



- Chapter, Textbook or the Internet? 
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- Scientific Journals!? 
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- University Education is an important part of the educational system.
- Software first or Hardware first? 
- Afghan National Textbooks Program
- Access to Online Afghan Textbooks

## My Opinions, Suggestions & Advice on Higher Education in Afghanistan



**Dr Yahya Wardak**  
Advisor at MoHE



# **Higher Education in Afghanistan**

## **Opinions, Suggestions & Advice**

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## **1. Chapter, Textbook or the Internet?**

Is it believable that most of the Afghan students do not have textbooks and use ten to twenty years earlier chapters (notes translated by instructors from a book on an issue or subject) as the only teaching materials?

Well, I would not believe it if I had not seen the painful situation of higher education in Kabul and some other provinces. Students carry twenty or thirty pages in plastic bags, memorize the contents by rote and jot them down to pass the exams. In contrast, students in other countries have access to voluminous literature, and they refer to libraries several times a week.

Elsewhere in the world, university is considered as the main center of new knowledge, technology, and research, but unfortunately students at the Afghan universities still use the learning materials of the 20th century. Nevertheless, some lecturers have written, translated, and published books in their respective fields as exceptional cases.

In the last 13 years, no systematic initiative was conducted to provide new standard textbooks. However, in 2014, the Ministry of Higher Education published a curriculum in several volumes for 50 fields. That was the first positive step, but unfortunately, it has not been applied in every field. As curriculum improves the teaching plan and framework, the relevant books should be available for each teaching subject in the native language of the lecturers and students.

There have been suggestions that the lecturers and students should use English books or the internet. But not all lecturers and students have a good command of English to exploit English books. As well as the internet can never be substituted with books because books have been the best means to share and gain knowledge for thousands of years.

I contributed to starting an online course from 2003 to 2005 and worked as its tutor in InWEnt gmbH/Bonn for doctors in Asia, Africa and Latin America, who had studied in Germany. The course was about HIV/AIDS in German

language, and it was then translated into English. As a developed country, Germany continuously works and investigates about e-learning that is getting more common, but it is not replaced with classroom learning. Most trainings at institutions are organized in classrooms as usual.

Although the number of users of new technology in Afghanistan has been increasing, the internet does not properly work due to lack of electricity and/or other technical problems.

Another trouble is related to breakdown in communication due to language barrier. Although teaching is possible through the internet, the learning materials should be provided in a language that is understandable for students. Part of such materials can also be shared on the internet to be utilized in courses by the interested organizations and people abroad.

Another issue is that learning through the internet is not inexpensive; it rather costs more as it requires complete technical facilities such as electricity, smart phone, computer and access to the internet.

In addition, learning content should be available, and the texts should be stored in computers to be easily accessible for the students. Full texts without charts, figures, audio and video can also be boring. Nevertheless, there is no specialized, professional organization throughout Afghanistan to operate for improvement in this respect.

Although there are some advance courses of English language, they are only suitable for those who already have a full command of the language.

Some years ago, an online program called GLP was initiated at the Ministry of Higher Education by USAID. Their experiences should be taken into consideration. They spent a great deal of money but were not so effective to fulfill the expectations.

Elsewhere in the world, textbooks play the main role in mastering any profession by the students. Lecturers and authors write numerous books per annum for each subject and translate international, standard books. The

libraries of every university purchase abounding books in both their native and English languages to be provided to their students as and when needed. In addition, each university has a bookstore, either inside or outside its campus.

Let's contemplate applying the same experience.

Do Afghan universities entertain this practice? Thousands of new students join universities on annual basis, but how many books are provided to them? Unfortunately, the MoPH and universities has not allocated any budget for writing, translating and publishing books.

Classroom, teacher and book are the main elements of education, followed by online learning. Therefore, let's initially provide the basics for taking further actions. At the end, I would like to quote a Greek saying: *"A student without book is like an unarmed soldier."*

### **Suggestions:**

- ▶ In the budget of the Ministry of Higher Education and each university, a specific portion should be allocated for writing, translating, and publishing textbooks.
- ▶ An initiative called "National Textbooks Program" should be executed by the Ministry of Higher Education, and it should be considered as one of the priority tasks by the ministry.
- ▶ The program should be financial supported by the MoPH.
- ▶ The program should be proposed to the USAID, DAAD, World Bank, and other donors.
- ▶ It should be envisioned that each university subject should have a certain curriculum and at least one textbook.
- ▶ The newly provided textbooks should be introduced to the relevant lecturers.

- ▶ The adverse condition of libraries at Afghan universities and faculties to store books in stocks should immediately change for the better.
- ▶ At least one professional librarian should work in each library.
- ▶ Each library should have a specific annual budget for purchasing new books

## **2. Medium of Instruction, English or National Languages?**

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Whenever some foreign and local experts witness the low standard at Afghan universities and lack of state-of-the-art textbooks, they instantly suggest that both instructors and students should use English textbooks and that the medium of instruction should be English. Nonetheless, these suggestions seem to be correct and a reasonable solution to the problem, but not feasible.

