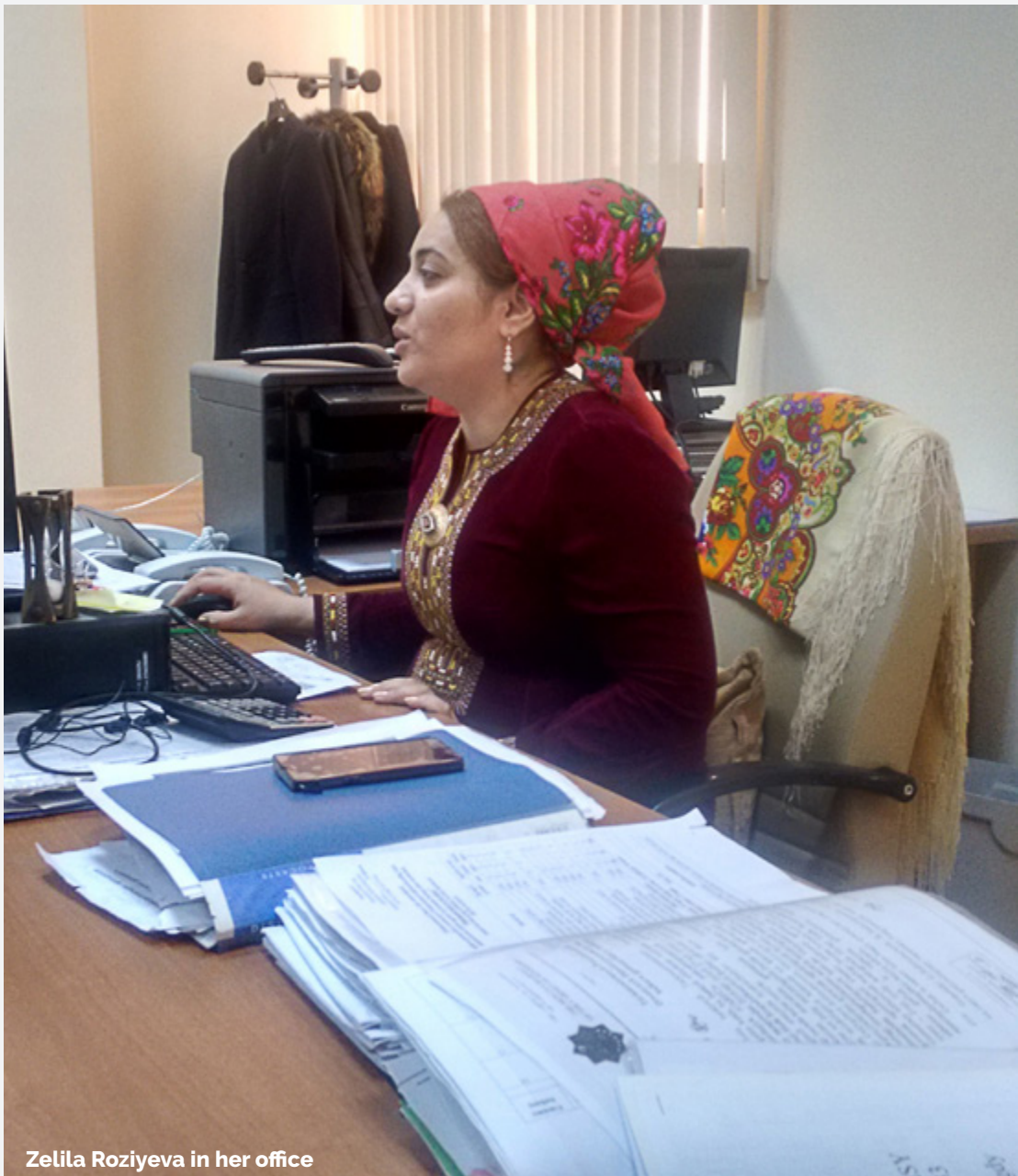


Zelila Roziyeva is an English teacher and administrator. But she begins each workday—Monday through Saturday—by waking up at 6 a.m., making breakfast for her family, and helping her two children get ready for school. She and her husband, Nazar, drop them off, and then Ms. Roziyeva begins her day at the Institute of International Relations (IIR), while Nazar goes on to his job at a bakery.



