

THE ROLE OF ELEMENTS OF HIDDEN CURRICULUM IN LEARNING LIFE SKILLS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY OF THE STUDENTS AT ISLAMIC AZAD UNIVERSITY QAEMSHAHR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at investigating the role of the elements of hidden curriculum in learning life skills among university students. It adopts a descriptive survey method. The population of the study encompasses 1500 M.A. students majoring in various fields in 2011, 2012 academic year. The sample consists of 306 students selected through application of random sampling method according to Morgan's table. Researcher-made questionnaire consisting likert-type items was used to collect data. One-way Anova and freedman test were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that according to the students' attitudes instructor-student relation, social-bureaucratic structure of the educational setting, physical environment and architecture of the educational setting, staff-student relation, and student-student relation significantly affect students' life skills.

Keywords: *Hidden Curriculum, Life Skills, and University Students*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, international educational organizations consider learning for knowing, learning for applying, learning for surviving, and learning for co-existing as important missions of higher education systems in the twenty first century (Hakimzade, *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, World-Health Organization (WHO) introduces life skills as a part of mental health plan of this organization in order to stimulate different countries to promote life skills curriculum and develop mental abilities (problem-solving, controlling passions, self-awareness, social adjustment and controlling stress) among children and teenagers (Babaei, 2007). Life skills help people interact with others well in different situations in order to gain desirable results. These skills encompass developing of critical thinking, controlling behavior, acquiring knowledge, establishing two-way communication and improving physical and social environment (Babaei, 2007). Teaching the elements of life skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, creative and critical thinking, interpersonal communication, self-awareness, empathy and coping with stress is part of the goals of educational systems throughout the world. Higher education system is expected to improve and strengthen these skills and capacities. Ahola (2000) states that students have to acquire informal cultural codes in academic environments to perform better. These contradict with the acquisition of life skills, problem-solving- creative thinking, etc. Thus, it is necessary to focus on academic curriculum in order to avoid the negative consequences and achieve the goals and expectations of higher education in terms of teaching life skills. It is said that Philip Jackson coined the term "hidden curriculum" in 1992 in his book entitled "life in classrooms". It is worth mentioning that this is based on his book entitled "circular substructure" published in 1968. Jackson (1968) introduced three Rs: rules, routines, and regulations. Overly (1970) was one of the pioneers who elaborated on hidden curriculum. Dewey (1938) introduced the concept of parallel learning or developing lasting attitudes which according to Schubert (2008) was expanded by Jackson (1968) and inspired education experts of the next generations to attend the hidden consequences of life in classrooms. Jackson (1968) considers two curricula in schools: hidden and visible curriculum. In his view, crowds, praise and power are three elements of hidden curriculum. They mix together to form a different sense of life in classrooms so that every student in order to succeed in school has to experience and get along with it. In fact, students acquire codes regarding the power of teacher from the crowds in classroom and according to the praise system. These codes are hidden curriculum. The requirements of the elements of hidden curriculum in classroom may differ from the

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academic requirement of classroom. According to Dreeben students learn through observing the social structure of classroom and the way teacher applies the power which is the hidden curriculum itself. In fact, the social structure of classroom and the way teacher applies power lead to the formation of a concept besides academic concepts in students (Pinar, 1998).

