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Hidden Curriculum: An Apparent Challenge or an Unexplored Opportunity?

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Abstract

Hidden curriculum concerns implicit teachings and the factors affecting the emergence of the said teachings which students experience as a result of attending school. The essence of the present paper is the systematic review of those scientific-investigative articles carrying the title of hidden curriculum and which are products of Iranian researchers' endeavors within the last two decades (1991-2012). 19 papers in this regard, made available through domestic and international data bases and profiled domestic magazines were included in this investigation for an examination of their full texts (no sampling applied). The present review study aims at determining the most important educational influences raised from hidden curricula and providing applicable solutions towards optimal employment of positive consequences and avoidance from negative ones. Findings indicate the dominance of negative consequences over positive educational outcomes in various dimensions of hidden curriculum (school structure, school's social atmosphere and teacher-student interaction) in Iranian schools. This implies the necessity of serious consideration of solutions presented herein in order to prevent the replacement of the opportunity raised by the hidden curriculum with the challenges resulted from it within the school.

Keywords: Official Curriculum, Hidden Curriculum, Dimensions of Hidden Curriculum

Introduction

Schools in the third millennium possess the legacy of those ideas on which the glorious human civilization has been founded in science and technology areas. Appreciating such achievements and improving that treasure of human wisdom and knowledge is a mission that is closely linked to educational institutions in today's world. Success in this area will be achieved only through the formulation of an efficient and up-to-date curriculum. Curriculum, either considered as a set of courses, or a program for study, a directory of headings, content of a course or set of courses, a schedule for teaching, a set of goals and purposes, or a set of learning experiences and a way of thinking (Vajargah, 2009), is oriented to achieve a nation's educational system goals. There is no doubt that only a desirable curriculum which is a balanced, coherent and proportional combination of elements such as goals, content, learning activities, teaching methods, learning

materials and resources, evaluation, space and grouping- logically adjusted during the curriculum planning process- may provide for such an achievement (Ebadi, 2013).

In Iran, the goals of educational system have a distinct status as defined by the Education's fundamental development document and positioning in the areas determined by the educational philosophy (beliefs, religious customs and arts, social, political, biological and physiological, aesthetic and artistic, economic and professional and scientific, technological education). Official (explicit) curricula in all educational courses correspond to the same goals. Notwithstanding all planning, what occurs in reality is not aligned with the efforts of those involved in educational system and its subsystems and students, as unpredictable actors, process their scenes differently and play roles which are not planned intentionally before.

Such unofficial, unintended and unpredicted experiences are known as *hidden curriculum*. The concept of hidden curriculum, since its presentation by Philip Jackson in 1968 has forced not only the professionals in this area but also those of other areas such as psychology and sociology to theorize and explore its roles and effects on learning in various knowledge, attitude and skill areas. In Iran, too, education researchers have not neglected the exploration of hidden curriculum roles and have added to the literature by their investigations and compilations. Analytic review and examination of some of these investigations – carrying curriculum in their titles- was considered by the present paper.

The correspondence of hidden curriculum with values, demands, norms, attitudes and impressions the students receive by interacting with the culture and structure governing the school, on one hand represents a valuable opportunity which may lead to enriched learning experiences and on the other hand, reminds a threat which, if neglected by curriculum planners and those involved in educational programs, will be destructive to learning. Hidden curriculum, as defined, includes unspecified (intended or unintended) teachings and what plays a role in those teachings. Although faced no conceptual challenge by curriculum professionals in its *unspecified teachings* part, this definition is controversial in its continuation, regarding it being intended or unintended. Some consider these teachings as a legacy of school years for the whole life which is much more permanent than teachings corresponding to official (explicit) curriculum (Mehrmohammadi, 2008).

This implies the necessity of observing what the students experience in the light of their attending the school and tracking everything that they learn among the educational environment walls without the planning generation having intended them. In other words, hidden curriculum is the educational black box. If this is true, one has to see: how one may find a way through it and put its secrets in the service of learning?

There is no doubt that the key to the secrets of this curriculum may be found in the treasury of thinking and research. Therefore it is necessary to build on the works of those researchers who tried to find those secrets to understand whether the hidden curriculum is an apparent challenge which will be followed by the futility of the intended goals of curriculum or a hidden opportunity which will lead to a productive education by revealing its capacities.

