

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Investigating the Obstacles to Operationalizing the Philosophy Education Program for Children and Explaining the Solutions to Realize It

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the obstacles to implementing the Philosophy for Children (PFC) program in Iran and to explain the strategies for its implementation. 1- What are the obstacles and solutions to implementing the FBC program in Iran?The statistical population of the study consisted of all experts in the field of philosophy for children, education, university professors, and education managers in Iran. Using a purposive sampling method and observing the theoretical saturation criterion, a sample of 30 people (including philosophy for children experts, education experts, field and university professors, and education managers) In the year 202 was selected. The research method was qualitative and qualitative content analysis. To collect data, content analysis of documents (including Lippman's works, scientific articles, and upstream education documents) and semi-structured interview tools were used. The validity of the interview tool was ensured through content review by 12 experts and alignment with theoretical foundations, and its reliability was confirmed by the agreement method between coders and review by 12 participants. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings showed that operationalizing the FBEC program in Iran requires attention to three levels: principles and policies (including policy conflicts), strategies, and operational implementation, taking into account limitations. The study concluded that the FBEC program is feasible with intelligent localization and reform of educational infrastructure. The findings are useful for both the academic community (developing a local theoretical framework) and policymakers and teachers (providing practical guidance). It is suggested that a national strategic document for the FBC be developed with broad stakeholder participation and its pilot implementation in selected schools with documented monitoring be considered.

KEYWORDS

Philosophy Program for Children, Obstacles, Solutions, Localization.



Introduction

Critical thinking is not only an essential skill, but also an essential tool for informed decision-making, complex problem solving, and data analysis (Ahmadi Haji, Hadipour, & Aghili, 1404). Philosophy for Children (FBC) as a new educational approach was first proposed by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s with the aim of fostering independent thinking in children (Daniel, 2021). By emphasizing the development of critical, creative, and caring thinking skills, this program has set its ultimate goal of educating independent and thoughtful citizens (Lipman, 2003) and has been welcomed by many educational systems worldwide. International evidence indicates the positive impact of this program in developing children's intellectual skills in more than 50 countries (Fisher, 1998, cited in Marashi et al., 2007). However, recent studies emphasize that the implementation of FBC in different cultural contexts requires revision and adaptation to local values (Gregory & Laverty, 2021). In this regard, research conducted in some Islamic countries also indicates the significant potential of this program for integration with the foundations of Islamic education (Alhashmi & Bakali, 2023). Despite the theoretical reception of the Philosophy for Children program in Iranian academic circles and references to its potential in developmental documents, this program has not yet been implemented systematically and formally in the country's educational system. Previous research has mainly focused on explaining the theoretical foundations of the philosophy for children program or its comparative study with Islamic education. However, there has been no comprehensive study based on the perspectives of key stakeholders regarding the objective and implementation obstacles that prevent the transformation of these theoretical capacities into an operational curriculum in Iranian schools. This gap between theory and practice forms the main issue of this research. The central question is what structural, strategic, and operational obstacles make the implementation of the FBEC program in the Iranian educational context challenging? And what solutions can be proposed to overcome these obstacles and realize a local implementation model? Answering these questions is essential because failure to identify these obstacles will expose any move towards localization and implementation to the risk of failure or deviation. Therefore, this research seeks to systematically identify the obstacles to the implementation of the FBEC from the perspective of relevant experts and managers, and then explain operational and contextual solutions to transform it into an implementation program compatible with Iranian conditions.

Method

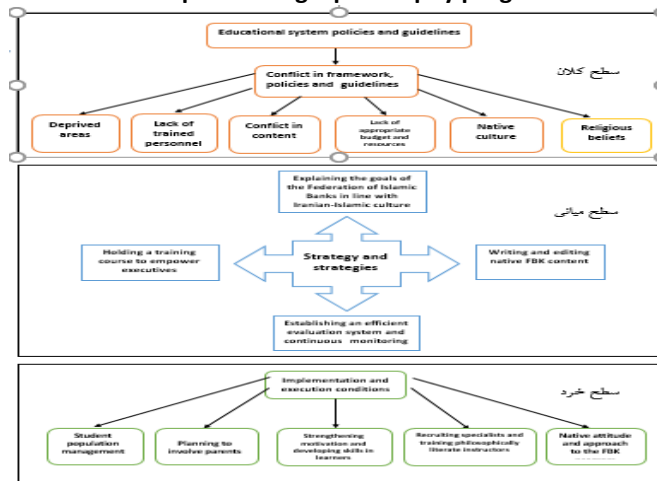
This research was applied in terms of purpose; qualitative in terms of data type; cross-sectional in terms of data collection time; and based on qualitative content analysis and theme analysis in terms of research design. Data collection tools included: 1) document study and content analysis (including Lippmann's books (founder of the Philosophy for Children program), related scientific research articles, and developmental documents such as the Fundamental Education Development Document) and 2) semi-structured interviews. The statistical population of the study consisted of all Islamic education specialists, philosophy for children specialists, seminary and university professors, and senior education managers with experience and expertise in this field. Using the purposeful sampling method with maximum diversity (Flick, 2014/1393, as cited in Khadiwi & Seyd-Kalan, 2022/1401) and observing the criteria of accessibility and information richness, a sample of 30 people was selected. The composition of the sample was as follows: 10 specialists in the philosophy of Islamic education, 10

