

Lack of textbooks in Universities: Students still use handwritten old notes to learn lessons

AT News Report

KABUL: University students in Afghanistan still use the old handwritten papers and notes to learn lessons because printed textbooks are not available for them in the state-owned universities.



Instructors and students believe that the lack of textbooks and absence of a unified curriculum in universities affected teaching system. So, students of different universities follow different curricula. In some universities, old handwritten notes, prepared two or three decades ago, are distributed to students, which have never been updated over the years.

Students want the handwritten papers to be updated, improved and published in the form of printed textbooks which would help the teaching system get stronger with a better quality, instead.

Maliar, a student in Economics Faculty of Nangarhar University, says, “Most of the instructors are teaching their old and outdated chapters and notes which kept students away from new changes and improvements in teaching system.

The students hoped the government and concerned departments will put an end to old handwritten papers and work for a unified and updated curriculum to help in bringing quality education in Afghan universities.”

Wafa Muhammad, a student in Law Faculty of Nangarhar University, says, “It is true that instructors use old and handwritten teaching materials in universities of the country. The teaching materials have not been updated for years. The topics we learn in university are not implementable, usable or practical in the work market. I mean the teaching curriculum is not prepared based on the needs of the job market.”

He emphasized that the teaching curriculum must be

prepared with the needs of today’s world and in accordance with new needs and new technologies.

He added, “We are in trouble with old handwritten papers and notes by the teachers. If these teaching materials were replaced with standard and updated textbooks, it would be better for lecturers, students and for whole education system to move toward quality. The related departments must take this issue seriously to replace the old handwritten papers with standard and updated printed textbooks. This will improve quality of teaching in universities and will enable the students to utilize their knowledge they learned in universities beneficially in practical working areas.”

He further continued that there is no unanimous curriculum being taught in universities, so every university and even each instructor has a different curriculum and teaching materials for the students.

“This is a big problem for the teachers to update their materials themselves. If all instructors were given a single curriculum, then they would be able to jointly work on it and improve and update it year by year, month by month even week by week. In such case, it would be possible for the instructors to collect their teaching materials in a single book and update it, when needed in close cooperation of other instructors,” he said.

Ebadullah Nassiry an instructor in the Economics Faculty of Nangarhar University told Afghanistan Times that another problem that mars education system is the weak familiarity of Afghan instructors with English language.

“While we know we don’t have updated and enough books in our national languages, therefore we need to update our teaching materials from English sources. Unfortunately, most of the instructors in universities are not able to update their teaching material from English sources for the same reason,” he said.

Alteration in subjects for teachers is another problem that hinders instructors to update their teaching materials. In universities, it is not clear to instructors what subject to teach. For example, if a lecturer takes a subject a semester, he or she will be given a different subject to teach in next semester.

In such cases, instructors are definitely not able to improve and update their teaching materials. Furthermore, most of the handwritten papers are without any references and it is not clear from which sources these teaching materials come. This issue prevents the students to have access to the main sources from where the teaching papers were prepared.

While standard textbooks contain original references and this enable students to have access to the main source of the subject, if needed.

In general, lack of printed textbooks is a serious problem in nearly all public universities.

When a lecturer teaches from a book which is not available to the students, then there is no difference between handwritten notes and a textbook. So, for a quality teaching system there is a need that the related governmental departments or NGOs working in this sector are required to help the instructors in printing updated books in enough quantity to be available to all students in universities. Approximately, 70 percent instructors still use handwritten papers as teaching materials. Government or NGOs engaged in this sector can improve quality education in the country by printing enough textbooks.

Advisor at the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), Dr. Yahya Wardak, says, "To improve teaching quality in universities a lot of efforts are needed to print thousands of updated textbooks in native languages [Pashto and Dari] for Afghan students because still thousands of students have no access to standard textbooks and this has a negative impact on the teaching system."

He added that lack of updated textbooks, current outdated teaching methods and materials have put the Afghan universities' teaching system in a big trouble. He also emphasized on a great need of modernizing and improving the teaching system with providing students updated standard textbooks.

He also affirmed, "To achieve this goal, so far, we have published 157 textbooks for all Afghan universities, but how these could be enough for so many subjects and thousands of students. Started in 2009, the project mostly focused on medical books for universities of the country, while there is also a tantamount need of textbooks in other fields such as social sciences, literature and history..."

About the features of the textbooks, he explained that ninety percent of the published books were written by the university lecturers and the remaining were in English. Every book has a CD, containing the textbook in PDF format. Approximately 1,000 to 2,000 copies of each textbook were printed. In fact, these copies were insufficient for six to seven thousand students of medical faculties of the country. However, the e-books in PDF format are available to everyone on: www.ecampus-afghanistan.org.

He accepted this with exclamation of sorrow, "Unfortunately, most of the students and teachers are not able to read textbooks in English and they need updated books in their native languages Pashto and Dari. So, they prefer using old-style papers and notes."



He emphasized again that in general there was an enormous need for more textbooks to be translated, reprinted and published in the country for different colleges to enable the instructors in replacing the old material to new ones.

About the funding of the 157 textbooks, Dr. Yahya Wardak pinpointed that 95 textbooks were funded by German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and 60 by Kinderhilfe-Afghanistan.

No perks and privilege were provided to authors for their books, but as appreciation 50 to 100 textbooks were given to the authors and 400 to the author's faculty and 50 to all the seven remaining faculties throughout Afghanistan. In addition, 10,000 copies of 2 DVDs, containing the PDF format of all medical textbooks, are also planned to be distributed among Afghan students. The collection of all printed books in two DVDs would enable the students and instructors to have all the books available on their computers, he added. He also highlighted that there is a great need to pay attention to the betterment of the quality of English language in schools as a part of the effort to prepare the graduates to have the ability of using English books and materials in universities. When Mr. Wardak was questioned about printing of more textbooks, he said that the ministry and concerned departments don't have enough budget to continue book printing process. They know the importance of the program, though. So, as the fund becomes available then the textbook program will be able to provide better and standard books to more students in Afghan universities.