The present paper is an effort in this area and a systematic review on a series of investigations performed in Iran under the title of hidden curriculum; and tries to determine the possible challenges/opportunities of hidden curricula and their positive/negative effects; and to suggest some applicable approaches to the curriculum planners.

Materials and Methods

Table 1 summarizes a profile of the research background and methodologies on hidden curriculum in Iran together with the respective titles and codes which will serve as references throughout this paper.

Title	Researchers	Methodology	Research Code	Researcher(s) Code
Hidden curriculum, a study of implicit learning at school: case study: scientific spirit	Haddad Alavi, Abdollahi, Ali Ahmadi	Qualitative, survey, case study, demographic	110	11
A study exploring the performance of educational management as a component of hidden curriculum and the student's value-related education	Kazemi & Mahram	Qualitative, 3-month case study,	120	12
Determining the challenges of high school religious hidden curriculum and improvement of Islamic education	Saiidi Rezvani	Survey and content analysis	130	13
Determining the effect of hidden curriculum on middle school students' educational achievement for model development purposes	Bayanfar, Maleki, Delavar, Seyf	Qualitative, mixed or combined method	140	14
A study of the role of hidden curriculum in students' disciplinary behaviors in the view of principals and teachers of middle schools in Khalkhal, Iran	Taghipoor, Ghaffari	Descriptive-correlation	150	15
A study of unintended consequences of hidden curriculum raised by the social atmosphere of middle schools in Isfahan and solutions to reduce its negative outcomes	Alikhani, Mehrmohammadi	descriptive	160	16
A study of the role of hidden curriculum in creating attitudes towards strength, improvement of national identity and globalization	Ghorbani, Ghahraman, Sharepoor, Izadi	survey	170	17
The role of hidden curriculum in university students' scientific identities	Mahra et al.	Survey, qualitative	180	18

A study of the role of hidden curriculum components in middle school students' learning	Fallh et al.	Descriptive, survey	190	19
Realization of religious teachings goals		Analytic, theoretical	200	20
Implicit and inverse curriculum in Iran's today education	Farasatkha h	Analytic, theoretical	210	21
Hidden curriculum, emphasis on social education	Karimi	Analytic, theoretical	220	22
Hidden curriculum, absurd curriculum planning and absurd hidden curriculum	Mehrmoha mmadi	Analytic, theoretical	230	23
Identifying the damages of citizenship education in hidden curriculum, theoretical secondary education system	Fathi et al.	Survey, descriptive	240	24
An analysis of implicit curriculum, a new discussion in unknown dimensions of educational system	Ghoorchia n	Analytic, theoretical	250	25
An evaluation of hidden curriculum in Iran's higher education system	Mahram	Case study	260	26
Effects of hidden curriculum on educational behavior of physical training students	Rezazadeh et al.	Survey	270	27
The hidden relationship between organizational environment and hidden curriculum in secondary schools in Dehloran, Iran	Amini & Yazdekhas t i	Survey	280	28
A study of hidden curriculum in masters' dissertations at Shahid Beheshti Univ.	Fathi et al.	Qualitative, ethnic	290	29

Table 1. Codes and Titles of Reviewed Research Papers

Table 2 presents an example of definitions of hidden curriculum cited by reviewed papers.

Definitions of hidden curriculum in domestic papers	Researcher (s) code	Research Code
Values, intentions, norms, attitudes, skills and impressions dependent of cognitive materials transmitted to students implicitly through school's culture	11	110
Student's strategies in successful passage of curriculum or planned obstacle	19	190
Unforeseen outcomes, functions and educational results which are a certain and effective part of educational experience, though non-apparent in curriculum guidelines or educational policies	20	200
A curriculum with unspecified but intended goals	20	200
Teachings specified within the curriculum implementation framework and experienced by students because of being present throughout the educational system's culture, corresponding mostly to expectations and values rather than knowledge-related areas	23	230
A curriculum includes all beliefs that students obtain directly from environment, living and non-living objects around them in a passive way (cited from Hubert, 2000)	24	240
Everything that students learn in everyday life and in interaction with learning environments	24	240
Hidden curriculum includes implicit, unofficial and intangible teaching of the system of values, impressions and non-scientific aspects of schools which are not affected by the entire educational system and the structure and texture of society (cited from Ghoorchian, 1995)	27	27

