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Afghan School Principals Leadership Practices

**Afghan school principals' leadership practices: Evolving roles that shape schoolteachers'
instructional approaches and achieve students' learning outcome**

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Abstract

Currently, Afghan school principals are in the vulnerable situation of not being fully capable of responding to a complex school context. This is because there is no program of studies at university level to prepare them for this position even though school principals have a significant leadership role. They must hold the entire school community accountable for the provision of access to quality education, while providing direct support to assistant principals, head teachers, and teachers to achieve the desired learning outcomes for their students. In this study, I considered the evolution of Afghan school principals' leadership practices in relation to how their instructional leadership approaches enable teachers to improve their teaching and learning practices. I explored the perspectives of two former Afghan Education Ministers, and of school principals, head teachers, and teachers. I conducted a qualitative case study to understand the leadership practices of school leaders in Kabul, Afghanistan. I looked at how school principals see their roles, how they derive meaning from their work, and how they assess their own development. The leadership practices of Afghan school principals have rarely been the subject of scholarly research; generally speaking, they have been the recipients of polices and guidelines, and their voices are heard infrequently by the policy makers and the educational leaders at the local, district, provincial, and national level, so I attempted to bridge the gaps between and among these levels of leadership. This study adds to the existing literature on the role of Afghan school principals in the context of Afghanistan, based on understanding the school principals' role in shaping schoolteachers' instructional approaches in relation to the achievement of student learning outcomes.

Résumé

Les directeurs d'écoles afghans se trouvent actuellement dans une situation vulnérable, n'étant pas pleinement préparés à répondre à un contexte scolaire complexe. Ceci s'explique par l'absence d'un programme d'études de niveau universitaire visant à les préparer à cette fonction, bien que les directeurs d'écoles jouent un rôle de leadership significatif. Ils doivent rendre l'ensemble de la communauté scolaire responsable de la fourniture d'un accès à une éducation de qualité, tout en apportant un soutien direct aux directeurs adjoints, aux chefs d'établissement et aux enseignants pour atteindre les résultats d'apprentissage souhaités pour leurs élèves. Dans cette étude, j'ai examiné l'évolution des pratiques de leadership des directeurs d'écoles afghans en ce qui concerne la manière dont leurs approches de leadership pédagogique permettent aux enseignants d'améliorer leurs pratiques d'enseignement et d'apprentissage. J'ai exploré les perspectives de deux anciens ministres afghans de l'Éducation, ainsi que celles des directeurs d'écoles, des chefs d'établissement et des enseignants. J'ai mené une étude de cas qualitative pour comprendre les pratiques de leadership des directeurs d'écoles à Kaboul, en Afghanistan. J'ai examiné la manière dont les directeurs d'écoles perçoivent leurs rôles, dont ils donnent un sens à leur travail et dont ils évaluent leur propre développement. Les pratiques de leadership des directeurs d'écoles afghans ont rarement fait l'objet de recherches universitaires; en général, ils sont plutôt destinataires de politiques et de lignes directrices, et leurs voix sont rarement entendues par les décideurs politiques et les responsables éducatifs aux niveaux local, district, provincial et national. Ainsi, j'ai tenté de combler les lacunes entre ces différents niveaux de leadership. Cette étude enrichit la littérature existante sur le rôle des directeurs d'écoles afghans dans le contexte de l'Afghanistan, en se basant sur la compréhension du rôle des directeurs d'écoles dans la définition des approches pédagogiques des enseignants en lien avec la réalisation des résultats d'apprentissage des élèves.

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Initialisms and Acronyms

DED	District Education Directorate
ITAA	Independent Teachers Accreditation Agency
MoE	Ministry of Education
PED	Provincial Education Directorate
SPLP	School Principals Leadership Practice
SPLPs	School Principals' Leadership Practices
IARCSC	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
PEIs	Private Educational Institutions
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
	German International Development cooperation

Introduction

Afghan society is very complex, and Afghanistan has a very complex culture. Part of the reason it has remained unknown is because of this complexity.

Makhmalbaf, M. (2020, p. 1)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my doctoral study was to explore the evolving role of Afghan school principals' leadership practices (SPLPs) and how school principals' instructional leadership approaches enable teachers to improve their teaching and learning practices. I explored this from the perspective of two former Afghan Education Ministers, two school principals, two head teachers, and four teachers. I conducted a qualitative case study with semi-structured interviews to understand school principals' leadership practices in the context of Kabul, Afghanistan. It is important to understand how school Principals "see their roles, how they derive meaning from their work, and how they assess their own development" (Johnston, 2018, p. 1100). However, the role of school principals significantly changed between 2001 and 2021 given the transformation of Afghanistan's earlier extremely autocratic leadership approaches to more democratic one. Though on August 15, 2021, after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan the education prospects has changed again.

Problem Statement

On August 14, 2021, Afghanistan was ranked 169 in the global education index (United Nations Development Program, 2020). The literacy rate hovered then around 43% with the significant gendered gap of 55% of males and only 29.8% of females being literate (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2020). Over the course of its

contemporary history, the Afghan education system has suffered significantly. Between 1978 and 2001, over 80% of school buildings were destroyed (Centner, 2012). The civil war and the massive displacement of intellectuals meant that less academic literature on the field of education was published. In particular, Afghan SPLPs, the quality of schoolteachers' teaching, and student learning outcomes were scarcely documented.

In the two decades between 2001 and 2021, there were some changes evident in the Afghan education system. However, along with conceptual changes, practical changes needed to be made at schools for instance, instituting and practicing a shared and instructional leadership approach, including schoolteachers in the decision-making process, encouraging student-centered teaching approaches, and facilitating teachers to create professional leadership communities in schools to ensure that their instructional approaches are aimed at student learning outcomes that are contextually relevant yet globally acceptable (see Dimock & Goh, 2011; Karlsoon & Mansory, 2007 Leithwood, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2019; Molina et al., 2018; Qian et al., 2017; Tan, 2015; Qian & Walker., 2011l; Wie, 2017).

Considering the significant importance of SPLPs and their contribution to teachers' instructional approaches and student learning outcomes, the role of the school principal has seldom been the focus of scholarly research in Afghanistan. This makes it difficult for any leaders in educational institutions to make research-based informed decisions to improve their practices (Day et al., 2016; Deo, 2014; Hallinger, 2005; Hallinger et al., 2018; Karlsson & Mansory, 2007; Leithwood, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2010, 2019; Molina et al., 2018; Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013; Sadat, 2004; Samady, 2001a; Spink, 2005; Wei, 2017).

In this context, Afghan school principals do not consider student learning outcomes to be their main responsibility (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007; Molina et al., 2018). Instead, school

principals focus on "teachers being on time, maintaining strict discipline in classroom, and teaching students to be good citizens" (Molina et al., 2018, p. 6).

Setting a standard for school principalship has hardly been the subject of school development efforts and scholarly research in Afghanistan. Additionally, there is no program of studies at university level to educate school principals about the competencies required to lead a school. And when it comes to Afghan SPLPs, both male and female school principals have been equally disadvantaged. Therefore, it was important to study the evolving role of Afghan school principals' leadership, who creates and environment in which teachers and students thrive and their contribution (or lack thereof) to student learning outcomes. This study, thus, investigates the evolving role of the principals of Afghan schools and its contribution to teachers' instructional approaches and student learning outcomes.

Background and Context of the Study

Historically, education has existed among people, communities, and civilizations as a way of transferring and disseminating values, manners, skills, and knowledge from one generation to the next. Khurasan—The Land of the Sun or the eastern province—of ancient Persia or current-day Afghanistan, has a long history of traditional education that was followed by traditional Islamic education that began in the 7th century and has continued to the present. For example, long ago, a group of adults and children in a community would come together during the winter to study books and tell stories. During the summer, adults worked in the fields along with their children. Education took place in the King's court, in places of worship, and under the trees (Andishmand, 2011). The knowledgeable elders and parents taught values, manners, and skills to children (Baiza, 2013). While traditional type of schooling continued, in

the last one and half century Afghanistan was influenced by the neighboring British India and formal education system was introduced.

Afghanistan has a history of 150 years of formal Education, begun in 1869, by which is meant a semi-secular, or western type of education system. However, educational development, access, and quality have always been hindered by different political movements in separate events in Afghanistan's contemporary history. Below, I present a brief history of the Afghan education system over the past 150 years, and I offer a detailed contemporary history of this in the literature review section of this dissertation.

During the rule of Amir Shir Ali Khan and his son, Yaqoob Khan, two modern Western types of school were established. However, in the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880) and threats from British India in the south caused these two newly established schools to be destroyed and never reopened during Amir Shir Ali khans' successor (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013). Abdur Rahman was installed as Amir of Afghanistan in 1880 by the British leadership and, in return, the British Empire obtained control over Afghanistan's foreign affairs. Furthermore, Abdur Rahman's successor Habibullah Khan, as the Emir of Afghanistan from 1901 until 1919, established many schools for both boys and girls. Though, what was known as the *Constitutional Movement* slowed down the development of education. Under the rule of Amanullah Khan who led after Habibullah Khan, also tried to establish more schools, and maintain the existing ones in addition to sending boys and girls for exchange progress abroad. His progressive mindset was resented by the traditionalists and led to revolution of 1929 and fall of the government, and subsequently to the abolishment of all educational reforms and social innovations. In 1929, Habibullah Kalakani, who ruled for nine months, closed all educational

institutions and media outlets founded during the rule of Amanullah Khan as Andishmand (2011) and Mousavi (1998) have reminded us.

Between 1929 and 1933, a slight development in education was evident but, while he was distributing graduation certificates, King Mohammed Nadir was assassinated on November 8, 1933. This caused a further divide between the ruling elite and the nation and negatively affected the education system for the following 40 years under the rule of his successor, Zahir Shah. For instance, the enrollment in 1929 of 83,000 students was barely surpassed sixteen years later in 1945 when 93,000 students were enrolled (Andishmand, 2011). During Daoud Khan's republic government (1973 to 1978) the number of enrolled students exceeded one million in urban centers and rural areas across the country. Then the Saur Revolution of 1978 and the subsequent policies and plans caused the number of enrollments to drop significantly because teachers and professors were imprisoned, hanged, or fled the country because of their ideological stances (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013; Mousavi, 1998).

By 1989, the separation of the national curriculum, in which the central government promoted communism and Mujahedeen's curriculum promoted Jihad, was affected. These political maneuvers lit the fire of civil war and led to a complete destruction of the education system. The Mujahedeen leaders literally burned every single school in the capital, Kabul, and in the provinces. This political chaos created a power vacuum in which the Taliban came to power in 1996 and they banned girls' education completely and only boys' schools were operational (Andishmand, 2011).

During Karzai and Ghani's government (2001–2021), although access to education was significantly increased to over 9 million boy and girl students, the quality of education at the schools was still questionable. On August 15, 2021, Ghani fled the country, and the Taliban once

again took control of it. However, since this second round of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan

has gone back to ancient times in its re-establishment of a male dominated society in which

females are stripped of all their rights, including their education. The economy collapsed and

people still (in 2022) barely have enough food to survive (Organization of Islamic Cooperation,

2021). In the past 150 years, the Afghan people have suffered from the lack of a coherent

national policy, constitutional government, and leadership at all levels (see Table 1).

Table 1

150 Years of Afghan Modern Education

1870-1919	1919-1929	1929	1929-1973	1973-1978
Tribal Leadership	Emirate of Afghanistan Amanullah Khan	Habibullah Kalakani	Kingdom of Afghanistan Nadir Shah & Zahir Shah	Republic of Afghanistan Daoud Khan
Two modern schools were established but destroyed during the second Afghan Anglo War of 1878 to 1880	Established many primary schools and few High Schools Mainly in Capital Kabul	Lead the country for 9 months and closed all educational institutions	Opened limited number of schools, Because of Nadir Shah's Assassination in a School establishment	Established many primary, and secondary schools across Afghanistan

Table 1 - Continued

1978-1992	1992-1996	1996-2001	2001-2021	2021- …
Democratic Republic of Afghanistan Taraki to Dr. Najib	Islamic State of Afghanistan Mujahideen	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Taliban	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan	Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan Taliban
Although, the number of schools increased but it was in consistent	Civil War and all the schools and their buildings were destroyed completely	Banned all girl's education and changed the curriculum to include extremist content	Over 9 million boys and girls were enrolled into the schools across Afghanistan	Banned all girl's education.

However, it was not only the conflict between traditionalism and modernism or between religion and secularism that caused the failure of the development of formal education in Afghanistan. Mostly, changes in the form of government from Emirate[1] of Afghanistan to Kingdom[2] of Afghanistan to Republic[3] of Afghanistan to Democratic Republic of Afghanistan and again to Republic of Afghanistan to Islamic state of Afghanistan to Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan to Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and finally in August 2021, to Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan were political maneuvers that caused the education system to go one step forward and two steps backwards. In the course of its contemporary history, Afghanistan has had more assassinated Amirs, kings, and presidents than those who died a natural death. This points to the continual instability that had adversely affected the access and quality of education throughout Afghanistan's contemporary history (see Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

In the past 150 years, many forms of government have been tried. Prior to 1996, the term *Islamic* had never been used in the official names of Afghanistan and yet now the religion of Islam has become a political tool used to justify the killing of innocent people, depriving girls of their education, and the promotion of teachings of extremist ideologies rather than those based on pluralism, inclusion and diversity (see Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

Additionally, during these major political maneuvers, the very fabric of the society (especially in relation to education) was negatively affected (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013;

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[1] An emirate is a political entity ruled by an emir, a title often associated with Islamic Leadership. Emirate systems can exist within larger political structures like kingdoms or republics.

[2] A kingdom is a form of government characterized by a hereditary monarchy, where political authority is vested in a single individual, often referred to as a monarch or king/queen. The monarchy's legitimacy is typically based factors such as divine rights, bloodline, or historical tradition.

[3] A republic is a political system where sovereignty resides with the people or their elected representatives rather than a monarch. In a republic, leaders are chosen through elections, and the governance structure emphasizes the importance of public participation, representation, and the rule of law. Republics can take various forms, such as parliamentary republics, semi/presidential republic, federal republics, unitary republics, democratic republics, people's republic, Islamic republics, direct republics or direct democracy, and military republics.

Giustozzi, 2010; Karlsson & Mansory, 2007; Mousavi, 1998; Samady, 2001a, 2001b, 2013).

During the past decades, the focus has been on access to education but hardly any systematic

approach has been made to improve its quality. The study of SPLPs as an approach to improve

the quality of leadership in schools and to facilitate teaching quality and achieve student learning

outcomes, has hardly been the subject of school development efforts by the educationalists,

policy makers, and school principals themselves in Afghanistan.

Rationale of the Study

In this increasingly diversified, interconnected, and changing world many aspects of

people's lives have changed. Education plays a major role in balancing the rapid discoveries,

technological advancements, and access to information in relation to people's perspectives

through which they see the world and adapt to it. Therefore, the work of Afghan school

principals cannot be based on the past 100-year-old policies and plans. According to Starr et al.

(2020),

> Education is at a pivotal moment. Worksheets, textbooks, desk in rows and the teacher
>
> lecturing from the front of the classroom are familiar examples of learning in high school.
>
> In today's fast-paced, knowledge-based, global economy, the currencies for success are
>
> critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving; none of these can be taught effectively
>
> through the aforementioned traditional approaches (p. 8).

The school principals, as institutional leaders, are at the forefront of the rapid changes; it is

school principals who execute policy to align teachers' pedagogical efforts with students'

learning needs.

Furthermore, Hallinger et al., (2018) mapped the educational research conducted in the

areas of instructional leadership at schools across the world over the past 80 years and there was

not a single study conducted in Afghanistan. Comparably, the number of instructional leadership

papers published elsewhere are Pakistan 4, Iran 2, India 3, China 22, Turkey 30, United Arab

Emirates 2, Singapore 15, Hongkong 54, Thailand 26, and Malaysia 20 (Hallinger et at., 2018).

A few pieces of research conducted in the Afghan context either overlooked or missed the

importance of school principals' leadership practices and this puts Afghan school principals in a

vulnerable situation in that they bear a great responsibility but have limited authority and

support.

Similarly, Afghan women in leadership positions have been disadvantaged as Reilly

(2015) has noted that when it comes to school leadership practices both male and female school

principals are equally disadvantaged in terms of the lack of professional educational leadership

support such as educational programs that could facilitate capable, resilient, and professional

school principals to enhance their practices and achieve the desired outcomes.

Generally, the significance of the roles and responsibilities of school principals has been

overlooked and the reform of SPLPs in the Asian regions opens new opportunities for Afghan

school principles to rethink their leadership approaches (Liu & Hallinger, 2018; Rizvi, 2008;

Qian & Walker, 2011; Zhao, 2013).

In Afghanistan, since the first round of the Taliban regime in 2001, the national education

policies have been designed to respond to the much-needed change in curriculum, to concepts

such as inclusion and diversity, and to skills such as creativity, problem solving, and critical

thinking. However, little attention is paid to those who are appointed to principalships. School

principals are assigned to a principalship based on "their teaching experiences and seniority

rather than their leadership experience and qualification" (Rizvi, 2008, p. 87). This situation in

Afghanistan has many similarities in public schools in Pakistan. But, in the former, there is no

formal training or university degree to be had that prepares school principals for their

principalship role. The Afghan school principals do not attend any study program at all to

prepare them for this. Although short term programs and training workshops are offered to the

school principals, but it is not significant as it is short term and low impact. Anecdotally, it is

believed that school principals learn the principalship role and responsibilities on the job.

According to Lambert (2009) the concepts of

> [l]earning, teaching, and leading are intricately intertwined. To learn is to understand the
>
> essence of teaching; to teach is to understand the essence of leading. This relationship is a
>
> vital understanding that can reduce the complexity of leading to the simple truth that
>
> human learning propels each of these concepts. (p. 7)

> However, aspiring male school principals are given a principalship role after five years of

teaching experience and aspiring female school principals after seven years of teaching

experience according to the national education strategic policy (Molina et al., 2018; Reilly,

2015), but it is unclear how the Afghan school principals perceive learning and how they

construct leadership knowledge on the job. Little is known about how they facilitate teachers to

lead and improve their instructional approaches.

> There are barely any research studies conducted on the role of the Afghan school

principals and a qualitative case study on the role of Afghan school principals' instructional

leadership practices is virtually non-existent (see Hallinger et al., 2018). Additionally,

throughout the history of Afghan formal education, neither the role and responsibilities of school

principals nor those of administrative and teaching staff members are regulated.

> Furthermore, between 2001and 2021, the Afghan government was committed to

democracy, inclusion, diversity, human rights, and education for all. All government institutions

tried to align their practices with national and international standards (Ramazan, 2020).

Anecdotally, over the course of 20 years, the national educational leadership has slowly evolved

from having an autocratic and authoritarian leadership approach to having a more egalitarian and

democratic one.

It is evident, therefore, that the role of school principals has not remained the same. Their

role has "expanded and become more complex [and] it is becoming increasingly apparent that

the responsibilities placed on principals far exceed their capacity to handle them singlehandedly"

(Lynch, 2012, p. 166). Based on the 150 years of Afghan formal education system and how the

schools' leaders follow the dominant discourse of leadership in their school leadership practices,

it is believed that the Afghan SPLPs slowly shifted from using an autocratic approach to school

leadership to a democratic one between 2001 to 2021. Additionally, the period between 2001 and

2021 is significant to Afghan education history because there were over 9 million students

enrolled in schools, the formal school leadership was slowly shifted their leadership approaches.

Contribution of Study

The role of Afghan SPLPs has rarely been the subject of scholarly research. This

grassroots study adds to the existing literature on the role of Afghan school principals in

developing contexts in addition to describing and evaluating the principals' contribution to

shaping teachers' instructional approaches and students' learning outcomes. Generally, the

Afghan schools have been the recipients of polices and guidelines and the voices of their

officials are infrequently heard by policy makers and educational leaders at the district,

provincial, and national level. This study aimed to ground understanding for policy makers and

educational leaders to the realities of schoolteachers, head teachers, and principals and respond

to their needs accordingly.

Afghanistan's complex and instable contemporary history, hardly any research has been conducted in the field of school principals' leadership and very few studies have been published in the field of education in general. However, Afghan university students and professors who have emigrated to different countries have explored Afghan contextual issues and have provided in-depth historical accounts of the Afghan education system (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013; Karlsson & Mansory, 2018; Mousavi, 1998; Samady, 2001a).

Other research on Afghan education systems has focused mainly on the broader topics of rebuilding the higher education system and on dealing with the challenges faced by Afghan higher education leaders (Azizi, 2008; Romanowski et al., 2007; Tobenkin, 2014), on girls' and women's education and educational leadership in higher education (Babury & Hayward, 2015; Mashriqi, 2013) along with the issue of access to education in Afghanistan for Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran (Baiza, 2013; Hoodfar, 2010; Karlsson & Mansory, 2018; Qahir & Kirk, 2007; Samady, 2001a), and the participation of parents in school management committees (Barekzai, 2014). Research studies that explore Afghan SPLPs scarcely exist (see Hallinger et al. 2018) so this study adds to the existing literature on the role of school principals in the developing context of Afghanistan. Additionally, it will help Afghan school principals to make informed decisions based on research, reflect critically on their role, and select appropriate leadership approaches that best help them to achieve their schools' vision, missions, goals, and objectives.

Research Question and Sub-questions

In this research study, I explored Afghan SPLPs, how school principals perceive their leadership approaches, and how they aid teachers in their instructional approaches to improve the quality of teaching and learning at the classroom level by exploring the over-arching question,

"What are the evolving roles of Afghan school principals that shape their leadership practices and how do school principals facilitate the schoolteachers' instructional approaches?" This overarching question has three sub-questions.

(1) How do Afghan school principals perceive the notion of leadership practices?

(2) What are their roles in improving teachers' instructional approaches?

(3) What are the schools' strengths in general regarding student achievement, teachers' professionalism, and enhanced school leadership practices?

Definition of Key Terms

School Leader: In this study, this term refers to school principals, vice principals, head-teachers, and teachers. School principals are responsible for all school-related affairs; they implement the polices and guidance of the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) at school level, and they lead institutional members such as vice-principals, head-teachers, teachers, and students, while responding to all stakeholders' daily needs. They are professionals responsible for the achievements of all teachers and students.

Vice-Principal: Vice-principals provide administrative support to school principals. They also coordinate between and among the school principal, head teachers, teachers, students, and the community. Their primary focus is on the school's administrative affairs.

Head teachers: The head-teachers' primary responsibilities include organizing class schedules, assigning classes to teachers, ensuring that teaching hours are respected, and coordinating between and among the school principal, vice-principal, teachers, and students. Their primary focus is on the academic affairs of the school.

School teachers: School teachers are professionals with pedagogical expertise who are responsible for curriculum content delivery, using diverse contextual teaching approaches, and

keeping students' records. Their primary focus is on students' academic success, but they also have some administrative tasks.

Public Schools: Public schools are also called government schools. In government schools, the chain of command starts with the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) that leads and guides the provincial education directorate followed by the District Education Directorate (DED) and, finally, the school principals. A school principal implements all policies and guidelines at the school level. Generally, it is a top-down approach to leadership that is evolving over time.

Private Schools: Similarly, in private schools, the chain of command starts from the Afghan MoE followed by the DED, and the school principals. However, the main difference between public and private schools is in their fee structure. The public schools are free of charge for all students from kindergarten to grade 12 and public universities are free of charge for all Afghan students as well, while private schools and universities charge a certain amount each month based on Afghan MoE guidelines.

Additionally, as their names suggest, public schools are owned by the government and private schools are privately owned. The fee structure of private schools is calculated on the annual administrative cost, the logistical expenses, and an additional 15% annual profit divided by the total number of students.

Large schools: Large schools are educational institutions in which primary, middle, and high school students are enrolled. The number of students in these large schools is about 3,500 to 4,000 students. On the other hand, private schools enroll 100 to a maximum of 1000 students.

Thesis Organization

This thesis includes this introductory chapter in which the purpose of the study and the problem statement are offered along with the background and context of the study, its rationale and research question, as well as the definition of key terms and, finally, the outline of the contribution this study makes. Chapter two elaborates on the relevant literature review on historical and current approaches to school principals' leadership practices. In this chapter, I presented 150 years of modern/formal, semi-secular, or western education system history in Afghanistan. Additionally, I discuss the current state of school leaders' leadership practices, school principal's roles, responsibilities, and leadership practices, school principal's licensure, corruption in the education system, and education in emergencies and crises. In chapter three, I offer the conceptual and analytical framework, where I contextualize SPLPs and discuss the concepts of shared instructional leadership. Then I offer a four-path model of SPLPs, and, finally, I clarify an analytical framework with specific domains of SPLPs. In chapter four, I discuss qualitative case study method as an inquiry method, data collection tools, data analysis approaches, and ethical considerations while in chapter five, in offering the findings, I discuss the school principals' leadership practices and how these changed over time. I look at school leadership and students' achievements and explore whether the Afghan school principals are still autocratic leaders. In chapter six, I present the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations. I look at education leadership vs business management, the public-school principal's job description according to governments documents, schoolteachers' perception of school principals' leadership practices, corruption in education, school discipline, and education in crisis. I offered remarks on the Afghan model of instructional leadership approaches to SPLPs in Afghanistan and on schoolteachers' teaching practices and I discuss how the broader context and

the dominant discourse impacts school leaders' practices and students' learning outcomes. In conclusion, I offer closing remarks and pointed to this study's contribution to the field of educational leadership research in developing contexts. And finally, I offer recommendations and lessons learned during the study to refocus the efforts made in the Afghan education system to improve the quality of education.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

"As the world experiences the 4th industrial revolution, mere literacy and numeracy skills will not save the future of the Afghan People."

(Education Minister Laila)

In this chapter, I present a survey of the literature on the historical background of the Afghan education system, on school principals' leadership practices, on corruption in education, and on education in emergencies and protracted crises.

Historical Background of the Afghan Education System and Schools Principals Role

The historical trajectory of the Afghan education system spanning 150 years reflects a lack of sustained stability, which has hindered efforts to enhance access and quality of education. Throughout this tumultuous history, the system has faced numerous challenges such as political unrest, foreign invasions, and internal conflicts, contributing to a lack of continuity and the absence of a stable period for educational development. Moreover, there has been a notable oversight in addressing the significance of School Principal Leadership Practices (SPLPs) during these turbulent times.

The absence of a stable educational foundation over the years has had a lasting impact on contemporary school principal practices in Afghanistan. School principals find themselves navigating leadership roles without a strong historical basis upon which to build their strategies. The dearth of stable periods has left them grappling with challenges ranging from resource constraints to societal disruptions, impacting their ability to establish and sustain effective leadership practices.

In the current landscape, Afghan school principals operate within a system that has not enjoyed prolonged periods of stability, making it challenging to institute enduring frameworks for educational leadership. As a result, contemporary principals face the task of not only addressing the immediate needs of their schools but also working towards establishing foundational structures that can withstand future uncertainties. To improve the quality of education and access for students, there is a pressing need to recognize the historical context and build resilient leadership practices that can adapt to the unique challenges of the Afghan education system. This requires a concerted effort to provide training, resources, and ongoing support for school principals to develop and implement effective leadership strategies tailored to the complex historical and contemporary realities of Afghanistan's educational landscape.

Amir Shir Ali Khan (1869–1878)[4]

In 1875, for the first time, Amir Shir Ali Khan established two formal schools in Kabul city. The first school provided formal education to children of the ruling elite, and the second school was dedicated to military training (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013). The elite school was named Maktab Khawanin (Elite School) and was located in Balahi Sar-e-Kabul and it was here that children of the ruling elite were educated. Subjects taught by Afghan teachers included law, political science, and literature. Additionally, mathematics, geography, chemistry, and map-drawing were taught by foreign teachers (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

The Maktab Herbi, or Military School, in which 300 military officers were enrolled, was established in Sher-Pur-e-Kabul. The subjects taught included warfare tactics, reading, writing, religious education, and history. The practical military training included lessons on forms of attack, cannon training, infantry training, cavalry training, and targeted shooting (Baiza, 2013).

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[4] These dates refer to the period during which each ruled Afghanistan.

Both Maktab Khawanin and Maktab Herbi were managed by Judge Abdul Qadir. Technically, he was the first Afghan school principal. Additionally, he was the secretary of Amir Sher Ali Khan's Court, managing director of the Journal of Shams Al-Nahar, and was also considered the first honorary education minister (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

Amir Shir Ali Khan personally invigilated exams, followed students' progress, asked questions, and encouraged smart students to study. Both formative and summative evaluations were used to understand students' progress. Similarly, teachers' teaching practices were evaluated and tracked (Baiza, 2013). However, Amir Shir Ali Khan did not plan to expand his educational agenda to other parts of the territory. Rather, it stayed limited to the elite families and military officers residing in Kabul city.

