

History of education in afghanistan



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Early Modernism to Present Day Policies

This chapter presents a chronological narrative about the evolution and changes in Afghan national education goals and outcomes and issues related to teacher education in a cultural/historical context. Traditional views regarding education goals and practice provide the basic foundation for understanding the progress and challenges toward universal education in the nation.

The historical information in this chapter is well documented in numerous sources, as well as having been part of the author's own education as a child and adolescent in Kabul schools. Important references from which reliable objective information was drawn include the Ministry of Education (1968) report on the last fifty years of education, as well as other books, reports, and documents (Dupree, L., 1973; Poullada, 1973; Rashid, 2008; Rotberg, 2007; Rubin, 2002; Sadat, 2004; Samady, 2001 and 2013; Sarvi, 2003; Tomsen, 2011). These sources were consistent in their reporting of events related to education progress or decline. Their general agreement on facts enabled me as author to weave together this history without always attributing the information to a specific source. Other, less central, historical sources are included as citations where appropriate.

Although not an Arabic nation, Afghanistan does share the religion of Islam with Arab Muslim nations, as well as the Arabic script essential to reading the Holy Quran. Dari and Pashto, the two main languages of Afghanistan, are derivatives of Indo-European (Indo-Aryan), not Semitic (Arabic/Hebrew) languages. Afghanistan is part of the historical stream of Islamic culture

embracing the centuries of advancement of knowledge in science, mathematics, philosophy, poetry and literature during the historical era when Europe was locked in what historians now refer to as the Dark Ages. The writings of Plato, Aristotle, and other Greek thinkers were preserved and expanded by Islamic scholars who made original contributions in scientific and literary fields. Afghanistan, before modern national boundaries were outlined, was the birthplace or home of numerous scholars of renown such as Avicenna and Al-Biruni, as well as the poet, Rumi, whose works are revered even today.

This information is offered as a prelude to provide a better understanding of the pride of Afghanistan in its educational and cultural roots, and the determination to restore or reconstruct the educational legacy and intellectual vitality of its people. The study presented in this dissertation explores the responses to present day crises and chaos in a war-ravaged country as it faces the challenges to create a new national system of education that both respects the past and wants to be respected in the global society. Afghanistan now attempts to overcome the overwhelming gap between what is left after massive destruction and what needs to be done to catch up with the rest of the modern world.

Before the Modern Era

Traditional education and apprenticeships for Afghan children and youth in previous centuries was centered on the home and the mosque. When and where madrassas (religious schools) became available, they were also accessible to boys. Signs of modern education did not appear in Afghanistan until the early 1900s, around 1903, under the reign of Amir Habibullah who

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founded the first secondary school, Habibia Lycee. This school was modeled after the Indian high school program which itself was adopted from the British who copied it from the French. Habibullah took steps to increase literacy through increases in print media, newspapers, journals, and the support of libraries. Some students from Habibia were sent abroad for study, especially to British India. Habibia high school gained a reputation over the years for its role in providing a large number of leaders for the nation. However, the pace of educational change and modernization was slow.

Steps Toward Modernization

A method for teaching literacy was developed in 1906 including new textbooks and a teacher's guide. This led to the creation of the Office of Textbooks in 1907 in order to provide uniform school textbooks for the increasing number of schools.

It became clear that a standard curriculum, with new textbooks, required trained teachers knowledgeable in the text material; therefore, the first teacher training institute, Dar-al-Malimin, was established in Kabul in 1912. In the following year a Department of Education was established to attend to the issues of promoting primary education. Amir Habibullah appointed his son as department head. Education, free school supplies, and a small stipend were available to the male students selected to attend. In 1912, the first normal school was established in Kabul to train teachers for primary schools (Ministry of Education, 1968, p. 6).

In 1919, Shah Amanullah became the ruler by succession, and actively supported the movement toward widespread national education. He

elevated the Department of Education to the Ministry of Education and appointed his son, Prince Abdur Rahman, as the country's first Minister of Education.

