

Impact of Erasmus+ CBHE Projects on the Modernisation of Higher Education Institutions in Turkmenistan



Report

Turkmenistan, 2021

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Executive Summary

Between 2014 and 2020, representatives of Turkmen universities' staff took part in the Capacity Building of Higher Education projects (CBHE) and among other CBHE activities they had learning and training activities organized abroad, online and at their home institutions. The given survey outlines the main findings of the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study which was conducted by the National Erasmus+ Office in Turkmenistan in November - December 2020 based on 29 survey responses from the group mentioned above.

The objective of the study is to assess the impact of Erasmus+ CBHE closed projects on the Turkmen team members and their higher education institutions. The projects have been focused at achieving the long-term impact on the higher education system and institutions of the Central Asia to provide the ministries and universities with data, experience and good practice from EU, and the methodology essential for the reform in the higher education area. The number of such projects for Turkmenistan is, unfortunately, too small: only two projects - ACADEMICA (Accessibility and Harmonization of Higher Education in Central Asia through Curriculum Modernization and Development) and ROAD (Regional Objectives for Administrative Development), however, ACADEMICA and ROAD have delivered to the Turkmen universities the highly required knowledge for development and prerequisites to changes in institutional policy, innovation capacities, and experience in university-businesses cooperation practice. Among expected impacts there is advancement in internationalisation and growing the EU and CA regional and cross regional cooperation.

1. Introduction

The Erasmus+ Programme is the European Union's Programme aims to support projects, partnerships, activities and mobility in the fields of education, training, youth and sport. Since 2014 the Erasmus+ provides significant investment in the key areas of international mobility, joint degrees, international cooperation partnerships for innovation, and supporting to the higher education reform policies. Strengthening international cooperation activities, the EU expects positive effects of the Programme on the modernisation of higher education institutions and national higher education systems.

The Programme has become important facilitator of higher education reform in the Central Asia region contributed to:

- developing mutual relations with European Union

- encouraging democratization and transition of CA countries toward the market economy
- changing the atmosphere for CA regional cooperation to favorable
- involving systemic reform with the support of the relevant Ministries
- increasing cooperation projects between Programme and Partner countries which influenced on different aspects of higher education reform
- growing a profound interest in the CA Higher Education Area (CAHEA) of ministries and institutions, rectors, academics and students
- supporting the bilateral inter-institutional mobility of staff and students between Programme and Partner countries
- developing main descriptors for a three cycle system aligned with the EHEA
- encouraging CA HEIs to promote a student mobility scheme within the region and outside
- stimulating the process of internationalisation in the HE of Central Asia
- introducing innovative elements such as: new practice-oriented MA programs designed in line with the best EU practises, latest achievements of science and new elements of teaching/learning environment

Starting from 2015, the educational legislative frameworks of Turkmenistan have been significantly developed by adoption of laws and concepts which has become the result of the country's economic growth and the increased role of higher educational services. The Turkmen Government has initiated a number of regulations to harmonize the higher education with Bologna process aimed at raising the national education system to a new qualitative level in compliance with the existing international standards.

The activities of Erasmus+ CBHE projects in Turkmenistan have proved to be flexible to respond to changes in the country addressing the widespread implementation of the reform in the Turkmen higher education system and strategies of the country's development outlined in the approved in 2010 the "National Programme of Social and Economic Development of Turkmenistan for the period 2011-2030" (NPSED)¹ which identifies the need to establish an educational system closer to international educational standards.

The Turkmen higher education system is currently undergoing significant reform with integration of information technologies and distant learning, creation of portals for scientific and educational environment, curricular reform and teacher training. The Erasmus+ Programme has provided the assistance to almost half (11 out of 26) of Turkmen higher education institutions, helped to improve the quality

¹ National Programme of Turkmenistan on Socio-Economic Development for the Period 2011-2030, 2010, Education sector, par. 2.7.2, 3.4, 4.4

of trained specialists and opened the way for transformation of the Turkmen universities into Bologna type which is proved by the Government initiated regulations to harmonize higher education of Turkmenistan with Bologna process. However, a big gap still remains between Turkmenistan HEIs and the universities of developed countries which require further transformations.

Since 2015, 11 Turkmen higher education institutions have been involved in 7 Erasmus+ CBHE joint projects (2 projects have already been completed and 5 active projects) with the total budget – 5.3 MEUR.

The Capacity Building projects have assisted the Turkmen universities to deliver the knowledge requirements for economic development of a stronger civil society and enhancing management and innovation capacities, the internationalisation of HEIs as well as modernizing education systems together with increasing regional and cross regional cooperation.

In view of these expectations, the NEO in Turkmenistan conducted this study to evaluate the impact of 2 closed Erasmus+ projects ACADEMICA ((561553) Accessibility and Harmonization of Higher Education in Central Asia through Curriculum Modernization and Development) and ROAD ((574243) Regional Objectives for Administrative Development) on national and regional priorities and needs of different target groups involved in the projects.

The evaluation is guided by six questions:

- (1) What has been achieved and why?
- (2) Why would it not have been possible without EU Partners?
- (3) Who profited it directly from the activities and how?
- (4) What are the academic, economic, social and environmental long term impacts and who will be affected?
- (5) How do the different projects compare (effectiveness, efficiency and addressing priorities) and how are they complementary in order to reinforce the impact?
- (6) What are the main lessons learned?

1.1 Current stage of higher education reform in Turkmenistan

Since 2015, the landscape of Turkmen higher education has gradually been changing: the Turkmen Government has approved a number of legislative documents to modernize the university material and technical basis and to develop their scientific and technological potential.² The measures have primarily been focused on facilitating the knowledge exchanging, enhancing equipment and facilities, introduction of advanced technologies and new methodologies for teaching aids. The widespread introduction of innovative technologies in educational process and creation of university digital educational portals have gradually been replenished with interactive multimedia programs and educational materials. These technological resources are currently used for developing distance-learning, arranging videoconferences with local and foreign universities – partners on cooperation in educational area.

In 2019-2020 academic years the number of higher education institutions was increased to 25: one new institution was opened in Ashgabat. To implement the Digital Education Concept and other Turkmen Government's legislative initiatives³, in April 2020 the Ministry of Education established the Innovation Information Center.⁴ The Center's task is to connect all educational institutions of Turkmenistan to one digital system by 2025, and to offer advanced training courses for teachers and administration staff of educational institutions to support their competencies in using modern e-learning technology.

The increasing interest to implementing the Bologna principles in the education system of Turkmenistan is confirmed by the active process of introducing Bachelor programmes in all HEIs with approving the accreditation procedures of diplomas, and developing the second phase of educational model Master degrees.

In recent years, the number of students in Turkmen universities has significantly changed. The enrolled higher education students in 2019-2020 academic year was increased compared to the previous academic year (2018-2019) by 3 thousand

² Decree of the President of Turkmenistan On modernizing of higher educational institutions and improvement of teaching efficiency, adopted on 21/07/2015;
Programme of the President of Turkmenistan for socio-economic development of the country for 2019-2025 (PPSD, 2019-2025);
Concept for developing the digital educational system in Turkmenistan, adopted on 15/09/2017
Concept for developing the digital economy in Turkmenistan for 2019-2025 adopted on 30/10/2018

³ Concept for developing the digital educational system in Turkmenistan, adopted on 15/09/2017
Concept for Developing the Digital Economy in Turkmenistan for 2019-2025, adopted on 30/10/2018

⁴ <https://turkmenistan.gov.tm/ru/post/52345/president-turkmenistan-holds-meeting-science-education-health-care-sports-and-public-organizations>

392 students (due to the introduction of thirty-three new specialties in HE Institutions of Turkmenistan): the total number of the first year students in 2020 became 12 thousand 242.⁵

In accordance with the current legislation, all Turkmen universities are state-owned and subordinate to the relevant sectoral ministries; however, the transition to a paid system has already started: HE institutions are becoming self-sufficient and financially independent, which should certainly lead to an improvement of higher education quality and content.⁶

From 2021 in postgraduate and doctoral studies the number of graduate students will increase from 67 to 105 due to introduction of new doctoral specialties.⁷

1.2 Erasmus+ in Turkmen higher education

The activities of EU educational programmes TEMPUS and Erasmus+ have significantly and steadily encouraged the progressive changes in the higher education system of Turkmenistan. From 1997 up to March 2013, 34 TEMPUS projects had effectively promoted international academic cooperation between Turkmen and EU universities. The main actors in TEMPUS projects were 10 higher education institutions, 7 ministries (the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Economy and Finance, the State Committee for Sports and Tourism, the Ministry of Nature Protection, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Agriculture) and the Academy of Sciences of Turkmenistan.

