

Review of Centralization and Decentralization Approaches to Curriculum Development in Iran

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Abstract

The current review article aims at classifying, summarizing and organizing some researches conducted about the process of centralization-decentralization and its influence on curricula. Regarding some conducted studies in this area, this paper discusses the condition of decentralization in general and then represents decentralization levels in order to provide the readers more information. Types of decentralization in education are the issues that have been mainly discussed in this paper. The analysis of centralization reduction policies in curriculum of Iran's higher education is the next subject to be discussed; some investigations carried out in this scope are also presented. Then school-based curriculum planning is explored as a practical solution to reduce centralization of curriculum planning system. Finally, after introducing the dualistic (zero or one) view as the main problem that makes educational issues complicated and inefficient, such as in curriculum planning decentralization, the evolution overview is presented from centralization to decentralization and then again turning back to centralization in Iran's and world's curriculum systems. The most important result obtained from this review is that although many theorists and experts in the field of curriculum planning have supported the dominance of decentralization on curricula and have talked about various shortcomings of centralization, the real move towards decentralization of different parts of educational system such as curriculum planning, specially in Iran, is very slow.

Keywords: Education, Curriculum, Decentralization, Centralization, Decentralization levels.

Introduction

There is a great tendency throughout the world to move towards decentralization in the area of emerging policies, and governments apply decentralization as a good strategy in private sectors. The major challenge in the field of education and in particular in curricula development is the tendency to centralization or decentralization. Tendency toward decentralization and delegation to schools in public education system has increased in recent years with the aim of improving the quality of education. Decentralization in education seems to be a global phenomenon and is one of its main issues. One reason for supporting

decentralization in education is that by assigning decision-making rights and responsibility for being responsive to the educational system, the quality of education improves. The educational executors have a greater contribution to making decision about education. Educational decentralization is also a strategy for strengthening indigenous cultures, native and local communities and local economy (Piri et al., 2011).

Many education experts believe that decentralization is one of the most important phenomena that have had a significant effect on training and curriculum during the last fifteen years.

The topic of some heated debates was the attempt to answer this question:
Who "should really decide about education in public training?"

Some believe that we cannot put aside the problems with centralized planning, i.e. centralization. In contrast, many others believe that numerous educational problems occurred during the eighties in some countries, including unsatisfactory academic progress of students, increased separation of teacher and student in the process of teaching and programs failure in responding to the needs of learners, that led decentralization to come into the center of attentions and provided a shift to reducing centralization (Khandaghi, 2010).

However, studies show that the main goal of decentralization in different countries has not been promoting and improving education. These kinds of reforms have often arisen with political reasons and have progressed with hidden and informal motivations. Some of these motivations include: national education budget cuts by assigning educational costs in China and Venezuela, or breaking the power of teachers' unions in Chile, and strengthening national policy control in Mexico and China. (Gouya, 2008).

Also, in Iran the poor performance of students in examinations and International Olympiads in mathematics and science, unsatisfactory academic progress in literacy and multiple educational failures at the national level are all absolute evidences of the inefficiency of centralized curriculum that caused this system to be faced with problems and challenges.

In Iran's educational society, different viewpoints have been expressed by experts and authorities about centralization and decentralization of curriculum. This is in such a way that some people consider the losses and deficits in Iranian's academic achievement as one of the consequences of centralized system. In contrast, some support the centralized system.

Among them are those who consider centralization and decentralization of curriculum not as an absolute, but rather as a continuum of evolution of the two conditions and believe that in most countries, a balance between both is required to make an effective educational system.

In what follows, it is attempted to analyze several technical articles about centralization and decentralization of curriculum of different grades in Iran's and World's educational system; this paper tries to explore different aspects mentioned in the articles and then concludes with explaining their implications for Iran curriculum.

Review of selected articles

In addition to the significance of centralization, – the centralization in educational systems which was defined earlier- the investigator's personal interests in this issue have also been presented.

By searching in Scientific Information Databases (SID) such as Jahad Daneshgahi scientific data base and using the main keywords such as centralization, decentralization and curriculum, many local papers, books, and other materials were collected; after reviewing them, the following articles were selected and investigated.

a) Decentralization of curriculum; a universal or condition dependent solution?

