

## *Emerging Roles of English in Afghanistan*

MARIAM ALAMYAR

*Purdue University*

### **ABSTRACT**

This research paper examines the spread of English in Afghanistan. Specifically, it discusses the users and uses of English language in different settings such as educational, social, economic, and political. It explains the prevailing English teaching methods and the Afghan people's attitudes toward English and English speakers. To characterize the social and cultural contexts, I used autobiographical data including personal experiences, studies, observations, oral stories, documents, and sources. The sources also include personal diaries, memorials, epistles, videos, photos and encounters to provide accounts of the role of English and its functional allocation in Afghanistan. The result of the research shows that the roles of English are increasing rapidly in some domains and becoming as important as Pashtu, which is the second official and widely used language in the country. However, the consequences of English spread suggest that there is a need for proper language planning and educational policy-making to teach English and to give learners in different parts of the country equal access. Additionally, to implement policies requiring English as the medium of instruction in higher education and to other settings, users of English need stable security situation, more language training, equipment, and English materials.

*Keywords: English Status, English in Afghanistan, English in Different Settings, English in Expanding Circle*

## INTRODUCTION

Afghanistan is a landlocked Muslim country located Central Asia. It shares borders with Pakistan, Tajikistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and China. From the south and west, the country neighbors Iran and from the south and east, it is bounded by Pakistan. Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan are in the north and China's border is in the far northeast (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Map of Afghanistan

Based on 2008-2009 Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan censuses (CSOA), Afghanistan has an estimated population of approximately 23 million people. From this, about 5 million live in urban areas and about 18 million in rural areas (CSOA, 2009). It has a wide range of ethnic groups and indigenous languages. There are 13 ethnic groups of which the Pashtu

speaking Pashtuns are not only the largest group but also the most politically powerful. The Farsi Dari speaking Tajiks are the second largest. The other 11 ethnic groups are the Hazara, Uzbek, Baluch, Nuristani, Pashshia, Turkmen, Aymaq, Arab, Qirghiz, Qizilbash, Gujur, and Brahwui.

Afghanistan is a multi-lingual and a multi-ethnic country. Ethnicity and language are very closely interlinked in the country; when one speaks of an ethnic group, they also speak of a particular language group. Shared language and being a member of a particular ethnic group has created a strong sense of belonging. Thus, each specific language group tries to provide social support for those within it much more than for the people who speak a different language or belong to a different ethnic group. The numbers of languages, dialects, and accents in the country have not been precisely accounted for yet due to the fact that the ongoing decades of war has destroyed the research infrastructure and the insecurity makes it hard for researchers to go to different places and collect data. However, *Ethnology of Languages of the World* reports 49 languages in the country (*Ethnology Language of the World*, 2009). The majority speak Farsi Dari and Pashtu which are the official languages. Farsi Dari serves used as the lingua franca and is widely used in different settings, especially in academia and for administration purposes in governmental and local organizations. For centuries, Farsi has been used as the medium of instruction. Pashtu has been one of the official languages and widely used language, too. However, it has been only been recently that it is encouraged to be used for academic and administrative purposes, and yet it has not been used as widely as Farsi Dari.

The other well-known languages are Hazarage, Uzbeki, Baluche, Nusristani, Pashia, Qizilbashi, Turkmeni, and Pamiry, spoken by minor groups in different parts of the nation. Among all of the languages spoken in the country, Farsi Dari, Pashtu, Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pashai, and Baluchi are considered the six main languages. Currently, besides the official languages,

English is gaining important status in the country as well. Since the downfall of the Taliban in 2001, it is the most dominant foreign language in the country. English in Afghanistan falls under Kachru's Expanding Circle where it is used as a foreign language in different contexts. Yet, very little or no work has been done on the functional allocation of English in countries within the Expanding Circle such as Afghanistan for the last 35 years. Thus, this research paper intends to make contribution to the study of the spread of English in Afghanistan. Specifically, it presents illustrations of the users and uses of English language in different settings such as educational, social, economic, and political. It also sheds light on Afghan people's attitudes toward English, English speakers, and other foreign languages. This paper therefore will address the following research questions:

