

State of the Afghanistan Universities' Curriculum

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Abstract: Afghanistan's university education system is dysfunctional, with a literacy rate of 43%. Therefore, this study examined the Afghan university curriculum in an attempt to identify ways to improve the system. University curriculum reform has taken several forms. Using a randomized sampling method, this study surveyed 175 academics from public institutions in Afghanistan (100 men and 75 women). The conclusions of this study are as follows: First, the university curriculum is outdated and does not meet international standards. Despite being enthusiastic about their careers, most academics reported that their workplaces were unsupportive. The academics further mentioned that most schools lacked appropriate teaching materials and that the curriculum did not adequately embrace new technology. Teachers also claimed that they were not involved in the development of university curricula, which made it difficult for them to apply and adhere to the curricula's criteria. The government and the Ministry of Education must invest fully in the university curriculum by providing modern facilities to address these problems. Moreover, they should promote the use of innovative technology. These ideas can help improve the current university curriculum to meet global standards.

Keywords: University, Curriculum, Afghanistan, Teaching, Innovative technology

1. Introduction

Afghanistan has a relatively poor economy, ranked 96th globally. Its university curriculum has long been in turmoil, although efforts have been made to improve it (Zakirova & Ahmad, 2019). Afghanistan's university curriculum includes students in bachelor's, master's, and PhD programs and is managed by the Ministry of Higher Education (Nuffic, 2016). Nevertheless, it is dysfunctional, and the country has a literacy rate of approximately 43%. Thus, this study focused on the university curriculum in Afghanistan to explore the efficacy of the degrees and school reforms that have been implemented.

Afghanistan's higher education sector consists of all educational institutions. The country had 31 universities in 2012, including 19 universities

and 12 colleges of higher learning (Adkins, 2016). Since 2001, the education field has expanded tremendously, and according to the World Bank, the number of private universities increased from 68 in 2012 to 100 in 2014 (Nuffic, 2016). The World Bank also mandates that private sector higher education colleges specialize in marketing, information and communication technology (ICT), management, finance, and medicine.

According to the Afghan University curriculum, first-year students study “general education.” Subsequently, the students select a particular major. The study duration varies depending on the chosen course. Bachelor’s degrees in veterinary medicine, medicine, pharmacy, and engineering usually take up to five years, while a bachelor’s degree in the sciences and arts take about four years to complete (Baharustani, 2012). Upon completing a bachelor’s degree, students can advance to a master’s degree.

The country has a limited number of master’s programs, and most of those students are in the engineering and education fields. Moreover, most master’s programs are offered only at private universities, as only a few public universities provide master’s courses (Abdullah et al., 2014). Afghanistan’s universities collaborate with international institutions from Germany, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States to establish critical and relevant programs. PhD programs are scarce in Afghanistan.

Given the inefficiency of Afghanistan’s university curriculum, the country has a low number of people pursuing master’s and doctoral degrees (Shipley, 1994). The long-term implications affect the quality of education provided to undergraduate students. According to Pherali and Sahar (2018), most university students in Afghanistan have insufficient skills and knowledge, which affects their ability to compete in the global employment market. Furthermore, students’ curriculum is not well understood, necessitating the Ministry of Education (MOE) to train both instructors and students in the curriculum. Although most students are unaware of the Afghan university curriculum, research has shown that teachers are familiar with it and follow its requirements. According to Pherali and Sahar (2018), despite their dedication to the jobs, instructors feel dissatisfied with their working conditions because most universities in Afghanistan fail to provide appropriate teaching resources.

According to Deo (2014), however, students feel that the curriculum has provided them with knowledge and skills that have resulted in their personal development and the ability to solve individual and societal problems. Further, teachers claim that the curriculum enhances their professional development because the ministry organizes seminars where lecturers are prepared and equipped with the knowledge to lead their professional development and improve their teaching skills (Deo, 2014).

