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Evaluating the Need for Curriculum Reform in Afghanistan's Higher Education: Perspectives of Lecturers and Students in Kandahar

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Abstract

The higher education curriculum is a comprehensive framework that establishes educational objectives, organizes subject content, guides teaching strategies and shapes student assessment. This study evaluates the current curriculum in Afghanistan's higher education system to identify its strengths, limitations, and the need for reform in light of modern educational expectations, labor market demands, and international standards. A cross-sectional descriptive design was employed in 7 public and private universities in Kandahar, involving 218 lecturers and 385 students selected through systematic sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires and analyzed with SPSS IBM-26 based

on descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the curriculum aligns with Islamic and national values, providing a foundational academic structure. It has shortcomings in fostering practical skills, innovation, and compliance with global standards. Both lecturers and students emphasized the need for updates in teaching methods, course content, and assessment strategies to meet global academic and professional requirements better, thereby enhancing academic quality and relevance. These insights underscore the importance of context-specific curriculum reform that strikes a balance between national identity and international standards, fosters practical learning, and addresses the evolving needs of students and the labor market.

Keywords: curriculum reform, higher education, practical skills, lecturers, students

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The curriculum and syllabus are two components that help education function well and produce the intended results (Javadi & Asl, 2020). There is a direct relationship between curriculum and syllabus in the teaching and learning process. The term "curriculum" refers to a more comprehensive concept that encompasses all the activities students engage in, including what they learn, how they learn, the support their teachers provide, the resources required for learning, and the learning and teaching strategies employed. According to Blenkin (2012), a curriculum is a collection of disciplines and/or knowledge topics. The process of transmitting knowledge and skills to students in the most efficient manner possible is known as curriculum. Accordingly, the curriculum is being reformed and assessed based on the criterion that it helps equip students with the skills and abilities needed to participate in the global knowledge economy, as stated by Savage (2017). Curriculum design, according to Richards (2001), is a term that encompasses the intentional and methodical arrangement of the course and is one of the key components of education that enables it to function effectively as a system and deliver quality results.

The curriculum is fundamental in higher education as it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional ability. Its importance for human capital development makes it a vital instrument for national advancement as well. The relevance and quality of a university curriculum have clear consequences for a nation's economic development, potential for innovation, and social progress (Benavides et al., 2020). Brown (1995) asserts that, needs analysis, goal setting, testing, materials, teaching, and evaluation are the primary elements of curriculum design. Importantly, a curriculum should be dynamic and adaptive, reflecting the changing demands of time, location, and society (Almaleh et al., 2019).

Although some efforts have been made to reform the higher education curriculum in Afghanistan, a thorough assessment of the curriculum remains lacking. Often, curricular material is created without careful study, input from students and lecturers, or consideration of employment market needs. Given Afghanistan's multiethnic, Islamic, and culturally diverse history, the curriculum must simultaneously preserve Islamic and national values and educate students with internationally applicable skills. Thus, this study is conducted to assess the efficacy of the current higher education curriculum from the perspectives of both lecturers

and students.

1.2 Research Problem

Although global trends in higher education emphasize the need for curricula that respond to digital transformation, international standards, and labor market demands, Afghanistan's higher education curriculum remains, in several aspects, predominantly traditional and theoretical, often exhibiting a misalignment with these global developments. While some reforms have been initiated, it remains unclear to what extent these changes effectively address the integration of practical skills, alignment with labor market needs, and adherence to international academic standards. In many cases, curriculum revisions are undertaken without adequate empirical evaluation or meaningful input from key academic stakeholders, particularly lecturers and students. Additionally, limited attention has been given to incorporating innovation, sustainability, and modern pedagogical practices. These gaps underscore the need for a context-specific, evidence-based evaluation of Afghanistan's higher education curriculum, focusing on its strengths, weaknesses, and effectiveness from the perspectives of those directly engaged in the teaching and learning process.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To evaluate the effectiveness of the current higher education curriculum in Afghanistan.
2. To assess the curriculum's alignment with international standards, labor market demands, and practical skill development.
3. To identify key areas in need of reform for transforming the curriculum toward sustainability.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What is the effectiveness of the current higher education curriculum in Afghanistan?
2. How relevant is the curriculum to international standards, labor market needs, and practical skills development?
3. What changes and reforms are necessary to improve and sustain the curriculum in the future?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is crucial for understanding and addressing the challenges facing Afghanistan's higher education curriculum. It provides a comprehensive assessment of the current curriculum's effectiveness in meeting the needs of modern education and the job market. It addresses a significant gap in the literature, where the voices of students are frequently ignored in curriculum assessments, by emphasizing the viewpoints of both students and lecturers. This study identifies key areas for improvement, including the lack of practical skills, insufficient integration of digital tools, and a disconnect from international standards, all of which require attention for effective educational reform.

