I. LOGISTICAL INFORMATION

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Priority areas of EP in Mongolia

1) Policy support mechanisms
2) Curriculum and materials development
3) Financing
4) Networking and partnership
5) Monitoring and evaluation

II. BACKGROUND

In today’s new millennium, sustainable development ensures the unity of globalization and the nation’s interest in the rapid development of science and technology, with the power of knowledge, information and advanced technology being the main economic resource. In addition, for the benefit of the children and adolescents of this millennium, the Mongolian ‘Law on Education’ provides a legal environment that supports both formal and non-formal education, with Article 7.1 denoting “the education system of Mongolia will be made up of a combination of formal and non-formal systems which consist of pre-school, primary, secondary and upper secondary education” and Article 8.1 denoting that “the citizens of Mongolia have a right to an education in formal and non-formal settings.”

As the Education Law (Article 17.2) denotes that the “NFE’s research and methodological organization” should operate in addition to a governmental administrative organisation responsible for education, the ‘Non-Formal Education Centre’ (its old name) was established in 1997. After studying the experiences of other countries the Centre modified several of its activities to the conditions and character of our country which was still in socio-economic transition. One of these activities was the ‘Equivalency Programme’ training, chosen to be the first step in the recovery and education of out-of-school children, a pressing issue that was as a result of the socio-economic changes. This has now developed into one of the main areas of the NFE section’s activities and its contribution is important for increasing educational access and quality.

With the aim of developing and overhauling primary and secondary education, and to improve its quality within the ideology of Mongolian ‘Law on Education’, the education sector was standardized and requirements were integrated and applied to the education service’s processes and results. These actions have allowed us to analyze, by comparison methods, the activities and results of different training methods of formal and non-formal education.
Education training through the Equivalency Programme (EP) covers a wide framework of activities in all of the NFE’s sections with the main target group benefiting from its training being children, adolescents and adults who have either never received any level of formal education or those who dropped out of school before finishing their formal programmes and curricula. The EP provides “second” opportunity to have a primary, secondary and upper-secondary education for this target group. Taking into account the legal environment and a financial solution, this training seems to have been expanding in last few years.

III. PRIORITY AREAS

1) Policy support mechanisms

Several policy documents have been made and are being implemented with the intention of supporting and advocating the EP, and also to act as a guideline for its activities. The following steps are generally those taken towards the EP:

- One of the six main objectives of the ‘National Programme on NFE Development’, in 1997, was to provide for the re-training in education for out-of-school or school drop-out children and adolescents, and has since become the keystone for further policies and legislation made on the EP. In order to implement the elements of the programme, subsequent activities to study other Asia-Pacific countries’ experiences on the EP, and to develop content and a methodology suitable for the Mongolian lifestyle, have begun.

- As a result of these activities and studies, the ‘Curriculum on the Equivalency Programme for Primary and Secondary Education’ was approved in 2001, which has become a very influential document for the re-training of out-of-school and school drop-out children and adolescents. In line with this curriculum, the EP textbooks for elementary and secondary education have been developed and are still being used today.

