



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 8.4
IJAR 2022; 8(8): 96-102
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 29-05-2022
Accepted: 04-07-2022

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The role of professors and students in developing and revising the universities curriculum in Afghanistan

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22271/allresearch.2022.v8.i8b.10051>

Abstract

The main aim of this research is the professors and students involvement in the main decision-making of developing and revising the Afghanistan university curriculum? The researcher has used the latest studies related to this issue in other countries for the field research, a mixed-method (quantitative and qualitative), were used.

The results of previous studies in other countries indicate that the role of professors and students in Developing or revising the university curriculum are highly significant, the present study indicates that despite the efforts of the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education in revising the curriculum, there are still significant issues. In achieving an ideal curriculum, otherwise, the curriculum would face serious challenges.

Keywords: Curriculum, decentralization of curriculum, government-centered, participatory curriculum

Introduction

Recently, the independence of universities has been debated around the world. However, due to the long-lasting wars and lack of security in the country, there have been many different educational systems in Afghanistan. Curriculums have undergone changes due to different political systems. The curriculum has moved towards socialism with the left-wing governments, with the Mujahidin government, the curriculum emphasized jihad, the curriculum focused more on religious sciences during the rule of the Islamic Emirate, and the curriculum changed again and national and global values were introduced when the new government of Afghanistan formed in 2000. On the one hand, the existence of peace provided the necessary ground for education. On the other hand, the establishment of close political relations with the international community had an impact on the country's curriculum. Various universities in Afghanistan would copy the old curricula that had been somewhat revised by the professors. However, a unified curriculum had not been applied to all the universities of the country and there were significant differences between various curricula. Ministry of Higher Education tried to tackle the issue at hand. Latif Roshan -The minister of Higher Education of Afghanistan- prioritized this issue. Even with the next minister's appointment, this issue was still underway and work on reforming and unifying the curriculum in all disciplines as a nationwide curriculum continued vigorously. Officials of the curriculum planning committee of Afghanistan have stated that these reforms have progressed about seventy percent. Despite these developments, the role of stockholders in developing and revising the curriculum in Afghanistan is not very clear: Is the process led by the government or other stockholders, in particular, the professors and students have a role in it? This study aims to answer the mentioned question and determine the university curriculum orientation in Afghanistan in regards to the new universal approach toward a participatory curriculum.

Background of the study

Literature review and previous studies in the region and the world indicate that the participation of influential factors, including professors and students, in curriculum development has been emphasized in the world and the region. The centralized system is being changed to a semi-centralized or participatory system.

Nowadays, the most important factor in influencing the success or failure of the education system is considered to be the professors' role (Abdi, 2018) ^[5].

In his article titled "The 'voice of the teacher' in curriculum development: a voice crying in the wilderness", Arend Carl argues that the curriculum of South Africa has many issues and professors play a significant role in solving them. The curriculum development is not limited to a new way of thinking, the role of professors and their involvement in the curriculum development in the best way is a significant and debatable subject.

It is essential to involve professors in the curriculum development process if we want to have an effective curriculum and successful schools. A successful curriculum should reflect the philosophy, goals, lessons, learning, experiences, and evaluations. The most important factor in a curriculum is the professor. Professors lead the curriculum development process with their knowledge and experience. Professors support the learning process because they are highly knowledgeable and experienced and they are more involved in the practice of teaching and recognizing the needs of society, particularly, students. As responsible for introducing the curriculum, they are also more involved than other factors (Alsubaie, 2016) ^[1].

Evidence indicates that professors played a leading role in the curriculum before the mid-twentieth century whereas recently, they have played a supportive role in the development and progress of the curriculum. This indicates that professors abdicate their responsibilities and they must be prepared to advance their responsibilities. In 1928, Rag and Schumacher identified the needs of professors to be involved in curriculum development and suggested that professors should work together with curriculum specialists to adjust the content and materials of the curriculum.

Similarly, Carl and Campbell have advocated for professors' involvement at all levels in committees. Professors can best adapt the content of the course to the needs of the students. The professor's role has been considered to be the central role of the curriculum by Rag and Schumacher. In 1949, Ralf Taylor proposed principles in which the central role in all stages and levels of the curriculum is related to professors, however, regarding the leadership role of the professors, the role has been limited to the knowledge and skills of professors (Handler, 2010) ^[7].

