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Pathology of the Implemented Curriculum of Islamic Education Courses in the Elementary Education Program of Teacher Training in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to investigate the pathology of the implemented curriculum of Islamic Education courses in the elementary education program at Farhangian University.

Methods: This qualitative research employed a phenomenological approach. The participants consisted of 10 graduates and student teachers of the program, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews and analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step strategy.

Results: The analysis of participants' lived experiences and perceptions yielded five main themes and sixteen sub-themes. Findings revealed that the implemented curriculum suffers from significant weaknesses in five dimensions: teaching-learning processes, academic level of professors, implemented content, evaluation methods, and learner-related factors.

Conclusions: The results suggest that improving professors' attitudes toward classroom management, fostering an environment for idea exchange, emphasizing the active role of student teachers, and revising faculty recruitment policies are essential strategies to reduce the weaknesses of the current curriculum.

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Introduction

Educational systems worldwide profoundly impact the realization of societal ideals. Among these, the role of teachers is particularly significant. In our country, due to the special place of Islam in the realm of thought and the lives of the Iranian people, efforts have been made to ensure that the education of students has a religious nature. To this end, the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education states that the mission of the education system is for educators and the educated to achieve levels of the "good life" (Hayat Tayyebah) (Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, 2011). This shift in perspective after the Islamic Revolution in Iran led to the centrality of "religiosity" in the activities of the country's education system (Iravani, 2014). This presence is so significant that some research (including Ahmadi et al., 2020) considers the main distinguishing feature of the post-revolutionary curriculum from the pre-revolutionary curriculum to be "the dominance of Islamic values."

After the revolution, in order to realize this dominance, "Islamic education" became very important. This importance reached the point where a separate course with this title was included in the teacher education curriculum. Among the various fields of teacher education, elementary teacher education is of particular importance because childhood is the period when values are institutionalized and individual personalities are formed (Sajadieh, Madanifar, and Bagheri, 2016), and teachers of this period have a special role in shaping children's character. The question here is, what has been the fate of this curriculum and its implementation? This question is valid because curriculum specialists speak of different levels in the curriculum. From one perspective (Klein, 1986; Glatthorn et al., 2018), we can speak of three levels in the curriculum. The first level, which is called by names such as the intended or prescribed curriculum, is the curriculum intended in official documents and by policymakers. The second level can be called the implemented curriculum, and it is the set of practices that instructors – in this case, teacher education professors – implement and teach. The third level, which is referred to as the experienced or learned curriculum, is the experience and insight that students – in this case, pre-service teachers – gain.

Ignoring these levels and settling for only the first can distract us from the actual situation and place us in an ivory tower, unaware of reality.

The gap between curricula is natural, and all three factors – developers, implementers, and those who experience it – are influential (Momeni Mahmoei et al., 2010). Research shows a significant

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distance between the different levels of curricula in this field. The factors contributing to this discrepancy can be categorized into four parts.

One of the main factors creating this gap is the curriculum content, which includes issues such as repetitive content and outdated syllabi (Talkhabi, 2019; Kian & Mehrmohammadi, 2013), curriculum inflexibility, lack of attention to indigenous education, the failure to cultivate critical and socially/professionally aware teachers (Tasdighi et al., 2018), deficiencies in the approved curriculum such as insufficient attention to the practical aspects of classroom management (Adams et al., 2021), idealized and unattainable nature of some courses, and incompatibility with the realities of society (Gharba et al., 2017).

Another factor relates to the teaching-learning process. Research in this area points to factors such as weaknesses in the educational domain (Salimi et al., 2018), the one-sided nature of the teaching-learning process and the use of lecturing (Maroufi et al., 2018), (Farsi et al., 2019), attention to lower levels of learning in evaluations (Mollaei-Nejad & Zekavati, 2008), and lack of supervision of individual and group activities (Ahmadi, 2014).

Another part of this gap relates to the role of professors in implementing the curriculum. In this area, research has pointed to professors' lack of awareness or adherence to the syllabus (Maroufi et al., 2018), professors' weaknesses in the teaching profession, professors and students settling for the conference method (Noghieh et al., 2019), oratory, communication, and social skills (Talkhabi, 2019), professors' professional and educational characteristics and the shortage of specialized professors (Farsi, Kazemi, Khrooshi, 2019), professors' weak teaching (Karimi et al., 2020), and professors' lack of proper training regarding the importance of correct curriculum implementation (Ghorba et al., 2017), lack of motivation (Dehghan et al., 2016), professors' incorrect interpretation of the curriculum, inability to interpret the processes of science from curriculum documents, limiting curriculum interpretation to evaluation results, and lack of participation in achieving an understanding of the practical goals of the curriculum (Fathoon & Sterzer, 2017) as weaknesses in curriculum implementation in the area of professors.

