Reflection on the Iranian Academic General Curriculum in the Globalization Era

Article info

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Abstract

The academic general curriculum is of great importance alongside the specialized curriculum; this field is not only limited to the subject of human knowledge and scientific disciplines, but is also related to the development of personal capabilities, such as the creativity and intellectual abilities, transfer of cultural heritage and values, and the evaluation of committed and accountable citizens. The present study aims to investigate the various areas of the Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in the academic general curriculum in Iran. This is an applied research wherein, a qualitative content analysis method, the thematic analysis (themes), has been applied to the two levels of the selected documents (the law on the goals, duties and organizations of the Ministry of Science, the comprehensive scientific map of Iran, and Iran's sixth development plan) and syllabuses of the general courses approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. The data collection tools included content analysis, note-taking, and a checklist. A descriptive-analytic method was applied to interpret and analyze the data. Based on the research findings, the level of contents associated with globalization has a significant degree of severity and weakness from one course to another in terms of the qualitative aspect. It is certain that most of the contents related to the components of globalization often have indirect links and regarding the positive, negative, and neutral aspects, it can be claimed that the neutral aspect is of considerable significance compared to the other aspects. The qualitative content analysis of the documents and syllabuses of the general courses was done and subsequently, the obtained scheme indicates that the existing approach to the GCE in Iran is a combination of political and civic education approaches, cultural transfer, and the neo-liberal approach, and hence, the educational system should try to train global citizens with an Iranian–Islamic identity. Among the important points in the analysis of the documents is a lack of distinction between globalization and internationalization.

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Introduction

The realization of the concept of a global citizen demands new expectations from education, in particular, higher education, in order to meet the individual and social needs across different fields (Howe, 2014). The aim of higher education is to train effective human resources toward meeting the needs of a society whose labor markets, institutions, and enterprises are being increasingly influenced by the changing processes brought about by globalization (Kromydas, 2017). The efficacy of higher education, thus, depends on the inclusion of the required skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to respond logically and appropriately to these requirements (Hakimzadeh, 2010). Meanwhile, curricula, as the most important element and means of higher education for the training of such a citizen, play a decisive and undeniable role in achieving the goals and missions of universities; the field of general education plays an important role in this regard (Keshavarz, 2011). Therefore, identifying the critical areas of the global citizenship education (GCE) in the academic curriculum is one of the main goals of the educational systems of different countries worldwide for the development of the global citizens (Rashidi, 2017b). Accordingly, the present study aims to answer the general question of the research (i.e., what are the areas of the global citizenship education in the academic curriculum?) along with the following question: how is the representation of the concept of a global citizen in the documents and syllabuses of the general courses related to the academic curriculum? A glance at the history of Iran's higher education system and a consideration of the studies conducted in this regard presents the fact that the theoretical and practical lessons obtained from these trainings for educating global citizens are different from those regarding the development of global citizens in the developed countries of the world. Through the use of an integrated approach, the higher education system seeks to realize the potentials of human beings at the international and national levels and help in meeting the social needs of the society (Rashidi, 2017c). In a study (Hamdi & Rezghi Shirsavar, 2013). Evaluated the performances of the universities in improving the citizenship education in the metropolitan cities of Iran. The results of this study indicated that the components of personal autonomy, awareness of the global issues, gender equality, diversity and multiculturalism, democracy, peace and conflict resolution, urban values, ethical values, environmental awareness, national identity and patriotism, work-related values, and family values were ranked from the first to the twelfth places, respectively. Universities have had an excellent performance in inculcating personal autonomy, awareness of the global issues, and gender equality, as the key components of citizenship education; however, they have had a very weak performance with respect to the components of environmental awareness, national identity and patriotism, work-related values, and family values. In addition (Arefi, Ghahremani, & Rezaeizadeh, 2009). investigated the necessity and strategies to improve the curriculum for general education courses in the undergraduate degree from the viewpoint of the students and faculty members of the Shahid Beheshti University of Tehran. The results indicated that the existence of a general education curriculum is necessary in higher education programs from the viewpoint of the students and faculty members and the thematic content approach is of a paramount importance in order to improve the general education curriculum. In another study, conducted by (Stoner, Perry, & Wadsworth, 2014).entitled as "Global citizenship is key to securing global health: The role of higher education", it was concluded that not only is individual responsibility very difficult but also, it is not effective by itself. Each person has to imagine herself/himself in a global position to understand the importance of health. A global citizen is someone who is: (1) aware of global issues, (2) socially responsible, and (3) civically engaged. (Gordon, 2014) conducted a study entitled as "Curriculum Integration versus Educating for Global Citizenship: A (Disciplinary) View from the International Relations Classroom"; he studied the students who went abroad and paid for their education, claiming that their curriculum was based on the norms of the global citizenship education. The results of his study indicated that, in many colleges that have international relations, it is possible to conduct and incite more group discussions, create groups that distribute overseas experiences, and to some extent, achieve the specific learning goals of the global citizenship education. (Sparapani, Callejo Perez, Gould, Hillman, & Clark, 2014) in a study titled "A global Curriculum?", investigated the teaching and learning practices of the United States of America, Taiwan, India, and Mexico. They found that teaching and learning are complex activities that include social and cultural themes and related concepts. Social pressures