After Amir Shir Ali Khan's death, under the leadership of his son, M. Yaqoob Khan, (1878–1879), the people fought against British India's advances towards the north for a year and nine months during the second Anglo-Afghan war (Baiza, 2013). During this period there was no opportunity for educational development.

Amir Abdur Rahman (1879–1901)

Following the second Anglo-Afghan war, Abdur Rahman was installed as Amir by the British to rule this geographic area in exchange for Britain's having control over Afghanistan's foreign relations (Andishmand, 2011; Anglo-Afghan Wars, 2020; Baiza, 2013; Hopkirk, 2006; Mousavi, 1998). During his 20 years of rule, although he had the opportunity and resources to advance formal education, instead he abolished the two schools, the Journal of Shams Al-Nahar, and the Sangi publishing company. He was a ruthless ruler, even towards his own people (ethnically Pashtun). Additionally, he massacred the minority groups including the Hazara and Sikh people to gain control over a greater geographic area (Baiza, 2013; Giustozzi, 2010;

Mousavi, 1998) and was known to British overlords as The Iron Amir. During the twenty years

of his rule, there was no sign of educational development. Rather, what predominated were

ethnic cleansing, ruthlessness, bloodshed, terror, and fear that took the country back to a state of

"conservative medievalism" (Baiza, 2013, p. 47). He planted the seeds of distrust between and

among different ethnic groups. By the time he died in 1901, he had fostered no concept of

nation-building that could be capitalized on in the present-day Afghanistan (Hoodfar, 2010;

Giustozzi, 2010).

Amir Habibullah Khan (1901–1919)

In opposition to Abdur Rahman's beliefs and actions, his son, Habibullah Khan,

instigated the new era of formal education and development. In 1903, Amir Habibullah Khan

established the first public boys' school, the Lycée Habibia, in Kabul city. Furthermore, he

established six branches of this school at elementary level across Kabul city. Lycée Habibia

conferred the baccalaureate degree on its graduates and in its first 14 years, 19 students

graduated with this degree. Additionally, he ordered all mosques (Muslim places of worship) to

offer a school curriculum under the guidance of school officers (Andishmand, 2011).

In 1909, like Amir Sher Ali Khan, Habibullah Khan also established a Maktab Herbi or

Military School in Kabul city. Habibullah's son, Amanullah Khan, was one of the first students

at this military school. Subjects such as advanced mathematics and gymnastics were taught, and

communication was added as a new subject in addition to law, political science, literature,

mathematics, geography, chemistry, and map-drawing. Initially, 150 students were enrolled in

the military school, and this number increased to 900 (Andishmand, 2011). Additionally, in

1910, he founded an orphanage in Kabul. In 1911, he established the first modern medical

hospital with Turkish doctors leading the facility. In 1912, he set up the first teacher training

institute, and 160 pre-service teachers were enrolled. In two years, a cohort of 65 students who were qualified to teach at the primary school graduated.

Habibullah Khan gave the responsibility of Lycée Habibia to his eldest son, Amanullah Khan, to manage and lead the school as a school principal. However, it was Habibullah himself who doing this to a certain extent (Andishmand, 2011) since he was fully invested in improving access to quality education. However, what was known as the constitutional movement started in the Lycée Habibia and this caused unrest among the educated community in Kabul city, so Amir Habibullah Khan decided to either imprison or execute the students and teachers who wanted a constitutional government. Furthermore, this constitutional movement prevented Habibullah Khan from further expanding his education plans. As much as he was invested during the first decade of the twentieth century in improving access to quality education, he was not willing to expand this in his second decade. In 1919, he was assassinated while on a hunting trip at Kala-gosh, Laghman Province.

Ghazi Amanullah Khan (1919–1929)

Ghazi is a title used for a warrior who successfully liberates his nation. Amanullah Khan demanded that the Anglo-Afghan agreement be changed so that Britain no longer had control over Afghanistan's foreign relations. However, Britain did not accept his demand, and this led to the third Anglo-Afghan war and Afghanistan won its independence from Britain in 1919 (Hopkirk, 2006). During Amanullah Khan's rule, moderate advances were made in education, and these included the development of the Basic Government Regulations that declared that elementary education was essential. Therefore, during the third decade of the twentieth century elites and commoners alike considered education essential. In Amanullah Khan's development policies, education held a special place. The highest civilian and military honor was the Medal of

Education (Andishmand, 2011). Foreign educational exchange programs were started, and hundreds of male students were sent to Russia, Germany, France, Italy, and Turkey.

The following year, female students were sent to Turkey for higher education and some military students were expected to attend an exchange program in Britain. Additionally, a public library was established in Kabul city to promote the attainment of knowledge by members of the public. Furthermore, many publishing companies were established in Kabul city and in the provinces; 13 different magazines and newspapers were then being published all over the country. Freedom of expression was extolled to ensure that people felt that they were part of this progress (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

In 1922, Amaniya High School, Maktab Amaniya, was established. Initially, this school was chartered to France and the first school principal was a French national. In 1931, the school was renamed Lycée Esteqlal. In 1923, Lycée Nejat, later called Amani High school, was established and chartered to Germany and its first school principal was a German national. The first cohort of students produced 6 graduands with a baccalaureate degree from this school. Furthermore, in 1922, the second teacher training institution was established in which the pre-service primary teachers from Kabul and other provinces were enrolled (Andishmand, 2011).

In December 1922, the first Afghan girls' school, Maktab Esmat, was established by Malika Soraya Tarzi, who was the first queen consort of Afghanistan as the wife of King Amanullah Khan. She played a major role in the modernization of Afghanistan and girls' education and established the second girls' school, Maktab Mastoraat, in January 1923. Initially, about 34 students were enrolled in this school and soon after, this number increased to 200. The first female school principal was Asma Rasmiya Tarzi, the mother-in-law of Amanullah Khan.

Malika Soraya, who established *Irshad Al-Naswan*, the first journal for women, and her sister

carried out the assistant principals' tasks.

The students who graduated from these schools were sent on exchange programs to

Turkey, Germany, and France (Andishmand, 2011). This caused tension among the religious

leaders who shared their concerns with Amanullah Khan, stating that since this was against

Afghan culture and tradition, the girls' schools should be closed. Amanullah Khan closed the

schools for a short while but later reopened them. In 1927, after his European trip, he wanted to

further modernize and revolutionize the education system. He announced that girls' primary

education was compulsory and seven new girls' schools were established (Andishmand, 2011;

Baiza, 2013).

During, Amanullah's ten years of rule, 322 primary schools were established in which

51,000 students were enrolled. About 3,000 students were enrolled in the secondary schools,

high schools, and technical vocational schools. Finally, the enrollment reached a total of 83,000

students. However, compulsory education caused many concerns among the rural public,

especially for parents who were not able to walk for miles to take their children to school and

fetch them afterwards. Additionally, compulsory education caused corruption among

government officials because families that were not able to take their children to school bribed

them to obtain a letter of exemption. Amanullah Khan wanted to implement a very ambitious

plan of national compulsory primary education for both boys and girls alike but did not have

adequate human and material resources to achieve these goals. Based on anecdotal evidence, the

quality of teacher education and of SPLPs was not a major area of concern to him even though

he was assigned as a school principal at the first school established during his father's rule.

Clearly, education lacked quality. In 1928, towards the end of Amanullah Khan's rule, signs of civil unrest were evident in the agendas aimed at rapid modernization of a traditional society. Since these issues were politically charged, compulsory girls' education and the inclusion of women in the workforce were considered to be the major causes of armed rebellion in different part of the country. It is also believed that Amanullah Khan did not create a strong administration capable of dealing with challenges to the government. In 1928, internal unrest, rebellion against his regime, and foreign interference led a revolution headed by Habibullah Kalakani (Andishmand, 2011).

Amanullah Khan responded positively to the rebellion's demands (1) to abolish all social reforms and innovations, (2) to abolish the military recruitment of a group of eight people, (3) to have all Afghan girls who were sent to European countries to get an education returned, and to abolish girls' education, (4) to avoid interfering in Mullahs' and Sadats' affairs and activities, and (5) to refrain from taking revenge on the Shinwaris. In an eighteen-article response, Amanullah Khan agreed to halt all his innovative reform plans but before this letter reached Habibullah Kalakani, the latter was already at the north gate of Kabul and he started a war against the Emirate of Afghanistan.

Amir Habibullah Kalakani (January to September 1929)

Habibullah Kalakani took control of Kabul and on January 15, 1929, in Gul-Khana Garden, his supporters crowned him as Amir Habibullah (head of the new government). Basically, he vowed to abolish all forms of education, and all journals, newspapers, and publishing companies (Andishmand, 2011). He ruled for nine months and during this period the country was in an unstable situation and all the established institutions were abolished. In a series

of wars against Amir Habibullah Kalakani in 1929, Nadir Khan, who was the head of Amanullah

Khan's military, managed to take control of Kabul and kill him (Andishmand, 2011).

King Nadir Khan (1929–1933)

During Nadir Khan's period of rule, he changed the Emirate of Afghanistan to the

Kingdom of Afghanistan and re-established some of the educational institutions. The education

levels were re-classified as primary, lower-secondary, high, and bachelor level. He established

the first military university and the faculty of medicine that marked the start of higher education

in Afghanistan (Andishmand, 2011). However, there was no sign of a faculty of education in

which Afghan school principals could be educated although education was considered essential

for men and women. Based on article 20 of the constitution, primary education was made

compulsory for boys and girls, but girls' education was conditional upon being within the

framework of Islam (Baiza, 2013). Additionally, article 22 of the constitution asserted that all

schools would be monitored and evaluated by the government to ensure that the curriculum was

based on Islamic values and beliefs and was aligned with the notion of imparting the knowledge

and skills needed in the rapidly changing industrialized world. Furthermore, education should not

disturb the religious beliefs of Dhamma people such as Jews, Christians, and Sabian, in addition

to Zoroastrians, Sikhs, Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists (Andishmand, 2011). However, the first half

of article 22 shows apparent distrust between the government and the people, but it could also be

described as reflecting Nadir Khan's past experiences with Habibullah Khan's and Amanullah

Khan's periods of rapid expansion of education in a traditional society that caused the

constitutional revolution and the rebellion against their regimes, so this influenced his creation of

a rigid policy.

In practice, schools were controlled by military personnel. As was the case during Amanullah Khan's rule (1919–1929), freedom of expression and freedom of speech were denied to students during Nadir Khan's rule (1929–1933). Harsh corporal punishment was inflicted on students who raised their voices against the government and its policies. Some younger students were trained to spy for the government on other students who spoke about politics (Andishmand, 2011). A climate of distrust, suspicion, and cynicism between the government and its people was created. This situation caused many students to stop attending school. According to Amanullah Khan's education minister, Faiz M. Zikria, between 1919 and 1929 the enrollment of boys and girls reached 83,000 students yet during Nadir Khan rule from 1929 to 1933 the enrollments dropped significantly to 4,591 students (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

Unlike Amanullah Khan, Nadir Khan tried to strengthen his prominence among tribes and attempted to keep a balance between traditional and formal education to ensure the longevity of his kingship. The policy of distrust and the practice of picking on students for their ideological and political views did not favour Nadir Khan; in 1933, while he was distributing the graduation certificates at a ceremony, he was assassinated by Abdul Khaliq, a student (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

In summary thus far, after the fall of Amanullah Khan's government and a complete school closure by Habibullah Kalakani, during Nadir Khan's rule between 1929 to 1933, formal education was expanding slowly but, when on November 8, 1933, Nadir Khan was assassinated, this resulted in the stagnation of the education system for many years.

Mohammad Zahir Shah (1933–1973)

Nadir Khan's 19-year-old son, Zahir Shah, took the throne and ruled for 40 years (1933 to 1973) and his brother, M. Hashim Khan, became the Prime Minister. Because of Nadir Khan's

assassination during that education ceremony, Zahir Shah and M. Hashim Khan were not

proponents of education at first, but they slowly changed their stance, and a few elementary

schools were established. Additionally, in 1934, the faculty of science was established and in

1937, a teacher education institute. The government efforts could have been focused on the

development of science and on developing qualified school principals who could lead

educational institutions (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013) but this did not happen at this point in

history.

By 1945 the number of schools had increased to 346 and they enrolled 93,000 students of

a total population of 2 million people. This was, clearly, inadequate. The policies of the Prime

Minister, M Hashim Khan, were considered destructive of education and nation building

(Andishmand, 2011). He created an even stronger spy network in schools. He continued the

policies of distrust between nation and government. Furthermore, he marginalized the minority

groups. Because Abdul Khaliq, an ethnic Hazara, had assassinated Nadir Khan, an ethnic

Pashtun, this "gave Muhammad Hashim a pretext for imposing an educational sanction on

Afghanistan's Hazara and Shia Communities" (Baiza, 2013, p. 127). The sanction caused at least

two generations of school age Hazara Shia children to be deprived of a basic education.

After World War II and the creation of the United Nations, Afghanistan needed new

leadership to fulfill adequately its national and international commitment. On May 10, 1946,

Sardar Shah Mahmood Khan, Zahir Shah's uncle, replaced his brother, M Hashim Khan, and

become the Prime Minister of Afghanistan. The changes in leadership and in the policies

regarding women and minorities helped improve access to education. The education sanction on

Hazara people continued until 1946, because it was then that Afghanistan joined the United

Nations and was therefore obligated to follow international conventions in respect of women's

right to education and the provision of education for all (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

In 1946, Kabul University was established. Faculties of medicine, law, political science, science, and literature were brought under its leadership. Teacher education institutes were founded and, by 1952, a record number of 95 primary schools in 14 different provinces were established (Andishmand, 2011).

From 1953 to 1963, Zahir Shah's cousin, Daoud Khan, was the Prime Minister. Education had high priority in his plans. From 1956 to 1961, a five-year education plan was drafted to educate all school-age children. However, only 5% of these children were enrolled in the schools (Andishmand, 2011). In 1954, the faculty of education was founded. Its main mandate was to educate schoolteachers (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013) but there were no courses of study aimed at educating school principals to lead and improve the quality of education at the school and classroom level. While the number of schools was increasing, there were no trained school principals to lead them; they were learning on the job. Additionally, following a Pashtun nationalist movement, all schools were ordered to change the language of instruction to Pashto. There were not enough Pashto books nor Pashtun teachers who could teach in the Pashto language to a diverse population. Therefore, not only was this movement unsuccessful but it also used scarce national resources and led to further delays in the expansion of education (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013; Mousavi, 1998).

Furthermore, from 1962 to 1967, the second five-year education plan focused mainly on high schools, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), and higher education. The third and fourth five-year education plans were focused on teacher education programs. However, there was no still sign of educating school principals to carry out their role.

Girl's education slowly started to gain momentum. Many girls graduated with a baccalaureate degree from Kabul high schools. In 1960, the faculty of science and literature at Kabul University started to accept girls in their educational programs.

On March 10, 1963, Daoud Khan resigned as Prime Minister and three days later Dr. M. Yousuf became the Prime Minister of Afghanistan. Zahir Shah, as King of Afghanistan, had taken a bold decision to break with the tradition that only a member of the royal family could lead the government. He also developed constitution and education law that could further improve access to, and quality of, education across the country. He wanted to transfer the power to the people gradually; the years between 1963 and 1973 were considered to be the decade of democracy (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

The efforts made in the 1960s and 1970s increased the enrolment in primary schools to 36%. According to the Afghan MoE reports, at the end of the second round of five-years plans, a total of 444,237 primary school students were enrolled in schools, with 39.9% in Pashto-speaking schools and 60.1% in Dari-speaking schools. In about a decade, the primary school enrolment increased from merely 5% to 36%. And in 1971 the number of primary schools increased across the country to a total of 2,807 for boys and 138 for girls. In 1970, the total number of primary school students had reached more than half a million (540,685). In 1975, the total number of students increased to 784,568 (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

However, the biggest challenge was the lack of qualified teachers, and this translated into a lack of quality teaching and learning at the classroom level. Most of the teachers were Imam of Masjids with a religious education background and the rest of them had been educated at the teacher education institutes at grade 9 to 12 level in Kabul. In-service teacher training was arranged during the summer and winter breaks to build up teachers' professionalism

(Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013). But at this point in history, there was no course of study to train school principals to lead schools, instructionally supervise teachers, and improve students' learning outcomes; all teaching and learning responsibilities fell on teachers.

President Daoud Khan (1973–1978)

In 1973, in a bloodless coup, M. Zahir Shah's cousin, Daoud Khan, with the help of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), while changing the form of government from a Tribal Monarchy-Kingdom to the Republic of Afghanistan, declared himself the President (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013). Again, as during his tenure as Prime Minister (1953–1963), he focused on educational development. However, instead of a five-year education plan, initially he implemented a one-year plan, followed by a seven-year plan to reduce illiteracy and impart a sense of patriotism. Additionally, for the first time, kindergartens were established.

According to critics of Daoud's education policies, the educational plans that were developed and implemented to improve access to, and the quality of, education at high school level remained questionable. The teacher education institutes were educating professional teachers qualified to teach at primary and kindergarten levels only (Farhang, 1992, cited in Baiza, 2013). In 1975, a total of 893,077 students were enrolled in schools and, in 1978, the number of students in primary, secondary, and high schools increased to 1,037,794. Between 1973 and 1978, high school graduates from the provinces were permitted to enrol at Kabul institutes of higher education and at universities. The government provided hostels for enrolled boys and girls from the provinces (Andishmand, 2011).

Politically, Daoud created a unitary one-party socialist republic, and this angered the PDPA who helped bring him to power. The PDPA took control of the country through a revolution, known famously as the Saur Revolution, orchestrated on April 27, 1978, and led to

the death of President Daoud Khan inside the Presidential Palace along with some of his family

members.

Communist Regime (1978–1992)

After the Saur Revolution, Noor M. Taraki was declared the president of what was then

called the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan. This change in the form of government from the

Republic of Afghanistan to this new Democratic Republic of Afghanistan caused the fabric of

the society to deteriorate because the government was democratic in name only and Noor M.

Taraki's leadership took the form of an absolute dictatorship. University professors were forced

to change their ideological stance in favor of the dictates of the new regime. Some of the

professors were either imprisoned or hanged, while others fled the country. Young party

members with hardly any credentials started to teach at Kabul university. The internal conflict in

the PDPA led to its members dividing up into Khalq (People) and Parcham (Flaq) factions. The

leader (from September 14 to December 27, 1979) of the Parcham faction of PDPA, Hafizullah

Amin, was against the extremist policies of Noor M. Taraki so he had this leader assassinated

and he became the President of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (Andishmand, 2011;

Baiza, 2013).

Hafizullah Amin's act was unfavourable to Russia so, in December 1979, Russia sent its

military to invade Afghanistan. Hafizullah Amin was killed by the Russian army in Operation

Storm-333. Babrak Karmal was immediately appointed as the next president of Afghanistan and

he held this position from December 27, 1979, until 1986 (Andishmand, 2011).

Mujahideen (religious fighters) interpreted communism as atheistic and as being against

the religious beliefs of Afghan people. Therefore, during the 1979–1989 Russian invasion of

Afghanistan, there was a series of wars between Mujaheddin and the Russian army. According to

Sultan Ali Kishtmand, the Prime Minister of Afghanistan, during this period, over 2,000 schools

were destroyed. Additionally, many religious madrasas, mosques, and hundreds of clinics and

health centers were burned to the ground. This happened because although Babrak Karmal's

government was rebuilding schools and health care centers to improve the quality of people's

lives, the popular belief was that communist ideologies were taught in schools and wounded

Russian soldiers were being treated in the clinics and health centers. Reconstruction during the

war was close to impossible, many people were displaced, and many more became alienated

towards formal education (Andishmand, 2011).

      Although efforts were made by the new president of Afghanistan, Dr. Najibullah (May,

1986–April 16, 1992) to ensure that the voices of the people were heard and their wishes

fulfilled, this did not help. His changing the form of government from the Democratic Republic

of Afghanistan back to the Republic of Afghanistan in an effort to stabilize the country was also

to no avail because the divide between the communist regime and Mujahideen was deep. At this

time the education system was also divided between the central government and the Mujahideen.

In the urban centers the national curriculum promoted communism and in Mujahideen-controlled

territories, the curriculum promoted and preached Jihad against the Russians to reduce Russian

influence in Afghanistan (Baiza, 2013). The Jihadist textbooks were printed by the University of

Nebraska Press and the content created a generation of students with an extremist ideology

(Davis, 2002).

      In 1978, for the first time, the total number of students surpassed one million but after the

Saur Revolution of that year, the number of students in both schools and universities dropped

significantly. Students graduating from high school were forced into mandatory military service

and the political situation led many Afghan people to migrate to other countries in search of a

peaceful life. Dr. Najibullah initiated national reconciliation in an effort to prevent civil war, but the Mujahedeen leaders did not accept this reconciliationist approach. In 1992, Dr. Najibullah let the Mujahedeen leaders take control of central power, but they began to fight against each other, and this led to all-out civil/ethnic war (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013).

Islamic State of Afghanistan (1992–1996)

The Mujahideen changed the form of government from the Republic of Afghanistan to the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Different ethnic leaders, who supported the overthrow of the communist regime, struggled to gain control of central government. Ethnic leaders did not accept the leadership of other ethnic leaders and continued their war against each other. Kabul city was divided among different ethnic groups (Andishmand, 2011). Based on my experience and memory, check posts were installed in all major streets of Kabul. Each ethnic group feared the other ethnic groups, and all were fully equipped with ammunition. Kabul city became a war zone. During this period, hardly any education took place in Kabul nor in the rest of the country.

Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996–2001)

The situation elaborated on above created a power-vacuum in which the Taliban was created and installed to lead Afghanistan. Again, the form of Government was changed, this time from Islamic State of Afghanistan to Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. By this time, girls' education was completely abolished by the Taliban regime and boys' education was based on extremist ideologies (Andishmand, 2011; Baiza, 2013). The number of boys enrolled reached one million. Most of the people who did not emigrate during the communist regime now had no choice but to emigrate to escape the harsh and rigid Taliban regime. As in 1979, the emigration to escape the Taliban regime in 1996 significantly changed the demographic of Afghanistan in that the remaining educated population left the country and this meant that Afghanistan now had

very few educated people and became prone to different kinds of exploitation by the regime and by foreign intervention.

President Karzai and Ghani – Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (2001–2021)

In 2002, after the overthrow of the Taliban, Afghanistan lay in ruins following 23 years of war. The capital city of Kabul witnessed some of the most violent conflicts of the past two decades as Spink (2005) has reminded us. In 2002, the international community, led by the United Nations Children's Fund, launched the Back-to-School Campaign and more than 3 million children were enrolled in schools (United Nations Children's Fund, 2004). By the beginning of 2004, more than 4 million children were going to school. In 2017, there were more than 9.2 million students enrolled in the formal education system in Afghanistan (Afghan MoE, 2016). As part of Afghanistan's National Education Strategic Plan, significant progress was made in providing access to education.

Furthermore, private education institutions from kindergarten to tertiary level were also legislated (Government of Afghanistan, 2004). Since 2004, when private education institutions were set up, around half a million children had been enrolled in private schools (Afghan, 2016). As mentioned above, the private schools are owned and operated by individuals and private companies for whom these are business opportunities in Kabul and in other major cities of Afghanistan such as Herat city, Mazar-e-sharif, and Jalalabad.

Between 2001 and 2021, it appeared that change in the fate of the country that had suffered for decades was in the making. The twelve years of formal education provided by the Afghan MoE included six years of primary, three years of lower secondary, and three years of upper secondary education. The two years of pre-primary school were free but not compulsory. Additionally, twelve years of primary and secondary school were free, but only nine years of

schooling were compulsory. There were two upper secondary education tracks and each one lasted for three years; the regular track of upper secondary led to university, and the other led to TVET. Students who chose the TVET track got the equivalent of a high school diploma. An alternative education track was Religious Education that spanned twelve years. It was based on the Islamic school system that had three streams called Madrassa, Dar-ul-Hifaz, and Dar-ul-Uloom (Samady, 2013). However, the Islamic education programs were slowly being integrated into the mainstream education system and were becoming regulated.[5]

The Current State of School Principals' Leadership in Afghanistan

School principals have a significant leadership role. They can hold the entire school community responsible and accountable for the provision of access to quality education. While providing direct support to assistant principals, head teachers, and teachers to achieve students' learning outcome (see Leithwood, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2010; Qian et al., 2017; Wei, 2017). In a recent report, *The Learning Crisis in Afghanistan*, Molina et al. (2018) asserted that Afghan school principals do not consider student learning outcomes nor attending to teachers' duties to be their responsibility. Instead, school principals consider that teachers "being on time, maintaining strict discipline in the classroom, and teaching students to be good citizens" holds considerable importance. On the one hand, "[t]his could in part be explained by poor preparation and support they received to lead the school" (p. 6) since there is a mismatch between school leaders' training and their decision-making power. School principals in Afghanistan receive management training on administrative skills but none of their training is directed towards supporting instructional efforts in the schools. On the other hand, the current school leadership

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[5] In Afghanistan, the academic year officially starts in March, the beginning of spring and continues through December. During the harsh winter months schools stay closed because school buildings are not heated.

practice reflects the deeply rooted notions of Akhlaq (morals or morality) and Adab (politeness and good manners) as being of value to students in the Afghan context.

To further contextualize the current SPLPs in Afghanistan, we need to keep in mind that the Islamic education system was widespread with a very long history, having reached this geographic location in the 7th century (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). Traditional education continued until the beginning of the 20th century when the formal education system was introduced in Kabul and was seen to be a threat to the longstanding Islamic values and beliefs rather than an opportunity to modernize the society (Deo, 2014; Karlsson & Mansory, 2007; Sadat, 2004; Samady, 2001a, 2001b, 2013) and to improve the quality of life for the people. It was feared that such modernization would break family ties in the movement from the collectivist ideal to a more individualistic way of life. According to Tan (2015),

> Underpinning the prevailing conception of learner-centred education in the west, it may be argued, are liberal values such as autonomy, liberty, equality, and individualism. Furthermore, it seems that a 'flatter' and more democratic relationship, rather than a strict hierarchical relationship between teachers and learners is preferred. Concomitantly, non-liberal values and practices more commonly found in non-western societies such as collectivism, social hierarchy, teacher authority and student compliance are seen as inimical to and incompatible with learner-centered education. (p. 304)

Therefore, there was a fundamental 'clash of values' between traditional schooling systems and modern ones. In particular, girl's education was not popular at the beginning of the 20th century. Amir Habibullah Khan, in an effort to modernize the education system, faced severe rejection by the traditional tribal leaders because he was encouraging girls' education (Deo, 2014; Karlsson & Mansory, 2007; Sadat, 2004; Samady, 2001a)

Over a century of struggle between the two world views of traditional Afghan schooling on the one hand, and the formal/modern/western concept of schooling on the other, created an array of perspectives on understanding the world. During this period, more Afghan people showed interest in a globalized world and started to embrace it so, by the turn of the 21st century, a greater percentage of the population shifted their focus to embrace the formal schooling system.

Based on a thorough and in-depth qualitative case study of two Afghan villages, Karlsson and Mansory (2007) worked to understand the village members' perceptions of education in relation to their local realities as influenced by globalization. They found that four dominant ideologies persisted throughout both villages—traditionalist, fundamentalist, Islamist, and secularist. Although only a few people held the secularist ideology, they seemed to be growing in number.

In attempting to understand the landscape of education in Afghanistan, most reviewers seek to find gaps and try to fill them, but for me, a bridge is needed to connect two world views. Western and globalized world views are not always that different from Eastern constructs and ideologies. Afghanistan is truly situated at the intersection[6] of the forces of globalization with Islamic value, and ethics on the one hand and secularism, individualism, and consumerism on the other (Tan, 2015). Similarly, the local realities operate on one side and global demands on the other and both affect the social fabric.

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[6] Conceptual intersectionality in the Afghan context has practical implications. For instance, conceptually, Afghanistan is situated between Eastern/Islamic and Western ideals. Practically, school principals are similarly situated and are required to respond to the needs of local people and align the leadership practices of their institutions with those of the rest of the world. However, this requires the national government to focus on, and facilitate the enhancement of, school principals' leadership capacities to enable principles to deal with complex social situations and institutions.

