

**Students' Experiences of Engagement in Online Learning: Perspectives of
Afghan Female University Students**

Halima Shafai

Student ID: 234033

Master's Program

Master of Arts in Education

Asian University for Women

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Dale Orlando Taylor

July 24, 2026

Abstract

After the Taliban's return to power in 2021, Afghan women have been restricted from higher education. The online learning system became one of the most available opportunities to continue their studies. For many Afghan female students, online learning became more than an alternative education system; it became a practical way of continuing their academic journey even when universities are closed for them. The online learning system helped them to continue learning, develop their knowledge and skills, maintain connections with others, and keep hope for achieving their education and career despite the restrictions and existing barriers. While existence research has focused on technological barriers and access to online education mostly, limited attention has been given to Afghan female students lived experiences of engagement in online learning. This study explored how Afghan female university students describe their experiences of engagement in online learning and the factors they perceive as influencing their engagement.

A qualitative phenomenological research design was used because this study aimed to understand the lived experiences of Afghan female university students in online learning. It was an appropriate research design because it helped to explore how participants experienced and understood their engagement in online learning methods. Data were collected through semi-structured online interviews with Afghan female university students who were currently studying through online education in Afghanistan. The interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis to examine common patterns and meanings across participant's lived experiences.

The findings of this study reveal that for many female students online learning has become more than just an alternative way of education; this is the only way to continue higher education, hope for a better future and develop important academic skills despite many challenges. At the same time, technological, familial, instructional and personal factors influenced students' engagement in online classes.

The study concludes that students' engagement in the context of Afghanistan is more than just attending in online classes. For them, engagement in online classes represents educational continuity, social connection, hope, resilience, and personal growth despite many political, cultural, and educational challenges. The findings also provide practical recommendations for universities, educators, policymakers, and international organizations to improve online learning and better support for female students in Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghan female university students; online learning; student engagement; higher education; conflict-affected education; phenomenology; Afghanistan.

Declaration of AI Use

I declare that this thesis is my original work. The ideas, analysis, findings, and conclusions presented in this thesis are based on my own research and understanding of my work. I have followed the university's academic integrity and AI policies throughout the research and writing process.

I used AI tools such as ChatGPT and Grammarly only to:

- Check grammar and improve sentence clarity,
- Receive suggestions on organizing and structuring my writing

I did not use AI to write the content of this thesis or replace my own thinking, analysis, or academic voice and I take full responsibility for all the presented work in this thesis and am able to explain every part of it.

Table Of Contents

Abstract	i
Declaration of AI Use	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background of the Study	1
1.2 Problem Statement	2
1.3 Research Questions	3
1.4 Research Objectives	4
1.5 Significance of the Study	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review	6
2.1 Introduction to the Chapter	6
2.2 Concept of Student Engagement in Online Learning	6
2.3 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	8
2.4 Transactional Distance Theory	9
2.5 Online Engagement in Developing and Conflict-Affected Contexts	10
2.6 Barriers to Online Learning for Afghan Students	12
2.7 Gender-Based Barriers	16
2.8 Teaching Practices and Institutional Support in Afghanistan	17
2.9 Research Gap	17
2.10 Conclusion	18

Chapter 3: Materials and Methodology	20
3.1 Research Materials.....	20
3.2 Research Location.....	20
3.3 Participants.....	21
3.4 Ethical Considerations	22
3.5 Data Collection	22
3.6 Data Analysis	23
3.7 Limitations	24
Chapter 4: Findings	25
Theme 1: Online Learning as a Lifeline for Educational Continuity	25
4.1.1 Online Education as the Only Opportunity.....	26
4.1.2 Academic Growth through Online Learning.....	27
4.1.3 Holding onto Hope through Online Education	29
4.1.4 Commitment to Completing Higher Education	31
Theme 2: Negotiating Everyday Barriers to Engagement	33
4.2.1 Technological and Infrastructural Barriers	33
4.2.2 Learning within Challenging Home Environments	35
4.2.3 Family and Cultural Expectations.....	36
4.2.4 Academic and Language Challenges	38
4.2.5 Physical and Emotional Challenges.....	40

Theme 3: Engagement Through Teaching, Interaction, and Relationships	42
4.3.1 Interactive Teaching Encourages Engagement	42
4.3.2 Teacher Support Strengthens Engagement	44
Theme 4: Creating Conditions for Meaningful Engagement.....	45
4.4.1 Institutional Support.....	45
4.4.2 Family and Community Awareness	47
4.4.3 Strengthening the Value and Future Opportunities of Online Education	48
Chapter 5: Discussion, Implication, Recommendation & Conclusion	51
5.1 Discussion of Research Question One	51
5.2 Discussion of Research Question Two.....	55
5.3 Implications of the Study	59
5.4 Recommendations.....	60
5.5 Conclusion	62
References	63

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In the 21st century, after the COVID-19 pandemic, e-learning has become a major learning method globally. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the transformation of the physical education system to e-learning. As a result, e-learning became an important platform to ensure the continuity of education while schools and institutes were closed (UNESCO, 2020). Online learning refers to interaction and instruction between learners and educators through different devices connected to the internet (Asaqli, 2020).

Similarly, in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Education transitioned from physical learning to distance learning to minimize mass human interaction in environments such as schools, universities, and all learning institutions to prevent spread of viruses. According to Haidari et al. (2021), e-learning was the only way to keep the education system active during that period, but most students and teachers were dissatisfied because of unfamiliarity with the new education system. They faced many problems in delivering the courses due to a lack of prior experiences in educational technology and pedagogical skills in e-learning. Also, a lack of devices and unstable internet connection was another major problem for many teachers and students.

Although online learning was initially introduced as a temporary measure due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become the primary means of learning for long-term goals for Afghan female students.

In 2021, following the Taliban's return to power, they restricted women's mobility, work, and education rights. According to UNESCO (2025), after 2021, 2.2 million girls were banned

from secondary and higher education in Afghanistan. Consequently, the online education system became an important available way for girls to continue their higher education.

Student engagement is one of the fundamental aspects for the success of e-learning globally. As Fredricks et al. reported, student engagement means being active in the class emotionally, which allows students to express their feelings and indicate motivation, cognitively, which shows learners' effort and critical skill, and behaviorally allows students to participate (2004). When students are active in class, have more engagement, and participate in assignments, they have better academic outcomes while low engagement isolates and demotivates the students (Kuh, 2009).

Despite the increase in importance of online learning for Afghan female students, limited studies exist on lived experiences of engagement under current situations in Afghanistan. Most of the research explored technical challenges, literacy and access to online education, but exploring female university students' live experiences remained undone. This study examines global and Afghan existing research on online learning, student engagement, and the challenges faced by female students in conflict-affected contexts.

1.2 Problem Statement

After the Taliban's return to power in 2021, women are no longer allowed to attend in the physical classroom and online learning has become one of the few remaining opportunities to continue their higher education (UNESCO, 2025). Although online learning is an important way of educational continuity, meaningful students' engagement remains difficult because of

technological, social, cultural, and educational challenges. This is essential to understand the importance of engagement in online learning.

Although many challenges are mentioned in previous studies, including technological barriers, internet access, digital literacy, and the implementation of online learning in Afghanistan (Asaqli, 2020; Haidari et al., 2021), limited research has been conducted on lived experiences of engagement among Afghan female university students who are using online learning as way of continuity to their higher education after the educational restrictions by Taliban in 2021. As a result, there is insufficient understanding of how these students experience engagement while learning under the political, social, and educational challenges.

Therefore, this study will explore the lived experiences of engagement in online learning among Afghan female university students. Understanding of these experiences will help educators, policymakers, higher education institutions, and other stakeholders to develop more inclusive and supportive online learning environments. The findings can also help to improve student engagement in online class, and learning opportunities for Afghan female students.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do Afghan female university students describe their experiences of engagement in Online learning?
2. What factors do students perceive as influencing their level of engagement in online classes?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims to explore Afghan female university students' experiences of engagement in online learning. It also examines factors that influence students' engagement, including teaching practices, technology, and home or learning environments. In addition, this study explores students' emotional, behavioral, and academic responses in online learning with a view on understanding them better.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the limited literature on online learning engagement among Afghan female university students. By exploring students' lived experiences, it provides a deeper understanding about the influence of social, cultural, and technological factors on engagement in online learning. Also, the finding of this study extends the knowledge about student engagement in conflict-affected areas.

The findings of this study will be significant, as they help educators, institutions, stakeholders. Firstly, the teachers can use the findings as an important awareness of students' significant barriers in online learning. In addition, they can use the findings to enhance their teaching strategies based on students' needs and create an inclusive and effective learning environment.

Furthermore, institutions can utilize this information to develop supportive programs. They can follow an effective curriculum and offer better technological support for students to create more engaging online environments and ultimately enhance student engagement and

success. Also, the findings can be used by policymakers to create effective education policies based on women's situation in conflict-affected areas, particularly Afghanistan.

Finally, parents also can develop an understanding of distance learning from this research. The study can help them to understand the important role they have in students' engagement in online classes, particularly in Afghanistan, where girls are restricted from public life. By exploring the problems of students in online classes, parents can support them with a proper learning environment at home. This can help their children stay motivated and engaged actively in their studies.

