

Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale

Volume 47 | Issue 1

Article 6

August 2018

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Tim Goddard

University of Prince Edward Island

Mohammad A. Bakhshi

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Jim Frideres

University of Calgary, frideres@ucalgary.ca

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Recommended Citation

Goddard, Tim; Bakhshi, Mohammad A.; and Frideres, Jim (2018) "The Long Journey for Afghan Teacher Training Colleges: Accreditation and Quality Assurance," *Comparative and International Education / Éducation Comparée et Internationale*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 1 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cie-eci/vol47/iss1/6>

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The Long Journey for Afghan Teacher Training Colleges: Accreditation and Quality Assurance

Le long périple des Collèges Afghan de formation des enseignants : Accréditation et assurance de qualité

J. Tim Goddard, University of Prince Edward Island

Mohammad Ali Bakhshi, Memorial University

J. S. Frideres, University of Calgary

Abstract

The authors, having spent five years working in Afghanistan provide a first-hand description of the processes that evolved over that time in the development of an accreditation and quality assurance policy and program for Teacher Training Colleges. The paper provides a brief historical sketch of the educational system in Afghanistan and the steps taken by the Technical Advisors in helping the Ministry of Education formalize a policy for accreditation and quality assurance. The second part of the paper focuses on the structure and content of the accreditation process that was successfully piloted on three Teacher Training Colleges. The Ministry of Education is now in the process of implementing the program across the country. It reveals that the accreditation process can be adapted and incorporated into the government of low income countries.

Résumé:

Les auteurs, ayant passé cinq ans à travailler en Afghanistan, fournissent une description de première main des procédures, ayant évolué durant ce temps, de développement d'une accréditation et d'une politique d'assurance de la qualité et de programme pour les collèges de formation des enseignants. Cet article fait une brève ébauche historique du système éducatif en Afghanistan et des étapes prises par les conseillers techniques pour aider le Ministère de l'Éducation à formuler une politique d'accréditation et d'assurance de la qualité. La deuxième partie de cet article focalise sur la structure et le contenu du processus des accréditations, lequel a été mis en œuvre avec succès dans trois collèges de formation des enseignants. Le Ministère de l'Éducation est maintenant dans le processus d'implémenter le programme à travers le pays. Il révèle que le processus d'accréditation peut être adapté et intégré dans les gouvernements de pays ayant des revenus peu élevés.

Keys Words: accreditation, teacher training colleges, education reform

Mots clés : accréditation, collège de formation des enseignants, réforme éducative

Introduction

This paper traces the process by which the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Education undertook to develop a pan-Afghanistan accreditation system for Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs). The accreditation system covers all public and private TTCs in Afghanistan; although the primary focus is upon public TTCs. Accreditation in Afghanistan allows the Ministry to put a “stamp” of approval on students who graduate from the TTC that indicates the graduates are ready to practise at a determined minimal level. It also allows the TTCs an opportunity for self-evaluation and the ability to provide feedback on program content. Finally, it provides the opportunity for continuous improvement (quality assurance) of the TTC and its educational program.

The second part of the paper focuses on how the accreditation process was developed by the Ministry of Education (2013). We also discuss how it will be implemented as well as the details of the accreditation process. The paper reveals that accreditation can be customized and carried out by low income countries that wish to enhance the teaching profession. Benefits include increased public confidence in teacher competency, enhanced credibility of the TTCs,

ensured administrative and operational effectiveness, and federal and local recognition of the TTCs.

Theoretical Framework

A strong body of scholarly work (Apple, 2009; Dei & Rummens, 2010; Goddard, Jakubiec, & Zhang, submitted; ISLDN, 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2008; Preckler, Sainz, García, Garcia, & Ordoñez, 2012; Preston, 2012) has emerged with the purpose to highlight and revitalize the particularity of the contexts where education takes place. Overall, this line of thought indicates that research-based evidence has become a necessary and fundamental aspect of the short and long-term decisions that are needed to assure that post-conflict jurisdictions such as Afghanistan continue to evolve their educational systems in times of change.

From its inception, the Teacher Certification and Accreditation of Teacher Training Institutions in Afghanistan Project (TCAP) took the approach that capacity development was a crucial ingredient for project success. As such, capacity development was established as a stand-alone component within the project, rather than being viewed as a more nebulous “cross-cutting theme.” In developing the Project Implementation Plan (Goddard, Crane, Jenkinson, Paul, & Wrightson, 2012), the project drew upon the idea that capacity development “refers to a form of change that focuses on improvements to the ways in which things get done” (Baser & Morgan, 2008, p. 52). To achieve these improvements, it required “the empowerment of societal actors through learning, knowledge, information and innovation to effect transformational and sustainable change in institutions, that in turn supports the achievement of the development goal” (World Bank Institute, 2011, p. 7). Indeed, as has been suggested elsewhere, “capacity development should involve individuals (end users and local experts) and institutional entities” (Hashimoto, Pillay, & Hudson, 2008, p. 124). It was stressed that an organization does not exist as an autonomous entity but rather as a conglomeration of people, and thus any development of the capacity of an institution must perforce entail development of the people within that institution.

In this regard, capacity development was conceptualized as having two components, *capacity* and *responsiveness*. Capacity means that “there are processes in place through which individuals, e.g., men, women, organizations and societies can obtain, strengthen and maintain resources and competencies to set and achieve their own development objectives” (Global Affairs Canada (2015, para. 23).

Responsiveness involves “the capacity of governments, institutions and public organizations to respond and serve the diverse needs, priorities and rights of people within a reasonable time frame” (Global Affairs Canada, 2015, para. 18). The project was premised on this participatory approach and sought to be more effective than the more common practice, prevalent at the time, where “too often capacity development design focuses on the outputs and planning of activities— simply filling in pre-identified gaps for missing functions and skills based on imported or historic solutions” (World Bank Institute, 2011, p. 10).