Some student characteristics also contribute to the gap between curriculum levels. Weak student performance due to confidence in future employment (Noghieh et al., 2018), motivation, gender, students' academic level, and their skills (Maroufi et al., 2018) affect the quality of the implemented curriculum.

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A review of the research background indicates that the curriculum of elementary education has been the focus of researchers. However, no research has been conducted on Islamic education courses at Farhangian University. This is despite the fact that the main demand of the Fundamental Transformation Document is that students achieve levels of *Hayat Tayyiba* (a pure life) based on the Islamic criterion system, and the curriculum of these courses plays an important role in shaping teachers' perspectives on Islamic education. Achieving this important goal requires that the curriculum related to Islamic education courses at the intended and implemented levels be considered and analyzed for shortcomings. Accordingly, this research seeks to fill the gap in previous research by identifying shortcomings in the implemented curriculum of Islamic education courses in elementary education, and to answer the question: From the perspective of graduates and student-teachers in elementary education, what are the most important weaknesses related to the implemented curriculum of Islamic education courses?

Material and Methods

This study employed a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The researcher's goal in conducting phenomenological research is to examine the meaning of a phenomenon or concept from the perspective of a group of individuals (Bazargan, 2014). In the present study, an effort has been made to clarify the weaknesses of the implemented curriculum of Islamic Education courses, based on the experiences of alumni and student teachers in the primary education program at Farhangian University.

The research field included all alumni and undergraduate students of the continuous bachelor's degree program in primary education. Efforts were made to interview individuals who had experienced the phenomenon in question and had the necessary awareness of the curriculum's weaknesses. Sampling was purposive, of the criterion type. Accordingly, participant selection was carried out based on these criteria. The selection criteria were: a) being a senior or graduate of the primary education program who had experienced the curriculum under review, b) selection from both male and female groups, and c) willingness to participate in the interview process. Data saturation was achieved after the eighth interview, but to validate the findings, interviews continued until the tenth person. Given that the research was conducted concurrently with the COVID-19 pandemic, most interviews were conducted in cyberspace using WhatsApp and Skype

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software. However, some interviews were also conducted in person. In order to observe ethical considerations, before starting the interviews with the participants, they were given the necessary information about the research objectives, and they participated in the research with full consent. They were also assured that their information would only be used for research purposes, and that their names and voices would be kept confidential by the researcher. The duration of the interviews varied between 50 and 70 minutes.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data analysis employed Colaizzi's seven-step strategy, involving: careful reading of all descriptions and opinions of the participants; extracting important phrases relevant to the weaknesses of the implemented curriculum of Islamic education courses; conceptualizing the extracted important sentences; sorting participants' descriptions and common concepts into specific clusters; converting inferred opinions into comprehensive and complete descriptions; converting complete descriptions of phenomena into realistic and concise descriptions; and referring back to the participants to clarify the ideas obtained and to provide final validation of the findings (Colaizzi, 1997; cited in Ghasemi & Salehi, 2017).

In the present study, member checking and peer review/feedback techniques were used to validate the findings (Creswell, 2011). To this end, after each interview was conducted and its text transcribed, the interviewee was contacted via email and social networks to prevent misunderstanding by the researcher. In addition to the interview text, the researcher's initial analyses were provided to the participant to ensure the accuracy of the analyses and the themes obtained. Furthermore, the items raised during the research, the analyses, and the themes were confirmed by the supervising professors and, in some cases, were revised.

Results

Based on the analysis of the conducted interviews, the weaknesses of the implemented curriculum are presented in Table 2 in the form of a general theme, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes. The fundamental weaknesses of this program can be categorized into five dimensions: teaching-learning strategies, instructors, content, evaluation, and learners. In the following sections, an attempt is made to explain the weaknesses related to each of these dimensions. Weaknesses of the implemented "Islamic Education" curriculum in the elementary teacher education program (table 1).