In this article, Amin Khandaghi and Goudarzi (2009) examined decentralization of education in generally and of curriculum in particular. They believe that choosing or rejecting decentralization should not simply rely on international recommendations and comply with global trends. Therefore, it is necessary to determine whether decentralization is the essential aspect of organizing educational system and centralization, the end product of evolution, or the result of political system change. To be stated more clearly, specifying the philosophical, political, economic and cultural origins of the decentralization is of significant importance.

The processes taken in this article to define intended concepts and results include the followings: defining and describing centralization and decentralization, the importance of decentralized curriculum, typology of decentralization, requirements of decentralization of curriculum, and finally the reasons for decentralization failure in some countries and returning to re-centralization of curriculum. Quoted from Mehr Mohammadi (2003), the article authors state that there is a naïve consideration in centralized curriculum planning systems about what happens in its implementation and not enough attention is paid to various forms of the standard curriculum during their implementation.

Amin Khandaghi and Goudarzi believe that Brook and Brook (1993) had looked in the thoughts of progressivism and constructivism for a comprehensive model of decentralized curriculum and considered student-centered curriculum as the core in decentralized curriculums.

Based on the analysis of these investigators, there is no exact and comprehensive definition of decentralization and each of the various provided definitions emphasizes on a particular aspect or element of decentralization in education and curriculum. Thus, decentralization is a complex and multifaceted concept.

Quoting from Colins and Zambon (1994), Amin Khandaghi and Goudarzi represent decentralization types in the following formats:

1. Organizational decentralization: it is the kind decentralization in which decisions at school level are made by specialists and professional trainers and based on education quality improvement of the students. In this type of decentralization, power is transferred to the school in its usual form (top-down).
2. Political decentralization: in this type of decentralization, parents participate in decisions that are made about their children's education. This requires that an executive board be present at schools to guide policies and programs.

3. Economic decentralization: in this type, parents decide about what school to choose. They select the school according to the budget allocated to each school. The school's income depends on the number of students the school attracts.

Quoting from Florestal and Cooper (2003), the authors quote have also discussed the following requirements and conditions to execute decentralized curriculum:

1. Political feasibility: among the necessary conditions for the implementation of the reforms that lead to decentralization is that the proposed changes should be politically supported. International experiences show that success in decentralization requires, to a great extent, political capacity in the country.
2. Preparing the legal context: one of the important questions that arises in any decentralization attempt is the legal issues of decentralization in the curriculum, and determining the extent to which the head education organization should have control over local curriculum.

In the final section of the paper, Amin Khandaghi and Goudarzi quoted from Vientiane (2002) the most important reasons for the inefficiency and failure of decentralized systems. They are classified in what follows.

1. Inconsistency of cultural, political and philosophical foundations of curriculum planning systems of different countries with decentralized systems.
2. Administration problems.
3. New global changes, lack of funding and resistance from teacher

What can be concluded from this article is that decentralization has a special place in the context of education democracy movement. But conceptual differences in democracy perception results in failure of some parts of executing of this movement. Amin Khandaghi and Goudarzi concluded that decentralization is not a panacea. This means that by changing centralized system to decentralized one, we cannot expect that education and curriculum quality will automatically improve or curriculum planning system will become efficient due to decentralization. In other words, decentralization is neither good, nor bad. Decentralization is a really complicated task, as it includes political, economic and legal issues and also executive methods.

Finally it can be said that the aim of decentralization is not to blindly follow a global process, but to modify education.

- b) Simultaneous management of decentralization stages in curriculum planning system

In this article, Mehr Mohammadi (2008) has criticized the dualistic or right/wrong view to educational issues, and has specially investigated decentralization.

The author of this article believes that most of the taken processes and proposed solutions in this context is based on dualistic view and in practice, they are not real solutions to educational systems.

Inspired by this chronic deficiency, this article tries to initially identify various levels of making free decisions about curriculum and then explain simultaneous management of decentralization stages or levels as an alternative solution. In the end, the author proposes a model called "nuclear model" for curriculum planning system management.