Since 1978, all Afghan institutions have been lagging to keep the pace with scientific improvement at the international level. Furthermore, during the 1980s, the foreign language taught in schools and universities was not English, rather it was Russian (I have also studied Russian from 9th until 12th grade.) Similarly, thousands of Afghans and a great number of university instructors have received higher education in the former USSR, and they have been working and teaching at most Afghan universities.

On the other hand, the quality of English taught in schools is not good enough to expect that high school graduates should be able to have a full grasp of English textbooks. Another problem is the level of English references. The instructors and students in Afghanistan may understand English, but unfortunately, they may not be able to comprehend the



textbooks taught in foreign countries due to the educational differences between Afghan and foreign students.

The countries where English is not the medium of instruction in schools do not use English as a medium of instruction at universities either. Rather, they use their national languages except for a few higher educational institutions.

Only the countries where English is the medium of instruction in schools continue higher education in the same language. In such cases, neither students nor instructors face language barriers as they have already mastered English in schools.

Although it is crystal clear that access to modern science and education is easier with English, having a good command of this international language is a pre-requisite to take advantage of the English references. Teaching in English is possible at some universities of Afghanistan. However, this process needs to have a mid-term strategy in place, followed by applying the strategy with persistent efforts.

As a consequence of the strategy, the high school graduates will have full command of English, and all the young lecturers at the universities should be able to teach in English. In a longer run, the criteria to suggest teaching in English could be met.

Otherwise, the universities should inevitably continue using the national languages as the medium of instruction. Therefore, textbooks should be prepared, published, and provided to the students as soon as possible. The university lecturers should pursue modern education in English so that they could prepare teaching material in national languages as per the students' needs.

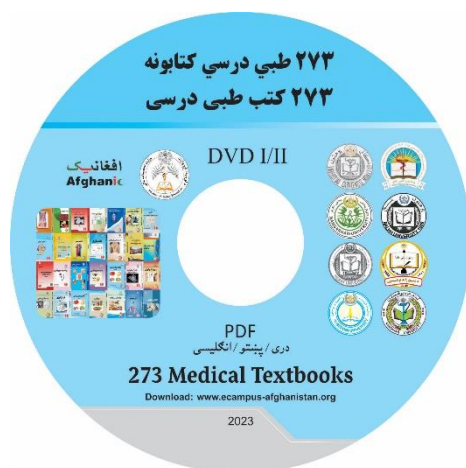


*"Each subject should have textbook."*  
*"Each classroom should have projector."*



### 3. Textbooks on DVD the First Effective Step towards a Digital Library in Afghanistan

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At the international level, Afghanistan is considered as a country with few publications in a limited number of prints—usually 1,000 copies. However, with the help of new technology, books are now available in digital format and can easily be distributed among the interested readers.

Therefore, we published 273 Medical Textbooks in English, Pashto, and Dari languages. Most of them were written by the instructors of Nangarhar, Khost, Kandahar, Herat, Balkh, and Kapisa universities. Some of them were also written by the professors from Germany and the USA. Besides publishing these textbooks, they were also stored on DVDs and distributed among all the medical faculties throughout Afghanistan.

Every instructor, student, and reader can easily access these 273 textbooks. They can run the DVD on their computer for reading, or one can also download them from our website ([www.ecampus-afghanistan.org](http://www.ecampus-afghanistan.org)).

Nonetheless, the Ministry of Higher Education, the universities and NGOs always suggest a Digital Library in their plans, projects, and programs. As well as USAID has spent some funds on Digital Library. Such projects usually include foreign books instead of Afghan writers', or they mainly serve as a

link to other digital libraries. For instance, you can view the same problem on the Ministry of Higher Education website: go to [www.mohe.gov.af](http://www.mohe.gov.af) and then click on 'Electronic Library'.

My humble suggestion to Ministry of Higher Education and the university instructors is that they should also publish their works via CD or DVD and upload them to their university websites too.

As the print limit is usually a thousand copies, they cannot satisfy the needs of all the interested instructors and students. So, if every textbook is published electronically, all students and instructors will be able to access the new books easily and quickly for use.

This approach will improve the learning process and the teaching quality. In addition, it will also accelerate academic ties and joint practical projects among the professors of Afghan universities.

## **4. Correlative Theoretical and Practical Education**

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In 2015, I invited an engineer to the Engineering Faculty of Nangarhar University for giving a professional presentation. At the end of the presentation, a student, raising his hand, said that he has heard such important, academic information about practical works for the first time. Although he was a student in the fifth semester, he had not touched even a brick for the purpose of practical constructional work. If we observe the education at Afghan universities, we will see that practical work in field or laboratory is rarely done by the students in most disciplines. It is one of the main reasons that the freshly graduated students cannot easily find and do any job in practice. Or in case they do, the result will be a poor-quality output. Therefore, the authorities and faculty members of the universities should provide functional laboratories to facilitate practical education for their students.

