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The Right to Education for Afghan Women: An Islamic Legal Perspective with an Analysis of Cultural and Political Influences

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Abstract

Objective: This study aims to explore the right to education for Afghan women through the lens of Islamic law, while critically examining the cultural, religious, social, and political factors that influence its implementation. The research responds to the ongoing marginalization of Afghan women's educational rights, which are often restricted based on specific interpretations of Islamic teachings. These interpretations, frequently shaped by local traditions and political agendas, have been used to justify the denial or limitation of girls' and women's access to education. **Theoretical framework:** The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in Islamic legal principles such as Maslahah (public interest), Adl (justice), and the obligation of seeking knowledge for all believers. This framework is juxtaposed with Afghanistan's socio-political context, revealing tensions between authentic Islamic teachings and their politicized applications. **Literature review:** The literature review highlights the fluctuating access to education for Afghan women, influenced by changes in governance, societal norms, and religious authority. While Islamic jurisprudence historically supports gender-inclusive education, local cultural legacies and political instability have distorted its application. **Methods:** Methodologically, this research employs a qualitative-descriptive design. Primary data was collected through closed-ended questionnaires distributed to educators and female students. Secondary data from academic literature, media reports, and international organizational publications enriched the analysis. **Results:** The findings indicate that the denial of Afghan women's educational rights stems more from cultural and political pressures than from genuine Islamic legal doctrine. The study reveals a significant gap between the core values of Islamic law and the current practices affecting women's access to education in Afghanistan. **Implications:** The implications of this research are both theoretical and practical. It challenges prevailing narratives and encourages policymakers and religious authorities to realign educational policies with the authentic values of Islam. **Novelty:** The novelty of this study lies in its integrated approach, combining Islamic legal analysis with socio-political critique, offering fresh insights into an often misunderstood issue.

Keywords: women's education, afghanistan, islamic law, cultural and political factors, gender equality.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic law, derived from the Qur'an and the Sunnah, is a complex framework that is interpreted differently across the Islamic world. In Afghanistan, local customs and tribal norms often conflict with religious principles, particularly when it comes to women's right to education [1]. This study aims to explore the intersections between these cultural, religious, and social forces and analyze how they shape educational policies and practices in Afghanistan, specifically from an Islamic shari'a law perspective. The study will investigate how these factors impact Afghan women's access to education, and how Shari'a law has been interpreted to either support or restrict women's educational rights [2].

The issue of women's education in Afghanistan has long been a point of contention, central to religious, political, and social debates. The tension between cultural traditions, tribal practices, and government policies has played a significant role in shaping educational opportunities for women. Afghan society's complex relationship with Islamic law has further complicated women's access to education, as interpretations of Sharia law have often been used to restrict this right [3]. For instance, during the first Taliban rule (1996-2001), women were deprived of their right to education under the justification of strict interpretations of Islamic law. After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, efforts by the Afghan government, supported by international organizations, led to substantial improvements in women's education, particularly through the increased enrollment of girls in schools and universities [4]. However, the return of the Taliban to power in 2021 has reignited concerns about the future of women's education, with new restrictions placed on women's access to education, particularly at the secondary and higher education levels. This study analyzes how Sharia law has influenced educational policies and practices in Afghanistan. It examines the religious, cultural, and political factors that have shaped these policies, especially under shifting political regimes [5]. By focusing on the impact of Sharia law and its interpretations, this study will explore how these interpretations have been used by the Afghan government to justify or restrict women's access to education. Additionally, it will assess the cultural and social barriers that have prevented Afghan women from fully benefiting from educational opportunities, and it will examine the effectiveness of efforts to align education for women with Islamic principles [6].

The literature surrounding women's education in Afghanistan reveals deep-rooted cultural, political, and religious influences. Studies such as Al-Muzini's *The Role of Women in Science and Education Through Islamic History* shed light on the historical contributions of women to science and education across the Islamic world [7]. Al-Muzini emphasizes that, despite the lack of dedicated educational institutions for women, Islamic women played an active role in scientific advancements and education. Al-Turabi's study on the Qur'an and Hadith supports the notion that Islam encourages education for both men and women, asserting that the right to education is not only fundamental but obligatory [8]. Similarly, Al-Hadari's 2014 study on the role of Hadith in women's empowerment underscores the importance of knowledge in the development of women's roles in society. These studies demonstrate that Islam historically advocated for women's education, promoting gender equality in learning [9].

However, despite these clear religious principles, Afghan women have faced significant challenges in accessing education. As highlighted by Abdul-Qader Al-Hilali, certain cultural and political forces have hindered women's educational rights. His work, *Teaching Females and Their Upbringing*, critiques the resistance to women's education in some Islamic societies, pointing out that certain interpretations of Islam have led to the marginalization of women in education [10]. Al-Hilali argues that the early generations of Muslims, who shaped the world through knowledge, recognized the vital role of women in society, and that Islamic law did not prevent women's progress. Yet, some modern interpretations have deviated from these principles, reinforcing restrictive cultural and political norms [11].

