

The Impeding Factors and Strategies for Formulating University Curriculum Goals (A Social Capital Development Approach)

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Abstract:

Social capital refers to trust-based connections and relationships between human and organizational collections as a valuable resource. Educational organizations are one of the institutions that influence the formation of social capital through the formulation of goals. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impeding factors and the social capital development strategies in formulating higher education curriculum goals, which was carried out in a qualitative way using the grounded theory method. 10 experts in the field of curriculum design and social capital were interviewed with. In the process of encoding the goals, the main categories of research were identified by social adaptation and social reconstruction approaches as follows. The identified barriers included: the inadequacy of the curriculum in catering for the needs of the social community, not revising the curricula, the inadequacy of the curriculum in increasing social participation and lack of attention to promoting social capital in formulating the curriculum objectives; and the strategies included: the application of various techniques of needs assessment for formulating the objectives, identifying needs from the point of view of the curriculum designers, identifying needs from the perspective of social science experts, revising the curriculum, identifying the problems of social capital development, determining the scope of changes, identifying the context and conditions involved in changes and determining the goals.

Keywords:

Curriculum, Social Capital, Goals, University

1. Introduction

The scholars consider many functions for social capital. Social capital, through the use of common items among people in the community, creates a spirit of mutual trust in various ways and serves the interests of the economy and creates a space that, while reducing the cost of using human resources, increases the interaction between them. Social capital, with its own ethical and behavioral rules and values in the field of

economics bounds individuals to engaging, exchanging and deciding in different social groups [1].

The existence or absence of social capital has a direct impact on different areas of society, such as economics and politics, but its impact on cultural development of society is more than other areas, and social capital is considered as the basis of the cultural development of any society. For the cultural development of any society, the social capital of this sector must be discovered and exploited. As social capital is strengthened in the cultural sectors of society, cultural development accelerates and in this way, the behavior of the society members and their interactions become predictable; because individuals behave in the framework of special cultural rules, and this accounted behavior leads to the expansion of trust in society and by increasing trust in the various cultural sectors of society, social and cultural relations get more fluid and less costly [2].

All of these benefits will be realized if social capital is properly developed and there are the necessary means to support it at the community. In order to develop social capital more than before, it is necessary to strengthen its supporting institutions in society. Social capital is created in the preconditions provided by institutions such as family, government, religion, civil institutions and educational system. Among this, the effect of educational system is more than other institutions due to having a direct relationship with the community. This effect is transferred to people through instructing and education. In today's societies, education has two formal and informal sectors. Its formal sector includes schools and universities and education & research institutions, and other forms of learning such as religious congregations and workshops, learning through the media, etc. are parts of the informal sector [3].

Higher education is one of the main pillars of the Iranian educational system and, given that the curriculum in its previous years emphasizes on teaching the lessons, the role of the higher education system is crucial for creating a key social capital.

In the past, the development of a curriculum has been done regardless of its impact on social capital and only with the aim of teaching the material concepts. Therefore, it is necessary to apply the required changes in the curriculum development so that these changes ultimately lead to improved social capital. This effect can be achieved through any of the curriculum pillars. The formulation of objectives for the curriculum in its early stages is a significant component due to its impact on the course of curriculum planning. If the development of social capital is considered at the stage of planning the curriculum objectives, one can hope that future generations will have an adequate level of social capital after graduating from the university. Thus, the purpose of this study is to identify the barriers and provide strategies for developing higher education curricula for the development of social capital among students.

1.1. Research Questions

What are the inhibitors of social capital promotion in the formulation of university curriculum objectives?

What strategies should be considered when developing the objectives of university curricula for the development of social capital?

1.2. Research Theoretical Background

In essence, humans respond to their needs through interaction with others. The effect of these mutual interactions and their role is to the extent that makes life impossible when eliminated. Meanwhile, social scientists with a curious attitude in societies have studied these actions and identified a set of factors that they call social capital. The concept of social capital involves concepts such as trust, cooperation, and collaboration among members of a group or community that formulates a purposeful system which guides them towards valuable goals [4].

Social capital is a set of norms in social systems that promote the level of cooperation of members of a society and reduce the costs of exchanges and communications. In other words, social capital can simply be defined as the existence of a certain set of informal norms or values that the members of a group share [5].