At the beginning of this article, Mehr Mohammadi quotes from Kliebard (1975) and compares what Dubee and Tyler (1949) had done in the face of a major theoretical controversy in the field of curriculum; he evaluates Dubee's solution as innovative and based on social equipment and considers Tyler's view as collection of contradictory viewpoints and without providing any theoretical basis.

Dubee's formation of democracy and education has been done with the purpose of putting an end to dualism or absolute polarity based on definite conflict between goals and methods, individual and society, and child and curriculum (Zouelm, 2006).

Mehr Mohammadi believes that in such a view, a variable such as centralization or decentralization is a variable that numerous and diverse conditions can be imagined for. Statistically, a variable that has dedicated different values to itself; it is a continuous variable, but not a categorical one which only two conditions can be attributed to it. Consider a situation in which one continuous variable is changed to a categorical one; consequently the obtained analysis and results will be superficial or even false due to losing part of variance. The same case is also quite possible and probable in the field of theorization.

Mehr Mohammadi goes on to analyze the current debate on decentralization of the education system, and evaluates these attitudes:

1. In the process of decentralizing education, an optimal position to be achieved should be defined based on considering internal and external organizational factors. By taking the attention of policy makers, this view discusses the following as the essential conditions for successful execution: preparing appropriate cultural, social and economic contexts.

In the analysis of this definition, Mehr Mohammadi believes although the fact that paying attention to the preparation of internal and external organizational factors is considered a positive point of this view, the notion that achieving an optimal level in all over the country is possible, is its serious negative point. Various and numerous optimal points should be identified and explained.

2. National capabilities and capacities should be taken into account in the process of decentralizing education. The concept of unity of the nation is important in this approach; this emphasizes that we cannot think of decentralization before having a minimum level of capabilities or capability in the national level (Zouelm, 2006).

Mehr Mohammadi also challenges decentralization approach and believes that in this realm, the multiplicity of nation concept is applied more than unity oriented considerations. In other words, the need for human resources and non-human equipment, or software and hardware facilities should not be presented as an having an integrated and uniform meaning in the national level.

3. Other countries have tended to centralization. This view has been put forward as a witness to the events which occurred in recent decades in some countries such as U.S. and England and concludes that reflection by itself is not criticized (Mousa Pour, 2006).

Mehr Mohammadi states that what is happening in different countries should be interpreted in the historical, cultural and educational context of their own country. Looking at the historical and cultural situations in the countries mentioned above and

the lack of minimal control over the education system, they decided to develop the idea of a national curriculum and adopt national policies.

Only in this context, thus, the tendency to centralization is understandable and analyzable. Among them, there are countries that have converted to over-decentralization and they want to return to a balance using centralization. Naturally, in seeking for balance, countries like Iran must just think about decentralization.

4. Decentralization, no; reducing centralization, yes. In the current debate on decentralization of curriculum planning system, the author has assumed that the proponents of decentralization do not want to detract from centralization levels and support the denial of any involvement of the central institutions in curriculum. Mehr Mohammadi believes that the extravagant look at reducing centralization or decentralization was not reflected, except in certain humanist theorists in which the child-centered curriculum is promoted; they also have been criticized by being described as mere feelings and inclusive reverence.

According to the author, clarifying the meaning or scope and aspects of decentralization is done by reducing centralization; this must be carefully considered in curriculum planning systems.

Mehr Mohammadi summarizes the issues discussion above as follows:

- Good use of actual and potential human and material capacities in education of each country.
- Good use of actual and potential human and material capacities in academic and research institutions of the country.
- Achieving curricula with good quality and effectiveness, according to the conditions in different regions of the country.
- Adjusting the scope of central administration involvement or a profile of capabilities and capacities of different regions of the country.

Levels and aspects of making free decisions

In this section, the author tried to define six conditions in which making free decisions about curriculum without central institution and involving other sections and institutions in this context are possible; each of these six conditions is considered as one of the foundations of a new paradigm in dealing with decentralization.

