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Youth and Education in Afghanistan After 2021

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ABSTRACT

The education system in Afghanistan has undergone a dramatic transformation following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. With severe restrictions on female education, ideological shifts in curriculum, and the broader socio-economic challenges facing Afghan youth, the landscape of learning and development has changed significantly. This paper examines the impact of these developments using secondary data from international organizations, reports, policy analyses, and academic literature. It explores the consequences of the Taliban's policies on youth education, the emergence of alternative educational pathways, and the long-term socio-political implications of restricted learning opportunities. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of international actors, humanitarian organizations, and online education initiatives in mitigating the crisis. By providing a comparative analysis of pre-2021 and post-2021 educational policies, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving dynamics of youth education in Afghanistan. The findings underscore the urgent need for policy interventions and international engagement to safeguard educational access and opportunities for Afghan youth, particularly for women and girls.

Keywords: Afghanistan; Youth education; Taliban policies; Gender disparities; International response

INTRODUCTION

The tapestry of Afghanistan's educational landscape has been dramatically reshaped since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, marking a profound turning point for an entire generation of young learners¹. In the wake of this seismic political shift, the fundamental right to education has been systematically dismantled, particularly for girls and women, creating an unprecedented crisis that threatens the future of Afghan youth². Before 2021, Afghanistan had witnessed remarkable progress in educational access and enrollment. Between 2001 and 2018, the number of women in higher education increased almost 20 times, with one out of three young women enrolled in universities³. However, the Taliban's takeover has swiftly unraveled these hard-won achievements, imposing severe restrictions that have effectively erased decades of educational advancement. The current educational reality in Afghanistan is stark

and deeply troubling. As of 2025, approximately 80% of school-aged Afghan girls and young women—roughly 2.5 million individuals—are out of school⁴. The Taliban has systematically prohibited girls from attending secondary schools and universities, making Afghanistan the only country globally to impose such comprehensive educational restrictions⁴. These policies have denied fundamental educational rights and created a generational catastrophe with far-reaching socio-economic implications. The transformation extends beyond gender restrictions. The Taliban has fundamentally restructured the educational curriculum, removing subjects related to human rights, arts, culture, and critical thinking while dramatically increasing religious education⁵. Textbooks have been rewritten to align with the Taliban's conservative interpretation of Islam, effectively reshaping the intellectual landscape for Afghan students⁵. The consequences of these educational policies are profound. UNESCO and human rights organizations warn that this



systematic exclusion could lead to increased child labour, early marriages, and a significant decline in skilled workforce development⁴. The number of primary school enrolments has already dropped from 6.8 million in 2019 to 5.7 million in 2022, signaling a broader erosion of educational infrastructure⁴. International actors, including UNESCO and human rights organizations, continue to call for the unconditional reopening of schools and universities for Afghan girls and women⁶. However, the Taliban remains resolute in its restrictive policies, claiming alignment with their interpretation of Islamic law—a justification rejected by scholars and leaders in other Muslim-majority nations. As Afghanistan stands at this critical juncture, the future of its youth hangs in a delicate balance, with education emerging as the primary battleground for fundamental human rights and societal progress.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To examine the impact of the Taliban's post-2021 education policies on youth education in Afghanistan, with a specific focus on gender disparities.
- To analyze the socio-economic and political consequences of restricted educational access for Afghan youth, particularly for women and girls.
- To investigate the emergence of alternative educational pathways, including online learning and underground schools, as a response to educational restrictions.
- To assess the ideological changes in the curriculum under Taliban rule and their implications for the prospects of Afghan youth.
- To evaluate the role of international organizations, humanitarian actors, and regional stakeholders in mitigating the education crisis in Afghanistan.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the impact of the Taliban's post-2021 education policies on Afghan youth, relying solely on secondary data due to security and political constraints. Sources include reports from international organizations such as UNESCO and Human Rights Watch, Taliban decrees, pre-2021 Afghan government documents, academic literature, and case studies on underground and online education.