Nonetheless, the government should invest more in the current curriculum by ensuring that all higher education institutions have the infrastructure and resources to ensure a smooth learning process. It should also invest more in

current technology by obtaining the necessary facilities and ensuring that all institutions adhere to government regulations. In addition, the government should implement measures involving female students in institutions, as reports show that 64% of the student population is male. In comparison, female students account for approximately 36% (Deo, 2014). Furthermore, it should be the MOE's mission, in partnership with the national government, to eliminate barriers that discourage female students from pursuing or continuing their education beyond the secondary school level (Spink, 2005). Therefore, despite specific improvements in the Afghan university curriculum, much work is needed to ensure that it meets global standards. The current study's objectives and hypotheses are as follows:

1.1 Objectives of the Study Data analysis

This research aimed to understand Afghanistan's university curriculum, evaluate the efficacy of the coeducation system in Afghan universities, and assess the issues influencing Afghanistan's university curriculum.

1.2 Research Questions

How is university education in Afghanistan affected by the curriculum?

What is the perception of teachers regarding the university curriculum education in Afghanistan?

1.3 Hypotheses

The research hypothesizes that coeducation has been a successful system in Afghan universities. In addition, Afghanistan's poor literacy rate is the reason behind difficulties related to the curriculum. Lastly, the university curriculum in Afghanistan has improved compared to previous decades.

2. Literature Review

The literature ascribe numerous factors to the current problems with the university curriculum in Afghanistan. According to Deo (2014), these concerns include bureaucratic interference and a lack of involvement by the school and university teachers or lecturers. In addition, professionals in the curriculum development boards of the MOE do not appropriately use educational resources when modifying old sections of university teaching materials (Nuffic, 2016). However, should these specialists obtain competent advice, they would provide unique ideas to fulfill the objectives of curricular development in Afghanistan (Abdullah et al., 2014).

A curriculum is a tool for educational administrations to impart educational life skills while impacting their experiences regarding the education system (Nuffic, 2016). According to Nuffic, this curriculum concept is widely misinterpreted in Afghanistan's environment, resulting in learners receiving poor educational experiences at schools and universities (Nuffic, 2016). Curriculum development in Afghanistan follows a linear design. According to Dandawate and Dhanamjaya (2019), there are multiple explanations related to building effective curricula. Importantly, the curriculum is outdated and does not adequately address the current needs of Afghanistan's society. Furthermore, they outlined curriculum difficulties; the country's current generation is studying the same body of knowledge as the preceding two or possibly three generations. While students worldwide acquire complex mathematical and scientific concepts through activity-based learning, Afghan students are compelled to memorize scientific topics through cramming.

To compound matters, there are several scientific and factual errors in the instructional materials of educational institutions (Shiple, 1994). Unfortunately, specialists who produce learning materials for sciences and mathematics at the tertiary level do not adhere correctly to scientific and factual concepts (Ghazi et al., 2010). Therefore, the MOE must establish methods to ensure that the curricula are constantly updated to match global standards and increase student and graduate competitiveness (Pherali & Sahar, 2018). One prominent issue regarding the university curriculum in Afghanistan is that government officials' involvement in developing the curriculum is detrimental to the country's educational system (USAID, 2020). While the current curriculum development process is based on a uniform policy for the entire country with distinct purposes and objectives, it is impossible to apply a national educational policy uniformly to its many regions and contexts (Moughari, 2020).

There are numerous impoverished places in Afghanistan where parents lack the financial means to send their children to higher education institutes (Adkins, 2016). Therefore, the dropout rates from these universities are linked to parents' inability to finance education costs (Dandawate & Dhanamjaya, 2019). Thus, government officials must develop new educational programs for disadvantaged children to address their academic concerns, including granting loans to these students to guarantee sufficient funding for maintenance and school expenses. Additionally, the government should ensure that the country's university population is evenly distributed across the country (Gilmore, 2004).

Furthermore, the curriculum development process in Afghanistan has been hindered by insufficient academic research to develop school textbooks. Importantly, during curriculum development, boards use resources for classroom instruction. As a result, the content selected for classroom instruction during curriculum development is often inadequate (Orfan, 2022). Curriculum development should be done through the teaching materials approved by the country's educational board system. It is evident in the literature that no

appropriate research or evaluation structure is in place to change and test the curriculum (Sheikh & Loney, 2018).

