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INTRODUCTION

Background of problem

Over the past several decades, the field of international relations and humanitarianism has come to place a greater emphasis on the development of education in fragile states. This is due to fact that the intricate fabric of a nation's progress, education is like the warp and weft, intricately weaving the threads of fairness and equal opportunities (Easar et al., 2023). Among the notable fragile ones is Afghanistan, a nation which is steeped in history and known for its resilience as well as a nation which has seen significant changes in its education policies for a longer time. This thesis explores the historical evolution of these policies and how they have affected social justice issues within the education system. As Afghanistan works towards creating a more inclusive and fair education system, understanding its past policies becomes crucial to moving forward (Shir Mohammad, 2021).

The history of education in Afghanistan is a complex tapestry woven with challenges and advancements. Since its establishment in 1747, Afghanistan struggled with the absence of formal education institutions, with only four schools established by 1919 despite the foundation of modern education in 1875. King Amanullah Khan's progressive efforts to make primary schools compulsory for all and open schools for girls faced staunch opposition from the clergy, ultimately leading to his exile from Afghanistan. This resistance to female education persisted through various periods, including the closure of girls' schools and the transformation of other educational institutions into madrasas during the Taliban regime (Rauf, 2021).

Despite these obstacles, there have been significant developments in the education system. From 1929 to 2001, enhancements in the educational fields occurred, although obstacles, especially concerning female education, persisted through various periods. The Taliban regime's ban on women's education and the closure of girls' schools further exacerbated the challenges, reflecting a tumultuous period for education in Afghanistan (Kayen, 2022). However, amidst these adversities, there have been notable advancements, such as the establishment of state and private universities and colleges, reflecting a complex educational landscape in Afghanistan (Kissane, 2012). On a global scale, the pursuit of fairness and equal opportunities is vital. These principles of social justice and equity function as guiding lights on our collective journey to create a better world. This is especially important when we look at Afghanistan, a country with a rich history facing significant challenges.

With decades of conflict and political instability, Afghanistan has dealt with numerous problems, including widespread poverty, gender inequality, and limited access to education

(Abdulbaqi, 2009). Achieving social justice here means tackling these bigger issues to ensure that everyone, no matter their background, has the same chances and rights. Equity, an essential part of this, means using customized approaches that consider the different needs of various groups, recognizing and fixing past disadvantages. In education, it is crucial to understand and analyze policies through the lens of social justice and equity. This understanding is vital for positive change and sustainable development in Afghanistan (Baiza, 2013).

The impact of over three decades of conflict has left Afghanistan's education system in disarray. For many children in the country, completing primary school is still a distant dream, especially in rural areas and for girls, despite recent progress in increasing enrollment rates (Radic, 2010). As highlighted by UNICEF, "In the poorest and remote areas of the country, enrollment levels vary extensively, and girls still lack equal access" (UNESCO, 2021). This harsh reality underscores the urgent need to look into the details of education policies, examining how they either continue or challenge social injustices and inequities. Through this thesis, my goal is not just to untangle the historical complexities but also to contribute meaningfully to the ongoing conversation, paving the way for a fairer and more equal education landscape in Afghanistan.

The early 20th century witnessed transformative efforts towards modernization and educational reforms in Afghanistan. King Amanullah Khan's endeavors to establish a modern education system faced resistance, particularly concerning gender inclusivity. The closure of schools during the Taliban regime marked a setback, and the ban on women's education left lasting impacts on the educational landscape. In this intricate tapestry of Afghan education, the struggles faced by the nation over the years form a crucial backdrop to contemporary challenges (Neyazi et al., 2022). The historical evolution, marked by both advancements and setbacks, lays the foundation for understanding the complexities embedded in Afghanistan's educational policies. It illuminates the persistent hurdles faced by marginalized groups, particularly women and girls, and highlights the ongoing battle for social justice and equity within the education system. Through this extended historical lens, I aim to provide a nuanced perspective that informs the discourse surrounding the development of a fair and inclusive education system in Afghanistan.

Problem of Statement

Afghanistan's educational system is facing many problems, including historical difficulties, modern complexity, and the need to promote social justice and equity. Even with advancements in policy development, the system's ongoing inequalities make it more difficult for everyone to receive an inclusive and fair education (Samady, 2013). The historical trajectory demonstrates

a patchwork of challenges, ranging from the failures brought about by the Taliban regime's prohibition on women's education to gender-based opposition to educational reforms under the reign of King Amanullah Khan (Emadi, 2010). The effects of these difficulties are still felt today, as seen by the gender enrollment gap that has persisted for so long and the persisting differences in educational access, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas.

The critical need to remove obstacles that oppressed groups must overcome in order to traverse a world defined by poverty, regional differences, and the intersectionality of race, religion, and gender highlights the importance of these concerns. The implementation of a truly inclusive and egalitarian education system in Afghanistan is hampered by these complex issues.

The objective of this research is to examine the nuances of Afghanistan's educational policy and reveal the historical intricacies that have shaped the present situation. Through the use of social justice and equality, the research analyzes the effects of these policies in order to pinpoint areas that require improvement as well as gaps and hurdles. The main objective is to give information that helps Afghanistan's education system create policies that promote justice, inclusion, and responsiveness to a range of demands.

Rationale for study

Starting an exploration of Afghanistan's education landscape, the need to dive into the complexities of social justice and equity is deeply personal for me. As an Afghan woman currently pursuing a master's degree in Azerbaijan, my engagement with these issues goes beyond mere academic curiosity – it is rooted in my lived experiences.

Growing up in Afghanistan exposed me to the profound challenges shaped by poverty, regional disparities, and the interplay of race, religion, and gender. I witnessed firsthand the diverse obstacles woven into the education system, where economic constraints, geographical factors, societal norms, and gender inequality converged to create barriers, limiting access to education and active participation. This study serves as a rallying call to break down these multifaceted barriers, advocating for an educational landscape that empowers all Afghans, regardless of their socioeconomic status, geographic location, race, or religious beliefs.

As an immigrant currently studying abroad, I possess a unique vantage point that allows me to draw connections between international educational practices and the nuanced challenges faced by Afghanistan. My personal journey underscores the imperative to align education policies with global standards of inclusivity and equity, ensuring that Afghan students, whether studying at home or abroad, receive a fair and equitable education.

The core objective of this research is to illuminate the intersectionality of challenges within Afghanistan's education system, emphasizing the significance of inclusivity that recognizes and uplifts all individuals. This endeavor transcends the boundaries of academia; it embodies a commitment to forging a more inclusive and equitable future. It represents my contribution to addressing issues that have intimately touched my life. Through this research, I aspire to provide insights and recommendations that catalyze positive changes in Afghanistan's education policies, fostering a brighter and more equitable future for all.

In addition to its localized focus, this study assumes a broader significance, contributing to the global conversation on educational inclusivity. By examining the challenges within Afghanistan's education system, it adds depth to the ongoing discourse on creating equitable learning environments worldwide.

Aim of study

This research aims to deeply explore how education policies in Afghanistan shape the landscape of fairness and equal opportunities, specifically within the context of social justice and equity. The primary goal is to unravel the historical journey and current structures of these policies to understand their broad impact on the overall educational scenario. By digging into the historical roots and contemporary frameworks, the study seeks to provide a complete picture of how education policies actively influence the complex dynamics of social justice and equity in Afghanistan.

The focus is on examining the historical development of education policies, shedding light on key milestones and shifts over time. This historical analysis aims to uncover the factors that have played a role in shaping social justice within the educational system. By understanding the historical context, the study aims to provide insights into the persistent challenges and progress made in achieving educational equity.

Simultaneously, the research seeks to critically evaluate current education policies in Afghanistan. The objective is to identify both explicit and implicit elements contributing to the promotion or hindrance of social justice and equity. With a specific emphasis on gender inclusivity and overall inclusivity in the modern educational landscape, the aim is to recognize policy mechanisms that either uphold or alleviate disparities.

In essence, this research aspires to contribute accessible insights that go beyond academic realms. It aims to inform and guide ongoing efforts towards creating a more inclusive, fair, and socially just educational environment in Afghanistan. This involves not only acknowledging

historical nuances but also shedding light on current challenges and suggesting potential pathways for transformative policy changes that can positively impact students and educators in Afghanistan.

Research Objectives

This study is designed to address the central research question: How do education policies in Afghanistan address and impact social justice and equity in the educational system? To unravel the complexities inherent in this inquiry, the research aims to achieve the following objectives:

Main Objective

To assess how education policies in Afghanistan, historically and in light of the Taliban's return, influence social justice and equity in education.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the historical impact of education policies in Afghanistan on social justice within the education system.
2. To assess the current effects of Afghanistan's education policies, particularly in the context of the Taliban's return, on social justice and equity in education.

Research questions

1. How have historical education policies in Afghanistan impacted social justice in education?
2. How do social justice and equity in education get affected by Afghanistan's education policies in the wake of the Taliban's comeback?

These specific objectives aim to provide a focused and comprehensive analysis of the intersection between education policies and social justice in Afghanistan, contributing valuable insights to the ongoing efforts for a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

Significance of study

The exploration of education policies in Afghanistan through the lens of social justice and equity emerges as a profound and essential endeavor (Omari, 2023). This research extends beyond the confines of academic inquiry, positioning itself as a critical intervention in the ongoing and dynamic discourse surrounding education in Afghanistan. At its core, this study endeavors to bridge existing knowledge gaps, providing a nuanced understanding of how education policies intricately shape and influence social justice and equity within the Afghan context. By meticulously examining the historical evolution, current policy landscape, and the

practical challenges faced, this research aims to contribute substantial and comprehensive insights, enriching the current body of literature on education in Afghanistan.

Moreover, the findings gleaned from this research hold transformative potential, transcending theoretical discourse to guide and influence real-world scenarios. As a beacon of illumination, this study aspires to inform policy development, guide educators, and engage stakeholders in Afghanistan. Through the illumination of both successful initiatives and persistent challenges, the research sets out to steer the trajectory of future policies, advocating for inclusivity, justice, and adaptability to the diverse needs of the Afghan population.

A particular emphasis is placed on amplifying the voices and experiences of marginalized group, with a specific focus on women. This study endeavors to shed a piercing light on the unique challenges this community face within the educational realm. It serves as an advocate for targeted interventions, seeking to empower this marginalized group, foster inclusivity, and dismantle longstanding barriers that have hindered their educational pursuits.

It is also hoped that this study will contribute to the body of knowledge already available because, due to Afghanistan's authoritarian leadership that restricts people's freedom of speech, not many studies of this kind have been conducted there. Whoever is discovered may suffer severe repercussions, including abuse. Alternatively, the study will serve as a catalyst for the development of further relevant research and will solidify the findings.

In summation, the significance of this study lies not merely in its academic contributions but in its potential to catalyze meaningful change. Beyond informing policy, it stands as an advocate for the empowerment of marginalized communities, aiming to contribute profound and nuanced insights to the overarching discourse on social justice and equity within Afghanistan's complex and evolving education system.

Theoretical Framework

The pursuit of social justice in education is a multifaceted endeavor aiming to establish an equitable society by addressing structural injustices and allocating opportunities and resources to marginalized populations (Gray Group International, 2024). In the conference book by Popov et al. (2015), the central ideal of social justice is aptly defined as encompassing both juridical and social elements (p. 17). Why is social justice important in education? The core values of equity, inclusion, and justice hold the key to the solution. Encouraging social justice in the classroom may foster a supportive atmosphere where all students feel appreciated and have the tools they need to achieve (OECD, 2012). Furthermore, it equips them to become engaged

citizens who confront and eliminate structural injustices within their communities. Education with a focus on social justice is morally required and may encourage constructive social change.

In addition to meeting children's urgent needs, putting social justice first in education helps to create a more equal future. Eliminating structural barriers and providing equitable access to opportunities and resources are necessary to close the achievement gap and provide every child with an equal chance at success. This has a ripple effect on society, making the community more inclusive and equitable (Gray Group International, 2024). Furthermore, instructors of social justice also equip their students with the knowledge and skills necessary to effect change. Encouraging children to think critically, develop empathy, and educate them about social issues all help them be better equipped to confront injustice and build a more just society. A future that is more inclusive and peaceful is established by instilling ideals of justice and equality in the next generation (Bogotch, 2000).

According to the conference book published by Popov et al. (2015), social justice can be seen as one fundamental goal and vision for an educational system, a notion that incorporates both juridical and social elements. This is the core premise that motivates this research. This becomes particularly crucial in the context of Afghanistan, a nation with a complex history and a pressing need for educational reform. The complex interplay of political, cultural, and historical elements has molded Afghanistan's educational environment, with social justice emerging as a key driver. Over time, the nation's education policies have undergone significant changes (Easar et al., 2023). Therefore, in order to fully comprehend the intersectionality of social justice concerns within the education system, a thorough grasp of the historical history of these policies is important. As highlighted in the conference book edited by Popov et al. (2015), social justice in education takes place on two fronts: on the macro level, where people's right to equal participation is ensured, and on the macro and micro levels, where students from different socioeconomic sectors have gaps in their right to an education are addressed (p. 17).

To address the main objective of the research, which revolves around understanding how education policies in Afghanistan impact social justice and equity within the educational system, the research adopts a theoretical framework that delves into social justice theories. Specifically, the chosen framework centers on feminist perspective, critical theory, and social constructivism, aiming to provide nuanced perspectives for comprehending and addressing the intricate complexities within Afghan education. These theories align seamlessly with the broader objectives of the research, emphasizing the challenge of gender stereotypes, promotion

of gender equity, and empowerment of students of all genders – principles advocated by feminist scholars.

An essential part of this theoretical framework is critical theory, which critically looks at the relationship between race, power, and education. Exploring the relationship between education, power, and race and showing the ways in which educational institutions and systems struggle with racism is how Gray Group International (2024) defined critical theory in their analysis of social justice ideas. According to this view, racial disparities are sustained and reproduced in ways that require critical analysis, casting doubt on the notion that education is a neutral setting.

Feminist perspectives, another integral aspect of the theoretical framework, have played a significant role in shaping social justice theories in education. Feminist viewpoints, according to Gray Group International (2024), "highlight how gender inequalities intersect with other forms of oppression in educational settings." Education methods that aggressively combat gender stereotypes, advance gender equity, and give students of all genders more authority have been supported by feminist thinkers and educators.

The final element in this theoretical framework is Social Constructivism, which will be employed to understand the socially constructed nature of education policies within the Afghan context. This framework facilitates an exploration of cultural norms, societal perceptions, and the meanings attributed to these policies. By examining the socially constructed aspects of educational norms, the study aims to unravel the influences that shape the promotion of social justice and equity in Afghanistan's education landscape (Gray Group International, 2024).

To sum up, the theoretical framework that combines social constructivism, feminist perspective, and critical theory offers a strong prism through which to view the complex relationships between social justice and fairness in Afghanistan's educational system. These viewpoints provide complex insights into how socially created norms, gender, and race interact with educational practices. Examining these theories highlights how important it is to dispel prejudices, advance equity, and give students agency as crucial elements of creating a more welcoming learning environment. By adopting these ideas of social justice, the research advances a more comprehensive vision in which education serves as a catalyst for constructive social change, aiming for a future characterized by greater opportunity and fairness for all.

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. Historical Context of Education in Afghanistan

Afghanistan, a country nestled in the heart of the Middle East, unfolds a story of rich yet eventful historical complexities woven into the very fabric of its educational system. With a population exceeding 33 million, more than half of whom are under the age of twenty-four, Afghanistan is a mosaic of diverse ethnic groups, officially recognizing fourteen distinct entities (Mings, 2017). The official languages, Dari, and Pashto, only begin to capture the linguistic diversity that spans various tribal and ethnic communities (Grau, 2004). Nevertheless, this cultural tapestry has been significantly shaped and, at times, disrupted by political changes, foreign interventions, and internal conflicts.

In examining the historical context of education in Afghanistan, the intricate interplay between political shifts, external interventions, and cultural influences comes sharply into focus. The roots of Afghanistan's educational challenges delve deep into its political landscape, marked by historical shifts that have left an indelible imprint on the nation's education system. From Amir Abdurrahman Kahn's implementation of shar'ia law in the late nineteenth century to the Soviet invasion and the subsequent rise and fall of the Taliban, Afghanistan's educational trajectory mirrors the ebb and flow of its complex history (Radic, 2010).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Afghanistan experienced a socially progressive era, allowing women to pursue education, vote, and participate in public life. However, the Communist coup in 1978 and subsequent conflicts led to the collapse of the education infrastructure, with schools being destroyed and educators targeted (Grau, 2004).

In the mid-1990s, the Taliban regime imposed strict interpretations of Islamic law, significantly affecting women's education. During the Taliban regime, girls were forced to stay at home and their permission to study was taken away. During this period, instead of scientific lessons such as chemistry and physics in schools, more emphasis was placed on religious education (Mings, 2017). After the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the collapse of the Taliban, with the establishment of the transitional government, the education situation is improving little by little, but still more than 60% of the Afghan people are unable to read and write. The Taliban's fundamentalist perspective, rooted in the supremacy of males over females, led to the exclusion of women from the educational system (Grau, 2004). The Taliban's oppressive measures, including prohibiting girls and women from attending school, resulted in the establishment of underground resistance movements, such as the Revolutionary Association of

the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Despite the clandestine nature of their operations, RAWA's efforts aimed at promoting education for women endured (Mings, 2017).