The data is analysed through a combination of comparative and thematic methods. Comparative analysis highlights the shift in education policy before and after 2021, particularly to gender, curriculum, and enrolment, and contrasts these with policies in other Muslim countries. Thematic analysis focuses on issues like gender inequality, ideological changes, and alternative learning models. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges Afghan youth face and explores emerging non-traditional responses.

LEGAL AND INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The Taliban's restrictions on education, particularly for women and girls, violate multiple international legal instruments that recognize education as a fundamental human right. This section examines Afghanistan's obligations under international human rights law, relevant UN conventions, and the global response to education suppression post-2021.

1. The Right to Education in International Law

The right to education is enshrined in several key international treaties, which Afghanistan, as a member of the international community, is expected to uphold:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948: Article 26 guarantees the right to free and compulsory education at the elementary level and emphasizes higher education accessibility based on merit⁷.
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966: Article 13 obligates states to provide equal access to education and progressively ensure free secondary and higher education⁸.
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979: Articles 10 and 14 mandate gender equality in education and prohibit discrimination against women in rural and urban areas⁹.

Afghanistan ratified CEDAW in 2003, committing to eliminating gender-based discrimination in education. However, the Taliban's policies since 2021 have directly violated these commitments, making Afghanistan the only country where secondary and higher education for women is officially banned¹⁰.

2. UN Resolutions and Declarations on Girls' Education

The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) and UN Security Council (UNSC) have condemned the Taliban's education bans:

- UNGA Resolution A/RES/76/220 (2021) urged the Taliban to respect human rights, including access for women and girls¹¹.
- UNSC Resolution 2593 (2021) called on the Taliban to uphold human rights, including commitments to allow safe access to education¹².
- UNESCO's 2023 Report highlighted that over 2.5 million Afghan girls are now out of school, leading to long-term economic and social decline¹³.
- These resolutions emphasize that denying education is not only a domestic issue but also a matter of international peace and security, given the risks of radicalization and economic collapse.

3. Regional and International Legal Reactions

Many governments and international organizations have condemned the Taliban's policies:



- The European Union (EU) imposed sanctions on Taliban officials responsible for education bans, linking the issue to human rights violations¹⁴.
- The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) urged the Taliban to reopen schools for girls, stating that Islam mandates equal access to education¹⁵.
- The United States and G7 Nations have conditioned humanitarian aid and diplomatic engagement on the Taliban reversing its restrictions¹⁶.

Despite these pressures, the Taliban remains defiant, rejecting external influence and enforcing ideological control over education¹⁷.

The Taliban's education restrictions violate multiple binding international treaties and have sparked widespread condemnation from UN bodies, regional organizations, and global powers. However, enforcement remains limited due to political constraints and Afghanistan's isolation from the international community. Addressing this crisis requires stronger international legal mechanisms, diplomatic pressure, and alternative educational solutions such as online and underground schools.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A complex interplay of cultural, political, and social factors has shaped Afghanistan's educational landscape. Understanding this historical context is crucial for analysing the current challenges and developments in the country's education system.

1. Early Developments (1900s–1930s)

The initial steps toward modern education in Afghanistan began under Amir Habibullah Khan (1901–1919). In 1903, he established the Habibia School in Kabul, introducing a curriculum influenced by British Indian educational models¹⁸. This institution became a cornerstone for educating Afghanistan's elite and fostering intellectual growth.

King Amanullah Khan (1919–1929) furthered educational reforms by making primary education compulsory and opening schools for girls¹⁹. His reign saw the establishment of the first girls' school in 1920 and efforts to promote women's education. However, these progressive initiatives faced resistance, leading to the closure of girls' schools after his abdication in 1929¹⁹.

