

Research Article

Designing a Spiritual Citizenship Curriculum Framework for Upper Secondary Education

Zeinab Rajabi¹, Mohammad Javadipour^{2,*}, Hamid Reza Rezazade Bahadoran¹,
Mortaza Samiei Zafarghandi³

¹ Department of Educational studies and curriculum planning, CT. C. Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

² Department of Educational Sciences, Tehran University, Tehran,, Iran

³ Institute for Educational Studies, Organization for Educational Research and Planning, Tehran, Iran

* Corresponding authors: javadipour@ut.ac.ir

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Abstract

The present study was conducted with the aim of presenting a curriculum framework for spiritual citizenship in upper secondary education. The research approach was qualitative, carried out using the phenomenological method. Participants in the study were university professors and experts in the field of curriculum studies. Using purposive sampling based on the principle of theoretical saturation, 18 individuals were selected as the sample, and data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using thematic coding and three stages of open, axial, and selective coding. The findings indicated that the spiritual citizenship curriculum framework comprises eight elements, including: Goal (enhancing spiritual thinking, expanding intellectual horizons, cultivating multi-dimensional personality, fostering decision-making power), Rationale (individual necessity, social necessity, educating responsible citizens, need to strengthen spirituality, building a dynamic and evolving society), Content (practical and theoretical content, creative content, objective content, content arising from students' experiences and needs), Teaching Method (debate, role-playing, field visits, storytelling, research-oriented approach, project-based approach, classroom dialogue), Teacher Characteristics (facilitation, guidance, teaching in students' language, possessing specialized knowledge), Location (local community, mosque, natural settings, social institutions and organizations), Implementation Requirements (attention to upstream documents, training expert teachers, stakeholder involvement), and Evaluation (self-assessment, process evaluation, observation, consultation, project evaluation).

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1. Introduction

Human beings are social creatures; therefore, all aspects of a person are significantly influenced by social conditions, and conversely, through their personal

development, they can communicate with others and influence society. Furthermore, human personality is shaped and refined in environmental conditions. Additionally, humans are obligated beings who have responsibilities, firstly towards God and then towards

others. Regarding human responsibility towards others, one of the most important roles in society is that of citizenship. Considering the changes and challenges of life, in a world that is constantly changing, there is a need for citizenship education (Sharifi & Mirshah Jafari, 2016). For human transformation and adaptation in society, education in true values must be addressed, and the greatest duty of the leaders of any society is to provide a context for the flourishing of abilities and the spiritual evolution of society, meaning turning towards human values (Naqibzadeh, 2018). Despite this, different citizenship behaviors emerge from individuals in society, influenced by the individual's perception of citizenship. The fact that each individual in society has different perceptions of citizenship depends on social and political realities, scientific attitudes, beliefs, individual identity, and their spiritual and moral values (Taniguchi & Nakano, 2017). Geographically, citizenship is connected to the entire world; also, the concept of citizenship has expanded from the political level to the social and cultural level, and in countries with internal disputes and conflicts, citizenship has received more attention (Reilly & Niens, 2017, cited in Veugelers & de Groot, 2019).

Citizenship is a set of duties, rights, obligations, responsibilities, and social commitments, along with a sense of belonging and social membership for serious and active participation in the economic, political, social, and cultural spheres of society (Nikvarz & Afrasiabi, 2017). In observing citizenship ethics in society, sometimes individuals comply with citizenship principles out of coercion or for short-term interests, and each person considers personal interests over national interests, ultimately leading to law evasion. To prevent chaos in society, government bodies need to oversee individuals' performance. The fulfillment of citizenship duties and active participation in society depends on individuals having spiritual commitments and beliefs.

Due to its scope and influence in society, citizenship has become closely linked with the development of ethics (Veugelers & de Groot, 2019). For the development of individual ethics and commitment in society, one can refer to spiritual citizenship. Since every attitude is based on a foundation of systematic knowledge and awareness, citizenship and citizenship education have also been examined based on various approaches; among these, the role of divine religions, sects, denominations, and their approaches is very significant (Shamshiri, 2015). In spiritual citizenship, an individual does not feel compelled to obey the law out of fear. Rather, it is truthfulness, trustworthiness, and adherence to moral values that commit them, making the acceptance of and adherence to laws not only easy but also pleasurable. Individuals tend to internalize the motivation for observing citizenship rights and duties so that they can provide the possibility of a harmonious and tension-free life, both with each other

and with the environment, and sustainable development for future generations, while minimizing the implementation costs of civic rights and duties. Otherwise, these costs constantly increase and lead to heightened social control in society (Nikomram et al., 2011).

