

# Exploring the Socioeconomic Impact of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan: A Case Study

By

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A thesis submitted to the BRAC Institute of Educational Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Education in Educational Leadership & School Improvement

BRAC Institute of Educational Development  
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## **Declaration**

I, Nazeer Mohammad Rasouli, hereby declare that the dissertation entitled "Exploring the Socioeconomic Impact of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan: A Case Study" is my original work and that it has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other degree or qualification.

To the utmost of my knowledge and conviction, this dissertation does not encompass any content that has been previously published or authored by another individual, except where proper citation has been provided within the text.

I declare that:

1. The work presented in this dissertation is my original research.
2. I have properly acknowledged all sources of information used in this dissertation, whether directly quoted or paraphrased.
3. I have not allowed anyone else to use my work as their own.
4. The research presented in this dissertation has not been submitted in whole or in part for any other degree or qualification.
5. I take full responsibility for the content of this dissertation and any errors or omissions contained within it.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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## Approval

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## **Ethics Statement**

I hereby acknowledge that the research entitled "Exploring the Socioeconomic Impact of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan: A Case Study" is my original work. This study has been conducted in compliance with research ethical principles, research procedures, and data management.

The research participants in this study were graduates from three private universities in Kabul, Afghanistan. The study included a total of 16 participants, comprising 12 males and 4 females who graduated from private universities between 2012 and 2020. To adhere to research ethical principles, the participants were given a consent form, and their participation in interviews and focus group discussions (FGD) was based on their interests.

To ensure the credibility of this study, proper research procedures were followed. The research proposal was developed and refined based on feedback from the supervisor and was presented to the dissertation committee at the BRAC Institute of Education Development before the commencement of fieldwork.

The study also adhered to proper procedures for data management, and the confidentiality of the research participants was ensured. To protect their legal identities, pseudonyms were used for research subjects, and the names of research sites were not mentioned in the study. Furthermore, data and recordings were filed in folders and protected by a password.

Lastly, I maintained objectivity by setting aside personal biases, prejudices, opinions, and viewpoints as a graduate student from Afghanistan. This was done to prevent any biases during the study.

## **Abstract**

After the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the new Afghan government prioritized rebuilding education, especially higher education. The surge in demand for higher education led to the establishment of numerous private and state universities. This study explores the socioeconomic impact of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan, utilizing a qualitative research approach and a case study design. Data collection methods included interviews and focus group discussions. The study aims to identify graduates' perceptions of the socioeconomic benefits of higher education, the link between higher education and employment, and the changing role of higher education in graduates' lives in Afghanistan. The study's key findings reveal that graduates view higher education as a pathway to a better life and an instrument for creating peaceful and sustainable societies and promoting social mobility. Higher education significantly improved graduates' quality of life and provided better employment opportunities and careers with higher incomes. However, there is a significant disparity between graduates' qualifications and those required by Afghanistan's labor market.

**Keywords:** Higher education; socioeconomic impact; graduate employability; social mobility; career advancement; quality of life.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to three influential individuals who have played pivotal roles in my life. Firstly, my late grandfather, who held my hands and took me to school for the first time. His love and support encouraged me to pursue my academic goals, and his memory always inspires me. Secondly, to my father, who taught me the value of resilience and hard work. His unwavering dedication to his career and his family has been a constant source of motivation for me. And last but not least, to my beloved mother, who has been my biggest inspiration throughout my educational journey. Her unwavering support, encouragement, and guidance have been instrumental in shaping me into the person I am today.

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## **List of Acronyms**

CSRS	Center for Strategic and Regional Studies
DROPS	Organization for Policy Research & Development Studies
FGD	Focused Group Discussion
HEDP	Higher Education Development Program
MoHE	Ministry of Higher Education
NHESP	National Higher Education Strategic Plan
OCED	Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development
OSUN	Open Society Network University
QAAD	Quality Assurance Accreditation Directorate
UCA	University of Central Asia
WB	World Bank

# **Chapter 1**

## **Introduction and Background**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Higher education has been acknowledged to positively impact both the economy and individuals' social and economic achievements (Volchik et al., 2018). Abu-Saad (2016) further emphasized that higher education plays a vital role in a community's competitiveness in the job market, making it a critical means of achieving more significant economic advantages and social mobility in most societies. Moreover, higher education is not limited to the labor market but it also positively affects other aspects of life, such as mental health, general health, and emotional well-being (Tomaszewski et al., 2021). As stated by Momeni (2019), higher education also serves as a crucial catalyst for change, enabling individuals to acquire knowledge and skills that can be utilized to secure employment.

The education sector has been a primary focus for both the government and the international community in Afghanistan. After the Taliban regime was overthrown in 2001, the new government identified restoring education and higher education as top priorities (Roof, 2018). In response, Afghanistan's government has made efforts to revitalize the higher education system and encourage private investment in establishing private higher education institutions (Adil et al., 2020).

The establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan after the collapse of the Taliban regime in 2001 has encouraged a significant number of Afghan nationals to pursue education and training to secure employment and livelihoods (Aziz, 2021, p. 5). This increased focus on education and training has resulted in positive outcomes for both individuals' quality of life and the country's economic prosperity. According to the World Bank Report (2013), investment in human capital has positively impacted economic prosperity across all levels of

education in Afghanistan, including primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and in both urban and rural areas. Therefore, the emphasis on education and training has not only provided opportunities for individuals but has also contributed to the overall development of the country.

## **1.2 Research Topic**

This research falls under the broader area of the socioeconomic impact of higher education. Specifically, the title of this research is "Exploring the Socioeconomic Impacts of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan: A Case Study." The study aims to investigate several aspects of the socioeconomic benefits of higher education in Afghanistan. Through this research, the perceptions of private university graduates regarding the socioeconomic benefits of higher education have been explored. Additionally, the study investigated the relationship between higher education and graduate employment in Afghanistan. Moreover, this research attempted to examine the changing role of higher education in graduates' lives.

By exploring these aspects of the socioeconomic impact of higher education, this research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role that higher education plays in shaping the lives of private university graduates in Afghanistan.

## **1.3 Statement of the Problem**

University education has long been recognized as vital for its social and economic value (World Bank, 2013). In Afghanistan, following the fall of the Taliban in 2001, there was a notable surge in Afghan nationals pursuing education and training to secure employment and livelihoods (Aziz, 2021, p. 5). However, despite the crucial role that higher education plays in the progress and development of Afghanistan, research indicates that the higher education system in the country is facing significant challenges (Ahmadi, 2022). These challenges



include a shortage of qualified academic staff, substandard quality of education, and inadequate facilities (Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, 2019). Addressing these pressing issues will be crucial for ensuring that the benefits of university education can be fully realized in the lives of graduates in Afghanistan.

According to Aziz (2021), educated unemployment is a significant issue in Afghanistan as graduates struggle to find employment despite holding degrees. This problem is compounded by the addition of 400,000 graduates to the labor market each year, which presents a major challenge for the country's economy. Moreover, the author adds that the majority of recent graduates lack the technical and professional skills required by local businesses and are not sufficiently creative or entrepreneurial to start their ventures (Aziz, 2021).

Moreover, Mohmand (2017) revealed that the increasing number of unemployed, educated youth in Afghanistan can be attributed to several factors. One of the main reasons is that the education system in Afghanistan does not meet international standards, with graduates lacking proficiency in English, a crucial requirement in the job market. The education system is split into government and private sectors, with low-quality education in the former and high fees in the latter. Students also lack proper career guidance, leading to poor performance in the job market due to choosing the wrong discipline. The education system is more theoretical than practical, and teachers are insufficiently trained and lack interest in students' personalities and career aspirations. Memorization is emphasized over creativity and originality. Finally, students lack vital job skills like communication and analytical skills, which are not taught in the education system (Mohmand, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the social and economic benefits of private higher education institutions in Afghanistan from the perspective of graduate students.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The research will focus on exploring the perceptions of private university graduates regarding the benefits of higher education on their socioeconomic status and the relationship between higher education and graduate employment in Afghanistan. Additionally, the study examines the multidimensional impacts of higher education on graduates' lives. The following research questions have been developed to provide an in-depth exploration of the topic:

1. What are the perceived socioeconomic benefits of higher education among private university graduates in Afghanistan?
2. How does higher education affect graduate employment in Afghanistan?
3. How does higher education play a role in changing graduates' lives in Afghanistan?

## **1.5 Purpose of the Study**

Predominantly, this study seeks to achieve three objectives. Firstly, it aims to understand the graduates' perceived socio-economic benefits of higher education. Secondly, it intends to look into the relationship between higher education and graduates' employment in Afghanistan. Lastly, the study aims to examine the changing role of higher education in graduates' lives.

The study has applied a qualitative research approach. This approach has enabled the researcher to have an in-depth and meaningful interaction with the research participants from three private universities in Afghanistan, thereby collecting data that is rich in detail and context.

## **1.6 Significance of the Study**

This study makes significant contributions to the existing literature by investigating how higher education at private universities impacts the social and economic lives of graduate students. It sheds light on the essential role that private universities play in educating the

younger generation and their contribution to a country's development compared to public higher education institutions.

Furthermore, this study highlights the transformative power of higher education and the positive impact that investing in it can have on individuals' economic and social well-being, providing them with better career prospects and more opportunities in life.