2. Mid-20th Century Progress and Challenges

The mid-20th century witnessed renewed efforts to expand education. In 1935, the Afghan government declared education universal, compulsory, and free²⁰. By the 1960s, significant attention was given to extending educational opportunities, resulting in increased enrolment and the establishment of new institutions²⁰.

Despite these advancements, challenges persisted, including limited access in rural areas and cultural barriers that hindered female education²⁰. The tension between modern educational aspirations and traditional societal

norms remained a recurring theme.

3. Soviet Era and Civil Conflict (1979–1996)

The Soviet invasion in 1979 and the subsequent civil war severely disrupted Afghanistan's education system²¹. Many schools were destroyed, and the educational infrastructure deteriorated²¹. The conflict led to a significant decline in enrolment and literacy rates, with long-term impacts on the nation's human capital²¹.

4. Taliban Regime and Education (1996–2001)

During the Taliban's first rule, strict policies were implemented that drastically affected education, especially for women and girls²². Female education was banned, and many schools were closed or repurposed²². This period marked a significant regression in educational attainment and gender equality in schooling²².

5. Post-2001 Reconstruction and Expansion

Following the Taliban's ousting in 2001, Afghanistan embarked on rebuilding its education sector²³. International aid and government initiatives led to the reopening of schools, the construction of new facilities, and policies promoting gender inclusivity. By 2015, notable progress was evident, including the launch of the first master's degree program in gender and women's studies at Kabul University²³.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

Despite significant strides, Afghanistan's education system continues to face challenges²⁴. Political instability, cultural resistance, and economic constraints impede universal access to quality education²⁵. The ongoing tension between traditional values and modern educational goals underscores the need for culturally sensitive and sustainable approaches to educational development²⁶.

1. Political and Gender-Based Restrictions

Since the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, there has been a significant regression in educational rights, particularly for women and girls²⁷. In December 2022, the de facto authorities banned women from universities, denying access to higher education to more than 100,000 young women²⁸. The United Nations has recognized this ban as a violation of fundamental human rights and a crime against humanity²⁹.

2. Economic Constraints and Poverty

Economic hardships severely impede educational access. Over 80% of Afghan women live in poverty, exacerbating barriers to education³⁰. Even before the Taliban's resurgence, Afghanistan struggled with over 3.7 million out-of-school children, a number that has likely increased due to ongoing conflicts and economic instability³¹. Families struggling to meet basic needs often prioritize survival over education, leading to declining enrolment rates.

3. Infrastructural Challenges

The prolonged conflict has led to the destruction of educational infrastructure. Many schools have been dam-



aged or repurposed, resulting in overcrowded classrooms and inadequate learning environments. The lack of proper facilities discourages attendance and affects the quality of education, particularly in rural areas³².

4. Social and Cultural Barriers

Deep-rooted cultural norms in certain regions prioritize early marriage and domestic responsibilities for girls over education. These societal expectations and security concerns lead to decreased enrolment and high dropout rates among female students. Additionally, restrictive gender norms and family pressures often prevent young women from pursuing higher education, even where access is technically available.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL COMPARISONS

The education crisis in Afghanistan under the Taliban is unprecedented, particularly regarding gender-based restrictions. However, similar patterns of education suppression, ideological control, and alternative learning pathways can be observed in other authoritarian or conflict-affected regions. Comparing Afghanistan's situation with countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia (pre-2017 reforms), Sudan, and post-coup Myanmar provides valuable insights into the broader implications of state-controlled education and restrictions on female learning.

1. Gender-Based Educational Restrictions

One of the most striking aspects of Afghanistan's education crisis is the systematic exclusion of women and girls from formal learning institutions. Similar restrictions have been observed in other regions:

- Iran: Women's access to higher education has fluctuated based on government policies, with quotas limiting female enrollment in certain university disciplines deemed inappropriate for women. However, unlike in Afghanistan, women in Iran still have access to primary, secondary, and most higher education programs³³.
- Saudi Arabia (pre-2017 reforms): Historically, Saudi Arabia imposed gender-segregated education and limited women's access to certain academic fields, particularly science and engineering. However, reforms since 2017 have expanded women's educational opportunities, showing a policy shift away from restrictive measures³⁴.
- Sudan (under Omar al-Bashir's Islamist regime): Sudan witnessed restrictions on female education, an emphasis on Islamic curriculum reforms, and an erosion of secular education systems, particularly in the 1990s and early 2000s³⁵.