Mahmud Tarzi, a reformist educated statesman and the father-in-law of Shah Amanullah, held an influential position in the Amani (Amanullah) government pushing especially for education reform and for the empowerment of women. Tarzi's daughter, Queen Soraya, in 1921 with her mother, Rasmiya, founded the first high school for girls, Masturat. Rasmiya was appointed as the first principal. Between 1921 - 1928, more than 800 females were enrolled. In 1928, the first co-education classes were introduced at Amaniyya Lycee for grades one and two.

Under Tarzi's leadership other primary schools were established in major towns, villages, and cities. In addition to schools in each province there were also schools for the country's nomads, the Kuchis. Several new high schools (Lycee) were founded between 1922 and 1930, some teaching foreign languages such as German or English as an attempt to provide an education comparable to that of Europe and other advanced nations. Two vocational schools were opened in 1924, one for business and administration and another for fine and applied arts. The goal was to have a national system of schools with a modern curriculum. The beginning of a network of government-run intermediate and secondary schools was achieved in 1928; as many as 40, 000 students were enrolled.

However, since higher education was missing in Afghanistan the government began to allow top male students (sons from elite families) to study outside

of the country, for example, in India, Germany, France, Egypt, and Turkey. Ten girls were allowed to go to Turkey in 1928 for university study, but this practice was soon aborted requiring the girls to return home as a conservative backlash grew strong.

Unfortunately, conservative sectors in society believed that government schooling was unreligious and if children attended those schools, they became infidels. Conservative traditional sectors opposed changes in the education system they viewed as western, modern, urban, and against Islam. The opposition included clergy, tribal leaders, some rural ethnic groups, and government opposition groups.

The unpopularity of Amanullah became so strong, threatening civil upheaval, that in early 1929 he abdicated and sought refuge in Italy. Taking his place as ruler for only nine months was the militia commander, Habibullah Kalakani, who reversed the educational reforms made under Amanullah. Among the first steps taken by the new Kalakani monarchy were the closure of female schools and the disbanding of the Women's Association of Kabul. The *Irshad-e Naswan*, the only newspaper published for women, also was banned. The government recalled the female Afghan students from Turkey and required them to put on the veil.

The government replaced the language of instruction, Dari, with only Pashtu in an attempt to bolster the state's claim to Pashtunistan, Pakistan's Northwestern Frontier Province.

Education returned to traditional practices. Social and economic measures, including education policy, aimed at sustaining a traditional agricultural

society. The majority of rural communities had no schools and continued the education of their children, in the traditional way, at home and in the mosques.

All government schools were closed briefly during this period in 1929; however, schools were re-opened in late 1929 when Nadir Shah became king after capturing and executing Kalakani. Although he at one time had been Minister of Education, education under Nadir Shah was not a central priority. However, one progressive step was taken in 1931 when women were allowed to take health classes at the Masturat Hospital in Kabul. Nadir Shah did support the establishment of Kabul University in 1931 despite the persistence of the anti-modern conservative resistance. In addition, in 1932, the faculty of medicine was founded.

Nadir Shah was assassinated at a high school graduation ceremony in 1933 (Dupree. L., 1973. p. 174). His nineteen year-old son, Prince Zahir, was immediately crowned king, but for many years a proxy rule by older male relatives characterized his leadership. Zahir Shah was king for four decades, from 1933 to 1973, during a period that was relatively free of civil unrest. Some favorable trends started to emerge in the late 1940s. Advances were made in education, the economy, and civil society especially in urban areas during much of his reign, although the conservative Islamic anti-modern element remained strong even as the Communist influence became a dominant disruptive factor. In 1964, a Constitution was created enabling greater citizen participation under a Constitutional monarchy.

Higher education introduced in the 1940s included embryonic universities in major cities, most notably Kabul University supported by the United States, and the Polytechnic University founded by the Soviet Union for vocational/technical advanced training. Faculties were established in law (1938), science (1942), and letters (1944). In 1947, Kabul University was formally established. Three years later, the departments of theology, agriculture, and economics were founded. Some departments were affiliated with foreign universities in Germany, France, America, and the Soviet Union. University admission gave priority to sons of the ruling aristocracy or sons of top bureaucrats (Sadat. 2004).

