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The Role of Universities in Preserving and Strengthening the Languages and Dialects of Afghanistan

Tariq Zakir[1*]; Lutz Rzehak[2]; Waheedullah Jamal[3]; Fahim Rahimi[4]

[1]*Department of Dari, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Nangarhar University, Jalalabad, Afghanistan*
[2]*Department of Asian & African Studies, Faculty of Humanities & Social Science, Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany*
[3]*Department of Arabic, Faculty of Literature & Human Science, Baghlan University, Polkhumri, Afghanistan*
[4]*Department of English, Faculty of Languages and Literature, Nangarhar University, Jalalabad, Afghanistan*
[*]*Corresponding Email: tariq.zakir@yahoo.com, Phone Number: +93780002650*

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Abstract

Universities and scientific institutions are the most important building blocks of the political, economic, social, and cultural development of human societies. In today's world, changes and developments are accelerating every day. Most of today's scientific advancements are the achievements of universities and research institutions. In this regard, universities and other scientific institutions are also responsible for studying, preserving, and developing the languages and cultural values of society. This is a very important task because some of our languages and cultural values face many challenges due to rapid global changes and influences from other countries and cultures due to globalization. This article analyzes the role of Afghan universities in preserving and developing the languages of Afghanistan in a descriptive-analytical manner. It shows that Afghan universities should conduct serious scientific research on strengthening and expanding the use of the country's official languages. These efforts must be based on serious academic work in the fields of philology, starting with the study of grammar and lexicology, through translations from other languages into the languages of Afghanistan, up to the development of digital spelling checkers and the publication of international journals in the local languages, and last but not least, the development of literature in the languages of Afghanistan. Regarding small linguistic minorities, necessary measures must also be taken to prevent them from completely abandoning their mother tongue in favor of a second or third language. To preserve these languages, vocabulary, writing rules, and oral literature must be collected.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Culture Dialect, Language, Universities.

Introduction

The languages and dialects of Afghanistan are considered to be the most important components of our national and cultural identity and our national values. Given today's developments and changes, most languages and dialects are subject to change and, in some cases, destruction. In the current situation, the languages of Afghanistan are not safe from these problems either. In an article in the journal "American Linguistics" in 1992, Michelle Krause of the Alaska Native Language Center estimated that given the rapid and precipitous changes in the world, 90 percent of the languages spoken today will no longer be used in about a hundred years. They will become so-called dead or extinct languages. This represents a high level of danger for many languages (Comrie et al. 2007, p. 5). Against this background, universities with their experts and academic staff are obliged to work on the preservation and strengthening of our languages and thus support our cultural heritage. The present research was conducted to answer the following questions:

What have universities, as responsible institutions, done in the field of preservation and development of Afghan languages?

What should be done to preserve and develop Afghan languages so that they do not disappear completely?

This study examines the issue in a descriptive-analytical manner. In the first step, the work of Afghan university professors in the field of language promotion was analyzed, and then, based on reliable sources, important solutions were proposed to preserve, strengthen, and expand Afghan languages.

Material and Method

The paper gave the reader extensive and customized assistance in understanding universities' roles in languages. On the basis of earlier, comparable investigations, the research criteria were developed.

Academic databases and online libraries, including Google Scholar, were the main sources of materials used for this review research conference paper. Using keywords related to the paper's topic, the search was carried out, and filters were added to include recently published books, reports, and peer-reviewed publications.

A methodical review of the literature was the methodology. The approach started with the development of research questions, which were then followed by a thorough search plan to find pertinent material. To guarantee that the right materials are chosen for analysis, inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed. A summary of the main conclusions, techniques, and findings from each source was part of the data extraction process. A thematic analysis was then conducted to find patterns and trends in the research field.

