

Feasibility study of teachers contribution in curriculum processes in the Iranian Education System

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Abstract

Realistic curriculum planning for schools requires the contribution of all groups, especially teachers, who influence the process of decision making in education. Since teachers have valuable experiences about school activities and are aware of the students' needs and problems, they should be considered as the main important element of decision making on curriculum planning. This research has tried to show the extent, and the possibility, of teachers' contribution in curriculum planning in Iran and have investigated the results of such contribution as well. A researcher-made questionnaire has been used to collect data from a sample of high school teachers in Tehran and experts of curriculum planning of the Ministry of Education concerning the extent of teachers' contribution in curriculum planning, the factors which facilitate this contribution, and the positive and negative effects of it.

Keywords: Curriculum Planning, Decision-making in Schools, Teacher's Role, High-school Students, Teacher's Participation in Curriculum Planning

Introduction

The idea of a school-centralization in the Iranian education system has been recently stated in conditions where the teachers have no main role in the curriculum planning process, and while the

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designed curriculum by the central officials in the level of the Ministry of Education are carried out by the teachers. The curriculum that is provided to the schools should be exactly followed-through and be put to practice according to the provided guidelines. The identity of the curriculum system is of the “teacher proof curriculum” type.

With respect to the structure of the centralized system of curriculum on one hand, and the increasing interest for involving the teachers in the curriculum planning in the framework of the overall orientation of the education system on the other hand, the feasibility study of the achievement of this goal is considered in this current article. In other words the investigation into the ability to carry-out the project for involving the teachers in the curriculum planning is the achievement of this goal (Sonsian, 1991). The article is to evaluate the issue from different angles and dimensions.

A review on the researches and studies conducted shows that despite the historical record of the teachers' participation and role in the curriculum process, a special movement has surfaced especially from the early times in 1980s in the field of education (Saban, 1995). The center of gravity of this movement has been attention to improving the teacher-training system and taking the improvement of the teachers' performance serious as the most important variable in enhancing the quality of education (McKay, 1992; Beure, 2001).

Teachers' Role

Various opinions have been stated with regards to the roles the teacher can take around school. “Toen & Bolz” have stated three main roles for the teachers in order to improve teaching. These roles include teacher as researcher, teacher as lecturer, and teacher as the curriculum designer (Saban, 1995). Bork (1990) as well has stated many roles for teachers in the school education system, the most important of which include teacher as the instructor for the new colleagues, teacher as a researcher, teacher as the producer of knowledge (through out-of-school researches), teacher as observer, teacher as instructor for the school colleagues, teacher as a councilor, and teacher as curriculum planner. Connelly (1988) and Schwab (1983) consider the teacher the principal member of the group for curriculum decision-making. Schwab says: “The first

answer to the question of who is to be a member of the curriculum planning group is teacher". This answer should be said with emphasis and loud voice. There are two important reasons for such answer. Connelly (1988) also writes: The teacher should be involved and participate in the exact and intelligent curriculum decision-makings.

For this reason teachers are considered the main nucleolus of curriculum planning and their participation in the design, conduction, and evaluation of the curriculums is a main key in improving the plans. Their participation in the process of changing and improvement of the school curriculums is of considerable importance (Fullan, 1999).

Elbaz (1991) describes the teachers' participation domain as including fields such as preparation of curriculum items, membership in the curriculum planning group, conducting researches in the class and course planning across the school. In general the most important domains for the teacher's participation in curriculum planning is consisted of the areas such as curriculum or course book selection, making compatible and moderating the curriculum, curriculum combination, completion and improvement of the curriculum and designing, conducting, and evaluating the curriculum (Lewy, 1991; Izadi and Guya, 1379/2000, Fathi & Guya, 1381/2002; Sabar, 1989). We should note however that these domains are different based on the curriculum planning system and the environmental variables.

Many studies have been conducted in the field of consequences and results of the participation of teachers in curriculum decision-making. Each of these researches have mentioned *some* of the positive results of such participation in this process (Howthorne, 1990; Fullan, 1999; Hisaolan, 2000)

Mainly, curriculum planning and the expansion of staff-development have common goals. When the teachers make a step forward in designing, conducting, and evaluating the curriculum and revise it, they are practically move toward extending and developing themselves (Kilion, 1993; Sabar, 1987).

Research Questions

1. In which domains can the teachers in Iranian education system participate in the curriculum planning process?
2. How can the teachers' participation mechanisms be in the curriculum planning process in the Iranian education system?
3. What are the main obstacles ahead of the school teachers in curriculum-planning?
4. Which elements can make the teachers' participation in the curriculum planning process easier in the Iranian education system?
5. What are the positive and negative outcomes of the teachers' participation in the curriculum planning in the Iranian education system?