1. *What is the status of English in Afghanistan?*
2. *Who are the users of English and how English is used in education and other settings?*
3. *What are the prevalent English language teaching methods in Afghanistan?*
4. *What are the attitudes of Afghans towards English and English speakers?*

## **METHODOLOGY**

In an attempt to explain the emerging roles of English in Afghanistan, in this paper, I used autobiographical method of research. According to Hammersley & Atkinson (1995), the autobiographical method has become increasingly well known within social and educational researches. They state that:

The accounts that are generated through this method can be a source of sensitizing concepts... they can suggest distinctive ways in which their authors, or the people reported in them, organize their experiences, the sorts of imagery and "situated

vocabularies ... they employ, the routine events, and the troubles and reactions they encounter. (p. 160)

The aim of using autobiographical method is to provide a voice for those who are able to write or have limited access to the sources relevant to that particular topic and situation. It is an active process of the creation of meanings. Because of decades of war in Afghanistan, the research infrastructure has been destroyed or has lagged behind rest of the world. There are limited sources found in the libraries and governmental organizations such as the Ministry of Higher Education's archives, and these sources are either too old, or are otherwise unavailable. Since little or no research has been done on the English language in Afghanistan, I used sources such as my personal experiences as an English learner and educator, studies, observations, oral stories, documents (both official and personal), diaries, memorials, epistles, videos, photos and encounters by living and working with education and non-educational as well as governmental and non-government institutions/organizations, and by being an English major and educator for nearly two decades.

## **FINDINGS**

This section summarizes and discusses the findings of the study. The findings are presented by research questions that focus on the status of English, users and uses of English in different domains, prevailing English teaching methods, and the Afghan attitudes towards English and English speakers. The study will be concluded with implications and suggestions for future research.

### **1. The Status of English**

During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989, English was not considered important in Afghanistan, and people tended to focus more on learning Russian. A

large settlement of the Soviet experts including advisors, doctors, nurses, engineers, technicians, geologists, and interpreters came to the country during this period. People needed to learn Russian to interact with these experts. Teaching and learning Russian was important in educational institutions as well. For example, in one of the most famous engineering schools in Kabul City, Kabul Poly Technique University, knowing Russian was essential. Most people, especially male students, were required to learn Russian before joining this engineering school. The majority of them found it a very difficult language to learn compared to English. Meanwhile, a number of students were interested in getting scholarships, fellowships, or assistantships to participate in academic and cultural exchange and other programs in order to study in Russia. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union in 1989 and the downfall of the Taliban regime at the end of 2001, the use of English increased dramatically, especially after the arrival of American troops, the supremacy of American culture and the acknowledgement of the financial realities of globalization (Azami, 2009).

## **2. a. English Use and Users**

As English spread and gained global use, it attained a significant role in Afghanistan as well or in what Kackr (1992) called the Expanding Circle. The total number of people in Afghanistan speaking the English today is not clear with no research to elucidate the trend. However, considering the demand for English in different settings in Afghanistan, one may approximate that the use of English is as important as one of the major languages, such as Pashtu,. English use is increasing rapidly. People who are proficient in English are mostly men and women between the ages of 16-35. People who are older than 35 and know English are mostly men and a small percentage of women who have worked in nongovernmental organizations (e.g., embassies or United Nation organizations) or those who have spent a period

of time in an English-speaking country. Females generally have less access to the English language because they were not allowed to attend schools or institutions during the Taliban regime and due to family restrictions, which did not allow them to work in the international organizations and attend private English courses. Females also tend to drop out of primary or secondary school due to family restrictions or other social and economic problems. As more and more people started to learn English, it began to have instrumental, interpersonal, regulative, and creative or innovative functions (Kachru, 1981 & Berns, 1990) in socio-cultural contexts in Afghanistan which will be discussed next.