Unlike Saudi Arabia and Sudan, where restrictions were eventually eased or reversed, the Taliban's complete ban on female secondary and university education makes Afghanistan an extreme case. This aligns with one of the study's hypotheses that the Taliban's ideological control over

education is shaping long-term socio-political outcomes, limiting opportunities for Afghan youth, and reinforcing gender-based exclusion.

2. Ideological Control and Curriculum Manipulation

The Taliban's restructuring of the Afghan education system—removing secular subjects such as human rights, arts, and sciences while increasing religious instruction—reflects patterns observed in other authoritarian regimes.

- Myanmar (post-2021 coup): The military junta has imposed strict ideological oversight over education, suppressing democratic ideals, censoring critical thinking, and reinforcing nationalist propaganda³⁵. This mirrors Afghanistan's removal of critical subjects to consolidate Taliban authority and prevent opposition movements.
- Iran: The Iranian education system has been shaped by government-imposed ideological frameworks, emphasizing religious studies and state-approved narratives³⁶. However, Iran still maintains secular components in its higher education curriculum, unlike Afghanistan's radical removal of such content.
- Saudi Arabia (before reforms): Saudi curricula previously excluded discussions of democracy, human rights, and gender equality, prioritizing religious and moral instruction³⁷. Reforms since 2017 have gradually reintroduced more diverse academic perspectives—a stark contrast to Afghanistan, where curriculum restrictions have only intensified.

These comparisons highlight how education policies are used as political tools. The Taliban's education model is not just about religious instruction but a strategic mechanism to control narratives and suppress dissent—a pattern also evident in Myanmar's junta-controlled education system. This comparison reinforces the study's hypothesis that ideological shifts in the Afghan education system limit critical thinking and affect the future prospects of Afghan youth.

3. Alternative Learning Pathways: Resistance and Underground Education

Despite restrictions, alternative education models have emerged in many authoritarian regimes, offering parallels to Afghanistan's underground schools and online education initiatives.

- Iran: Iranian students and activists have established informal and underground learning networks in response to restrictions on academic freedoms. Women have also accessed online education programs to bypass government quotas and limitations³⁸.
- Myanmar: In response to the military's control over schools, many educators and students have formed parallel education systems, such as the Civil Disobedience Movement's "Spring University," which provides online courses independent of the state³⁹.



- Sudan: Under al-Bashir's Islamist rule, secular educators established independent learning spaces to resist government-imposed ideological curricula⁴⁰.

These cases suggest that informal education networks, underground schools, and online platforms can serve as temporary but crucial alternatives for Afghan youth, especially women. However, the study's methodology acknowledges the limitations of these models, including risks of government crackdowns, lack of formal accreditation, and restricted internet access in Afghanistan. The findings suggest that while these alternative pathways provide some relief, they are not long-term substitutes for a functional, inclusive national education system.

4. Economic Consequences of Educational Restrictions

Countries that have historically imposed educational bans or severe curriculum restrictions have suffered significant economic repercussions:

- Iran and Saudi Arabia (pre-reforms): Restrictions on women's education and employment opportunities led to lower labour force participation rates, reducing economic productivity⁴¹.
- Sudan: The Islamization of education during the 1990s and 2000s contributed to brain drain, with many educated professionals fleeing the country. Sudan's restrictive policies also undermined economic growth, as it failed to produce a skilled workforce for an evolving economy⁴².
- Myanmar: The military junta's suppression of higher education and research has weakened the country's economic competitiveness and discouraged foreign investment⁴³.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