Spiritual citizenship provides a suitable social platform for an individual's activity, enabling them to harness everything in service of their progress towards excellence. Among all institutions involved in spiritual education for applying the model of spiritual citizenship in life, schools and their curricula play a decisive role. In other words, schools have a direct role in providing opportunities for developing insight, willingness, and enhancing the skills and practices necessary for a spiritual life (Yarmohammadian et al., 2012). Of course, considering that in Iran's curriculum, which is derived from the Islamic moral system, God has a central role and other domains are arranged accordingly. The main approach to moral education in Iran's formal and public system is a perspective of a religiously virtuous nature, which is evident in the formulation of the high goals of the Supreme Council of Education. These goals should be revised to be more realistic and appropriate for students' mental development and experiences, reducing their level of abstraction. Unfortunately, these goals are more idealistic and often not practical in society (Azadmanesh & Hosseini, 2014). One reason for this is that spirituality is a vague, complex, and general topic with various dimensions, subjects, and concepts (Yarmohammadian et al., 2012; Heidari et al., 2013). Also, there is no available curriculum that can holistically and comprehensively cultivate in students characteristics such as critical and creative thinking skills, the ability to fight injustice, responsibility, mutual understanding, cooperation and participation, respect for traditions and cultures, awareness of international law and the environment, peace and human rights, and respect for races and religions (Butcher, 2017).

In general, achieving a pure life (Hayat Tayyiba) at the collective level and realizing a righteous society (Saleh) requires a righteous school (Saleh) (Theoretical Foundations of the Fundamental Reform Document of Education, 2011). In fact, paying attention to religious education in the educational sphere is an undeniable necessity. Although in our society this necessity is accepted as the main and important duty of the education system, the results of numerous studies conducted in Iran indicate shortcomings and weaknesses in the field of religious education, and the education system has not been very successful in its critical mission of religious education (Eslamian, 2018).

Teachings related to citizenship and spirituality are largely underemphasized and duty-bound in our education system. Textbooks mostly transmit repetitive and clichéd

definitions and content to students. This has led to an accumulation of information and a lack of acceptance by students (Hazeri & Khalili, 2014).

On the other hand, in Iran, there is substantial evidence of a relative weakness in citizenship, especially in the area of responsibility and citizen participation in the nuances of receiving citizenship rights (Mirfardi, 2015). Low social participation of citizens, particularly in formal and public spheres (Mousavi, 2020), minimal political participation (merely voting) and being satisfied with it (Jalaipour, 2013), high levels of social apathy, self-centered individualism, and lack of civil commitment (Mohseni Tabrizi & Sedaghatifard, 2011; Ghaffari & Habibpour Gatabi, 2014), the insignificant amount of time Iranians spend on voluntary and charitable activities (an average of two minutes per day according to a report by the Statistics Center of Iran in spring 2015), and people's unawareness of their citizenship duties are among the evidence confirming the necessity of spiritual citizenship education in Iran. Unfortunately, despite the importance and need to identify its characteristics, this issue has not been seriously and effectively addressed in the academic sphere (Mousavi & Mobaraki, 2017).

For example, littering and polluting the environment, not observing traffic laws leading to traffic problems and increased accidents, delaying payments of bills, insurance premiums, and tolls, and not respecting the rights of urban transport organizations are instances of non-observance of citizenship in society. This necessitates continuous supervision by government bodies and incurs costs for the government. Any short interruption, neglect of laws and urban etiquette, and failure to respect others' rights will fuel many social, economic, and cultural tensions, violence, and adversities (Nikvarz & Afrasiabi, 2017). Under these circumstances, addressing spiritual citizenship could be the key to solving many of the aforementioned problems.

