The necessity of formulating a curriculum theory for the educational system of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Mohsenpour, Bahram (Ph. D.)[1]

Abstract

This article provides a short historical background of curriculum development and textbook preparation for primary and secondary schools in Iran. It further describes the concept and components of Curriculum Theory and reviews the viewpoints of the contemporary western theorists who have discussed and categorized curriculum theories. It also points out that these curriculum theories have their origins in the western philosophical, psychological and sociological doctrines and they provide guidelines for curriculum planners of those societies.

The article then highlights some educational problems in Iran that have emerged over the past years due to the lack of a home-grown curriculum theory. Therefore, the article emphasizes the necessity of formulating an indigenous curriculum theory to serve as a guide for curriculum planners and textbook compilers of the country.

1- Associate Professor of Tarbiat Moallem University, Tehran, Iran

By presenting some evidence and examples the article argues that the indigenous Curriculum Theory and its components can be drawn up from the Islamic world view as well as from Moslem educational literature.

Key-words: theory for curriculum planning; education, curriculum planning approaches, Islamic World-View

Introduction

Prior to the establishment of the Higher Council of Education, the primary and high schools in the country were not obliged to conduct a similar curriculum. These institutes were acting based on their managers' preference in the field of adjusting curriculum and selection of content. By the establishment of the Higher Education Council in February 1921, the primary school curriculum was confirmed by the council in July 1926. Based on this, the governmental schools implemented the curriculum in the primary schools approved by council. Finally in this same year, the compilation and the publication of text books was assigned exclusively to the ministry of education based on the suggestion made by the education minister.

During some periods in the recent eight decades, the compilation of text books has been assigned to the university professors and independent authors from the ministry. However, whether the planners and authors were dependent on the ministry or completely independent, the one model for adjusting the curriculum and compilation text books for Iranian schools has always been the curriculum and the text books of other countries, especially France and then England and the United States. In other words authors have preferred to copy, rather than to involve creativity.

While the tradition of copying and adaptation in the country's curriculum system has been very common – from the past to present – what is going on in the West especially in the United

States is very different. The Western education theorists have founded theories about education by relying on the overall world-view that governs their society. They also got assistance from psychology and sociology theories. These education theories in turn inspired the curriculum planning theory-makers.

Brian Holmes and Martin McLean investigated the education transformation in the West and introduced four types of curriculum theory which include: Essentialism, Encyclopedism, Polytechnicalism, and Pragmatism (Holmes and McLean, 1989).

However, other writers have considered other bases and standards for categorizing curriculum theories (Miller, 2000). In their book "Curriculum planning for better teaching and learning", J. Galen Saylor and his colleagues (1993) use the term "model" to categorize curriculum theories. In describing the curriculum model they write: Any model is initiated by a set of assumptions, which include: 1. The overall education objectives and goals, 2. Objectives' Resources, 3. The learners characteristics, 4. The nature of the learning process, 5. The type of the society that is being dealt with, 6. The nature of the knowledge.

Eliot Eisner (2002) also has explained five contradictory curriculum viewpoints, which include: 1. Viewpoint of Development and Expansion of Mental and Rational Processes, 2. Viewpoint of Academic Rationalism, 3. Viewpoint of Self-Dehiscence or Self-Relation, 4. Viewpoint of Social/Social Matching Reconstruction and 5. Viewpoint of Curriculum as Technology.

Two of the theory-makers named Giroux and William Pinar mention three types of curriculum theory with these names: Traditionalism, Conceptual Experimentalists, and Conceptual Reviewers (Fathi & Vajargah, 2002).

Other theories have also been offered about curriculums. A Summary of the most important theories have been offered in table 1.

Table 1- Some of the curriculum theories

Theories Commentators	Curriculum Theories						
Holmes, McLean	Essentialism	Encyclopaedism	Pragmatism	Polytechnicalism			
Miller	Subject/Discipline	behaviorism	Cognitive process	Humanistic	Social	Developmental	Trans-personal
Saylor, Alexander	Subject Matter	Tech. Competency	Human Traits	Humanistic	Social Functions	Individual Nees	
Ornstein. Hankins	Administrative	Behaviorism	Systemic	Humanistic	Reconceptualists		

Eisner	Academic Rationalism	Curriculum as Technology	Cognitive Development	Self-Actualization	Social Reconstruction
Giroux, Pinar	Traditionalists	Conceptual Empiricists			Reconceptualists

From what was said it can be concluded that today discussion about curriculum theory in the education literature of the western societies has gained considerable flow and has opened new research horizons to the curriculum field experts.

As well, from the discussion that we made at the beginning it can be concluded that effort for explaining curriculum theory and reaching a native curriculum theory as a guide for the country's curriculum planners, authors, and teachers is not only valuable, but is also very essential. This is since problems will arise if the curriculum theory is not clarified and explained in our education system. One of these problems will be lack of coordination between various subject matters especially during the implimentation. In such case for example, it will be difficult to coordinate necessarily between various course subjects. In other words, when there is not specific curriculum theory as the practical guide for the curriculum planners, it will be possible that each of the curriculum planning groups to export education ideals related to their own field of courses from different world-views. This fact will cause the different subject matters to follow different and perhaps contrasting educational goals.