The findings of this study will be valuable for policymakers, as they can use them to identify and address the shortcomings of higher education in Afghanistan's private universities. This will enable policymakers to reform and revise policies that affect private university education in Afghanistan and enhance the quality of education provided to students.

In summary, this study's contributions will not only advance the understanding of the impact of private university education on students' lives but also inform policies and practices that can lead to improving higher education in private universities in Afghanistan.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This section provides an in-depth exploration of themes related to the socioeconomic impact of higher education from the perspective of private university graduate students. A comprehensive review of relevant literature was conducted, including books, research and policy documents, academic websites, articles, and journals directly related to the topic of the study. The reviewed literature and published academic papers were categorized into three main sub-sections, namely: I) Socioeconomic impacts of higher education, ii) Higher education in Afghanistan, and iii) Views on private universities in Afghanistan.

#### **2.2 Socioeconomic Impacts of Higher Education**

Doumet (2018), a Senior Analyst at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Directorate for Education and Skills, stated that tertiary education has experienced a remarkable expansion in the 21st century. On average, across OECD countries, the percentage of 25 to 34-year-olds holding a tertiary degree increased from 26% in 2000 to 43% in 2016. The author noted that this growth had been primarily driven by the promise of improved job prospects, including better employment opportunities, career advancement, and higher earnings, leading many to view higher education as the optimal path to a more promising future (Doumet, 2018).

Moreover, according to Hailemariam's (2018) empirical study, which utilizes unique data from 36 advanced and emerging economies spanning the period from 1870 to 2010, higher education has a positive and significant impact on both the level and growth rate of national per capita income. Specifically, the findings reveal that a 1% increase in higher education

attainment would result in a growth rate of per capita income ranging from approximately 0.01% to 0.02% over five years. This implies that, on average, a one-year increase in intermediate tertiary education would lead to a 6% to 11% increase in output growth over five years. Furthermore, the study highlights that returns on female education are lower than those on male education at the tertiary level. These results remain consistent even when considering alternative specifications (Hailemariam, 2018).

In the meantime, higher education positively impacts the economy and individual social and economic performance (Volchik et al., 2018). Likewise, Abu - Saad (2016) described that higher education is vital in determining a community's competitiveness in the labor market. It is also recognized as an essential road to more significant economic benefits and social mobility for most societies. Moreover, higher education empowers minority development and produces the leadership needed for social and economic development. On the other hand, higher education's impact is confined to the labor market and positively influences other domains, including mental health, general health, and emotional well-being (Tomaszewski et al., 2021).

Additionally, as per Momeni (2019), higher education serves as a crucial catalyst for change, enabling individuals to acquire knowledge and skills that can be utilized to secure employment. Furthermore, the author emphasized that households with educated individuals are more likely to break free from impoverished living conditions than households without educated members. Additionally, she asserted that a stable income the working class earns ensures financial security for them and their families and benefits their communities. Due to its significant contribution to economic development, higher education is recognized as a form of human capital. Furthermore, investments in education create opportunities for national economic growth (Momeni, 2019)

## **2.3 Higher Education in Afghanistan**

In 2001, when the Taliban regime was ousted from power, rebuilding education and higher education was defined as a top priority to Afghanistan's new government (Roof, 2018). Despite the Afghan government's inability to provide free education to its citizens nationwide, private higher education institutions have been established, also with support from the international community, notably the United States of America (USA), through the "Higher Education Development Program (HEDP, 2015-2020)" which has invested \$50 million to improve the education system and promote positive changes and developments in the war-torn country (Adil et al., 2020, P. 27- 28).

Also, following Samady (2013, P. 7), in 2009, Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) established the "National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP)" intending to provide equitable access to higher education, create innovative institutions with high-quality teaching and research, producing graduates who are competitive in the global economy, and contributing to economic growth, social development, and nation building. Moreover, in line with the author's views, the NHESP focuses on two main programs: educating skilled graduates to meet Afghanistan's development needs and leading and managing a coordinated system of higher education institutions dedicated to providing high-quality tertiary education (Samady, 2013, P. 7).

Additionally, based on the World Bank Report (2013), higher education, with other forms of education, play a crucial role in driving growth and development. The higher education system produces skilled professionals, such as policymakers, administrators, entrepreneurs, engineers, and teachers, who are essential for development. Further, the report highlights that despite the need for further expansion of primary and secondary education in Afghanistan, it is imperative to prioritize higher education without delay (World Bank Report, 2013).

Subsequently, in line with McMahon (2009), higher education has traditionally been recognized as crucial for achieving personal success and driving economic growth. However, the quantifiable value of its non-monetary advantages has been inadequately comprehended until recently. The authors also highlight that obtaining a university degree leads to enhanced job prospects, increased earnings, elevated social status, and better health and longevity. Moreover, McMahon argues that higher education fosters democracy and sustainable development, resulting in reduced crime rates and decreased state expenditure on welfare and prisons. As a result, these significant social benefits outweigh the costs of a college education (McMahon, 2009).

### **2.3.1 Higher Education and Employment**

Higher education, which is thought to be necessary for people to succeed in the workforce, attempts to improve students' lives by fostering their aptitude for analytical thinking and rational reflection as well as their capacity for learning and behavior (Harvey, 2000, as cited in Ali & Jalal, 2018). Additionally, a study's findings indicated that higher education has a significant effect on and may be utilized as a predictor of employment because there is a positive relationship between higher education and employment (Ali & Jalal, 2018).

In Afghanistan, as stated by Aziz (2021), Afghan universities produce job seekers instead of job creators. He further adds that millions of Afghans rushed to get their education and training after the Taliban were defeated in 2001, in the hopes of finding employment and making a living. Since then, in addition to state-owned universities, private universities have been established. However, the majority of recent graduates are not equipped with the necessary knowledge and credentials to meet the technical and professional requirements of local businesses. Furthermore, they lack creativity and are not entrepreneurial enough to start their enterprises, which could lead to the creation of new jobs. As a result, foreigners are occasionally hired in both the private and public sectors. Despite this, the author highlights

that annually 400,000 graduates are added to the labor market, which is a major challenge for the country's economy to absorb. (Aziz, 2021).

Moreover, Mohmand (2017) explained that the rising rate of educated unemployment among Afghan youth is due to several factors. These include inadequate job vacancies, poor economic plans, and favoritism. The education system in Afghanistan is not up to international standards and lacks uniformity, with graduates not being fluent in English, which is now a vital requirement for employment. The education system is divided into private and government sectors, with government institutions having poor facilities and low-quality education, while private institutions are too expensive for most students. Also, there is a lack of career counseling, resulting in students choosing the wrong subjects and performing poorly in jobs they lack interest in. Additionally, the education system is more theoretical than practical, with a lack of technical education, training, and vocational institutes. Teachers are not adequately trained, do not take an interest in students' personalities or career aspirations, and promote cramming instead of new ideas. Finally, students lack crucial job skills like communication and analytical skills, which are not taught in the education system (Mohmand (2017)).

## **2.4 Private Universities in Afghanistan**

Higher education institutions play a crucial role in a country's economic, social, cultural, and political development, as they are not merely centers that produce degrees but institutions that generate scientific discoveries, innovations, technology, and creativity (Mohammadi, 2020). Private higher education institutions have been pivotal in providing education services to young people in Afghanistan over the last two decades, with the private sector catering to more than two-thirds of Afghan university students at the time of the country's fall on August 15, 2022 (Athayi & Nasery, 2022, p. 13).



Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in 2001, private higher education institutions have emerged as key players in promoting entrepreneurship, providing state-of-the-art facilities, ensuring quality education, and educating the country's youth, alongside public universities (Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, 2019). The fall of the Taliban in 2001 encouraged a significant number of Afghan nationals to pursue education and training to secure employment and livelihoods, leading to the establishment of over 137 private universities and institutions and nearly 38 state universities offering higher education services (Aziz, 2021, p.5). Private universities and institutes of higher education in Afghanistan offer a variety of disciplines, including Education, Law and Political Science, Social Sciences, Islamic Science, Computer Sciences, Economics, Engineering, Medicine, and Medical Technology (Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate, 2016).

The World Bank Report (2013), highlighted that the labor market highly values the soft skills of graduates from arts, humanities, general science, and social science degree programs. Unlike graduates of professional degree programs, they tend to pursue various administrative, managerial, and technical jobs in both the public and private sectors. Therefore, they need to possess soft skills such as discipline, teamwork, and time management, which are useful in general administrative and managerial occupations. Likewise, the reports emphasize fluency in modern international languages like English, and the use of modern technology like IT are also essential for these graduates (World Bank Report, 2013).

Recently, the number of graduates from private universities has increased significantly and contributed to the country's development in various areas such as music, sports, and media (Adil et al., 2020), as the younger generation of Afghanistan recognizes the significance of obtaining an education for their future (Roof, 2018).

In compliance with the World Bank Report (2013), investment in human capital has had a positive impact on economic prosperity across all levels of education in Afghanistan,

including primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and in both urban and rural areas (World Bank Report, 2013).

