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Cite This Article: Mumtaz, T., Zafar, H. & Azhar, T. (2026). Women's Education Under Two Taliban Regimes: Resistance, Resilience and Remote Learning (1996–2024). *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy*. 4 (02), 379-388.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.71327/jssrp.42.379.388>

ISSN: 3006-6557 (Online)

ISSN: 3006-6549 (Print)

Vol. 4, **No.** 2 (2026)

Pages: 379-388

Key Words:

Resilience, online platforms, remote Learning, documents, political suppression

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Abstract: *This study examines women's education in Afghanistan under two Taliban regimes: 1996–2001 and 2021–2024. Using qualitative analysis of policy documents and reports from NGOs/UNESCO, it explores how women resisted, adapted, and sustained learning despite systemic bans. Under Taliban I, formal schooling for girls was prohibited, yet underground “home schools” and cross-border education in Pakistan/Iran emerged as acts of resistance. After 2021, Taliban II expanded restrictions to secondary and higher education, prompting new forms of resilience through remote learning. Online platforms, WhatsApp classes, and international scholarship programs became critical survival strategies. The paper argues that women's education in Afghanistan cannot be understood only as victimhood; it reflects continuous resilience and tactical innovation against political suppression. Findings contribute to debates on education in conflict, gendered resistance, and the role of digital tools in safeguarding learning rights. The study concludes that remote learning, while limited, has redefined educational access and offers lessons for other contexts of educational exclusion.*

Introduction

Education is considered one of the basic human rights and plays an important role in the social and economic development of any country. It gives women and girls the opportunity to develop themselves, earn money independently, and participate in society. Nevertheless, some countries do not pay enough attention to the education of girls and women. Afghanistan can be mentioned in this context, as women's education in this country faced many problems under the two Taliban regimes. (Amiri, M. H., 2023). The first Taliban regime (1996 – 2001) imposed many restrictions on female education. Moreover, the second Taliban regime (2021-2024), which came to power in August 2021, once again limited educational opportunities for girls and women. Despite all these challenges, women managed to resist and find other methods of education. Such issues are discussed in this paper.

Historical Context of Female Education in Afghanistan

Both successes and difficulties characterize the historical context of women's education in Afghanistan. In the twentieth century, several Afghan regimes sought to provide education for women. Major

changes occurred during King Amanullah Khan's government, which sought to promote girls' and women's education. Despite challenges, women gained better opportunities to receive education in cities. In the late twentieth century, especially after 2001, female education in Afghanistan saw significant advances. The number of women who went to school increased; the number of female students at universities grew; women began to enter various occupations, such as doctors, teachers, journalists, and lawyers. Still, this progress could be easily undermined by political unrest and ideological opposition. Before the Taliban came to power, women in Afghanistan had varying levels of access to education depending on where they lived. In major cities such as Kabul, many girls attended schools and universities. Women worked as teachers, doctors, and government employees. However, in some rural areas, cultural traditions and poverty limited educational opportunities for girls. During the 1970s and 1980s, different Afghan governments introduced reforms to improve education. (Zaki, M. Y., & Shedenova, N. U., 2013). Schools for girls were opened in many areas, and efforts were made to increase literacy among women. However, years of war and political instability damaged the education system. Many schools were destroyed, teachers left their jobs, and families struggled to send their children to school. By the time the Taliban first took control in 1996, Afghanistan's education system had already suffered from many years of conflict. The restrictions imposed by the Taliban made the situation even more difficult for women and girls.

Literature Review

Many researchers, human rights organizations, and educational experts have studied the situation of women's education in Afghanistan. Their studies show that education is one of the most important factors for social and economic development. According to various reports, educating girls improves literacy, reduces poverty, and increases opportunities for employment. Researchers have also found that educated women are more likely to participate in community development and make informed decisions about health and family life. (Kayen, H. S., 2022).