The TEMPUS projects of 2013-2016 supported the cooperation with neighbouring countries and influenced significantly on the upgrading of the information technologies, and office and library facilities that assisted the Turkmen academic staff to gain experience in e-learning and developing digital learning aids, and provided them with enormous amount of factual material and practice to be used for teaching and academic research. Academic staff participating in international mobility programmes could have upgraded both their teaching and foreign language skills. Turkmen students could have possibilities of obtaining Master's degrees at EU and other partner country universities. Though Bologna principles were not implemented in Turkmenistan, however, the Programme made a

⁵ Decree of the President of Turkmenistan "On admission plan for higher educational institutions of Turkmenistan", adopted on 05/07/2019

⁶ <https://www.mfa.gov.tm/en/articles/8>

⁷ <https://turkmenportal.com/en/blog/34555/new-specialties-have-been-opened-in-postgraduate-and-doctoral-programs-of-turkmenistan>

significant impact on the modernisation of universities and the capacity building of the academic staff and also paved the way for Erasmus+ projects.

The flexibility of CBHE within the period of 2015-2020 has ensured timely and constructive response to important decisions and reforms in Turkmenistan concerning the technological advances in economy, social sphere and further improvement of the national higher education system.

The CBHE projects have contributed to realizing the state policy programmes⁸ in the education sphere adopted since 2015. “Professional Master’s Degree in Informatics as a Second Competence in Central Asia” (PROMIS-544319-TEMPUS) initiated the process of incorporating the MA programmes in September 2015 in two Turkmen Institutions (the Turkmen State Institute of Economics and Management, the Turkmen State Institute of Transport and Communication). The Project has also become an excellent opportunity for developing students’ entrepreneurial skills.

The Project “Innolabs in Central Asia for a Sustainable Catalyzation of Innovation in the Knowledge Triangle” (INOCAST- 543746-Tempus) – has funded developing the innovative laboratories in two Turkmen higher education institutions. The project created the environment for students to stimulate their creative and innovative thinking and acquire profound business knowledge and entrepreneurial thinking.

The Erasmus+ project “Accessibility and Harmonization of Higher Education in Central Asia through Curriculum Modernization and Development” (ACADEMICA) inspired the training of a new generation of engineers working in collaboration with ministries and business partners which was in line with the implementation of digitalization in the field of education. ACADEMICA established modern educational environments in two HE institutions through integration of innovative ICT based teaching and learning educational resources involving the university students and academic staff in the global digital educational space.

Within the framework of Erasmus+ “Regional Objectives for Administrative Development” (ROAD) two higher education project teams have established counselling Centres for training local civil servants. The Centers operate to offer training for civil servants. The subjects are coordinated with the Academy of Civil Servants in accordance with the Agreement on Cooperation and the regulations of the Ministry of Education of Turkmenistan. ROAD has also made a great contribution to the life-long professional development in the country.

⁸ Programme on the Development of Innovative Activity for 2015-2020 adopted on 11/06/2015
Concept for Developing the Digital Educational System in Turkmenistan adopted on 15/09/2017
Concept for Improving Foreign Language Teaching and Learning adopted on 22/12/2018

The Erasmus+ project “Modernisation of Higher Education in Central Asia through New Technologies” (HiEdTec) currently works on adaptation of three Turkmen HEIs to the digital generation through introduction and effective use of ICT-based Innovative Educational Technologies in the teaching process.

The project “Crisis and Risks Engineering for Transport Services” (CRENG) has joined three Turkmen universities to work on the implementation of new practice oriented MA programs. The project is particularly important for Turkmenistan considering the country’s integration into the global transportation system.

The Turkmen team of the project “New and Innovative Courses for Precision Agriculture” (NICoPA) has launched piloting courses on innovative BA and MA curricula on precision agriculture and new technological achievements. Three Turkmen HE institutions, participating in the project, plan to accredit new practice oriented curricula and innovative teaching recommendations developed according to the contemporary labor market demands and the Bologna Process.

Development of a Master Programme in the Management of Industrial Entrepreneurship for Transition Countries (MIETIC) is aimed to strengthen academic capacity of HEIs of Turkmenistan and the managers of Technoparks in industrial entrepreneurship by the development and implementation of Master programs and intensive trainings through establishing cooperation between EU and CA project partners. MIETIC outcomes will fill the gaps in relevant knowledge and skills of local HEIs, students and business in industrial entrepreneurship and link them to the labor market.

All Turkmen projects’ staffs have received significant assistance from the EU funded Projects to reinforce their foreign language skills, while participating in CBHE projects, which is also in line with the Turkmen Government policy in training and retraining foreign language skills of academic staff and teachers for the period 2019-2024.

EU projects have become the main tools of inter-university cooperation between the EU and CA universities and Turkmenistan HEIs. Each completed TEMPUS and Erasmus+ project continue to demonstrate the achieved results and further development of academic and scientific cooperation between EU and CA universities.

Both TEMPUS and Erasmus+ CBHE projects have stimulated the process of internationalisation in Higher Education of Turkmenistan which has improved the university cooperation and supported academic mobility, training programmes, and the academic quality. The projects have involved the Higher Education of

Central Asia in the idea of creating the CAHEA (Central Asia Education Area) which draws the people imagination much stronger today than ever.

1.3 Erasmus+ CBHE projects in Turkmenistan (awarded in 2015-2016)

Accessibility and Harmonization of Higher Education in Central Asia through Curriculum Modernization and Development (ACADEMICA - 561553 EPP-1-BG-EPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Project lifetime: October 2015 – October 2018

ACADEMICA aimed to contribute for the modernization and improvement of higher education in the field of Engineering Sciences of Central Asia countries. The project Consortium brought together 15 organisations from seven European (Bulgaria, Austria, Italy, and Spain) and Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). ACADEMICA intended to promote the voluntary convergence with:

- European educational standards
- Achievements and expertise of European Union in the development of modern educational environments
- Good EU practices and innovative methodologies for teaching and learning based on contemporary information and communication technologies and open educational resources
- Development of a system for transnational cooperation between EU and CA universities and business organizations to exchange of experiences and best education practices

The project partners have developed innovative methodology for the implementation of training e-courses to provide higher education lecturers with transversal and key competences. A modern infrastructure and technological environments have been established in the Turkmen State Institute of Finance (TSIF) and Turkmen State Institute of Culture (TSIC) with modernized curricula and integrated ICT-based methods and contents.

The Turkmen partner institutions have modernised 6 courses. The courses and curricula were modernised with the latest methods on distance and e-learning according to the labour market needs, national priorities, and the Bologna principles. The updated training programmes were approved at university level

and piloted with groups of students in the local virtual learning environments, which were established within the project life. The planned equipment was purchased, installed in time and utilised during the project. Instead of one planned three trainings for lecturers were held and an additional elective course on "How to work with Moodle" was developed.

During the project implementation, the teaching staff of both institutions got the opportunity to study the latest teaching techniques used on the basis of information technologies. For this purpose, 20 teachers were provided with short English course based on the Moodle educational platform and, using the gained knowledge, teachers could modernize the university curricula, content of lectures, practical and laboratory classes, presentations and forms of the class control. On the basis of the Moodle educational platform, the Integrated Educational Platform "Sanly Bilim" has been developed in Turkmenistan.

The project contributed to improve higher education, business and community interaction and the adaptability of the graduates to the labour market requirements. The Institutions closely worked with graduate employers: the involved business partners (State Commercial Bank "Turkmenbashi", Joint-Stock Commercial Bank "Rysgal", State Bank for Foreign Economic Affairs of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen Air Company "Howa Yollary") took active part in the project activities of ACADEMICA and dissemination of the information about ACADEMICA project and its results.

A catalogue of modernized courses has been published on the project's Virtual Learning Environment. Users can strengthen their professional relations by using the contact data published in the catalogue and to exchange knowledge, information, experience and educational resources. From 2019/2020 academic year a new specialty "Economic Informatics" has been opened at the Turkmen State Institute of Finance. When opening a new specialty, the experience obtained in the ACADEMICA project was also used.

In 2020-2021 academic years, the Turkmen State Institute of Culture introduced the Bachelor programmes to improve the quality of teaching, and to streamline the process of students' and teachers' mobility.

In terms of sustainability, the universities are free to copy, distribute and transmit the project results and courses' contents, and, to remix and adapt the project materials. The Ministry of Education has also recommended the methodology to be used for the modernization of education in other Turkmen universities.

ACADEMICA results remain relevant with the higher education state policy of Turkmenistan thus is highly important for the country. The project demonstrated

the possibilities of using modern IT in the learning-teaching process which have influenced on changes in the approach to learning and teaching both students and teachers.

Turkmenistan highly needs to have qualified engineering staff to manage the national economy. In this regard, the experience of leading European universities is invaluable. Extensive financial and technical assistance has supported the project work and implementation of the tasks.

Regional Objectives for Administrative Development

(ROAD 574243-EPP-1-2016-1-PT-EPPKA2-CBHE-JP)

Project lifetime: October 2017 – October 2019

The ERASMUS+ ROAD project initiative started in December 2017 involving a well composed Consortium of twelve partners from six European countries: three Technical Universities (UPC, IST and KTH), two comprehensive universities (URV, ULPG), one consultancy company with relevant expertise in public management and the Catalan School of Public Administration (Spain).

