

Designing a Pluralistic Curriculum Model for the Iranian Education System

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Abstract: The purpose of the present study is to propose a pluralistic curriculum model for the Iranian education system. To reach this end, Conceptual Analysis Model was utilized. Through purposeful sampling, three countries, namely the United States, Canada, and Australia were selected, and their curriculum elements were interpreted and investigated following theoretical conceptualizations. Then, to develop an optimal pluralistic curriculum model for the Iranian education system, the model was surveyed by curriculum experts. According to the findings, an optimal pluralistic curriculum model compared to the present condition which includes only two factors (viz. racial/ethnic inequality and gender inequality), should involve five factors including racial/ethnic iniquity, linguistic pluralism, gender inequality, social inequality, and religious diversity. In fact, the desired model, besides racial/ethnic inequality and gender inequality, should also subsume linguistic pluralism (second priority), social inequality (fourth priority), and religious diversity (fifth priority).

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1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, the astonishing pace of changes which our students experience or will experience in all walks of life in today's world, will compel the education system to meet their requirements. Students should have the capabilities to prepare them for facing the surging flood of change. In this post-industrial world or as some put it, the digital or communications era, students should possess the necessary capabilities to enable them to encounter the symbols and manifestations of a rapidly changing civilization. Under the current circumstances, construction and exchange of meaning through focusing on multiple types of symbolic systems in order to enhance students' communication abilities within the socio-cultural environment is a necessity and essentially, one of the main tasks of education systems is to serve as students' launching platform. Taking into consideration this important issue, so far different approaches to designing a curriculum have been developed and proposed in order to prepare students for entering a pluralistic society and a world filled with diversity and difference. Therefore, it could be stated that a pluralistic educational approach considers creating opportunities for the learners to involve and participate actively as a member of a school or a larger community. This approach particularly emphasizes the social changes and social justice. The common purpose of current models within this approach is to educate a global citizen, a critical analyst, a political participant, a proponent of cultural interaction and a

well-informed individual. Due to the significance of introducing this approach into the education system of all the world states including Iran and developing a curriculum suitable for it, this study seeks to identify a pluralistic curriculum approach through recognizing the objectives, content, teaching and testing methods as the elements of a curriculum, which has been accomplished by using a conceptual analysis research method.

Pluralism can be defined as the "reflection of gender, ethnic, and racial and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society in all institutionalized educational structures including norms, values and curricula" (Banks and Banks, 1997, p. 435). Therefore, the main characteristic of pluralism is liberation which requires interaction between the majority and minority groups and often among the minorities themselves (Lawson et al, 2011). Yet the increasing rate of immigration and further utilization of education systems by various cultures in a pluralistic world has intensified the need for using pluralistic approaches in education systems in various areas (Anderson et al, 2000), because under such conditions, construction and exchange of meaning through focusing on multiple types of symbolic systems in order to enhance students' communication abilities within the socio-cultural environment is a necessity, which will help the individual better interact in a global setting, and interacting in a global setting itself will lead to awareness of new solutions for common human problems and presentation of opinions and

recommendations. This is particularly a vital necessity for a country like Iran which boasts of having a great civilization and will lead to playing a more active role in the world community.

On the other hand, taking educational pluralism into consideration can enhance individuals' tolerance of people different from themselves due to contact with different cultures, which is regarded as one of the forms of socialization (Bradfield, 2001). Accordingly, educational pluralism experts believe that if education systems move along the rapid process of contemporary social, political, and cultural revolutions and prepare the suitable grounds for the evolution of identity, inevitably, they will have to develop curricula in accordance with the components and objectives of pluralistic education (Carpenter, 2000), otherwise the result of ignoring other societies' cultural revolutions, lack of proper interaction with other cultures and denying the fact that preventing from penetration of other cultures is practically impossible (due to dominance of media) is that students will face with an identity crisis, which is itself due to lack of knowledge about other cultures (Kendall, 2005).

Taking this important issue into consideration, educational planners and designers have so far adapted different approaches to developing curricula in regard to the diverse nature of knowledge (Kluth and Straut, 2001). These curricula have been occasionally developed in respect to diversity of teaching methods and subject matters as well as diversity of the learners (Kendall, 2005).