In 1946, a Women's Institute was started in Kabul to provide classes for a few privileged girls and women. A year later, two girls' high schools were created and in 1947, a women's faculty of education was established. Further steps were taken when, in 1949, the first group of girls having the equivalent of a high school diploma began to teach in girls' schools.

By 1950 there were 368 primary, secondary and vocational schools, and one teacher training school with a national total of 95, 300 students. The enrollment of children in primary education was 6% of the entire age group, 6 through 12 years, in an estimated population of 11 million people. (Samady 2001),

In the 1950s efforts to expand education and improve its quality were initiated. In 1949, the Afghan government asked UNESCO to send a Mission to study its educational system. In 1954, USAID and Columbia University Teacher's College focused efforts on the qualitative improvement of teacher

education in Afghanistan. In 1955, the Institute of Education was created and later integrated into Kabul University.

According to Wilbur (1962), in 1960 there were 175, 600 pupils in 1, 110 primary schools of whom 19, 000 were girls. Among the 11, 300 students enrolled in grades seven to nine, 2, 500 (22%) were girls. Approximately 193, 000 Afghan students were enrolled in schools in Afghanistan and abroad, a figure double that of a decade earlier in 1950. Nepotism, favoritism, and corruption were common complaints regarding the awarding of foreign scholarships (Wilbur, 1962, pp. 85-87).

Soviet Assistance and Intervention

By the early 1970s, about 90% of the Afghan armed forces were being trained by the Soviets. Thousands were trained in the Soviet Union as well as more thousands in Afghanistan. Russia also sent arms and military experts to Afghanistan. Afghan university graduates received fellowships for advanced study in the USSR and Warsaw Pact nations. From this aid and experience a growing elite of Afghans emerged with modern ideas as well as social and political sympathies in harmony with Communism. Slowly but surely the Sovietization of Afghanistan was occurring. Prime Minister Daoud enthusiastically encouraged Soviet engagement in Afghanistan, earning himself the nickname “ the Red Prince”.

At the time of Prime Minister Daoud’s reign in the 1970s, three boarding high schools were introduced in Kabul: Ibn Sina (later becoming Lycee), Khushal Khan Khattak Lycee, and Rahman Baba Lycee. Ibn Sina served as a teacher’s training institution equipping male rural students to return to their villages to

become teachers. Khushal Khan Khattak Lycee and Rahman Baba Lycee enrolled students from the tribal areas as part of the attempt to integrate various tribes into the government.

In the late 1970s Afghanistan had a functioning education system comprising over a million students including 20% girls in primary, secondary and higher education. Government expenditures on education came to constitute 40% of the national budget.

In 1977, the education infrastructure could not support the educational demands. By 1978, there were more than one million students in primary and secondary schools and other educational institutions in Afghanistan. Of there, there were 152, 750 girls (about 14%) and 5, 070 female teachers in primary schools. In an attempt to reduce pressure on both the education system and the labor market, the government instituted the, Kankurexam (from the French word *concours*), the university entry test at the end of the 12th grade. The main purpose of the Kankur was to select potentially successful university students from the rest of the student population. This test became a controversial but established screening mechanism for reducing pressure on the overstrained university system. (Other spellings will be found for this exam including Concord, Konkor.)

In 1978, the constitutional monarchy was abolished by a palace coup d'état declaring former Prime Minister Mohammed Daoud as the country's President of the first republican government. The Soviets immediately recognized the new government. Not only was the new constitution of the government styled after that of the Soviet Union but also changes in

academia began to resemble the Soviet approach to education including introducing co-education, especially at the university level, but also in the lower schools.

However, in April 1978, President Muhammad Daoud was overthrown in what is referred to as the Saur Revolution. Nur Muhammad Taraki, head of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) replaced Daoud as President. Taraki instituted even broader Marxist style reforms including a rural literacy campaign expanding educational opportunity to masses of uneducated farmers and women. He was not intimidated by the internal conflict between groups supporting traditional systems against the modernization movement. Taraki continued to offend those determined to maintain traditional customs. He pushed forward drastic social and economic measures, including land reform, women's rights and modern education. These ideological conflicts led within the year (in 1979) to his loss of power.

Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin ousted him as president. Amin took firm steps to quell any opposition such as imprisoning and executing individuals and groups who were viewed as unsupportive. He did not hesitate to go after his own party members such as former President Taraki or his sympathizers. Opposition, however, and dissatisfaction were broiling up throughout the nation making the Soviets uneasy about the stability of the rapidly changing government.

In December 1979 Soviet tanks rolled into Afghanistan. In 1980, President Amin was removed and Babrak Karmal, former 1960s parliamentarian, became the country's fourth president.

The educational system, over several decades, became increasingly influenced and funded by the USSR. After the Soviet invasion of 1979 this trend increased dramatically. Literacy courses and programs educating about health and technology were expanded throughout the country. Part of the reforms included the creation of a pedagogical research center. In 1981, the Central Institute for the Retraining of Teachers was established. In 1982, the Kabul Pedagogical Institute was founded. Further academic exchanges were established with Eastern Bloc countries. American and Western exchanges stopped.

Amin's presidency lasted six years. In 1986, Dr. Muhammad Najibullah, former head of the Afghan intelligence agency (the secret police), became the country's fifth president. President Najibullah, a graduate of the school of medicine at Kabul University realizing the need for more higher education throughout the country, opened three new universities; Balkh (1986), Herat (1988), and Kandahar (1991). However, Najibullah, seen to be brutal and ruthless, alienated many Afghan groups including his own army, but in particular the Islamic conservative groups that became united as the party of the Taliban. Najibullah was forced out of office in 1992, taking refuge for four years in the UN compound. His own brutal execution at the hands of the Taliban in 1996 precipitated the Civil War that eventually led to the empowerment of the Taliban.

Impact of Soviet Defeat, the Civil War and the Demise of Modern Education

Before the civil war in the 1990s, the Afghan higher education system was largely intact and thriving. UNESCO estimated university enrollment in 1990 at more than 24, 000, with women making up one third of the student body.

Much of the destruction of Kabul in 1992-1994 was in the area around Kabul University; classes were seriously disrupted as virtually all faculties fled Kabul or were killed. During Taliban rule (1995-2001), the provision of higher education was limited to men only, mainly at what remained of Kabul University, and concentrated on Islamic studies.

In April 1992 the Afghan government transferred power to the Islamic Jihad Council (IJC) which was designated by the Peshawar Accords. Within days the various factions collided and Kabul was engulfed in civil warfare cascading throughout the country. To make matters worse, schools and universities, specifically Kabul University, became the stages for warfare and pillage.

This had an immense impact on education. With no uniform curriculum, religious education was given priority over all other subjects. Equal education opportunities of boys and girls were ignored while religious schools for boys were encouraged. Due to fighting and the security situation the universities and schools were frequently closed. There was damage to buildings and insecurity, which affected school attendance as teachers, administrators, and students became displaced. Even laboratories, furniture, and the electric wiring from inside the walls of its classrooms were stolen.

The rival factions targeted the libraries and thousands of volumes were either looted or burned; rare titles were smuggled and sold off for high prices in the antiquarian book markets outside the country. In an article entitled *Raping the Libraries of Kabul* details of how the various factions burnt or sold millions of hand written books on religion, history, poetry, and

autobiographies of great scholars. From that million-volume collection only 20, 000 books survived. (Hussain, 1998).

By 1995, the Taliban defeated other fighting groups in the Civil War, and took over the government with pledges of peace and order. However, they introduced strict social policies based on their interpretation of proper practices in Islam. The Taliban completely closed down most government schools, especially those for girls. Only religious studies in religious schools (madrassas) were allowed for boys. Still, many Afghans educated their children, including their girls, illegally and secretly at home using pieces of the modern, already discarded, curriculum.

In 1999 the enrolment in primary education was 811, 500 with only 7% girls. The enrolments in secondary and higher education were limited and the universities were often closed and did not function effectively. Thousands of teachers and education administrators became victims of war, underwent intellectual apartheid, or left Afghanistan during the Soviet occupation, the Civil War, and especially after the Taliban came to power.