School principals as social and institutional school leaders are situated at the centre of this intersectionality, and this affects their perceptions and leadership practices; they are required to shift their focus from a strictly traditionalist approach to leadership to a democratic one. Further efforts must be made if we are to bridge the space between the two world views through a revised national curriculum and the acquisition of contextualized educational leadership practices across the education system in Afghanistan (Afghan MoE, 2020).

According to Fullan (2016), "Moral purpose and knowledge are the two main change forces that drive success" (p. 18). School principals could, through their leadership practices, bridge the gap between the two world views. The concepts of Akhlaq and Adab as part of an Eastern construct (Karlsson & Mansory 2007) need to be combined with the formal/western construct that includes critical thinking, creativity, problem solving skills, collaboration, and communication (Fullan, 2016) to prepare students to meet the new challenges they face in this increasingly diversified and globalized world, especially be prepared in this age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Striking a balance between the two world views, with their respective skills and knowledges, could help improve the school leadership practices of principals to achieve this desired outcome for teachers and students.

Currently Afghan school principals are in the vulnerable situation of being incapable of responding fully to a complex world because there is no program of studies that will prepare them for the complexity of the context in which they find themselves. Molina et al. (2018) recommended some points pertinent to policy dialogue in the Afghan context in the interests of improving the overall quality of education.

1. Align the goals of the system to learning.

2. Increase the amount of time students are effectively taught.

3. Strengthen teacher recruitment, support, and monitoring.

4. Strengthen principal recruitment, support, and monitoring.

5. Improve infrastructure in schools and availability of learning materials.

6. Look for positive deviants and local innovations. (p. 14)

These suggested areas of improvement will contribute to the mission of the Afghan MoE which is to provide access to quality education for all students.

Currently, as mentioned earlier, male teachers with five years and female teachers with seven years of teaching experience are eligible to become school principals (Molina et al., 2018; Reilly, 2015). The challenge is that principals do not receive official guidelines nor rigorous training and there are no school leadership degrees that could teach principles how to lead an educational institution effectively and efficiently. This is not to devalue the importance of homegrown leaders with "knowledge of practice" (Luttrell, 2010, p. 3), but school leaders capable of innovative, modern, and research-based knowledge of SPLPs could contribute greatly to teachers' professional development, student learning outcomes, and staff wellbeing (Leithwood, 2018). If all school principals were trained and educated to a high standard, this could result in a world class generation of students capable of "thinking critically, reason[ing] analytically, and mak[ing] choices grounded in ethics and positive value" (Dimmock & Goh, 2011, p. 235).

I am aware of the insecurity and of the social and financial challenges of Afghanistan as outlined by Molina et al. (2018), but the resources that are available need to be used strategically to address the grassroots challenge faced by the Afghan education sector to improve the quality of SPLPs to enhance the quality of teachers' instructional approaches and achieve the desired student learning outcomes. Since August 15, 2021, as the Taliban regime took control of the

country, many things have changed including girls' access to education that is banned by the regime. The economy is shattered, many have lost their jobs, government employees are replaced with Talibs who may have no concept of how to lead government offices and schools.

School Principals' Role, Responsibility, and Leadership Practices

In developing countries, the notion of school principals' leadership practices is at its basic form. School principals are provided with basic management training before they take up their appointments even though there is little association made between the role of the school principal and the teaching and learning processes at the classroom level. In Indonesia, for example, sometimes even the school principal's "role [is] not specified or defined in any official way" (Sumintono et al., 2015, p. 343) and in India their role is seen to be "non-essential [or] not necessary" (Saravanabhavan et al., 2016, p. 474).

Theoretically, according to Saravanabhavan et al. (2016), "In the school setting, leadership competency means that an administrator has the knowledge and skills necessary to manage the people and resources to attain the desired outcome of quality education" (p. 475). Currently, in developing contexts, a school principal is seen as an administrator, an instructional leader, and a "school site manager" (p. 473) whose responsibilities entail maintaining discipline, requisitioning supplies, improving the quality of the education system, facilitating professional staff, and performing participatory forms of governance. Hypothetically, school principals' roles and responsibilities could range from the management of day-to-day routines of school affairs to the effective utilization of scarce resources and the achievement of the goal of providing quality education. These are very broad terms and concepts; school principal could interpret them as they deem necessary but "[a] competent principal should exhibit proficiency in matters related to management and administration of the school as well as exercise his or her instructional

leadership in making the school effective" (p. 476). Professional school principals' competencies may also be defined as a combination of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and disposition that allows one to be successful in one's position. Competencies are descriptions of anticipated performance that combine professional know-how with the soft skills that can make the behavior most effective (Saravanabhavan et al., 2016).

There are scattered efforts made by researchers and education scholars in developing and semi-developed nations to elaborate on the school principal's role, responsibilities, and professional competencies (Charernnit et al., 2021; Elahi & Ilyas, 2019; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Niqab et al., 2014; Rizvi, 2008; Saravanabhavan et al., 2016; Sumintono et al., 2015; Uçar, 2021) but these efforts have hardly been streamlined as have those of the Ontario Ministry of Education that follows the Ontario College of Teachers' *Principals' Qualification Program* to instill in school principals professional competencies (Ontario Principal's Council, 2022).

Ontario College of Teachers is responsible for the School Principals' Qualification Program and teachers' certification or licensure. The program is organized into 12 modules that incorporate the five domains of the Ontario Leadership Framework: to set direction; build relationships and develop people; develop the organization to support desired practices; improve the instructional programs; and secure accountability. Additionally, the *Principals' Qualification Program* is divided into two parts. The first part includes work on the principal's role, equitable and inclusive schools, management and leadership, pedagogical leadership, inclusive education, and the co-creation of safe schools. The second part focusses on the changing role of school leaders, co-creating inclusive schools, building professional capital, evidence-based decision making, building relationships with parents and the community, and supporting wellness and wellbeing (Ontario Principals' Council, 2022). All this builds up the foundation of SPLPs. This

is quite unlike what happens in the developing countries where school principals are hired based on the number of years of their teaching experience in the best-case scenario, and on bribery, connections, and political affiliation in the worst-case one.

School Principals' Licensure

Since school principal "leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school" (The Institute for Education Leadership, 2013, p. 4) school leadership has moved in recent years to the forefront of educational research. This means that SPLPs have been extensively researched, and best practices are included in school principals' professional competencies to ensure improved teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcome (Hallinger et al., 2015, 2018; Harris, 2008, 2009, 2013a, 2013b; Harris & Spillane, 2008; Khaola & Oni, 2020; Nasreen & Odhiambo, 2018; Rizvi, 2008; Spillane, 2005). It is clear that SPLPs need to be regulated to ensure uniform and quality education delivery at the school and classroom levels.

Major western nations have started to professionalize the school principal's role and responsibility. For instance, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada, after a series of large-scale research projects, started to regulate the school principals' profession by providing a license for qualified school principals (Government of Alberta, 2022; Government of United Kingdom, 2014; Leithwood, 2018; Manna, 2015; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Ontario Principal's Council, 2022; Van Rosendaal, 2018).

"Professional certification is the evidence of practical work and acquisition of skills related to specific industry" (Elahi & Ilyas, 2019, p. 582), but in some developing countries, a school principal's professional certification is linked to having a Bachelor of Arts in Education, a Bachelor of Education, a Master of Education, a Diploma in Educational Leadership and

Management, or in Educational Planning and Management (Elahi & Ilyas, 2019). In western

countries, in addition to a degree in educational leadership and management, the professional

licensure of aspiring school principals includes five years of teaching experience and extensive

processes and procedures that lead to training, hiring, and maintaining highly qualified

individuals for school principalship (Government of Alberta, 2022 Government of United

Kingdom, 2014; Leithwood, 2018; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Ontario Principal's

Council, 2022; Van Rosendaal, 2018). For instance, in the United Kingdom, the *National

Professional Qualification for Executive Leadership* is a program that develops aspiring and in-

service school principals' leadership skills, knowledge, and behaviours so that they can perform

at their best. The content areas in which school principals are trained are (1) Strategy and

improvement, (2) Teaching curriculum excellence, (3) Leading with impact, (4) Working in

partnership, (5) Managing resources and risks, and (6) Increasing capability. Additionally, there

are seven leadership behaviours that help to improve aspiring and in-service school principals:

multi-school leaders' commitment; collaboration; personal drive; resilience; awareness; integrity;

and respect (Government of United Kingdom, 2014).

Similarly, the Ohio Department of Education (2019) has a set of criteria with which

aspiring school principals must comply before they can be assigned as licensed school principals.

The prerequisites include having maintained a five-year teaching license and having earned a

master's degree from an accredited university. Additionally, aspiring school principals complete

an approved preparation program, receive a recommendation from a dean or a head of teacher

education at the institution where they completed the preparation program, complete the Ohio

Assessment for Educators licensure exam, and take the educational leadership program

prescribed by the State Board of Education. A principal must have two years of successful

teaching experience under a standard teaching license (or work experience under a professional

pupil services license) for the ages and grade levels for which the principal licence is sought.

Moreover, an alternative principal license track is available for in-service school principals at the

Ohio Department of Education. It is a three-year licensure pathway that allows school principals

to work in an Ohio School as a principal or assistant principal while completing the requirements

required by Ohio law for a professional principal's license. Initially, applicants are required to

apply for a one-year alternative principal license with official undergraduate or graduate

transcripts with a minimum grade point average of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale along with the provision of

position verification by the employing school or district stating that the principal or vice-

principal position is held by the candidate. Additionally, applicants must provide work

experience certification stating that they have taught successfully for two or more years under a

standard or professional teaching licence or a five-year work experience letter asserting that they

have successfully performed administrative, educational, or management tasks. Finally, the

candidate needs to renew the one-year licence twice (a total of three years of on-the-job

experience is required) to receive the professional principal license (Ohio Department of

Education, 2019).

Certified Educational Principal, Licensed School Principal, Licensed Professional

Principal, School Principal with Certification, and Certified Professional School Leader are

terms of recognition used for school principals who have completed all the prerequisites for the

principalship role in the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Canada (Government of Alberta, 2022;

Government of UK, 2014; Ohio Department of Education, 2019; Ontario Principal's Council,

2022; Van Rosendaal, 2018).

Given the significance of SPLPs and their impact on teaching practices and on students'

learning outcomes, the professionalization and certification of school principals is becoming the

new norm (Leithwood, 2018). The recognition of school principals for their professional

competencies and professionalism is having a ripple effect around the world and the need for

professional school principals capable of leading schools to achieve the desired teaching and

learning outcomes is evident in most countries.

Countries like Pakistan, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and China are starting, to

a certain extent, to regulate the profession of school principal (Elahi & Ilyas, 2019; Nasreen &

Odhiambo, 2018; National Center on Education and Economy, 2021; Ng & Pun, 2013; Papa,

2011; Rizvi, 2008; Sumintono et al., 2015). In recent years, developing and semi-developed

countries have recognized that they face a significant challenge in the demand and supply of

professional school principals (Saravanabhavan et al., 2016; Sumintono et al., 2015). If there are

not enough school principals in a district, state, or province, the teaching workforce is likely to

be incapable of delivering quality education. And, if the supply of school principals is greater

than is required in a district, state, or province this creates a workforce of frustrated individuals

who are trained for the school principalship role but who must remain in a teacher's position

instead of being able to climb the professional ladder. Additionally, frustration results when the

political leaders at the district, state, or provincial level appoint school principals based on

political affiliation, being connected to politicians, ethnic background or favoritism, and bribery

(Saravanabhavan et al., 2016; Sumintono et al., 2015).

Sometimes, in developing and semi-developed contexts, the will of politicians transcends

education law that is constituted to ensure quality education and must be enforced by political

leaders. In some cases, politicians use this power to advance their political agenda and to please

individuals who are not qualified for the position of school principal but who amassed votes in an election, for example, by appointing them to the position (Ng & Pun, 2013; Sumintono et al., 2015). Therefore, an independent government body is needed to assess ability, train, hire, and provide professional licence to highly qualified individuals selected for the school principalship role. This could help reduce widespread corruption and improve the quality of education in every school.

Corruption in Afghan Education System

During Ghazi Amanullah Khan's rule (1919–1929), significant progress was made in education. As part of the constitution of 1923, he introduced compulsory schooling for both boys and girls in an effort to modernize the education system. The number of students enrolled increased, and primary school buildings were built. Education officers tried to enroll as many children at school as possible. However, as mentioned above, in rural Afghanistan, some families were unable to send their children to school, because of the cost associated with this. Instead, parents encouraged their children to work on the farms (Andishmand, 2011). Parents who were unable to commit to the compulsory education of their children offered education officers bribes (e.g., cheese, butter, or coins) in exchange for a letter of exception (Andishmand, 2011). This marked the first traces of corruption in Afghan education history.

In 2011, ten years after the first round of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan was considered the third most corrupt country in the world (Transparency International, 2021). In 2018, the scope and scale of corruption was at an all-time high and was described as a corruption epidemic or plague that infected all levels of society (Cooper, 2018). In 2021, Afghanistan was still one of the most corrupt countries in the world; it ranked 174 out of 180 countries and territories (Transparency International, 2021). As Centner (2012) said, "[U]nfortunately, systemic

corruption threatens not only the progress that has been made in the education system, but also the future of Afghanistan itself" (p. 852). Once again, in 2021, Afghanistan fell again under the Taliban regime. Now in addition to corruption a new problem has emerged—qualified teachers are fleeing the country. Female teachers are prevented from teaching, and girls beyond grade six are deprived of their rights to education and in 2023 all girls were banned from going to school. Additionally, all women teachers and those working in national and international organizations were ordered to remain at home and not return to work. This situation has, of course, worsened the process of education delivery. However, even before the second round of Taliban take-over,

> only 25% of the country's approximately 160,000 teachers had a high school education, and even fewer were well versed in more than one subject and had the ability to transfer that knowledge to the students . . . [O]nly ten out of 200 teachers (5%) could pass the exact same exam they were giving their students (Centner, 2012, p. 852).

> Post 2001, the Afghan education system was considered "a rapidly growing, but still flawed system" (Centner, 2012, p. 849). Because of the widespread corruption for instance, it was estimated that there were more than 16,000 ghost teachers, and that teachers graded students based either on their connections, or on how much they were bribed.

> And, because of the lack of a proper system and technology, schoolteachers themselves were forced to pay bribes to get their paychecks. Additionally, the public sector teachers' salary is estimated to be among the lowest in the world at "approximately U.S. 100$ per month" so schoolteachers accept bribes as a way of survival. Although this is not an accepted practice, the Afghan MoE has a weak accountability system that means that teachers have "little to fear and much to gain through bribery" (Centner, 2012, p. 855). This lack of accountability applied not

only to schoolteachers but also to school principals who were not held accountable for teachers'

quality of instruction and students' learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the practice of students and parents bribing teachers could lead students to

internalize the belief that to pay a bribe is a way of life and this sets the stage for future

widespread corruption. According to Centner (2012), "[t]heoretically, if corruption is strongly

condemned, public acceptance of corruption will decline, thus establishing the beginning of a

successful long-term, anti-corruption strategy" (p. 853) but I argue that it is not that easy to

eradicate corruption. Because the public service incomes are among the lowest in the world these

workers can hardly feed their children and make ends meet. In my experience, one of our

geography teachers was selling mobile phone prepaid cards on the streets of Kabul after school

hours to earn enough to pay the rent and buy groceries. Other teachers who were not able to do

so, might well have seen the easiest way to manage financially was to agree to be bribed.

While responding to its international commitment and attending to the United Nations

Convention Against Corruption, President Hamid Karzai established three bureaus: the High

Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption; the Major Crimes Task force; and the Anti-Corruption

Unit to prevent, investigate, and prosecute perpetrators of corruption. Efforts were made to

prosecute high-level corrupt officials, but the results were largely inadequate because these

institutions were too severely understaffed to respond to the widespread corruption endemic

across all government institutions and ministries (Centner, 2012).

A major concern was that High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption reported directly

to President Karzai, and the President himself was believed to "contribute heavily to the

worsening culture of corruption in Afghanistan" (Centner, 2012, p. 860); this has further

perpetuated the corruption that has trickled down even to the school level, classroom level, and

student level. Basically, it became a global challenge in the context of Afghanistan that finally led to the fall of the government, and it created an opportunity for the Taliban regime to take over the country once again.

Education in Emergencies and Protracted Crisis

In 2021, Afghanistan was placed first among the top ten worst countries for children to live in. According to Humanium (2019), war-torn Afghanistan is one of the "worst place to be born in the world" (para. 1). Additionally, "Afghanistan could see near universal poverty of 97 per cent by mid-2022, up from 47 per cent in 2020" (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2022, p. 2). Although access to, and the quality of, education was slowly improving between 2001 and 2021, large numbers of school-age children, primarily girls, were out of school (Trani et al., 2019). However, since August 15, 2021, the beginning of the second round of the Taliban regime, girls' education has been banned beyond grade 6. The sanction on girl's education has significantly increased the number of out-of-school children and currently 7.9 million children are in a vulnerable situation and require education support. Out of the population of 35 million Afghans, 24.4 million people, including 12.9 million children, need help (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2022).

According to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund Afghanistan situation report, "Even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic access to education was a challenge, with cultural practices, displacement, inaccessibility, and lack of facilities keeping 4.2 million (60 per cent girls) out of school" (2022, p. 2). The new political and socioeconomic situation since August 15, 2021, has further exacerbated the already fragile state in relation to conflict, forced displacement, poverty, economic instability, and increased domestic and community violence that has created a tense environment in which education stakeholders cannot focus and

concentrate on leading, teaching, and learning practices (United Nations International Children's

Emergency Fund, 2022).

Until 2010, "humanitarian relief entailed the provision of food, shelter, water and

sanitation, and health care. Education was seen as part of longer-term development work rather

than as a necessary response to emergencies" (Inter-agency Network for Education in

Emergencies, 2010, p. 3). However, the significance of education and education spaces provided

in a context of crisis is that it reduces the impacts of external crisis factors and provides a safe

space for children; education is now considered critical in the framework of humanitarian

response (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010). Since schools are at the

heart of the communities, they provide the platform for the revival of the socioeconomic,

cultural, and collective identity of the Afghan people. [7]

Currently, education in Afghanistan is in crisis (Radio Azadi, 2023); this requires

collaboration and sustainable support to ensure its long-term development, its socioeconomic

stability, and the prosperity of the country. According to Inter-agency Network for Education in

Emergencies (2010),

> Education in emergencies comprises learning opportunities for all ages. It encompasses
>
> early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocational,
>
> higher, and adult education. In emergency situations through to recovery, quality

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[7] The Covid-19 pandemic and the school closures that resulted from it and the economic situation caused by it have further exacerbated the fundamental challenges this fragile state of Afghanistan faces. In addition to education being in a protracted crisis (Nicolai et al., 2015), now the economy is also following its lead. The Afghan economy was artificially built on international aid (Ibrahim, 2021), so, when international aid dried up, the economy collapsed, and this worsened the situation in which Afghan people live.

education provides physical, psychosocial, and cognitive protection that can sustain and

save lives. (p. 2)

However, until recently, education in emergencies and in protracted crisis focused only

on pre-primary, primary, and lower secondary education (Nicolai et al., 2015). While the focus

might be on students' learning, the achievement of quality education relies on teacher quality

under the guidance of SPLPs and the provision of physical, psychosocial, and cognitive

protection of students and school staff members so further efforts are needed to provide

sustainable safe spaces and quality education.

In a situation of education in emergencies and protracted crises, in addition to the

provision of professional development for schoolteachers to improve their teaching practices,

there is also a need to train school leaders such as school principal, vice principals, and head

teachers to provide a safe environment for children. The provision of general access to education

in Afghanistan that has been the focus in the past is inadequate. To start afresh, post August 15,

2021, in addition to providing access to education there is a dire need to weld quality education

to such access. In other words, where access to education is provided it must be accompanied by

programs that ensure thorough teachers' and leaders' professional development to ensure the

desired long-term outcome.

However, providing such quality education seems to be impossible given that

Afghanistan has been immersed in consecutive civil and/or proxy wars over the last 150 years.

Conflicts increase vulnerability that leads to poverty, early marriage for girls, and child labor, all

of which prevent the most vulnerable from accessing quality education (Trani et al., 2019;

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2022). "Education opportunities . . .

mitigate the psychological impact of conflict and disasters by providing a sense of routine,

stability, structure, and hope for the future" (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010, p. 2). Education opportunities enable individual students to strengthen problem-solving and coping skills, and to make informed decision about how to service and care for themselves and others in dangerous environments (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010). Without quality education for all girls and boys, and without a stable economy any improvement in the quality of life for over 35 million people is impossible.

Based on its history, Afghanistan is stuck in a vicious cycle, and, in these times of despair, quality education represents hope in this beleaguered country (Burde, 2014). According to Aga Khan (2006),

> If our animosities are born out of fear, then confident generosity is born out of hope. One of the central lessons I have learned after a half century of working in the developing world is that the replacement of fear by hope is probably the single most powerful trampoline of progress. (para. 32)

To come out of the misery of war and destruction, education represents hope that could build the foundation for future generations to live in peace and prosperity (Burde, 2014).

Chapter 3: Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Conceptually, narrowing the notion of SPLPs to a manageable research agenda requires a framework aligned with the main objective of this study that is to explore school principal leadership practices that influence teachers' instructional approaches to achieving student success. First, I contextualize SPLPs and discuss the concepts of shared instructional leadership. Then I offer a four-path model of SPLPs, and, finally, I clarify the analytical framework with specific domains of SPLPs.

Contextualization of School Principals Leadership Best Practices

The best practices from both the western and eastern contexts can be drawn upon and contextualized in reference to Afghanistan. According to Wei (2017), "[S]imilar policies from foreign countries and many other jurisdictions, especially Australia, Hong Kong, the United Kingdon, and the United States provided a theoretical foundation for the construction of the Chinese standards" (p. 186). In China, the Ministry of Education has developed a policy to align leadership practices at all compulsory school levels relevant to the Chinese context, while also being globally aligned (Zhao, 2013).

According to Wei (2017) the Chinese Professional Standards for Compulsory Schools Principals uses the best practices (that have been contextually researched based empirically on evidence from the Chinese context) that contribute greatly to student success, achievement, and learning outcomes. For example, the alignment of the best practice of setting a school direction that is responsive to the local expectations of student achievement in exams is based on "a traditional Confucian emphasis on excelling in exams" (Qian et al., 2017, p. 198) and the universal demand of identifying their "school's distinctives strength and transform[ing] that strength into a brand" (p. 195).

The best practices have become a globalized phenomenon as nation states have been

exhorted to adopt particular leadership language, behaviours, and accountability in order

to bring about particular types of change in publicly funded schools, colleges, and

universities (Gunter, 2016, pp. 7–8).

The phenomenon of adopting best practices from a developed context in a developing one or

vice versa is termed a "Transnational Leadership Package" (Thomson et al., 2014, cited in

Gunter, 2016, p. 8). In the case of Afghanistan, there is no denying that the Afghan education

system is at the intersection of globalization and the influx of diverse policies that shape local

practices (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). The notion of policies crossing borders is known as

Global Policy Convergence (Courtney et al., 2021; Qian et al., 2017; Wei, 2017). Hartong (2015)

described the nationalization of education curricula and the alignment of policies in both the

United States and Germany as an example of the assertiveness of educational policies in a

globalized context. The concept of global policy convergence mostly unifies policies so

prevailing views of the social and cultural aspects of a society may take lesser precedence.

Although there is a fundamental ideological difference between the United States and Germany,

the concept of the nationalization of education curricula in a globalized context did not prevent

educational policy alignment from taking place, "[p]articularly because 'practical concerns' have

come to matter more than 'social and cultural aspects' of education" (Gunter, 2016, p. 167).

The Afghan SPLP as a local aspect of leadership is situated within its global context, and

the alignment of best practice is inevitable. Even though one might have a competing stance on

the notion of global policy convergence in a post-conflict context, after 2001 a transformation in

Afghan society was evident. The education system across the country started to change from

being rigid, polarized, and extremist based on the tenets of the Taliban regime to being a

democratic and flexible one. In this changing context, a knowledge of school leadership best practices was needed to help improve teachers' teaching quality and prepare students to attain skills, knowledge, and abilities that are contextually grounded, yet globally aligned.

When China's education policy involved borrowing context from the West and converging their education policies, guidelines, and practices, they did this based on rigorous contextual research and engaged in a wide range of consultations to negotiate, adapt, and contextualize the adopted policies and practices to improve compulsory professional standards for school principals (Wei, 2017).

Given the lack of contextual research and a set of school principals' professional competencies, Afghan school principals began to change their perception of the ways in which education systems function in different form of governments. Students who are accustomed to being passive receivers of education and who believe that this does them no harm need to realize that they are at the center of the learning and teaching activity and that teachers are facilitators who are meant to support their learning and point them in the right direction. In this changing context adopting and adapting the best practices from both western and eastern contexts may well improve access to quality education, develop school principals' leadership skills, improve teachers' professional capacity and instructional approaches to enhance students' learning outcomes.

Applicability of Instructional and Shared Instructional Leadership

The concept of instructional leadership was theorized during what was known as the effective school movement in the United States in the 1980s (Hallinger, 2005; Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership has become an inclusive part of educational leadership practices. In the1980s, it became popular because transformational leadership was finding its place in the

area of SPLPs being used to empower teachers and improve the quality of teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2005). In the1990s, its popularity decreased but at the beginning of the 21st century it picked up momentum in response to policy makers, researchers, and nation states aiming to improve the quality of education globally (Hallinger et al., 2018). The notion of instructional leadership was conceptually defined by Hallinger (2005), who described it in the three dimensions of (1) defining a school's mission, (2) managing an instructional program, and (3) promoting a positive learning environment. These dimensions are discussed below to enable me to offer the firm foundation on which later shared instructional leadership was conceptually and empirically developed and strengthened (Day et al., 2016; Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003). After presenting the conceptual base of instructional leadership as conceptualized by Hallinger (2005), I then relate it to the Afghan educational context. I argue that although the momentum of instructional leadership lessened in the 1990s, it become more popular at the turn of the 21st century because instruction is what happens at school and leadership is what school leaders practice. Therefore, as long as educational institutions exist and provide instruction to students, instructional leadership practices will be carried out.

Regarding the first dimension of defining a school's mission, it is important to clarify what a school's mission is and communicate its importance to the wider school community. The focus of defining a school's mission is always to prioritize students' academic achievement and teachers' contribution towards student success. The school mission needs to be understood and "accepted as legitimate by teachers throughout the schools and finally the mission [will be] articulated, actively supported and modeled by the principal" (Hallinger, 2005, p. 226). The second dimension of instructional program management is comprised of the supervision and instructional evaluation of teachers, curriculum coordination, and the monitoring of students'

progress. Afghan school principals need to engage with teachers' teaching practices and students' achievement to improve their professional competencies (Hallinger, 2005). The third dimension of promoting a positive school learning climate is inclusive of "protecting instructional time, promoting professional development, maintaining high visibility, providing incentives for teachers, [and] providing incentives for learning" (Hallinger, 2005, p. 226).

At the turn of the 21st century, instructional leadership needed to be transformed because it was formulated earlier when school leaders were at the center of school leadership practices and teachers were at the center of teaching practices and the lecture method was used to transfer knowledge from teacher to students (Hallinger, 2005; Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003). Instructional leadership was practiced mainly at small elementary schools and, since principals had relevant content knowledge related to the subject matter, they had the capability to guide teachers. But instructional leadership became impractical for a larger secondary school with thousands of students and a variety of specialized subjects such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. Also, instructional leadership was perceived to be a top-down and directive approach to leadership and "did not meet the fundamental challenge of providing quality learning for all students" (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). Therefore, the concept of shared instructional leadership gained prominence among educational theorists (Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003) to cover a wide range of schools in its sharing of leadership power with students, teachers, head of departments, head teachers, assistant principals, and the wider school community.

A conceptual change from instructional leadership to shared instructional leadership requires a major ontological and epistemological change in the perceptions of all stakeholders regarding SPLPs and stakeholders' individual efforts in achieving student learning outcomes.

This change signifies a shift from a positivist to a post-positivist approach to leadership; individuals and their diverse ideologies, knowledge, and skills are acknowledged, valued, and capitalized on.

I argue that, at the start of the 21st century this global ontological, epistemological, and conceptual change occurred around the world including in the developing context of Afghanistan. As I have discussed in my literature review chapter, the history of Afghan education was very political and centralized to respond to the ruling elites' political agenda. After 2001, it evolved into having a more egalitarian and democratic approach to leadership. However, in Afghanistan, history repeated itself on August 15, 2021, when Taliban regime was re-established, and it banned girls' education beyond grade six.