TCAP took the approach that the development of policies and procedures had to be done in conjunction *with*, not *for*, the partner organization. This approach, considered innovative in 2011, is now widely recognized as good development practice. As a recent UNESCO (2016) report stated,

education reforms can only be effective if countries have the capacities to make them operational, with not just trained staff, but with effective organizational processes, functioning institutions and the existence of tools and resources to develop, implement and manage education policies and plans (para. 1).

Indeed, that same report goes on to state that “in the field of educational policies and strategies, the current focus is placed on strengthening national capacities to design coherent policies and credible development plans” (para. 8). From the beginning of the TCAP, the focus was on building relationships with those who would be required to implement the policies that had been developed together (ISLDN, 2013).

As those strategic (transformational) and operational (transactional) change factors that needed to be addressed were identified, the work was further informed by the educational background of the project team. Drawing heavily on three specific pedagogical traditions, the project was first grounded in the idea of “learning through doing,” the notion that it is only through experience that one can come to truly understand. Learning itself must be closely connected to the life and experiences of those who stand to benefit from the process. In this, the work of scholars such as Dewey and Dewey (1915/2008) was recognized.

Second, TCAP was in adherence to the notion of “education as democratic transformation” (Portelli & Solomon, 2001, p. 20), and to the idea that capacity development leads to the creation of “emancipatory knowledge [which] creates the foundation for social justice, equality, and empowerment” (McLaren, 1994, p. 179). This required the project team to be facilitators, not trainers, and to allow partners to develop their own ideas rather than having to follow a pre-imposed model of development. This work is grounded in the emancipatory pedagogy of scholars such as Friere (2000), who speak to the need for educational reform to come from within the community.

Third, the strengths of the existing system and of the people who served that system were recognized and valued. Too often development “experts” take a deficit view of the context in which they are working, listing all the items which are not present and focusing on what is not there. TCAP took an asset-based approach, based on the principles articulated by Kretzmann and McKnight (1996), an approach that allowed our partners to be viewed in a more positive and respectful manner. The work of the project was conducted under the auspices of these three concepts, which were sometimes made explicit, but were always grounded in our thinking. The underlying philosophy was that change comes through the work of individuals, working collectively, and is always context-specific.

Drawing on principles recently articulated by Diplo (2016), the project embraced and exemplified tenets of capacity development that take into account the broader political, social, and economic environment in which change takes place and, as such, illustrate a complex new paradigm of educational development. The work of developing a pan-Afghanistan accreditation system for TTCs, as described here, was undertaken under these auspices.

Afghanistan in Context

It was not until the second half of the 20th century that modern educational reform in Afghanistan began. In the post-Taliban government, interim government officials collectively agreed that education is one of the key components to building a modern, sustainable Afghanistan; one that is economically viable and holds a bright future for integrating Afghans into the socio-economic base of the country, including urban and rural, male and female, young and old.

The interest in promoting education in the late 1940s found that government expenditure on education made up nearly 40% of the total federal budget. As well, a Women’s Institute was started in Kabul and two girls’ high schools were established at that time (Watkins, 1963). By the 1950s USAID and Columbia University Teacher’s College supported the Afghanistan government towards the enhancement of postsecondary education. The need for postsecondary

education was evident, as by 1975 there were three times the number of applicants to Kabul university than it could admit. It was clear that the educational infrastructure could not support the educational demands made by Afghan youth (Kowaluk & Staples, 2009). Three years later the government instituted the French “Concord,” an examination at the end of Grade 8, to reduce the high demand on higher education institutions. The new exam, called the *Kankor*, established criteria for those wanting to go on to postsecondary education. Prior to this, students wishing to enroll in postsecondary education were placed in apprenticeship programs or sent to religion centres, called Madrasas. During this time, most educational institutions in Afghanistan were increasingly controlled, indoctrinated and funded by the Russian government.

By the early 1980s, the education system for primary, secondary and higher education schools enrolled about one million students, about a fifth of whom were girls (Rafi, 2007). With the subsequent conflicts involving the Russians, and then the Taliban, by the beginning of the 21st century there were fewer than 800,000 students enrolled with less than 10% females (Sadat, 2004). After the Bonn Agreement (2001), the Afghan government renewed its support for a new modern educational system (Guerre, 2009). By 2002, the interim Islamic Republic of Afghanistan government had been created, and it is estimated that 3 million Afghan children (one third of them girls) gained access to 3,000 schools across Afghanistan with the support of the UNICEF led Back-to-School-Campaign. Many of these children were entering a formal classroom for the first time in many years (Ahmadzai, 2014).

While Afghanistan is rich in the potential development of minerals such as copper, iron, gold, lithium, and hydro carbons, these resources have not been exploited because of the lack of domestic skilled labour force, the continued security issues, and the lack of infrastructure to process or export the resources. Today, the per capita income in Afghanistan is the lowest in Asia and among the 20 lowest income countries in the world. It is estimated that nearly 40% of the Afghan population is below the poverty line. The precarious nature of the economy of Afghanistan places over 80% of the population as vulnerable to falling into the poverty category at any time. With an estimated population of 28.6 million, this is particularly troubling for young people as Afghanistan is, demographically speaking, a young country with nearly half the population under the age of 15. The current adult literacy rate (15+ years) is estimated to be less than 40% with adult female literacy rate just over 10% (Jackson, 2011). All this points to a need to enhance the educational qualifications of Afghans (Farhoumand-Sims, 2009). Table 1 reveals the current statistics regarding students (primary, secondary, postsecondary) teachers and schools in Afghanistan.