The reason for choosing the secondary education level for citizenship education is that secondary education is crucially important due to its fundamental role in shaping the personality and education of youth and its impact on their work and participation in societal progress. The life destiny of individuals in society is determined at this stage, and students' effectiveness stems from the quality of this period. Regarding the subject under discussion, i.e., spiritual citizenship, various publications and writings have been printed in Iran and abroad, each specifying and presenting this topic from a particular dimension. However, rarely in the writings and referenced sources has the topic of citizenship education been considered from a religious perspective, and so far, no curriculum model for spiritual citizenship has been designed in Iran. For instance, a study by Akhgar and Khalili (2016) addressed the components of citizenship education from the perspective of the Quran and Sunnah but did not

address its educational dimension in the education system. Mehrmohammadi (2012), Gholtash (2012), and Hazeri and Khalili (2014) did not pay attention to religious teachings in the field of citizenship education. Mohammadi, Mazidi, and Beheshti (2018), in a study entitled "Philosophical Foundations of Citizenship Education from the Viewpoint of Islam and Pragmatism," concluded that both in Islam and the school of Pragmatism, education is the most important factor in societal development, and educating citizens is a social necessity for sustainable development.

Also, in a study by Yarmohammadian et al. (2012), they addressed approaches to spiritual education in three countries: Australia, Turkey, and Japan, and did not address the citizenship dimension. Furthermore, in international studies like Abdulkerim Sen (2018), the spiritual dimension of citizenship education was not mentioned. Therefore, it was deemed necessary to consider the topic of spiritual citizenship in this paper. The aim of this research is to present a framework for students' spiritual citizenship to address social anomalies caused by moral problems, to promote spiritual citizenship behavior in society at the upper secondary level. Thus, considering the aforementioned points, this research is an attempt to answer the question: What is the curriculum framework for spiritual citizenship in upper secondary education?

1.1. Research Questions

What is the curriculum framework for spiritual citizenship in upper secondary education?

1.2. Research methodology

The research approach was qualitative, conducted using the phenomenological method. Participants in the study were university professors and experts in the field of curriculum studies. Using purposive sampling based on the principle of theoretical saturation, 18 individuals were selected as the sample. The criterion for selecting participants was having publications related to moral education, religious citizenship, and citizenship education. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. Regarding the assessment of the validity and reliability of the interview questions, after being designed, the questions were revised and approved by 6 expert professors in the relevant field. To record the interviews, all conversations were audio-recorded. The recorded interviews were then carefully listened to by the researcher and transcribed verbatim. After the recorded interview was transcribed, the "member checking" method was used to confirm the validity of the interviews. In this way, the written transcript was sent back to the participants to confirm the accuracy of the content and to revise it if necessary.

