Iranian Journal of Educational Sociology

Designing a Decentralized Primary Education Curriculum in Iran

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this current research is to design and formulate a decentralized curriculum for primary schools in Iran.

Methodology: The methodology is qualitative research from content analyzing of comparison-categorizing system, which includes three steps. In the first step, decentralized and extracting its parameters, international dissertations and researches in connection with subject of the research in qualitative analyzing method were investigated and studied. In the second step, after concluding the findings, the final curriculum pattern was formulated including decentralized curriculum (objectives and contents, teaching-learning methods, evaluation). In the third step, measuring-descriptive methodology was used by making use of factor-analysis for evaluating the credibility of suggested model from viewpoints of experts and specialists. The realm of research was all books and written references on decentralized curriculum that were selected by purposeful sampling. Due to the abundance of various available printed and digital references, those ones from 2000 to 2015 were used. Data collection tools were researcher-made charts and tokens, which were used for collecting categories and elements of decentralized curriculum. Faculty members, specialists and experts' viewpoints were used for reliability of the research.

Findings: The After taking opinions and revising, the final framework was formulated. For increasing the credibility of the research, ultimate attention and care were taken in order to prepare tokens. On quality of research, 467 conceptual codes were extracted, 23 main parameters were achieved which were used for formulating decentralized curriculum. A research-made questionnaire was designed in order to evaluate the conceptual structure of the research and it was reviewed by 200 specialists and experts, and then it finally was approved after carrying out a factor-analyzing showing that most of articles had proper weigh-factor which means all standard coefficients were within 0.3 to 0.6. On the other hand, the articles put proper weigh-factors on their factors.

Conclusion: This current research as a non-intensive curriculum model for Iranian elementary schools is usable for curriculum designers and authorities of Ministry of Education who have stepped forward efficiently to give more authorities to education organization of provinces.

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1. Introduction

Centralization and decentralization are of those items in the education system history, which had been discussed by theorists, experts and specialists in the realm of education and were their policies. The history of past one hundred years – twentieth century – showed itself that many education systems dealt with centralization and decentralization issues. Literature analysis of research subject could clarify that being in one being centralized and decentralized are of management affairs and are subject to political and social management, and the governments' ideological orientation. Every decision-making system has its own advantages and disadvantages. Iranian primary education system has centralized specification and in order to respond to the shortcomings and problems they are often trying to recover non-centralized system. Occurrence of such a phenomenon – non-centralization in education system structure – may take place in many parameters such as decision-making, administration structure, financial structure etc. (Khandaqi 2011).

The current research is investigating centralized and non-centralized systems in curriculum for primary education in selected countries and Iran. Experts and specialists in curriculum have introduced three types of education system, centralized, semi-centralized and decentralized. Governing the country is in connection with political, economic, geographical conditions of that country as well as time and place expedience, beliefs and ideas over the society, or people's political, economic and cultural development in the society. Centralization is a kind of performance that indicates how to pass the responsibilities on the subordinates in the organization and to what extent. No organization is totally and fully centralized or decentralized. Today's directors and managers, choose that level of centralization or non-centralization which helps them make the best decision and reach their organizational targets. In centralized curriculum, the curriculum is usually prepared by head-office; then schools subordinate offices are to follow it loyally. In decentralized curriculum, all responsibilities are passed on the subordinate departments, local offices, and lower levels and each of them has their own authorities. In non-centralized curriculum, policies and frameworks are designed by central organization and schools are given some authorities to perform them but the central organization supervises their performance. Curriculum in different countries may be showed in a continuum based on level of their centralization or decentralization. Iranian curriculum has been sometimes centralized and sometimes decentralized during past one hundred years (Khandaqi 2010).

One of the lawmakers and policy-makers' anxieties in decentralization is to keep education quality and achieving the defined objectives in national level. This research is trying to investigate centralization and decentralization issues in present existing Iranian curriculum and place of national curriculum to respond to this matter. In recent past decade, decentralization in education organization was done in order to maximize the contribution lower levels and increase their efficiency in education and make them perform curriculum more properly and step toward development which many countries all around the world have followed such a plan. The history of this issue turns to 1950s when curriculum used to be designed by theorists, experts and specialists of the particular subjects whose job was to set curriculum and teachers were just following and performing them as final user. Due to great developments and evolution in the realm of technology and sciences and inefficiency of curriculum designed in centralized form, a great movement toward decentralized curriculum was made in order to increase people's partnership and beneficiary parties in curriculum decision making. Actually, schools and teachers as effective forces in curriculum were taken into consideration and plans such as "decision making at school", "curriculum based on school" and "school-centering management" have been discussed. Observing the experiences on educational decentralization in various countries showed that there have always been anxieties about education systems despite of development in education quality. The purpose of decentralization has not just been development in education quality but such improvements and reformations have been influenced by political, social, economic and cultural evolution and changed (Londono Polo, 1996).