The literature review also revealed that, when developing and modifying university curricula, the academic experience of teachers from diverse learning institutions is not considered. Tanner and Tanner (1979) argued that effective curriculum development does not occur without the informed engagement of academic staff. The authors further asserted that instructors actively engaged in educational transformation are more likely to accept and implement new ideas than those who are not. Furthermore, evidence reveals that nations where highly educated instructors are excluded from the curriculum planning processes, are resistant to new modifications in school teaching materials (Scott, 2012). Consequently, it may be beneficial to incorporate or involve instructors in developing university curricula in Afghanistan because their involvement indicates that they will be more capable of adapting and adhering to new adjustments, to students' benefit.

3. Methods

The quantitative research method was adopted for this research. The current study was conducted in Afghanistan and included 175 teachers from 20 public universities (100 men and 75 women). Random sampling was used to recruit participants. Twenty of the 40 public universities in Afghanistan were represented in this study. The survey took all consent matters seriously, including privacy.

A survey questionnaire was created based on this research. Researchers took time to develop questions with which participants would be comfortable and provide the most-needed information. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. Items were rated on a 5-point scale, with 1 representing disagreement and 5 representing firm agreement. The first component of the questionnaire focused on the instructors' social demographics, whereas the second focused on their teaching capabilities. The last section focused on the university curriculum, its development and implementation, and whether the participants were comfortable with such a curriculum. After screening and removing the submissions with missing data, the total number of university teachers included in the study was 167. Data were collected from August to September 2022 via the Internet, using Google Forms.

3.1 Data analysis

Data collected were analyzed through descriptive statistics to summarize the respondents' replies. Bar charts were used to visualize the data. The quantitative data was then levelled, and the answers were sorted into different groups.

