

Interview with Aryana TV about Textbooks

Date: Oct 23, 2017

Interviewer: Dr. Yahya Wardak, advisor to the Ministry of Higher Education is with us in today's program, and as you can see, he has brought some textbooks of universities regarding which we are going to have an interview with him.

Good morning and welcome to the program.

Yahya Wardak: Thank you, I would like to regard my hail and good wishes to all the audiences of Aryana TV.

Interviewer: Thank you, let's talk about the textbooks of universities. How is the status que of textbooks at Afghan universities? And could you please give us some information regarding these textbooks?

Yahya Wardak: Well, recently the higher education of Afghanistan has improved in terms of quantity, but unfortunately not enough attention is given to the quality of teaching at universities. Since besides teachers and other learning aids, textbooks have a significant role in the enhancement of teaching's quality, we have initiated a program of printing and publishing textbooks. Through this program, we have published textbooks of different Afghan universities in Pashto, Dari and English languages and distributed to all the universities throughout the country.

Interviewer: Are these textbooks printed and processed in Afghanistan?

Yahya Wardak: Yes, all the textbooks are printed here inside Afghanistan, in Kabul. These are printed in two, three printing presses, and more than 90 percent of them are written by lecturers of different Afghan universities. For example, this one is written by a lecturer from Nangarhar University, this one by Prof. Wali Mohammad Fayez who is lecturer at Balkh University; also others are written by lecturers of Khost and Herat universities who have studied in their respective fields. Most of them have bachelor's and master's degrees and have experience of 20-30 years' study and teaching in their fields, that is they are educated and well-experienced.

Interviewer: we'll talk about the textbooks, but prior to that let me ask you some general questions. Could you briefly evaluate the situation of higher education in Afghanistan? What about some existing complains among students and teachers? And what can be the solution for it?

Yahya Wardak: about the general situation, it will be better if you invite the spokesman of Ministry of Higher Education because I only work in the program of publishing textbooks.

Interviewer: so, as an advisor to the ministry, can't you express your opinion in this regard? Some students call and ask us about the issue, and we've had interviews with them in person. According to them, there are a number of problems at the universities that refer to the ministry, and some students complain about teaching system at their universities; they say that their teachers cannot teach them updated materials, or they don't have sufficient experience and are not professional lecturers. Also, as they say, the teachers have memorized the texts and expect the students to learn by rote. So, as such complaints seem to have increased among the students and teachers, what's your idea as an advisor to the Ministry of Higher Education and what can be the solution for the issue?

Yahya Wardak: well, it's good that you linked that problem with our issue of teaching materials. It's true; some seven to eight years ago, I witnessed students of faculties of medicine, engineering and so on at universities that they used handwritten texts which had been written 20-30 years ago. The teaching materials were in a terrible condition and some are still the same, so you are absolutely right in this regard. Most of the students complain, but unfortunately yet any broad program at the ministry is not yet available for solving the fundamental problem at universities. There are some teachers who write textbooks, then print them with their own costs and sell them to the students; the teachers have many problems, and some of them even cannot afford printing their written books. So it's true that unfortunately Ministry of Higher Education and other donors who spend great deal of money in the sectors of education and higher education have not yet initiated a broad program for resolving the problems of lack of teaching materials.

A great program of providing textbooks for schools was initiated at the Ministry of Education with the help of international donors. As you have already discussed the issue here at the TV, although that program may have some problems, those are going to be resolved. I suggest the same program of providing textbooks for universities called "Afghan National Textbooks Program". With starting such a program, lecturers of universities will be encouraged to write books in their respective fields, this way we will have at least one textbook for each subject that is taught at universities. There are some newly established faculties which don't have any textbook available. Therefore, it's clear that students complain their teachers don't teach them updated materials.