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Table 1. Weaknesses of the implemented Islamic Education curriculum

Overall Theme	Main Theme	Sub-Themes
Weaknesses of the Implemented Curriculum	Weaknesses Related to Teaching-Learning Strategies	Use of Non-Participatory Teaching Methods
		Disorganization in Content Delivery
		Unpersuasive Teaching-Learning Flow
		Stereotypical Lecture-Note and Memorization-Based Instruction
		Lack of Provision of Learning and Performance Assignments
	Weaknesses Related to Professors	Low Academic Level
		Irrelevant Field of Study
		Lack of Motivation
		Inability to Communicate
	Weaknesses Related to Content	Emphasis on Theory and Neglect of Practice
		Complexity
		Repetitiveness
		Lack of Content Motivation
	Weaknesses Related to the Learner	Lack of Motivation
		Weakness in Prerequisite Knowledge
	Weaknesses Related to Evaluation	Focus on Final Exams and Memorization

Accordingly, the weaknesses of the implemented curriculum can be categorized into four dimensions. These weaknesses, stemming from the perceptions and lived experiences of student-teachers, fall into the following four areas: teaching-learning strategies, instructor shortcomings, content-related weaknesses, learner-related weaknesses, and finally, evaluation-related weaknesses. These weaknesses are elaborated upon below.

1- Weaknesses related to teaching-learning strategies

Analysis of the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants reveals that the most significant weakness in the implemented curriculum of Islamic Education courses pertains to teaching-learning strategies. Regarding the weaknesses in this area, five fundamental shortcomings were identified, including the following: 1. The use of non-participatory teaching methods; 2. The unpersuasive nature of the teaching-learning process; 3. Disorganization in content presentation; 4. The cliché of lecture-based and rote memorization teaching; and 5. The failure to provide learning and performance assignments. The following sections attempt to explain each of these weaknesses using the narratives of the participants.

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1-1. The use of non-participatory teaching methods:

One of the main reasons for the participants' dissatisfaction with the implemented curriculum is the lack of attention paid by some instructors to student participation in the teaching-learning process. Examination of the interviews reveals that in the teaching-learning process, most instructors used non-participatory and unreflective teaching methods. The excessive use of lectures by instructors and the one-sided nature of the teaching-learning process have prevented the exchange of ideas in the classroom and have hindered students from deeply understanding the topics. For example, one of the interviewees states: "*In the Islamic Educational System course, the professor mostly presented the material through lectures, and the students were not very intellectually active. There was no intellectual discussion, and because the class was not very in-depth, we learned almost nothing specific from the class."*

Students expected professors to give more importance to students' viewpoints and beliefs. Another interviewee stated: "The closed and one-sided atmosphere also reduces the motivation for learning," and described these classes as boring and uninteresting. Furthermore, it made students feel that professors looked down on them. Some participant statements in the research were:

"University is not like school where the professor comes and teaches the children the lesson and the students memorize the same thing and repeat it. In university, we must value the students' opinions and respect their viewpoints."

2-1. Disorganization in Content Delivery: According to research participants, another disorganization that is raised as a weakness is the disorganization in the way content is presented. Lack of explanation of the logic and purpose of the lesson, generalizations, lack of coherent attention to topics, and assigning teaching to students are signs of these disorganizations. For example, the opinion of some participants in the research was as follows:

"During teaching, they would state topics in pieces. In fact, I have to say they acted like islands, and it was not clear which part of the philosophy of education they were stating. And there was no coherence in the discussions. Whereas, they should have proceeded step by step. But acting like islands causes you not to know what the previous discussion was, and the topic gets lost in the student's mind."

"In class, there was discussion about paying attention to Islamic education, religious education, but they didn't really make it tangible for us, for example, how should we provide the student with

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different types of education so that when he/she graduates from the educational system after 12 years, he/she appears in society as an educated person. They didn't say these things. They just said these are important and should be paid attention to."

"The professor only talked for 5 minutes in class, and the rest of the class was at the disposal of the students, and each chapter was taught by one or several people, and usually, in the conferences that are given in the class, the students don't listen at all, and I didn't listen either, and I didn't understand what they presented."