Studies on Afghanistan have shown that restrictions on girls' education have serious consequences for society. Many reports explain that when girls are prevented from attending school, the country loses valuable human resources. Teachers, doctors, nurses, engineers, and other professionals cannot be developed without education. Researchers also emphasize that denying education to women affects future generations because educated mothers often play a major role in supporting their children's learning. (Mohammadi, A. Q., Neyazi, A., Habibi, D., Mehmood, Q., Neyazi, M., & Griffiths, M. D., 2024). Human rights organizations have repeatedly stated that education is a fundamental human right. They argue that all children, regardless of gender, should have equal access to learning opportunities. The experiences of Afghanistan are often used as an example of how educational restrictions can affect an entire society. (Lee Dr, S. E., 2013).

Education for Girls During the First Taliban Rule (1996-2001)

Under the first Taliban rule, a very strict interpretation of Islamic law was adopted, leading to the infringement of women's rights. One area where this had a significant impact was education, particularly for girls. Most girls' schools were closed during this period, and women were banned from attending universities (Qazi Zada, S., & Qazi Zada, M. Z., 2024). Moreover, female teachers were dismissed in large numbers. The regime claimed that the education bans were temporary and had security and religious implications. Nevertheless, millions of girls were deprived of the right to education in most areas; they could not study after reaching a certain age limit. It was also difficult for women to move around without being accompanied by men.

Challenges Faced by Girls During Taliban Rule

Girls in Afghanistan faced many challenges during both Taliban regimes. The biggest challenge was the closure of schools and educational institutions. Many girls who wanted to study were forced to stay at home. Their dreams of becoming doctors, teachers, engineers, and other professionals were interrupted. Another challenge was fear. Families were often afraid of breaking the rules because they could face punishment. Some girls had to hide their books and educational materials. Teachers who secretly educated girls also faced risks. (Horsman, J., 2013). Economic problems created additional difficulties. Many families could not afford private lessons or internet access. Even when online learning became available, some students lacked smartphones, computers, or electricity. These challenges made education difficult for many girls.

Role of Families and Communities

Families played an important role in supporting girls' education. Many parents believed that education was important for their daughters' future. They encouraged girls to continue learning even when schools were closed. Communities also helped by organizing secret classes and study groups. Neighbors shared books, teaching materials, and learning spaces. In some cases, local leaders quietly supported educational activities because they understood the value of education. The support of families and communities helped many girls continue their studies despite restrictions. Their efforts showed that education remained important to Afghan society. (Hasan, S. T., Bano, S., Imran, M., Ahmad, S., & Ayyub, A., 2025).

Resistance during the First Taliban Era

Despite all the restrictions placed on them, the Afghan women and communities found ways to resist. Secret schools were organized in homes and other secluded places, especially in urban centers such as Kabul. The teachers who were women taught the girls despite all the dangers associated with doing so. Communities that were keen on ensuring education got support for these secret schools. (Shahrani, M. N., 2000). The secret schools became symbols of bravery and resilience. Afghan women risked punishments and imprisonment in order to ensure that the girls continued getting an education. Humanitarian international agencies also offered support for education through community-based learning programs. While these measures could not compensate for formal education, they ensured that education did not become extinct.

Educational Developments from 2001 to 2021

After the end of the rule of the first Taliban regime in 2001, Afghanistan saw an increase in the development of its education sector. The development of the education sector in Afghanistan was supported by international efforts, governmental reforms, and civil society. Millions of girls went back to school, and their enrollment rose in primary and secondary education. Many women studied in universities, and they joined different courses of education. Literacy rates of women rose, even though many difficulties existed, especially in rural regions. Women became teachers, doctors, engineers, reporters, and civil servants. Institutions of education prepared programs especially for the development of women. This twenty-year period was the period of the largest development of education in the history of Afghanistan. Nevertheless, educational achievements were not equal; security, poverty, culture, and regional issues were obstacles to access to education. However, this period showed how important education is for women in Afghanistan. (Ahmadi, M. H., 2022).

