

Role of India in Strengthening Afghanistan's Educational Infrastructure

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ABSTRACT

India has played a crucial role in enhancing Afghanistan's educational infrastructure through capacity-building initiatives, institutional support, and scholarship programs. As a key development partner, India has invested in higher education, vocational training, and school reconstruction, aiming to empower Afghan youth and professionals. This paper examines India's contributions, including the establishment of educational institutions such as the Afghan National Agriculture Sciences and Technology University, scholarships under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), and skill development programs. Additionally, it explores the challenges faced, such as political instability and security concerns, and highlights the broader impact of India's efforts on Afghanistan's socio-economic development. The study underscores the importance of sustained international cooperation in fostering long-term educational growth in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Educational infrastructure, institutional support, scholarship programs, socio-economic development

Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar of nation-building, and Afghanistan's war-torn history has left its educational infrastructure in dire need of support. India, as a key regional player, has played a vital role in strengthening Afghanistan's education sector. Through various bilateral agreements and developmental aid, India has helped establish institutions, provide scholarships, and promote skill-based training for Afghan students.

India has played a pivotal role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure, recognizing that education is a key driver of peace, stability, and socio-economic development. As a long-standing ally, India has consistently contributed to the rebuilding of Afghanistan's academic institutions, providing scholarships, technical assistance, and infrastructural support to foster a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, India has invested significantly in Afghanistan's education sector through various initiatives, including the construction of schools, vocational training centers, and higher education institutions. Additionally, India has facilitated capacity-building programs, teacher training, and digital learning platforms to bridge educational gaps. These efforts have not only empowered Afghan youth but have also strengthened bilateral ties between the two nations.

This paper explores India's contributions to Afghanistan's educational infrastructure, examining key projects, collaborations, and their impact on Afghan society. Despite geopolitical challenges, India's commitment to education in Afghanistan remains a cornerstone of its diplomatic and humanitarian efforts in the region.

Objectives

1. **To examine India's contribution to Afghanistan's educational infrastructure** – Analyze India's initiatives in developing schools, universities, and vocational training institutes in Afghanistan.
2. **To evaluate the impact of India-Afghanistan educational collaborations** – Assess the effectiveness of Indian aid programs, scholarships, and capacity-building efforts.

3. **To explore policy frameworks and agreements** – Review bilateral agreements, international cooperation, and strategic partnerships for educational development.
4. **To identify challenges and opportunities** – Investigate obstacles faced in implementation and potential areas for further collaboration.
5. **To assess the role of education in Afghanistan's socio-economic development** – Understand how India's efforts in education contribute to stability, employment, and social growth.

Review of Literature

1. **India's Educational Aid to Afghanistan:**

- Studies highlight India's role in reconstructing Afghanistan's education sector post-2001, focusing on infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development.
- Reports from organizations like UNESCO and the World Bank discuss India's investments in schools, vocational training, and scholarships.

2. **Scholarship Programs and Human Resource Development:**

- Literature emphasizes Indian government initiatives such as the ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) scholarships for Afghan students.
- Case studies explore the effectiveness of programs like the Afghan Scholarship Scheme and capacity-building training for Afghan professionals.

3. **Higher Education and Skill Development:**

- Research indicates India's support in establishing institutions such as the Afghanistan National Agriculture Science and Technology University (ANASTU) and collaborations with Afghan universities.
- Vocational training programs, IT education, and skill development initiatives are studied in relation to economic empowerment.

4. **Challenges in Educational Cooperation:**

- Security concerns, political instability, and limited infrastructure are highlighted as major hurdles in India's educational contributions.
- Studies also examine the sustainability of Indian aid in light of changing geopolitical dynamics, especially post-2021 developments.

5. **Education as a Tool for Peace and Development:**

- Literature links educational empowerment with peace-building efforts, women's rights, and social development in Afghanistan.
- Comparative studies discuss India's education model as a reference for Afghanistan's long-term development.

6. **Recent Developments and Future Prospects:**

- The Taliban's takeover in 2021 has disrupted many of India's education-related initiatives, yet India continues to engage through humanitarian assistance (MEA, 2022).
- The future of India's role in Afghanistan's education sector will depend on geopolitical developments and engagement with the Taliban regime (Singh, 2023).