Table 1: Number of Schools, Teachers and Students

Number of schools	Number of teachers	Number of students
16,400	188,037 (33% female)	9.2 million (39% girls)

Source: National Education Strategic Plan III, (2016) and EMIS, (2016)

Today, Afghanistan has made connections with several countries in the region, and these will potentially facilitate the flows of skilled and professional migrants in and out of Afghanistan. However, with the low educational levels of Afghans, many may not be able to fully participate in the domestic labour force and, if they leave, can only participate in the secondary labour resource pool of more developed countries. At the same time, returned diaspora educated elites from outside Afghanistan, e.g., Iran, Pakistan, have taken on the few skilled and professional

jobs in Afghanistan. Simultaneously, many highly skilled professionals and trades people within Afghanistan have left the country to find new lives. Currently the emigrants are having a brain and capital drain on the Afghanistan economy and it is estimated the total cost to the Afghan government is between 6,000 and 20,000 USD for each person leaving Afghanistan (Lutz & Desai, 2014; Stites & Bushby, 2017).

The political, social, and cultural situation across the country has mitigated the security situation in the development of education in Afghanistan. In the southern areas of Afghanistan, religious, ideological, and ethnic differences have influenced the progress and functioning of the educational system at all levels. Moreover, during the Taliban era, many female teachers were barred from working and girls were not allowed to go to school. However, by 2001, with the fall of the Taliban, a new era in the role of women in education began.

By 2002, 15% of the teachers in Afghanistan's schools had graduated from Teacher Training Colleges. Initially, UNICEF supported the Ministry of Education in providing training for 50,000 primary school teachers with a ten-day program on language arts and pedagogy. Since then, UNICEF, along with other NGOs have provided support that covers both formal and community-based schools around the country (Mohammad, 2006). Nevertheless, an ongoing obstacle is the recruitment of qualified trained teachers, where today almost 300,000 students graduate from high school every year and compete for the approximately 100,000 openings in postsecondary institutions. Of these, approximately 30,000 are places in vocational programs and TTCs in Afghanistan (Krause-Hannak, 2016).

The Education System and Teacher Training Colleges

Two separate systems of education exist in Afghanistan. The older system is a religious one taught by the mullahs who conduct schools in the village mosques. They teach the religious precepts of the Quran, reading, writing, and arithmetic. The other is a public system introduced in Afghanistan's 1964 constitution; it provides free and compulsory education. These two systems exist in a parallel but separate fashion.

In 1912 the first teacher training college, *Dar-al-Mallimeen*, was established in Kabul, and the following year the Department of Education modernized the curriculum of the traditional schools (Miran, 1975). One decade later another TTC was established in Kabul. The students of this newly created TTC were primary school teacher graduates. Then, in 1964 two additional TTCs were established, the first one was *Dar-al-Mallimeen Aali* (High level TTC), which is now called Sayed Jamaluddin Afghan TTC. The second one was Teacher Training Academy. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education personnel did not hire instructors through an established procedure, nor were the procedure for students' enrollments clear. The overarching criterion was that anyone who had graduated from Grade 7 could continue their lessons at the TTCs (Kamgar, 2003). This resulted in considerable confusion as to the curriculum to be followed as well as the standards necessary to graduate from a TTC with a credential to teach primary and secondary students.

To address the issue of teacher quality in the primary and secondary schools, the Ministry of Education developed a plan to enhance teacher training (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008). Like other responses to Afghanistan's critical social and economic conditions in the early 21st century, the Ministry's teacher training activities were substantially supported by international organizations. In 2011 the *Education Law* was put into effect, providing a mandate for the Ministry of Education to create Teacher Training Colleges (TTCs) across the country (Islamic

Republic of Afghanistan, 2011). Table 2 identifies the current number of public and private TTCs that operate across the country.

Table 2: Number of TTCs, TTCs’ Lecturers and Graduates in Afghanistan

Number of public TTCs	Number of public support centers and satellite TTCs	Number of TTC lecturers	Number of TTC graduates (2002–2014)	Number of private TTCs
48	260	2,540 (15% female)	169,093 (45% female)	120 ^{ab}

Source: Personal communication, Teacher Education Directorate, 2016, Barakat, 2014.

^a The number of lecturers in Private Teacher Training Colleges is indeterminate as they do not submit accurate data to the Ministry of Education. Estimates range from 1,500 to 4,000.

^b Five of these private TTCs are in Pakistan according to TED (Teacher Education Directorate).

As noted earlier, the education sector in Afghanistan has been a major priority for the Afghan people and the donor community since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001. As Khan (2012) notes, article 22 of the constitution stipulates that “all citizens of Afghanistan both men and women have equal rights and duties before the law, and any kind of discrimination of the citizens of Afghanistan is prohibited.” Significant government and NGO resources have been devoted to improving educational outcomes in Afghanistan including teacher training (Beaudet, 2009).

Government Policy and Contemporary Teaching Standards

The Afghanistan government has identified the professional development of teachers as a critical part of re-establishing the country’s human capital and subsequent development of their economy (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2009). In 2002 a Comprehensive Needs Assessment of the education sector was conducted together with the Afghan Interim Administration by a team of professionals from the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Asian Development Bank. One of the key recommendations of this report was to support teacher professional development as well as to introduce a modern teaching curriculum. More recently, in 2004 (a/b) the Ministry of Education released several education policy documents outlining their priorities. All these documents noted that teacher training is a key component of all education programs for the Afghan government, and they highlighted the importance and needs within the teacher training sector. However, until the beginning of 2004, activities and programs remained relatively autonomous of each other. The Afghanistan Teacher Education Program, supported in part by a private sector company, was the first concerted effort on behalf of all donors in the teacher training sector to develop a coordinated and integrated response to assist the Ministry of Education in achieving its goals for teacher development (Intili & Kissam, 2008). A number of collaborating agencies, e.g., Academic Council on Education, the Ministry of Higher Education, UNICEF, USAID, World Bank, all provided financial and technical support. The program goals were to produce a long-term plan for teacher education in Afghanistan and enable coordination among diverse inputs and delivery systems through a commonly agreed upon approach (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2012).