In the context of Afghanistan, scholars like Bamk and Meshwani have discussed the cultural and political obstacles that prevent Afghan girls from accessing education. Their work highlights the gap between rural and urban education opportunities, as well as the specific challenges faced by girls in rural areas [12], where cultural, social, and security concerns severely limit educational access. In their study, these scholars argue that while Afghanistan has a rich educational heritage, the current political situation under the Taliban has rolled back many of the gains made in the early 21st century [13].

This study, therefore, seeks to bridge the gap in literature by focusing specifically on the application of Islamic law in Afghanistan's education system [14]. The research aims to answer key questions: How do interpretations of Sharia law shape policies and practices regarding women's education in Afghanistan? What cultural and social challenges do Afghan women face in accessing education? How has the Taliban's return to power impacted women's education, and how can these challenges be addressed through the lens of Islamic law? Additionally, this study examines the extent to which the restrictions placed on women's education align with core Islamic teachings that promote education for all [15], regardless of gender. Finally, the study aims to propose solutions for improving women's access to education within the framework of Islamic law, aligning modern educational strategies with Islamic values that encourage learning for both men and women [16].

The significance of this study is profound in the current socio-political climate of Afghanistan, where the Taliban's restrictions on women's education have raised international concern [17]. This research will contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the role of Islamic law in shaping women's educational rights in Afghanistan and will provide practical recommendations for policymakers and educators. It aims to propose strategies that respect Islamic principles while expanding women's access to education, ensuring that all Afghan women, regardless of their cultural or social background, can pursue education in alignment with Islamic values [18]. By understanding and applying Islamic law in a way that aligns with the principles of gender equality and education, this study hopes to contribute to the broader effort of enhancing women's rights in Afghanistan. It seeks to not only provide a critical analysis of the current educational system but also offer actionable recommendations to improve the educational opportunities for women, ensuring that their right to education is fully recognized and upheld by Islamic teachings [19].

This study utilized an open-ended survey to analyze and provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities surrounding girls' education in Afghanistan. A survey was conducted with 26 participants, including students, teachers, and school staff, representing diverse age groups (22–60 years) and experiences [20]. The survey included both male (27%) and female (73%) respondents and addressed various themes such as educational policies, cultural and societal challenges, and the alignment of these issues with Islamic principles. The data gathered provides a foundation for analyzing the current state of girl's education, evaluating policy impacts, and proposing practical recommendations for reform [21].

This study highlights the critical need for a re-evaluation of policies surrounding girl's education in Afghanistan, especially in light of the current government's approach. It highlights that Islamic teachings, when interpreted correctly, provide strong support for women's right to education, and these principles should guide the development of educational policies. Despite the significant challenges posed by political, cultural, and security-related factors, the study emphasizes the role of religious scholars, community leaders, and the government in promoting educational reforms that align with both Islamic values and modern educational needs. The findings suggest that, with strategic changes such as the creation of women-only educational institutions, enhanced online education, and increased awareness of the importance of female education, Afghanistan can pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future for its women and society [22].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The right to education for Afghan women has remained a focal point of international concern, particularly under shifting political regimes and cultural constraints. While education is globally recognized as a fundamental human right, the realization of this right in Afghanistan, especially for women, has been marked by ongoing challenges rooted in socio-political instability, traditional cultural practices, and contested interpretations of Islamic teachings [22].

Islamic legal tradition places high value on the pursuit of knowledge for both men and women. Classical Islamic scholars and foundational texts underscore the obligation of seeking knowledge as an essential component of a believer's duty, regardless of gender. In this sense, the denial of educational access to Afghan women stands in contrast to the broader spirit of Islamic jurisprudence. The principles of Maslahah (public interest), Adl (justice), and Ijtihad (independent reasoning) within Islamic law provide the flexibility to advocate for female education, even within conservative frameworks [22].

Despite these theological foundations, cultural traditions in Afghanistan—often rooted in patriarchal norms rather than religious doctrine—have historically restricted women's mobility and access to education. In many rural regions, the cultural association of honor with female seclusion contributes significantly to educational exclusion. These norms are often reinforced by local leaders and communities under the guise of protecting Islamic values, creating a blurred boundary between cultural practices and religious obligations [22].

Political developments have further complicated the issue. Under the Taliban's previous and current regimes, policies limiting girls' education have sparked global criticism and raised questions about the politicization of Islamic law. The use of religious justification to ban secondary and higher education for women reflects a selective and literalist interpretation of Islamic sources, often disconnected from classical jurisprudence that encourages learning. This manipulation of religious texts for political control exemplifies how education for women in Afghanistan is not only a legal or cultural issue, but a deeply political one [23].