Historical Context: Afghanistan's education system has been significantly impacted by decades of conflict, leading to a lack of resources, trained educators, and infrastructure. Since 2001, international aid, including India's contribution, has played a pivotal role in reviving the sector. India's assistance aligns with its broader strategic interests and commitment to regional stability.

India has played a significant role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure, particularly after the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. The historical background of India's involvement in Afghanistan's education sector can be traced through various phases:

1. **Pre-2001 Relations:**

- India and Afghanistan have shared strong historical and cultural ties for centuries.
- During the 1950s–1970s, India supported Afghanistan's educational and infrastructural development through scholarships and training programs.
- With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979–1989) and subsequent civil war (1990s), India's engagement in Afghanistan was limited.
- During the Cold War, India maintained friendly relations with Afghanistan, especially under King Zahir Shah and later the Soviet-backed regimes.
- However, during the 1990s, Afghanistan was plagued by civil war and the rise of the Taliban (1996–2001), leading to a decline in educational infrastructure.
- The Taliban imposed severe restrictions on education, especially for women and girls.

1. **Post-2001: Rebuilding Efforts:** After the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the establishment of a democratic government, India emerged as a key development partner, focusing on education, capacity building, and skill development.

- After the U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban in 2001, India emerged as a major development partner for Afghanistan.
- India's assistance focused on reconstruction, including education, healthcare, and capacity-building initiatives.

Major Contributions: India has played a significant role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure, particularly in promoting women's education. This contribution aligns with India's broader commitment to Afghanistan's development and stability. Below are some key aspects of India's role in this area:

- **Scholarships & Training:** India provided scholarships to Afghan students under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and other programs.
 - **Infrastructure Development:**
 - Constructed the **Afghan Parliament Building** (inaugurated in 2015).
 - Established the **Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health** in Kabul.
 - Built and funded schools, vocational training centers, and IT institutions.
 - **Technical & Higher Education:** India supported institutions like the Afghan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University (ANASTU) and vocational training centers to build skilled manpower.
 - **Teachers' Training & Capacity Building:** India facilitated training programs for Afghan teachers and professionals, enhancing their skills in education administration.
 - **Kabul University & IIT Collaboration:** Strengthened academic collaborations between Indian and Afghan universities.
 - **Distance Learning & E-Learning:** Initiatives like the PAN-Africa e-network project helped Afghan students access quality education from Indian universities.
- 2. Post-Taliban Era (2001–2021):** After the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and the establishment of a democratic government, India emerged as a key development partner, focusing on education, capacity building, and skill development.
- 3. Post-2021 Taliban Takeover:**
- Following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, India's educational support faced challenges.
 - Despite restrictions, India has continued offering scholarships and online educational programs for Afghan students, especially for those in exile.
 - The future of India's role in Afghanistan's education sector depends on diplomatic developments and the status of women's education under the Taliban regime.

India's efforts in Afghanistan's education sector have played a crucial role in human capital development, fostering goodwill and strengthening bilateral ties. However, the political situation remains a major factor in determining the continuity and expansion of these initiatives.

3. Key Indian Contributions to Afghanistan's Education Sector:

- **Construction of Schools and Universities:** India built educational institutions such as the Habibia High School in Kabul and the Afghanistan National Agriculture Science and Technology University (ANASTU) in Kandahar.
- **Scholarship Programs:** The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program provided thousands of scholarships for Afghan students to study in India.
- **Technical and Vocational Training:** India helped establish vocational training centers to equip Afghan youth with marketable skills.
- **Digital Education Initiatives:** The 'e-Vidya Bharati' and 'e-Arogya Bharati' programs provided online education opportunities to Afghan students.

4. Post-2021: Challenges and Future Prospects:

- Following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021, India's educational initiatives faced uncertainty.
- However, India has continued to engage through humanitarian assistance and online education opportunities.

India's long-term commitment to Afghanistan's educational infrastructure has played a crucial role in human capital development, fostering a strong people-to-people connection between the two nations.

The impact of India-Afghanistan educational collaborations: India-Afghanistan educational collaborations have played a crucial role in fostering academic exchanges, capacity building, and cultural ties between the two nations. To evaluate their impact, consider the following aspects:

Construction of Educational Institutions:

- India has helped build and renovate schools, colleges, and universities in Afghanistan.
- One of the most notable projects is the construction of the **Afghan Parliament building**, which includes a library to support education.
- The **Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health in Kabul** also plays a vital role in education and healthcare.