## **2. b.1 English in Education**

Although English is not used as the medium of instructions in governmental instructions, one can claim that English still has instrumental functions which mean it is used for social mobility, economic development, and employment opportunities since it is part of school curriculum (Berns, 1990). Between 1985-2004, English was taught as a subject beginning in seventh grade, but today English education starts from fourth grade and continues through university. English is a compulsory subject within the school curriculum. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have been working on a new syllabus for schools, and there is an impetus aimed at making English the primary foreign language taught in the country. Overall, there are 17 governmental universities and institutes. The most prestigious one is Kabul University which was founded in 1931 and officially opened for classes in 1932. It has approximately 25,000 students, of which 40% are females, in 15 schools within the university. In total, it has almost 597 faculty members of which 122 are female professors (Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan, 2017). The Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan had planned to implement English as medium of instruction by the end 2015 in governmental universities across the

country, especially in Kabul University, which is the biggest and most highly regarded governmental university for its quality education and its location in the capital city (National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2010-2014). However, the majority of the students and educators have received inadequate or no training in English instruction, which made it difficult to utilize English in higher education and the plan to make English as the medium of instruction has not yet been implemented. In addition, the country has been suffering from security issues, which make the implementation of this plan even harder.

Additionally, in provinces, especially in the southern part of Afghanistan (e.g., Kandahar, Helmand, Urozgan), where the security is not stable, people have less access to English courses compared to those who live in Kabul City and other major cities of Afghanistan. In areas such as the southern part of Afghanistan where the Taliban still have control, English is not allowed to be taught, and girls are not allowed to go to school. When the Taliban took over the government in 1996, they banned teaching English even to boys, and Arabic was used as the foreign language in schools instead. In rural areas and areas where extremists and the Taliban dominate, English is not taught at school at all because it's unsafe for the teachers to teach a language which is considered inappropriate by the extremists. According to the Voice of America (2009), "Taliban militants shot and killed a man for teaching English in eastern Afghanistan, Paktia province and destroyed a number of schools in Afghanistan" (para. 1). The Taliban and other extremists in the country claim that teaching students the English language means teaching them Western culture. They repeatedly targeted those seen as sympathetic to foreign governments. Due to security reasons, students in rural areas have no or very little access to materials and personnel to learn English.

Although English is not required to gain entry into governmental institutions, students who are interested in getting scholarships, assistantships, fellowships, or who are participating as exchange visitors are required to take an English language test such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOFEL), the International English Language Test System (IELTS) and/or other English tests designed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and foreign organizations such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Students need to receive good scores on these exams to be able to meet the standards for pursuing their education in foreign countries including the United States, Canada, India, Tajikistan, Germany, and other countries around the world. English for specific purposes (ESP) classes are also taught in different schools within Kabul University through the English Department. Before 2001, freshman and sophomore students in all other schools (e.g., Engineering, Pharmacy, Fine Arts, General Science), except in the English Department, had to take an English language subject/course focusing on English integrated skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening). Currently, in these schools, not only general English but also English for specific purposes is taught. Students are taught terminology and read articles on different topics related to their field of study. At the university level, there are additional English language courses provided by the British Council and USAID geared toward making English the medium of instruction at governmental institutions.

As a whole, English proficiency levels and the outcomes vary depending upon at which institutions people have studied and how much they have been exposed to English on a daily basis. In governmental institutions with Farsi Dari or Pashtu as the medium of instruction, the tuition is free and learners are not much exposed to English. It is also generally known that those who have studied English only at primary, secondary, high school, or university levels at governmental institutions are more likely to have low English language proficiency compared to

those who have studied in some private courses and institutions which provide better academic environments. Low English language proficiency relates to governmental institutions because education is free and they lack qualified English language teachers. Often these teachers are not familiar with the new English language teaching methods due to lack of training, facilities, and materials.

However, hundreds of private English language courses and a number of private educational institutions, including the American University of Afghanistan, are now in operation. Private institutions, where the medium of instruction is English, generate a lot of revenue from students' tuition. In private institutions, English learners do not have as many problems since the tuition is very high and therefore, very exclusive. Furthermore, the teachers in private higher education institutions are those who have studied English in Pakistan, India, and other English-speaking countries. Some of the private institutions only hire foreign English language teachers or teachers who have a strong background in English from an English-speaking country. For instance, the majority of the professors in the American University of Afghanistan at Kabul are foreigners. As a result, they are more versed in updated English language methods.