The 9/11 Call to Action:

The Chase for bin Laden, Defeat of the Taliban, and Western Occupation

Then on 9/11/01 Osama bin Laden and his followers known as Al Qaeda planned and carried out a major attack on the United States. Bin Laden was a member of the Saudi ruling family. He had become radicalized against the West, particularly against the United State. He and his armed men used remote areas in Afghanistan (and Pakistan) for hide-away bases. The destruction of 9/11 resulted from carefully planned attacks using commercial

airlines as suicide bombers, destroying both of the Twin Towers in New York City as well as a simultaneous attack on the Pentagon in Washington, D. C. A third part of the plan involved the use of another airliner for a third target in the Capitol, probably the White House, but the plane crashed as a result of passenger intervention. These attacks resulted in the deaths of more than 5,000 Americans in one brief morning.

By October, 2001 the government of the United States retaliated, seeking revenge on bin Laden. Other sympathetic nations joined to make an allied force that stormed Afghanistan, taking the country from Taliban control. After the defeat of the Taliban in 2001 many Afghans who had fled as refugees during the years of conflict, returned to Afghanistan to help rebuild their country.

As the school year started in March 2002, the capacity to supply education had been decimated in both quantity and quality. The situation of the country was described in this way by a joint report of international organizations:

The Afghan education system has been undermined by 23 years of war, by widespread physical destruction, by restructuring under a communist regime, and by its use as a political and religious pawn by succeeding governments. The concept of secular education has been under constant attack for decades-first as a source of foreign ideas that led to the communist takeover and then by the Taliban who banned education for girls entirely, and promoted and expanded the system of religious schools at the expense of secular schools (AIA, 2002).

The results of the US response, with international support especially from western governments, led to the defeat and withdrawal of the Taliban and the institution of a new western supported (and many believe controlled) interim government. A national Shura (representative convention) was held, a new Constitution for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was written, elections were scheduled, and commitments made for a decade of international funding and support in rebuilding the nation as a democratic, modern, technologically equipped participant in the global community.

The challenges were overwhelming including rebuilding the entire governmental infrastructure, rebuilding roadways and creating new lines of transportation and communication, restoring and upgrading electrical power as well as water and sanitation systems, rebuilding or removing destroyed structures, establishing a banking system, and modernizing commerce including all types of products imported for human survival and comfort.

The biggest challenge was that of re-building the totally destroyed education system from the bottom up and from the top down. The education system reformed by the Soviets to include the masses had never been fully operational. Educational opportunity was left largely to those who had access to urban areas where even girls were allowed to attend schools at the university in Kabul where co-educational classes had been the Soviet policy. However, by the end of the Civil War and certainly by the end of the Taliban rule, the universities had been destroyed and were barely functional when offering classes at all. As described earlier, faculty had fled or were dead, buildings were gutted and marauded. Campuses were denuded either by soldiers trying to eliminate hiding places for opposition forces, or by civilians <https://assignbuster.com/history-of-education-in-afghanistan/>

seeking firewood. Furniture was stolen and broken up to use for home heating; equipment was looted; even the electrical wiring was stripped from buildings still standing and taken for sale in the black market. Libraries and laboratories were ghostly artifacts attesting to the destruction of symbols of learning.

As the attempt to re-open universities began in 2002, the flow of citizens from the country began to reverse with many Afghans returning from refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran or from other countries in which they were exiled including the United States, Canada, Iran, Great Britain, Germany and other countries. Some of these returning were able to take positions of leadership in the new government headed by President Karzai in a democratic election, and some were capable of restoring the universities and the schools. Stories from students who began to study again at Kabul University tell of walking across human bones on the tall grasses of the university campus that had earlier been a site of warring groups.

The next chapter, relating the efforts to rebuild a nation, provides the heart of the dissertation describing the responses to the enormous challenges to the recruitment, preparation, education, deployment of teachers in post-conflict education in Afghanistan. The specific initiatives, policies, programs and problems in building a national corps of professional teachers for Afghanistan in the face of enormous limitations of human capacity, financial resources, cultural and social value differences, are expanded upon in the following dissertation chapters.

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