Table 2. An example of definitions of hidden curriculum cited by reviewed papers

The present investigation consists of a systematic review performed through reference to accredited databases to review the domestic research papers carrying the title of hidden curriculum. The main key word was *hidden curriculum* in both Farsi and English and by searching in search engines such as Google, Google Scholar, ERIC, Springer Link and Pubmed and in domestic databases such as SID, Irandoc, Magiran, SRLST, and ISC as well as Scirus, Sciencedirect, and Excite and without selecting a specific language, and limited by the last 20 years time frame, relate papers were found. Next, the papers which were not written by Iranian researchers were eliminated and finally 19 papers were included as the population- without sampling- for a thorough examination of texts and a review of findings on positive and negative effects of hidden curriculum. The selection criterion was the papers' direct consideration of hidden curriculum as the essence of research and discussion of its challenges and opportunities (if any) for the educational system.

With an accurate examination of all papers, first their findings were extracted and coded. Then, they were analyzed and grouped considering the three dimensions of hidden curriculum that is, school structure, school's social atmosphere and teacher-student interaction (Silver, Alexander and Louis, cited by (Khuiinejad, 1997). Before the analysis, the components of the three dimensions of curriculum, accounted for in domestic papers, were identified which are presented in Table 2. In order to facilitate and accelerate the reference-making, an innovative method was used to code the papers, researchers and findings. That is, papers were coded from beginning from 110 and continuing as 120, 130, ... to 290. Researcher (s) code (s) was (were) determined by deleting the zero from the paper codes (11, 12, ...29) and a four-digit number was selected for any finding adding the figures 1,2,... to the research code. For instance, the code number 1101 represents the first finding of the research number 110.

Dimension	Components
School structure	Bureaucracy, laws, regulations, methods and systems or management, students' grouping, school's general organization, promotion requirements, scoring, disciplinary rules, roll call, mobility at breaks, open/closed environment, reward and punishment methods, instrumental subsystem (space, capacity and shape of classrooms, size, window positioning, desks and benches combination and arrangement, physical features, painting and walls decoration), teaching methods and the effects of textbook contents (attractiveness, consistency/inconsistency with everyday life), class and course schedules
School's social environment	The school's atmosphere is a combination of norms, expectations, determining beliefs, school's social system, administrative control, formalities control, personal control and symbolic control, cultural subsystems governing the school (beliefs and values), personal subsystem (beliefs and norms relevant to questioning, curiosity and criticism), power elements, population and peer pressure and instructors' executive culture
Student-teacher interaction	Affected by structure and social atmosphere, this dimension is a combination of task presentation manners, teacher-student relations, teachers' dominant or libertarian attitude, teachers' economic, class-conscious and cultural orientation, classroom interaction patterns (verbal/nonverbal), students' interrelations, task-related skills, communications, interactions and inclusive encounters with authorities, themselves and school personnel

Table 3. dimensions of hidden curriculum and its corresponding components based on Iranian research papers

Results

The main purpose of the present review was to determine the challenges and opportunities raised by hidden curricula and to examine its positive and negative educational effects. Thus, two important questions were considered:

1. What are the most important educational effects –either positive or negative- of hidden curriculum?

2. What are the most important applicable solutions for optimized use of positive effects and release from negative effects of hidden curriculum?

The results of analytic study of reviewed papers are presented in Tables 4-6.