The establishment of the transitional Islamic Republic of Afghanistan brought new opportunities for educational development in Afghanistan (Samady, 2013). The new Afghan Constitution (1382/2004) called for nine years of compulsory education for all Afghan children between the ages of 6–15. In addition, high school, college, and university education was expanded and

would be free to those who qualified. Government policy focused on the elimination of illiteracy and the availability of all levels of education to both boys and girls. The new constitution promoted education at all levels, for women and nomads, and generally called for the elimination of illiteracy in the country. President Karzai noted that education was a high priority for government support, and several countries, e.g., Japan, Germany, USA, and specific universities such as the University of Nebraska, Purdue, and Portland State University began to support the building of infrastructure as well as curriculum in various Afghanistan universities and TTCs. Furthermore, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) covered the cost of printing millions of textbooks for students in both primary and secondary schools.

The goal was to build a national cadre of qualified teachers who would be knowledgeable in content and pedagogy. Teachers were defined as the heart of education. By encouraging the recruitment, development, and retention of teachers, Afghanistan was investing in the future of its youth and in the future of a stable, developing, and peaceful nation. To build a national cadre of qualified primary and secondary school teachers to improve the learning achievement for all primary and secondary school students was a central goal of the government, which was reflected in the Ministry of Education Five Year Strategic Plan: 1384/2006.

Because of the new education policy, between 2001 and 2015 student enrollment increased from approximately 1 million to more than 9 million, of which almost 40% are female students.¹ However, the development of education and its impact on the economic development of the country is dependent upon the number and quality of teachers available for primary and secondary schools (Warnock, 2009).

The Role of the Ministry of Education

Improving the quality of teachers and their teaching practices is central to Afghanistan's current efforts to rebuild a quality education system. The future of Afghanistan's human capital lies in the ability of the Ministry of Education to invest in teacher professional development (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2016). In this context, the Ministry is committed to building a national cadre of qualified primary school teachers through the efforts of TTCs. TTCs are two-year educational institutions that specialize in preparing students to become teachers in the primary school system. Successful completion of the two-year program results in a teacher diploma and the right to teach in any primary school in Afghanistan. Teachers who wish to teach in the secondary system are required to attend university and obtain their degree before they can enter the teaching profession. If a student does not have sufficient high marks to directly enter university after high school, he/she may attend a TTC and if successful, apply to enter a university—a kind of “back door” strategy for entering university. At present, it is estimated that only about 10% of the TTC students are attending as a strategy to enter university. To fully appreciate the focus on enhancing teacher education by the government, in 2001 there were four TTCs, and by 2016, 48 TTCs (at least one in each province) have been created along with well over 260 TTC support centres and satellites. All this fits into the central goal of the federal government to improve the learning opportunities and achievements for all school-age and older students across Afghanistan.

¹ There is considerable debate as to the number of students in primary and secondary schools. In 2014 the Department of Education estimated that 11 million students were enrolled. However, the new Minister of Education places the number at 6 million. The argument centres on the number of “ghost” students that are registered but either don't exist or never enrolled (Shaheed, 2016).

Nevertheless, the conflict in Afghanistan has not only destroyed much of the physical infrastructure of the education system, but also the human resources that are so critical to establishing a quality education system (Afghanistan Interim Administration, 2002). The Ministry has made great efforts over the recent years to improve the skills and competencies of teachers. Despite the seemingly insurmountable challenges, the Ministry facilitates the pre-service and in-service training of almost 35,000 teachers annually and has deployed 138,000 teachers to the schools over the past decade. It revived 19 Teacher Training Colleges and has begun an initiative of radio-based teacher training. The Ministry's efforts have been assisted with several donors, e.g., Canada, Germany, Sweden, USA, and World Bank, providing funding for additional short-term teacher training for up to 75,000 teachers. Today, the Ministry's concern is how to coordinate the efforts of a multitude of NGOs who are providing teacher training of some sort.

The TTCs provide the main support for pre-service teacher training. All TTCs have training center, library, science laboratories, administrative buildings, video, internet, audio-visual and radio equipment, and conferencing facilities, although the extent of these services varies considerably from one TTC to another (Azam et al., 2014). This is confirmed by the authors of this paper as they have visited TTCs across the country. In summary, there is no set of standards with which a TTC must comply in their teacher education program.

In addition to the above programs, a special housing subsidy program for teachers has been established to attract women to the teaching profession, and to increase the number of male and female teachers in the rural and underserved areas of the country. In this regard, the Ministry works towards establishing an environment that will attract people to the teaching profession so teaching in Afghanistan will once again be a respected and sought-after profession.

Within the Ministry of Education there are several departments, but only one is directly involved with TTCs (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004). The TED is responsible for national teacher training policies and programs. They also manage the TTCs within the 34 provinces. The TED is also responsible for academic guidance to these colleges. There are plans to establish an Academy of Teacher Training as a part of the Teacher Education Directorate that will be responsible for a countrywide program for in-service teacher training and support, which will bring teacher development programs down to the district and school level. Today, TTCs offer a two-year teacher diploma for Grade 12 graduates as well as a five-year diploma in teacher training for Grade 9 graduates. Classes, eating facilities, and dormitories at the TTCs are segregated by gender but students are taught the same curriculum.