In sum, while Islam intrinsically supports the right to education for women, cultural and political influences in Afghanistan have often undermined this right. A nuanced understanding of Islamic legal principles, when combined with critical cultural and political analysis, is essential for developing a sustainable and authentic framework that supports Afghan women's educational rights in both theory and practice.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design to explore the right to education for Afghan women through the lens of Islamic law while examining the intertwined cultural, religious, social, and political factors that shape its implementation. The research aims to uncover how these overlapping dimensions influence interpretations of Islamic teachings and their application in Afghan society, particularly concerning female education [23].

To gather primary data, a survey method is utilized. Closed-ended questionnaires are distributed to key stakeholders, including educators and students—especially female students—within selected Afghan communities or educational institutions. These participants are chosen for their firsthand experience with educational access and their insight into the religious and cultural narratives surrounding women's education.

In addition to primary data, the study relies heavily on secondary sources, including academic journal articles, media reports, policy papers, and publications from international organizations. These sources provide contextual background and comparative insight into

how Islamic law has been interpreted and applied across various political regimes in Afghanistan [23].

The collected data is analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in how religious texts are interpreted and used to justify or challenge educational restrictions. The study emphasizes the divergence between authentic Islamic legal principles, which uphold the value of education for both genders and cultural or political distortions that undermine this right. The findings aim to inform policymakers and stakeholders in developing solutions rooted in Islamic values [23].

Table 1. Research Methodology Overview

Component	Description
Research Design	Qualitative-descriptive
Research Focus	The right to education for Afghan women from an Islamic legal perspective, influenced by cultural, social, and political factors
Research Objectives	To explore how cultural, religious, social, and political factors affect the interpretation and implementation of Islamic law on women's education
Primary Data Collection	A survey using closed-ended questionnaires
Target Respondents	Key stakeholders: educators and students (especially female students) in selected Afghan communities or institutions
Sampling Technique	Purposive sampling
Secondary Data Sources	Academic journals, media reports, policy papers, international organization publications

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women's Education from an Islamic Perspective

Women's education has been a subject of interest for scholars and thinkers throughout history. The status of women in society has often sparked extensive debate, with positions ranging from extreme restriction to liberal permissiveness, depending on the ideologies of those addressing these issues. Some have used women's rights, including education, to advance ideological agendas, while others have entirely closed the door to education for women under the pretext of religious and moral grounds. Others have sought to promote excess freedoms, driven by personal or ideological flaws. Among these contested issues is the education of women, a topic that has oscillated between acceptance and rejection, and between extremes of strictness and moderation, from ancient times to the present day [24].

In the contemporary era, gender disparities in education have become evident, with some favoring the education of men over women. This bias has often been justified by isolated and controversial fatwas, which claim that women's education should be limited to primary levels or prohibited altogether. Imam Al-Ghazali, in his book "The Issues of Women Between Stagnant Traditions and Incoming Innovations", attributes this phenomenon to a severe lack of knowledge, a state he describes as "compounded ignorance" among certain Islamic speakers who misrepresent Islam's stance on women and education with vehement rhetoric [25].

From an Islamic perspective, women's education is foundational due to their vital role in building the Islamic nation and fostering a thriving society. Islam unequivocally supports women's right to education, in stark contrast to many philosophical, intellectual, and religious traditions of other cultures and civilizations. The Islamic heritage is replete with evidence, both textual and historical, affirming the importance of women's education. Many examples highlight women's significant contributions to intellectual, scientific, and social development, illustrating that education has always been a right granted to women under Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, in later periods, some restrictive fatwas emerged, limiting women's education or confining it to certain stages. These rulings lack a correct

understanding of Islam and often reflect a deficit in knowledge among their proponents. Revisiting the original Islamic sources, the Qur'an and Sunnah, and re-evaluating certain jurisprudential opinions to align with the evolution of time and circumstances is essential to restoring women's education to its rightful place in Islamic society. Denying or restricting women's education contradicts logic, science, and the core principles of Islam. Even when certain individuals attempt to justify such restrictions using weak hadiths that lack authority among scholars, their arguments are devoid of credible evidence [26].

The Islamic tradition celebrates women's education, as exemplified by the wives of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), many of whom were literate and highly knowledgeable. Numerous female companions and successors were renowned as scholars, narrators of hadith, and educators. After the death of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), one of his wives, Hafsa bint Umar (may Allah be pleased with her), played a significant role in preserving the Mushaf (the written compilation of the Holy Qur'an). Despite the presence of numerous male Companions, she was entrusted with safeguarding the Mushaf, highlighting the vital role and position of women in Islamic history. This event underscores the importance of women in society, particularly in the fields of education and knowledge. Women have always played an essential role in preserving and transmitting knowledge, as exemplified by Hafsa's contribution to the preservation of the Qur'an. While Islamic heritage underscores the importance of women's education and their critical role in societal development, it is equally important to appreciate the elevated status of knowledge and scholars in Islamic teachings and the obligation to pursue learning. By examining these dimensions, it becomes evident that achieving equality between men and women in general rights, as prescribed by the principles of Islamic law, reinforces Islam's commitment to women's education. Moreover, it highlights the religious and societal benefits of women's education, demonstrating its vital role in fostering a balanced and progressive Islamic society [27].

