Islamic Education in Afghanistan

Pia Karlsson and Amir Mansory

Abstract
In Afghanistan Islamic education takes place in mosques, madrasahs, and Qur‘ān schools as well as in Western type of schools (primary and secondary schools). The most common institution for Islamic learning is the mosque or masjid school where practically all children learn the basics of Islam.

Since long, a conflict between the two education systems, Islamic education and Western type of education, exists in Afghanistan. It concerns the state control over Islamic education, girls’ participation in education, and the role of Islam in the Western type of education. Two tendencies are visible today: a clear preference for Western type of education and an increasing interest for a complementary Islamic education in addition to the few hours of Islamic subjects taught in primary and secondary schools. Islamic schools for girls have been established in a few places by communities or by the Ministry of Education.

Keywords
Islamic education • Maktab • Madrasah • Afghanistan • Ṭālibān

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Introduction

What today commonly is understood as education was actually established in Afghanistan, as in other Muslim countries, several centuries before it took shape in most of the Western world. With the advent of Islam to Afghanistan in the seventh century, education also arrived in the country, and thus, education within the framework of Islam has existed for more than a millennium. The type of education that has been developed in the West reached Afghanistan approximately 100 years ago.

Western type of education was not introduced by a colonial power during the nineteenth century as was the case in many third-world countries; Afghanistan was never, as most of the neighboring countries, colonized. Nevertheless, Afghanistan incorporated most of the typical features of the Western educational system such as grade structure; school hours and semesters; subjects like language, mathematics, science, etc., which are taught in separate modules; annual examinations; and so on. All such classical qualities were imported to primary and secondary schools, with one difference, though: Islam was always included as a subject from grade 1 and onward.

The two educational systems, Islamic education and Western type of education, have, since the beginning of the twentieth century, existed side by side; at times without dissonance but more often than not with conflicts and disagreements. Over the years, three issues have been at stake as regards education in Afghanistan: (1) the government’s aspiration to control the community that runs Islamic schools, (2) Islam as a subject in the curriculum in Western type of schools, and (3) girls’ participation in education, Western as well as Islamic education. These issues have contributed to a king’s exile, to an official ban on girls’ education, and to the occupation of the country by foreign powers. The turbulent events of the past decades have not cooled down the conflict: quite the opposite, the questions are still burning.

In the postcolonial period and up to September 11, 2001, Islamic education did not attract much interest (with the exception of a few conferences for Islamist scholars). After the terrorist attacks, media, governments, international agencies, researchers, and others turned focus and attention to Islamic institutions of learning, not least to Afghan institutions. The word madrasah became common also in Westerners’ vocabulary. Islamic schools have been described as sources of terrorism “suspected of fostering a medieval mind-set and violent militancy” (Pohl 2006, p. 390). Ṭālibān, i.e., students in Islamic education, got a new meaning, at least in Western minds. (Ṭālibān is the plural form of ṭālib, student in madrasah.)
Islamic Education Has a Long Tradition

In the first Islamic schools in Afghanistan, moral education and reading, writing, and arithmetic were taught. Sometimes vocational education was included, for example, calligraphy and bookkeeping (Rafi 1999). However, to read and memorize the Qur’ān were the prime objectives of Islamic education.

Since long, Islamic education takes place in mosques, madrasahs, and Qur’ān schools as well as in Western type of schools (primary and secondary schools). (A Qur’ān school is a school where students learn to memorize the Qur’ān (Dār al-Hifāẓ). In the literature, Qur’ān or Qur’ānic school is often used to describe Islamic education in general, which is somewhat misleading since Islamic education includes many additional subjects and not only studies of the Qur’ān.) The Islamic place for worship, the mosque or masjid, became early also an institution for learning. Masjid schools have existed since the arrival of Islam to Afghanistan. Male individuals, mullās, who had acquired knowledge of Islam in madrasahs or through personal studies have been teaching in the mosques for hundreds of years (Amaj 1991; Rafi 1999). This type of Islamic education is still very common. In 1960, almost 10% of Afghan men were working as religious teachers as a full- or part-time occupation (Dupree 1973).

