

Interview with Deutsche Welle Radio



Afghan Students' Problems with Textbook in Universities

Dr. Yahya Wardak's
Interview with Deutsche
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In today's program we have reports from Herat and Khost universities regarding the problems of students with the availability to textbooks and materials, and, about this issue, administrative advisor and expert in Ministry of Higher Education Dr. Yahya Wardak is with us in studio. He will answer the questions of you dear listeners.

-Hello, welcome Mr. Wardak. (Dari)

-Hello, I offer my regards from Bonn to dear listeners in Afghanistan or wherever in the world they are.

-Welcome to our program Mr. Wardak. (Pashto)

-Thank you.

- At the beginning, tell us: How do you evaluate the problems of students regarding the textbooks and learning materials?

- Three years ago, I went to some universities of Afghanistan. I saw the students using and copying old hand-written lecture-notes and chapters as learning materials which were written 20-30 years ago. That situation made me very sad; even I cried. That time I decided to work for the textbooks, since then I have been working in Ministry of Higher Education and until now we have published 116 medical textbooks, and we gave them to all medical faculties of the country.

-OK. Wardak, as you said the published books. Clarify whether these books were written or translated. And how about their quantity?

-Well, the books that we have published so far were both written and translated. Most of the books (about 90 %) were written by lecturers of different universities such as Nangarhar, Khost, Kabul, Herat, and Balkh. Those lecturers have twenty to thirty years work experience. They compiled books and other materials during their works, and then they sent them to us. We gave them to printing presses in Kabul to print them. After that, we send them to all the universities which have medical faculties. These books were printed in one to two thousand copies, and each book has a CD that contains all contents of the book. Also all the books can be downloaded from a website, www.ecampus-afghanistan.org, throughout Afghanistan and all over the world.

-Dear listeners, a few months ago, the Ministry of Higher Education declared that they have provided a new curriculum for all the universities of the country, and this would be taught in the first semester at the beginning of the year. This curriculum includes some books for the medical faculties which were translated from other languages, but in Sheikh Zayed University in southeast of the country the students of medical faculty face with troubles regarding professional textbooks. Listen to Faridullah Zahir's Report on which kind of problems they are.

The students of this faculty said to Deutsche Welle Radio that some books have been arrived from Kabul to their faculty, but except of few of them, others have not been given to them; instead, they were kept in library. These students say that they still face with lack of quality textbooks, so that they are obliged to use chapters or purchase books from bookstores.

Student: I am Mohammad Islam a student of the second year of medical faculty in Sheikh Zayed University. Students face with some problems regarding the textbooks, for example I can tell about Microbiology. In the library, there isn't any useful book for microbiology in order to students take advantage of it. Therefore, our teachers give us chapters, and we study them. As well as, a book of Physiology, which was written by a lecturer of Kabul University, is not available in the library; thus, we buy them in bazaar.

Students of the third year of medical faculty in Sheikh Zayed University complain that instead of the books, which were sent by the ministry to their university, their lecturers made chapters, and the books are used only for self-study; in addition, the subjects of the books and the teachings of the lecturers are quite different from each other.

-The teachings and the books do not correspond to each other; it means that teachers do not teach from the books; instead, they have made their own books and chapters five or ten years ago. This case is the same for all subjects—not for one or two. The lecturer's old written chapters are taught. The textbooks sent by the ministry don't match to the teachings.

Meanwhile the students of medicine in Khost request the Ministry of Higher Education to send them English books since, according to them, some academic topics, which can be found in English books, can't be found in Pashto and Dari textbooks.

At the same time, the dean of medical faculty Jahan Shah Tani rejected interviewing with Deutsche Welle Radio because, as he said, he has sent official letters to the ministry regarding to the textbooks and other troubles of the faculty, but the ministry has not given attention to them.

Afterward, we tried to visit Mohammad Rasool Bawari, the chancellor of Sheikh Zayed University, about the mentioned problems; in spite of waiting for about an hour in reception, he did not give us opportunity to interview him.

Sheikh Zayed University has 15 faculties in which about 7,500 students study who are youths of different areas; approximately 90 of them are girls.

-Ok, Mr. Wardak, you heard the report from Khost. What would you say about it?

