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Impact of Taliban's Takeover on the Academic Performance of Afghan Scholars in Pakistan

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Abstract: *The unexpected entry of the Taliban in August 2021 into Kabul (Afghanistan) has not only affected the country politically and economically but has also affected its whole education system. This incident, the Taliban's takeover (TTO), left enormous effects on the academic activities of Afghan students globally. The researchers tend to understand the impacts of TTO on the academic performance of Afghan scholars in Pakistan. The results received from the survey among the scholars show that the incident had badly affected their studies (89.5%) along with their mental health (92.1%) and it is due to these mental health issues that they are unable to focus on their studies. 71.1% of the respondents were found unable to complete their academic activities as usual, while the majority of the respondents, 52.7% could not organize a time to complete the academic tasks.*

Key Words: Taliban, Afghanistan Takeover, Academic Performance, Afghan Scholars

Introduction

Taliban History

Under the mulla Omer's leadership and Saudi-sponsored Madaras (schools) in Pakistan (Saidy, 2020) Taliban (Students) was the name of the group, according to Satar Saidy's report in BBC, The Islamic Tehreek-e-Taliban (Taliban Islamic Movement) entered Afghanistan from the south province (Kandahar) and announcing "Implementing Islamic Sharia" and fighting "evil and corruption in Afghanistan, in middle of that decade, they quickly conquered cities and provinces. In 1995 the Taliban reached their most significant victory, capturing the strategically important province of Herat on the Iranian-Afghan border. As reported by Saidy, a year later Taliban succeeded in capturing Kabul, the capital, in 1996, Burhanuddin Rabbani the head of the Mujahidin group at that time, moved with his headquarters to Mazar-e-Sharif in the north after Kabul fell in the hands of the Taliban. As one of their first acts in the capital, they killed

Mohammad Najibullah, the last president of the Soviet-backed regime who had taken refuge in the UN office. By 1998 the Taliban had got control of nearly 90% of Afghanistan.

The Taliban government was only in power for a short time. After the 9/11 al-Qaeda's attacks on the US, The Taliban administration refused to return back Osama bin Laden, the head of al-Qaeda. The US invented Afghanistan's new government and The Taliban quickly lost their power over the country and dispersed to the south of Afghanistan and to the border of Pakistan. They began a mutiny against the Kabul administration backed by Western countries and international coalition soldiers under US leadership. The US-led forces eventually ended their fight missions in 2014. However, the Taliban still targeted rural areas by carrying out suicide strikes in mainstream cities (Hassan et al., 2016).

Finally, The US & the Taliban made an agreement in February 2020 in Qatar. which is known as the "Doha Agreement". Under this

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agreement, all US troops will depart Afghanistan within 14 months if the Taliban adheres to their commitment.

The main conditions emphasized by the US in the agreement were that the Taliban distance themselves from groups like ISIS (Da'ish) and al-Qaeda and that they do not pose a threat to US interests. Other issues, such as the type of Afghan system, the fate of the army and elected institutions, the constitution, and the Afghan people's rights and freedoms, have been deferred to inter-Afghan talks.

([Saidy, 2020](#)) adds that US forces continued their evacuation from different parts of Afghanistan and Taliban attacks continued throughout Afghanistan. The only clear move made by Biden, the president of the US, was to oust the Americans from Afghanistan, but no other decisions have been made. Eventually, on August 6, 2021 when they succeeded in capturing the first province in southwestern Nimrooz, which is bordering with Iran, they moved to capture other cities of Afghanistan.

The Taliban's rapid advance has allowed its militants to seize control of various areas without firing a single shot, finally on August 15 2021, they surrounded Kabul, and after leaving Afghan President Mohammad Ashraf "Ghani" from Kabul, the Taliban entered to capital and took control over all Afghanistan for the second time after 20 years, unlike before, they seized power in all of Afghanistan's provinces. Afghan people witnessed a great change in history.

The Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 was one of the most significant international events of the year, bringing a new era to the country. Despite the fact that the US-Taliban agreement was signed in Doha, Qatar's capital, on February 29, 2020. Twenty years later, the Taliban's rise shocked the world once more. The rise of the Taliban in 2021 was attributed to the United States, which overthrew the Taliban regime in 2001. Despite billions of dollars spent by the US and NATO to train Afghan security forces, the Taliban took control on August 15, 2021. The sudden political upheaval in mid-August, when the Taliban rushed into Kabul, has weakened not just Afghanistan's existing economic situation but also its educational underpinnings.

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the effects of the Taliban's takeover on

Afghan students' academic performance living in Pakistan. The researcher of this study conducted a survey among the Afghan scholars studying in Pakistan (Hazara University Mansehra Pakistan) to explore if the Taliban's takeover has affected their academic performance.