Direction of a monocultural education system (which seems to be inevitable due to the social context) has consequences. Among these instances such as limiting the growth of creativity, curiosity and self-confidence in children coming from subcultures (non-dominant cultures) and causing selfishness and mental egotism and egotism in behavior in children coming from dominant cultures may be mentioned. Among other consequences of unity-oriented education are reduction of moral, social and national empathy, identity confusion, and fear of being detached from one's real roots. The opponents of unity-oriented education refer to the abovementioned consequences and thus, prescribe a pluralistic educational approach. From the viewpoint of the proponents, pluralistic education seeks to liberate children from the limitations and restrictions imposed by the ethnic-racial axis. Its main mission is to raise consciousness in a child about the existence of other cultures, communities and ways of living and thinking, and its aim is to change his condition in a way that he may be set free from the constraint of biases and step into the world determined to explore its diversities. However, pluralistic education does not detach the child from his own culture, but rather enables him to

gain a broader insight into his own culture without losing grip on his cultural roots. The fundamental principal of pluralistic education is to create sensitivity to innate pluralism in the real world and to this end; schools can organize various religious gatherings, create diversity in subjects, subject matter of textbooks, and curriculum, and pay more attention to costume diversity and moral differences. From a pluralistic view, a curriculum must possess two main characteristics. First, it must be free from any narrow-mindedness; because no curriculum can possibly cover all the world issues and any curriculum has to be developed selectively. Second, a curriculum must be presented in a way that it will be free from superstition and prejudice as much as possible. Teachers must teach students about other societies, cultures, religions and ethical systems and through dialogue with students raise questions about other cultures and societies, and finally, let students judge. However, pluralistic education does not hold that cultures, societies and religions are all equally good, but rather acknowledges their strengths and weaknesses (Toorth, 1998). Pluralistic education is a philosophical concept based on the assumption that all children regardless of their race, social class or gender, must have equal learning opportunities at schools (Elkind, 2001). The origin of the reform movements based on the ideal of considering diversity of cultures and societies in education could be traced back to the decade 1980-1990 onwards. Because during these years, numerous reports were published on educational organizations' need for taking diversity of cultures and nations into consideration (Adams, 2004) so that under the current circumstances, construction and exchange of meaning through focusing on multiple types of symbolic systems in order to enhance students' communication abilities within the socio-cultural environment is a necessity and essentially, one of the main tasks of education systems is to serve as students' launching platform (Hiss and Parki, 1993).

But taking into consideration the advantages and necessity of pluralism in education systems as a requirement of living within the global community as well as direction of global education towards pluralism, the need for developing a pluralistic curriculum for implementation in Iranian schools was felt. Although, so far such a curriculum has not been developed in Iran and requires significant cultural and scientific infrastructures, yet by creating the required conditions this approach may be employed. Basically, one of the important areas of curriculum development is the epistemological area where theories and approaches are introduced, even though some of them may not be suitable for implementation under certain circumstances. Therefore, this study has been conducted in order to present a suitable model of a

pluralistic curriculum in Iran so that the main factors and practical methods of

presenting and implementing a pluralistic curriculum in Iranian education system may be identified. Thus, the questions that this study seeks to answer are the following:

- 1- What is a pluralistic curriculum?
- 2- What are the characteristics of a pluralistic curriculum?
- 3- What are the viewpoints of pluralists on the elements of a curriculum?
- 4- Can a pluralistic model be presented for the Iranian education system?

2. Method

This study seeks to present a suitable model of a pluralistic curriculum in Iran. With regard to methodology, this research is based on conceptual analysis method. Basically, conceptual analysis method means understanding and improving a set of concepts or conceptual structures based on which we interpret experience, express intentions, categorize issues and conduct researches (Short et al, 2009).

Therefore, in order to deal properly with this significant issue, three conceptual analysis methods have been used in this study based on the issues contained in each step. In the first step, conceptual interpretation method has been used, which provides suitable objective interpretations of the concepts that are used for formulating the studies and curriculum plans. Because in order for the propositions to be useful for the objectives and principles of pluralistic curriculum, they had to be rendered into terms with a lower level of abstraction and this required a more comprehensive insight into the concept of pluralistic curriculum and determining how to make objective the components of pluralism in a curriculum. Since the aim of the next study was conceptualizing or developing the concept of pluralistic curriculum, in this part by adhering to conceptual analysis method which provides justified explanations of the range of references of a term in ordinary language, objective instances of applying pluralism to curriculum were dealt with and using comparative method, a more accurate interpretation of the characteristics of pluralistic curriculum components was provided.