The project was aimed at training Kyrgyz and Turkmen servants in local development trends, creating guidelines and recommendations for local development strategy, and implementing online virtual Campuses.

The Turkmen project team focused on enhancing the local development strategy of civil servants through improving the system of advanced training by creating retraining centers in partner universities of Turkmenistan as well as the organization of educational, counselling service and training for students and staff of the higher education institutions and the trainees of the Public Administration Academy under the President of Turkmenistan.

On March 28, 2019 two Turkmen universities opened training and consulting centers. The centers have been created by the Turkmen project partners - the International University of Humanities and Development (IUHD) and the Turkmen State Institute of Finance (TSIF) with the support of the EU project ERASMUS+ "Regional Objectives of Administrative Development" (ROAD).

The ROAD centers have been equipped with modern tools and technologies designed to quickly access the online network in order to get the necessary training materials and also virtual training. The work of a wide library network is arranged by electronic and traditionally printed publications of authors from various universities of the world. A significant part of them has been received at previous seminars organized in an international format. The Centres have become

a sustainable platform for organising training courses, exchanging experience and providing support to the Turkmen public administration and civil servants.

The opening of the ROAD Training and Consulting Centers is a final project activity in the implementation of the EU project in Turkmenistan which results were announced at the International conference held in the summer 2020 in Kyrgyzstan. The team supported the Academy of Civil Servants to improve their educational programmes and teaching, as well as their administrative policies and processes.

To disseminate the program and to get a greater involvement, one of the International Conference within the framework of ROAD project took place in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan), organized by International University for the Humanities and Development in May 2018, with more than 200 attendants.

Furthermore, National dissemination conferences, with more than 200 participants took place at:

- IUHD and TSIF- Ashgabat, 25th March 2019

- IUHD and TSIF- Ashgabat, 11th September 2019

Erasmus+ has become an important tool in the professional development of Turkmen staff in three institutions. Professional development opportunities in higher education are often limited, and Erasmus+ has supported teachers to network with EU and CA universities. As a result of joint work in international consortia, the university teachers have been able to get acquainted with different views and to take a fresh look at their activities. Working together with EU leading experts and visiting other partner countries for internships, the Turkmen project academics have gained valuable experiences and improved their intercultural knowledge.

The established contacts are useful for their research activities and joint publications with EU and CA project partners which influence on the sustainability and long-term impact of the project results.

On the individual level

Erasmus + projects have supported the participants to develop their professional competence in the field of ICT technologies and foreign languages, using the latest tools and techniques, and to develop intercultural communication skills, working together with colleagues from different countries in multinational consortia.

Both projects opened new opportunities for all participants: they have become more active, and motivated. The acquired behavioral and technical skills have successfully been used not only in teaching. This is particularly evident among young teachers: for some of them the participation in Erasmus+ projects has stimulated their career development. For example, three participants in ACADEMICA and ROAD projects have become heads of departments at TSIC, one participant has become the leader of institution Trade Union Committee. Among TSIF partners, two members have become deans (one of them is the Erasmus+ Institutional Coordinator), and two team members have succeeded in their careers, becoming a deputy dean of faculty and a head department.

As far as both project outcomes are concerned, EU partners have played key role on the involvement of all the consortium members to the project objectives which should be considered to be the most crucial sustainability factor. There is no doubt that effective management favored the involvement of partners, and it is also favored by a clear distribution of rights and responsibilities, and clear decision-making procedures. ACADEMICA and ROAD projects were very participative, and there were efficient coordinators in both projects.

On the institutional level:

ACADEMICA and ROAD projects have promoted new teaching methodologies and skills development. In each topic, Turkmen trainers have developed training materials containing presentations, case studies and relevant documents, so that they make use of them and get acquainted with the best standards within the field of training.

Implementation of the educational platform on the basis of MOODLE in both projects has increased the institutional resources available to students: students have the opportunity to communicate and consult efficiently with course instructors. The important innovative solutions, implemented by the ACADEMICA and ROAD projects, have become the creating of the open and personalized environments - training centers incorporated into the existing university structures with integrated special programs for students and academics: centers have been adequately equipped, staffed and made available to operate in an environment capable to deliver indoor and virtual trainings.

ACADEMICA and ROAD centers are providing advanced knowledge and skills through trainings, providing courses of qualification upgrading and consultancy services. Centers enable students to participate in discussions, brainstorming and interview sessions. Students are motivated to organize activities like business clubs, contests and demonstrate the centers to foreign guests.

It is important to note that the ROAD staff, recruited and trained within the project, have been committed and have already organized more than 5 trainings with nearly 150 participants. This is still in progress and will continue to carry on.

Both project teams have supported the implemented activities with following dissemination actions:

- The project websites have supported the distribution of news, events, and conferences.
- The Moodle platform has provided the trainers, academic staff and students with teaching and learning materials.
- Both teams organized sending leaflets, booklets and press releases to mass media, local, regional and national newspapers, journals, and conferences to address stakeholders, the general public, professional groups, regional and local groups.

On the national level:

ACADEMICA and ROAD projects were designed to focus on real needs to strengthen the relations between the higher education institutions of Partner countries and the wider economic environment by improving the teaching methods and improving teachers' competencies.

Based on the ROAD developments, the Turkmen partners of TSIF and IUHD universities organized training courses in November, 2019. In total, 67 participants from Academy of Civil Servants attended and gave their feedback on the improvement of training quality. New educational programme for Academy of Civil Servants under the President of Turkmenistan for the academic year 2020-2021 has been developed with the purpose of providing the course on "Regional Objectives of Administrative Development".

One course manual ("Project Management") and three presentations ("Digital Education", "Negotiation & Change Management" and "Information System") have been prepared and provided for participants of Academy of Civil Servants of Turkmenistan.

Both projects' objectives have also supported Turkmenistan policy strategies on improving the activities of educational institutions, widespread use of digital resources, enriching the educational process and ensuring its compliance with international standards. Both projects contributed to the strengthening of links between higher education institutions and business stakeholders. Representatives of interested institutions (Academy of Civil Service under the President of Turkmenistan, Ministry of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan,

Banks of Turkmenistan, State Committee of Turkmenistan for Tourism, City Administration of Ashgabat) took active part in meetings, surveys, events and conferences held within the framework of the project.

3. Methodology and objectives of the study

The objective of the given survey is to analyse the impact of two closed Erasmus+ CBHE-JP projects ACADEMICA and ROAD on the higher education staff and institutions of Turkmenistan. Capacity building projects are expected to have a long-term structural impact on the systems, organisations/institutions and individuals in the Partner Countries with the impact and sustainability of their results and maintaining or developing the outcomes after the end of the project.

The study is a mixed method of qualitative and quantitative evaluation and analysis of survey questionnaires and written interviews proposed to Erasmus+ local coordinators, project staff and academics of three higher education institutions.

Qualitative research methods, based on document analysis, focus groups and written interviews, are used in accordance with the following methodology: (1) social reality is perceived individually; (2) each person creates a reality based on his/her personal experience; (3) the opinions of people are different, however, they are shared through their interactions.

We extracted data from all possible sources, analysed them, compared the findings and formed conclusions. We applied the principle of triangulation in our study, which is usually practiced in evaluations. The method is based on the data verification from different sources. Specifically, we first identified questions, extracted data from all possible sources, analyzed them, compared and formed conclusions.

The practical element of the study is survey questionnaires targeting at two specific groups participated in the Programme in academic years 2015-2019: 1) Erasmus+ local coordinators, 2) Erasmus+ projects staff and 3) a separate list of questions for Erasmus+ coordinators.

The survey answers were intended to demonstrate the impact on the institutional and individual levels to demonstrate how Erasmus+ has had on the reform process at higher education institutions and faculties: on teaching, training, university management and external relations, and, to show how Erasmus+ has contributed to these changes. The higher education staff had to describe how cooperation with EU universities and participation in the project mobility have changed their teaching practices and modernized the curricula content.

The survey was distributed through email invitations to Erasmus+ coordinators. The questionnaires were completed in total by 29 respondents.

We used the following sources of information:

1. Reports provided by the Local Coordinators at different stages of ACADEMICA and ROAD projects.
2. Statistics provided online from institutions participating in Erasmus+ and Institutional questionnaires for Erasmus+ CBHE-JP projects.

The institutional questionnaires consisted of 13 categories of questions with 54 varieties of answers: some questions were included to provide background information, the Local Coordinators were interviewed on the impact of Erasmus+ on the university programmes and changes implemented within Erasmus+ projects related to internationalisation, their experience with new teaching methods, and the development of the internationalization process in the university.