Education of Women under the Second Taliban Regime

The second emergence of the Taliban into power in August 2021 brought about uncertainty about the future of women's education. According to Taliban leaders, their new policies would include women's right to receive education in accordance with the principles of Islam. Nevertheless, access to education

was limited by the gradual implementation of new policies. Schools for girls at the secondary level were shut down in various regions of the country. Increasing restrictions on higher education have been observed, including the ban on attendance at women's universities introduced in December 2022. These and other restrictive measures have been applied to various institutions of education, training, and informal education. (Amiri, M. H., 2023). The new measures raised concerns among the Afghan population and the international community as far as violations of human rights, development, and the future of the country are concerned. Denial of education has negative impacts on individual women, family, society, and the economy as a whole. Unlike the previous Taliban period, the new policies have resulted in uncertainty for millions of girls. Modern technology opens new possibilities for education in this situation.

The Resilience of Afghan Women

Perhaps one of the most amazing aspects of this ongoing crisis is the resilience of Afghan women. Regardless of the educational restrictions that exist, there are numerous examples of how Afghan women continue to educate themselves via other channels. Students are forming study groups, attending online lectures, and participating in virtual learning sessions. There are even those who stand up for their educational rights. By using platforms such as social media, Afghan women are speaking out about their struggle and bringing awareness to their educational restrictions. However, this kind of resilience can be seen in everyday deeds. (Brodsky, A. E., Welsh, E., Carrillo, A., Talwar, G., Scheibler, J., & Butler, T., 2011). Despite everything, families try to support the education of their daughters. Educators offer to help with teaching, while students devote themselves to studying, even though there are no guarantees for the future.

The Emergence of Remote Education

The phenomenon of remote education has been taking on increasing importance in the country, with the Taliban regaining power in Afghanistan. Modern technologies have created possibilities that could not be used during the previous Taliban regime. Various types of online courses, virtual classes, educational websites, and mobile applications offer different ways to educate those students who cannot attend regular schools. There are special programs for women of Afghanistan organized by international institutions, universities, and non-governmental organizations. There are several advantages of remote education. In the first place, students receive all necessary materials for study in the comfort of their own homes. Remote education provides an opportunity to be taught by foreign teachers from different countries. Many women in Afghanistan can learn different subjects, such as languages, computer science, business, health science, and social science. Many students say that remote education helps retain academic skills. (Gunawardena, C. N., & McIsaac, M. S., 2013).

Obstacles Faced by Remote Learning

Despite the advantages offered by remote learning, there still exist several challenges associated with it. First, Afghanistan's infrastructure regarding internet access does not allow everyone to study remotely due to the absence of electricity, computers, or phones. Another factor that discourages people from participating in remote learning is poverty, because the cost of services may be too high. Additionally, remote learning is not always associated with getting an official qualification since some remote learning services are not accredited. (Hakimi, M., Musawi, S. Z., & Khaliqyar, K. Q., 2024). Thus, students acquire new skills, but they cannot use them as proof of education during job searching. Finally, security problems may restrict certain educational processes; therefore, many initiatives try to run covertly in order not to draw attention.

Role of Remote Learning in Promoting the Empowerment of Women

The process of remote learning has greatly contributed to the empowerment of women in Afghanistan, as it enables women to gain education amidst all the socio-political barriers. Through the provision of remote learning facilities, women will be able to acquire education and skills that can aid them in their future careers. The benefits of education for women include confidence, critical skills, and knowledge of their rights and duties. In cases where there is no chance for education from formal institutions, women can continue learning remotely and be engaged in the outside world through remote education. (Nesari, N., Hosseini, M., Saberi, N., & Quraishi, T., 2025). Remote learning has enabled women to engage in subjects that were hard to learn before. Digital skills, languages, entrepreneurship, and information technology are some examples of the skills that can enable women to engage in economic activity and become more independent through remote learning.