Finally, since in order to present a suitable model of pluralistic curriculum for the Iranian education system it is necessary to examine the compatibility of the concept of pluralism with religious Iranian values, in this phase, assessment of conceptual structure was used. In this method which provides a justified definition of conceptual structures (Short et al, 2009, p. 44), issues such as studying the components of Iranian curriculum based on the experts' opinions were dealt with.

3. Results

Obtained results indicated that pluralistic curriculum is a curriculum which in its elements, diversity of individual characteristics are considered and respected. In other words, in pluralistic curriculum a special attention is given to various and growing needs of different societies. Components of this curriculum include considering racial and ethnic inequalities, social class inequalities, diversity of religions and sects, linguistic diversity and gender inequalities, which lead to curriculum characteristics such as: providing grounds for reducing prejudice against different cultures within the curriculum, providing equal opportunities (diversity in educational strategies) in curriculum, taking into consideration the fact that various identities, races and beliefs coexist within educational environments, creating proper grounds for understanding various cultures, introducing national and religious culture and values to the world, providing the grounds for understanding the concept of poverty, introducing the concept of social justice, introducing the methods for reducing class difference, teaching social norms and values, introducing various religions and sects, providing the grounds for preventing religious prejudice, teaching respect for other religions, introducing local languages and acknowledging them, providing the grounds for multi-lingual courses, introducing a common language for communication with everyone, formal instruction of a second or a foreign language at the national level, proving the grounds for eradicating negative views and lack of knowledge about the linguistic diversity within society, providing the grounds for introducing women's rights, taking into consideration the mutual relationship between men and women, providing the grounds for improving women's condition, familiarity with the active role of women in development of society, providing equal educational opportunities for boys and girls and finally, improving educational texts in girls' curriculum.

Also, educational pluralism has specific aspects which have manifested within the curriculum in a certain way. These characteristics include paying attention to reducing biases so that children will have a positive attitude towards other students from different ethnicities and cultures, identify knowledge structure and its formation within various

cultures and educational equality which means education systems should teach strategies to the students which will be usable for all the races. In this regard, unifying the content of the curriculum becomes significant. In this aspect, pluralistic curriculum seeks to provide content in which knowledge, attitude and experiences of various cultures are

presented. Also, methods in which students learn to respect opposing ideas and in which

knowledge is considered a changeable and dynamic phenomenon- not the fixed and static facts in a textbook. Consequently, also in evaluations apart from attention to results and progress, participation of students in the process of teaching/learning is also basically taken into consideration. Besides, various evaluation methods are employed which suit the characteristics and knowledge of each student and take different cognitive, emotional and behavioral levels into consideration.

In order to analyze different aspects of this model, first, using an exploratory and library research and asking two open-end questions, experts' and some of colleagues' opinions regarding important factors of pluralistic curriculum was gathered. Validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through consulting academic experts and Iranian curriculum experts. Reliability of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha in a primary study was obtained 94% and for data analysis factor analysis method and Friedman test were used.

Since the aim of this research is to identify the factors related to pluralistic curriculum, in order to identify these factors, exploratory factor analysis was used and factors which were important in developing a pluralistic curriculum were recognized.

Prior to conducting exploratory factor analysis, suitability of correlation matrix for factor finding was examined using KMO test and Bartlett's test of sphericity in which KMO value was 0.69 and level of significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity was also obtained less than 0.001. On the whole, the results of both tests were satisfactory. The suitable value of KMO index (0.69) testified to suitability of the items for extracting the factors. Also, significance of Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed internal correlation of the variables and possibility of forming a set of variables (factors).

Table 1. KMO test and Bartlett's test of sphericity

KMO test		.692
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Chi-square	2126.638
	df	253
	Sig.	.000

Exploratory factor analyses by using principal

factor analysis and varimax rotation were used to specify the number of pluralistic curriculum subscales. Minimum factor load for variables on one factor based on Caesar test was supposed to be 0.30.

In order to determine the number of factors, factors the eigenvalues of which were more than 3 were selected based on which in this analysis, under the current condition, 2 factors were extracted that on the whole include 10 variables. Extracted factors were labeled and along with their eigenvalues, variance percentage and cumulative variance percentage have been presented in Table 2.

Table 2. exploratory variance of the key factors of the current condition

Factors	Racial and Ethnic Inequality	Gender Inequality
Eigenvalues	6/208	3/812
Variance Percentage	22/085	17/539
Cumulative Variance Percentage	22/085	39/624

As shown in Table 2, under the current condition the two factors of racial and ethnic inequality and gender inequality have the highest correlation with the set of factors of pluralistic curriculum.