Regarding the concept of shared instructional leadership, Lambert (2002) suggested that "instead of looking to the principal alone for instructional leadership, we need to develop leadership capacity among all members of the school community" (p. 37). In addition to focusing on students' success, achievements, and learning outcomes, it is crucially important to focus also on the learning of teachers and school leaders to ensure that schools are developing a culture and an environment in which all stakeholders learn to lead.

As Lambert (2002) asserted, "Instructional leadership must be a shared community undertaking and leadership is the professional work of everyone in the school" (p. 37). In the context of shared instructional leadership, the principal can share instructional leadership practice with teaching staff since shared instructional leadership requires that all the stakeholders take the role of learner if shared instruction is to happen. I argue that more than ever, there is a great need for all stakeholders to continually learn to lead and respond to the needs and mental

wellbeing of diverse students with their individual differences, skills, capabilities, knowledge, and dispositions, in addition to achiev[ing] the desired learning outcome.

Four-Path Model Practicality

Based on thorough quantitative research with multivariable and multiyear research projects, Leithwood and colleagues (2010, 2019) conceptualized school principals' leadership practice to run through four paths if they were to teach students to achieve success. These are known as the Rational, Emotional, Organizational, and Family paths. School leaders use these leadership practice paths to ensure that their schools are organized and that teachers are empowered and integrated into the process of sharing instructional leadership practices to reach students and achieve success (Paletta et al., 2019). While school leaders could use all paths at once, it may complicate the situation in which the school principal finds her/himself because individual leaders, based on their strength, the school's areas of improvement, and their contextual realities, can adopt and adapt certain paths to ensure the effectiveness of their practices in achieving student success or based on their contextual needs use each path alternatively (Leithwood et al., 2010, 2018; Paletta et al., 2019).

Leithwood (2018) asserted that "the need for alignment across paths seems to complicate leaders' work hugely. But, picking only one or two powerful variables on a path, and planning for the most likely interactions makes the leadership tasks much more manageable" (p. 3). Therefore, I investigated SPLPs to understand which one of the four paths they followed to enhance the students' achievements and learning outcomes in the context of Afghanistan.

Rationale for Using the Four Path Framework

Why focus on SPLPs through the four-path model to teach students to achieve success? The application of the concepts of rationale, organization, emotion, and family have been

rigorously researched and the model is based on empirical evidence in both developed and

developing contexts (e.g., Ontario, Texas, Hong Kong, China, and Singapore). Additionally, this

framework was developed based on the 'Leading Student Achievement Project' and my focus is

on SPLPs that facilitated schoolteachers to improve students' learning outcomes. Therefore, this

is an appropriate conceptual framework for my study.

The Rational Path

>Academic emphasis
>
>Disciplinary Climate
>
>Focused Instruction
>
>Collaborative inquiry processes
>
>Knowledge building

School-wide Experience

The Emotional Path

Leadership Practices
Ontario Leadership Framework

>Efficacy
>
>Trust

Student Learning And Wellbeing

Organizational Path

>Principals' learning teams.
>
>Professional Learning Communities
>
>Instructional Time
>
>Interactive Technologies

Classroom Experience

Family Path

>Family Educational Culture

Figure 1

Four Path Framework adapted from Leithwood et al., 2018, p. 99.

In the Afghan context there are 14 different ethnicities with differing socio-economic status living in both rural and urban centers across the country (Reilly, 2015). Similarly, Ontario is highly diverse with different levels of socio-economic status among immigrants, natives, and Europeans. Conceptually, the diversity in the Afghan context and in Ontario resonates but it is important to understand that,

> [n]o two regions, school districts, or schools are exactly alike; nor are their achievement goals or leadership challenges . . . [The Four Path Framework] lays out a flexible pathway to effective leadership that can be applied to a wide variety of leadership roles and situations. At the same time, it provides a shared vision of leadership and a common leadership language that enables coherence of leadership across the entire education system. It supports a powerful collaborative approach to leadership and professional learning. (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 3)

Additionally, while all four paths hold considerable importance so does each variable. The survey of "1779 teachers in 81 Texas elementary schools about the status of school leadership and all 13 variables on the four paths model" (Leithwood et al., 2018, p. 1) found that in the rational path all three variables of an academic press, a disciplinary climate, and the use of instructional time were considered to have contributed to students' achievement. In the emotional path, collective teacher efficacy was a major contributor to student achievement as compared to teachers' commitment to, and trust in, others. It is noteworthy that "collective teachers' efficacy is nurtured by school leaders when they help clarify school goals, provide meaningful capacity-building, and collaborative opportunity for staff" (Leithwood et al. 2019, p. 16).

In the organizational path, a safe and orderly environment had a greater impact on student achievement as compared to other variables in this domain. In the family path parents' social and intellectual capital was perceived to be a stronger contributor to student achievement as compared to forms of communication and parental expectation (Leithwood et al., 2019). I argue that leadership practice and its four paths are of considerable importance in their applicability to the Afghan context. School leaders can exercise their leadership power to achieve the desired outcome gradually and systematically for students by drawing on their personal leadership resources such as the cognitive, social, and psychological (Leithwood, 2018).

School Principals' Personal Leadership Resources

School principals' job descriptions are getting longer with more sophisticated and complex phenomena entering their practice domain such as ensuring students' and staff members' mental and physical wellbeing (Leithwood, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2010, 2019). According to Leithwood (2018) school leaders possess personal leadership resources—cognitive, social, and psychological—that help them to enhance their leadership practices. Personal leadership resources can be divided conceptually into three main categories to facilitate understanding, although, in practice, all act in a holistic manner. A school leader may use social, psychological, and cognitive resources to solve a single issue in their school at a given time. Personal leadership resources enable school leaders to lead educational institutions towards achieving success for their students along with students' and teachers' wellbeing. School principals' social, psychological, and cognitive personal leadership resources are extensively detailed by the Ontario Ministry of Education in a series of papers under the heading: *From research to policy to effective practices: Ideas into actions for school and system leaders* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). School leadership practices appear incomplete if school

principals' personal leadership resources are not integrated in an understanding of their

leadership practices. In other words, when school leaders draw on their personal leadership

resources, their leadership practices get contextualized.

Contextualized Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework graphically or narratively displays the main issues to be studied

such as "key factors, variables, phenomena, concepts, participants, and the presumed

interrelationships among them as a *network*" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 15, emphasis in original). The

conceptual framework identifies and elaborates on the flow of information and concepts. I have

developed an initial framework to visualize where the school principals stand in relation to their

professional community. Figure 2 shows the flow of policies and guidelines from the Afghan

MoE to the Provincial Education Directorate (PED), followed by the District Education

Directorate (DED) to facilitate ability in school principals to lead schools.

However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the Afghan MoE reached students directly

through on-air and YouTube channels. Using these technological tools surpassed all the

traditional hierarchical structures. However, how beneficial these platforms appeared to be is

questionable.

The Afghan MoE policies and guidelines, PED and DED, parents, students, and the

community shape the whole framework. For this study, I focus on Afghan SPLPs. In the

framework below the interconnections are displayed. The policies and guidelines flow from the

Afghan MoE to school principals through PED and DED, but a direct dissemination of policies

and guidelines could reach school principals through the official website of the Afghan MoE.

While the teachers affect students most immediately, school principals also make a significant contribution to their success through vice-principals, head teachers, and schoolteachers' professional efforts in achiev[ing] desired learning outcome.
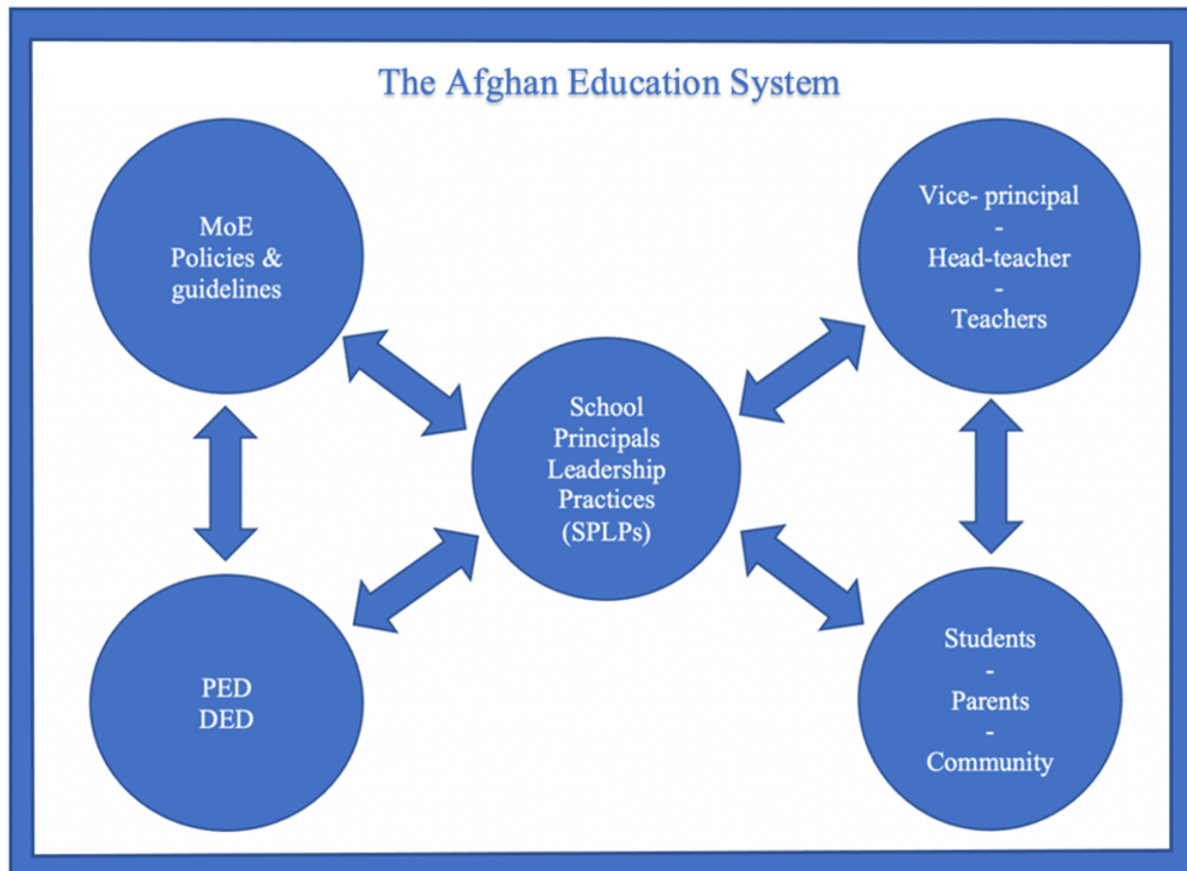

Figure 2

The centrality of SPLPs in the Afghan education system

According to Miles et al. (2020),

> A conceptual framework forces [one] to be more selective—to decide which things are the most important; which relationships are likely to be most meaningful; and, consequently, what information should be collected and analyzed—at least at the outset. (p. 15)

In this conceptual framework, the SPLPs take a central role in implementing policies and guidelines disseminated by MoE. Therefore, only the Afghan SPLPs are researched in this study. I use the four-path framework and the school principals' specific domain of SPLPs as a conceptual and analytical framework for the study of Afghan SPLPs to understand SPLPs holistically in the context of Afghanistan.

Analytical Framework

The specific domain of practice serves as an analytical framework for this study. This framework helps to focus on Afghan SPLPs to understand their contextual realities. The table below is adapted from Leithwood (2018, p. 32), who demonstrated successful school leadership practices that have been adopted and adapted in diverse Eastern contexts such as China, Singapore, and Pakistan (see, too, Ng et al., 2015; Niqab et al., 2014; Qian & Walker, 2011).

Zhao (2015) has eloquently mapped the last twenty years of educational reform in China and in the United States, and he has noted how each country is trying to align its approaches to education to each other. For instance, the United States wants to have an education system that depicts the Chinese centralized and exam-oriented one, while China seeks to have an education system that depicts the decentralized, individual schools' creativity-based model that operates in the United States. Therefore, the school leadership practices diagrams show a horizontal alignment for China and a vertical alignment for the United States.

Table 2

What successful school leaders do (adapted from Leithwood et al. 2018, p. 32)

Domains of Practice	Specific Practices
Set direction	• Build a shared vision. • Identify specific, shared, short-term goals. • Create high-performance expectations. • Communicate the vision and goals
Build relationships and develop people	• Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff. • Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members. • Model the school's values and practices. • Build trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents. • Establish productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives
Develop the organization to support desired practices	• Build a collaborative culture and distribute leadership. • Structure the organization to facilitate collaboration. • Build productive relationships with families and communities. • Connect the school to its wider environment. • Maintain a safe and healthy school environment. • Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals
Improve the instructional programs	• Staff the instructional program. • Provide instructional support. • Monitor students' learning and school improvement progress. • Buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work
Secure accountability	• Build staff members' sense of internal accountability. • Meet the demands of external accountability

Figure 3

An initial instructional leadership model in China—Eastern Version (Qian et al., 2017, p. 193).
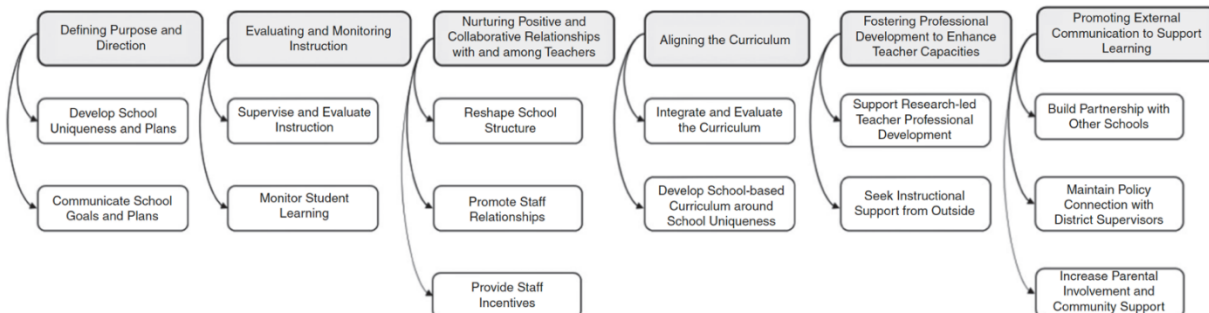
First, the alignment of each diagram is different. Table 2 shows a top-down/central approach to school leadership practice while Figure 3, depicts, horizontally, a learner approach to instructional leadership. Table 2 possesses five domains of practice; these include, respectively, four, five, six, four, and two specific practices. The fifth domain of Secure Accountability was added recently to permit school principals to hold the school stakeholders accountable. Additionally, this will enable school principals to respond to local and national policies (Leithwood, 2018).

Figure 3 has six domains that capture a more comprehensive and shared school instructional leadership practice. Furthermore, each domain includes, respectively, two, two, three, two, two, and three specific practices. The figure 3 is focused on principals' leadership practices to ensure high-quality instruction by schoolteachers to improve student learning outcomes. This framework simultaneously diversifies and narrows down the specific practices to leave school principals little room to interpret the framework in any other way. According to Qian et al., (2017), "Western and Chinese principals *do* interpret and enact leadership practices in different ways" (p. 194, emphasis in original) because the cultural and social context shape the way in which school principals enact their leadership practices (see Leithwood et al., 2010, 2018, 2019).

Adopting or adapting any of these practices or creating an integrated version of these two models could serve as an analytical framework that is contextually relevant to the Afghan context. The school principals may interpret specific leadership practices based on their schools' contextual realities to achieve student learning outcomes. This will depend on the school principal's leadership resources to scrutinize and practice the leadership power that serves teachers' professional development that is focused on students' learning outcomes.

Chapter 4: Methodology

As a construct, SPLPs could strengthen the outlook of educational institutions and achieve student success. How the concept of SPLPs is shaped in the minds of school principals themselves and how they practice their leadership in the educational institution to improve teachers' instructional approaches and achieve students' learning outcomes demands a methodology that will not approach the issue with merely numerical variables but, rather, with human connections, semi-structured interviews, data analysis, and open-ended questions to get to the depth of SPLPs (Creswell, 2013).

I do not subscribe to a positivist ontology that we could find the truth objectively, instead I believe that there could be many perspectives about the school leadership practices shaped by school principals, head teachers, and teachers that need exploration and understanding from the perspectives of each research participant. Furthermore, based on the constructivist perspective, I believe that realities are intersubjectively created in consensus with a group of people in a society and, since the reality is constructed, it is ever changing. In this paradigm the knower and the known are interactive, inseparable, and value-bound (Maxwell, 2002). Since the researcher, the researched, and the site will be in constant interaction with each other, there will be continual knowledge creation that the researcher needs to capture through different ways such as taking fieldnotes and non-participative observation. In this case, ontologically and epistemologically the qualitative case study best aligns to my understanding of the evolving role of school principals in shaping schoolteachers' instructional approaches to achieve students' learning outcomes.

Qualitive Methodology

Qualitative studies follow an inductive approach to scientific inquiry (Johnson & Christenson, 2008; Leavy, 2017). Qualitative researchers adhere to the interpretivist

philosophical paradigms. Generally, the qualitative researcher can choose among five qualitative research methods—narrative inquiry, phenomenological study, grounded theory, ethnography, and case studies in addition to content analysis (Creswell, 2013; Leavy, 2017). Similarly, Johnson and Christensen (2008) categorized the qualitative research methods into five approaches—phenomenology, ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and historical research. Generally, qualitative methods are preferred in socio-cultural studies. Unlike the quantitative approach's numerical data collection, qualitative research data is based mostly on the collection and presentation of soft data (e.g., words, pictures, narratives, life and work experiences, and stories) and individuals' meaning-making processes in a society (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Qualitative research is often used when an inductive approach is deemed appropriate; the researchers seek to generate a theory (grounded theory) in addition to exploring people and their cultures (ethnography), individuals and their experiences (phenomenology), or real-life contexts (case study) (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Lesser-known people and contexts can become known through their stories in narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2013).

Based on the researcher's aim and research question, content analysis and historical research could be used to achieve the desired end for a specific form of inquiry (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Leavy, 2017). "Educational historians have been able to find historical data that lend themselves to data analysis and have studied how various educational phenomena operated in the past" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 47). For instance, Baiza's *Education in Afghanistan: Developments, influences, and legacies since 1901* (2013) gives a thorough and in-depth understanding of the Afghan education system. In this study, I will use a qualitative case study methodology to understand the evolving role of Afghan school principals in shaping schoolteachers' teaching approaches and students' learning outcomes.

Qualitative Case Study

A case study is a research approach based on a holistic method of inquiry because case study research could respond to questions aimed at exploration, description, and explanation. In other words, case study research could stretch across the spectrum of research paradigms such as, quantitative and qualitative case study research (Yin, 2013), and a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods that could use case studies. The last mentioned is known as Mixed Method Case Study Research or as blended research design (Mackinnon, 2009; Walton et al., 2019). As a research method, a case study responds to the complexities of socio-economic, health, and educational issues.

In this study, I have chosen to use a qualitative case study approach with purposefully selected embedded cases of educational leaders such as school principals, head teachers, and teachers in addition to education ministers. This selection will provide a comprehensive view of the Afghan school principals leadership practices (SPLPs). A case study approach will be beneficial in providing a "detailed understanding" (Creswell, 2013, p. 71) of school principals' vision development, communication, and schoolteachers' empowerment to provide a quality learning experience for students. The qualitative case study research approach also helps reveal the roots of issues surrounding Afghan SPLPs.

I collected the data by conducting a written question and answer sessions with two former education ministers, and I have conducted semi-structured interviews with two principals, two head-teachers, and four teachers. Following Creswell (2013), the data collection tools I used were document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. I used a cross-case analysis of the SPLPs, students' graduation dates, and teachers' professional development records. For the

purposes of this study, I chose a qualitative case study method to enable me to understand the school leadership practices of school principals in real-life contexts.

A Qualitative Case Study of the Afghan SPLPs

The traditional approach to education may not be the ideal to teach the next generation. The school leaders need advanced levels of leadership approaches to empower schoolteachers and nurture students' unique talents to advance in the current "fast-paced, knowledge-based, global economy" (Starr et al. 2020, p. 8). As mentioned before, currently Afghan school principals are appointed to principalship roles based on their teaching experience and seniority rather than on their leadership competencies and qualifications (Rizvi, 2008).

In 2020, the Afghan MoE developed a *Self-study guide for school principals* to enable them to lead complex social institutions like schools. The self-study guide highlights the Afghan school principals' general roles and responsibilities. It includes chapters on topics such as the effective use of the self-study guide, school principals' specific roles and responsibilities, the inclusion of teachers and student representatives in decision-making processes, teachers' evaluation, the school's learning environment, decision-making, active learning and teaching, the inclusion of parents and *shūrā* (a group of elder and respected people in the community providing consultation) to improve the quality of education. In addition, there are chapters on planning and on the implementation of emergency plans, and on critical situations such as a response to a pandemic at school level, In addition to managing time and stress (Ministry of Education, 2020). It is mandatory for all school principals to study this self-study guide at their respective schools and implement its suggestions as necessary. However, the chapters in this self-study guide on school principals' roles and responsibilities are vague and superficial.

A thorough in-depth study of the Afghan SPLPs is of crucial importance because the school principals are situated at the intersection of traditional approaches to school leadership practices on the one hand, and contemporary global influences of democratic approaches to school leadership practices on the other. The vaguely explained roles and responsibilities of school principals makes their attempts at instituting practices even more challenging.

Case Study

Multiple cases of public and private schools' principals, head teachers, and teachers sampling adds to the confidence of the findings. By looking at a range of similar or contrasting cases, we can understand a single case finding, grounding it by specifying *how* and *where* and, if possible, *why* it carries on as it does. (Miles et al., 2020, p. 29, emphases in original)

In qualitative research, a "case may range widely in definition from individuals to roles, groups, organizations, processes, and cultures. However, when the case is an individual, qualitative research has many within-case samplings decisions: which *activities, processes, events, locations*, and *role partners*?" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 28, emphases in original). In this study of Afghan SPLPs, I explored their shaping of schoolteachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. School principal practices is the primary research topic with multidisciplinary and multiview's from a coparticipant group of head teachers, teachers, in addition to two education ministers views and perspectives, and their perception of school leadership practices was studied. Additionally, the principal's role partners such as the head-teachers, and teachers whose perception of the Afghan SPLPs could expand the holistic understanding of these SPLPs, were also studied. Sampling the school principals, head teachers, teachers, and education ministers added to the richness of my study.

Sampling and Data Collection Tools

Given the critical political situation in Afghanistan, I conducted all my research on the SPLPs virtually (Online via WhatsApp calls) using interviews conducted over the phone. As mentioned above, the research participants included two former education ministers, two school principals, two head-teachers, and four teachers. I studied in the Afghan public school system and taught at a private school, so I was able to ground this study in the context of the Afghan education system. I approached individual school principals, head teachers, and teachers virtually via social media to ensure their safety, given the current political situation in Afghanistan. I sent the data collection timeline, detailed information, and consent form samples in the Dari language to ensure that the research participants understood all the processes and procedures. I shared the detailed information sheet and consent form for individual participants, and they agreed to participate. I conducted the interviews over the phone (WhatsApp) with them at their convenience. There is 9h30m time difference between Kabul and Montreal.

Based on the initial Virtual meeting with the research participants—school principals, head-teachers, and teachers—I conducted an in-depth semi-structured interview with each of them. Each interview lasted two hours. As a reciprocity, I offered 3,000 AFN (~ 60 CAD) to each research participant for their time, and participation and 2,000 AFN (~ 40 CAD) for the cost of minutes and/or the internet connection. Additionally, I sent a set of questions to the Afghan education ministers for them to respond to in writing based on their requestion.

The community members, students, provincial education directorate, and DEDs were not selected to be research participants based on the current political situation in the country.

Table 3

Research Participants with pseudonyms

No	Research participants' role	Number of participants	Data collection approach
1	Two former Education Ministers Mohammad & Laila	2	Set of questions to answer in a written form
2	School Principal Karim & Ali	2	Semi-structured interviews
3	Head teachers Khalid & Walid	2	Semi-structured interviews
4	Teachers Nahid, Ahmad, Mahmood, & Kabir	4	

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview is an approach that a researcher can use purposefully to get to an in-depth understanding of an issue. According to Galletta and Cross (2013), semi-structured interviews are divided into three parts—an opening segment, a middle segment, and a concluding segment.

The opening segment lays the foundation for the entire interview. The researcher needs to ensure that the participant is comfortable and that they understand their rights. In this segment, the researcher starts the interview with broad questions that are designed to enable the participants to start to speak from their experience. As the participant does so, the researcher makes mental notes about significant parts of the participant's story to enable him/her to probe for clarification at the later stage of the interview for greater exploration and depth (Galletta & Cross, 2013). For school principals, during this opening segment, I posed questions regarding the participant's journey in becoming part of the education system and established the role in which each had had the greatest impact and why this was so. This provided me with contextual information that I could probe at a later stage of the interview. Furthermore, I enquired about

teachers' experiences with different school principals during their teaching careers and how each school principal could impact teachers teaching practices and improve students learning outcomes.

Second, in the middle segment of the semi-structured interview, I designed the questions to evoke answers to my research questions. This section of the interview was guided by my analytical framework and the interpretive tradition that guided the study. Then, following Galletta and Cross (2013), based on the broader question of the opening segment, I was able to get more deeply into the story initiated by the participant in response to the specially designed questions I worked out before the interview and/or by a series of probing questions to try to understand the contextual realities of each research participant. During this segment, I probed into what constituted the role and the responsibilities of each participant and how they could ensure improvement in their management for school principals or instructional approaches for teachers guided by the school principals, depending on their disposition, and students' learning outcomes.

Finally, in the concluding segment, as its name suggests, I identified the significant points on which the research participant could elaborate, and I devised the questions accordingly. This section built on the opening and middle segments and enabled me to get comprehensive data in response to my research question. Additionally, the questions in this section of the interview were theory-laden, based on my literature review and analytical framework in response to the theoretical question of this research.

The semi-structured interview questions were divided into three sections and each section would respond to the three sub-research questions. For example, the interview questions were categorized under the main research question, "What are the evolving roles of Afghan school

principals that shape their leadership practices and how do school principals facilitate the

schoolteachers' instructional approaches?" and the combination of answers would respond to it.

This overarching question was then categorized into three sub-questions.

(1) How do Afghan school principals perceive the notion of leadership practices?

(2) What are their roles in improving teachers' instructional approaches?

(3) What are the schools' strengths in general regarding student achievement, teachers'

professionalism, and enhanced school leadership practices? Furthermore, for school principals,

head teachers, and teachers, I developed three sets of questions to respond to each one of the

research sub-questions. For example, to respond to the first sub-question, I asked the following

questions of the school principal.

(1) Can you tell me about your professional journey as a schoolteacher, head teacher, and school

principal?

(2) In which role did you have the greatest impact? (3) Why?

(4) Can you elaborate on your role as a school principal?

(5) What constituted your main responsibilities?

(6) Which aspects of the school (school environment, community, parents, students, teachers,

and headteachers) fall under your jurisdiction?

(7) What do the terms Amir Maktab (school authoritative leader – school principal) or Mudir

Maktab (School Administrator – school principal) mean to you and do they have the same

meaning?

(8) Does your school have a vision, a mission, goals, and objectives?

(9) What processes have you used to develop your schools' vision, mission, goals, and

objectives?

(10) How accessible is this document to your co-workers such as vice-principals, head-teachers, and teachers?

(11) (If this has not responded to yet) did your colleagues from the school community participate in developing the vision, mission, goals, and objectives?

(12) Which aspects of your school have the highest priority in your view out of teachers' PD, students' achievement and success, school environment, administrative tasks, financial aspects of the school?

(13) How do you assess your school's development, and how do you know that you have achieved these goals?

(14) From your perspective, what are the evolving roles of Afghan school principals that shape their leadership practice?

(15) How does the current Afghan school principal perceive the notion of leadership practices?

Additionally, I prepared a separate set of question for the education Ministers.

(1) In general, could you share your experiences in the field of education, as a schoolteacher, headteachers, school principal, education minister?

(2) Which level of educational leadership was the most rewarding experience for you, and why?