"Students' voices must be heard" is the title of an article that indicates the need for students' participation in curriculum development has been part of the debates in educational research in the past. Unfortunately, students only have one opportunity to share their views with those of other influential factors in the curriculum development process. Even in Western countries, students' views and opinions are neglected. They will only be asked for their opinions on the matter when the major decisions have already been made and the curriculum design work is in the final stages. In this case, the students are considered in the experimental work and they are ignored in the final major decision making (Brooker, 1999) ^[3].

In a study conducted in one of the medical schools, students in the clinical psychology department were asked to give their opinion through a questionnaire. As a result, they not only provided answers for their department curriculum challenges but also by exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the relevant curriculum revealed how students can play a role in the curriculum and how effective

they can be. They were also able to critically investigate their clinical learning experience, thus creating a strong scientific perspective in the field of education that supports the contemporary perspective of students as active participants in the curriculum decision-making process (Thornton R, 2000) ^[13].

The result of a study conducted on China's curriculum reform illustrates that China's curriculum is evolving from absolute centralism to a balancing globalized one with preserving national culture and honors. China's curriculum has evolved from being fully administered by the government to a participatory curriculum. Some authority has been given to the students and other stockholders in the development and implementation of the curriculum and it has encouraged a participatory and balanced curriculum. (W.W Law, 2014) ^[8].

A study of the role of students in curriculum revisions illustrates that revisions in education cannot be successful unless students are directly and substantially involved in all aspects of curriculum revision. These should include the first decisions, revisions, and implication steps. (Levin .B, 2000) ^[9].

Curriculum theorists have no doubts regarding the significant role of the professors and students in the development of the curriculum. However, they argue that professors should pass educational programs regarding the development and changes of the curriculum and with their knowledge of students, learning environment, and society in general, they would be able to play an effective role in all stages of the curriculum development process (Managha, 1999).

Another study on the role of professors in curriculum in Turkey demonstrates the importance of their role in the curriculum. (Bas & Senturk, 2019) ^[2].

Methodology

In this study, the quantitative and qualitative (mixed) method has been used, which is based on applied research. Survey research has been used in the quantitative part of the study and simple qualitative research has been used in the qualitative part. A mixed explanatory design was used. First, the quantitative method was conducted, and then the qualitative method. The researcher intends to use the qualitative method to clarify the results obtained from the quantitative data. By using the characteristics of the participants in the quantitative method, the purposive sampling was applied for the qualitative stage. The results of each method are mentioned separately. Finally, a joint conclusion of both methods is reported (Razavi *et al.*, 2013).

Statistical population and sampling method: All the students of 39 public universities of Afghanistan in 2020-2021 were the quantitative statistical population of this study, which was a total of 205480 students. According to Morgan's table, the total number of respondents was 384. The questionnaires were randomly distributed by stratified sampling. In the qualitative section, the purposive sampling method was conducted. Using the snowball sampling method, a total of 39 professors who had responsibilities in the curriculum department was chosen. A semi-structured interview was conducted to receive their views and opinions, some points that could not be obtained through a questionnaire were accumulated.

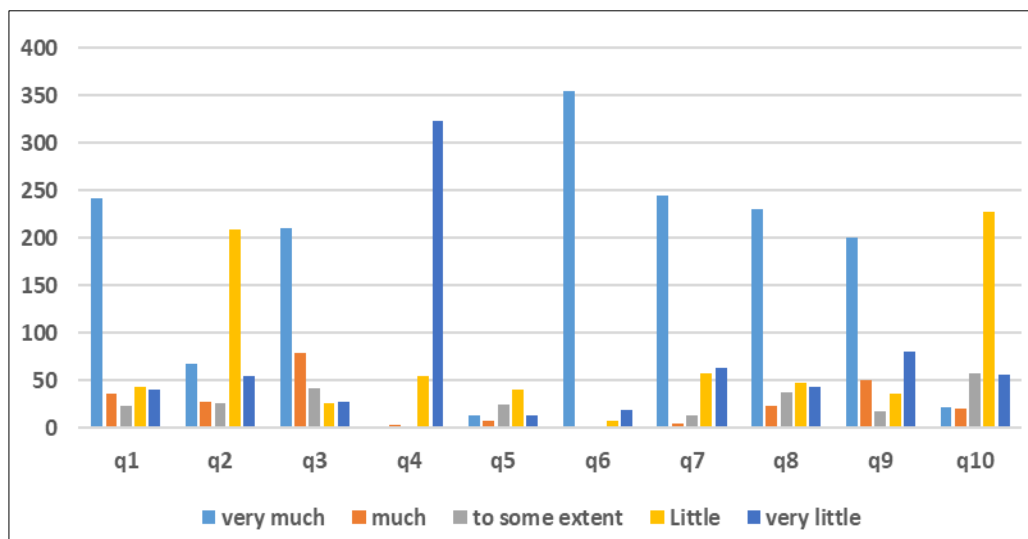
Methods analysis: The results of the quantitative part were analyzed using One Sample T-test. The qualitative part was categorized using the three-step coding method and the categories were used to interpret the answers.