Academics were asked how participation in project mobility and training influenced on the development of their pedagogical competence, on the use of new technologies and teaching techniques, development of research work and internationalization processes at their university and faculty, influence on research, and on the development of relations with external and business partners. It was expected that project managers and university participants would appreciate the impact of the Erasmus + projects implemented at their university.

The Survey examines the level of impact of the Erasmus+ CBHE projects and the expected outcomes of the impact on the certain groups of participants so that these results can support the further development of the Program and its design.

4. Empirical findings: the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on the Turkmen HE Institution practice

Survey of Erasmus+ Coordinators

The survey of Erasmus+ coordinators was structured according to two thematic areas:

- Effects of Erasmus+ on teaching and other activities
- Effects of Erasmus+ on the international orientation of an institution

The survey was distributed through email invitations to 4 active Erasmus+ project coordinators and completed in total by 4 respondents. Thus the response rate was 100%.

Survey of academic staff

The survey of academics included in total 13 questions with 54 sub-questions:

- 1) Profile of respondents
- 2) Professional skills and competencies
- 3) Teaching
- 4) Research
- 5) Management
- 6) International cooperation

The survey was distributed by e-mail addresses of targeted respondents: academic staff of three Turkmen higher education institutions participated in ACADEMICA and ROAD projects.

The respondents participated in the survey through e-mails; totally, the survey was completed by 29 respondents. Thus the response rate was 100%.

4.1 The impact of the Erasmus+ CBHE at the individual level

First we have explored the characteristics of staff participated in two projects: the composition of participants and their distribution by higher education institution.

Table 1: Turkmen teams according to higher education institutions in ACADEMICA and ROAD

Higher education institutions		N	%
1.	Turkmen State Institute of Culture	6	21%
2.	Turkmen State Institute of Finance ⁹	16	55%
3.	International University for the Humanities and Development	7	24%
Total responses		29	100%

⁹ The Turkmen State Institute of Finance was involved in ACADEMICA and ROAD projects, therefore we have combined the data provided by two project teams of TSIF

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents by institution. The sample is divided the following way: 55% of respondents from TSIF, 24% from IUHD, and 21% from TSIC. A comparative survey shows that HE staff are represented mostly evenly (see below ref. 9). Despite TSIF is represented by two teams, however, the higher number of respondents may indicate more active work of TSIF staff and their higher motivation to participate in international projects, and a lower representation of respondents from IUHD (even though universities tend to be larger than other types of higher education institutions).

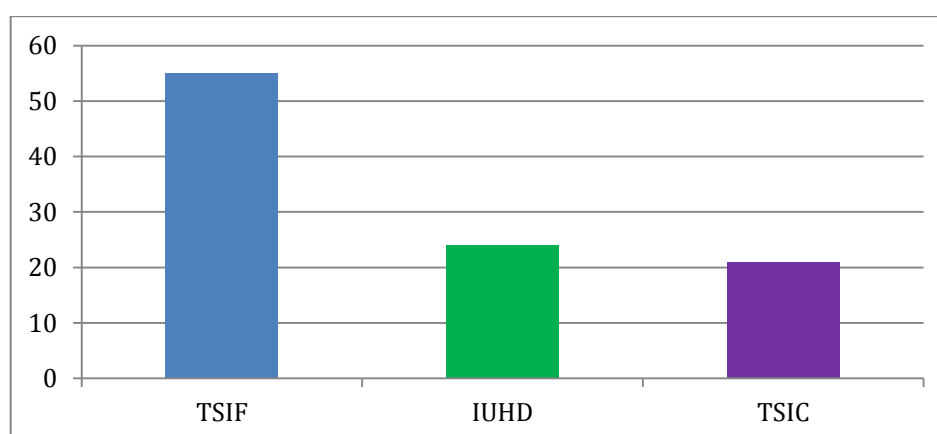


Figure 1 Turkmen team according to higher education institutions

Table 2: Turkmen project staff according to gender in ACADEMICA and ROAD

Gender	Response	%
Female	8	28%
Male	21	72%
Total	29	100%

Regarding gender (see **Figure 3**), more male than female staff took part in Turkmen teams of ACADEMICA and ROAD. According to survey questionnaires, 72% of staff in ACADEMICA and ROAD projects involved male and only 28% female.

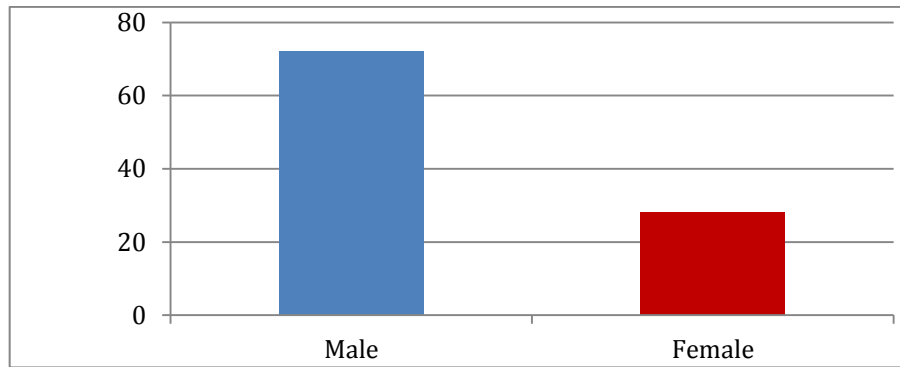


Figure 3 Turkmen project staff according to gender in ACADEMICA and ROAD

Looking at their role at higher education institutions (**Figure 5**) where project teams work, 27 out of 29 staff members are academics. All of them have teaching responsibilities. Non-academic staff represents 7% of total project members and 93% are instructors and lecturers at HEIs.

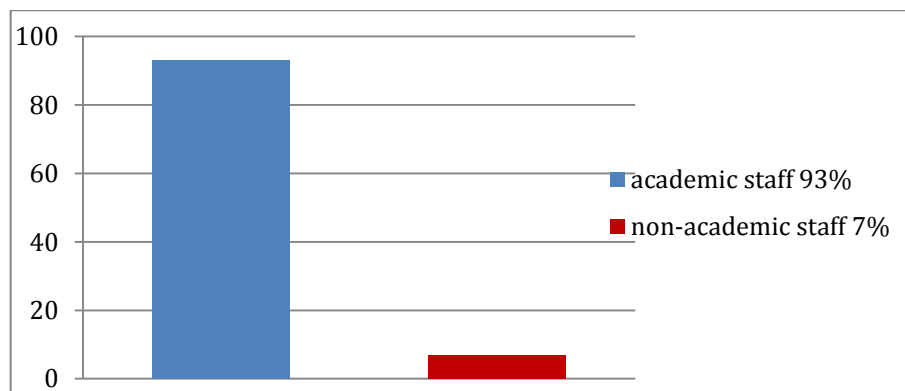


Figure 4 Turkmen project staff in ACADEMICA and ROAD by type of role at their higher education institution

Next, we have explored the effects of the Erasmus+ Programme on skills, competencies and areas of knowledge improved during participation in the Erasmus+ project mobility and training experience.

Table 3: Turkmen staff skills and competencies improved in ACADEMICA and ROAD mobility and training experience

	Highly improved	Improved	Not improved at all	% of positive E+ influence
Work in teams	16	13	-	100%
Field-specific skills (professional)	10	18	1	97%
Communication skills	22	7	-	100%
Digital skills	8	21	-	100%

Planning and organisational skills	7	21	1	97%
Innovative potential and entrepreneurial skills	9	10	10	65%
Foreign Language skills	17	11	1	97%
Being able to interact and work with people from other backgrounds and cultures	20	9	-	100%
Experience in new teaching methods	11	17	1	97%

We have particularly interested in which areas the Erasmus+ Programme have achieved the strongest and most lasting effects, and where there are opportunities for more improved internationalisation practice.