#### **2.4.1. Issues in Private Universities**

As per the Center for Strategic and Regional Studies (2019), the development of higher education and the establishment of numerous institutions of higher learning in Afghanistan during the past twenty years is considered to be one of the noteworthy achievements in the sector, as seen in other countries as well. The number of private higher education institutions increased significantly after 2002, with the establishment of multiple universities alongside public institutions. Nevertheless, apprehensions have been raised concerning their inferior quality. This discussion concerns the state of higher education and the status of private universities in Afghanistan (Center for Strategic and Regional Studies, 2019).

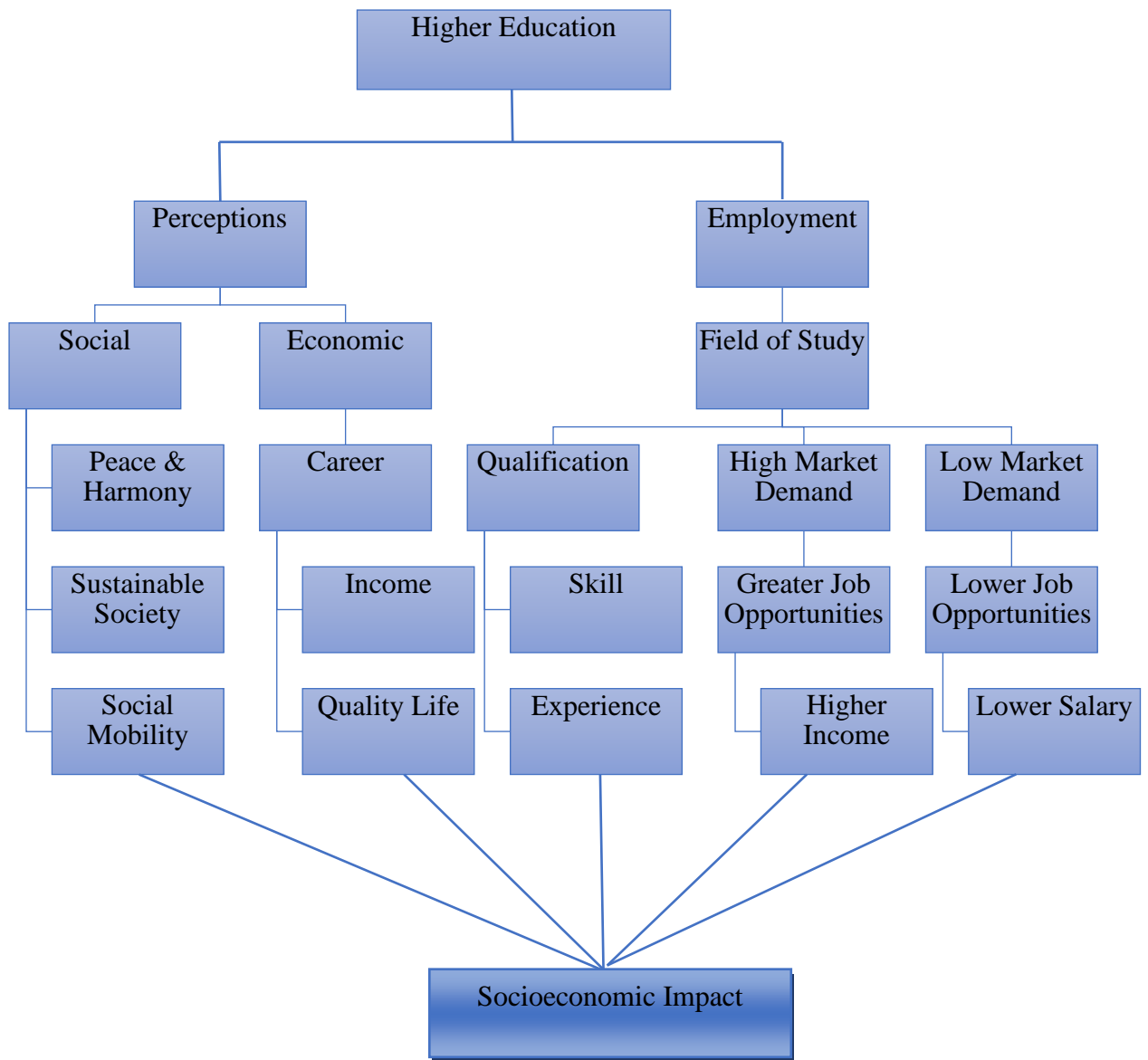
Private universities in Afghanistan face several challenges such as the absence of a specific strategy to attract students, a shortage of qualified academic staff, inadequate facilities, and substandard quality of education (Center for Strategic & Regional Studies, 2019). Additionally, a significant weakness of these institutions is the prevalence of part-time lecturers, who are mostly full-time faculty members from public universities, teaching without the approval of their respective universities' leaders (Babury & Hayward, 2014).

As stated by the World Bank Report (2013), private higher education institutions have expanded access to education for students in Afghanistan, but the quality of education provided by these institutions varies greatly, with some exceeding expectations and others falling below minimum standards. This highlights the need to address the challenge of developing a high-quality university system in the country (World Bank Report, 2013).

## **2.5 Conceptual Framework**

The proposed conceptual framework offers a structured approach to investigating the socioeconomic impact of higher education on graduates of private universities in Afghanistan. It identifies independent, dependent, and mediating variables that may influence the relationship between higher education and its socioeconomic benefits. The study hypothesis suggests that higher education positively affects socioeconomic status, which is mediated by factors such as field of study, qualification, skills, experience, and employment status. Becker's Human Capital Theory (2009) supports this idea, suggesting that higher education is an investment that enhances individual productivity, leading to better employment opportunities, higher earnings, and improved quality of life.

This study aims to explore the socioeconomic impacts of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan by addressing three research questions. The proposed conceptual framework will guide the investigation and conclude the effects of higher education on the lives of graduates in Afghanistan. The study will investigate the following socioeconomic impacts of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan:



**Figure 1.1.** Socioeconomic Impacts of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In this study, the methodology section demonstrates the research design that was implemented, consisting of several components. These include the research approach, research site, research participants, sampling procedure, data collection method, research tools, data collection process, data analysis, the role of the researcher, ethical concerns, credibility and rigor, and study limitations.

The study utilized qualitative research to delve deeply into the perceptions of private university graduates regarding the socioeconomic benefits of higher education and to examine the socioeconomic impacts of higher education on the lives of Afghan private university graduate students.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

This study has explored the socioeconomic impacts of higher education on private university graduate students in Afghanistan, using a qualitative research approach and a case study design. According to Gay and Airasian (2003), qualitative research is centered on understanding social settings or activities from the perspective of research participants while also providing an in-depth investigation of social and cultural phenomena (Toloie-eshlaghy et al., 2011). The case study design is beneficial for studying complex phenomena within their context, such as the experiences and perceptions of individuals regarding a specific phenomenon, as they generate data that describe events or experiences from a subjective perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2015).

### **3.3 Research Site**

The present study was carried out at three private universities located in Kabul, Afghanistan. The study participants consisted of graduates from A University, B University, and C University. These universities have faculty members with PhDs and Masters Degrees and offer a diverse range of courses to students coming from different provinces of Afghanistan.

A University and B University provides courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels in management sciences, information technology, engineering, and social sciences. On the other hand, C University solely offers these courses at the graduate level.

### **3.4 Research Participants**

This study's research participants were graduates from three private universities in Kabul, Afghanistan. The study had a total of 16 participants, consisting of 12 males and 4 females, all aged between 25 to 35 years old. These participants graduated from the universities between the years 2012 to 2020.

Out of the 16 participants, 12 held bachelor's degrees, of which 10 were male and 2 were female. Four participants had master's degrees, consisting of 2 males and 2 females. The participants' undergraduate and postgraduate studies varied, including literature, engineering, political science, journalism, medicine, computer science, business administration, and master of business administration.

The study equally selected participants from the three universities chosen from the annual ranking list. The universities were selected based on their ranking, with one being the top-ranking, middle-ranking, and lower-ranking universities on the list (Quality Assurance and Accreditation Directorate, 2016). Also, to ensure the confidentiality of the participants' identities, pseudonyms have been assigned to each individual, as indicated in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Participants' details and their pseudonyms

Identity	Level of Education	Pseudonym
Graduate Student	Master Degree	Nizam Rezai
Graduate Student	Master Degree	Aziz
Graduate Student	Master Degree	Elham Muraddi
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Qasim
Graduate Student	Master Degree	Farzana
Graduate Student	Master Degree	Basima
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Ahmad Sear
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Noor
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Nargis
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Qaise
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Hamid
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Zarif
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Jamila
Graduate Student	Master Degree	Basir
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Kham Mohammad
Graduate Student	Bachelor Degree	Ali

### **3.5 Sampling Procedure**

This study utilized a purposive sampling methodology to carefully select a total of 16 graduate students from three private universities in Kabul, Afghanistan. Specifically, the sampling strategy involved selecting five students from A University, five students from B University, and six students from C University. The purposive sampling technique was used to choose proficient and well-informed participants about the research topic and willing to

express their experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Etikan, 2016).

The purposive sampling technique was chosen as it enabled the researcher to select participants with specific characteristics that were essential to the study's research objectives. The participants were chosen based on their educational background, degree program, and academic performance. In addition, the researcher selected participants who had graduated between the years 2012 to 2020.

By using purposive sampling, the study ensured that the selected participants could provide in-depth insights into the research topic, leading to a more comprehensive and meaningful analysis of the collected data.

