

Education in Turkmenistan

Context

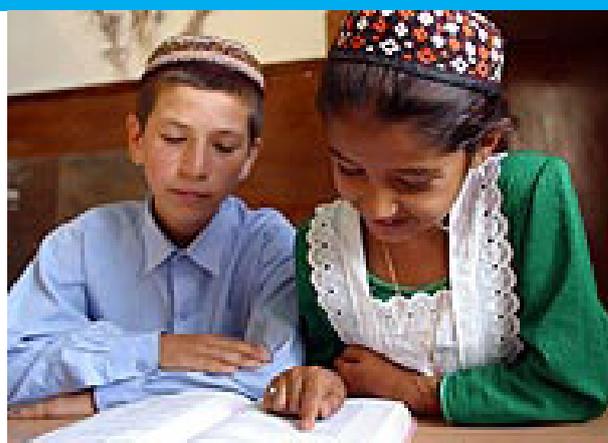
In February 2007, President Berdimuhammedov became the second leader of Turkmenistan since its independence in 1991. The change in government sparked hope for reforms that would improve the stultified education system, which was the result of almost two decades of retrogressive policies.¹

The political change was accompanied by windfall profits from high gas and oil prices. The country's GDP grew by over 500% between 2000 and 2006.² In 2005, its GDP (PPP) per capita was \$3,838USD, which was the second highest in Central Asia and the Caucasus, after Kazakhstan.³ Despite this extreme economic growth, much of the income has been channelled into infrastructure development at the expense of spending on social development.⁴ On the UNDP's Human Development Index, Turkmenistan is ranked 109th out of 177 countries.

Forty per cent of Turkmenistan's population is under the age of 15 (See Figure 2). These demographics present an opportunity for Turkmenistan's economic growth. However, it could also pose a challenge if appropriate youth friendly services are not put into place. Employment opportunities and relevant educational training are necessities to harness the potential of Turkmenistan's youth and currently both are scarce.

Education Reform

Despite flagging education spending, the new government of Turkmenistan has made progress toward education reforms. The following are some notable reform efforts:



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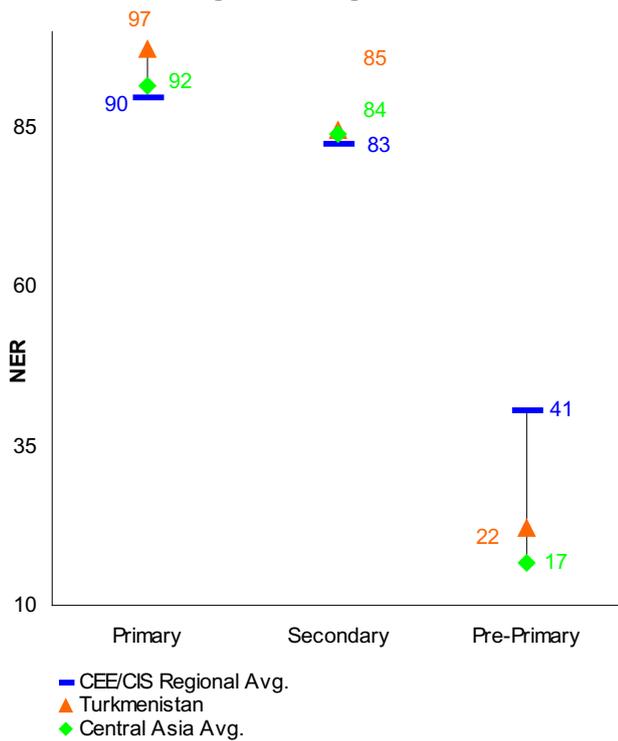
- The government, in cooperation with UNICEF, has undertaken a comprehensive Education Sector Review.
- The government has made education a national priority, inviting the United Nations to partner with the government on its social agenda.
- The government raised compulsory education from 9 to 10 years.
- The president announced that 'model schools' were to be built in all five regions to demonstrate interactive teaching and learning methodologies.
- The MoE, in partnership with UNICEF, completed three curriculum guides – in mathematics, geography and technical/vocational education that suggest new approaches to content development, teaching and testing.
- Reforms of higher education and vocational schooling are underway.⁵
- The government in cooperation with UNICEF is developing a comprehensive sector wide approach to education reform for 2008.

