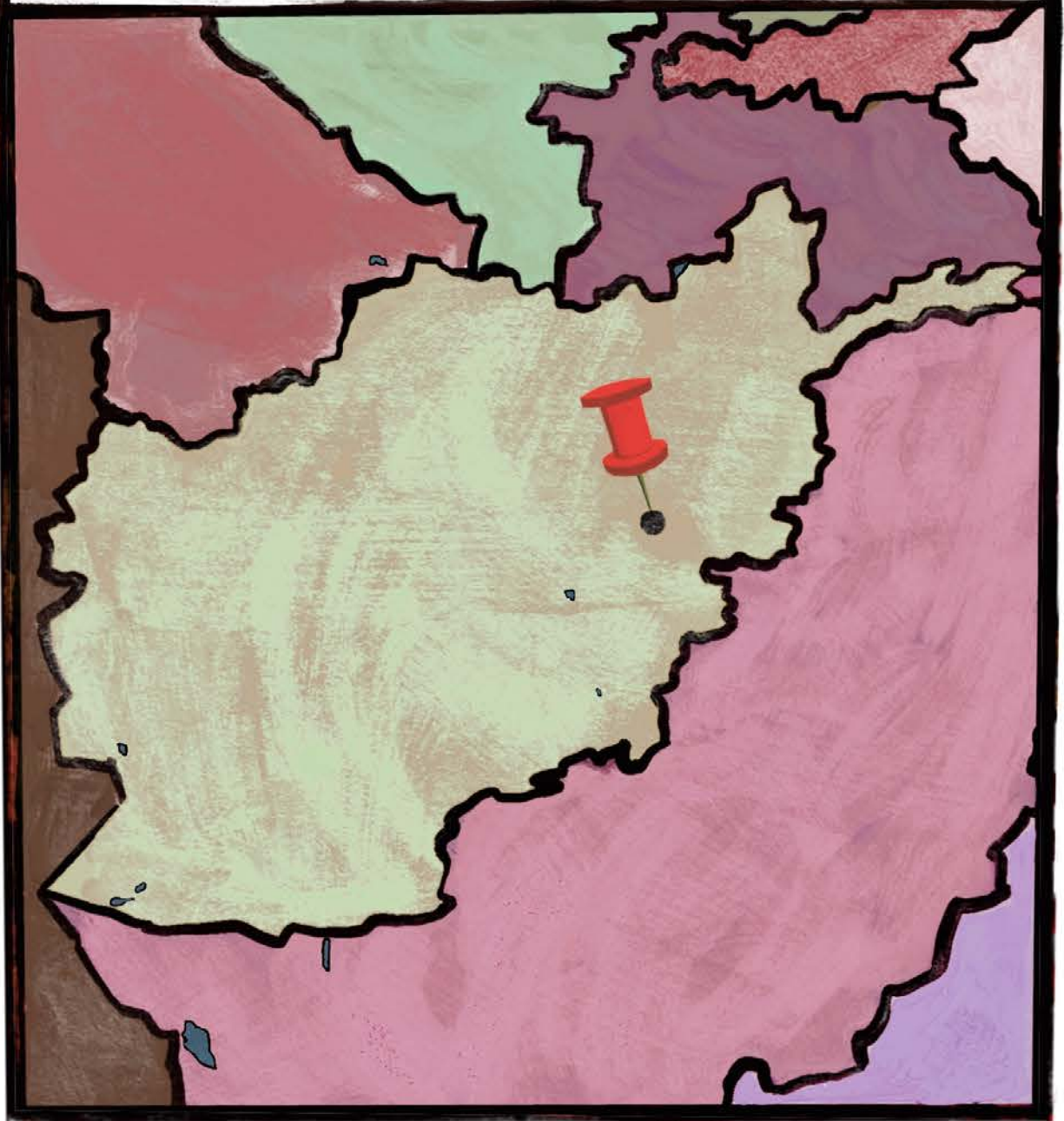


# KABUL

AFGHANISTAN





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# THE QARI, KABUL, AFGHANISTAN