1. Invisible or zero release

This level of release shows the effort of central institution to develop standard, prescriptive and detailed curricula. Mehr Mohammadi states that as the focus of his article is on decentralizing in curriculum realm in the stage of designing the program, it is referred to as the lowest level of releasing decision making.

2. Releasing the development of learning resources and textbooks

At this level, the goal is to release control of the production of education resources and materials. By releasing learning resources, the author means monitoring the publication of textbooks which is certainly the most important and the most effective teaching and learning resource and is developed along curriculum framework. Limiting the central structure of curriculum to generating a curriculum framework can be considered as the message of releasing production of teaching and learning resources.

3. Making free the choice of curriculum framework

Educating with subject-oriented or integrated approaches requires totally different curriculum frameworks; this situation can be thought of as an indication of successful implementation of this level of release.

The central administration of curriculum may try to generate more than one curriculum framework and ask the executive levels to freely choose among them. The practical experience of this level of release can be found in the recent modifications in curriculum of China (Mehr Mohammadi, 2005).

4. Making free a part of curriculum framework

It is possible that the original curriculum or curriculum framework developed by central administration consciously stop ordering and specifying the tasks and allow some decisions to be made for part of the time taken for the curriculum for a particular subject matter at decentralized levels.

According to the author, a curriculum framework contains prescriptive and non-prescriptive part that the non-prescriptive part of it will be established by the recognition of the local competent authorities.

Mehr Mohammadi believes the release of 10 to 25 percent makes a perfect capacity and opportunity to let the curriculum adaptation happen regarding the diverse executive conditions and needs of receivers.

5. Making free the whole curriculum in its conventional meaning

According to the author, at this level of release, the mission of central planning administration reduces to assigning the learning of performance standards in a specific area and non-central authorities are responsible for developing curriculum framework and choosing or generating learning sources. This level of release, according to Mehr Mohammadi, is the least mission of central administrations. Regarding making free decisions in this level, the point to be mentioned is that achieving the four previously mentioned levels is quite possible in this level. Delegating the curriculum tasks to decentralized levels in educational system is one circuit among various release circuits which may find legitimacy and acceptance in specific conditions for a specific region and in a specific learning area.

6. Making free some weekly hours of school

In the author's opinion, in this level of release, curriculum central administration is not supposed to plan for each and every hour of students and teachers and quits control, mandate and management of schools in this way. This level of release is close to what have been explained in the fourth level.

Mehr Mohammadi believes this level of release is fully applied to decentralized curriculum, but in the aspects that work as the complement for decentralized curriculum, it should be controlled by non-central administrations. In a more controlled type of this level, taking some elective courses offered by the central administration can be also taken into account.

The suggested decentralized model

After discussing about levels of release and making free decisions which was kind of conceptual and experience analysis, Mehr Mohammadi proposes his model. This model is subject to the following principles and elements:

1. Regarding educational and training requirements and national interests in social, cultural and political aspects, decentralizing the curriculum is a fundamental principle.

2. Polar view to decentralizing curriculum planning system is not responsive and leads to inaction or inappropriate and destructive actions.
3. In non-polar view of decentralization, identification of release levels is a fundamental principle.
4. In non-polar view of decentralization, identification of various conditions and capabilities in different parts of the country is a fundamental principle.
5. In non-polar view of decentralization, considering the element of change in capabilities and conditions and making balance based on this is considered as a fundamental principle.
6. In non-polar view of decentralization, taking into account the possibility of simultaneous entrance of all release levels in curriculum management is a fundamental principle.

Regarding the principles mentioned, Mehr Mohammadi supports a model in curriculum management that can be called nuclear or chaotic model.

Executive dos and don'ts of this proposed model include:

Firstly, decentralization cannot be scheduled based on the release levels, or based on the fact that which represents the lower and narrower level of decentralization and which one represents a wider level.

Secondly, the success of nuclear or chaotic level requires a comprehensive executive plan. Thirdly, to establish a curriculum planning system based on nuclear model, new technology capacities should be used; by establishing an information-based management (IBM) system, its administrative difficulties can be reduced.

c) A new explanation of centralization and decentralization Iran

In this section, the article by Gouya and Khosroshahientitle "A new explanation of centralization and decentralization Iran" is investigated. The authors have studied the tendency of Iran's educational system and curriculum to decentralization and believe that in many countries, decentralization is considered a modern manner and countries must necessarily follow this manner.