1-3. Unconvincing Nature of the Teaching-Learning Process: Among the weaknesses expressed by student teachers is the unconvincing nature of the teaching-learning process. Considering that the content of Islamic Education courses encompasses the foundations, principles, and methods related to Islamic education, it is expected that the content should be presented in a way that student teachers are convincingly persuaded of these topics. Otherwise, they will not develop an affinity for these theories. An examination of student opinions reveals that the implemented curriculum in this area faces serious weaknesses. One of the participants in the study stated:

"The sessions were not very rich. In the philosophy class, the kind of thinking and philosophical reflection that should have been there was absent, and the professor was imposing their own views on us."

Another participant believed: "We somehow felt that this course and its topics were being imposed on us and that we were supposed to memorize and regurgitate the exact same thing. It wasn't clear what benefit this course had for us."

4-1. Clichéd Lecture-Note and Memorization-Based Teaching: Among the weaknesses expressed by most participants was the clichéd lecture-note and memorization-based teaching. Learning opportunities in this approach were limited to introducing a book or notes, lecturing, a lack of student participation, and a final exam. This pattern led students to simply pursue passing the course by memorizing concepts and topics, and they referred to these classes as unengaging and unproductive.

One of the participants stated:

"The professor gave us a set of notes, saying that the class and exam content would come from these notes. In class, they would share their memories and talk about the notes, and the class wasn't very deep. The students, who were just looking to pass, didn't participate much. It was more

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professor-centered than student-centered. And ultimately, there was a written exam based on those notes."

Failure to Provide Learning and Performance Assignments: One of the notable weaknesses identified by participants was the lack of learning and performance assignments. The majority of participants stated that professors did not assign specific tasks to students in these courses. This lack of assignments deprived students of the opportunity for reflection and contemplation on the content. For example, one participant stated:

"They didn't give any specific assignments. And they didn't tell us to go and critique and analyze anything."

Another member believed: *"Now that I think about it, what was beneficial to me from the classes was related to these discussions, challenges, and doing practical work."*

2- Weaknesses Related to Professors/Faculty

One of the problematic factors in the failure of this curriculum in its implementation, which was highly regarded by participants, was the academic and ethical dimensions of the professors/faculty. They referred to issues such as: low academic level, use of professors/faculty with irrelevant fields of study, lack of motivation, and inability to explain the content. These factors will be discussed in more detail below.

2-1. Low Academic Level:

Analysis of the interviews shows that one of the fundamental challenges of Farhangian University is the academic level of its professors/faculty. Participants are dissatisfied with the academic level of the professors/faculty at Farhangian University. Employing school teachers as guest professors/faculty is one of the main reasons for participant dissatisfaction. One of the participants in the research stated:

"In our campus, the number of experienced professors/faculty was very low. Given the labor market conditions, many students with high two-digit and three-digit ranks were becoming very unmotivated when we talked to them, because it was clear that they had a high intellectual level. This was because some of the professors/faculty really had a low academic level."

Another member stated that: *"The professor was weak in terms of studies. He didn't have philosophical thought. Therefore, he couldn't create a discussion of thinking in the students."*

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Another member stated that: "*Usually, professors/faculty who were faculty members were good, but the professors/faculty who were school teachers... The difference in teaching methods between professors/faculty who were faculty members and other professors/faculty was really clear."*

2-2. Irrelevant Field of Study:

One of the weaknesses mentioned by the participants was the use of faculty with irrelevant fields of study to teach Islamic education courses. In some cases, professors of general Islamic studies were employed to teach courses such as the philosophy of education, which differs in content. One research participant stated:

"He was the head of Islamic studies at the university. I don't think he was a professor who had studied much philosophy, and his foundation in philosophy was a bit weak, and he didn't have a philosophical perspective. As a matter of fact, we had other courses with him where he was much stronger. And he was much stronger in a course like religious education."

2-3. Lack of Motivation:

Another factor contributing to their dissatisfaction was the low motivation of some professors. For example, one participant stated:

"The class didn't have much excitement or enthusiasm, and the professor wasn't working very seriously, and with such an atmosphere in the class, as I mentioned, it caused boredom and fatigue in the class, and the students got bored."

Another member stated: *"He was a professor who was very tired and very calm, and his class was not at all engaging."*

2-4. Inability to Communicate:

While the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the communication between professors and students, one issue highlighted by participants was the inability of some professors to communicate effectively. This was considered a factor affecting the quality of the curriculum implementation. One participant stated:

"He had studied philosophy and had a high level of academic knowledge, but because he was out of sync with many of the students, he couldn't have much impact on them."