Islamic world-views as the source for formulating curriculum theory

With regards to what was said, it seems that the experts in the field of curriculum planning in our country can move toward theory-making in the field of curriculum-planning by relying on Islamic world-views and the current needs of the society. These experts can set the preparation of such theories as their concentration. Fortunately, there has been moves in the field of Islamic education theory-making in the recent years that should be considered valuable with respect to its guidance for curriculum. From this, we can refer to the doctorate thesis by Alamol-Hoda (2002), Shamshiri (2003), and Salsebili (2000).

Alamol-Hoda first concentrates on deducing the Islamic education identity based on verses from the Holy Quran and concepts from the philosophy of authenticity of existence by Molla-Sadra (Existential philosophy and claims that the purpose for Islamic education is proving presence unification through looking at God's creatures in the surrounding and the nature at large. Islamic education is trying to remove the boundaries of physical and meta-physical sciences from the point of view of subject unity and not from the point of view of research methodology or conceptual structure. It wants to transfer the mixture of all presence and acquisition knowledge in an effective way to its students. Alamolh-Hoda then states the criticalness of combining curriculum for fulfilling the Islamic education and writes that the approach of combining curriculum provides for diverse possibilities to expand attitude by looking at the creatures toward proving presence unification. Alamol-hoda believes that although using major and subject-centered programs is essential to the Islamic education advancement, but Islamic meta curriculum is considered a fundamental policy for expanding the "understanding by looking at the nature" attitude and is a suitable environment for offering many

lesson programs through it with variety of levels for combination of characteristics and special conditions (Alamol-Hoda, 2002).

In his thesis entitled "Investigating the fundamentals of epistemological of Islamic Gnosticism and its impacts on education", Shamshiri (2004) writes: "The theory of gnostic education has an activity centered and aesthetic attitude toward curriculum. In the framework of this theory, the curriculum involves the learners' experiences in various fields of their lives such as emotional, artistic, religious, intellectual, spiritual, and moral issues.

Also, in his thesis named "Offering a guiding model for using curriculum viewpoints in the nation's curriculum system (The new high school system)", Salsabili investigates and describes various curriculum theories. After that he offers a model for curriculum, which include a combined model with the aim of moving the capable and thinking human to a complete human-being.

In the Moslems educational literature and in other Islamic sources, there are, as John B. Miller points out, elements that if put together and when looked as a whole, will form a native curriculum theory based on Islamic points of view. An education viewpoint which is based on Islamic World-view has advantages as a source for eliciting the native curriculum theory. These advantages include both differences with the common education viewpoints in the West besides having enough capacity for deducing the curriculum theory.

Training goals in Progressivist Advancement education

Progressivist education which is derived from philosophical tradition of pragmatism and Darvin's evolutionary theory focused on the issues of now and here instead of putting forward arguments such as God, religion, spirit, and soul. Progressivist education puts

its main foundation on a series of naturalistic and evolutionary theories and is based on a specific attitude. This attitude, considers the world and all of its components the product of evolutionary change and believes that this change will be continuous. On this basis, the social, moral, and physical concepts in the world are always changing. Human-being is a full complex creature whose nature is the result of life and social evolution. His destiny in this world is to continue to live in this world of all changes where he himself is a part of, and reach moderation and feel successful (Mason, 1987).

Educational goals in Islamic education

The content of school text books in primary schools, middle schools, and high schools in the Islamic Republic of Iran, which are based on national education goals shows that the educational goals are to prepare students for life in the two worlds. In the current Iranian school books, God, role of religion in life in an expanded form, and in general creation and strengthening of the spirit of belief in God is one of the main goals of the Islamic Republic's education system. In the Islamic education, those moral behaviors which are originated from religion, are principles that are assumed to be constant and not subjected to change and transformed through-out times. What this means is that the only item that is dependent on conditions of time and place is the moral activity and not morality itself) (Motahhari, 1983).

In both Islamic discourse and Islamic gnosticism, solid theories about epistemology from Islam's view have been brought forward, which can inspire the theory-makers in the field of learning. This is since the learning theories have roots in epistemological theories and are founded based on cognitivism attitudes.

In Islamic education, the teacher's role is distinguished from the responsibility that other education systems consider for him. In the same way assumption toward the teacher role with regards to

commitment and morality in our expected native curriculum theory is much more than the curriculum plans in other moral systems.

Another element in the curriculum theory is the learning environment, which should have its position in the native curriculum theory identified. In Islamic education, the learning environment should be clear of damaging and abnormal causes so that elements that disturb education would not diminish the education efforts (Hojjati, 1979).

Evaluation of the learned material by the learners is another element from the elements of curriculum planning. In Islamic education the results of evaluating the learners' performance is in ultimate attention. This means that it is expected that the results of the evaluation, shows the learner's position compared to Islam's ideal human-being and shows the distance he has to the desired perfection in Islamic education.

The last word is that, it is not difficult for the experts in the field of curriculum in our country to try to prepare the native curriculum theory. It would be suitable to take advantage of other theories and take steps towards formulating a native curriculum theory.

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