Following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001 due to the U.S.-led military offensive, efforts were initiated to rebuild Afghanistan's education system. Foreign aid, support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the Ministry of Education played crucial roles in the positive transformation of educational opportunities (Ahmadi & Sultan, 2023). While the situation improved, with increased enrollment and literacy rates, challenges persisted, particularly for women. Foreign aid agencies, including the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), played pivotal roles in funding educational projects, contributing millions of dollars to support rebuilding efforts (Grau, 2004).

In the critical examination of Afghanistan's National Education Strategic Plan by Radic (2010) distinct marginalized groups emerge, each facing formidable challenges in accessing education. Radic sheds light on the plight of Afghan girls, constituting 35 percent of the school population, who grapple with barriers such as limited accessibility, security concerns, and cultural factors, resulting in a mere 13 percent completing the primary school cycle. The Kuchi nomads, a population of around 2.4 million, encounter hurdles associated with seasonal settlement patterns and language barriers, leading to notably low attendance rates. Moreover, Radic explores the challenges faced by children with disabilities, estimated to be between 300,000 and one million, revealing pervasive societal prejudices and high dropout rates. In addition, the research delves into the circumstances of incarcerated children, particularly girls, emphasizing their low educational attainment prior to imprisonment. Internally displaced persons and returnees, numbering over 5.3 million, grapple with obstacles in accessing education due to displacement. Radic's meticulous analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the diverse and complex challenges confronted by these marginalized groups in Afghanistan's education landscape (2010).

Despite progress, the Afghan education system faces ongoing challenges, including security threats from groups like ISIS. The U.S. strategy to rebuild Afghanistan includes not only eradicating threats like Al-Qaeda but also establishing an environment where women can attend school without fear. However, schools continue to be targeted, leading to closures and trauma among students. The decades of violence have resulted in high instances of mental illness, including post-traumatic stress disorder (Mings, 2017).

Afghanistan's education landscape confronts multifaceted challenges, with literacy rates among the lowest globally. The country's overall literacy rate, recorded at 28% in 2005 for individuals

aged six and above, emphasizes the magnitude of the issue. Gender disparities compound this crisis, with female literacy lagging significantly behind males; female literacy in 2005 stood at a mere 18%, while males reported 36% literacy. Particularly alarming is the revelation that eleven provinces exhibited female literacy rates below 10%, reflecting a stark gender-based educational divide (Ministry of Education of Afghanistan, 2008).

The gender gap in literacy persists across various age groups. In 2005, the adult literacy rate was 23%, with a glaring discrepancy between female (11%) and male (32%) literacy rates. The nomadic Kuchis, in particular, faced a staggering overall literacy rate of just 6%. Even among youth aged 15 to 24, where literacy rates are typically higher, Afghanistan reported the lowest rates compared to all SAARC¹ countries. The female youth literacy rate declined from 19.6% in 2005 to a concerning 18.4% in 2007 (UIS, 2023).

While primary school enrollment has seen marginal improvements, secondary education, especially for females, remains a critical concern. UNICEF reported that the female secondary school enrollment ratio from 2000 to 2005 was a disheartening 5%. Retention of girls in secondary schools is a pronounced issue, with females comprising only 24.1% in grades 7-9 and high school grades 10-12 in 2005. Notably, tertiary enrollment has witnessed a concerning decline, dropping from 2% in 1990 to 1.1% in 2005, with this trend persisting (Aliv, 2011).

In summary, Afghanistan's educational journey is a tale of resilience amidst adversity. The nation's rich cultural tapestry has faced disruptions due to political upheavals, foreign interventions, and internal conflicts (Grau, 2004). The 1960s and 1970s brought a promising era, but subsequent events, including the Communist coup, Taliban regime, and U.S.-led invasion, posed severe challenges. Despite commendable efforts to rebuild the education system, issues such as a gender gap in literacy rates, security threats, and struggles faced by marginalized groups persist. The country's commitment to overcoming these challenges and providing inclusive, accessible education remains crucial for fostering a brighter future (Emadi, 2010).

1.2. The Situation of Education in Afghanistan until 15 August 2021

Afghanistan's education sector has seen tremendous progress since 2002. Of the six million children who are presently enrolled in school, it is estimated that over five million children are

¹ SAARC stands for the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. It is an organization of South Asian nations, established in 1985, with the aim of promoting regional cooperation and development in South Asia. The member countries of SAARC are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Each member country is considered a part of South Asia, a region in the southern part of Asia.

still not in school, with girls making up about 35% of the population (Wardak, 2009). Although more kids are attending school Overall, the proportion of girls attending is not rising and appears to have hit a ceiling. On the same, Afghanistan was ranked 99th out of 100 developing nations in the State of the World's Mothers report, which was released recently (Baiza, 2013). This rating is the outcome of various factors interacting to make education inaccessible and poorly made.

In urban areas, the majority of teachers work. Since just 22% of teachers meet the minimum requirements, there is an additional challenge in providing high-quality, inclusive education due to teachers' inadequate pedagogical skill and knowledge base (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006).

As per Chalkboard (2008), the majority still use rote learning and frequently administer physical punishment. The recruitment of new teachers and the standard of education delivered are also impacted by low salaries. A common cause of absenteeism among teachers is their need to work multiple jobs to support their families. The curriculum in schools is deeply ideologically charged and dangerously out of date. This is especially true for the secondary school curriculum, which has not been updated in a while. Positively, despite several obstacles, a significant amount of the elementary school curriculum has been revised, and millions of books have been distributed. With more schools being planned, there are currently about 11,000 public schools in the nation, after at least 4,500 new ones were constructed since 2002 (Chalkboard, 2008). But according to estimates, only 25% of schools have functional buildings, and many of them lack secure access (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006). The attacks on schools, teachers, and students have resulted in the closure of over 600 schools in 12 provinces in 2008 alone, and the poor and worsening security situation continues to threaten the progress that has been made since 2002 (IRAN, 2008).

1.3. Educational Development

Afghanistan's educational development started in the early 1990s when UNESCO and other NGOs worked to restore rural areas' educational services and systems (Samady, 2013). Education emerged as the most crucial factor "that would carry bringing "stability and security" to the state and returning the nation to "peace and prosperous development" (Karlsson, 2007).

As previously mentioned, education services were severely damaged in FCASs² and required GOs' assistance with the provision of textbooks, teacher training, and covering teachers'

² Fragile and Conflict-Affected States are countries that are experiencing significant challenges due to conflict, violence, or other destabilizing factors

salaries(Samady, 2013). UNESCO provided this kind of assistance to provinces like Wardak, Farah, Ghazni, Kandahar, and Paktia, enabling them to support teacher training, student enrollment, and school supplies. At the time, cutting-edge techniques for educational development programs were presented as "skills training programs." These were created by non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan and embraced by all the provinces (Karlsson, 2007). These abilities were associated with elementary education and included "dyeing, carpet weaving, and silk weaving." The community benefited from this because health education, literacy, and numeracy programs combined with the preservation of the "nations cultural heritage" increased job opportunities and forced people to "become literate and numerate" (Samady, 2013).

1.4. A breakdown of Afghanistan's "formal" and "informal" educational systems

Afghanistan has a long history of outstanding education and a rich cultural legacy that dates back many centuries. Its contemporary educational system is, nevertheless, quite new (Karlsson, 2007). Afghanistan has been a battleground since the 19th century due to its strategic location at the intersection of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Key international powers like the US, NATO, the UK, and the USSR have all been involved, which has hampered the nation's educational system by sustaining a cycle of violence. Political upheavals, regime changes, and persistent conflicts have frequently delayed or even reversed achievements in education over time, despite brief periods of progress (Easar et al., 2023). In Afghanistan, there are typically two education systems: formal, which is government-run and modern, and informal, which is traditional and community-based. Informal education often involves teaching by religious leaders in settings such as mosques, madrasas³, and homes⁴, alongside academic and religious instruction by clergy members (Yazdani, 2020). Madrasas and mosques offered pupils the chance to learn creative writing, literature, history, philosophy, and ethics in addition to religious instruction decades ago, when Afghanistan had a formal education system

³ Madrasas don't follow a set curriculum. Madrasa curricula vary across the nation and are not uniform. Pupils are instructed using a variety of Islamic texts and resources, which may vary from madrasa to madrasa, especially from Sunni and Shia madrasas, as well as from province to province or region to area. For instance, students in a mosque in Herat City usually start by studying the alphabet and phonetic instructions, which are frequently printed prior to the beginning of the Quran's single thirtieth chapter.

⁴ In certain instances, it was also typical for women to receive basic reading instruction at home from a female teacher or to learn how to read the Quran. These teachers were frequently the daughters of religious clerks or scholars.

(Samady, 2013). But these subjects had not been taught much, and the education provided at madrasas was and still is primarily Islamic. This unofficial system was the only one used in the nation for education and was widely used before the legitimate system was established. Afghanistan's cultural diversity was enhanced between the tenth and fifteenth centuries by madrasas, which served as the primary educational establishments in the nation (Blumör, 2014). Nevertheless, this unofficial system continues to operate all throughout the nation. Madrasas and mosques used to be exclusively public establishments (Yazdani, 2020). On the other hand, a growing number of religious academics have founded their own (private) madrasas in recent decades. Religious scholars who study higher religious education outside of Afghanistan, primarily in Pakistan and Iran, are the owners of numerous private madrasas. They found their own madrasas upon their return. Cross-border relationships between religious leaders in Afghanistan and scholars in nearby and distant Islamic nations have resulted in the integration of Afghanistan's madrasas into a transnational network that stretches from Pakistan to Iran, several Arab nations, and Egypt. Some of these nations provide financial support, books, and training for religious instructors to Afghanistan's madrasas (Blumör, 2014).

In the past, men and boys made up the majority of madrasa students in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, under a system of "co-education⁵ in mosques," girls who reached puberty also attended madrasas to learn the Quran and fundamental reading skills. However, under a certain age, women now attend madrasas in urban areas, particularly private ones. The education system that is currently in place was first established in the 1800s. In Kabul, the first civic school was founded under Amir Sher Ali Khan's (1860–1878) rule. The students were from the families of prominent government officials (Yazdani, 2020). Girls were not permitted to attend schools at this time; the only guys who were allowed to attend were lads from well-known families and government officials. In addition to founding the Ministry of Education, Amanullah Khan created the first girls' school during his administration (1919–1929) (Samady, 2001). In addition to pushing for more reform, Amanullah Khan developed an educational system with a focus on the West. Both male and female students were sent overseas for higher study between 1919 and 1929, and only in Afghanistan's major cities did female students adhere to the new dress code that the government had instituted which did not align with the customs of the country's women. Amanullah's attempts to emancipate women and reform education were met with opposition from religiously conservative forces. He eventually left the nation in 1929 as opposition was organized against him (Doorandesh, 2019). After his departure,

⁵ The boys and girls were not sat next to each other; instead, they were grouped in rows facing one another or in another arrangement.

Habibullah Kalakani, who ruled for around eight months, brought about yet another setback for education. Under Nadir Shah's rule from 1930 to 1964, as well as for approximately 40 years during Zahir Shah's monarchy, educational advancement accelerated (Yazdani, 2020). Mandatory primary education was proclaimed in the constitutions of 1931, 1948, and 1964, which also established education as a national right for all citizens. A new constitution was drafted with the primary objective of ensuring free general secondary, vocational, and higher education following the overthrow of the monarchy and the founding of the first republic by Mohammad Daud (1973–1978). Following Daud's assassination, the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a communist organization backed by the Soviet Union, came to power (1979–1992) (Kirk, 2006). According to Sarvarzade & Wotipka (2017) the PDPA⁶ created the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) modified the previous governments' educational policy and embraced a secular approach to education that was influenced by communist ideology. This was the age when more girls attended school and when education became inclusive of both genders. But orthodox religious organizations opposed the reform, which also included changes to the clothing code. This led to a 10-year conflict and the fall of the final communist regime in 1992 (Samady, 2001). Following the downfall of the communist regime, Mujahideen factions, which had combated Soviet forces and the PDPA, formed the Islamic State of Afghanistan. While the new government did not create a distinct national education policy, it did eliminate materials promoting communist ideology. Instead, there was a shift towards prioritizing religious education as a central focus (Sarvarzade & Wotipka, 2017).

After the Mujahideen were overthrown in 1996, the Taliban created the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996–2001). In addition to pushing for more religious education, they outlawed textbooks that they claimed violated Islamic norms and prevented girls from attending school. The best university in the nation, Kabul University (founded in 1932 and a source of inspiration for subsequent generations of leaders), was converted into a military installation, and its research culture, lecture halls, and laboratories were destroyed (Easar et al., 2023).

Higher education institutions suffered greatly, as did staff and students; what was not destroyed was seized and sold as a result of internal strife and the harsh Taliban administration (Welch & Wahidyar, 2020). The worst of Afghanistan's contemporary educational history occurred during the first Taliban government. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001–2021), with strong backing from the international community, placed a strong emphasis on education following

⁶ People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan was a left-wing political party in Afghanistan that played a significant role in the country's politics during the late 20th century.

the end of the Taliban's first reign in 2001. In an attempt to improve education, the republican system made changes to it. With the publication of new textbooks that broadly incorporated Islam and liberal values, a new, moderate curriculum was implemented (Easar et al., 2023). Significant progress was accomplished during this time period, particularly in the area of female education. During this time, the number of private schools, colleges, and institutions opening nationwide increased (Baiza, 2013).

The education industry has been going through yet another collapse since the Taliban overthrew the republican government on August 15, 2021, ushering in their second term. This means that a cursory look at Afghanistan's education system reveals that it has never progressed linearly but rather in a cyclical manner with ups and downs, with both men and women suffering from these swings (Butt, 2023). Education has been more politicized over the past few decades because to the frequent and violent changes in regime, which are typically accompanied by drastically opposing ideologies. Since the various regimes associated with various ideologies have always sought to further their principles through education, violent overthrows of political administrations have resulted in significant curriculum amendments (Easar et al., 2023).

1.5. In Afghanistan, who are the marginalized people?

Although the term "marginalization" is often used in contemporary literature, it is rarely defined. When it is brought up for discussion, inclusion and (social) exclusion are frequently mentioned. The idea that social exclusion and marginalization are synonymous is true (University of Mumbai, 2021). According to Hansen, (2012), comprehension of inclusion necessitates an examination of the definition of exclusion. These two processes are so linked to one another and dependent on one another.

The term "marginalization" refers to the status of people, populations, or groups that are not part of "mainstream society" and who exist on the periphery of those who hold positions of authority, cultural domination, and economic and social prosperity. A marginal group may actually comprise a numerical majority; however, it should be distinguished from a minority group, which may be smaller in number but has access to positions of political or economic power (University of Mumbai, 2021). According to Marshall (1998), marginalization is the process through which a group or individual is excluded from significant roles and symbols of political, religious, or economic authority in any given community. Furthermore, marginalized groups are denied access to resources and power, which are necessary for them to exercise their right to self-determination in the political, social, and economic spheres. An innate quality of "people in the margin" is their limited access to financial resources as well as other resources

like social assistance, health care, and education. Their limited involvement and degree of self-determination is another trait. Nonetheless, the historical and socioeconomic background of a community greatly influences the criteria of what is considered marginalized (University of Mumbai, 2021). Also, Population groups inside a society or community whose interests are not reflected by the main political structure of the society are referred to as marginalized groups by the INEE. Socioeconomic or cultural factors, such as an individual's income or wealth, gender, race or ethnicity, place of residence, religion, citizenship status, internal displacement, or physical or mental health, are used to identify marginalized groups (Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2004)

1.5.1. Girls and women

Afghanistan's history of women's education has been marked by several attempts and disappointments, particularly during the 20th century (Mashwani, 2017). There have long been conflicts in Afghanistan regarding women's access to education, reflecting a broader struggle between modernity and tradition. Afghan women have endured various forms of violence, including forced isolation, mandatory head coverings, and educational deprivation (Kissane, 2012)

In 1996, the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan, overthrowing the Coalition government led by the Mujahedeen. The Taliban banned women from attending schools outside their homes, permitting only Islamic education at home. They prioritized madrasas and Islamic study centers over traditional schools, transforming every educational facility into some form of madrasa. This policy significantly impacted women's lives and freedoms, leading to severe restrictions on their participation in society (Kayen, 2022). Emadi (2010) reported that on September 28, 1996, the Taliban issued a directive through Radio Sharia, prohibiting women from working outside and girls from attending schools. Approximately 250 women in Herat province disobeyed this directive and were brutally assaulted by Taliban forces for violating Islamic law. During the Taliban administration, schools primarily accepted male students and outright forbade or restricted female students, denying the bulk of Afghan women an education (Adkins, 2016). In 2001, formal schools enrolled only one million boys, with no girls attending at all (BBC News, 2014).