### **3.6 Data Collection Methods**

This qualitative study collected data through interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). Ten graduates from three private universities in Kabul, Afghanistan, were interviewed through Zoom. Additionally, FGDs were conducted with graduate students from these universities, including six graduates, to discuss the socio-economic impacts of higher education on their lives and to gain a better and more in-depth understanding of their unique experiences through group dynamics.

Before conducting the interviews and FGDs, a brief pilot interview and FGD were conducted with the participants to assess the appropriateness of the data collection tools. The pilot phase provided an opportunity to refine the interview questions and FGD to be more specific, avoid sensitive questions, and add follow-up questions from the participants to collect in-depth and detailed data.

It is worth noting to mention that due to time constraints, financial limitations, and the recent political unrest in Afghanistan since August 14, 2021, the research was conducted remotely,



and online data collection methods were utilized. Specifically, the data was collected from the researcher's home institution in Dhaka, Bangladesh, through the Zoom platform.

### **3.6.1 Interview**

Adhabi & Anozie (2017) described an interview as an interactive process that enables researchers to consult with people and gather their opinions on a particular issue for a meaningful purpose. The authors also noted that semi-structured interviews allow researchers to ask additional, more detailed questions based on the subject's responses. As such, in this study, the semi-structured interview was utilized as one of the data collection tools because it allowed for further follow-up questions.

Ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with graduate students from three private universities in Kabul who graduated between 2012 and 2020. The interviews were conducted virtually using Zoom, and recordings were made with the participants' permission for transcription and effective data collection. The interviews involved one-on-one discussions with the participants for 40-60 minutes in gathering in-depth data from them.

### **3.6.2 Focus Group Discussion**

Focus groups are a type of data collection method that uses semi-structured interviews conducted in a group setting, typically facilitated by a facilitator who guides the conversation, and the specific design of data collection methods in focus groups may vary (Creswell, 2013, as cited in Adhabi & Anozie, 2017). In this study, the researcher conducted a focus group discussion (FGD) to gather data on the socioeconomic impacts of higher education. The FGD lasted for an hour and included six graduate students from three different universities. Through this FGD, the researcher was able to gain insight into the group dynamics and the points on which the participants agreed or disagreed about the influences of higher education.

The FGD also allowed the researcher to engage in a friendly discussion with the participants and gather their opinions. By collecting both agreeable and dissenting views on the subject of higher education, the researcher was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. Overall, the FGD proved to be a valuable data collection method for this study, allowing the researcher to gather rich data on the socio-economic impacts of higher education from the perspectives of graduate students.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

In the data analysis process for this study, the first crucial step was to transcribe the interviews and focus group discussions to ensure a systematic and accurate analysis. In the second step, I translated the interviews conducted in Dari/Persian to English. To guarantee the highest level of accuracy, I meticulously heard the recordings. I reviewed the data multiple times to ensure that the transcriptions reflected the exact words and voices of the participants.

Accordingly, thematic data analysis has been utilized for this study. Braun and Clarke (2017) suggested that to analyze qualitative data effectively, it is important to first become acquainted with the data, establish initial codes, identify themes, scrutinize the themes, define them, and then proceed with writing up and analyzing the data. As discussed, I carefully cross-matched the transcriptions with the recordings to maintain the data's accuracy.

Moreover, for data analysis, I utilized the QDA Miner software, which aided in systematic coding, and creating themes, sub-themes, and categories. After establishing the initial codes and themes, I noticed that some sub-themes merged, along with the main themes and categories. The QDA Miner software proved to be a valuable tool in this analysis.

Finally, while considering the research questions, I developed three main themes and three sub-themes for each major theme, allowing for an in-depth analysis of the data. This

methodical approach enabled a comprehensive examination of the data, leading to a more nuanced understanding of the research topic.

### **3.8 Role of the Researcher**

From November 21, 2022, to May 8, 2023, I studied the socioeconomic impact of higher education on 16 private university graduates in Kabul, Afghanistan. As a researcher, I have a bachelor's degree in economics and five years of experience in educational projects in Afghanistan. I have gained unique insights into the higher education sector in Afghanistan. This experience has been precious in shaping my approach to conducting this study, as I aimed to incorporate theoretical and practical aspects into my research. In preparation for this study, I have completed two research courses as part of my M.Ed. in Education Leadership and School Improvement at the BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED) at BRAC University, ensuring that I am well-equipped to conduct rigorous and methodical research.

### **3.9 Ethical Issues and Concerns**

Ethics refers to the moral standards that guide individuals or groups in decision-making and behavior, regulating their conduct and ensuring consistency with accepted values and principles (Agwor & Osho, 2017; Ezigbo, 2009). This study has considered ethical issues in various ways. Firstly, before collecting data from the participants, I took ethics approval from the appropriate authority of the BRAC Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED), BRAC University. Secondly, explanatory statements and consent forms were sent to the research participants to explain their roles and the purpose of the research and to take their consent. To ensure effective communication with the research participants, a brief introduction of the researcher and the purpose of the study was given.

To maintain the confidentiality of the research participants, pseudonyms were used for research subjects, and the names of research sites have not been mentioned in this study to protect their legal identities. Furthermore, as a qualitative study, acknowledging researcher bias is crucial. The researcher acknowledges that having studied for his undergraduate degree at a public university in Kabul, he may have been biased toward the results. However, he has attempted to put aside his expectation of public higher education and focus on exploring the socio-economic impact of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan.

Overall, ethical issues and concerns have been considered and addressed throughout the process of writing the proposal, conducting fieldwork, and writing up this study. The researcher has ensured that the study adheres to ethical standards and protects the welfare and confidentiality of research participants.

### **3.10 Credibility and Rigor**

To ensure the credibility and rigor of this study, the researcher has academic expertise in both Economics and Education, relevant to the topic and title of this study. He is also familiar with the education sector in Afghanistan and has taken academic courses on Policy Analysis and Research at various prestigious institutions, including the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS), the University of Central Asia (UCA), and Open Society Network University (OSUN). The researcher has produced policy briefs and argumentative essays related to the topic of this study, providing valuable insights to maintain the credibility and rigor of this study.

To further ensure the trustworthiness of this study, the research proposal was developed and refined based on feedback from the supervisor and pitched to the dissertation committee at BRAC Institute of Education Development before fieldwork commenced. This process ensured that the proposal was scrutinized from various perspectives.

Given that qualitative research emphasizes maintaining high standards of rigor to establish reliability and credibility (Henry, 2015), the researcher undertook several actions to ensure this study's credibility and rigor. Debriefing was used to avoid biased opinions, and a peer-reviewed the study's findings, crosshatching them with the collected data. Additionally, the findings were sent to the participants for member checking to confirm the originality of their voices and opinions. These actions enhance the study's trustworthiness and establish its credibility.

### **3.11 Limitations of the Study**

This study has some limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, due to time constraints and limited funds, the study only focused on three private university graduate students in Kabul, Afghanistan. As a result, the perspectives of public university graduate students remained unexplored. Obtaining permission from different governmental agencies and officials to conduct research in state-owned universities in Kabul was a time-consuming process that was not feasible within the given period. Nevertheless, the study's findings provide a starting point for future researchers to explore state-owned universities in Kabul and other cities.

Secondly, due to funding constraints, time limitations, and political challenges in Afghanistan, the study was conducted online via the Zoom platform from Dhaka, Bangladesh. Unfortunately, this prevented the researcher from conducting in-person research in Kabul, Afghanistan. Although online research has advantages, conducting in-person research may have provided additional insights and a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences.

Finally, the research faced challenges related to stable power and internet access for the research participants during interviews and focus group discussions. Initially, poor internet connectivity and power cuts made it difficult to schedule and conduct the interviews and

focus group discussions. To overcome this challenge, the participants were provided with a stable internet connection and power in a learning hub in Kabul.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter describes the socioeconomic impacts of higher education on graduates' lives in Afghanistan. First, it discusses the personal and social benefits of higher education from the viewpoints of graduate students. Second, it explains how these graduates think about the potential benefits of a university degree in their lives. Moreover, it focuses on the importance and relevance of tertiary education in the labor market and how higher education affects the labor market outcomes for graduates. Subsequently, this section of the study highlights the effects of higher education on graduates' lives. It explores how and in what ways higher education has improved the graduates' quality of life and granted them better employment opportunities with higher incomes.

This study's findings are relevant and aligned with its aims and purpose. I have collected the data through online interviews and focus group discussions. After completing the process of creating the main themes and sub-themes in response to this study's research questions and purpose, I have developed three main topics followed by sub-topics.

- ❖ Graduates' perception of the socioeconomic benefits of higher education
- ❖ Higher Education and graduate employment in Afghanistan
- ❖ The changing role of higher education in graduates' lives

#### **4.2 Graduates' Perception of Socioeconomic Benefits of Higher Education**

Through the interviews, participants shared their perceptions regarding the socioeconomic benefits of higher education. These insights are revealed from their unique personal accounts

and the socioeconomic background they belong. In the following, these understandings are in more detail.