Literature Review

Education is recognized to be the first step in every human action in today's globalized world of technology. It is linked to a person's contented stage and possibilities for a better existence and plays an important role in the advancement of human prosperity ([Battle & Lewis, 2002](#)). [Alos et al. \(2015\)](#) argued that the academic performance of students plays a key role in producing competent and skilled graduates who will serve as strong leaders and labor force for the country. Academic achievement is one of the essential considerations for businesses when employing new staff, especially recent graduates. As a result, students must work extremely hard in order to earn good grades in the class and prepare themselves for future opportunities in their careers, as well as to satisfy the requirements of employers ([Alos et al. \(2015\)](#)).

At the Dakar conference in 2000, governments and educational institutions recognized war as a key impediment to bringing all students into school. They identified that students in nations impacted by conflict are denied learning not just because the schools are shutdown and the teaching faculty is missing but also due to limited access, school closures, threats to children's safety while traveling to and going to class, and a rise in absenteeism among teachers. Despite the fact that conflicts vary in nature, they exacerbate learner dropouts and repetition, resulting in a severe drop in attendance rates and resulting in low educational achievements ([Mukhtar, 2017](#)).

Furthermore, [Scrimin et al. \(2009\)](#) stated that students who have been exposed to or experienced disputes have difficulty retaining memory and attention issues, along with poor visual-spatial skills. They are also seen as poorer in getting marks than those who have not been exposed to such a situation. They also indicate that a single traumatic conflict experience occurrence might be equivalent to other kinds of chronic trauma and that their relation to cognitive tasks could have a negative impact on academic performance in

institutions. A related study by [Perfect et al. \(2016\)](#) argued that students who were conflict-affected had lower academic performance, cognitive functioning challenges, and behavioral, social, and emotional issues.

[Shemyakina \(2011\)](#) says that due to disagreements, parents may be hesitant to send their students to school, which may contribute to their non-attendance. Conflict may have a negative impact on the educational attainment of a student who does not attend school.

[Swee \(2009\)](#) provides evidence on the impact of Bosnia and Herzegovina's civil war (1992-1995) on college academics and attendance performance during the time of the conflict. He revealed that battle frequency does affect the educational performance of students also with their attendance at school during times of war. He claims that most students and instructors lost three academic years of school and that those living in relatively tranquil areas of the nation experienced delayed transfer to the next educational level owing to the country's Instability in general. He further added that low attendance in the time conflicts due to the relocation of students with their families made them unable to go to their schools, which eventually harmed their academic performance. The study may not be applicable to the current study because it was done in Bosnia and Herzegovina and focused on civil conflict.

[Farah et al. \(2021\)](#) discovered that learners in Baringo County performed poorly in their examinations because of inter-conflicts caused by cattle rustling, which adds to significant student absenteeism from school and teacher absenteeism due to fear of being killed, learners' inability to concentrate in class for fear of being killed, loss of lives and property, as a result, affected students' examination performance. According to the

research, when there are conflicts between groups, there is a high rate of absence among both students and teachers, as a result, academic performance decreases.

Research Methodology

This research study is an effort to understand if the Taliban's takeover has an impact on the academic performance of Afghan scholar who are currently studying in Pakistan under Allama Muhammad Iqbal scholarship. In order to achieve the accurate and precise results, the researchers conducted a survey among these scholars. Using convenient sampling technique, the data was collected from a total of 11 PhD and 27 MPhil scholars through a detailed questionnaire which was later analyzed through using SPSS statistical software.

Pilot Studies

In order to measure the impacts of the the Taliban's takeover on the academic performance of Afghan scholars, the researchers used a five point Likert scale questionnaire for data collection. A pilot study was conducted before the final data collection process in order to understand and point out the shortcomings in the questionnaire. The researchers conducted the pilot study among 5 scholars which helped them to remove errors and add the needy elements to the questionnaire. The researchers, after the data analysis of the pilot study, removed all the queries received from the respondents, revised the categories of the responses and removed confusion in the questions. The researcher made a final questionnaire with zero confusion and errors with proper and accurate response categories. The researchers found nothing wrong this time and thus went for the final data collection. The data was collected which was later analyzed through SPSS software.