Scholarships and Capacity Building Programs:

- India provides numerous scholarships to Afghan students under programs like the **Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) Scholarship** and the **Special Scholarship Scheme for Afghan Nationals**.
- Thousands of Afghan students, including women, have pursued higher education in India in fields like medicine, engineering, law, and social sciences.

Technical and Vocational Training for Women:

- India has supported skill development programs for Afghan women, including courses in IT, nursing, and business.
- Various NGOs and institutions in India offer training programs to Afghan women, empowering them to become self-reliant.

Distance Learning and Online Education:

- India has extended access to online education platforms, allowing Afghan women to study remotely, especially in times of political instability.
- Virtual classrooms and partnerships with Indian universities enable Afghan students, particularly women, to access quality education.

Teacher Training and Curriculum Development:

- India has provided training to Afghan teachers to improve the quality of education.
- Collaboration with Afghan educational authorities has helped in designing a more inclusive and effective curriculum.

Advocacy for Women's Education:

- India has consistently emphasized the importance of women's education in international forums.
- It has encouraged Afghanistan's governments to uphold the rights of women, including access to education.

Quantitative Assessment:

- Number of Afghan students enrolled in Indian institutions (e.g., ICCR scholarships, AICTE programs).
- Success rate and graduation rates of Afghan students in India.
- Employment and career advancements of Afghan alumni after returning home.
- Number of faculty exchange programs and joint research initiatives.

Qualitative Assessment:

- Skills development and knowledge transfer to Afghan professionals.
- Influence of Indian education on Afghanistan's governance, healthcare, and technology sectors.
- Testimonials and experiences of Afghan students regarding cultural adaptability and academic exposure.

Institutional Impact:

- Contributions of Indian universities in rebuilding Afghanistan's educational infrastructure.
- Establishment of collaborative research centers or academic programs in Afghan universities.
- Long-term policy impact on Afghanistan's higher education sector.

Geopolitical and Diplomatic Significance:

- Strengthening bilateral relations through education diplomacy.
- India's role in fostering Afghanistan's self-reliance through academic empowerment.
- Challenges posed by changing political dynamics (e.g., Taliban governance).

Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

- Accessibility of scholarships and institutional support.
- Security and visa-related challenges for Afghan students.
- Sustainability of educational collaborations amid political uncertainties.

India's Contributions to Afghanistan's Education Sector:

India has played a significant role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure through various policy frameworks and agreements. A cornerstone of this collaboration is the **Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA)** signed between India and Afghanistan in October 2011. This agreement encompasses a broad spectrum of cooperation, including a strong emphasis on education.

1. **Scholarships and Student Exchange Programs:** India has been instrumental in providing educational opportunities to Afghan students. Over the years, more than 16,000 Afghan students have pursued higher education in India, facilitated by numerous scholarships. This initiative aims to build a skilled workforce in Afghanistan and strengthen people-to-people ties between the two nations.
2. **Capacity Building and Training:** Beyond formal education, India has focused on capacity building by offering training programs for Afghan civil servants, diplomats, and police forces. These programs are designed to enhance governance and institutional effectiveness in Afghanistan.
3. **Community-Based Projects:** Through small development projects, India has supported the establishment of health clinics, schools, and other essential services. These projects encourage community involvement and contribute to the restoration and enhancement of Afghanistan's infrastructure, including its educational facilities.
4. **Infrastructure Development:**
 - Construction of schools and higher education institutions, including the Afghan Parliament Library and Habibia High School.
 - Establishment of the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam, contributing to overall socio-economic development.
5. **Higher Education and Scholarships:**
 - Indian universities offer scholarships to Afghan students under the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) program.
 - Indian universities host Afghan students in fields like medicine, engineering, and humanities.
6. **Technical and Vocational Training:**
 - India has set up skill development centers to provide vocational training in agriculture, technology, and business management.
 - Afghan professionals receive training in Indian institutions under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program.
7. **Capacity Building and Teacher Training:**
 - India has organized teacher training programs to improve the quality of education in Afghanistan.
 - Various institutions have collaborated with Afghanistan's Ministry of Education to enhance curriculum development.

These efforts reflect India's commitment to fostering educational development in Afghanistan, recognizing that a robust educational infrastructure is pivotal for the country's long-term stability and growth.