Table 1. Results in the Form of Open, Axial, and Selective Coding

Category (Selective Coding)	Component (Axial Coding)	Concepts (Open Coding)	Sources
Methods of Spiritual Citizenship Education	Methods Based on Educational Innovations	Debate and creative thinking, case study, role-playing method, storytelling, Socratic dialogue, field visits, discussion, negotiation, group work, role-creation, questioning, teacher-student participation in bilateral dialogue, question and answer, thoughtful discussion and conversation, conversation, group research, dialogue with reflection, dialogue-oriented approach, project-based approach (group and individual), using games, group and class discussion, students posing questions, cooperative learning, learning activities based on fostering creativity and innovation, using group assignments, learning in small groups, posing questions for discussion and dialogue, real learning with reflection and dialogue, self-assessment	P1, P3, P14, P9, P15
	Methods Based on Mental Development	Learning groups designing questions, practice, formulation and posing questions by adolescents, dialogue (two-person and multi-person), helping students learn social roles, using discoveries by students, guiding student activities, predictability, mutual respect, having a role model role, encouraging individuality, being trustworthy, having a supportive stance overseeing procedures, facilitating the flow of discussion and dialogue in class, using modeling method, using craft method, using brainstorming method, using objective experiences in teaching, analogy-based teaching method	P11, P8, P1, P3, P9
Outcomes of Spiritual Citizenship Education	Individual and Moral	Self-care and other-care skills, knowledge about types of misconduct, sense of solidarity and promotion of mental and moral health, reduction of social anomalies and increase in positive interactions among community members, increased self-confidence and self-knowledge, fascination with religious and cultural values, humanitarian behaviors, finding unity within contradictions, behaviors based on social/political actions, finding one's place in the world, becoming one with the laws of existence, illuminating spiritual life in the human world, joining the immortality of existence, institutionalizing spiritual values in individuals, mental and psychological health, correctly fulfilling needs, proper communication with others, proper communication with the environment, responsibility, respect for social norms, inclination towards goodness, steadfastness, sustainability of valuable and moral behavior, sensitivity towards society, social commitments, skills for proper communication with others, understanding the surrounding environment, awareness of types of anomalies, sensitivity towards religious matters, religious awareness, understanding the relationship between man and the universe, reduction of crime and delinquency, student self-improvement, high resilience, connecting intra-school and extra-school learning, ethics of thought, science, faith, achieving inner harmony, caring for each other, solidarity and ethics, empathetic perspective, attention to students' voices in spiritual education, providing spaces for contemplation on existence, memory-oriented perspective, ritualistic education, the separate space of school from society, religious insight, convergent ethics based on care, sense of interconnectedness, social and moral concern, dynamic approach to spiritual education, passive approach in spiritual education, ideological aspect, components of global citizenship, school culture, communication and interactive atmosphere in school, transcendental behaviors, consistency of words and actions, spiritual balance, community-orientedness, mental health, thinking and problem-solving skills, assertiveness and criticism, constructive criticism, participatory and responsible, cultural adaptation, understanding difference and plurality, multi-perspective approach, flexible curriculum, respect for the national and Islamic dimensions, spirit of being open to criticism, avoidance of prejudice and ignorance, thoughtful, critical, responsible, and sensitive to the environment and society, ethics-oriented and dignity-oriented and value-preserving, responsible, ethical, and law-oriented citizen, self-cohesion and beauty, high resilience, sense of empathy, observance of ethical norms, understanding social and political issues, moral and spiritual values	P4, P17, P6, P11, P2, P16
	Mental and Attitudinal	Awareness of healthy lifestyle, awareness of mental illnesses, awareness of healthy pleasure, attention to healthy and destructive recreation, responsibility towards others, use of multiple information sources, avoidance of superficial knowledge in various matters, avoidance of simplistic views, maintaining mental balance and creating peaceful environments, maintaining balance in human relationships with nature, maintaining balance in human relationships with other humans, avoidance of concealment, multi-dimensional view of existence, group participation, being up-to-date, promoting self-fulfillment, understanding physical and mental strengths and weaknesses, increasing skills to cope with physical and mental problems, increasing mental health, enhancing coping skills for physical and mental problems, constructive communication and interaction with others, stress management, healthy identity formation, resistance to anomalies, effective individual communication, interpersonal communication, social communication, increasing mental health, reducing anxiety and depression, self-belief and self-love, crisis management, fewer slips, respect for others, maintaining boundaries, avoiding inappropriate actions, using modeling in spiritual education, using teamwork in spiritual education, utilizing the capacity of religious places, multi-educational approach, utilizing the capacity of peers, utilizing the capacity of cyberspace, respect for individual differences, life skills, increasing self-esteem, education accompanied by respect, respecting the rights of others	P5, P7, P10, P16, P12

Table 2. Example of the Conceptual Reduction Process from Raw Data to Final Categories in Grounded Theory

Row	Raw Cases (Interview / Scientific Texts)	Integrated Concept	Final Category	Factor Type
1	The fading of spirituality in adolescents' lifestyle	Need to strengthen spiritual foundations	Attitude towards the current state of spiritual citizenship	Causal
2	External prescription without attention to the real conditions of the school	Dominance of top-down approaches	External environment	Intervening
3	Parrot-like and memory-based teaching of spiritual concepts	Dominance of non-practical approach in spirituality education	Regressive approach	Strategies
4	Increase in students' inner peace and reduction of anxiety	Promotion of mental health and spiritual peace	Mental and Moral Dimension	Consequences

Data analysis in this research was based on thematic coding, i.e., three main stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In the open coding stage, the most key words or terms with high semantic load are extracted. In the axial coding stage, duplicate codes are removed, and codes with shared meaning are placed in one category. In the selective coding stage, codes obtained from the axial coding stage are examined for semantic commonality and then categorized into categories.

It should be explained that for validation, the findings from coding and analysis were assessed using two criteria: researcher review and independent coders. For this purpose, the researchers responsible for writing the present study carefully reviewed and coded the raw primary data. After coding was completed, according to the evaluator reliability criterion and using the expert group, the findings were provided to 5 other experts active in the field of teacher education, and the accuracy of the data was confirmed.

2. Findings

After the open coding process, the research findings were presented in the form of a framework consisting of goals, rationale, content, location, teacher, method, and evaluation. In this process, after merging and conceptual reinterpretation, the initial codes were organized in the form of axial and selective categories. To clarify the path from primary data to final categories and to show the analytical logic used in designing the model, an example of the conceptual data reduction process is presented in the following tables.