## **2. b.2. English in Social, Economic, and Political Contexts**

With the arrival of the United Nations and other international non-governmental organizations, such as the British Council and USAID, people's interest in learning English for the purpose of individual advancement through employment and better education has dramatically increased. Afghans with good or excellent English communication skills find work as managers, translators, interpreters, and drivers with international non-governmental organizations. They are paid 10 to 15 times more money than if they worked for governmental organizations (Azami, 2009). Afghan citizens who also have citizenship from Western countries

like the United States and Canada are being brought to Afghanistan to work as translators, interpreters, linguists and cultural advisors for the military and other international organizations. Being dual citizens who have passed a security background check, they get a higher salary and can be trusted in the political arena. However, Mahanta, (2009) claims that the “Prospects of high salaries and an expedited migration to America continue to draw young Afghan men into the U.S. Army's translator corps, but some are finding the reality is not as rewarding as their dreams” (para. 1). They risk their life as soon as they undertake such an assignment for they have to go on missions with military members and stay in military bases in provinces where the fight is going on against the Taliban, ISS, Haqqani Network, and other insurgent groups.

In general, English interpreters and translators are the highest earners. They are heritage Farsi speakers who have grown up in the US or have lived in the U.S. for a long time; they are not necessarily as proficient in either Farsi Dari or Pashtu as they are in English. Such employees are also the ones with high oral English proficiency because they have had more contact with native English speakers. However, when it comes to their native language (Farsi Dari and Pashtu), some of them who were born or lived in the U.S. for a longer time, have problems recalling Farsi Dari or Pashtu words during interpretation. Still, as long as they are able to convey the message from the target language into the source language, which is either Pashtu or Farsi Dari, they are being hired.

From 2001-2008, English was not a requirement for working in governmental organizations. However, today it is required even in governmental sectors where salaries are very low. In some ministries, a certain amount of paper work is done in English. For instance, in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, the employees are dealing with different types of letters, many in

English, they receive from different countries and embassies. English for computing courses are offered for employees within different ministries.

The need for English proficiency in governmental and non-governmental organizations is not an obstacle for younger workers because of their contact with and opportunities to learn English in the post-Taliban period. However, employees over 50 years of age who have received little or no English instruction are at a disadvantage. When there is a job advertisement, especially in the international organizations, “Excellent communication skills in English are required” is at the top of the list for the requirements. This makes it difficult for older people, even if they are experienced and an expert in that position, to be hired. In contrast, the younger generations, who have studied just two or more years of English, are being hired and paid well.

English is also reaching the Afghan people through mass media. The development of technology, such as access to the internet, bilingual websites, and mobile phones with text messaging, have also had a major impact in using English to communicate. According to the Ministry of Communication and Technology of Afghanistan (2009), approximately, 500,000 Afghans which equals to 1.5% of the population had internet access by the end of 2008. This figure is increasing with the establishment of Internet cafes, iPhones, and smart phones. However, the majority of these people who have access to the internet are living in major cities of Afghanistan and working with international organizations (Ministry of Communication and Technology, 2009). Additionally, Afghan channels with the English news, English satellite television shows and movies, radio stations with English language news and programs—including the BBC news, World Service frequencies, Aljazeera channel, CNN, and international and local English language newspapers, especially *Kabul Times*, and *International security Assistance force (ISAF)*—are all having a tremendous impact on communicating and learning

English (Azami, 2009). Some Afghan local channels provide programs in English, too, such as the Lemar TV channel, which offers a one-hour English class. Today, a large number of Afghans in cities have satellite television which broadcasts English channels from abroad. *Afghanistan News Center, Afghan Daily, The Outlook, Afghan Online Press, Afghanistan Times, and Kabul Times* are all media printed and written in English and widely read by local people in English courses, non-governmental institutions, and at home. *Afghan Scene* is also an English magazine focusing on events happening in Afghanistan, especially in Kabul. These English newspapers and other media are used in English language institutes as educational resources and materials.