- However, since there is now a requirement to comply with the new and competence-based Educational Standards of 2003, the ‘Curriculum on the Equivalency Programme for Primary and Secondary Education’ of 2001 needed to be overhauled. Therefore, the contents and structure of this curriculum was re-developed into a policy document, the ‘National NFE Curriculum on the Equivalency Programme for Primary, Secondary and Upper-Secondary Education’, which we actively use today. It is suitable for new educational standards and covers all levels of education, and was approved by the 358th Order of the Ministry of education, Culture and Science (MECS) in 2005. The main improvement of the later curriculum was that it not only had a competence-based module structure that depended on good educational standards but it also covered the upper-secondary level education rather than merely primary and secondary level education (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary and secondary education’s Equivalency Programme in 2001</th>
<th>Primary, secondary and upper-secondary education’s Equivalency Programme in 2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Primary and secondary education (up to Grade 8)</td>
<td>• Primary, secondary and upper secondary education (up to Grade 11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Subject-structured</td>
<td>• Module-structured</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Two textbooks for primary, five textbooks for secondary education on the EP</td>
<td>• 46 modules for primary, 45 modules for secondary and 23 modules for upper secondary education on the EP</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Knowledge-based</td>
<td>• Competence-based</td>
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- The government level policy document entitled the ‘Educational Master Plan of Mongolia, 2006-2015’, approved by the 192nd Order of 2006, clearly defines that activities are to be implemented in the Equivalency Programme’s training of competence, quality and management, within the framework of the objective “to improve the opportunity for out-of-school and school drop-out children and adolescents to enrol in non-formal education”. This is one of the three main objectives of its sub-section ‘Non-formal and Adult Education’. The implementation of the Master Plan’s objectives have been evaluated and tasks, such as transforming the EP’s training
into an online friendly version and to formalise the EP structure, have been added to the edition that has been under revision since 2009, and are considered to be the main direction for implementation of activities until 2015 (Table 2).

Table 2. Sets of programmes to be implemented by the Equivalency Programme and its criteria specifications (Revised edition of the Master Plan of the Education Sector, 2010-2015)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sets of programmes</th>
<th>Outcome and criteria specifications</th>
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<tr>
<td>1.2.1 Implementation of primary, secondary and upper secondary education’s EP and</td>
<td>• Online EP trainings will be implemented to conduct achievement analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>to increase the number, type and distribution of training materials and teacher</td>
<td>• 40% of out-of-school children and adolescents have enrolled in EP training and not less than 10%</td>
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<td>handbooks</td>
<td>of school age children will be transferred to formal schools</td>
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<td>1.2.2 Transfer EP modules into online version, to develop, use electronic training</td>
<td>• Regulations will be made to provide a lunchtime programme to EP learners in the vulnerable</td>
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<td>materials, enhance the opportunity of open learning, establishment of strategic</td>
<td>group of children younger than 12 years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>source</td>
<td>• Variable expenditure allowed per learner of EP will be increased in line with inflation and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.3 Consider and relate local features, inflation rate when calculating variable</td>
<td>financing would be sufficient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expenditure per EP learner, to increase allocation and proper expenditure</td>
<td>• Handbook materials will be developed for teacher of EP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.4 Provide EP learners up to 15 years of age with dormitories to provide better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>condition to study</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.1 To develop evaluation form for basic and upper secondary education’s EP and</td>
<td>• To perform evaluation on basic and upper secondary education’s EP and to establish 10 model</td>
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<tr>
<td>to further develop the contents and methodology</td>
<td>centres to experiment with the training modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1.2 To further develop methodology and theories of multi-grade teaching and to</td>
<td>• NFE’s teachers would receive training in multi-grade teaching methodology and would be certified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>introduce and to evaluate them within NFE structure</td>
<td>• Training programme to provide education such as sustainable development, health, legislation etc</td>
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<td>2.1.3 To take certain measures to improve the capacity of personnel who are</td>
<td>non-formal ways, and its handbooks and training materials will be developed</td>
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<td>responsible for developing online and distance training materials</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2.1.4 To develop and use handbooks and recommendations of EP’s training methodology</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>for formal and non-formal teachers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.1.1 To structure and formalise the educational re-training by EP</td>
<td>• Legal environment to validate primary, secondary and upper secondary education through EP training</td>
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- Amendments in the Education Law (2006) also legalised the possibility of obtaining a primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education certificate through the EP and allocated per-student based variable costs for the EP training.

The Amendments in the “Education Law” that was revised in December 2006 reads:

8.2. Primary, secondary, and upper secondary education can be obtained through a non-formal education Equivalency Programme for re-training for a certain term of education, for self-learning, and for learning skills for employment. The content and regulation of the Equivalency Programme shall be developed and implemented by a State Central Administrative Authority in charge of education.