First, I should say that we have published three books on Microbiology written by Prof. Dr. Obaidullah Obaid, the current minister of higher education. They were printed in 2,000 copies, and we sent them to all the universities. They were Medical Parasitology, Microbiology (I), and Microbiology (II). As well as, we have published General Microbiology by Shakhas, Microbiology by Prof. Mohammad Juma Hanif, Principles of Parasitology by Yousuf Mubarak, and Parasitology by Dr. Sabir. That is we have published more books of one subject, and we distributed them to universities. The problem is that since, in Afghanistan, there are 6 to 7 thousand students of medicine, unfortunately we can't give the books to each student. We give most of the books to libraries, so the students should take them from libraries at the beginning of semester, and after taking exam, they should give them back. Furthermore, it is good they confirmed that the textbooks have arrived to the universities, but as their teachers use old chapters instead of textbooks, the students should share this issue with the administration of university. As well as, the lecturers and the responsible authorities (dean of faculty and chancellor of university) should encourage the teachers to use new and standard teaching materials.

-Mr. Wardak, one of our listeners posed question on the issue:

-In the name of Allah. I am one of the students of Balkh University. I would ask the guest of the program whether the Ministry of Higher Education supervise the resources which are translated from other languages into our national languages or not.

-Well, I should reply to you that a few of these books have been translated; for example a book entitled Basic Guide to Anesthesia for Developing Countries has been published that its one side involves the original English text while Dari translation is written on the left side. Most of the books we published and made available for students in Afghanistan were written by lecturers of medical faculties of the country. Each book is confirmed by head of department, dean of related faculty and chancellor of related university. They confirm that the book was written correctly and is useful for students; after this, we launch its printing and distribution.

-Thank you. You pointed out to the translation of the books, but still some students have troubles with translation, such as a lady tells us:

-I would like to tell Mr. Wardak that students can't take advantage of the translated books; that is, after reading two or three sentences, student faces with a word that he/she does not know, then they need to refer to English textbooks for resolving their problem, or they search the issue on the Internet. What is your point of view about it?

-Their worry is right about those books which are translated either in foreign countries or in Afghanistan from foreign resources by translators who do not know professional terminologies. In such cases, this problem exists; it should be resolved. Our books don't have this problem. Even we have published three books in English, and one another has original English text on one side and Dari text on the other; that is, it does not have the mentioned errors.

-Mr. Wardak, some students of Herat University say that they hadn't received any book neither in Dari nor in Pashto from Ministry of Higher Education. Regarding this issue our correspondent reports from Herat:

Some students in Herat University complain nonexistence of sufficient professional textbooks, and they say that responsible organs do not pay serious attention to it. A student of third year in Herat University, Nazir Ahamd, said:

There are fewer books in Dari and Pashto while there are some in Persian. The useful books are very few. They contains some terms that we are not familiar with. In English there are a lot of professional book, yet they are not enough for using. Each book may have one or two copies, for example some books of Laboratory may be one or two copies in the entire faculty, but they are not available for teachers and students. There are many guys from suburbs who don't have enough money. They could only endure the rent of rooms and other costs; therefore, purchasing books is difficult for them.

Meanwhile, lack of attention to libraries has created problems in some faculties of Herat University. A student of Computer Science Faculty of Herat University, Parwiz Aazim, said:

There are books in the library, but unfortunately we don't have librarian; we don't have any responsible person in library. Unfortunately, this is inattention of chancellor's office of the university.

Farhad Nikzad, student of medical faculty said:

Lack of professional textbooks has increased troubles of students. The quantity of books is not enough for all the students. We might have ten textbooks of one subject, so that it can't be enough for more than ten students. Therefore, we must take one book and copy and spread it because there are about hundred or eighty students in each class.

Deputy of Herat University Nazir Ahmad Sikandary refused the blame about lack of textbooks in his university and said that over 20,000 copies of more than 50 textbooks have been brought to that university.

-We can't give the books to students to be with themselves because most of the students don't care about keeping the books; thus, the books face with threat in terms of maintaining. The books are in the libraries of each faculty and library of university. There are librarians in each library, and the students can benefit from the books anytime they want.

The authorities of Herat University say that several countries especially America and Germany have supported the preparation of professional textbooks in the past ten years.

-Ok Mr. Wardak, you heard the report. Have you had any program for purchasing books for libraries of universities, or will you have any?

