

Challenges of Online Learning in Kandahar City, Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing need for online education in Afghanistan and especially in Kandahar city, unfortunately this form of learning has not been well developed here. The findings show that online learning, in addition to growing needs and opportunities, faces many challenges in Afghanistan, especially in Kandahar city. In this context, this research has been done to investigate the fundamental factors challenging online learning in Kandahar city. Keeping in mind the previous studies, in order to achieve the goals of this research, a purposeful sampling method was used to find and analyze the key issues raised, and as a result, the basic problems facing online learning in Kandahar city were investigated as much as possible. In the following, the necessary suggestions are also presented so that, by implementing it, the relevant practitioners and policy makers will solve the existing problems and provide the basis for sustainable and all-round development of Kandahar city, Afghanistan and the region.

KEYWORDS

educational systems; factors challenging online learning; female education; Kandahar City-Afghanistan.



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INTRODUCTION

Online education, includes technology-based learning, blended learning, distance learning, and online learning. E-learning is "the delivery of content through all electronic media, including the Internet, satellite broadcasts, audio/video tapes, interactive television, and CDs" (Khalid, 2020). E-learning since the 1990s emerged in different countries and was considered a revolution in terms of access and flexibility in education worldwide (Khalid, 2020). With the emergence of new technology-especially educational information and communication technology, e-learning has become an important option. It has been used in all educational levels from school to graduate programs (Khalid, 2020).

The people of Afghanistan who have recently gained relative access to the Internet and social media have also turned to online education up to some extent, which includes schools and universities at different levels. Also, online education in Afghanistan includes formal and informal educational sectors.

In addition to the opportunities to promote online education, it faces with many problems in Afghanistan, especially in the city of Kandahar. This is mainly because this country lacks even the necessary ICT infrastructure, as well as the lack of necessary skills

of teachers and students in using information technology (Hanafiah, & Aziz, 2022; Huang, 1997); Mahboobi, 2021; Iariqi, Najafi, Abdulrab, Murray, & Slimanzai, 2019; Mahdi & Wani 2021) Also, infrastructural problems such as lack of regular electricity supply, low-speed internet, Limited access to ICT tools and lack of computer lab, are also apart of challenging factors faced with online learning in Afghanistan (Rahim, & Sandaran, 2020; Jindal and Chahal, 2018).

In addition to infrastructural problems and inappropriate resources in online education in Afghanistan, the use of old teaching methods by professors and teachers has challenged the increasing changes in the quantitative and qualitative advancement of online education in this country (Frough, 2019).

Finally, it should be mentioned that the social problems faced by online learners in Afghanistan, are also a big challenge in this context, especially for girl students. Because they are more concerned with gender attitudes, poverty, early marriage, insecurity, lack of educational facilities, and other problems in the field of education. In few cases, girls have to get permission from their parents or other male family members to use the internet. Multiple household responsibilities also put too much pressure on female students to attend online classes (Sofizada, 2022).

In this article, the problems facing online learning in Kandahar city have been investigated and researched to some extent. The findings and results of this research would help the policy makers in public and private educational sectors to plan and act accordingly and appropriately to solve these problems by understanding and identifying the various aspects of them and to make the field of education healthy, accessible, and effective for all children in the city of Kandahar and Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online education, as an effective way to implement and advance educational programs at the global level, Afghanistan, especially in the city of Kandahar, is facing various opportunities and problems that have attracted the attention of many scientists and researchers. Here is some of the latest relevant research specifically reviewed:

The most important opportunities that encourage students to pursue online education are that it is fast, continuous, repeatable at any time and any place (Frough, 2019), which also, at the same time it provides many flexibilities for learners and instructors like learning, interaction, and expression (Stephani, Alvin, & Riatun, 2023) and students can more easily become professionals in their personal and social lives by raising their academic and skill capacities.

In addition, the low cost of online education, the ease of completing training courses, the initiative by the government, the recognition of the employer, and filling the gap of long-term closures of face-to-face courses (Jindal, & Chahal, 2018) are among the important advantages of online education.