40.2. Fixed expenditure of universities, institutes and colleges, total expenditure of dormitories, and variable costs of formal and non-formal schooling, and variable costs of kindergartens and general education schools regardless of the form of ownership, shall also be financed from the state budget.”
The ‘Regulation for organizing primary, secondary and upper-secondary education’s Equivalency Programme’ was developed and approved by Resolution Number 362 of 2007 by the MECS with the purpose of implementing Articles 8.2 and 40.2 of the amendments to the ‘Education Law’, and to increase the requirements of the training and the participation and roles of the related parties, and also to effectively spend the finances allocated to the training. It comprehensively defines all the necessary requirements set up for the Equivalency Programme including training organization, conditions, monitoring and evaluation, documentation etc.

The Government Action Plan of 2008 and the ‘Comprehensive National Development Strategy of Mongolia based on the Millennium Development Goals’, which were approved by the government, certain articles of those are also considered as legislation that supports equivalency education.

The EP issues are also comprehensively addressed in ‘Education’, a national programme which has been developed in consideration to a National Comprehensive Policy.

The above mentioned policy documents and legislation have been progressive steps of action for the equivalency education and has helped the training’s sub-structure to find its fundamental shape.

2) Curriculum and materials development

The National NFE Curriculum on Equivalency Programme for Primary, Secondary and Upper Secondary Education (2005) complies with educational standards which are oriented to competency building and its knowledge and skills content for learners can be categorized into four sections: Communication, Knowledge, Life and Social Skills.

Several different types of training materials have been developed within the content of the EP curricula. For example, the primary education textbooks, ‘Mathematics’, ‘Mongolian Language’ and seven sets of textbooks in secondary education, ‘Mathematics and Informatics’, ‘Mongolian Language and Literature’, ‘Natural Science’, ‘English Language’, ‘Russian’, ‘Social Science’ and ‘Drawing’, were developed and published with the support of the IPEC, ILO in 2004.

The materials of the renewed EP curriculum of 2005 were developed in module form, which was based on four competences. It has knowledge and skills content that is designed according to the educational level and a total of 200 modules are planned to be developed for the primary, secondary and upper-secondary education’s EP. As from Aug 2010, a total of 117 modules have been developed, 44 for the primary education level, 45 for the secondary education level and 28 for upper-secondary education level. Compared to the textbooks mentioned above, modules are published and distributed in smaller quantities but are not sufficient for all the learners. Therefore, in 2009, the modules were transferred into an electronic version (CD) for the learner’s use. Also, all the modules developed so far can be found on and downloaded from the NFDE Centre’s website.

Currently, most of ‘core’ modules have been developed and are available. Even some of the other handbooks for learning knowledge and the skills that relate largely to under-developed life skills competences are developed. For example, NFE Life Skills handbooks, health and ESD training curricula with handbooks, posters and videos are available for EP use. In addition, textbooks designed for the formal schools, together with books and handbooks of the NFE’s other programmes, such as health and ecology, can be used for EP.

3) Financing and resource mobilization

Amendments in the Education Law (2006) have allocated variable costs for the Equivalency Programme training from the government budget, starting in 2008, and a certain proportion of the budget relating to the number of Equivalency Programme learners was given. By calculating these parameters of budget spent it is estimated that the following amounts were spent according to allocation of the variable costs per learner: in the 2007-2008 academic year 1.2 bn tugrugs was spent, in 2009 about 1.5 bn tugrugs was spent, and in 2010 about 1.8 bn tugrugs was spent.
According to the Master Plan of the Education Sector, the Equivalency Programme’s total variable costs will be 1.2bn tugrugs for each year from 2008 to 2011 and 1.7bn for each year from 2012 to 2015.

For development and publication of the EP’s modules, training materials, handbooks and recommendations for teachers, 176 mil tugrugs were allocated for each year from 2008 to 2011 and 193m for each year from 2012 to 2015.

This Equivalency Programme’s financing is allocated from the MECS to aimags, the Education and Cultural Departments of the capital city to local units, and onsite expenditure is operated by school directors. Most of this budget is spent on the NFE teachers’ salaries and social security contributions (SSC) and the small amount remaining is spent on the organisation of the training.