When I was a student of medicine in Czechoslovakia, we would be taught theoretical lessons and lectures from 8 am to 12 pm; while in the afternoons, we practically worked in practice rooms and laboratories during the first

semesters. However, in the last semesters, we theoretically studied before breaks, but for the rest of the days, we observed patients' files, examined patients and practically worked in hospitals. This way, we would practice what we had learned; we could learn easily and memorize the theoretical lessons. For example, when we were to study hepatitis, our bedside teaching instructor would take us to a patient suffering from the disease to show us the physical symptoms of the disease. We would observe the laboratory examinations and get information about the history of the illness. Consequently, anytime we face with a similar case, we recall that patient and the knowledge we have received about the disease.

My suggestion to the authorities and lecturers is to further emphasize on both theoretical and practical teaching to be included in their teaching plans and schedules. They should not solely rely on lecture-notes and chapter-notes because these materials are not sufficient to effectively educate engineers and doctors for practical works.

Therefore, there is a close correlation between theoretical and practical education.

Since some faculties of medicine do not have teaching hospitals where students can get practical education, this situation should no longer continue. Any medical faculty must have an active and well-equipped teaching hospital.

Neither workshops nor evaluations or quality assurance committees can lead to improving the quality of education. Rather, besides building capacity of lecturers, the following three parts should be emphasized on the most:

1. Curriculum and textbooks;
2. Practical experiments in laboratories; and
3. Practical fieldwork (e.g., on bedside at a hospital) so that the quality of higher education will improve.



## 5. Master's or Bachelor's?

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Universities are established for the purpose of acquiring wisdom and knowledge. During the last few decades, the horizon of knowledge enormously expanded to the extent that had never happened in centuries. In many countries, students are categorized for either sciences or arts disciplines in the middle schools. Then, in bachelor's degree at a university, a particular discipline is studied in general. It means that undergraduates have not yet mastered any certain field to be able to work independently compared to master's degree holders. Therefore, having completed bachelor's degree, students usually proceed to pursuing master's degree in a specific field of study, which contributes to their educational level to effectively occupy job vacancies.

Afghanistan is in dire need of such well-versed experts in the fields of economics, agriculture, medicine, and so forth. Expertise in a field will not be so effective with bachelor's only, rather one needs to get special trainings, master's and PhD for it.

Unfortunately, Afghan universities offer very few master's and PhD programs. Nonetheless, many university instructors and government officials do their master's and PhDs abroad, but this is not sufficient to satisfy the demand of the job market in Afghanistan. Therefore, the universities of Afghanistan should start master's and PhD programs in addition to some private and public universities that have initiated master's programs to fulfill the needs.

However, not only should the programs be offered, but also their fundamental requirements should also be provided including, infrastructure, budget, curriculum, textbooks, labs, and research facilities, besides hiring academic personnel. If a university or faculty is lacking PhD members, it should consider sending the lecturers to earn PhDs abroad and contracting other Afghan or foreign PhD professors until the scholars return.

Similarly, since some Afghan universities are supported by foreign universities, they should take advantage of this opportunity in establishing their master's programs. Afghan universities should launch master's programs in collaboration with partner universities. Part of the programs can be implemented domestically, while the rest should be done at the host university

abroad. In addition, foreign professors should be invited for the implementation and teaching of Master's and PhD programs.

Although foreign universities have been providing the opportunities for Afghans to pursue their master's degrees, these programs might end as soon as the foreign assistance comes to a halt.

One of the best advantages of master's programs in our own country would result in further participation of females. In addition, the considerably large amounts of funds provided to foreign universities for supporting education in Afghanistan can suffice to provide infrastructure, learning material, and even professors' salaries here in Afghanistan. In such a scenario, the outflow of funds would also be prevented so that it could add upon the currency in circulation at the local level.



## **6. Higher Education Research Center (HERC)**

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There is no doubt that "Higher Education" plays a very significant role in the long-term development of a society. In fact, university is the platform of producing academic, knowledgeable, political, and social experts. It is university that educates young specialists at Bachelor's, Master's and doctoral levels to perform a fundamental role in the improvement of society and the economy.

Although the higher education system in Afghanistan has had quantitative improvements over the last years, it still faces many challenges that can increase if not addressed. For instance, the number of high school graduates increases every year: In 2015, there will be around four hundred thousand high school graduates. However, all public and private higher education institutions can accommodate only one hundred thousand students while the rest would remain devoid of higher education.

In addition, Afghan universities do not produce experts who could be hired at the employment market because the highest degree they offer is bachelor's while the programs for master's and PhD are hardly available.

Other serious concerns are as follows: How can the teaching quality improve? Are short-term training programs better or Master's and doctoral programs? Should the medium of instruction be English or any national language? Do we need textbooks or should everything be available online? Should there be any entry test (Kankor) or not? Should Kankor be an independent entity apart from MoHE? What are the advantages and disadvantages if it is independent? Should the quantity of private higher institutions be increased or the current ones are more than enough? These and other similar questions should never be addressed based on someone's personal insight; rather they should be meticulously studied with empirical research, evaluations, and both national and international experiences.