Moreover, this study is important as it is particularly suited to Afghanistan's unique socio-cultural setting, where any curriculum modifications must reconcile current educational trends with Islamic, cultural, and national values. The study provides practical suggestions for educational authorities and policymakers to guide curriculum reform, aiming not only to enhance academic quality but also to increase graduate employability, promote critical thinking, and better align higher education with the globalized knowledge economy. Ultimately, the findings of this research contribute to the larger body of knowledge on curriculum reform in post-conflict and developing nations, offering a blueprint for educational transformation in Afghanistan and similar contexts.

2. Review of Literature

This section of the study employs an integrative literature review, which synthesizes findings from a wide range of empirical and theoretical studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of curriculum reform in higher education. This section examines key trends related to digitalization, globalization, labor market alignment, and transformative learning within the framework of curriculum reform, drawing on academic research.

2.1 Higher Education Curriculum in Afghanistan

Afghanistan's higher education curriculum, encompassing Bachelor's, Master's, and PhD programs, is overseen by the Ministry of Higher Education (Nuffic, 2016). A key issue is the extensive involvement of government officials in curriculum development, which has affected the education system (USAID, 2020). The curriculum is widely considered outdated and misaligned with international standards. Academics report limited institutional support, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate integration of modern technologies, which is compounded by their exclusion from curriculum design, hindering effective implementation (Khuram & Patmal, 2024; Dandawate & Dhanamjaya, 2019). In contrast, some studies suggest that the curriculum provides students with knowledge and skills that contribute to personal growth and problem-solving abilities, while also supporting lecturers' professional development through ministry-organized seminars that enhance teaching competencies (Deo, 2014). These mixed perspectives indicate both systemic shortcomings and areas of positive impact, highlighting the need for targeted reforms and investment in modern facilities and resources.

2.2 Digital Transformation and Innovation

Technological advancements are widely recognized as a key driver of curriculum change. Research indicates that while digital technologies have transformed learning environments, many higher education programs continue to rely on outdated content and structures, often lacking a coherent framework for digital integration (Benavides et al., 2020; Ryazanova & Garifullina, 2024). At the same time, international cases illustrate how curricular reform can embrace innovation. For example, Australia's curriculum includes seven core competencies, such as literacy, numeracy, ICT proficiency, and intercultural understanding, that aim to prepare students for modern societal demands (Savage, 2017). Similarly, in Nigeria, curriculum innovation is seen as a continuous process shaped by political, economic,

technological, and cultural changes, reflecting both national and global imperatives (Taiwo et al., 2025). These examples underscore the importance of adapting curricula to evolving contexts while also highlighting Afghanistan's lag in this area.

2.3 Labor Market Alignment

A recurring theme in the literature is the mismatch between higher education and labor market needs. Tomasella et al. (2024), Annala et al. (2020), and Aturupane (2013) stress that graduates must acquire not only academic knowledge but also technical and soft skills to secure employment in both public and private sectors. Failure to provide these competencies often results in graduates struggling to enter the workforce, particularly in developing nations. From the student side, research by Molesworth et al. (2009), King & Bunce (2019), and Gibbs (2001) indicates that learners are increasingly viewing themselves as consumers, demanding curricula that are directly linked to employability. Haywood et al. (2011) further report that students in England often avoid "boring" or abstract content, favoring subjects they perceive as career-relevant. Together, these findings indicate that higher education curricula must respond to shifting student expectations and evolving market conditions.

