



The Issues of Higher Education in Afghanistan

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Abstract

The diversity of human resources with advanced degrees is viewed as an opportunity for universities to foster innovation and knowledge production; however, Afghan universities exhibit differences in their attention to this important aspect. To achieve development in higher education, universities require an appropriate infrastructure that supports innovation, knowledge production, creativity, and the development of their connections with the world beyond the country's borders. This research aims to conduct an analysis of higher education in Afghanistan, employing a problem-solving approach, to provide logical and effective solutions for aligning the strategies of the Ministry of Higher Education with those of the universities. This study is applied in nature and has been conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining fieldwork and library research. To obtain accurate and effective information regarding the decreasing motivation of students, a field survey was conducted, utilizing questionnaires, while other components were analyzed through library research. The main issue identified and analyzed in this research consists of the challenges faced by universities in the country, which limit the potential for development. The findings of the research indicate that the most significant challenges include a shortage of qualified professional staff, the exclusion of girls from education, decreased academic motivation, a lack of creativity and innovation, and the lack of internationalization of universities. Therefore, to overcome these problems, it is essential to identify the challenges facing higher education and utilize the proposed strategies for the growth and development of higher education.

Keywords: *Issues, Innovation, Faculty, Gender Discrimination, Internationalization of Universities, Decrease in Academic Motivation*

1. Introduction

The primary and fundamental aspect of the development of a country lies in its educational institutions. Universities are among the most critical elements shaping this development. In today's competitive world, the countries that succeed are those that excel in knowledge production, outpacing other nations in this regard. A country that emerges victorious in this arena is one that has achieved

dynamism in higher education, rather than merely possessing abundant natural resources. In both developed and developing countries, universities are responsible for addressing issues and fulfilling the needs of the nation (Rafat, 2016:14).

Higher education is no longer a luxury item reserved for wealthy countries; rather, it has become an essential necessity for nations, particularly impoverished ones (Gilles, 2008: 192). Knowledge produced by nations is utilized at an unprecedented pace, and new technologies rapidly emerge and simultaneously become obsolete, a phenomenon unparalleled in history. It is, however, knowledge and expertise that are recognized as the primary source of competition and deemed the ultimate wealth of nations. Our country faces economic poverty and meager income, compounded by a rising population suffering from poverty. The question arises: what methods exist for combating poverty in this context? Is it feasible to address this without a higher education system capable of designing strategies for poverty reduction? Who should be responsible for formulating policies aimed at advancing economic development and attracting foreign investment to effectively alleviate poverty?

Afghanistan's universities are currently in a position where they are unable to meet the demands of the labor market and do not adequately respond to the needs of society and the economy. While countries seek problem-solving skills and their application, the focus should not merely be on rote learning that fills memory without fostering understanding. There is a concerted effort to cultivate creative, curious, and innovative individuals, teaching them to keep their knowledge up to date.

Afghanistan's universities are facing a series of challenges that have a direct impact on the country's social, cultural, and economic development. Identifying such problems does not imply a pessimistic outlook; rather, it is essential to recognize the realities and to develop appropriate and realistic policies and strategies to address them. Jarvis asserts that "if a society aims to take advantage of available opportunities, it must first identify the problems and challenges, and then address them in order to progress towards its desired goals and create the necessary groundwork for that" (Jarvis, 2008; 88).

The present research is novel within the context of Afghanistan; however, a range of studies has been conducted in other countries.

Salimi et al. (2019) in their article address the emerging challenges of higher education in Iran and propose a conceptual model. They believe that several challenges face universities, including internationalization, industry relations, new fields of science, and interdisciplinary approaches. Jafari-Thani et al. have discussed the challenges and issues of quality assurance in Iran's higher education, arguing that quality assurance is a lengthy process that lacks effective feedback within the country, hindering the possibility of necessary reforms.

Arefi et al. (2013) specifically examined the challenges of international higher education at Shahid Beheshti University, identifying structural, financial, cultural, technological, and diplomatic issues as primary factors, while emphasizing the need for universities to maintain independence in international affairs in order to facilitate the exchange and utilization of experiences from others.

As the head of one of Afghanistan's universities, with many years of experience in this field, I have consistently been concerned about how to steer the country's universities toward quality enhancement in alignment with internationally accepted standards. Therefore, this text conducts a pathological analysis of higher education, with the main question being: what challenges exist in the realm of higher education in Afghanistan that hinder the development of universities?