The Ministry of Education has a presence in each of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan. These are the Provincial Education Departments (PEDs) which are responsible for all budgeting and administration of schools and teachers in the province. The PEDs are supported by District Education Departments (DEDs) that have a presence in every district of the country although most DEDs do not have their own office and are often based in an annex of an existing school. There is no regional administrative structure in Afghanistan. For example, all finances for the TTCs and DEDs are managed by the PEDs, and they in turn report directly to the central Ministry of Education in Kabul. On a quarterly basis, a budget is allocated to the PEDs after the approval of the Governor of the province, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Finance. In each province, there is a representative of the Ministry of Finance, a revenue collector, who is responsible for issuing payments to all departments including the Education Department at the provincial level (Spink, Karvar, & Atmar 2004). This structure had led to concerns regarding fraud and corruption in the provision of educational services throughout Afghanistan (Independent Joint Anti-Corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee, 2015).

In the overall structure of the Ministry of Education, there is a General Director for TED. Appointed by the Minister of Education, this person is the key link between the Ministry of Education and the TTCs and is responsible for applying the policies of the TED. The General Director also ensures all central government decisions are adhered to and laws outlined by the Ministry of Education in relation to teacher training at the provincial level are enforced. While TTCs would normally report directly to the TED in Kabul (the central office), there remains a strong reporting linkage between the TTC and the PED because finances are allocated through the PED. In each PED, there are two deputies, one administrative and one academic. Each of the deputies have several departments reporting to them. These include a planning department, an inspection department, and an employment department. The relationship with the TTC and the PED is therefore still strong. PEDs as well as the TED can make recommendations to the Minister of Education to appoint or remove senior level staff at the TTCs. This line of responsibility therefore remains confusing for all concerned.

Teacher Training Colleges

The proposed National Development Budget for 1394–95 (2015–2016) still emphasizes inputs over quality—over two thirds of the total budget of 453 million USD is allocated to education infrastructure and equipment while only 10% for curriculum and teacher development. Within this latter category, very few funds are reserved for teacher training or the development of teacher materials. Most funds are reserved for the construction of teacher training infrastructure and facilities, such as new classrooms, new dormitories, libraries, and internet. The longer-term strategies of the government involve giving support to the TTCs on physical rehabilitation, provision of supplies, and developing a new curriculum for pre-service teacher training (Spink et al., 2004). Teacher education and professional development cannot be seen in isolation of the ministry system and the structure within which they work.

Individual TTCs are, however, supported by different organisations in addition to the government. For example, one TTC was rehabilitated with USAID funding while four TTCs in Laghman, Kandahar, Helmand, and Takhar provinces received support from UNICEF on supplies for libraries, computers, furniture, and generators, even though at present UNICEF has no further plans for technical support to the TTCs. Another organization that has supported TTCs in Badakhshan, Bamyan, and Baghlan is the Aga Khan Development Network. It has provided funds for physical rehabilitation of the facilities and supplies for laboratories and libraries, but most importantly it has provided technical support through the appointment of international staff stationed full time at various TTCs. Also, for two of the TTCs that the Aga Khan Development Network is supporting, the Government of India will provide in-kind support, such as solar panels for electricity, computers, and staff for the IT training program.

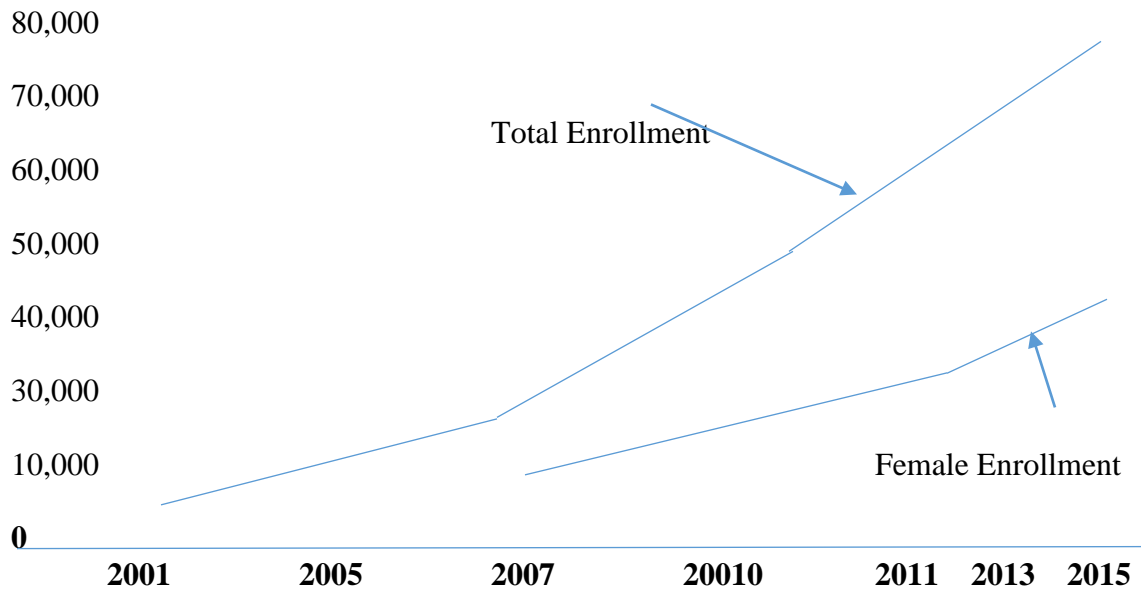
Any student who is enrolled in a TTC course can be considered for a teaching position. These students are also eligible to transfer to an in-service course. However, in-service students are not eligible to transfer to a pre-service course, as entry to pre-service is governed by the *Kankor* examination. Of all Grade 12 students qualified to attend TTCs in 2014, only a third enrolled. Many students could not provide the means to stay away from home while continuing their studies in a TTC. Also in many cases students did not enroll because they did not see teaching as a viable career path.

