





*Research Paper*

## Developing a Specific Curriculum for Afghan Immigrants in the Public Educational System of Iran

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### Abstract

**Aim:** The present study aimed to investigate the constituent elements of a curriculum for Afghan immigrants and present a model in this regard. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. Thirty professors and teachers were selected by purposive sampling for interviews. Interview transcripts were analyzed using three coding steps. The presented model was validated using member check. The results of the study are presented as a model with 11 main themes and 32 subthemes. The subthemes that came under the causal conditions were citizenship rights, human rights, cultural commonalities, language challenges, cultural cohesion, cultural adaptation, the existence of minorities, geographical proximity, neighborhood rules. Underlying conditions subthemes included following items: fragile security, ethnic ignorance, negative view of different cultures, religious differences. Interfering factors included following items: arrogance, xenophobia, extreme politicization, security vision, and ethnic prejudices. The key themes of the strategies included the following items: multicultural curriculum development, integrated curriculum development, culture awareness, respect for differences, acceptance of others, denial of cultural differences, and suppression of cultural differences. Subthemes of the consequences were promoting Iran's international image, expanding political relations, reduce delinquency, international investment, cultural transfer, realization of educational justice and cultural

solidarity. Also, a special and comprehensive curriculum for immigrants was identified as a central category.

**Keywords:** *Afghan Immigrants, Curriculum, Model.*

## **Introduction**

Education brings many benefits to individuals and societies. Education, by equipping individuals with a variety of skills, provides opportunities for them to be useful and have a high income, which in turn leads to breaking the cycle of poverty. In addition, education affects citizenship and individual's perception of and involvement in the community. This is especially important for immigrants. Education makes immigrants better acquainted with the host community and provides an opportunity to integrate them into the community. This is especially important for customs, rules, and language (Dempster and Hargrave, 2017). Recent decades have witnessed an increasing flow of migration, including families with children. In 2012, more than 12% of 15-year-old students had an immigrant background in the EU. (OECD, 2015) The growing number of immigrant students has profoundly challenged education systems to ensure the development of skills in diverse students and to promote social cohesion. Under the current situation with the turmoil and wars in the Middle East, Iran's stability and security has attracted a lot of immigrants. Most of these immigrants are from countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Syria. In the meantime, Afghan immigrants outnumber other immigrants. According to the results of the 2016 Population and Housing Census, 1,583,979 people with Afghan citizenship lived in Iran. Accordingly, 1,242,000 Afghans live in urban areas and 340,968 live in rural areas (Ministry of Interior, 2016). Therefore, educating immigrant learners and addressing their educational challenges in Iran, especially Afghan immigrants, is important for several reasons: 1- No specific research has been done in this field, 2- there is a big gap between Iranian and Afghan students in academic success, 3- Afghan students' language and dialect are somewhat different from Iranian students', 4- Afghan students enter the educational cycle from deprived families more than other immigrants, 5. they are the largest group of immigrants in Iran, which is growing compared to other immigrant groups, 6- they have a high level of academic decline and have little cultural affinity with Iran, and 7- this group of immigrants constitutes a significant part of the population of Iran, and not paying attention to their needs creates many economic, social and cultural problems for Iran. All of these factors, individually or in combination, are challenging the traditional curricula available to these immigrants. As a result, addressing the challenges of educating immigrants leads to better

educational outcomes and long-term opportunities for participation in the communities they are a part of. In other words, the present study, considering that the international community is moving towards accepting the special rights of immigrants in education and developing special educational programs for this group, seeks the following basic question: What are the characteristics of a curriculum for immigrants in Iran?

## **Methodology**

We used Strauss and Corbin' grounded theory with their six main components which includes the following items: causal conditions, underlying conditions, interfering factors, strategies, consequences and central category. The process of grounded theory method mainly includes the following steps: theoretical sampling, theoretical coding and theory formulation (Flick, 2006). The research samples consisted of individuals who had valuable lived experiences related to the phenomenon under study. The data collection process continued until theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation occurred after 30 interviews. The validity of the research was confirmed after the interview questions were modified and approved by six professors. All interviews were audio recorded. The researcher carefully listened to recorded interviews and transcribed them verbatim. Then, member check was used to confirm the validity of the interviews. As such, the transcripts were sent to the participants to confirm the accuracy of the content and to correct the content if necessary. Data were analyzed using open, axial and selective coding, which resulted in 12 main themes and 30 subthemes.

## **Results**

After conducting a total of 30 interviews with research samples (professors and teachers who were in direct contact with Afghan students) and studying them several times, a model consisting of 12 main themes and 30 subthemes was presented. The subthemes that came under the causal conditions were citizenship rights, human rights, cultural commonalities, language challenges, cultural cohesion, cultural adaptation, the existence of minorities, geographical proximity, and neighborhood rules. Underlying conditions subthemes included following items: fragile security, ethnic ignorance, negative view of different cultures, and religious differences. Interfering factors included following items: arrogance, xenophobia, extreme politicization, security vision, ethnic prejudices. The key themes of the strategies included following items: multicultural curriculum development,

integrated curriculum development, culture awareness, respect for differences, acceptance of others, denial of cultural differences, suppression of cultural differences. Subthemes of the consequences were: promoting Iran's international image, expanding political relations, reduce delinquency, international investment, cultural transfer, realization of educational justice and cultural solidarity. Also, a special and comprehensive curriculum for immigrants was identified as a central category.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Afghan students make up a significant portion of Iran's student population. Recent decades have witnessed a rapid increase in the migration of Afghans to Iran, with issues and challenges for Iran's educational system. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the educational issues of Afghan Students. Therefore, the present study sought to provide a model to address these educational issues. There are factors that can play an important role in facilitating or inhibiting the education of Afghan immigrants. For example, factors such as citizenship rights, human rights, cultural commonalities, and cultural cohesion can be considered facilitating factors for the education of Afghan students. Some factors such as ethnic ignorance, cultural prejudice, and negative attitudes toward ethnicities can act as barriers to educating Afghan students. Various studies have confirmed the results of the present study, for example: attention to pluralism (Hunts, 2012), recognition of ethnic and cultural diversity (Banks, 2014), common understanding among different ethnic groups (Parkh, 2008), understanding of concepts intercultural in the classroom (1997), eliminating racism in the curriculum, building understanding among racial groups and respect for different cultures to neutralize tensions and conflicts within classroom (Michelle, 2003). All of the above items serve as key elements in the education of Afghan Immigrants. Therefore, the following suggestions are presented to move towards a favorable curriculum for Afghan immigrants in Iran:

1. Modifying the curriculum from a focus on integration to ethnic and cultural diversity
- 2- Reviewing the four elements of the curriculum (purpose, content, method, evaluation) and paying attention to immigrant students' realities of life, especially Afghan immigrants.
- 3- Paying attention to the backgrounds and conditions of Afghan immigrants and considering them in the policies and plans of the public educational system.
- 4- Changing teacher training programs so that teachers gain a sufficient understanding of the conditions and characteristics of Afghan students.
5. Promoting multiculturalism through special courses dedicated to multiculturalism in order to familiarize Iranian students with other

students, including Afghan students, and eliminating problems such as ridicule of language, appearance and culture.

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