

Tempus Programme in Turkmenistan

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Speaking of educational programs that work in the field of higher education it is necessary to mention about the European Union Tempus Programme. Tempus addresses most of the issues to be addressed during the reform process; it is a programme that uses internationalization as a tool in order to achieve changes at different levels of HE institutions.

Through different types of Tempus projects the European Union universities support Turkmen partner universities in their efforts to redesign curricula, broaden specializations or improve university management systems. All types of Tempus projects also include the upgrading of facilities of higher education and the training of staff.

Since the start of the programme in 1996 the European Commission has allocated a total 4 million Euro to Tempus in Turkmenistan.

During the past 6 years of Tempus activities in Turkmenistan 9 Institutions from 16 HEI's have participated in the programme throughout the country. The total of 15 projects has been financed. All subjects that were developed by projects were urgent for Turkmenistan and correspond to its priorities.

The list of national Tempus priorities are defined jointly by national authorities and the European Commission in order to ensure that Tempus projects are in line with the national strategy for HE development and reflect the specific needs of higher education in the partner countries.

Also they are relevant to the most important economic sectors, such as engineering, technology and vocational training including oil and gas sector, chemical and industrial manufacturing, computer and software engineering, information technologies, economics and business administration, rural development, agriculture and food sciences, environmental sciences.

Speaking of current activities it is necessary to mention about five present projects implemented by Turkmen universities in close cooperation with European partner institutions. Two of these projects are in the field of **University Management:**

- Modernisation of the Turkmen State University Library (Installation of library equipment and teaching library staff to work on it).
- World Standard Education at Turkmen Universities (Creation of a sustainable university management organization at Turkmen Universities through providing extensive training in Internet usage for five Turkmen Universities).

Another two projects are in the field of **Curriculum Development:**

- Development of International MSc Program on Environment and Water Resources Management in Central Asia (Improvement of regional cooperation on environment and water resource management; development of internationally recognized MSc program).
- A Professional Language Training System for Turkmenistan (To establish a national center for interpreting and translator training at the World Languages

Institute; to develop a curriculum for interpreter and translator training in languages for specific purposes)

The last project is in the field of **Institutional Building**:

- Turkmen Economy Training Center (To offer development courses at European Universities for Turkmen professors (staff members), who will adapt and develop 6 training courses for different target groups in Turkmenistan; to set up and assist in the running of the Training Center.

Many lessons have been learned from the previous experience of TEMPUS programme and the Institutions have become aware of what is required for the future.

The biggest difficulties that potential participants face during project preparation are project design and appropriate EU partner searching. Though during the last years and after some training provided to them, the local partners have become more active in proposal preparation.

Year by year the number of Tempus applications submitted by Turkmen universities is constantly increasing, thus confirming the growing interest in the programme and the recognition of its efficiency.

Education system of Turkmenistan

The state education system has been structured in a way to combine all levels of education. It consists of: preschool education; secondary school; professional education; higher education; qualification improvement and retraining of the staff; out of school institutions and upbringing; special educational institutions.

National priorities

National priorities in education is described in the basic documents such as “Socio-economic development of Turkmenistan till year 2010” and “Education” program. They are the following:

1. Quality and effectiveness of education
2. Computerization of the education system
3. Professional education
4. Civil raring
5. Functional literacy
6. Global education
7. Involvement of the community
8. Strengthening the capacity of education system
9. Universal schooling
10. Integration of the world wide experience

Education financing

Financing is mainly made through the following sources: state budget, self-supporting activities and other sources not elicited by the legislation of Turkmenistan

In 1997, according to state figures, 18% of the whole state budget was spent on education showing the strong priority placed on education by the government. 17% of the allocated budget went to the preschool education, 62% to general education and 7,9% to tertiary education. Only 52% of the total was spent to the salaries, and teachers are paid significantly less than in other countries. Since March 1, 2001 average salary of the teacher is 1126 thousand manats whereas the average state salary is 950 thousand manats.