and contradictions are rising due to these international competitions. Thereby, this research outlines a global discussion regarding internationalization in education through the comparative analyses of the current educational discourse in the fields of mathematics, science, and technology in the United States of America,   Mexico,   India,   and   Taiwan.
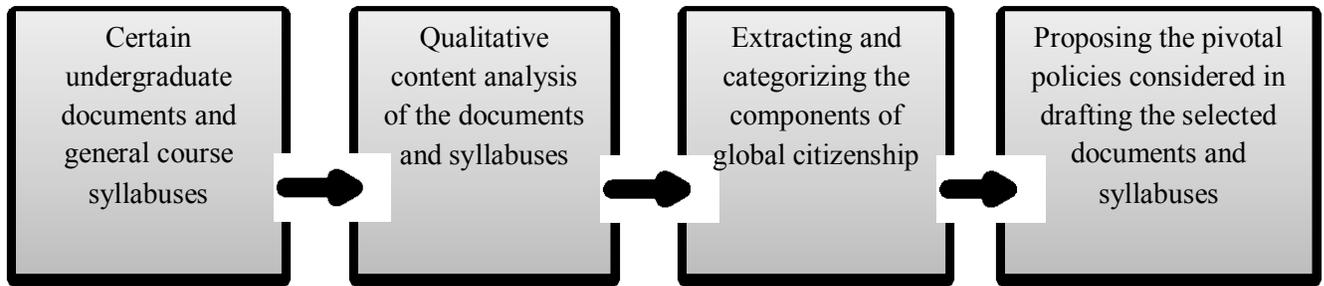
| Certain undergraduate documents and general course syllabuses | → | Qualitative content analysis of the documents and syllabuses | → | Extracting and categorizing the components of global citizenship | → | Proposing the pivotal policies considered in drafting the selected documents and syllabuses |

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of the Research

Methodology
Given the nature of the qualitative researches, the qualitative content analysis (thematic analysis) method has been applied in the present study. This method is based on determining the concepts in the selected texts and the way in which they have been defined and represented. These definitions and representations, sometimes, cannot be distinguished at the first glance (Farasatkhah, 2016). Hence, qualitative content analysis, in addition to being a research method, serves as a tool, which helps the researcher to display what is happening in different layers through the continuous text analysis (Mohammad Pour, 2013). The statistical population of the study consisted of two parts: the first part included the general syllabuses of the undergraduate degree and the second part consisted of the national documents, out of which, three documents (the law on the goals, duties, and organizations of the Ministry of Science, the comprehensive scientific map of Iran, and Iran's sixth development plan) were selected using the purposive sampling method considering the aim of the study.

Results and Discussion
In order to answer the general question of the study (i.e., how is the representation of the concept of a global citizen in the documents and syllabuses of the general course related to the academic curriculum?), the qualitative content analysis method (the thematic analysis) was used in two levels in regard to the selected documents and syllabuses approved by the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution.
   1.   Qualitative Content Analysis of the Approved Syllabuses for the General Academic Courses:

Globalization involves various components and some fundamental axes (Farmihani Farahani, 2010). Given the priorities and needs of globalization as well as the efforts and needs in this area, in general, the following components have been considered in this assessment (Rashidi, 2017a). Obviously, the mentioned cases are based on the researched literature and based on the conceptual map derived from this extensive literature. In fact, it has been tried to review the approved syllabuses based on the presented components and thereby analyze how these components are represented in the approved syllabuses (Table 1).
Characteristics of globalization based on the research literature for analyzing the approved syllabuses.