Unfortunately, neither MoHE nor any of the national universities has done any research in this regard. So far, five ministers have worked in MoHE in the last 13 years, but none of them has continued the previous minister's work. Rather, they set their own priorities and kept them going until another minister took over.

Keeping the aforesaid points in mind, we would like to make a suggestion that a specific research center should be established regarding Higher Education in Afghanistan. This center should work under the auspices of the relevant governmental entities in accordance with the central government plan to conduct research considering the specifications of certain fields of study.

We believe that this would be an effective initiative to establish a practical academic policy which will be free of the copycat models of foreign countries; thus, being a more effective, national, academic and educational policy. Therefore, we should not address the issues of Higher Education with relying on copying the foreign models only, but we should thoroughly study the

issues persisting at higher education, discuss the solutions, develop a plan and then implement it with the help of international experts. In fact, the experiences and suggestions of other countries can help us complete and successfully implement this policy.

## **7. Afghan-German University in Kabul (AGU)**

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Germany, besides the USA and the former USSR, was one of the first countries that supported higher education of Afghanistan in a long-lasting and effective way during the 1970s. Prior to that, in the 1960s, Germany also established the German Language Department at Kabul University, followed by providing academic support to the faculties of Sciences and Economics. Many German professors visited Kabul University to teach the Afghan students and write textbooks in collaboration with Afghan professors.

Germany actively contributed to building infrastructure, equipping the laboratories, developing curriculum and publishing textbooks. Afghan lecturers were sent to Bochum, Bonn, and Cologne universities to gain Master's and Doctoral degrees in Sciences and Economics. The academic assistance and partnership resulted in providing infrastructure, facilitating proper teaching circumstances, and improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Due to unfavorable conditions and war, the assistance came a halt but resumed in 2002, and mutual programs were conducted in the fields of German Language, Economics, Sciences and Computer Sciences up to 2018. In addition, Germany also provided short-term assistance to the faculties of Medicine, Engineering and Pharmacy. In the recent years, a number of university lecturers got their Master's from Germany as a result of the assistance, and they have been quite effective in improving the education quality in their respective fields.

However, the academia of Afghanistan has been lagging behind the educational improvement on the international level for over 30 years. On the other hand, sciences and technology have vastly expanded and advanced in the last few decades. Therefore, Afghan universities are in even greater need



of updated infrastructure, laboratories, curriculum, teaching material and raising the educational level of the instructors to Master's and Doctoral degrees. All of the above ideas can be achieved with the establishment of Afghan–German University.

According to the new constitution, it is now possible for foreign countries to establish educational facilities in Afghanistan. The American University of Afghanistan (AUAF) is its first instance, and an Afghan-Turkish University is also going to be set up soon as another one.

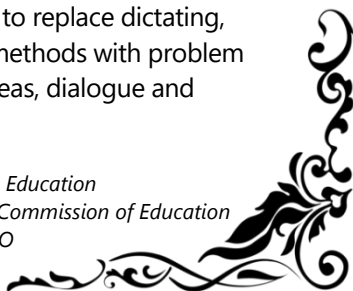
Keeping the needs of Afghanistan and the academic assistance of Germany in mind, the potential Afghan-German University can have the following faculties: Economics, Sciences, Medicine, Computer Sciences, Engineering, Geology and Public Administration. It will be a new chapter in the 100-year friendship and academic cooperation between Germany and Afghanistan.

With the celebration of the 100th anniversary (Diamond Jubilee) of German-Afghan relationships in 2015, it is highly expected that establishment of an Afghan-German University will be declared by the leaders of both countries.



Textbooks should be available in order to replace dictating, rote learning, and repetition teaching methods with problem solving, critical analysis, categorizing ideas, dialogue and activity.

*Rehabilitation and Development of Afghanistan Education  
Policy, Goals, and Strategies Independent High Commission of Education  
for Afghanistan Kabul, 2003. Funded by UNESCO*



## **8. The Importance of Higher Education for the Future of the Country**

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## **9. Academic Journals!?**

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in 2015, I had a discussion with the editor-in-chief of the academic journal of Nangarhar University (called Poha) to publish a review about the textbooks published by our office. Surprisingly, he said that it was an academic journal in which only academic articles are published. I suggested to him to have a look at other academic journal almost all of which include Book Reviews regarding newly published textbooks of related fields. Unfortunately, this suggestion has been in vain to date.

Some private higher educational institutions in Afghanistan publish journals in a better print quality than the public universities. Most of them are printed in color to publish new information about the study fields offered by the universities, their achievements, and other new material for the students and those who are interested in the universities. However, majority of them are in the form of advertisements, while publishing only few academic works of the lecturers.

It would be better for the private universities to publish academic articles of the lecturers as the governmental universities do. In contrast, the public universities should publish useful, interesting information in their journals as the private universities do.