Box 1. Quick Facts about Education in Turkmenistan

	Turkmenistan	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan	Central Asia
Total Population	4.8 m	14.8 m	5.3 m	6.5 m	26.5 m	57.9
Youth Unemployment Rate as a % of Total Unemployment	150.2	153	155	136.1	x	
Percentage of GDP spent on Education	x	4	3.7	2.2	x	
Net Pre-Primary School Enrolment, 2005 (<i>Gender Parity Index (GPI) (Girls/Boys)</i>)	x	33, (.97)	10, (1.0)	7, (.93)	21	17.8
Net Enrolment in Primary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	x	91, (.98)	87, (.99)	97, x	x	91.67
Net Enrolment in Secondary School, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)	x	92, (.99)	80, (1.01)	80, (.85)	x	84
Gross Enrolment in Tertiary Enrolment, 2005 (<i>GPI</i>)		41, (1.25)	43, (1.62)	17, (.35)	15, (.80)	34
Primary Student/Teacher Ratio, 2005	x	x	24	22	x	
Out of School Children of Primary School Age (% girls)	x	9,000 (59%)	24,000 (48%)	18,000 (86%)	x	51,000
Ranking on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (out of 179 countries)	162	150	150	150	175	x

Source: UNESCO EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008

Figure 1: Comparing Education Net Enrolment Rates in Turkmenistan to Sub-Regional and Regional Averages, 2005



- The government carried out a thorough study of parenting practices, infrastructure needs, the state of early learning and an analysis of the education sector.
- ‘Some 5,000 Turkmen students are in higher educational institutions overseas, and the President has now taken steps to fully acknowledge their degrees and diplomas.’⁶

Access to Education

The coverage of Turkmenistan’s education system is extensive (See Figure 1). In primary school, there is a net attendance rate of 97%,⁷ which is above the regional and sub-regional average. This coverage may be a remnant of the Soviet education system which provided education



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systematically to all children. The real challenges in access to education are in secondary and pre-primary education. In secondary school, the net attendance ratio drops to 85%, which is above the regional and Central Asian averages but still not sufficient. This is especially worrying considering that youth make up almost half of the country’s demographic.

Access to pre-primary education is extremely scarce, especially for hard-to-reach populations. The pre-primary school attendance rate is far below the regional average and about on par with the average in Central Asia.

Many of the school building are deteriorating as a result of the lack of investment over the past decade and a half. This puts further strain on access to education. As school buildings crumble, classrooms become more crowded, intake rates drop and enrolments decline.

Figure 2
Turkmenistan: 2010

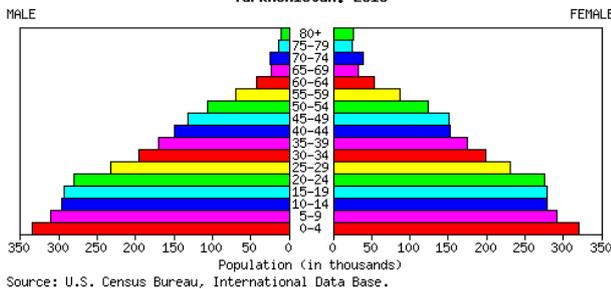
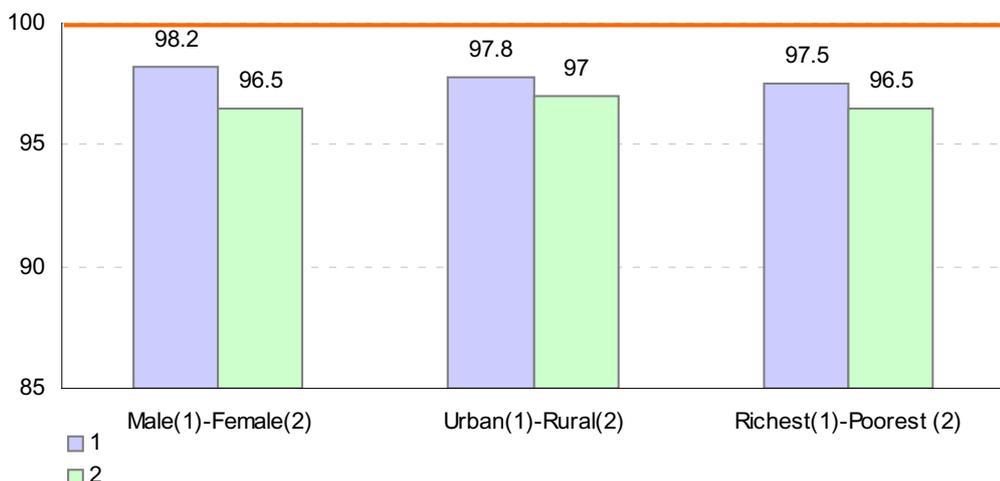


Figure 3: Comparing education parity between sub-national groups in Turkmenistan, 2008



Equity

Turkmenistan has nearly achieved gender parity in primary school. Net attendance rates show that there is not a significant rural-urban or income quintile gap. See Figure 3. This kind of parity is typical of Soviet style school systems, which achieved equality of attendance through strictly regulated school enrolment policies. These optimistic figures do not indicate that there is no inequality in the system or that inequities could not arise.