2.4 Alignment with International Standards

The curriculum should meet international standards to ensure students grasp the relevant knowledge to solve problems efficiently and effectively (Orfan, 2022). Globalization requires that curricula be both internationally relevant and culturally responsive. Clifford & Montgomery (2015) and Howson & Kingsbury (2021) argue that effective curriculum reform requires striking a balance between global standards and local cultural realities, ensuring inclusivity while safeguarding national identity. This is especially relevant in Afghanistan, where Islamic and cultural values are central to education.

2.5 Participation of Students and Faculty

Curriculum reform is not only about structure but also about participation and transformation. Studies emphasize the importance of involving both faculty and students in curriculum development, as this fosters innovation, educational relevance, and develops students' positive relationship with the community (Tanner & Tanner, 1979; Lubicz-Nawrocka & Bovill, 2021). Scholars such as Rogoz (2024) and Vela et al. (2024) underline the need for change to satisfy current market expectations. While much research lacks helpful implementation ideas, Almaleh et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of professional skills for students. However, Nicolettou et al. (2024) note that most reform models remain theoretical, lacking feasible strategies for implementation. Tomasella et al. (2024) also observe that while sustainability is often cited, it rarely translates into practical curricular frameworks.

Overall, the existing literature on higher education curricula emphasizes the need for modernization, alignment with international standards, and responsiveness to labor market demands. Additionally, issues such as differences across academic levels, integration of digital resources, practical skills, and sustainability remain underexplored. Addressing these gaps, this study draws on the views of lecturers and students in Kandahar to provide

context-specific insights into curriculum effectiveness and to offer evidence-based recommendations that balance global standards with national priorities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used a descriptive method within a cross-sectional research design. This design was selected to portray a picture of the current state of higher education curricula in Afghanistan, particularly at the Universities of Kandahar.

3.2 Study Site and Duration

The study was conducted over a period of two months, from February 19, 2025, to April 15, 2025, in Kandahar province. It involved two public universities (Kandahar University and ANASTU University) along with five private universities (Malalay, Saba, Benawa, Lmar, and Mirwais Nika).

3.3 Population Identification

The research targeted both lecturers and students from public and private universities in Kandahar. The statistics obtained from selected universities, which together report an estimated 12,450 students and approximately 500 faculty members in total.

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The study included students enrolled in universities in Kandahar who had completed at least one academic year, as well as lecturers with a minimum of one year of teaching experience. Students who had not yet completed an academic year, lecturers with less than one year of teaching experience, and non-academic staff or individuals not directly involved with the curriculum were excluded. These criteria ensured that participants possessed sufficient experience and relevant insights into the current curriculum, thereby making their feedback more informed and valuable.

3.5 Sampling Method and Size

This study used the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table to determine the sample size, and participants were selected through systematic sampling to ensure equal representation. From a total student population of 12,450 at Kandahar universities, 385 students were selected, while from 500 lecturers, 218 were chosen. The study included a total of 603 participants.

3.6 Instruments Used for Data Collection

For this study, two structured questionnaires were developed to gather quantitative data from students and lecturers on their perspectives of the current higher education curriculum. The student questionnaire consisted of three sections: socio-demographic information (age, academic program, year of study), curriculum evaluation items using a 5-point Likert scale to assess content relevance, teaching methods, and practical skill integration, and multiple-choice questions on strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Similarly, the lecturer questionnaire collected socio-demographic data (teaching experience,

qualifications, department), used Likert-scale items to evaluate curriculum content, teaching methodologies, and alignment with professional standards, and included multiple-choice items on strengths, areas for reform, and suggestions for improvement. Both instruments were piloted with a small sample, and feedback was used to refine their clarity, relevance, and validity before full distribution.