This research has been conducted to analyze the vulnerabilities of higher education in Afghanistan, adopting a problem-solving approach in order to foster future alignment between the strategies of the Ministry of Higher Education and universities. To this end, a series of policy recommendations have been

proposed to enhance effective higher education, the consideration of which will contribute to greater efficacy within the educational sector.

This study is applied in nature and employs a dual methodology of fieldwork and library research. To obtain precise information regarding the decline in students' motivation, a field-based approach utilizing surveys was employed, while other areas were explored through library research using analytical methods to identify vulnerabilities.

2. Higher Education

In general, education can be categorized into four segments: primary education, which includes grades one through twelve and is delivered by schools; semi-higher education, which encompasses up to grade fourteen and is provided by institutes, typically lasting two years; higher education, which refers to advanced studies at universities and colleges that confer undergraduate degrees and generally lasts four years; and finally, graduate education, which includes Master's and doctoral programs, focusing on research where a Master's typically takes two years and a doctoral program four years, often referred to as specialist courses.

In this context, the author refers to higher education as the Bachelor's, Master's, and doctoral levels taught by universities, from which graduates obtain their degrees. The key issue raised here is the challenges faced by universities at this level of education that impede their development.

3. Vulnerability Analysis of Higher Education

The excessive demand for higher education has prompted the government to create opportunities for private higher education. Investing in higher education is an effective means to achieve economic, social, and cultural development. However, the subpar performance of universities has complicated the path to development. Merely offering quality education to applicants is insufficient; rather, diligent oversight and addressing their challenges will create a more competitive environment. In this study, the author identifies several vulnerabilities which will be explored below.

3.1. Shortage of Qualified Professional Staff

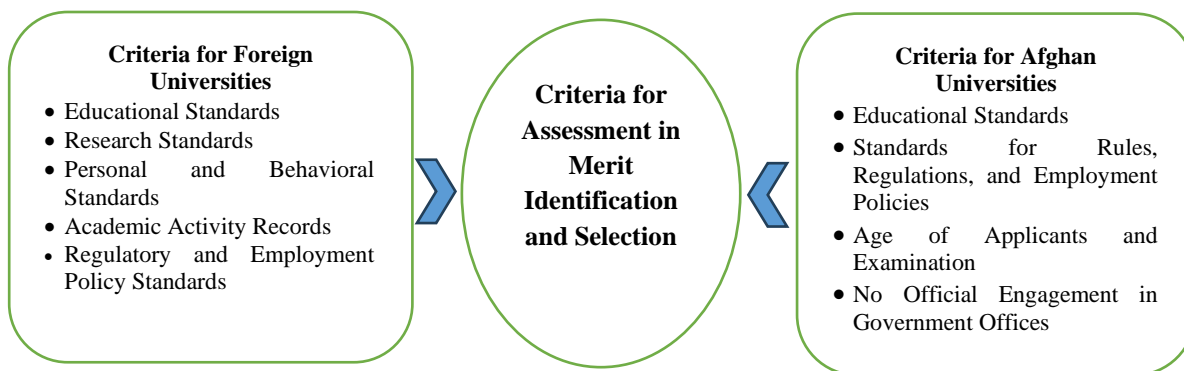
Higher education is considered the primary driver of transformation and advancement within society, with universities playing an essential, undeniable, and effective role as a catalyst. Essential to fulfilling this vital role is the presence of qualified, capable, and professional faculty members. A primary concern in this regard is the inability to attract skilled, committed, and experienced professionals; unfortunately, in many instances, qualified individuals with advanced degrees have been unable to join due to cumbersome recruitment regulations.

The lack of professional, specialized, and capable faculty has been a persistent challenge for the Ministry of Higher Education. Existing regulations for higher education need to be revisited and amended in light of the internationalization of universities and the rapid advancement of technology. Recruitment processes vary across countries; for example, in Lithuania and Estonia, faculties have the authority to recruit because they believe that informed, careful, and considered selection of new colleagues is crucial for the well-being of the institution, necessitating meticulousness beyond any other actions, as no decision is more critical than that made by the faculty of that department.

In Spain, universities have autonomy in decision-making, provided they adhere to the general criteria outlined in regulation frameworks. In the United States, faculty selection was initially conducted through governmental representatives in 1840, but subsequently, this responsibility was transferred to university boards; however, a detailed guideline on hiring practices has been established, encapsulating all criteria necessary for university faculty selection (Mosadeg, 2016: 35).