Regarding the relativity of centralization and decentralization concept, Gouya and Khosroshahihave classified decentralization into three kinds: devolution, delegation and deconcentration; this classification has been done according to the degree and intensity of decentralization.

1. Devolution:

Privatization is a subset of delegating responsibility i.e. transferring responsibility and resources from the public sector to the private sector. The administration that has taken the responsibility should regard the following:

- It must be legally separated from the Central Office
- It must act autonomously.
- The delegated authorities must be legal.
- It must only act in specified geographical area.

2. Delegation:

It assigns decision-making right to lower ranked in the hierarchy. However, taking back this right is left to the discretion of the assignor.

3. Change of concentration

In this type of decentralization, only doing the tasks is assigned decision-making right is left and preserved to central government.

Types of educational decentralization:

As Behrman et al. (2002), Gouya and Khosroshahi also believe that all elements of a set must work together and the worst situation is the one in which decentralization is practiced only in one sector. Therefore, being familiar with educational decentralization will help societies to move toward it.

1. Fiscal Decentralization: According to the World Bank's report, for local governments and private institutions to effectively carry out the assigned responsibilities, they should be given adequate budget and authority for making decisions about costs.
2. Management decentralization: The authors argue that management and fiscal are highly interdependent, because moving toward fiscal decentralization will be successful when local managers can make appropriate decisions about educational processes.
3. Curriculum decentralization: Gouya and Khosroshahi believe having various interpretations of curriculum, there are different interpretations of the curriculum decentralization. They continued that such decentralization will willingly or unwillingly put a great burden on the shoulders of teachers; therefore, lots of potential capabilities should be available. If these potentialities will be used in in-service courses for teachers, it will result in good education.

The role of standards in curriculum decentralization

The authors stated that the necessity of educational standards is felt more in a decentralized system rather than in a centralized one. In addition to emphasizing the need to determine national curriculum standards, Gouya and Khosroshahi state that developing curriculum standards and national framework is the solution by which assigning authorities to various regions becomes possible and yet not harm will be made to the national unity. This is why there is a great tendency in the current situation in countries with decentralized curriculum to determine national curriculum standards; Norway can be considered as a good example.

In their final summation, the authors stated that for Iran and any other country that is willing to move toward decentralizing the educational system, considering why and how of decentralization in order to arrive to a new explanation of centralization and decentralization is a necessity.

d) Reflecting the centralization, decentralization and returning to centralization

In this article, Amin Khandaghi and Dehghani (2010) studied the historical overview of centralization experience, the growth of decentralization tendencies in the seventies and the reasons for this educational centralization re-growth.

In this paper, the reasons for the deviation from the original purpose of decentralizing the educational and curriculum planning system have been investigated under the titles "hard dealing and soft dealing". These two ways of dealing have been practically appeared in a decentralizing educational system and curriculum; this resulted in wrong and inexact interpretations from centralization and decentralization. Amin Khandaghi and Dehghani have also investigated these changes in the context of Iran's curriculum planning system.

Dealing with decentralization in practice: hard dealing and soft dealing

Quoting from Gershberg (1998), the authors stated that decentralization is successful when at first they get why and for what purpose it is necessary to decentralize, and then the central government transfers both resources and responsibilities to the local and regional authority.

Amin Khandaghi and Dehghani then studied types of dealing with centralization concept in curriculum planning system. In exploring countries' background and experiences in centralized and decentralized systems, this distinction can be made between the two approaches or ways of dealing.

Hard dealing: in this kind dealing, the administrative, structural, political and fiscal changes is at the center of attention and less attention has been paid to the content and programs' enrichment. For example, fiscal decentralization is one of the most fundamental changes that have had an impact on educational decentralization.

Amin Khandaghi and Dehghani believe that in Iran's centralized educational system, fiscal focus can be found in the significant share of government in supplying financial resources for education; the central government's reliance on unpredictable oil income results in having less consistent financial resource and this makes planning difficult. However, to solve this problem in recent years some actions has been taken such as devoting two out of one thousand share of industry to education.