Islam's Emphasis on Women's Intellectual Development

Islam grants women an esteemed status, honoring them in every role they fulfill whether as mothers, daughters, wives, or sisters. This respect extends to their intellectual and educational rights, with Islam strongly emphasizing the pursuit of knowledge for all. The Qur'an explicitly encourages learning, as demonstrated in the verse: "Say, My Lord, increase me in knowledge" (Qur'an 20:114), highlighting that seeking knowledge is one of the highest pursuits. The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ further affirmed this principle, stating that "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" and emphasizing that knowledge must be placed in its proper context to yield meaningful benefits. From the earliest days of Islam, women actively participated in learning and teaching. The Prophet ﷺ personally educated women, including his wives, and encouraged their intellectual growth. The Qur'an also directed the wives of the Prophet to reflect on and share the wisdom they received: "And remember what is recited in your houses of the verses of Allah and wisdom" (Qur'an 33:34). This guidance underscores the role of women as both learners and conveyors of knowledge [28].

Islamic history provides numerous examples of women excelling in education and scholarship. Female companions of the Prophet and their successors became respected narrators of Hadith, educators, and scholars. Sayidda Aisha (Ummul-Muminin), for instance, is celebrated as one of the most prominent scholars of Islam, whose knowledge shaped generations. Such examples reflect the deep-rooted encouragement Islam offers to women's education and its transformative impact on society. Despite this legacy, later interpretations emerged that limited women's access to education, driven by cultural and ideological biases rather than authentic Islamic teachings. These restrictive views often contradicted the clear Islamic principles advocating knowledge for all. Revisiting foundational Islamic sources is essential to realign modern practices with the original teachings, ensuring that women are empowered to pursue education as a fundamental right

and religious obligation. Islam not only permits but actively promotes women's education as a means to elevate their roles in family and society. By fostering a culture of learning, Islam ensures that women contribute meaningfully to the development of the community and the broader Islamic civilization [29].

Achieving Equality Between Men and Women in General Rights According to Islamic Principles

Islam establishes equality between men and women in rights and responsibilities, ensuring fairness in both worldly matters and the Hereafter. This principle is evident in the Qur'an, as stated: "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while they are believers, We will surely grant them a good life, and We will surely give them their reward [in the Hereafter] according to the best of what they used to do" (Qur'an 16:97). Equality is also seen in rulings such as those concerning punishment, where the law applies identically to both genders: "The woman and the man who commit theft cut off their hands as recompense for what they committed" (Qur'an 5:38). The equality enshrined in Islamic principles surpasses that of many ancient legal systems and modern laws in ensuring justice. For example, under Jewish law, women were significantly restricted in their civil rights, being under the authority of their fathers or husbands. Similarly, in Brahmanic law, as stated in The Laws of Manu, women were entirely under male control and denied independent legal status throughout their lives. Ancient Roman and Greek laws also marginalized women, denying them education and civil rights. In Athens, even as a democracy, educational and cultural opportunities were exclusively reserved for free men. Islam, by contrast, ensures gender equality in marriage, commerce, employment, and education. Women in Islamic history have been active in various fields, including participating in warfare, as exemplified by Umm Ayman bint Qais al-Ghifariyah, who earned a commendation from the Prophet ﷺ during the Battle of Khaybar. The Hadith "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim" reinforces that education is a universal right, transcending gender, class, or social status [30].

Islamic jurisprudence also provides evidence supporting women's ability to hold significant positions in society, such as the role of hisbah (moral policing). Some scholars have allowed women to undertake this role, which encompasses monitoring markets, enforcing public order, and ensuring compliance with Islamic laws. Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized the importance of hisbah as a vital and multifaceted leadership role. Similarly, the Hanafi school permits women to serve as judges in matters where their testimony is accepted, based on the rationale that testimony entails a form of authority. Scholars like Ibn Hajar and others have noted differing opinions, with some supporting women in leadership and judicial roles under specific conditions. In modern times, women have assumed various prominent positions, including ambassadors, ministers, university professors, and judges, often receiving equal pay and recognition. However, granting women access to such roles must be accompanied by access to quality education, as the Prophet ﷺ emphasized that knowledge is fundamental to empowerment and leadership. In essence, Islam firmly upholds the principle of equality between men and women in rights and responsibilities, with particular emphasis on education as a foundational right. The Qur'an and Sunnah make it clear that education is not only a right for every Muslim but also a duty that enables justice, empowerment, and active participation in society. Therefore, providing women with the opportunity to assume leadership roles requires ensuring access to education and the resources necessary to achieve their full potential, in alignment with Islamic teachings [31].