The criteria considered for hiring in universities worldwide, including Afghanistan, indicate that the overall criteria and regulations are quite similar (with some exceptions), and the only differences lie in the evaluation and assignment of numerical scores to those criteria and standards. One of the major distinctions considered in recruiting qualified and elite candidates in other countries as faculty members is their individual-behavioral traits, research capabilities, and academic backgrounds in other educational institutions. In contrast, the Afghan higher education law does not account for research qualifications, individual-behavioral traits, or the professional backgrounds of faculty members, which are deemed crucial criteria during their recruitment.

Figure 1. The theoretical framework of criteria influencing the qualification and selection of faculty members



The question now is, how does the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan fulfill its mission by omitting these three critical aspects? While the strategic plan of the Ministry aims to institutionalize research-oriented thinking and innovation in universities, research centers, individuals, and organizations by utilizing global opportunities to address the country's questions, needs, and challenges (Spokesperson, 2020: 3). If a faculty member lacks research capability, can such a mission truly be realized at that university? It seems that the gap will only be bridged when professors possess the necessary competencies.

Adherence to recruitment laws and regulations in Afghanistan is essential and should be maintained. However, interview findings with faculty members emphasize the lesser role of these laws and regulations while highlighting the influence of informal criteria on qualification and selection processes; this is due to the fact that universities are the primary centers of knowledge production and dissemination today, focusing on education and research at the highest levels, which can only be effectively managed by qualified and specialized individuals.

Based on the findings of the research, it appears that the Law on Civil Higher Education in Afghanistan needs a thorough review, incorporating elements such as academic activity history, research output (articles, books, research projects), and individual-behavioral characteristics. This is crucial because an individual may have taught in public universities on a contractual basis or in private institutions for many years and may have conducted significant scientific research (articles, books, research projects) but not be considered during the hiring process.

Thus, if such a highly qualified individual is not selected, there is a risk that a newly graduated individual with only a Bachelor's degree may be appointed as a faculty member, which will undoubtedly jeopardize the mission that the Ministry of Higher Education has in terms of research, addressing community needs, and fostering a research-oriented and innovative mindset in universities. However, if a qualified and specialized faculty member is chosen, the university's performance will be positive and fruitful, enhancing the quality, capacity, and overall efficiency of the educational system. Faculty members are significant contributors to a university's productivity, playing a role in enhancing the quality of services, products, and outputs provided by universities. Therefore, having capable, ethical, experienced, creative, and innovative faculty members can be a crucial factor in improving the quality of higher education processes and outcomes.

The shortage of faculty members in Afghan universities (particularly public ones) and the hiring of individuals with merely a Bachelor's degree pose significant challenges for higher education. While having qualified, experienced, and highly educated professors is a pressing need for the effectiveness and growth of the higher education system, a lack of thorough supervision in the recruitment process remains a challenge. The Ministry of Higher Education and the universities must ensure that they select appropriate faculty members to achieve their vision and mission within a competitive national and international framework aimed at attracting top academic talent.

One of the criticisms regarding faculty recruitment in Afghanistan's public universities is the limited scope of job advertisements, which are often restricted in duration (10 to 15 days) and not disseminated through reputable job sites. To enhance faculty recruitment, the breadth of job advertisements should be expanded, and listings should utilize established job platforms, the Ministry's website, the respective university's channels, and other personal and group connections (Ebrahimi, 2006: 69). Broad publicity means providing equal opportunities for all interested candidates to be informed.

For instance, in Canada, faculty recruitment advertisements are widely publicized to ensure that all Canadians and foreign residents are aware of the opportunities, usually for a duration of one month. The goal of extensive advertising is to enable the selection of the best candidates from among potential applicants (Ghiasi et al., 2020: 109). The limited duration of advertisements hinders the selection of qualified individuals.

A fundamental requirement in other countries for suitable faculty selection is accountability. The applicant for a faculty position must provide evidence of their capabilities to conduct independent academic activities, such as teaching, research, and quality assurance during the interview process. This is evaluated through their publication record, conference presentations, and teaching experience. Conversely, in the recruitment of faculty in Afghanistan, the evaluation often relies solely on passing written exams and presenting conferences to faculty members at the Bachelor's and Master's levels, without considering additional evidence or capabilities that should inform the selection process.