Social capital is a subject in social organization and is a potential source of value that can be controlled and changed for strategic and profit-oriented goals [6].

Social capital refers to the values and norms that derive from group and social interrelationships understood by people, who in turn, create these links and relationships as well [7].

Social capital involves a social framework that facilitates the relationships among individuals within this framework, and the lack of it will impose more cost to the community members for achieving their goals. In other words, as physical capital leads to changes in various materials for shaping tools that facilitate production, human capital also creates changes in individuals (skills and capabilities of individuals) that enable them to work in new ways [8].

The social capital includes the bilateral relations, interactions and networks that arise among human groups and represents the level of trust found among a particular group and community as the outcome of continuous obligations and norms consistent with social structure [9].

Eisenstadt believes that the most important issue in shaping a society with proper social capital is to pay attention to the trust, solidarity, and social participation of individuals, and the stability of the modern social order is impossible without public solidarity and participation in the light of trust [4].

If we consider social capital as the connection and social networks that can create a sense of cooperation among those present in the networks in question, what is becoming more and more important is the role of civil society institutions in the formation of this capital. Different institutions such as family, educational and religious centers, government, etc. are influential in this [10].

According to many experts in the field of social sciences, one of the most influential institutions in the formation of social capital is educational institutions [11].

Today, at the community level, education in the broad sense is a synonym to "socialization," and both words embody the concept of the transfer of culture from one person or group to another person and group. Pedagogical-educational institutions can contribute to personal growth and welfare due to the special functions they carry out. As any level of education, higher education moves along the same lines with educational theories to achieve its goals. Higher education is the point of intersection of three realms of culture, power and knowledge. Undoubtedly, the educational system operates in the context of society and culture, and it has an ongoing trade with it [12].

Higher education is regarded as one of the most important stages of formal education and continuous learning, which has taken on many tasks and missions throughout its history. In fact, the curriculum is the beating heart of the academic centers and the most important component of the higher education system, and it plays a decisive and undeniable role in achieving the goals and missions of higher education in quantitative and qualitative terms. Focusing on the curriculum, recognizing and analyzing the effects of different factors on its quality have a direct effect on the quality of higher education [13].

Before the twentieth century, curriculum was considered as “determining the content material, what has to be learned, subjects relevant to the student, school experiences, and the different subject materials for a year or an academic course, a list of educational goals or chapters of the lessons. But with the advent of the 20th century, due to the importance and role of education and the development of educational research, the traditional concept of curriculum has changed and the newer concept of "organizing the activities and learning experiences under the guidance of a school for the realization of individual and social growth and competence of learners and achievement of educational goals” attracted the attention of many scholars [14].

Shariatmadari defines the curriculum as "all experiences, studies, discussions, group and individual activities, and other actions that the student conducts under the supervision and guidance of educational environment." From this point of view, the curriculum is not limited to the classroom experiences and activities of individuals [15].

According to Doll, the curriculum is a formal and informal flow through which learners are supervised by professors, gain knowledge and understanding, or acquire skills, or change their attitudes and values or their value system. In his view, each educational environment has a formal and structured curriculum; and an unstructured, informal, and hidden curriculum. The structured curriculum includes the content, goals, and intentions of the lessons and the organization of education [16].

In the view of some scholars, the curriculum is considered as a factor for social reconstruction. In this view, it is argued that higher education institutions are generally established to provide services to the community. Hence, universities must serve the social needs, and curricula must be designed in order to meet these needs [17].

Cline introduces nine elements as curriculum elements: goals, content, learning activities, teaching methods, materials and learning resources, evaluation, time, space, and grouping. The most common view in this field considers the curriculum, as containing the decision on four elements of goals, content, methodology and evaluation [18].

Targeting is the first step that planners do. This stage has an irreplaceable effect on the fate of the designed curriculum. Goals are hierarchical and include ideal, general, and behavioral goals. One of the sources is the development of community goals. The formulation of goals is based on the needs of the community, taking into account the circumstances and conditions of the community as well as meeting the social needs. The basic foundation here is the needs of the community, professions and jobs that are needed in the society in the present and future [19].