Accountability and acceptance of duties in regard to the future of the world from various dimensions(Rosic,2007),Ability to work with others and communicate effectively, commitment to equality and social justice (Mir Ahmadi, 2016) ,Ability to resolve conflicts and commitment to peace and compromise, commitment toward sustainable growth and environmental protection Participation in the community at the local, national, and global levels and in various dimensions Awareness of and respect for the values, beliefs, and rights of others(Rapoport,2014),Recognition of the international systems, Taking a

global and democratic attitude, knowledge and ability to utilize modern information technologies(Takkac & Akdemir,2012),Recognition of the interdependence and tendency to the formation of human society, Learning to recognize, act, live, and coexist, Enjoying critical thinking, creativity, and accountability in all aspects, Having self-esteem and national and global identity (Zohbyun & Elyasi,2014).

Table 1. Qualitative Content Analysis of the General Course Syllabuses

Evaluation of the approved general course syllabuses		
Name of the Course	Syllabuses	Characteristics of a global citizen
Ethic of Life (Applied Ethics)		
1	Adoption of Islamic moral values on personal and social issues	Committed to Equality and Social Justice
2	Work ethic and livelihood referring to group work	Team Work
3	Social etiquettes that refer to citizenship ethics, accountability, etc.	Accountability
4	Morals of friendship and friends, which refer to the duties and rights of friends towards each other…	Awareness of and Respect for the Values and Rights of Others
5	Environmental ethics, which refer to the etiquettes of human interaction with the environment and ethical solutions to environmental problems.	Environment and Sustainable Development
Social and Political Rights in Islam رین		
1	Justice	Social Justice
2	Freedom of thought and belief	Democracy
3	Freedom of speech	Democracy
4	Selection of job and housing	Awareness of and Respect for the Values and Rights of Others
5	Security and social justice	Committed to Equality and Social Justice
6	Law and International Relations in Islam	Understanding the International Systems
An Introduction to the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran		
1	Law	Awareness of and Respect for the Values and Rights of Others
2	Public freedoms	Democracy
3	Foreign policy	Understanding the International Systems
Human in Islam		
1	Human freedom and responsibility	Democracy and Accountability
Political Thought of Imam Khomeini (RA)		
1	Parties and groups and political participation	Participation in the community at the local, national, and global levels and in various dimensions
2	Principles and fundamentals of foreign policy	Understanding the international systems
3	International system	Understanding the international systems
4	Social justice	Committed to Equality and Social Justice
Foreign language course syllabus: The foreign language course has been presented, the aim of which is to "acquire the ability to read and understand the concepts of foreign texts in order to prepare students for the acquisition of semi-specialized texts", which includes eight clauses. As		

globalization is accompanied by the expansion of the language of the dominant discourses, the prevalence of the language of these dominant discourses is associated with the expansion of the process of globalization within the framework of the wishes and interests of the owners of the specific discourse; this is the same phenomenon that is true about English today, the language found to be dominant in most of the societies. A review of the existing documents and programs of the Iranian society reveals that this issue, despite its importance and relevance to the strategic needs of the society, has been neglected and no separate policy or program has been prepared and developed in this regard yet. National documents have transiently addressed the English language and this indicates serious weaknesses, disagreements, and conflicts in this regard (Aghagolzadeh & Davari, 2014).

Note:
Alongside the courses mentioned in the field of the approved general course syllabuses, there are a number of general lessons in which the concept of the global citizen were observed since they are not concerned with this concept in terms of their aim and contents. These courses include Familiarity with the Holy Quran, Reading the Holy Quran, Family Planning, Imam Khomeini's Last Will and Testament, Physical Education, Persian Literature, Islamic Revolution of Iran, Islamic Thought 1 and 2, Philosophy of Ethics, Early History of Islam, Islamic History and Culture and Islamic Civilization, and Practical Mysticism in Islam (Rashidi, 2016c).