4. Results and Discussion

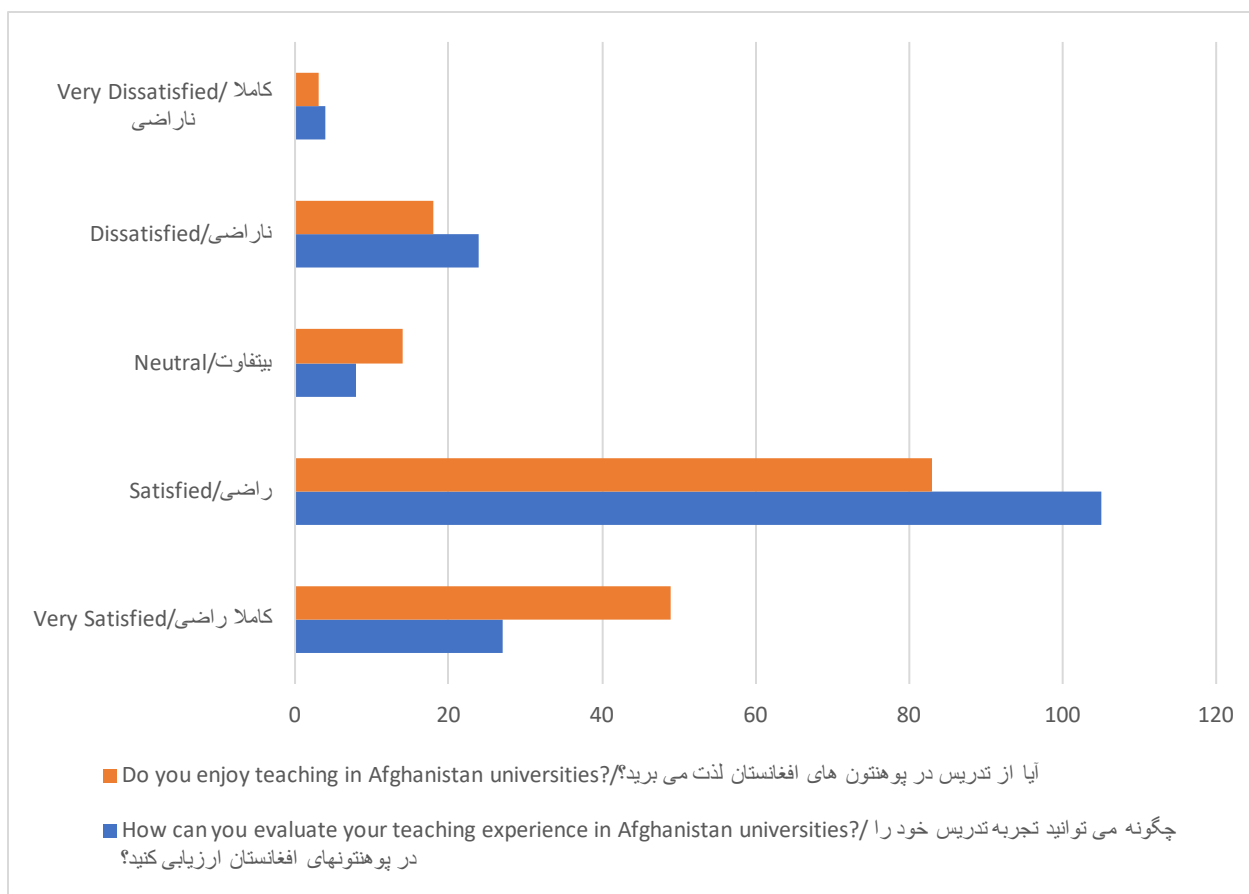


Fig. 1 Satisfaction of teachers in teaching with the curriculum

The majority of teachers in Afghanistan’s universities enjoyed teaching (Figure 1). Furthermore, it was found that they rated their teaching experience in Afghanistan as adequate since most of them selected “satisfied” regarding this question.

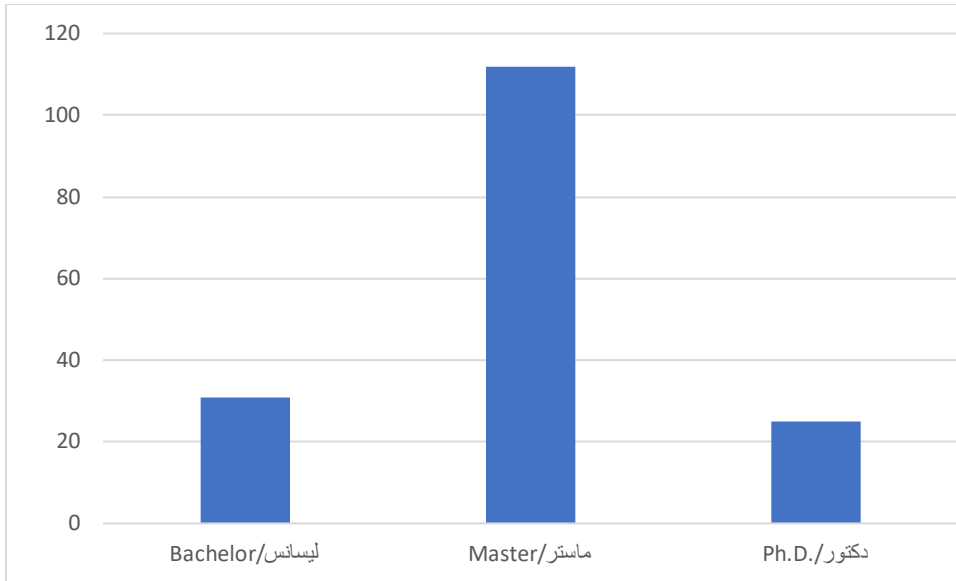


Fig. 2 Bachelors, Masters, and PhD intakes

Figure 2 indicates that master's degree courses tend to register larger intakes than bachelor's and PhD courses.