Future Possibilities of Remote Learning in Afghanistan

The future of remote learning in Afghanistan will be dependent on developments in terms of technology, internet access, and international assistance. With the development of technology becoming cheaper and more accessible, remote learning might offer more chances to women and girls who find themselves limited in traditional education environments. Educational organizations and international bodies could assist in improving remote learning initiatives by providing financial aid, free online courses, and technical support. (Barikzai, S., Bharathi, S. V., & Perdana, A., 2026).

Nevertheless, in order for remote learning to function efficiently, certain issues have to be resolved, including poor internet access, electricity shortages, a lack of digital gadgets, and other problems. Increased funding in the area of technological development and education will play a key role in ensuring access for all Afghan students. Although remote learning cannot substitute the formal school and university system entirely, it can still be considered an important step on the path to education for Afghan women.

International Aid and International Reaction

The international community has been very helpful in the process of educating women in Afghanistan. Agencies like UNICEF, UNESCO, and various NGOs have been advocating the educational rights of women. Various organizations have established scholarships, virtual educational platforms, and various educational aids. Various universities from all over the world have provided distance education services to Afghan students. Campaigns have been carried out to ensure that the issue remains at the forefront of international attention. Many governments and international agencies believe that for the sustainable development of Afghanistan, it is essential to include women in both education and political matters. This is because education for women ensures economic progress, better health, less poverty, and more cohesive communities. (Mazhar, P. D. M. S., & Goraya, D. N. S., 2021). Although international pressure has not yet succeeded in reversing all the restrictions, there has still been the creation of various alternative channels for education. Many international organizations have worked to support education in Afghanistan. These organizations have provided financial assistance, educational materials, teacher training, and scholarships. Organizations such as the United Nations and various humanitarian groups have repeatedly called for equal access to education for girls. They have highlighted the importance of education as a basic human right. Some organizations also developed online learning programs and distance education opportunities. These programs became especially important after 2021, when many girls lost access to traditional schools and universities.

International Support of Women's Education in Afghanistan

Since the arrival of the Taliban came to power in 2021, many international organizations have been involved in efforts to provide girls and women in Afghanistan with educational rights. The organizations

include UNESCO, UNICEF, the United Nations, and various NGOs. They have raised the problem of limitations related to education on an international scale and have been working to adopt policies that would guarantee the right to education to all people. Along with raising awareness, international organizations have been implementing a variety of programs to support the education of Afghan students. Many organizations have been offering scholarships and other opportunities for girls' education through online resources. The representatives of humanitarian organizations have stressed that education is important for the social and economic development of the country and that the denial of educational rights to women has serious negative implications not only for women but for the whole society. (Gonnella-Platts, N., 2022). The participation of the international community in such processes testifies to the global recognition of the importance of education. It is one of the major human rights that should be guaranteed to everyone through financial, awareness-raising, and educational programs. These organizations provide scholarships, online learning platforms, and emergency education support. They also raise global awareness about restrictions on women's education in Afghanistan. International pressure remains an important factor in keeping the issue of girls' education visible in global discussions. (Rahmany, A., 2025).

Benefits of Women's Education in Afghanistan

Women's education benefits not only individuals but also society as a whole. Educated women are more likely to find employment and contribute to economic development. They can support their families and improve their living conditions. Education also improves health outcomes. Educated women often have greater knowledge about healthcare, nutrition, and child development. This knowledge helps families live healthier lives. Furthermore, education promotes social development. Women who receive education can participate more actively in community decision-making and public life. They can become leaders, teachers, doctors, and role models for future generations. (Burridge, N., Maree Payne, A., & Rahmani, N., 2016).

Success Rate of Afghan Women

Despite many difficulties, Afghan women have achieved remarkable success. Some women who studied in secret schools later became university graduates and professionals. Others became teachers and helped educate younger generations. Many Afghan women have also become advocates for education and human rights. (Ahmed-Ghosh, H., 2004). They have spoken publicly about the importance of learning and equal opportunities. Their stories inspire young girls to continue pursuing education despite challenges. These success stories demonstrate that determination and hard work can help people overcome obstacles. They also show the powerful impact that education can have on individuals and communities.