Zelila Roziyeva in her office

Like most English language educators, Ms. Roziyeva balances her work and family life. When asked about her biggest challenge, she smiles and asks, “Don’t you mean challenges?” She goes on to say that one of her biggest challenges is managing her time between her various duties. Even on her job, she wears many hats at the IIR in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan:

- She teaches English to future diplomats.
- She ensures that fourth- and fifth-year students are well matched to internships in Turkmenistan and abroad.
- She reviews syllabi for English language courses, including lesson plans and curriculum selection.
- She also creates the final exam schedule every semester, monitors student attendance, and manages a specialized training course for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) every spring.

With all her responsibilities, it should come as no surprise that Ms. Roziyeva’s lunch break is usually spent in front of her computer. “I eat with one hand while I type up a lesson plan or work on a schedule,” she says. While a normal workday is 8 a.m. until 5 p.m., she often works from 7 to 7.

The IIR is a prestigious five-year university program that accepts 15 students every year in each of four faculties: Diplomacy and Security Studies, International Law, International Journalism, and International Economics. While most universities in Turkmenistan are managed by the Ministry of Education, the IIR is a specialized institute that works in close collaboration with the MFA. This means that students must not only complete required coursework, but must

also have strong language skills. In fact, prior to beginning their coursework, students are expected to be functionally bilingual in Russian and Turkmen. Students are expected to speak at least two additional languages fluently by the time they leave the IIR.

Students begin taking English classes in their first year and add a second language—Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Farsi, French, or German—during their second year. “This way,” Ms. Roziyeva explains, “students have a better chance of working internationally or for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” Students study English for five years and are expected to work hard to improve their skills. “I always tell the students, ‘You must become your own translators.’ They are conscious of the fact that they will need all the languages that they will study, but English most of all. That’s why I push them to learn new vocabulary in English and present on news stories that are important in today’s world.”

As a teacher and administrator, Ms. Roziyeva works hard to support Turkmenistan’s next generation of lawyers, economists, journalists, and diplomats with their English language proficiency because these skills are the gateway to their professional development and future careers. “New students understand that English is important, but by the time they are in their fifth year, they see why they must speak English well. Without English, many of our students at the Institute will not be able to work in international organizations or with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,” she explains.

Students’ levels of proficiency in English vary widely when they enter the IIR. Ms. Roziyeva overcomes this challenge by using differentiated instruction techniques. “I often ask students to work together on assignments,” she says. “For example, students with higher English language

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Because she teaches future diplomats, she prepares for class by watching a lot of news.

proficiency may collaborate on a difficult vocabulary task asking them to match prefixes and suffixes to words. Students with a lower level of proficiency would be matching the same words to the definitions. This way, everyone is working on the same set of vocabulary and acquiring important tools to better their English skills. Depending on the assignment, stronger students may have to write a longer response to an essay prompt, while less proficient students may work on creating a well-organized paragraph.”

Ms. Roziyeva teaches English six hours per week to the first-year Diplomacy and Security Studies students on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Wednesdays in the fall. Because she teaches future diplomats, she prepares for class by watching a lot of news. “I begin by making notes of the biggest news stories and what vocabulary is necessary to understand these events,” she says. “In class, I ask my students to share their opinions about the current events, using our class discussion to preteach

the target vocabulary. Students would then work in pairs or small groups on a communicative vocabulary activity. Since IIR’s English classes are small, I try to have my students speaking English as much as possible. Before class ends, we review vocabulary, and I assign homework, which could be preparing a short presentation on an interesting news story.”