Every single decision-making system has its own expediency; centralization in designing and formulating curriculum is a traditional attitude in realm of curriculum and it has been carried out by the end of twentieth century in a centralized-orienting way in most of education systems around the world. Centralization in curriculum has roots in political, historical, social and economic background of the nations and governments and education systems. In centralized systems, there is a general tendency toward centralized controlling of all steps of designing and producing curriculum from defining the objectives and purpose to performing curriculum and evaluating plans and students' learning. The message beyond centralized curriculum is that preparing and developing curriculum is not teachers' job. Normally, a long list of behavioral and moral objectives, which students must reach, is prepared including success criteria which were designed based on them(Utomo, 2005).

In past three decades, there was a great tendency to shelf centralizing curriculum in various realms of education. Some parts of failures and shortcomings in education all around the world is subject to centralized curriculum system. From when there has been requests for having contribution in decision-making about education system turns to the commencement of centralizing curriculum movement of education system and governments' requests to bring education system under their control. Education systems all around the world have been directed by decision making in educational institutional level during the past centuries in centralized and non-centralized way (Muta, 2000). Lesson-centering curriculum has a remarkable long background. It can be said that objectives and purpose, content, method, time, evaluation methods in decentralized form mean that everything is done and carried out by teachers and trainers. Nowadays, most of the countries are interested in shelf centralized curriculum and in their education system and Iranian education system is not an exceptional one and they would like to step forward on a decentralized route appropriate with circumstance ruling the society, considering the fact that being at the beginning of the way requires research and studying in the realm of non-centralized curriculum.

2. Methodology

In this dissertation, the qualitative methodology is of content analysis of category system comparison. After studying and reviewing documents, and home and foreign written references available on sites and databases, necessary information was extracted. In this step, those sentences and concepts available in the books and references were selected which were most appropriate with the subject of research and parameters and also research question. Then gathering extracted sentences and concepts and also code for concepts of the same issue were carried out and then selected codes were coded in accordance with curriculum parameters (objectives, content, teaching-learning method, evaluation). For credibility of suggested model, viewpoints of experts and specialists in the field of curriculum were taken and used; a questionnaire was prepared based on these selected codes and curriculum parameters and was analyzed by measuring-descriptive method using factors analysis.

For such purpose, all books and printed or digital sources – from 2000 until 2015 – on non-centralized curriculum were considered. In addition, 30 theorists, experts and specialists in the field of curriculum design were purposefully selected to check the credibility of designed model. In this current study, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was used and the results are shown in Table 1.

Table1. RMSEA

Variables	RMSEA
Increasing quality and justice of education	0.086
Innovation	0.085
Considering local and regional capabilities	0.093
Students being school-centered	0.083
Program approaches	0.097
Equilibrium in being centralized and decentralized	0.086

Preparing and formulating contents	0.087
Subject-centering	0.083
Flexibility and responsibility	0.082
Systematic thinking in teaching	0.087
Education environment	0.081
Teaching methods	0.084
Learning and performance	0.083
Teachers' training	0.086
obstacles	0.088
Curriculums' effects	0.084
Curriculum assessment	0.087
Main model of research	0.094

According to the Table 1, the coefficients for all variables were less than 0.1 confirming the reliability of the questionnaire. In order to measure validity of the questionnaire was checked by Cronbach test. The coefficient was found to be 0.84, which indicated a proper validity. In addition, tools validity was checked by Cronbach test and was found to be 0.89, which was acceptable.

Text analysis method for this research was content analysis method by making use of comparison category system. It deals with exerted theories and their different aspects by creating connection and relationship between them. For credibility of the suggested model, abundance, percentage and factor-analysis method were used, which are considered in qualitative content analysis

3. Findings

Table2. Identified parameters

Parameters	Identified items in research
Objectives of non-intensive curriculum	1- Partnership 2- Lesson-centering and student-centering 3- Considering local and regional capabilities 4- Equilibrium in being centralized and decentralized 5- Innovation and creativity 6- Increasing justice and quality of education

indicates objectives of non-centralized curriculum. Identified objectives in such way are partnership, lesson-centering and student-centering, considering local and regional capabilities, equilibrium in being centralized and decentralized innovation and creativity, increasing justice and quality of education.

In terms of the issue of justice and quality of education, the findings of this research are consistent with Heredia-Ortiz (2007) about effect of decentralization on output of education system and repetition rate reduction, and also with Fathi Vajegah (2007) about considering local and regional capacity and partnership and about school-centering with Vaziriyazdi (2013) and Taqipor Zahir (2013).