3.7 Validation and Reliability

To ensure content validity, both questionnaires were reviewed by a panel of experts in curriculum development and higher education, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and appropriateness of the questions. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The student questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.74, while the lecturer questionnaire had a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.71, indicating acceptable internal consistency for both instruments.

3.8 Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered to the selected participants during the data collection period. The systematic sampling method ensured that participants from diverse academic disciplines and various years of study were included, providing a broad range of perspectives on the curriculum. Each participant received a copy of the questionnaire and was given sufficient time to complete it. Data collection was supervised by research assistants to ensure that the process was conducted smoothly and that responses were completed accurately.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were used to provide a profile of participants and summarize their opinions on the curriculum. For Likert scale items, the distribution of responses across categories (e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree) was examined to assess satisfaction levels and identify trends in the perspectives of students and lecturers. Multiple-response analysis was applied to capture the frequency and percentage of options selected in relevant questions, which helped identify common themes regarding curriculum strengths and weaknesses. Finally, a comparative analysis was conducted between students and lecturers to explore potential differences in their perceptions of the curriculum.

3.10 Ethical and Legal Considerations

Ethical guidelines were strictly followed in this study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were fully informed of the study's purpose and their right to confidentiality. Participants were assured that their personal information would not be shared with third parties and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

4. Results

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive examination of the current state of the higher education curriculum in Kandahar, Afghanistan, as perceived by students and lecturers.

Standardized surveys evaluating several facets of the curriculum, including content effectiveness, teaching methods, market demand alignment, and digital technology integration, were used to gather data. The results from both students and lecturers are presented in this section, highlighting important areas of consensus and difference between the two groups. The study also examines demographic data and notable trends that emerged during the data collection phase. These results will inform suggestions for required changes to align higher education in Afghanistan more closely with global standards and market demands, while also highlighting the strengths and shortcomings of the current curriculum.

Part One: The analysis of the data gathered from students

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the students (n= 385)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
18–25 years	293	84.4%
26–35 years	83	14.3%
36–45 years	8	1.1%
Over 56 years	1	0.3%
Faculty		
Medicine	80	20.7%
Law and Political Science	31	8.0%
Economics	43	11.1%
Engineering	20	5.2%
Education	7	1.8%
Languages and Literature	7	1.8%
Computer Science	73	18.9%
Public Administration and Policy	60	15.5%
Sharia	7	1.8%
Journalism	2	0.5%
Agriculture	55	14.2%

University		
Kandahar	55	14.2%
Malalay	55	14.2%
Saba	55	14.2%
Benawa	55	14.2%
Lmar	55	14.2%
ANASTU	55	14.2%
Mirwais Nika	55	14.2%

Table 1 presents the age, faculty, and university distribution of the students. Most students (84.4%) are aged 18–25 years, with a minimal number above 35 years. Faculty-wise, the largest groups are in Medicine (20.7%) and Computer Science (18.9%), while Education, Languages and Literature, Sharia, and Journalism have minimal representation. Students are evenly distributed across the seven universities, each contributing 14.2% of the total sample. This table highlights the predominance of younger students and varying faculty representation.

Table 2. Evaluating the effectiveness of the current higher education curriculum. N (%)

No.	**Statement**	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neutral**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1	The current higher education curriculum meets scientific, professional, and modern needs.	43 (11.1)	52 (13.5)	100 (25.9)	135 (35.0)	55 (14.2)
2	The academic program classification in the current curriculum is standard and satisfactory.	34 (8.8)	65 (16.8)	60 (15.5)	153 (39.6)	73 (18.9)
3	The course materials, lecture notes, and books in the current curriculum meet modern academic standards.	48 (12.4)	57 (14.8)	72 (18.7)	145 (37.6)	63 (16.3)
4	The curriculum in my department is new and updated.	44 (11.4)	59 (15.3)	59 (15.3)	131 (33.9)	92 (23.8)
5	I am satisfied with the current curriculum of my department.	39 (10.1)	64 (16.6)	55 (14.2)	128 (33.2)	99 (25.6)

