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Designing and Validating the Literacy Curriculum Model Based on the Criteria of PIRLS in the Elementary Course of the Educational System of Iran

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to design and validate the reading literacy curriculum model based on the criteria of progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in the elementary course of the Iranian educational system. To this end, PIRLS test criteria have been used to explain and design the dimensions of the curriculum according to the elements of the Akker curriculum. The present research is qualitative in which an attempt has been made to develop a desirable model by adopting a systematic approach in the field of curriculum design and using valid national and international resources and documents. Some features of this model include indigenousness, attention to audience characteristics, scientificity, simplicity, novelty, and active approach to teaching and learning. The opinions of 31 experts in the field of curriculum planning and Persian language teaching were used to validate the proposed model, and these people highly approved the desired model. However, the application of this model requires attention to issues such as having a systemic approach to reading education, bilingualism, professional training of teachers, and attention to content and resources and facilities.

Keywords: literacy curriculum, design, validation, elementary school, PIRLS test

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Introduction

Reading and comprehension skills are one of the most important needs for learning in students. The comprehension, interpretation, and inference abilities from textbooks and non-textbooks introduces students to new ideas and information and teach how to think and live better. To this end, various national and international institutions evaluate reading skill in students to improve the learning level within the world's educational systems and promote educational policies and planning related to the teaching and learning process in it (Seddiq, 2008).

The subject of reading has dedicated a huge amount of educational research to itself especially in the early years of education because of the importance. The most important of these studies is the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). The study of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an innovative program to assess children's reading ability in the fourth

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grade of elementary school. According to the theoretical basics and framework of reading literacy, reading is focused on written comprehension and recognizing the values, meanings and concepts of words, sentences and receiving knowledge, leaning and purpose of the message that the author has written by using verbal cues and symbols (Karimi, 2008). The international results of PIRLS Assessment Project over four years show that the performance of Iranian students in each course is lower than the overall average, while countries such as Russia, Hong Kong, and Singapore have been able to improve in subsequent courses and achieve first to third ranks despite the low performance in 2001. This significant progress can attract the attention of countries such as Iran to the educational programs and policies of these countries.

The results of studies such as PIRLS indicate that the reading curriculum should be considered more and, if necessary, changes should be made. Studies such as Salehi et al. (2009), Mobarak Ghamsari (2016), Salsabili (2010), Danaye Toosi (2011), Daneshgar et al. (2017), Kalantari (2011), Jafari Saani et al. (2010), and Ghaderidoost (2009) expressed the inadequacy of the efforts made in the curriculum to address literacy and comprehension processes and the existence of major weaknesses in this field. Therefore, the present research seeks to design the characteristics of the desired model of literacy curriculum for the elementary school in Iran to take a new step in explaining and introducing this type of curriculum for planners and policymakers. It is hoped that the model will be considered in the design and development of the curriculum in the elementary school.

Specific objectives

Review and identifying the logic characteristics of literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the need assessment of literacy curriculum for the elementary school

Review and identifying the characteristics of reading literacy curriculum objectives for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the content characteristics of reading literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the characteristics of reading literacy curriculum learning activities for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the characteristics of the role of teacher in the literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the characteristics of materials and resources in the reading literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the characteristics of learners grouping in the reading literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the characteristics of time and place in the reading literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Review and identifying the measurement characteristics in the reading literacy curriculum for the elementary school.

Accreditation of designed curriculum from the perspective of experts in the field of Persian language teaching.

Research Methodology

The researcher has used qualitative research method (analytical-documentary) to identify the coordinates of the elements of the reading literacy curriculum for the elementary school according to the research objective to examine and identify the characteristics of based on the Akker explanation. The statistical population of the present research consists of two parts including literature and specialized research texts such as articles, books,

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research project reports, dissertations, etc. on the components of literacy education as well as the teachings related to this approach. The second part consists of specialists and researchers in the field of reading literacy education throughout the country, whose exact statistics were not available. As a result of the statistical population, the statistical sample of the present study also consisted of two different sections. In the first section, the approximation of the main resources of this approach, which is available in research sources, was examined and commented on. In the second section, 31 people who had research and teaching activities in the field of reading education in the country were asked to cooperate with the researcher. The data collection instruments in the first section include study files and review of specialized texts (documents) of this approach. In other words, the required information and data were collected in a library manner (using research documents and theoretical literature) in the design stage of the curriculum. Then, the literacy-based implications were extracted. The most important studies that were used in mentioning the characteristics and implications of the mentioned curriculum elements are Danaye Toosi (2011), Karimi (2008), PIRLS Encyclopedia (2016), Zandi (2014), Karimi, Kabiri, Bakhshali Zadeh (2018), Akbari Sheldareh et al. (2012) as well as the content of the upstream documents. In the second section, the researcher designed a researcher-made questionnaire to validate the curriculum. The designed curriculum was presented to the relevant experts using an open-ended questionnaire containing the characteristics of the curriculum elements and corrective comments were obtained and reviewed.