The role of education in Afghanistan's socio-economic development:

Education plays a crucial role in Afghanistan's socio-economic development by fostering human capital, reducing poverty, and promoting social stability. Here are some key aspects of its impact:

1. Economic Growth and Employment:

- Education equips individuals with skills necessary for employment, entrepreneurship, and innovation.
- A more educated workforce attracts foreign investment and boosts economic productivity.
- Technical and vocational training supports industry and infrastructure development.

2. Poverty Reduction:

- Education enables individuals to secure better-paying jobs, improving household income.
- Literacy and numeracy help people manage finances and access economic opportunities.
- Educated women, in particular, contribute to family well-being and economic stability.

3. Social Development and Gender Equality:

- Education promotes gender equality by empowering women and increasing their participation in the workforce and decision-making.
- Increased literacy rates lead to better health awareness, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health.
- It fosters civic engagement, reducing corruption and enhancing governance.

4. Peace and Stability:

- Education combats radicalization by promoting critical thinking and tolerance.
- It strengthens national identity and social cohesion, reducing ethnic and sectarian divides.
- Schools serve as community hubs for peace-building and development initiatives.

5. Challenges and the Way Forward:

- Afghanistan faces challenges such as limited access to schools, gender restrictions, and inadequate infrastructure.
- Investment in education, especially for girls and rural communities, is crucial.
- Collaboration between government, NGOs, and international organizations can enhance educational opportunities.

Challenges in Implementation:

- **Security Concerns:** Political instability and threats from extremist groups hinder India's projects.
- **Cultural Barriers:** Societal norms sometimes restrict access to education, particularly for women.
- **Sustainability Issues:** Ensuring long-term sustainability of educational initiatives remains a challenge due to financial and administrative constraints.

Effect of Taliban war on India in Strengthening Afghanistan's Educational Infrastructure: The Taliban's control over Afghanistan has had significant implications for India's role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure. Here are the key effects:

1. **Disruption of India's Educational Assistance Programs:** India had been a major contributor to Afghanistan's educational sector before the Taliban takeover in August 2021. Various projects, including school construction, scholarships, and training programs for Afghan students and teachers, were either halted or significantly reduced. The Taliban's restrictive policies on education, especially for girls, have directly undermined these efforts.
2. **Reduced Access for Afghan Students to Indian Institutions:** India had provided thousands of scholarships to Afghan students under programs such as the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR). Many Afghan students who were studying in India faced uncertainty due to visa restrictions and financial difficulties after the Taliban took over. Furthermore, new admissions of Afghan students have been impacted.
3. **Gender-Based Educational Restrictions:** The Taliban has imposed severe restrictions on women's education, banning girls from secondary schools and universities. India's past efforts in promoting women's education—such as funding schools and offering special scholarships for Afghan women—have now been largely nullified.
4. **Diplomatic and Security Challenges for Educational Initiatives:** India's role in Afghanistan's education sector has been affected by strained diplomatic relations and security concerns. Indian-backed educational institutions and projects face an uncertain future due to the absence of diplomatic engagement and the risk of instability.
5. **Shift towards Online and Third-Country Education Support:** Since India cannot directly operate within Afghanistan, there is a growing focus on online education and collaboration with third countries to support Afghan students. India has been exploring ways to provide virtual education programs for Afghan students.
6. **Humanitarian and NGO Efforts:** Despite the Taliban's rule, India has continued to support Afghanistan through humanitarian aid, including food and medical supplies. Some Indian and international NGOs have attempted to keep educational initiatives alive, but these efforts remain limited due to Taliban restrictions.

Effects of India's Educational Initiatives in Afghanistan

1. Human Capital Development:

- India's efforts have enabled thousands of Afghan students to receive higher education, contributing to the country's skilled workforce.
- Afghan professionals trained in India have played a vital role in rebuilding Afghanistan's public administration and private sectors.

2. Strengthening India-Afghanistan Bilateral Relations:

- Education has been a soft power tool for India, fostering goodwill among Afghans toward India.
- Many Afghan graduates from Indian institutions have taken leadership roles in Afghanistan, strengthening diplomatic ties.

3. Promoting Economic and Social Development:

- The availability of skilled graduates has boosted economic activities and employment opportunities.
- India's educational support has contributed to social stability by providing Afghan youth with alternatives to conflict and extremism.