3. Discussion and Conclusion

In recent decades, attention to spirituality as the source of healthy human life has been considered by many scholars. Many of these experts believe that the responsibility for spiritual citizenship education lies with the education system, which can address this important matter through the curriculum. However, it must be said that developing

a spiritual citizenship curriculum framework has faced specific issues, which formed the main focus of the present study.

The findings of the current research, which led to the design of a spiritual citizenship curriculum model for upper secondary education, compared to national and international studies, show that although the research literature has addressed the importance of citizenship education, ethics, values, and spirituality, the approach of the present study is distinct and goes beyond previous research in terms of comprehensiveness, curriculum structure, and reliance on the field realities of the educational system.

Many studies have sufficed with the conceptual or value-based explanation of these components, whereas in this research, spiritual citizenship has been reconstructed within a coherent and implementable model at the curriculum level.

At the level of causal factors, the findings of the present study indicate that the increasing need to strengthen spirituality in the current era, the emergence of social and moral problems due to the lack of spirituality, the necessity of tangible and structural spiritual education, and attention to spiritual literacy and intelligence are among the most important reasons for designing a spiritual citizenship curriculum. These findings also show conceptual alignment internationally with the view of Woolley (2018), who considers spiritual citizenship based on the internalization of moral values and conscious responsibility.

Despite this alignment, a significant portion of previous studies, especially those by Dalton, have analyzed citizenship education mainly within the framework of civic participation, political action, and secular social responsibilities, and have paid less attention to spirituality as a causal and foundational factor. In contrast, the present study introduces spirituality not as a marginal component but as the main origin of the formation of citizenship behavior and identity, emphasizing its fundamental role in directing other dimensions of citizenship.