3.2. Reduced Academic Motivation

Interest and motivation are influential factors in growth and progress, stimulating the process of learning among individuals. One of the greatest challenges facing universities, especially private ones, is the decline in motivation to pursue higher education. The decrease in applicants indicates a lack of academic motivation. Research shows that insufficient motivation to continue education is a significant challenge for universities, affecting the outputs and outcomes of higher education (Maqdis Firmani, 2017) and hindering growth opportunities. If this issue is not resolved, it is possible that many private universities may suspend operations due to a lack of students and financial pressures.

Individuals are drawn to higher education for various motivations; while motivation is an internal factor driving individuals toward their goals, it is not solely dependent on intrinsic elements like

awareness, interest, academic ability, and talent (Moghaddas Farimani, 2017: 111). External factors such as family, schools, society, employment prospects, and systemic policies also play a crucial role. Internal factors are always within an individual's control, whereas external factors are beyond an individual's control and can directly or indirectly impact them. Here, we will explore external and environmental influences that are potential determinants of students' aspirations for further education, essentially representing their professional orientation for the future.

To derive an effective outcome, questionnaires were distributed to 100 male twelfth-grade students, revealing that respondents identified environmental factors that contributed to their decision not to pursue higher education. Among the hundred individuals surveyed, 27 deemed further education in Afghanistan unfeasible, citing primary reasons in order of significance as: lack of hope for the future, gender-based restrictions in education, minimal educational returns in future employment, lack of meritocracy, poverty, substandard universities, large family sizes, marital status, teacher job dissatisfaction, a lack of distinguished professors at universities, political issues, inadequate amenities in dormitories, and familial constraints.

The findings indicate that various factors influence their reduced motivation. The most significant factor identified was the lack of hope for a positive future, particularly prevalent among those interested in social sciences. They argue that career and educational fields are crucial for shaping an individual's identity within society, and when one cannot secure suitable employment, it may be better to focus on alternative endeavors; their identity becomes unstable, leading to feelings of shame for their families and communities. Some respondents cited gender restrictions as influencing their decision not to continue higher education. They felt obliged to halt their studies because their sister had given up her education, viewing this as a form of civil disobedience and support for her rights.

Meritocracy is another factor contributing to decreased educational motivation; respondents believe job opportunities have been deprived of many qualified graduates, resulting in increased unemployment as the principle of merit-based hiring has been overshadowed by nepotism. Additionally, they attributed poverty and financial constraints as barriers to continuing education, stating that pursuing education would lead to financial hardship for their families, compelling them to engage in labor to survive. Job dissatisfaction among teachers was also mentioned as a contributing factor to the decline in academic motivation. Furthermore, the lack of experienced faculty members in universities was cited, with some students expressing frustration that newly graduated individuals were teaching in some classes.

Other influencing factors included political issues, lack of educational and living amenities in universities and student dormitories, and family restrictions. Some parents believed that pursuing education in Afghanistan is futile and advocated for seeking other forms of employment.

3.3. Gender Discrimination in Education

The right to education is a fundamental human right that holds significant importance and is among the basic rights. Education has been labeled a path to peace, aligning with the core objectives of the United Nations. Human rights documents obligate governments to incorporate and safeguard this right within their constitutions. Women constitute half of the country's population and have historically faced discrimination and inequality in accessing their rights, including the right to education.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defines discrimination as "any distinction, exclusion, or restriction based on gender that has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women of human rights." On December 20, 2022, a letter from the Ministry of Higher Education was sent to all universities, stating that the continuation of women's education in universities was suspended until further notice

(<https://www.avapress.com/fa/news/262751>). The question remains: How does gender discrimination and inequality in educational opportunities impact society?

Gender discrimination is a form of inequality where half of society's potential is hindered from fully participating in education, leading to the loss of their talents and resulting in numerous negative consequences. Education is crucial for empowerment, allowing individuals to utilize their knowledge to engage in society effectively and take control of their lives. Restricting women's access to education yields far-reaching adverse effects. The greater the exclusion of women from educational opportunities, the lower productivity levels become, leading to higher maternal mortality rates associated with lower literacy and education levels. This, in turn, directly impacts the economic and social growth of a society (Zahed et al., 2020: 657).