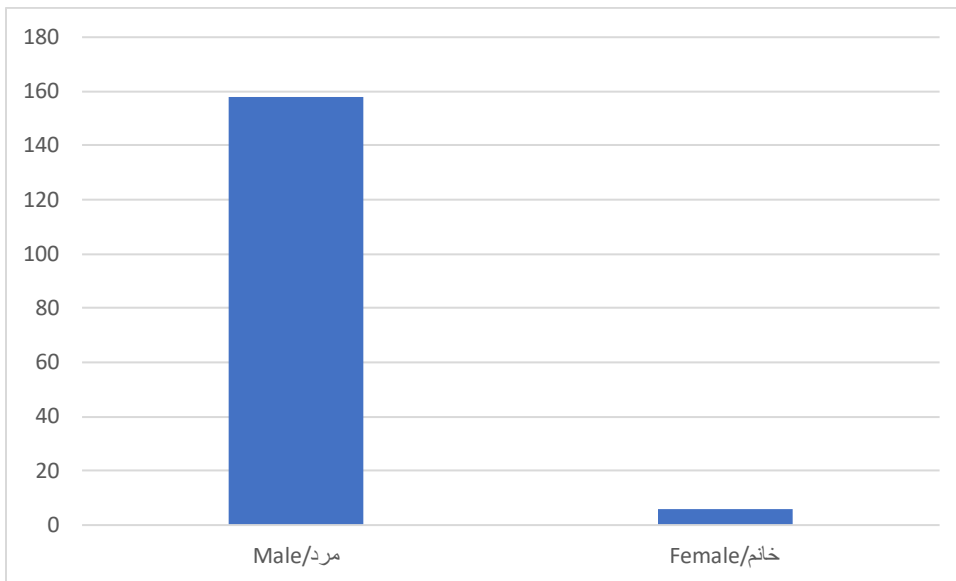


Fig. 3 Male students compared to female counterparts

Furthermore, most of the students in the universities were men ($n = 160$) (Figure 3).