Educational effects reported by domestic papers	Researcher (s) code	Research code
1101- creating a negative competition for scores instead of participation and group work 1102- stabilizing social education on the basis of governing policies 1103- educating obedient individuals 1104- continuation of existing class structure for social control 1105-increased social inequalities 1106- no need for thinking and problem processing, and replacing the memorization method to obtain high scores 1107- grade points are the only measure of academic achievement 1108-education consists of obtaining information only to return tit on tests 1109- no need for participation, cooperation and group work 1110- passive and indifferent attitude	11	110
1201- stabilizing the students' value system in lower levels of Graves' classification, and non-achievement of higher levels due to the managers' performances	12	120
1301- in spite of setting the goal of relating the religion and life in religious curriculum, lessons contain the hidden message of limiting the religion to personal relations with God	13	130
1401-indesirable effect on in-depth , meaningful and viable learning because of negative and unintended effects 1402- influencing 24.77% of students' academic achievements 1403- preferential valuation of various subject matters	14	140
1501- positive and significant relationship between schools' physical structures and disciplinary behavior 1502- significant and positive relationship between schools' organizational structure and students' disciplinary behaviors 1503- positive and significant relationship between school's internal interactions and students' disciplinary behaviors 1504- positive and significant relationship between rewards and punishments with disciplinary behavior 1505- positive and significant relationship between ICT and disciplinary behavior	15	150

1601- significant statistical difference between open and close schools in various dimensions of school atmosphere and effect on average (reduction of) non-commitment, inhibitor factors, vivacity, sincerity, consideration and trust 1602- more closed atmosphere in boys' schools compared with girls' schools	16	160
1801-obtaining anti-educational experience because of chairs arrangement (in rows) 1802-weakened scientific spirit because of inconsistency of content with real needs of learners and lack of horizontal and vertical relationships with other teaching subject matters and lack of contents' volume proportionality with the audience and out of date contents 1803-negaqtive effect on learners' scientific identities because of laws and regulations leading to anti-educational experiences such as increased classroom capacity	18	180
1901- effect of school's laws and regulations as a component of hidden curriculum in learning-teaching process	19	190
2201 and 2301- creating and improving the competition spirit instead of friendship and cooperation by the evaluation system governing the school 2202 and 2302- creating and improving the obedience and submission spirit instead of innovation and creativity 2203- very apparent effect of hidden curriculum on teaching and learning 2303- preferential valuation of various subject matters	22& 23	220& 230
2501- transmitting values and beliefs through powerful mechanisms such as power elements, population and rewarding 2502- teaching and learning the concept of social classes 2503- legitimacy of hierarchy	25	250
2701- significant effect of physical environment and space on learners' behaviors 2702- significant effect of schools' body of regulations on learners' behaviors 2704- significant effect of instruments, sport and educational materials on learners' behaviors	27	270
2801- preferential valuation of various subject matters	28	280
2901- elimination of motivation and effort in learners due to structural reasons (insufficient training) and involvement in investigative work 2902- hatred and bitter experience from investigative work because of awkward laws and paperwork	29	290

Table 4. Positive and negative effects of hidden curriculum with focus on school's structure

Educational effects reported by domestic papers	Researcher (s) Code	Research Code
1111- treating people based on their ranks 1112- induction of values 1113- re-creating negative values 1114- inducing needlessness to school's teachings for solving real life problems	11	110
1302- creating negative attitude toward Islamic studies subject as a result of hidden religious curriculum 1303- creating and improving the idea of religion-politics separation as a result of hidden religious curriculum	13	130
1506- positive, significant link between school's social environment and students' disciplinary behaviors	15	150
1601- effect of closed school atmosphere on (reduced) levels of students' self-confidence	16	160
1701-improvement of national identity as a result of schools' social relations structure 1702- creating and improving the views on national strength as a result of schools' social relations structures 1703-creating a positive attitude toward globalization as a result of schools' social relations structures	17	170
1902- effect of interpersonal relationships on students' learning	19	190
2001- effect of hidden curricula on attainment and transmission of values and attitudes (weakening/strengthening them)	20	200
2204- delay in social education because of undesirable effects of hidden curriculum	22	220
2401- destruction of citizenship education learning components in knowledge-based dimensions 2402- positive effect on manners, such as cleanness, punctuality and politeness 2403- destruction of citizenship education learning components in lawfulness, patriotism , responsibility and participation dimensions	24	240
2601- effects of hidden curriculum components on religious, national, and scientific identities and responsibility, and reduction of these traits in higher grades and increased rates of cheating, addiction and sexual incautiousness	26	260
2703- significant effect of social relations and interactions on learners' behaviors	27	270
2802-negative and significant relationship between organizational environment (open/closed) and obedience and submissiveness	28	280