Policy Changes Between the Two Taliban Regimes

Although both Taliban governments imposed restrictions on women's education, there are some differences between the two periods. During the first Taliban regime from 1996 to 2001, girls' schools were largely closed, and educational opportunities for women were extremely limited. Access to technology was also very low, making alternative forms of learning difficult. When the Taliban returned to power in 2021, many people expected that policies might be different because Afghanistan had changed significantly during the previous twenty years. Millions of girls had attended schools, thousands of women had graduated from universities, and technology had become more common.

However, new restrictions were gradually introduced. Secondary schools for girls were closed in many areas, and women later faced restrictions on their access to university education. These policies created uncertainty for students and families. Many young women who had spent years preparing for higher

education suddenly found their academic plans interrupted. One major difference between the two periods is the availability of technology. During the second Taliban regime, some students were able to continue learning through online platforms, educational videos, and digital courses. Although technology could not fully replace schools and universities, it provided opportunities that were not available during the first Taliban rule. (Agha, A., & Rind, J., 2025).

Case Study 1: A Girl Studying in Secret

One example of resistance can be seen in the experiences of girls who attended underground schools. Imagine a student named Amina living in Afghanistan during Taliban rule. She dreams of becoming a doctor and helping people in her community. When girls' schools are closed, she is disappointed and worried about her future. However, a local teacher begins holding small classes inside a private home. Amina attends these classes secretly along with a few other girls. They study reading, writing, mathematics, science, and other subjects. Although they face challenges and uncertainty, they continue learning because they believe education is important. This example represents the experiences of many Afghan girls who continued studying despite restrictions. Their determination demonstrates the value they place on education and personal development. (Barlow, R., 2026).

Case Study 2: Learning Through Technology

The second case involves students who used online learning after 2021. A student may no longer be able to attend school regularly, but she has access to a smartphone and an internet connection. Through educational websites, recorded lectures, and online courses, she continued learning from home. Although online learning presents challenges such as limited internet access and a lack of direct interaction with teachers, it allows students to continue developing their knowledge. Many young women have used technology as a way to remain connected with education when traditional opportunities became unavailable. This example highlights the importance of digital learning tools in modern education. Technology has become a valuable resource for students facing barriers to formal schooling. (Monib, W. K., 2024).

Psychological Impact on Students

Educational restrictions affect not only academic progress but also mental and emotional well-being. Many girls experience disappointment, frustration, and uncertainty when they are unable to continue their education. Students often spend years working toward their goals, and sudden restrictions can make them feel discouraged. Some young women worry about their future careers and opportunities. They may fear that they will not be able to achieve their dreams or contribute to society in the way they had planned. These concerns can create stress and anxiety. At the same time, many students remain hopeful and motivated. They continue reading books, attending online classes, and studying independently. Their resilience demonstrates the strength of the human spirit in difficult circumstances. (Panter-Brick, C., Eggerman, M., Gonzalez, V., & Safdar, S., 2009).

Economic Effects of Restricting Women's Education in Afghanistan

Education plays an important role in economic development. When women receive education, they are more likely to participate in the workforce and contribute to national productivity. Educated women can become teachers, healthcare professionals, business owners, and skilled workers. Restricting women's education can reduce economic growth because fewer people are able to develop their talents and skills. Families may also face financial difficulties when women have fewer employment opportunities. (Najam, R., Patrinos, H. A., & Kattan, R. B., 2024). Many economists argue that investing in education is one of the best ways to promote development. Countries that provide educational opportunities for both men and women generally experience higher levels of economic progress. Therefore, women's

education is not only a social issue but also an economic one.