Table 3. ranking of factors under current condition based on Friedman's test

Factor	Ranking of Average
Racial and Ethnic Inequality	4/60
Gender Inequality	4/04

Table 3 presents the results of Friedman's ranking test for binary components which are respectively; 1- racial and ethnic inequality and 2- gender inequality.

As mentioned in the findings of the first question, in order to determine the number of factors, factors with eigenvalues more than 3 were selected based on which in this analysis, under the suitable conditions, 5 factors were extracted which include 23 variables. Extracted factors were labeled and along with their eigenvalues, variance percentage and cumulative variance percentage have been presented in Table 4.

Table 4. exploratory variance of the key factors of the suitable condition

Factors	Racial and Ethnic Inequality	linguistic Diversity	Gender Inequality	Social Inequality	Religious Diversity
Eigenvalues	4/423	3/908	3/240	2/639	1/758
Variance Percentage	15/898	15/167	14/670	12/408	11/285
Cumulative Variance Percentage	15/898	31/064	45/735	58/143	69/428

Since the unrotated matrix and structural factor loads were not significant, extracted factors based on the common method, were obtained using varimax rotation and this rotation increased the factors to 5 under suitable condition. As seen in Table 4, the five components include: 1- racial and ethnic inequality, 2- linguistic diversity, 3- gender inequality, 4- social inequality, and 5- religious diversity.

Based on the findings presented in Table 4, the five extracted factors on the whole, explain 69.428 % of the total variance. In this research, the factor of racial and ethnic inequality explains the greatest part of the total variance and the variable which has loaded this factor more than any other factor is the variable of creating proper grounds for understanding various cultures, which has been presented in Table 5. The second factor which explains the greatest part of the remaining matrix is the factor of linguistic diversity and the most important factors which together have loaded this factor with the greatest load are the variables of familiarity with and acknowledging local languages and preparing the grounds for abandoning negative attitudes and lack of knowledge about linguistic diversity in society, which has been presented in Table 5. According to Table 5, the ranking of the factors within the suitable pluralistic curriculum based on Friedman's test is as follows:

Table 6. the ranking of factors under suitable condition based on Friedman's test

Factors	Ranking of Average
Racial and Ethnic Inequality	4/60
linguistic Diversity	3/50
Gender Inequality	3/18
Social Inequality	2/19
Religious Diversity	1/15

Results of the factor analysis of the fourth research question regarding presenting a pluralistic curriculum for the Iranian education system indicated that all the five aspects of pluralistic curriculum including racial and ethnic inequality, linguistic diversity, gender inequality, social inequality, and religious diversity are significant in explaining a pluralistic curriculum. This finding is compatible with the results of some of the studies; including Cubris and Noy's (2006) study in which through a comparative study of the religious and cultural aspects of pluralistic curriculum of religious education in several successful countries, they have shown that in these countries multiple instructions are provided in a way that curricula are presented with a variety of contents and methods which are in accordance with different religions and based on their needs, students refer to each of these curricula and they are free to choose as they wish; also Flower's (2002) research which studies the incorporation of liberal and pluralistic components

into various aspects of education and emphasizes that pluralistic education should be started at the very early ages and seek to establish flexibility, mutual respect and rational thinking in children's character and at high school, other cultures and religions should be introduced as part of the curriculum; and also Fakouhi's research (2002) which takes into consideration the necessity of paying attention to various ethnicities and culture and stresses that national identity is internally associated with local identities and externally associated with global identity; as well as Tavasoli and Ghasemi's (2002) research which emphasizes increasing interracial interactions in the areas of livelihood, authority, emotional and intellectual aspects, and sense of belonging, convergence and loyalty of ethnicities to the communal cross-ethnic identity (national or regional identity).

The other result of this research revealed that the suitable model of pluralistic curriculum in comparison to the current condition which is composed of the components of racial and ethnic inequality and gender inequality includes five components including racial and ethnic inequality, linguistic diversity, gender inequality, social inequality and religious diversity. In fact, the suitable model not only includes racial and ethnic and gender inequality, but also components of linguistic diversity (second priority), social inequality (fourth priority) and religious diversity (fifth priority).