#### **4.2.1 A Pathway Towards a Better Life**

Graduate students perceive higher education as a window toward a prosperous life. In this regard one of the graduates, Elham Moradi, from Zoom interview #3, 05. 12. 2022, described "improving the quality of my life was the most critical reason for me to pursue higher education." Qasim, another graduate from interview #4, 12.12.2022, believes that "higher education is a life-long learning process that can bring prosperity and a quality life." Likewise, Noor, as a graduate student described that "everyone has this expectation to have a better life after graduation from university. I mean they wish to find a job, have a salary, get married, buy a car ... and live a happy life" (Personal Communication: Interview #8, 12.12.22).

Similarly, the graduate's think of higher education as mastering a skill to survive in the competitive world Jamila, an FGD participant stated that "When you have education, it means you have a skill and your skill enables you as an individual to work and make a good living for yourself and your family (Focus group notes #1, 09.12.2022). Accordingly, Ali, another participant of FGD stated:

Well! Higher education means getting more knowledge to get prepared for life. You know life is getting more competitive day by day. So, we have to prepare ourselves for a better life and a life with better quality. So, for me, higher education means a high-quality life (Focus group notes #1, 12.09.2022).

Moreover, higher education has influenced students from rural areas to study and move to cities in hopes of a better life. As Basir, a participant in the FGD described:

I used to live with my family in the countryside and my father is a former. He told me that you have two options in life. You can go to school and then university to become



an educated person and live a prosperous life or like me become a farmer. Therefore, I decided from that day to study hard and continue my higher education (Focus group notes, 09. 12. 2022).

#### **4.2.2 A Tool to Create Peaceful and Sustainable Societies**

Higher education raises the social awareness of citizens, encourages them to coexist, and gives them the sense to work for the progress and development of their country. Qaise, one of the participants, from interview #10, 09. 12. 2022, believes, "higher education raises the awareness of the citizens and increases the understanding of the people in a country regarding the shared values and their shared identity". Similarly, Aziz, participant of interview #2, 02.12.2022 said, "When you are educating yourself, you know how to adapt yourself in society. So, when you are educated you know the norms and the values of the society". Additionally, higher education persuades people to obey the law and regulations. As Farzana, a participant in interview #5, 06.12.2022, stated, "Socially higher education changes the behavior of the people and also educated citizens obey the law and regulations and this marks the transformations of a society in different aspects".

Likewise, higher education brings peace and encourages citizens to value diversity in society. Noor participant of interview #8, 12,12,2022, believes that "education brings peace and prosperity in communities and educated people can easily live in peace and harmony with one another because they respect one another, they cooperate and finally, they value diversity and pluralism". Qaise, another participant of interview #10, 09.12.2022, believes, "education makes the citizens more aware and respect others' beliefs, race, culture and values".

Moreover, higher education marks social changes and educated individuals drive these changes. Nargis stated:

Society changes in different aspects when the citizens change. In other words, education enables the people in a community to work for peace, security, progress,

and development. For instance, I am a teacher, so I train the teachers and teach the students. It is a social change and this is how education changes society over time (Personal communication: Interview #9, 08.12.2022).

In the same way, Noor another participant in interview #8, 12.12.2022, believes, "educated people play a vital role in the development of a country. For instance, see the developed countries, these countries developed because they have more doctors, engineers, teachers, and scientists. Therefore, these countries developed as a result of education and educated citizens".

### **4.2.3 Promoting Social Mobility**

Graduate students believe education plays a vital role in promoting individuals' social status in society. Elham Moradi, a participant in interview, #3, 05.12.2022, explained, "In today's world if you have a good education then all people will respect you and if you do not have one, then people will not respect you". Also, education has the power to shift one's social status and position in society. Farzana another participant of individual interview #5, 06.12.2022, stated, "Education has the power to shift one's social status in society. For example, twenty years ago, society did not allow a girl to get an education, but now, I am an educated girl and everyone has respect for me in society". Qasim, another graduate describes his experience in the following:

Wherever I go people respect me, not because of my age, I am 35, but because of my education, because of my professional background, and because of the articles that I have written and published in international journals. These academic works have put me relatively in a higher position among my colleagues (Personal communication: Interview #4, 12.12.2022).

Moreover, higher education socially enables people to get out of the poverty trap. Nizam Rezahi, a participant described:

I have seen fewer chances of educated people falling into poverty, and those have been exceptional cases. I see a direct relationship between higher education and prosperous life. For instance, I can compare myself to my friends who did not pursue higher education. Today, they work as a laborer, but I have a decent job, salary, and a better life. We are both humans, and there is no other difference between my friends and me. Thus, education has economically put me in a better position and my friends in a lower position life (Personal communication: Interview #1, 06. 12. 2022).

### **4.3 Higher Education and Graduates Employment in Afghanistan**

Graduate students from private universities in Afghanistan believe that the relationship between higher education and employment is positive. Meanwhile, they discuss that higher education is a prerequisite for getting a job. Moreover, they state that there is a huge discrepancy between the academic qualifications the graduates hold and those that employers look for in the job market.

#### **4.3.1 Relationship Between Higher Education and Graduates Employment**

Higher education has enabled graduates to master the relevant skills which are required to enter the job market and get employed. Qaise a participant in interview #10, 09.12.2022, mentioned that "it is clear that the university had a role in my employment and educated me to become a journalist and work in media. Otherwise, I would not be able to be a reporter today". Nargis, another graduate of interview #9, 12. 12. 2022 stated that "the primary aim of the university is to equip students with skills to enter the job market. For instance, in my case, I have studied medicine and now, I am a doctor". In the meantime, Basima participant in interview #6, 03.12.2022, described that "we all live in a world that requires experts and skilled people in various fields, from services to technology. So, if you have a better higher

education and have expertise in a field, you can easily find a better job". Furthermore, Jamila a member of the Focus group discussion shared her experience as follows:

I want to add two more things that enabled me as a graduate to have a job. First, I have learned the skills and the knowledge. Second, the English language. The medium of instruction at my university was English. Therefore, during four years of studies I have learned English and it helped me a lot in my career (Focus group discussion #1, 09.12.2022).

On the other hand, although, the relationship between higher education and employment is positive, due to the high unemployment rate in Afghanistan often graduates fail to find a career after their graduation. Aziz, a participant in interview #2, 02.12.2022, explained that "I graduated last year with the highest score. Besides, my degree I know English and have a diploma in IT, but since last year, because of unemployment I could not succeed to find a job". Meanwhile, Hamid, a participant believes that "In countries, like Afghanistan, due to unemployment, a huge number of graduates fail to find their ideal career after graduation. It does not mean that these graduates are not eligible for the job market. It is because of problems that we have in our country" (Focus group notes #1, 09.12.2022).

Furthermore, the participants believe higher educational degrees bring more employment opportunities to individuals. In this regard, Basima demonstrated her experience:

Well. As you know that we all live in the 21st century and it is the century of science, technology, and knowledge. In the meantime, the job market requires more skilled people with higher degrees upper than high school graduates. So, I thought to myself that now as a school graduate, I cannot further compete in the job market for better job opportunities with higher salaries. Therefore, I decided to go for higher education and do my undergraduate studies. Therefore, it helped me to get employed (Personal communication: Interview #6, 03.12.2022).

### **4.3.2 A Prerequisite for Securing a Job**

The key aspect discussed by participants is that higher education qualification is a requirement to secure a position or enter the job market. Farzana, a participant from interview #5, 06. 12. 2022, states "I had a job before starting my university. My degree secured my job. If I did not begin my university, I would lose my job, because I was only a high school graduate. So, the university guaranteed my job security". Similarly, Qasim, another graduate, says:

In 2012, I was working in an office as an IT assistant, but one day my employer told me that I have to start my higher education. Otherwise, I could not work in this office anymore with a high school certificate. Therefore, I get started with my undergraduate degree (Personal communication: Interview #4, 12.12.2022).

Also, the graduates add that higher education is a critical factor to enter the job market in Afghanistan. For instance, Ahmad Sear, a participant in interview #7, 03. 12. 2022, highlights that "The job market in Afghanistan is looking for people with high educational qualifications, those who have higher degrees, will have better career opportunities. So, the degree is a requirement to enter the job market, then your skills determine your fate". Hamid, another participant from focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, emphasizes that "The first thing an employer asks for is a degree, and the second is experience. Therefore, having a degree and experience is a must to get employed in Afghanistan". Similarly, Qasim a participant from interview #4, 12. 12. 2022, adds "The basic requirement for a job when you apply is having a bachelor's degree. In any field that you apply to, you must have a degree in your hand. Indeed, your degree is like a passport to enter the job market"

Unlike, other participants, Kham Mohammad, a participant in the focus group discussion argues:

To enroll in governmental positions in Afghanistan, the level of educational qualifications, talent, experience, and profession cannot grant you the job. Regrettably, it is determined by family connections, political dependency, and personal links. Even this applies to the private sector nowadays. Only those with family connections get shortlisted and invited for interviews, not others (Focus group notes #1, 09. 12. 2022).

### **4.3.3 Graduate Mismatch in the Labor Market**

It is described by the participants that there is a huge discrepancy between the qualifications the graduates hold and those that are demanded by Afghanistan's labor market. According to Basir, a participant in the focus group discussion:

In Afghanistan, everyone wants to study Medicine, Law and Political Science, Economics, and Journalism. The majority of students want to pursue their higher studies in one of the mentioned fields. Like everyone else, I studied law and political science, and after graduation, I failed to find a job in my field of study. Therefore, I became a teacher. This is one of the reasons why graduates cannot find jobs because the job market requires graduates who studied Agriculture, Banking & Finance, and Mechanical Engineering, not Social Sciences (Focus group notes #1, 09. 12. 2022).