Madrasahs also have a long history in Afghanistan. A renowned mullā-teacher might attract a large number of students at which point the mosque had to expand and construct special rooms for the training sessions and space for lodging the students. Thus, a madrasah institution with boarding facilities had been created. Hundreds, maybe thousands of madrasahs of varied sizes existed in most big villages and towns. Madrasahs have historically been more common than Qur’ān schools in Afghanistan. Madrasahs have, until very recently, been intended exclusively for boys and men. From the beginning, the students, the ṭālibān, learned a broad spectrum of religious subjects as well as Arabic language, logic, rhetoric, literature, history, etc. The education had and still has to some extent an informal character, and students attended irregularly and on individual basis. They decided themselves at what pace they wished to learn and for how long they wanted to continue.

Madrasahs were boarding institutions, and students from different villages attended the school and lived there together. Generally, education was free of charge, and the costs were shared by the local community that was responsible for running the school. The aim of madrasah was to provide the specialists a Muslim society needs or, in other words, to produce masters in Islamic theology and law. A mullā is an adult man who has studied in a madrasah, and he has high status as a learned person – but mullās are also sources of satire for people! Today’s younger mullās usually have primary and sometimes secondary education in addition to Islamic studies. Sometimes a mullā – especially among Sunnī Muslims – is called mawlawī. There is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes a mawlawī. Learning in the Qur’ān school (Dār al-Hifāẓ) is limited to recitation and memorization of the Qur’ān. When the whole Book is learned by heart, the boy student becomes a qārī, a very honorable title. Initially, mostly blind men became qārīs. In addition
to the mentioned institutions, Islamic education also exists at the university level, at faculties of *Sharī‘ah* since at least half a century. Moreover, Islamic subjects have always been – to a varying extent – on the schedule at the Western type of schools.

Traditionally, Islamic education (except at the university) has been community based, which means that the village council (*šūrā*) takes the responsibility for the management – to use a modern word – of the madrasah and the *masjid* (mosque) school. Encouraged by the *šūrā*, the households took turns in providing food to the teachers and students. Usually, the *šūrā* also organized and collected some kind of remuneration for the teachers; mostly, teachers were paid in kind. The communities were also responsible for maintenance of the mosque and the madrasah.

In the beginning of the 1970s, in addition to the many village and city madrasas, there were some 10–15 Islamic schools of extraordinary reputation in Afghanistan with a large number of *fālibān* and prominent scholars as teachers. These particular madrasas followed a prearranged curriculum, and the training ran for a fixed number of years. The students were grouped into classes like in public schools. Students from small village madrasas sometimes completed their Islamic studies in these madrasas. There were many similarities to the government madrasas (see below) with one important exception: they were community based and managed and, thus, not controlled by the government. They were independent institutions and were not concerned about the requirements set up by the Ministry of Education (MoE) regarding, for example, student admissions.

The few (around 13) government madrasas that existed before the wars (before 1978) had a curriculum decided by the government. The first government madrasah was launched by King Amānullāh already in the 1920s in Kabul. The intention was to set up a proficiency system for imāms (Rafi 1999). As time went on, the government took over some city madrāsahs, renamed those to "formal madrasahs," and established a strict system for admissions, teacher recruitment, accreditation, and so on. These madrasahs were in many aspects organized as secondary schools for grades 7–12 with schedule, curriculum, and examination system. Subjects such as mathematics, science, and languages were included. Students were admitted after studies in village madrasahs or primary schools.

The Communist government (1978–1992) introduced a Soviet inspired education system, which included hardly any Islamic teachings (Samady 2001), but (wisely) left the traditional madrasahs to local communities. The madrasahs survived but kept a low profile during this period. Only teachers affiliated with the Communist parties were employed. (There were two Communist parties in Afghanistan at the time: *Khalq* (The People) and *Parcham* (The Flag).) Girls’ education was much encouraged. Teachers were officially accused of backwardness, and the students, particularly those who studied at higher levels, were called "black reactionaries" (due to their black beards). However, the government madrasahs remained. Even during the Communist rule, there was still a need for Islamic judges since the *shari‘ah* law system was partially continued.