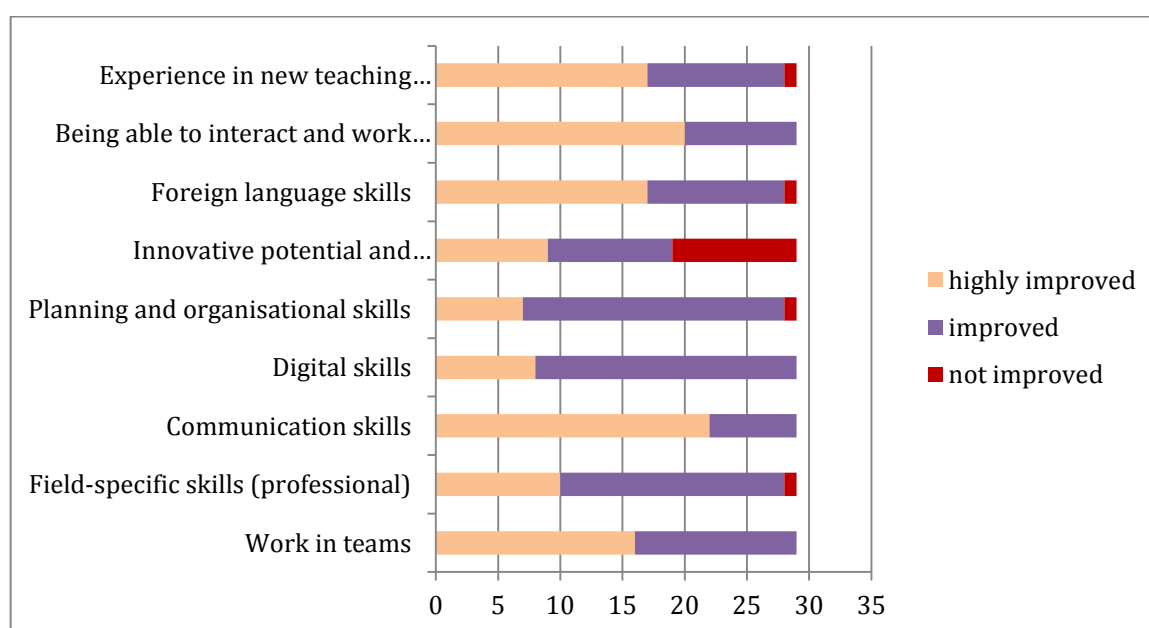


Figure 5 Skills and competencies improved in project mobility and training

Figure 5 shows that Turkmen project members have considerable progress practically by all indicators: they feel stronger impact of project activities on the development of their professional knowledge and teaching practice, they have become more experienced in using innovative teaching methods and digital technologies, and their interactive and organizational skills have been much increased. At the same time, less progress is observed in the acquisition of innovative potential and entrepreneurial skills (65%), although, given the previous period, this indicator is a significant step forward.

Participation in the ACADEMICA and ROAD encouraged the participants to develop their transversal and social skills: 100% of participants noted the improvement of their intercultural competences and digital skills. 97% noted a significant increase in the potential of their professional knowledge and knowledge of the English language.

All participants could improve their intercultural understanding: as reported, they could learn to communicate better with people of different cultures in mobility and become more interested in European culture and policy.

Professional development is an important reason for the participants, since both projects participants mostly are young and motivated teachers, therefore, participation in international projects has provided an opportunity for them to improve their professional competencies, achieve career growth, establish new cooperation, and find international partners. As noted above (p. 12), work in project teams stimulated the career growth of eight participants, and as a result, they have been able to realize their increased competencies and full potential at their institutions.

Staff training is the most common experience in Erasmus+ CBHE projects, rather short for most mobile staff (for more than a week) and includes workshops and training. **Table 4** shows distribution of respondents' project mobility by academic years. The sample is divided as follow: 7% of respondents went abroad for training in 2015-2016, 24% in 2016-2017, 40% in 2017-2018, 48% in 2018-2019, and 55% in 2019-2020.

Table 4: Participation of Turkmen project staff in Erasmus+ mobility for training in 2015-2020

Academic year	Number of participants in Erasmus+ mobility for training	%
2015-2016	2	7%
2016-2017	7	24%
2017-2018	12	41%
2018-2019	14	48%
2019-2020	16	55%

There is a gradual increase in the number of mobility during 5 years in both projects (from 7% of the staff in 2015 up to 55% in 2020). **(Figure 6)** Apparently, most of the survey participants traveled abroad within Erasmus+ projects one or more times. They usually visited one or two countries and spent about two weeks there.

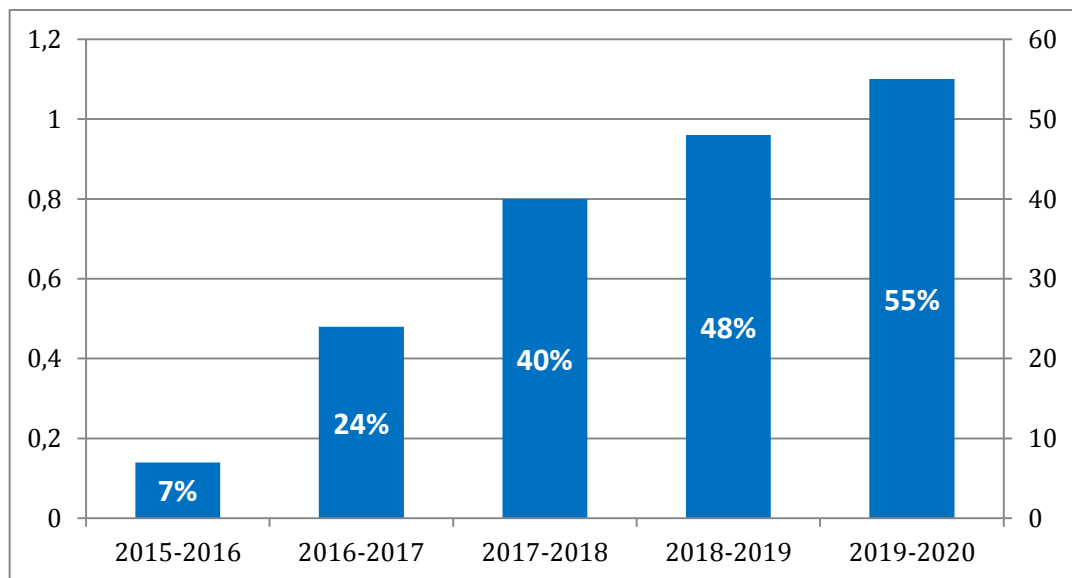


Figure 6 Turkmen project staff in Erasmus+ mobility for training in 2015-2020

Obviously, there is also a small group of highly mobile members with extensive experience in the Program, and there are those who did not participate in project mobility. Even though the reasons cannot be derived from the survey data, nevertheless, it can be considered that Erasmus+ is a program with a low threshold for academic staff with no mobility experience. In this respect, Erasmus+ can serve as an important path towards internationalisation.

4.2 The impact of Erasmus+ CBHE at institutional level

Table 5: Erasmus+ coordinators according to institution

Institution	Response	%
Turkmen State Institute of Culture	1	25%
International University for Humanity and Development of Turkmenistan	1	25%
Turkmen State Institute of Finance	1	25%
Turkmen State Institute of Finance ¹⁰	1	25%
Total	4	100%

Two survey questions for Erasmus+ coordinators, submitted to the content analysis, were open-ended.

1) What changes have been implemented at your institution within Erasmus+ projects relating to internationalisation? Please, explain ¹¹

To fully understand the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on three Turkmen institutions, we first investigated how institutions needed to adapt to join Erasmus+. Thus we asked Erasmus+ coordinators: **What changes have been implemented at your institution within Erasmus+ projects relating to internationalisation?** (Table 6)

Table 6: Changes implemented at three Turkmen HEIs in ACADEMICA and ROAD related to internationalisation

Categories	% of positive responses	Examples of citations
Lectures, seminars, individual consultations, tutorials in a foreign language; preparation of teaching and assessment material in a foreign language		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All courses are taught in English at International University for the Humanities and Development: seminars, drafts materials of the curricula, model-drafts of the curricula description, list of recommended literature. - Russian and English are taught at our

¹⁰ TSIF is represented here by two project groups involved in ACADEMICA and ROAD

¹¹ We have combined here the data given by two project groups of TSIF

	34%	<p>Institution, however courses in foreign languages are not held.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our institution offers English courses only for communication purposes - Ten teachers studied English in ACADEMICA project. There are no curricula taught in foreign language at our Institution.
Project work in labs, project work in groups	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under the framework of ROAD project, training and counseling center was created, furnished, equipped and structured at our university. - In our university, tasks for laboratory works have been developed in the project ROAD. - We use tasks for seminars and laboratories developed in the ACADEMICA project.
Introduced courses for virtual mobility; e-classroom	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of teaching/learning materials and updating Web Platform, e-learning courses. - At the moment, we have placed curricula, materials, video and audio lessons on the Web Platform, tasks for students developed in the project Road. - We stimulate the introduction of virtual mobility, so teachers of the Institute are actively worked to prepare materials for the Moodle educational platform.
Courses offered in a foreign language	34%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Apart from English we provide interesting subjects as Second Foreign Language Elective, languages included: Chinese, German, Italian and Japanese. - Our Institute does not offer Programs in foreign languages. - We have not subjects taught in foreign language - Our university has not yet offered courses in foreign languages.
Programmes offered in the English language		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - University teachers recruited and trained within the ROAD project were actively involved in the project's events and organized more than 5 trainings with nearly 150 participants.