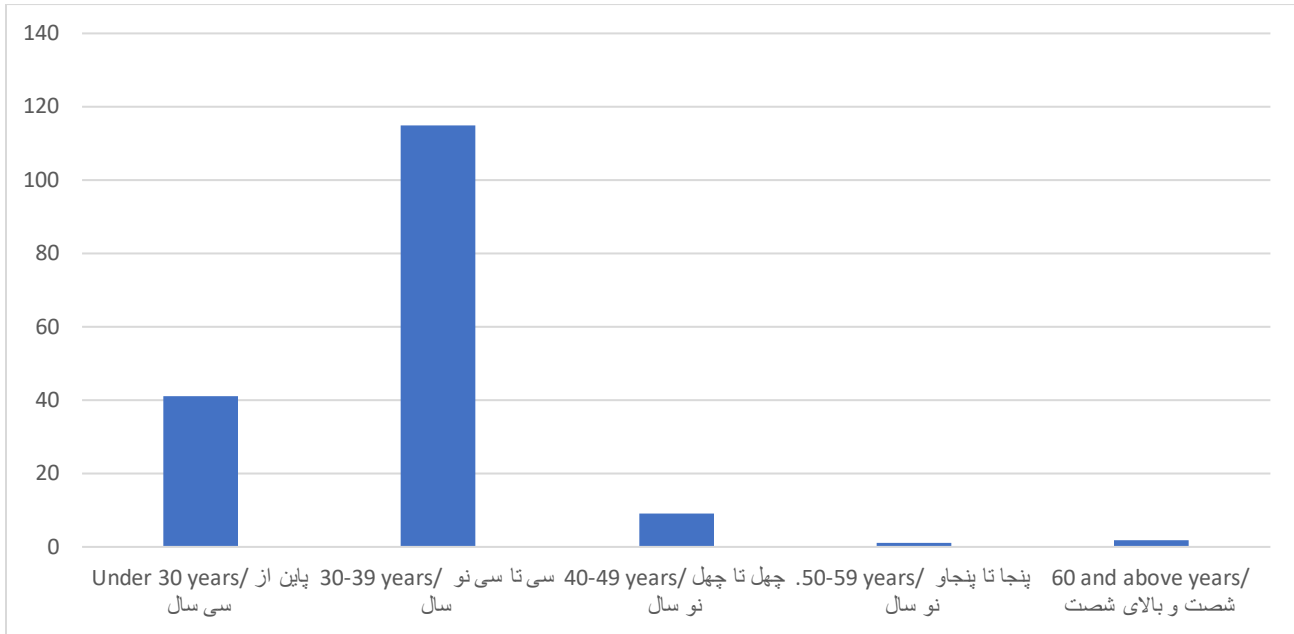


Fig. 4 Participants' age

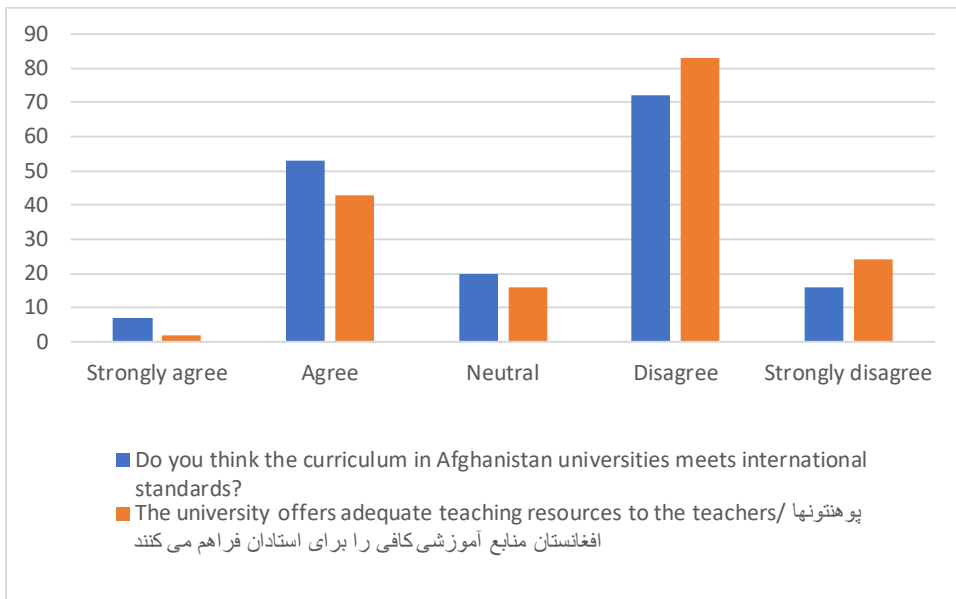


Fig. 5 Meeting international standards

Figure 5 indicates how the participants regard the university curriculum of Afghanistan based on whether it meets international standards and provides suitable teaching materials for teachers.