The economic impact of education is significant - communities with higher education rates enjoy increased productivity. Kuznets argues that the true wealth of a developed country lies not in its industrial tools but in the technical capacity and skills of its workforce, achieved through education. Barro suggests that education influences economic growth through two primary channels: the level of education and the quality of education; his research correlates specific GDP per capita levels with the educational attainment and quality of various countries, demonstrating that nations with superior education systems experience better economic growth than those with lower educational quality (Barro, 2000: 88).

Additionally, Walter McMahon's research on East Asian countries highlights how education has transformed their status from poverty to wealth. Adam Smith states that investing in education enhances individuals' skills and abilities, which, in turn, contributes to increased income, benefiting the entire community. Consequently, investing in education does not merely consume resources; it becomes capital that is utilized in production processes to enhance individual capabilities and community income.

Education equips individuals to combat unemployment and alleviate social deprivation, as educated individuals strive for employment or entrepreneurial endeavors, applying the skills acquired during their studies, while uneducated individuals lack such capabilities. Furthermore, education reduces criminal tendencies, fosters healthier environments, and raises awareness among parents, facilitating greater social connection and participation (Kalemli, 2002: 422).

Depriving women of their right to education not only hampers economic empowerment and development but also leads to declining health indicators, increased poverty and unemployment, higher rates of early marriages, suicides, migration, a shortage of qualified professionals such as teachers, doctors, and specialists.

The suspension of female education in higher education institutions has led to a prohibition of studies for all female students, resulting in severe challenges for many universities, particularly private ones, which have lost half of their student population. The cessation of female students imposes heavy economic burdens on private universities, and the continuation of this trend may lead to the closure of many higher education institutions, especially those without medical programs.

3.4. Innovation and Creativity

Afghanistan is among the countries in dire need of development and progress. Human resource development aligned with societal needs is a key component of growth. The effectiveness and quality of a country's developmental process depend on the quantity of its specialized and skilled human resources. Today, it is universally acknowledged that specialization is crucial, and organizations entrust their activities to qualified and skilled individuals.

One of the pressing challenges in higher education, particularly in Afghan universities, is the lack of creativity and innovation. It is rare to find a university engaged in inventions, innovations, and creative outcomes. Innovation is one of the primary responsibilities of universities, and fostering innovative individuals who can identify environmental opportunities and provide new products, methods, and services based on their knowledge is essential for survival in a competitive and unstable environment (Hasan Moradi, 2007: 18)

Every community is filled with needs and problems that require logical responses, and creativity and innovation are capable of addressing these needs effectively. The more prevalent innovation and creativity are in a society, the more conducive the environment for growth and progress. Human perfection lies in novelty and advancement, achievable when suitable conditions for innovation and creativity are fostered. Higher education is a vital platform for innovation, as students are typically required to create new ideas through their research and seek solutions to societal challenges.

Robert J. Sternberg and Linda E. O'Hara (as cited in Sadeghi Mal Amiri, 2010: 105) identify knowledge, reasoning abilities, style of thinking, motivation, personality, and environment as factors essential for invention and creativity.

Thus, an appropriate environment and necessary infrastructure for fostering innovation and creativity are essential. Universities and research centers are pivotal for innovation and creativity; unfortunately, the necessary conditions for such pursuits have not been adequately established, resulting in lower levels of creativity and innovation within the country's universities compared to others.

4. Challenges in the International Arena

In addition to domestic challenges, higher education faces international challenges related to faculty brain drain and the globalization of universities, which are further discussed below.

4.1. Brain Drain of Faculty Members

The widespread emigration of educated individuals, academics, and faculty members from one country to another is termed brain drain (Rafat, 2016: 15). One of the challenges the war has imposed on the people of Afghanistan is migration and displacement, with faculty members and educators forming a significant portion of this wave. Brain drain has emerged as a serious challenge in Afghanistan, as substantial time and capital have been invested in nurturing these individuals, making their replacement a time-consuming endeavor.

Human capital is a key factor in a country's economic development, and the exodus of skilled individuals and faculty members can contribute to societal regression. Recent developments have prompted several faculty members from both public and private universities to leave the country, presenting a major challenge for higher education in Afghanistan. Public universities have resorted to hiring newly graduated individuals (Bachelor's degree holders) and even students in their eighth semester, as well as employing contract faculty from private universities, a challenge that persists in scenarios across several institutions.