Importance of Equal Educational Opportunities

Equal access to education is important because every person deserves the opportunity to learn and develop their abilities. Education helps individuals gain confidence, solve problems, and contribute to society. When girls and boys receive equal opportunities, communities benefit from a wider range of talents and skills. Educational equality also promotes fairness and social justice. It helps reduce discrimination and encourages greater participation in community life. Women who receive education can become leaders, professionals, and role models for future generations. Many countries around the world have made progress in improving girls' education. These examples show that positive change is possible when governments, communities, and families work together to support learning for all children.

Comparing the Two Taliban Regimes

Comparing the two Taliban regimes provides similarities and differences in terms of the education of girls and women. The main similarity lies in restrictions on the educational process of girls and women in the Taliban regime. It is based on the ideology of the separation of the two sexes and restrictions on female presence in society. Nevertheless, there are many differences as well. Firstly, during the first Taliban regime, there were no possibilities to get any information and use different technologies for educational purposes. Therefore, educational possibilities for girls and women were limited to secret schools and other similar methods. On the contrary, the second Taliban era is characterized by the existence of the digital world. Internet, mobile phones, social media, and educational websites provide new methods of resistance and gaining new educational knowledge for Afghan women. Global awareness is another difference since contemporary times allow Afghan women to communicate with international networks and share their experiences. (Iqbal, S., 2023).

Women's Education in Afghanistan – The Future Prospects

It is not clear what the future holds for women's education in Afghanistan. Restrictions persist and impact the lives of millions of girls and women. Nonetheless, the continued determination of students, teachers, family members, and advocacy groups is an indication that the desire for education remains essential for all of these people. Technology could further expand educational opportunities via remote education and learning through digital technology. Collaborations between Afghanistan and other nations could also offer further assistance. Community-driven education could also be important for sustaining education.

Future development would require policy changes that acknowledge education as a basic right available to every citizen, regardless of gender. Development needs the participation of women in education, the economy, and society as well. Denial of education means that Afghanistan loses vital human resources and limits future potential. Afghan women have proven that education cannot be quenched easily. It persists despite all restrictions placed on it. The future of women's education in Afghanistan remains uncertain. Many people hope that girls will once again be allowed full access to schools and universities. Education is essential for the country's social and economic progress. Technology may continue to provide opportunities through online learning, digital classrooms, and educational platforms. However, long-term progress requires access to formal education for all students. Governments, communities, families, and international organizations all have important roles to play in supporting education. By working together, they can help create better opportunities for future generations of Afghan girls.

Recommendations

- Several steps can help improve women's education in Afghanistan. First, equal access to schools should be provided for all girls. Education should be recognized as a basic right.
- Second, support should be given to teachers and educational institutions. Schools need resources, trained staff, and safe learning environments.
- Third, investment in technology and internet access can expand learning opportunities. Remote learning can help students continue their education during difficult times.
- Finally, awareness programs should encourage families and communities to support girls' education. When society values education, more opportunities become available for women and girls.

Conclusion

The education of women during the reigns of the two Taliban regimes can be described both as oppression and defiance. While the first Taliban regime limited the access of girls to education, the educational achievements made in the period from 2001 to 2021 were undermined by the second Taliban regime. Nevertheless, Afghan women had always shown determination in their efforts to obtain education. Despite various limitations imposed on them, Afghan women have been searching for alternative means of education, ranging from underground schools during the first Taliban reign to remote learning during the second. Remote learning is becoming increasingly relevant, despite various restrictions. The fight for the education of Afghan women emphasizes the importance of such issues as educational rights, gender equality, and social justice. The perseverance of Afghan women is an inspiring example of the human need for knowledge and personal improvement. Access to education is a necessity not only in terms of individual rights but also for the development of Afghan society.

Women's education in Afghanistan has faced many challenges under both Taliban regimes. Despite restrictions on schools and universities, Afghan women and girls have shown remarkable courage, determination, and resilience. Underground schools, family support, community efforts, and online learning have helped many students continue their education. Education is not only a basic human right but also an important tool for social and economic development. Providing equal educational opportunities for women is essential for building a stronger, more prosperous, and more peaceful Afghanistan in the future.

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