6	I have access to the sources and references of my curriculum.	22 (5.7)	58 (15.0)	55 (14.2)	141 (36.5)	109 (28.2)
7	The current higher education curriculum aligns with Islamic and social values.	15 (3.9)	54 (14.0)	49 (12.7)	124 (32.1)	142 (36.8)
8	The current curriculum provides opportunities for practical experience (internships, practical training) during studies.	74 (19.2)	80 (20.7)	64 (16.6)	99 (25.6)	68 (17.6)
9	The current higher education curriculum needs reform.	54 (14.0)	27 (7.0)	43 (11.1)	101 (26.2)	160 (41.5)

Note. 1- Strongly Disagree; 2- Disagree; 3- Neutral; 4- Agree; 5-Strongly Agree

Table 2 summarizes students' responses regarding the current higher education curriculum. About 35% agree that it meets scientific, professional, and modern needs, while 24.6% disagree. Academic program classification is considered satisfactory by 39.6%, though 25.6% disagree. On course materials, 37.6% feel they meet modern standards, and 26.7% disagree. Around 58.8% are satisfied with their departmental curriculum, while 26.7% are dissatisfied. A large proportion, 64.7%, indicated that they have access to necessary sources and references, while 20.7% disagreed. The curriculum's alignment with Islamic and social values was strongly supported by 68.9% of respondents. Practical experience opportunities are considered sufficient by 39.9%, but an equal portion disagrees. Overall, 67.7% believe curriculum reform is needed, with 41.5% strongly agreeing.

Table 3. The challenges of the current curriculum and evaluating the need for reforming it.

Questions	Choices	(N)	(%)
What challenges have you faced when looking for a job?	Lack of interest in own field	54	1.2%
	Lack of necessary skills to get a job	158	3.5%
	Lack of work and practical experience	140	3.1%
	Limited job opportunities in the relevant field	237	5.2%
Which aspects of the current curriculum of higher education need to be reformed?	Academic content	75	1.6%
	Teaching methods	110	2.4%
	Ethical and social skills	105	2.3%
	Research programs	121	2.7%
	Evaluation system (exams, research, assignments)	83	1.8%
	Enhancement of students' practical skills	222	4.9%
What is the most effective way to reform the curriculum?	Adherence to international standards	201	4.4%
	Attention to labor market needs	123	2.7%
	Capacity building of instructors	122	2.7%
	Conducting research	128	2.8%
	Collaboration between private and public institutions	133	2.9%
What are the shortcomings of the current curriculum of higher education?	Incompatibility with Islamic and national values	58	1.3%
	Incompatibility with international standards	200	4.4%
	Lack of modern sciences	101	2.2%
	Lack of practical skills	216	4.7%
	Lack of innovative and critical thinking	116	2.5%
What are the strengths of the current curriculum of higher	Compatibility with Islamic and national values	225	4.9%

education?	Compatibility with international standards	135	3.0%
	Contains more practical skills	51	1.1%
	Can meet labor market needs	93	2.0%
What significant challenges could arise in changing the current curriculum of higher education?	Lack of financial resources	184	4.0%
	Lack of experts	220	4.8%
	Lack of policy implementation	135	3.0%
	Slowness in the curriculum change process	111	2.4%
In which area do you think the most change is needed in the current curriculum?	Increasing practical skills	190	4.2%
	Alignment with international standards	162	3.6%
	Integration of Islamic, cultural, and national values	109	2.4%
	Promotion of new teaching methods	243	5.3%
Total		**4561**	**100.0%**

