

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



September 22, 2019

The Challenges of Effective Voting in Political Context of Afghanistan

As we are in the eve of holding presidential election, there is no more than a week for people to choose their favorite candidate through casting their votes in the ballot box. In fact, we are nearing to a moment and golden opportunity to decide whether vote on basis of rationality or emotion, program or promise. In fact, our country is in a very sensitive point of history needed to a well qualified political leader being able to deal with various complicated social, political and economic issues at the same time. Though naturally people want to vote for rational criteria such as expertise, better program and so on, practically the emotions are more likely to win the rationality in the context of Afghanistan. For example, in the last elections, many of highly committed personalities with advanced qualification such as PHD or Master Degrees failed but some traders and inexpert people succeeded to win the elections.

There are several factors and challenges why people cannot vote for meritocracy; the main factors can include poverty, low political literacy, weak political culture and demoralization of people by some candidates. In addition, one of the main weaknesses of people is lack of having a searching habit for political decision making. Probably a large number of people do not know what qualifications or what report card their favorite candidate have. Therefore, they are easily deceived by alluring promises, emotional speeches, money, food, language and other traditional differences. On the other hand, our media, writers, analysts and political figures intentionally or unintentionally demoralize people by prejudiced label of corruption, election fraud and other negative points.

Therefore, it is extremely expected from impartial thinkers and writers to take part in promotion of a right political culture in Afghanistan. Initially, people must understand the importance of election, especially the importance of upcoming presidential election. Unfortunately, majority of people are indifferent to their political fate tending to belittle the national process. According to a recent survey reflected in the media, around 56% of people are not willing to participate in the upcoming election. In last elections, there were cases that young people voted for good-looking faces and nice fashioned candidates without giving importance to the consequences of their action. These kinds of example might be more in rural areas of the country. As a result, in last parliament election, we sent some weak representatives who blamed for giving or taking bribe in first opening days of the parliament. However, there are always some aware and committed people who know that the presidential palace is the place of political decision making, not an engineering site or clinic for medical doctor.

In political culture of Afghanistan, people tend to vote on the basis of race, language, religion, money and so on while in advanced political culture meritocracy is the first and the last criteria for voting. In Afghanistan, political mistakes are frequently repeated due to political sophistication and fallacies propounded by weak candidates. Unfortunately, weak candidates, instead of introducing their programs, they use from every wrong option, including money, power, raising social differences and buying people's vote. As a result, a large number of people will not go to the ballot box with well-consideration of sensible views, but with the attitudes and interests of their personal, ethnic, linguistic, and regional tendencies. In political environment of Afghanistan, the roles of individuals are more important than role of state structure. It means, we need to pay more attention to characteristics, personality and background of our political leaders because the president's personality, mentality, believes and attitudes will affect the whole political decisions. In this context, a corrupt man can corrupt the entire nation while a righteous man is able to rectify the whole nation. With looking at history of weak countries, we will come to understand that sometimes one person could rescue a big nation. If we select a wrong engineer, he might impair only one building but if we select a wrong political doctor he would destroy the whole society. Unfortunately, most people neither are aware of importance of election nor know the criteria for making a right decision at ballot box.

Most often, we forget to vote for a committed, unbiased and patriotic personality; unfortunately, the current situation and the economic dependencies of our country are such that some patriotic people are victims of their loyalty and attitudes. The candidates for presidential positions should be patriotic and have a popular tendency to bring people and the interests of the people at the top of their decisions. Those who do not have sense of co-operation with people or are not people-centered ethics cannot be useful and voting of such people is useless. Those who have their family out of Afghanistan they cannot work for this country because they cannot feel the bitter of poverty and affliction. thus, they do not have common a fate with Afghan residents.