Journals are allocated for publishing academic articles of professors because the faculty members need to publish their works for promoting their academic ranks. Therefore, to publish their works, the lecturers need to pay money depending on the number of pages. For example, a lecturer should pay for four pages if his/her paper is four pages long while another should pay for six pages based on the length of his/her paper. The main purpose of publishing these journals is to complete the number of published articles required for the lecturers to get promoted and receive an increment. However, the journals should also provide some room for publishing other related pieces of writings.

### **Suggestions:**

- As the circulation of these journals quite less, it should be increased from one hundred to three hundred and fifty copies.
- A specific budget should be allocated for the academic journals by each university so that they can be published on time and continuously.
- As Afghan Medical Journal and Teb Pohana (i.e. Medical Knowledge) are published by Kabul University of Medicine and Nangarhar Medical Faculty respectively, these and other medical journals should be combined and sent to all the medical faculties so that their circulation, as well as the number of readers, will increase.
- The journals should be exchanged among the universities and related faculties in order to strengthen their academic ties. For example, the journal of Kabul University of Medicine should be distributed to the medical faculties of all the public and private universities (9 public and 46 private)<sup>1</sup>.
- Besides publishing academic works, other interesting topics and relevant news should be published for the information of lecturers. For instance, if a program of Master's or PhD is to be started, this information is worth publishing in the journals.
- Since these journals publish research studies, it is necessary to publish research methodology and other related information as well.
- Introduction, critique and reviews of standard books of foreign authors

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers are according to the list published on MoHE's website.  
December 2022

and newly published books of Afghan lecturers should be accommodated in the journals. It is an interesting section at the end of all the academic journals around the world.

- All the academic journals should be published on the websites of related universities so that more lecturers and researchers can benefit from them. Also, they can be published on any specific website along with other books and monographs.

## **10. Workshops and So-called Projects!?**

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A good number of seminars, workshops, and meetings are held at the Ministry of Higher Education and the universities on different issues such as enhancing teaching quality, e-learning, English as a medium of instruction, gender, women's rights, and so on. Also, some projects are implemented under these names on which tens of millions of dollars are spent. Officials and the staff of the ministry and universities willingly participate in these workshops because most of such meetings are held with the financial support of international organizations. In such meetings, abundant quantity of food, tea and cookies are served as refreshments most of which are wasted. Pictures and videos are taken at the events to prepare reports.

Sometimes the activities and projects of some organizations are limited to solely holding meetings, without any considerable achievement. Many of such seminars and projects do not have a sustainable output for the universities, lecturers or students. Some years ago, I participated in three different meetings in the conference hall at the Ministry of Higher Education about the curriculum. Many speakers (such as the deputy minister, director general, director, and some lecturers), in all three meetings, repeated similar presentations. Chancellors and deputy academic chancellors of different universities, based in other provinces, were invited to the meetings. They were paid the expenses of travel, accommodation as well as per diems. The expenses of those meetings were too much in contrast to their effectiveness.

Moreover, several seminars were held regarding making strategic plan for the ministry (2015-2020). As per my information, not all the budget specified for making the plan was utilized. Therefore, it was considered to hold another

meeting to receive feedback on the strategic plan. But unfortunately, after passing several years, the strategic plan of Ministry of Higher Education, as the most important document for the future of higher education, was not finalized. According to sources\*, the World Bank has spent 2.6 million dollars on making the strategic plan.

Similarly, a great sum of money is spent on useless seminars and workshops by various Afghan institutions where senior authorities are busy with the seminars while they do not have time to contemplate and perform their own duties.

A project should be implemented in a sector after thorough analysis and evaluation of that sector's problems. Project means accomplishing certain activities with specific budget to achieve certain goal(s) in a specific timeframe. But for some, it means spending money without having any goal or achievement.

If there is a problem, it should be discussed with the people involved to measure its practical solutions. Then a project should be proposed for the solution and achieving the goals. Supporting the project activities by organizations and stakeholders play an important role in success of the project. I would like to present my own example here:

In 2011, I witnessed a main problem of students in the Faculty of Medicine at Nangarhar University. They used handwritten lecture-notes, written twenty to thirty years ago, as the only learning materials and textbooks. Even the students did not have those so-called chapters (lecture-notes) for many subjects; therefore, whatever the teachers taught them, they would note or learn the lectures by rote to write down the notes on exam papers. The lecturers also designed questions for exams in that limited range of their lecture notes. Therefore, most of the students did not understand various subjects due to the low quality of teaching. This is one of the major reasons why fresh graduates of the Faculty of Medicine do not have a full understanding of medical conditions as professional doctors.

Having observed and appraised the problem, I discussed it with the students, lecturers, dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Nangarhar University, deputy of the faculty, chancellor of Nangarhar University, deputy chancellors of the university, as well as with authorities of Kabul University and Kabul Medical

University. Then I started the project of Publishing Textbooks for Afghan Universities. At the beginning, over 12 teachers expressed their enthusiasm, regardless of expecting anything in return, to write and type their lecture notes in form of books, update textbooks and submit them to our project for publication. So far, 369 textbooks have been published and distributed to Afghan universities, hospitals, research and academic centers, and academic individuals in both hard and soft copies. In addition, the softcopies are also available to everyone on the internet for free.