Table 3 provides an analysis of responses to multiple-choice questions regarding challenges, reform needs, and other aspects of the higher education curriculum. The main job-related challenge was "Limited job opportunities in the relevant field" (237 responses, 5.2%). For curriculum reform, the top priorities were enhancing practical skills (222 responses, 4.9%) and improving research programs (121 responses, 2.7%). The most effective reform approach was "Adherence to international standards" (201 responses, 4.4%). Key shortcomings included lack of practical skills (216 responses, 4.7%) and incompatibility with international standards (200 responses, 4.4%), while the curriculum's major strength was alignment with Islamic and national values (225 responses, 4.9%). Among obstacles to reform, "Lack of experts" was highlighted (220 responses, 4.8%), and the area most needing change was the promotion of new teaching methods (243 responses, 5.3%).

Part Two: The analysis of the data obtained from lecturers

Table 4. Socio-demographic characteristics of the lecturers (n= 218)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age Group		
26 – 35 years	159	72.9%
36 – 45 years	38	17.4%
46 – 55 years	16	7.3%
56 – 65 years	3	1.4%
Above 66 years	2	0.9%
University		
Kandahar	76	34.9%
Malalay	25	11.5%
Saba	13	6.0%
Benawa	17	7.8%
Lemar	9	4.1%
ANASTU	50	22.9%
Mirwais Nika	28	12.8%
Work Experience		
1 – 5 years	133	61.0%
6 – 10 years	38	17.4%
11 – 15 years	33	15.1%
16 – 20 years	11	5.0%
More than 20 years	3	1.4%
Education Level		
Bachelor's Degree	107	49.1%
Master's Degree	93	42.7%
Doctorate (PhD.)	18	8.3%

Table 4 summarizes the demographic profile of the lecturers. Most respondents were aged 26–35 years (72.9%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (17.4%), with very few respondents above 56 years (2.3%). Kandahar University had the highest representation (34.9%), followed by ANASTU (22.9%) and Mirwais Nika (12.8%). Regarding work experience, the majority (61.0%) had 1–5 years, and 17.4% had 6–10 years. In terms of education, 49.1% held a Bachelor's degree, 42.7% a Master's degree, and 8.3% a Doctorate. These characteristics provide context for understanding the lecturers' perspectives on curriculum evaluation.

Table 5. Evaluating the effectiveness of the current higher education curriculum. N (%)

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	The current higher education curriculum meets academic needs.	20 (9.2%)	56 (25.7%)	32 (14.7%)	94 (43.1%)	16 (7.3%)
2	The current teaching methods in the curriculum are effective.	10 (4.6%)	43 (19.7%)	40 (18.3%)	94 (43.1%)	31 (14.2%)
3	The necessary conditions and facilities for implementing the current curriculum are available.	29 (13.3%)	33 (15.1%)	38 (17.4%)	99 (45.4%)	19 (8.7%)
4	Reforming and updating the curriculum leads to the academic and economic development of the country.	3 (1.4%)	17 (7.8%)	27 (12.4%)	60 (27.5%)	111 (50.9%)
5	I consider the current curriculum of my department to be standard.	13 (6.0%)	50 (22.9%)	33 (15.1%)	82 (37.6%)	40 (18.3%)
6	The current higher education curriculum aligns with international standards.	21 (9.6%)	46 (21.1%)	28 (12.8%)	78 (35.8%)	45 (20.6%)
7	The current higher education curriculum requires revision.	6 (2.8%)	24 (11.0%)	30 (13.8%)	76 (34.9%)	82 37.6%)

Note. 1-Strongly Disagree; 2- Disagree; 3- Neutral; 4- Agree; 5-Strongly Agree.

Table 5 presents lecturers' responses regarding the current higher education curriculum. A

notable 43.1% agreed that the curriculum meets academic needs, and 43.1% agreed that teaching methods are effective. Approximately 45.4% agreed that the conditions and facilities for implementing the curriculum are adequate. Most lecturers strongly agreed (50.9%) that reforming the curriculum would support academic and economic development. Agreement on the curriculum being standard was reported by 37.6%, while 35.8% agreed it aligns with international standards. Finally, strong support for curriculum revision was observed, with 37.6% strongly agreeing and 34.9% agreeing, indicating a significant interest in reform.