The purpose of this research is to investigate the strategies to strengthen students' social capital in formulating goals and its deterrent factors.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Materials and Methods

This qualitative study is a grounded or fundamental study. The statistical population of this study was professors of curriculum planning and sociologists who taught in universities and higher education institutions in Tehran in 2015. According to the necessity of using informed and well-known individuals, 10 cases were selected by purposive sampling.

The main method of data collection was semi-structured interview. After the initial coordination with individuals, meetings were held at the researcher's office or at the respondent's workplace. Before starting the meeting for ten minutes, a full description of the purpose of the research and the method of concluding it was given to the interviewee, and then the meeting began. For having complete information, after obtaining interviewee's permission, all the sessions were recorded and then transcribed based on these documents. Initially, with the design of 3 to 4 general questions, the subject was discussed and, using responses given by the interviewee, the next questions were asked. During the meetings, attempts were made to avoid distraction from the subject without making the interviewee sensitive to it and to move only within the preset framework. The basis for identifying the validity and reliability of the interview has been the checklist of the researcher's questions. After the first interview, the initial analysis of the results was done and, by comparing them with the research questions and objective, changes were made to the checklist questions as well as to the manner and priority of questioning. The interviews were held individually and the duration of each interview was between one to two hours.

For data analysis, data coding was done using open, axial, and selective categories.

The text of the interviews was first transcribed and, after deleting the irrelevant comments on the subject of the research, the information was classified into dozens of paragraphs. The paragraphs that had the same subject were placed adjacent. At this stage, the concepts of scientific value were extracted from the text of the statements and were assigned a name for each one.

In the axial coding, the data that were previously split into concepts and categories in open coding joined to link between a category and its subcategories. At this stage of coding, questions were raised to identify the type of relationship between similar concepts. This has led to the recognition of the concepts that make it possible to form a more fundamental category together, and each of them fell into one of these categories.

In selective coding, the axial category was chosen and its relation to other categories was done, and by searching for affirmative or non-affirmative instances the validity of these relationships was increased.

Table 1 and 2 show the processing of coding.

Table 1. *The Axial and Selective Coding of the Obstacles in the Goals-Setting Phase.*

Conceptual codes	Secondary theme
9. The inefficiency of the curriculum in preparing an individual for the society 37. The disability of curriculum in meeting to the expectations	Inadequacy of the curriculum in responding to the needs of the social community

<p>of society.</p> <p>19. The failure of higher education curriculum in responding to the needs of society.</p> <p>45. The disability of current curriculum in educating the individuals that society needs.</p> <p>57. Lack of coordination of the curricula with the needs of the society.</p> <p>35. Lack of proportionality between society's needs with curriculum items</p> <p>25. The problems of current higher education in responding to the demands of the society</p>	
<p>18. Lack of change in curriculum over the past years</p> <p>42 The Obsolescence of the curriculum of some disciplines</p> <p>26. Being over the curriculum in the country</p>	The lack of review of curricula
<p>10. The disability of the Curriculum in promoting social capital</p> <p>41. The weakness of current curriculum in creating social capital</p> <p>27. The curriculum disability in influencing social capital</p> <p>34. The failure of higher education in producing social capital</p>	The inadequacy of the curriculum in increasing social participation
<p>17. Not considering social capital as an objective in the current curriculum</p> <p>28. Not considering the promotion of social capital in setting the goals of previous curricula</p> <p>6. Not considering the components of social capital in the needs-assessment of previous curricula</p>	The lack of attention to the development of social capital in formulating the curriculum objectives

Table 2. *The Axial and Selective Coding of Goals-setting Strategies.*

Conceptual codes	Secondary theme
<p>4. Emphasizing on needs-assessment for goals</p> <p>33. Using goal-oriented needs-assessment methods</p> <p>16. Using methods based on goal setting in needs-assessment</p> <p>29. Using goal-oriented methods</p> <p>44. Defining goals before needs-assessment</p> <p>47. Needs-assessment focused on goals</p>	Applying different techniques to evaluate the needs for developing objectives
<p>12. Referring to social scientists to review the expectations from the curriculum in the needs-assessment stage</p> <p>24. Identifying the expectations from curriculum by referring to curriculum experts</p> <p>39. Distinguishing the goal from change by referring to curriculum experts</p> <p>48. Asking expert people in the field of social sciences about changes</p>	Identifying needs from the perspective of The curriculum design experts
<p>1. Asking the opinion of experts of social sciences</p> <p>21. Identifying the expectations from the curriculum by referring to experts of social capital area</p> <p>11. Designing the curriculum in collaboration with social scientists</p> <p>32. Using the experts of social capital for design and</p>	Identifying needs from the perspective of the social sciences scholars