Students in the Diplomacy and Security Studies faculty receive an average of six hours of English per week during their five years at the IIR. Ms. Roziyeva enjoys teaching the English for Diplomacy and Security Studies courses because “the subject matter is interesting and the students are better prepared for their future careers. Diplomat students have a realistic idea of the English skills that they will need at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” Interest in English is not limited to future diplomats at the IIR, though. Future journalists, economists, and lawyers are all interested in learning English for their careers.



Ms. Roziyeva reviews English homework with first-year Diplomacy and Security Studies students at the Institute of International Relations (IIR).



Ms. Roziyeva helps second-year International Law students with vocabulary exercises.

Ms. Roziyeva knows how important English is for career development in Turkmenistan, as she has overseen the student-internship program at the IIR since 2013. “Our fifth-year students go abroad for a three-month internship, and they come back seeking additional opportunities to go abroad so that they can use their English as much as possible,” she explains. “As the head of student internships, my primary duties involve finding internships in Ashgabat for our fourth-year students, either at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or at other ministries. I also monitor our fifth-year students’ progress during their internships in Turkmen embassies abroad. I remain in contact with professionals at the embassies and at the MFA to make sure that the students are learning important professional skills.” The MFA monitors students during their internships and selects some to enter the world of diplomacy; students selected for that career often have high proficiency in English. “Most of the students that begin their careers with the MFA were the top pupils in English class and

were instrumental during their internship opportunities,” Ms. Roziyeva says. “MFA employees place a high value on English proficiency and remember interns who speak English well.”

Ms. Roziyeva also oversees a three-month course, open to the general Turkmen public every spring, that prepares candidates to enter the MFA. Once again, English is at the forefront of hiring practices, as candidates must pass an entrance exam in English and Turkmen to be considered for the course. For this course, she says, “First, I prepare an exam that is both in English and Turkmen and based on Turkmen history. Once the test has been administered and corrected, I create the teaching schedule.” While professionals from the MFA teach the more specialized courses, such as diplomatic protocol and correspondence, Ms. Roziyeva and her colleagues from the IIR teach English.

Ms. Roziyeva works hard to find materials and activities that will help future professionals

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Her main source of motivation is her hardworking students.

use English authentically. She says, “I use a great book from the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, for my third-year Diplomacy and Security Studies English course. This book helps students understand the basics of diplomatic correspondence and academic writing.” Meanwhile, for the course she teaches to first-year Diplomacy students, she uses a book that helps students learn high-frequency collocations and understand, in Ms. Roziyeva’s words, “the distinction between complex ideas, such as the differences between power and authority.”

Ms. Roziyeva also focuses on authentic material when reviewing her colleagues’ selection of English language syllabi and course materials to prepare the IIR students for the professional world. “Each teacher must develop a curriculum that focuses on the same target-language structures and topics as the one adopted by the Ministry of Education,” she explains. “I look through each English teacher’s plan and materials to make sure that each theme is related to the coursework. For example, our international journalists courses should have primary sources drawn from current affairs, with a strong component related to media, radio, TV, and so on. For lawyers, it should be related to

past and current legislation in Turkmenistan and abroad.” Once she has approved English course plans and syllabi, they are submitted to the Rector for final approval.

Zelila Roziyeva’s many roles and responsibilities at the IIR highlight the growing need for English speakers in Turkmenistan’s diplomacy and international organizations. Students at the IIR and throughout Turkmenistan have become more engaged in the English language classroom thanks to the diligence and professionalism of Ms. Roziyeva and English language professionals like her. While her duties certainly have numerous challenges, she reflects that her main source of motivation is her hardworking students. “I am proud of the students that are ready for class,” she says. “I am proud when they participate and give me the fruit of my hard work. When this happens, I feel accomplished.”

This article was written by **Sarah Bedrouni**, who is an English Language Fellow in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. Sarah has been teaching and training teachers for over 12 years.

Photos by Sarah Bedrouni



A street view of the main administration building at the IIR