Hidden curriculum concerns the implied ways of forming knowledge and behavior, that is, what happens besides formal curriculum. It's part of administrative and bureaucratic pressure in school so that students are forced to obey governing ideologies and social activities related to power, behavior and ethics (Husen and Postlethwaite, 1994). Schneider, quoting from Anderson (2002) was one of the first experts who introduced hidden curriculum in higher education. He states that hidden curriculum is a way, through which different participants are engaged in a game, attend signs and adjust themselves to educational context. Schneider believes that hidden curriculum significantly determines what the basis of self-esteem is among all the participants of curriculum. Moreover, the very hidden curriculum is more influential in terms of instructors' and students' adjustment. In his view, there is no kindergarten, high school or college without a hidden curriculum. Samuel and McDowls describe hidden curriculum as malformed, undisciplined, mal-defined and vague so that contradicts the visible curriculum in a hidden way and uncover the interactions in educational environment (Anderson, 2002). Hidden curriculum is described as teaching codes and values in an implied manner, and developing special tendencies in learners (Apple, 2004). According to Lempp and Csealle (2004) hidden curriculum includes a series of effects active at the level of organizational culture and structure; for example, they include the implied rules about surviving in an institute. D'eon, *et al.*, (2006) considers hidden curriculum as learning happening through organizational nature and structure as well as administrators' and instructors' behaviors and attitudes. Harden (2001) considers hidden curriculum as behavioral value and models acquired accidentally. By "accidentally" he means not pre-determined. Schubert (2008) describes hidden curriculum as what is acquired in and out of schools through teaching-learning process an invisible way.

Factors Forming Hidden Curriculum: As discussed earlier, what is planned by designers and material developers for improving and educating learners is called official curriculum which enjoys visible coherent educational goals and determined content selected and organized according to principles and learning methods that are in harmony with the goals and materials. However, learners' acquisition is not limited to formal curriculum. It's not possible to constantly control affective factors of experience formation since other factors that are seldom noticed by educators and planners affect learners' thought and behavior. Sometimes, they are more penetrative than formal curriculum. According to Silver *et al.*, (1980), the most important elements are the organizational structures of an education institute, its social atmosphere and the mutual reactions of teacher-learner. These factors affect the development of attitude and tendency in learner. Wallance (1991) considers grouping students according to their abilities, teacher-student relation, regulations and routines in classrooms, and implied content of textbooks, giving different roles to students based on their sex, and praise structures in classrooms as educational activities that may be included in hidden curriculum.

Silver *et al.*, (2001) believe that hidden curriculum is derived from planned curriculum and informal curriculum. They introduced three sets of informal learning opportunities: administrative and organizational system and regulations of school, social element of school such as social atmosphere, group life processes and mutual reactions among the members of school, situational perceptions of students to our teachers and school as an institute and situational perceptions of teachers towards students. These three types of incoherent curricula are related together and are parts of school philosophy influencing the whole educational institute. According to Maleki (2010) the elements forming hidden curriculum are: rules and regulations of school, interpersonal relation, teacher-learner relation and the relation between teaching and hidden curriculum. Summarizing above-mentioned discussion, the elements forming hidden curriculum are categorized in three classes: structure and regulation of institute, atmosphere of institute, and the relation between people and teacher-learner interaction.

Instructor-Student Interaction: Instructor-student interaction in classroom is affected by its dominant structure of institute and social organization. Such relations may have direct effect on learning in its own

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way (Silver *et al.*, 2001). Instructor may cause different impacts through his behavior and treatment in classroom. If an instructor behaves openly and provide sufficient opportunities for learners, there is self-confidence may be boosted. However, if the instructor makes his own opinions dominant in classroom, learners' ability may be blocked. Moreover, teachers who adopt a materialistic perspective, treats students accordingly and won't have a proper didactic role for them. However, learners' behaviors are crucial in instructors' decision-making. Learners who participate in classroom activities treat others with positive attitude and won't have anti-social behaviors so that it provokes respective attitude in instructors (Maleki, 2010). Several studies investigated the role of learners' behavior in instructor reactions. These studies identified two types of learner-social behavior important for academic achievement: 1) personal mutual action skills such as helping, participating, positive talking and controlling aggression. 2) Assignment related skills such as attendance, positive talking about material, obeying instructors' expectations and consistency in doing assignments. These skills reflect the important general goals of hidden curriculum. Learners who adopt these skills as hidden curriculum and master them would be successful (Silver *et al.*, 2001).