The findings of this study will be shared through my master's thesis at Asian University for Women. I will also present a short summary of the findings to teachers and faculty members of the university. I hope to publish the findings in an academic journal so that other researchers and educators can utilize them.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Chapter

This chapter will focus on the literature that is related to the online learning system and students' engagement in this learning environment. The main purpose of the chapter is to explore what the existing studies say about online learning, and Afghan students' approaches to learning, particularly female higher education students. It also shows how student engagement is defined and explained and the challenges that students face in distance learning. It will begin with explaining the concepts related to online learning and student engagement. These concepts are important as they play a significant role in helping the students engage actively, followed by three main dimensions of student engagement, including behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. The chapter then will examine some critical theories, including Transactional Distance Theory and Self-Determination Theory, which will be discussed in relation to students' engagement in distance learning. It next reviews the existing research on online learning engagement and factors that influence student engagement from a global perspective. The chapter concludes by reviewing the problems that Afghan students face in the context of online learning. Afghan students, particularly female university students, are the focus of this research, and in the context of Afghan students, the research will discuss the problems students face in online learning from the perspective of social and cultural aspects.

2.2 Concept of Student Engagement in Online Learning

Student engagement is considered as a multidimensional concept that contributes to the success and improvement of learning around the world (Fredricks et al., 2004; Kuh, 2009). In

online learning, students' engagement is an important factor for better outcome because they do not have physical interaction with teachers and classmates, so opportunities are less likely to be engaged in (Martin & Bolliger, 2018). In addition, many researchers reported that student engagement has three major dimensions: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive (Fredricks et al., 2004). These dimensions are connected and show students' participation, feeling, and thinking during the class learning.

Behavioral Engagement: It is commonly defined in many ways, including positive conduct in school and following rules, and avoiding disruptive behaviors such as skipping school. Involvement in learning and academic tasks, such as persistence, effort, attention, and joining in class discussions. Also, participation in extracurricular school activities (Fredricks et al., 2004; Nguyen et al., 2015). This shows that behavioral engagement is about students' active participation in learning.

Emotional Engagement: this engagement refers to reactions of students and their feelings including happiness, interest, sadness, and boredom (Fredricks et al., 2004). Also, some studies say that it investigates students' sense of belonging and feeling valued through their school-related activities and outcomes (Cooper, 2014; Jones, Marrazo, & Love, 2008; Voelkl, 2012; Wang & Holcombe, 2010, cited in Nguyen et al., 2015). This means that students' feelings and sense of belonging are important for engagement.

Cognitive Engagement: Many researchers define cognitive engagement as focusing on students' internal traits that help them in learning and mastering knowledge and skills in school (Nguyen et al., 2015; Fredricks et al., 2004). For example, Connell and Wellborns' conceptualization say that cognitive engagement includes problem solving skills and persistence in challenging times (Fredricks et al, 2004). These studies show that cognitive engagement helps

students stay motivated and continue learning even when they face difficulties. The three mentioned dimensions of student engagement provide an important framework for understanding how Afghan female university students experience online learning. This study is based on behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions to explore how participants express their participation, feelings, and learning experiences in virtual classrooms. The next section discusses these factors.

2.3 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

The Self-Determination Theory explains that there are three psychological needs that have an impact on students' engagement in the classroom including autonomy, which means being in control, competence, which means feeling able, and relatedness meaning feeling connected. As He et al. reported, supporting these psychological needs in students can increase their engagement in classroom activities. In addition, when students feel that they are heard and supported by their teachers, they become motivated to engage in class (2025). Based on Self-Determination Theory, students are more likely to engage in the class when they have some choice in their learning, feeling able to do their work, and feeling connected to their teachers and classmates. Previous studies also found that teacher support, opportunity for participation in class, and positive interaction with teacher and classmates help them to stay motivated and engage in the classroom (He et al., 2025). Since this study explores the experiences of Afghan female university students in online learning, Self-Determination Theory is a useful framework for examining participants' motivation, confidence, and sense of belonging. The theory will guide the interpretation of the findings related to students' engagement in virtual classrooms. While Self-Determination Theory explains students' internal motivation, another important

theory explains the influence of interaction between teachers and students in engagement in online learning.

2.4 Transactional Distance Theory

The Transactional Distance Theory focuses on the psychological and interaction gap that exists between the educators and learners in distance education, which has a negative impact on students' engagement (Li et al., 2023). Another study using Community of Inquiry (CoI) and Transactional Distance Frameworks reported that in online learning, students can have a sense of community through communication and interaction with educators, and teachers' support contributes to better academic performance for learners (Gökoğlu et al., 2024). In the context of Afghanistan, female university students may face high transactional distance frameworks as they encounter more barriers, such as limited stable internet connections which may make them feel disconnected from teachers and classmates. Similarly, students may not have a comfortable environment while joining in online classes that resulting in their inability to engage actively. In addition, online classrooms are often overcrowded, preventing all students from getting a chance to participate or have a conversation with teachers. These barriers may negatively affect learners and teachers' interaction. Transactional Distance Theory is relevant to this study because online learning has a direct impact on communication and interaction between students and teachers. Transactional Distance Theory has been used to understand interaction and communication in online learning widely. Since this study explores Afghan female university students' experiences of engagement in online classrooms, the theory provides a useful lens for understanding how participants describe their interaction and communication with teachers, peer interaction, and the influence of the online learning environment on their engagement. This theoretical perspective

will help in the interpretation of the findings by understanding the role of communication and interaction in students' engagement in online learning. Therefore, Self-Determination Theory and Transactional Distance Theory provide complementary perspectives for understanding student engagement in online learning. The following section reviews studies on student engagement in developing and conflict-affected contexts.

2.5 Online Engagement in Developing and Conflict-Affected Contexts

Understanding students' engagement in conflict-affected contexts is highly important. Students' experiences in developing countries are different compared to those in developed countries. In fragile contexts like Afghanistan, students face problems such as unstable internet connections, low quality of teaching strategies due to unfamiliarity with the transition of delivering systems, a lack of digital resources and insufficient digital literacy (Haidari, Safawi, & Yelken, 2021; Asaqli, 2020; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). These reasons cause students to not participate, communicate, and interact in online classes which has a direct impact on students' engagement in online learning. Research conducted in developed countries shows that students usually do not face internet connection issues, digital literacy, and they own personal devices (Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Fredricks et al., 2004). Therefore, the findings of these studies may not fully represent the context of low-income countries. This section reviews studies in developing countries, and this examination may help us to understand the common barriers in other low-income countries like Afghanistan, where limited studies are conducted.

Hung and Chen (2003) examined distance learning and use of IT across the Asian Pacific region, including South Korea, Hong Kong, China, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, Australia, Guam, and

New Zealand. They mentioned that online learning is improving fast, but every country has different problems in terms of e- learning. One important point is the digital divide among students in many countries. Students who have devices and the internet can benefit more than those who do not. For example, in China, students who live in remote areas may face problems in online participation due to accessing a stable internet connection. Also, in Taiwan and Japan, students face cultural barriers on how to learn in online classes. As a result, sometimes Western methods may not fit the local methods. Also, the author mentioned that e-learning is not only about accessing technology and the Internet. Effective interaction matters for better outcomes. Overall, in the Asian context, cultural barriers, teaching methods, and structural challenges may affect the quality of online learning and student engagement. This perception can help us understand problems of online learning in other developing countries, especially Afghanistan, where cultural barriers, technological issues, and teaching methods exist.

Another study by Khasawneh et al. (2025) shed light on the online learning in conflict-affected regions, particularly at Ghaza University. A qualitative study was conducted on online learning in nations where physical classes are not feasible. They found that the online learning environment is an effective alternative education system where in-person classes are not possible. Distance learning has a dual nature in conflict- affected areas, as online learning is a lifeline for development in developing societies, and students have positive perceptions. At the same time, new concerns arise when students struggle with unstable internet connections and essential digital resources, which have a direct impact on their engagement. Similarly, they mentioned that the psychological toll as a result of conflict also impacts student engagement in online class. The findings of this study are relevant to the present study as they explain the challenges students experience in online learning within conflict-affected areas. However, in

Afghanistan the context may present additional social, political, and cultural challenges that require more investigation.

Although these studies highlight valuable insights of the topic, the experiences of students in Afghanistan may be different because of political restrictions in Afghanistan, cultural context, and educational challenges. The studies reviewed in this section show that students' engagement in online learning is influenced by many factors including: technological, educational, cultural, and psychological factors in developing and conflict-affected contexts. However, limited research has particularly examined how Afghan female university students experience engagement in online learning. As a result, this study focuses on understanding these experiences within the Afghan context. The next section focuses particularly on Afghanistan.

2.6 Barriers to Online Learning for Afghan Students

Online learning is the most common feasible and available education system for girls in Afghanistan. International organizations' reports mention that despite the functions of online learning serve as a lifeline for many girls in Afghanistan, this remains unequal for girls (UNESCO, 2025). Similar to other conflict-affected nations, Afghan students experience technological and educational challenges. However, they also face social, cultural, and political barriers that have influence student's engagement in online learning. The following sections review the major barriers identified in the literature and explain how they may influence Afghan female university students' engagement in online learning.