	34%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No - No - We have no curricula taught in English
Website in 2-3 languages with the English page	100%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Our university website has 3 language webpages including English page. - Currently website at the development stage - Our Institute website is at the final stage of development. The website is planned to be in Turkmen, Russian and English

Most of respondents in the survey answered this question positively (66%). The most frequently reported changes were in the area of the organisation of teaching/learning processes, including generally supported services such as a university website. More substantial changes such as study programmes in foreign languages were less frequently reported (34%). (See **Figure 7**)

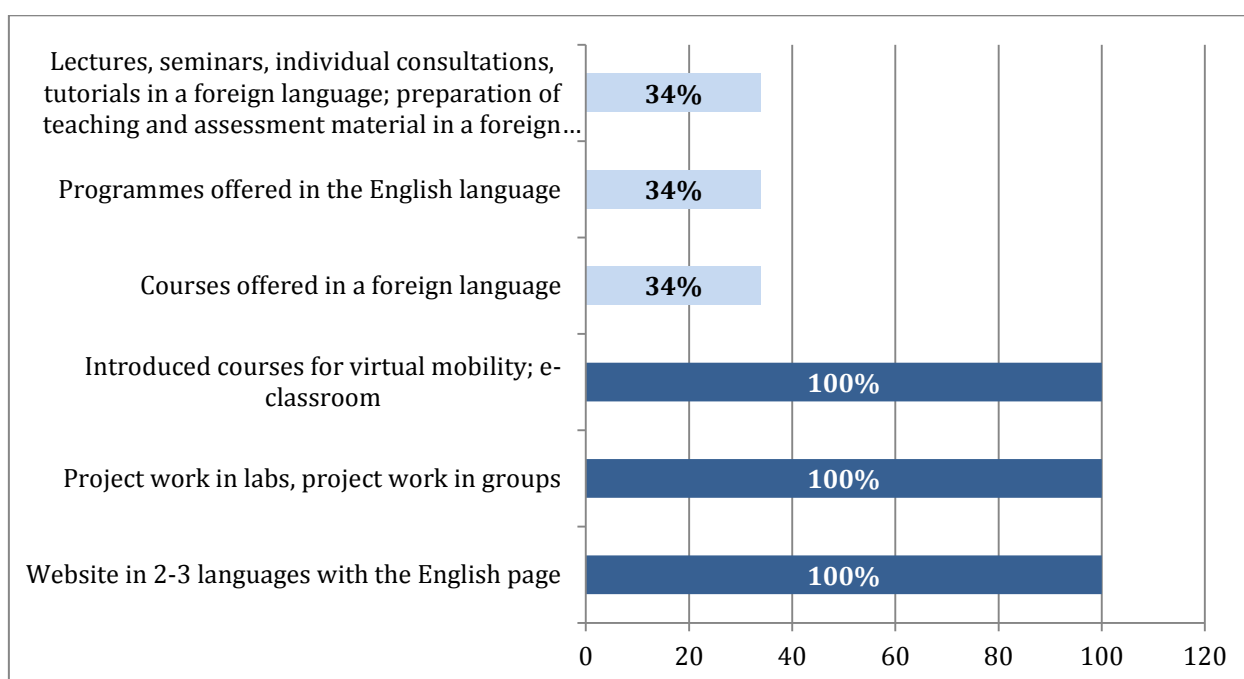


Figure 7 Changes implemented at three Turkmen institutions in ACADEMICA and ROAD related to internationalisation

Among those who responded that their institution is not able to accept foreign students (**Table 7**), there were three types of reasons given:

Table 7: Does your institution accept incoming foreign students?

Answer	Response	%
Yes	1	34%
No	3	66%
Do not know	0	0
Total	4	100%

1. There are no courses offered in foreign languages.
2. Russian and English are taught at our Institution, however courses in foreign languages are not held.
3. Ten teachers studied English in ACADEMICA project. We have no curricula taught in English.

In this section we have studied the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme on the organisation and content of courses offering in foreign languages to explore the impact of Erasmus+ on the internationalisation of study at three Turkmen HEIs, which serves both for home students to develop their intercultural competences without leaving the country, as well as for incoming students for a quality study-abroad experience.

We have paid particular attention to the different institutional approaches to organise study offerings for students. In response to open-ended questions, most respondents reported the positive impact of Erasmus+ projects on the development of internationalization processes in three universities. 66% reported positive impact of curriculum development and teaching activities.

According to answers of three Erasmus+ Coordinators, their universities have experienced an increase in the international activity: currently, the universities offer joint courses for HE institutions and share courses with other interested institutions, the cooperation between project partners has been increased, and the modernized and developed new courses in projects have officially been accredited. However, the number of courses, offered in foreign languages, is implemented at only one university; although, these effects are gradually spreading to TSIF and TSIC, and other Turkmen HEIs.

Turkmen academics are mostly internally motivated to cooperate with international partners. The main factors for motivation lie in small size of the higher education system and the poorly developed system of incentive criteria. Therefore, support through the Erasmus+ Program is one of potential sources of HE staff motivation.

The questionnaire analysis (see **Figure 8**) shows that HEIs staff reported higher levels of impact on such indicators as strengthening of institutional support for international cooperation (63% and 31%) and support to staff mobility (28% and 48%). and a slight less influence on the quality of teaching activity (27%, 39% and 31%).

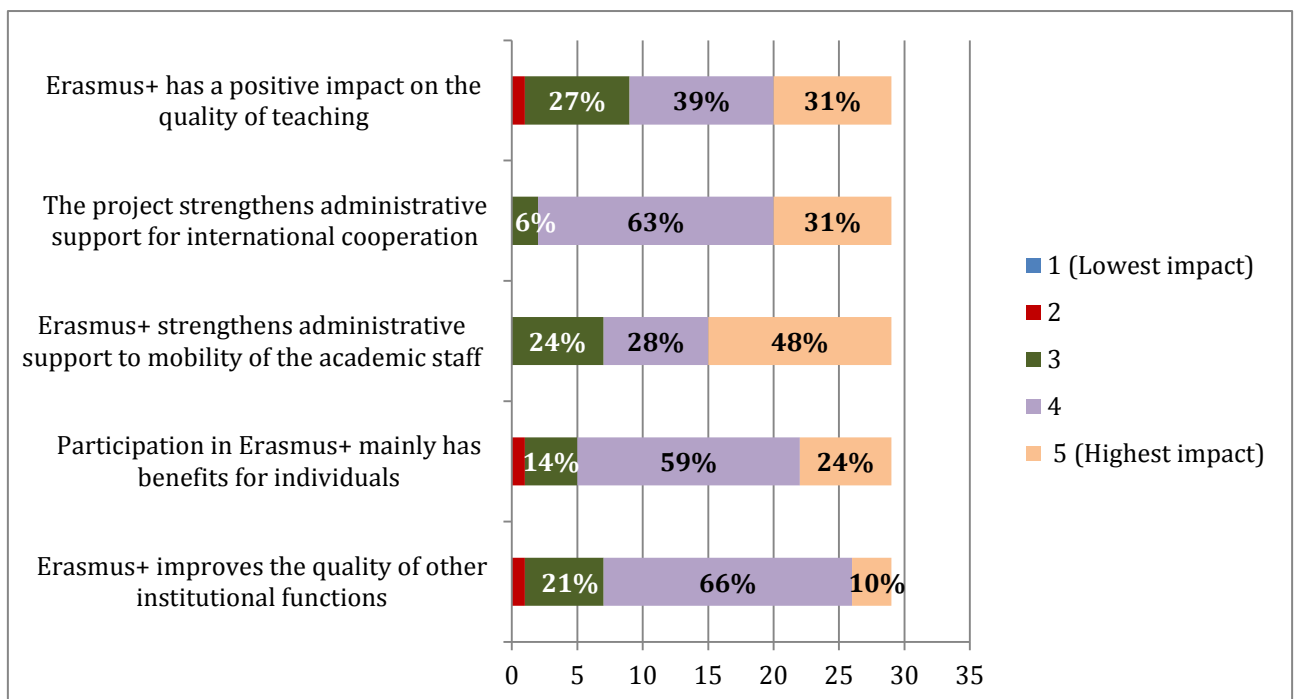


Figure 8 Opinion of Turkmen teams on the overall impact of the Erasmus+ on their institutions

Academic research is essential for the economic and social development of any society. Research is one of the most outstanding and competitive aspects of higher education institutions. One of the main tasks of university academics is to study and create new knowledge and share this knowledge with students.

We have studied the project impact on the institutions' research: the average indicators (see **Figure 9**) show satisfactory figures of overall institutional research work (41% of satisfactory level, and the same indicators (41%) show a level of Erasmus+ impact on improving scientific research in both projects.

The dominant satisfactory indicators of three universities specifying the insufficient impact of ACADEMICA and ROAD on attracting partners to research activities in both projects. Though both projects did not set the straight goals to build the scientific potential of participants, yet, in any international project research is an essential tool not only for setting specific goals and implementing objectives precisely, but also for dissemination of ideas and developments in publications after the project completion.