Even men with low English proficiency are very keen to watch American or other Western movies or programs in their free time in order to learn new words, phrases, and sentences. Women rarely get the chance to watch them, particularly in strict religious families, either because they are busy working around the house or male members of their family do not allow them to watch due to religious and cultural norms. They believe that some of the English movies contain inappropriate scenes that bring feelings of lust; therefore, women should not be allowed to watch such movies. But men can watch such movies, even though religious rule suggests otherwise.

The internet is becoming widespread in Afghanistan as well. Most people have access to the internet in the offices in Kabul and other major cities. The younger generation uses the internet through their cell phones or other forms of access. They use social media such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Afghan chat websites, and instant messengers as Yahoo, MSN, Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, and other cell phone apps to communicate with other Afghans around the world. When using these different types of social media, they communicate in English or, even if they communicate in Dari or Pashtu, using the English alphabet.

English language learning and teaching materials, such as audio and video CDs, DVDs, storybooks and other English books and dictionaries are sold in private English language institutions and in bookstores in the cities. More than ever before, Afghan scholars in various fields are using English language terminology alongside Farsi Dari and Pashtu in their written works. Young and old alike are encountering English more often and even using English terms while they are talking with their friends, colleagues, family members, and as well as during speeches, interviews, meetings, or conferences in different settings. For example, before a meeting begins, professional employees tell each other in Dari, “beya ke berawyem *meeting* shoro mesha” which translates as “Let’s go. The meeting is going to start.”

Some talented youth even write articles or literary works in English. However, their work is not widely-read or well-known due to the lack of access to publishing companies or their inability to pay for the publishing fee. They also do not have a network with publishers outside the country. Conversely, in general, oral English use remains more widespread than written English use in different contexts, particularly in major cities of Afghanistan where security is relatively better than in other cities. In these cities, people communicate in English in various formal and informal settings because they are allowed to use English, and they have little restrictions from the extremists on the use of English.

Learning English has become an important skill for members of the Afghan National Army, police, and parliament members. Courses have been launched to teach English to the Afghan military personnel who must work alongside the international forces. Courses are offered for members of parliament as well. They need to know English to interact and communicate with their trainers of the Afghan army, who come from many different countries. This way, they can avoid military confrontation, which could be caused by a misunderstanding of each other’s

languages. Parliament members also need to know English to be able to carry out communication with the international alliances inside and outside of Afghanistan and/or to receive the training provided by international experts on different political, social, and economic concerns. Knowing English also helps the Afghan security forces to be considered as candidates for attending military schools in the United Kingdom and the United States. Sometimes, one can hear through different local media reports that Afghan security forces and international forces fail in their mission, or even kill or injure each other due to the lack of English language communication skills necessary to communicate efficiently and productively during their missions.

Professional conferences and meetings, particularly those held by the foreign organizations with a lot of foreigners in attendance, are carried out in English. Professionals, such as government authorities, senior administrative and management teams, program advisors, and trainers in governmental and non-governmental organizations are required to know English and to use it in their daily work. Afghans with different professions, who attend such meetings and conferences, speak English to be understood by both foreigners and Afghans.

Store signs, office signs in non-governmental organizations, international hospital signs, and even some governmental office signs (e.g., those within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) are exclusively in English. Furthermore, a few places have English names, such as the bazaar in Kabul called Kochay-e Morgha, which advertises in English news and is widely known as Chicken Street where Afghani handicrafts and other antique goods are bought and sold. Since sellers mostly deal with foreigners, most of the stores' signs are in English. They use English while negotiating prices. There is even a market called Saray Bush (Bush Market) where most of

the goods come from the U.S. and other English-speaking countries. It was named Bush Market at the time when George W. Bush was the president of the U.S.