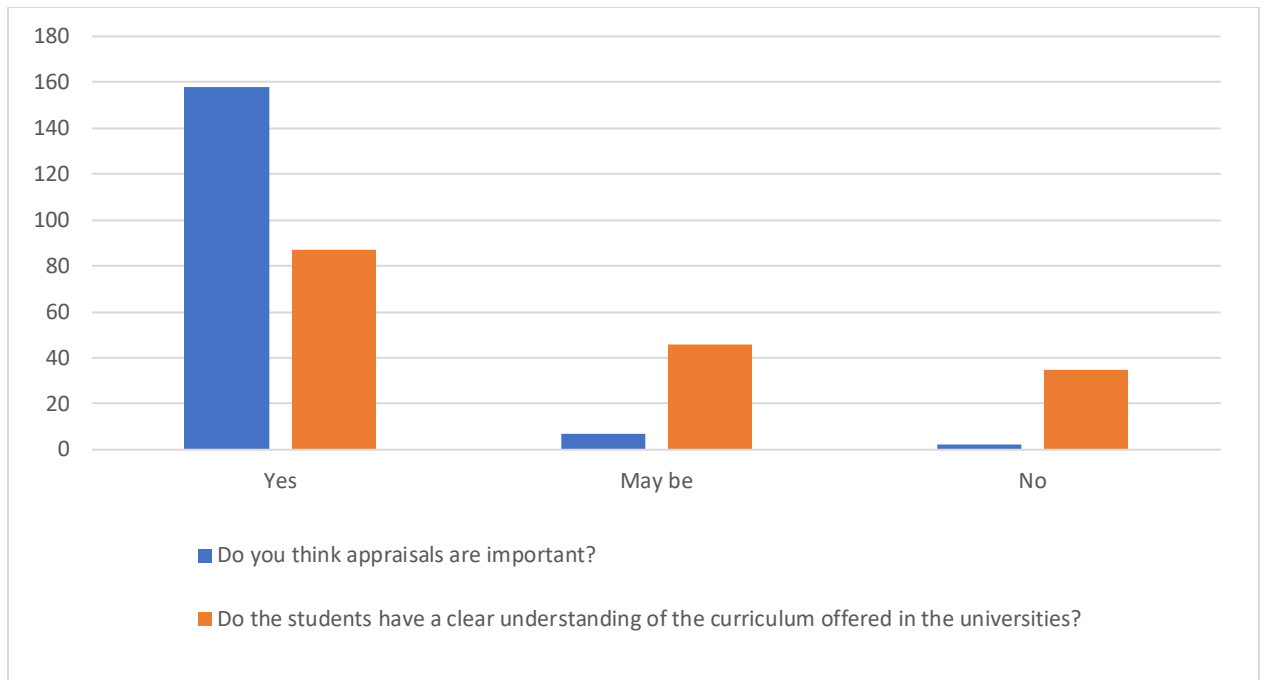


Fig. 6 Importance of appraisal

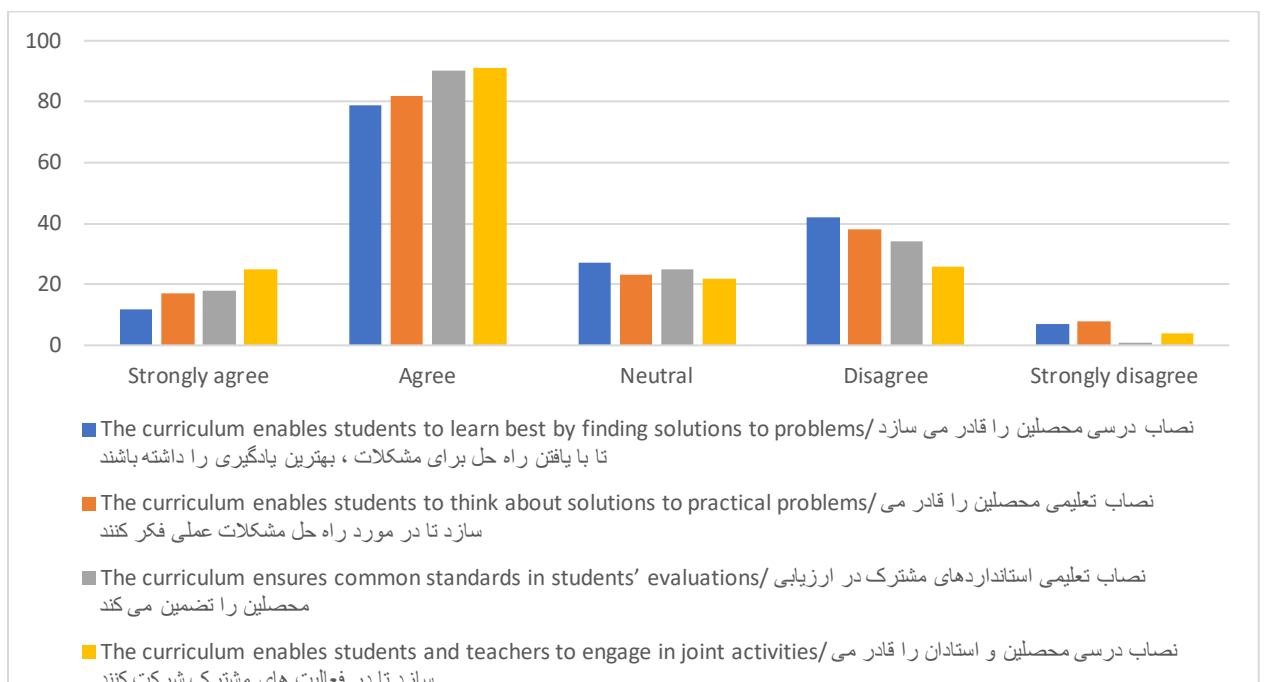


Fig. 7 Students' agreement on curriculum solutions, evaluation, and joint activities

Several inferences can be drawn from these results. First, the participants perceived the curriculum as outdated because it did not adhere to international standards. Additionally, despite their enthusiasm for their profession, most teachers felt that the working environment was unsupportive. Finally, the participants agreed that most colleges did not supply suitable instructional materials.