History and Challenges of Education in Afghanistan

When Islam entered Afghanistan, the region was not under a single rule. Different regions, including the north, south, east, and west of the country, were governed by various local rulers who spoke different languages and followed distinct cultures. Before Islam,

the predominant religions in Afghanistan were Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and Hinduism, along with the religious instructions associated with these faiths. With the spread of Islam in the 7th century, Islamic education replaced the earlier religious teachings, and Islam became the dominant religion. Cities like Balkh, Ghazni, Herat, and Ghor, which are now part of Afghanistan, became centers of education. For instance, there were 3,000 students at the school of Dhahak ibn Muzahim (d. 723 AH), and during the Abbasid period, Balkh alone had 400 schools and 900 schools for children. It is well known that during the time of Mahmud of Ghazni (998-1030), over 50 schools were built by the government, and about 50 more by the locals [32].

Before the 7th century AH, there were 359 schools and Islamic houses (Takka) in Herat. The Ghuri dynasty (1000-1215) also valued education and scholars, and schools continued to operate during this period, with new schools established in Ghazni, Balkh, Herat, and Bukhara, and under the Timurid dynasty, many schools and mosques were founded. After the spread of Islam, applied sciences were not neglected, and scholars like Al-Farabi (d.950), Ibn Sina (d.1037), and Al-Biruni (d.1061) contributed their knowledge to the development of science in the region [33].

There were no formal educational institutions in Afghanistan from its establishment in 1747 until 1875. Amir Sher Ali Khan, the ruler of Afghanistan (reigned 1868-1878), established the first two official schools in the country, laying the foundation for modern education. One of these was a civil school, and the other was a military school. Two additional schools were built during the reign of King Habibullah Khan (1901-1919), and these schools resemble the modern educational system today. One of these schools was established in 1903 with only ten Afghan and Indian teachers, and was called "Habibiyah High School." The second school, built in 1909, was known as the "Military School". Although the foundation for modern education was laid in 1875, the number of schools established did not exceed four until 1919. The largest development in education came after 1919 when King Amanullah Khan (reigned 1919-1929) made primary education obligatory for all. During this period, the Ministry of Education was established, the number of secondary schools increased, and German and French teachers were hired for Kabul's secondary schools alongside Afghan teachers. For the first time, schools outside the capital were opened, and the number of primary schools rose to 322. The Ministry of Education sent hundreds of students to study in Russia, Italy, Germany, and Turkey. In 1921, girl's schools were opened, and some students were sent to Turkey for education. The opening of girls' schools and their sending to Turkey led to strong opposition from some religious scholars who believed that this went against Sharia. In 1923, the scholars requested that King Amanullah Khan close the girl's schools, arguing that women should be educated in their homes and by their relatives. Despite attempts by King Amanullah Khan to convince the scholars that there is no Islamic prohibition against women's education and citing examples from other Muslim countries like India, Mecca, Medina, Egypt, Damascus, and Baghdad, his efforts were unsuccessful. He temporarily closed the schools but later reopened them. However, the decision to open girl's schools and send them to Turkey eventually led to King Amanullah Khan's exile from Afghanistan in 1929, as the society was not ready to accept such major reforms. He faced strong resistance from tribal leaders, which forced him to abdicate and live the rest of his life in exile in Zurich, Switzerland, where he died in 1960 [34].

In 1929, Habibullah Kalakani (known as "Ibn alssaqa"), who had opposed Amanullah Khan's reforms and seized power, declared himself the king who closed girl's schools and recalled students who had been sent abroad. He also closed schools established by foreign countries like Germany and France. After his rule, Mohammed Nader Shah (1929-1933) restored the monarchy and reopened the girl's schools, establishing new schools. The first step towards higher education was the establishment of the Kabul Medical College in 1932, which was founded by Professor Dr. Rifqi Kamil from Turkey. In the following year, more Turkish professors were brought to teach at this college. This college was one of six

colleges established before universities were formed in Afghanistan. Mohammed Nader Shah also established a new constitution in 1931. However, he was assassinated in 1933, and his son, Mohammed Zahir Shah, succeeded him. Under Zahir Shah's reign (1933-1973), educational development continued, albeit slowly. Primary education became mandatory for 14 years, and an education law was enacted. During this time, many students were sent abroad to countries like Germany, France, the United States, and India, and many new schools were built. In 1946, Kabul University was established as the first university in Afghanistan, followed by other colleges and universities [35].

In the 1960s, the new Afghan constitution granted women equal rights, leading to increased participation in political life. However, these rights began to decline during the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1973, Mohammed Daoud Khan presented a five-year development plan that included education, but its implementation was not effective. After the 1978 coup, the communist government prioritized education, and the Afghan Women's Democratic Organization was established to support women's rights to education. Education continued during the Soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989 and the fall of the communist regime in 1992. However, during this period, education was limited to cities under central government control. There was no formal education in many areas outside government control. Around five million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and opposition groups, established schools and attempted to continue their education. In Pakistan, refugees also created universities and schools [36].