The MECS also allocates a small proportion of the budget for ‘expenditure for training and practice’; separate from the budget for the Equivalency Programme, but it is very common for local levels not to allocate this part of the budget. This is largely due to factors such as the aimag’s Education and Cultural Department’s administration and the NFE specialist’s experience, as well as the activities and school administration’s attitude towards the NFE sector.

As seen from this data, variable costs given for learners of the EP are principally spent on its NFE teacher’s salary. In many places, a teacher’s salary is calculated solely on that teacher’s duration of employment and experience in order to avoid an intentionally false increase in the number of learners, which is thought to happen frequently in some areas.

It is necessary to increase the budget for the EP by reforming the rate for calculating the variable expenditure and to apply a monitoring mechanism on its expenditure. On the one hand, the NFE’s Enlightenment Centre’s teachers are responsible for organizing training other than the EP’s training, such as literacy, life skills and the NFE’s other activities at local level, while their salaries are replaced only by the variable expenditure of the Equivalency Programme. Such actions influence the NFE’s activities and schools and local administrations only support activities that allocate the budget for salary and tend to dismiss other activities. Consequently, understanding that the NFE service only organizes training for out-of-school children is spreading to all levels of its structure.

4) Networking and partnerships

The EP’s training organisation and management structure can be considered on three levels: national, provincial and local. At national level, this includes the main government department, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MECS), and also the National Centre for Non-Formal and Distance Education (NFDE Centre) of the MECS. At provincial level, it includes the Education and Cultural Department and at local level, it includes the NFE Enlightenment Centres. The roles and functions of each structure are as follows:

- The Education Department of the MECS is responsible for policy development, approval of policy papers and the monitoring and assessment of the EP’s content, methodology, training and monitoring processes, and the Evaluation Office is responsible for the information and data of the training.

- The NFDE Centre’s role is to develop and distribute the EP’s content and training materials; to train teachers and human resources personnel at national level; to propose and develop policy documents and to deliver them to MECS; to collect and analyse data relating to the EP; and to provide information and methodology support at local level.

- The Educational and Cultural Department, which is the subsidiary organisation of an aimag (the city governor’s office), is responsible for organising the EP at local level and the implementation of policies. Specialists responsible for the NFE facilitate the soum’s NFE teachers with: methodological and professional guidance; organising training for NFE teachers; monitoring the implementation of the training programme; monitoring the curriculum-related regulations; giving advice and recommendations;
collecting reports and information data at aimag level; making an evaluation and conclusion; and also regulating the activities of the project and curricula implemented by the MECS and NFDE Centre.

- The main organisation that manages the EP is the Enlightenment Centre, located in soums and districts. Currently there are 358 officially registered enlightenment centres, with 10 of them having independent status whilst the others are operating alongside the formal schools. These centres are responsible for registering the learners in its area, for enrolling them in the EP, and to organise and conduct training activities.

International donor organizations and national non-governmental organizations play an important role in the implementation of the EP. These organizations’ functions include activities to increase educational access and to reduce the numbers of out-of-school children by enrolling the poor and vulnerable groups, as well as the out-of-school children, in various levels of training. They also assist in improving the capacity of teachers and human resources, and improving the resources and training environment. These organizations include UN’s specialized organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO, ILO, World Vision, Save the Children’s Foundation, and also national NGOs such as the Foundation for Development of Women in Rural Areas, the Centre for Children’s Rights and Equal Step Centre.

In addition, ‘Regulations for implementing training through the primary, secondary, upper-secondary education’s EP’ indicated those individuals and other organizations are able to provide training through the EP with permission. This activity has the advantage of lightening the workload of the government organization and increasing access to the EP with a freedom in the training, but unfortunately coordination and regulation of this activity is still not determined. For example, it is not clear which organization grants permission and makes financial decisions so a decision cannot be made at any level. Currently, there are organizations, enterprises and individuals who are interested in conducting the EP but due to the issues mentioned earlier, they are not able to operate in such a field.

