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# Educational Needs Assessment of the Formal General Education in the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on A Systematic Review

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## Abstract

Learner needs constitute the foundation of curriculum planning because curriculum decisions should be guided by a comprehensive understanding of the knowledge, competencies, and developmental requirements of learners. However, rapid technological, social, cultural, and economic changes have transformed students' educational needs, while curriculum development in many educational systems has not adequately responded to these emerging demands. The present study aimed to identify and synthesize the educational needs of students in light of contemporary societal transformations and generational changes to provide an evidence-based framework for curriculum development in Iran. A qualitative systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines. The initial corpus consisted of 317 studies addressing educational needs assessment, developmental challenges of children, adolescents, and youth, as well as emerging trends in science, technology, economy, and culture published between 2011 and 2022. After applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 131 studies were selected for final analysis. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and inductive coding procedures. The findings identified a comprehensive framework comprising seven educational domains, seventeen dimensions, and fifty-two categories of learner needs. These domains included religious–moral identity, scientific and technological identity, economic and vocational identity, socio-political identity, biological and physical identity, aesthetic and artistic identity, and fundamental competencies. Together, these domains provide a multidimensional representation of the knowledge, skills, values, and competencies required by students to meet the demands of contemporary society. The findings suggest that curriculum development should move beyond traditional subject-centered approaches toward comprehensive learner-centered frameworks that integrate identity development, twenty-first-century competencies, digital literacy, social participation, and lifelong learning. The proposed framework offers curriculum developers, educational policymakers, and teacher educators a systematic basis for redesigning general education curricula that are responsive to the evolving educational needs of present and future generations.

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# Extended Abstract

## Introduction

Understanding learners' educational needs represents one of the fundamental principles of curriculum planning. Every curriculum is ultimately designed to respond to the characteristics, expectations, developmental capacities, and future requirements of learners. Consequently, identifying learners' educational needs constitutes an essential prerequisite for curriculum design rather than merely a preliminary planning activity. Rapid transformations in science, technology, economy, culture, and social life have significantly altered the competencies expected of future generations. Educational systems are therefore increasingly challenged to prepare learners not only for academic achievement but also for lifelong learning, digital participation, responsible citizenship, professional adaptability, and sustainable personal development. These societal changes require curriculum frameworks that extend beyond traditional disciplinary knowledge toward more comprehensive conceptions of learner development. Although numerous studies have examined specific aspects of students' educational needs, existing evidence remains fragmented across different disciplines and research traditions. Therefore, this study sought to synthesize available evidence systematically to identify a comprehensive framework of students' educational needs that could guide curriculum development in Iran in response to contemporary and emerging societal challenges.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative systematic review methodology. Relevant literature addressing educational needs assessment, developmental characteristics of children, adolescents, and youth, as well as changing trends in science, technology, economy, and culture, published between 2011 and 2022, was identified through comprehensive searches of major scientific databases and publications from 29 national organizations. The review process followed the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews. An initial pool of 317 documents was identified. After removing duplicate records and applying predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, 131 studies were retained for detailed analysis. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Through iterative coding, concepts extracted from the reviewed studies were grouped into categories, dimensions, and broader conceptual domains. This inductive analytical process enabled the development of an integrated conceptual framework representing students' educational needs across multiple developmental, cognitive, social, cultural, and professional dimensions.

## Results

The systematic synthesis identified a comprehensive framework consisting of seven major educational domains, seventeen conceptual dimensions, and fifty-two educational categories that collectively represent the educational needs of contemporary learners. The first domain, religious–moral identity, encompasses religious knowledge, ethical values, faith, and responsible behavior. The second domain, scientific and technological identity, includes science education, mathematics, Persian language and literature, and digital literacy. The third domain, economic and vocational identity, emphasizes employability, career readiness, and labor-market-related competencies. The fourth domain, socio-political identity, incorporates family identity, social participation, political awareness, national identity, cultural identity, and lifestyle development. The fifth domain, biological and physical identity, includes health literacy and environmental literacy. The sixth domain, aesthetic and artistic identity, emphasizes artistic appreciation, creativity, cultural participation, and media literacy. Finally, the seventh domain, fundamental competencies, includes decision-making, self-regulation, self-control, and other transferable competencies necessary for

lifelong learning and personal development. Taken together, these seven domains demonstrate that students' educational needs extend well beyond academic knowledge to encompass identity formation, social participation, technological competence, health, creativity, employability, and essential life skills.

## Discussion and Conclusion

The findings demonstrate that contemporary curriculum development requires a fundamental shift from content-oriented planning toward learner-centered curriculum frameworks that reflect the multidimensional nature of students' educational needs. Rather than focusing exclusively on disciplinary knowledge, curriculum designers should consider learners' cognitive, social, ethical, technological, vocational, cultural, and personal development as interconnected dimensions of education. The proposed framework also reflects the increasing importance of competencies associated with lifelong learning, digital transformation, sustainability, and active citizenship. These competencies have become indispensable for preparing learners to participate effectively in rapidly changing knowledge societies and labor markets. From a practical perspective, curriculum developers, educational policymakers, and teacher education institutions should systematically incorporate the seven identified educational domains into curriculum design, instructional planning, learning assessment, and educational policy. Such integration would facilitate the development of curricula that are more responsive to learners' present and future needs while promoting educational equity for all students rather than only academically high-achieving groups. Overall, this study contributes to curriculum theory by providing a comprehensive evidence-based model of students' educational needs derived from a systematic synthesis of contemporary research. The framework offers a conceptual foundation for redesigning general education curricula that balance academic learning with identity development, life competencies, digital literacy, social responsibility, and lifelong learning. Future research may examine the implementation of this framework across different educational levels and cultural contexts to evaluate its effectiveness in supporting curriculum innovation and educational reform.

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**AI Use Statement:** During the final preparation of this manuscript, artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted tools were used solely to assist in matching and linking in-text citations with the corresponding entries in the reference list.

**Ethical Approval:** Ethical approval was not required for this study because it was conducted as a systematic review of previously published studies and documentary sources and did not involve direct participation of human subjects, collection of identifiable personal data, or experimental interventions.