During the Taliban regime (1996-2001), female education was prohibited, and all girl's schools were closed, except for the Kabul Medical College. The Taliban kept the medical college open as medical examinations for women could only be conducted by female doctors. Therefore, they allowed women to work as doctors and nurses but prohibited them from working in all other fields. During this period, the number of religious schools increased, and most other schools were converted to religious schools. In 2001, the Taliban issued an education law, which stated that education was a right for all Afghan citizens. The law also indicated that women's education would be organized under a special law consistent with Islamic law. However, this special law for female education has not yet been issued.

Advancements and Barriers in Afghan Women's Education (2001–2021)

The fall of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001 opened the door for rebuilding the educational system in Afghanistan. After the collapse of the Taliban and the formation of the new Afghan government under Hamid Karzai (2001-2014), the education sector in Afghanistan underwent a significant transformation with the support of the United Nations, the United States, and many international organizations. Billions of dollars were allocated for the development of educational infrastructure, with schools reopening and new educational institutions being established in all provinces. Teacher training colleges were created in most regions, and higher education expanded to nearly all provinces, with a noticeable growth in the number of private universities. According to a report published by the Afghan Ministry of Education in 2012, 10.5 million students were enrolled in 16,600 schools and educational centers, with 38% of them being female students. Additionally, 770,000 students participated in 30,000 literacy courses, 62% of whom were women. Today, there are approximately 30 public universities and about 100 private universities and colleges in Afghanistan. These efforts have contributed to improving educational opportunities for women, although significant challenges remain, such as limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and security concerns that hinder access to education in rural and remote areas.

In terms of educational policies, Afghanistan witnessed significant developments after 2010, as the Afghan government, in cooperation with the international community, began

to promote women's education through awareness programs and projects aimed at providing financial and logistical support for schools in rural areas. These efforts also included educational initiatives in collaboration with non-governmental organizations, which offered scholarships and special programs to support women in higher education. However, with the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, the situation drastically changed. The Taliban, which had previously imposed strict restrictions on women's education in the 1990s, reinstated some of these restrictions upon regaining control. Despite the interim government's announcement of the reopening of boys' schools from grades six to twelve, no clear decision was made regarding the education of girls, leading to continued uncertainty. The movement justified its stance by stating that women's education is permitted but must align with "Islamic values," continuing to demand gender segregation in educational institutions. Additionally, Afghanistan's educational institutions face a severe shortage of qualified teachers, particularly female teachers, as the restrictions on women's work hinder the development of this sector. There are also challenges related to security and instability, as ongoing armed conflicts in certain areas have led to the closure of schools or restricted students' access to them. Given these complex circumstances, the future of women's education in Afghanistan remains unclear. However, there are ongoing efforts by the international community to pressure the Taliban to provide equal educational opportunities for women and girls, while also fostering dialogue on the importance of education as a fundamental human right [37].

It is important to note that women's education is allowed in some cases. Currently, women are permitted to study up to grade six in government schools and have access to religious schools to learn Islamic sciences. For higher education, women are only allowed to enroll in midwifery programs, limited to those who had graduated before the return of the Taliban. These women are now allowed to study in these two restricted fields, although society requires a skilled workforce and experts in all sectors, not just these two. This decision is based on urgent societal needs, as there is a severe shortage of midwives in rural and remote areas, leading to high maternal and child mortality rates. Additionally, upon a more detailed assessment of these fields, it becomes clear that there are only a few religious and government health institutions in the country, which are insufficient to meet the community's needs.

Survey Insights on Girls' Education in Afghanistan

As part of this research, a survey was conducted to gather opinions from a segment of Afghan society regarding girls' education. The survey included 26 participants aged between 22 and 60, representing diverse roles such as students, teachers, and school staff. Women constituted 73% of the participants, while men made up 27%. The survey questions addressed key topics related to educational policies in Afghanistan, particularly those affecting girls' education. The participants were asked about their views on these policies and their impact on the current state of girls' education. Additionally, the survey sought their opinions on the potential for improving the educational situation for girls and implementing reforms to existing policies. The survey also explored cultural, political, social, security, and geographical challenges to girls' education. Another critical focus was examining the compatibility of these policies and challenges with the principles of Islamic law. The difficulties faced by educational institutions in promoting girls' education were also assessed [38].

Based on the collected data, this report aims to analyze the survey results, providing a comprehensive picture of the state of girls' education in Afghanistan. The analysis includes evaluating educational policies and their direct impact on access to education, considering differences between urban and rural areas. The report also addresses major challenges faced by educational institutions and female students, such as cultural, social, and security-related barriers. It highlights the role of religious and community leaders in shifting societal perceptions toward girls' education and proposes strategies to develop educational policies

that align with Islamic principles while improving educational opportunities for girls. This analysis represents a critical step in understanding the current situation and developing solutions to the existing challenges. The findings offer a comprehensive overview of the obstacles and opportunities related to girls' education in Afghanistan, emphasizing the importance of considering reforms and policies to enhance educational access for girls under the prevailing conditions.