Soft dealing: regarding this type of dealing with decentralization concept in educational system, the authors, quoting from Bray (1999), state that the control over curriculum and course content is generally one of the most recent areas that central administrations tend to decentralize. The Central Powers have found over time that the native features of curriculum content must be preserved. The main issue is that curricula must have high quality and consequently attaining the ideals of the education system becomes possible.

Amin Khandaghi and Dehghani then argue that regarding the soft dealing, while serious efforts have been made by the central authorities in carrying out the responsibilities, a

policy should be formed in which local authority also takes a part of the responsibility for the development and designing curriculum; therefore, special links must be established between local and central authority.

Inaccurate understanding of centralization and decentralization

The authors believe that one of the reasons for the failure of decentralization movement to in educational system that led to re-growth of centralization was indeed its inaccurate understanding and perception; this occurred in decision making about selecting or implementing centralized or decentralized curriculum planning system. This inaccurate perception can be analyzed in terms of the theory and practice. Firstly in theoretical terms, in choosing any of these systems, the main purpose and subject matter of the educational system has been neglected. The improvement of education quality and how to make positive changes in institutions, attitudes and values, as well as utilizing these procedures which occurs in most curricula are all marginalized and more attention has been given to solving the economic, financial and administrative problems. This is the very being in the center of attention in hard dealing and marginalizing in hard dealing which had been talked about earlier.

Practitioners and agencies of curriculum planning system can be among those who have misunderstood it both in theory and practice. In other words, studies show that educational systems do not act well in executing what has been called centralized or decentralized educational system. Thus, the centralized or decentralized educational are considerably different from what they must be.

What has been discussed above is among the reasons that cause the inefficiency of tendencies toward decentralization and re-centralization in education systems and particularly in curriculum.

e) Analysis of the policy of reducing concentration from curriculum in Iran's higher education

The main discussions of this article have been proposed by Mehr Mohammadi (2009); they can be followed in two areas of necessities and opportunities corresponding to decentralization policy in Iran's higher education curriculum.

Necessities

The author raises the main question of this section in this way:

From the perspective given in curriculum knowledge, what necessities make it reasonable to adopt the policy of reducing centralization in higher education's curriculum?

The principles that all curriculum planning systems in universities must adhere to them, are as follows:

1. Decision-making systems, the distribution of power and authority in the generating curriculum

Quoting from Eisner (1994), Mehr Mohammadi defines the types of power distribution and decision-making system in the following statuses:

- Absolute focus in which macro and micro decisions are both focused on the future.
- Absolute lack of focus in which macro and micro decisions are both focused on the present.
- Half-focused in which micro decisions are made in future and micro decisions are made in the present.

In the analysis of decision-making systems in this framework, recent policy should undoubtedly be evaluated in order to achieve the status of a half-focused. For preserving decentralization thoughts and universities' independence in taking actions, an appropriate and accurate semi-focused model must be defined as quickly as possible for higher education in Iran.

2. Designing curricula based on the local-native requirements

Quoting from Schwab (1969) who proposed practical theory in curriculum, Mehr Mohammadi believes that removing curriculum experts from basic national positions that are involved in generating new curricula indicates discredited curricula.

3. Closing the gap in intended and operated curriculum

The gap between decisions made and performance or intended (formal) curriculum and operated curriculum will definitely diminish in the light of reducing centralization policy. Closing this gap is of crucial importance. The curriculum designed in universities can still be applied in various forms by the professors who have run it.

4. Creating nimbleness and agility in decision making systems

In his criticism about centralized curriculum planning systems, Mehr Mohammadi believes that these kind of systems are naturally and inherently slow and have high inertia. He also believes that if reducing centralization doesn't lead to the emergence of agility's capacity in the university curricula, it will be a non-event policy or an ineffective movement.

Opportunities

The author raises this crucial question in this section:

From the curriculum perspective, what principles and policies should be considered to achieve maximum functionality in executing centralization reduction policy in higher education curriculum?