Afghanistan's people, who have recently gained relative access to the Internet and social medias, use from these facilities in online learning (Noori, Orfan, Akramy, & Hashemi, 2022). Previous findings show that "Google Classroom is the most LMS, WhatsApp is the most mobile instant messaging, Gmail is the most email server, and Skype is the most Cloud-based video conferencing program in e-learning in most public universities in Afghanistan" (Musawi, & Baktash, 2021).

In addition to the opportunities that exist to promote and optimize online education, serious problems also affect its expansion, quality, and effectiveness. For example: Internet addiction is one of the most important problems that have negative educational (reduced academic performance), medical (reduced mental health, reduced general resistance to

stress, risk of depression), and social (reduced quality and quantity of social contacts) results. " (Alwaely, Minnullina, Fedorova, & Lazareva, 2023). Also, online education makes students solitary and passive in social interactions (Mohammad Zadeh, Prendergast, Tew, & Beneroso-Vallejo, 2023; Stone, 2019).

One of the important problems facing online education, especially in backward countries such as Afghanistan, is the lack or even the absence of the necessary ICT infrastructure, as well as the lack of necessary skills of teachers and students in using information technology (Hanafiah, & Aziz, 2022; Huang, 1997; Mahboobi, 2021; Iariki, Najafi, Abdulrab, Murray, & Slimanzai, 2019; Mahdi & Wani 2021).

For example, Frough, (2019) found that lack of information technology facilities, lack of leadership support, lack of sufficient internet, and lack of committed students are among the important factors of teachers' failure to effectively promote online education in Afghanistan. Also, infrastructural problems such as lack of regular electricity supply, low-speed internet, limited access to ICT tools, and lack of computer labs challenge online learning in this country (Rahim, & Sandaran, 2020; Jindal, & Chahal, 2018). In Afghanistan, as the evidence shows that more than 3/4 of professors and students in this country did not have access to information and communication technology and e-learning tools in their universities (Oryakhail, Saay, & Nasery, 2021). Studies also show that many students in this country face the problem of unreliable internet connections and lack of necessary electronic devices (Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020; Samala, Marta, Anori, & Indarta, 2022).

Of course, it should be remembered that the weak infrastructure and inappropriate facilities in the online education sector are rooted in the weak economy and intentions of parents, which has made both the government and families unable to provide the necessary equipment and facilities for online education in this country (Mahdi, & Wani, 2021).

In addition to infrastructural problems and inappropriate resources in online education, deep concern about the use of old educational methods and the lack of compliance and resistance of professors to the ever-increasing changes in the quantitative and qualitative advancement of online education, which have a destructive effect on its effectiveness, are also documented in several research (Frough, 2019). As in another research by Quinn, (2022), one of the important problems in online education in this country, is the resistance of teachers to change the approach and new commitments to advance online education, which includes reformulation and adjustment of lessons in different formats, such as discussions, tests, collaborative problem solving and discovery learning. More importantly the lack of necessary skills of professors and Teachers to use EdTech in teaching and online education is considered one of the major problems in Afghanistan (Sofizada, 2022; Oryakhail, Saay, & Nasery, 2021).

In this regard, the findings of Syafii, & Retnawati, (2022) show that complicating the lesson process and not presenting it attractively with expressive and eloquent language, the problems of student-teacher interaction in the online education process, the lack of communication between teachers and Students' parents in the context of their education as well as giving homework with unclear instructions are among the major problems related to teachers in promoting effective online education process in Afghanistan. Also, other similar findings show that the challenge of online education in this country are mainly related to the lack of digital skills of teachers and learners, the lack of structured content in contrast to the abundance of online resources, the lack of interaction and motivation of learners, and the lack of social and cognitive presence of teachers (constructive ability) (Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020). Findings of other research in Afghanistan have also shown "that most students were not satisfied with distance education because learners

could not learn from online education compared to traditional classrooms, students did not have access to Internet-based learning through computers or smartphones, and Online learning did not enable students to learn independently" (HimatTakal, & Hakimi, 2021). In addition, in this type of education, by not doing research-based exercises, students are less thinking and creative (Gorman, & Hall, 2023)) and thus obtain more unfavorable results.