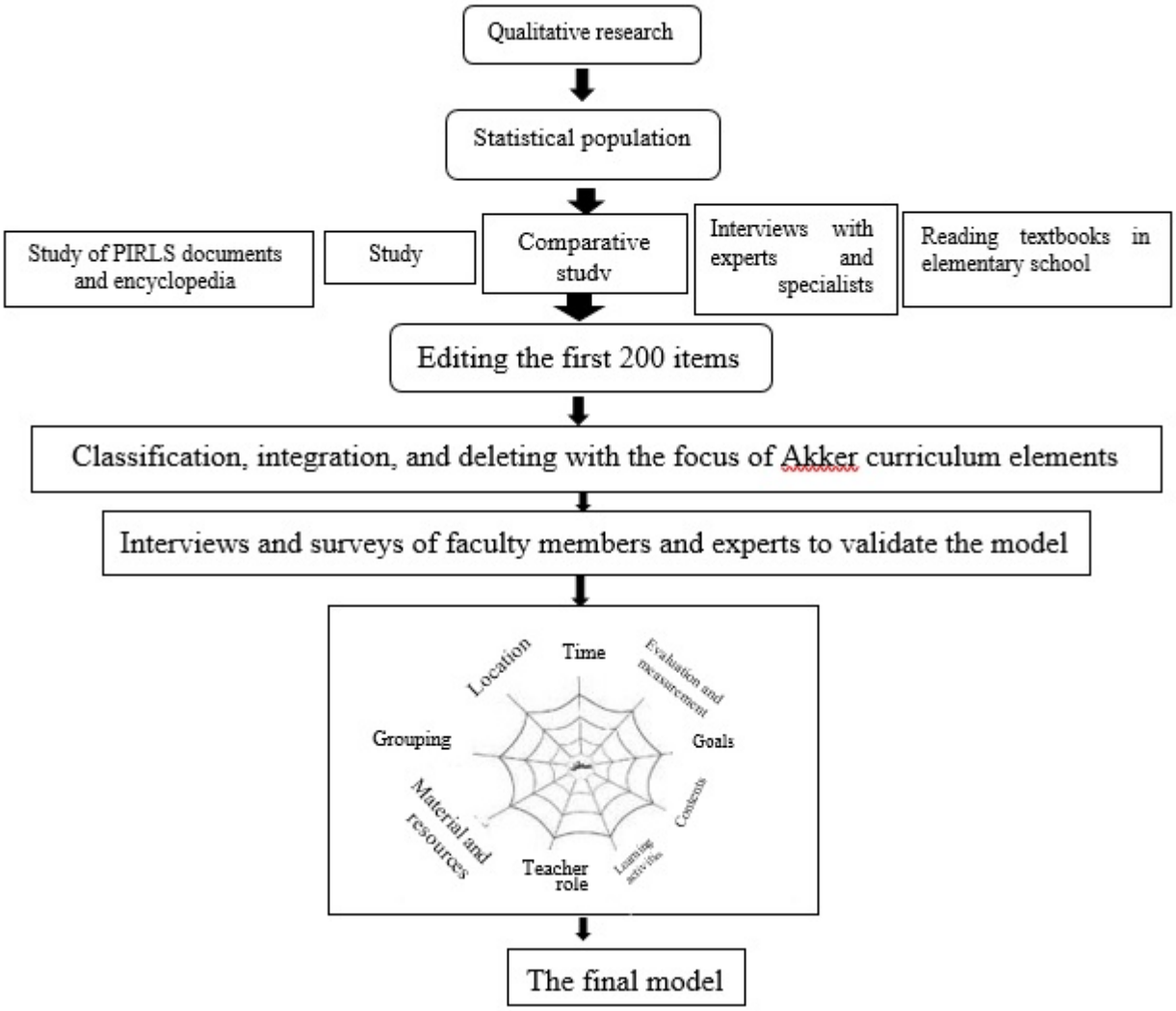


Figure 1. The practical framework of the proposed model

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Results

Research literature illustrates that the content of textbooks are not well considered the components of literacy, especially comprehension processes. In other words, the level of attention of reading textbooks in elementary school to the objectives and processes of reading does not have a suitable and worthy position, and the main weakness in this regard is very obvious. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the components of such an approach in the content of curricula by the authors and compilers of such programs to train students familiar with information texts and comprehension skills. In this regard, it was necessary to design a suitable literacy curriculum for the elementary school in Iran to be used by the administrators of this specialized field in compiling and writing the content of textbooks. Therefore, the researcher tried to select the types of elements of the curriculum that are best suited to the literacy approach considering the findings of the research and examining the research texts and looking at the theorists in the field of curriculum. To this end, the researcher chose Akker explanation of the curriculum and considered in compiling the features of the model.