Results and Discussion

The general changes in our current globalized world and the cultural dominance of powerful countries have caused many problems for the languages and cultures of developing and underdeveloped countries. Accordingly, universities and other academic and cultural institutions play an important role in the preservation and development of our languages. However, little work has been done in this field in Afghanistan so far. In Iran, for example, an article published in 2018 entitled “The Role of the University in Preserving, Strengthening, and Expanding the Persian Language” by Abbas Vaezzadeh suggests using Persian words to create scientific terms and introducing Persian courses in

universities and other educational institutions around the world to promote the Persian language and literature and expand their use. Our research is completely different because Vaezzadeh only deals with the preservation and development of the Persian language in Iran. Our research examines the work of Afghan university professors in the field of preservation and development of Afghanistan's languages and offers an opportunity to support both the country's official and unofficial languages.

The Role of the University in Society

Educational and scientific centers have existed since time immemorial, but a university in its current form was first established in France in the 13th century. As social and cultural institutions, universities have undergone many changes throughout history. In the 19th century, the orientation of universities as producers of modern knowledge paved the way for new research, which was due to the constant accumulation of knowledge, the increase in the number of scientists, the increasing complexity of human societies, and the emergence of new questions in various fields of human society. This happened due to the development of scientific methods and the increase in the number of scientific disciplines (Javadani 2009, pp. 37–38). There is no doubt that higher education is the most important building block of the political, economic, social, and cultural development of society. In today's world, changes are gaining momentum every day (Alizadeh Majd 1397, p. 166). Therefore, universities and higher education respond to the needs of the people, and most of today's developments and advancements are the products of universities and research institutions. In many countries, including third world countries, there are many social, cultural, political, etc., problems. These problems somehow show the weakness of the academic system, education, and its inefficiency. According to the Times ranking, Shanghai, and other countries with powerful universities are the economic and industrial superpowers of the world (Alizadeh Majd 2017, p. 267). Recent developments in the world have forced developed countries as well as developing countries to think about and revise their higher education systems. These developments are so profound that one of the United States politicians believes that the world is pregnant with four revolutions: political, economic, cultural, and technological revolutions. He says that Americans should prepare their society for these revolutions so that by knowing about them, a framework for the direction of the future is created. The political situation of the world has changed. During fundamental cultural changes, it is necessary for people to have some kind of moral foundation that they can rely on to survive future changes, and finally, technological changes can make human dreams a reality (Mansouri 2014, pp. 51-52). These developments and progress are hardly possible without a good education system.

The Importance of Preserving and Strengthening Languages

Languages differ in terms of their social domains and areas of use as well as in the number of their speakers. Some languages have more speakers than others, and their areas of use are constantly expanding. These languages take over the domains of smaller languages that do not have comparable economic, cultural, or political support. As a result, small languages are at risk of being abandoned. Therefore, in his book "Atlas of Languages," Comrie divides languages into three types according to their endangerment: so-called dead languages no longer have native speakers; so-called dying languages still have native speakers but will disappear within a generation or two, except in truly exceptional circumstances, because they are no longer learned by children; and so-called living languages which are learned by children and thus passed on from generation to

generation (Comrie 2007, p. 5). Looking at the current situation in the world, the process of globalization has led to people all over the world experiencing cultural harmonization. At first glance, this globalization seems pleasant and hassle-free. However, according to many researchers, the homogeneity of culture and way of thinking poses a threat to the diversity of thought and ideas. The loss of diversity of thought causes irreparable damage to human society, so the cultures and languages of many societies are in danger. The cultures and languages of the superior and stronger societies become uprooted plants, losing categories such as identity and personality. Diversity is a major feature of both nature and society. Loss of diversity in culture and thought destroys the basis of growth and excellence of human societies and upsets the balance of a social community (Shir 2006, p. 4). The loss of a language means that the culture conveyed through that language is also lost. With the loss of their cultural treasure, future generations will be trapped in cultural poverty. It cannot be ruled out that future generations will accuse us of negligence. According to Ghulam Ali Haddad Adel, "Linguistic variants with the originality and significance they have today are in danger of decay and oblivion. It is with great regret and sadness that it must be said that today, in many areas, when old villagers die, old villages also die, as well as their original and ancient culture, and the language and dialects are also buried under the sad ruins of collapsed mud houses" (Adel 2008, p. 2). Given the value of languages, in recent years, the issue of preserving languages as part of human cultural heritage has been considered a serious problem by both linguists and UNESCO. Since the loss of a language represents an irreparable loss for humanity, the 15th International Congress of Linguists advised UNESCO that this organization must consider this problem as an urgent matter and support linguistic institutions and programs in preparing descriptions of languages, their grammar and vocabulary, and in creating records of the oral literature of extinct languages (Yarmohammadi et al. 1382, p. 110). Based on this principle, in 1340 (1960/61), with the help of UNESCO and other international institutions, an institution called the "Institute of Linguistics" was established at the Faculty of Languages and Literature of Kabul University. This institute, whose members were both foreign and local linguists, was established with the aim of collecting material and making records of the languages and dialects of Afghanistan. Experts from this institution traveled to 268 different regions to collect linguistic materials. According to the report of this institute, much work was completed to create a Linguistic Atlas of Afghanistan. However, this institution collapsed in 1350 (1970/71) for unclear reasons, and its completed works have never become publicly available (Yemin 2008, pp. 42-43).