Interviewer: well, yeah, it's right that students don't have access to the material, yet it's the responsibility of teachers to prepare updated learning material for their students, isn't it? Ok, let's talk about these textbooks; as I just reviewed the first few pages of the first one you showed "Cartography with Principles of Topography", I saw some orthographic errors in the text for example the word "ستندر" which should be spelled as "استندر" and some other words. Once the students see the errors, they complain that even their teachers' textbooks have such basic problems. So, is there anyone who proofreads the textbooks so that they will be free of errors?

Yahya Wardak: the textbook you pointed out "Cartography with Principles of Topography" is written by Pohanwal (Assistant Professor) Dr. Mohammad Tahir Enayat. He has been a lectures for years at Kabul University and has upgraded up to the academic rank of Assistant Professor in his field. He has worked as the chancellor of Kabul University, advisor to Ministry of Higher Education as well as chancellor of Nangarhar University. Also, our process of publishing textbooks is that we first encourage lecturers to write or update, type and design their books. After that, their textbooks are affirmed by head of the respective department, dean of faculty and chancellor of related university. And, in relation to some terminology, such as the word "ستندر/استندر" that you said, there is no standard accepted way of spelling such words. However, there are no big problems in terms of contents and writing of these textbooks as they are the outcome of the lecturers' 30-40 years' of teaching. There might be some errors in typing the texts that's I can't guarantee that the textbooks are totally correct. Also, it's the authors who shoulder the responsibility of their own texts.

Interviewer: But students of schools or universities consider such points as they have requested us to share the issue with anyone we invite to the TV from Ministry of Higher Education or Ministry of Education.

Yahya Wardak: Yeah, it's OK. First of all, as we don't have books, we have to start culture of writing and reading books and expand it. Every book that is published for the first time may have

some problems. Elsewhere in the world, as the books are very good in terms of quality or all other aspects, they are the 30th-50th editions. God willing, in the next editions of these textbooks the errors will be resolved if any.

Interviewer: yes, it's good that they should be revised to remove their teething troubles. Well, these textbooks have CDs; it's good that students can easily have access to them. And what's this textbook about?

Yahya Wardak: Yeah, it's a good point. Let me first talk about the CDs and then I'll provide information about the book. All the textbooks that we print and publish are stored in CDs in PDF format because the printed copies are not enough for all the students and lecturers; therefore, they can copy the softcopies to their computers. Besides CD with each textbook, we have compiled and published 214 medical textbooks in two DVDs that contain textbooks related to subjects of the first to last class of faculty of medicine including chemistry, physics, biology, internal medicine, surgery, eyes, obstetrics and gynecology and so on.

Interviewer: there are 214 textbooks in these DVDs?

Yahya Wardak: yes, it's like a complete medical faculty for teachers and students. And it's not all; as technology and digitalization improves, besides the DVDs, we publish the textbooks online through a website from Bochum University in Germany. Show the link through the camera to the audience if possible. That's, everyone can register him/herself in the website and download the textbooks everywhere, whether in Afghanistan, Africa or Europe.

I receive calls from remote parts of the country such as Kunar and Badakhan, then I suggest them to take advantage of the website and download the textbooks to their own computers.

Interviewer: Good, can you give us these DVDs?

Yahya Wardak: yeah, I can give them to you as a sample.

Interviewer: as a quarter of the program Subh wa Zindagi (meaning Morning and Life) is for discussion on medical issues, I'll take the DVDs for that part of the program.

Yahya Wardak: Yeah, sure. And regarding the textbook that you asked, I would say that it's about breast cancer which is a very important issue in Afghanistan. I think, last week, some seminars and workshops were held about this issue, but unfortunately in Afghanistan only seminars are held on important issues rather than working in practice. However, publishing this textbook, as the first comprehensive textbook on the issue, is a practical work in this respect. It discusses diagnosis, treatment and prevention of breast cancer, so it will soon become a helpful reference for the doctors.

Interviewer: So, it will more facilitate their work.

Yahya Wardak: yes, of course,

Interviewer: thank you Dr. Yahya Wardak for accepting our invitation to the program, have a nice time.

Yahya Wardak: Thank you.

Interviewer: there are many textbooks and a lot of questions are remaining, so hopefully we'll have you next time.