I have seen coffee shops and restaurants in Afghanistan—Everest Pizza, Wow, Chief Burger, Kabul Coffee House, Flower Street Cafe, Lonely Planet, and French Bakery—which exclusively have English names and are run by Afghans. Other restaurants and hotels have both English and Farsi Dari in their names (e.g, Panj Seteara “Five Star”, Kabab Dagh Naan Dagh “Hot Bread Hot Steak”, Restaurant Shahee “King Restaurant”, and Restaurant Shula-e-Abee “Blue Flame Restaurant”). Similar to Walmart in the U.S., there is also a chain supermarket, Finest Store, in different areas of Kabul with goods brought from the U.S. Some of these stores have security guards who search people before they enter the store; the majority of the customers are either internationals and/or Afghans who work for foreign organizations and/or have high ranking positions in governmental organizations.

While speaking in Farsi Dari or Pashtu, people also use some English terms in different settings; *Mood, restaurant, hotel, guard, rest, relax, team, group excuse me, oops, funny, enjoy, play, song, personality, yes, no, control, authority, capacity building, license, agenda, program, meeting, strategy, plan, file, chart, table, change, highlighter*, etc. are terms used extensively, depending on the situation and context. In addition, there are other terms that Afghans have already borrowed from English or which have no equivalent in their native language (e.g., computer, TV, radio, CDROM, DVD, hard disk, keyboard, systematic). These all indicate the innovative and imaginative function of English in Afghanistan.

### **2.b.3. Teaching Methods**

In teaching and learning English in Afghanistan, Grammar Translation and Audiolingual Methods and other traditional teaching methods with teacher-centeredness have been practiced

for many years, which have made it difficult for Afghan students to have strong communication skills (Hikmat, 2009). Students are observers and passive rather than creative and active participants in the process of language learning and teaching. Lessons are taught more theoretically rather than practical. Teachers lecture and students write down the lecture word by word to reproduce it in the examinations. Students rarely have having the chance to express their opinion or have pair or group discussion and most of the time they should rely on their lecturers' opinion.

Nevertheless, recently, the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) was introduced by international organizations and instructors who studied abroad. This approach requires activities that are functional, instrumental, interactional, task based, and learner-centered and these give the learners a great opportunity to effectively bridge the gap between their old learning styles and the new ones. From personal observation, with years of experience as an English language educator, it seems that the new method is proving to be effective and welcoming for most of the learners because students and instructors are starting to realize and understand the value of practical work and the importance of communication in English. In order to be able to have access to science and technology, international trade, commerce, and even to eliminate political insecurity, educators and experts in different fields must use a communication based approach to language learning. Conversely, professors who are from the older generations of teaching methodology seem to show resistance to this new method because they have the misconception that the method does not focus on the accuracy of grammar, which is important in learning a foreign language.

The English Language Teachers' Association for Afghans (ELTAA), established in 2006, aims also to boost English language teaching and learning methods by providing professional

and academic support to teachers in the cities of Kabul, Jalalabad, Herat, and Mazar Sharif. The United States Embassy in Afghanistan, the British Council, and other international organizations largely fund the association, which offers English language teacher seminars, intensive English language courses, workshops, and conferences inside the country. Sometimes, it sends teachers abroad to the United States, England, Pakistan, Turkmenistan and other countries for conferences, such as the Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT), the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA), and the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL) (USA Embassy, Kabul, Afghanistan, 2017).

### **3. Attitudes towards English and English Speakers**

Overall, English language proficiency is considered a high-status language in all sectors in Afghanistan. Berns (1990) states that English is used as “a symbol of prestige and modernity” in terms of its interpersonal function (p. 61). This is true for most Afghan youth who are inspired to learn English to gain prestige, improve their economic and interpersonal status, and have access to modernized practices and technologies in today's world. However, people's attitudes vary towards English and English speakers based on age, economic opportunities and personal purposes.

By and large, the new generation is more enthusiastic about learning and using English than the older generations. They have very positive attitudes toward the language for they realize that English is a global language. Through English, they can improve their lifestyle and can have access to modern technology, international communication, commerce, trade, and many other opportunities. On the streets of Kabul and some provinces, one can occasionally see children or teenagers who just learned some phrases in English shaking hands with smiles on their faces

while greeting English-speaking soldiers. I have frequently witnessed parents in Afghanistan taking pride when their children speak English.