(3) From 1996 to 2001, how the Afghan school principals practice their role and responsibilities within the school and in what ways were they responsible to the external stakeholders (such as parents and district education directorate)?

(4) How would you describe that ways in which Afghan school principals' role have changed over time?

(5) From 2001 to 2021, what lay behind the changing role of Afghan SPLPs? Which of these would you choose: socio-cultural, economic, political, dominant discourse, globalization, new forms of colonialism, liberalism, or neoliberalism?

(6) How did changes improve the quality of Afghan SPLPs and students' achievement?

(7) From your perspective as an Afghan Education Minister, how significant were the role of Afghan school principals, and why?

(8) To what extent, do you think that Afghan school principals were engaged in school affairs such as teacher observation, professional development, school environment, students' learning outcomes, students' success in Konkor, administrative, and financial affairs of the school?

(9) And which aspect of the school is significantly more important than the other aspects? Why?

(10) How were the Afghan Ministry of Education policies and plans disseminated to the schools and classroom levels?

(11) During your tenure as Afghan education minister, how connected were you with the other levels of educational leaders such as provincial and district educational directorates, school principals, teachers, and students?

(12) What strategies have you used to get connected with other levels of leadership? (13) What are your thoughts on Afghan girls' education, female school principals, and their role during the second round of Taliban regime?

(14) What are your thoughts on the education in Afghanistan in general during the second round of Taliban regime?

(15) What would be the adverse effect of their discriminatory policies against women and minority groups such as, for example, the collapse of the economy, a distrust between the

Taliban regime and the people, hopelessness, worsened quality of life, the negative impact of the

mental health of the population or other forms of adversities that may impact our people?

(16) What are your thoughts on the Afghan education system during the different forms of

Government that have kept changing in e Afghanistan's contemporary history?

(17) As an educator, social activist, and politician, what are your views of the Afghan school

principals' leadership practices during the second round of the Taliban regime?

(18) Where is it heading and is it going to change to include girls and women in the social fabric

of society, or would this then be too late?

(19) How would you summarize your thoughts and feelings based on the questions I have asked

you?

(20) Would you like to share anything that was not mentioned here?

The answers to these questions gave me insight into how different levels of leadership

perceive the notion of school principals' leadership practices; of course, the teachers see it from

their perspective and the education ministers see it from theirs. Teachers expect the school

principal to be more caring, engaged, and supportive of teachers' teaching practices and the

education ministers sees the principalship as an administrative unit which needs to commit to its

bureaucratic mandates.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data collected through semi-structured interviews and document analysis

in relation to schools' organizational structure and school principals' job descriptions.

Furthermore, I explored a single case of Afghan SPLPs with embedded units of a

school's principal, and its head teachers and teachers. First, I analyzed individuals' perspectives

using within-case analysis and cross-case analysis to understand each research participant's

perspectives and draw conclusions from it. Additionally, I received the written responses from

the education ministers (see Baxter & Jack, 2015; Miles et al., 2020).

Single Case Study with Embedded Units

A single case study with embedded cases is a powerful approach when one is using

within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Miles et al., 2020). In this

study, I explored the single case of Afghan SPLPs that contribute to teachers' instructional

approaches with embedded cases of school principals' leadership practices. Single case analysis

provides an in-depth understanding of individual cases, and other single cases could enhance the

global understanding of the SPLPs.

Within-case Analysis

Based on a within-case analysis, a detailed description of each site provides greater

insight into understanding individual cases "as a stand-alone entity" (Eisenhardt, 2002, p. 18). As

I have indicated above, I conducted semi-structured interviews with school principals, head

teachers, and teachers. I also submitted a set of questions to the education ministers who

responded in written form. The semi-structured interviews facilitated my understanding of the

perception of the Afghan school principals regarding SPLPs. During the interviews, the school

leaders reported on different approaches to school leadership and teachers' teaching practices in

addition to the historical data on students' rate of acceptance at different universities in Kabul

and internationally.

Cross-case Analysis

Cross-case analysis, the case-oriented, variable-oriented, and mixed, is used with

different strategies. In mixed strategies, the researcher uses some components from case-oriented

and variable-oriented ones. In using a case-oriented strategy, the researcher may seek for

replication (see Yin, 2013), or approach the problem through many exemplars or through comparing cross-cases while formulating forms, types, and families (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). In using variable-oriented strategies, the "researcher often looks for themes that cut across cases" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 97). First, I coded the data and then categorized the codes into the different themes that emerged from this to facilitate my cross-case analysis. This approach to analysis does not "neglect the primacy or dignity of each individual's story but consolidate[s] their experiences to discern their common or most frequent constituent elements" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 97). Therefore, I looked for perception of all research participants in relation to SPLPs while acknowledging their unique characteristics.

Additionally, cross-case analysis requires careful attention to detail regarding similarities and differences within and between participants' perception of SPLPs. If I had used multiple cases, there was a risk that I may have overlooked details that were of significance to understanding individual cases in relation to the similarities and differences that shape SPLPs (see Eisenhardt, 2002). Therefore, I purposefully chose only selected research participants to ensure that I got an in-depth understanding of each research participant's perception and thus reduced the risk of missing any significant and relevant data. I analyzed each case individually in a within-case analysis and all cases in a cross-case analysis in relation to each other to understand the cases holistically (see Eisenhardt, 2002).

For my reporting on the cases of SPLPs, I studied Yin's (2013) list of linear, comparative, chronological, theory building, suspense, and un-sequenced methods. The linear approach to a case study allows the researcher to describe the problem, the methods of data collection, the data analysis, the findings, and the conclusions, all of which are reported linearly, but a "comparative structure repeats the same case study materials two or more times, comparing

alternative descriptions or explanations of the same case" (Yin, 2013, p. 188). Since there are similar cases of SPLPs, I thought the most appropriate way to report my research findings would be through a comparative approach. For Yin (2013), "[T]he relativist application arises when a case study repeats a similar set of episodes, but from the perspective of different participants, accommodating relativist or constructivist approaches and the presentation of multiple realities" (p. 188). Although my case study's reporting may take a chronological format, it does not assume to build a theory or present material in what Yin (2013) has called a suspenseful or un-sequenced manner. Additionally, as explained above, I used a constructivist comparative approach to understand and report on the Afghan SPLPs.

Ethical Considerations

This study had human research participants. Therefore, the ethical issues were of particular importance to me. I used a pseudonym for each to keep their identity confidential. Additionally, all data is kept in password protected folders on a password protected computer to ensure its safety. Only I have access to the recorded interviews and transcripts that were conducted in the Dari language. I made the findings generated through semi-structured interviews available to all the research participants and shared the overall findings with them to ensure validity and accuracy.

Case Study Research Validity

The validity in qualitative research is the relationship between the phenomenon under study and the external views about it. Unlike how the quantitative approach to investigation operates, in qualitative research the researcher becomes an integral part of the process as an instrument of research (Maxwell, 2002). Based on semi-structured interviews and document analysis the researcher constructs a perception of the phenomenon. Thus, "it is always possible

for there to be different, equally valid accounts from different perspectives" (p. 41). Since I approached the study of Afghan SPLPs from a constructivist perspective, I was not seeking an absolute truth but a constructed account of principals' leadership practices in schools that may contribute to teachers' instructional practices and students' learning outcomes.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the political situation in Afghanistan post 15 August 2021, I was unable to travel there to conduct this research in person. The only alternative approach was to conduct the research over the telephone and via WhatsApp with the research participants. This limited me to conduct a focus group discussion with students although I had initially planned to go into the field and conduct face-to-face interviews, observe school principals' leadership practices, and conduct a focused group discussion with students. At first, I wanted to interview eight teachers, then it was reduced to six and finally, four teachers participated in the research. Because of the uncertainties caused by the Taliban takeover, it was difficult to find research participants. Some of the teachers were not willing to participate because they did not know the possible outcome of their participation in the study. For instance, would they face any punishment by the Taliban for their participation? And those teachers who did participate in the study managed to give an interview from their private homes in absolute privacy to ensure their safety.

Research is a rare event in Afghan schools. It was only some students from the engineering faculty who would visit the school to do practical work and survey the school buildings. Professors and students from the Faculties of Education barely visited the school to do research or teach as student teachers according to the head teacher, Walid. Therefore, the research participants were reluctant to sign an official document like the consent form. At first, they did not know if this consent form would bind them to a contract. Then I explained in detail

that this consent form was there to let them know that if they were comfortable participating in this research study, they could do so. If not, they could withdraw at any time and there would be no pressure to participate. Just the concept of participating in research is a new phenomenon for some of the Afghan school principals, head teachers, and teachers so it was a challenge to make them understand that there would be no harm, and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Conducting research in the field and face to face with the research participants could have further enriched my study.

Chapter 5: Findings

"I had more control at the school level as a principal and could bring about the change I sought necessary for the enhancement of our school environment and the children's performance."

(Education Minister Laila)

To understand the evolving role of Afghan school principals from the perspective of school leaders I explored one over-arching research question and three sub-questions. As outlined above, the main question was "What are the evolving roles of Afghan school principals that shape their leadership practices and how do school principals facilitate the schoolteachers' instructional approaches?" The sub-questions that guided this research were

(1) How do Afghan school principals perceive the notion of leadership practices?

(2) What are their roles in improving teachers' instructional approaches?

(3) What are the schools' strengths in general regarding student achievement, teachers' professionalism, and enhanced school leadership practices?

As mentioned previously, I collected data from two former education ministers, Mohammad and Laila. Following their preference, I submitted a set of questions to them, and they provided their answers in written form. I interviewed two school principals, Karim and Ali, two head teachers, Khalid and Walid, and four teachers, Nahid, Ahmad, Mahmood, and Kabir. All the interviews were conducted in the Dari language and transcribed, translated into English, and analyzed. In my analysis of the interviews and data collected, six themes emerged: School principals' leadership practices; School leadership and students' achievement; Facilitating

teacher's instructional approaches; Teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership practices; Corruption in education; and Education in crisis.

Since each school principal's knowledge, skills, and disposition differed, their leadership practices were dissimilar. Moreover, different issues relating to school principals' routine leadership practices included political pressure, corruption, their transfer from one school to another against their will, the body of students who came from war-lord backgrounds and families, and the assignment of novice and inexperienced teachers to the school's cadre of academic teachers by the district, provincial, and MoE authorities.

Given that the Afghan education system has rarely been researched, I offer a brief contextual background related to where the research was conducted. For instance, I describe the school environment, and I offer a profile of a typical school principal, a head teacher, and a teacher. I then answer the research question about the evolving roles of Afghan school principals that shape their leadership practices and look at how school principals facilitate the schoolteachers' instructional approaches. I then address the sub-question about how Afghan school principals perceive the notion of leadership and their role in improving teachers' instructional approaches. Then I consider the strengths of the school in relation to student achievement, teachers' professionalism, how schoolteachers perceive their school principal's leadership approaches, and how school principals are involved in teachers' teaching practices and students' achievements and success.

Afghan Public Schools' Structure

The school under the study was centrally located and it was an all-boys school. Approximately 3500 to 3700 students are enrolled at primary, middle, and high school level. The school structure is headed by the school principal followed by the deputy academic and

executive management divisions. Under the former are the three head teachers of the primary, middle, and high school. There are seven departments in the school, each with its own committee that functions according to their mandate. The departments include mathematics; science; social studies; religious studies; foreign languages (English, German, French, and Turkish languages); Dari literature; and Pashto literature.

In the executive management division, there are seven sections to ensure that all aspects of the schools are attended to appropriately. These sections are led by a finance officer, a finance trustee officer, a logistics officer, a logistics trustee officer, a teaching and learning resource officer, an attendance officer, and a maintenance officer.

The committees are formed with student and teacher leadership, and administrators' guidance and support. Additionally, there is a close collaboration between and among all the committees to ensure that students', parents', and school leaders' needs are met. The committees operate under the headings: health; sport; culture; finance, green environment, parents' contact; and discipline committees.

The classroom arrangements follow Afghan education system guidelines. Generally, teacher to student ratio is 1: 45 but sometimes it is as high as 1: 90; this differs from school to school and from classroom to classroom. At the beginning of each school year, students are designated to a specific class. Once assigned, students always go to the same classroom for the entire academic year; they always remain in the same classroom. It is the subject specific teachers who go to each classroom to teach; this process is based on preassigned schedules devised by the head teachers of each section. This means, of course, that students never leave their classroom from the moment they enter until they leave the school; physical activity and going to the washroom are the only exceptions here. This means that if a student is seen outside

of the classroom with no legitimate reason, he is considered to be a person who is disrupting

school discipline and is sent back to his classroom. Below, I offer the public-school organogram

to have a better understanding of the school structure.

Figure 4

Afghan Public School Organogram
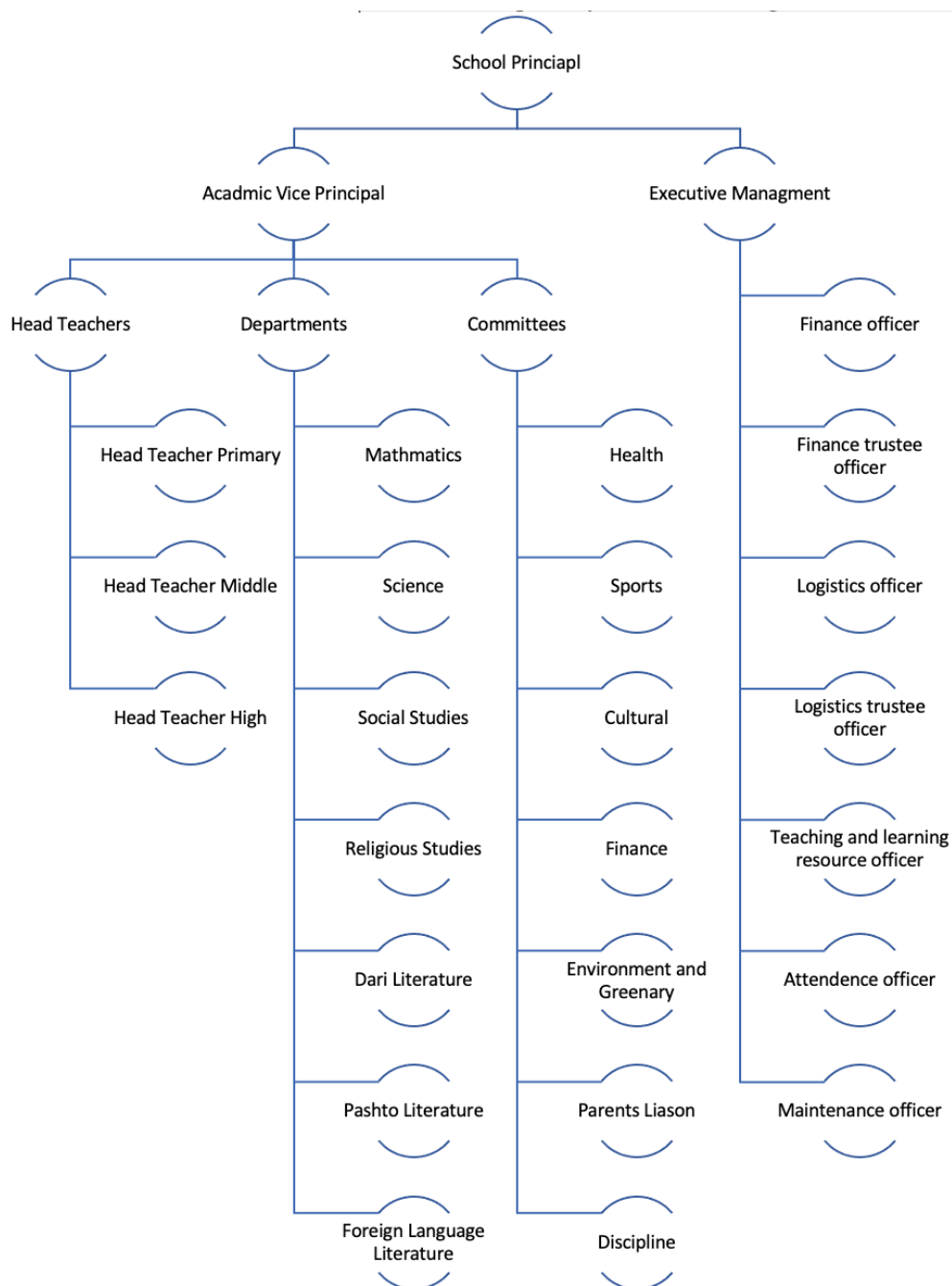
To maintain discipline is the short-term daily goal of the highest priority to the members of the discipline committee as well as to the academic, and non-academic staff members. One of the schools' mid-term goals is student achievement at the national level examination. So, to present educated, yet disciplined students to society is the overall aim of the school according to head teacher, Khalid.

Karim School Principal's Profile

With thirty-five years of experience as a physics teacher, head teacher, and school principal, he has been a long-time serving school principal in both provincial centers and in Kabul. His career began with four years of teaching science subjects. From the beginning of his career, he was interested in administrative jobs at the school, so he became a head teacher. Since he thrived in his school-based relationships and had good administrative skills, he was promoted to a principalship role. Throughout his career even when he was head teacher and school principal he continued to teach whenever the school was short of teachers. During his career he has experienced different forms of government and regime. He insisted that he was not affiliated to any political party or to any regime. All he is interested in is serving the community and students.

A Head Teacher's Profile

Walid was born in the late 1950s and has had 34 years of experience as a biology teacher, head teacher, and interim school principal. A faculty of science graduate in the late 1980s, he had to undergo mandatory military service, and started to teach biology in one of the provincial centers, becoming head teacher in the mid 1980s. For 12 years, he continued his tenure as head teacher in a provincial center and then transferred to a school in Kabul, where he has been headteacher and, at times, the interim school principal for the last 22 years. Like the

principal mentioned above, in his lifetime, he has experienced different forms of government and regime but is not associated to any political party and does not favor any one political ideology. Rather, he is committed only to his profession and to serve students. Most of his role and responsibilities constitute administrative tasks.

A Teacher's Profile

Ahmad, a chemistry teacher with nine years of teaching experience, started his primary education in Bamiyan province and then moved to Kabul to complete his schooling. In 2011 he started his bachelor's degree in the engineering faculty at the Kabul polytechnic university. He and a colleague started an education center at which they taught 'Konkor' a preparation program for high school students to succeed in gaining admission to the public universities. However, because of some issue between them, they closed the education center. Ahmad then started to teach at a private school and later joined a different private school.

<div align="center">

School Principals' Leadership Practices (SPLPs)

</div>

Afghan school principals are situated in a unique environment and context. On one hand the country faced decades of war and destructions between 1970 to 2001 and, on the other, between 2001 to 2021 the country was introduced to the democratic values. Therefore, the school principals had to adapt to the new era, but they were not given any higher education that could have prepared them to lead schools in a democratic manner. However, during their tenure as school principals, the MoE and NGOs were providing educational leadership seminars and workshops to develop their leadership potential. And for teachers these organizations provided in-service teacher training workshops in their respective subject areas.

To understand the leadership practices of school principals, Karim and Ali shared their experiences. From a broad perspective Karim believes that the

school principals' role is the provision of guidance, control, evaluation, and obtaining results. Their responsibility includes checks on subordinates' tasks, resolving subordinates' issues and concerns, and drawing a conclusion from the results produced. The school principal assigns tasks to all his subordinates, and he controls and monitors their performance.

Although, democratic values, perspectives, and practices were introduced to school principals they still use terms like *control over* instead of *cooperation among* staff, and they speak of *subordinates* instead of associates, colleagues, and coworkers.

Perhaps something significant was lost in the translation and delivery of these school leadership concepts or perhaps a lack of experience and contextual limitations caused the school principals' leadership practices to become part of a mechanical process of "input – processes – output." The school principal *gives an input* and their *subordinates* process the tasks and then *create an output*. According to Ali, a school principal,

> If subordinates face challenges in performing their tasks, then school principals guide them in the right direction. Then the school principal requires all the units in the school to provide him with their reports. Once all the reports are accumulated, they are submitted to the district and provincial directorates. These are the process of management at the school.

The notion of school principal leadership practices has been introduced in Afghanistan. While between 1950s and the early 2000s even in the modern western types of schools or formal schools the Afghan school principals were using traditional methods of school management such as discipline by corporal punishment, adhering to only the administrative aspect of the school and hardly supporting teachers in their instructional approaches. The introduction of new

approaches to school leadership that have not been contextualized have further complicated

school principals' leadership practices, who would otherwise practice their simplified

administrative management methods in their schools. Even between 2001 and 2021, school

principals' involvement in teachers' professional development was minimal except for some

innovative school principals.

Regarding schoolteachers' professional development, Ali stated that "all plans are

provided by the ministry of education. But some school principals are innovative and provide

teachers with professional development and arrange seminars to improve students'

achievement." He further explained that "extra-ordinary sessions are held to invite all school

principals to discuss any issues and concerns regarding school's administrative processes and

finding ways to improve the processes and procedures." Furthermore, according to him,

> previously, GIZ[8] was sponsoring professional development programs and activities
>
> proposed by the school leaders. For instance, teaching computer programs for teachers,
>
> seminars for science, language, literature, social studies, and religious studies teachers
>
> were arranged to improve teachers' teaching practices and professional competencies.

In addition to international NGOs the ministry of education directorate of science and technology

also organized seminars. Some schools like the one under study here, were privileged school and

had close ties with district education directorates, provincial education directorates, and the

MoE. Therefore, this school had direct access to government institutions and granting agencies

to sponsor their programs and activities. However, other schools were not as fortunate in being

able to provide similar facilities and educational programs and development sessions for their

teachers and students. Moreover, students admitted to this school came from affluent families

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[8] Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

and backgrounds. For instance, according to school principal, Karim, "Schools with more facilities are for students whose parents are high ranking government officials, businessmen, and members of parliament; they live a lavish lifestyle. They are not much interested in education. They merely manage to finish their high school." Though, they get almost all the opportunities after they graduate from high school. For instance, according to the school principal Karim, "Where there is a government scholarship allocated to intelligent students, only students with connections to the government officials and members of parliament have access to these opportunities and they go abroad for their studies." Though, among 3700 students in such as large school, not all of students came from a privileged background. According to the school principal, Karim, "the poorer students, even though they might be much more intelligent than their counterparts, do not have access to fully paid government scholarships. Therefore, they must study hard and work harder to reach a certain level in society". School principal Karim, further elaborates that,

> As compared to 10 to 15 years ago, students are not as much interested to study and learn. Now we have students who work and provide as the sole income of their family. They symbolically go to school. When they graduate, due to financial constraints, they cannot continue their higher education.

> While families' financial status plays a role in students' achievement and success at the

school and beyond, according to Karim and Ali, both believe that student achievement is based on their own "will, desire, and hard work to achieve success." Ali mentioned that "the reason for their success is students themselves." Ali was comparing his privileged school that is located at the center of Kabul close to the diplomatic enclave, ministries, and presidential place to one that serves a deprived community located on the outskirts of the city. He said,

Generally, few of our students get admitted at the public universities.[9] But if similar facilities and infrastructure is given to Lycée Abdul Rahim Shaheed, probably 90 to 95 percent of their student would get admitted to Kabul University. Even now, although, they have limited resources and annually approximately, 65 to 70 to 75 percent of their students get admitted to Kabul University. The reason for their success is students themselves.

He is referring to Hazara Community, they come from a historically deprived community and face all kinds of difficulty and hardship that continues to this day. Their parents are either government employees, shop keepers, or people who uses a chariot to carry other peoples' stuff from point A to B for a onetime wage (Karachi Wan). And the children, in observing the difficulties that their parents are going through, decide to study hard and get themselves and their family out of poverty. When they succeed, their parents, teachers, school, and themselves are proud of their achievement. Furthermore, Ali stated that, in addition to students' efforts and commitment, their parents' guide and support them. He went on to say,

Although, parents encourage them and the schools provide them with the platform, the main factor for students' success is students' efforts and hard work only. If you visit their area, young boys and girls even when it snows or rains, are going to tuitions to be prepared for the Konkor exam. It is their desire to achieve success. They are hardworking themselves.

While personal motivation and determination help individuals to achieve success, it is also the school's environment that provides students with the support needed to succeed. In a

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[9] Getting admitted into public university of your choice is a sign of excellence.

school, it is the school principal's mandate to ensure that quality education is delivered and that students achieve success. However, the participating school principals mentioned that it is students who decide on their success or failure, rather than the school principals themselves although, according to MoE documents on the school principal's job description, they should ensure that all aspects of the school are attended to, including the student's achievement and success. However, the school principals also feel helpless as Karim pointed out when he said, "Generally school principals have a symbolic role; they do not have any resources at their disposal." When school principals are situated in a context in which there is only a small amount of support, many responsibilities in relation to limited competencies, corruption, and teachers who do not teach adequately, does not help the school and students to achieve success. Below, a detailed job description of the school principal is laid out based on Afghan MoE documents.

Public School Principals' Job Description According to Afghan MoE Documents

Based on the Ministry of Education guidelines and provisions (2020), Afghan school principals report to District Education Directors, while academic vice-principals and executive managers' report to school principals. The school principal's role and responsibilities include the provision of leadership and monitoring of all school affairs such as teaching and learning, management, discipline, policy implementation, following rules and regulations, guidelines, and any other Ministry of Education directives. Specifically, based on the government directives, Afghan school principals' specific role and responsibility include the following.

- Providing leadership and monitoring all school personnel activities, leading, creating teachers' working groups, distributing their tasks, and creating a sense of teamwork among members of the school personnel.

- Monitoring and supervising all affairs related to students, teachers, and school personnel and creating detailed statistics of students, teachers, and school personnel.

- Managing all school personnel, including human resources, suggesting new hires, promotions, demotions, rewards, and recognitions, hiring, and firing school employees, and ensuring that the employees get paid according to the provision of the rules and regulations.

- Managing and organizing all the logistical aspect of the school including identifying its priorities and needs. Providing all the materials such as textbooks, teaching and learning materials, stationery, and their distribution based on rules and regulations set forth by the Ministry of Education.

- Preserving the public property, controlling, and making effective use of the school resources.

- Creating a safe and secure teaching and learning environment and ensuring the school's maintenance and discipline.

- Ensuring the safety of the school's infrastructure, including health, clean drinking water, and a green school environment.

- Based on education law, policies, rules, and regulations, and programs of the Ministry of Education in terms of education

  - observing teaching methods

  - evaluating, and invigilating exams

  - ensuring the implementation of the curriculum

  - improving the quality of teaching and learning.

  - Leading and organizing parents' meetings at the school.

- Creating and maintaining a strong and permanent bond between the school and the community organizations, parents, and school personnel.

- Creating and maintaining a strong and permanent connection with governmental and non-governmental organizations to improve the quality of education.

- Leading and organizing support groups to defend education (to support school, teachers, and students) in coordination with governmental organizations and the community.

- Making decisions to implement school goals, objectives, and related programs.

  - Based on schools' action plan, the school principal implements and controls all school activities and creates a report of the implemented plans.

- Analyzing the reports received from the school management and their implementation.

- Developing technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge of school leaders, teachers, and administrative personnel.

- Creating a sense of collaboration between the academic and administrative personnel.

- Preparing an action plan before the start of each academic year.

  - Preparing the textbooks, documents, and offices to successfully start the educational and administrative tasks.

- Providing the list of required teachers to be hired (on time).

- Ordering and guiding teachers to teach, provide extra courses to students, join social organizations, communities, and committees, perform duties within the school, and other tasks.

- Performing other tasks as might be required to achieve the school's goals and objectives including students' learning outcomes and ensuring that quality education is delivered (Afghan Ministry of Education, 2020).

All this is clearly part of the school principals' mandate as elaborated in the job description. However, in the field, the public-school principals do not believe all this to be part of their responsibility.

According to School Principal Ali, the rules are that teachers with three to five years of experience can apply for a head teacher's position. Head teachers with three to five years of experience can apply for an academic vice-principal's position, and academic vice-principals with three to five years of experience can apply for the principalship role. In fact, though, because of the bureaucracy and corruption in education, anyone could be hired as a school principal.

The complexities of Afghan school principals' leadership practices

When I started this study, it seemed to me that the role and responsibilities of Afghan school principals were clearly laid out. However, when I re-visited the interview transcriptions of all the educational leaders and the other documents I had collected, it became clear that the role of the school principal is complex and is seemingly integrated into all aspects of the school including the students' physical health, the teachers' teaching practices, the students' discipline, overseeing all aspects of the school, and providing professional guidance to co-workers to ensure that the school is academically, financially, and physically well maintained. However, it also became clear that all school principals have their unique management approaches and unique contexts in which they operate that significantly affect the extent to which they are engaged in the school's affairs. For instance, according to Karim, "Ideally, first, school principals'

performance is based on his *Zarfiyat Kari* (professional capacity) and individual management style."