My purpose behind mentioning this example is that different aspects of higher education should be studied, evaluated, and discussed with students, teachers and other staff in order to cooperatively find solutions for the problems; not that we should wait for foreigners to come and tell us what we need; thus, spending millions of dollars whereas priority is not placed on students, teachers, or universities.

For instance, in the last 20 years, tens of millions of dollars were spent under the name of gender equality and women's rights. However, it was observed that there was no toilet available for female students at a large university despite the great deal of expenses under the name of female students and gender equality.

Another example is that the universities (even MoPH) do not have access to stable electricity and internet while some are trying to implement projects and organize seminars on E-learning, costing millions of dollars.

I suggest that we should discuss the matters with students to see what problems they have, ask teachers about what they want, visit different departments of the universities to see what they need. After that we can design projects to be proposed to international donors to solve the problems.

I have not seen any authority of the MoPH or universities to submit a proposal regarding the solution of challenges. In a meeting with deputy chancellor of a university, a foreigner asked about what problems the university faced so that those problems could be thought about and solved. The question was answered that the university needed anything that could be offered. "If you can donate a single item such as a pen," said the deputy

chancellor, "please, do it." The foreigner was astonished. Thus, nothing was done for the university.

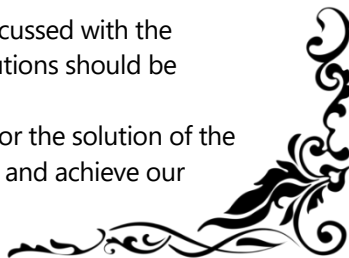
A ministry and a university (or a minister and a chancellor) should have a vision for their administration: what to achieve for the ministry or university in cooperation with the colleagues and with support of donors. Making a workplan is essential for progress, instead of spending time at the office just signing documents and participating in meetings. The most important responsibility of senior officials is to provide guidance and appropriate work conditions for employees so that they can effectively and efficiently accomplish their assignments. This way, they can be trained well in their fields and can innovate as well.

*\*Based on verbal information of two employees of Higher Education Development Program at the Ministry of Higher Education in Kabul.*



If there is a problem, it should be discussed with the people involved and its practical solutions should be measured.

Then a project should be proposed for the solution of the problems in order to solve problems and achieve our goals.





## 11. University Education as an Important Part of the Educational System

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After the fall of the Taliban (2001 = 1,000), thousands of schools were built in Afghanistan (2014 = 17,000). The Government of Afghanistan and the international community tried to provide an increasing number of boys and girls with access to schools. The background was of course that very few girls were allowed to attend primary school during the reign of the Taliban.

The President of Afghanistan, the Minister of Education and many donors from abroad often proudly presented the increasing number of pupils at international conferences as a proof of the success of their politics and support. During recent months, the number of over 11 million schoolboys and girls was mentioned as an instance (2001 = 1 million).

However, not much thought was given to the future of these young people after graduating from school and if all of them will have the chance to learn a profession or go to university. This question should not be taken for granted: Will millions of people be able to qualify for a job, or will they have access to further education and find work to earn a living for themselves and their families?

Thirteen years later, in 2014, There are approximately eight million schoolgirls and boys. At the moment, about 200,000 of them will complete the 12th grade every year with an upward tendency, but not all of them will have a chance to go to a vocational college or university. The 32 public universities can only accept a quarter of these school leavers (50,000). All of the rest must either pay for expensive degree courses at private universities or will be left to themselves.

Afghanistan has concentrated mainly on basic education over the last thirteen years while vocational schools and universities were much neglected. As a consequence of this policy, we have an increasing number of 12th grade school leavers who cannot find a place at one of the universities. Even university graduates have problems finding jobs in Afghanistan.

One reason for this is the low quality of university education that does not take the requirements of the job market in Afghanistan into account. The other reason is that the universities in Afghanistan teach theoretical basics only since there are no laboratories, and students do not do internships or other practical training sessions. These graduates without practical skills are unable to work as qualified doctors or engineers. Many of them are hired for jobs that are completely different from the subject of their university degree. Also the unemployment rate among academics is increasing rapidly.

Many patients go abroad for medical examination and treatment. Why is this so? Because Afghanistan does not have well-trained doctors! Why are the local doctors so incompetent? Because medical students use hand-written notes that are decades old as their only teaching materials; they have no practical laboratory experience and did not receive daily training at the patients' bedside. Afghanistan must better understand the consequences and interdependencies of inadequate training in this area as well as in other areas. Drastic changes must be brought about to achieve lasting success.

In order to achieve noticeable improvements, the educational policy of Afghanistan must be critically reviewed and readjusted immediately. The importance of vocational training and university education for a successful development of the country must not be ignored.

There are approximately 100,000 foreign workers in Afghanistan since the country does not have sufficient number of skilled Afghan workers. Although hundreds of millions are spent in the educational sector each year, there is a lack of skilled workers for example in the fields of civil engineering, road construction, telecommunications and many other fields. Many foreign university lecturers (often from Pakistan and India) work at more than 85 private universities in Afghanistan.