The issue remains as to why the brain drain and faculty exodus occur and how it can be mitigated. The author suggests this topic be explored and analyzed in a separate paper. However, research in other countries shows that inadequate educational, research, and laboratory facilities, lack of meritocracy, and the appointment of less knowledgeable individuals to critical positions encourage brain drain, where 60–70% of qualified scholars either remain unemployed or are underemployed.

Some classify the causes of faculty brain drain based on indicators from the home and host countries; in the home country, factors include political issues, lack of security, unemployment, poverty, injustice and discrimination, absence of academic engagement and connections, limited job opportunities, bureaucratic challenges, nepotism, and traditional governance systems. In contrast, the host country presents factors such as access to academic resources, stability, job opportunities, participation in specialized and managerial affairs, meritocracy, non-discrimination, and social amenities. Personal factors such as feelings of insecurity, lack of growth, identity issues, uncertainty about the future, feelings of inferiority and humiliation, as well as discontent with the sociopolitical environment also play a role (Saljuqi, 2000: 7).

Afghanistan, which has endured prolonged conflict and violence, has experienced four major waves of brain drain (1980–1990 with the Soviet invasion, 1992 upon their withdrawal, 1998–2001, and in 2021 with the exit of U.S. coalition forces), witnessing the mass exodus of specialists, educated individuals, and, notably, faculty members (<https://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-60200786>).

The brain drain of faculty in Afghanistan, like in other countries, is driven by internal, personal, and external factors. Internal factors include political insecurity, conflict, discrimination in hiring practices, weak educational systems, absence of production and innovation, lack of equal job opportunities based on merit, and exclusion from participation in decision-making. Personal factors include feelings of insecurity, identity crises, lack of hope for the future, absence of academic freedom, and overall dissatisfaction. External factors (from the target country) are characterized by equitable job opportunities, merit-based employment, superior amenities, academic freedoms, and ample prospects for growth in scientific and technical fields.

To combat faculty brain drain, the government must implement several measures: firstly, provide greater political, social, and research freedoms to faculty members, ensuring they do not feel ineffective in their specialized fields. Secondly, universities should prioritize meritocracy in hiring faculty members. Thirdly, a “reverse pathway” approach should be employed to create conditions for those who have left to return, similar to the model successfully implemented by South Korea. Fourthly, adjustments to hiring and recruitment regulations can serve as preventive measures against the exodus of experienced faculty.

4.2. Internationalization of Universities

The extensive development of communication tools and the accelerated pace of data transfer in the 21st century have made mutual cultural awareness more crucial than ever. If nations fail to participate in data exchange and do not present accurate representations of their information, cultural misunderstandings and misinterpretations may arise, leading to significant detriment to both nations. Many scholars have faced negligence from their governments, and their identities today remain obscured. One of the core missions of universities is to foster these concepts and establish an academic presence in the contemporary world.

The internationalization of universities not only brings economic advantages and increases revenue but also enhances quality, promotes global rankings, and facilitates interaction with the international community. Unfortunately, Afghanistan's higher education sector has not achieved notable effectiveness regarding international cooperation. One of the challenges within higher education is the lack of internationalization and global outreach of its universities. Thus, what are the major barriers to the internationalization of Afghanistan's universities? What strategies can be employed to overcome this issue?

Science is an international concept that transcends borders; engaging with the international community is essential for accessing the latest discoveries and applying them to local needs. Upon examining global university rankings, criteria such as the number of international students, foreign faculty

members, international publications, hosting conferences and workshops, and establishing international partnerships feature prominently. Countries like China, India, Malaysia, South Korea, Turkey, Morocco, and Iran have increasingly prioritized international education by 2025. Student and faculty exchanges, opportunities for study abroad, and participation in international seminars and conferences are further systematic methods for internationalization.

A report by the International Association of Universities in 2003 indicated that 73% of member institutions considered internationalization as a top priority for higher education reform (Knight, 2006: 19). For Afghanistan's universities to internationalize, adherence to recognized global standards and indicators is vital, yet unfortunately, many of these criteria are either unavailable or minimally met, significantly affecting universities' global rankings. The Times Higher Education (THE) rankings for 2024 consider the following metrics: academic reputation (40%), staff reputation (10%), student-staff ratio (20%), citations per faculty (20%), international faculty ratio (5%), and international student ratio (5%).