implementation of the curriculum 7. Using social science experts for needs-assessment 20. Distinguishing the goal from change by referring to social capital experts	
46. Reviewing the program in collaboration with curriculum specialists 22. Identifying educational problems in the field of social capital according to experts' opinion 37. Clarifying the borders and limits of curriculum changes 38. Specifying the range of changes	Reviewing the curriculum
43. Identifying the sections requiring change in curriculum 31. Understanding curriculum sections which need to be changed	Identifying problems in the development of social capital identifying the limits of change
2. Using society-based theories and perspectives for curriculum goals 14. Using community-based methods for needs-assessment 30. Using the theories with a society-based approach 8. Needs-assessment based on society needs 23. Meeting the needs of the society in the needs-assessment process 15. Formulating the curriculum goals based on the needs of society. 3. Formulating the curriculum goals in line with the needs of society. 36. Using society-based theories 40. Applied goals in line with the needs of society.	Identifying the context and conditions involved in the change setting goals with two social adaptation and social reconstruction approaches

3. Results and Discussion

In total, 48 conceptual codes were obtained from the interviewees in open encoding. In the axial coding, the second level concepts were obtained. The number of concepts on barriers was reduced to 17 at the first-level and to 4 at the second level, and the strategies reduced from 31 codes to 8 codes. In the last step, the main topic of the research, namely the formulation of goals in the selected coding, was identified.

The inadequacy of the curriculum in responding to the needs of the social community, the lack of review of curricula, the inadequacy of the curriculum in increasing social participation and the lack of attention to the development of social capital in formulating the curriculum objectives were the barriers that the interviewees put forward.

Applying different techniques to evaluate the needs for developing objectives, identifying needs from the perspective of the curriculum design experts, identifying needs from the perspective of the social sciences scholars, reviewing the curriculum, identifying problems in the development of social capital, identifying the limits of change, identifying the context and conditions involved in the change And setting goals with two social adaptation and social reconstruction approaches were the strategies presented by the interviewees. The following Table which is the combination and integration of the main category, its obstacles, strategies was formulated.

Table 3. Final combination of impeding factors and strategies

Obstacles in goals		strategies in goals		
Inadequacy of the curriculum in responding to the needs of the social community The lack of review of curricula The inadequacy of the curriculum in increasing social participation The lack of attention to the development of social capital in formulating the curriculum objectives.		Applying different techniques to evaluate the needs for developing objectives identifying needs from the perspective of the curriculum design experts Identifying needs from the perspective of the social sciences scholars Reviewing the curriculum Identifying problems in the development of social capital identifying the limits of change Identifying the context and conditions involved in the change setting goals with two social adaptation and social reconstruction approaches		Promoting Social

According to the interviewees, university institution has an influential role in the low social capital of individuals. Regarding the statements such as "given the disability of the curriculum in promoting social capital, it is necessary to set new goals for it to help promote social capital"; "It is a fact that the present curriculum cannot promote social capital"; "in this regard, higher education also has an impact similar to other educational institutions such as schools and families"; "it can be said that the current curriculum has been weak in the field of improving social capital and responding to the expectations of the community"; and "in the past, the improvement of social capital components has never been a part of the curriculum objectives; therefore, the current programs are not efficient in this regard"; indicates that interviewees believe the higher education system, despite its high potential, has not had a proper impact on the development of social capital and its components, including trust and participation in students. Zakersalehi concluded that the level of scientific socialization of students was low after graduation and the only work that university is doing is teaching and it does not provide students the possibility of scientific socialization [12].

Mohseni in a study showed that social trust among people with university education is lower than those without education [20].

Sharepour also proved the existence of a negative correlation between the components of social capital and education [21].

Morshedi concluded in his research that the trust and social participation among students and educated people is low or less than average [22].

