



HOLISTIC
LEARNING
INNOVATIONS

SNOWBALL

Country: Afghanistan

Target Age: 11-12 Years

Learning Areas: Literacy | Respect for the
Environment | Numeracy | Science | Relationship
Building | Critical Thinking | Creativity

THE CONTEXT

Zarina Girls High School sits in Baghlan Sanati, a semi-urban district of Baghlan Province, serving over 2,000 students across 14 surrounding villages. It is one of the most prominent schools in the Central District, with a strong track record of placing students into higher education. Like many schools in the region, however, it operates in a resource-constrained environment — short on textbooks, materials, and teaching aids — making effective, engaging instruction a persistent challenge.



Zarina School in Baghlan Province, Afghanistan



During an interview, Homa Tarin the 6th Grade teacher, in Zarina School, Baghlan Province, Afghanistan.



HCD workshop, in Zarina Girls high school Teachers are busy in Group working.

THE CHALLENGE

Sixth-grade students at Zarina were struggling across both academic and non-academic areas. In the classroom, they found it hard to write essays, read texts fluently, and solve mathematical problems. Beyond the curriculum, many lacked the confidence to communicate with peers, grasp lesson concepts, or voice their own opinions. The school's Human-Centred Design (HCD) team identified a root cause running through all of these difficulties: students were largely passive, marginalised from active participation in lessons and excluded from social and extracurricular activities. As a result, their abilities were falling behind what was expected for their grade.

"The 6th-grade students faced challenges in Maths, Dari, communication, cooperation and support. Because they were marginalised and did not have active participation in the lesson process."

— Huma Tarin, Grade 6 Teacher

THE INNOVATION

SNOWBALL

The design team's response was a method they called **Snowball** — built on a simple idea: more participation leads to faster learning and better understanding. In every lesson, no student is a bystander. Each girl contributes her thinking to a problem or topic, and places a paper snowball model on the table as she does so. Gradually, the snowballs accumulate into one large pile — a physical, visible sign that every voice has been heard and that knowledge is building collectively.

The method was woven into a set of complementary activities spanning literacy, numeracy, critical thinking, and climate action:

- **Message of the Day** — Students write a positive message each day on a card or sticky note and pin it to the class board, building sentence-writing skills and positive habits of mind.
- **Passerby Activity** — On their way to and from school, students record observations in their notebooks — noting the time, place, and date — and reflect on what they saw. This develops critical thinking and story-writing skills.
- **News Activity** — Once a week, groups of students research TV and online news, select the most important stories, and present them to the class. The activity strengthens listening, memory, essay writing, and coherent expression.
- **Climate Change Action** — Students used the school's tailoring room to sew reusable fabric and paper bags from newspaper and fabric scraps, which they then distributed free to local shops to promote alternatives to plastic.

In Maths, students practised arithmetic through buying-and-selling simulations, linguistic maths tasks, and making measurement units from materials found in their environment.



Weekly evaluation process in the class to assess the snowball impact



Message of the day activity by the student

THE IMPACT

The Snowball method transformed how sixth-grade students at Zarina engage with learning. Academic skills — sentence writing, story writing, text coherence, and mathematical reasoning — all improved measurably, as shown by the school's baseline-to-endline assessments. Equally striking were the gains beyond the curriculum: students developed stronger critical thinking, cooperation, comprehension, and a sense of responsibility. Their climate action work rippled out into the wider community, normalising the use of cloth and paper bags in local shops and reducing plastic waste in the area.



Distribution of cloth bags to the shopkeepers of the city by the sixth-grade students on climate change

Today, the school shares its HCD-designed innovations with colleagues through weekly staff training sessions, embedding the approach across the whole curriculum. The principal notes that both student learning and teacher practice have improved substantially compared to five years ago — and that Snowball's sixth-graders have become role models for the rest of the school.

"The students of the sixth grade inspire other students at our school, and I personally get positive energy from their passion and work."
— Shafiqa Rasouli, Science Teacher