The Times Higher Education continues to provide one of the most prestigious annual university rankings. Regrettably, for 2022 and 2023, when the author consulted the rankings, no Afghan universities were listed, demonstrating that substantial efforts are required across various sectors. The Ministry of Higher Education must address this issue seriously. Current challenges against the internationalization of Afghanistan's universities include the lack of coherent policies by the Ministry, difficulties in attracting international students and faculty, absence of clear policies in this context, and insufficient research output in reputable foreign journals.

The internationalization of universities results in attracting foreign students, faculty, and staff, creating opportunities for the exchange of culture and values beyond the borders of Afghanistan. However, doing so necessitates organizing a conference or symposium to gather impactful ideas from academic leaders, subsequently synthesizing these ideas into a strategy devised by the Ministry to guide international activities and pursue established standards.

Furthermore, within the educational sector, notable domestic and international faculty members should be invited to collaborate between two or more universities, providing opportunities to enhance educational standards and facilitating research pathways that can advance into the international arena. Necessary infrastructure must be established to incorporate online systems equipped with appropriate hardware and software.

Politically, the Ministry of Higher Education must grant autonomy to universities to engage in agreements with foreign institutions regarding education, faculty recruitment, student exchanges, scientific travels, and enhancing international collaboration without imposing operational burdens.

5. Suggestions

- To address existing challenges in coordinating efforts between industry and academia, we must implement theories of adjacency and motivation. This entails that the industry should be psychologically, socially, and organizationally closer to universities. To operationalize this collaboration, a joint committee encompassing the Research, Writing, and Translation Directorate within the Ministry of Higher Education, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and representatives from both public and private universities should be established. This committee should consolidate its activities within an annual operational plan and submit monthly progress reports. Additionally, to draft the operational plan, a large conference or workshop should be organized, inviting researchers, faculty, and industry representatives to present their proposals and facilitate agreements for collaboration between industry and academia.

- The Ministry of Higher Education should establish a directorship titled "Directorate of Innovation and Technology Development," inviting creative individuals to present their ideas through this directorate, thus transforming them via partnerships with industries into innovations, inventions, and new products (innovation in materials, processes, markets, and services).
- To internationalize universities effectively, the Ministry of Higher Education is advised to develop a strategic policy plan addressing the internationalization of universities, which defines methods for attracting students, faculty, staff, conducting applied research and publishing findings in international journals, and developing infrastructures. Subsequently, to execute this policy and secure funding, negotiations with stakeholders such as the national budget, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, and organizations allocating budgets for innovation and creativity should be pursued.
- To attract experienced, specialized, and qualified individuals, necessary amendments must be made to the new recruitment regulations. These should include criteria for evaluating research output (articles, books, and research projects), teaching history, and individual-behavioral characteristics. The issue of brain drain also warrants a separate, in-depth field study aimed at identifying the underlying scientific, economic, social, and political roots of the challenge.

Conclusion

This study, which employs a dual methodology of library research and field studies, has yielded the following conclusions regarding the challenges facing higher education in Afghanistan:

- Collaboration between industry and academia is very limited, leading to a lack of engagement and coordination between the two sectors. The primary challenge is an internal organizational one, and thus far, no effective measures have been established to address it from either side .
- Universities, particularly state universities, face a shortage of professional and specialized faculty. The recruitment of most faculty members in Afghan universities is influenced by varying regulatory and organizational criteria and even hidden policies, preventing institutional and academic productivity from growing.
- Afghan universities and the Ministry of Higher Education tend to overlook critical criteria such as conducting research and teaching experience in other universities as valuable work experience and the significance of individual-behavioral attributes. Stringent hiring regulations have failed to attract top talents and, in some cases, have facilitated faculty brain drain.
- The environment for creativity, innovation, and invention within Afghan universities is significantly restricted. The continuation of this trend will limit competitive capabilities on a global and regional scale; hence, it is imperative to establish necessary hardware and software infrastructures in the fields of education and research.
- Following the recent upheaval, student enrollment in Afghan universities has declined, with environmental and external factors playing a more significant role than personal issues. If this trend persists, it could jeopardize the survival of many private universities.
- Afghan universities have experienced limited success in the international arena, primarily due to the absence of a cohesive and systematic framework from the Ministry for attracting faculty, employees, and students, along with insufficient research published in reputable international journals. Brain

drain, gender discrimination in education, and continued closure of educational opportunities for women lead to economic, social, cultural, and academic inefficiencies, exacerbating issues such as forced marriages, suicides, migration, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, reduced specialized workforces, and mental health problems.

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