One of the important problems facing online education in less developed countries is social problems, which are "mainly due to the lack of human interaction between teachers and students, the lack of physical spaces at home to receive lessons and the lack of support from parents " (Ferri, Grifoni, & Guzzo, 2020). Also, in another study, the inflexibility of students and teachers, the challenge of interpersonal communication in settings a variety of online learning processes have been documented (Mayer, 2023). In addition, addressing social inequalities to create an inclusive learning environment) (Hakimi, Fazil, Khaliqyar, Quchi, & Sajid, 2024), which provides the basis for effective online education for all students, regardless of their gender and social status, is considered one of the most important problems facing online education in Afghanistan. Considering that low motivation and an unsupportive environment, (Samala, Marta, Anori, & Indarta, 2022) Especially in the field of online education, it will cause individual and social backwardness of today's and tomorrow's generations in Afghanistan.

Another important issue that has been documented regarding online education in Afghanistan is the lack of technical facilities and educational resources for higher education, especially for girl students. Because they are more prone to gender attitudes, poverty, early marriage, insecurity, lack of educational facilities, and other problems in the field of education, (Ahmadi, 2022). Study shows in another similar research that specific social barriers related to gender to access digital devices in Afghanistan is existed. For example, "In some families, male members of the family are prioritized in using technical facilities to continue higher education. In a few cases, girls have to use the Internet or a digital device with permission from their parents or other male family members. Multiple household responsibilities also put too much time pressure on female students to attend online classes" (Sofizada, 2022).

It is necessary to remember that the issue of women's education in Afghanistan is faced with fundamental problems and requires a separate discussion. Research shows that about 85% of women in this country do not have formal education (Niaz Asadullah, Alim, & Anowar Hossain, 2019). Overall, research shows that social barriers, especially gender discrimination, still exist and hinder the access and participation of female students in learning especially in digital learning (Hakimi, Fazil, Khaliqyar, Quchi, & Sajid, 2024).

According to the review of some relevant research, it became clear that there are many problems facing online education at different levels in Afghanistan, each of which has been examined and studied to some extent, but Kandahar City, which is one of the most populated cities in Afghanistan, has not been investigated and researched in this context. To fill this gap, this research wants to pay attention to the city of Kandahar, which is presently the main center of political power in Afghanistan, and to document the problems of online education on behalf of other cities in the country.

RESEARCH METHODS

Population and Sample: The study encompasses both Female and male prospective instructors within its population in Kandahar city. Employing a purposive sampling approach, 12 prospective instructors from this city was purposively chosen. This method ensures that the sample represents various demographic groups within the instructors' population, allowing for a more comprehensive analysis.

Statistical Techniques Used in the Present Study: The research methodology primarily employs quantitative techniques to evaluate the fundamental factors challenging online learning in Kandahar City. Data collection involves a Likert scale-based survey with 12 questions and 4 demographic questions. After data preprocessing, statistical analyses are conducted using the frequency analysis within SPSS version 24. These techniques enable a comprehensive examination of the fundamental factors challenging online learning and provide valuable insights into the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All the compiled data were collected from the instructors currently working at in educational institutions in Kandahar city, for identifying the fundamental challenges experienced by them/respondents using descriptive and frequency analysis. The most significant issues and challenges were analyzed by the mean value of the items. The following tables demonstrate the mean and responses of the target groups in terms of percentage.

Interest and Commitment of Student

The lack of interest and commitment of students was the first objective of the current research in the context of online education problems in Kandahar city, and the relevant findings are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Lack of interest and commitment of students in online learning in Kandahar City.

Lack of interest and commitment of students		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	6	50.0
	Disagree	1	8.3
	Non	1	8.3
	Strongly agree	2	16.7
	Strongly disagree	2	16.7
Total		12	100.0

Table 1: Shows that 50% of respondents agreed that students in Kandahar city have no interest and commitment to pursue online education. While only about 16.7%, of the respondents disagreed with the same question.