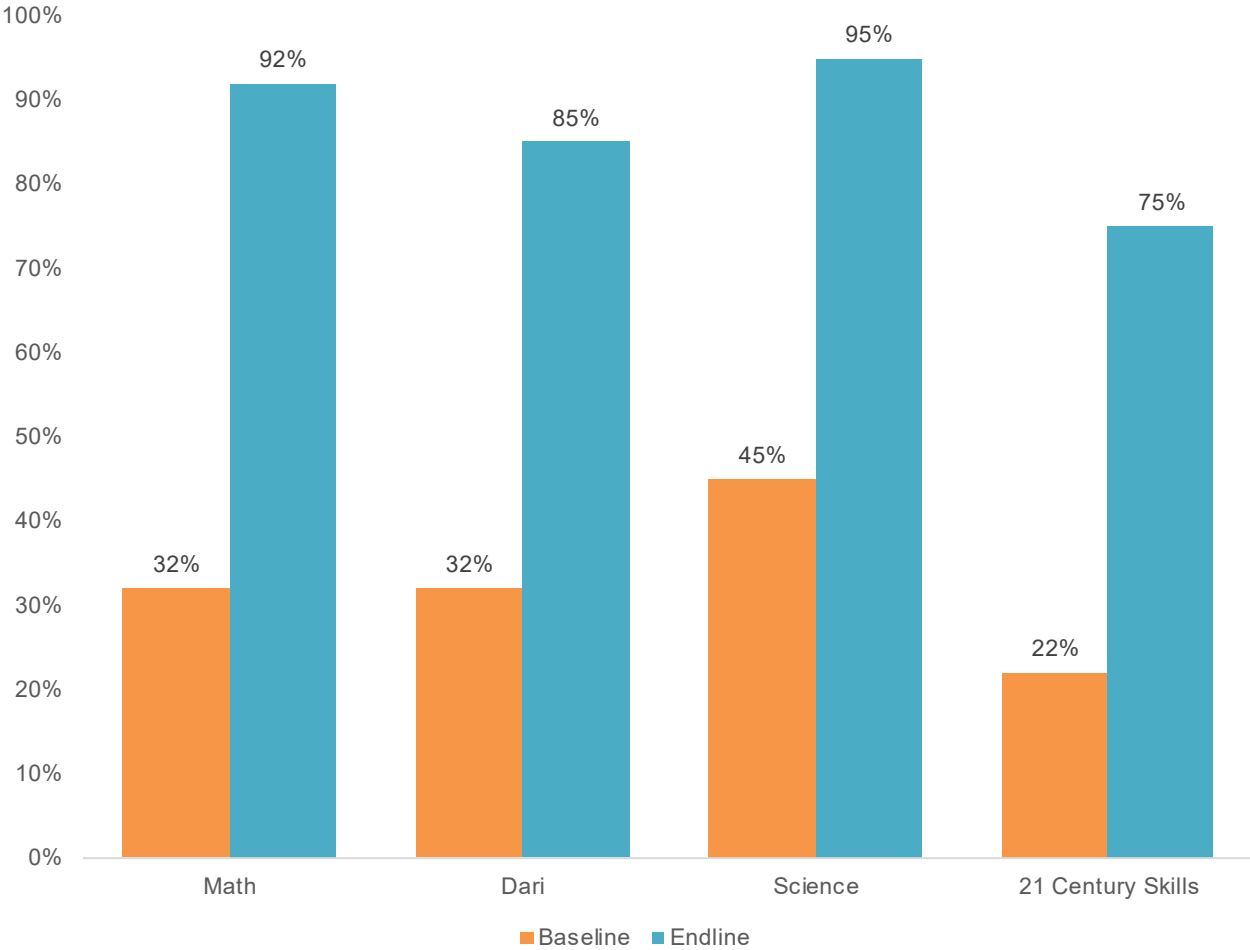
"This process has really had a tremendous impact on the curriculum system of our school. The educational level of our students and the teaching methods of our teachers have improved a lot compared to five years ago."
— Toorpakay Sidiqi, School Principal



Science Experiment Process, Science Subject Teaching hour.

THE IMPACT (CONTINUED)

Students Learning Assessment, Baseline and Endline Comparison



Meet the Teachers



Shafiq Rasoli

Science Teacher

Shafiq Rasoli, the Science teacher at Zarina girls' school who has been teaching for 25 years said, "The Schools2030 programme and the HCD process is a truly creative and new approach, I can say that it is the best program. Because, every year we design innovation, we still receive the result of its success from the comparison of the baseline and endline assessment, this helps us to innovate and expand it so many other students benefit from it.



Maliha Wahidi

Dari Subject Teacher

Maliha Wahidi, the Dari Subject Teacher who has been teaching for 35 years said, "I love my profession, especially when I teach topics to the students in the best and easiest way. In recent years, the solutions we receive from the human-centered design process have brought me to my dreams, because the innovations are designed according to the students' needs, which is an excellent measure to raise the comprehensive learning results of our students.



Huma Tarin

The Math Teacher

Huma Tarin is a math teacher and has been teaching for 13 years. From the point of view of our students, math is always a difficult subject. I always try to use the method that can make learning math subjects quick and easy. Fortunately, with the school2030 program, I was able to change the way of teaching math subjects from contemporary methods and I use environmental materials.



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