In the same way, Basima, another graduate from interview #6, 03. 12. 2022, explains "I have studied Law, and I failed to find a job in my major of study due to unemployment. Thus, now I work as a mentor and teacher in a private school". More importantly, Ali, a member from focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, states that "What I learned from university, I could not apply in the field of my work because I studied computer science, but work as an English teacher. It is different from what I have studied in university".

Moreover, there is a mismatch between the skills and jobs in Afghanistan's labor market. Nizam Rezahi, a participant from interview #1, 06. 12. 2022, reports that "The medium of

instruction in all universities in Afghanistan is in Dari, while English is the first and most significant skill, which is required in the market. So, this is a major problem for fresh graduates to get employed". Likewise, Jamila, another participant from focus group discussion #1, 06. 12. 2022, adds that "What we learn in universities is not applicable in the labor market. First, the curriculum of universities is not aligned with the job market. Second, all universities in Afghanistan offer courses in Social Sciences, not in technical fields".

#### **4.4 The Changing Role of Higher Education in Graduates' Lives**

The central themes discussed by the graduates are higher education and how it positively benefited and transformed their lives with their families. Meanwhile, according to the graduates, higher education financially brought them higher incomes. Also, their qualifications enabled them to promote their career paths and have better employment opportunities in the labor market. In the following, these benefits are explained in more detail.

##### **4.4.1 Improving Graduates' Quality of Lives**

The participants have described through interviews and focus group discussions that tertiary education has dramatically improved their quality of life. However, the graduates experienced problems of unemployment as well. Qasim, a graduate student, describes his experience as follows:

I used to live with my family in a remote village. After completing my undergraduate degree, my family moved to the capital city (Kabul) and I got a job in an IT company. Currently, I have expertise in cyber security. So, I can manage the economic part of my life by working and having a career in my field of study. So, this is the benefit of education. If I had not had this knowledge and skills. Today, I would not be able to live a better life (Personal communication: Interview #4, 12. 12. 2022).

Farzana, another participant in the interview, described that higher education has economically improved her life. She illustrated, "Higher education enabled me to buy a house and a car. These are the economic benefits of higher education. If I did not have my master's degree, I would not be able to have these facilities now. So, whatever I have today is because of my education" (Personal communication: Interview #5, 06. 12. 2022). Basima, a participant from interview #6, 03. 12. 2022, also added "Education enabled me to have a job. The job was a source of income. It helped me to support my entire family. Most importantly, I have financially supported my siblings, who were also studying at university".

Furthermore, higher education also helped graduates to get out of the poverty trap and live prosperously. In other words, it prevented the transmission of poverty between generations in Afghanistan. Zarif, a member of the focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, stated, "Higher education changed my life. I used to be very poor, but after graduation, I succeeded in having a better job with a good salary. Now, I relatively have a better life". Similarly, Elham Moradi, another participant highlights:

Before I started working, my family was poor. My father was the only breadwinner, and the rest was not working. By getting my first and second job, I paid all the loans once I got to pay my university fees, and then I decided to buy a house. Now, I live in my apartment (Personal communication: Interview #3, 05. 12 2022).

Interestingly, although participants were not able to find a career upon graduation from university, they still describe that education has improved their quality of life. Ali, a participant in the focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, states, "Almost for one year, I was jobless, but when I got a job, I worked hard to learn office management skills. Now, I have a better career. However, my salary is low, but I am happy because I am learning more important things than money". In contrast to other graduates, Khan Mohammad, a member of focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, told "Higher education changed my insights about



the world. I have not studied to become rich but to become a good human being. Now, I feel convinced because I have a precious thing which is my education". In the same way, Nargis, a participant from interview #9, 08. 12. 2022, added "Higher education transformed my life. For instance, in 2015, I was a refugee in Iran, I did not have the right to get an education, but now I am a teacher in my country, and I teach others. So, this is what education gifted me. I am feeling proud of it".

#### **4.4.2 Securing Graduates' Higher Incomes and Financial Security**

Graduates have discussed in interviews and focus group discussions that higher education affected their income and brought them financial stability in life. Ahamad Sear, one of the graduate students from interview #7, 03. 12. 2022, expressed, "Economically, higher education increased my income. By completing my master's degree course, my salary increased, and within three months, I earned the money I paid for my master's degree". Ali, a graduate student from a private university in Kabul, participated in the focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, stated, "Tertiary education had an impact on my income and salary. There was a direct link between my qualification and salary. When I was a fresh graduate from high school, my salary was comparatively lesser than when I got my bachelor's degree". Most interestingly, Khan Mohammad describes:

My undergraduate degree has significantly increased my salary, followed by my income. For example, when I was a fresh graduate, my salary was 150\$ per month, but in the second year, it increased to almost 200\$. Now, talking with you, I have a bachelor's degree with four years of experience, and my salary is three times higher than four years ago (Focus group notes #1, 06. 12. 2022).

Meanwhile, the graduate students mentioned that higher education reduced their financial concerns in their day-to-day lives. Noor, who graduated in 2016 from a private explains:

During four years of studies, I got some loans to pay my tuition. It was often a matter of concern for me to pay the loans back. But, once I got my degree, I found a job with a reasonable salary. Within two years, I paid off all my loans. After, I saved a portion of my monthly income to begin my master's degree (Personal communication: Interview #8, 12. 12. 2022).

Similarly, Hamid, a participant from group discussions #1, 09. 12. 2022, pointed out, "In my family, only my father was working, and he was the only breadwinner. His income barely sufficed our monthly expenses. But, once I got a job, my salary covered other additional expenses. Now, we live with peace of mind".

#### **4.4.3 Career Promotion and Better Employment Opportunities**

Higher education has enabled graduate students in Afghanistan to get promotions in their careers and access to better employment opportunities with their qualifications. Farzana, one of the graduates from interview #5, 06.12.2022, states, "My bachelor's degree and master's degree shaped my professional career. With a bachelor's degree, I worked with the United Nations (UN) and two other international organizations, and when I got my master's degree, I got a job with the government". Likewise, Nizam Rezahi, another participant, explains, "After completing my Master's degree course, I was promoted in office. In particular, the university upgraded my skills because the curriculum was in English, which helped me a lot with getting a good job"(Personal communication: Interview #1, 06. 12.12.2022).

Moreover, job seekers with undergraduate degrees have better chances of getting employed in the job market in Afghanistan. Khan Mohammad, a graduate student, shares his experience in the following:

Personally, in my life, I have noticed once I have finished my undergraduate degree. I got a promotion in my position in the office, and my salary increased. Indeed, those who graduated just from high school have a lower influence and career. In contrast,

people who did their bachelor's degrees were comparatively higher in their positions (Focus group notes #6, 09. 12. 2023).

In Afghanistan, graduates with bachelor's degrees have better chances of getting employed than those with lower degrees. In the same way, graduates with master's degrees also have higher chances of employability in the job market compared to graduates with undergraduate degrees. Basima, a participant describes her professional journey:

When I graduated from high school, I started working with an organization as an intern, and then, I got a promotion to an admin assistant. It was at that time, that I thought that now I could not work in a higher position without having a bachelor's degree. Therefore, I started my university, and during my university, I got a promotion from admin assistant to admin officer (Personal communication: Interview #6, 03. 12. 2022).

Farzana, another graduate student with a master's degree from a private university in Kabul, Afghanistan, commented:

I used to work as an administrative officer, but when I got my master's degree, I was promoted from an admin officer to an office manager in my office. Even after some time, I got another job in the same office as the head of the coordination and communication department (Personal communication: Interview #5, 06. 12. 2022).

## **Chapter 5**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

#### **5.1 Discussion**

This study aims to explore the socioeconomic impact of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan. As a result, this chapter discusses and interprets the findings of this study in an elaborative way. It reflects on how education leads to improved quality of life besides the intrinsic value of education. Moreover, it probes how education contributes to sustainable peace and development. Furthermore, it describes that education promotes social mobility and reduces poverty among individuals by providing equal opportunities for them.

Additionally, this chapter illustrates how graduates with higher levels of education are more likely to find employment, remain employed, get promotions in their careers, learn new skills on the job, and enjoy higher salaries compared to their counterparts with lower levels of education. Meantime, it reports on the mismatch between the graduates' skills and professions and why the present education system in Afghanistan does not equip the graduates with the suitable skills required in the labor market.

Subsequently, this chapter concludes by discussing the role of higher education on improving graduates' quality of life and their increased salaries and incomes. Likewise, it explains how a university degree ensures graduates' promotion and better employment opportunities in the labor market. The recommendation at the end of this chapter by the writer will mark the end of this case study.

## **5.2 Students' Perceptions of Socioeconomic Benefits of Higher**

### **Education**

According to Abu-Saad (2016), in most societies, higher education is not only regarded as a way to economic prosperity but is considered vital importance for the lower classes to make a better life by getting higher education. Similarly, Doumet (2018) also argues that in the belief of the mass, a university education is a road to golden employment opportunities, career promotions, higher salaries and incomes, and ultimately a window toward a brighter future. The prospects of reaching a prosperous life through university education are also reflected in the voice of my research participants as Elham Moradi, one of the participants, stated, "The only reason for me to continue my higher education is to improve the quality of life" (Personal Communication: Interview #4, 05. 12. 2022). Similarly, Qasim, another participant, believes that "Higher education is a lifelong learning journey, so once you get an educational qualification, it economically guarantees your life anywhere in the world" (Personal Communication: Interview #4, 12.12.22).