In this research, linguistic diversity refers to the existence of an enlightened policy for education system curriculum in order to preserve the language of the minorities and help them enter the larger community. In fact, schools should teach several languages, especially the local (minority) languages and the majority language so that individuals will be enabled to enhance their capabilities. This means designing a form of education that is genuinely multicultural, that is; an education which provides minority languages a better status, not only within the education system but also in the embodiment of the "national culture"- something any country strives to promote. The nineteenth article of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution states that the people of Iran, regardless of their ethnicity or tribal origin, are entitled to equal rights; and that color, race and language are not considered as advantages. The fifteenth article of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution states that the official language and orthography of Iran is Persian; however, the use of local and ethnic languages in the press and mass media as well as instruction of these languages at schools along with Persian language is not forbidden.

Social inequality also means that individuals have unequal political, economic or cultural

opportunities. Social inequality may have different origins. Some researchers believe that the main origins of inequality are individual differences in regard to innate capabilities and motivation and tendency towards hardworking. Another viewpoint holds that inequality is in fact based on the discriminations society makes while treating individuals. The reason behind these discriminations are characteristics such as social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender and religious categories which have been socially defined (Kamali, 2000).

Religious diversity refers to tolerance and peaceful coexistence to prevent wars and disputes; however, this does not mean that various sects must be uniformed, but rather that in spite of diverging tendencies of various religions, they should respect each other, and although each adheres to its own beliefs, they should coexist peacefully. Under these circumstances, curriculum should be presented to all students regardless of their religious affinities. The nineteenth article of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution states that according to the verse "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity", Muslims are obliged to treat non-Muslims kindly and with Islamic equity and respect their basic rights. And the twelfth article states that the official religion of Iran is Islam and Jafari Esna Ashari sect and other sects including Hanafi, Shafei, Maleki, etc. are all respected and the followers of these sects are free to practice their religious rituals according to their own jurisprudence and also in their religious education. Therefore, based on the conducted study and the experts' opinions as well as the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution presenting a pluralistic curriculum for the Iranian education system is a significant necessity.

4. Discussion

One of the main features of today's world is racial, cultural, ethnic, social class, religious and linguistic diversity which is considered an influential factor in interpersonal interactions and social structures. In this age, due to the vast amount of physical and virtual interactions of the individuals and cultures and removal of arbitrary boundaries, inevitable bonds have been formed between individuals and cultures. Coexistence of cultures and their confluence has increased the likelihood of challenges and tensions between individuals and cultures. Therefore, devising suitable mechanisms to converge cultures, creating mutual understanding and interaction among them in order to secure peaceful coexistence and eliminating possible

misunderstandings, gains even more significance. In this regard, one of the main tasks of the education system in multicultural societies is designing the curricula sensitive to diversities and responsive to multicultural characteristics. Thus, pluralistic curriculum as an urgent need in multicultural societies which strive to enjoy peaceful coexistence is a vital issue. This approach rejects and challenges racism and other forms of discrimination at schools and communities and instead confirms and emphasizes (ethnic, cultural and racial) pluralism.

By accepting the significance of education system's attention to multicultural educational policies and consequently development of a pluralistic curriculum, the necessity of developing such a curriculum in Iran due to existence of different ethnicities, various cultures and languages as features of a multicultural society is felt more than ever. In this study, the researcher has studied the current condition of pluralistic curriculum in Iran with a critical view and through necessary analyses; he has determined the share of each of the various aspects of pluralistic curriculum in the Iranian education system so that in this way a model for pluralistic curriculum in Iran may be presented.

5. Conclusion:

Results of the study indicated that the suitable model for pluralistic curriculum in comparison with the current condition which is composed of the components of racial and ethnic inequality and gender inequality includes five components including racial and ethnic inequality, linguistic diversity, gender inequality, social inequality and religious diversity. In fact, the suitable model not only includes racial and ethnic and gender inequality, but also components of linguistic diversity (second priority), social inequality (fourth priority) and religious diversity (fifth priority).

In this research, the suitable model of pluralistic curriculum for the Iranian education system is linguistic diversity which refers to the existence of an enlightened policy for education system curriculum in order to preserve the language of the minorities and help them enter the larger community. In fact, schools should teach several languages, especially the local (minority) languages and the majority language so that individuals will be enabled to enhance their capabilities. This means designing a form of education that is genuinely multicultural, that is; an education which provides minority languages a better status, not only within the education system but also in the embodiment of the "national culture"- something any country strives to promote. The nineteenth article of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution states that the people of Iran, regardless of their ethnicity or tribal origin, are entitled to equal rights; and that color, race

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Social inequality also means that individuals have unequal political, economic or cultural opportunities. Social inequality may have different

origins. Some researchers believe that the main origins of inequality are individual differences in regard to innate capabilities and motivation and tendency towards hardworking. Another viewpoint holds that inequality is in fact based on the discriminations society makes while treating individuals. The reason behind these discriminations are characteristics such as social, economic, racial, ethnic, gender and religious categories which have been socially defined (Kamali, 2000).