The Role of Universities in Preserving and Developing the Country's Languages

Today, Afghan languages, especially the official languages of Pashto and Dari Persian, which represent our most important national and cultural values, are facing numerous internal and external problems. Internal problems include the huge difference between the spoken and written language. External problems arise because much attention is paid to foreign languages while our official languages lack comparable attention. In schools and universities, superficial treatment of official languages in teaching is observed. This is reflected in the downgrading of scores for language and literature subjects in entrance examinations. At the same time, ruthless invasion of foreign languages and cultures is evident. Today, one cannot simply ignore the change in languages, cultures, and the whole process of social and cultural change. On the one hand, compassionate societal leaders are trying to protect their culture from the damage caused by the intrusion of foreign influences, and on the other hand, neo-colonial entities are making additional efforts to

occupy space and create consumer markets for themselves, allocating huge funds for this work (Babaei 1387, p. 50). In such a situation, first of all, the responsible institutions (universities, Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Information and Culture, media, and other related departments and institutions) and then every Afghan, especially educated people, are called upon to protect the valuable heritage of their homeland. Universities are part of these responsible institutions and have the duty to protect the official and unofficial languages from destruction and foreign influence at three levels: preservation, strengthening, and development of national languages. The people of the society will not tolerate any movement against their language, even if it leads to progress, unless it is compatible and harmonious with the cultural values of their society. We remember that during the republic, there were rumors about teaching some courses such as medicine and engineering in English, which provoked many reactions at different levels of the country.

In the last two centuries, science and technology have developed rapidly in some countries of the world, and this unprecedented development has brought great changes in the fields of economy, society, culture, and others. Along with these rapid developments in these fields, the languages of these countries have also experienced considerable advancement in various linguistic fields. Our country has not experienced comparable innovations and progress in the field of technology. This is one of the reasons why the languages of our country seem less suitable for some fields of science and technology. If a scientist wants to express his scientific knowledge in languages such as English, French, or German, he will hardly face much difficulty because modern scientific knowledge has been developed in the context of these languages. However, if a researcher wants to express his findings in some scientific fields in a language that has fewer opportunities for expression, he or she will face many problems (Ashur 2009, p. 10). To overcome these difficulties, it is necessary to keep up with the progress of the world, which is very difficult in the present situation. The only thing that can save our languages from these problems to some extent is to carry out a series of activities and scientific works as follows:

Grammar Writing: The study of a language and its different varieties is an important basis for establishing rules and norms of language use. Studying a language means developing a scientific understanding of that language. Only those who have such an understanding are able to use a language appropriately and formulate thoughts logically in that language. Solid knowledge of grammar is also necessary to be able to teach one's own language as well as foreign languages. The better someone knows a language, the better they can use it (Vahidian Kamyar 2019, pp. 1-2). If we do not have sophisticated languages, we cannot adequately express our ideas and thoughts. Only highly developed and well-elaborated languages can produce strong thinkers. In Afghanistan, researchers in the field of Dari language and literature have already done remarkable work in this field. The following works should be mentioned here: "Modern Dari Grammar" by Mohammad Nasim Neghat Saeedi, "Dari Grammar" by Mohammad Rahim Elham, "Contemporary Dari-Persian Grammar" by Mohammad Hossein Yamin. Besides that, dozens of books and hundreds of articles have been written in this field. Valuable works have also been done in the study of the grammar of the Pashto language: "Pashto Grammar" and "Pashto Japghdul" by Sediqullah Rekhtin, "Grammar (Haganiyeh)" and "Contemporary Pashto Grammar" by Majwer Ahmad Ziyar Mohammad, "Pashto Nahwah" by Saber Khishki, "Pashto Morphology" by Zarghona Zywar Rekhtin, and "Pashto Nahwah" by Mohammad Agha Shirzad. Numerous other books and articles have also been written on this topic. Most of these instructions are aimed at language and literature students, but most general readers and students of other subjects will also understand them to some extent. However,

the amount of work done in the subject today does not meet expectations or requirements. Therefore, language and literature professors should get to work and create teaching materials using modern grammar techniques that at the same time take into account the requirements of different sections of society.

Research and publication of scientific works: Research and the production of knowledge are inherent tasks of universities and academic institutions. Most of the modern developments in society are products of the work of universities and scientific institutions. Despite their limited capabilities, the teaching staff of universities in Afghanistan have written many research reports and articles. The publication and dissemination of this research have also played a crucial role in the preservation and promotion of the languages of Afghanistan. Of course, given the scientific progress of the world, the work done is of very limited importance and does not meet the requirements of the times. In addition, many works are full of words and terms from other languages. The main reason for this is that there are no terminological equivalents in our own languages for many modern concepts. Sometimes this is also simply related to the authors' negligence and lack of familiarity with the languages of the country. Therefore, our professors should try to write scientific papers while taking into account the experience and developments of today's world but avoid the use of foreign words as much as possible, which will strengthen the national languages.

Translation from other languages: In today's world, there is no nation or country that does not need the knowledge and experience of others. To pass on the knowledge and experience of others, it is necessary to translate their works and writings into our own language. Otherwise, it becomes very difficult and sometimes impossible to apply the knowledge and experience of others. Accordingly, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education recently made translation from international languages a prerequisite for appointment as an academic professor. Translating into our own languages is undoubtedly a laudable task as many works have recently been translated into the country's official languages. This improves and strengthens our languages. On the other hand, the obligation to translate has caused many problems for professors. Due to the incomplete knowledge of foreign languages of most professors and their unfamiliarity with translation methods, the inconsiderate use of numerous foreign words has been encouraged, and the morphological and syntactical structures of our languages are sometimes ignored. Consider the sentence hagha machinona chi nandari ta warandi karal kom chi da hewad pa danana jor shawi o " as an example. I heard in one of the media that this is exactly the English translation of "He presented to the exhibition the machines manufactured in the country." Through the translation of English works, this structure came into Pashto. It is commonly used in certain translations.

Dictionary writing: Lexicographic research is essential for any language because languages are dynamic phenomena and are constantly changing. Some words disappear from contemporary usage, new words enter common usage, or existing words acquire expanded or new meanings. With all these lexical changes, the structure of a language also changes. Every language needs dictionaries and other lexicographic works that record and explain such changes. For languages with a high rate of change, it is necessary to keep writing new dictionaries or updating old dictionaries (Sabzalipour and Nikgehar 2013, p. 67). In Afghanistan, not much work has been done in the field of lexicography, especially in relation to Persian. This is due to the fact that many speakers of the Persian language mostly use the dictionaries written in Iran. Several dictionaries have been written for

Pashto, which solve the problems of speakers of this language to some extent. Most of the written dictionaries are not specialized and are often compiled by one person, often not taking into account the principles of linguistics and lexicography in particular. Today, it is necessary that specialized dictionaries in different disciplines and general dictionaries are written by a group of experts in different sciences. Accordingly, university professors should also cooperate with the departments relevant to their field, such as the Academy of Sciences and the like, in the field of cultural studies, especially digital dictionaries.