This shows that as a result of decades of political and economic instability, the culture of learning education in the country, especially in the city of Kandahar, has weakened, and for this reason, children do not have much interest and commitment to education and lessons, and are more concerned and spend their childhood with finding a morsel of bread. And this is one of the important problems facing online education in Kandahar city.

Digital Literacy

The lack of digital literacy was the second objective of the current research in the context of online education problems in Kandahar city, the relevant findings of which are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. shows the lack of digital literacy among students in Kandahar City to promote online learning.

Lack of Digital and literacy of students		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	5	41.7
	Disagree	1	8.3
	Strongly agree	5	41.7
	Strongly disagree	2	8.3
	Total	12	100.0

Table 2 shows that about 41.7 percent of respondents agreed that students in Kandahar City do not have enough digital literacy to pursue online learning. About 41.7 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the same question. It shows that, despite the growth of science and technology, people in Afghanistan, especially students in Kandahar City, are deprived of basic digital literacy and access to it, and this is considered one of the most fundamental problems facing online learning in this city.

Prerequisite Knowledge

The students' lack of literacy as a prerequisite for advancing online learning was the third objective of this research in the city of Kandahar, the relevant findings of which are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. shows the lack of prerequisites literacy of students in Kandahar city to advance online learning.

Lack of prerequisite knowledge of students to advance online lessons		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	7	58.4
	Disagree	1	8.3
	Non	1	8.3
	Strongly agree	2	16.7
	Strongly disagree	1	8.3
Total	12	100.0	

Table 3 shows that about 58.4 percent of the respondents agreed that students in Kandahar City do not have the prerequisites knowledge for online learning. While only 16.7 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the same question. This shows that Afghanistan, as a war-prone-country, that has experienced a lot of political and social instability, has not developed much in the context of education, and for this reason, the students in Kandahar City also have no sufficient literacy to advance online learning and this is considered one of the most basic problems of online learning in this city.

Time and Concentration of Students

Not having enough time and concentration of students to advance online learning in was the fourth objective of the current research in the context of online learning problems in Kandahar city, the relevant findings are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4. shows the lack of time and concentration of students in Kandahar city to advance online learning.

Lack of enough time and low concentration of students		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	6	50.0
	Disagree	4	33.3
	Non	1	8.3
	Strongly disagree	1	8.3
	Total	12	100.0

Table 4 shows that about 50% of the respondents agreed that students in Kandahar city do not have enough time and focus to advance online learning. On the contrary, about 33.3 percent of the respondents disagreed with the same question. This shows the fact that Afghanistan, as a deprived country, has experienced years of economic and political instability, and especially now people are struggling with poverty and destitution, and in addition to adults, young children are also working. and they do not have enough time and focus to advance their courses and this is considered one of the most basic problems of online learning in Kandahar city.

Structure and Quality of Course Content

The problems of structure and quality of course content in the context of online education in Kandahar city was the fifth objective of the current research regarding the problems of online learning in Kandahar city. The relevant findings are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5 shows the problems of the structure and quality of the curriculum content of online education in Kandahar city.

Structure and quality problems of course content		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	5	41.7
	Disagree	2	16.7
	Non	3	25.0
	Strongly agree	1	8.3
	Strongly disagree	1	8.3
	Total	12	100.0

Table 5 shows that about 41.7 percent of the respondents agreed that the problems of the structure and quality of online education in Kandahar city are one of the main problems facing online education in Kandahar city. On the contrary, about 16.7% of the respondents disagreed with the same question. This shows that, unfortunately, teachers and educational institutions do not pay serious attention to the curriculum and content and give poor-quality materials with confusing structures to students, and this is considered one of the most fundamental problems of online education.

Teachers' Response to Change and Adaptation

The problems of teachers' resistance in response to change and adaptation with the online education system in Kandahar City was the sixth objective of the current research in the field of online education problems in Kandahar City, the relevant findings of which are presented in Table 6 below.