Table 6. The challenges of the current curriculum and evaluating the need for its reform

Questions	Choices	(N)	(%)
What are the strengths of the current higher education curriculum?	Aligns with Islamic and national values	86	2.7%
	Aligns with international standards	130	4.1%
	Includes practical skills	178	5.6%
	Meets labor market needs	155	4.8%
What are the weaknesses of the current higher education curriculum?	Does not align with Islamic and national values	188	5.9%
	Does not align with international standards	120	3.7%
	Lacks modern sciences	150	4.7%
	Lacks practical skills	92	2.9%
	Lacks innovative and critical thinking	100	3.1%
What skills should be increased in the curriculum of higher education?	Foreign language learning	133	4.2%
	Information technology	89	2.8%
	Technical skills	100	3.1%
	Innovative and research skills	103	3.2%
Which aspects of the current higher education curriculum should be reformed?	Academic content	135	4.2%
	Teaching methods	111	3.5%
	Moral and social skills	101	3.2%

	Research programs	117	3.7%
	Evaluation system (exams, research, assignments)	135	4.2%
	Expansion of students' practical skills	104	3.2%
In which area does the curriculum need the most change?	Improvement in practical skills	120	3.7%
	Prepare based on international standards	81	2.5%
	Integration of Islamic, cultural, and national values	119	3.7%
	Promotion of modern teaching approaches	113	3.5%
What are the major obstacles to changing the current higher education curriculum?	Limited financial resources	125	3.9%
	Lack of specialists	90	2.8%
	Non-implementation of policies	96	3.0%
	Slow curriculum reform process	133	4.2%
Total		**3204**	**(100%)**

Table 6 summarizes responses on various aspects of Afghanistan's higher education curriculum. The curriculum's strengths were identified as practical skills (178 responses, 5.6%) and meeting labor market needs (155 responses, 4.8%). Key weaknesses included a lack of alignment with international standards (120 responses, 3.7%) and insufficient knowledge of modern sciences (150 responses, 4.7%). Foreign language learning (133 responses, 4.2%) was the skill most suggested for enhancement. Academic content and the evaluation system were the top areas for reform, with 135 responses (4.2%). The areas requiring the most change were the improvement of practical skills and the integration of Islamic, cultural, and national values (both over 3.7%). Major obstacles towards the reform were the slow reform process (133 responses, 4.2%) and limited financial resources (125 responses, 3.9%).

Comparative Analysis of Students' and Lecturers' Perspectives

A comparison of students' and lecturers' views revealed both shared concerns and notable differences regarding the curriculum. While both groups emphasized the need for reform, only 24.1% of students believed that the curriculum met labor market demands, compared to 86.2% of lecturers. Similarly, 68.8% of lecturers and 56% of students reported a lack of

practical skills, and 68.8% of lecturers, compared to 51.8% of students, felt that the curriculum did not align with international standards. Both groups highlighted the limited integration of modern sciences, technology, and research components. However, students stressed the need for more practical learning opportunities, whereas lecturers focused on structural and policy challenges, including financial constraints and slow reform processes. These findings underscore the importance of incorporating both student and lecturer perspectives in curriculum reform to address learning experiences and teaching responsibilities effectively.

5. Discussion

This study found that Afghanistan's higher education curriculum has both strengths and significant limitations. Respondents acknowledged its compatibility with Islamic and national values, as well as its partial responsiveness to labor market needs. However, the curriculum remains theoretical mainly, with a limited focus on practical skills, digital integration, critical thinking, and international alignment. These results directly address the research objectives by identifying the curriculum's current strengths and shortcomings, while also pointing to the need for reform.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research. Khuram and Patmal (2024) reported that Afghanistan's university curriculum is outdated and not sufficiently aligned with global trends, a view that resonates with the present results. The lack of digital integration also reflects their conclusion that universities lack adequate teaching materials and technology use. Internationally, digital transformation has become a global priority in education (Benavides et al., 2020; Ryazanova & Garifullina, 2024). Likewise, Orfan (2022) and Baharustani (2012) emphasized that the Afghan curriculum falls short of international standards, a point also highlighted by the 162 students in this study, who recommended reform. Nevertheless, some students (35%) agreed that the curriculum has supported their personal development, echoing Deo's (2014) findings that education in Afghanistan still equips students with practical knowledge and skills.