Every year, up to 2,000 students are sent to study abroad, but this is not enough for a country with a population of around 34 million and 40 years of stagnation due to military conflicts. The need for well trained skilled workers has increased significantly in Afghanistan.

In addition to students who studied abroad, Afghanistan needs some excellent universities of its own in order to meet the need for qualified specialists and management staff who should then bring international know-how to Afghanistan and pass this on to men and women nationwide. This will also lead to women's access to education as many of them cannot study abroad to get further education for cultural and family-related reasons.

There should be a fair balance of the money spent in the educational sector, meaning that more money must be invested in vocational colleges and universities. It is hereby requested from the Government of Afghanistan, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and also the international community and the donor nations to take action to improve the current situation.

The importance of the development policy in the medical and engineering field has not been sufficiently recognized by the authorities in Afghanistan nor by the donor nations although it was mentioned several times by the former President Hamid Karzai. Some donors have found their niche where they work and spend most of the money available to them.

In Afghanistan, one ministry is responsible for basic and vocational education (Ministry of Education) and another ministry for universities (Ministry of Higher Education). Therefore, communication and coordination are very important and should be improved. The two ministries must start a dialogue. Even if the status quo does not change, they should develop a joint educational strategy.

Only well trained university graduates (not only bachelor's degrees but also master's degrees and doctoral programs) can take an active part in economic development, innovation, start-ups and an effective administration to tackle the challenges of the future in Afghanistan.

This is the only way that Afghanistan can successfully stand on its own feet in the near future. Afghanistan must be put in the position to educate qualified specialists and managers at home according to international standards, trained at their own educational institutions by local professors.

*Yahya Wardak, Kabul 2014*

## 12. Software first or Hardware first?

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During my work for universities in Afghanistan as a CIM Expert and Advisor to the Ministry of Higher Education in Kabul, I had numerous discussions with the representatives of German, American and other donors and organizations. They frequently emphasized on providing opportunities for the lecturers to get further education in their countries or other states such as Turkey and India or organizing special, short-term trainings in Afghanistan. The Ministry of Higher Education and representatives of the universities in Afghanistan often complain about the lack of infrastructure such as classrooms, chairs, laboratory equipment, textbooks and teaching materials. Many of them state that without the availability of the required facilities, lecturers cannot provide effective teaching as well as the students cannot sufficiently learn from them.

In the year 2021, 351,231 male and female students were enrolled in 39 public and 129 private universities, and this number annually increases (NSIA, 2022). Next year another 400,000 new 12-grade graduates will apply for the limited number of seats available at the universities (100,000 at both public and private universities). This massive increase in the number of students unfortunately leads to a further deterioration of quality at the universities. The university officials complain in every conference that they get more and more students every year exceeding their capacities by 50% to 100%. For example, if a university has the space for 1,000 students, they will get 2,000 students without receiving any notice or planning in advance; therefore, requiring more lecturers, chairs, tables, and etc. This is why most of the persons in-charge and professors complain about an increasing decline of teaching quality. For political reasons and to calm down these young applicants, they are sent to public or private universities to give them a second or third chance. This increase in the number of students is connected to the growing number of 12th grade leavers. In 2014, we expect approximately 400,000 school leavers to take part in the admission exam (Konkor) who will apply for only 40,000 seats available at the public universities. This situation will dramatically deteriorate over the years to come.

Unfortunately, the development of this situation does not concern the authorities in Afghanistan or abroad as they do their routine works without giving any thought to the near future. Due to the lack of capacities and because of the bureaucratic processes, the Ministry of Higher Education has spent less than 50% of its development budget in the year 1392 (2013/2014). Some international donors spend a great deal of funds but hardly meet the needs of the universities or only as long as funds are available. Plentiful discussions are conducted about the sustainability of projects, but most of them are prematurely terminated, or their impacts come to a halt as soon as the project finishes. For example, USAID supported English courses in Kabul and many other provincial universities, building their own infrastructure. They did not cooperate with the existing English Departments to support their structures and capacities, so that English language teaching at the universities would continue after the fund flow ceased. Another example is spending bulk amounts of money on developing and introducing e-learning components. Unfortunately, such efforts did not succeed since not all lecturers or students have internet access and nor do they speak English. These programs continued for a while outside university campuses, but most are a thing of the past now (nothing gained, nothing lost).

E-learning and short-term extra training measures are like the top floor of a house: It needs the ground floor and the lower floors. The essential basics are classrooms, infrastructure, equipment, laboratories, adjusting study courses to the requirements of the local job market, setting up functional university libraries instead of the existing storage facilities for books, printing textbooks, and so forth.

It should not be needed to ask donors for all of the requirements. Instead, the Afghan authorities should apply for fund at the Ministry of Finance, then collect the fund once released and spend it on the purposes mentioned above. Only if the ministry or the universities could not manage to do receive the required fund for whatever reason, then donors should be asked to provide the necessary infrastructure. This means the hardware is necessary at the first place, followed by software.