Table3. Content selection criteria in decentralized curriculum

Parameters	Content selection criteria
content	1- Subject-centering 2- Responsibility and flexibility 3- Preparing contents 4- Decision making on selecting kinds of content

Table No. 3 indicates content selection criteria in decentralized curriculum in this current research. The criteria identified here are subject centering, responsibility and flexibility, preparing contents, decision making on selecting kinds of content. On subject-centering and preparing contents, the results and findings of this research are in consistent with Lee Young (2004), Simpson (2011) and Fathi Vajegah (2007) and on responsibility and flexibility and decision making on selecting kinds of content the findings and results of this research are in association with Lee Young (2004) Taqi Zadeh (2000) and Fathi Vajegah (2007).

Table4. Criteria for selecting a proper method in non-centralized curriculum

Parameters	Teaching-Learning methods criteria
Methods	1- Systematic thinking 2- Teachers training 3- Learning and performance 4- Leadership 5- Teaching methods 6- Decentralizing ground

Teaching-Learning methods are the main factors in curriculum and have very important role in curriculum design process. In this current research, criteria for selecting teaching-learning methods selection in decentralized curriculum have been gained by content analysis and coding. Based on content analysis and coding in teaching-learning methods parameters, the results and findings of this research are consistent with Lee Young (2004), Heredia-Ortiz (2007) and Mehr Mohammadi (2007). In terms of teachers' training, learning and performance and teaching methods, the findings and the results of the current research are consistent with Fathi Vajegah's (2004), Izadi (2000) and Londo Polo's (1996). In terms of leadership criteria (management), the findings and results of this research are consistent with Wong's (2004), Smith's (1986), Izadi (2000) and Fathi Vajegah (2004) studies.

Table5. Teaching-learning method evaluation

Parameters	Teaching-Learning method criteria
Evaluation	1- Supporting the curriculum 2- Identifying obstacles 3- Modifying and curriculum feedback 4- Making use of obtained results and findings 5- Curriculum effectiveness 6- Level and measures of decentralization

Based on content analysis and coding carried out, the criteria for program supporting, reformation and feed-back, curriculum effectiveness, making use of curriculum and identifying obstacles, level and measures of the decentralization have been obtained.

In terms of criterion of supporting curriculum, the findings and results are consistent with Wong's (2004), Simons' (2011) studies. In terms of criterion of identifying obstacles, the findings and results are consistent with Vaziri Yazdi (2013), Mehr Mohammadi's (2007), Taqi Zadeh's (2000) and Zaira's (2005). In terms of criterion of reformation and feedback of curriculum, the findings and results are consistent with Vaziri Yazdi's (2013), Fathi Vajegahi's (2004), Londo Polo's (1996), Zaira's (2005) and Mohammadi and Khaledian (2013) studies.

In terms of criterion of curriculum effectiveness and making use of them, the findings and results are consistent with Londo Polo's (1996), Zaira's (2005), Heredia-Ortiz (2007) Vaziriyazdi (2013) studies. In terms of criterion of level and measure of decentralization, the findings and results are consistent with Mehr Mohammadi's (2007), Vaziriyazdi (2013), Izadi (2000), Yar Mohammadi's (2002) and Simons (2011).

4. Discussion

Centralization and decentralization are important issues in curriculum. According to the studies and investigations carried out, education systems all around the world are not absolutely centralized or definitely decentralized but a combination of both in different level of education system is applied. Due to difference if social, political, cultural, political and economic grounds in every country, centralized and decentralized approaches are different countries and each approach is proper and applicable based on the

ruling circumstance in that country. It is not possible to declare which approach is the most appropriate one for all countries.

According to the results obtained here, curriculum parameters may be decentralized in accordance with society and situations, in the way that human's capabilities is different in every parameter and proper training has become an important factor for executives for creating equality and balance in performing curriculum parameters. Reformation in education systems is unavoidable since every education system needs flexible approaches for its improvement in accordance with ruling circumstance in the society. The point that shall be taken into consideration is that centralization and decentralization are not in the place of main objectives but they are tools for improving justice and quality of education, which take all parameters of curriculum into consideration.

Finally, according to the findings and results of this research it is recommended that Iranian primary curriculum be reviewed and re-formulated in accordance with suggested model to move toward decentralization. Also considering the local and regional capabilities, it is recommended that issues such as partnership in different measures of curriculum, reinforcing and developing school-centering issue and student-centering issue, innovation and creation of curriculum executives to decentralization be taken into consideration more than ever. Moreover, in content issue it is suggested that decision-making, selecting and formulating content, subject-centering, flexibility and responsibility be passed on policy-makers. Besides, considering the results, it is suggested that issues such as identifying, evaluating effectiveness of decentralized curriculum and dimensions of decentralization appropriate with the current and existing situation be taken into consideration and studied more.

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