The teachers reported that most students did not understand the current university curriculum, while the teachers perceived the curriculum to be easy to understand. Thus, though they adhered to the curriculum, some acknowledged that they needed additional skills to influence the students to follow the curriculum.

This study further shows that the curriculum does not correctly incorporate new technology from the teachers' perspectives. The participants stated that they had not prepared the curriculum, hence their dissatisfaction with it (Wei, 2009). Teachers perceived significant challenges in implementing and adhering to the established curriculum requirements.

This study found that most teachers were below the age of 40, implying that they were bachelor and master's degree holders, as most people were at that stage of their academic pursuits at that age. Hence, the quality of knowledge being passed on to the students may be high because most lecturers have been educated and are continuing their education, just as those in other countries, with more developed education systems.

This study found that Afghanistan's university curriculum did not meet international standards. Universities did not provide teachers with sufficient teaching materials, implying that Afghanistan's graduates were less competitive in the global job market than graduates from other countries (Baharustani, 2012). The curriculum should be better equipped so that insufficient teaching materials do not affect how students are taught. Instead, they may acquire the intended skills and knowledge from their teachers, which will lead to job competitiveness.

The participants agreed that appraisals were essential to Afghanistan's university curriculum. This ensured that the teachers have the required skills and knowledge before being mandated to interact with the students. Furthermore, the curriculum provided the necessary support for quality education to students (Orfan, 2022). In addition, students clearly understand the university curriculum because the MOE has openly displayed it to the public and tended to adhere to the curriculum materials (Orfan, 2022). Regarding the gender representation of the participants, it is evident that university education in Afghanistan includes both male and female students (Orfan, 2022). However, the curriculum should be revised to encourage more women to enroll in university courses (Jones, 2009).

The curriculum should meet international standards to ensure students grasp the relevant knowledge to solve problems efficiently and effectively (Orfan, 2022). Furthermore, in this study, teachers reported that the system encouraged mutual interactions between students and teachers. According to Orfan, the curriculum also established a common standard for student evaluation, ensuring that students developed at the same academic pace (Orfan, 2022).

The curriculum has enabled teachers to develop academically because it ensured that activities had been implemented to enhance their professional development. In addition, the system allowed students to experience personal

growth. However, the teachers reported that the curriculum did not provide sufficient resources to teach science and technology (Orfan, 2022).

5. Limitations

This study has several limitations that serve to identify topics for additional research. Some crucial components may have been overlooked in the more comprehensive picture. Thus, we included a small number of variables and related properties. Among the limitations were the size of the sample and the geographic scope of the study. The model was tested in the actual world by conducting a field survey in a specific country. Because of the time constraint, the sample size may not be large enough to represent the population. Ethnography's fundamental flaw is that it consumes a substantial amount of time.

6. Conclusions

Afghanistan's university education system is dysfunctional. The results indicated that the university curriculum in Afghanistan faces several challenges. Most Afghan students do not clearly understand the curriculum, and lecturers report that most universities do not provide adequate learning materials. Because Afghanistan's university curriculum is outdated, it barely meets international standards. However, there have been changes to bring it on par with the international curriculum, such as establishing the PhD program. Lecturers reported that the curriculum allows them to advance professionally, which has also been found among students who feel that the curriculum has assisted them in building interpersonal skills as well as tackling societal problems (Azimi et al., 2019). The government and MOE should invest in the university curriculum by ensuring that universities have up-to-date infrastructure and promoting new technologies, keeping them on par with international standards. In addition, the MOE should implement methods to boost the number of female students admitted to universities. Implementation of these recommendations would contribute to improving the current Afghanistan university curriculum and enabling it to meet global standards. They should also promote the use of innovative technology.

7. Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

8. Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

9. Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. Author1 carried out the field work, prepared the literature review and overlook the writeup of the whole article. Author2 wrote the research methodology and did the data entry.

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