Another participant stated: *"Some professors don't know how to manage the classroom, but they really have a high academic level. Students, by digressing and taking the discussion into irrelevant subjects, did not allow us to benefit from their knowledge."*

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3. Weaknesses Related to Content

Regarding the content of the implemented curriculum, based on the participants' viewpoints, three significant weaknesses were identified, including: "Emphasis on theory and neglect of practice," "Complexity," "Repetitiveness," and "Lack of Engaging Content." The findings related to each of these weaknesses are presented in detail below.

3-1. Emphasis on Theory and Neglect of Practice:

According to research participants, the content of Islamic education courses excessively emphasizes theoretical aspects, leaving little opportunity within the curriculum to discuss the practical application of these concepts. Furthermore, the content includes topics that teachers never encounter in their professional lives. For example, one participant stated:

"This abstract nature was very boring. What's important is how to act in specific educational situations. But the content of the books isn't suitable because of this issue I mentioned. Student teachers need to learn how to act in such-and-such a situation, and how to behave if a specific or unique event occurs. These topics, which I believe are more important than abstract issues, were not included in our curriculum."

"When the professor was teaching the theoretical foundations of the document [likely referring to a key policy document], many students complained, asking, 'What is the professor teaching?' The goals are written in a very abstract and idealistic way, and in reality, we won't achieve these goals in twenty or even forty years."

Complexity: Participants identified the complexity, difficulty, and ambiguity of the content as a weakness of the Islamic education curriculum. This complexity prevents students from engaging effectively with the material. One participant stated:

"We read the theoretical foundations of the document in this course, but I think these foundations are somewhat difficult, vague, and complex. And we encountered terminology that we had no understanding of."

3-2. Repetitiveness:

The majority of participants acknowledged that many parts of the Islamic education course content were repetitive. They believed that the volume of Islamic studies courses in the areas of Islamic knowledge and Islamic education is excessive and should be reduced. One participant believed that:

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"In my opinion, the volume of Islamic studies courses in our curriculum is too high. You have general Islamic studies courses, and then you have Islamic education courses as well. This excess leads people to become averse to religion, even to become anti-religious. In my opinion, that's what has happened to students now."

Another member stated, "*A high percentage of the content in Islamic Education courses was already covered in other courses, and this repetition was very annoying."*

3-3. Lack of Engaging Content: One of the weaknesses noted by participants in this section was the lack of engaging content in these courses. Some participants considered the content of these courses to be unengaging, outdated, and impractical, while others wanted a reduction in the volume of these courses, citing reasons such as the instructor's inability to explain the content and the large volume of these courses as factors contributing to their lack of appeal. One of the research participants stated:

"In my opinion, the content of these courses was not suitable. It was a bit dry and formal, and this inflexibility was tedious."

4- Weaknesses Related to the Learner From the perspective of the research participants, students influence the implementation of the curriculum, or their reactions to the implemented curriculum increase or decrease the quality of the teaching-learning process. To the extent that some participants identified weaknesses such as "lack of motivation" and "weak prerequisite knowledge" as important weaknesses of some student teachers. Each of these weaknesses is elaborated on below using participant narratives.

4-1. Lack of Learner Motivation: One of the weaknesses related to the learner is a lack of motivation. According to the participants, many reasons contribute to the decrease in student teachers' motivation. Some of the reasons for student teachers' lack of motivation are external factors such as the learning atmosphere and environment, with many participants believing that the Farhangian University environment resembles a school. Also, the reassurance of employment in education has a negative impact on student teachers' motivation. However, according to participant narratives, some student teachers had low learning motivation. For example, one participant stated:

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"Professors who expected more work and activity from us faced problems with student cooperation and collaboration. On the other hand, because we were only used to passing course credits, we didn't have much motivation or enthusiasm for activity."

4-2. Weakness in Prerequisite Knowledge: From the perspective of the research participants, many student teachers, especially those who had studied in the fields of experimental sciences, mathematics, and physics, were not familiar with philosophical concepts and terminology. For example, one of the participants stated: "Many students who take these courses don't have a correct understanding of philosophy. And they don't know what philosophy even is. People who were in the humanities during high school read philosophy very briefly. We, who were in experimental sciences and mathematics, never read anything about ontology, epistemology, or similar topics. And when a student encounters the theoretical foundations of the document [presumably a policy document] upon entering, they naturally cannot grasp it at all."