Girls are unable to enroll in and attend school for a variety of reasons. Over half of parents cited security and accessibility as the top barriers preventing girls from attending elementary school, according to a survey by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (Radic, 2010). Notable factors include the need to work (12.1%), poverty (10.1%), and child marriage

(3.7%). According to numerous reports, other factors prohibiting girls from obtaining education include a dearth of female teachers and subpar sanitary conditions. The fact that one-third of public schools are currently boys-only institutions further alienates females from obtaining an education by preventing them from having equal access to it (Powell, 2014).

1.5.2. Children with disability

The precise numbers about the population with impairments are hard to come by, just like they are for other vulnerable populations. Many people would rather not identify as disabled because it is a very subjective experience. It is widely believed in Afghanistan that those with disabilities are feeble, ineffective, and a burden to their family (Radic, 2010).

The number of individuals with disabilities is estimated by the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled to be approximately 300,000, however estimates from other sources place this number closer to one million or 4 percent of the overall population (Malik, 2017). According to estimates from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations (UN), this figure is closer to two million, according to the same source. According to Handicap International, Afghanistan is home to 196,000 school-age children who are disabled. This total figure may be significantly larger, and compared to males, girls are probably more limited to the private sphere, making them less noticeable in the community (Radic, 2010). Over seventy-five percent of children with disabilities have never attended school, and of those who do, over 75 percent drop out during their elementary education. Less than 1% of people finish secondary school and go on to pursue further education. Numerous issues, including a lack of materials that are appropriate for the classroom, teachers who lack empathy, encountering prejudice or discriminatory behavior, and difficult access to schools, can be blamed for the high dropout rates. There is just one government-funded school that teaches about 150 visually impaired kids; 3,900 more disabled kids are taught by non-governmental organizations (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006).

1.5.3. Children in Prisons

It is difficult to get official statistics on the number of children incarcerated in Afghanistan; nonetheless, Pul-e Charkhi, the country's largest jail, is located outside of Kabul and houses over 60 inmates (IRAN, 2008). In contrast, data from all 247 juvenile facility inmates were acquired for a 2008 study by UNICEF and AIHRC, with 85% of the inmates being male (Radic, 2010).

Given that many youngsters are frequently imprisoned in police stations or adult facilities rather than being officially registered in the court system or placed in juvenile rehabilitation centers, the number of children behind bars is probably higher. The UNICEF survey discovered that among the study participants, the rates of illiteracy were 40 percent for males and 62 percent for girls, respectively, and that 72% of boys and girls had not finished their primary school before being incarcerated (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2008).

1.5.4. Returnees and Internally Displaced Individuals

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have helped facilitate over 5.3 million of the approximately 5.3 million refugees who have returned to Afghanistan since 2002. Following a large number of returns to the East and North, the central region received around 1.5 million returnees (Radic, 2010).

According to estimates, there are more than 230,000 internally displaced people in Afghanistan, with 120,000 of them living in the south. This number is probably much greater given the absence of national and international institutions for the identification and protection of IDPs. Based on UNHCR data from 2008, it is estimated that there are approximately 2.8 million Afghan refugees in the world today, with the majority residing in Pakistan and Iran. Concerns have been raised concerning Afghanistan's capacity to accept and care for returns in light of Pakistan's apparent plans to close the remaining camps and deport the 1.7 million registered refugees by the end of 2009 (UNHCR, 2009).

1.6. Education Policy Reforms in Afghanistan (2001 – 2021)

Education reform is the umbrella term for several programs with a variety of goals that try to modernize, improve, or change the educational system. As such, it frequently entails "a shift towards student-centered learning and a student-centered classroom," with the aim of preparing students according to the requirements of the changing economy of the twenty-first century (Sitti et al., 2013). Furthermore, governments' need to address social and economic issues can be a driving force behind education reform (Allmnakrah & Colin Evers, 2019). Reforming education can sometimes be aimed at "curbing radical and militant extremism," as was the case in Afghanistan following the overthrow of the Taliban 1.05 regime (Davies, 2016). This included adjusting procedures, policies, and organizational structures to enhance the educational system in Afghanistan. Following the events of 2001, there was a notable surge in financial and strategic assistance directed towards the reconstruction and restoration of the Afghan state, encompassing the field of education. Afghanistan supported by the international community and international organizations, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and there

were notable improvements in education, both in terms of number and quality, during the Transitional Administration, the interim government that took over after the Bonn Agreement. Following the invasion of Bonn, the Afghan government considered taking the required steps to install a peaceful curriculum in place of the nation's violent one as part of its efforts to reform education. (Easar et al., 2023). For example, in 2001, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the "Back-to-School Campaign, "which had a significant impact on Afghanistan's educational system and led to the construction of 200% more schools and the hiring of 500% more teachers than in the previous two years earlier. Furthermore, enrollment rates experienced a notable uptick in 2004 after falling from 32% to 6.4% during the Taliban's initial takeover of Afghanistan (Acks et al., 2015). Despite the commendable efforts made, certain areas still required further support and attention in order to fully implement education reform (Easar et al., 2023).

In Afghanistan, the education sector has faced numerous challenges, including conflict, insecurity, and limited resources. In response to these challenges, the government of Afghanistan, along with various stakeholders, has implemented a range of education policies and initiatives aimed at improving access to quality education for all (Abdulbaqi, 200). These policies encompass efforts to increase enrollment rates, enhance the quality of teaching and learning, and address disparities in access to education, particularly for marginalized groups such as girls and children in rural areas (Emadi, 201).

1.6.1. Afghanistan's National Development Strategy (ANDS)

Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan, has referred to the National Growth Strategy (ANDS) as the nation's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, an Afghan-owned roadmap for Afghanistan's advancement in all areas of human effort (GIRoA, 2008). The Afghanistan's National Development Strategy (ANDS) was introduced in 2008 with the goal of directing the nation's development initiatives through 2013. Nevertheless, ANDS implementation took longer than planned to complete because of a number of issues and modifications in the political environment. This policy serves as a key development framework, outlining the policies, strategies, and strategic priorities of the government in order to accomplish Afghanistan's developmental goals (Radic, 2010). These goals are grouped into three categories: security, governance, rule of law and human rights, and economic and social development. It is meant to lead the nation toward reaching the targets listed in the Afghanistan Compact and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for 2020. It reflects the government's vision, principles, and goals (GIRoA, 2008). Achieving "national and gender equity in access to quality

and relevant education" is the national education policy goal of Afghanistan, as stated in the ANDS (Radic, 2010). The government's aims to "facilitate the development of the education sector from which students will emerge literate, numerate, and technologically proficient" are outlined in the policy framework (GIRoA, 2008). The goal of the ANDS is to assure fair access to education for everyone, without regard to socioeconomic background, geography, or gender. It highlights how crucial it is to give vulnerable and marginalized groups such as girls, rural communities, and the impoverished high-quality education (Radic, 2010).

1.6.2. National Education Strategic Plan (NESP)

The National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) for Afghanistan for 2006–2017 served as the cornerstone for reconstructing the country's education system, which had collapsed due to decades of conflict. The NESP reflected the government's commitment to education as expressed in the ANDS and the 2004 Afghan Constitution. It also aligned with the Afghanistan Compact (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006), the Education for All (EFA) project, and the 2020 Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The NESP stated that its objectives were to enable our people to engage in and make meaningful contributions to the development, economic prosperity, and stability of our nation, as well as to assist the development of dynamic human capital by granting everyone equal access to high-quality education (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2010).

The NESP was an effort to plan, coordinate, and oversee the overhaul of the educational system. It was divided into eight program areas, each of which had a number of independent but connected parts. The program areas included general education; literacy and non-formal education; education administration reform and development; teacher preparation and working conditions; curriculum development and learning materials; Islamic education; technical and vocational education and training; curriculum development and learning materials (Radic, 2010). The NESP outlined three primary policy goals and results, which were as follows: fair access; further quality and relevance; and effective and transparent administration. Due to their readiness for work in the domestic and global labor markets, these characteristics were consistent with responsible, healthy, and productive members of society who are ready to give back to their community (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2010).

In NESP, equity was a fundamental component that was covered in a number of sections and critical areas of the Plan. The Minister of Education was able to monitor fair access for women and girls if access was broken down by gender. The regulations guiding the fair distribution of educational opportunities for underprivileged groups within society were emphasized (Radic,

2010). In order to provide equitable access for all parties involved, NESP worked to establish an inclusive and mainstreaming approach. (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2017).

The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan enshrined the right of every citizen to access free and high-quality education, regardless of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or religious affiliation. It mandated that education, up to the B.A. level, be provided by the state free of charge. The constitution obligated the state to develop and implement effective programs for the balanced expansion of education throughout Afghanistan, including the provision of compulsory intermediate level education. It also mandated the opportunity to teach native languages in areas where they are spoken (Radic, 2010).

Furthermore, the constitution emphasized the importance of educating women, nomads, and eradicating illiteracy. It stipulated that all education must align with the principles of Islam. Equity in education extended to ensuring access for girls and boys, nomadic children, children with disabilities, pre-school children, and others who may have missed the early years of basic education. Achieving equity faced challenges such as a shortage of girls' schools and female teachers, lack of inclusion policies, inadequate facilities, insufficient teacher training and knowledge, and outdated curricula (GIRoA, 2008). Key supply-side strategies in the National Education Strategic Plan focused on three areas: inclusion (including students with special needs, internally displaced people, returnees, and other vulnerable groups); gender (including girls' enrollment and retention in other learning programs); and geography (including the disparity between the situation in urban and rural areas). Access included the various channels via which education could be provided, such as traditional elementary and lower secondary (basic) education, secondary education, community-based learning, Islamic education, Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and daycare facilities. In addition, there were other options for learning, such as adult and literacy programs offered by Community Learning Centers, Accelerated Learning Centers, Mosque-based learning, online, and home-based learning. Programs aimed to increase accessibility by building informal centers, utilizing information technology solutions to overcome obstacles, and making innovative uses of already-existing facilities (Radic, 2010).

1.7. Progress in the Educational Reforms (2001 – 2021)

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's first curriculum was accepted in 2004. Rather than being an all-encompassing curriculum, it was designed to address the pressing needs of schools, especially about hiring, and preparing teachers as well as organizing textbooks. Primary education constituted a large portion of this curriculum. The fundamental education goals and

benchmarks were outlined in the first National Education Strategic Plan (NESP I), which was adopted in 2006 (Easar et al., 2023). Actually, NESP I was the first thorough national education plan, which served as the foundation for the new, updated curriculum, included hiring, and training teachers, building schools, launching special departments within the Ministry of Education for curriculum revision, and compiling and publishing new textbooks for public schools, Islamic education, and vocational training (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006).

Between 2007 and 2020, Afghanistan's educational landscape witnessed significant changes, as documented by Easar et al. (2023). Primary school textbooks for grades 1-6, based on the 2004 curriculum, were introduced in 2007 to tackle pressing educational challenges. Following this, in 2008, the Ministry of Education embarked on the development of secondary education textbooks (grades 7-9) aligned with the National Education Strategic Plan I (NESP I), which had been adopted in 2006 (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006). After a decade-long endeavor, revised secondary textbooks were published in 2010, with distribution occurring in the subsequent academic year, 2011. Concurrently, in 2011, new high school textbooks (grades 10–12), also rooted in NESP I, were printed and distributed, marking the inception of publications under a revised curriculum. This marked the commencement of a continuous process of curriculum development and textbook revision, culminating in the release of the latest editions.

Several significant strategic documents, including the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the Afghan Millennium Development Goals (AMDG), the National Education Strategic Plans (NESP I, NESP II, and NESP III), Education for All (EFA), and Education Law (EL), guided educational reforms, such as the creation of a new curriculum, textbooks, and teacher training, the launch of Islamic Education as a new program, and the expansion of Vocational Education. These documents were in addition to the 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan (Easar et al., 2023).

In another consideration, the Ministry of Education Afghanistan's 2020 Annual Progress Report states that Education: in 2020, there were around ten million students enrolled in schools, a tenfold rise from 2001. Among these pupils, girls made up about 40%. Primary education saw the biggest rise. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (Wang, 2021), there has been a notable increase in the quantity of schools and teachers. The number of schools increased from 6,000 in 2001 to almost 18,000 in 2018, and the number of teachers increased from 27,000 in 2003 to nearly 226,000 in 2020. Additionally, coeducation was expanded for both primary and secondary students in a few provinces' basic public schools as well as in a few private

schools in Kabul, up until the Islamic Republic's fall to the Taliban. In Kabul's private international schools during the Islamic Republic, McGraw-Hill Education⁷ and another foreign educational curriculum were first introduced (Easar et al., 2023).

In terms of higher education, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education started a staff development, rehabilitation, and rebuilding initiative in 2002 as a way to overhaul the educational system (Abdulbaqi, 2009). A major challenge was the high rate of post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues that affected over half of the student body, in addition to the significant toll of lives lost during the conflict that raged in Afghanistan from nearly three decades until 2001 (Hayward & Babury, 2015). A strategic development plan was prepared and released in 2005 with support from UNESCO-IIEP. It was feasible to get ready for rehabilitation and transformation by 2009 since the majority of the damage to educational institutions had been adequately restored (Easar et al., 2023). Public universities continue to dominate higher education in Afghanistan and remain the first choice for all qualifying students because studying there is free for all those who meet the requirements and because they are regarded as the truly prestigious academic institutions in Afghan society (Berger & Hanni, 2015).

The curriculum for higher education had undergone a thorough review and update procedure by 2014. More than half of the curricula at public higher education institutions underwent evaluation, updating, and improvement for the first time ever (Hayward & Babury, 2015). As of 2018, it was decided that there were sufficient institutions of higher learning, and the focus shifted to improving educational quality (Welch & Wahidyar, 2020, Hayward & Babury, 2015). The cooperation of Afghan and US/European universities has also made a significant contribution to raising the standard of higher education. With an emphasis on scientific and technological domains, this collaboration has aided in the development of curricula and instructional materials, promoted training and research, and brought new innovations (Samady, 2013).

Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education has improved the quality of higher education and addressed obstacles to female enrollment by implementing a number of initiatives, if small in nature. The Ministry started building three dorms for women in order to address the lack of suitable and safe accommodation (Easar et al., 2023). These efforts were essential because many Afghan women pursue higher education for a variety of reasons, such as the need to show that women can succeed in the workplace and in education, the need to gain independence, the

⁷ McGraw-Hill Education is a prominent American educational company known for providing textbooks, digital learning platforms, and other educational resources across various subjects and levels of education.

importance of completing their education to make up for the sacrifices made by their families, the desire to learn about women's rights, and the desire to improve their employment prospects (Burridge et al., 2016).

As of 2020, Afghanistan boasted a combined total of 167 universities and higher education institutions, of which 39 were publicly funded while 128 were privately operated. The student population in the same year amounted to 429,790, with males constituting the majority at 71.01%, leaving females representing 28.99% of the total (Easar et al., 2023). Within public institutions alone, enrollment reached a substantial figure of 205,480 students. Notably, Kabul University emerged as the institution with the highest enrollment, boasting 23,722 students. By the subsequent year of 2021, the tally of private educational establishments surged to 129, with an additional institute officially registered under the Ministry of Higher Education (Akhtar & Ranjan, 2021).

1.8. Obstructs in Education Reform (2001-2021)

The Ministry of Education had several difficulties in its early years, chief among them being a shortage of qualified instructors, classrooms, textbooks, and Teacher Training Colleges (TTC) (Easar et al., 2023). One of the main issues was the dearth of instructors who could fulfill the prerequisites. According to the ministry's requirements, TTC graduates could teach for four years, from grade one to grade four, whereas university graduates with a bachelor's degree could teach for eight years, from grade five to grade twelve (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006). According to ministry data, there were just 21,000 teachers in late 2001; by 2005, that number had risen to 140,000. Of these teachers, 29% had less than 12 years of education under their belts, 49% had completed high school (12th grade), and the remaining 22% met the minimum requirements, the majority of whom had graduated from TTCs in previous decades. Only 28% of them were female, and most of them lived in cities (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2010).

In addition, during the Islamic Republic, schools began to face a number of difficulties, including poor building design, bribery to gain entrance, passing test scores, and acquiring certifications. Teachers were frequently forced to pay third parties with connections to the principals in exchange for creating the "Jadwale Natayej" result charts during the Islamic Republic. Principals also misappropriated school funds, diverting them for their own personal gain. There were other challenges that teachers faced, like principals pressuring them to teach subjects outside of their areas of competence or demanding payments in exchange for allowing them to shift from one school to another. More obstacles for both students and instructors to

overcome included the absence of facilities for clean drinking water and well-equipped restrooms, as well as spaces in schools for advice and supplies related to physiology, health, and hygiene, especially in a nation that has just experienced war (Easar et al., 2023).

According to the publication "Education in Afghanistan since 2001: Evolutions and Rollbacks" authored by Easar et al. (2023) barriers to education in Afghanistan are multifaceted. These barriers encompass:

1.8.1. Cultural Barriers to Education

Families now lack their principal source of income due to the loss of numerous key breadwinners in the Afghanistan conflict. Many adults give up their schooling to support their families since, in accordance with cultural customs, the eldest brother is expected to take care of the family in the event that the father is absent. Many small children were compelled to work in shops and other jobs alongside their dads and brothers due to the dire financial situations of their families, depriving them of the chance to concentrate on their education. It is also customary for families to devote more money to their boys' schooling than their daughters' because it's thought that the boys will grow up to be the people in the family (Easar et al., 2023).