Results

Table 1. Present the Participant demographic details

	Age	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	25 & less than 25	12	31.6	31.6	31.6
	26-30	15	39.5	39.5	71.1
	31-35	5	13.2	13.2	84.2
	36-40	6	15.8	15.8	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0	
Gender	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %	
Male	37	97.4	97.4	97.4	

Age	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Female	1	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	
Education Level	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
MPhil	27	71.1	71.1	71.1
PhD.	11	28.9	28.9	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

Table 2. The Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan had an effect on your studies?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid SA	21	55.3	55.3	55.3
Agree	13	34.2	34.2	89.5
Neutral	2	5.3	5.3	94.7
Disagree	2	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows that the Taliban's takeover had left huge effects on the studies of Afghan scholars. The table reveals that the massive amount of respondents i.e. 21 being 55.3% of the total respondents i.e. 38 respondents Strongly Agreed that the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan

had significant effects on their studies. 13 (34.2%) agreed that the incident had effects on their studies, while 2 (5.3%) were found neutral which means the incident neither effect their studies nor it has improved them. Two respondents (5.3%) disagreed that their studies had been affected.

Table 3. The Taliban's takeover affected your mental health, stress, pressure, fear and anxiety etc. due to which you could not concentrate on your studies.

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid SA	25	65.8	65.8	65.8
Agree	10	26.3	26.3	92.1
Neutral	3	7.9	7.9	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The table above demonstrates that the Taliban's takeover affected the participants' mental health due to which they couldn't concentrate on their studies. The table shows that the majority of respondents i.e. 25 being 65.8% strongly agreed that the Taliban takeover affected their mental health due to which they couldn't concentrate on

their studies also, 10 being 26.3% agreed with the question asked while 3 being 7.9% remained neutral which means that there is the probability of both, the incident had effects on their mental health & studies or it had no effects on their mental health and studies.

Table 4. During the Taliban's takeover, you had completed all your academic activities as usual and it has not affected your academic schedule?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid SA	2	5.3	5.3	5.3
Agree	4	10.5	10.5	15.8
Neutral	5	13.2	13.2	28.9
Disagree	18	47.4	47.4	76.3
SD	9	23.7	23.7	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The table above reflects that during the Taliban takeover, participants completed their academic activity as usual and this event had zero effects on

their academic schedule. The table shows that the majority of participants i.e. 18 being 47.4% of total respondents i.e. 38 disagreed with the asked

question i.e. "During the Taliban's takeover, you had completed all your academic activities as usual and it has not affected your academic schedule." Also, 9 being 23.7% strongly disagreed

with the statement while 5 being 13.2%, 4 being 10.5% and 2 being 5.3% remained neutral, agreed and strongly agreed with the states respectively.

Table 5. During the Taliban's takeover, you had organized your time to do everything the teachers asked you to do?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Strong Agree	3	7.9	7.9
	Agree	3	7.9	15.8
	Neutral	12	31.6	47.4
	Disagree	18	47.4	94.7
	SD	2	5.3	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The table indicates that during the Taliban's takeover, the participants had organized their time to complete all the tasks asked by the teachers. The data shows that the majority of respondents i.e. 18 being 47.4% revealed that they couldn't organize their time for different academic

tasks given by teachers. 2 being 5.3% was strong agreed while 12 being 31.6% were neutral, 3 being 7.9% were agreed & strongly agreed that there was no problem to organize time and finish the academic tasks received from their teachers.

Table 6. You were highly focused on your studies before this incident and had lost your concentration after?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	SA	16	42.1	42.1
	Agree	15	39.5	81.6
	Neutral	6	15.8	97.4
	Disagree	1	2.6	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0

The table shows the focus and concentration of participants in studies. The data reveals that majority of participants 16 being 42.1% strongly agreed that they were highly focused on their study before the Taliban's takeover and lost their

concentration after Taliban's takeover while, 15 being 39.5% agreed to the argument. On the other hand, while, 6 being 15.8% remained neutral and said nothing while 1 being 2.6% disagreed to the above statement.

Table 7. Even after having faced this incident you still have improved you grades?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	SA	2	5.3	5.3
	Agree	10	26.3	31.6
	Neutral	6	15.8	47.4
	Disagree	20	52.6	100.0
	Total	38	100.0	100.0

The above table talks about the effects of the incident on the student's grades. The data shows that 20 respondents (53.6%) disagreed that they had improved marks after Taliban's takeover. However, 10 being 26.3% of the respondents

agreed that even after having faced this incident, they still have improved their grades. 2 being 5.3% have, strongly agreed while 10 being 26.3% remained neutral.

Table 8. The incident did not affect your results/CGPA?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid SA	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
Agree	9	23.7	23.7	36.8
Neutral	6	15.8	15.8	52.6
Disagree	16	42.1	42.1	94.7
SD	2	5.3	5.3	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The table above indicates if the Taliban's takeover has affected participant results/CGPA? The data shows the majority of the participant i.e. 16 being 42.1% disagreed that that the incident did not affect their results/CGPA which means that the Taliban's takeover had affected the results of these

students. 2 being 5.3% strongly disagreed to the statement while 6 being 15.8%, 9 being 23.7% and 5 being 13.2 remained neutral, agreed and strongly agreed to the statement which meant that the Taliban's takeover did not affect their results and it remained same as before.