- Afghanistan's education crisis is worsening under Taliban rule, with long-term consequences for gender equality, economic growth, and national stability.
- The Taliban has imposed severe restrictions on female education, making Afghanistan the only country in the world with a complete ban on secondary and higher education for women.
- The curriculum has been restructured to eliminate secular subjects, reinforcing ideological control and limiting critical thinking among students.
- Overall school enrolment has declined, with both male and female students facing fewer educational opportunities due to policy changes and instability.
- Alternative education models, such as underground schools and online learning, offer temporary solutions but lack formal accreditation and face increasing restrictions from the Taliban.
- Afghanistan's economy is at risk of collapse, with a projected 30% GDP decline over the next decade due to reduced workforce participation and mass brain drain.

- Despite widespread international condemnation, sanctions and diplomatic efforts have failed to reverse education bans, and regional actors, including some Muslim-majority countries, oppose Taliban policies.
- Internal divisions within the Taliban suggest some officials support education access, but hardliners remain dominant, preventing policy changes.
- If restrictions continue, Afghanistan faces deepening poverty, social unrest, radicalization, and long-term international isolation.

The findings of this study reveal that the Taliban's post-2021 education policies have profoundly affected Afghan youth, particularly women and girls. These restrictions have reversed decades of progress, increased gender disparities, and weakened Afghanistan's future workforce. Before the Taliban's takeover, one in three young Afghan women were enrolled in universities; however, since 2021, approximately 80% of school-aged Afghan girls—around 2.5 million individuals—have been forced out of school. This drastic shift has reinforced patterns of exclusion and economic dependence, directly contradicting the principles of Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes the role of education in national development. The long-term implications of these policies suggest an overall decline in economic productivity, governance capacity, and societal advancement.

Beyond outright bans on female education, the Taliban has restructured Afghanistan's curriculum to consolidate ideological control. Secular subjects such as human rights, arts, and philosophy have been systematically removed, while religious instruction has expanded significantly. This aligns with Authoritarianism and Education Theory, which posits that education under repressive regimes is often manipulated to suppress critical thinking and sustain political power. Comparative analysis with Iran, Saudi Arabia (before reforms), and Myanmar highlights how authoritarian regimes frequently use education as a tool of ideological reinforcement. However, Afghanistan remains unique in its complete exclusion of women from higher education, setting it apart even from similarly restrictive governments.

Despite these challenges, Afghan youth—particularly women—have sought alternative educational opportunities through underground schools, online learning platforms, and secret study groups. While these initiatives demonstrate resilience, they face significant barriers, including limited internet access, lack of accreditation, and the risk of government crackdowns. Alternative education models have provided temporary relief in other authoritarian contexts, such as Iran and Myanmar, where informal learning networks have flourished despite restrictions. However, in Afghanistan, the Taliban's heightened surveillance and control over digital spaces further limit the sustainability of such initiatives. The findings suggest that while these underground learning methods may offer short-term solutions,



they cannot replace a fully functioning, accredited education system.

The economic consequences of these educational restrictions are severe. Studies from UNESCO and the World Bank estimate that excluding women from education and employment could shrink Afghanistan's GDP by up to 30% over the next decade. The lack of an educated workforce also threatens long-term economic stability, as the country increasingly relies on international aid rather than self-sufficient economic growth. This economic stagnation is further exacerbated by an increasing brain drain, as educated professionals flee the country in search of better opportunities. Similar patterns have been observed in Sudan and Myanmar, where educational suppression has led to economic decline and increased reliance on foreign assistance.

International reactions to the Taliban's education policies have been largely condemnatory, yet diplomatic efforts and economic sanctions have done little to reverse these restrictions. Organizations such as the United Nations and UNESCO have repeatedly urged the Taliban to restore educational access, but with little success. Historical comparisons suggest that external pressure alone is unlikely to yield significant change unless coupled with strong regional advocacy and internal resistance. In countries like Sudan and Saudi Arabia, shifts in education policy only occurred when internal political dynamics changed. In Afghanistan, without sustained diplomatic engagement, financial incentives, or regional intervention from influential Muslim-majority states, the Taliban is unlikely to revise its stance on education.