As I have already stressed, in Afghanistan, the school principals' profession is not regulated and there is no program of studies at the university level that provides educational leadership training in professional competencies in education settings. Additionally, there is no standardized approach to educate, hire, and regulate school principals and what they do. Therefore, as I have indicated above, some school principals are hired based on "political affiliation, ethnic background, favoritism, and bribery" as noted by head teacher, Ahmad.

Once a school principal is hired, according to Afghan Education Minister, Laila, they "are not officially held accountable for any of the performances of the school (teachers and students) [because]there was no 'accountability' measurement set forth by the ministry." Some school principals perform at their best and others do not. This lack of a fixed policy to govern the school principal's role and responsibility established the ground for the disproportionate quality of education delivery. For example, as head teacher Khalid mentioned, "In some schools, students are high performers due to the school principal's leadership practices, one who facilitates schoolteachers to improve teachers teaching practices, while other school principals are far from reaching their basic goal."

Similarly, according to Laila, "Politics overpowered the technical know-how of what education could mean for a nation." The minister asserted that "removing a school principal from a position was an impossible task if s/he had connections with politicians even after a bad performance." In other words, a school principals' position had become a political one and was not based on merit or on years of experience and seniority.

The quality of school principals' leadership practices is directly connected to their qualification and experience as a teacher, vice-principal, and then as a principal. Therefore, "if school principals and teachers are hired based on political affiliation, ethnic backgrounds, favoritism, and connection with the politicians, and without any experience, it significantly deteriorates schools' functionality," said head teacher, Walid. This means that many schools lack good teaching practices and have poor student learning outcomes. This could also mean a lack of quality education and no student achievement or success.

How did the school principal's leadership practices evolve over time?

Based on the 150 years of Afghanistan's history, there have been significant changes in the form of government as I outlined at the beginning of this dissertation. Schools, as a small administrative unit within the district, provincial, and national education system, follow the dominant discourse of national leadership orientation whether autocratic or democratic in nature. If the government or regime instructs them to be inclusive in their approaches, schools do so. If they are guided not to use corporal punishment to discipline students, schools obey. If the government provides any curriculum textbooks, be they extremist in content and delivery or not, schools follow. According to school principal Karim, "whatever I do, it should be according to the education policies, procedures, and guidelines prescribed by the Ministry of Education. It all depends on being obedient to government guidelines and its rules and regulations. It can be any ruling government". This situation also signifies that school principals are not engaged in providing insights and feedback into the curriculum, a disconnect between the ministry leadership and the school level leadership. Though, over the course of the 20 years from 2001 to 2021, school principals shifted their leadership practices generally from being autocratic leaders to being more democratic school leaders. For example, corporal punishment used to be employed

to maintain discipline, to punish students for not doing their homework, for being unable to answer to teachers' question, or for failing to memorize previous lessons by heart (rote memorization). But, between 2001 to 2006, the use of corporal punishment gradually declined as school leaders' practices evolved.

In addition to changes in school leaders' practices, a cognitive change was also evident in their way of thinking. According to school principal Ali, "It is important to ensure that teachers behave well with the students, rather than torturing, beating, or forcing them to behave in certain way. This will help students' change their behavior as well." Furthermore, according to head teacher, Khalid, "One of the most important tasks of academic and non-academic staff is to help maintain discipline without corporal punishment." In the schools, using corporal punishment began to fade after the fall of the first round of Taliban regime and for five years into President Karzai's presidency between 2001 to 2006. Stopping corporal punishment was the most prominent and explicit change in school principals' leadership practices that also influenced head teachers and schoolteachers' practices. This cultural change took some time: it did not happen overnight. Additionally, "students were exposed to social media, and this also helped reduce the culture of corporal punishment" (Mahmood, a teacher). For instance, students were more aware about their rights and if a teacher would beat a student other students might record and upload it on social media. Many videos went viral showing how a teacher beat a student.

Furthermore, to tackle daily school administrative issues, public schools established committees to respond to students' needs and to maintain discipline. According to head teacher Khalid, there were seven committees established at the school. "The committees [included] health, sports, financial, literature and cultural, greenery [and] environment, parents' liaison, and discipline committees." The formation of different committees signified that Afghan school

principals, to a certain extent, shared their leadership responsibilities among the school staff and students. Moreover, teaching methods were changing from teachers' lectures to student-centered ways of learning. However, "[s]ince teacher to student ratio is at least around 1:45 and at most 1:90, student-centeredness in a class of 90 students in 45-minute periods becomes impractical and difficult to follow" according to head teacher Khalid. As much as new approaches help to improve learning outcomes, new contextual challenges arise so, for any changes to occur, contextualized research and effort is required.

Are Afghan school principals still autocratic leaders?

Afghanistan has a history of authoritative leadership approaches at the school level. School principals were called *Amir Maktab* which means totalitarian school leader. However, this terminology has slowly changed to *Mudir Maktab* in certain schools which means school's administrator. However, there are signs of authoritative leadership evident to this day. According to head teacher, Khalid, "school principal is a guide and an evaluator. But we are the servitors, subalterns, and implementers. [But] there is a spirit of collaboration between the school leadership, academics, and non-academic staff in our school". The terms such as *servitor*, *subaltern*, *control*, and *orders* signify the deeply rooted totalitarian and authoritative leadership approaches of the Afghan school principals. Additionally, the orders given by the district and provincial education directorates signify a top-down approach to leadership. However, head teacher Khalid also stated that there is a spirit of collaboration in the school. In a school with 3500 to 3700 students, many departments, committees, and executive units, collaboration forms its foundation, so collaboration is a necessity between related units to ensure that the school is functional. Furthermore, Khalid stated, "if the school principal along with his team works collaboratively only then would he be considered successful. This means that the school

principal can step in to do a task when his guidance and support is needed". However, according to Khalid ideally,

> The school principal does not need to be authoritative and say that as the head teacher
>
> you must do everything. A collaborative school principal provides guidance, support, and
>
> evaluates the quality to ensure successful completion of a task. If she/he sees a mistake in
>
> the process, she/he could guide and correct the mistakes. A task done collaboratively
>
> ensures successful completion.

Head teacher Khalid explicitly related the school principal's collaboration to administrative tasks only, and that school principal's collaboration in instructional approaches is not evident. Additionally, this head teacher implied that some school principals may use their authority to get certain tasks done by their subordinates. But it is not practical in an education setting. Educational leadership is based on the kaleidoscopic features of itself. Therefore, one aspect of the school has impact on the other aspect of the school. According to the Afghan Education Minister Mohammad, "The majority of school principals are hired based on their business management education and backgrounds." A school principal with a business management background may use their management approaches to ensure that certain tasks are completed. Yet again, it is not practical in an education setting. Because educational leadership in its nature requires ethics of care (Noddings, 2012), and instructional approaches (Hallinger et al., 2018), that supports teachers and students alike. However, in the context of this research, it is evident that, there are signs of strict managerial and autocratic leadership practices visible in the Afghan education system.

Educational Leadership Versus Business Management

According to the Education Minister, Mohammad, the assignment of individuals with business management background to a school principalship role was a planned move by the Afghan MoE. According to him, "The school structure has been outdated in Afghanistan. The principals were not being effective in school management. Therefore, we had worked on a plan to appoint principals with management background and not educational". While school principals with a management background may not necessarily have an in-depth awareness about educational leadership theories, research, and practices in the education literature. It has been established that business management is seen to be "an inadequate and inappropriate basis for establishing . . . educational policy" (Callahan, 1962). Educational leadership and management entail much more than merely business management; emotional leadership is necessary (Hargreaves, 1998), along with an ethics of care in a school environment (Noddings, 2013), and instructional leadership approaches (Hallinger et al., 2018), along with knowing how to implement these to improve teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. Even in recent times in India, generally, "Indian scholars still appear to be divided between a managerial type of training (MBA model course work offered by business school) and educational administration/leadership training (M.Ed.) offered by colleges of education" (Saravanabhavan et al., 2016, p. 475). If school principals with a management background are assigned to a principalship role, they must be required to understand the complexities of educational institutions and the diversity of its stakeholders. Although, the philosophies of educational leadership and business administration may have some similarities, but, naturally, schools are not business organizations, though some private schools are based on a for-profit business model.

The Afghan school principals are not held accountable for teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. This situation creates a lack of trust between and among educational leaders, students, parents, and the community. According to head teacher Walid,

> In the last few years, whoever was the school principal, I as a head teacher performed all my tasks based on my academic and administrative role and responsibilities. Finally, all tasks were completed but there is a need for a caring approach, accepting one's responsibility, and working in a collaborative manner with the rest of the team.

This head teacher, as a major stakeholder in the education sector, also requires care from the school principal.

Additionally, based on the Education Minister Laila's personal experience, the quality of education is a major concern for parents in both public and private schools. There is no concept of care and motivation instilled in school leaders for them to disseminate across the school. She asserted that,

> My experience in education in Afghanistan first as a parent, then as a teacher/principal and then as the education minister spoke the same language: the quality of education that children were getting in Afghanistan was of grave concern and a major change was required to fix this problem. I saw my child uninspired and uncared for by her schoolteachers (both private and public in grade 1); I saw the thirst of parents for a better-quality education alternative when I ran the school and, finally, I saw the hesitation of politicians who tried to control and run education to their benefit.

Quality education is the heart of a school. School principals are the beating pulse. To deliver quality education, the school principals need to get to the depth of education theories and practices of facilitating teachers' instruction and students' learning outcomes. Additionally,

among other qualities the school principals need be passionate in their profession and care for the schools' stakeholders. Qualities of an individual who cares for others, according to Noddings (2012) is that "[i]n an encounter, the carer is attentive; she or he listens, observes, and is receptive to the expressed needs of the cared-for." Furthermore, the carer "then . . . must respond. She responds positively to the need if she has the resources to do so and if doing so will not hurt others in the web of care" (Noddings, 2012, p. 53). The need for emotional leadership (Bauer, 2003), the implementation of an ethics of care (Noddings, 2012), and instructional leadership approaches at the schools (Hallinger et al., 2018) are of paramount importance for all the stakeholders to improve school leadership practices, enhance instructional approaches, and achieve a desired students learning outcome.

Furthermore, according to head teacher Walid, "a successful school principal establishes a stable relationship with all." Similarly, according to Leithwood (2018), building relationships and developing people are in a successful school principals' domain of practice. He elaborated on this domain of practice with reference to practical aspects such "stimulat[ing] growth in the professional capacities of staff, provid[ing] support and demonstrate[ing] consideration for individual staff members, model[ing] the school's values and practices, build[ing] trusting relationships with and among staff, students, and parents, and establish[ing] productive working relationships with teacher federation representatives" (p. 32). Building relationship among the members of the school community could help foster educational leaders' leadership practices, teachers' quality of teaching, and student learning outcomes. While business managers may not be able to get to the depth of what education with all its complexities means to its stakeholders.

School Discipline

In Afghan schools, discipline is defined in terms of students staying in their classroom during all the periods, staying quiet, being obedient to their teachers and school personnel, and not breaking any furniture or other public property. Additionally, they must not talk with other students during lectures since this may disturb the class. While this culture is slowly changing, in earlier times students were not encouraged to ask any questions since this might also cause disruption during the class. Given the teacher students ratio as mentioned earlier, anecdotally students are still not able to ask questions about the lessons. Moreover, the duration of each period is around 45 minutes. Normally, it takes about five minutes for teachers to go from one classroom to the next when the periods are changing. Therefore, 40 minutes are left for 45 to 90 students to review the previous lesson, for teachers to check students' homework, deliver the new lesson, and assign new homework for students. Teachers have a responsibility to complete their respective curricula each year, so they rush to the finish line to complete their daily syllabus.

To maintain discipline in a large school with over 3500 to 3700 students is a challenging task. Therefore, for the school staff, discipline takes the highest priority. According to head teacher Khalid, "Discipline is one of the most important aspects of the school in which the administrative staff and the academic staff play their role to maintain students' discipline within the school premises and classrooms." For students who create issues for themselves, the teachers, and the school, there are certain procedures that are implemented. The students are introduced to the discipline committee by their teachers. This committee informs the students of rules and regulations governing their discipline. The students know that if they violate the rules, disrupt the school order, and create issues for themselves, their classmates, teachers, and school, they will be

introduced to the school principal. If a student is already known to the discipline committee, the committee introduces the individual to the school principal for further procedures.

First, the school principal will talk with the student and ensure that they understand that they violated certain rules and regulations in the school. Then the principal tells the student to follow the footsteps of the intelligent students and work for their future rather than focusing on disruptive activities. Since Afghan public schools do not have any student counselors, this process basically takes a form of counselling by the school principals themselves. According to Walid, usually students' behavior changes after the first consultation with the school principal. But if a student continues to be disruptive, two more chances are given, before the second step is taken which is to call in their parents. According to Walid,

> If any student is having an issue, then we ask their parents to come and discuss issues with them, sometimes with the student being present and sometimes without the student's presence, to help them get focused on their studies and their future. This process significantly helps students.

If students' parents are called in, this is serious. Therefore, most of the students try to change their behavior for the better, after their first few rounds of interaction with the school principal. However, if a student continues with their disruption even after their consultation with the school principal after their parents have been called in, further steps are taken. According to Walid,

> A disciplinary committee is formed. Based on the rules and regulations, the disciplinary committee decides either to allow the students in the class or suspend them. From this point on, it is not an individual's decision. The final decision is based on the rules and regulations that govern students' discipline.

Walid believes that it is the teachers' behavior that sets the tone for a class. If the teacher is behaving well, the students learn from their teacher. According to head teacher Khalid, It is significant to ensure that teachers behave well with the students, rather than torturing, beating, or forcing them to behave in certain ways. This will help students change their behavior as well.

Corporal punishment was a dominant practice used in Afghanistan to discipline children at home and at school (Corboz et al., 2018). The culture of corporal punishment lost popularity between 2001 and 2021. Teacher training organized by the non-governmental organizations focused on student-centered teaching methods instead. Additionally, international NGOs such as Save the Children researched, organized, and delivered context specific interventions for school administrators and teachers through meetings, seminars, training sessions, and classroom observations to inform them about the adverse short-term and long-term effects of corporal punishments. Save the Children also drafted the manual for a fear-free environment and prepared trainers and facilitators to run similar interventions across Afghanistan. These sessions helped reduce the use of corporal punishment across Afghanistan (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2020). Therefore, teachers' teaching practices slowly changed to accommodate a student-centered approach. Additionally, students started studying and gaining awareness about the rest of the world through social media.

However, to a certain extent, corporal punishment is still practiced in the Afghan schools by teachers to maintain discipline in the classroom (Corboz et al., 2018; United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2020) but it has become an individualized practice. Some teachers who practice corporal punishment are also caught on camera by other students and these posts go viral, so it is becoming an unacceptable practice for all. Based on the attention paid to teachers' undesirable practices and school principals' reactions towards such behaviors, it

is evident that the role of schoolteachers and school principals are evolving slightly towards

practicing leadership and teaching approaches that correspond to social awareness and

democratic principles.

School Leadership and Students' Achievement

School principals in Afghanistan are not directly involved in improving students'

achievement and success, as they believe it is not their responsibility. According to head teacher

Khalid, the monitoring and evaluation of teaching quality are handled by the head of

departments, head teachers, and academic vice-principal, with the results later shared with the

school principal. However, there is a disconnect between school principals leadership practices

and students' achievement.

As a result, students who wish to gain access to public universities seek external tuition to

enhance their subject knowledge in science, physics, biology, chemistry, and mathematics.

School principal Karim highlights the difficulty of getting admitted to Kabul University due to

the high percentage of grades required in the Konkor Exam. Consequently, many students are

unable to gain admission and resort to private tuitions for exam preparation, neglecting the

similar lessons provided by schoolteachers.

Contrary to the hands-off approach of some school principals, others, like school

principal Ali, believe that "students' success relies on their own efforts, family support, and the

encouragement they receive from teachers. He emphasizes that only diligent students with strong

determination achieve admission to universities". While some argue that students' success lies

solely in their own hands, though it is crucial for school principals to play a more significant role

in achieving learning outcomes. Instructional, transformational, shared, and distributed

leadership approaches could make a difference. Currently, however, Afghan school principals'

efforts towards teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes are minimal, with instructional leadership approaches rarely seen.

This lack of accountability for teachers' and students' performance, as mentioned by the education minister, leaves students in a vulnerable situation. Head teacher Khalid acknowledges that some students, driven by their ambition and family support, manage to succeed despite challenges. Yet, it remains essential for school principals to facilitate schoolteachers' instructional approaches, empowering teachers to enhance their teaching practices for better outcomes.

Ultimately, the role and responsibilities of Afghan school principals should encompass the academic, financial, and logistical aspects of schools, but individual differences in contexts, leadership capacities, discourses, and dispositions can influence their approach. By taking a more proactive stance and fostering a conducive learning environment, school principals can pave the way for students' success without the need for external tuitions.

Teachers' Perceptions of School Principals Leadership Practices

Ahmad, Mahmood, and Kabir, teachers who taught in two private schools, expressed their perception of the two types of school principal in detail. According to Ahmad, although both the school principals he discussed were leading private schools, their leadership approaches were significantly different. He mentioned that,

> The first school principal created a sense of community among schoolteachers and parents. She created an environment in which students were able to learn, because [she] had a close connection with parents. The second school principal was more interested in financial income. They did not care about teachers' emotions and students' learning outcomes.

Additionally, according to Mahmood, the first school principal was creating a trusting relationship between the teachers, students, and the community. However, the second school principal was covertly keeping a representative in the classroom to control what the teachers did. He asserted that,

> the school principal had one or two representatives within each class. If any teacher, taught in a way that students did not learn, or the teacher was harsh in her/her classroom management practices, the news would reach the school principal. And the school principal indirectly tried to make the teacher understand [the need]to change her/his teaching methods or her/his behaviours.

While both the school principals were making sure that teachers had sufficient teaching materials, "the first school principal was providing teachers with professional development workshops by inviting district education directors to give seminars, videos, online resources, PowerPoint presentations, and teaching materials be they physics teachers or chemistry teachers" according to Mahmood. Furthermore, the first school principal would go one step further by encouraging the schoolteachers to provide lively lessons and ensure student learning outcomes were achieved. Kabir further elaborated, "The school principal was encouraging teachers to provide lively lessons, not dry and uninteresting [ones]. The chemistry lessons should be delivered with experiments rather than simple explanation[s]". furthermore, he provides an example of chemistry experimentation as compared to a simple theoretical explanation.

> For example, if sodium and chlorine compounds are mixed, it creates the edible component of salt. Therefore, the teacher needs to show sodium and chlorine separately for students and then show the process through which it turns into salt. Even sometimes,

she was offering to prepare slideshows so that teacher's lesson [would get] interesting

and engaging.

As a discussion point, some school principals are more concerned about the students' learning

outcomes and success than others. Furthermore, according to teachers some school principals

find the areas of improvement for one teacher and generalize it to others. So, Kabir believes that

"a school principal can treat each teacher individually based on their performance. If one teacher

needs improvement, [the] school principal could individually provide support for the respective

teacher". Therefore, Ahmad asserted that "from [his] perspective, the best school principal is the

one who encourages and supports all schoolteachers equally." The school principal is the head of

the institution [so] all the teachers are looking up to her or him. Therefore, to keep a balance in

their leadership practices is important. Kabir provided a detail of how he felt about the

environment created by the school principal in the first school, when he said, "It felt like a

second home to us. In the first school, the environment was created such that teachers had a

professional relationship with each other". He further elaborates that,

> In this school, no teacher was trying to damage the reputation of other teachers to
>
> promote themselves. It was not a toxic environment. All the teachers liked each other.
>
> The school principal with teachers and teachers with teachers had a sincere, cordial, and
>
> warm relationship.

However, as Kabir explained, in the second school the environment created was such that one

teacher was trying to damage the reputation of other teachers in order to get promoted or get

credit in the eyes of the school principal. He mentioned that "it was a toxic environment."

Ahmad believes that "the best school principal is the one who is sincere with her/his teachers,

and genuinely listens to and supports them". According to teacher Ahmad who further elaborated

that "in the second school, the school principal would call all teachers for a meeting. But it was

he who would share all his plans and procedures. But he never gave time for teachers to express

themselves or criticize him". To cut teachers out of the discussion and critical discourse could

create a situation of distrust in the workplace and it would negatively affect the teaching and

learning practices of teachers and students learning outcomes. As mentioned by Ahmad,

> Therefore, teachers started to hold grudges in their hearts for school principal. After the
>
> meeting, teaching periods started, and everyone had to go to their respective classes.
>
> Although teachers were going to their class, they were not teaching as they should have.
>
> As I mentioned before, the second school was just for commercial purposes only.

Teachers, like any individual, want to feel that they are valued, supported, cared for, and that

their voices are being heard in the workplace. If the school principal is considerate,

schoolteachers will give their best to teach students. If teachers are not valued, this culture will

trickle down to the classroom level where students are not valued, supported, and their voices are

not heard.

> According to Mahmood, "The first school principal was attentive to schoolteachers and

as much as she could, she would respond to individual teacher's needs. The teachers felt

protected under her leadership." Mahmood further elaborated, "When I saw that a school

principal cared for me, the next day, I was going above and beyond to teach my classes. When I

was at the school, I was trying very much to improve the quality of my teaching." In addition to

the school principal's caring and support of the schoolteachers, she was also concerned with

students' achievement and success. According to Mahmood,

> She was closely engaged with teacher teaching practices. She observed that the teacher
>
> who prepared slides, took students to the laboratory, did field trips, showed videos,

introduced new books, or if the teacher used any other creative way to teach at the end of

the month the principal would encourage the teacher with some financial incentives.

Since a quality of a good leader is to stay true to their words, Mahmood asserted that "the first

school principal was true to her words. Whatever promises she was making, she was fulfilling

them." As mentioned before, this sets the school culture. Therefore, the school principal could

expect the same from the schoolteachers to commit to their words. For example, commit to their

own attendance, maintain excellence in teaching, and be leaders in their areas of teaching.

Additionally, according to Ahmad,

> In the first school, if teachers needed a month's salary in advance, she would provide it
>
> without any further questions. She created a very trusting relationship. In the second
>
> school, up to the 10th of the month, we had not received our salaries. If we asked the
>
> school principal, he said that it is not up to him. It is up to him school owner, whenever
>
> they pay the employees.

This signifies the ineffectiveness of a school leader who fails to understand his teachers'

needs. Understanding would strengthen the relationship between the teachers and the school

leaders. Workplace satisfaction could also greatly impact the quality of teaching and learning at

the school. In Afghanistan, unlike in some western countries, salaries are paid monthly instead of

weekly or biweekly. If a teacher is working for 40 days without a salary [10 days past their

payment date], How would the teacher deal with their personal and family expenses, and what

would be the impact on their physical, psychological, and emotional well-being? Furthermore, a

good private school pays approximately 200 to 300 US dollars a month and this makes it difficult

for families to survive. This could reduce the quality of teaching and learning in the school,

especially when 10 days past the payday and there is no supportive school principal.

School principals should rather set the culture of the entire school. On one hand, if the school principal is an autocratic leader, to a certain extent, it will affect the classroom level practices. On the other, if the school principal is an instructional leader whose focus is on students' achievement, success, and improved learning outcomes, the teachers will deliver, and the students will succeed.

Corruption in Education

In 2020, Afghanistan ranked 165 out of 180 based on the corruption perceptions index (Transparency international, 2021). In 2021, corruption finally crippled the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and this led to the return of the Taliban regime. Although the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) was formed to regulate and provide qualified individuals to different government institutions, they failed to commit to their mandate. According to head teacher Khalid, "in the previous government, there was IARCSC, and this institution's mandate was to recruit qualified individuals for different government institutions. However, those people who had connections and those who could bribe got the jobs". Bribe had become a common practice, a malpractice that ruined every single government institution and the schools. According to Khalid,

> For example, a grade14 graduate would get the job, but a Bachelor graduate would not. IARCSC would tell the candidate that they had not received enough marks/grades in the placement examination. Following this corrupt approach, the MoE required all schoolteachers to at least get their bachelor's degree.

However, once the new rule was implemented by the Ministry of Education that all teachers should at least have a bachelor's degrees, according to Khalid,

The teachers with 14 years of education enrolled themselves into Private Education

Institutions (PEIs). Although they were not attending the classes, at the end of each

semester, they would pay bribe and receive their grades. And in two years, they would

receive their bachelor's degree and continue teaching. It looked as though they were

going to the bazaar and purchasing their teaching certification (Head Teacher Khalid).

Additionally, head teacher Walid highlighted the issue of under-qualified teachers by saying,

Unprofessional teachers, who are 'considered to be' professional teachers, add significant

challenges to the school. I have shared this concern many times in meetings with the

school principal, DED, and PED. They would say, 'We will take an action' but,

unfortunately, they did not take any action and they do not listen to us. For example, in a

school with 3500 to 3700 boy students, they sent a 20- or 21-year-old girl to teach high

school boy students, aged 18 to19 years. Would this teacher be able to teach? And would

the student be able to learn? I don't think that students would learn anything from that

teacher with such a [tiny] age difference.

If a well-established government agency like IARCSC could do this, what could be

expected of an individual teacher who gets hired to teach based on connections and bribery?

What could be expected of their teaching quality? What kind of knowledge and values would

these teachers impart to students? In this context, even a highly qualified principal leading the

education institutions could get frustrated.

Additionally, a similar concern was shared by the education minister, Laila, who pointed

out that some school principals were assigned based on connections and bribery and no one

would be able to remove or replace them. She asserted,

Such a school principal was not officially held accountable to anyone for the performance of the school (teachers and students). Data was collected from time to time in which school principals helped in providing that data and the final signature of the principal was required for all the paperwork coming from that school. But there was no accountability measurement officially set forth by the ministry. This is the reason why some principals were great, and some were not and removing a school principal from a position was an impossible task if he/she had connections with politicians even after a bad performance. Furthermore, another critical concern was raised in relation to why the MoE did not hold the school principals accountable for their performance, teachers' teaching practices, and students' learning outcomes while knowing all the facts and the significance of school principal's leadership practices that could improve these.

Corruption not only crippled the central government but also the smallest unit of administration such as schools. According to Cooper (2018, para, 3) a parent said,

A suicide attack isn't the most dangerous thing for us, because a few people will die but Afghan mothers will have other children. It is the unprofessional and unknowledgeable teachers that are most dangerous for us because they kill the future of Afghanistan.

The corruption in the education system created a challenge of its own kind. For example, for a teacher to get a teaching job, a bribe of 1000 USD is paid to different government official at IARCSC or the officials across the country who employs the teachers in their respective schools (Cooper, 2018). This is equivalent to five months' worth of an Afghan teacher's salary. There were 220,000 teachers for around 10 million students. Suppose each teacher is paying about 1000 USD for their appointment, this would create a corrupt fund worth a whopping amount of 220 million USD. Additionally, there were around 40,000 employees in the MoE and across the

country including school principalship and administrative jobs. The concept of ghost teachers and ghost schools significantly add to the complexities of corruption in the education system in Afghanistan.

Education in Crisis

"Today schools are like a warehouse in the country which collect children for few hours and then let them go. It is not a learning community."

(Education Minister, Mohammad)

The already fragile state of education in Afghanistan was even further plunged into a disaster. According to Save the Children, Afghanistan (2022), since the Taliban takeover in 2021, 80% of secondary school girls are being deprived of education. Primary school girls and their female teachers are provided with the kind of environment that makes them sick and tired of going to school. In one of the schools, the academic vice principal is a Talib. A female schoolteacher Nahid, who reportedly has 30 years of teaching experience in Afghan schools, said,

> The school principal is deprived of all his practices. Whatever decision is taken by academic vice principal is final. He tells all the female teachers to never show their face to a male teacher and to students' fathers. Whenever you are talking with them, you need to wear your mask and stay in a room and use the small window, through which you can communicate with them.

However, when the academic vice principal observes the female teachers' classes, according to this female teacher "he brings in six or seven male teachers to join him. He tries to make the female teacher extremely uncomfortable. So that female teachers decide by themselves to leave the teaching profession." He uses a double standard policy to ensure that primary female

schoolteachers and students are also deprived of their basic right to teaching and learning. Now, in 2023, all girls' schools beyond grade 6 are closed including university. Additionally, all female employees including female teachers of national and international organizations have been ordered to remain at home and never to return to their work.