Furthermore, scholars contend that the cultural barrier of "Pashtunwali," an unwritten tribal code among the Pashtun community in Afghanistan's southern and southeastern regions, has impeded female education, alongside rigid religious interpretations. Despite the persistence of such cultural barriers, opinions among residents vary significantly. Non-Pashtun respondents tend to perceive cultural obstacles as less inhibiting to women's education, given their less stringent social codes and more progressive views on women's autonomy and rights. Conversely, the Pashtun community exhibits a more inflexible cultural ethos. To ensure an unbiased understanding of female education and "Pashtunwali" guidelines, an ethnographic approach is deemed crucial for comprehending the cultural norms and practices embedded within this system (Inayatullah, 2022).

1.8.2. Security Barriers to Education

Due to armed insurgency attacks and generalized fear, Afghanistan's education system has been badly disrupted, with many parents choosing not to bring their children to school (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2006). Between 2004 and 2005, the Taliban made a major comeback in Afghanistan, endangering the country's educational progress, especially in rural regions (EFSAS, 2022). As a rebel organization against the government, the Taliban targeted schools with violence, claiming that teachers were acting as spies for foreign powers and objecting to

the curriculum being taught. The Taliban, upon its reappearance, issued a code of conduct known as "Layeha" in 2006, which directed field commanders to attack schools that had adopted the post-2001 curriculum, with a focus on schools teaching girls (Easar et al., 2023).

According to the Ministry of Education, the Taliban threatened and actually attacked more than 500 schools in 2006, most of which were in the south and east of the nation (Rubin & Clancy, 2016). As a result, the schools had to close. All throughout the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the education sector has been extremely concerned about the threat posed by the Taliban. Furthermore, throughout the Islamic Republic, the combination of ISIS-K⁸, and the Taliban resulted in lethal assaults on educational establishments such as the American University of Afghanistan, Kabul University, and those of the Hazara Community (Mohammadi & Sajjad, 2021).

1.8.3. Resources Barriers to Education

One factor contributing to the decline in the number of girls enrolled in school is a lack of human and material resources, particularly with regard to the availability of public schools and teachers in them. Women's access to education was directly impacted by the distance between their houses and the schools. Schools with closer locations to the residences of female students had higher enrolment rates (Easar et al., 2023). Women are less likely to be motivated to pursue higher education when they live far from their community due to the increased risk of gender-based violence. Women's education was further hampered by the problem of safe travel distance (Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, 2020).

1.8.4. Corruptions Barriers to Education

The competency of executives at the capital and province levels had not improved despite efforts to enhance the skills of the education sector workforce. This was mainly because there were not enough qualified professionals to fill the positions at the Ministry of Education's low pay scale. The issue of inefficient management within the Ministry of Education has been made worse by a lack of suitable workplace tools and resources, particularly in the field of information technology (Easar et al., 2023). The Ministry of Education has been found to be corrupt in a number of ways, including the employment of 40,880 false teachers, 1,033 fake schools, 1,400 school construction projects carried out without following the law, the embezzlement of more than \$20 million in contracts for textbook printing, the loss of 64 containers containing various school supplies (such as notebooks, boxes, pens, and food items),

⁸ ISIS-K: Islamic State Khorasan Province, a branch of the Islamic State operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

and a host of other incidents of theft and looting that have not yet been made public (Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, 2020).

According to reports, there have been instances of corrupt activities in higher education by both domestic and foreign contractors, in addition to long-standing networks of patronage shaped by partiality and personal ties. Afghanistan encountered several challenges in the field of higher education between 2001 and 2021. These problems included poor education, a lack of qualified instructors and staff, poor management and administration, a lack of access to academic databases and e-libraries as learning resources, few opportunities for graduates to advance their careers, and poor job prospects for those who finished their degrees (Easar et al., 2023). Higher education establishments were not able to engage guest professors from overseas universities or institutes due to budgetary constraints and security concerns. There was a decline in the teaching and research culture in both public and private higher education institutions as a result of academic staff members taking on more employment in the private sector due to the low remuneration in the public sector (Welch & Wahidyar, 2020).

1.9. The Education situation in Afghanistan after 2021

The general availability and caliber of education in Afghanistan declined when the Taliban took control of the nation. The Taliban announced their educational policy in September 2021, which included requiring gender segregation in educational institutions, prohibiting girls from attending secondary schools, and limiting the number of female teachers to primary schools. As a result, since August 2021, fewer students have enrolled in secondary school. According to a USAID survey, attendance at secondary schools among girls in Afghanistan has declined in all provinces, including Kabul, since August 2021. In eight provinces, the attendance of boys in secondary school fell by more than 10 percent. Because of staffing shortages brought on by prohibitions on women teachers, Taliban regulations have also restricted young children's access to education. For instance, the Taliban mandates that schools be divided based on gender and that only female teachers be able to instruct girls. Due to this policy's significant reduction of the role of female teachers and the need for more male teachers to fill in for female teachers who had previously taught coed classes, male-only classrooms were created, which resulted in an absence of teachers (SIGAR, 2023). Afghanistan's declining economy is another problem restricting access to education at all levels. As a result, families are being compelled to marry off their underage girls in order to pay for their weddings or pull youngsters from school to work. Schools have either partially or entirely closed as a result of these personnel and financial concerns (Easar et al., 2023).

The overall standard of education in Afghanistan has also declined as a result of Taliban aims and practices. Not only have Taliban tactics resulted in fewer teachers, but they have also caused a decline in teacher quality as qualified educators have been replaced by unqualified community members or Taliban officials. Additionally, religious subjects have taken the role of secular courses under the regulations and public schools were transformed into places of worship. The issue is made worse by the fact that a large number of teachers are leaving their positions out of concern for their personal safety. They do this out of fear of being singled out by the Taliban for harsh measures like dressing code violations and because going to schools puts female teachers at risk due to the Taliban's ban on women working and traveling outside the home (SIGAR, 2023).

Furthermore, according to Human Rights Watch, there has been an increase in the use of corporal punishment in schools since the Taliban took control and in order to impose strict regulations and interfere with the power of the appropriate educational authorities, representatives from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice frequently paid surprise inspections or followed a program of visits. Children's human rights are violated when they are subjected to corporal punishment. Using violence as a form of discipline on kids is dehumanizing, hurts their development, their ability to succeed in school, and their mental health. It also causes needless suffering. All children have the right to an education in a violence-free environment, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has determined that all forms of corporal punishment are forbidden by international law. (Fetrat, 2023).

Like the country as a whole, Afghanistan's public and private education systems are currently in dire need of reform. Many parents struggle to feed their kids enough, let alone pay for their education, as a result of the dire economic conditions. As a result, a large number of Afghan students depend on free educational opportunities. With financing from the European Union, the United Nations children's organization UNICEF has, at least partially, been able to sustain operations in the face of the humanitarian catastrophe by paying the salaries of about 194,000 public primary and secondary school teachers. Private education facilities outside of the capital deal with a falling economy, while private schools and universities have continued to operate in Kabul. Following the shutdown of public universities, a large number of students who had previously studied for the national university admission exam in private education facilities ceased attending lectures. Since the Taliban took control of the country, the number of students has drastically decreased, forcing over half of Afghanistan's private education centers to close.

This is due to the mandatory separation of boys and girls in classrooms, a lack of female teachers, and fears about the restrictions on education for women and girls (Reuters, 2022).

1.10. Women's right in Afghanistan During the Taliban's Second Rule: 2021-Present

With the rapid advance of the Taliban armed forces and the easy and effortless capture of Kabul in August 2021 and the revival of the Islamic Emirate after nearly 20 years, the shaky foundation of democracy and civil rights suddenly collapsed on the Afghan citizens (Easar et al., 2023). In this way, the dream that was the result of two decades of continuous efforts of the civil society and especially the women of Afghanistan to achieve freedom and equal rights, in the struggle of overt and hidden political interactions and the settlement of accounts of major world powers and the region turned into a terrible nightmare (Kayen, 2022). Following their takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban quickly implemented a series of directives and proposals that severely restricted women's rights and freedoms. Despite promising a more lenient governance approach than during their previous term, the Taliban issued more than twenty directives without prior commands or instructions (BBC Farsi News, 2023). On September 7, 2021, the Taliban announced an all-male interim cabinet, sparking protests (Rauf, 2021). The same day, three women were killed, and seven others injured in Herat due to Taliban shooting at protesting women (Hasht Subh Daily Media, 2024). The Ministry of Interior issued a statement the next day, September 8, 2021, imposing restrictions on protests and requiring prior notification to security agencies (BBC Farsi News, 2023). In September 2021, the Taliban dissolved the Ministry of Women's Affairs, barring women employees from entering the ministry (Amnesty International, 2022). In November 2021, female presenters were banned from appearing on television without full face coverings, and the dubbing of foreign TV shows into local languages was prohibited (Kayen, 2022). In December 2021, the Taliban imposed restrictions on women's travel, requiring them to have a male guardian for travel over 72 kilometers and banning solo travel abroad without a male relative. Safe houses for victims of domestic violence, known as "Aman" or "safe houses," were closed (BBC Farsi News, 2023). In May 2022, the Taliban began enforcing a strict dress code for women, requiring them to cover their faces in public and only allowing them to leave their homes with a male relative (Easar et al., 2023).

These actions significantly curtailed women's rights in Afghanistan, with four primary categories of oppression emerging: deprivation of political rights, limitations on public appearances and activities, prohibition of further education, and restrictions on the ability to

seek employment (BBC Farsi News, 2023). According to Hasht Subh Daily Media (2024) Afghanistan is the only country on earth that does not allow women and girls to study. Every day that passes by the Taliban government, the restrictions on women increase and the Taliban show that they have not changed their approach and performance compared to the previous period of their government from 1996 to 2001 (BBC Farsi News, 2023).

1.11. The Effects of the Taliban's Return to Power on the Education Sector

Education and society have suffered greatly since the Taliban's comeback to power. According to the data and analysis, the limitations have hurt education, particularly for women. In this context, they have also negatively impacted girls from a variety of perspectives (Abdulbaqi, 2009). The worst impacts of the Taliban's comeback to power on society and education seem to be as follows.

First of all, the educational system in Afghanistan has suffered since the Taliban took over, especially for female students enrolled in private universities. The number of students has significantly decreased to zero as a result of the Taliban's severe limitations on women's and girls' access to education (Ahmadi, 2022). As a result, more than half of Afghanistan's private educational institutions have closed due to insufficient enrollment. Furthermore, in the event that there is no ban, female students who would have otherwise paid to study science or social science subjects are being forced to change their curricula to include a greater emphasis on religious themes, which goes against their educational objectives (Easar et al., 2023).

Secondly, the ban on female students' attendance at school and higher education after sixth grade has resulted in significant psychological damage, such as increased anxiety, sadness, and sorrow (Neyazi et al., 2022). According to BBC Farsi News (2023), girls were so touched by the Taliban's first attempts to close schools for female students who wanted to finish grade six that they publicly cried for the schools to be reopened. Numerous research has provided evidence supporting the idea that the prohibition on girls' education in Afghanistan has seriously harmed women's mental health in addition to impeding their ability to develop cognitively. Living in Afghanistan is undoubtedly a difficult and depressing reality, since it is the only country globally where girls are prohibited from obtaining any kind of offline education after the sixth grade (Ahmadi, 2022). When schools and universities close to that age group, girls lose out on an important source of support as well as opportunities for social and personal development. At this crucial age, they should be learning about problem-solving and life management through classroom discussions and debates, textbook examples, and trips home with friends. Lack of access to social services and education would make young females feel

alone and forlorn. Closure of education institutions is one factor contributing to the rise in suicides, particularly among women. Given that girls attempt suicide at a rate of 80% and account for 95% of self-immolation deaths among those between the ages of 14 and 19, this issue needs to be addressed (Abdulbaqi, 2009). These circumstances may lead to a higher suicide risk, particularly in nations like Afghanistan where women confront additional barriers and limitations. The government's efforts to address the issue of rising female suicide rates are weakened by the shutdown of schools and colleges, which it imposed as a ban on education. A community-based mental health program and online psychosocial therapy are two essential resources and services that could assist prevent suicide but are now inaccessible due to this restriction. The prohibition on education makes it much more difficult for women to get the help they require in rural areas, where they already have limited access to formal education. The problem is made worse by the Taliban's strict regulations, which make it more difficult to accomplish the goals of combating suicide and offering online education services (Tharwani et al., 2023).

Third, Afghanistan's cultural, musical, and artistic manifestations are being hampered by the recent revision of university subjects and curricula to embrace a purportedly "Islamic" focus, as well as the abolition of the fine arts faculty, which included music classes and teachings, and cultural events. This stands in sharp contrast to the policies of former rulers like President Daud Khan, Monarch Zahir Shah, and the Communist administrations in general, who supported and encouraged the development of the nation's radio, film, and cultural industries. The Afghan cultural legacy is suffering from these recent developments (Ahmadi, 2022).

Fourth, women are unable to participate to the workforce as educators, administrators, researchers, managers, coaches, and female dormitory supervisors since they are not allowed to continue their education past primary school (Neyazi et al., 2022). Due to this ban, half of Afghanistan's population has their potential unfairly limited, and gender imbalance in the workforce and society at large is maintained (Abdulbaqi, 2009).

Fifth, The Taliban's prohibition on girls attending school in Afghanistan could have a major negative impact on the economy of the nation in the years to come. According to a recent UNICEF research, this ban will cost 5.4 billion US dollars, which is a significant loss of the potential economic contribution made by Afghan women if they had been allowed to pursue higher education (Neyazi et al., 2022). The restriction limits girls' economic potential and their capacity to contribute to the stability and progress of their nation by denying them the chance to learn new skills and expand their knowledge base. This emphasizes how crucial it is to

support universal access to education, particularly for girls, in order to support Afghanistan's continued economic growth and ensure a more prosperous and sustainable future (Abdulbaqi, 2009).

Sixth the Taliban want to progressively replace formal institutions with informal ones, but they want to do so covertly and locally rather than through official announcements or policies. This is shown in the transformation of learning centers and schools into madrasas in a number of Afghan provinces, which leads to a shift from a formal to an informal system of education and learning. In the philosophy of the Taliban, madrasas play a major role, since the word "Taliban" means "students of madrasas" (Easar et al., 2023).

Seventh, throughout Afghanistan's recent history, elites residing in urban areas who had considerably greater access to modern education than those in rural areas have typically been the ones to spearhead political transformations. The political elites typically tried to change society by incorporating their political ideologies into textbooks and the educational system. On the other hand, the Taliban puts out a different argument. The bulk of Taliban members have grown up in the rural districts of east and south Afghanistan, as well as along the tribal border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Taliban lack contemporary schooling and only receive education from madrasas. Being a group that was raised in the countryside and received their education in madrasas, they seek to change society, particularly in metropolitan areas, by implementing an educational model that is at odds with the contemporary curriculum that city dwellers are accustomed to. Put differently, the aim of the Taliban is to subjugate the rural community compared to the metropolitan one. An approach that is at odds with previous administrations' aim to control the social climate in cities rather than the countryside. Education is in the forefront of achieving this goal thanks to this transformative approach. Therefore, this goal may be furthered by the deterioration in educational standards (Easar et al., 2023).

Lastly, a prohibition on women attending school contradicts the core tenets of human rights. According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), education is acknowledged by international law as a fundamental human right. The UDHR also acknowledges that education is essential to promoting peace, well-being, and sustainable development as well as to the full enjoyment of other human rights (Neyazi et al., 2022).

CHAPTER II: METHODOLOGY

The careful examination and implementation of each phase in a research project are essential. These procedures have to be suitable for testing the hypotheses and research questions as well as for facilitating the overall study design, which includes gathering and analyzing data (Noltingk, 1965). This chapter gives the reader a framework for assessing the validity of the findings and outlines the methodologies utilized in this study to answer the research questions. It also gives enough information so that another researcher may conduct a similar study and explains the reasoning behind the decisions made. In order to enable other researchers to replicate the study, Creswell, (2009) highlights the significance of offering a thorough explanation of the research methods. I will give a comprehensive description of my research strategy, data gathering strategies, and data analysis approaches in this chapter. This will detail the process I used to choose interview subjects, carry out the interviews, and evaluate the interview material. My goal in sharing this much information is to increase the research's transparency and trustworthiness.

In short, in this chapter, key aspects of research methodology, such as data instruments, data collection, data analysis, and sampling techniques, are detailed. Additionally, the chapter will discuss the validity and reliability of the research methods used, as well as ethical considerations. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the methodology used in the study.