Educational planning and management system

Educational planning and management system is built on the principle of the data collection, analysis and dataflow from school to etrap level to velayat level and from velayat level to central level and after the confirmation by the appropriate financial bodies goes in the way back (from central level to velayat, etrap and school levels). Data are analyzed at all levels in order to improve teaching and education process, to get maximum enrollment and increase the quality of education. Still the educational planning and management system at different levels of educational administrative structure needs further improvement in terms of timely data collection, analysis and flow of information from school/ etrap to velayat level and central level.

Educational management organs are divided into two levels: high bodies of authorities and management of education; state bodies of educational management that are Ministry

of education and local bodies of executive authorities (hackimliks) of velayats, etraps, and cities.

Training of teachers

Updating of the teacher qualification is carried out under the National Institute for Education through running regular training courses on different disciplines and issues of the school planning and management. This Institute also works on the improvement of the curriculum and educational programs, textbooks and instructional materials as well. Special attention is given last year to the innovative studies in the education. For this purpose there are workshops and training are developed and running this year. For the improvement of the scientific work running under the National Institute different symposiums, conferences, round tables are held.

School supply

The government of Turkmenistan pays much attention to the school supplies. In the year 2001 for the secondary schools the following were purchased; 16 181 set of the school furniture and 2 460 blackboards. Supplies of the school materials are going on permanent basis.

Reforms in the education sector

The basic - 1993 education reform includes two directions. First, review of the school curriculum, transmission to new textbooks and teaching materials. Second, change of teaching methods aimed at developing students motivation, improvement of their thinking skills which is very important in life especially during transition market economy.

For the introduction of new educational policy by the President special attention is paid to the quality of education. Renovation of the education context was done in parallel with curriculum renovation. On the basis of the approved programs new textbook are being developed. Programs, curriculum, and instructional materials tested during two years and now stabilized.

New programs were developed on the basis of the existing national traditions and universal human values. Organization of teaching educational activities principles of schools, monitoring of the learning achievements of the students at all levels are the bases of new curriculum. Monitoring of learning achievement of the students includes indicators for reading speed at different ages, limited number of words in written tests, requirements to the oral responses on different subjects, number of the test in each grade etc. Besides, there is in school monitoring of learning achievements of students' mainly done by the school administration and different inspectorates checking at different levels. At the end of the school year there are common exams in the grades 4-8 on a single test and state exams in the graduate classes.

Teaching methods are chosen by the teachers themselves taking into account individual and physiological characteristics of each child. Child concentration principal decides by the teacher independently, which in accordance with existing normative documents regulated the schools operation. Besides secondary schools there is the net of

the out of schools institutions providing possibilities to get additional education, gaining necessary life skills as to the needs of child.

Awarding the high places at the International Olympiads on intellectual and natural sciences (chemistry, math's, physics, biology, computer sciences) by the schoolchildren of Turkmenistan is the certain indicator of the quality of education.

By the announcement of the new educational policy on the 3-rd of May 1993, by the signing the Convention of the Child's rights in 1994, by the joining to the Universal Declaration of children survival, development and protection on the 28-th of December 1996, Turkmenistan is obliged itself to improve the quality of education. This objective is the major priority of the state development policy. Further development of the educational system directed in the national strategy of the Saparmyrat Turkmenbashy "Strategy of the socio-economic reconstruction of Turkmenistan up the year 2010"

During one of the meetings of the government of Turkmenistan President Saparmyrat Turkmenbashy underlined the necessity to improve the quality of education and raring, to the functional literacy (skills to use acquired knowledge into the life). For this purpose he strongly recommended to revise the curriculum, programs teaching material, strengthen the cooperation with schools, family and community, study and adopt the positive international experience. This was the start point of the creation in each related agencies the special departments for the worldwide experience study and introduction. So far such departments established at the Ministry of Education in Turkmenistan and in all high institutions.

The concept of the long life education and self-education were introduced in order to prepare new highly qualified staff and retrain present one.