The study's findings indicate that the suppression of education is not just a short-term policy but a structural barrier threatening Afghanistan's long-term stability. The exclusion of women from educational and professional spaces will likely deepen poverty, increase social unrest, and contribute to radicalization. While alternative education efforts provide hope, they remain fragile in the face of Taliban control. Addressing this crisis requires a coordinated approach involving Afghan civil society, international actors, and regional stakeholders. Without meaningful intervention, Afghanistan risks further isolation, economic stagnation, and a deteriorating human rights situation that will take generations to reverse.

POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE PROJECTIONS

The Taliban's educational policies have profound political implications for Afghanistan's future. The exclusion of women and girls from education not only violates human rights but also threatens to destabilize the nation's socio-political fabric. This section examines the political ramifications of these policies and offers projections for Afghanistan's trajectory under continued Taliban rule.

1. Erosion of Human Capital and Governance Challenges

The systematic exclusion of women from education diminishes Afghanistan's human capital, leading to a less informed and less skilled populace. This erosion hampers effective governance and public administration, as a significant portion of the population is denied the opportunity to contribute to national development. The World Bank reports that in 2022, Afghanistan's domestic revenues reached \$2.2 billion, accounting for 15% of GDP, which is still lower than the \$5.2 billion available in 2019. This decline underscores the economic challenges exacerbated by restrictive educational policies⁴⁴.

2. Internal Dissent and Policy Fractures

Within the Taliban's ranks, there is evidence of dissent regarding educational restrictions. Notably, Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai, the Taliban's deputy foreign minister, publicly criticized the ban on girls' education, stating that there is no justification for such restrictions. Following his remarks, he was reportedly forced to flee Afghanistan. This incident highlights internal disagreements that could lead to policy fractures and challenges to the Taliban's cohesion⁴⁵.

3. International Isolation and Legitimacy Crisis

The Taliban's oppressive educational policies have drawn international condemnation, leading to political isolation. The United Nations has recognized these actions as crimes against humanity. Afghan women's rights activists are calling for a boycott of the Afghan national cricket team, arguing that participation in international sports events helps to normalize the Taliban's oppressive regime. This international scrutiny undermines the Taliban's quest for legitimacy and may result in sustained sanctions and reduced foreign aid⁴⁶.

4. Suppression of Media and Civil Society

The Taliban's suspension of Radio Begum, a women's radio station, for alleged policy violations and unauthorized collaboration with a foreign TV channel, exemplifies the regime's broader strategy to suppress dissent and control narratives. This suppression stifles civil society and limits platforms for alternative discourse, consolidating the Taliban's authoritarian grip⁴⁷.

5. Future Projections: A Precarious Path Ahead

If current educational restrictions persist, Afghanistan faces a precarious future. The exclusion of half the population from educational and economic participation will likely lead to increased poverty, social unrest, and potential radicalization. The United States Institute of Peace highlights the profound personal and societal impacts of the Taliban's education ban, noting that over a year and a half after the ban, the sadness among affected individuals is overpowering⁴⁸. Without significant policy reforms, Afghanistan risks becoming a pariah state, with deteriorating human rights conditions and a bleak socio-economic outlook.