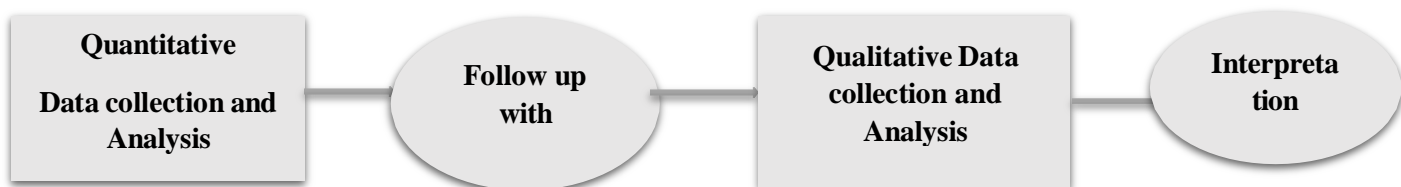
2.1. Research Design

According to Kothari (2004), research constitutes a unique addition to the current body of knowledge, contributing to its advancement. Research also includes the methodical process of developing a hypothesis and generalizing. Therefore, the term "research" refers to the methodical process that includes stating the issue, developing a hypothesis, gathering information, analyzing the facts, and concluding which may take the form of a solution or several for the issue at hand or a generation for a theoretical formulation. According to (Creswell, 2009) "research is a series of procedures used to gather and evaluate data in order to improve our comprehension of a subject or problem." Additionally, according to (Noltingk, 1965), research is essentially an examination of processes. As a result, research is the process of discovering the answers to the questions. It is an organized pursuit of truth that combines concepts and data to provide new information about the world we live in. Also, Kothari (2004) stated that, the research design is the conceptual framework that the study is carried out in; it serves as the guide for data collecting, measurement, and analysis. As a result, the design comprises a schedule outlining the researcher's steps, from formulating the hypothesis to

considering its practical ramifications to conducting the final data analysis. Thus, the plan, structure, and strategy of a research to identify substitute instruments to address the issues and reduce the variations can be referred to as the research design. Additionally, Creswell (2009) states that research designs refer to the particular steps in the research process, such as data collecting, data analysis, and report writing. Stated differently, research design refers to the methods used by researchers to set up the parameters for data collection, analysis, and written reporting of the research findings.

I've decided to use a mixed-method research strategy for my study. In order to comprehend a research problem, Creswell (2009) defines a mixed methods research design as a process for gathering, evaluating, and "mixing" both quantitative and qualitative research and methodologies in a single study. This method makes it possible to analyze the many problems relating to Afghanistan's educational policies in a more thorough and nuanced manner. These ideas serve as the basis for this study methodology, which recognizes the complexity and richness that are inherent in data. In order to present a comprehensive picture of the socio-educational landscape in Afghanistan, it looks at a wide range of data, including official publications, policy statements, census reports, and other pertinent documents. Specifically, the explanatory sequential mixed methods approach was utilized by me. Creswell (2009) states that the project is divided into two phases, with the researcher gathering quantitative data in the first phase, analyzing the data, and using the analysis to plan (or expand upon) the second phase, which is qualitative. The questions that will be posed to the participants and the kinds of individuals who will be specifically chosen for the qualitative phase are usually determined by the quantitative results. This design aims to provide a more detailed explanation of the preliminary quantitative results through the use of qualitative data (p. 278).

Figure 1: Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods



- *Source:* Creswell, 2009, p.270

I went with a mixed-method approach for a number of reasons. First of all, statistical insights into enrollment rates, educational access, and other important metrics can be obtained by utilizing quantitative data obtained from agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank. With the use of these data, education policy which effects on social justice and equity in

Afghanistan may be thoroughly and methodically examined. Nevertheless, quantitative data might not fully convey the intricacy of the problems at hand. Qualitative information gleaned through interviews provides a more profound comprehension of the viewpoints and lived experiences of those impacted by these policies. Interviews enable the investigation of complex points of view and can highlight information that may be missed by using only quantitative data. I hope to contribute to a deeper knowledge of this crucial problem by offering a more thorough and comprehensive examination of how education policies affect social justice and equity in Afghanistan by integrating quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In addition, a mixed-method approach was used in order to address methodological issues as well as to better advance the overall goals of my study. As suggested by (Bryman, 2012), collecting data from several sources through a mixed-method technique can improve the validity and dependability of research findings. I can validate data from various sources by combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, which will make my research seem more credible. A more in-depth examination of the study problem is also made possible by a mixed-method approach. Though qualitative data can assist identify the underlying causes of these changes, quantitative data can offer insightful information on trends and patterns. In order to guide future policy and practice in Afghanistan, it is imperative that I have a more thorough grasp of how education policies affect social justice and equity in the nation. This may be achieved by merging both forms of data.

2.2. Data Collection Method

As Creswell (2009) mentioned, the process of gathering data in Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods is divided into two phases: the first involves meticulous quantitative sampling, while the second, qualitative phase, involves intentional sampling. By following his method, in this research my data collection has been divided in to two parts. First, I have used a wide range of textual sources for quantitative data, such as press releases, media sources, academic institutions, project reports and research papers from international agencies and non-governmental organizations, and academic journals with a focus on education and policy. A variety of textual sources were used to collect the data for this study, indicating a multimodal approach to information gathering. It became clear that depending only on Afghan official resources such as position papers, research reports, and policy documents presented difficulties while giving priority to their accessibility. The incorporation of alternate sources to enhance the research was spurred by issues including ineffective or missing data and concerns about data accuracy. In response to these challenges, supplementary information was sourced from a variety of external entities, including reputable international organizations such as the World

Bank, UNICEF, and UNESCO. These organizations provided valuable insights into the complexities of education policy in Afghanistan. Furthermore, academic institutions and specialized policy and education academic journals offered scholarly perspectives that complemented and expanded upon the government-centric narrative. A complete understanding and contextualization are crucial, which is why news releases and media outlets from both local and international organizations were included in the data gathering procedure. By using such an extensive method of gathering data, the research aimed to investigate in detail how Afghan education policies have changed over time and what it means for social justice and equity in the academy. With the goal of promoting positive educational outcomes and assisting in the making of evidence-based decisions, this research carefully selects and synthesizes data from a variety of textual sources in order to make a substantial contribution to the conversation on education policy and practice in Afghanistan.

Second for the purpose to gather qualitative data, I used a structured interviewing technique to conduct online interviews with 20 educated people in order to get their opinions on Afghan education policy. This approach makes it easier to analyze social justice and equity concerns in a more nuanced way by providing a greater grasp of the intricacies of education policy. Five Afghanistan's major contemporary cities, such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Bamiyan, were used to select the participants. Several of the participants already hold prominent positions in society and politics, which speaks to their influence in their communities. The interviews had to be done online because I'm not in Afghanistan. The ethical rigor of the research was improved by conducting interviews online, which allayed participant concerns about security and guaranteed their safety and privacy. Furthermore, due to security concerns, participants asked not to disclose the cities in which they reside.

Because conducting interviews is an essential part of my research, I made sure to carefully capture the data, emphasizing the important points as Walford (2007) stresses. Even though I conducted the interviews online, I collected data in an organized manner. To keep things focused and consistent, I asked the interview using a pre-planned series of questions rather than an open-ended discursive format. (Bryman, 2012) suggests that this technique improved the depth and reliability of the data obtained by enabling an iterative research procedure. Also, Because the interviews were structured, it was possible to refine ideas and reflections found in previous interviews in an interactive way, which resulted in a thorough and cohesive analysis. While an organized interview schedule was adhered to, there was room for exploration of emerging themes and in-depth discussion of pertinent subjects. Although I did not establish a fixed duration for every interview, I made sure that the discussions were concentrated on the

goals of the study. Notwithstanding the virtual medium, the methodical strategy facilitated a significant conversation, enabling individuals to proficiently convey their viewpoints and experiences.

According to Yang (2015) it is advantageous to obtain useful data when employing thorough and relevant language when conducting interviews. For this reason, I primarily employed Dari. Having a relaxed interaction with my participants was my goal. I noted down details like their name, age, and particular job title. These details are significant since they connect to their power dynamics with society and establish the limits of their ability to change it. Due to mutual interests coming from our shared origin and unity, I did not utilize full video calls, but rather utilized a brief segment of our interview as a video chat to watch each other's faces. In-depth narrative interviews seem like the best course of action, as suggested by Yang (2015). In addition, each of my interview subjects provided their own explanations and interpretations of the events, as well as their own standards and modes of evaluation.

2.3. Sampling

For the quantitative portion, I selected information from official sources such as the World Bank, UNICEF, UNESCO, and the Afghan government. These organizations provide thorough and trustworthy statistics on education in Afghanistan, and the sampling process includes gaining access to their publicly available databases. These datasets were chosen because the data were available for the intended time period and because they were pertinent to the study concerns. The reliability and correctness of the data were guaranteed by the use of official sources, which gave the analysis of Afghan education policy a strong basis.

Additionally for the qualitative portion several regions of Afghanistan are home to my interview subjects. Initially, the center represents a crucial region with a greater propensity for "Westernization and democratization" and the potential to influence social justice and equity. Next, there will be distinct outcomes and approaches to this topic's promotion and prevention in the North and South-West. The majority population in this district is made up of members of many ethnic groups, hence their social behavior may have an impact on social justice and equity in either a favorable or bad way.

Through my friends, I use the so-called directed snowballing strategy to select each participant. All of my volunteers are older than 25 and extremely intelligent; they have degrees from Afghanistan universities in math, physics, medicine, and social science. A few of them hold additional degrees from Pakistan or Iran. They have more influential roles in both social and political spheres. They describe themselves as highly educated, politically active, employed as

university teachers and NGO activists, and all participants traditionally reside with their families; married participants may also live with their spouse and kids or other relatives such as mother-, father-, sister-, and brothers-in-law.

Although I accept that none of them is personally acquainted with the others or that they disagree on many matters, I am nevertheless able to classify them together for the purposes of my research because of their agency in pursuing a common objective. As noted by Bryman (2012) our impression of social collectivity is derived from our comprehension of self-classification, which is a term that relates to our own socially created understanding. Individuals are shaped by the contextual circumstances they have experienced in life (pp.148-128). My subjects' awareness and experiences are pertinent to my research topic because they satisfy the conditions of the theme I have chosen.

2.4. Interview Process

To guarantee a balanced representation, I employed a diversified selection process for participation. I phoned a friend of mine who used to be a professor at the University of Kabul in Germany and requested for assistance in locating highly educated people in Kabul the capital city of Afghanistan. He put me in touch with someone who had taught before the Taliban took power, and she was able to put me in touch with three more intelligent people. Through this strategy, I was able to connect with individuals that possess extensive understanding of the educational system in addition to ensuring that the representation was gender balanced. I once more asked my German acquaintance for assistance with other city, such as Herat, Kandahar and Bamiyan, because he has a large network from attending numerous seminars. In addition, I had connections in Mazare-Sharif from my time working there as a teacher. I spoke with three Mazar-e-Sharif residents to guarantee a variety of viewpoints. By using this method, I was able to take gender equality into account when choosing my participants and ensure that I had a thorough understanding of Afghanistan's educational policy. Because internet access in Afghanistan is so bad, the interviews were done mostly through voice calls, with about thirty minutes of the interviews being done through video. In order to guarantee accuracy in the transcription and analysis of the data, I captured the audio and video during the interviews. Since there is a time difference between Azerbaijan and Afghanistan, I worked with the participants to arrange the timeframe prior to the interviews. The interviews went smoothly in spite of the difficulties caused by spotty internet connectivity. In addition, I made sure that the interview procedure was ethical and transparent, getting each participant's informed consent and upholding anonymity throughout the study.

2.5. Ethical Consideration

As researchers, we shall offer our fieldwork to the cause of minority rights and the lives of individuals capable of bringing about social change. It is crucial that, as academics conducting fieldwork, our top concern be the safety of the people we interview and that no one be put in danger. Our integrity and dependability can have an impact. Since we are aware of the violence and cruelty committed against their rights, we ought to be committed to conducting ethical fieldwork out of moral and ethical principles.

As a graduate student at Khazar University, I was conscious of the need to conduct my research in accordance with the rules set forth by the Khazar University Research Council, with ethics as a top priority. These encompass every facet of my research methodology, such as the need for transparent data collecting, guarantees of participant and data privacy and confidentiality, and even the giving of voluntary consent through notification to respondents. I carefully heeded the council's suggestions. I promised my participants that their name and data would be kept private, and maintaining confidentiality was a continuous procedure. The nature of my research question directs the research process (Bryman, 2012) . I created the consent form and information, outlining my goals to each participant. They gave me their permission before I started, and that went for my research topic, goal, identity, and actions. Furthermore, I told them out loud that the information gathered would be utilized for the master's thesis, which will be posted on a public website run by the Khazar University Library.

Ethically, I recognized the participants as essential components of my thesis research and was aware of the many power dynamics and views that existed between myself and them (Sultana, 2007). I made sure they understood that they could stop participating in the study at any time if it made them uncomfortable. Furthermore, I took sure to handle sensitive subjects with respect and delicacy if they were taboo, such sexual or anti-religious conversations. I also took into consideration the recommendations given by academics about fieldwork, realizing that there were inherent dangers associated with it, such as unpredictability and potential danger (Sultana, 2007., Crawford et al., 2017) This realization strengthened my resolve to help my participants develop respect and understanding for one another.

To further enhance the ethical considerations in my research, the collection of quantitative data from reputable sources like UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank was conducted with utmost transparency and adherence to ethical guidelines. The meticulous approach in obtaining and utilizing this data not only ensured its accuracy and reliability but also upheld the ethical standards expected in scholarly research. This commitment to ethical data collection practices

extends the foundation of trust and integrity established in the qualitative aspects of the study, reinforcing the overall ethical framework of the research endeavor.

By upholding ethical principles in the data collection process, I aimed to maintain the trust and integrity of the research endeavor. The meticulous attention to ethical considerations not only safeguarded the rights of stakeholders but also upheld the ethical standards expected in scholarly research.

2.6. Data Analyzing Method

Utilizing several techniques to glean significant insights from a variety of data sources is necessary when conducting data analysis in a mixed-methods research design, which blends quantitative and qualitative methodologies (Kothari, 2004). In keeping with Bryman's claim that "The choice of data analysis technique depends on the nature of the research question," (Bryman, 2012) as I previously said, I decided to use a mixed-method approach. This choice is in line with Creswell's viewpoint, which emphasizes the necessity of "mixing" quantitative and qualitative data in a single study in order to comprehend challenging research issues (Creswell, 2009). Applying several analytical techniques appropriate for each type of data is necessary in the context of my research on education policies in Afghanistan in order to integrate quantitative data from sources such as UNICEF, UNESCO, and the World Bank with qualitative insights from interviews. With the use of this method, a thorough and nuanced study is possible, leading to a better comprehension of how education policies affect social justice and equity in Afghanistan.

I decided to utilize Stata statistical software for the quantitative data analysis because of its well-known strong statistical skills, which make it a perfect tool for examining big datasets and drawing insightful conclusions. As I previously determined, the statistical analysis included a thorough review of enrollment rates, access to education, and other important data that were gathered from UNESCO, the World Bank, and UNICEF, among other sources. I used a range of statistical methods, including regression analysis, trend analysis, and descriptive statistics, to identify patterns, trends, and correlations within the dataset. These analytical techniques complemented the qualitative knowledge gleaned from the interviews by offering a quantitative picture of how education policies affect social justice and equity in Afghanistan.

For my qualitative data, after I had gathered all of the information, it was time to compile, arrange, and evaluate my study data I employed the "open coding" strategy or thematic analysis, as suggested by (Bryman, 2012), as I divided, looked over, contrasted, theorized, and

categorized the data that I had gathered. I went over my interview data, underlined the parts that kept coming up, and noted and annotated pertinent passages with discussion sections. I reviewed and read again to make sure I didn't miss any information that was provided. After that, I began to identify patterns in the data by classifying it according to its significance.

I began by interpreting the data in English, assigning each category a specific color and name for clarity. For instance, data related to access to education was highlighted in green, representing a deeper level of investigation. I remained vigilant for any inconsistencies or contradictions in the narratives provided by the participants. However, since the participants were well-informed about the topic and purpose of the interviews, there were no discrepancies, and the process proceeded smoothly without giving rise to any doubts (Gambs & Kim, 2015). The majority of researchers hold the belief that rich details of knowledge, emotions, and experiences can be obtained by qualitative approaches in social science, such as in-depth interviews accompanied with a narrative life story. My data was challenging to fit into the constrained space of my thesis because I found it to be so rich and complex, especially when taking into account ideas like gender role and agency, familial support, empowerment, security, and patriarchy (Gambs & Kim, 2015).

After all of the data had been codified and categorized, my next step was to make sure I was using the appropriate literature to analyze the information I had gathered. I was forced to investigate new, relevant topics and perspectives about social justice as a result of how the data and specific findings were interpreted. This strengthened the theory section and literature review chapter I had previously prepared. This contributed to the usefulness of my data analysis.