specialists in the philosophy for children program (FBEC), and 10 seminary and university professors and education managers. The sampling process continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. The main research tool was a semi-structured interview, the questions of which were designed based on the theoretical foundations and research objectives. To determine the content validity of the tool, the initial version of the interview guide after design was provided to 12 experts specializing in the fields of philosophy of education, the FBEC program, and qualitative research methods.

Results

Considering the primary central concepts and their similarities to each other, the researcher placed each of the concepts related to the research topic into general categories and assigned them the titles of challenges and opportunities. Finally, 47 challenges and 29 opportunities were identified as challenges and opportunities for creating and developing the distance education system (figure 1), each in 5 core categories: cultural-social, educational development, individual development, structural-financial and organizational development, and technological development.

Figure 1. Obstacles to implementing a philosophy program for children in Iran



Answer to Research Question 1: What are the structural and policy obstacles to implementing a philosophy program for children in Iran? According to the statements of the interviewees, it can be said that given the conflict in the framework, policy, and guidelines at the macro level of the country, it is necessary for those involved in the country's education system to fundamentally review their planning at the upper levels and provide the necessary conditions and criteria for the implementation of an effective and practical FBEC program.

Answer to Research Question 2: What are the strategic obstacles to implementing FBK in Iran? The interviewees pointed out important challenges in the strategic area of implementing the FBEC program, which are considered a serious problem in achieving the FBEC program and require careful and principled planning by educational planners to achieve the intended goals.

Answer to Research Question 3: What are the implementation obstacles to implementing and operationalizing the FBK program in Iran? According to the interviewees, the three levels (policy, meso-level, micro-level) are interconnected in a chain. Removing obstacles at the macro-level (policy) is a necessary condition for formulating appropriate strategies (meso-

level) and only then will successful operational implementation (micro-level) be possible. The absence of any of these links will lead to the failure of the entire implementation process.

Answer to research question 4: What are the strategies for implementing the philosophy program for children in the Islamic education system? Considering the policy solutions presented, it can be said that education stakeholders should provide the necessary legal, financial, and content frameworks for the effective implementation of the FEBC program through comprehensive planning. Considering the solutions presented in the strategic area, it can be said that educational planners must prepare the necessary preparations in the areas of content, evaluation, and culture building to achieve the goals of the FBC program. According to the interviewees, the solutions presented at the three levels are complementary. Success depends on simultaneous and coordinated action at all levels, such that macro-level solutions provide the foundation, mid-level solutions design the path, and micro-level solutions implement the plan in practice.

Discussion and conclusion

This study aimed to identify obstacles to the implementation of the Philosophy for Children (PFC) program in the Iranian education system and to provide operational solutions. The findings show that the implementation of PFC in Iran faces a complex and multi-level challenge that is organized at three levels: macro (policy-making), intermediate (strategic), and micro (executive), and these levels influence each other in a chain. At the macro level, the perceived conflict between the foundations of PFC and the country's religious-cultural values was identified as the most important structural obstacle. At the middle level, weakness in local content production and the lack of an efficient evaluation system were two key strategic obstacles. At the micro level, high class density and a lack of philosophically literate instructors make qualitative program implementation impossible. This study shows that implementing the FBE in Iran is not a simple “method-oriented action” but rather a “systemic reform” that requires coordination and simultaneous action in the three areas of theory, strategy, and practice. Success depends on FBE moving from the margins of academic discussions into the context of educational policymaking and curriculum planning in the country. The present study is an initial step in this direction, but it is suggested that future studies design and carefully validate indigenous tools (content and evaluation) as well as longitudinal studies to measure the impact of the proposed solutions on students’ intellectual and moral skills.

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Authors’ Contribution

The authors collaborated on this research work.

Conflict of Interest

According to the authors, this article is free of any conflict of interest.

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