TTCs are an integral part of the education system of Afghanistan because they train students professionally to become successful teachers, and to increase the quality of education (Spink et al., 2004). In addition, the role of the TTCs is to upgrade the qualifications of existing

teachers who are not formally qualified, as well as to train new professional teachers (Barakat, 2014). The Ministry of Education (2010) also oversees and supports district level development centres across the country. The Teacher Education Directorate argues that when the number of professional teachers is increased, the quality of education is enhanced as professional teachers teach well and help students improve their capacity to teach (Schunk, 2011). In the end, the aim of Teacher Education Directorate is to establish sustainable programs to increase the number of professional and competent teachers across the country (Mansory, 2012).

Figure 1 identifies the dramatic increase in student enrollment at TTCs over the past 14 years. Beginning with 450 (all males) in 2001, this had increased to over 80,000 by 2016, of which slightly more than half were women. Current students attending TTCs are equally divided between pre-and in-service programs.

Figure 1. Student Enrollment at Teacher Training Colleges, Afghanistan: 2001–2013



Source: Personal communication, Teacher Education Directorate, 2016

Accreditation in Afghanistan

Given the concern over enhancing the quality of educational programs, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has continued to look for ways to implement this policy. Nevertheless, the concepts of accreditation and quality assurance are not found in Dari or Pashtu, the two official languages of Afghanistan, and thus there has been little concern about the development of pan-Afghanistan teaching/institutional standards. That is not to say that the Ministry of Education has not been concerned with the TTC curriculum. As a matter of fact, it has been attempting to establish some minimal standards for TTC programs to raise teacher competency. Twice a year the Ministry of Education sends out employees to visit TTCs, to observe and evaluate the activities there. Upon returning to Kabul (the central office), the observers write a formal report to the Director General of the TED, identifying issues and concerns observed during their visit. However, with extensive bureaucratic hurdles to deal with and little budget to address the issues

or concerns, very few pro-active responses have been given by the TED or the Ministry of Education regarding these reports.

All this has changed since 2012. A short review of the project will illuminate the genesis and process that took place. In 2005/6, a professor at the University of Calgary met with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and a private corporation that specialized in international development projects to discuss educational issues in Afghanistan. However, given the security situation at the time, legal counsel at the university felt that the liability issues were too high; the discussions were discontinued. Two years later, the Director General of the TED in Afghanistan led a small team to Canada, attempting to interest Canada to support her vision for teacher education reform in Afghanistan. Conversations were then held between CIDA and the Director General about the project, and all participants shared their views, giving the project a new life. By 2010, CIDA had reviewed the initial ideas and advertised a “request for proposal” for the Teacher Certification and Accreditation of Teacher Training Institutions in Afghanistan Project (TCAP). The first author, by then at the University of Prince Edward Island, was part of a team put together by the World University Service of Canada (WUSC), a Canadian NGO, to draft a proposal. Following a competitive process, this proposal was accepted by the CIDA. The project became operationalized in 2011 and concluded in 2016.

Under the terms of agreement by which TCAP was implemented, the Director General of the TED was identified as the contact person for the Ministry of Education. As such, the Director General would oversee the activities of the project, and thus the accreditation component of the project was started. In 2013 the third author, as Technical Advisor for Accreditation, arrived in Kabul. With the support of the Director General, members of the Teacher Education Directorate, Afghan scholars and professionals, and outside consultants, he began the arduous task of developing an accreditation structure and process that would be “made in Afghanistan” and would be in the best interest of enhancing teacher training in the country.

The project focused on TTCs as the universities of Afghanistan had received a major grant from the World Bank, and had embarked upon an accreditation system some time before. Unfortunately, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education did not communicate or share their ideas about accreditation until the Technical Advisor initiated communications between the Accreditation Working Group and the Director of Accreditation for the Ministry of Higher Education.

As the development of accreditation process unfolded, three TTCs were identified to participate in a pilot project. In consultation with the Director General of the TED, it was determined that this work would take place in the three provinces—Bamyan, Kabul, and Nangahar. Bamyan is a Dari-speaking and Shia Muslim province located in the central mountains of Afghanistan. Nangahar is primarily a Pashto-speaking and Sunni Muslim province located on the eastern border of Pakistan. Kabul with a mixed population, serves the large (5+ million) metropolis of the capital and its surrounding hinterland. The three pilot TTCs of Nangarhar (Jalalabad), Bamyan (Bamyan), and Sayed Jamaluddin Afghan (Kabul) would become the innovators, the leaders in the process and, in the end, apply for accreditation from the body that would eventually oversee the accreditation process. These three institutions represent a variety of dimensions: urban and rural, large and small, old and new, Dari- and Pashto-speaking, along with both men and women students. They became active participants in the development of the criteria for accreditation as well as the structure and process by which the accreditation process would take place.

To begin, the Director General of the TED appointed an Accreditation Working Group comprised of staff from the TED. These individuals, in addition to carrying out their regular TED jobs, were assigned, without pay increase, the task of identifying criteria for assessing accreditation as well as developing a policy that the TED would use in carrying out the accreditation process. This working group, along with the Technical Advisor and the supporting Afghan professionals, began to establish the general criteria that would be used to evaluate the TTCs when applying for accreditation. It began with the scoping criteria used by various government agencies around the world. This process identified the different accreditation criteria from both low and high-income countries, e.g., Norway, Canada, India, Maldives, and Saudi Arabia. The intent of the scoping was to look for relevant criteria that would be applicable to Afghanistan, and then to identify other criteria that would be appropriate to the Afghanistan TTC context.