A critical issue identified is the gap between higher education outcomes and labor market demands. In this study, 158 students reported that they lacked the necessary skills to secure employment. This aligns with the work of Pherali and Sahar (2018), who highlighted the mismatch between theoretical training and employability. Similarly, Rogoz (2024) and Vela et al. (2024) underlined the importance of adapting curricula to satisfy current market needs. Additionally, Tomasella et al. (2024) and Annala et al. (2020) emphasize the growing need to ensure that graduates are well-suited for the job and meet labor market expectations. Together, these findings emphasize the need to bridge theory with practical application to enhance graduate employability.

There is also strong support for curriculum reform among both students and lecturers. About 67.7% of students agreed, with 41.5% strongly agreeing, while 37.6% of lecturers strongly agreed and 34.9% agreed. This is consistent with Savage (2017), who emphasized that curricula must prepare students to participate in the global knowledge economy. Almaleh et al. (2019) also noted that a curriculum should be dynamic and responsive to social and

technological change, while Taiwo et al. (2025) argued that curricular frameworks must adapt to global trends and technological and social needs.

This study is strengthened by its large sample size, which included 218 lecturers and 385 students from both public and private universities in Kandahar, ensuring diverse perspectives. However, its scope was limited to one province and did not include employers or policymakers, whose perspectives are vital for curriculum design. This might not entirely reflect the circumstances in other Afghan universities. In addition, reliance on self-reported data may have introduced bias, as participants might have provided socially desirable responses.

Future research should therefore include a broader range of provinces, private and public universities, and a wider range of stakeholders, including employers, curriculum developers, and policymakers. Comparative studies with other South Asian and Central Asian countries could provide insight into how Afghanistan's challenges align with broader regional trends. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are necessary to evaluate the long-term effects of curriculum reforms on students' skills, employability, and academic success.

Overall, the findings underline the need for comprehensive reform of Afghanistan’s higher education curriculum. To remain relevant and effective, the curriculum must integrate practical skills, digital literacy, and innovative pedagogy while maintaining Islamic and cultural values. Such reform is essential to strengthen individual growth, improve labor market readiness, and contribute to sustainable national development.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the current state of Afghanistan's higher education curriculum, with a focus on the perspectives of lecturers and students in Kandahar. The purpose was to assess the curriculum's alignment with international standards, labor market demands, and practical skills. The findings revealed that while the curriculum maintains compatibility with Islamic and national values, it falls short in key areas such as practical skills, critical thinking, digital integration, and alignment with global benchmarks. Both students and lecturers expressed strong support for curriculum revision, underscoring the reform to enhance relevance and effectiveness.

This study contributes to the literature, filling a notable gap in the research on Afghan higher education. The results carry important implications for policy and practice. Higher education policymakers and curriculum developers are recommended to design a reform framework that integrates international standards without neglecting cultural and religious foundations. For universities, the results underscore the importance of modernizing teaching practices, expanding digital integration, and promoting active learning strategies to better prepare students for the demands of the labor market. Lecturers should integrate practical learning opportunities into their courses. A key contribution of this study is its dual focus on both lecturers and students, providing a comprehensive perspective that is rarely addressed in Afghan higher education research. Furthermore, future research should expand to include other provinces and involve a broader range of stakeholders, including employers and

curriculum developers, to provide a more comprehensive assessment of curriculum effectiveness and its impact on student learning outcomes and employability.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request.

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The authors declare that there are no competing or potential conflicts of interest.

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