One of the most important challenges for the engagement of Afghan female students in online learning are technological problems. The literature identifies several technological barriers that influence students' engagement in online learning. These barriers are discussed in the following subsections

2.6.1.1 Poor Internet Connection

Many studies show that poor internet connectivity is the major obstacle for students' participation in online learning. Many students in Afghanistan who are attempting to join distance classes experience frequent disconnections and slow bandwidth during their lessons. This problem discourages students and decreases their participation in online learning (Reuters, 2023; Nesari et al., 2023; Quraishi et al., 2024). This problem occurs in provinces and rural areas much more than in cities. Another study also reported that students who are studying in an online education system face significant internet issues including poor connection (Afghanistan Human Rights Center, 2024). These challenges affect student engagement in e-learning significantly.

2.6.1.2 High Cost of Data

The high cost of the internet in Afghanistan is another major problem for girls, as their families cannot afford it continuously due to ongoing poverty and economic crises. UNICEF Afghanistan (2025) reported that poverty limited educational opportunities for many girls in Afghanistan. Some female students say that online learning is the only opportunity for them, but they cannot participate due to the high cost of the internet in Afghanistan (8am.media, 2026).

Similarly, Reuters mentioned that even with the presence of online learning opportunities, some girls cannot attend class because of the high cost of Wi-Fi and internet packages (2023).

2.6.1.3 Lack of Devices

Many students do not own devices such as smartphones and laptops, or use shared devices to join in distance learning. Sometimes they struggle to submit assignments as smartphones do not support all platforms. A quantitative study reported that limited device ownership is a major problem and restricts participation of students in the online education system (Quraishi et al., 2024). According to the Gallup World Poll, only 6% of women in Afghanistan have access to devices, while 25% of men own devices (Gallup, 2023). Another study also shows that many students face device problems that may affect their engagement in online classes (Nesari et al., 2023 & Haqbeen et al., 2024)

2.6.1.4 Electricity Instability

In Afghanistan, people experience shortages of electricity frequently, especially in winter due to high electricity demand and dependence on hydropower, which disrupts all individuals including online learners. Hadadd et al. (2025) reported that despite many positive impacts of online learning, electricity instability limited the students' participation in Afghanistan. Similarly, the World Bank. (2021) reports show that in most of the provinces of Afghanistan people experience frequent shortages of electricity especially during the periods of high demand. This challenge directly affects students participating in online learning.

2.6.1.5 Digital Literacy

Besides technological access, students also need the skills to use digital tools effectively. Having access to technology does not guarantee for students' participation in online classes because possessing digital skills is another crucial part of online engagement. This section will explore digital literacy challenges in the online education system that affect students' engagement.

Next, an explanatory study focused on easiness and accessibility of online tools for female students in Afghanistan will be presented. This study was conducted in three phases: 1,000 participants in the first phase, 654 participants in the second phase and 30 participants in the third phase due to the complexity of said third phase and a lack of information and communication technology (ICT) skills due to that the majority of students from participating

(Haqbeen, J., Sahab, S., & Ito, T. (2024)). Similarly, another study which is done as a Case study at Samangan University in Afghanistan, mentioned that the lack of ICT skills is a challenge which decreases students' engagement in e-learning (Quraishi et al., 2024). These studies suggest that digital literacy is an important factor influencing students' participation and engagement in online learning systems. As this study explores Afghan female university students' experiences, digital literacy will be considered as one of the factors that may shape their engagement in virtual classrooms.

2.7 Gender-Based Barriers

Technological barriers are not the only challenge. Social and cultural factors also have a role in Afghan female students' engagement in online learning. Significant gender-based barriers exist in the socio-cultural environment of Afghanistan.

Based on The News International (2024), after the Taliban's restriction on girls' secondary and higher education, online learning became common for female students, and the female students have been participating in online classes secretly because of socio-cultural and political consequences.

Many studies and international news show that cultural barriers in Afghanistan affect female participation in online classes significantly. Gender discrimination also remains common as cultural norms in Afghanistan allow for boys to make decisions and focus on their career plans while girls are not permitted to do so. People place less value on girls' education and prioritize house chores for girls over education. Girls do not receive support to have access to the internet for online education while distance learning is the most common pathway (Nesari et al., 2023 & Hussaini Hadadd et al., 2023). According to a UNICEF report, in some communities, early marriage is still common for girls in Afghanistan. Seventeen percent of girls get married before their 15th birthday. This cultural barrier prevents them from continuing their education due to home responsibilities and pregnancy (2024).

Another study shows that cultural and religious beliefs play an important role in girls' engagement in education. For example, a comparative education survey regarding the girls' educational rights was conducted between Bamyán and Kandhar province of Afghanistan. The findings show they have different perspectives regarding the girls' educational rights culturally

and religiously. In Bamyan, 95 percent of participants supported that Islam has no restrictions on girls' education, and they believe that girls have the right to go to schools even if the teachers are men. However, in Kandhar province, 70 percent of participants reported that Islam has restricted the girls' education, girls have to remain at home, avoid attending school with male teachers, and they consider early marriage as a religious value (Ahmadi et al., 2024).

2.8 Teaching Practices and Institutional Support in Afghanistan

In addition to technological and social barriers, teaching practices also shape students' engagement in online learning. They are also an important factor in students' engagement. Qualitative research has been conducted on challenges that students face in online learning, and findings show that teachers without prior experiences of online teaching, a lack of pedagogical training and use of technology and skills can cause problems in content delivery and keeping students engaged (Haidari et al., 2021). Another quantitative research has been conducted on 150 students from the Online University of Women in Afghanistan. The findings show that lack of trained and skilled educators is another major problem in the online learning system in Afghanistan which has a direct impact on the participation of students (Quraishi et al. 2024). These findings suggest that teacher preparation and institutional support play an important role in increasing student engagement in online learning in Afghanistan.

2.9 Research Gap

Overall, previous studies reveal many barriers to online learning in Afghanistan. However, they leave several important questions unanswered. There are few studies examining

the experiences of Afghan university students with online learning, especially for women, while online learning is a major learning platform. Most of the research conducted in Afghanistan examines the problems that students face in online education, including technology limitations, lack of infrastructure, and lack of experienced teachers (Haidari et al., 2021; Quraishi et al., 2024; Nesari et al., 2023). These studies explore challenges of distance learning but do not address how these problems impact students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Also, many international organizations as well as the news show that online education is one of the few opportunities for Afghan girls to learn after the Taliban takeover in 2021 (UNESCO, 2025; Reuters, 2023). However, most literature focuses on whether students have the chance to receive an education. Another study illustrated how cultural and gender barriers affect girls' participation in online education in Afghanistan (Ahmadi et al., 2024). However, there are limited studies about real-life experiences of students' engagement in online classes. This study aims to fill this gap by examining students' experiences of engagement in online classes from the perspective of Afghan female university students in today's educational landscape.

2.10 Conclusion

This literature review described the existing research on online learning and the factors that affect student engagement, particularly in developing and conflict-affected contexts. Previous studies highlighted the importance of online classes globally and the challenges that students face for participating. However, students in Afghanistan struggle with many issues including technological limitations, digital literacy challenges, cultural restrictions, and limited institutional support. While some studies highlighted the challenges that students face in e-learning, limited research explores the experiences of engagement among Afghan female

university students. Therefore, this study will examine students' experiences of engagement in online classes from the perspective of Afghan female university students.

Chapter 3: Materials and Methodology

3.1 Research Materials

There are a number of tools that can be used to assist the collection and analysis of the data. Semi-structured interview questionnaires on the experiences of Afghan female university students regarding online learning were the main materials used for this study. The interview questions were open-ended with some follow-up questions to allow the respondents to share their experiences, feelings, and perspectives about online learning.

The interviews were conducted with participants through some tools such as Zoom, Google Meet, or WhatsApp since they were not in the same location and a physical meeting was not possible. To ensure that the questions and answers were understood with precision, the interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants.

The researcher used a computer and a word processor to transcribe the transcription of the interviews. Notes were recorded on observations that could be helpful to the researcher while analyzing the data.

3.2 Research Location

This study was conducted with Afghan female university students who are pursuing their education through online learning from different. Considering that the participants are from various parts of Afghanistan and are restricted from physical classes, the entire study was conducted online.

The online interview method provided an opportunity to conduct the study in a safe and accessible manner, avoiding the need for physical meetings. Moreover, the online method is appropriate for the research since the objective of the study is to investigate the engagement of the participants in an online learning environment. In this sense, the online method provided a backdrop for the research as well as a platform for the study.

3.3 Participants

The participants of the current study were Afghan female university students who are currently engaged in the process of learning through the online platforms. For these women, the social and political conditions of their country have limited their access to higher education, and the internet provides a significant opportunity for them to continue their academic journey.

The target of participants for this study was 15 female students, and purposive sampling was used to select the participants. This method of sampling enabled the researcher to select students who have relevant experiences of the phenomenon being studied. They were selected through personal and professional networks. Additionally, they were invited to participate if they met the study criteria such as being Afghan female university students currently studying through online learning in Afghanistan.

The participants of the current study were from various academic programs and different universities. However, the common factor between the participants was their exposure to distance learning. This helped to obtain a wider perspective of the topic.

The participation of the individuals for this study was completely voluntary. Participants were informed of the purpose of the current study, and they were assured of the confidentiality of the information they would provide. Pseudonyms were used instead of the names of the participants.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were considered in this study to protect the rights and privacy of the participants. Before conducting the interviews, participants were informed about their roles in the study, purpose of the study, the interview process, and the use of collected data. Additionally, they were informed that their participation is completely voluntary, and they could withdraw from interview at any time without any penalty.