2. Qualitative Content Analysis of the Selected Legal Documents Associated with the Concept of the Global Citizen in Higher Education:

It can be argued by examining the above documents that the laws are not at the same level. For example, in the Comprehensive Scientific Map of the Country, the general law and other laws are not at the same level; however, in actual practice, the context of Iran's higher education is composed of all the above laws, which shape its realities in the macro and micro levels. In addition, it is not possible to depict a rational space in which the micro and macro policies and the associated laws approved for them are at separate sides. The micro policies and rules are established in order to enforce the macro laws and consequently, they must be consistent with each other. Based on the findings of this study, from the qualitative aspect, the level of the contents associated with globalization has a significant degree of severity and indicates a weakness from one lesson to the other and from one document to the other. It is certain that most of the materials associated with the elements of globalization are those that are often indirectly related to the components of globalization; besides, from the positive, negative, and neutral aspects, it can be claimed that the neutral aspect is of a considerable significance as compared to the other aspects. The scheme obtained from the qualitative content analysis of the documents and the general course syllabuses indicates that the existing approach to GCE in Iran is a combination of the political, civic, and cultural transfer approaches as well as the neo-liberal approach. The findings from the documents indicate that the concepts and assumptions, each denoted with a "title", are introduced into the Iranian society with the aim of preservation of face, and this is due to various factors, such as scientific relations, Internet and satellite communications, etc. One of the important points in the analysis of the documents is the lack of any distinction between globalization and internationalization. This is considering that globalization is an infrastructure for internationalization. Accordingly, national documents and different perspectives in the field of education and training should be based on training a global citizen with an Islamic−Iranian identity (Table 2).

Table 2. Analysis of the Selected Legal Documents Related to the Concept of the Global Citizen in Higher Education

Selected and Relevant Legal Documents for the Analysis of the Concept of the Global Citizen in Higher Education		
Name or No. of the Legal Article	The Text of the Law	Characteristics of a global citizen
Comprehensive Scientific Map of Iran		
Chapter 1, Value 7	Science and technology should be enabling, empowering, and wealthy and in accordance with the environment and the spiritual, physical, mental, and social health of the community members.	▪ Awareness of and respect for the values, beliefs, and rights of others
Chapter 1, Value 9	Active and inspiring interaction with the global environment and the processes of science and technology development in the world.	▪ Democracy
Chapter 1, Value 10	Ethics, primacy of public interests over the individual and group interests, strengthening the spirit of cooperation,	▪ Understanding the international systems

	participation, and accountability in the academic community and its related institutions.	
Chapter 2. The Prospect of Science and Technology in Iran 1404	• Ability to produce and develop science, technology and innovation and applying its achievements • Leading the boundaries of knowledge and technology along with the scientific authority in the world	▪ Democracy and Accountability
Chapter 2. The macro goals of the science and technology system	• Establishing a knowledge-based and justice-centered society through the employment of competent, educated, and elite people for exerting scientific authority in the world • Deepening and expanding the general and specialized education besides strengthening the morality, openness, and spirit of creativity in the members of the community, especially in the younger generation • Expansion of scientific and technological cooperation with the international scientific centers	▪ Participation in the community at the local, national, and global levels and in various dimensions
Chapter 2; 2-3. The objectives of the country's science, technology, and innovation system	1. Achieving a sufficient level of general knowledge in the members of the community and eliminate illiteracy 2. Full coverage of the general education curriculum 3. Achieving an appropriate level of knowledge and skills of the country's workforce in accordance with the international standards in order to meet the needs of the community and the domestic and international labor market 4. Achieving the first place in the rankings of the universities in the Islamic world.	▪ Understanding the international systems
Chapter 2-4. Optimum quantities of high-quality macro indicators of science and technology and international participation	• The number of articles shared with other countries • The number of international collaborative researches • The number of new scientific fields worldwide • The number of prominent and influential scientists involved in the management of international assemblies • The number of invited speakers and members of scientific committees and international conferences	▪ Understanding the international systems
Chapter 4; Strategy 1, 1-4. (Strategies for the Development of Science and Technology), macro strategy 9	• Active and effective scientific and technological interaction with other countries, especially with the neighboring and other Islamic countries of the region.	▪ Committed to equality and social justice
Chapter 2-4. National Strategies and Measures in Accordance with the Macro Strategies for the Development of Science and Technology in the Country	Macro strategy 9 • Active and effective scientific and technological interaction with other countries, especially the neighboring and other Islamic countries. • Development of Persian language as one of the world's leading scientific languages. • Development and strengthening of the networks of national and transnational relations among the scientists and researchers and international cooperation with the Islamic and Persian-speaking countries. • Modification of the mechanisms and rules of recruitment, promotion of researchers, allocation of incentives, scholarships, and study opportunities in order to increase international collaboration among scholars.	▪ Having self-esteem and national and global identity ▪ Understanding the international systems ▪ Participation in the community at the local, national, and global levels and in various dimensions ▪ Ability to resolve conflicts and commitment to peace and compromise ▪ Ability to work in a team and communicate effectively
General Policies of the Sixth Development Plan		
Science and Technology Policy	• Strategies for the development of international scientific cooperation with the target countries.	• Ability to work in a team and communicate