Structure and Regulations of Educational Institute: One of the most important elements of hidden curriculum in an institute is its compact set of rules, regulations and administrative methods. Conservation of such a bureaucratic structure may be considered as a goal itself and affect learner socialization (Silver *et al.*, 2001). In order to administrate current affairs, every educational institute has its own rules and regulations such as classification system, evaluation methods, discipline issues, group activities, and learners' participation in administrative affairs (Maleki, 2006). Classification systems include grouping, promoting procedures and establishing qualifications. Evaluation methods consist of tests, scoring and establishing academic achievement levels. Discipline issues include learners' attendance, classroom regulations, grounding procedure, dismissing regulations, etc. personal and group activities include lectures, student committees, social interest, etc (Silver *et al.*, 2001). Each of the above-mentioned rules and regulations may affect learners' attitudes and behaviors. For example, evaluation methods and teachers' reaction towards the results may affect learners' self-confidence and attitudes toward the teacher.

Architecture and Physical Setting of Educational Center: Several experts believe that nonverbal teaching and behaviors are more influential than other factors in transferring messages to learners. Hence, "environment talks" (Navid, 2003). So the elements such as color, lighting, sounds, facilities and form of college all have educational effects.

Staff-Student Relation: Staff-student relation is one kind of relations in educational centers. Economical, cultural and scientific perceptions and attitudes of the staff at an educational center regarding learners are influential (Ghasemi and Maezooghi, 2008).

Student-Student Relation: characteristics of students and peer groups in different areas have their own effects. In other words, a student is affected by cultural and social characteristics of other students. For instance, students from rich families who have their own culture may feel selfish seeing students from working class families; on the contrary, students from working class families may feel downgraded. Both cases may be included in hidden curriculum (Maleki, 2006).

Research Hypotheses

- 1- There is a significant relationship between the students' relation with the instructors and the students' life skill learning.
- 2- There is a significant relationship between the organizational and social structure of the educational centers and the students' life skill learning.
- 3- There is a significant relationship between the physical environment of the educational center and the students' life skill learning.
- 4- There is a significant relationship between the students' relation with the staff and the students' life skill learning.
- 5- There is a significant relationship between the students' relation with each other and the students' life skill learning.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is applied in terms of its purpose and a survey regarding its procedure. This type of research focuses on the significant factors and deep investigation of the variables.

Statistical Population: The population of this study includes all M.A. students of Azad Qaemshahr University who were 1500 students studying in 2011-2012. Simple random sampling method was used in this research. Moreover, the size of the sample had been selected by using Kerjisy and Morgan table consisting of 306 students.

Data Collection Instruments: In this study a researcher-made questionnaire was used besides library analysis in order to gather the applied data. The questionnaire was based on Likert scale including five options (very much, very, average, few, very few).

Reliability: In order to approve the reliability of the study, the questionnaire was tested through valid sources and skilled people in the field of educational sciences and lesson planning.

Validity: The validity of the research was confirmed as 0.83 according to the results of Cronbach Alpha.

Data Analysis Instruments: Descriptive and inferential statistics are used in the present study. In the section of descriptive statistics, frequency table, graphs and indices of central scattering, and in the section of inferential statistics, spearman correlation coefficient is used in order to analysis the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

First Research question: There is a significant relationship between the students’ relation with the instructors and the students’ life skill learning.

Table 1: Spearman correlation coefficient between the students and their life skills learning

Statistical index	N	R	Df	sig
Variables				
Relationship between the students and instructors	306	0.539	305	0.000
Students’ life skills learning				

According to table 4-1 and the obtained P value, in the level of confidence of 95%, sig=0.000 is less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. It can be seen that the observations strongly confirm the first research question. Therefore, with 95% level of confidence we can argue that there is a significant relationship between the students’ relation with the instructors and the students’ life skill learning.

Second Research Question: There is a significant relationship between the organizational and social structure of the educational centers and the students’ life skills learning.