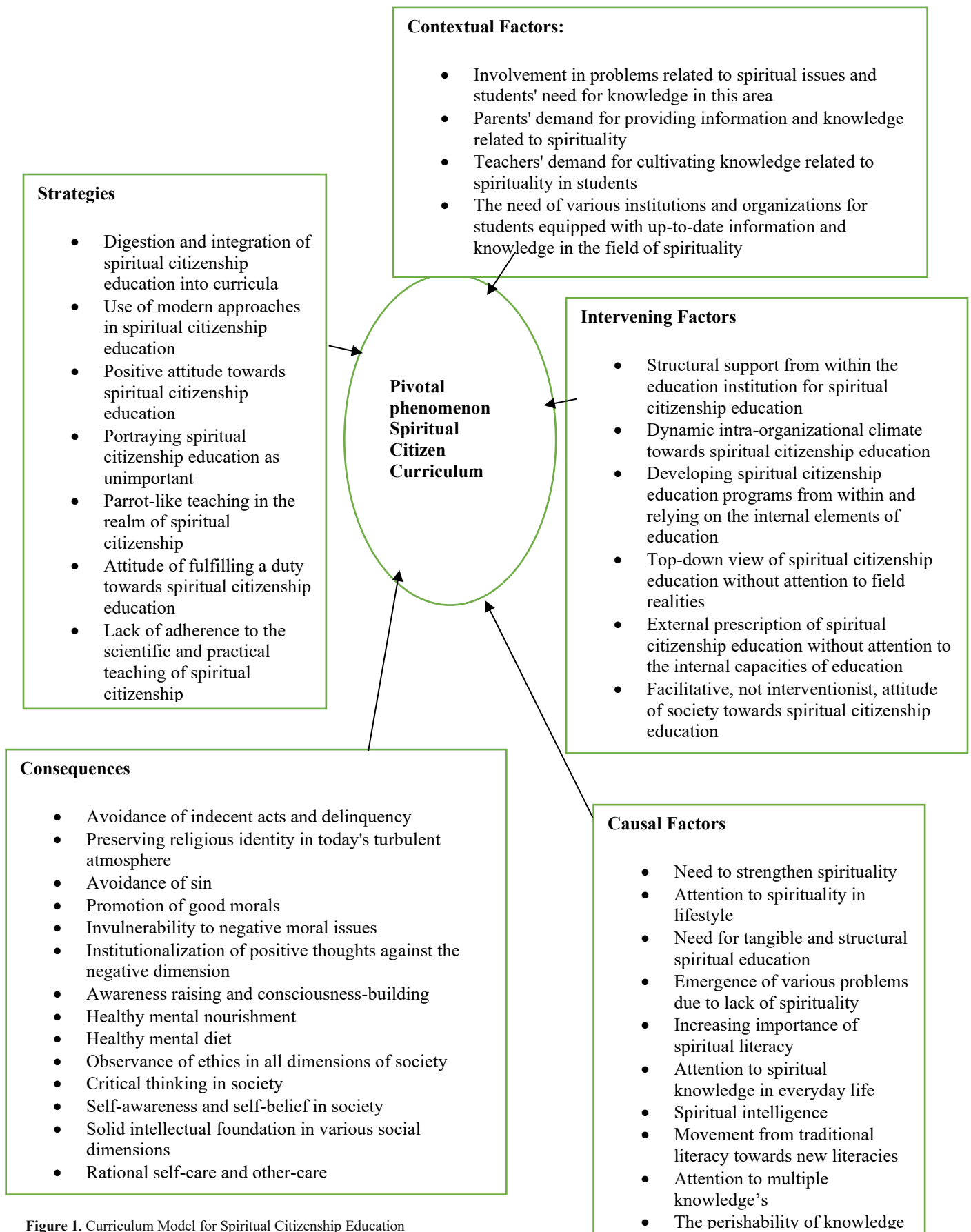


Figure 1. Curriculum Model for Spiritual Citizenship Education

In the section on contextual factors, the findings show that students' engagement with spiritual issues, their need for related knowledge, the demand from parents and teachers for spiritual education, and the need of social institutions for students aware and equipped with up-to-date spiritual knowledge provide the context for realizing the spiritual citizenship model. These results are consistent with the research by Alimoradi et al. (2024), which emphasizes the link between spiritual citizenship, ethics, and the socio-cultural needs of society. In international studies, reports from Oxfam and the views of Marshall and Kennedy also emphasize the role of social, cultural, and educational contexts in educating responsible citizens, although their focus has mainly been on civic and social dimensions, analyzing the spiritual dimension less independently and structurally. In the area of intervening factors, the findings of the present study emphasize the importance of structural support within the education system, the existence of a dynamic organizational climate, and the design of programs based on internal capacities. At the same time, it identifies top-down approaches and external prescription as serious obstacles to realizing spiritual citizenship education. This finding aligns with the views of Hanam and Bista, who have warned about the negative consequences of imposed and decontextualized approaches in citizenship education. The difference is that most of these studies have remained at the level of theoretical critique, while the present study has extracted and explained these factors as objective and influential components in designing a curriculum model.

In the strategies section, the findings indicate that spiritual citizenship education should be implemented in an integrated manner with other subjects, utilizing modern educational approaches, and by forming a positive attitude among educational stakeholders. These results are consistent with the research of Giron and Robert Jackson, which emphasize the school's role in moral and value education; the difference being that these studies have mainly sufficed with providing general recommendations and have less frequently delved into designing an executive, staged curriculum tailored to the formal education structure.

On the other hand, identifying inhibiting strategies such as parrot-like teaching, a duty-fulfilling approach, portraying spiritual education as unimportant, and lack of adherence to scientific and practical teaching constitute important distinguishing aspects of the present study compared to many previous studies. These components have usually been mentioned sporadically and implicitly in national and international research, whereas in the present study, they have been identified and analyzed as independent and influential elements in the ineffectiveness of educational programs.

The outcomes obtained from the proposed model, including avoiding delinquency and moral harms, preserving identity in turbulent social conditions, promoting good morals, enhancing mental health, strengthening self-awareness, self-belief, and developing critical thinking, are consistent with the findings of Nikomram et al. (2011), who consider the internalization of moral values as a factor in reducing social control costs and increasing internal order in society. At the international level, studies such as those by Dalback, Rissanen, and Youssef Say also point to the role of moral and values education in shaping citizens' identity, responsibility, and moral action, but they often lack an executive model tailored to a specific educational context. In this framework, the findings of the present study show that by combining theoretical components with field data and the realities of the education system, a native, comprehensive, and curriculum-oriented model for educating spiritual citizens can be presented that systematically fills the existing gap in the research literature.

Authors Contribution

All the authors have participated sufficiently in the intellectual content, conception, and design of this work or the analysis and interpretation of the data (when applicable), as well as the writing of the manuscript.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interest

The author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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