- Policies for the development of scientific and technical cooperation with international institutions and centers. - Purposive development of international presence for acquiring international academic seats. - Development of an international presence. - Earning foreign exchange from the activities in the field of science and technology To implement these policies, the following solutions are considered: - Increase Iran's share of research credits in international institutions and expansion of the research collaborations with the universities and research centers abroad. - Launch the center of thinking for science and technology studies. - Growth in the number of international seats occupied by Iranian scholars. - Development of scientific diplomacy and international relations. - Grant one trip per year for outstanding national and international scientists.	- effectively - Committed to equality and social justice - Ability to resolve conflicts and commitment to peace and compromise - Participation in the community at the local, national, and global levels and in various dimensions - Awareness of and respect for the values, beliefs, and rights of others - Understanding the international systems - Having a global and democratic attitude - Knowledge and ability to use modern information technologies - Having self-esteem and national and global identity

The Law on the Goals, Duties, and Organizations of the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology		
Article 2, Clause 2, Note 14	- Physical health, vitality, and strengthening of will - Development and excellence of human aspects in students to strengthen the ties of right and justice and respect for all human beings around the world - The dignity of knowledge, guidance, and empowerment, and understanding the position of the teacher - Development, promotion, and deepening of all types of rationality in all areas of education - Promote the status and role of family education and its effective partnership with the formal education system - Educational justice in the quantitative, universal, and obligatory dimensions and qualitative justice regarding the individual, gender, cultural, and geographical differences	- Responsibility for the future of the world from a variety of dimensions - Ability to work with others and communicate effectively - Ability to resolve the conflicts and commitment to peace and compromise - Committed to the sustainable development and environmental protection - Participation in the community at the local, national, and global levels and in various dimensions
Article 1	The mission of this institution is to provide the required education for students during the twelve academic years	Participation in the community at the local,

while considering their basic competencies in order to help them achieve a healthy life in the individual, family, social, and global dimensions. This has a fundamental role in the public education system.	national, and global levels and in various dimensions ▪ Respect for others ▪ Committed to equality and social justice ▪ Resolving conflict and committed to peace

Conclusion

As mentioned earlier, the aim of the present study was to investigate the areas of the Global Citizenship Education (GCE) in regard to the academic general curriculum policy of Iran. Based on the findings, the level of contents associated with globalization is of a significant degree of severity and there is a weakness from one course to another in the qualitative aspect. The current approach to the GCE in Iran is a combination of the political, civil, cultural transfer, and the neo-liberal approaches. A lack of distinction between globalization and internationalization and components, such as justice, freedom and security, rights and international relations are among the obscure, controversial, and abstract words that may differ in meaning from one person to another. Hence, it can be concluded that the gap between the top-level documents, curriculum, and the educational institutions of the country in relation to the country's need for globalization is due to the shortcomings of the educational system and the existing curriculum. The text and content of the current educational system has a lot of positive aspects in terms of the general course curriculum and it is efficient in many fields and aspects; however, it seems that the overall output of these texts does not meet the expectations of the society in regard to globalization. Since globalization, as the basis of internationalization, has not been regarded in the national documents, as a result, the prerequisites for introducing the area of internationalization have not been considered based on the conducted studies and measures.

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