The graduate students in Afghanistan believe a university education is an opportunity for them to enjoy a high standard of life. These graduates from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds think of higher education as mastering skills and getting specialization in different fields of education. Indeed, it is true because, in today's competitive and fast-moving world, only those with good education can survive. The labor market requires professionals with higher degrees, more experience, and more expertise. Therefore, skilled and educated people will have more employment opportunities with higher salaries and incomes. Subsequently, graduates with stable incomes will have access to more facilities in life.

In addition that higher education improves the quality of life, higher education promotes democracy and social cohesion, and educated citizens contribute to sustainable societies by

helping one another and living in peace and harmony (McMahon, 2009). Also, according to the World Bank report (2013), education promotes the civic values and attitudes required for a modern democracy in society. In this context, Qaise, one of my participants, believes that higher education not only increases the social understanding of people but also educates individuals to respect collective values and shared identity (Personal communication: Interview #10, 09. 12. 2022). In the same way, Noor, another participant thinks that education changes the mind of the people and make them responsible citizens to value peace, live in coexistence and take collective action for progress and development. (Personal communication: Interview #8, 12. 12. 2022). The voices of the participants reflect that higher education plays a vital role in reinforcing democracies and bringing peace and stability to societies. Because higher education raises the social awareness of the people, make them loyal to the social contract and values, and educates individuals to become more aware and respect others' beliefs, culture, and values in society. Higher education also instills in citizens the spirit of collective endeavor for creating a democratic, peaceful, and prosperous nation. Similar to ensuring peace and strengthening democratic societies, higher education also promotes social mobility. In the context of Afghanistan, higher education relatively has played a constructive role in mobilizing young graduates. It equipped students from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds with the skills and expertise to have access to better opportunities, like better jobs, incomes, and career advancements. Thus, these opportunities have shifted social status and position in society. Meantime, education also unlocked the doors of affluent life for the graduates. In this regard, Basir, one of the participants, described that I used to live with my parents in a remote village and do farming alongside my father. One day while plowing the land, my father told me that I could either become a farmer like him or get an education to get a decent job and live a prosperous life.

Therefore, from that day onward, I have studied hard and now have a job and live with my family in the city (Focus group notes, 09. 12. 2022).

Similarly, the World Bank report (2013) in Afghanistan shows that as the education levels of individuals increase their welfare, in the same way, individuals with postgraduate degrees enjoy the highest levels of quality of life, followed by graduates and those graduates from teacher training.

### **5.3 Higher Education and Graduates' Employment in Afghanistan**

In addition to the role of education in improving the individual's quality of life, strengthening democratic values, and promoting social mobility, education has significantly improved the career prospects of graduates in Afghanistan. From the narrative of the participants, I have found that they believe the relationship between tertiary education and employment is positive. A similar study by Ali and Jalal (2018) in Pakistan concluded that the labor market requires more qualified, experienced, skilled, and educated individuals. The study also revealed that the large population of students engaged in higher education tends to get high employment opportunities in Pakistan. In this regard, Basima explains that “We live in an era in which the labor market requires an extremely highly-skilled workforce from service to technology. So, to get employed in today's competitive and specialized labor market, you have to be skilled and highly educated (Personal Communication: interview #6, 03.12.2022). Moreover, the participants have emphasized that tertiary education is a prerequisite for employment in Afghanistan. The participants have narrated that with a high school certificate, you have no chance of getting a job, and even with an undergraduate degree, today you have less chance of getting a job compared to an individual with a postgraduate degree. In this context, Qasim, a participant from interview #4, 12. 12. 2022, stated, "The main requirement for a job when you apply is having a bachelor's or master's degree. When you apply for a job, you must have a graduate or postgraduate degree. Indeed, your degree is

like a passport to enter the job market". Likewise, Qasim, another graduate, said "I used to work as an IT assistant in an IT company in Kabul. One day, I received a letter from the HR department, which notified me that I could no longer work with them with a high school diploma, so I had to resign from the office or start my undergraduate degree. Thus, I got admission to a private university to have my degree to secure my job and get a promotion in my career" (Personal communication: Interview #4, 12.12.2022).

The findings of a study concluded that individuals with higher education have greater employment opportunities and better chances for career advancement in Afghanistan's labor market (Momeni, 2019, p. 14). Likewise, a similar study in China also revealed that any individual who wants to have a better job must first obtain a higher education degree (Mok, 2016). Also, according to Boa and Li (2014, as cited in Mok, 2016), the higher the level of educational qualifications, the higher the chance of success for students to get employed in the labor market in China.

Although university degrees are the basic requirements for employment, Teichler (2018) noted that a close link between the graduates' field of studies and vacant jobs is often considered by employers in countries with an emphasis on professionalism in the labor market. The participants of this study also stated that due to the mismatch between their academic qualifications and those that employers look for in the job market in Afghanistan have failed to find their ideal careers. For instance, Basima says, "I have studied law and political science, but now I am a teacher in a private school" (Personal Communication: interview #6, 03. 12. 202). In the same way, Basir narrated that "In Afghanistan, everyone wants to study Medicine, Engineering, and Humanities, while employers look for graduates who have studied courses in Agriculture, Banking, Finance, and vocational courses. Because of this mismatch between university courses and the labor market, graduates often fail to find an occupation" (Focus group notes #1, 09. 12. 2022).



## **5.4 The Changing Role of Higher Education in Graduates' Lives**

On top of the positive correlation between higher education and the employment of graduates in Afghanistan, higher education has significantly improved the quality of graduates' life in various dimensions, including personal and family levels, income, and career. To begin with, the participants have narrated that university education has positively touched their individual and personal life. It raised their standard of living from an economic point of view and as well enabled the graduates to get out of the poverty trap and enjoy life with access to basic facilities, like education and housing. Farzana, one of the interview participants described, "Higher education has given me the financial means to buy a house and a car. So, if I did not have my master's degree, I would not be able to have these facilities now" (Personal communication: Interview #5, 06. 12. 2022). Similarly, Basima added education had been a source of income for me, and with that income, I have supported my siblings to get an education (Personal Communication: interview #6, 03. 12. 2022). Meantime, Zarif, a member of the focus group discussion #1, 09. 12. 2022, stated, "Higher education changed my life. I used to be very poor, but after graduation, I succeeded in having a better job with a good salary.

Furthermore, the majority of graduates have narrated that higher has significantly benefited them with higher incomes followed by financial stability in their lives. What I could draw from graduates' voices is that the return rate of higher education for Afghan graduates who have studied in private universities in Afghanistan has improved in the past years. In this regard, Ahamad Sear stated that "higher education increased my income. For example, upon completing my master's degree, my salary was doubled, and within three months, I earned the amount of money I invested in my education (Personal Communication: interview #7, 03. 12. 2022).

On top of that, the stories of my participants in this study have revealed that higher education has significantly increased the chance of employability in the labor market for graduate students of private higher education institutions in Afghanistan. It provided them with the opportunity to study and simultaneously work. As a result, this enabled them to apply their theoretical learnings into practice in the workplace. In the process, they become more skilled, followed by career promotion and better employment opportunities. On this point, Farzana, a graduate student with a master's degree from a private university in Kabul, Afghanistan, commented that "I used to work as an administrative officer, but when I got my master's degree, I was promoted from an admin officer to an office manager in my office. Even after some time, I got another job in the same office as the head of the coordination and communication department" (Personal communication: Interview #5, 06. 12. 2022).

Correspondently to my findings, the World Bank report (2013) revealed that investment in the education sector in Afghanistan has significantly improved the Afghan graduates' standard of life and economic welfare at all levels of education. Kariya (2011, as cited in Teichler, 2018), suggests that studying in private universities leads to better careers and income because of their higher fees and credible education services. In contrast, the analysis in Japan shows that studying in private universities with higher charges compared to the lower tuition fees of public universities on average leads to low-income careers. Also, the findings of another study have confirmed that graduates with higher education degrees are likely to get better employment opportunities with higher incomes (Ali & Jalal, 2018).

## **5.5 Scope of Future Research**

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study on the socioeconomic impact of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan, several areas for future research could further enhance our understanding of this important topic.

Firstly, future researchers can expand the horizon to include public universities in Kabul and other major cities in Afghanistan. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of higher education on graduate students across the country.

Secondly, it would be valuable to study the impact of specific degree programs on the lives of graduates. By examining whether graduates from certain degree programs have a different socioeconomic impact than graduates from other programs, future research could offer insights into the potential advantages and disadvantages of pursuing different types of degrees.

Finally, future research could broaden the focus beyond the personal, social, and economic impacts on graduates to consider the broader impact of higher education on society as a whole in Afghanistan. This could include examining the impact of higher education on economic growth, social mobility, and civic engagement. Such research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of higher education in shaping the future of Afghanistan.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This study found that students perceive higher education as improving quality of life, promoting sustainable peace and development, and encouraging social mobility. Graduate students view higher education as a pathway to acquiring skills and expertise for employment and prosperous life. The study confirms a strong correlation between higher education and employment in Afghanistan, with higher education degrees leading to better career opportunities and higher incomes. However, there is a mismatch between academic courses taught in universities and those demanded by employers. Education positively affects the lives of graduate students, enabling them to fulfill basic needs and enjoy better employment opportunities, career promotions, higher salaries, and financial stability.