In addition, the project established Quality Improvement Groups (QIGs) within each of the pilot institutions (ranging from 4–6 faculty). With the support of the Director General, each of the three QIGs would meet with the Technical Advisor (TA) and Accreditation Working Group to discuss issues regarding the criteria and the process of accreditation. The QIGs quickly became the link between the TTC and the Accreditation Working Group. Moreover, the QIGs would help the Director of the TTC to complete the Self-Study template. To facilitate communication and to ensure that decisions reached would be followed up, the Director of the TTC became the “chair” of the QIGs and the point person for communication for the TA and the Director General. This arrangement also facilitated communication with the Director General who holds several meetings each year with the Directors of TTCs to discuss operational and financial issues. At any of those meetings the Director General would be informed of the progress of the process and issues and concerns that the QIGs might have.

The QIGs were also linked with faculty at their own institution, they served as a conduit to share information with faculty about the progress that the Accreditation Working Group was making. In addition, QIG members were provided with a laptop (and a one-day training session) to facilitate communication among QIG members from the three institutions. Besides having many meetings with the Accreditation Working Group in Kabul, the TA and his supporting Afghan professionals, including the second author, also travelled to the three pilot institutions over time to meet with the QIGs, faculty members, students, and Provincial Education officials. However, since travelling to Jalalabad (Nangarhar) became a security issue for international staff and advisors, meetings with the Director of the College and his QIG took place in Kabul after the first year while meetings with the QIGs in Bamyan and Sayed Jamaluddin took place on their respective campuses.

Over a two-year period, the Accreditation Working Group of eight people from the TED developed an accreditation policy to embed the process into the Ministry of Education. They identified 12 criteria for evaluating accreditation applications with the goal of designing an accreditation process tailored-made for Afghanistan. Once that was completed, the Accreditation Working Group developed indicators for the 12 criteria that could be measured. When this was completed, the Accreditation Working Group met with the QIGs and other Ministry of Education officials to confirm that the measures were appropriate and reflecting measures that could be used in assessing accreditation.

Upon completion of the accreditation policy and the formal acceptance of the policy and operational indicators of the 12 criteria by the Director General, the Accreditation Working Group was disbanded; a new committee was created to move the process forward. The new

group, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee, appointed by the Director General of the TED, was given the mandate to develop the strategies and processes by which accreditation would be carried out. Initially a nine-member committee, it is now a 12-member committee (8 men, 4 women) made up of the Ministry of Education employees and one representative from a TTC. The committee has been charged with establishing and carrying out the accreditation process for TTCs across Afghanistan.

The Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee began considering the detailed process of carrying out an accreditation. This meant, for example, they had to develop a structure and process by which applications from TTCs would be initiated and dealt with. In addition, the TED had to ensure that appropriate resources would be available to the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee to carry out the process once the pilot project was completed and funding from the Canadian Government was no longer available to the Ministry of Education. In the end, the Director General assured that funding was in place and the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee developed a standardized document (Self-Study template) that would operationalize the 12 criteria. This document was reviewed by the QIGs, selected members of the TED, and other individuals from the Ministry of Education to ensure the vocabulary was appropriate as well as reflecting the Afghan context. It should be added that all documents produced by the Accreditation Working Group and the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee were reviewed for gender appropriateness by an outside consultant and are published in both Dari and Pashtu. Once the Self-Study template had been reviewed and approved by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee, it was sent to the three pilot TTCs to fill out and was submitted to the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee for assessment.

The Self-Study Template

The Self-Study template is the key to the accreditation evaluation process developed by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee. It is a document that TTCs fill out and provide evidence for their answers. The template is divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to information about the TTC as an institution, e.g., physical infrastructure, number of students and faculty, financial information, identification of departmental heads and composition of administration structure. The second part of the template focuses on performance measures (indicators) related to the 12 criteria established².

Each criterion was measured by specific indicators; the number per criterion ranged from 5 to 23. For example, for the strategic planning, evaluation and reporting criterion, questions include the following: “Does the institution have a strategic plan?”; “Does the institution have performance data on past and present students?”; “Is there any system for giving and receiving reports in the institution?”. In all cases, each indicator was provided a weight of 3–5. Thus, each criterion could be summarized by a single quantitative score. The scoring revealed that certain minimal scores must be achieved as the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee assigns an accreditation rating (no accreditation, probation, conditional, full) for the TTC application. There were two related scales used in this assessment. First, the mean score for each of the criteria. Second, a related measurement that assesses the cumulative percentage of criteria that have a satisfactory score of 3 or better. Both scoring procedures were used to ensure that the final scores obtained by the TTC were not solely a function of one measurement strategy.

² An identification and further description of the criteria, management strategy and other documents can be obtained from the authors.

The initial submissions by the three TTCs were completed in mid 2015 which was then reviewed by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee. At that time it was agreed that some of the indicators in the template were not specific enough or needed to be rewritten to be clearly understood by the TTC members who were filling out the template. It was also decided that not all indicators would be afforded the same weight in the assessment process. Thus, additional changes were made to the template, and the pilot TTCs once again submitted their “formal” application for accreditation.

To assess the new Self-Study template for accreditation, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee (and other members from the Teacher Education Directorate) held a short-term training program (two weeks) in the Maldives and met with the Accreditation team from the Republic of Maldives. Previously, the Accreditation Working Group had taken a short-term training program in Georgia. These events were made possible through the financial contributions of the Government of Canada. Through these events, Afghan participants could speak with those who were in different places on the post-conflict continuum, and those who had previously experienced similar issues regarding education faced in Afghanistan.