To ensure confidentiality, instead of participants' real names pseudonyms were used in interview transcripts. All recorded interviews, transcripts, and research data were stored on a password-protected computer and were accessible only to the researcher. The findings are written in a way that avoids presenting participants' identities and personal information.

3.5 Data Collection

For this research, online semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect relevant data. The reason for choosing a semi-structured interview was to allow participants to express themselves in their own words regarding their thoughts and experiences in online education. However, it also allowed the researcher to take control of the interview by asking a series of interview questions.

Each interview was conducted online in a one-on-one setting using online tools such as Zoom, Google Meet or WhatsApp. The interview duration was about 30 to 40 minutes. Also, the interview questions were about participants' experiences in online classes, their emotional responses to online classes, and their difficulties in online classes.

With the participants' permission, audio recording of the interview was done to ensure accurate recording of participants' responses. The interview was then transcribed in written form to allow a thorough review of the interview to prepare for data analysis. In addition to audio recording, the researcher also maintained field notes to record important observations that might not be evident from the audio recording of the interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

For data analysis part, thematic analysis was used. Thematic analysis is a qualitative method that helps identify, analyze, and interpret common themes in participants' responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each interview was recorded, and audio was translated into English text. To become familiar with the data and understand the participants' experiences the transcripts were read several times.

Even if this study used a phenomenological research design, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used because it provides a flexible method for identifying and interpreting patterns across participants lived experiences. Thematic analysis was appropriate for identifying common meanings and experiences because the purpose of this study was to understand how Afghan female university students experienced engagement in online learning. This was aligned with main of phenomenology, which is to understand people's lived experiences.

Then researcher proceeded to coding, where key words, phrases, and ideas were identified in participants' responses. The codes were then grouped together to form larger categories, and then key themes that capture the experiences and views of the respondents were identified. These themes were then used to understand how Afghan female university students participate in and are motivated to participate in online learning, and what influences their participation and motivation. The themes were then contextualized based on my research questions and the literature on to say about student engagement and online learning. The themes were also contextualized in the setting of online learning in conflict-ridden countries like Afghanistan.

3.7 Limitations

There are some limitations on this study. First, the participants represented a small number, so the findings may not be interpreted as representative of all Afghan female university students. Secondly, the experiences of other students, particularly high school students, were not explored as this study focused only on female university students. Lastly, participants might not be able to express themselves in the interview in the data collection stage due to internet and communication challenges. Data was collected online.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter will present the findings of the thematic analysis of collected data through semi-structured interviews with Afghan female university students about their experiences of engagement in the online education system. Making use of the analyzed data, four main themes were developed based on the participants' shared experiences. Each theme presents how students described their online educational involvements, the factors that influenced their engagement and participation in class, and the challenges they faced as well as the opportunities they got while studying online. Some direct quotations from participants are included for supporting the findings and to represent their voices. The organization of findings was made according to the themes and subthemes that emerged from the interview data.

Theme 1: Online Learning as a Lifeline for Educational Continuity

The first theme describes how online learning became an important way of instruction for higher education of Afghan female students after universities and physical higher education centers were closed to women in Afghanistan. For most participants, online education was not only an alternative way of learning. Instead, it became the only chance to continue their studies, improve their knowledge, and keep hope for their dreams. Although participants mentioned many difficulties, they also explained that online learning helped them continue their academic journey for higher education when traditional education was no longer available because of political restrictions. This theme includes four subthemes: online education as the sole opportunity, academic growth through online learning, holding onto hope through education, and commitment to completing higher education.

4.1.1 Online Education as the Only Opportunity

Almost all participants explained that online education was the only way they could continue studying after women were banned from attending universities in Afghanistan. Many of them explained that they had no other educational choice. Instead of stopping their education completely, they decided to join online programs offered by international universities and NGOs. Several participants described that adjusting from face-to-face education to online learning was difficult initially. Online classes seemed totally unfamiliar for them, and they faced several challenges. They preferred the physical classroom compared to online learning, they also missed the classroom discussions, interaction with classmates and friends, and learning directly from teachers. However, they accepted this change because it was the only educational opportunity, and they wanted to continue their studies.

Another important finding was that online classes helped female students to be socially connected. Many participants explained that after political restriction on women's mobility and higher education, they were prohibited from any social interaction. Therefore, online classes were the only available way to be socially active. This effective opportunity helped them to communicate with others, exchange ideas during class discussions, and feel that they still belonged to the community and learning environment.

Key findings from Interviews:

- "Before the Taliban, I studied in a classroom with my friends. Suddenly everything changed. Online learning was very different, but I had to accept it because I wanted to continue my studies."

- “The classes were not only for studying. They helped me meet people, talk with others, and feel less alone.”
- “I have classmates from many cities and communicate with different cultures.”
- "After the Taliban, since we do not have opportunities for physical classes, online is the best opportunity”
- Despite several issues, online education is the only pathway to continue their education instead of ending completely. This is reflected by many of the participants including: P1, P2, P6 and P12.

This finding suggests that online learning supported Afghan female university students beyond academic learning. This educational method was the only path that allowed the students to continue their higher education. Also, online classes are a space where they can reconnect socially after they were prohibited from physical education. It helped them be less isolated as they had interaction with teachers and peers who shared similar educational experiences.

Overall, this subtheme shows that online education was much more than a learning platform. It is an important source of educational opportunities for girls in Afghanistan, and also supports the students in having a sense of connection and belonging during these times of political restriction on higher education.

4.1.2 Academic Growth through Online Learning

Although students faced many challenges during the online classes, they recognized this opportunity as a valuable experience that helped them to develop their academic journey. They

explained that online learning helps them to become more independent and responsible for their own learning. They do not have face to face instruction from teachers which results in the fact they have less support to understand and realize assignments, so they have to search and look for extra information by themselves.

Many participants also described improvements in research skills. They became more confident in searching academic journals, accessing online libraries, and understanding how to use reliable sources of information. Several of them explained that these were skills they had rarely experienced in physical education.

Participants further informed their reading habits changed through online education. As most learning materials are provided digitally according to lessons and assignments, they have to spend more time reading books, journals and other academic sources. Gradually, regular reading helped them strengthen their reading skills while during in-person classes they mostly were dependent on teachers' lectures.

Further, some of the participants explained that through online learning they achieved self- discipline. Besides house duties they manage their time effectively as they organize their study schedules, completing assignments on time. These online experiences helped them to develop stronger personal discipline, improve their time management skills, and build confidence in their ability to be independent learners.

Key Findings from the Interview:

- "I learned to study by myself. Before, I always depended on teachers, but online learning taught me how to find information and understand lessons on my own."

- "Because everything was online, I had to read more than before. At first it was difficult, but later I enjoyed reading and learned many new things."
- "I learned to read more books and do research."
- "I searched Google, YouTube and many other sources to solve my problem."
- "We have assigned readings to write reflections."

Participants' descriptions reveal that online learning was not only a way to continue their education but also a shift from depending on instructors to becoming more self-directed learners. They take greater responsibility for their academic success. Also, online learning encouraged them to develop important skills, such as time management, problem solving, research, critical reading, and self-discipline. Despite the many challenges they faced, they found this experience to be an opportunity to grow academically and become more confident in their ability to learn independently.

This subtheme highlights that online learning is an important contributor to academic development for Afghan female university students. Despite the challenges of learning in an online education system, they believe this is an important opportunity to learn and grow academically.

4.1.3 Holding onto Hope through Online Education

During this period of educational restriction for girls and uncertainty about the future in Afghanistan, online learning represents hope for many students. Although they have an unclear future, online education motivates them to keep moving forward. Many of them mentioned that

participating in online learning helped them feel that they are still making progress toward their goals even if they are surrounded by many restrictions that keep them away from learning and public life. They expressed that education rights and opportunities are uncertain in Afghanistan for the moment. Studying online is a greater chance and hope than giving up on their education.

Also, the majority of participants explained that in the current situation, online classes help them to have a sense of purpose and believe that their educational journey has not ended. They see this opportunity as an investment in their future instead of focusing only on present challenges. Also, they believe that every new skill and lesson they learn through online courses, makes them closer to their future goals. Moreover, some students who were studying in online international universities, expressed that this opportunity is a hope for a better future. They were hopeful that studying at an online international university may help them to go abroad for further education, and have job opportunities.

In addition, many participants also expressed that distance learning inspires them to continue their education for international opportunities. They mentioned that they are committed to online opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and academic skills which prepares them for international scholarships. Getting international opportunities and studying abroad is always a motivation to continue studying even when they are unsure about what the future will bring.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- "Education gave me hope. Every class reminded me that my future was not completely lost."
- "Studying at this university gives me hope."
- "I think about migration and a better future."

- "I hope to study for a master's abroad."
- "I always dream of studying in another country. Online education helped me believe that maybe one day I can reach that dream."

This finding highlights that distance learning is closely connected to hope, resilience and future aspirations in situations in which women are deprived of every single basic educational right. Online learning helps them to have a sense of direction for gaining knowledge in a context where learning and seeking knowledge is unacceptable.

In general, this subtheme indicates that online education is a source of hope, confidence and future aspirations that gives the students meaningful goals to work towards long-term educational goals.