2.7. Limitation and challenges

While conducting this study, certain limitations and challenges were encountered, which may have influenced the depth and scope of the analysis. One significant constraint was the scarcity of recent and precise data, posing challenges in accurately assessing the landscape of education policies in Afghanistan. The reliance on outdated or incomplete data may have obscured certain policy gaps or inaccurately portrayed the progress of the Ministry of Education (MoE), potentially affecting the interpretation of the study findings. To address these limitations and enhance the credibility of the study, rigorous measures were implemented to cross-verify conflicting data with supplementary sources wherever feasible. Despite these efforts, it's essential to acknowledge that the inherent limitations stemming from data constraints may have impacted the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Not only were there restrictions on the quantity of data, but there were also difficulties in gathering qualitative data. Interviewing participants and corresponding with them for qualitative data was made more challenging by Afghanistan's patchy internet service. Reaching a wide range of participants from different parts of the nation was hampered by this limitation, which might have reduced the sample's representativeness. The results' applicability to a larger population may also have been impacted by the limited sample size used to collect qualitative data. A number of actions were taken to overcome these problems. First, by scheduling interviews during times when internet connectivity was better, an effort was made to make the most of the available connections. In order to ensure a varied variety of opinions, participants were chosen from important cities in Afghanistan, such as Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif, Kandahar and Bamiyan. It is imperative to recognize that these approaches might not be entirely effective in addressing the limits presented by sample size constraints and internet connectivity.

It's important to note that while these limitations pose challenges, they do not invalidate the overall findings of the study. By acknowledging these constraints, I aim to provide a nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding education policies in Afghanistan, while also highlighting areas for future research and improvement.

2.8. Validity and reliability

I listened to Bryman recommendations to guarantee the reliability and validity of my study. Validity, in the words of Bryman, is the extent to which a study fairly represents or evaluates the particular idea that the investigator is seeking to gauge (Bryman, 2012). In the framework of my study, this entails making certain that the information I gather appropriately depicts how education policies affect social justice and equity in Afghanistan. In order to do this, I have done a number of things, such as carefully crafting my research questions to match my goals, utilizing a variety of data sources to confirm findings, and interviewing a wide range of individuals to get a variety of viewpoints. For the purpose of to guarantee the validity and reliability of my findings, I have also used a thorough data analysis method that includes coding and theme analysis.

Despite the restrictions and difficulties encountered, I used strict data gathering techniques to increase the validity of this study. A variety of textual sources were used to collect the data for this study, indicating a multimodal approach to information gathering. Although the Afghan government's sources were given priority, additional data was obtained from diverse external sources to enhance the research. This includes academic institutions, specialized publications, and credible international agencies and non-governmental organizations' project reports,

research papers, and policy documents. To provide a detailed understanding of the complex socio-political environment surrounding Afghanistan's education policy, press releases, and media sources were also included. These thorough data collection initiatives aimed to strengthen the validity and reliability of the study's conclusions by offering a comprehensive understanding of the complexity surrounding Afghanistan's educational systems.

I've tried to minimize the effect that out-of-date or incomplete data might have on the interpretation of the results of my research. To find out how flexible the results were to changes in the data, I performed sensitivity analysis. This gave me the guarantee that the results were not considerably affected by the data's limitations. My research was improved and made more valid because it was mostly dependent on a detailed evaluation of the literature of prior research for context and background data.

CHAPTER III: FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are presented in this chapter, together with information on the data and the study that was carried out to answer the previously stated research question. Three sections comprise the results. The first section highlights the main conclusions and patterns from the research on the historical effects of Afghan education policy on social justice in the educational system. The results regarding the current effects of Afghanistan's education policy on social justice and fairness in education are presented in the second section, along with an explanation of the specific findings and their implications. This is especially relevant in light of the Taliban's recent comeback. The results from the two objectives are finally interpreted in a comparative manner in the third section, which also offers a perceptive appraisal of their relevance and interrelation.

3.1. Section One: Impact of Historical Policies on Social Justice and Equity

This section examines how education policies have historically affected social justice and equity, with a particular focus on the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Afghanistan Educational Strategic Plan. After being put into effect, each of these policies has produced a diverse set of outcomes, especially when it comes to how they affect equity and social justice.

As was previously said in the literature review, it is clear that Afghanistan's educational policies before the Taliban took power had a significant impact on the country's educational environment, especially with regard to social justice. These regulations were purposefully designed to improve educational opportunities for all students, improve teaching standards, and reduce gaps in access to education. A careful examination of primary school enrollment statistics, carefully carried out with the use of the World Bank dataset and statistical analysis using Stata, revealed a slow but noticeable trend over time towards achieving more gender equality in educational access. Even with ongoing regional disparities, there has been a notable increase in the total number of female primary school enrolments, indicating concrete steps toward achieving gender parity. These results are in maintaining with the broad goals outlined in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which emphasizes the critical role that gender equality plays in education (Wardak, 2009). In general, the results of this section will show how these policies have different effects and shed light on their ramifications.

3.1.1. Students Enrolment in School

Initially, primary school enrollment data is a useful tool for analyzing how the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is being implemented. I determined the ratio of female to male enrollment over time using World Bank (2024) data and statistical analysis with Stata. While not continuously, the data shows a tendency toward a greater gender equality in educational access. The enrollment trends in primary education in Afghanistan between 1999 and 2013 are depicted in the table 1. The table illustrates the advancements made in achieving gender parity in educational access by displaying the number of male and female students as well as the overall enrollment over time.

Table 1: Enrollment Trends in Afghanistan's Primary Education (1999–2013)

Year	Female primary Enrollment	male primary Enrollment	Ratio Enrollment	Student primary
1999	4	50	0.08	875,605
2000	0	43	0.00	749,360
2001	0	45	0.00	773,623
2002	47	104	0.45	2,667,629
2003	69	123	0.56	3,781,015
2004	63	147	0.43	4,430,142
2005	73	126	0.58	4,318,819
2006	79	128	0.62	4,669,110
2007	76	125	0.61	4,718,077
2008	103	126	0.82	4,974,836
2009	99	119	0.83	4,945,632
2010	103	122	0.84	5,279,326
2011	100	116	0.86	5,291,624
2012	106	123	0.86	5,767,543
2013	108	126	0.86	5,986,268

- *Source: World Bank 2024: School enrollment, primary, female (% gross) and School enrollment, primary, male (% gross)*

In 1999, the ratio was 0.08 due to the fact that the percentage of gross enrollment for female students was 4% and for male students it was 50%. With percentages of 103% for female

students and 126% for male students, the ratio has considerably increased to 0.82 by 2008. The ANDS's goals are in accordance with the significant increase in the ratio, which indicates a positive shift towards gender equality and this trend continued, with the ratio reaching 0.86 in 2013.

Furthermore, from 773,623 in 2001 to 4,974,836 in 2008 and then to 5,986,268 in 2013, the overall number of students enrolled in elementary education demonstrated a consistent rise over time. This indicates that from 2001 and 2008, there was an average annual increase of about 600,173 students. These numbers demonstrate the advancements made toward ensuring that all Afghan children, irrespective of gender or socioeconomic status, have equal access to education, in keeping with the objectives specified in the ANDS.

Also, the National Development Strategic Plan (NDSP) in Afghanistan, as highlighted in the literature review, aimed to develop a vibrant human capital by ensuring equal access to quality education for all, fostering productive participation in the country's development, economic growth, and stability (Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2010). My analysis of World Bank and UNICEF statistics revealed significant improvements in gender equality, teacher quality, and enrollment rates resulting from the NDSP. These advancements indicate a positive trend towards fair access to education, with notable increases in enrollment numbers. Moreover, the emphasis on teacher quality has led to improvements in teachers' credentials and effectiveness. Efforts to promote gender equality have also led to a rise in the enrollment of girls in schools, enhancing educational opportunities for underprivileged populations. Overall, the NDSP has had a substantial impact on transforming Afghanistan's educational landscape towards a more functional and inclusive system.

According to World bank statistics, the enrollment rate of women contributes to Afghanistan's goal-achieving progress. The female-to-male ratio for students enrolled at three different educational levels in 2003 is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Percentage of Female Enrollment in Formal Schools by Region

Region	% Of Enrollees in Primary School (grades 1-6) who are Female	% Of Enrollees in Middle School (Grades 7-9) who are Female	% Of Enrollees in High School (Grades 11-12) who are Female
Northern	59	39	46
Central	41	12	8
Eastern	49	8	4
Western	53	33	42
Southern	12	6	7
Nationwide	44	23	25

- *Source:*(World Bank, 2024)

Female middle school enrollment rates in Northern and Western area schools are lower than those of high school, as Table 2 demonstrates. This is presumably due to the resources that are available to girls beyond elementary school and the fact that both male and female students are retained in high school in settings where views toward female education are more favorable. However, Table 2 significant regional disparity is what stands out the most: While female enrollment at middle and upper levels is declining in the Central and Eastern areas, it is still comparatively low in the Southern region at all educational levels.

In short, the number of students enrolled in school in 2020 increased tenfold from 2001 to about ten million, according to the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan's 2020 Annual Progress Report and approximately forty percent of these pupils were female.

3.1.2. Students' enrollment in higher education

The National Development Strategy Plan's the implementation in Afghanistan led to a notable rise in the number of male and female students enrolled in higher education. The data that illustrates this growth in a variety of disciplines is taken from the World Bank and is mentioned in Table 3. This result is consistent with earlier studies that have shown an upward trend in higher education enrollment in Afghanistan, as noted by Samady (2013), the National Education Strategic Plan outlines the goals of the Ministry of Higher Education, which include creating innovative institutions that offer top-notch teaching, research, and services, facilitating equitable access to higher education, producing graduates who can compete in the global economy, and promoting social development, economic growth, national stability, and nation-building. Development of faculty and staff, curriculum revision and development, science and

technology, postgraduate studies and research, equity and access including open and distance education, accreditation and quality assurance, and governance of higher education are all highlighted in the Strategic Plan. and as a result, the number of students enrolled in higher education increased more than three times between 2002 and 2012, from 31,203 to 101,000 (Samady, 2013).

Table 3: Higher Education Enrolment by Faculty: 2002 & 2010

Year	2002				2010			
	male	Female	Total	%	Male	female	Total	%
Agriculture	3060	34	3094	9.92	7337	238	7575	9.92
Engineering	3833	145	3978	12.75	6379	239	6618	8.67
Nature science	1345	690	2035	6.25	1196	787	1983	2.59
Computer science					1268	268	1536	2.01
Geology	953	12	965	3.09	2235	148	2383	3.12
Medicine	5068	1127	6195	19.85	4565	1472	6037	7.91
Veterinary science	427	3	430	1.38	647	52	699	0.92
Pharmacy	287	42	329	1.05	285	134	419	0.55
Fine arts	134	36	170	0.54	553	159	712	0.93
Economy	1616	134	1750	5.61	3636	272	3908	5.12
Law and policy	2201	355	2556	8.19	3511	627	4183	5.48
Social science	771	460	1231	3.95	2256	628	2884	3.77
Journalism	523	127	650	2.08	624	92	716	0.94
Education	1479	1274	2753	8.82	17217	7055	24272	31.78
Literature	2445	1340	3785	12.13	5830	2118	7948	10.41
Theology	1098	184	1282	4.11	3621	871	4492	5.88
Total	25240	5963	31203	100	61160	15205	76365	100

- Source: (World Bank, 2024 and Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2010)

For instance, the overall number of female students in the veterinary department increased significantly from 3 in 2002 to an unbelievable 52 in 2010. In the same way, the number of female students enrolled in the faculty of geology increased dramatically from 12 in 2002 to an

impressive 148 in 2010. These numbers demonstrate an important increase in gender parity and point to a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

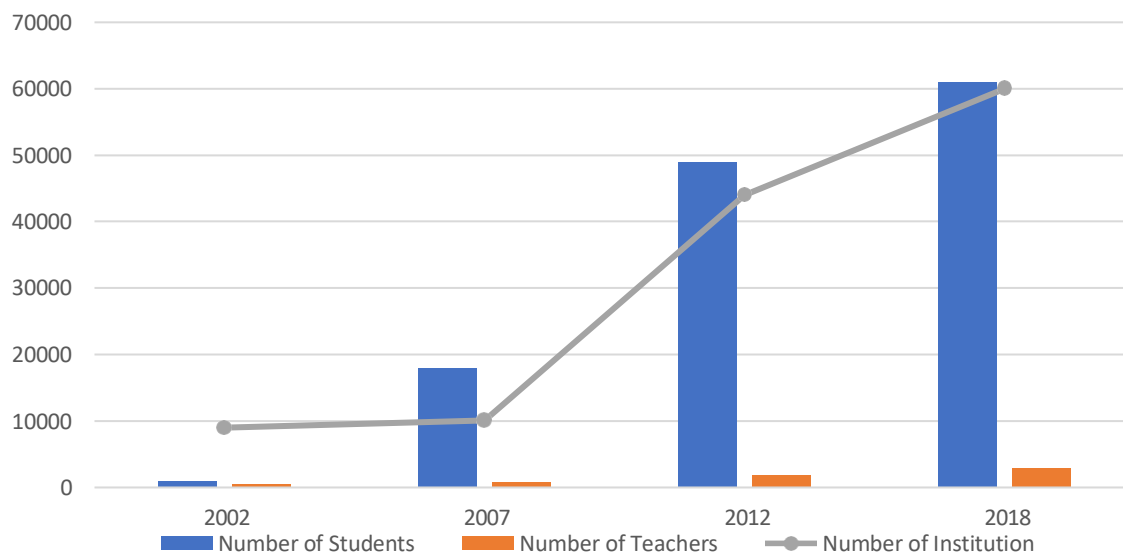
One significant accomplishment of the National Development Strategic Plan is the emergence of the field of computer science. This field didn't exist before 2010, yet by then it had drawn in close to 1,268 male, and 268 female students. This development highlights how technology is becoming more and more important and how it will shape Afghanistan's future. In addition, the increase in students enrolling in the education department indicates that the necessity of teacher training is becoming more widely recognized. For example, the number of male students in the education area increased from 1479 in 2002 to 17217 by 2010. Comparably, within that same time period, the number of female students enrolled in school rose from 1274 to an astounding 24272.

Particularly notable is the increase in female enrollment in traditionally male-dominated subjects like computer science and geology. It is a reflection of changing social mores and a growing understanding of how crucial it is for women to work in these sectors. The rise in female enrollment is evidence of the advancements achieved in Afghanistan in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment. Women gain from these advancements not just because they give them new opportunities, but also because they advance the growth and prosperity of the nation as a whole.

In a similar vein, Afghanistan's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) industry has seen substantial changes as a result of the NESP's implementation. Actually, efforts to offer fair education to people from different backgrounds were demonstrated by the growth of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs. Regional differences, however, indicate that there may still be difficulties in attaining inclusion and equity in education, especially in the South (Easar et al., 2023). The emphasis on raising teacher quality also had a favorable effect on Afghanistan's overall educational quality, which is consistent with research showing how important high-quality teachers are to achieving better learning results (Chalkboard, 2008). According to my data analysis from the UNESCO database, from 1,510 in 2002 to 61,663 in 2018, the overall number of students enrolled in formal TVET programs has increased significantly. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in the TVET industry, as seen by the rise in the number of instructors from 550 in 2002 to 3,824 in 2018. The NESP's emphasis on equity and inclusivity, which guarantees everyone, regardless of background, access to high-quality TVET programs, is responsible for this rise. Regional differences do, however, still exist, especially in the Southern region, where female enrollment

in TVET programs is still relatively low when compared to other regions. This demonstrates the continued difficulties Afghanistan faces in attaining gender parity and fair access to education. Chart 1 shows that since the NESP was put into effect, there has been a notable increase in the number of TVET instructors.

Chart 1: Number of students, instructors, and institutions in formal TVET (2002-2018)



- *Source:* (UNESCO, 2021)

3.1.3. School Infrastructure and Teaching Staff

Excellent instruction is a major determinant of the quality of learning for students. In order to achieve high-quality learning results, it is imperative that there be a sufficient number of teachers who meet the minimal academic requirements. Additionally, as it affects how much time a teacher can spend with each student, the student-teacher ratio has a significant influence on learning results (Rowe, 2012). Afghanistan faced significant challenges in its education system, with an alarming ratio of 62 students for every teacher in elementary schools. This often led to overcrowded classrooms, where one teacher was responsible for teaching multiple classes, resulting in even higher effective class sizes. The ratios were slightly better in lower secondary and upper secondary schools, with 43 students per teacher and 41 students per teacher, respectively. However, these figures were still higher than the regional average of 25 students per teacher in lower secondary education and 31 students per teacher in upper secondary school (UNESCO, 2021).

By the implementation of these policies, Afghanistan has made notable improvements in teacher quality and educational infrastructure, leading to more manageable class sizes and improved learning environments. After analyzing data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics

and Statistics in the World Bank, I found that the number of teachers in all levels of education has been increasing steadily since 2003. Between 2003 and 2020, the total number of teachers increased from 27,000 to nearly 226,000, marking a significant growth over the years. Specifically, between 2007 and 2018, the total number of teachers increased by 58%, rising from 143,000 to 226,000. Interestingly, the number of female teachers experienced a more significant increase, growing by 105% during the same period. This growth has resulted in a notable shift in the proportion of female teachers, which has increased from 28% in 2007 to 36% in 2018, indicating an 8-percentage point increase over 11 years, also there has been a notable surge in the quantity of schools. The number of schools has increased from 6,000 in 2001 to almost 18,000 in 2018. Moreover, coeducation was promoted for both primary and secondary pupils in a few provinces' primary public schools as well as in a few Kabul private schools up until the Islamic Republic's fall to the Taliban.