*“The goal of education is to live our lives in light, to build a future life, and to educate others.”*

– The Qari

By Zuhra Faizi

## ABOUT THE QARI

*Qari is a common title for a religious leader who recites the Quran.*

The Qari, age 38, teaches a grade one class in a community-based school in a room on the first floor of his home in Kabul, Afghanistan. While community-based schools are situated within informal spaces, they teach the national curriculum as students are expected to eventually transition to the formal system. In the class are 53 boys and girls, from five to fifteen years of age. These students have been left out of the formal education system after decades of war and being denied resources. Student artwork – a map of Afghanistan, cartoon characters, the Pashto alphabet – enliven the splotchy, white walls. Similar to many of his students, the Qari’s family experienced multiple waves of internal and cross-border displacement before returning to his childhood home in Kabul where his family lived before the civil war in the 1990s. His teaching centers culture and religion through pedagogical methods that integrate active learning models and storytelling.

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The Qari’s relationship-building practices are focused on advancing the learning of all students. While the varying ages present many pedagogical challenges, the Qari works with students’ different academic levels to enhance learning. Students with more advanced skills, typically older, are partnered with one or two students with developing skills to provide additional guidance. These older students, called “teachers,” help their “students” find page numbers, solve math problems, and write new vocabulary. This practice ensures that all students are actively engaged in the learning process. Younger students receive support in a relatively large class where the teacher is not always able to provide individualized attention. Meanwhile, by assigning older students some responsibility, there is a sense of recognition and appreciation for what they bring to the classroom. One student joyously shares, “I’m a teacher and these two are my students!” Within these pods, student relationships also reflect characteristics the Qari has shown them as a teacher: affirmation, patience, and care.

## CREATING RELEVANT CURRICULUM

The Qari extends the formal curriculum in ways that connect home and school.

The Qari brings in Islamic stories and lessons that highlight various community norms and practices: respect for parents, helping neighbors, and greeting each other. When he explains the rights of parents through the life and teachings of Prophet Muhammad, the children listen closely, eyes glued on their teacher. These lessons connect school and home by reinforcing shared community norms. The focus on norms and traditions further strengthens a sense of community within the classroom and cultivates trust between the education system and families, many of whom have had negative experiences with past education policies that were designed to reshape local values, such as minimizing the role of religion. One mother praised this part of the Qari's teaching; she explained, "When [our children] come home, they respect us. They didn't say salaam [peace] before when they went out. Now when they go outside and see adults, they greet them with salaam. This makes us very happy." The Qari's practices demonstrate that, at times, adapting what is in the set curriculum is important to meet the needs of students.

## SUSTAINING CULTURE WHILE FUTURE-BUILDING

The Qari balances providing space for different cultural expressions and fostering new norms and skills that will help students navigate life in Kabul, part of their future-building in this new place.

The Qari's class has students with families from Kabul as well as those displaced from rural areas of the country who have had less exposure to the norms of formal public school education. While some boys and girls wear black and white public school uniforms, many wear colorful traditional clothes, beaded scarves and floral dresses. The Qari does not point out the differences as some teachers do. He does occasionally point out anything that might cause distractions in the classroom, such as jingling bangles, which would not be permitted within other schools his students will transition to in the future. Respect for diversity also extends to making space for various dialects of Pashto. He gently teaches his students, who speak dialects that differ from formal Pashto, multiple words that convey similar concepts, with some that are more commonly spoken in school. The Qari strongly believes in instilling cultural confidence as well as gaining new skills, such as formal language skills, that prepare students for greater opportunities. While approaching these sensitive issues can be challenging, he does so from a place of care and appreciation for local culture.

**Learn More** about the Qari and community-based education in Afghanistan, "[Drop by Drop, a River is Formed: Community and Education in Kabul, Afghanistan.](#)"