The Islamic revival during the *jihād*, the liberation war against the Soviet occupation 1979–1989, paved the way for an expansion of madrasahs. Mujāhidīn (Mujāhidīn is plural of *mujāhid* (the holy fighter). set up madrasahs, which included
religious and nonreligious subjects, with Arabic support in the liberated areas. Some of these madrasahs were strongly influenced by the Wahhābī school of Islam.)

The Taliban government (1996–2001) introduced yet another type of madrasah: a 6-year primary school with subjects such as mathematics; science; languages, including English; and literature. More than 50% of the time was set aside for religious subjects. These Taliban madrasahs were the only schools with government support at the time. Essentially they replaced the previous type of primary education in Afghanistan with the exception of NGO and community-supported primary schools. The Taliban madrasahs were, however, fairly limited in number.

Some 10 years ago, two competing tendencies were visible as regards Islamic education: on the one hand, the big sprawling institutions with hundreds of Taliban engaged in intense studies were closing down. Students seemed to prefer the Western type of education provided by the government in primary and secondary schools. On the other hand, Islamic education was revived. Qur’ān schools became increasingly popular as complement to primary and secondary education; and new forms of Islamic education, sponsored by the government, were becoming more accessible. Today it seems as the state has completely taken over the Islamic education and established a number of formal madrasas all over the country. Moreover, Islamic schools for girls have been established in some places (Ministry of Education 2003, 2006; Gran 2006; Ministry of Education of Afghanistan 2016).

Western Type of Education Is of Recent Date

By the end of the nineteenth century, the Afghan King recognized the need for trained officers and administrators and set up two institutions in Kabul in 1878 for training of military and administrative staff. Only members of the royal family were admitted as students in the Madrasah-yi Niẓāmī (Military School) and the Madrasah-yi Mulkī (Public School). In these schools, but also in the first primary school for boys established in Kabul in 1903, the curriculum was based on that of the Islamic madrasah, i.e., most of the subjects taught in the madrasah were also taught in the new schools. As in the original madrasahs, the sons of the elites were the first students of schools (maktabs) (Rafi 1999).

The first girl school, also in the capital, opened in 1921 (Samady 2001). The state has from the beginning been the only provider of Western type of education until the 1980s when the state gradually collapsed and international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) took over part of its responsibilities. Provision of education has always been free, from primary to tertiary level, and completely centralized. Today, however, fee-based private schools have appeared in most cities.

The few girl schools that were established in the 1920s closed down after just one decade, and most of them were not reestablished until the 1950s, mainly, if not only, in the cities. Generally, public education developed very slowly until the mid-twentieth century when foreign aid started to assist the expansion of the Western type of education. In the 1970s, approximately one third of all children attended primary schools, of which only 15% were girls (Samady 2001). In Kabul, however,
girls constituted around 35% of all pupils, while in rural areas, hardly any educational opportunities were available to girls (Ghani 1990 as cited in Christensen 1995; Ministry of Planning 1975). The Soviet invasion in 1979 and the eventual collapse of the Afghan state resulted in a failed education system, in particular with regard to the public education. The number of students decreased dramatically throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The foreign occupation of the country gave rise to hard struggles, but within a relatively short time, many areas were liberated by the resistance movement, the Mujāhidīn. In these areas, the Mujāhidīn groups, with the support of international NGOs, established schools, including schools for girls. This development continued during the Taliban regime (1996–2001). In spite of the Taliban ban on girls’ education, the number of girl schools in some rural areas with support from in particular the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) increased every year. In the cities, however, public schools were not allowed to enroll girls.

The primary education curriculum has been in constant flux, in particular as regards the Islamic subjects, and has changed in accordance to the preferences of those in power from the prewar government to the pro-communist regime in the 1980s, to the Mujāhidīn administration, to the Taliban rule, and up to today’s government.

Conflict Issues in Afghan Educational History

As noted earlier, from an educational perspective, three issues have been important in many upheavals and rebellions throughout modern history in Afghanistan: the role of Islam in education, education for girls, and the government control of Islamic education. These issues were disputed already in 1929 when King Amānullāh was forced into exile and have, after a relatively calm period thereafter, again become very hot issues since the 1970s.