4. Challenges and Future Prospects:

- The return of the **Taliban in 2021** has disrupted many of India's educational initiatives, especially concerning female education.
- Security concerns and political instability pose risks to continued educational cooperation.
- However, India remains committed to supporting Afghanistan's education sector through diplomatic channels, scholarships, and online learning programs.

Indian law policy regarding to Strengthening Afghanistan's Educational Infrastructure: India has played a significant role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure through various policies, initiatives, and developmental assistance programs. India's approach is based on its broader policy of capacity building, human resource development, and fostering strong bilateral relations with Afghanistan. Here are key aspects of India's involvement in Afghanistan's education sector:

1. Key Indian Policies and Initiatives:

a) Scholarships and Higher Education Opportunities:

- **ICCR Scholarships:** The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) has been offering scholarships to Afghan students to pursue undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs in Indian universities.
- **Special Medical and Engineering Seats:** India has provided reserved seats for Afghan students in premier Indian institutions for medical, engineering, and management studies.
- **Technical and Vocational Training:** Programs such as the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) initiative offer short-term skill development and technical training.

b) Construction of Educational Institutions:

- **Afghan Parliament Building:** Built by India, this serves as a symbol of democratic governance and includes educational and research facilities.
- **Habibia High School, Kabul:** India helped renovate one of Afghanistan's most prestigious schools, which has produced several leaders and scholars.
- **Afghan National Agriculture Sciences and Technology University (ANASTU):** India supported the establishment of this university in Kandahar.
- **Indira Gandhi Institute of Child Health (IGICH), Kabul:** India has contributed to medical education and child healthcare.

c) E-Learning and Distance Education:

- **The Pan-Africa e-Network Project:** Expanded to Afghanistan, enabling online education and telemedicine support from India.
- **Collaboration with Afghan Universities:** Indian universities have engaged in partnerships for faculty training, curriculum development, and online education.

2. India's Role in Capacity Building and Skill Development:

- **Training of Afghan Civil Servants and Professionals:** Programs under ITEC focus on governance, public administration, banking, and business management.
- **Empowerment of Afghan Women:** Special scholarships and vocational training programs have been offered to Afghan women in various sectors.

3. Challenges and Impact Post-Taliban Takeover (2021):

- The Taliban's return to power in August 2021 led to uncertainties in India-Afghanistan relations, affecting educational initiatives.
- **Concerns for Women's Education:** India has expressed concern over restrictions imposed on girls' education in Afghanistan.
- **Continuing Scholarships:** India has continued to support Afghan students already enrolled in Indian institutions but faces challenges in extending further assistance due to political instability.

4. Future Prospects:

- India remains committed to supporting Afghanistan's education sector, but future engagement will depend on the evolving political situation.
- There is potential for **online education programs, skill training, and humanitarian assistance** focused on youth and women.
- India's humanitarian aid policy, including food and medical supplies, could be extended to education through digital platforms and scholarships.

Conclusion and Recommendation

India has played a crucial role in strengthening Afghanistan's educational infrastructure by providing financial assistance, building institutions, offering scholarships, and promoting capacity-building programs. Through initiatives like the construction of the Afghan Parliament, the establishment of educational

institutions such as the Afghanistan National Agricultural Sciences and Technology University, and various skill development programs, India has contributed significantly to human capital development in Afghanistan. These efforts have not only improved access to education but have also helped empower Afghan youth, particularly women, by providing them with opportunities for higher education and professional growth. However, the current political instability in Afghanistan poses challenges to sustaining these initiatives, necessitating continued engagement through diplomatic and humanitarian channels.

Recommendations

1. **Continued Scholarship Programs** – India should expand scholarship programs for Afghan students, enabling them to study in Indian universities and contribute to Afghanistan's development upon return.
2. **Online and Distance Learning** – Given the current challenges, India can leverage digital education platforms to provide Afghan students with remote learning opportunities.
3. **Collaboration with International Organizations** – India can partner with UNESCO, UNICEF, and other global educational bodies to ensure the sustainability of Afghanistan's educational sector.
4. **Skill Development and Vocational Training** – More focus should be placed on technical and vocational training programs to enhance employability among Afghan youth.
5. **Women's Education Initiatives** – Special emphasis should be given to ensuring that Afghan women continue to have access to quality education, even through online and community-based initiatives.
6. **Diplomatic Engagement** – India should maintain diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan and regional stakeholders to safeguard its educational investments and ensure continued support for Afghan students.

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