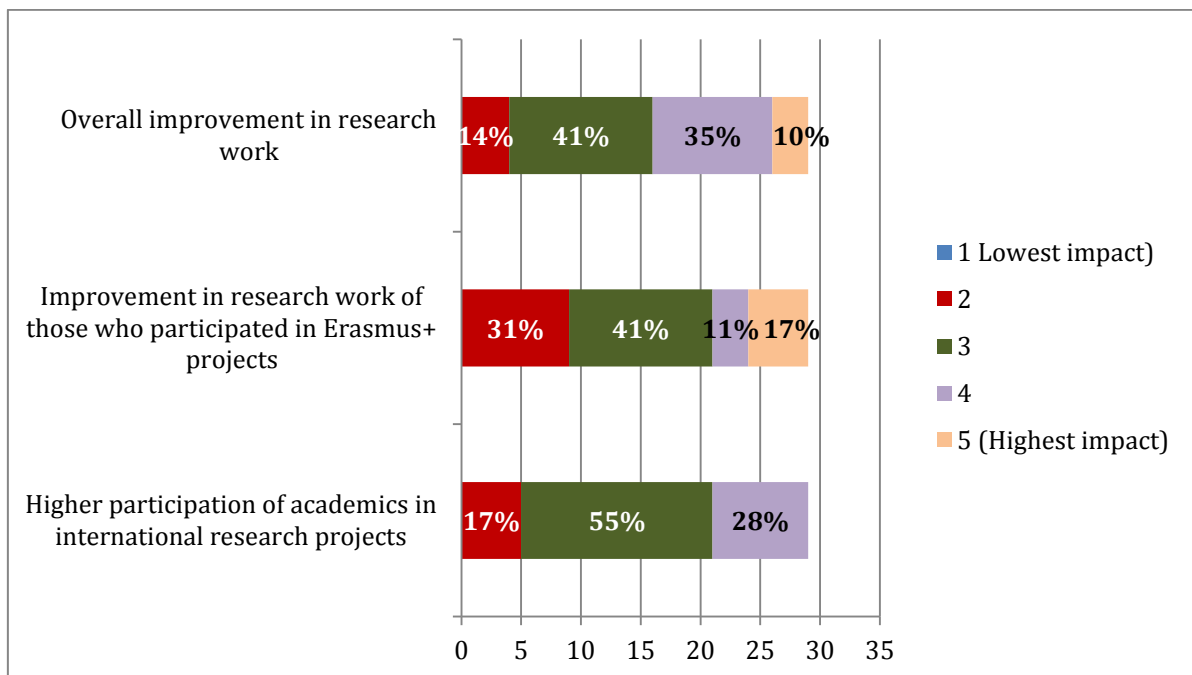


Figure 9 Erasmus+ impact at institutional research

In Erasmus+ projects, teachers share their experience of using innovative pedagogical technologies and methodologies. We studied the answers of project participants, how Erasmus+ influenced on the use of innovative pedagogical technologies at their universities. The influence of Erasmus+ was assessed according a ten point scale.

Table 8 and Figure 10 show the average indicators. The table lists the most used university technologies in teaching/learning. As expected, the most used tools are virtual (7.3) and computer-based tools (5.8). In particular, the materials developed by partners in projects and posted on educational platforms are most often used both in classes and in preparation for classes. The popular teaching methods are mixed learning (6). The use of educational videos (5,6) and Inquiry

Based Learning (5,3) are also favourable tools used by teachers in the teaching/learning process.

Table 8 Impact of Erasmus+ on the use of innovative pedagogical technologies and teaching methods

Averages are calculated based on a ten-point scale ranging from 1 - lowest impact to 10 - highest impact		
Erasmus+ has had impact at the use of innovative pedagogical technologies and methods at my institution	Average value	Responses
Internet-based tools	4,8	29
Computer-based tools	5,8	29
Distance-learning technologies	4,5	29
Work with electronic documents	5,2	29
Virtual learning	7,3	29
The use of e-learning games	3,5	29
(IBL) Inquiry Based Learning (research studies)	5,3	29
Mobile learning devices	1,2	29
The use of educational videos	5,6	29
Tools for working with audio	4,5	29
Collaborative learning (students work in groups of 2 or more)	3	29
Mixed learning	6	29

Figure 10 shows the difference in the frequency of use of technology by teachers in the classroom, as well as a list of all the tools used in teaching.

Erasmus+ experience helps staff to use more innovative teaching methods: after project trainings they share gained experience with their university colleagues. Turkmen partners reported that they have introduced new innovative teaching methods such as Work-based and Project-based learning, Open Educational Resources and ICT based collaborative workspaces. The virtual real-time campus on the Moodle platform, implemented by EU partners, operates as the document

repository and communication channel for teaching activities: the Campus is actively used for online trainings to provide the CA partners institutional development.

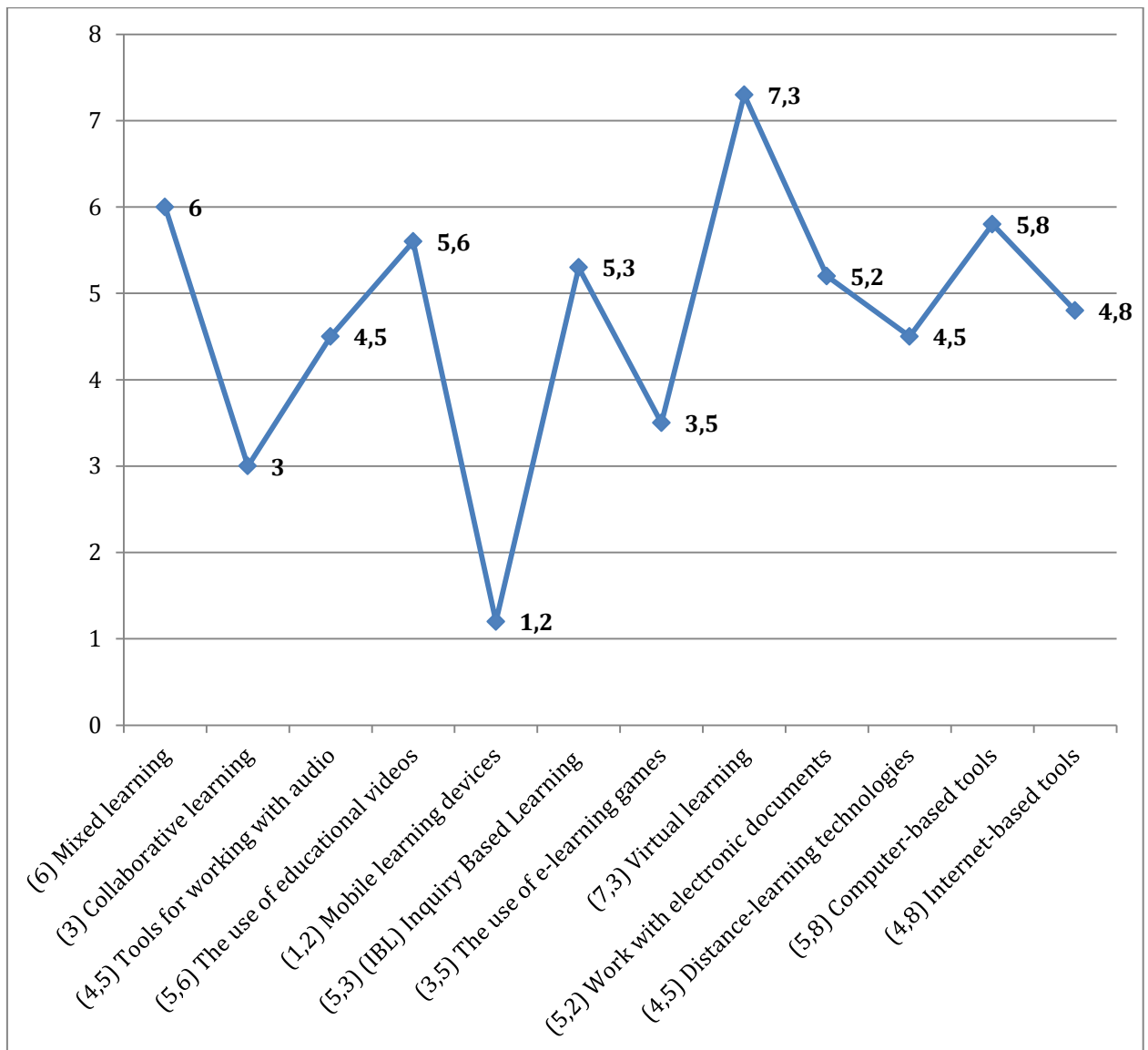


Figure 10 Erasmus+ impact on the use of innovative pedagogical technologies at three Turkmen institutions

Erasmus+ project partnerships stimulate expanding universities cooperation with institutions not related to the field of higher education. University and enterprise cooperation has an important positive impact on the developments in research and exchange of knowledge. This impact includes the incorporation of international developments (created with partners from other countries) in university curricula, as well as using teaching materials from open educational resources such as massive open online courses.

We have examined the level of cooperation between three Turkmen universities and enterprises: both projects ACADEMICA and ROAD were aimed at developing cooperation links with business parties and institutions not related to higher education. The benefits of ACADEMICA and ROAD for external stakeholders were limited to specific subject areas, such as the development of training courses for civil servants and engineering research.