Findings

As mentioned before, a mixed explanatory design was used in this study. First, the quantitative method was conducted,

and then the qualitative method. Therefore, the results of the quantitative findings are analyzed first.

A. Quantitative section analysis: In the quantitative part of the research, a researcher-made questionnaire was used. These questionnaires contained ten similar questions. They were distributed among 384 students in 39 public universities of Afghanistan.



Graph 1: The participation of all stockholders in the university curriculum decisions is the most emphasized one which has been asked in the sixth question

According to the above graph, it can be seen that the participation of all stockholders in the university curriculum decisions is the most emphasized one which has been asked in the sixth question. The students expressed their strong dissatisfaction with the non-participation of stock holders. In the fourth question regarding the participation of parents in the university curriculum decisions, the majority of respondents have expressed concern about the non-participation of parents in this process.

The sample population is more than 30 people. Therefore, for inferential analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires, one sample t-test is used and there is no need to determine its normality. The test is performed on each of the questions. Each question explains a specific topic as they are illustrated below:

Question 1: How much of Afghanistan's university curriculum is government-oriented?

Table 1: To what extent is Afghanistan's university curriculum government-oriented:

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How much of Afghanistan's university curriculum is government-oriented?	14.048	383	.000	1.034	.89	1.18

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of Type I, α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=14.384$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{1.034\}$, therefore, the

majority of the respondents agree that Afghanistan's university curriculum is government-oriented.

Question 2: How much are students involved in the development of the country's university curriculum?

Table 2: The involvement of students in the country's university curriculum development

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How much are students involved in the development of the country's university curriculum?	-6.147	383	.000	-.411	-.54	-.28

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I, α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=6.147$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore,

the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{-411\}$, therefore, $3-\mu > 0$ which means that the majority of the

respondents agree that the involvement of students in the country's university curriculum development is insignificant.

Question 3: How much attention has been given to the use of new technologies in Afghanistan's university curriculum?

Table 3: The level of attention given to the use of new technologies in Afghanistan's university curriculum

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How much attention has been given to the use of new technologies in Afghanistan's university curriculum?	17.143	383	.000	1.091	.97	1.22

As it can be seen from the above table and according to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=17.143$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{1.091\}$, therefore, $-3\mu < 0$, which means that

the majority of the respondents agree that a significant level of attention has been given to the use of new technologies in Afghanistan's university curriculum.

Question 4: How much are the parents involved in the development of Afghanistan's university curriculum?

Table 4: The involvement of parents in Afghanistan's university curriculum development Test Value = 3

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
					Lower	Upper
How much are the parents involved in the development of Afghanistan's university curriculum?	-68.351	383	.000	-1.810	-1.86	-1.76

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=68.351$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{-1.810\}$, therefore, $-3\mu > 0$, which means that the majority of the

respondents agree that the involvement of parents in Afghanistan's university curriculum development is insignificant.

Question 5: How beneficial is centralism in curriculum development?

Table 5: The beneficial level of centralism in curriculum development

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How beneficial is centralism in curriculum development?	-32.620	383	.000	-1.573	-1.67	-1.48

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=32.620$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{-1.573\}$, therefore, $-3\mu > 0$ or in other words $3\mu > 0$, which means that

the majority of the respondents agree that centralism in curriculum development is not beneficial.

Question 6: How important is the participation of all stockholders in decisions about the country's university curriculum development?

Table 6: The participation of all stockholders in decisions regarding the curriculum development

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How important is the participation of all stockholders in decisions regarding the country's university curriculum development?	35.608	383	.000	1.734	1.64	1.83

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=35.608$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{1.734\}$, therefore, $-3\mu < 0$ or in other words $3\mu > 0$, which means that the majority of the respondents agree that the participation

of all stockholders in decisions about the curriculum development is highly significant.