## 5.7 Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that higher education has a significant socioeconomic impact on the lives of Afghan private university graduate students. To further understand and maximize the benefits of higher education for Afghan graduate students, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, government officials, the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), and private higher education institutions in Afghanistan.

1. **Increase Access to Higher Education:** The government should work towards increasing access to higher education for all Afghan citizens, especially those from underprivileged backgrounds. This can be achieved by expanding the number of state-owned universities and providing scholarships and quotas to deserving students.
2. **Foster Collaboration between Universities and Industries:** Universities should collaborate with industries to ensure that the education provided is relevant to the job market. This can be done by establishing partnerships, internships, and mentoring programs between universities and industries.
3. **Improve the Quality of Education:** Private universities in Afghanistan need to focus on improving the quality of education they provide to students. This can be achieved by hiring qualified faculty, investing in modern teaching facilities, and adopting up-to-date teaching methodologies.
4. **Enhance Career Services:** Private universities could provide career services to their students, such as career counselling, job fairs, and resume writing workshops. This will enable graduates to find better job opportunities and prepare them for the job market.
5. **Encourage Entrepreneurship:** The government should encourage entrepreneurship among graduates by providing access to funding, training, and resources. This will

create job opportunities for graduates and not only improve the graduates' quality of life but also help boost the economy.

6. **Improve the Curriculum:** The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) of Afghanistan need to work towards updating and revising the curriculum in line with international standards and job market trends. This will enable graduates to acquire relevant and in-demand skills, making them more employable and competitive in the job market.
7. **Promote Job Creation:** The government could take responsibility for promoting job creation and providing more employment opportunities for graduates from higher education institutions in Afghanistan. This can be done by incentivizing industries to invest in the country, creating public-private partnerships, and encouraging entrepreneurship. This will help address the issue of unemployment and enable graduates to apply their skills and knowledge in the workforce

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Consent Letter

Dear participant,

I am conducting a research study as part of my M.Ed thesis in Educational Leadership and School Improvement at the BRAC University, Institute of Educational Development (BRAC IED). The purpose of this study is to explore the socioeconomic impact of higher education on private university graduates in Afghanistan.

This study aims to understand the graduates' perceived socio-economic benefits of higher education, the relationship between higher education and graduates' employment in Afghanistan, and the multidimensional impacts of higher education on graduates' lives.

Your participation in this study would involve a one-on-one interview/focus group discussion for one hour. During the interview, you will have the opportunity to share your opinions and experiences with the researcher. Once the study is completed, you will have access to the research, which may be useful for your understanding of this topic.

Please be assured that there is no potential risk to you from participating in this research. The data collected from participants will be used only for this research, and your identity and information will be kept confidential.

If you agree to participate in this research, please sign your name in the space provided below:

I hereby agree to participate in the research titled "Exploring the Socioeconomic Impact of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan: A Case Study."

**Signature/Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact me at [nazeer.rasouli@gmail.com](mailto:nazeer.rasouli@gmail.com) if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely, Nazeer Mohammad Rasouli

## Appendix B. Interview Guide

### Important information:

- **Interview date:**
- **Participant's Name:**
- **Level of Education:**
- **University:**
- **Year of Graduation:**

1. What does higher education mean to you?
2. Why do you choose to pursue a higher education degree?
3. What were your motivation and reasons for getting admission to a private university?
4. Do you think higher education has some social benefits?
5. What are the social benefits of higher education?
6. What are your perceptions regarding these benefits in your life?
7. In what ways has higher education benefited you?
8. What do you think about the economic advantages of higher education?
9. As a private university graduate, how much did you invest in your higher education?
10. Do you think there should be return rates for higher education? Why?
11. Do you think you have earned the amount you invested in your higher education? If not, then why? If yes, then how?
12. Are you in employment?
13. Do you think your university has a role in helping you in getting employment?
14. What kind of support did you receive from your university to date? Please explain with examples.
15. In your opinion, how did higher education ensure better career prospects in your life? Could you please give examples?

16. Did higher education play a role in upgrading your social status and respect? If yes, then how? (Ask for examples)
17. How did higher education socio-economically change your life after your graduation?
18. To what extent did your undergraduate studies meet your socioeconomic expectations in your life?

## Appendix C. Focus Group Discussion Guide

### Important information:

- **Interview date:**
- **Participant's Name:**
- **Level of Education:**
- **University:**
- **Year of Graduation:**

1. What does higher education mean to you all?
2. What were your aspirations for pursuing higher education?
3. Why did you choose to study this specific major at a private university?
4. Do you think that higher education has benefits?
5. What do you think about the benefits of higher education in your life?
6. Have you ever thought about your future career after graduation?
7. How did your degrees help you get a job?
8. How does your degree enable you to have an income?
9. Do you think higher education has a link to your income?
10. What is the link between higher education and the level of your income?
11. What are the advantages of higher education for society?
12. How does higher education help the people in a community?
13. Do you think higher education contributes to a country's development? Could you please elaborate?
14. In what ways can higher education help a country?
15. What are the socioeconomic impacts of higher education in your country?

## **Appendix D. Sample of Interview Transcript**

**Interviewee:** Graduate 1

**Interviewer:** Nazeer Rasouli

**Date of Interview:** December 06, 2022

**Level of Education:** MBA

**Year of Graduation:** 2014

**Location of Interview:** Kabul, Afghanistan

**Interviewer:** What does higher education mean to you?

**Interviewee:** To me, higher education means a window towards a prosperous life and a solution to difficulties of the society.

**Interviewer:** Why do you choose to pursue a higher education degree?

**Interviewee:** My father has been one of the very, very beginning ones who come out of a village and goes for studies and then when he finds the limitations in our particular region in Shibar (a village in Bamyan, Afghanistan) he decides to come to Kabul to continue higher education. I have been inspired by my father, by all those people who have been educated around us. And again as I said to me education is a window towards a better life. So that was the reason.

**Interviewer:** What were your motivation and reasons for getting admission to a private university?

**Interviewee:** Honestly, when I was studying for a master's degree, Kardan University was the only university that was offering a master's degree in private universities because I had a full-time job and I was not able to manage my time and go to the government or public universities, so I was waiting that whichever universities start the first master degree program I will just go and start and A university was the first one that starts. So, the main reason was that.

**Interviewer:** What are your perceptions regarding these benefits in your life?

**Interviewee:** Fortunately, I am thankful for the education. Whatever today I am is because of my education, if I have not had the education I would not have been where I am standing today or I would not have what I have now.

**Interviewer:** In what ways has higher education benefited you?

**Interviewee:** Education socially to the stages that I got was only because of education. The jobs that I got, it was only because of the education. I have been in an Afghanistan set up and I have never benefited from other relations except for my abilities and I am thankful for that. So to me, education in my social life, family life, and economic life education had a direct impact.

**Interviewer:** What do you think about the economic benefits of higher education?

**Interviewee:** I was a high school graduate in 2008. I started working actually in 2008. But then I realized that this education being only a school graduate will not take me anywhere. So at that time, I had for example a salary of 9000 Afghanis, I think. I had an office job, very neat, very decent job, but I knew that with this I will be in this job, I will get some salary per month for the kids then I decided to start my higher education. By finishing my undergraduate degree and master's degree, my income increased. So this income automatically brought opportunities in our family lives economically. This opened further doors for my siblings to start education. For example, now I do not have anyone in the family who is not in university or has not graduated from the university. So, this was all the impact of higher education, even will impact the future generation.

**Interviewer:** Do you think there should be return rates for higher education? Why?

**Interviewee:** Higher education has a huge return rate, externally and internally that is how employers and organization companies invest in their people to have a higher return, but in

terms of productivity, innovations, and in terms of doing something better for the organization so there is a direct return.

what I have invested in my higher education.

**Interviewer:** Are you in employment?

**Interviewee:** Yes, I am working as the head of HR at AKAH internationally for Central Asia and I am responsible for three countries before that I worked with AKAH and the government of Afghanistan, inside Afghanistan.

**Interviewer:** Do you think your university has a role in helping you in getting employment?

**Interviewee:** For sure. As previously I said after graduating with my Master's degree I was promoted to my job in particular, the university upgraded my skills and also the curriculum was in English and which helped me a lot with getting a good job in the job market of Afghanistan and even now abroad the country.

**Interviewer:** What kind of support did you receive from your university to date? Please explain with examples.

**Interviewee:** Honestly, there was not much employment supports in my university, except for some job fair, and personally whatever I have achieved in my professional life it is because of education and personal struggles and perseverance.

**Interviewer:** In your opinion, how did higher education ensure better career prospects in your life? Could you please give examples?

**Interviewee:** On a personal level if with a bachelor's degree program, I may not be able to qualify for certain roles. For example, higher than a managerial level in a classical hiring setup, but if I have a master's degree then I automatically qualify and then it depends on my abilities how I perform to get through the interviews and get the job. So there is a direct relationship between higher education and getting a job.