Steps and Policies Adopted by the Current Government

The majority of steps and political policies taken by the current Taliban government reflect a misinterpretation of Islamic rulings, leading to the obstruction of girls' education. The government claims that educational institutions must be "suitable" for women from a religious and cultural perspective, yet such provisions remain absent. While the government asserts its aim to improve education according to Islamic standards and reform curricula to align with these values, this is not entirely accurate. The previous curricula were already designed based on Islamic principles. One of the study participants highlighted this issue, stating:

"It must be said that Islam clarified its stance on women's education fourteen centuries ago, with its rulings and principles being unequivocal. However, in my country, in the 21st century, Islamic rules are being interpreted differently. The question here is: Is this version of Islam being promoted derived from true Islam, rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah, or is it built on rumors and personal whims?"

Under current government policies, education for women and girls beyond grade six (secondary and university levels) has been prohibited for over three years. Women have also been banned from teaching in higher grades, universities, and some educational institutions. Similarly, restrictions have been placed on the selection of educational fields available to women. Additionally, the government cites the enforcement of the hijab and Islamic dress code for girls and women in educational settings as another barrier. They have barred girls from accessing education, claiming non-compliance with the hijab as justification. These measures are presented as efforts to ensure women adhere to Islamic teachings in their roles as mothers, daughters, and Muslim women living under Sharia [39].

One participant in the study commented:

"While the Taliban government initially imposed the Islamic hijab in universities and schools, and the majority of public and private universities complied with these rules, it is deeply unfortunate that the doors of schools and universities have been closed to Afghan girls."

Moreover, the current government has enforced complete gender segregation at all educational levels. This policy has been implemented nationwide since the beginning of their rule. However, over the past three years, the government has made no progress in creating the conditions it claims are necessary for girls to return to schools and universities. As a result, thousands of girls now face uncertainty and an unclear future.

Disparities Between Rural and Urban Areas in Education Access

People living in cities are often more aware of their rights and work diligently to secure them. Urban families tend to prioritize the education of girls and actively encourage them to continue their studies. In contrast, many rural families prevent their daughters from attending school due to cultural, and traditional objections, and concerns about social issues or security risks. During the previous government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, before the current Taliban regime took power, families often prohibited their daughters from attending schools and universities due to the instability and ongoing conflicts in different regions. Educational institutions in cities are generally better equipped, with easier access to experienced teachers. Urban areas also have better transportation infrastructure

and a higher number of schools for girls. In rural areas, the lack of schools and universities, the shortage of qualified teachers (especially female teachers), cultural and traditional restrictions, security concerns, and poor transportation options make accessing education for girls extremely challenging. Furthermore, the educational infrastructure in cities is far superior, with a better teacher-to-student ratio and more schools dedicated to girls. On the other hand, in rural areas, the infrastructure is very limited, and the number of girls' schools is much lower [40].

Additionally, due to the cultural and social pressures in cities, fewer women and girls are kept at home, and families are generally more accepting of girls' education. In rural areas, however, the cultural and social pressures on women to stay at home are much stronger, and many people in rural areas view modern education with scepticism. As a result, women and girls in rural areas face greater challenges than their urban counterparts when it comes to accessing education, including cultural and traditional restrictions, security issues, and a lack of educational infrastructure and facilities. In most villages, since some families do not allow their daughters to attend schools or universities, there is a severe shortage of female teachers, and only a small percentage of girls are allowed to study. This results in widespread ignorance in these areas. Additionally, the availability of female teachers is virtually nonexistent. In some regions, the limited number of girls' schools makes it difficult for girls to attend school due to the distance between schools and their homes. Another factor hindering girls' education is early marriage, which often prevents them from completing their education after marriage.

How Can the Leaders of the Current Regime Contribute to Promoting a Positive Stance on Women's Education?

To bring about change, educational programs and scholarly dialogues between religious leaders and scholars must be organized to emphasize the importance of women's education. Such efforts will reinforce the significance of education by reviewing the history of Islam and highlighting the active role women played in science and society during the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Additionally, the Sharia brought by the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ is suitable for all times and eras. Its guidance is not limited to the time of the Prophet and his companions but interacts with every age. On this basis, Afghan girls have a legitimate and established right to access education. Religious scholars play a constructive role in this area, and their impact will be greater if they fulfil their duty through the following actions:

First, Forming an Inclusive Government and Promoting Freedom of Expression: It is crucial to establish an inclusive government based on the people's vote, with freedom of expression supporting women's education, and to emphasize that Islamic law respects the dignity of women and their rightful status more than any other religion or ritual.

Second, Establishing the Loya Jirga: The formation of the Loya Jirga (the Grand Assembly of the Afghan people) and consultation with religious scholars are essential for discussing the issue of women's education. Women make up half of the population, and their exclusion from education means that half of society is effectively sidelined.

Third, Education and Interpreting Religious Principles: Providing education and interpreting religious principles that indicate a positive stance toward women's education is essential. From the outset, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ addressed both men and women in his call for learning. During the time of the Prophet ﷺ, a special day was dedicated to educating the female companions. Aisha (may Allah be pleased with her) provided half of the knowledge of the religion and answered people's questions while offering solutions to their concerns [41].