5. Weakness Related to Evaluation

According to the statements of the participants, the main weakness related to the evaluation of Islamic Education courses is the focus on the final exam and rote memorization.

5-1. Focus on the Final Exam and Rote Memorization: The way evaluation is conducted in Islamic Education courses reflects a fairly similar approach in most of Farhangian University's classes. In such a way that most participants believe that evaluation is summarized in the final exam, and students' performance assignments and learning activities are not evaluated. On the other hand, these exams focus on students' memorization. For example, one of the participants stated in this regard: "*For the evaluation, there was a twenty-point exam. The questions were also in essay format. We had memorized the notes and took the exam."*

Discussion

The main issue examined in the present study is the pathology of the implemented curriculum of Islamic Education courses in the elementary education program at Farhangian University. This is because teachers play a pivotal role in creating any transformation in the education system and can strengthen or eliminate the weaknesses and strengths of the curriculum, and turn the best educational opportunities into the most unproductive situations.

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On the other hand, the curriculum, as the beating heart of the education system, plays an important role in preparing teachers. Considering that in these courses, student teachers become familiar with the principles and methods of Islamic education, which are greatly emphasized in higher-level documents, especially in the Fundamental Transformation Document, the pathology of the Islamic Education curriculum becomes doubly important. The results of this study showed that, from the perspective of Farhangian University graduates and student teachers, the most significant weaknesses of the implemented curriculum are related to the elements of the teaching-learning process, the role of professors, content, learners, and evaluation.

Weaknesses Resulting from the Teaching-Learning Process: Analysis of the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants led to the identification of weaknesses related to the teaching-learning process, including "non-participatory teaching methods," "the teaching-learning process not being persuasive," "disorder in the presentation of content," "the cliché of lecture-based and rote learning," and "failure to provide learning and performance assignments." This section of the research findings is consistent with the studies of Molaei Nejad and Zekavati (2008), Farsi et al. (2019), Momeni Mehmouei et al. (2010), Salimi et al. (2018), Maroufi (2019), and Naghieh et al. (2019), which evaluated the educational situation and the teaching-learning process as unfavorable. Furthermore, researchers have shown that most professors use teacher-centered methods, especially the lecture method. Also, the necessary supervision is not carried out on the individual and group activities of student teachers.

On the other hand, the use of the lecture method should not inherently be considered a weakness. This is because the correct implementation of this method is effective in students' learning, and students cited lectures that were presented with strong reasoning and in an engaging manner as a strength of some classes. This part of the findings is consistent with the research of Farsi et al. (2019), which shows that when teacher-centered teaching methods are combined with professional and educational skills, they can lead to effective learning. Therefore, the important issue in the implemented Islamic education curriculum is not necessarily the avoidance of student-centered methods; teacher-centered methods, too, can be effective if there is a deep relationship between the teacher and students and the teacher possesses strong scientific command and articulation.

Another weakness of the teaching-learning curriculum is the lack of attention to student teachers' agency, especially in the cognitive dimension. One-way teaching-learning processes have

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prevented group discussion and exchange of ideas in these classes. As a result, the opportunity to reflect on the content has not been provided, and student teachers have not developed recognition and belief in the content persuasively. This is important because the teacher is the final link in the process of operationalizing educational theories and the intermediary between the education system and students (Bagheri & Iravani, 2001). Islamic education courses also have a discursive nature, so that the most important transformative documents, including the Fundamental Transformation Document and the National Curriculum Document, and their related theoretical foundations, constitute the content of these courses. Therefore, if student teachers do not have the opportunity to reflect on these documents and foundations, and do not persuasively believe in the desired ideals and goals, they will not have a realistic attitude towards the theories, will not feel attached to the theories, and will not be sufficiently familiar with the situations in which the theories should be used. Of course, a small number of professors have provided opportunities for expressing views and criticizing and reviewing course topics, thereby creating a platform for the exchange of thoughts and ideas. Weaknesses related to the non-persuasive nature of the teaching-learning process have been confirmed by Fathi et al. (2018). In the mentioned research, subject-matter pedagogical knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge have been investigated, and the research results showed that the acquisition of professional competencies in general pedagogical courses does not occur optimally, and the acquisition of competencies in subject-matter courses is more than general courses. This is because in subject-matter curricula, information processing has replaced information acceptance, and through reflective observation and analysis of their professional 'I', they critique and evaluate their actions and shape their professional identity.

