

## Analyzing the evolution of higher education in Afghanistan

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### ABSTRACT

The analysis of higher education is considered as an important historical research and it has been discussed in most countries, but in Afghanistan, it seems that higher education has been less analyzed. Therefore, this research was conducted to analyze the evolution of higher education in Afghanistan. The study used a qualitative research method with a historical lens. The researcher tried to use documents related to historical periods, available resolutions, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with key experts in the field of higher education using a "targeted approach" based on the pattern of qualitative interviews and theoretical saturation, with 14 people and show the evolution of higher education with an analytical perspective. The results of the findings show the evolution of Afghanistan's higher education in five periods of pragmatism, Isolation and exclusivity, stagnation, and transformation. The fifth period, which is the ritualization of universities based on Islamic teachings, begins after 2021. Higher education has had different orientations since 1932-2021. The common feature of these orientations in most periods has been ideological orientations.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Higher education, Historical periods, Orientations.

## Introduction

Higher education is considered as the highest and last stage of the educational system, or in other words, the top of the education pyramid in every country (Alfonso, 2018). In Afghanistan, not only the history of the evolution of education has not been researched, but higher education as a supplementary education period has been given the attention of experts and researchers as much as public education, it has not been the subject of theorizing and scientific research. This situation can be clearly proven with a brief look at the scientific and research resources available in the field of higher education and interviews with key informants and experts. This is in the situation that Afghanistan's higher education system has been engaged in policymaking in various educational sectors, including scientific programs, without relying on the necessary scientific support, but according to its main and inevitable duties. Therefore, the evolution of the higher education system has not been scientifically researched in any period, while in other countries; the history of higher education is a part of research in graduate education. However, what is important in the current research is to pay attention to the naming and precise division of historical periods and the orientations of higher education in these periods, which can be identified based on documents, views and opinions of key informants in the field of higher education.

However, the problem of the current research is raised with the question of what was the evolution of higher education in Afghanistan and what was the role of political systems in its evolution?

### Research questions:

- What are the most important historical periods of higher education in Afghanistan?
- What were the influential events in each of the historical periods of higher education in Afghanistan?
- What are the orientations governing each of the transformation periods of higher education in Afghanistan?

## Methodology

The purpose of the research is to study the evolution of Afghanistan's higher education. The study used a qualitative research method with a historical lens. By using the available sources and documents and interviewing key informants, the researcher tried to show the periods of developments in Afghanistan's higher education with an analytical perspective. To collect information from all documents, sources, resolutions and documents of higher education, the information of academic staff members and experts were used as key informants and elites. The sources of information to identify the historical periods of higher education in Afghanistan are: 1- Examining documents and approvals related to the courses of history of higher education; 2- Examining the classifications made by researchers from the historical periods of higher education; 3- The opinions of key informants were higher education. The key elites were selected by the research team with a targeted approach. From the in-depth interview method, based on the pattern of qualitative interviews and following its standards and using the "theoretical saturation criterion", 14 people were interviewed as a sample in a period of 35-50 minutes. Then the collected data was analyzed through qualitative content analysis.

## Findings

The findings of this research show that Afghanistan's higher education has experienced the following four periods from 1932-2021, and the fifth period will begin after 2021:

- 1- The period of pragmatism (1932-1978);
- 2- The period of isolation and monopoly (1978-1992);
- 3- The period of Stagnancy (1992-2001);
- 4- The period Transformation (2001-2021);
- 5- The period of ritualization of universities (2021- onwards)

However, modern higher education in Afghanistan started with the establishment of the Medicine Faculty in 1932 (Samady, 2001). and developed from 1961 to 1978. Although after the Soviet invasion in 1979, major changes appeared in higher education (Wolayat & Glass, 2021). But in 1980, compared to neighboring countries, the development of higher education was lower. On the one hand, there were many challenges in the development of modern higher education, and on the other hand, its structure was limited (Samady, 2001).