For example, Georgia has in the recent past emerged from Russian occupation and conflict. The short-term training program in the Maldives took place with additional resource personnel from the Ministry of Education and consultants from Scotland, Australia, and New Zealand. These individuals had worked in their respective countries regarding accreditation; they suggested process for carrying out the final assessment of the applications and blending in both qualitative and quantitative indicators used in the Self-Study template. These resources provided a contextual validity and usefulness to the Short-Term Training programs as well as exposure to relevant content (Goddard, 2017). At this short-term training program, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee also evaluated some of the indicators to establish “coder” reliability of the various indicators. The results of this exercise revealed a high “coder” reliability amongst the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee members in their evaluation of the submissions made by the three TTCs.

In addition, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee established the process of having “external evaluators” carry out a site visit of the institutions to ensure the veracity of the answers provided on the Self-Study template. As the short-term training in Georgia revealed that just filling out a Self-Study template lent itself to fraud and misrepresentation (Jibladze, 2013; Orkodashvili, 2012), the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee agreed to have a three to five-person “external evaluation” committee receive the Self-Study submission, evaluate the veracity of the information provided, and then carry out a site visit at each institution making an application. This committee is selected and appointed by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee and given the task of validating the template responses. The external evaluation group would also evaluate the TTC on additional criteria as outlined by the Malcolm Baldrige Award for Quality Assessment (Baldrige National Quality Program, 2006).

In addition, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee created a “code of ethics” for members as well as for any others working with them on the accreditation process. This code focused on transparency, confidentiality, and integrity of the process, and on the information collected by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee and the external evaluation committee. Finally, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee prepared a *Handbook for Accreditation and Quality Assurance* that would be used for future TTCs consultation when applying for accreditation. This *Handbook* provides detailed information regarding the process of accreditation as well as the steps taken in assessing the TTC Self-Study

template. It identifies the process by which the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee measures the various indicators in the Self-Study template. This document assures that the process of accreditation is open, public and transparent, and all future TTCs making an application understand the criteria used by the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee, the operationalization of those criteria and the method by which the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee evaluates the Self-Study template submitted by the TTC.

By early 2016, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee had received the final formal applications by the three TTCs and established three external evaluation committees to carry out a site visit for each of the pilot institutions. These committees consisted of members from the TED, the broader community, and other individuals who have some expertise in postsecondary education, e.g., university professors, retired Ministry of Education officials. After the site visit and the evaluation of the “Self-Study template” filled out by the TTC, the external committee prepared a report for the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee. The latter then reviewed the committee’s observations, concerns, commendations, and recommendation. Directors of the three TTCs were provided a copy of the report and were given the opportunity to respond. In turn, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee began the arduous task of evaluating the Self-Study template and each indicator while assigning a “weight” to that indicator.

In the spring of 2016, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee completed their final assessment of the Self-Study templates for the three pilot TTCs and the integration of the external evaluation committee report to make a final recommendation to the Director General of the TED. The final submission revealed that all three pilot institutions would be recommended conditional accreditation. This meant that remedial action had to be taken by the TTC within the next year to achieve a rating of “full” accreditation.

Conclusion

The entire process of developing an accreditation system for the 48 TTCs across Afghanistan took nearly five years. Its development and implementation at the pilot stage was the result of the hard work of a group of Ministry of Education employees and the strong support given to them by the Director General of the TED. It was also noted that the institutions themselves began to take ownership over the process, and they implemented changes within the TTC to reflect their understanding of the accreditation process as well as its value. Directors of the three TTCs and the QIGs indicated their own involvement in making changes in the institution to reflect their concern about the involvement of students, the need for documentation, and the way of assessing the performance of faculty. Over time, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee began the process of taking “ownership” of the process of accreditation. For example, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee members identified additional changes to both the Self-Study template and the external evaluation which would be undertaken to ensure the appropriateness of indicators and the measurement of indicators in subsequent applications. Further, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Committee developed a series of documents which ensure that the process of accreditation is open, transparent, and relevant. Documents focusing on appeals, the mandate of the external evaluation committee, and confidentiality of information, for example, all provide assurance that the process is public and standardized. What now lies ahead is the ability of the Ministry of Education, and particularly the TED, to allow the TTCs to take on more responsibility, independence, and authority in implementing the teacher education program.

In summary, the process of establishing an Accreditation and Quality Assurance program for Afghanistan was lengthy. However, with the support of the Director General of the TED, issues such as funding, allocation of resources and space, and transparency of the process were resolved. What happens next is that the process is now opened to the remaining 45 TTCs so that they may undergo a comprehensive accreditation evaluation. The TED will also need to develop a procedure and criteria for assessing quality assurance for those TTCs that become accredited.

Using the process and the documents produced by the Accreditation Working Group and the Accreditation Quality Assurance Committee within the Ministry of Education, other nations wishing to implement an accreditation system for their postsecondary educational institutions might find the material useful as a reference point when considering their own situations.

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J. Tim Goddard is a Professor of Education at the University of Prince Edward Island and was Project Director for the *Teacher Certification and Accreditation of Teacher Training Institutions in Afghanistan* Project. His primary area of research and teaching is educational leadership and administration, particularly those serving minority and marginalized populations in post-colonial and post-conflict environments.

Mohammad Ali Bakhshi is a Master of Educational Leadership student at Memorial University of Newfoundland and was Project Coordinator for the *Teacher Certification and Accreditation of Teacher Training Institutions in Afghanistan* Project. His research interests are teacher education and school improvement.

J. S. Frideres is a professor emeritus at the University of Calgary. He has been involved in international development in areas such as India, Indonesia, Australia and the Philippines. He was a technical advisor for the *Teacher Certification and Accreditation of Teacher Training Institutions in Afghanistan* Project. He has been involved in accreditation and quality assurance research for over two decades.