

Hybrid Means and Empowerment: Afghan Youth in Search of Creative Thinking

By Lutf Ali Sultani

[Gran Hewad](#), a fellow of the Afghanistan Policy Lab, has launched a series of research methodology seminars tailored for youth based in Afghanistan. In this brief exchange, Mr. Hewad discusses the inspiration behind organizing these hybrid seminars, provides an update on the current status of the program, and outlines the challenges that lie ahead.

1. What inspired you to start this educational program focused on teaching research methodology to people back in Afghanistan?

The inspiration for initiating this educational program stemmed from a longstanding vision to cultivate research skills and critical thinking among Afghan youth, particularly addressing the gap I observed during my own education at Kabul University. Having graduated in 2006, I recognized the persistent reliance absence of research and creative writing approaches along the course of studies. This realization underscored the urgent need for a program that promotes skills in research, critical thinking, and effective communication through writing. My consultations within the Afghanistan Policy Lab and scholars at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit Organization (AREUO) reaffirmed that this need remained unmet, motivating me to act.

2. Can you describe the structure and curriculum of the program? How are the courses delivered, and what specific topics are covered?

Before launching the program, I conducted a comprehensive needs assessment, revealing the necessity for a partner on the ground in Afghanistan with expertise in research and education. AREUO, a reputable research organization based in Kabul, agreed to partner and facilitate organizationally the seminar studies, bringing invaluable experience and resources to the initiative. Together, we structured the program to include foundational research methodologies, critical analysis, and practical writing skills. The curriculum is delivered through online seminars held weekly, complemented by interactive sessions and group assignments to apply learned concepts in real-world contexts.

3. Given the nature of the program being hybrid, what challenges have you faced in implementing the program, and how have you overcome them?

Implementing a hybrid program presents logistical challenges, primarily coordinating activities across different time zones. Communication and resource sharing occur primarily through email and WhatsApp groups, where I provide readings and facilitate discussions. Managing a 9-hour and 30-minute time difference between the US EST and

Afghanistan necessitates early morning sessions once each week, accommodating participants' schedules and ensuring maximum engagement.

4. How do you measure the impact and success of the program? Are there any success stories or notable achievements from your participants that you can share?

The program's impact and success are measured through various metrics, including participant attendance and engagement levels during seminars. Initially concerned about virtual participation, we were encouraged by the enthusiastic commitment shown by participants, particularly female attendees who have actively contributed and taken leadership roles in seminar discussions. As the program progressed, participants formed research groups, developing and executing their research proposals under supervision. This hands-on experience has empowered them to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings, fostering a sense of ownership and accomplishment. They are going to be producing research-based reports from the ground with fresh thoughts and analysis.

5. What are your plans for the program? How do you envision its growth and sustainability, and what additional support or resources are needed to expand its reach and impact?

Looking ahead, our immediate plans involve conducting a comprehensive assessment of this pilot phase to refine and enhance the program's effectiveness. AREUO's steadfast support and commitment are pivotal in sustaining and expanding the initiative. We envision scaling the program to reach more Afghan youth across diverse regions, responding to the overwhelming demand demonstrated by initial participation rates. Additional resources and partnerships will be crucial in expanding curriculum offerings and enhancing technological infrastructure to ensure broader accessibility and long-term sustainability.