Table 6 shows the problems of the structure and quality of online education in Kandahar city.

Resistance of teachers to change and adapt with the advancement of online teaching		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	5	41.7
	Disagree	1	8.3
	Non	2	16.7
	Strongly agree	4	33.3
	Total	12	100.0

Table 6, it shows that about 41.7% of the respondents agreed and about 33.3% strongly agreed that the problems of the structure and quality of online learning course content in Kandahar city are one of the basic problems of online education in Kandahar city. On the contrary, about 8.3 percent of the respondents disagreed with the same question. This shows that, unfortunately, teachers and educational institutions do not pay serious attention to the curriculum and content and give poor-quality materials with confusing structures to students, and this is considered one of the most fundamental problems of online learning in Kandahar city.

Assessment and Feedback

The problems of accurate assessment and providing appropriate feedback for more success of students in the context of online learning in Kandahar city was the seventh objective of the current research in Kandahar city, the relevant findings are presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. The problems of accurate assessment and providing appropriate feedback for the success of students in online learning in Kandahar city.

Lack of accurate assessment of students to provide them with feedback for the advancement of teaching and learning		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	8	66.7
	Strongly agree	3	25.0
	Strongly disagree	1	8.3
	Total	12	100.0

Table 7 it shows that about 66.7 percent of the respondents agreed and about 25 percent strongly agreed that the problems of accurate assessment and providing appropriate feedback for more success of students is one of the basic problems of online learning in Kandahar city. On the contrary, about 8.3 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the same question. This shows that, unfortunately, the education system in Afghanistan is not advanced and improved to modern international standards and the culture of evaluation, giving feedback to students and making them realize that they need to grow and work harder in this country, especially in the city of Kandahar, has not been institutionalized and this is one of the It is considered the most basic problems facing online learning in this city.

Gender Discrimination Between Male and Female Students

The problems of gender discrimination between male and female students by parents in online education in the city of Kandahar was the eighth objective of the current research in

the context of the problems of online education in the city of Kandahar, the relevant findings of which are presented in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Gender discrimination problems between male and female students by parents in online learning in Kandahar city.

Gender discrimination between male and female students by parents			
	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	Agree	6	50.0
	Disagree	1	8.3
	Non	2	16.7
	Strongly agree	1	8.3
	Strongly disagree	2	16.7
	Total	12	100.0

Table 8 shows that about 50% of the respondents agreed that the problems of gender discrimination between male and female students by parents in online education in Kandahar city is one of the main problems facing online learning in this city. On the other hand, 16.7 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the same question. This shows that Afghanistan, as a traditional country, is still captive to the beliefs of gender inequality, and in this sense, the city of Kandahar, where relatively more traditional people live, somewhat provides more opportunities and educational facilities for male students rather than female ones. And this is one of the most fundamental problems facing online learning in this city.

Weak Internet

The problems of weak internet in Kandahar city was the ninth objective of the current research in online learning problems in Kandahar city, the relevant findings of which are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. The problems of weak internet in online learning in Kandahar city.

The problem of weak internet			
	Frequency	Percent	
Valid	Disagree	2	16.7
	Non	1	8.3
	Strongly agree	8	66.7
	Strongly disagree	1	8.3
Total	12	100.0	

Table 9 it shows that about 66.7 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the problems of weak internet in online education in Kandahar City are one of the main problems for online education in this city. On the contrary, about 8.3 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the same question. This shows that weak internet, high cost of the internet, and its disconnection are one of the major problems for online teaching in Afghanistan, especially in the southwestern part of this country, and this is one of the most fundamental problems for online learning in Kandahar city.