Afghans' attitudes towards the English language are also linked to ways that English has contributed to a better life for themselves or family members. If English has improved their economic stability and access to modern education and jobs with higher salaries, they have a more positive attitude toward it. English is recognized as a global language by some professionals in different fields who claim it has positive effects on science, technology, and international trade commercial growth; therefore, they have more optimistic attitudes toward English.

Some learn English for their personal use. For example, when purchasing items from anywhere and any company, they think that if they know English, they will be able to read the user guides, which are frequently written in English, so they can understand the necessary ingredients. Furthermore, those who marry Afghans who reside in English speaking countries learn it because they know that they have to use it at least for communication purposes when they start to live in those countries. Thus, they start learning English to be able to interact with English speakers in English-speaking countries.

Attitudes toward English speakers in Afghanistan also vary depending on personality. Those who are open-minded and work with English speakers in the country have very welcoming attitudes towards English. Those English speakers who are hard workers in the international organizations and working on different areas of infrastructure such as health care, education, agriculture, etc., are admired by Afghans, and their work is appreciated. Afghans believe that these English speakers are in the country to help Afghanistan develop educational, economic, political, and military infrastructures.

On the contrary, some people think that the more English is used in Afghanistan, the more it can endanger the vitality and purity of Afghanistan's indigenous languages, which are an important part of Afghans' heritage. They also believe that English speaking militaries are in Afghanistan for invasion purposes and that they are trying to impose their own culture and language upon them. Members of the older generation who cannot get employment in international organizations that offer high salaries are both antagonistic toward and ambivalent about the importance of the English language in Afghanistan. They are of an age where learning English to a high level of proficiency is challenging. Most of the older generation is very experienced at administrative work. They feel that because they are experienced and have higher degrees, they should be paid more than the youth who only have a high school degree with English and computer skills.

Afghans' mindsets vary toward American and British English. Some prefer British English, which they experience as a medium of instruction in private institutions. In academic and social settings, I have consistently witnessed how some students prefer American English because they think of it as "a sweet language with a sweet accent." Most people find American English pronunciations easier and clearer compared to British English. However, some say British English is mostly dependent on rules and is more "standard" than American. American English has a lot of exceptions to its "rules." Therefore, the majority prefer American English over British English. However, in academic and nonacademic contexts, both British and American English materials are utilized, but nowadays more American English materials are used compared to British due to a large number of the U.S organizations and Americans' presence in Afghanistan.

## **Implications and Conclusion**

This study aimed at providing an overview of the status of English, English use and users, the spread of English in different settings, and the attitudes of Afghan towards English and English speakers. The data collected through autobiographical research suggest that the role of English is expanding in an unprecedented way since the downfall of Taliban in 2001. The English language holds a prestigious position in educational institutions and other settings. The learners also understand the special role English plays both at local and international levels. Several developments that accounts for the importance of English are increasingly contributing towards securing its status in school curricula, with the potential of making English the medium of instruction in the governmental institutions in Afghanistan. The growing need for English language skills in academic and non-academic domains has added to the desire of Afghans to participate in the global community as well as expand their contact with English outside the classroom.

The spread of English in Afghanistan suggests that there is a need for language planning and educational policy-making to teach English to a larger number of students in all parts of the country to give equal access to all learners. This then brings about the problem of finding qualified English language educators to meet the demand, an issue with which the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education have been struggling. However, while doing this, it is also important to further strengthen the role of official languages (i.e., Farsi Dari and Pashtu) in the education system in order to support the development of the national language. Hence, it is only through careful language planning and educational policy making that clarity around official languages and the dilemmas that emerge from multilingualism can be addressed. Finally, further empirical research is needed to develop a coherent and effective language policy to

constructively implement the use of English in education and different dimensions of the Afghan society.

**Mariam Alamyar** is a continuing lecturer at Purdue Language and Cultural Exchange Program in the English Department, Purdue University. Her research interest include English language writing and assessment, writing in digital space, sociolinguistics, language controversies, world Englishes, curriculum design, and ESL/Writing program administration .