I initiated the plan to conduct this research before the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. It was finally time to conduct a fundamental research study to understand the evolving role of Afghan school principals and ways in which they could help improve the quality of instructions in their respective schools. Now, Afghan school principals' leadership practices have become secondary to girls' access to education. The harsh reality is that the Afghan girls are going through this deprivation under this regime and already two and half of the school year has passed. The Taliban continue to ban girls' education, and this is a problem that needs serious international pressure and support if we are to have Afghan girls given their basic rights. The Taliban has purposefully ban girls' education because they are trying to keep the entire population in the dark. Children with an educated mother do much better in their entire lives as compared to children of uneducated mothers.

Additionally, according to Save the Children (2022), "Education is a lifeline for all children, especially girls. Without it, they are at increased risk of violence, abuse, and exploitation, including early marriage" (p. 3). The Taliban continue to impose their rigid and exclusionary policies and deprive the minorities, women, and girls of their basic rights to education. As I mentioned in the literature review, until 2010, "Humanitarian relief entailed the provision of food, shelter, water, sanitation and health care. Education was seen as part of longer-term development work rather than as a necessary response to emergencies" (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010, p. 3). However, the significance of

education and education spaces provided in a context of crisis, reduces the impacts of external crisis factors, and provides a safe space for children. Therefore, education is now considered critical in the framework of humanitarian response (Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies, 2010). However, under the Taliban rule the girls, women, female schoolteachers, and school leaders are deprived of the few rights they had.

Findings Summary

In this research study, I tried to understand the evolving role of the Afghan school principal leadership practices and consider how they could support teachers to improve the quality of their instruction and students' learning outcomes. The findings suggest that there has been little, or no attention paid to school principals' leadership practices in the course of Afghanistan's contemporary history. Based on the dominant discourse, the nature of school principals' leadership shifted slightly from one form of government to the other. School principals' leadership practices as a significant contributor towards quality of education, teachers' teaching practices, and students' learning outcome has largely been neglected. Therefore, there has been an individualized or rather personalized form of managing the schools based on the knowledge, skills, capacities, and disposition of the individual school principals. Generally, Afghan school principals have little to no direct involvement in improving teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes because they believe that it is not within their scope of practice. It is believed that teachers teach their classes, and the students themselves are responsible for their learning outcome. "If students are serious about their education, they will learn," said school principal, Karim.

In the context of Afghanistan, the school principal's role has merely been that of administrator who is not trained or educated but is given authority to be a school leader. The job

description above highlights the scale and scope of Afghan school principals' practices and not any leadership practices. Specifically, Afghan school principals are not setting directions for the school such as building a shared vision, identifying specific, shared, short-term goals, creating high-performance expectations, and communicating the vision and goals with the school community such as teachers and students, and nor with the community at large as the successful school leader's framework elaborated (Leithwood, 2018) and not like the Eastern version of school leaders' successful instructional leadership practices such as "defining purpose and direction, developing schools' plans and their uniqueness, communicating school goals, and plans" (Qian et al., 2017, p. 193). Therefore, the role and responsibilities of Afghan school principals are merely administrative rather than instructional and do not fall under any definition of educational leadership.

Chapter 6: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

A good pluralistic, true Afghan education curriculum with teachers and administrators who care about the future of Afghanistan can change the face of Afghanistan through education.

(Education Minister, Laila)

Discussion

The educational context in Afghanistan has undergone significant changes, but it remains relatively underexplored in scholarly research. This discussion examines some broader themes that have emerged from the research, shedding light on the Afghan education context. We will also explore the key learnings from interactions with participants and findings related to various aspects of school principal leadership practices. Additionally, I will relate it to the conceptual framework of shared instructional leadership. This discussion delves into topics such as autocratic educational leaders, the distinction between educational leadership and business management, school discipline, students' achievement, teachers' perceptions of school principals' leadership, corruption in education, and the challenges faced by education during times of crisis.

Before, we further discus the main themes. I offer a discussion on some broader challenges that school principals face in their daily leadership practices such as resource constraints, security and access, gender disparity, and professional development.

Resource Constraints

Afghanistan's education system grapples with resource constraints that impede the delivery of quality education. These challenges, rooted in historical conflict and political instability, have severely affected the nation's educational infrastructure and funding. The key areas where resource constraints are evident include insufficient funding, inadequate

infrastructure, shortages of teaching materials, lack of technology, limited teacher training and support, and challenges in remote and conflict-affected areas. These constraints have a direct impact on student learning outcomes, hindering access to a well-rounded education, and creating barriers to academic success.

Afghanistan's education sector historically receives limited funding from the government and international donors. As a post-conflict nation with competing priorities, education often receives a smaller allocation of resources. Consequently, schools struggle to meet the basic needs of their students and teachers, hindering the provision of a conducive learning environment and quality education.

A significant proportion of Afghan schools lack proper infrastructure and basic facilities. Poorly constructed buildings with inadequate ventilation, heating, or cooling systems create uncomfortable learning environments for students. Overcrowded classrooms further exacerbate the situation, hindering effective teaching and learning. Additionally, some schools operate in temporary structures or tents, rendering them vulnerable to adverse weather conditions and compromising the safety and comfort of students and staff.

Shortages of teaching materials are a pervasive issue in Afghan schools. Scarce or outdated textbooks, workbooks, and learning resources limit the ability of teachers to deliver effective lessons and engage students in meaningful learning experiences. The lack of adequate teaching materials hampers the development of comprehensive and up-to-date curricula, hindering students' access to a well-rounded education.

The integration of technology in education is minimal due to resource constraints. Many schools lack access to computers, internet connectivity, and other digital tools that could enhance the learning experience. The absence of technology also affects teachers' professional

development opportunities, limiting their exposure to modern pedagogical practices and hindering the adoption of innovative teaching methods.

Professional development for teachers is crucial in improving the overall quality of education. However, resource constraints often restrict the availability of training programs and workshops for educators. As a result, teachers may not receive adequate support to enhance their teaching skills and keep abreast of modern pedagogical approaches. This limitation hampers the ability of teachers to deliver effective and engaging lessons to students.

The consequences of resource constraints have a direct impact on student learning outcomes. Without adequate teaching materials and supportive infrastructure, students' access to a comprehensive and well-rounded education is compromised. Insufficient infrastructure negatively affects the learning environment, making it challenging for students to concentrate and fully engage in their studies. As a result, academic performance and educational attainment suffer, perpetuating disparities in educational outcomes.

Addressing these constraints requires collaborative efforts from the government, international donors, and educational stakeholders to prioritize education, allocate sufficient funding, and invest in improving infrastructure and teacher training. By mitigating these constraints, Afghanistan can work towards providing a more inclusive and equitable education system, ensuring all students have access to quality learning opportunities for their future prosperity. School principals' leadership practices could take a central role in provision of quality education.

Security and Access

Ongoing conflicts and security concerns impact access to education, particularly in rural and conflict-affected regions. This leads to disparities in educational opportunities across the

country. Security concerns and ongoing conflicts have been major impediments to ensuring

access to education for all in Afghanistan. These challenges affect both rural and conflict-

affected regions, leading to significant disparities in educational opportunities across the country.

Afghanistan has been grappling with decades of conflict, including armed insurgency and

terrorism. In areas where conflict is prevalent, schools are at risk of direct attacks, bombings, or

occupation by armed groups. Such threats create a climate of fear, leading to school closures and

a disruption of regular academic activities. Security concerns discourage parents from sending

their children to school. They fear for their children's safety while traveling to and attending

school, especially in regions where violence is prevalent. This leads to lower enrollment rates

and irregular attendance, particularly among girls, who are often disproportionately affected due

to cultural norms and security risks. Though, now under the Taliban regime girls beyond grade 6

are completely deprived of their basic rights to education.

Ongoing conflicts force many families to flee their homes, leading to internal

displacement. Displaced students often face challenges in accessing education due to lack of

schools or unfamiliar curricula. Similarly, displaced teachers may struggle to find employment,

leading to a shortage of qualified educators in host communities.

Security concerns disproportionately impact girls' education. In conservative and

conflict-affected areas, families may be more hesitant to send their daughters to school due to

safety concerns and cultural norms. As a result, girls are more likely to be denied educational

opportunities, perpetuating gender disparities in education. Rather, during the second round of

Taliban regime, they are completely denied of their basic rights. If they try to seek knowledge in

any way, they are subject to prosecution, torture, and imprisonment.

Teachers and school administrators face challenges in performing their duties amidst security risks. For instance, teachers may not be able to travel to schools regularly, affecting the consistency of instruction. Moreover, school administrators must navigate security protocols to ensure the safety of students and staff. Security concerns and ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan present significant challenges to ensuring access to education for all.

Gender Disparities

Historically and traditionally, gender norms and cultural beliefs still pose challenges for girls' education. Gender disparities persist in enrollment rates, retention, and access to leadership positions. Post august 2021, After the Taliban take-over of the country, girls, women, and all females are deprived of their basic rights including education. Rather some of them say that they are imprisoned in their own homes, town, cities, and country. And their only crime is being female.

Professional Development

Professional development plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of education within any educational system. In the specific context of Afghanistan, the access to professional development opportunities for teachers and school principals is limited, presenting formidable challenges to the improvement of the overall education system. This discussion aims to elaborate the underlying reasons contributing to these limitations, investigate the ramifications on educational outcomes.

Afghanistan's education system contends with resource constraints, often resulting in professional development being deprioritized in the allocation of limited resources. Inadequate funding and logistical challenges create barriers for teachers and school principals to access meaningful and regular professional development programs. Even when resources are available,

the diversity and quality of professional development programs may be insufficient to meet the specific needs of educators in Afghanistan. The content and relevance of training sessions may fall short of addressing the unique challenges faced by teachers and school principals in the Afghan educational context. Generic, not contextual, or outdated training modules may fail to effectively cater to the specific requirements of Afghan educators.

Teachers and school principals may not possess full awareness regarding the importance and benefits of professional development. Additionally, incentives to participate in training programs, such as salary increments or career advancement opportunities, are limited. This lack of motivation can discourage educators from actively seeking out and engaging in professional development opportunities. The restricted access to professional development directly impacts the quality of teaching and school leadership in Afghanistan. Without continuous training and skill enhancement, educators may struggle to stay updated with modern pedagogical practices, curriculum advancements, and educational technology. The lack of adequate training hampers the effectiveness of teaching methods, classroom management, and the ability to cater to the diverse learning needs of students.

Effective professional development nurtures innovation among teachers, encouraging them to experiment with new teaching methods and strategies. However, the scarcity of such opportunities in Afghanistan may hinder the adoption of innovative and student-centered teaching approaches. Consequently, students may miss out on engaging and interactive learning experiences that could otherwise enhance their educational development. The importance of professional development extends beyond individual educators and encompasses school leadership as well. School principals play a pivotal role in guiding and improving school

performance. However, the lack of access to quality leadership training may hamper their ability to effectively manage schools, support teachers, and create a conducive learning environment.

The constraints posed by limited professional development opportunities for teachers and school principals in Afghanistan represent significant impediments to the overall quality of education. Addressing this issue necessitates proactive measures, including increased investment, customized training modules, promotion of awareness and incentives, gender-inclusive approaches, partnerships, and technology-enabled learning (specially using AI technologies). By prioritizing professional development and empowering educators with the necessary skills and knowledge, Afghanistan can enhance teaching practices, school leadership, and ultimately improve the educational outcomes and prospects of its students. These collective efforts will contribute to creating a more robust and equitable education system in Afghanistan.

School Principal Evolvement Over Time

Over the years, the role of school principals in Afghanistan has undergone a transformation. Initially, appointments were frequently made based on political affiliations rather than educational expertise, which had adverse effects on the quality of education. However, there is a noticeable shift in recent times, with an increasing recognition of the significance of competent and qualified school leaders in driving positive changes and improving educational outcomes.

A Competent and qualified school leaders have the ability to effectively communicate and collaborate with staff, implement evidence-based instructional strategies, navigate administrative responsibilities, foster a positive school culture, and adapt to the dynamic challenges within the educational landscape. A qualified school principal, therefore, not only meets the educational and administrative requirements but also consistently demonstrates

leadership practices that contribute positively to the educational experiences and achievements of both teachers and students within the school community. The school principal who could incorporate both the eastern values and the western expertise in school leadership practices, could change the landscape of education in the developing context of Afghanistan.

This elaboration delves into the historical context of principal appointments, the challenges it posed, and the emerging understanding of the critical role of educational expertise in shaping effective school leadership.

In the past, school principals in Afghanistan were often appointed through political affiliation, bribery, and favoritism with little consideration for their educational qualifications or leadership abilities. This approach was prevalent due to political patronage and the influence of power dynamics in the education system. As a result, individuals lacking educational expertise and leadership skills found themselves in school leadership positions, leading to suboptimal management and limited improvement in educational standards.

The practice of political appointments of school principals presented several challenges. Principals lacking educational backgrounds struggled to effectively manage schools and provide visionary, transformative, and shared instructional leadership. The absence of relevant experience and knowledge hindered their ability to implement effective educational strategies and foster a conducive learning environment. Consequently, educational institutions faced administrative and pedagogical challenges, impeding the holistic development of students.

Competent and qualified school leaders play a pivotal role in driving positive changes and achieving improved student learning outcomes. Educational expertise enables principals to make informed decisions, develop evidence-based strategies, and implement innovative teaching approaches. Effective school leaders foster a positive school culture, promote professional

development for teachers, and establish a nurturing learning environment conducive to academic excellence.

Appointing principals with educational expertise yield numerous benefits for schools and students. Such leaders are well-versed in curriculum development, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques, enabling them to align educational practices with academic goals. Moreover, they can engage effectively with teachers, parents, and the wider community, fostering collaborative partnerships that enhance the overall educational experience.

Educationally proficient principals have a direct impact on educational outcomes. Their visionary leadership and pedagogical knowledge translate into improved student performance, higher retention rates, and better overall school performance. A focus on educational expertise also results in the adoption of research-based best practices, creating a positive cycle of continuous improvement within the school system. Not considering a proactive approach to improve the quality of school principals' leadership practice could prove to hinder educational development and student learning outcomes.

The growing recognition of the importance of educational expertise could led to policy reforms aimed at strengthening the criteria for principal appointments and continues professional development. Capacity-building programs, training workshops, and leadership development initiatives could be introduced to equip aspiring principals with the necessary skills and knowledge to lead effectively.

The evolution of the role of school principals in Afghanistan reflects a transition from political appointments, based on malpractices of bribery and favoritism to the increasing recognition of the importance of educational expertise. The historical practice of appointing principals based on political affiliations presented challenges that hindered the quality of

education. However, the contemporary understanding of the significance of competent and qualified school leaders could bring about positive changes. Yet we have a long way to go, specially, during the Taliban rule. Emphasizing educational expertise in principal appointments holds the potential to drive improvements in educational outcomes, school performance, and the overall development of students. By prioritizing educational qualifications and leadership competencies, Afghanistan can foster a more robust and effective education system that empowers school leaders to create impactful and transformative learning experiences for students.

Autocratic Educational Leaders

Throughout Afghanistan's history, the role of educational leaders has witnessed the adoption of autocratic leadership styles, which have had profound implications for the education system. Such approaches limited teacher autonomy and stifled innovation and collaboration among educators. Consequently, teacher morale suffered, and student learning outcomes were negatively impacted, resulting in a decline in the overall quality of education.

The rigid implementation of the curriculum under autocratic leadership hinders teachers' creativity and flexibility within the classroom, leading to a less engaging learning environment for students. Consequently, students may have missed out on critical opportunities for active learning and critical thinking. To address these challenges, a fundamental shift towards shared instructional leadership is required. Empowering teachers to actively participate in decision-making processes and fostering a culture of innovation can revitalize the education system. By encouraging collaboration among staff, educational leaders facilitate the exchange of best practices, enabling continuous improvement and enhancing the learning experience for students.

Embracing shared instructional leadership allows for the development of a dynamic and inclusive learning environment. Empowered teachers are more likely to inspire and motivate their students, leading to improved academic performance and better long-term prospects for learners. Investing in professional development and creating opportunities for teacher growth are essential components of shared instructional leadership. By prioritizing the growth and development of the teaching workforce, educational leaders can build a highly skilled and motivated cadre of educators capable of adapting to the demands of an ever-changing world. Ultimately, shared instructional leadership approach values teacher autonomy and empowerment. Afghanistan's education system, equipping students with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in an increasingly complex and interconnected global landscape is vital.

Educational Leadership vs. Business Management

Drawing a clear distinction between educational leadership and business management is of paramount importance in the context of schools. Educational institutions necessitate leaders who prioritize educational objectives, cultivate a positive learning environment, and provide unwavering support to teachers and students. This distinction acknowledges that the primary mission of schools is to facilitate learning and holistic development, rather than merely focusing on financial aspects and profit-making.

Educational leadership entails a visionary approach that emphasizes the pursuit of academic excellence and the cultivation of a nurturing learning environment. Educational leaders must articulate a clear and compelling vision for the school, aligning it with the needs and aspirations of the students and the community. By setting educational goals and fostering a

culture of continuous improvement, educational leaders guide the institution towards enhanced student outcomes and overall educational growth.

In contrast, business management is predominantly concerned with financial aspects and resource allocation. While financial management is a crucial aspect of school administration, it should not supersede the fundamental educational mission. Educational leaders must strike a balance between financial sustainability and the delivery of quality education. A myopic focus on financial gain can compromise the well-being of teachers, students, and the overall learning environment.

Effective educational leadership requires an understanding of the unique needs and challenges faced by students and educators. By providing support and professional development opportunities to teachers, educational leaders enable them to deliver engaging and effective instruction. Additionally, fostering a positive school climate that promotes inclusivity, respect, and collaboration contributes to the overall well-being and academic success of students.

Differentiating between educational leadership and business management is crucial for maintaining the core purpose of schools: to facilitate learning and student development. Educational leaders must prioritize educational goals, cultivate a positive learning environment, and offer unwavering support to teachers and students. By upholding these principles, schools can thrive as centers of academic excellence and holistic growth, fulfilling their mission to prepare students for a successful future.

School Discipline

Maintaining discipline in schools presents a multifaceted challenge. In certain instances, schools have resorted to implementing strict disciplinary measures, raising apprehensions about the well-being and emotional development of students. While disciplinary procedures are

necessary, it is essential to contextualize these measures and consider students' backgrounds. For instance, students hailing from warlord families or having close relations to high-ranking government officials may present unique challenges and potential consequences for school leaders and teachers.

Discipline in schools is vital for creating a conducive learning environment that fosters academic growth and ensures the safety and well-being of all. However, the approach to discipline must be balanced and sensitive to the diverse circumstances that students may come from. Implementing overly punitive measures without understanding the contextual realities of students' lives can be counterproductive and may exacerbate existing issues. Recognizing the varied backgrounds of students is crucial in formulating effective disciplinary strategies. Some students may have experienced trauma or adverse circumstances outside the school environment, which can manifest in their behavior. Instead of solely punishing such students, schools should consider adopting restorative justice practices that focus on addressing the root causes of behavior and providing necessary support.

Furthermore, schools should prioritize creating a positive and supportive school culture where students feel safe and valued. This involves promoting open communication and trust between students, teachers, and administrators. Implementing preventive measures, such as social-emotional learning programs, can equip students with essential skills to manage emotions and conflicts constructively. Collaboration among school stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and the community, is vital in addressing discipline-related challenges. By working together, schools can tailor disciplinary approaches to meet individual student needs, consider cultural sensitivities, and ensure fairness and equity in disciplinary actions.

Maintaining discipline in schools requires a thoughtful and balanced approach that takes into account the contextual realities of students' backgrounds. Striking a balance between enforcing necessary disciplinary measures and offering support and understanding to students is crucial for their overall well-being and academic success. By adopting restorative practices and fostering a positive school culture, educational institutions can create an environment where students can thrive and grow academically and emotionally.

School Leadership Practices and Students' Achievement

School principals' leadership practices play a pivotal role in shaping students' academic achievement and overall school performance. Shared instructional leadership, where principals collaborate with teachers to set educational goals and strategies, creates a sense of shared responsibility for student success. This approach fosters a collaborative and inclusive school culture that supports teachers' professional growth and enhances instructional quality.

Furthermore, principals who provide instructional support and feedback to teachers positively impact student outcomes. By offering guidance and resources to educators, principals enable them to implement effective teaching strategies and tailor instruction to meet students' diverse needs. Instructional support empowers teachers to continuously improve their pedagogical practices, leading to enhanced student learning experiences.

Moreover, effective collaboration between principals, teachers, and other stakeholders strengthens the educational ecosystem. By involving parents, community members, and external partners, principals can create a supportive network that complements and reinforces learning both inside and outside the classroom. Conversely, the absence of effective educational leadership practices may hinder students' academic achievement and success. When principals fail to engage in shared instructional leadership or provide instructional support, teachers may

lack the necessary resources and guidance to optimize their teaching approaches. This can lead to a suboptimal learning environment that hampers student progress and growth.

School principals' leadership practices, encompassing shared instructional leadership, instructional support, and collaboration, significantly influence students' academic achievement and overall school performance. Effective leadership practices create an environment of shared responsibility, professional growth, and collaboration that positively impacts student outcomes. Conversely, a lack of effective educational leadership may impede students' achievement and hinder the realization of their full potential. By prioritizing and fostering strong leadership practices, schools can create a foundation for academic excellence and success for all students.

Teachers' Perception of School Principals' Leadership Practices

Teachers' perceptions of school principals play a critical role in shaping their job satisfaction and motivation in the educational setting. When principals are perceived as supportive, approachable, and invested in the growth of their teachers, it creates a conducive environment for professional development and, subsequently, enhances student success. Supportive school principals prioritize the well-being and professional growth of their teaching staff. They actively engage in open communication, actively listen to teachers' concerns and ideas, and offer constructive feedback and encouragement. This supportive approach fosters a sense of trust and collaboration between teachers and principals, promoting a positive school climate and enhancing overall job satisfaction among educators.

Approachable principals create an environment where teachers feel comfortable seeking guidance and sharing their experiences. Teachers who feel valued and respected by their principals are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and committed to their teaching roles.

Approachable principals also encourage open dialogue and collaboration among staff, which can lead to the exchange of best practices and innovative teaching approaches.

On the other hand, school principals with a background in business management, who focus solely on the financial aspect of the school, may inadvertently hinder educational development, teachers' instructional approaches, and students' success. A business-oriented approach that prioritizes financial outcomes over educational goals can create tension and a misalignment of priorities within the school community. When educational objectives take a backseat to financial considerations, teachers may feel undervalued and unsupported in their efforts to provide high-quality instruction. This can lead to demotivation and decreased job satisfaction among educators. Additionally, a narrow focus on financial outcomes may result in resource constraints, which can negatively impact the learning environment and limit opportunities for professional development and instructional improvement.

Teachers' perceptions of school principals significantly impact their job satisfaction and motivation. Supportive and approachable principals create a nurturing environment for professional growth and, in turn, positively influence student success. Conversely, principals who prioritize financial concerns over educational development may unintentionally hinder teachers' instructional approaches and overall student success. School leaders must prioritize an educational focus and foster a collaborative and supportive environment to empower teachers and promote the best possible learning outcomes for students.

Corruption in Education

Corruption has emerged as a pervasive challenge within the Afghan education system, exerting detrimental effects on various aspects of its functioning. One of the significant areas impacted by corruption is resource allocation, where funds earmarked for educational

development may be misappropriated or diverted for personal gain, depriving schools of much-needed resources and infrastructure. Another critical concern is the corrupt appointment of school principals, where bribery, favoritism, ethnicity, and political affiliation often supersede merit-based selection criteria. This practice compromises the quality of education as individuals may secure leadership positions based on illicit means rather than their competence and dedication to the improvement of educational standards.

The prevalence of corruption in educational institutions creates an environment of distrust, eroding public confidence in the education system. Such an atmosphere normalizes malpractices, further perpetuating corruption and undermining the integrity of educational institutions. The impact of corruption on the quality of education delivered is far-reaching. Embezzlement and mismanagement of funds hinder the provision of essential learning resources, textbooks, and infrastructure, thereby affecting students' learning experiences and outcomes.

Addressing corruption in the Afghan education system requires a multi-faceted approach. Implementing transparent and accountable systems for resource allocation, along with merit-based criteria for appointing school principals, can help curtail corruption. Encouraging civic engagement and promoting public oversight are crucial in holding corrupt practices accountable and ensuring the effective use of resources for educational development. Furthermore, fostering a culture of ethical leadership and professional integrity is instrumental in combating corruption. Training and supporting educators, administrators, and policymakers in adhering to ethical standards and principles can promote a culture of transparency and accountability within educational institutions.

Corruption poses significant challenges to the Afghan education system, affecting resource allocation, school principal appointments, and the overall quality of education

delivered. By addressing corrupt practices through transparent and accountable systems, promoting ethical leadership, and engaging the public in oversight, Afghanistan can work towards a more equitable and effective education system that truly serves the needs and aspirations of its students and communities.

Education in Crisis

Afghanistan has encountered a multitude of crises that have profoundly impacted its educational landscape. These challenges include armed conflicts, political transitions, and natural disasters, all of which have disrupted education and exacerbated existing difficulties in the country.

One significant crisis that Afghanistan has faced is armed conflicts, which have persisted for several decades. Ongoing conflicts have resulted in the destruction of educational infrastructure, displacement of families, and insecurity, rendering access to education a daunting task for many students. Schools have been targeted, and the fear of violence has led to widespread disruptions in the learning process.

Moreover, political turnovers, such as the transition from the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the Islamic Emirates of Afghanistan in late 2021, have also had a profound impact on education. The abrupt policy changes, including the complete ban on girls' education and the female workforce, have further marginalized women and girls, depriving them of their basic rights to education and participation in society.

Addressing the educational challenges in Afghanistan necessitates a comprehensive and concerted effort from the government, international organizations, and civil society. Ensuring access to quality education for all, including marginalized groups, is crucial for rebuilding and

stabilizing the nation. By prioritizing education amidst the crises, Afghanistan can pave the way

for a brighter future and foster resilience in its education system and society.

Finally, the limited research on the Afghan education system highlights several key

themes, including resource constraints, security concerns, gender disparities, and the need for

professional development. School principal leadership practices play a crucial role in addressing

these challenges. It is essential to foster collaborative and shared instructional leadership

approaches that prioritize educational goals and support teachers and students. Addressing issues

such as autocratic leadership, corruption, and maintaining discipline requires a comprehensive

and contextually sensitive approach. Amidst the ongoing challenges, the education system must

adapt and innovate to ensure access to quality education for all Afghan children, regardless of

their circumstances.

Conclusions

Leaders or those appointed to a role, leading or the activity that leaders undertake and

leadership or the relational power processes, within educational services and

organizations, have grown, rapidly as a field of practice and study in the last thirty years.

(Gunter, 2016, p. 5)

School Principals Leadership Practices

Afghan school principals' leadership practices were at their earliest stage of development

between 2001 and 2021 as the SPLPs was evolving from an autocratic leadership approach to

more democratic forms of leadership. School principals and vice-principals had formal

leadership authority, but parents, teachers, and students were able to provide leadership to some

extent and had some capacity to ensure student success (Leithwood et al., 2019). Greater

demands have been made on school principals' leadership practices. Based on school principals' official job description, practices such as setting a school's goal, objective, mission, and vision are not explicitly added, but the school principal's job description includes an article that gives school principals instructional leadership power, but the Afghan school principals believe that teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcome are not part of their responsibility. For them, the teachers, students, and their parents themselves are responsible for students' learning outcomes.

Though, it became evident that school principals perform their leadership practices based on their experiences and capacities. Therefore, school principals' leadership practices, teachers' teaching practices, and students' achievements differ between and among schools. While I agree with the statement that "no two regions, school districts, or schools are exactly alike; nor are their achievement goals or leadership challenges" (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 3), in the Afghan context, the lack of a school leadership framework adds to the complexities of Afghan SPLPs.