It comes as a surprise that further e-learning programs are planned for the near future. I pressingly suggest that the programs and projects of the past should be critically evaluated before starting new programs in this sector.

First of all, course contents and books must be translated into Afghan languages and further developed, then shared in digital form (offline on CD and DVD as well as online).

I received a message (on 01 Oct 2014) that the Ministry of Education will distribute 34 million schoolbooks to primary schools nationwide. The Minister for Education explained that 10 million of these books were printed in Afghanistan and the rest in Indonesia with financial support from USAID. During the last 15 years, a total of 213 million schoolbooks for various grades and on different subjects were financed with USD 119 million by the United States, Denmark, and the World Bank. But what about textbooks for universities? Apart from around 300 textbooks published by my office, not even 100 books in all disciplines were printed with a maximum of 1,000 copies.

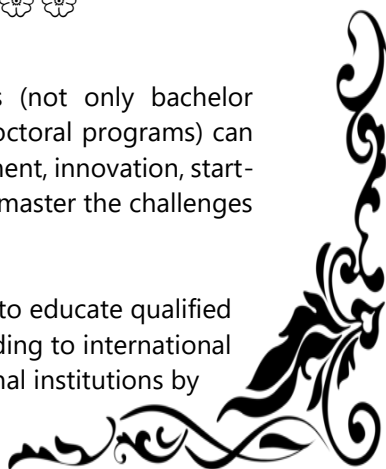
*Dr. Yahya Wardak, CIM Expert at the Ministry of Higher Education  
Kabul, 1 Oct 2014*

*\* National Statistics and Information Authority, 2022*



Only well trained university graduates (not only bachelor degrees but also master degrees and doctoral programs) can take an active part in economic development, innovation, start-ups and an effective administration and master the challenges of the future in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan must be put in the position to educate qualified specialists and managers at home according to international standards, trained at their own educational institutions by their own professors.



## 13. Afghan National Textbook Program

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- The method of “papers & notes” must come to an end.
- New textbooks should be written and translated by university lecturers in every field.
- At least, 100 books should be published annually: an aggregate of 500 textbooks in 5 years.
- Each subject should have at least one textbook.
- Overhead projectors (OHPs) should be provided for all classrooms.

### Recommendations

#### **To MoHE:**

- Initiate the “Afghan National Textbooks” (ANT) Program;
- Consider the program as a top priority;
- Encourage lecturers to translate, write and publish textbooks in their respective fields.

#### **To Lecturers:**

- Revise your books and share with us for publication;
- Write and translate new textbooks for publication.

#### **To the donors (DAAD, USAID & World Bank):**

- Provide any sort of support to the (ANT) program;
- Provide funds for publication of textbooks.

### Suggestion

- At least, 50 textbooks should be published by the Ministry of Higher Education on an annual basis.
- Two DVDs (300 medical books and 100 engineering books) containing all medical and engineering textbooks should be distributed to each student.

- All previous and new textbooks should be published in soft format on the websites of the universities and faculties to be easily accessed by all students.
- The curricula of all fields of study should be published on university websites to be used by the teachers and students.

## 14. Access to Online Afghan Textbooks

Since 2010, we have published 369 textbooks from various medical universities in Afghanistan.

All the printed books can be downloaded in PDF format from [www.ecampus-afghanistan.org](http://www.ecampus-afghanistan.org)

From this website, the authors can get articles about textbooks, as well as information and guidelines to publish their books.



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## Dr Yahya Wardak

Yahya Wardak was born in 1967 in Afghanistan. He is son of Zir Gul Wardak who had worked at top management in banking system of Afghan Ministry of Finance, whose last job was the chairmanship of Pashtany Bank. Mr. Wardak got primary education in Spin Kali School, secondary education in Harbi Showanzai (Military High School 1981-1985), and higher education in the field of General Medicine in Czechoslovakia (1985-1992).



After learning language in Germany, he studied Health System, Public Health, and Tropical Medicine in developing countries at Heidelberg University. Later on, he has studied Health Management in Mibeg Institute in Cologne for one year.

Yahya Wardak (MD, DCH & TM, Berlin), from 2000 to 2002, was an official personal of The Bernhard Nocht Institute for Tropical Medicine in Hamburg. After that, he joined with InWEnt (GIZ) in Bonn. He worked in creating and applying medical e-learning courses for the doctors of developing countries (2003-2006).

He was an editor with Deutsche Welle Radio and an advisor for some other German organizations (e.g. DED, InWEnt) regarding programs for Afghanistan, from 2007 up to 2009.

He traveled to Nangarhar in 2009 for observing the situations of Afghan universities, and he, until (May 2021), was advisor at the Ministry of Higher Education in Kabul. He has now an office and continuing the publishing of textbooks program.

In this period, besides other works, he has published 369 textbooks and distributed to universities of Afghanistan.

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- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Pashto/Dari), 1997, Hamburg, 2021, Kabul.
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