4.1.4 Commitment to Completing Higher Education

Participants remained strongly committed to completing their higher education although they faced many barriers. Even under difficult circumstances, they see education as a valuable achievement that should not be abandoned. Their commitments to complete a higher degree do not show only earning a university degree, but a personal decision to continue their educational goals. Many of them mentioned that in the current situation under the Taliban government, they are removed from social life and considered less valuable. However, when they see themselves surrounded with barriers just because of their gender, they work harder for education and use every single opportunity to complete it.

Many of them expressed their pledge to complete higher education because of injustice in Afghanistan. They believe that giving up and accepting the ending of their educational journey

means that we allowed the Taliban to decide our future. Therefore, they use every single opportunity to continue their way. Although continuing education under the current situation means struggling with enormous barriers such as ; poor electricity and internet connection, family issues and security challenges, they keep trying to achieve their goals because of their future, family and next generations.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- "I continue because I have to graduate for my future."
- "I want education to get a better job."
- "I should benefit from this opportunity for my future."
- "Even though Afghanistan is in a bad situation, I still have opportunities."

This shows that participants' engagement on higher education is not only there with the eye on a degree. They see education connected to their identity, personal value and hope for a better future. Continuing their studies in the current harsh situation reflects their determination for taking control of their rights which are an important part of their lives even if circumstances are beyond their command. For them, persistence is not the absence of challenges, but the decision to fight for continued learning when conditions give rise to many obstacles.

This subtheme indicates that students, despite restrictions and significant challenges, are committed to completing their higher education. Participants' experiences and determination show that they do not view education as a solely academic achievement but also shape their goals, personal strength, identity, resilience, and hope for a better future.

Theme 2: Negotiating Everyday Barriers to Engagement

The second theme approaches the challenges that affect engagement of Afghan female university students in online learning. Participants were highly motivated and committed to continue their education, but there are many barriers that make learning difficult for them. There are some everyday obstructions that affect students' engagement in online classes including technology, studying environments, family and cultural expectations, academic pressure, and physical and emotional difficulties. Based on participants' experiences these barriers have a direct influence on their concentration, participation and motivation in online classes.

4.2.1 Technological and Infrastructural Barriers

Almost all participants expressed that technological barriers are one of the major challenges in their online education system. Some of them said that they do not have access to a proper device. They only have a phone and some have a shared laptop with other family members while they have to study all the books, articles and do assignments on the phone. Also, poor internet connection was the most common problem for them. This challenge makes participating in class and handing over assignments more challenging for them.

Similarly, many participants also mentioned that they cannot provide for internet packages since they are not affordable to them. Financial difficulties caused them to not always have enough internet data to attend every class. Electricity shortages are another major problem for participants. They described that due to a lack of regular electricity, they cannot charge their devices and they miss their classes.

Several participants' experiences reveal poor internet connection is also a problem and cause students cannot participate in the class. They expressed that sometimes during class the screen freezes, interrupting discussions and even becoming disconnected in the middle of the class is not unheard of. Some of them hesitate to participate in the class because the teacher cannot hear their voice properly.

A few participants expressed that online learning platforms were unfamiliar for methods initially. They had struggled using them, and even missed assignments and classes due to an absence of prior knowledge about the platforms which were assigned by the university. Over time and practice they learned how to use learning management systems, participate in online classes and submit assignments.

Key Findings from the Interview:

- "Poor internet connection disconnected me during exams."
- "The Internet is not always affordable for me."
- "We had no electricity for three days a week."
- "I only use my phone to continue my class."
- "I was not even familiar with technology initially."

These findings show that technological and infrastructural barriers are persistent challenges for students which reduces their engagement in class. Problems such as limited access to devices, poor internet connection, electricity shortages, financial problems and lack of digital literacy have a direct negative impact on their class attendance, participation in discussions and examinations and submitting assignments. Therefore, based on these findings, the effectiveness

of online learning classes depends on many factors including students' motivation, availability of reliable technological infrastructure, and proper digital resources. Participants are significantly disrupted without these essential supports in their academic journey.

In general, technological and infrastructural obstructions cause many interruptions which have a direct impact on student participation.

4.2.2 Learning within Challenging Home Environments

The majority of participants explained that they do not have suitable learning environments for online classes. Since they lived within large families, they had very little quiet space for attending online classes. They cannot concentrate and have disruption from family members, children, neighbors and even household tasks during their classes.

Many participants had shared rooms with siblings and family members. They were not comfortable during the class to talk or engage actively because they did not have private study space.

Similarly, responsibilities surrounding housekeeping tasks also interrupt online learning and reduce class engagement. Based on some participants' experiences, their family members expected them to help with cooking, cleaning, or caring for younger siblings, even during class hours.

Key Findings from the Interview:

- "It was difficult to focus because there was always noise around me. Sometimes I could not even hear my teacher clearly."

- "Sometimes I had to leave class to help my family. It was difficult to give full attention to my studies."
- "I had to study in the same room with my family, especially in the winter season."
- "Family interruptions make concentration difficult."

These findings show that the home environment wherein students join class has a significant role on students' engagement in online learning. Lack of private space for studying, interruption from other family members and outside causes and house work duties reduce concentration and affect students' engagement during classes. Therefore, learning from home was not effortless and without barriers for students because of constant distractions which made it difficult for students to engage actively.

In summary, learning environments in online systems are significantly important, but many participants faced difficulties. They do not have quiet study space, face frequent distractions and household duties reduce their concentration, participation and overall engagement in online classes. These findings reveal that successful online education needs a supportive home learning environment.

4.2.3 Family and Cultural Expectations

Participants expressed both positive and negative experiences with their families while studying online. Some students received support and encouragement from their parents and siblings to continue their education remotely. Others described that their family does not support them to attend online classes. They need a proper device, internet and a proper environment but they do not always receive it from their parents even though they have the ability to support them. For example, one participant said that she can have private space because they have an

extra room, but her father does not allow her to use it. Some other participants said when they need internet data, they do not receive support. They have struggled and asked multiple times for help.

However, for many participants cultural expectations are also a barrier and affect their engagement. Some families did not consider online education as an effective way of learning. They believed that studying from home was not as important as physical education, and did not support the student to have full attention on their online classes.

Similarly, the majority of participants described that they are disturbed by guests visiting the house. They were expected to leave their classes to greet the guests and participate in family gatherings. Some of them had fear of judgment from relatives or neighbors when they came to visit after spending many hours online.

Key Findings from the Interview:

- “My family understands that I have classes, and they support me to continue my education.”
- “I could not concentrate during my exam because guests had arrived at our home.”
- “Before the Taliban, I studied in a classroom with my friends. Suddenly everything changed. Online learning was very different, but I had to accept it because I wanted to continue my studies.”
- “My mother sometimes says... do not study at all and leave them”

These findings show that cultural and family expectations have a significant impact on students' engagement in the class. Family members do not play a role only in the accessibility of

online education but also have a significant part in students' engagement and academic outcome in online classes. Based on students' experiences, family responsibilities and cultural expectations reduced their engagement because of constant interruption, undermining the importance of online classes. It is important to note; the perspectives of society and family can affect students in not taking themselves seriously and participating actively. Therefore, recognition of online education by family and society can help students to be active and engage in the courses.

Overall, this subtheme expressed that family and cultural expectations play a role in students' engagement in online learning. Lack of family support and cultural misunderstandings about online learning are an obstacle that reduces students' engagement. However, some students receive support from family members and parents that make the learning experience easier.

4.2.4 Academic and Language Challenges

Academic and language challenges also affected participants' online learning experiences. They expressed the most common challenges including studying in English, managing multiple assignments simultaneously and organizing their study schedules. These experiences make it difficult to participate successfully in online learning as students have to put more effort.

Some participants explained that studying in an English medium university was one of the biggest challenges for them to engage actively in the class. Usually, they need more time to read academic articles, and complete assignments. Similarly, some participants expressed that sometimes they struggle to understand different English accents of teachers in the class.

Also, a few participants pointed out that the large number of readings, assignments, presentations, and group projects pressurize them. They find it difficult when they have to complete everything on time. Many explained that amidst internet problems, electricity shortages and family responsibilities, it is really difficult to manage everything.

Key Findings from the Interview:

- “English is my second language, so I need more time to complete assignments.”
- “I have nine assignments within five days, and it is really difficult to manage.”
- “This semester I have eight courses, and sometimes I feel overwhelmed.”
- “I feel overwhelmed by the number of assignments each week.”
- “The teacher had a different accent, so it was difficult to understand. I did not catch the lesson and had to search for it on YouTube.”

These findings illustrate the language barriers and academic demands as challenges for participants. Language barriers and heavy workloads make it difficult to manage and it affects their confidence because students get stressed. The language barrier has a direct impact on student engagement because students who feel unsure hesitate to participate in the class.

This subtheme shows that one of the important challenges of students in online classes are language barriers, assignment pressure and heavy workloads.

4.2.5 Physical and Emotional Challenges

Participants also explained that they experienced many physical and emotional challenges that affected their engagement. Physical discomfort including strain, headaches, and blue-light fatigue because of spending many hours looking at computer or phone screens. These challenges caused students to not stay focused in prolonged online classes.

In addition to physical challenges, some participants expressed emotional difficulties as well. Students have anxiety due to the current situation, uncertainty about education and the future as well as regarding the political situation. This challenge affects their motivation and concentration. A few participants also noted that spending many hours in digital class without physical interaction causes boredom.

Some participants also described that sometimes they experience feelings of depression and hopelessness during the class. Under the current situation in Afghanistan, they are worried about their future and career opportunities. Some of them explained that they think about whether they will be able to work in the future after online education.