In accordance with the recommendation of the President of Turkmenistan in the Ministry for Education there was established the department for the study and introduction of positive world experience. As it was underlined by the President there is the need to improve the quality of education in order to have it in a proper way in accordance with the needs of each child and increase the activity of the community and parents, be them more involved into the education process.

As the result of the National Program in the year 2001 there were 480 computers installed into the schools and in the year 2002 -228 computers.

Curriculum reform

Curriculum reform has focused on making education more relevant to the national endeavor to build a Turkmen identity. Educational reform was developed in new political circumstances after getting the independence and neutrality status.

Regardless the decrease of the time frame of basic education to 9 years, new curriculum aims to maximum effective usage of teaching time and study disciplines in more practical way, children needs special protection is included, to apply the knowledge they gained on improving the environment and quality of life.

During the years of reforms some corrections were made in the list of the study disciplines of the secondary schools. Number of hours for state language and literature subjects are also increased.

Overview of basic education

Turkmenistan is undergoing an accelerated process of nation building, and the forging of a strong and distinctive national identity is seen as the highest national priority. The issue of national identity occupies a central space in the public and policy

domain in Turkmenistan today, and has implications that transcend the domains of governance and politics to impact on the daily lives of every citizen.

In Turkmenistan there is legislative base providing equal rights in education. Each citizen regardless the nation, heritage, sex is guaranteed free education at all levels of education within the state standards. Education in Turkmenistan based on the principles of humanism, democracy, national self-consciousness and mutual respect among people and nations.

In accordance with the basic Law on Education of Turkmenistan the main objective is the comprehensive development of a person on the basis of national and common to all mankind values. The legislative base combines the following laws, normative acts and regulations: Constitution of Turkmenistan, Law "About education", "About child rights guarantee", Presidential decree "On preschools", "On secondary schools", "On high education", regulations of the Ministry of Education on specialized institutions, mutual agreements with different agencies. Free access to education provides high level of education and literate rate of people.

In the school year 2001/2002 13 000 new pupils seats were officially opened in the country. It helps to decrease number of students' studied in two/three shifts. Physical status of schools is also the indicator of the increase of school enrollment. In the year 200-2001 the number of students studied in one shift school was 67,3%, in 2002-69,7%.

Vocational training has already undergone basic reforms in response to external pressures, including consolidation of teaching programs and concentration of training in shorter time periods and a major reduction in public financing by shifting to financing by beneficiaries. It is not well prepared to give training in market-oriented occupations.

Higher education. There are 16 higher education institutions in Turkmenistan with some 21000 students enrolled. Higher education institutions train students in economics, medicine, agriculture, jurisprudence, oil and gas engineering, transportation, communication, languages learning, art. Students are provided with scholarships, textbooks and training appliances. In addition to this there are several vocational training institutions. The private sector in education is non-existent. The country has a literacy rate of close to 100%.

Institutions of Higher Education currently by Presidential Decree are referred to as High Schools. The President of Turkmenistan introduced a new order and curriculum content in 2002 that now students of high schools (institutions) must spend 60% of their entire 4-5 years of education by working in the work places of their specialization. Students can succeed better in getting practical knowledge at these places. Now the students have 2 years of theory, plus 2 years of practice.

International Cooperation

The neutral status of Turkmenistan opened wide opportunities for cooperation with foreign states in the educational sphere. Many young Turkmen citizens are receiving training abroad both financed privately, grant aided and by the state. The State provides them with privileges to cover the educational expenses abroad" in approved cases which usually are within state organizations. The public sector in general are rarely sponsored by state organizations for higher education or training abroad.

Moreover, all of the Embassies that function in Turkmenistan (British, French, German, American, Turkish, Chinese, Indian etc and other donors...) send the best students for undergraduate and postgraduate training to their countries, where students

receive training and obtain scholarships. Such programs like Tempus (European Union), DAAD (Germany), ACCELS (American) operate well in Turkmenistan. Many students were trained successfully in USA and Europe and then upon their return to Turkmenistan they attain the best positions in state and private sectors, where they show good educational background. They are considered as the most skilled and qualified experts in the labor market.