Out of the curriculum elements, development of goals was one of the most important issues that the interviewees referred to. Tonkaboni et al. concluded in a research entitled "The Relationship between Higher Education Curriculum and Social Capital" that there is a positive correlation between educational objectives of higher education curriculum and social participation [23].

The findings show that the current curriculum is very predetermined, and the items provided are formalities for different disciplines and are not going to take place. The interviewees emphasized that the current curriculum in the higher education system is more decisive for content that needs to be taught and other curriculum areas are not addressed to or, if there are any, are not taken into consideration by anyone. In this situation, the first step is to improve the curriculum by revising and making extensive changes to it. Reforms should be made both in the redesign and modification of the curriculum, and the necessary attention should be paid to its proper implementation. In a study titled "Description and Recognition of the Concept of Social Capital in the Higher Education System", it was stated that in order to promote social capital, the elements of higher education curriculum, including the determination of goals, should be regulated based on the components of social capital [24].

4. Conclusions

Considering the urgent need of society for social capital along with other forms of capital, the interviewees believed that efforts to promote social capital were one of the key components of the curriculum. This issue is also in line with one of the most prominent curriculum theories. Some curriculum scholars believe that when it comes to measuring needs, one should pay attention to the needs of the society, and finds what the society expects from the educational system, and transfer these needs to learners in the form of a curriculum. If the curriculum planners take into account the needs of the society and incorporate them into the curriculum, all of the curriculum will be focused on meeting these needs, and the students and the professors will move on a definite path. Higher education curriculum, if correctly targeted, will be able to achieve its ultimate goal of promoting social capital. To design an appropriate curriculum, qualified people in the field of curriculum planning and social capital should take the responsibility and want them to express their expectations of an effective curriculum. To identify the needs of a successful curriculum, one can either act concisely or dedicate an independent process for the identification of needs. The second view has been emphasized in this research. In this perspective, the focus of setting objectives for the curriculum is on social experimentation and emphasizing the transfer of the required culture to students. In other words, setting objectives for curricula is pursued with the ultimate goal of socializing learners and is arranged to provide the values and traditions needed by society as well as the necessary platforms for active participation of people in society. In a curriculum that emphasizes the development of social capital, the emphasis and focus of the curriculum is on strengthening critical thinking skills, group process skills, and skills that are unavoidable to participate in a democratic society. The curriculum needs assessment process should emphasize both the current and future needs of the society. The retrospective view guides education in line with the existing conditions of the society. In contrast to this view, a prospective viewpoint builds curriculum based on the needs of the society. Given the identified needs and existing shortcomings in terms of social capital among students, it is best to develop curriculum focused on current needs while taking the future needs into account as well.

By carefully examining the needs of the society in different sectors and identifying the weak points, especially regarding social capital factors, it is necessary to properly run a need assessment for the educational and non-educational objectives of the curriculum. The attempt to educate college students with a positive view to higher education system, as well as a collective spirit, the ability to engage in collective activities and a sense of trust in other people and the system can be among the goals of the curriculum based on social capital approach.

In order to make positive changes in curriculum implementation, it seems that, in reviewing the general curriculum of different disciplines, a general revision should be made in the objectives of these plans and a simple review does not suffice. One of the problems of the current curriculum is neglecting the preparation that a person needs for entering the society. It is suggested that the necessary approaches are used to determine these needs. Eisner who introduced the theory of social adaptation and social reconstruction, believes that the ultimate goal of the establishment and operation of higher education units is to serve the community and strive for a better life for its members, and it is clear that any targeting and needs assessment of their activities should also be tailored to the needs of the society. According to the opinions provided by the interviewees, this theory is the best option for curriculum need assessment [25].

Finally, given the responses given by the professors, it is clear that the best solution to agree on for needs and formulating goals is to use goal-oriented methods. These practices are more complex and more reliable. These methods are better than other methods to make changes and improvements in the existing curricula, and with the help of them, it is possible to elaborate the neglected goals and plan to achieve them. Considering these issues, the higher education institutions will develop the ability to influence social capital by providing appropriate curricula.

The selection of interviewees and requesting them for participation in research interviews was very time-consuming and many requests were not answered due to the high profile of the professors.

The concepts presented in the interviews were too many, and their arrangement and categorization took a lot of time. Due to the involvement of the people in the teaching process and the university, refining the responses to eliminate cases that were biased required high precision.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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