In conclusion, the tables that follow provide a thorough account of the significant impacts of education programs in Afghanistan that existed before the Taliban took power. These results demonstrate the revolutionary influence of pre-Taliban educational programs in Afghanistan on the advancement of social justice and fair access to education.

Table 4: significant impacts of education programs in Afghanistan

Finding	Data
Student Population Growth (2001-2020)	7 million, 37% girls
Number of Teachers (2020)	170,000, 30% female
Number of Training Centers (2001-2020)	4 to 42
Number of Technical and Vocational Schools (2020)	60, 200,000 students, 30% female
Number of Registered Madrasas (2020)	Over 480
Number of Reopened Schools (2001-2020)	673

- *Source:* (World Bank, 2024, Afghanistan Ministry of Education, 2017)

3.2. Section two: The Effect of Policies Following the Taliban's Domination

In this section, which is the finding of my interview, the focus is on the current effects of Afghanistan's education policies, particularly in the context of the Taliban's return, on social justice and equity in education. The findings provide insights into how recent government changes and Taliban policies have influenced access to education, curriculum, teaching methods, and overall educational quality for different groups, including boys and girls.

In order to acquire a variety of viewpoints on social justice and education policy in Afghanistan, interviews with a total of 20 people from the country's five largest cities were undertaken for

this study. Because internet connection is limited in Afghanistan, the interviews were performed mainly by voice conversations. To improve communication, around half of each interview was conducted via video call for about 30 minutes. The interviews went well, paying close attention to ethical issues and participants informed permission even in the face of obstacles like sporadic internet connectivity.

A broad viewpoint on education in Afghanistan was provided by the interviewees, who represented a wide variety of backgrounds and vocations. Financial management, accounting, nursing, medicine, teaching at different levels (university and school), and students were among the professions of the interviewees. Participants ranged in age from 20 to 37, so a variety of viewpoints from various phases of life were included. With regards to education policy and social justice in Afghanistan, this diverse population made sure that the research covered a wide range of perspectives. An overview of the participants varied origins and vocations, as well as their age range, are included in the table 3, which highlights the variety of viewpoints covered in the research.

Table 5: Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants

Occupation	Number of Participants	Range of Age	Gender
Financial Management	1	30	Female
Accounting	1	27	Male
Doctor	1	35	Male
Nurse	1	30	Female
Teacher in school	3	30-35	Female
Teacher in school	3	30-37	Male
Teacher in university	2	35	Female
Teacher in university	2	35-37	Male
Student	3	20-27	Female
Student	3	20-29	Male
Total	20	20-37	Male and Female

3.2.1 Access to Education

Following their takeover of Afghanistan, the Taliban quickly implemented a series of directives and proposals that severely restricted women's rights and freedoms. Despite promising a more lenient governance approach than during their previous term, the Taliban issued more than

twenty directives without prior commands or instruction (BBC Farsi News, 2023). Security concerns and restrictions imposed by the Taliban have significantly affected access to education in Afghanistan, with a particular impact on girls' educational possibilities. Participants pointed out that a lot of schools have closed or are run under tight rules, which limits access for both boys and girls. A student in the Department of Law related her story, saying that at first, she was able to go back to university following the Taliban's removal. Boys and girls were later forbidden from learning together, however. In order to fix this, universities started separating the sexes with curtains; but, in the end, the Taliban declared that girls were no longer allowed to attend. She expressed her dismay, stated that "*Seeing boys leave for university while we are forced to stay at home pains me. Since Islam permits us to pursue higher education, this defines discrimination against girls based on their gender. Nobody should be able to prevent us from learning.*" This narrative resonates with the literature, particularly concerning the closure of universities. On December 21, 2022, the Ministry of Higher Education issued an order closing female university, ending Afghan women's ephemeral hopes of pursuing higher education. Senior Taliban commanders had conversations that resulted in this decision because they believed that the university setting was incompatible with Sharia law and Afghan culture (Abdulbaqi, 2009).

Almost the second month of the Taliban's control, universities reopened, although with rigorous restrictions requiring gender segregation (BBC Farsi News, 2023). The difficulties of teaching under the Taliban's policy of gender segregation were described by a male university instructor. He pointed out the craziness of the scenario as he explained how it was hard to teach and build relationships with his female students because of the use of curtains in classrooms to divide male and female students. He said *that initially the Taliban demanded that girls and boys come to the university on different days, but due to the lack of facilities, they came to the conclusion that it is better to use curtains to separate boys and girls in the classrooms.*" It is the same result with the body of research on the Taliban's strategy for implementing gender segregation in schools. Under the Taliban, colleges were allowed to reopen as long as they adhered to a rigid policy of gender segregation, according to (Abdulbaqi, 2009). The difficulties faced by the male university instructor are also similar to the more general strategy covered by Ahmadi & Sultan (2023), in which the Taliban carried out plans to create separate classes for male and female students, frequently using curtains in the lack of dedicated spaces. The wider impacts of the Taliban's education policy, which have been thoroughly examined in the literature, are in line with the difficulties teachers face in instructing and building connections with female students as a result of these segregation policies.

Following all the restrictions that Taliban imposed on women and girls the Taliban leadership said on March 23, 2002, that girls' schools would not open, despite pressure from around the world and the resources that the international community had given (BBC Farsi News, 2023). On the day that girl schools were supposed to resume, this decision was made at the last minute. Across the nation, a large number of girls who had been anticipating the reopening of schools that day instead discovered that their school was closed. Many teachers who had gone to work believing that their schools would reopen were likewise taken aback by this statement. The decision to prevent many young ladies from attending school startled and upset them greatly (Grant Farr, 2022). This aligns with the experiences shared by a female teacher from a school in Kabul, who described how, after the Taliban took control of the city, all schools were closed, citing insecurity issues. While boys and girls under the sixth grade were eventually allowed to return, older students were told they could resume classes in the new school year. However, when teachers and students returned to school in March, they found the gates locked, with the Taliban preventing female students from attending. She remarked, *“In terms of resources or logistical issues, nothing unexpected has surfaced. There is no defense for this other than deliberate cruelty.”*

A male doctor from the Bamiyan province discussed how the Taliban's restriction on females attending school had an impact on medical students' education. Many medicine students lost out on educational opportunities since hospitals were no longer open to them after the announcement of the ban, which prevented them from receiving the practical training they needed. According to him, the Taliban may not yet be aware of how limiting girls' access to education will harm Afghanistan's future, but they will quickly learn that it undermines the country's economy because women make up half of a community. The same, a male teacher from Kandahar shared his concerns about the impact of the Taliban's education policies on the future of Afghanistan. He emphasized the importance of education in rebuilding the country and expressed hope that the international community would continue to support education initiatives in Afghanistan. This is aligned with literature review that the Taliban's ban on girls attending school in Afghanistan could have a major negative impact on the economy of the nation in the years to come. According to a recent UNICEF research, the restriction has cost the country 5.4 billion US dollars, which is a significant loss of the potential economic contribution made by Afghan women if they had not been prevented from obtaining an education. The restriction restricts girls' economic potential and their capacity to support the stability and progress of their nation by preventing them from having the chance to learn new things and acquire new skills. This emphasizes how critical it is to support universal access to

education, particularly for girls, in order to support Afghanistan's transition to a more wealthy and sustainable future and sustain the nation's economic cycle for the benefit of all parties involved (Easar et al., 2023).

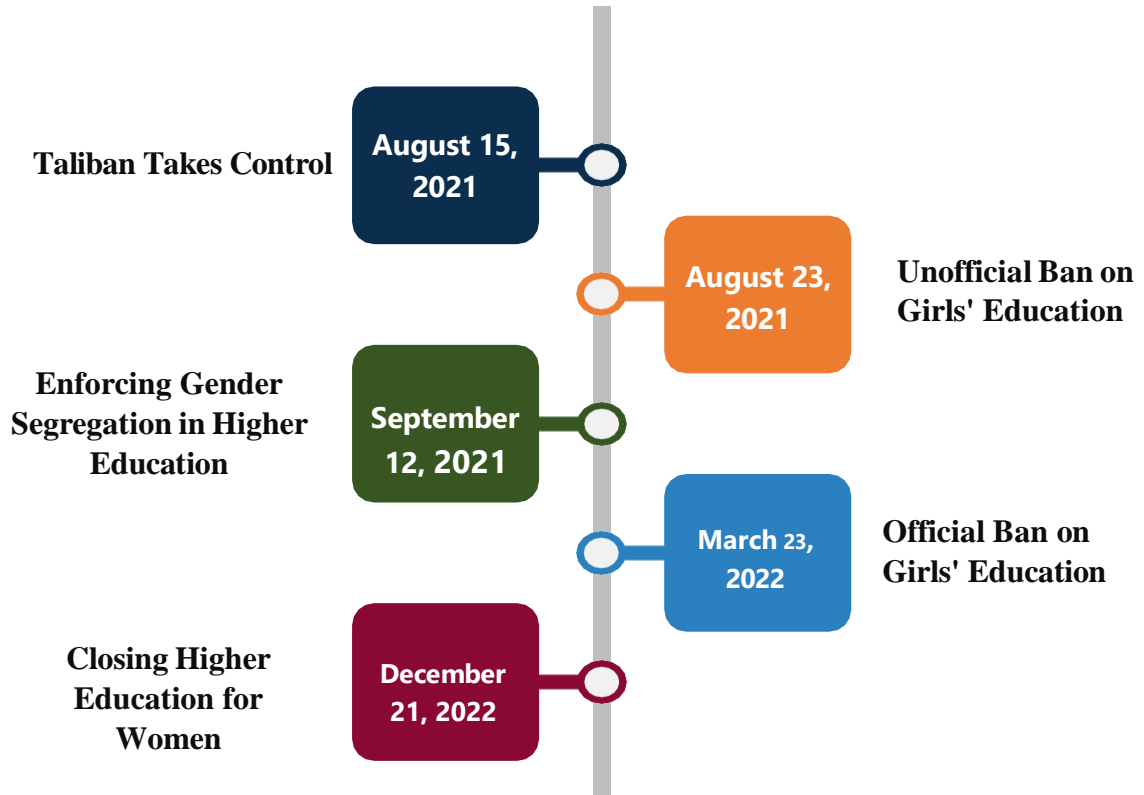
Furthermore, a female professor at a university underlined that boys are similarly impacted by access to education. She gave the example of her brother, who was forced to leave Herat to study because of insecurity and shifting educational regulations. She says his brother is very sad, she said: His brother had always insisted that he had worked hard to fulfill his ambitions of attending college and that he did not want to end up like his father, a poor worker. He put a lot of effort into his studies to be successful in his chosen career at a reputable institution in Herat, but he is now compelled to stay at home. This illustrates how educational limitations can affect people of all genders, restricting their access to opportunities. She also stated that boys' access to education has been severely damaged by the country's worsening economic and humanitarian difficulties in Afghanistan. Boys are increasingly expected to work and contribute to home income as a result of families experiencing more financial difficulty, which frequently results in them giving up on their education completely. Boys can attend schools and universities, but many feel pressured to put work ahead of their studies because they see it as a more pressing need for survival. Their mental health has suffered as a result of this change, which has also interfered with their education. Boys are experiencing higher rates of anxiety, depression, and other mental health problems as a result of the pressure to balance employment and school. This problem is made worse by the country's poor mental health resources. She also added that *“Many boys are discouraged from continuing their education due to the lack of a bright future for their education.”*

The participant stories collectively underscore the pressing necessity of addressing Afghanistan's educational barriers. The Taliban's policies have severely hindered efforts to create a more open and democratic society and had a devastating effect on education, especially for girls. Regardless of gender or origin, it is imperative that efforts be made to guarantee that all Afghan children have access to high-quality education.

In brief, the following graph presents the historical order of significant policy modifications pertaining to education, specifically for women, that were enacted by the Taliban. First came the official announcement on August 23 that girls' schools will close upon the Taliban's return. September 12 saw the implementation of policies pertaining to gender segregation. This was followed by a major increase in restrictions when the Taliban officially outlawed girls' education on March 23. In the end, Afghan women had no longer any option to pursue higher

education when the Ministry of Higher Education ordered the closure of female universities on December 21. The Taliban's efforts to prevent women in Afghanistan from accessing higher education are becoming more systematic, as this graph illustrates (BBC Farsi News, 2023).

Figure 2: Timeline of Taliban's Actions Against Women's Education in Afghanistan



- *Source: work of author*

3.2.2. Curriculum and Methods of Instruction:

Under the Taliban, there have been modifications to the curriculum and methods of instruction, with a move toward a more traditional and conservative outlook. Taliban curriculums are also contributing to a decrease in the general quality of education by restricting the options available to Afghan pupils. To concentrate mostly on Islamic studies that follow its interpretation, the Taliban are specifically eliminating some secular subjects from the curriculum at all educational levels (Easar et al., 2023). Every individual who was interviewed mentioned that the Taliban had altered the curricula and instructional strategies. According to them, the Taliban increased the amount of time spent teaching religious topics and eliminated computer science and English from the curriculum altogether. Such changes raise concerns about the quality and relevance of education provided to students in Afghanistan. One of these participants said that *“The Taliban impose their ideological curriculum, which is based on the repetition and imitation of dogmatic beliefs, on the university curriculum. For example, they have removed basic and major courses*

and instead of them they increased Islamic culture from 8 to 24 credits. But because the Islamic culture does not have the ability to teach so many credits, in some departments, the memorization of the Holy Quran, the memorization of the verses, and the memorization of the hadiths are taught instead.” But the curriculum has not only changed in university, it also has changed in school too. Another participant who is a schoolteacher narrated that *“First, when they came and gained dominance, they removed the topics of civil education, culture and formal art and said that instead of these, you should teach interpretation of holy Quran and other religious topics and do not even take an exam on these (deleted) topics.”*

One participant stated that extra hours studying the Quran and Islamic studies have often taken the place of courses like civics, sports, art, and culture. He claimed that there was not anymore, any difference among the mosque and the school. Teachers with the necessary qualifications to teach us critical disciplines like chemistry, computer science, and physics are in limited supply.

The results of the interviews closely match the unsettling adjustments that have been documented in the literature on the curriculum amendments that the Taliban have suggested. The suggested alterations by the Taliban are drastic and wide-ranging, with the goal of eliminating any images or references to ideas that they believe to be at odds with their philosophy, as reported by Hasht Subh Daily Media (2024) . Textbooks are slated to be emptied of all pictures of living things, including females and sports, as well as biology textbook depictions of the human body. In addition, any positive picture of democracy, human rights, peace, women's rights, and education is prohibited in the Taliban's proposed curriculum. Edison is given as an example of how non-Muslim scientists and creators should be excluded from the curriculum. Moreover, all mention of radio as "colonial media," population control, elections, and references to mines and dangers have to be removed because of their connection to the Taliban.(Hasht Subh Daily Media, 2024). In general, the three key aspects that the Taliban sought to change in the school curriculum were as reported by Hasht Subh Daily Media are:

1. Art: The Taliban want to remove art from the curriculum because they believe it is not a necessary topic. They propose that teaching agriculture as a more useful and practical topic should take the place of educating art.
2. Civic Education: According to the Taliban, civic education is possibly dangerous and unneeded, especially when it comes to themes associated to democracy. They support removing civic education classes from grades 7 through 12, arguing that they are a vestige of democratic values.

3. Culture: Similar to this, the Taliban believe that culture should not be taught in schools. The suggestion is to substitute it with a topic they believe will be more beneficial; however, they do not specify what that topic might be (2024).

3.2.3. Teacher Qualification

Since the Taliban took back control of the country, Afghanistan has seen a decline in the number of qualified teachers. Teachers who remain face extreme financial difficulty as a result of the Taliban's harsh and repressive rules, which are also leading to the firing of teachers or their departure for personal safety. Teachers have stated that the Taliban's ban on women leaving the house alone has resulted in more issues, and that the Taliban is specifically targeting female educators for disciplinary measures (SIGAR, 2023).

According to a participant from the province of Kabul, the majority of experienced teachers, male and female, migrated away from their homes as a result of the high risk and instability following the Taliban's entrance. One of interviewees told a story about other teachers who worked all in the same school. He said most of his colleagues left the country because of a feeling of insecurity and the bad status of the financial economy. He clarified that numerous colleagues of his had migrated to other nations, including Iran or Pakistan, due to financial constraints and the inability to pay instructors' wages following the Taliban's entrance. Their decision to relocate was motivated by their desire for better economic and peaceful circumstances. He said most of his colleagues left the country because of a feeling of insecurity and the bad status of the financial economy. He clarified that numerous colleagues of his had migrated to other nations, including Iran or Pakistan, due to financial constraints and the inability to pay instructors' wages following the Taliban's entrance. Their decision to relocate was motivated by their desire for better economic and peaceful circumstances. He also mentioned that due to the policy that women are not allowed to work, most of the experienced women and teachers who taught in boys' schools and universities were fired, and instead new teachers from the male class were chosen to teach subjects in their place. Most of these new teachers lack experience and knowledge, and this change has affected the quality of teaching and learning for all students. *"We had 16 female teachers overall for years 10, 11, and 12, and 4 male teachers,"* one participant, a grade 12 student in Kabul, said. *"The female professors had specialized in teaching that specific course and were experts in their fields. Four of the male professors left the nation after August 2021, and we are already feeling the effects of their absence. The teachers who teach us now used to be grade 4 and 5 instructors."* According to a different student from Mazare Sharif, *"90% of the teachers at my school that instruct students*

in grades 10, 11, and 12 are women. Teachers of the male gender took their post once the Taliban took power. Four new teachers have been allocated to my class. Rather than focusing on teaching their assigned subjects, they converse more on religion, the lifestyle of the Prophet Muhammad, and the Taliban's victory over the US and the West through jihad."