1. Using an integrated approach to curriculum design

For optimal use of the great capacities of this approach in higher education's curriculum design, the knowledge of types, semantics and concepts, and levels is required; then this

knowledge should be introduced to practitioners in the country's universities. In addition to designing new interdisciplinary fields, the integrated approach can also be utilized in the new trends in education and even in organizing predicted in existing curricula.

2. Developing the scope of participation in decision-making

By providing a proactive presence of universities in curriculum in light of the policies discussed in this paper, curriculum practitioners in university level can properly move toward this optimal status.

3. Changing the narrow interpretation in the design of curriculum framework

Quoting again from Eisner (1994), Mehr Mohammadi emphasizes that making decisions about goals and content can be achieved in a legitimate and credible form by subject specialists, but the nature of the curriculum is not revealed with making these decisions. The real essence of curriculum is revealed when decisions are made about learning opportunities and further curriculum elements.

4. Curriculum as a research project (investigation)

The author believes that curriculum should be recognized as a research project at university level and it must also be supported. The universities that became practically independent sooner than Iran's universities in the area of curriculum and have dense experience in this area have committed to this approach. Quoting from Short (1991), Mehr Mohammadi called these particular researches as thoughtful practice investigations.

5. Innovation in assessment of student learning

The crucial role of students' performance evaluation mechanism is to the extent that the author calls evaluation mechanism as the main component of operational ideology in curriculum (educational system); this has been inspired by the concept of operational ideology proposed by Eisner (1994). Operational ideology is a concept that is defined against clear curriculum ideology.

Finally quoting from Costa and Kallic (1995), Mehr Mohammadi emphasizes the importance of assessment and requires planners to familiarize themselves with new and various ways of assessment to achieve the authentic assessment. He stresses that the policy of decentralization and delegating authority to universities in a sense that it abandons the policy of Science Ministry's Mandate; this provides dynamicity of higher education and acceleration of scientific development.

f) School - based curriculum, a strategy for decentralization of curriculum planning systems

The specific aim of the last article reviewed here, by Piri et al. (2012) is a practical strategy for the decentralization of the curriculum planning system. The solution has been called school-

based curriculum. In this paper, the authors believe centralized curriculum planning systems are not responsive to the changing needs and have many shortcomings and drawbacks.

They believe the idea of school-based curriculum is based on the fact that the best place to design a curriculum is a place where teachers and students interact with each other. In the forthcoming parts of their article, they discuss about important features of the idea of school-based curriculum and its historical overview.

Historical background of school – based curriculum

Quoting from Mehr Mohammadi (2003), the authors Authors quoted have referred to the 1960s as the period of curricula reform. Quoting from Ahmadi (2007), they also state that in the 1960s, multiple curriculum centers was established to develop and design curricula, but the program failed due to the lack of flexibility in operation and not considering the needs of a growing change in several areas. Accordingly, in the late 70's and early 80s curriculum specialists tended to consider schools and teachers as partners in the curriculum process. This tendency was first found in countries with decentralized educational system and later in countries with centralized system.

Quoting from Sharon and Chung (2000), Piri and colleagues state that the emergence of new educational ideas was somehow effective in the creation of school – based curriculum, as the theories influenced by humanism, the theory of multiple intelligences, critical theories and constructivism were among the factors that emphasized integrated curriculum, the use of alternative assessment methods, team teaching and collaborative learning, and especially on school-based curriculum in educational reform and innovation in schools.

School – based curriculum and its role in decentralizing curriculum planning systems

Quoting from Aziz Zade (2002), Piri et al. consider school-based curriculum a type of decentralization that defines the school itself as the main factor in improving curriculum quality and emphasizes redistribution of decision-making authority as the most basic way to sustain the quality of schools. Moreover, some concepts such as participatory decision-making and authoritative school has also been utilized as relatively the same as school – based concept.

These expressions tend to describe educational systems in developing the authorities of members at the national level and in creating conducive conditions for participation, promoting innovation, continuous professional development and accountability.