I want to reiterate that school principals have an important leadership role. They can hold the entire school community responsible and accountable for achieving success and providing access to quality education while providing direct support to the assistant principal, head teachers, teachers, and students. I argue that only the most dynamic and professionally capable school principals who share school leadership purposefully can lead schools successfully under the diversified, conflict related, and challenging conditions of Afghanistan. To do so, of necessity they require a thorough contextual, geographical, cultural, political, economic, historical, and educational awareness of the context in which they serve. I realise that "[l]eader's skills change over time; the internal dynamics of staff change over time; and building trust with

staff takes time" (Ontario Leadership Framework, 2013, p. 6) and that these are a normal part of the evolutionary process of educational institutions and systems. However, when governments are overturned as has happened yet again in Afghanistan, the entire infrastructure of the education system is disrupted. Once again, the education system is facing precarity under the Taliban regime as the entire teaching staff is forced to adapt to the Taliban's educational approaches against their will and now all girls are deprived of education and all women, including teachers, are deprived of their rights to work and contribute to the economy.

Schools being a small administrative unit within each district and province, it is clear that the role of school principals mimics the dominant discourse of leadership at the national level. For instance, if the government is based on democratic principles, schools follow similar ones. If the government is a dictatorship, so are schools. If the government is corrupt, corruption at the school level is inevitable.

In Afghanistan now girls' education beyond grade six is banned, as I have already emphasised. Given that schools follow the ruling government's autocratic directives, people cannot stand against this decision and demonstrate. Although in defiance of this, some people did demonstrate on the streets in asking for their basic and fundamental rights, all the while risking their lives, but nothing changed, yet they faced consequences for asking their basic rights.

Schoolteachers Need Principals' Care and Support

Schoolteachers are among the primary stakeholders in any school context. They can play a significant role in supporting school principals to help them achieve the school's goals and objectives, thereby contributing to student success. For instance, one of the key indicators of students' success is their graduation from grade 12 and gaining admission to a university. To

attain this goal, school principals can collaborate closely with teachers to enhance the quality of instruction.

Furthermore, school principals should effectively communicate their plans, policies, and approaches to both teachers and students, fostering a shared commitment to achieving students' success. However, for this collaboration to succeed, principals need to possess strong communication skills. When the school principal can professionally communicate with their colleagues, it facilitates the proper implementation of the school's plans. Additionally, teachers will feel valued, respected, and included in the decision-making process, recognizing their importance in the successful execution of the school's strategy.

Likewise, when students are informed about the concerted efforts of schoolteachers and school leadership in ensuring their success, they are more likely to channel their own efforts toward achieving success.

If a school principal identifies the school's strengths in relation to its challenges and effectively utilizes available resources, it can significantly enhance teachers' instructional practices and improve student learning outcomes. This, in turn, will lead to the achievement of the school's goals and the resolution of its challenges. Teachers, as attentive observers of school principals, analyze their behavior and assess their attitudes towards both themselves and their students. Consequently, principals should maintain constant awareness of this dynamic and actively foster mutual respect between themselves and their teaching staff.

Furthermore, schoolteachers expect school principals to exhibit a caring attitude not only towards them but also towards the students and the school as a whole. According to Quay & Noddings (2018), caring is the foundation of pedagogical activity in education. Some educators, like Ahmad, Mahmood, and Kabir, explicitly stated that they enjoyed teaching in schools where

the principal demonstrated care for both teachers and students. This care translated into heightened interest and involvement in the teaching and learning process, ultimately striving for student success. According to teacher Ahmad, 'When we felt cared for, we were motivated to care for our students as well.'

I firmly believe that when school principals are genuinely invested in their roles and responsibilities, it naturally extends to caring for the well-being of both teachers and students. Conversely, when school principals do not prioritize students' learning outcomes and teachers' instructional practices, it weakens the overall school environment. On the other hand, if school principals actively engage in supporting teachers to improve instructional practices for the sake of achieving student success, the entire school will thrive in accomplishing its goals and objectives.

Turbulent Contemporary Education System in Afghanistan

Over the last few decades Afghanistan has experienced some of the most violent, destructive, and dreadful periods of its history (Spink, 2005). Education has been used as a tool to impose dominant political ideals on the people of this country. Monarchs were in power until 1973 and the education system promoted loyalty to the king. Then the communist regime took over the country in 1978 and remained in power until 1989; this brought in a completely new educational curriculum with new ways of learning and teaching that promoted the Russian language and communist ideologies. This era was followed by the Jihadist movement when the traditionalist conservative believed that the introduced the notion of communism is to stand against the culture and religion of Islam.

In this period extremist ideologies were promoted at the schools throughout the country to fight against foreign interventions and their ideologies. In other words, insurgency was

promoted through the curriculum. For example, in mathematics the concept of addition was taught by explaining that two guns plus two guns equals four guns (Deo, 2014; Samady, 2001a). The communist ideology was severely challenged, and the country experienced many insurgencies. All this resulted in the destruction of the education system setup by the communist regime.

The Russian-led education system was destroyed, including the school buildings. Afghanistan was led by Mujahidin from 1989 to 1996 and there was a widespread civil war fought by major ethnic groups. All these events caused the destruction of the education system. For example, in most places, school building skeletons existed but there was no education, there were students, but no teachers, there was a school, but it had no roof, window, chair, or blackboard and, where there were schools, each class held over 100 students from grades 1 to 12. It was a disaster but worse was yet to come. From 1996 to 2001 Afghanistan experienced its darkest time during the first round of the Taliban regime. They banned girls' education, and the curricula of boys' schools were changed. During this period, the curriculum become even more extremist. For example, in the first grade at school, the first thing that students would learn was A is for Allah, G is for Guns, and J is for Jihad[10].

In the past 150 years, with the rapid chang[ing] of each regime over a relatively short period of time, the former education system would be repealed and replaced by a new system of education that would serve the new ruler's political agenda and interests.

This caused the school principals to constantly adopt and adapt to new programs, policies, and curricula. From 2001 to 2021 Afghanistan was led by a democratically elected government.

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[10] Jihad is considered a holy war against disbelievers.

Primarily, from 2001 to 2004, there was a recovery period that allowed Afghanistan to catch its breath. Prior to 2004, the Afghan education system was centralized with a non-democratic approach and a single curriculum, lecture method teaching, was used across the country from K to 12. Teachers were at the center of the teaching and learning activity and students were thought of as empty vessels that needed to be filled with the teachers' knowledge. Authoritative leadership practices were perpetrated: students submitted to their teachers and their teachers submitted to the school principal. However, the paradigm was slowly shift[ing] from a strictly totalitarian leadership practice to a more democratic one. School leaders slowly changed their fundamental belief about the nature of leading an educational institution and about how to gain new knowledge about new ways of leading an educational institution to lead schools and achieve student learning outcomes effectively.

In this changing context, the voices of students, teachers, and parents began to be heard through parent teacher meetings and parents could decide between enrolling their children in public or private schools. Prior to 2004, corporal punishment was validated by parents and practiced by teachers and school principals, but this culture was slowly changing as the focus shifted from teacher centred to student centered education.

The broader paradigm or the dominant discourse was shifting from an autocratic form of leadership to a more democratic form. Instead of a single reality being seen as acceptable at the schools, different realities were beginning to be appreciated. These changes were grounded in the constitution of Afghanistan. The curriculum was being modernized with the inclusion of civic education, environmental science, physical education, and technological education. A Science Olympiad between schools was set up to encourage groups of students to create their prototypes and present them in competition with local and foreign schools.

However, post 2021, Afghanistan has once again returned to a darkest era. The Taliban took control of this geographic region and the first thing they did was ban girls' education, deprive them of their fundamental rights to education, and force them to remain at home. The school principals and head teachers have no choice but to obey. It is believed that the curriculum will change to the one that was taught during the first round of the Taliban regime (1996–2001) with its extremist content. However, it did not change yet (Nov, 2023).

Discipline in Schools

"Discipline is the practice of making people obey rules or standards of behavior and punishing them when they do not" according to the Collins online dictionary. Discipline is one of Afghan schools' short-term goals but of highest priority to school principals, head teachers, teachers, and members of the discipline committee. In the Afghan schools, maintaining discipline means that students must follow all the rules and regulations. As I have outlined, from the moment they enter the school, they have to maintain discipline and keep this up during the morning assembly, the line-ups to their classroom, and once they are in their classrooms, they must stay on their own chairs until all the periods are finished. The only exception is going out for physical education classes, to laboratories, and for washroom breaks. During the class they may not make any noise or disturb others.

According to a study conducted at schools in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Macao, and Taipei it was found that "where the disciplinary climate of schools was relatively strict, [there] were top performers in mathematics" (Ning, 2018, p. 489). Similarly, in Afghan schools, it was evident that in schools with better discipline students' success at the national entrance exam to the university was greater compared to those with discipline issues.

As outlined above, Afghan schools follow certain procedures to deal with disciplinary issues in schools. Starting with the individual student's consultation with the teacher, then with the school principal, followed by a meeting with the student's parents, and finally, if none of these processes and procedure work, with a committee formed to take a decision about the student based on the generic rules and regulations, this process usually results in the student's suspension from the school. This has a long-lasting effect on their personal, familial, and community reputation. But if the school principal is thoroughly engaged with her/his school and knows her/his students and teachers well, practices quality leadership with teacher- and student-centered approaches, this would create a culture of trust and understanding in the school community and discipline would unlikely be an issue at all.

Corruption in Education

According to Collins online dictionary, "Corruption is dishonesty and illegal behaviour by people in positions of authority or power." In the context of Afghanistan, there has long been a history of corruption in the education system. As mentioned earlier, parents who did not wanted to send their children to school would bribe the officials to provide a letter of exemption. If students wanted to get higher grades in the exams, they would bribe their teachers. If teachers wanted to get their paychecks, they would bribe an official to obtain them, and if a school principal or teacher wanted to get hired, they would bribe their way into the position.

Corruption adds significantly to the complexities of an education system in developing contexts. While many efforts are needed to improve access to, and quality of, education, as much as greater access to education is provided, so are fewer checks and balances followed. In post conflict contexts, there is a lack of educational experts, proper infrastructure, resources, and leadership capacity to ensure the successful completion of projects and programs. Therefore, the

system falls victim to widespread corruption and this, in turn, weakens the already fragile system of education.

After the first round of the Taliban regime, the Government of Afghanistan sought to improve the quality of life of its people through economic development, trade, the fight against corruption, the establishment of a public service commission to attract highly qualified personnel to government offices and improving access to quality education (World Economic Forum, President Ashraf Ghani's Interview, 2020). All these efforts were made to align Afghan institutional practices with the rest of the world and educate students to respond to the needs of Afghanistan's future. However, these efforts were not enough to stabilize the country and maintain a strong government; one of the main reasons was widespread corruption. According to Heyneman (2004),

> A school system, which is free of corruption, is charactered by the following: equality of access to educational opportunity, fairness in the distribution of educational curricula and martials, fairness in accreditation in which all institutions are judged by professional standards equally applied and open to public scrutiny, fairness in the acquisition of educational goods and services, balance and generosity in curricular treatment of cultural minorities and geographical neighbors, maintenance of professional standards of conduct by those who administer educational institutions and who teach in them, whether public or private. (p. 638)

Afghanistan, in being one of most corrupt countries in the world, has seen its education system suffer significantly in different periods. During the second round of Taliban rule, as was the case in the first round (1996–2001), there is no equality of access to education for boys and girls. There is no system setup for the distribution of educational curricula and materials and

there is no system of accreditation. Education in general lacks any kind of standard and is not open to public scrutiny. In other words, there is no such a thing as the acquisition of educational goods and services and this extremist group deprives minorities of their basic and fundamental rights to education. There is no maintenance of professional standards of conduct by the Taliban educational administrators, so many capable teachers including those who have been fired by the Taliban, have emigrated to other countries.

Between, 2001 to 2021, School principals' leadership practices have shown some progress towards modernization and standardization, but the country still lacks political will to improve the access and quality of education. As I have explained, there is a direct correlation between corruption in a political system and in the corresponding education system. Countries with less corruption have significantly improved their education system (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2021; Ng & Pun, 2013; Sumintono et al., 2015). Countries with more corruption lag in terms of improvement in their education system.

Education in Crisis

The modern education system in Afghanistan has faced many crises since its establishment, as I have pointed out in the literature review section. "Civil war has a debilitating impact on a country's education system both in terms of decimating educational infrastructure and teaching workforce as well as cuts in educational spending as the military budget increases" (Pherali & Sahar, 2018, p. 240). War, in general, destroys socio-economic, physical, and government systems and infrastructures. Therefore, continuous war and instability keeps an education system at its most basic form and prevents any advancement to a level where there is detailed and specialized research aimed at improvements in school and education systems.

Most recently, between 2001 and 2021, according to Pherali & Sahar (2018) "Afghanistan's education is caught in the nexus between deteriorating security condition, weak governance and widespread corruption, resulting in the rebel capture of educational spaces for radicalisation and violent extremism" (p. 239). Currently, the Afghan education system is in crisis compounded with extremism that has led to the destruction of educational infrastructures developed over the course of two decades.

For school principals situated in this context of war, the fear of an unknown future, the lack of students interested in studying, the lack of teachers' interested in teaching, the lack of economic stability, the lack of quality education programs for in-service teachers and administrators, and the lack of resources available to them incapacitates them to lead their schools in an appropriate manner and this leads, in turn, to a crisis in education.

Research Journey

My interest in exploring educational leadership at schools developed as I observed the differences between my school principal when I was a high school student, One of the school principal who left the school and emigrated to Germany with his family, and a new principal took over the leadership role at our school. As a student, I could see the difference between how the school used to be and how it changed over time. Everyone at school talked about how our previous school principal was engaged in all aspect of student development including the academic, and the extra-curricular activities and how he checked periodically on the teachers' teaching and on the students' progress and achievement. At the morning assembly, he always communicated the school's vision, mission, goals, and objectives, and his expectation of students, teachers, and parents.

Annually, when 12 grade students graduated, he followed closely on the number of students who had been accepted into different faculties at the universities in Kabul and he passed on this information to the current students to give them a sense of what the future could hold for them in relation to enrolling in the faculty of their choice. He wanted us to have an inclusive school in which all students' needs were met by high-quality teaching that resulted in high levels of achievement by students in the national entrance exam to university.

The school principal included the head teachers, teachers, students, school support staff, and parents and kept them accountable to fulfil their assigned roles and responsibilities. The sense of being part of such a school community gave us reason to be very proud of our school. In terms of the physical environment when one entered the school, it was welcoming. One could tell that the school was well maintained.

When this principal left the school, things were not the same. It seemed as though everything fell apart, and the most obvious example was the physical environment that deteriorated very quickly. Students and teachers started to lose interest in their responsibilities because no one was holding them accountable for their learning and teaching practices. Morning assemblies were no longer held, no vision, mission, goals, or objective were communicated, and everyone started to work in silos. This situation aroused my interest in the significance of principals' roles, responsibilities, and school principal's leadership practices, that could change the fate of an entire school (for better or worse). I felt that the fate of an entire nation could be decided by the principles behind good school principal's leadership practices.

Therefore, it became important for me to explore the role of Afghan school principals in the facilitation of teachers to improve their instructional methods and help students achieve success. After exploring the relevant literature and findings from this research on SPLPs, it

became evident to me that the school principal's role is central to practice, and, therefore, to

research and policy in different nations around the world. It became vital to understand the

significance of SPLPs in teaching and learning, and how their implementation can help

schoolteachers improve student learning outcome, achievement, and success.

The purpose of my doctoral research was to understand the notion of SPLPs and

investigate how school principals can use their leadership skills and knowledge to enhance the

quality of teaching and learning for all school's stakeholders to participate in the process of

leadership for learning. I believe that school principals can play a significant role in improving

teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes if they have educational leadership

competencies, if they are provided with student counsellors, psychologists, therapists, and other

experts to support them, if they are aware of guide students for the what the future holds for each

student that will help improve their quality of life, and, finally, if the ruling government and

regime allows them to do so. School principals could do wonders to help improve the quality of

education with proper vision, missions, goals, and objectives.

Recommendations

In this section, I offer recommendations to different levels of Afghan Education system.

Starting from the Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, Provincial and District

Education Directorates, Policy makers and schools.

Recommendations: Ministry of Higher Education

A dire need for school principals with educational leadership expertise exists.

The establishment of programs of studies at the university level to equip school principals with

all the competencies and leadership approaches required of a school principal, is of highest

priority. The program of studies must be at master's and PhD level. School principals need to

hold professional certification or licence to practice. Once hired as school principals, they need to keep up to date with all the education developments in the country, region, and the world.

Close collaboration between the MoE and the faculty of education is needed to ensure that qualified teachers and school leaders are trained to the highest standards. Additionally, contextualized teaching methodologies need to be included in Faculty of Education curricula and each school needs to collaborate closely with these faculties and vis versa so that pre-service teachers has a school to do their teaching practicums in a established school.

- Pre-service teachers need to have access to schools to practice their teaching.

- Educational leadership pre-service students need to complete their practical work with an experienced school principal.

- The school principal needs to sign off for the credit achieved during students' practical work at school.

- The school principal must keep abreast of technological advancement to ensure students are prepared for the future workforce.

Currently the Afghan high schools do not have student support workers such as child psychologists, social workers, and career counsellors. This support team needs to be put into place so that school principals can take more responsibility for the students' achievement and their learning outcomes. Additionally, each school needs a counsellor or psychologist to ensure that students, teachers, and administrators are in good mental health.

All school principals need to be fully responsible for teachers' instructional approaches and students' learning outcomes and should use all the resources at their disposal towards the common goal of student success. There is a need for occupational therapists and pedagogical

advisors, as well as physiological, psychoeducational, psychological, and mental health specialists to support school leadership and ensure that students reach their full potential.

Recommendations: Ministry of Education

Furthermore, all in-service school principals should attend a full day course of educational leadership once a week; courses must include theoretical and practical educational leadership approaches. During the principal's absence while attending school leadership seminars, the vice-principal academic needs to take full responsibility for the school. The vice-principal academic must attend an education leadership course once a week for a full day to learn about the theoretical and practical aspect of school leadership to further strengthen teachers' quality of instruction and students' learning outcomes.

Additionally, there is a need for a thorough computerized/digital check and balance system to monitor students', teachers', and administrators' attendance/absenteeism. If there is evidence of lateness and/or unexplained absenteeism in a given academic year, teachers and administrators should not be allowed to continue at the school if a legitimate reason for absenteeism is not given.

Education Policy Makers

There is a need for a thorough, grounded, and contextualized school principal's job description. Practices such as the provision of leadership at the school, being accountable for the internal affairs of the school, supporting teachers' instructional approaches, and helping students to achieve their full potential must be established based on the literature review of the successful school principal's instructional leadership practices (Qian et at., 2017) and (Leithwood, 2018). A hybrid of Eastern and Western versions of successful school principals' instructional leadership practices to help Afghan school principals to refocus their efforts to manage and maintain an

effective school in facilitating teachers' instructional approaches to improve students learning outcomes could be developed.

Similarly, there is a dire need to ensure that policy makers strengthen education policies that will hold school principals accountable for their role as educational leaders in terms of supervision, and instructional support for teachers, and ensuring their contribution to students' achievement and success. Below, I offer a mix of eastern and western version of Instructional leadership model that could help Afghan school principals to improve their leadership practices.

A hybrid of Eastern and Western Model of Instructional Leadership could prove to be beneficial in the Afghan context.

- ❖ Set direction and define purpose.

    - o Build a shared vision.

    - o Model the school's values and practices.

    - o Identify specific, shared, short-term goals.

    - o Communicate school goals and plans.

- ❖ Evaluate and monitor instruction.

    - o Staff the instructional program.

    - o Supervise and evaluate instruction.

    - o Provide instructional support.

    - o Monitor student learning.

    - o Buffer staff from distractions to their instructional work

- ❖ Build relationships.

    - o Nurture positive and collaborative relationship with and among teachers, students, parents, and community.

- o Increase parental involvement and community support.

- o Provide support and demonstrate consideration for individual staff members.

- o Build partnerships with other schools.

❖ Foster professional development to enhance teachers' capacities.

- o Support research-led professional development.

- o Stimulate growth in the professional capacities of staff.

- o Seek instructional support from outside the school.

❖ Develop the school to support desired practices.

- o Build a collaborative culture and distribute leadership.

- o Build the school to facilitate collaboration.

- o Allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals.

- o Create high-performance expectation.

- o Maintain a safe and healthy school environment.

❖ Secure accountability

- o Build staff members' sense of internal accountability.

- o Meet the demands of external accountability.

- o Maintain policy connection with district supervisors.

In addition to a thorough and contextualized job description, the MoE needs to hold the school principals accountable for their practices including the facilitation of teachers' instructional approaches and students' learning outcomes. In greater detail, Afghan school principals' leadership practices could be improved and school principals in Afghanistan could lead their schools effectively by following these key steps.

1. Set clear goals and expectations: A school principal must set clear goals and expectations for their school, staff, and students. These goals should be achievable, measurable, and aligned with the overall mission and vision of the school.

2. Build a positive school culture: A positive school culture is critical for creating a supportive learning environment. The school principal must create a culture that fosters mutual respect, trust, and collaboration among students, teachers, and staff.

3. Develop a strong instructional program: A school principal must focus on the development of a strong instructional program that meets the needs of all students. This program should be grounded in research-based practices and designed to promote student achievement.

4. Invest in teacher professional development: A school principal must invest in the professional development of their teachers. Providing ongoing training and support can help teachers improve their teaching practices, which will benefit the students.

5. Use data to inform decision-making: A school principal must use data to inform decision-making at all levels. This includes using data to identify student learning needs, assess the effectiveness of instructional programs, and evaluate the performance of staff.

6. Engage with parents and community members: A school principal must engage with parents and community member to build a strong partnership. This partnership can help to create a positive school culture, promote student learning, and support the school's overall mission.

7. Foster a safe and secure learning environment: A school principal must prioritize the safety and security of their students and staff from external and internal threats. This

includes developing and implementing policies and procedures to address safety concerns and ensuring that the school is a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students.

8. Communicate effectively: A school principal must be an effective communicator. They should communicate regularly with teachers, staff, parents, and students to build trust and promote transparency.

9. Manage resource effectively: A school principal must manage resources effectively, including the school's budget, facilities, and materials. They should prioritize investments in resources that directly support student learning.

10. Encourage innovation and creativity: A school principal should encourage innovation and creativity among their staff and students. This can help to promote new teaching practices, foster a culture of learning, and inspire students to explore new ideas and concepts.

11. Foster leadership skills among staff: A school principal should foster leadership skills and encourage staff to take on leadership roles that can help build a strong team and promote a culture of collaboration and continual improvement.

12. Stay informed about education policy: A school principal must stay informed about education policy changes and updates. This can help them adapt their school's programs and practices to meet new standards and requirements.

13. Celebrate achievements: A school principal should celebrate the achievement of their staff and students. Recognizing and rewarding progress and success can help to build morale and motivate students and staff to continue to strive for excellence.

14. Develop a systemic school improvement plan: A school principal should develop a comprehensive school improvement plan that outlines the school's goals, strategies, and

resources. This plan should be regularly reviewed and updated to ensure that it remains relevant and effective.

15. Foster a culture of continual improvement: A school principal should foster a culture of continual improvement among their staff and students. Encouraging staff and students to reflect on their performance and identify areas for growth can help to promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

16. Build strong partnerships with other schools and organizations: A school principal should build strong partnerships with other schools and organizations to share best practices, resources, and ideas, collaborating with other schools and organizations can help to promote innovation and improve student outcomes.

17. Provide support for students with special needs: A school principal should ensure that students with special needs receive the support they need to succeed. This includes providing accommodation, support services, and specialized instruction as needed.

18. Promote parental environment: A school principal should promote parental involvement in the school. Encouraging parents to participate in school activities and events can help to build strong partnership between the school and the community.

19. Address students' behavior and discipline: A school principal should have clear policies and procedures for addressing student behavior and discipline issues. This includes providing support and resources for students who are struggling with behavioral issues and promoting positive behaviors through school-wide programs and initiatives.

20. Embrace technology: A school principal should embrace technology and leverage it to improve teaching and learning. This includes providing access to digital resources and tools promoting online learning and integrating technology into classroom instruction.

Effective school leadership requires a multifaceted approach that encompasses many different skills and strategies. By following these tips, school principals in Afghanistan can lead their schools effectively and help to provide their students with a high-quality education.

District and Provincial Education Directorates

There is a need for continual professional development for school leaders including school principals, deputy academics, head teachers, head of departments, and teachers. Additionally, there is a need to professionalize the schoolteachers' profession. Each teacher needs to have a valid provincial teaching licence to be able to teach, hold at least a bachelor's degree, carry out extensive pre-service teaching practice and observation of experienced teachers during the practical period of their studies, and do research in their area of expertise to stay up to date with recent developments in their fields.

Furthermore, each teaching staff member needs to renew their teaching certification online and pay a fee every three years to maintain their teaching certification. All the initial teaching certificates must be authorized and maintained by an Afghan Independent Teachers Accreditation Agency (AITAA). There has never been such an institution established before, but it could significantly help to regulate the teachers' profession.

The teachers as professionals also need moral support from the school principals to perform best at the school; according to teacher Ahmad, it also boosts their confidence in the school, and it helps students achieve. Furthermore, it helps to better the mental state of teachers and students. And finally, there are many subjects at the schools that grade 10, 11, and 12 need to master before they are admitted to the University. For instance, currently, grade 10, 11, and 12 students have many general subjects to study, and it is a waste of resources and their time for

them to master all these subjects in these grades. Students need to be able to choose their areas of specialization and dive deeply into the subject beyond grade 9, rather than having 14 subjects in grade 10, 13 subjects in grade 11, and 13 subjects in grade 12.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a need for many more research projects to be undertaken in the field of education to explore what can be done to improve school principals' leadership practices, teachers' teaching practices, and the achievement of students' learning outcomes. Since girls and women are a significant part of our society, research should be undertaken to allow them to take part in the social, cultural, scientific, and economic development of the country.

Large-scale and mixed-method versions of this study are needed if we are to better understand the school principals' evolving role and discover what could be done to contextually improve their leadership practices, and to facilitate school principals to improve teachers' teaching quality and achieve desirable students' learning outcomes. Additionally, an in-depth study of MoE policy is needed to help contextualize school principals' leadership practices and ensure that school principals are held accountable for the instructional aspects of the school.

Contribution to Current Areas of Research

In the past 150 years, the evolving role of Afghan school principals showed a pattern of one step forward and two step backwards based political maneuvers and changes in the form of governments and regimes. While the governments were changing it was also evident that schools as a small administrative unit of that government followed the leadership patterns and practices as prescribed by the central government. Though, generally the Afghan school principals believed that their role and responsibility entail just the administrative tasks at the school, as

elaborated by school principals Karim and Ali. Particularly when asked about school principals'

role in achieving students' success, they responded that it is the sole responsibility of students

and their families who support them to achieve. Although, it is mentioned in the school

principals' job description. The school job description asserts that:

- Based on education law, policies, rules, and regulation, and programs of the ministry of

  education [principals are responsible for]

  - observing teaching methods.

  - evaluating, and invigilating exams.

  - ensuring the implementation of the curriculum.

  - improving the quality of teaching and learning.

These are the responsibilities of school principals based on their job description.

Additionally, based on the literature review and its syntheses in findings and recommendations

two models of instructional leadership and management that could complement each other and

might prove to be helpful in the context of Afghanistan to help school principals recognize their

role and responsibility as instructional leaders is laid out.

This research has highlighted the importance of school principals' leadership practices

and that their leadership has an impact on teachers' teaching practices and student learning

outcomes. Generally, in a large public school, there are three to four thousand students enrolled,

their increased responsibility must be met. Since each school principal is entrusted with the great

role and responsibility of leading an educational institution, they have a serious responsibility,

and their practice must be nothing short of perfection.

Additionally, this research project could help policy makers focus on the importance of

the school principal's role and responsibility and ensure that teachers' instructional quality is

maintained, and students' success is achieved by officially making school principals accountable

for all the school's educational outcomes.

Finally, this research study adds to the existing literature on the role of school principals'

and students' success in schools in developing contexts.

Conclusion

In this research study, I explored the evolving role of Afghan school principals' leadership practices and how they could facilitate schoolteachers to improve their instructional approaches and achieve students' learning outcomes. It is evident that school principals generally focus on administrative aspects of the school and do not make much effort to improve teachers' teaching practices and students' learning outcomes. Their leadership styles generally follow the dominant discourse of leadership as explained above.

Afghan school principals need to realize that their role encompasses more than just completing administrative tasks and maintaining discipline at the school. I want to reiterate that while these are important, students' learning outcomes form the core responsibility of an educational institution.

School principals' personal leadership approaches may significantly differ from one to another because there is no program of studies that could help school principals learn about the school leadership competencies and leadership approaches that could synchronize, standardize, and professionalize their leadership approaches in the developing context of Afghanistan.

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