Almost all participants explained that they experienced social isolation since attending online classes. Because of too much exposure to screen and online communication, they do not enjoy physical interaction. A few students expressed that communication with others has become difficult, and they are not as confident in public as before. Since they try to be in a private space and attend the class, they prefer to always stay isolated and use digital devices and not even talk with family members.

Many students explained that even though online classes are an opportunity and allow them some communication, this cannot be a replacement of a physical classroom and relationship. They missed having interaction with teachers, classmates and studying on campus.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- “Everything is on the screen, including books, quiz, classmates and teachers, and it has become exhausting.”
- “After four hours of online classes, I usually get headaches.”
- “The uncertainty about the future makes me hopeless.”
- “I realized I no longer wanted to communicate with people, and I became socially isolated.”
- “After studying online for four years, I feel isolated from social life and it is difficult to communicate with them.”

Overall, these findings show that physical and emotional challenges and social communication have a significant role on effectiveness of online classes. Feelings of hopelessness and isolation makes students demotivated, so they may not pay full attention and engage much in the class. In addition, physical discomfort also reduces engagement because students cannot focus on the lesson as they should. Therefore, findings suggest that students need physical health, social connection and emotional well-being to have sustained engagement and meaningful learning experiences.

In summary, this theme shows that Afghan female university students face many barriers in the online education system. The barriers that influence their engagement are technological

problems, challenging home environments, family and cultural expectations, academic pressure, and physical and emotional difficulties. This shows participants' determination, strong commitment to achieve their goals as they continue studying despite these challenges.

Theme 3: Engagement Through Teaching, Interaction, and Relationships

The third theme explains the impact of teacher support, instructional methods and relationships with classmates and teachers on students' engagement in online learning. Along with the many challenges that students face in the online education system, there are many factors that help them stay engaged during online classes. Almost all of them explained that the classes are interesting and enjoyable with interactive teaching methods, active participation and group work. These factors motivate them to participate in class. This theme consists of four subthemes.

4.3.1 Interactive Teaching Encourages Engagement

Participants explained that their class engagement had a direct relationship with the teaching method. They were more willing to participate in the class when the teacher used a student-centered approach than only giving lectures. Many participants expressed that they enjoyed classes where teachers give more chances to students, asked questions, encouraged discussion, asked every student to share their opinions and give feedback.

Similarly, many students appreciate teachers who have well-organized lesson plans. Classes with clear objectives and materials help students to pay attention and stay focused.

In addition, many participants described teachers who used a variety of class activities such as presentations, videos, quizzes, breakout rooms or real-life examples as really interesting methods which reduce boredom in online classes.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- “When teachers include activities and encourage students to talk, I feel more confident. In lecture-based classes, I do not participate.”
- “The teacher was very organized, which helped all students understand difficult assignments.”
- “Reading activities and classroom discussions helped students understand the lesson much better.”
- “When teachers ask us questions and require us to turn on our cameras, I push myself to concentrate and participate. In lecture-based classes I cannot concentrate, and sometimes I even fall asleep.”

These findings suggest that interactive and well-planned lessons keep the students active and involved in online learning. A well-organized lesson plan helps students to learn easily. In contrast, lecture-based classrooms make students bored and reduce engagement.

Overall, this subtheme indicates that one of the important factors in effective online classes where students are active learners, is teaching methods. Some participants shared that they had positive learning experience in interactive, well-organized, and student-centered classes.

4.3.2 Teacher Support Strengthens Engagement

Almost all participants consistently described that the most important source of support during online learning is the teacher. In these classrooms where the teachers encouraged and supported the students emotionally and created a positive classroom, they are confident and motivated. Some of them appreciated the teachers who are accessible outside the classroom for online learning. They mentioned that in the online learning system mostly they study by themselves and often have questions. Some teachers are accessible for additional support such as responding to emails, messages and such. Similarly, some participants valued the teachers who see students' needs. As students face many problems like internet shut downs and electricity shortages it happens students cannot finish their assignments. Some teachers then extend the deadlines and record the lesson which students can use later.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- “Some teachers give students more space to talk, which makes me feel comfortable participating.”
- “We can contact our teachers and advisors through email whenever we face problems.”
- “When I emailed my teacher about an assignment, I received a reply within about twelve hours.”

These findings show that a significant factor of students' engagement in online classes is teachers' support. Teachers who were available when students needed, responsive to their duties and supportive of students' needs were appreciated by students the most. Students feel motivated and confident to participate in the class when they are supported emotionally and have good communication.

In general, teachers who are supportive and responsive have a direct influence on students' motivation and assurance. Therefore, this emotional support and encouragement increase active involvement in online class.

Theme 4: Creating Conditions for Meaningful Engagement

The fourth theme describes the suggestions by participants for a more effective engagement in online learning. Participants identified many obstacles that influenced their educational journey, but they also expressed some ideas for effectiveness and meaningfulness in online learning. They suggested that better institutional support, family support and community awareness, recognition of online education and more certain future opportunities would be helpful for students to engage in online learning. This theme includes four subthemes.

4.4.1 Institutional Support

Almost all participants believed that educational institutions have an important role in improving students' engagement in online learning. They explained that institutions could help students through financial support, such as scholarships and internet allowances. These supports can assist students to continue their studies without worrying about educational expenses.

Some participants suggested that universities should understand students' problems in the current situation and follow more flexible policies. Students often face problems that are not under their control such as internet disruptions, electricity shortages or family responsibilities. The teachers should extend the deadlines or record lectures, so they can recover the lesson

without stress. They believed that flexibility reduced stress as they can focus on their courses and have direct involvement.

Many participants suggested that technical support is another important demand for them. They explained that guidance in using digital platforms and solving technical problems should be provided by universities for students as they are not familiar with online learning systems. In addition, some participants also believed that institutes should have teachers training programs to have qualified and skillful teachers to make classes more interactive.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- "International organizations should help Afghan girls with devices and the internet because many students are motivated but cannot afford them."
- "Some teachers understand our internet problems, but others expect us to have a strong connection all the time."
- "Teachers should know how to involve students instead of only giving lectures."
- "Having a clear portal with easy access to course materials helps students learn better."

These findings show students' suggestions that institutional support play an essential role in improving engagement in online learning. They believe that institutional support such as financial assistance, flexible academic policies, technical support and teacher training can reducing many of the existing challenges. As a result, the findings suggest that students' efforts are not only the reason for effective online learning but also that educational institutions can help in creating an accessible, flexible and supportive online learning environment for students.

In summary, participants focused on institutions' support such as addressing students' financial issues, technical and academic needs which can enhance online learning systems. They believe that they may have a more effective and engaging learning experience if institutions support them with flexible policies, digital assistance and well-trained teachers.

4.4.2 Family and Community Awareness

Participants described that family and community support are essential for effective and successful online learning. They believe that families would support the students and their educational needs if they become aware of the importance and value of online education. Many of them expressed that their family members do not understand that online classes are as important as physical classes and need the same attention. In addition, many of them suggested that families should support students with proper environments for attending online classes and avoid unnecessary interruptions during these sessions. They believe this support can increase students' engagement.

Participants also emphasized the importance of community awareness about online education. They expressed that since girls do not have access to traditional education; societies should recognize online learning as a valuable way of learning and not undermine it.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- “Many parents believe online classes have no value because schools and universities are closed.”

- “When they were watching TV or talking, I requested them to keep silent so that I could participate in the class. Sometimes this even causes arguments. I think families need to respect students' study time.”
- “People around us should know that studying online is still education. We also have classes, assignments, and exams just like students who study on campus.”
- “During my exam my Dad came and asked me to serve the guests. I could not concentrate because of the guests and the fear of being judged. Families should understand that online learning is as important as face-to-face education.”

Participants' experiences revealed the importance of family and community support in students' engagement in an online learning environment. Family and community should be aware of the value of online education because greater awareness can encourage families to provide students with their educational needs and improve their engagement.

Overall, participants emphasized that family and community support has a direct relationship with effectiveness and successfulness of online learning.

4.4.3 Strengthening the Value and Future Opportunities of Online Education

Official recognition of online education is another important factor for their future which is suggested by participants. Many participants expressed their concern that online degrees are not always valued equally with degrees earned from traditional universities. Official recognition of online degrees would increase students' motivation and commitment because many of them continue for future job opportunities.

Almost all of them suggested solid employment opportunities after graduation. They hoped that they would spend time and effort on online education despite the many challenges. The knowledge and skills they gained would help them after graduation to have online jobs, remote employment or other work opportunities that they could do from home.

A few participants also expressed interest in entrepreneurship. They believed that the knowledge and skills with recognized degrees they gain from online education could help them establish small businesses, providing online services.

Many participants described the importance of mental health and well-being. They explained that experiencing stress, anxiety, loneliness and uncertainty affected their effectiveness in online learning. They suggested that universities should provide online mental health services such as counseling services and well-being activities. These services would help students to maintain their well-being and use their opportunities properly and remain engaged in their studies.

Similarly, participants encouraged inciting organizations and universities to offer more educational opportunities such as additional online courses, professional development programs, language courses and scholarship opportunities.

Key Findings from the Interviews:

- “I applied for a job, but they told me my online university degree would not be accepted”.
- “Girls need online job opportunities after graduation because working outside the home is difficult.”