2803- positive and significant relationship between organizational atmosphere (open/closed) and innovation and creativity 2804- positive and significant relationship between schools' organizational atmosphere (open/closed) and students healthy and non-healthy competitions		
2903- conversion of anti-values to values in case of superficial evaluation of learners' investigative work 2904- learning flattery to be accepted by teachers	29	290

Table 5. positive and negative effects of hidden curriculum with regard to schools' social environment

Educational effects reported by domestic papers	Researcher (s) Code	Research Code
1115- conflict with scientific spirit 1116-creating and strengthening the imitation and obedience vs. innovation, curiosity and creativity 1117-creating and strengthening the passiveness and recourse instead of questioning and criticism 1118-obedience, silence, performing the tasks and taking scores :required for success at school 1119-obedience and repetition of information transmitted by the teacher as the students' duty	11	110
1505- positive, significance link between reward/punishment and disciplinary behavior	15	150
1604- reduced participation and interest in group learning tasks in closed-atmosphere schools 1605-absolute obedience and blind following and concordance with the status quo in schools' closed atmospheres	16	160
1903- effect of teacher-learner relation on learning	19	190
2101-removal of undesirable outcomes of official curriculum's inconsistency with students' real life in concordance of hidden curriculum with students' lived experiences	21	210
2404-positive effect on specific skills such as being quiet and disciplined, self-control, duty-awareness and participation	24	240
2504- order in works	25	250
2905- implicit messages and unofficial but expected demands 2906-understanding the value of professors' assessment and scientific criticism without attention to sex 2907- positive effect of professors' timely behavioral and verbal feedback on learners 2908-satisfaction from teacher and making him/her a model	29	290

2909-adherence to investigative ethics considering the teachers' attitude and integrity 2910- halo effects (formation of false abilities in learners' minds towards the teacher and emergence of repulsion 2911-induction of non-seriousness in works, needlessness to provide a complete and defect-free investigative work following teachers' inconsideration 2912-growth of anti-values and abnormalities due to distances, ambiguities and rumors (lack of communication)		
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Table 6. Positive and negative effects of hidden curriculum regarding the teacher-learner interaction

The second question has been addressed by presenting some solutions derived from the reviewed papers (Table 7).

Solutions	Researcher Code	Research Code
creating an environment of respect, trust and participation at classroom creating a secure environment for discussion, commenting and dialogue at classroom enriching the textbooks, learning methods, teaching facilities, evaluation methods, ... changing the evaluation /scoring system to create motivation ; and evaluating based on discussions, comments, dialogues, experience , innovation and informed questions creating the ground for students' activity and participation in teaching process creating a positive competition environment to flourish the talents and individual potentials improving individual capabilities ,curiosity and questioning spirit through material and non-material rewarding	11	110
providing a model for increasing in-depth, meaningful and viable learning, relying on principles such as varied teaching and evaluation methods, varied motivation methods, varied roles of teachers and learners in educational process, uniform valuation of all subject matters, design and adjustment of desirable educational environments, attention to the effects of material facilities and classroom equipment on in-depth learning, the necessity of familiarity of educational staff in all levels with psychological traits of its students, attention to extraordinary activities for improving students' talents and intelligence	14	140
holding tutorial courses in the form of in-service training on the topic of hidden curriculum centered on arguments such as social	15	150

<p>environment analysis and school and classroom's physical structure, ways to identify appropriate communications among students, ways to create effective interactions between parents and school authorities,</p> <p>equipping the classrooms and providing for hardware facilities, better use of technology, flexible educational plans and better use of virtual space, reconstruction of schools and use of traditional architecture and landscaping, providing for better possibilities of students' participation in school administration</p>		
<p>identifying the social atmosphere governing the school, and trying to improve it</p> <p>increasing principals' awareness to create an open environment , and applying participatory management and leadership at school holding in-service, short-term training courses on hidden curricula designing hidden curricula to bring positive unintended outcomes for the students</p> <p>performing qualitative projects to identify the unintended outcomes of curricula and providing for solutions to cope with their negative consequences</p> <p>use of qualitative evaluation</p>	16	160
<p>designing and changing the classrooms from rectangular to square and creating the possibility of sitting in the form of panel</p> <p>performing educational evaluation in step-by-step format</p>	18	180
<p>replacing negative ideas with positive ones, revising school rules, crating an open atmosphere and giving more freedom of action to students and improving their self-confidence</p> <p>holding in-service trainings and teaching workshops on hidden curriculum and elevating teachers' professional competencies in this respect</p>	19	190
<p>replacing ministry-and super ministry-orientations with school – orientation in determining the curriculum goals and contents</p> <p>participation of real institutions of schools authorities and families in a non-rigged form</p> <p>modifying the cultural and educational goal-setting with a concentrated political-ideological mixture</p> <p>concordance of education with students' real-life experiences</p>	21	210
<p>holding continuous and broad in-service trainings focused on the ways to identify inappropriate relations among students , how to improve them, and ways of creating effective interactions among them</p>	24	240