The ACADEMICA team has implemented training courses targeted to develop the students' entrepreneurial competencies, based on their involvement in business environment. The ROAD project has been considered as one of the successful Erasmus+ projects contributed to the formation of a university-entrepreneurial cooperation model in Turkmenistan. In fact, it turned out that the involved enterprises and administration have won even more than expected. Moreover, through the project activities, the members have created contacts with CA regional professionals and established a research community on a mutually interested basis to support and disseminate the ideas of the project.

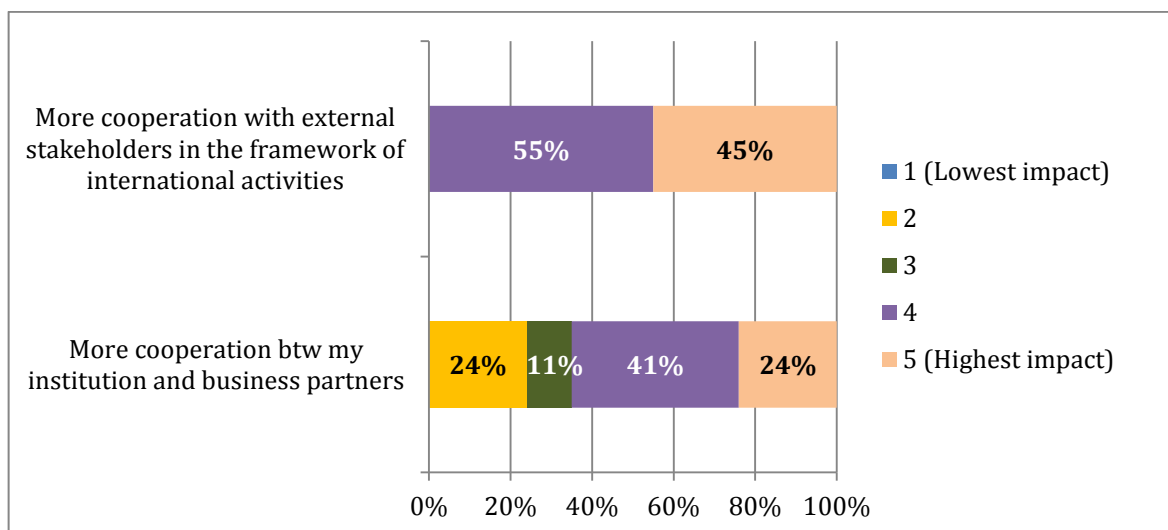


Figure 11 Impact on the improvement of relations btw institutions and external stakeholders

As shown in **Figure 11**, both teams have noted only positive attitudes towards international cooperation within projects: all respondents noted 50% of good and 45% of highest impact.

24% of respondents marked the highest impact and stated that this cooperation was entirely the result of participation in Erasmus+ projects and 41% noted a good level of projects' impact on the development of links between their university and enterprises. Almost 35% (11% and 24%) noted a satisfactory level.

Overall, the results show that the contribution of Erasmus+ projects to the development of university-enterprise cooperation is evident, and the universities should further accumulate and develop experience gained in Erasmus+ projects.

5. Recommendations

- Institutions should study the national principles of educational policy and models of international cooperation for complete understanding of the impact of Erasmus+ projects on the Turkmen universities.
- HE institutions should understand their responsibility for Erasmus+ projects and the sustainability of projects' results.
- Participants of Erasmus+ projects become more experienced in using innovative teaching methods and digital technologies, and in using open educational resources. Project teams should disseminate knowledge and skills in using of innovative technologies gained in Erasmus+ projects.
- Universities should widely disseminate positive experience of Erasmus+ projects, attract new participants from uninvolved higher education institutions and provide them with assistance in writing project proposals.
- HE Institutions should study the process of defining and implementing university strategies for supporting entrepreneurship, and explore curricula and teaching innovative courses that focus on the development of entrepreneurial skills.
- HE Institutions should support curricular development and teaching innovation, oriented at fostering entrepreneurial skills.
- HE staff should encourage research and opportunities to integrate learning with ICT, distance education into teaching, and virtual mobility.
- Basic research skills should be practiced earlier at the undergraduate level in all disciplines. Students should know the importance of research skills in the labor market.
- Higher education institutions should seek to extend their partnerships with other higher education and research institutions, also with industry for the purposes of student exchanges for training, academic field work, joint research projects, recruiting visiting lecturers.

- Higher education institutions should create institutional partnerships with other higher education and research institutions, and also for the purpose of involving students in joint research projects
- The university's strategy should link teaching to research and community activities while enhancing synergies between them.
- Academics should explore good practices opportunities and strategic approaches on integrating research and education for the introduction of research-based learning in order to use research approaches in teaching students.
- HE Institutions should develop approaches to the organisation of institutional courses and study programmes in foreign languages to ensure the strategic frameworks of the modernisation of teaching and learning. Such strategy and well-developed information tools (website, etc.) can increase an institution's attractiveness for foreign academics and students, and other stakeholders.
- Institutions should offer courses in foreign languages as electives to national students. They should explore ways to encourage national students to take advantage of these opportunities.
- Institutions should develop clear incentive mechanisms through remuneration, workload and appointment criteria to motivate professors to develop courses in foreign languages.
- Institutions need to create incentives for academics and develop a strategic plan for internationalisation of teaching and learning as part of modernisation of teaching and learning.

6. Conclusion

We have studied the positive impact of the Erasmus+ Program at the institutional and individual levels on the examples of three Turkmen higher education institutions took part in the ACADEMICA and ROAD projects - the Turkmen State Institute of Finance, International University for the Humanities and Development of Turkmenistan, and the Turkmen Institute of Culture. The impact on the teaching staff is particularly obvious:

- Participation in Erasmus+ projects have expanded the academic staff professional knowledge, teaching practice, interactive and organizational skills

- Project partnerships have stimulated the expanding of university cooperation with international stakeholders and business partners. The respondents' attitudes towards these approaches are about 100% (55% of good and 45% of highest impact).

This proves that Erasmus+ is a means to disseminate knowledge and innovations for the Programme participants: academics, participated in Erasmus+ projects, through innovative teaching methods are contributing to modernization and the quality of education, and are increasing students' knowledge.

The availability of financial support and the duration of the Erasmus+ Program enable teachers to engage in international mobility, establish new and expand existing cooperation for acquiring knowledge and learning new teaching techniques.

We also have studied the institutional availability of courses and curricula in foreign languages. In two out of three educational institutions, the aspects of curricula internationalization are different. The differences between institutions are quite noticeable. If a higher education institution supports and develops internationalization strategies, a clear link can be traced between this institution and Erasmus+ Programme. In this sense, Erasmus+ can serve as an important source to support the development of internationalization.

Erasmus+ influences the administrative services of institutions to support the international cooperation activities. The Bologna process has intensified the transformation of Turkmen higher education system. The internationalization of higher education, being a mission of the national Government, is reflected in extensive educational programmes, including the governmental support for international students to study in Turkmenistan, students' mobility and exchange programmes for academic staff, joint research and information exchange.

The Erasmus+ Program is widely considered to be an important and complementary tool in the country's reform. However, as part of internationalization strategy, the legal and financial frameworks should be arranged for encouraging educational institutions to develop curricular and courses in foreign languages. Bilingual education is an emerging trend in Turkmenistan, since the country has adopted three languages, and the government of Turkmenistan fully supports the idea of multilingual education. Given the fact that the Turkmen Government is taking large-scale measures to modernize education and is implementing the development of teaching and

learning in foreign languages,¹² these prerequisites could drive Turkmen universities towards internationalization processes.

Among the three surveyed universities, the IUHD has more potential and ambitious in their international orientation, as it offers a range of courses and study programs in foreign languages. In this case, IUHD could use all Erasmus+ opportunities to strengthen its profile as international university. However, for TSIF and TSIC the participation in Erasmus+ are still additional events, thus, consequently, the impact of the Erasmus+ Program on their institutional practice is rather weak.

Research has become a focus of reform in Turkmen higher education institutions: there is high demand to build a system of research universities. Research is one of the most outstanding and competitive sides of most universities. Faculty members who conduct research are respected by their colleagues, remain in the lead of their fields, and can share with students the latest developments in their disciplines. They usually collaborate with scientists from other universities, discover new methods and interpretations, and contribute to the development of their universities.

Teachers who conduct research share up-to-date information with students and give them the opportunity to explore their areas of interest more deeply. The best and brightest students are often attracted to the university because of the opportunity to work closely with the faculty; as a result, outstanding research programs tend to help recruit excellent students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

One of serious shortcomings of all Turkmen projects participants is the lack of regular research publications. We think, that recommendations on strategic approaches to institution research, and new projects in search of funding for these topics will contribute to further integration of Turkmen universities in the globalization process.

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