Few official statistics are available on enrolment patterns among sub-national groups. However, significant inequality exists in pre-primary education. Pre-primary enrolment rates are as high as 67% in Ashgabat, the capital city, and as low as 11% in Lebap, an outlying rural region.

Learning Outcomes and Quality

Little information is available about the quality of education in Turkmenistan or the learning outcomes of the education system. Proxy indicators of quality indicate that school-based processes are relatively efficient. Only 0.8 students repeat a grade, 99.8% of students make it to the final grade of primary school and only 0.1% of students drop out of primary school.

This indicates that although students move from one grade to the next, they have necessarily mastered minimum learning objectives for each grade.

Education financing

'To tackle education reforms and the related spheres, as briefly outlined above, requires a steady stream of financial and human resources. Availability of finance may not be an eminent constraint in Turkmenistan, as confirmed by the increasing foreign reserves, and the notable reduction in the bilateral borrowing and foreign debt, measured both in absolute terms and in debt-GDP ratio. However, the human resources are a constraint, with its adverse impact captured most vividly in the current lack of any trace of public finance management as it is commonly understood in relation to economies in transition.

Box 2. Life Skills Education in Turkmenistan

'Teenagers and young people make up one fourth of Turkmenistan's population. Legally, they have access to free education that makes the literacy rate very high. A number of school students have won international competitions on science, language and arts. In general, children have an opportunity to learn in the school, but what they are really missing are skills that will help them overcome the challenges of every day life and avoid mistakes.

'Ahmet Babajanov is one of the pioneers of life skills based education in the country. Ahmet has been able to change the lives of thousands of children by teaching them how to communicate with people, how to behave in critical situations and how to avoid bad habits and have a healthy life style. He believes that his training provides teenagers and young people with skills that will help them take informed decisions in future.

'School curricula in Turkmenistan do not include special subjects that would teach students how to acquire life skills. Because families in Turkmenistan are mostly traditional and conservative, parents also don't discuss such issues with their kids as reproductive health, HIV/AIDS prevention, and drug addiction. Obviously, young people may be exposed to risky behaviours and my goal is to empower young people to positively affect their own lives,'" says Ahmet.

'Ahmet started teaching life skills based education in 2002 as part of the UNICEF-supported Young Adolescent Development programme. He headed the Youth Organization branch in Dashoguz city in the north of Turkmenistan. Though Ahmet was not a formal teacher, he had access to schools and was able to carry out hundreds of training sessions as part of children's extra curricular activities. For the year 2007 he and his colleagues have been able to train more than 20,000 teenagers and 700 teachers with their own efforts.

'Ahmet represents a new generation of educators that brings about change in the teaching process in Turkmenistan. He not only uses interactive methods of teaching, but he also trains other teachers how to apply them in their subjects. The most popular methods among children are games, role plays, feature stories, quizzes and peer education. Teachers like discussions, brainstorm exercises, presentations, and situation analyses.'

Source: Unicef Turkmenistan Web Site. 2008.



Apart from the gas sector, the most visible investments in the past few years in Turkmenistan seem to have taken place in physical infrastructure; mainly roads, as well as buildings of prestige. But to date, there has been precious little economic return on these, which can be readily translated into outputs and impact. This sheds doubts as to the efficiency or effectiveness of these investments, in terms of economic and social welfare of the population at large.⁸ It seems social sector financing may have suffered at the expense of these investments: 'Both health care and education showed a decrease in their share of employment over the same period.'⁹



Priorities in Education in Turkmenistan

The following are UNICEF's priorities for improving education in Turkmenistan:

- Supporting the government in developing a comprehensive education sector policy and strategy;
- Promoting and scaling up the Child Friendly Learning Environment;
- Providing policy support for education reform based on quality and inclusiveness;
- Investing in early childhood education;
- Enhancing quality in basic and secondary education;
- Improving the flow of data and information systems, e.g. through EMIS;
- Improving access to education through innovative education approaches; and
- Supporting Human Resource Development Plan and capacity development.

1 UNICEF Annual Report 2007.

2 World Bank Statistics Online.

3 UNDP Human Development Report 2007.

4 UNICEF Turkmenistan Annual Report 2007.

5 UNICEF Turkmenistan Annual Report 2007.

6 UN. Turkmenistan Country Analysis. 2008.

7 ChildInfo.org 2008.

8 Government of Turkmenistan. Assistance in Education Reforms and Preparation for Mid-Term Review. 2007.

9 Government of Turkmenistan. Assistance in Education Reforms and Preparation for Mid-Term Review. 2007.