Because there aren't enough academics in the nation right now, the Taliban use maulvis⁹ to educate in their place. According to one respondent, the Taliban mandated the hiring of additional educators to address the teacher shortage, and these educators are selected through a screening process. ". *Participating in this exam, a few of my colleagues reported that the Taliban inquired about the proper ways to worship and proper of washing for praying and the exam is administered in Arabic." In the view of this respondent, this requirement is seen as an insult to teachers who have dedicated many years to serving the children of Afghanistan. We might lose our positions if we don't pass the test.*" Another respondent commented, "*Schools were better before, with stricter rules. Since there are no restrictions anymore, some teachers appear to be competent even though they may only have completed six years of school. They do this by using fictitious documents.*"

Corroborating these findings, reports from Hasht Subh Daily Media, (2024) indicate that the selection of teachers by the Taliban is done unfairly. For instance, the Taliban restrict certain groups of Afghan citizens from participating in the teacher's exam, instead opting to hire teachers with prior work experience during the previous Taliban regime or those who are currently affiliated with the Taliban group. This practice highlights the lack of fairness in the teacher selection process, echoing the sentiments expressed by interview participants regarding the discriminatory nature of the Taliban's policies.

One of the participants, a student in grade 12 facing the critical year of university exam preparation, from a large public school with 1,000 students known for its quality education, shared insights into the impact of recent changes in teaching staff. They noted that the school had previously employed more female than male teachers. However, the student mentioned that out of the 14 subjects in their curriculum, only 7 had teachers assigned, leaving subjects such as physics, biology, skills, computer, English, and art untaught. The student clarified that these subjects were not eliminated by the Taliban but remained untaught due to the dismissal of female teachers. This situation forced the student to seek private classes outside of school, a

⁹ Religious scholar

financial burden that strained their family's resources, especially considering that four out of five family members were also attending school.

3.2.4. discrimination and punishment

There has been a culture of corporal punishment in public and private schools in Afghanistan for many years, leading to complaints from some parents. However, these complaints have increased during the current situation (Easar et al., 2023). According to the participants, at morning assemblies, school officials employed various forms of discipline such as foot slapping, beatings, and humiliations. One of them narrated that *“In front of everyone, I was severely attacked and humiliated twice at the morning assembly: once for carrying a cell phone and once for my haircut. At the morning assembly, they cut my hair in front of everyone, calling it a “Western style.” I was then given a foot beating as punishment.”* Another participant recounted an incident where her seven-year-old son was severely beaten in school because he couldn't pronounce some Arabic words correctly.

Under the previous government, boys were expected to wear a school uniform consisting of a blue or white shirt and black or blue dark trousers (Fetrat, 2023). The male students that I have interviewed said that since the Taliban takeover the uniform has changed, and they are now required to wear traditional Afghan clothing which called. One participant, a student in Herat province said, *“When the government first changed, I and a few of my classmates struggled to rapidly switch from the pants-and-shirt uniform to the perahan tunban. As a result, we were each given two slaps and were prohibited from entering the classroom for the duration of the day.”*

He also added that *“I used to enjoy school, but that hasn't happened. It has been made even more difficult by the ongoing worry about an unexpected visit from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice. Some boys run out of school and engage in alcohol consumption or cigarette and hashish smoking. After being captured by Taliban forces, they are taken back to school and subjected to physical punishment.”*

Other students regard of punishment narrated that *“At our school, the study of Pashto is given considerable attention. My classmate was asked by a new teacher to compose a poem in Pashto, but he was not able to complete it. In front of the class, the instructor made him stand on one foot, repeatedly beat him across the face, and pulled on his ears. My classmates felt humiliated.”*

Also, one student who is currently enrolled in Kabul University's economics program shared insights regarding the psychological impact of insecurity on male students. He described how male students' psychological well-being has been severely impacted by the dominant feelings of insecurity and uncertainty, leading to tense and nervous feelings. There is an air of expectancy among students since they are always concerned about what new rules or regulations the Taliban might impose. He claims that each day when we arrive at the institution, we're all nervous and waiting to hear about the new policy. As a result, we all study and engage in class with a great deal of fear.

These reports are consistent with those of, which found that the Fetrat use of corporal punishment in schools has increased since the Taliban took power. As measures of discipline, students have reported being beaten, slapped, humiliated, and foot whipped at morning assemblies. Furthermore, it has been claimed that representatives from the Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice make surprise inspections or frequent visits to schools in order to impose harsh restrictions and takeover the power of school administrators (2023).

3.3. Section Three: Comparative Analysis of Historical and Current Education Policies

In this section, in order to discover how social justice and fairness in education have changed over time, I will compare the historical policy-related findings of section one with the current state of circumstances in Afghanistan in section two. Using data and conclusions from the literature review and data analysis, I will examine shifts, difficulties, and continuities in educational access, curricula, teacher quality, and the general educational environment.

Afghanistan has significantly improved educational access prior to the arrival of the Taliban, especially for women and other marginalized populations. As was covered in Section One, the adoption of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy and the Afghanistan Educational Strategic Plan led to a noticeable rise in enrolment in both elementary and higher education. But with the Taliban making a comeback, questions have been raised about how long these victories will last. According to reports, and words of participants there has been a decrease in educational access, particularly for women and girls, as a result of the Taliban's policies and actions, which include closing schools and placing limitations on females' education. The declining enrolment rates and the difficulties female teachers and students encounter in obtaining an education are clear indicators of this regression.

Over time, Afghanistan's curricula and methods of instruction have also changed. There were attempts to raise teaching standards and update the curriculum prior to the Taliban's return. However, there are worries that these improvements could be reversed due to the Taliban's policies. As mentioned in section two the curriculum has been restricted by the Taliban, who prioritize a conservative Islamic education and limit exposure to subjects like women's rights, the humanities, and the social sciences. These modifications show a move toward a more conventional and constrictive educational strategy, which may have effects on educational equity and social justice.

furthermore, through efforts for qualification upgrading and training, Afghanistan has attempted to raise the level of education overall by improving the quality of teachers. But there are now doubts about the training and retention of competent instructors in light of the Taliban's comeback. The teaching profession faces challenges from the Taliban because of their regulations, especially for women instructors. Social justice and equity in education may suffer as a result of this change in the educational environment, which also raises worries about the possible loss in teacher quality.

Finally, the comparative review of Afghanistan's past and present educational policies shows the shifts, difficulties, and continuity in the country's curriculum, teacher quality, and general learning environment. Even if educational standards had improved prior to the Taliban's takeover, there are still issues that must be resolved if social justice and equity in education are to be guaranteed in Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes this thesis by giving a thorough overview of the research findings, practical recommendations, and closing thoughts. The main findings of the study are summarized in this chapter, along with their importance for understanding Afghanistan's educational policies. It also provides useful recommendations on how to enhance social justice and equity in Afghanistan's educational system for decision-makers, teachers, and other stakeholders. This chapter ends with some thoughts on the research's impacts and recommendations for more research in this important area.

summary

Education policies play a crucial role in shaping the social justice and equity landscape within a country's educational system. In Afghanistan, a nation marked by an unstable history of conflict and war, each successive leader has introduced new policies that have significantly impacted social justice and equity. These policies have often reflected the broader socio-political context of the country, with varying degrees of success in addressing the educational needs of the population. This thesis examines the historical and current impact of these policies, especially in light of the Taliban's return to power, on social justice and equity in education. This thesis investigates how social justice and fairness in education have been impacted historically and currently by these practices, particularly in light of the Taliban's recent comeback to power. The study intends to examine the ways in which social justice and fairness in education are impacted by these policies historically and in light of the Taliban's comeback. The study aims to accomplish two specific goals: first, it will examine the historical influence of Afghan education policies on social justice within the educational system; second, it will evaluate the current effects of Afghan education policies on social justice and equity in education, especially in light of the Taliban's return.

The explanatory sequential mixed methods technique developed by Creswell (2009) serves as the foundation for the study design, which enables a thorough examination of all the facets of Afghanistan's educational system. This study provides a nuanced understanding of the effects of education policies by fusing qualitative insights from interviews and other sources with quantitative data analysis.

A significant finding drawn from the research is that gender equality in education was positively impacted by pre-Taliban educational practices. Progress towards gender parity is evident in the analysis of enrolment data, which reveals a consistent rise in the number of female students enrolled in primary and postsecondary education. The Afghanistan National Development

Strategy (ANDS), which places a strong emphasis on gender equality in education, is in line with the aims that this development has achieved. The National Development Strategy Plan (NDSP) and its effects on educational access and quality are also highlighted in the study. The NDSP has improved curriculum development, infrastructure, and teacher quality, making the educational system more egalitarian and inclusive. Positive results of these measures can be seen in the rise in female enrollment in disciplines like geology and veterinary science.

The study also highlights the enormous obstacles that Afghanistan's educational system faces, particularly in the wake of the Taliban's takeover. Both boys' and girls' access to education has been severely hampered by the Taliban's strict policies, which are typified by the closing of females' schools and the implementation of a restrictive curriculum. Not only have these restrictive policies reduced educational options, but they have also had a significant influence on social fairness and the quality of education. The negative consequences of these practices are highlighted by interviews with a range of stakeholders, including community residents, educators, and kids. They draw attention to how these limitations have created serious obstacles to attaining social justice and fairness in education as well as exacerbated already-existing inequities.

The study concludes by highlighting the significance of ongoing initiatives to advance social justice and equity in Afghan education. Even while there has been success in certain areas, there are still many obstacles to overcome, especially in guaranteeing that every child has access to education. According to the study, inclusiveness and equity should be given top priority in future education policy in order to guarantee that all Afghan children have access to top-notch instruction.

Recommendation

A complete set of recommendations has been produced based on the findings of this thesis, which underscore the shortcomings and inequalities present in Afghanistan's educational framework. These ideas are meant to promote a more inclusive and fair learning environment as well as address the systemic problems that impede access to education, especially for women and vulnerable communities. These ideas aim to alter Afghanistan's educational system so that it is inclusive and helpful for everyone by supporting gender equality, pushing for policy changes, and making sure there is a friendly educational environment.

- The Taliban should be urged to lift the restriction on females attending education. Because it gives women and girls the opportunity to pursue education and make contributions to

society, this measure is essential for achieving gender equality and guaranteeing that everyone has access to high-quality education.

- The ban on women working should be reevaluated, especially for teachers and government personnel. This move could result in a more equitable and productive educational system by giving women greater financial power and enhancing the experiences and perspectives of the teaching staff.
- All forms of physical punishment should be outlawed in schools. The establishment of a safe and nurturing learning environment is crucial for raising student achievement and wellbeing because it fosters a courteous and upbeat learning environment.
- Look for strategies to bring down the price of schooling. By guaranteeing that all students have equal access to educational materials, financial aid for textbooks and uniforms can help break down obstacles to education, particularly for disadvantaged communities.
- Consider curricular changes that support tolerance, diversity, and treating everyone with respect. To create a culture that celebrates diversity and advocates for equal opportunities for all people, it is imperative that education does not encourage bigotry or impede inclusivity.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the results of this research shed light on the complex relationships that exist in Afghanistan between social justice and educational programs. A thorough examination of past and present educational policy allows for the formulation of various important conclusions.

First, the historical analysis shows that educational policies like the Afghanistan Educational Strategic Plan (AESP) and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), which were implemented prior to the Taliban's takeover, significantly improved educational opportunities, and decreased gender enrollment disparities. There has been progress in attaining gender parity in education as seen by the significant rise in primary school enrollment that resulted from the implementation of these measures, particularly for girls.

Secondly, the current effects of Afghanistan's education policies, particularly in the context of the Taliban's return, highlight the challenges and opportunities facing the education system. Despite efforts to improve access to education, regional disparities persist, particularly in the Southern region. Additionally, while there have been improvements in teacher quality and infrastructure, there is still a need for further investment and reforms to ensure equitable access to quality education for all.

The necessity of continuity and adaptation in education policy is further shown by the comparative study of historical and contemporary education policies. Education in Afghanistan can only be used as a vehicle to advance social justice and equity if new difficulties are addressed, and continual efforts are made to guarantee that earlier policies have set the groundwork for growth.

Overall, this study highlights how important education policies are in determining Afghanistan's social justice and equity. Lawmakers may design a more inclusive and equitable education system that benefits all Afghan residents by having a thorough understanding of the effects of both previous and present policies.

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Appendix

Interview question

1. What is your occupation and social position?
2. How would you describe the current state of schools and universities in your area since the Taliban's return in 2021?
3. How have recent government changes affected access to education for boys and girls?
4. Have you noticed differences in education provision for different groups under the Taliban?
5. What challenges do students face in accessing quality education since the Taliban's takeover?
6. How has the curriculum in schools and university changed since the Taliban's return in 2021?
7. Have there been any changes in teaching methods in education setting under the Taliban's rule?
8. In your experience, how have teacher qualifications and training been impacted by recent policy changes?
9. How have recent policy changes impacted the presence of discrimination in education?
10. Have you seen or experienced any situations in schools that demonstrate how educational policy affect equity and social justice?
11. In your opinion, what recommendations would you suggest improving social justice and equity in education based on your observations and experiences?

Profiles of my participants

I appreciate and consider the requests of some of my participants who asked me not to share their name or any other personal information.

1. 35 years old, female, university teacher before the Taliban's return, graduated from the Economics Faculty.
2. 35-year-old female, university teacher before the Taliban's return, graduated from the Education Department, lives in Mazar-e-Sharif.
3. 37-year-old male, currently a teacher at a private university in Kabul, graduated with a master's degree in Law and Policy from Iran.
4. 35-year-old male, university teacher in Herat, Bachelor's degree in Computer Science.
5. 35-year-old male, pediatrician, from Bamiyan, graduated in Medicine from Kabul University.
6. 27-year-old male, accountant, living in Herat, graduated in Accounting from Herat University.
7. 30-year-old female, works in financial management in a private organization, graduated in Economics.
8. 30-year-old female, nurse at a private hospital in Mazar-e-Sharif, graduated in Midwifery.
9. 37-year-old male, teaching mathematics as a schoolteacher in Kandahar, Bachelor's degree in science.
10. 33-year-old male, schoolteacher teaching English language, graduated in English Literature from Bamiyan university.
11. 30-year-old male, sports teacher in a school, graduated in Physical Education.
12. 30-year-old female, worked as a Dari language schoolteacher before the Taliban's return, graduated in Dari Literature.
13. 32-year-old female, physics teacher in a school, living in Kabul, graduated in science.
14. 35 – year -old female, worked as history schoolteacher before the Taliban's return.
15. 20-year-old male student in grade 12 at school
16. 21-year-old male student in grade 12 at school
17. 29-year-old male student in Economic Faculty in Kabul university.
18. 20-year-old female student in grade 12 at school in Mazer-e- sharif.
19. 22-year-old female student in grade 12 at school
20. 27-year-old female student in Low faculty

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Abstract

Afghanistan, a nation facing difficult political and social issues, has long worked to establish social justice in its educational system. The present study undertakes a comprehensive examination of Afghanistan's educational policies with the aim of evaluating their past and present effects on educational fairness and social justice. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data analysis, in order to offer an in-depth understanding of the various aspects included.

The findings demonstrated that improved access to education was provided by the educational policies in place prior to the rise of the Taliban. The percentage of students enrolled in school and universities had gone up. It also showed that more women were engaging in fields of study that had historically been dominated by men. More public and private colleges and universities were also founded. The findings also showed that advancements in fields such as technology were made before the Taliban era, for example adding subjects like computer science in the curriculum. However, with the arrival of the Taliban, all progress was lost. New policies were implemented, leading to a decline in the development of education in Afghanistan. These policies included the prohibition of women in society and in education, increasing prejudices and discrimination, hiring unqualified teachers, and changing the curriculum.

The study draws attention to the significant difference between the improvements in education that occurred prior to the Taliban era and the failures that occurred during their leadership. According to the findings, social justice and equality in Afghanistan's educational system can only be promoted by inclusive and equitable educational policies.

Key words: *Social justice, education policy, women, Afghanistan, equity, access to education, gender equality.*

List of Abbreviations

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
AMDG	Afghan Millennium Development Goals
ANDS	Afghanistan's National Development Strategy
ANESP	Afghanistan's National Education Strategic Plan
DRA	Democratic Republic of Afghanistan
EFA	Education for All
EL	Education law
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict-Affected States
GO	Government Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INEE	Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISIS-K	Islamic State Khorasan Province
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MOE	Ministry of Education
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PDPA	People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan
RAWA	Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
TTC	Teacher Training Colleges
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO-IIEP	UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WHO	World Health Organization

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