## REFERENCES

- Atkinson, P. (1990). *The Ethnographic imagination: Textual constructions of reality*. London: Routledge.
- Azami, D. (2009, January 12). English takes hold in Afghanistan. *British Broadcasting Corporation*. Retrieved from [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/7493285.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/7493285.stm)
- Berns, M. (1990). *Contexts of competence: Social and cultural considerations in Communicative Language Teaching*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Berns, M. (1990). Why language teaching needs the sociolinguist. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 46, 339-353.
- Bolton, K. (2006). World Englishes Today. In B. B., Kachru, Y. Kachru & C. L. Nelson (Eds.), *Handbook of World Englishes* (pp. 240-269). New York, NY: Blackwell Publishing.
- British Council in Afghanistan. (2017). *Teaching English Radio*. Retrieved from <http://www.britishcouncil.org/afghanistan>
- Building on success, the Afghanistan compact. (2006, January 31-February 1). Paper presented at the London Conference on Afghanistan, London, UK.
- Hammersley, M., & Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in practice* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). London: Routledge.

- Hikmat, A. (2009). *The effects of English teaching methods course of the English Department of Kabul Education University on secondary school English teachers (unpublished Master Thesis)*. University of Massachusetts Amherst, Massachusetts
- Kabul USA Embassy. (2017). *English language development programs and resources by the Public Affairs Section*. Retrieved from <https://af.usembassy.gov/education-culture/english-language-programs/>
- Kachru, B. B. (1996). Resources for research and teaching. In L. Smith & M. L. Forman (Eds.), *World Englishes 2000* (pp. 209-51). Honolulu: University of Hawaii & East-West Center.
- Kachru, B. B. (1998). World Englishes and culture wars. Paper presented at the Sir Edward Youde Memorial Fund Lecture. The University of Hong Kong: Hong Kong.
- Kachru, B. B. (1992). *The other tongue: English across cultures* (2nd ed.) . University of Illinois Press, Urbana, IL
- Kachru, Y., & Nelson, C. L. (2006). World Englishes in Asian contexts. In Y. Kachru & C. L. Nelson (Eds.), *Language Arts & Disciplines*. Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong
- Kachru, Y., & Smith, L. (2009). The karmic cycle of World Englishes: Some futuristic constructs. *World Englishes*, 28(1), 1-14. doi: 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2008.01566.x
- Mahanta, S. (2009, March 4). *Afghan translator finds refuge, but few benefits in U.S.* *Online PBS news Hour*. Retrieved from ([http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/asia/jan-june09/afghan\\_03-04.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/asia/jan-june09/afghan_03-04.html))
- Maps of World. (2013). Map of Afghanistan. Retrieved from <http://www.mapsofworld.com/afghanistan/afghanistanpolitical-map.html>

Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

(2010). *Official website*. Retrieved from <http://www.mcit.gov.af/>

Ministry of Education: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. (2008). *National report*

*on the situation of adult learning and education*. Retrieved from

[http://www.uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/multimedia/uil/confintea/pdf/National\\_Reports/Asia%20-%20Pacific/Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/multimedia/uil/confintea/pdf/National_Reports/Asia%20-%20Pacific/Afghanistan.pdf)

Ministry of Higher Education: Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. (2017). Kabul University

History. Retrieved from <http://ku.edu.af/en>

Nasuti, M. J. (2009, October 12). The U.S. Department of State tells Muslims that they only have

a future if they learn English. *Kabulpress.org*. Retrieved from

<http://kabulpress.org/my/spip.php?article414>

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2014). *National higher*

*education strategic plan*. Retrieved from

[http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Afghanistan/Afghanistan\\_HESP\\_2010-2014.pdf](http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Afghanistan/Afghanistan_HESP_2010-2014.pdf)

Voice of America. (2009). *Taliban Militants Kill English Teacher in Afghanistan*. Retrieved

from <http://www.voanews.com/content/a-13-2007-11-15-voa51-66698677/558924.html>

Zita, K. (2004, April). *Afghanistan telecom brief*. Paper presented at USTDA South Asia

Communications Infrastructure Conference, New Delhi, India.