Another weakness related to the teaching-learning strategy is disorganization in content presentation, in that the subject matters are not presented cohesively, leading to mental confusion for students. Furthermore, students objected to the lack of connection between the abstract concepts of these courses and their practical application, and expressed satisfaction with professors who linked theory with practice. The general presentation of a series of abstract concepts without attention to the context of their application has led them to consider the content of these courses as impractical. For example, the concept of "Hayat Tayyiba" (wholesome life), which is the central theme in the Fundamental Transformation Document, is presented in general statements, and the

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application of this concept in the lived experience and practical life of teachers in the implemented curriculum has been neglected. As a result, the concept of Hayat Tayyiba has become meaningless to them. Weaknesses related to disorganization in content presentation have been confirmed by previous researchers such as Tasdighi et al. (2018), Talkhabi (2018), and Fathi et al. (2018), who emphasized the integration of theory and practice. In the present study, student teachers complained about the theoretical nature of the courses and stated that this amount of theoretical courses was unnecessary.

Another part of this disorganization in content presentation relates to the incomplete implementation of the curriculum. In some cases, professors have not taught parts of the curriculum or have divided the curriculum among class groups and assigned its teaching to students. In the latter situation, students focused only on the topic related to their group and were relatively passive during the presentations of other groups.

Another weakness related to the implementation of the Islamic education curriculum is the lack of attention to learning activities and performance tasks. Given that the teaching-learning process has been one-sided, learning activities such as reflection on content, critique and evaluation of topics, and examination of the application of theoretical topics in specific educational situations have not been addressed. Furthermore, performance tasks have not been considered to make the theoretical topics meaningful. In such a way that the majority of participants believed that professors did not assign performance tasks for these courses. This part of the research is consistent with the findings of Ahmadi (2014). The findings of the aforementioned research indicated a lack of adequate supervision over the individual and group activities of student teachers.

Weaknesses Stemming from Professors

Following the teaching-learning process, student teachers, when considering the factors contributing to the failure of the implemented Islamic Education curriculum, attributed the greatest significance to the academic and ethical character of the professors. The majority of student teachers expressed that the academic level of the professors at Farhangian University did not meet the needs of the students, with only a small number of professors possessing a high academic level. They expressed greater satisfaction with professors who were active as faculty members and voiced dissatisfaction with the employment of schoolteachers, guest lecturers, and hourly instructors. Another weakness related to professors concerned the use of unqualified professors to

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teach Islamic Education courses. Specifically, professors of Islamic Studies were utilized to teach Islamic Education courses. This has resulted in the professor's inability to effectively explain the content of the lessons. This section of the research findings aligns with the findings of Salimi et al. (2018), Farsi et al. (2019), Karimi et al. (2020), and Maroufi et al. (2018), which indicated that Farhangian University suffers from a shortage of faculty members and experienced professors.

It is worth noting that the majority of participants expressed satisfaction with the ethical character of the professors, citing qualities such as good temper, diligence in work, and presentability and outward acceptability. However, they were dissatisfied with the professors' inability to communicate effectively and the lack of motivation of some professors. The findings of this section of the research are corroborated by the findings of Talkhabi (2018). In that research, student teachers emphasized oratory, communication, and social skills.

Weaknesses Stemming from Content

Regarding the content, some participants considered the material in these courses to be difficult, complex, repetitive, and impractical. The content focused on theories, while the application of this content in practice was neglected. Consequently, these courses contained abstract terms and concepts that student teachers did not fully understand, hindering their ability to effectively engage with the material. For example, the philosophy of education course covers various types of educational philosophy (historical, theoretical, personal, and social), which are more suitable for policymakers and planners and may not be helpful for teachers facing complex educational situations.