Secure and Reliable Electricity

The problem of lack of secure electricity in Kandahar City was the tenth objective of the current research in online education in Kandahar City, the relevant findings are presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10. The problems of lack of secure electricity in the context of online learning in Kandahar city

Lack of reliable electricity		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Agree	2	16.7
	Disagree	1	8.3
	Non	1	8.3
	Strongly agree	7	58.3
	Strongly disagree	1	8.3
Total		12	100.0

Table 10 shows that about 58.3 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that the problems of lack of secure electricity in Kandahar City is one of the basic problems of online learning in Kandahar City. On the contrary, about 8.3 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed with the same question. This shows that the per capita access to electricity in Afghanistan, especially in Kandahar City, is much lower than the regional and global standards, and because of this, students in Kandahar City are facing disruptions and power cuts in pursuing online learning. This is one of the most fundamental problems facing online education in this city.

Discussion

According to the objectives of this study to analysis the fundamental problems of online education in Kandahar City, it became clear that so far, limited research and studies have been done in Afghanistan by individuals and national and international organizations in the context of online education. Taking into consideration, each of them is of special importance, but these studies and researches are at different levels and particularly, cannot cover the scope and objectives of this study.

The first discussion regarding the problems facing online learning in the city of Kandahar is the lack of sufficient digital literacy and the lack of proper information technology infrastructure in the country, especially in the city of Kandahar, which has made online learning in this city so difficult and faced it with fundamental problems. These problems have been well documented in several previous related research in various levels (Hanafiah, & Aziz, 2022; Huang, 1997; Mahboobi, 2021; Iariqi, et. al., 2019; Mahdi & Wani 2021). It should be said that one of the other important problems that have challenged online learning in this city is the lack of commitment and motivation of students on the one hand and also, teachers' resistance to changes their methods and adopt with new teaching criteria and mechanisms is on the other hand.

Another issue that can be discussed and considered as a result of examining the problems of online learning in the Kandahar city is the social and economic problems that are involved in the online education system, including students and teachers, in preparing the necessary materials and resources that can be used in online learning that made them incapable to provide these facilities and as a result, online learning has faced a serious problem in this city. This problem has also been shown in previous research (Ferri, et. al. 2020; Sofizada, 2022). Also, in the context of the social problems of parents towards their children, they do not help and not provide facilities and materials for education, which in

turn has caused students to be disinterested and it becomes one of the most important problems facing online learning in this city (Hakimi, et. al., 2024).

In addition, the low quality of Internet, along with the lack of secure and reliable electricity, are the another main problem for online learning in Kandahar city. Because the majority of people in this city have low economy and cannot afford additional expenses in this field. These types of problems have also been well illustrated in previous research (Ferri, et. al. 2020; Samala, et. al. 2022).

In the following, it is necessary to remember this research is limited to Kandahar city but it can be applicable in the same context. Finally, those who are interested should scientifically and practically investigate various aspects of challenge facing online education and its effective factors in other cities of Afghanistan to create a scientific and national discourse and witness the prosperity of our country Afghanistan.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this article was to examine the fundamental problems of online learning in Kandahar city, were studied. The results of this study show that students' lack of interest and commitment, students' lack of digital literacy, students' lack of prerequisite literacy, students' lack of time and concentration, problems with the structure and quality of course content, problems with the structure and quality of course content, problems with accurate evaluation and providing feedback. It is suitable for the success of students, the problems of gender discrimination between male and female students by parents, the problems of weak internet, and the problems of permanent lack of electricity in the field of online education in Kandahar city. It is necessary for those involved in the educational system in the city of Kandahar and Afghanistan to understand the mentioned problems and take practical measures to solve these problems and to effectively educate the children of today and the future generations in the city of Kandahar and whole Afghanistan. Accordingly, several practical measures that can be applied to solve the mentioned problems have been suggested in the following.

Suggestions

To overcome the known problems and obstacles of online learning in Kandahar city, the following should be considered:

To the government: The following actions must be taken by the government:

- Serious attention should be paid to develop information technology infrastructure;
- Based on a clear policy, activities of online learning institutions should be monitored and standardized;
- Encourage families and children by providing needed educational facilities and creating jobs for graduated students to learn education using different methods.

To the researchers: Interested researchers should investigate the various aspects of online education problems in other cities of Afghanistan scientifically and practically.

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