Islam as a Subject in Western Type of Education

Islam was an important subject from the very beginning of maktab education, that is, in the primary and secondary schools run by the government. This fact did not cause much friction until the 1970s when secular subjects expanded at the expense of Islamic teachings. From that time, much more attention was paid to the secular content of maktab education, and Islamic subjects were, if not directly reduced in the curriculum, dealt with as less important by teachers and planners. The students represented the new generation that was expected to contribute to the development of Afghanistan and bring the country into a modern era. The underlying assumption was that religious knowledge was of less importance and out of date. The curriculum that was introduced by the Communist government (1978–1990) further emphasized this development but still did not erase all Islamic subjects. Islam remained a subject for 1–2 h per week in the primary school during this period. The short-lived Mujāhidīn government (1992–1996) introduced a considerable expansion of the
time dedicated to Islamic subjects in *maktab*. The hours increased from a couple of hours to 12 per week in grades 4–6. Mostly, the NGOs who supported education in the 1990s adhered to this curriculum. In the Ṭālibān primary schools (1996–2001), students spent more than half the time on Islamic subjects.

One of the first measures undertaken by the interim government in 2002 was to considerably reduce the number of hours of Islamic subjects to the same amount as during the Communist period. This caused a lot of opposition and has been changed several times. Table 1 compares the number of hours per week students have studied Islamic subjects in *maktabs* during different periods.

### Table 1  Hours per week of Islamic subjects during different governments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qur'ān</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Karlsson and Mansory (2004)

aSCA The Swedish Afghan Committee, then one of the biggest NGOs involved in education in Afghanistan

State Control of Islamic Education

From the 1920s, *maktab* and *madrasah* represented two education systems, which often were regarded as contradictory systems and looked upon with suspicion by the ruling classes and rural masses alike. When governments have put their efforts on educational development, they have focused only on *maktab* education. If attention was paid to *madrasahs*, the reason was not to improve or expand them but rather to control and supervise these community-based Islamic schools. (During the Ṭālibān government, the big madrasa in Ghazni protected its independence and even rejected government support.)

For a long time, the state has sought to control Islamic education with varying degrees of efficiency and success. Khattak (1986: 46) has described this struggle as follows: “since the early days of Afghan governments until now the administration has tried by various means to get rid of these influences [by religious instructors] and to administer Islamic instructions through state agencies.” This aspiration to control Islamic education is still evident.

Since 2006, primary and secondary education head toward a decentralized system with increased local participation and influence, while Islamic education moves in the opposite direction, toward a centralized, state-controlled system, contrary not only to current global trends but also to the Afghan tradition. The struggle of the
center to control Islamic education has been a recurrent theme in the history of Afghan education. Judging from the first National Education Strategy Plan 2006–2011 (Ministry of Education 2006), a renewal of the state struggle returned to the agenda. A new initiative to establish state madrasahs was taken, an initiative, which was said to be justified by the Constitution (2004): “the state shall devise and implement a unified curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture, . . .” (Art. 45) and “the state shall adopt necessary measures for promotion of education in all levels, development of religious education, organizing and improving the conditions of mosques, madrasahs and religious centres” (Art. 17). These statements were interpreted by the MoE as the duty to develop “a moderate, modern and tolerant Islamic education system” (Ministry of Education 2006: 94) and as an “[extended] responsibility to the oversight of madrasahs and the integration of religious and faith based education into the overall system” (ibid.: 5). A total of 364 secondary madrasahs (grades 7–12) were planned for 2010, one in each district, to provide Islamic education for an anticipated 90,000 boys and girls by year 2010. In 2006, 212 schools were already running, 2 of which were girl madrasahs. In 2013, 644 Islamic schools (grades 1–12) were established with 183,000 students, among those 21% were girls (Ministry of Education 2016), a considerable expansion.

UNESCO (2016) reports that the curriculum of Islamic education now dedicates 60% to religious subjects, including the Arabic language; 20% to social studies, English, and national languages; and 20% to maths and science. This curriculum is justified as to increase employability of Islamic education students. Graduates of Islamic education are eligible to work as Mosque imāms, lawyers, teachers of Islamic subjects, as well as religious advisors for the military.