Another content-related weakness is the large volume of Islamic studies courses and the repetition of certain topics across different courses. This content overload is particularly evident in the course on the Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran. This course contains thirteen chapters, each covering various topics, requiring more time for thorough exploration. Furthermore, content overload itself hinders serious focus and reflection on the material. Moreover, previous researchers, such as Karimi et al. (2020), Talkhabi (2018), Ahmadi (2014), and Farsi et al. (2019), have confirmed these weaknesses, stating that there is a high degree of overlap in the curriculum of Farhangian University, with many topics being repetitive. For instance, anthropological, axiological, epistemological, and other foundations are included in both the Islamic Educational System course and the Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran course. In addition

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to being repetitive, this may cause mental confusion for student teachers. Given the sources cited in the course outlines, the philosophical foundations of the Islamic Educational System course are attributed to one thinker, while the philosophical foundations of the Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran course are developed by another. In some cases, disagreements exist between these authorities, leading to a lack of coherence and mental confusion for student teachers. On the other hand, the analysis of the participants' perceptions and lived experiences indicated that the content of Islamic Education courses relies excessively on the theoretical dimension, neglecting its practical and applied aspects. Consequently, participants were not familiarized with the application of theories in specific educational situations. This part of the findings is consistent with the findings of Tasdiqi et al. (2018), Elhamian et al. (2019), Fathi et al. (2018), and Ahmadi (2014).

Weaknesses Stemming from Learner Performance

The level of student motivation and academic proficiency also affects the implemented curriculum. According to participants, the majority of student teachers had low motivation for learning. In addition to intrinsic motivation, certain external factors also contributed to this lack of motivation. One of these factors is the atmosphere and environment of Farhangian University, which, according to participants, more closely resembles boarding schools. Furthermore, the assurance of employment in education has negatively impacted their motivation. The findings in this section of the research align with those of Naghieh et al. (2019), which showed that confidence in future employment leads to weaker performance by student teachers.

Additionally, the teaching-learning process and the attractiveness of classes were also effective on the level of student motivation, causing many student teachers to simply seek to pass their courses. This section of the research findings is consistent with the findings of Momeni Mehmouei et al. (2010), Maroufi et al. (2019), Farsi et al. (2019), and Fathi et al. (2018), who consider the role of student teachers, along with curriculum developers and implementers (faculty members), to be important in achieving curriculum goals.

On the other hand, many participants had weaknesses in their prerequisite knowledge. In particular, student teachers who enter Farhangian University from science and mathematics-physics fields are unfamiliar with many philosophical concepts.

Weaknesses Arising from Assessment

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In the discussion of assessment, interviewees also objected to the focus on final exams and the lack of attention to formative assessment. Most professors, for example, relied on twenty-point written exams to assess student teachers, and assessment of learning activities and assignments was neglected. The method of assessment and the extent of attention paid to it also affected the teaching-learning process, and the focus on final assessment led to formulaic lecture-based and rote learning. Furthermore, there was insufficient monitoring of student teachers' learning activities and performance-based assignments. This section of the findings is consistent with the research of Mollai Nejad and Zekavati (2008), which showed that in the teacher education curriculum of Iran, assessment is often at the level of knowledge and understanding, with higher levels of learning receiving less attention.

In conclusion, the main weaknesses of the Islamic education curriculum in the primary education major at the Teacher Training University can be summarized as follows:



Recommendations

Given that the majority of participants expressed dissatisfaction with the professors' command, academic level, and overall quality, it is expected that Farhangian University will revise its faculty recruitment policies, selecting stronger professors as faculty members and implementing more stringent oversight of faculty activities. Furthermore, engaging in dialogues with professors to shift

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their perspectives regarding classroom practices and fostering an atmosphere of intellectual exchange and persuasive teaching-learning processes is another critical necessity for improving the implementation of the Islamic Education curriculum.

On the other hand, it is essential that both the design and implementation of the curriculum connect educational theories with students' practical experiences, enabling student teachers to become familiar with applying theories in educational situations. Additionally, considering the substantial volume of some Islamic Education courses, especially the Islamic Educational System and the Philosophy of Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the curriculum content should be reduced to provide the necessary space for contemplation and reflection. Moreover, given that many of the intended goals of the curriculum recommend the critique and evaluation of school educational activities, it is essential that these goals be pursued during the practicum and that this pursuit be monitored.

At the same time, this research focused solely on the implemented curriculum and did not consider the experienced curriculum. Therefore, it seems that to gain a comprehensive view of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the Islamic Education curriculum, the experienced curriculum must also be considered, and its gaps with the intended and implemented curricula should be examined. Furthermore, conducting quantitative research on the factors contributing to the weaknesses of this implemented curriculum can determine the degree of impact of each of these factors.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of Tehran University. The patients/participants provided their written informed consent to participate in this study.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection, and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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