In conclusion, the Taliban's educational policies have far-reaching political implications that threaten Afghanistan's stability and development. Addressing these challenges requires both internal reforms and sustained international engagement to advocate for inclusive and equitable education for all Afghans.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the educational crisis in Afghanistan necessitates comprehensive policy interventions that consider the socio-political landscape and prioritize inclusivity. The following recommendations aim to mitigate the adverse effects of current educational restrictions and promote sustainable development:

1. Support Alternative Education Pathways

In response to the Taliban's restrictions on formal education for women and girls, it is crucial to develop and support alternative educational avenues:

- **Community-based education (CBE):** Implementing CBE programs can provide localized and culturally sensitive learning opportunities, especially in rural areas. These programs have historically been effective in reaching marginalized populations in Afghanistan.
- **Online and Distance Learning:** Leveraging technology to offer online courses can circumvent physical educational barriers. Mobile learning platforms, in particular, can provide flexible and accessible educational content.

2. Engage with the Taliban for Educational Access

Constructive engagement with the Taliban is essential to negotiate educational access:

- **Diplomatic Dialogue:** International stakeholders should engage in dialogue with pragmatic elements within the Taliban to advocate for the reopening of educational institutions for all genders.
- **Conditional Aid:** Linking humanitarian aid to educational access can incentivize policy changes. Providing aid contingent upon the Taliban allowing education for women and girls may yield positive outcomes.

3. Increase International Support and Scholarships

The global community should enhance support for Afghan students:

- **Scholarships for Afghan Women:** Universities worldwide should offer scholarships to Afghan women, enabling them to pursue higher education abroad. This approach not only educates individuals but also fosters future leaders.
- **Support for Local NGOs:** Funding local, women-led organizations can strengthen grassroots educational initiatives and ensure that aid reaches those most in need.

4. Preserve Educational Infrastructure

Maintaining and protecting existing educational infrastructure is vital:

- **Prevent Asset Stripping:** Ensure that schools and universities remain intact and are not repurposed, allowing for a quicker resumption of educational activities when possible.
- **Protect Educators:** Safeguard the rights and well-being of teachers, providing them with support and security to continue their roles.

5. Monitor and Advocate for Human Rights

Continuous monitoring and advocacy are essential to uphold educational rights:

- **International Oversight:** Organizations like UNESCO should monitor the educational situation and report violations to maintain global awareness.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Raising global awareness about the educational crisis can mobilize support and pressure for change.

Implementing these policy recommendations requires a coordinated effort among international organizations, governments, and civil society to ensure that the right to education is preserved and promoted for all Afghans.

CONCLUSION

The Taliban's post-2021 education policies have created an unprecedented crisis in Afghanistan, systematically dismantling the progress made over the past two decades. By banning secondary and higher education for women, eliminating secular subjects, and enforcing ideological curriculum changes, the regime has not only restricted access to knowledge but also weakened the country's economic and social foundations. The findings of this study confirm that the exclusion of women from education leads to increased poverty, economic stagnation, and long-term political instability.

Despite these challenges, Afghan youth—particularly women—have demonstrated resilience through alternative education models, including underground schools and online learning platforms. However, these solutions remain unsustainable in the face of growing government restrictions, lack of accreditation, and the absence of international recognition. Without a functioning and inclusive education system, Afghanistan risks falling further into isolation, experiencing mass brain drain, and facing long-term developmental setbacks.

International responses, including UN condemnations, diplomatic efforts, and economic sanctions, have failed to pressure the Taliban into reversing its education bans. Even within the Taliban, policy divisions exist, with some leaders advocating for education reform, but hard-line factions



continue to dominate decision-making. As seen in similar cases in Sudan, Myanmar, and pre-reform Saudi Arabia, external pressure alone is unlikely to bring significant change unless combined with regional advocacy, grassroots resistance, and alternative education policies that are locally and culturally adaptable.

For Afghanistan to have any chance at a stable and prosperous future, urgent action is required. The Taliban must recognize that investing in education, particularly for women, is not just a human rights issue but a necessity for national development. Without meaningful reform, the country will face worsening poverty, radicalization, and governance failures that will affect not only Afghanistan but also the broader region. Moving forward, international actors, regional stakeholders, and Afghan civil society need to collaborate on sustainable solutions that preserve education access and protect the rights of Afghan youth.

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