In the plan for 2006–2010, policies for “private and cross-border madrasahs” (a euphemism for community-based and Pakistani madrasahs, respectively) were to be developed. It was hoped that by setting up state madrasahs, there would be no need for Afghans to go to Pakistani madrasahs and study Islam (Gran 2006). Afghans who had participated in Islamic education abroad were to be “evaluated” at their return, using a “databank of questions” to be developed (Ministry of Education 2006: 98). This reform has now become implemented, and the graduated madrasah students who return from Pakistan are tested in new examinations. By 2008, only 5000 of the 4500 examined had passed and got formal certifications (Ministry of Education 2008).

The Ministry of Education is upgrading the Islamic school teachers both as regards salary levels and education. Teachers have been sent to Egypt and Iran for studies (unclear for how long), and teachers from Al-Azhar University have assisted in instruction at the Afghan madrasahs. A new curriculum has been completed, and textbooks have been produced accordingly, recently by the support from the Kingdom of Jordan (UNESCO 2016).

After 2008, the government seems to have acknowledged the high demand for Islamic education and responded to the pressures from local communities. As seen in Table 2, government madrasahs are assumed to be governed by similar rules as maktabs. Even such activities as scouts are included in madrasahs. All teachers as
Table 2  Ministry of Education plans for Islamic education as stated in the National Education Strategy Plan 2010–2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Baseline 2008</th>
<th>Target for 2014</th>
<th>Target for 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Islamic education graduates who passed national standard test</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of Islamic education graduates who are state employees within 1 year of graduation</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of grade 6 graduates of basic education enrolled in Islamic education</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender parity index in Islamic education</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of madrasahs established</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Darul Hefazes (Qur’ān schools) established</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of Darul Ulums (madrasahs grade 13–14) established</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of registered private madrasahs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of teachers using active learning and teaching methods</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of professional teachers passed competency test</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of students with access to sport facilities</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of schools with scouts</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Ministry of Education (2009)

well as administrators should get similar training as school staff. All private madrasahs, i.e., community-run madrasahs, are assumed to be registered with MoE by 2020. In the latest plan, it is stated that MoE will encourage the private sector to participate actively in providing Islamic education according to the national rules and regulations. If existing unregistered Islamic private schools get registered, their students’ certifications may be approved by MoE. As other schools, Islamic education institutions are to be supervised and monitored by MoE officials. Similarly, madrasahs are also encouraged to be supported by community shūrās as other schools are supposed to be. As seen in Table 2, the government intends to fully control, formalize, and standardize all forms of Islamic education institutions. However, and astonishingly, the MoE pays no attention whatsoever to the masjid (mosque) schools where practically all Afghan children get their basic Islamic education. The only explanation available is that these schools sort under the Ministry of Pilgrimage and Endowments.

According to the third National Education Strategy Plan, 2015–2020 (Ministry of Education 2016) (draft version written by MoE but still (July 2016) not approved by the donors), the overall aim for Islamic education is to “develop human resources with competencies needed for religious preaching in mosques, teaching Islamic subjects, working as judges and attorneys, working in governmental and non-governmental organizations, and pursuing their studies in higher education institutes” (Ministry of Education 2016: 33). To regularly improve Islamic education, it is seen as necessary with “extensive consultation with Islamic ‘ulamā’” (ibid.: 33). The
MoE is “determined to promote active learning” (ibid.), and lecturers from the teacher training institutions are to observe the teaching in Islamic schools and guide the teachers “in new teaching methods, such as group work” (ibid.). To increase girls’ participation in Islamic education, it is seen as necessary to recruit qualified female teachers from teacher training institutions and from general schools through overtime payment and equip madrasahs with boundary walls, healthy drinking water, and sanitation facilities. Other Islamic countries will be asked to fund Islamic education in Afghanistan and to participate in a “development board” for fundraising and “discuss Islamic education policies.”

It seems obvious that the state seeks to grasp full control over the Islamic education institutions. MoE “strives to teach real teaching of Islam and prevent extremism” (Ministry of Education 2012: 26). Islamic education teachers are accused of using “lecturing and drilling techniques for teaching” and not “active learning methods” (ibid.: 26). However, whether this expansion, revised curriculum, and encouragement of girls’ participation in Islamic education are demand driven and based on independent national policies or a way to attract increased donor funding remains to be seen.