- “Organizations should support online entrepreneurship so girls can create their own employment after graduation”.
- “Girls face many mental health challenges, so universities should provide online wellbeing workshops and support”.

Participants' recommendations reveal that online education is more than a temporary solution for continuing studies among female university students in Afghanistan. They emphasized that improving the value of online education requires greater recognition of its quality and stronger pathways to future opportunities. As a result, expanding learning opportunities, well-being workshops and supporting them in the path to employment and entrepreneurship would help online education to become more sustainable and meaningful in students' lives.

In summary, participants proposed many ideas that could strengthen students' engagement in online learning. They expressed institutional support, family and community awareness and improved recognition of online education as a priority to the improvement of online education. In addition, they highlighted the importance of expanding educational opportunities, suitable employment possibilities, entrepreneurship and mental health support. In general, participants believed that students' motivation and efforts is not only enhance and implement a more meaningful online education but it also strengthens educational institutions, families, communities, employers and society overall.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implication, Recommendation & Conclusion

This chapter will develop the findings of the study in relation to literature review and the theoretical frameworks that are used in this study. The main purpose of this research was to explore how Afghan female university students describe their experiences of engagement in online learning and to examine the factors they believe influence their engagement in online classes. The discussion will be led according to the two research questions as this helps to explain the findings more clearly and shows how they relate to existing studies. The discussion also uses the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) and the Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) to better understand students' experiences of online engagement. Finally, the chapter also presents the implications of the study, its limitations as well as recommendations for practice and future research and a conclusion.

5.1 Discussion of Research Question One

Research Question 1: How do Afghan female university students describe their experiences of engagement in online learning?

The findings of this study show that participants of this study described their engagement in online learning as more than simply attending an online classroom and completing assignments. For them, engagement equals three main ideas. First, they see online learning as a way to continue their education and be socially connected. Second, they described that online learning is a source of hope that strengthens their resilience and commitment to their future educational goals. Third, they explained that online learning helped them to grow personally and academically.

Educational continuity and social connection

One of the main findings of this study is that online learning is much more than an online classroom for participants. It became the only available way to continue their higher education after the Taliban restriction on women's rights. At the same time, online classes are the best possible way to communicate with others including teachers and classmates while they are not allowed to go outside. Therefore, online classes reduce feelings of isolation. For the majority of them, online class helped them to feel they were still university students and their educational journey had not ended completely. These experiences show that engagement in online classrooms was closely connected to both continuing education and maintaining social relationships.

This finding supports the previous studies. Reuters (2023) reported that online education became one of the few remaining educational ways, after the Taliban took control of the country, for Afghan women to continue higher education. Similarly, Khasawneh et al. (2025) found that online learning is an important way for students in conflict-affected areas where physical education is impossible. However, the present study adds a new perspective that online learning is valuable not only because of having access to education but also because it helps students remain connected with others. In a situation where they are prohibited from public life, almost all participants experienced social isolation. Virtual class helps students have interactions with teachers and classmates through online learning that has become an important part of their engagement.

This suggests that feeling connected with teachers and classmates helped participants have sense of relatedness which helped them to stay motivated to remain engaged in online learning. According to the Self-Determination Theory, connection with other people motivates

the students. In online learning participants can interact and communicate with teachers and classmates without attending physical classrooms. This helps them to feel being a part of a learning community. The Transactional Distance Theory also suggests that the psychological distance created by online learning can be reduced through interaction between students and teachers. In this study, communication and classroom interaction regularly helped students feel less isolated and motivated them for more engagement in their educational duties.

Hope, resilience, and future commitment

Another important finding is that participants described their online experiences as a source of hope that helped them remain engaged despite the existence of many barriers. Educational restrictions, uncertainty about the future and low quality of life could not stop them from studying and they believed that education could bring better opportunities. Participants kept going forward to complete their degrees, gain scholarships, go abroad for higher education or find better jobs in the future. These long-term goals helped them to stay motivated and continue learning even if the situation is tough.

The present study's findings are similar to previous studies. UNESCO (2025) reported that for Afghan girls, online education is an important way to continue learning and remain hopeful after losing access to formal education. In addition, Khasawneh et al. (2025) mentioned that education is a source of hope and a path to a better future for students in conflict-affected areas. The findings of the present study are aligned to these studies as it shows that participants remained engaged in online classes because they believed education would be the better way to improve their future. According to Self-Determination Theory, participants stayed motivated

because they had a clear sense of purpose for their future. They believed that these goals were achievable for them (competence) and able to choose to continuing learning despite difficult circumstances (autonomy). These psychological needs supported their continued engagement in online learning.

Personal and academic development

The findings of this study also show that online learning supported the participants to grow personally and academically. Almost all the participants explained that through online learning methods they become more independent and self-directed learners. They learned to take a bigger responsibility in their studying journey such as searching for information, reading academic articles, managing their time productively, solving problems independently. These skills developed in participants because of adapting to the online learning system and they also believed this development made them more confident and capable learners.

Similar findings were reported by Martin and Bolliger (2018), who found that students played a more active role in their own learning throughout the online education system. However, the present study suggests that these skills did not develop only because online learning is a good opportunity but because this was the only option for them to rely on. This finding is also aligned with the Self-Determination Theory. As students became more independent, they felt more confident in their learning, which helped them stay engaged in the class. Students developed a stronger sense of competence when they gained new knowledge and completed their academic tasks successfully. The feeling of being capable of learning

independently increased their confidence and motivation to remain engaged in their studies actively.

Overall, the findings reveal that engagement in online learning is described much more than participating in virtual classes by participants. Based on the participants' experiences, online learning was used as a pathway to continue their higher education, have connections with others, develop important academic skills and was a source of hope for the future. These findings extend previous research because it shows that in the context of Afghanistan, experiences of engagement in online classes have a direct link to resilience, social connection and personal growth. As a result, it should be understood that engagement in online classes is a students' commitment to continue their education regardless of significant barriers, not only a participation in learning activities.

5.2 Discussion of Research Question Two

Research Question 2: What factors do students perceive as influencing their level of engagement in online classes?

The findings of this study show that there are several factors that influence participants engagement in online learning systems. They include technological barriers, teaching and institutional support, home and family support and personal and academic factors. Participants described that these factors impacted in both negative and positive ways, which could encourage or reduce their motivation, participation and overall engagement in online classes.

Technological and infrastructural factors

A significant finding of this study is the impact of technological and infrastructural challenges in virtual classes on students' engagement. Obstacles such as poor internet connection, electricity shortages, limited access to proper devices and limited digital literacy were described by students as factors that had negative impacts on their engagement in online classes. These challenges often caused students to not participate in some part of the class e.g. discussions and made it difficult to hand over their assignments on time. Therefore, sometimes they cannot concentrate and motivate themselves because of concerns about missing the important parts of their tasks and lessons.

The present finding is in line with previous studies conducted in Afghanistan. Haidari et al. (2021) reported that unstable internet connection, limited digital access and unfamiliarity with online teaching had negative effects on students' participation in online education. Similarly, Quraishi et al. (2024) reported that the major problems for students in online classes were poor internet connection and limited ownership of proper devices. Haqbeen et al. (2024) also found that many students in Afghanistan lacked the digital skills which are required in the online education system to use online platforms effectively. The findings of the present study support these studies and also show that these challenges do not only affect students' access to online classes but also reduce their confidence and active engagement.

These findings provide evidence for the Transactional Distance Theory. According to this theory, effective communication and interaction between students and teachers make learning meaningful. In the present study, communication interruptions during online classrooms often happened due to poor internet connection and electricity shortages. Students sometimes missed lessons, could not ask questions or lost connection during discussions. These interruptions made

it more difficult for students to engage actively in learning. Because of these problems, students found it harder to communicate with teachers and take part in class discussions.

Home, family and teaching support

The findings reveal that students' engagement is influenced significantly by the environment in which they attend online classes, family support and teachers' support. Participants described that supportive families consider online education as valuable as physical learning, encouraged them to continue their education and let them study in a quiet place. This support is decisive for students' capacity to concentrate better and have active engagement. In contrast, students explained that they had to leave the classes to do household duties or go to family gatherings. Mostly they experienced interruptions because of cultural expectations and housework. Lack of private space and noise during online classes reduce student engagement.

Similarly, teacher support is also explained as an important factor for students' engagement in online classes. Participants described that interactive teaching methods motivated them to be active in the class. Also, when the teacher encouraged discussion, supported them by providing timely feedback and understood students' challenges and needs, these practices helped students to experience a positive learning environment and motivated them to participate actively.

These findings are also supported by Martin and Bolliger (2018) who reported that interaction and communication with teachers have an important role in increasing student engagement in online learning. Similarly, Haidari et al. (2021) reported that teachers' online teaching experiences can improve students' learning experiences in Afghanistan. Hanny et al.

(2023) also found that family support and cultural expectations play important roles in online education in Afghanistan.

These findings are also explained by Self-Determination. This theory supports that students are more engaged when they have more support and connection to others. This support strengthened participants' sense of relatedness, which encouraged active participation in online classes.

Personal and Academic Factors

The present study found that personal and academic factors are also important in students' engagement in online learning. Participants expressed that studying at an English medium university, having multiple courses and assignments, spending long hours in front of a screen and dealing with significant stress were major challenges online. Studying in English was not effortless and students mostly needed more time and effort to read academic materials and complete assignments, which was stressful. These challenges caused students struggle to concentrate in the class, reduced motivation and limited their engagement.