Vocabulary: Languages are subject to changes and developments in various areas. Vocabulary is the most unstable part of a language. We constantly see new words emerging while other words gradually disappear from common usage, eventually being considered old and archaic, and finally disappearing from use altogether. Languages require a strong vocabulary where strong means that the vocabulary develops in parallel with society. Therefore, lexical deficiencies are one of the most important problems in the area of vocabulary of a language. The vocabulary problems come to light as deficiencies when texts are translated from one language to another (Naji Maidani and Esfandiari 2013, p. 655). Some translators then start inventing words on their own when they cannot find an adequate word in the vocabulary of their language (ibid, p. 658). Due to the rapid developments, the word formation process in Afghanistan is extremely slow and unscientific as compared to the rest of the world. Of course, given their inherent duty, universities should do more in terms of word formation than any other department.

Publication of literature (poetry, stories, and the like): The existence of literary works is also a factor in the survival and spread of languages. Ali Mohammad Haqshanas believes that literary works, especially poetry, are crucial for the preservation and dynamism of languages. He unequivocally states, "I see the secret of the death of languages in the sterile stagnation of their poetry. Every language dies when its last poet is dead" (Madrasi and Bashirnejad 1385, p. 102). Languages with strong cultural support have not only resisted the cultural invasion of foreigners but have also grown stronger and thus spread to other parts of the world. Poets like Attar, Maulana, Saadi, and Hafez have played an important role in the spread and influence of the Persian language in the world. Nowadays, writing poems, stories, and the like is considered important and crucial for the preservation, strengthening, and spread of the languages of Afghanistan. Professors of literature should be in constant contact with poets, writers, and literary associations and introduce others to the works of creative and innovative poets and writers so that our students, compatriots, and the world can get acquainted with the contemporary literature of our country.

Organization of training courses on writing and editing: Most of the presenters, writers, officials, and employees of the media and other governmental and non-governmental departments are not very familiar with the rules of official languages. In the news and reports, it is constantly observed that words and sentences are used contrary to the rules of the language. In other media and reports, it is common to use the plural form for the numerical unit. For example“Ten people were killed” while the use of such a sentence is not correct according to the rules of the Persian language. Here, universities, especially the language and literature departments, must play their role and fulfill their inherent task, which is education. Universities can help the media and other institutions by strengthening the position of the language and literature department and entrusting these departments with the task of correct language and writing. This cooperation can be done in various ways, for example by conducting training courses on writing and editing for

employees of various governmental and non-governmental bodies, which are conducted continuously and at different levels by members of the academic staff of the literature departments (Vaezzadeh 2018, p. 937). Great attention must be paid to the teaching of official languages in all disciplines, with particular attention to correct language use, writing, and editing, as well as the drafting of contracts and letters of intent in the field of text correction. This applies to the media sector and all other institutions working in the field of language and literature. Publishing international journals in local languages in various fields, especially in social sciences, is one way to strengthen the country's languages. By publishing such journals, our researchers and professors can easily publish their research results in their own languages, which is valuable in several ways. First, most of our compatriots who do not know foreign languages can use these articles. Second, our professors no longer have to send huge sums of money to other countries to get articles printed.