Table 2: Spearman correlation coefficient between the organizational and social structure of the educational centers and the students’ life skills learning

Statistical index	N	R	Df	sig
Variables				
T the organizational and social structure of the educational centers	306	0.604	305	0.008
Students’ life skills learning				

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According to table 4-2 and the obtained P value, in the level of confidence of 95%, sig=0.008 is less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. It can be seen that the observations strongly confirm the second research question. Therefore, with 95% level of confidence we can argue that there is a significant relationship between the organizational and social structure of the educational centers and the students' life skill learning.

Third Research Question: There is a significant relationship between the physical environment of the educational center and the students' life skill learning.

Table 3: Spearman correlation coefficient between the physical environment of the educational center and the students' life skill learning

Statistical index	N	R	Df	sig
Variables				
The the physical environment of the educational center	306	0.641	305	0.001
Students' life skills learning				

According to table 4-3 and the obtained P value, in the level of confidence of 95%, sig=0.001 is less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. It can be seen that the observations strongly confirm the third research question. Therefore, with 95% level of confidence we can argue that there is a significant relationship between the physical environment of the educational center and the students' life skill learning.

Fourth Research Question: There is a significant relationship between the students' relation with the staff and the students' life skill learning.

Table 4: Spearman correlation coefficient between the students' relation with the staff and the students' life skill learning

Statistical index	N	R	Df	sig
Variables				
the students' relation with the staff	306	0.638	305	0.000
Students' life skills learning				

According to table 4-4 and the obtained P value, in the level of confidence of 95%, sig=0.000 is less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. It can be seen that the observations strongly confirm the fourth research question. Therefore, with 95% level of confidence we can argue that there is a significant relationship between the students' relation with the staff and the students' life skill learning.

Fifth Research Question: There is a significant relationship between the students' relation with each other and the students' life skill learning.

Table 5: Spearman correlation coefficient between the students' relation with each other and the students' life skill learning

Statistical index	N	R	Df	Sig
Variables				
the students' relation with each other	306	0.588	305	0.004
Students' life skills learning				

According to table 4-5 and the obtained P value, in the level of confidence of 95%, sig=0.004 is less than the significance level of $\alpha=0.05$. It can be seen that the observations strongly confirm the fifth research

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question. Therefore, with 95% level of confidence we can argue that there is a significant relationship between the students' relation with each other and the students' life skill learning.

Discussion

The results of the study revealed that hidden curriculum plays a key role in learning life skills among the students. According to their attitudes, hidden curriculum elements (instructor-student) relation, administrative and social education of center, architecture of the educational center, staff-student relation and the student-student relation) affect learning life skills among students. The findings of this research are in line with the researches conducted by Bavari (2010), Bayanfar (2009), Xojen (2009), Babaie (2006), Hira (2008), Doen (2006), Mark *et al.*, (2006), Miar and James (2006), Yang *et al.*, (2006), Apple (2004), Anderson (2002) and Ahola (2000). What the lesson planners in the educational system prepare for the growth and development of the students is the formal lesson plan. But there are some other factors which affect on the thought and emotion of the students and often are more influential than the formal lesson plan. If the formal and explicit lesson planning system of the educational system clarifies somehow the implicit messages and govern them, it can cover the implicit lesson plans. Therefore, planners should concentrate more analytically on the educational environments and lesson plans based on these new concepts and they should be aware that life in the classroom is much deeper than the imagines which we often depict in the formal lesson plan. The result is that formal lesson planners of the educational system must constantly consider the hidden lesson plan elements as a black educational box. In general, it is recommended that:

- 1) Generally, lesson planners in the educational system should strongly notice the field of implicit lesson plan in the process of formal lesson planning.
- 2) Making familiar and aware the instructors of the effect of their behavior and attitude on the students.
- 3) Improvement of the organizational and social structure of the educational centers such as discipline regulations and the methods of qualification improvement.

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