Research methodology

The current research is qualitative, which means the viewpoint of those directly related to the teacher's participation is put to investigation. With regards to this matter, the statistical population consists of three layers of the experts in curriculum planning, the specialists for curriculum planning in the Ministry of Education, and finally the high school teachers teaching in the province of Tehran. Accordingly, the research sample includes ten experts, thirty specialists for curriculum planning from the Ministry of Education, and three-hundred high-school teachers. To collect data, a questionnaire based on Likert's scale was used. At first, the mentioned questionnaire was organized around the sub-scales of the teachers' participation domains in curriculum-planning, participation methods, the preventing elements, the facilitating elements, and the positive and negative outcomes of the teachers' participation. The content validity of the questionnaire was approved by ten experts in curriculum planning. In the next phase, the primary conducting of the questionnaire answering and the data analysis on the results from the experimental data was performed on thirty of the high-school teachers. Therefore the number of items was decreased from 60 questions to 51. The reliability of the tools was reached to be 0.82 through split-half, which shows the high reliability of the information-collection tools. In order to analyze

the research results, descriptive and inferential research methods were put to use, which included one-sample t, independent t, one-way analysis of variance, and the interval estimate testing.

Research Results

The current research results revolved around a five-element axis (domains of: participation, participation methods, obstacles and limitations, facilitating elements, and the positive and negative results of teachers' participation in curriculum planning). This five-element axis is described as follows:

- Participation domains. In this research, seven main domains for participation were put to consideration. These were, loyal conducting, curriculum-planning matching, school books selection, expansion and completion of plan, organization, modification of parts and the components of the approved curriculum, and the designing of the desired curriculum. The research findings show that most of the individuals in the research sample believe that teachers can potentially participate in all seven mentioned domains.
- Teachers' participation mechanisms in curriculum planning. In the current research, five mechanisms of teacher participation were the focus of attention with respect to the levels of curriculum decision-making. The findings showed that the individuals in the research sample believe that the five most important mechanisms of participation in the national, provincial, regional, clustered schools, and the school level are suitable grounds for teachers participation in curriculum planning.
- The effective elements for increasing the teachers' participation in curriculum planning. Removing a set of element and the preventing conditions while creating the environment where teachers' participation in curriculum planning can be increased is among the most important variables. Comparative analysis of the experts', specialists', and high-school teachers' viewpoints shows that three elements of providing the resources and the financial support, cultural-development for participation, and entrusting more responsibilities are positioned as the most important elements.

- Results and consequences of teachers' participation in the curriculum planning. The research findings showed that the entrance and involvement of teachers in curriculum planning matters as well as giving more control to the schools in this field can have certain positive and negative consequences. Apart from the few positive outcomes accepted by the research sample, the findings showed that there are several issues in the area of negative outcomes which causes them to be worried. These elements are, complete dependence of the curriculum-planning system on school's creativity, endangering the national education standards, serious competition among schools for attracting various resources and causing problems for coordination across schools in the field of curriculum-planning.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the current research, it became clear that the teachers can participate in various domains based on the field findings. The most important of these domains are offering suggestion for the modification of the approved curriculum and making adjustments and limited changes in the curriculum and suitable program and book selection from among the various suggested plans and books. These findings match the findings by Fitzpatric (2001); Elbaz (1991), and Marsh (1991) to a very high extent. As well, the research findings show that providing the ground for teachers' participation in the school level or several neighboring schools (in clustered-school format).

The fact of the matter is that curriculum planning is an activity, which is deeply inter-related with teacher's teaching and occupation, and we can't and we shouldn't ignore them in this process. For this reason any type of activity which causes increase in the teachers' participation in curriculum planning is equal to enriching the curriculum-plan decision-making and having influential education at school.

As well, based on the findings it can be claimed that facility and financial resources preparation, entrusting more control to schools and teachers and cultural development are among the most important elements on increasing the teachers' participation in curriculum-planning. These elements have more of a structural and

administrative aspect and are required to be re-thought regarding the role and position of schools and movement toward a semi-concentrated or at least semi-concentrated curriculum plan. At the meantime, changes in the teacher training system as well on-the-job-training are very important. As can be seen, the current findings are in Haberman (1992) and Marsh (1991) path, while at the same time similar to Kilion's findings (1993).

At the end, the research findings showed that any action in the field of education, with respect to the conditions and requirements of the country, have positive and negative results. Unlike what the curriculum-planning literature states (Saban, 1995; Elbaz, 1991; Yung, 1993, Fitzpatric, 2001), the teachers' participation does not only have positive consequences. Although teachers' participation causes increase in teaching quality, students' school-education achievement, and job satisfaction among the teachers, it will increase the schools educational expenses and broadens the tribal and regional feelings and interest (considering that the country is made up of different tribes). For this reason, the decision-making about increase in teachers' participation requires preparation of arrangements in the system decision-making, and equipping and enabling the teachers and making specific decisions, which should not be unparalleled to the national unity and exaltation of the country's education system.

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