Preservation of endangered languages: Languages with a small number of speakers, especially if they are not officially recognized as minority languages, are at risk of being abandoned by their speakers in favor of other languages and of disappearing from the linguistic landscape sooner or later due to various factors. Factors that favor such developments include any kind of language contact, whether through the spread of new means of communication and transport, through mass media such as radio and television, or the fact that literacy is taught in a language other than the first language. When speakers of such small languages become familiar with the official language of a country, this naturally causes the spread of the official language or languages, but in many cases, this may lead to the gradual disappearance of smaller languages (Madrasi 2013, p. 27). These factors are particularly relevant in Afghanistan, with its well-known linguistic diversity, and there is a risk that most officially unrecognized languages with a small number of speakers will be abandoned and disappear altogether in the not-too-distant future. This applies to the Pamir languages (Shughni, Roshanani, Yazgholami, Ashkashmi, and Vakhi) in northeastern Afghanistan, the Parachi language in the Kapisa region, the Ormuri language in Logar province and southern Afghanistan, the Pashayi language in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kapisa, the Gujri, Ghori, and the various languages of Nuristan (Yemin 1391, p. 95). Dozens of dialects of Dari Persian and Pashto could also be eliminated from use. However, these languages and dialects are also culturally important, and the government and institutions have a great responsibility to preserve them. As we have mentioned in the previous sections, a language and dialect are tied to the culture and identity of the people, and with the disappearance of any language and dialect, part of the culture and identity of its speakers is also lost. From this point of view, the government and the responsible institutions should take the necessary measures to create documentation on these languages and collect as much material as possible so that the next generations will have the necessary linguistic and cultural material to pass on language skills in the future. The role of language in the development of culture is so important that in many developed countries of the world where local languages are threatened with extinction, huge budgets are allocated for the teaching and preservation of these languages (Keramesh, Introduction to Translators, 2010, p. 13). There is no doubt that the universities of Afghanistan have made some efforts to collect and preserve the languages and dialects of some regions. Considering the importance of the subject, it should be mentioned that this work is not enough. Besides that, the research in this field was carried out mostly by individual scholars or insufficiently educated language activists, is not uniform and not systematic. Such studies were carried out mainly with regard to

dialects of Dari-Persian and Pashto and to the oral literature of some regions. In addition, with the establishment of master's and doctoral programs in the fields of language and literature, some students have also researched the dialects and oral literature of some regions in the form of theses. By undertaking such research, they not only open up new scientific and cultural opportunities for researchers but also preserve our indigenous languages and cultures from complete disappearance. Given the threat of language loss, the work done is not enough. To prevent this crisis, more activities must be carried out. First, linguistic departments should be set up in universities to document and study small languages so that in the future we can train young linguists who can study and preserve these languages. Second, we should generally pay more attention to languages in remote regions that are in danger of disappearing. Perhaps it is impossible to preserve these languages as living languages of the world. The only measures that can be effective in this case are collecting words, writing down grammar rules, and collecting and writing down oral literature such as poems, proverbs, legends, and beliefs. By taking such measures, the complete disappearance of these languages can be prevented to some extent. This material can help linguists and future researchers in the field of language study and development.

Conclusion

The hasty and rapid developments of the current century have eliminated many human problems on the one hand and caused problems on the other. The development of new communication channels and the globalization of communication through modern media and networks create a risk of destruction to societies, traditional ways of education, and endangers the preservation of the traditional lifestyle and, in general, cultural and linguistic diversity. These developments of globalization have greatly influenced the languages and dialects of Afghanistan. Accordingly, the languages of Afghanistan can be divided into two main groups: first, the languages used in schools and educational centers, especially the official languages, and second, the languages and dialects that are not used in official offices and whose number of speakers is decreasing with each passing day, i.e., languages and dialects that will disappear in the near future. The most important point is that every language is closely linked to culture, and when a language disappears, the culture and identity of its speakers will also be destroyed. Therefore, considering their responsibility for preserving and strengthening cultural and national values, the relevant departments, especially universities, should do their best to preserve, strengthen, and expand the official languages, including the field of science and technology, so that our languages keep pace with today's developments. In addition, writing textbooks for different levels, researching and publishing research papers, translating authoritative works in different fields, compiling dictionaries, writing dictionaries, supporting the creation and publication of literary works, creating educational programs for writing and editing, and publishing international journals in the languages of the country, and the like can play a valuable role in strengthening and expanding our languages. On the other hand, languages and dialects that are not used in schools and educational institutions may disappear in the near future, as the use of a second language in schools is considered one of the important factors of language change (Madrasi and Bashirnejad 2005, p. 95). Dialects have their own linguistic and cultural value and are considered cultural values of our country and therefore should be preserved. It is difficult and impossible to preserve these languages and dialects in the form of spoken languages or bring them up to a level that would allow their use as languages of instruction. Nevertheless, it is important to collect

the vocabulary of these languages and document oral literature such as stories, legends, and hymns that have been passed down orally from generation to generation. By collecting these materials, the complete disappearance of any of these languages will be prevented to some extent.

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Data Availability Statement:

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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