Last but not least, we also forget to note that our next president must have a coherent and applicable program for solving problems of the country. In order to achieve this goal, the candidates should be able to analyses the root cause of problems. It means, if a doctor cannot diagnose the disease properly, issuance of prescription would not be effective and may even aggravate the illness. Therefore, the tasks of the candidates are rooted in proficient identification and analysis of the problems. The programs that are provided without scientific support and unprofessional work are ineffective and will not cure the pain of people.



Challenges before Adopting New Curriculum by MoE

By: Amin Danish

Adopting any types of curriculum will affect the level of learning and change students' behaviors accordingly. Competency based education (CBE) is no exception and will certainly fulfill the learners' expectations. CBE is an approach which is deeply rooted in the behaviorism school of psychology placing emphasis on learners' achievable narrow and broad skills ability. The interrelated skills in the mentioned approach are selecting based on society's or learners' needs to bear a clear result. CBE has been already adopted by different countries. Finland's Ministry of Education, which has the most successful education system in the world, is the best example. Similar to many other countries, Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) has decided to adopt the CBE. MoE, along with UNESCO national and international experts, will discuss technical educational curriculum development issue. On the other hand, those countries who have adopted such approach are the core empirical contexts that help Afghanistan in adoption and implementation. This article will point out the obstacles before adopting CBE in Afghanistan's particular context.

There are a number of challenges we will face with implementation of CBE in Afghanistan's particular context. First, the educational practitioners in MoE had neither studied nor practiced the basic principles of CBE implementation. This is what the practitioners unintentionally have been neglected from the CBE implementation according to existing educational condition and the roots which CBE are touching our values. That is, adopting new approach is not fully compatible with our religious values since CBE is rooted in empiricism school of thought which may principally and philosophically contradict Islamic ways of gaining new knowledge. The MoE practitioners have not taken into consideration the fundamental the philosophical challenge, which forms the base for movement direction. In other words, the competency based education approach, design the learning units according to the students' explicit behaviors that should be measurable. This challenge basically has been presented as one of the most common problem in the educational contexts that are always not implementable. Our religious principles pointing out beyond five senses ways as penetrations for gaining new information which are not always measurable. Inspiration is one of the most common examples.

Currently, the practitioner in MoE have to provide justification for adopting CBE according to Afghanistan's certain reli-

gious context so that it could reconcile with religious values. Reasonable justification will pave the ground for adopting CBE approach if it wins the public trust.

The second challenge relates to Afghan schools which have not been equipped sufficiently within the last 18 years to internalize students all the designed and defined life competencies. The Afghan MoE needs to provide a rich learning environment for all Afghan students to create, develop, and foster the life competencies through intended ways and support curriculum development and compiling of textbooks department to develop standardized instructional materials for school students across the country. Moreover, the MoE should provide supplementary materials, electricity, cartoons, simulations, labs, libraries, ICTs, iPad, internet, etc. to enrich classes/schools. Currently, the above mentioned issues still remain a challenge for Afghanistan schools to be equipped with standardized textbooks and learning materials.

Third, the CBE needs a decentralized system of school education to involve students, teachers, principals, parents, etc. in the development, design, and implementation of curriculum. The current educational system should be more flexible and committed to students learning and give full authority to lower ranking educational officers. Accordingly, they have to know their main responsibilities as curriculum cycle elements in school education system. Implementing CBE with centralized educational system is next to impossible. Because, the expected competencies are unlikely to foster during the levels of educations by limitation.

Fourth, the political tensions in the higher level of MoE officials make a challenge for adopting the new curriculum. The involved parties intervening directly and indirectly in recruitments, development process, and even selecting of the contents which is the authority of author according to job details. Escalation in political tension will prevent adopting new educational curriculum approach, which is not suitable for Afghan children and younger generation.

To sum up, implementing CBE in Afghanistan context have to be studied through research projects. The result of the study will clearly respond the applicability or inapplicability of the approach. The study have to be done before any adopting any new educational approach in Afghanistan's certain context. It will help educators to understand theories applicability and implementation in the country.

Amin Danish is a member of staff in Afghanistan's Ministry of Education.