Recommended Changes to the Taliban's Policies on Women's Education in Light of Islamic Law

First, Considering the Islamic Hijab and Educating on Women's Rights in Islam: As Afghanistan is an Islamic country, the government should align its educational policies with the teachings of Sharia. According to Islamic principles, the proper hijab is an essential part of religious commitment, and its implementation should be ensured by Islamic guidelines. However, the hijab should not be an obstacle to girls' education. Many studies confirm that women and society value the hijab, and it does not negatively impact education.

Second, Establishing Women-Only Educational Institutions: It is recommended to increase the number of girls' schools and universities, employing qualified female teachers to instruct them. These institutions should follow Islamic principles and focus on providing a safe and appropriate learning environment for girls, particularly in rural areas where educational facilities are scarce.

Third, Enhancing Online Education and Distance Learning: Although some institutions have made efforts to provide distance education, this option still has limited impact, particularly in rural areas lacking the necessary technological infrastructure. It is crucial to develop strategies that more effectively utilize distance learning technologies to ensure that women in remote and underserved areas have access to education.

Fourth, Raising Religious Awareness and Supporting Families in Women's Education: Religious scholars and preachers should foster a positive attitude toward women's education by educating the community and families about the role of education in Islam. They can play a pivotal role in spreading the correct understanding of women's education from an Islamic perspective, helping to change cultural practices and mindsets that hinder education.

Fifth, Gender Segregation in Education: Gender segregation in educational institutions should continue, with qualified female teachers available to teach girls at all educational levels. This step aligns with Sharia's teachings, which call for the preservation of moral values and chastity in educational settings.

Sixth, Developing Curricula Combining Religious and Modern Sciences: It is necessary to establish an educational system that integrates both religious and contemporary sciences, enhancing female students' ability to deepen their understanding of Islamic knowledge while acquiring modern scientific and practical skills. This system will enable women to engage with both religious viewpoints and contemporary subjects, thus empowering them academically.

Seventh, Removing Security and Cultural Barriers: Providing a safe educational environment for women requires eliminating security barriers that prevent girls from pursuing their education and addressing cultural constraints that hinder women's education. Families and society must recognize that erroneous customs and traditions, not Islamic law, are the true obstacles to girls' education [\[42\]](#).

Strategies to Enhance Women's Participation in Higher Education (Post-University Level)

First, Educational Programs to Improve Women's Skills and Scholarships for Women in Islamic Countries: These programs aim to encourage women to pursue higher education, stimulate their involvement in scientific research, and provide suitable work and educational opportunities.

Second, Raising Family Awareness on the Importance of Women's Education: Efforts should be made to enhance the family's role in supporting women's education, encouraging them to continue their studies and professional growth.

Third, Creating Financial Aid Programs and Student Loans: To support women who cannot continue their education due to financial constraints.

Fourth, Enhancing Distance Education, and E-Learning Programs: Enabling women to continue their studies in flexible, suitable environments.

Fifth, Establishing Schools and Universities for Women: Providing safe and appropriate learning environments that align with Islamic principles, where women feel comfortable and secure.

Sixth, Hiring Female University Professors: Training and employing women as professors to teach at women-only universities and institutions.

Seventh, Engaging with Religious Scholars: To explain the importance of women's education from an Islamic perspective and clarify the role of education in empowering women.

Eighth, Supporting Families and Communities: Promoting a culture of family support, alongside government policies that encourage women's education, to motivate women to continue their studies.

Ninth, Improving Security Conditions: Creating a secure environment for women's education. Safe transportation should be provided for female students, especially in regions with security instability [43].

CONCLUSION

The issue of women's education in Afghanistan remains one of the most pressing challenges faced by the country. The government's interpretation of Islamic principles, combined with cultural and societal pressures, has led to the imposition of policies that restrict women's access to education, limiting their opportunities for personal and societal advancement. However, the study highlights those Islamic teachings, when interpreted correctly, support women's right to education, emphasizing the importance of balancing religious obligations with the need for modern education. To overcome the current barriers, it is essential that Afghanistan's leadership, including religious scholars, work together to promote policies that align with true Islamic values while ensuring that women have access to education at all levels. The establishment of women-only institutions, the promotion of online education, and the creation of a supportive environment for female students are critical steps towards fostering a more inclusive educational system. Additionally, improving security conditions and addressing cultural restrictions will play a pivotal role in ensuring that all girls in Afghanistan, regardless of their geographic location, have the opportunity to fulfil their right to education. Ultimately, the future of Afghanistan's development hinges on the education of its women. By empowering women through education, Afghanistan can unlock its full potential, promoting social, economic, and cultural progress. Both the government and society must embrace the true spirit of Islamic teachings, which uphold the dignity, equality, and education of women as essential to the nation's prosperity.

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Author Contribution

Sabrina Nadiry: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

Conflicts of Interest

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

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