5) Monitoring and Evaluation

The NFE’s information structure is such that it goes from ‘the bottom to the top’. In other words, the Enlightenment Centres - the basic units - collect the data and deliver it to the provincial office in Word and Excel file format, and the aimag (provincial office) sends this data to the NFDE Centre and the MECS, and these two organizations cooperatively exchange their data.

Relating to the implementation of ‘Regulations for implementing training through primary, secondary and upper-secondary education’s EP’, the MECS has started to collect the following administrative information related to the NFE’s activity since the 2008-2009 academic year:

- On the form BDB-7B, ‘Staff of the NFE’s Enlightenment Centre’, information on the staff member’s number, age, gender, academic degree, educational level is collected
- On the form BDB-12, ‘Number of groups and learners studying in the EP’, information on the number and education level, age, gender is collected
- On the form BDB-15, information on the number, age, gender and causes of out-of-school children from 6 to 14 years of age is collected
- On the form BDB-20B, ‘Completion rate for the EP training’, the information on the number of learners who graduated in the EP in literacy and other training that provides the educational needs of the public is collected.

The above mentioned data collection is insufficient to apply evaluation and monitoring on the implementation of the EP’s regulation. Therefore, with the goal to establish an integrated information database for the NFE, software was developed in late 2009 with support from the UNICEF which collects the following sets of information data:

The NFE MIS provides the opportunity to collect not only quantitative data but also detailed information about the Enlightenment Centre’s training environment and the EP learners with registration of illiterate, out-of-school children and adults.
‘Regulations for implementing training through primary, secondary and upper-secondary education’s EP’ indicates that individuals and other organizations are able to run training through the EP with permission. With this in mind, a separate toolbar has been added to not only collect data for the EP, but also to collect information and establish the database for other organizations working in the field of NFE.

This last software tool could play an important role to create a partnership and synergy between governmental organizations and domestic, foreign or international NGOs operating in the field of NFE.

Currently, it is the specialist responsible for the local NFE function to act as the main data collector by sending information data, necessary to make up the main database, to the Enlightenment Centres and then this data is entered onto the database categorized by province and soum. Advancement is that while most aimags and soums had no internet connection in previous years and instant communication possibilities were limited, now more schools are connected to the internet, comparatively speaking. However, in most of these places current bandwidth speed and quality is still not good enough to enter data into the main database and is an obstacle for it to fully benefit from its function.

There has been no monitoring and evaluation on how effective the EP’s module training currently is for meeting the learner’s needs and demands. Therefore, in the future, a comprehensive evaluation needs to be made on the module’s content, type; range, access and further adjustments should be made according to the conclusion of the evaluation. Evaluation of the NFDE Centre’s EP modules are planned to take place in 2010.

IV. IMPACTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE EQUIVALENCY PROGRAMME

Current achievements of the EP are concluded as:

- The EP’s content has been agreed on and a national level curriculum was developed.
- Several dozens of training materials for the EP have been developed and used in the training. For example, sets of the EP textbooks and more than 120 EP training modules were published and subsequently distributed to the Enlightenment Centres, with several of those being translated into the Kazakh language.
- The EP’s methodology has been developed. Teachers who organise the training for the EP have been trained in multi-grade teaching (MGT) methodology, and many handbooks and recommendations have been published and distributed for these teachers. For example, the ‘MGT training methodology’, ‘MTG training modules’ and the ‘methodology for organising training in multi-grade groups’.
- The EP’s financing has been agreed. Learners enrolled in the training have been financed through variable expenditure per learner from the government budget (according to the enactment of 8.2 of the Education Law). A total of 1.4bn tugrugs was spent on the EP’s variable expenditure in 2009 and 1.5bn tgs has been allocated for the year 2010.