First of all, I have to say that dear students are right. Actually, Afghan universities are in a pressing need for Dari and Pashto textbooks because most of the students,

unfortunately, don't know English. And also English books here don't exist, or some existed are very expensive. Therefore, there should be Dari and Pashto textbooks for all subjects e.g. Social Sciences, History, Literature, Natural Sciences, and Science that are taught in Afghanistan besides medical textbooks on which we have been working for three years and some have been published and made available for the students. Luckily, in the sector of education, Ministry of Education had started a vast program of publishing books of all subjects for all the 12 grades, then, in the past few years, they were distributed in all schools of the country, and even a book for teachers' guiding was published and given to the teachers. We should have the same national program for the textbooks of all subjects in Afghan universities. I agree with the opinion of the students. Teacher and textbook play the main role in the quality of education. Where there is no book, the students can't learn. When they don't learn, they can't be good doctors; that is, our patients can't be cured. Consequently, the patients need to go to foreign countries.

-Again the messages of listeners. We are listening to what the audiences say:

In the name of Allah. I am Mohammad Khalid from Nangarahar. My request from Dr. Yahya Wardak is to extend the translation of the textbooks for the students of universities. Translating professional books which are necessary for medical colleges is important for us. The number of copies is not important to be two or three thousand, rather they should translate one book but perfect; so that, the students would take advantage of them.

This student is right. This sequence should be extended and improved, i.e. books should be published for those subjects which have not been translated and published yet. As well as, the quality is important. The books should be well-translated. Good books should be translated, and intention should be paid to their quality. I do agree with this student.

-Mr. Wardak, how much did the publication cost and who did support it? As I think, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has been your cooperator.

German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) has supported the publication, first of all; and most of the books have been published by fund of this organization. Recently, especially in the past two years, another organization (Kinderhilfe-Afghanistan) –Dr. Eroes is its head—has supported the publication of textbooks for Nangarahar University as this organization's projects are educational. I should say that the expense of each book is two or three euros. It is only the expenditures of printing the books. We don't pay even a single Afghani to the lecturers and authors for compiling or translating because they earn salaries. To provide materials, we so far have published and distributed 116 medical textbooks, and recently the first non-medical textbook of mathematics for Khost University (Sheikh Zayed University) was published. As you heard from the students that they pressing need books of other subjects, we attempt to publish non-medical textbooks, as well, if there is fund.

-Mr. Wardak, World Bank has offered \$5,000,000 to the Ministry of Higher Education for supplying the universities and publishing textbooks. Have you used this sum in the publication of textbooks?

Unfortunately, we have not used funds of World Bank. Last year we proposed to it. World Bank accepted, but because of some bureaucracies the books were not published. My hope is that our ministry and other ministries of Afghanistan will make a program for the international aids. If the funds of World Bank are used for publication of textbooks besides other sectors, this will be a suitable use. The sum is given to the ministry for improving the quality of education, and the best way for increasing the quality of education is publication of textbooks.

-Mr. Wardak, the books published through the ministry are given only to public higher education centers, or the private higher education institutes can also benefit from them? Are some of them sold in bookstores or not?

Most of the books we so far have published were given to the libraries of universities which have medical faculties like Kabul Medical University, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Paktia, Khost, Nangarhar and Albironi universities. Recently, in Afghanistan, some private medical colleges and universities have been established; we give two or three copies of each book to them because they also train doctors. For example, in some provinces of Afghanistan (Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Khost), there are private medical colleges. We help with them as well. We don't take money from any person; that is, all the books are made available for them free of charge. In addition, we offer one sample of each book to some other organizations like Ministry of Public Health, some hospitals like 400-bed Charsad Bestar Hospital, Science Academy and some other institutions—they are given just as samples.

-Well, Mr. Wardak, tell us, at the end, whether any credit is given to the author of the books by the ministry or not?

The system in Afghanistan is that when a lecturer writes and publishes a book, it is a need for upgrading his/her academic rank. If the book is confirmed by the academic solidarity, the lecturer will upgrade a position beyond—it is a credit. We just give them 50 textbooks as acknowledgement, but we don't give any money.

-Bundle of thanks to advisor of Ministry of Higher Education administrative expert esteemed Dr. Yahya Wardak for he answered patiently to our and the listeners' questions.

I also thank you for inviting me to your studio and broadcasting my voice, students' and other experts' voices regarding this issue.