Question 7: To what extent is can the revision of the country's university curriculum be considered an urgent matter?

Table 7: The need for the country's university curriculum

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
To what extent is can the revision of the country's university curriculum be considered an urgent matter?	9.617	383	.000	.810	.64	.98

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=9.617$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{0.810\}$, therefore, $-3\mu > 0$. This means that the majority of the

respondents agree that the revision of the country's university curriculum is an urgent matter.

Question 8: How important is complying with environmental conditions in developing a university curriculum?

Table 8: Complying with the environmental conditions are in developing a university curriculum

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How important is complying with environmental conditions in developing a university curriculum?	12.022	383	.000	.914	.76	1.06

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=12.022$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{0.914\}$, therefore, $-3\mu > 0$. This means that the majority of the

respondents agree that complying with the environmental conditions in developing a university curriculum is highly significant.

Question 9: How much of Afghanistan's university curriculum is based on other countries'?

Table 9: Regarding the country's university curriculum being based on other countries

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
How much of Afghanistan's university curriculum is based on other countries'?	7.930	383	.000	.667	.50	.83

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=7.930$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{0.667\}$, therefore, $-3\mu < 0$. This means that the majority of the respondents agree that Afghanistan's university curriculum

is based on other countries' and is not in correspondence with the Afghan society and its needs.

Question 10: To what extent do the personal opinions of the Minister and other officials of the Ministry of Higher Education affect the development of the university curriculum?

Table 10: The role of the personal opinions of the Minister and other officials of the Ministry of Higher Education and its effects on the development of the university curriculum

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
To what extent do the personal opinions of the Minister and other officials of the Ministry of Higher Education affect the development of the university curriculum?	-14.495	383	.000	-.719	-.82	-.62

According to the assumption test, $H_0: \mu=3$ and $H_1: \mu \neq 3$, the error level of the type I α is equal to 5%. Since $T(383)=14.495$ and $\text{sig}=0.00$, 0 is smaller than α , therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the 95% confidence interval for the difference in means of -3μ is $\{-0.719\}$, therefore, $-3\mu < 0$. This means that the majority of the respondents agree that the personal opinions of the Minister and other officials of the Ministry of Higher Education do

not have a significant effect on the development of the university curriculum.

Analysis of the qualitative part of the research: A total of five questions were presented in this section. Firstly, the three-step coding method had been conducted. The table below lists the final codes and categories as well as the percentage of each category.

Table 11: the coding of the qualitative part questions

Number	Number of respondents	Codes	Categories	Percentage
1	2-4-5-7-8-9-11-12-13-15-16-18-19-21-23-25-27-28-29-31-33-34-35-37-38-39-	-the curriculum is unitary -is in line with universal standards -considers the local conditions	Satisfaction with the current situation	67%
	1-3-6-10-14-17-20-22-24-26-30-32-36-	-haven't considered the local conditions -is imported -is government-oriented	Dissatisfaction with the current situation	33%
2	All of the interviewees (from number 1 to 39)	All professors at the mentioned universities that are responsible for curriculum planning	Participatory curriculum	100%
3	1- 2- 4-6-7-8-10-12-13-15-16-17-19-21-22-24-25-27-28-29-31-33-34-36-38-39	Religion, traditions, social relations, economics	Social needs	67%
	3-5-9-11-14-18-20-23-26-30-32-35-37-	Contemporary technology, foreign relations of the country, the government political system, minister's personality	The government strategy	33%
4	2-3-6-8-9-11-12-14-15-16-17-20-21-23-26-27-28-29-30-32-34-35-38-	All groups of the stockholders and other factors are considered.	Considering all the factors	58%
	1-4-5-7-10-13-18-19-22-24-25-31-33-36-37-39-	-Failure to consider the involvement of the students -Failure to consider the involvement of the students	Failure to comply with the principle of participation in the curriculum	42%
5	All of the interviewees (from number 1 to 39)	Considering various steps such as: Needs assessment, design, implication, and evaluation	All stages of the curriculum development process	100%

As it can be seen from table 13 the answers from the interviewees has be coded and the answer to each question is further explained below:

1. In response to question 1 which assesses the current state of the country's university curriculum, majority of the interviewees (about 95%) were satisfied with the current situation and the new revisions. Regarding this, one of the heads of departments in shariah faculty of Kabul University said that considering the process of the curriculum revision, the professors especially the head of departments have been actively involved and it can even be said that this process has been led by them. Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education has completely given the professors and the head of departments all the responsibilities regarding the revision process.
2. Regarding question number 2, majority of the interviewees agree that expert professors with the cooperation and participation of other officials and experts can properly perform this task. For example, a professor at Kabul University said that developing and revising the curriculum is the joint work of professors, experts, and officials. The ministry officials should only provide facilities and cooperate in this participatory process. However, about ten percent of those interviewees mentioned that students and parents are also involved in this process.
3. Concerning the effective factors in curriculum, the majority of the interviewees argued that several internal and external factors affect the curriculum. Some of these factors are new scientific changes around the world, technological advances, local and national political and economic changes, and the active participation or non-participation of stockholders in the curriculum development or revision.
4. Regarding the influential factors in curriculum development and revision in Afghanistan, the majority of interviewees agreed that students and parents were neglected in curriculum development and revision. About ten percent of the interviewees argued that representatives of students were involved in the

process. One of the heads of the departments at Shaikh Zayed University in Khost Province has said: "during the curriculum revision process we distributed questionnaires to all of our students and collected their views by answering open-ended and closed-ended questions. Afterward, we unified their views. The members of the department then sent the proposal which was based on the students' views and opinions to the Ministry of Higher Education and the Curriculum Planning Committee.

5. In response to the stages in which professors and students can be involved in the curriculum development and revision, the majority of interviewees agreed that professors and students can participate in all stages and levels of the curriculum development and revision. These stages include all the steps from needs assessment to final decisions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study indicate that almost all experts agree on the effectiveness of the presence of professors and students in the university curriculum decisions. However, they still do not have the necessary involvement in the development process all over the globe. All countries are rapidly evolving from centralized curriculums to participatory curriculum approaches, therefore, there is still hope to achieve this goal. For instance, Turkey has included a large number of its professors in the curriculum committee of the Ministry of National Education. Furthermore, China which is highly government-oriented and strongly follows the policies of the ruling party is trying to change its strategies regarding the curriculum development process. There are trying to change their country's curriculum to be a participatory curriculum. Literature review and indicate the same major changes in the curriculums development process for the rest of the countries as well. These changes include evolving from a centralized approach to a more decentralized one. In the decentralized approach, curriculums are changing to be a participation curriculum with considering all the effective factors in the process. In most countries, including countries in the Middle East

region, professors and students have been given more responsibilities in this matter. The professors are trying to present their new graduates in accordance with the global labor market and adjust their higher education curriculum in accordance with the global and international standards.

The obtained field data from the quantitative part of the research which was gathered using questionnaires indicated that students are not very involved in developing and revising the universities curriculum in Afghanistan. However, the professors' role in the process is significant and cannot be neglected. The results of the interviews illustrate a kind of satisfaction with the contribution of professors in this process. The interviewees regard the participation of professors and experts in cooperation with the officials of the Ministry of Higher Education as a sufficient factor for advancing this process. Some of the interviewees suggested that the students' perspective of the matter is not good enough; therefore, they are not qualified to be given the authority to develop or revise the curriculum. However, curriculum theorists argue that a curriculum can be considered as successful when all influential factors of the curriculum, including students and their parents, professors, experts, and administrators participate in developing it. Otherwise, in the absence of one of these influential factors, the whole development and revision process of the curriculum will be disrupted and the results will not be satisfactory.

Nevertheless, the results of the questionnaire and the interviews reveal the non-participation of parents in this process. The parents of students and the community have no participation in the curriculum development and revision process in Afghanistan universities. This group has been completely neglected.

Recommendations

No curriculum can be called successful unless the professors and students have an active presence in its development; therefore, the following suggestions are presented:

1. Professors should compose an extensive membership of the curriculum planning committee, and they should be the leaders in the curriculum development, revision and change process.
2. For professors to better develop this great responsibility, they must increase their knowledge in all aspects, especially the curriculum development and revision process.
3. The students should be involved in the curriculum development and revision process. Questionnaires should be distributed among them and their opinions should be respected. Students should be actively involved in the relevant committees and clusters regarding their needs.
4. When necessary, students' parents should be considered in the curriculum development and revision process. Their views should be reflected in the curriculum like other influential factors.
5. The curriculum development and revision process of Afghanistan's higher education should be accelerated. It should be done in accordance with the needs of society and the rapid scientific changes in the world. Otherwise, the curriculum itself will get in the way of society's progress.

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