**Girls’ Education**

In Afghanistan girls have until recently been practically excluded from all Islamic education except for the few years they are allowed to attend the masjid schools. Girls probably constitute a minority of madrasah students in most Muslim countries. In Afghanistan, girls’ maktab education has also met difficulties throughout history.

In the first girl schools, the students were daughters of the urban elites. The girls were dressed in Western-like uniforms, an outfit that did not correspond to what was generally considered to be in accordance with the Muslim dress code. Thus, it was not hard for the belief to arise that maktab education as such countered Islamic values. The advocates for girls’ education moved too hastily and may not have had enough contact with the faith and values of the majority of the population at that time. As a result, girls’ education faced its first backlash by the end of the 1920s, and the schools closed down.

During the following decades, girl schools were revived at a very slow pace. Boys’ education expanded slowly as well. From the 1950s, girls’ education expanded little by little and initially mostly in urban areas. It was increasingly accepted that girls and women were needed in the pedagogical and medical professions since the gender separation required female teachers for girls and female doctors for women. By the end of the 1970s, girls constituted around one third of all students. Rural female students were, however, few. The Communist government established by the Soviet occupants tried to introduce a socialist education system without Islamic influences. The posters that were spread throughout the country depicting girls dressed in short skirts, red neck scarves, and clenched fists were hardly cherished by the Afghans, particularly not by people in rural areas. Parents withdrew their children from maktab, first the girls and then the boys. However, in
Kabul schools during the 1980s, the number of girl students outnumbered the boys, and in rural areas, soon liberated by the Mujāhidīn movement, girls became pupils to an extent that had never occurred before. Contrary to what is generally described, the Mujāhidīn members, at the time often Islamist modernists, generally favored girls’ education. With international financial support (sometimes also conditioned), girl schools were established in many of the Mujāhidīn-controlled rural areas. This development continued during the Ṭālibān ban on girls’ education: the number of rural girl schools increased continuously during these years. City girls, however, were totally excluded from education with the exception of those who could participate in clandestine home schools. The Ṭālibān believed that only Islamic education was required for the population; women, however, did not need education at all. The Ṭālibān movement was not homogenous in their view of education, and in rural areas girls’ education was often accepted, and sometimes women were allowed to teach.

After the fall of the Ṭālibān regime, girls have returned to schools in the cities, and rural schools have also had an increase of girl students. Still in 2014 girls constituted approximately 40% of all students, and a majority of the girls were still urban dwellers. It was estimated that approximately 30% of all Afghan girls were enrolled in maktab (Ministry of Education 2016). Table 3 summarizes the most important issues of controversy in Afghan educational history (Karlsson and Mansory 2007).

Conclusion

The two education systems, Islamic education and Western type of education, still exist in Afghanistan. The conflict between the two is still there, and it still concerns the state control over Islamic education and the role of Islam in the Western type of education. The government seems to be strongly determined to exercise power also over Islamic education. Whether this ambition will be successful is still an open question, although state-controlled madrasahs seem to be dominating today. The presented statistics of attending students is not reliable, the financial resources available for Islamic education are limited, and it is doubtful whether the population is prepared to give up the long tradition of community-based Islamic education. Two tendencies are visible today: a clear preference for maktab education and an increasing interest for a complementary Islamic education in addition to the few hours of Islamic subjects taught in maktab. Presently, the government has to a large extent succeeded in controlling the madrasahs but seems to have lost the struggle as regards the role of Islamic subjects in basic education, i.e., in maktab.

Girls have until recently been excluded from formal Islamic education in Afghanistan. After the elementary instruction, girls get in the masjid school; their opportunity to learn about Islam is still mainly through maktab education. That girls have been completely excluded from Islamic education – and as a result have acquired more limited knowledge about Islam than boys and men – has by far not attracted the same concern as girls’ participation in maktab education. However, in the last plan
for Islamic education, the Ministry of Education seems determined to expand the facilities of Islamic education for girls.

In the masjid schools, all Afghan children receive elementary Islamic education according to centuries-old traditions. To improve the textbooks and train the imāms
in teaching methods have not been on the agenda so far, a measure that maybe could be considered as a first step in case the Ministry of Education really intends to improve Islamic education.

References