How AI Can Promote Social Good

By: Hala Hanna and Vilas Dhar

Artificial intelligence is now increasingly present in corporate and government decision-making. And although AI tools are still largely in the hands of institutions that focus on profit before purpose, these new technologies could be equally powerful in promoting social good. To that end, a joint effort by MIT Solve and the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation shows how AI applications can be used to extend prosperity to economically marginalized groups. Already, entrepreneurs are exploring how AI can be used to address some of the world's thorniest challenges in thoughtful, creative, and previously impossible ways.

AI is most exciting when it can both absorb large amounts of data and identify more accurate correlations (diagnostics), while leaving the causal conclusions and ultimate decision-making to humans. This human-machine interaction is particularly important for social-impact initiatives, where ethical stakes are high and improving the lives of the marginalized is the measure of success.

What's more, algorithms are only as good as the data that train them, and the choice of which data to include in AI models is inherently biased. Or, as the saying goes, "bias in, bias out." Take the issue of financial inclusion and creditworthiness. For people without a bank account, getting a loan or credit card is near impossible. Yet many of the unbanked can prove their creditworthiness in other ways, such as through a history of paying utility and phone bills on time.

Destacame, an AI-based platform that now serves 1.3 million people in Chile and Mexico, uses an algorithm to create an alternative credit score using data not reported to credit bureaus. By proving its clients' ability to repay loans, the platform helps to reduce the barriers that often prevent financial institutions from lending to them.

In education and health, meanwhile, AI can dramatically reduce the cost of providing high-quality services, and improve outcomes. Century Tech's educational platform, for example, makes teachers more productive by automating rote and administrative tasks. And by understanding how each student learns, it provides customized individual plans aimed at improving their performance in school.

In a similar vein, Ada Health serves both patients and health workers. The platform's conversational interface, backed by natural language processing, gives patients instant personalized medical insights that help them to identify appropriate next steps. Its AI engine and curated medical knowledge base, meanwhile, provide semi-skilled health professionals such as community health workers, pharmacists, nurses, and mid-

wives with clinical decision-support tools. At the frontlines of health-service delivery where worker shortages are acute, such support can make the difference between sickness and health.

Yet there is a limit to what bots can do. Although AI tools can triage customer-service requests or even make psychological support available to larger numbers of people, forging a genuinely deep connection requires a human touch.

The ISeeChange platform, for example, combines natural language processing with user-generated data and sensor networks to give cities critical data to improve their climate resilience, infrastructure design, and even public safety. Residents submit detailed stories and data about their neighborhoods to the platform, which then aggregates these individual experiences into climate models.

Crisis Text Line, meanwhile, uses machine learning to analyze words and phrases associated with youths in crisis through text messages, and triages messages to ensure at-risk users get help fast. By processing vast amounts of data, the organization has identified some of the most likely predictors of the need for an emergency response. For example, it found a high correlation between the word "ibuprofen" and attempts at self-harm. By using AI, messages containing this word are now prioritized in the queue. But the outreach is done by human volunteer counselors who contact the distressed texter.

These examples show how new business models are helping to extract additional value from big data and AI technologies, benefiting those previously excluded from the data economy. That is why MIT Solve and the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation are collaborating to support tech entrepreneurs solving global problems. We will continue to identify promising ventures in their early stages; equip them with the capacity to grow, scale, and diversify; and champion their stories to bolster the use of AI for social good. And Solve judges will select a new cohort of tech entrepreneurs at the upcoming Solve Challenge Finals. AI has the potential to improve billions of people's lives - but only if it creates and delivers value directly to those most in need, rather than fattening the bottom line of businesses already serving the most privileged. By harnessing these technologies for social good, today's new breed of entrepreneurs can bring about lasting, transformational change.

Crisis Text Line is a Patrick J. McGovern Foundation grantee and Solver finalist. Inclusion in this commentary has no influence on Crisis Text Line's likelihood of being selected for the MIT Solve program.

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