Table 9. How far you were active in studies at HU before the Taliban's takeover?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid Strongly Active	8	21.1	21.1	21.1
Active	18	47.4	47.4	68.4
Normal	11	28.9	28.9	97.4
Inactive	1	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows the activeness of the participants in studies before the Taliban's takeover. The table demonstrates that the majority of the respondents i.e. 18 being 47.4% were active in studies before the incident also 8 being 21.1% responded as strongly active.

However, 11 being 28.9% replied normal which means that they remained the same before and after the incident. However, 1 being 2.6% responded as inactive in studies before the incident.

Table 10. Are you active in studies as before this incident?

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid SA	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
Agree	12	31.6	31.6	44.7
Neutral	8	21.1	21.1	65.8
Disagree	9	23.7	23.7	89.5
SD	4	10.5	10.5	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows if the participants are as active in their studies as before the Taliban's takeover? The data reveals that 12 participants being 31.6% agreed that yes they are active as before the incident while 5 being 13.2% strongly

agreed. On the other hand, 8 being 21.1%, 9 being 23.7% and 4 being 10.5% showed neutral, disagreement and strongly disagreement to the statement.

Table 11. You have performed according to what you have been taught in the classroom.

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid SA	5	13.2	13.2	13.2
Agree	20	52.6	52.6	65.8
Neutral	12	31.6	31.6	97.4

	No of Respondents	%	Valid %	Cumulative %
Disagree	1	2.6	2.6	100.0
Total	38	100.0	100.0	

The data above ask the participant about their performance. The researchers asked the respondents if they have performed according to what they have been taught in the classroom? The data in the table exposes that 20 participants (52.6%) agreed that they have performed in according to what they were taught in class also, 5 being 13.2% strongly agreed to this statement. On the other hand 12 being 31.6% remained neutral and 1 being 2.6% disagreed to the statement.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Taliban's sudden takeover had far-reaching impacts for Afghans all across the world. It also has an impact on the country's economy, politics, and day-to-day affairs. Some of the Afghans lost their lives, while others lost their jobs as a result of this situation. Schools, colleges, and universities were closed, affecting students' education as well as the entire educational system.

The current study is an investigation of the impact of Taliban's takeover on the academic performance of Afghan scholar in Pakistan. Results of the study's revealed that the incident "Taliban's takeover" have enormous effects on the academic activities and performance of the Afghan scholars who are currently enrolled in Pakistan under the Allama Iqbal Scholarship. Along with the effects on academic performance this incident has also effected the mental health of these students.

The researcher from the data analysis, concluded that 55.3% of the total respondents have expressed that the incident has affected their studies. They told that the incident has left huge impacts on their academic activities due to which they cannot concentrate properly. The findings also show that the Taliban's takeover affected participant's mental health. 65.8% of the respondents strongly agreed that the Taliban's takeover had a negative impact on their mental health causing them suffer from anxiety and other health problem which eventually make them unable to focus on their studies. Researcher also

found that that participants could not complete all of their academic activities as usual during the Taliban's takeover, affecting their educational curriculum in this case the majority of participant i.e. 47.4% strongly disagreed that "they had completed all of their academic activities as usual during the Taliban's takeover, and their academic schedule had not been affected."

Majority of respondents were also found unable to organize their academic tasks finished well before time with their teachers. 47.4% of these respondents strongly disagreed that "during the Taliban's takeover, they had organized their time to do everything the teachers assigned to them." Moreover, the study's findings show that participants lost their focus after Taliban's takeover, 42.1% of these respondents were found highly focused on their studies before Taliban's takeover however, they lost their concentration afterwards.

Results of this study also demonstrates that after this incident the academic performance of students has badly effected and 52.6% participants were found to be among those who have not improved their grades likewise 42.1% of the total respondents told that this incident had badly affected their CGPA.

The researchers also found that majority (18 being 47.4%) of the respondents were active prior to the incident while 31.6% were found still active in studies as before the incident. Lastly, the findings revealed that 52.6% of the respondents performed according to what they have been taught in the classroom.

The researcher from the above discussion finally concludes that the Taliban's takeover has considerable effects on the academic performance of Afghan scholars. The mental health issues examined during this period i.e. anxiety, staying alone, stressed, depressed, worried, changes in sleeping and eating habits, hopelessness, and missing something, have made them distracted from their primary goals i.e. studying which eventually effect their academic performance.

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