bringing substantial changes in organizational setting to help students achieve intellectual autonomy and growth of critical thinking and removal of destructive competition bringing changes into schools' environment so that to make them drivers and facilitators of students' initiative and creativity spirit tenderizing the interactions and relations governing the school to improve organizational atmosphere	28	280
use of combined methods (qualitative-quantitative) in evaluating the learners' performances and transforming the scoring system updating the information and knowledge of teachers and students aligned with learners' knowledge and skill demands	29	290

Table 7. Solutions provided by reviewed papers regarding the desirable roles of hidden curriculum

Table 8 indicates that domestic researchers have reported 87 educational outcomes of hidden curricula. 47.13% of cases point to the effects of school structure, 28.89% to school's social atmosphere/environment, and 22.98% relate to the teacher-learner relationships. Negative effects account for 60.92% and positive ones, for 39.08% of them.

Dimension	Positive Effects		Negative Effects		Total
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
School's Structure	12	29.27	29	70.73	41
Schools' Social Atmosphere	12	46.15	14	53.85	26
Teacher-Learner Interaction	10	50	10	50	20
Total	34	39.08	53	60.92	87

Table 8. Frequencies and percentages of educational effects of hidden curricula as reported by the reviewed papers

Discussion and Conclusion

Apparent adoption of the concept of hidden curriculum by education experts confirms the fact that hidden curriculum is not a secret, enigmatic entity hidden under the official curriculum which tries to achieve its goals deceitfully and unobserved by the students. This conceptual 'capital' of curriculum domain has the sign of 'curriculum' on it (Mehrmohammadi, 2008) which means that it cannot be simply considered as a set of unintended/implicit goals imposed on official educational system intentionally or unintentionally. However, the role of students' unintended experiences, obtained in the process of interaction with educational system, is indispensable in the definition of hidden curriculum. The results of a review of the papers related to hidden curriculum in Iran indicates that the common point of all of these papers is their emphasis on implicit teachings and the factors affecting the formation of such teachings as the essence of hidden curricula. The question whether the influence of conscious intent on such a curriculum would impair its concept or add to its comprehensiveness has not been taken into account specifically by reviewed papers and only some researchers have presented prescriptive guidance

to enrich these curricula in their analyses and during their conceptual interpretations, relying on this contradiction. No doubt the emergence of such implicit teachings- either intended or unintended- will have some effects which in the researcher's view, should be taken into accounts by investigators- instead of insisting on conceptual controversies- if the synergic capacity of hidden curriculum is to become the dominant approach in our schools by following the presented solutions , rather than wasting the explicit goals of official curriculum by its negative outcomes. The present research revealed that the said valuable potentials have been neglected in Iranian schools. Dominance of negative effects over positive ones is a bitter reality. This may be due to unawareness and insufficient knowledge of teachers and principals on how to effectively use the said curricula or due to denial and its rejection in schools' educational structure and resistance against changes adequate to the demands of information explosion era. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a new approach, considering the solutions presented in the present paper (Table 7) ; redefining schools' structures; revising the bureaucracy, regulations and management systems governing the schools; institutionalizing the culture of compassion and creating an appropriate social atmosphere which is appropriate to the local culture; and establishing humanistic interactions between teachers and learners; creating the opportunity for the hidden curricula to fertilize the explicit goals and objectives of our official education system.

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