These findings are supported by Nguyen et al. who explained that motivation and ability to manage academic tasks increase students' engagement (2015). The findings of the present study also support this as students experienced language barriers, academic pressure and screen fatigue which affected students' confidence and made it hard to engage actively.

These findings are also explained by the Self-Determination Theory. According to Self-Determination Theory, students are more likely to remain motivated when they feel confident in completing academic tasks. However, challenges like heavy workloads and stress affected their

sense of competence and reduced motivation. Therefore, the findings suggest to maintain meaningful engagement in online class, and academic support and emotional well-being has an important role.

In general, the findings of this study reveal that technological, environmental, instructional and personal factors have the most influence the engagement of the participants in online learning. Problems such as poor internet connection, shortages of electricity, home duties, language difficulties and academic workload reduce engagement. Supportive families, interactive teachers and positive learning environments encourage students to remain motivated and participate actively. Therefore, the findings suggest that meaningful engagement in online learning depends not only on students' own motivation but also on the support they receive from their families, teachers and educational institutions.

5.3 Implications of the Study

The present study has many important implications for online education in Afghanistan and other areas where physical classes are not feasible. First of all, merely having internet connection and accessing devices are not enough for increasing students' engagement in online classes. They need a supportive learning environment in where universities should consider interactive teaching, flexible learning policies and trained teachers. Secondly, the findings underline the role of family and community support. It is beneficial for families become aware of the importance of online education and encourage other families to support students and to not disrupt during online classes. Lastly, international organizations and policymakers should recognize online education as an important educational way for female students and support

them with digital resources, mental health support and professional teachers which are effective in improving the quality of education as well as student's engagement. Overall, these findings suggest that active participation and engagement do not rely solely on students but also require support from institutions, families, communities and policymakers.

5.4 Recommendations

There are several recommendations for improving student's engagement in online education to be suggested based on the findings of this study. Universities should provide teacher training to develop interactive online teaching methods. This recommendation is made because the majority of participants expressed that interactive teaching, teacher encouragement, and opportunities to participate helped them stay engaged in online learning. This recommendation is also supported by Martin and Bolliger (2018) who reported that interactive teaching strategies improve student engagement.

Educational institutions and international organizations should continue expanding, providing affordable internet access and digital devices. This recommendation has significant impact because many participants reported that poor internet connections, the high cost of data, and limited access to devices reduced their participation in online classes. In addition, they should expand international education opportunities as well as remote employment opportunities. This recommendation is supported by UNESCO (2017) which emphasizes that digital access and online job opportunities can improve educational continuity and future careers especially for women who are facing social and economic barriers.

Furthermore, universities and international organizations should provide online mental health and social-emotional learning (SEL) support. This will reduce students' experiences of anxiety, stress and isolation of students while attending online learning. This is recommended based on the findings that many participants experienced some emotional challenges including stress, anxiety, loneliness, isolation, and hopelessness. These emotional difficulties have a negative influence on their motivation and engagement in online learning. The OECD (2021) also supported this recommendation that students' well-being is highly important for meaningful engagement in learning. Students may not be able to engage actively and take advantage of their educational opportunities when they do not have good mental health.

Families should understand the importance of online education and support the students. They should not underestimate the value of digital learning and avoid interruptions during classes. This recommendation is made because many participants expressed that household responsibilities, family interruptions, and undertaking the value of online learning made it difficult for them to attend classes and concentrate while attending online classes.

Lastly, future researchers could choose the larger number of participants from different regions of Afghanistan or use mixed-methods to find broader understanding about student engagement in online learning. This is recommended because this study included only a small number of participants and used only a qualitative approach. In the future, studies may provide a deeper understanding of student engagement in online learning by using larger and more diverse samples.

5.5 Conclusion

This study explored the experience of engagement in the online class perspective of Afghan female university students and the factors that had most influence on their engagement. The findings of this study reveal that for many female students online learning has become more than just an alternative way of education; this is the only way to continue higher education, hope for a better future and develop important academic skills despite many challenges. At the same time, technological, familial, instructional and personal factors influenced students' engagement in online class. These findings present a better understanding of the experiences of Afghan female university students in online learning. They also add to the limited research on student engagement in Afghanistan that showed how social, cultural, technological, and educational factors shape students' engagement in digital learning environments

On the whole, the study highlights the importance of a supportive online learning environment for Afghan female university students through collaboration and support among educational institutions, families, communities and policymakers to ensure that Afghan female students can continue their education and achieve their goals for the future. Although Afghan female university students experienced many challenges, the findings of this study show their determination and commitment to continue learning and achieve their educational goals. It is hoped that the findings will help educators, universities, policymakers, and international organizations to understand students' experiences and develop more effective strategies to support students' engagement in online classrooms.

References

- Afghanistan Human Rights Center. (2024). *Report on access to education for women under the Taliban*. <https://www.bolaq.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Access-to-Education-for-Women-Dec-2024-Afghanistan-Human-Rights.pdf>
- Alariqi, A. A., et al. (2019). *Factors affecting e-learning effectiveness in a higher learning institution in Afghanistan*. In *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Education Technology and Computers* (pp. 145–149).
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research*, 74(1), 59–109. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074001059>
- Gallup. (2023). *Afghanistan: Gallup World Poll*. <https://www.gallup.com>
- Gökoğlu, S., Karaoğlu Yılmaz, F. G., & Yılmaz, R. (2024). Student engagement, community of inquiry, and transactional distance in online learning environments: A stepwise multiple linear regression analysis. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 25(4), 107–127. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v25i4.7660>
- Haddad, Z. H., Ebrahimi, M., Sultani, G., Quraishi, T., & Habibi, N. (2025). The role of online educational platforms in enhancing women's capacity in Afghanistan. *Socio-Economic and Humanistic Aspects for Township and Industry*, 3(2), 302–311. <https://doi.org/10.59535/sehati.v3i2.497>
- Haidari, M., Jaswal, L. H., & Deligiannidis, B. (2021). Online teaching experiences in higher education institutions of Afghanistan during the COVID-19 outbreak: Challenges and opportunities. *Cogent Education*, 8(1), Article 1947008. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2021.1947008>
- Haidari, S. M., Safawi, S. S., & Yelken, T. Y. (2021). Investigating challenges facing Afghan university students during COVID-19 outbreak. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 9(4), 341–351. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v9i4.4191>
- Hanny, C. N., Graham, C. R., West, R. E., & Borup, J. (2023). "Someone in their corner": Parental support in online secondary education. *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 24(1), 85–105. <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v24i1.6882>

- Haqbeen, J., Sahab, S., & Ito, T. (2023). A digital initiative to address girls' education challenges in collaboration with NPO in post-2021 Afghanistan. *IIAI Letters on Informatics and Interdisciplinary Research*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.52731/liir.v004.176>
- He, J., Wang, Q., & Lee, H. (2025). Enhancing online learning engagement: Teacher support, psychological needs satisfaction and interaction. *BMC Psychology*, 13, 696. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03016-0>
- Hung, D., & Chen, D.-T. (2003). A proposed framework for the design of a CMC learning environment: Facilitating the emergence of authenticity. *Educational Media International*, 40(1–2), 7–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0952398032000092080>
- Khasawneh, R., Alsharif, B., & Khasawneh, R. (2025). Online learning amidst crisis: Perceptions of Gazan university students. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, 1659256. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2025.1659256>
- Kuh, G. D. (2009). *What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement*. National Association of Student Personnel Administrators.
- Martin, F., & Bolliger, D. U. (2018). Engagement matters: Student perceptions on the importance of engagement strategies in the online learning environment. *Online Learning*, 22(1), 205–222. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1092>
- Li, J., Xue, E., Zhao, Y., & Li, Y. (2023). *Transactional distance and college students' learning engagement in online learning: The chain mediating role of social presence and autonomous motivation*. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management*, 16, 2185–2201. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S413546>
- Nesari, N. (2025). Bright future: *The role of online educational technology in empowering the academic advancement of Afghan women*.
- Nguyen, T. (2015). The effectiveness of online learning: Beyond no significant difference and future horizons. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 11(2), 309–319.
- OECD. (2021). *Education policy outlook 2021: Shaping responsive and resilient education in a changing world*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/75e40a16-en>
- Quraishi, T., Bayani, B. M., Yashar, S., Daudzai, M., Salamzada, R., Amini, M., & Hakimi, M. (2024). Integration of mobile learning technologies in Afghanistan universities: Opportunities and challenges. *Education Specialist*, 2(1), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.59535/es.v2i1.227>
- Reuters. (2023, March 27). *The Internet fails to thwart Afghan girls' online study*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/internet-fails-thwart-afghan-girls-online-study-2023-03-27/>

The News International. (2024, January 3). *Afghan women and girls flock online to evade Taliban curbs on female education.*

UNESCO. (2017). *Digital skills for life and work.* UNESCO.
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000259013>

UNESCO. (2025). *Afghanistan: Girls' and women's education.*
<https://www.unesco.org/en/gender-equality/education/afghanistan>

UNICEF Afghanistan. (2024). *Child marriage in Afghanistan.*
<https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan>

World Bank. (2021). *Policy notes: Priorities for inclusive development in Afghanistan—Providing electricity for growth and development.* World Bank.
<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/8033eefca38ca8af7b653869a3469087-0310012021/original/Policy-Notes-report-Jan-12-2021-Final-version-2.pdf>