Quoting from Goodman (1982) and Cheng (1996), the authors noted that making decisions on each element of the curriculum is obviously very difficult for any individual to do it alone; therefore, participatory decision-making is required. This type of decision making has the following advantages.

1. More participation can improve responsibility, accountability, commitment, performance support, and results.

2. Partnerships can provide opportunities for individuals and groups to enrich their professional experience and can also lead to professional development.
3. Participation in curriculum and decision-making provides more opportunities for schools, so that they overcome resistance and change ineffective activities.

Piri et al. state later that in the idea of school-based curriculum, the best place for curriculum design is the school and thus, the two main set of factors are effective in making decisions about school-based curriculum:

1. Official effective factors including local authorities, officials of school districts, administrators and teachers.
2. Non-official effective factors including society, industry owners, aid agencies, parents and learners.

Quoting from Agha Zade (2008), Piri et al. declare that school-based strategy in Iran's educational system is the major factor of educational modifications since 1998; this provides a pervasive and widespread public participation in educational system; followed by that, School Administrative Regulations Act in 2001 defines school-based curriculum as a central strategy to facilitate access to educational goals by delegating decision-making authority to schools.

Features of school – based curriculum

School-based curriculum must be internal or developed within the school rather than being imported. This means that it must be developed inside the school and by school authorities. This is the point which has been quoted from Nasr Isfahani (2003) about the features of school-based curriculum. The authors have also quoted from Howells (2003) that administrators, teachers, students and parents who want to participate, are involved in this type of curriculum; in such schools, teacher is of dignity, as having responsibility for the design and operation of curriculum is essential for the professional identity of teachers.

School-based curriculum: a sample of decentralization

Quoting from Salsabili (2008), Piri et al. state that the current situation in Iran's current centralized curriculum design on the one hand and the need for decentralizing the uniform and quite centralized and close system on the other hand prevent Iran's curriculum planning system from moving toward decentralization. Due to the tendency towards decentralization which is felt in Iran's educational system, using school - based curriculum can provide the context for decentralizing curriculum planning system.

The authors conclude and summarize by stating that it may be assumed that it's possible to achieve school - based curriculum in decentralized educational system; although it cannot be denied that this curriculum is easier to be achieved in decentralized system, this is possible to be applied to centralized educational systems due to the flexibility of the school-based curriculum in the field of curriculum selection and compatibility of subject matters, integration of curriculum regarding new approaches to teaching and complementing materials for curriculum.

Summary and conclusion of the articles' review

Analysis and evaluation of the opinions and ideas of academic experts and practitioners in Iran's educational system that were the authors of the articles discussed in this review, and also the theoretical studies conducted about the status of Iran's curriculum planning system indicate the necessity of making changes in the structure and decision-making authority in the curriculum planning system of Iran. In other words, summarizing the views of recent studies and other resources not mentioned in the current paper, it can be concluded that this change is necessary. But it should be noted that this necessity is conditional and it should be based on conditions.

This conditional implementation can be thought of at least from two aspects; national aspect and the aspect of international modifications and changes.

In the national aspect, the most important factors include paying attention to required capacity, appropriate design and implementation, and continuous monitoring and evaluation of decentralization curriculum. In the international aspect, observing the experiences of other countries' decentralized curriculum and the changes affecting these systems such as globalization, and so on are among important conditions of establishing decentralized curriculum. The review studies here clearly shared these factors:

Studies carried out in some countries showed that in some of them, decentralized curriculum and educational system have failed to achieve their goals and for this reason, they have returned back to the centralized systems.

Therefore, decentralized model cannot be considered the best model of decision-making in curriculum planning system. The required factor to achieve superior results in any situation of these two systems is the availability of particular contexts. The absence of any of these conditions results in the useless and inefficient diffusion of that system. The final point in this article reflect the reality that the efforts made in Iran's educational system, particularly in the field of curriculum that follows centralized system, suffers from lots of shortcomings and inefficiencies. Hence it has been attempted to move from the current situation to decentralized system; school-based curriculum is a good example for that. The notable point in this regard is that with all counsels and benefits that school-based decentralized approach provides, the efforts made in its design and operation in Iran's educational institutions have had a very slow movement.

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