A Brief Timeline of Education in Afghanistan:

1747  Ahmad Shah Durrani founds the Durrani Empire, marking the birth of the modern Afghan state.
1839-42  First Anglo-Afghan War is fought, strengthening the local clergy and tribal leaders.
1878-80  Second Anglo-Afghan War is fought.
1880-1901  Abdur Rahman Khan rules Afghanistan. His reign is characterized by attempts to modernize the country and exert central control over the religions education system.
1893  Durand Line is surveyed, dividing large populations of Pashtuns, as well as other groups, and delineating the frontier between Afghanistan and the British Empire.
1901  Habibullah assumes the throne.
1904  Habibia College, Afghanistan’s first modern secondary school, is founded.
1913  The first department of education in Afghanistan established, though it would be another nine years before a minister of education is appointed.
1919-29  Amanullah Khan rules Afghanistan. He institutes many reforms to education, including compulsory and free primary education for certain groups; ending the clergy’s control over mosque schools; and expanding curricula to include nonreligious classes.
1929  Civil War breaks out, in part over opposition to Amanullah’s attempts to wrest power from the clergy and intervene in rural family life, but also as a response to financial crises. Amanullah is deposed by Habibullah Kalakani.
1931  Nadir Shah, who seized power from Habibullah Kalakani, enacts a new constitution that undoes most of Amanullah’s reforms, defining the state of education in Afghanistan for the next two decades.
1937  Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, assumes the throne.
1953  Mohammad Daoud Khan becomes prime minister. He expands support to education, enlisting aid from the US.
1956  Teachers College, Columbia University (TC) begins its education development work in Afghanistan by training English teachers for secondary schools. School enrollment climbs considerably.
1966  TC, funded by USAID, expands its education work in Afghanistan to supporting curricula reform and providing textbooks, which it continues to do for the next ten years.
1973  Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto becomes prime minister of Pakistan after previously serving as president for two years.
1977  Zia ul-Haq deposes Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto in a coup in Pakistan and declares martial law. General Zia governs Pakistan for the next eleven years, overseeing the Islamization of Pakistan’s education system; expanding madrassas on the border with Afghanistan; and managing US and Saudi funding for the Afghan mujahidin living in exile in Peshawar.
April 1978  The Afghan communist party seizes power in the Saur Revolution and attempts to secularize education across Afghanistan.

December 24, 1979  USSR invades Afghanistan. During its occupation, the USSR launches aggressive literacy campaigns throughout rural Afghanistan and revises the Afghan curricula to reduce the focus on religious studies.

January 1980  US President Jimmy Carter authorizes additional covert aid to support the Afghan resistance.

1984  Saudi aid to the mujahidin increases, especially for the building and funding of madrassas.

1984  Afghan mujahidin leaders request support from the US government to provide a culturally relevant, religious curriculum to the Afghan refugees.

1986  University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), funded by the USAID, begins to provide jihadist textbooks to Afghan refugees.

February 1989  USSR completes its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

1992  President Najibullah falls. Eventually Burhanuddin Rabbani becomes president, but civil war is raging.

1992  US/UNO revises jihadist textbooks. However, revisions are minimal and originals remain widely available throughout the Taliban’s rule (with images removed).

1994  A group of mujahidin called the Taliban emerges from villages in Kandahar Province and joins in the civil war in Afghanistan.

1996  The Taliban take Kabul, eventually consolidating their control over most of Afghanistan and ending the civil war.


2002  At USAID’s urging, Afghanistan redistributes redacted versions of the UNO jihadist textbooks rather than the better-quality “Basic Competency” materials. UNO is awarded an additional education contract to distribute these books.

2006  US military institutes a new field manual outlining operations to support counterinsurgency in Iraq, later used in Afghanistan.

2006  In partnership with the Ministry of Education, USAID supports a dramatically successful community-based schools program across Afghanistan, which runs until 2011.


2013  USAID releases millions of US dollars to support community-based education through the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Kabul (“on-budget”).