After the overthrow of the Soviet-backed regime by the Mujahideen, higher education entered a period of turmoil. During the Islamic government of the Mujahideen and the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban in the first period (1992-2001), more attention was paid to Islamic education instead of the modern higher education system. During this period, due to the civil wars, the ruling systems did not have any kind of solution on the salaries of professors and the development of higher education. Most of the academic staff and professors left the country. The higher education system and infrastructure were severely damaged (Wolayat & Glass, 2021). But with the beginning of the 20th century, there was hope for the revival of higher education. During the Republic regime period (2001-2021), higher education was transformed in terms of quantity with the cooperation of the international community (Elite No. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8 and 9). It experienced explosive growth with the establishment of 150 public and private higher education institutions. And nearly seven times the number of students increased from 58,769 to 365,982 (Ibrahimi, 2014). But, higher education institutions had little administrative autonomy during these periods, and their administrative affairs were subject to rigid rules and strict regulations enforced by the Ministry of Higher Education. Even the universities did not have a role in the selection of students and their ability, and they were introduced by the National Examinations Department. In terms of financial resources, higher education institutions are dependent on the central government and this type of funding has not been effective. Because the mechanism of allocating financial resources to institutions ignores efficiency incentives and increases uncertainty about the future. At the same time, political decisions in the appointment of executive employees have a negative impact on the governance and management of middle and low level employees (Shakir, 2012).

## Conclusion

In the discussion of the history of Afghanistan's higher education; it can be said that Afghanistan's higher education system has experienced four historical periods and the fifth period is ongoing. In these periods, higher education has had different orientations. The common point of the orientations of higher education, which is often mentioned in all periods, is the ideological orientation of the ruling political systems. According of opinion (Elite No. 9): "During the period of pragmatism (1932-1978), the orientations were towards the training of expert personnel to meet the needs of the society and the bureaucratic and bureaucratic system". And its basis relied on the cooperation of foreign countries and their experiences and curriculum content were used (Elite No. 1, 3, and 9). During the period of isolation and monopoly (1978-1992), especially during the Soviet occupation, it was intended to cultivate a committed force for a democratic society and loyal to the communist system, and short-term training courses were designed and implemented. In the opinion of the (Elite No 2, 8 and 9): "In this period, higher education was influenced by the ideology of communism". The third period, which covers 10 years, was the period of stagnation for higher education (Elite No. 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9), during the period of stagnation (1992-2001), the orientation of the curriculum towards Islamic ideology in the regions under the rule the Islamic government and the Islamic Emirate of the Taliban (first round) have been on the agenda. According to (Elite No. 1, 2, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 14): The fourth period can be defined as a period of transformation. Education has been in accordance with national and international requirements.

In the discussion of characteristics, Afghanistan's higher education during the period of pragmatism was managed by internal staff and foreign experts with respect to academic freedom and had international prestige (Elite No. 1, 3, 6, and 8). During the period of isolation and monopoly, higher education policies were made by a limited number of faculty members loyal to the system and without the participation of academics under the supervision of Russian advisers, which reduced the cooperation of Western countries with higher education (Elite No. 1, 2, and 9). During the Stagnancy, higher education was not organized and did not make any progress. (Elite No 1, 2 and 9). In the fourth period, which is known as the Republic Regime period, higher education changed. During this period, higher education benefited from the support of the international community and developed using the existing domestic and foreign capacities. New fields of study were created. Curricula with global standards were revised (Elite No 2).

The results of the research show that Afghanistan's higher education has operated with a centralized approach since its establishment and has experienced four periods of pragmatism, isolation and monopoly, stagnation and transformation, and is at the beginning of the fifth period. Higher education has had different orientations in these periods. Higher education has had different orientations in these courses. The experience gained from the higher education periods before and after the civil wars is the transition from the relatively national and independent higher education system in the period of pragmatism to the

ideological and centralized system in the period of isolation and monopoly. After a ten-year period of stagnation, it is a period of transformation towards asking opinions and making universities and faculty participates in higher education policy-making.

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