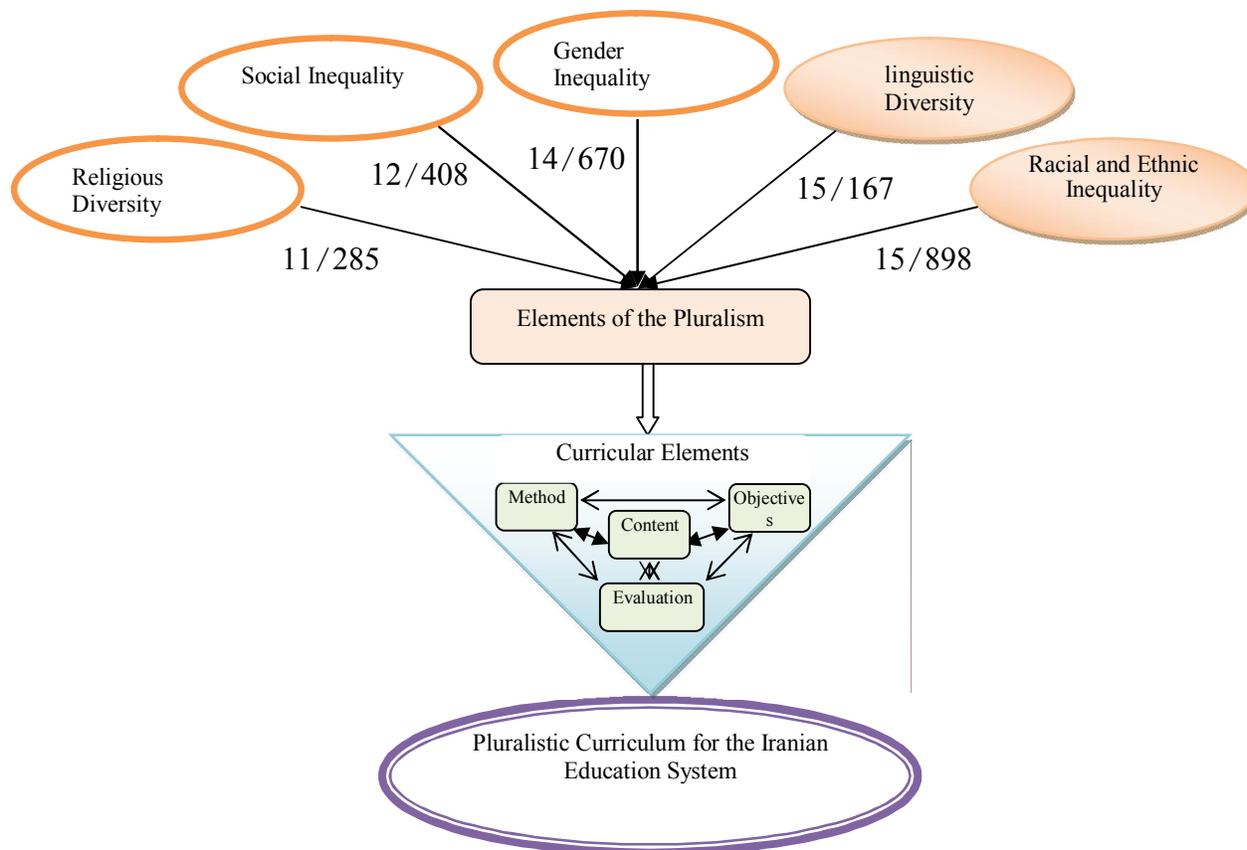


Diagram 1: Pluralistic Curriculum Model for the Iranian Education System

Religious diversity refers to tolerance and peaceful coexistence to prevent wars and disputes; however, this does not mean that various sects must be uniformed, but rather that in spite of diverging tendencies of various religions, they should respect each other, and although each adheres to its own beliefs, they should coexist peacefully. Under these circumstances, curriculum should be presented to all students regardless of their religious affinities. The nineteenth article of the Islamic Republic of Iran's constitution states that according to the verse "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with

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