V. CORE CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though we have achieved the above-mentioned advances, there are still many issues and challenges that need resolving and the following recommendations are being proposed as possible solutions to these challenges:

- Legislation has not yet fully translated into implementation at local and grassroots level. For example, in ‘Directions in enrolling secondary school age children in education’ in 2008, the legal environment (with regard to the capacity of NFE) has not reached a level in which it can cooperatively work with the formal education services. This is one of the main reasons why a certain percentage of children of secondary school age are not in school. Several articles of the Education Law, denoting that soum and bagh’s governors have taken certain responsibilities to reduce its school drop-out rates, and to ensure its citizens achieve an education, have not been implemented. Support of the local administration on the NFE’s activities is still not adequate.
NFE teachers/facilitators are not able to be part of the social care system which was identified by educational law. Formal school teachers receive a bonus for every six years of employment and on retirement they receive a further bonus equal to 18 months of salary, but NFE teachers are not eligible for these extra bonuses.

Regulations to enrol out-of-school children in the EP are inadequate whilst training coordination is not established, training access is limited, and the legal environment to calculate results and the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are not settled. Accommodation and food supply for the main target group – children of herders – has not been resolved. The main challenge is the low budget allocation in this field. It is necessary to take successive measures to improve the implementation of the policy documents and to establish the coordination of the training of the EP. In order to do so, the first step must be taken to develop the evaluation and monitoring methods for handling the data of the training process, the learner’s educational achievement, establishing the knowledge and skills levels, and to have this evaluation and monitoring method approved by the MECS.

Information and data about the EP is inaccurate and insufficient. It is important to collect accurate and rational data and to revise the official data collection forms within the framework of this activity, to train the people responsible for collecting the data, and to create an integrated channel for a data-receiving process. Database improvement should be performed immediately by starting to use the information database software program that has already been created.

Use of information, communication technology and public media in the EP is lacking. Governmental regulations and financial support is needed to make the EP open and free to all learners, to promote the use of IT and to transfer it into an online version. As a result of these activities, the implementation of legal documentation regarding the EP and NFE will be enhanced, and it could also act as leverage to create an opportunity for everyone to have continuous and life-long learning possibilities.

The facilitation of parental, family, and public and local administrative participation and roles to increase access to the EP is needed, and its advocacy and cooperation is currently inadequate. In particular, there is a need to increase participation and support of the decision-makers, the school and local administrations in order to enforce regulations, and that such participation should be evaluated as one of the indicators of a positive outcome.

The NFE Enlightenment Centre has insufficient equipment, tools and training materials which result in a failure to meet the growing needs and demands in this field. Quality and access to the EP should not only be addressed by variable costs, but an initiative is also needed for the government to allocate more of the budget on the improvement of the training environment, conditions, the development of various types of training materials, teacher training and re-training. In particular, a budget is necessary for module development, and MECS expenditure for training materials should be allocated to meet the demands of the learner regarding published material. This issue could also be resolved by re-directing finance for projects from UN organizations such as UNICEF, UNESCO and the ILO.

Capacity of organisations at all levels of NFE is inadequate, especially human resources, and is not sufficient to meet the requirements to shape the EP’s environment. The NFE’s teacher training structure is poorly developed, and social care, such as salaries and bonuses, are still not fully coordinated like that of formal school teachers, and those issues are influencing the training quality and results. Therefore, it is important to resolve issues such as teachers’ salaries and social care by institutionalizing the EP. Teachers’ issues can be resolved by integrating the EP’s content into the curriculum of related universities and colleges.

The consistency of the formal and non-formal education system is inadequate and so is its regulatory system. Even though regulations indicate that individuals, enterprises and other organizations are able to run training through the EP, it is still not clear which organization is responsible for granting permission. Therefore, it is necessary for the MECS, and its subsections, to plan and organize activities that promote synergy between governmental and non-governmental organizations, enterprises and individuals and to further develop a regulatory mechanism for this issue.

It is important to periodically organize activities to establish the challenges, by monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the EP’s regulations, and to find the solutions and a mechanism of implementation for these challenges.