Akker argues that the core (logic) of a curriculum is usually related to learning goals and content. This core generally guarantees changes to many other aspects of the learning plan. The pivotal role of logic or the reason of curriculum, which is the general role and main mission of the curriculum acts as a guiding component in the decision-making process of the curriculum. Thus, the arrangement of the elements of the curriculum can be shown in a special way in which all the elements and components are connected and related to each other around the main logic of the curriculum. The core and nine spider web, refers to the ten parts of a curriculum, each of which is about one aspect of learning program of learners. Nine elements have been mentioned for the curriculum. These elements are 1) Setting objectives, 2) Contents, 3) Learning activities, 4) Teacher role, 5) Materials and resources, 6) Learning time, 7) Learning location, 8) Grouping learners, and Evaluation. The main dimensions and characteristics of the literacy curriculum, which are conceptualized in this study based on the Akker model, are listed (Table 1).

Table 1. The main dimensions and characteristics of the literacy curriculum

Curriculum Elements	Item
Principles and foundations	1. Applying a monotheistic naturalistic approach 2. The principle of program flexibility 3. The principle of child-orientation 4. Proportional attention to the constructive role of man and woman 5. Pay attention to most geographical areas 6. Emphasis on indirect methods 7. The principle of centrality of communication approach 8. Paying attention to human knowledge in various fields 9. Paving the way for continuous reading 10. Cultivate auditory and visual memory 11. Pay attention to multiple intelligences 12. Pay attention to the expansion of the vocabulary 13. Activity-based principle 14. The principle of holistic approach 15. The principle of movement from simple to evolved form 16. The principle of preparing learning opportunities 17. The principle of reinforcing critical thinking and creativity 18. Improving lifestyle etiquette 19. Readability at all levels of education 20. Using the latest achievements in the field of literature and psychology

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Logic (Why should learners learn to read?)	1. Academic success 2. Predicting reading in the future 3. Self-increasing reading
Needs assessment (The distance between the current and the desired situation)	1. Understanding elementary school students in terms of individual characteristics, regional language 2. Identifying the ultimate objectives and outcomes 3. Level of general knowledge and skills 4. Using mother tongue 5. Identifying weaknesses in the dimensions of the individual, society, content, facilities
Objectives (What objectives do learners learn to achieve?)	1. Extracting objectives from the three resources of current needs of the society, students' interests and needs, the nature of the subject 2. Promoting a culture of reading 3. Reading as a strategic skill 4. Classification of objectives into three levels of cognitive (raising the level of comprehension, interpretation, and comprehensive inference), emotional (creating interest and motivation to read), and psychomotor (having independent study).
Content (What do learners learn?)	1. Development of content based on need assessment and set objectives in the previous step 2. Pay attention to children's literature 3. Pay attention to global literature 4. Pay attention to classical, ancient, and folk literature 5. Pay attention to comprehension processes 6. Content selection criteria based on objective, level, and time 7. Considering the difficulty levels of textbooks 8. Selection of content in 4 stages: determination of linguistic species, linguistic elements, non-verbal, and translingual elements
Learning activities (How do learners learn?)	1. Awareness of correct study and learning strategies 2. Extensive reading 3. Read comprehension education 4. Using mental mapping
The role of the teacher (How does the teacher facilitate the teaching and learning process?)	1. Teacher's professional qualifications (communication, pedagogy, specialized knowledge, organization, behavioral competence) 2. Mastering the methods of teaching-learning techniques, unit method of work, storytelling method, book reading, learning method through cooperation, dramatic method, visual method in word teaching, use of metacognitive strategies, problem solving method, memorization and repetition method, question and answer method, group discussion method, role playing method, novelization method, silent method, puppet method, complete behavioral method, poetry method, and anthem reading
Materials and resources Element (What helps learners to learn?)	1. Educational media, multisensory media 2. Computer 3. Library 4. Books and all written materials 5. Teacher 6. Guidebook
Learner grouping element (Whom do they study with?)	1. Individual grouping 2. Collective grouping
Location element (Where do they learn?)	1. Classroom 2. Library environment 3. Workshop 4. School yard
The element of time (When do they learn?)	1. First to third grade more than 243 hours 2. Pay attention to studying in all courses 3. Pay attention to lifelong learning and not be limited to class time
Measurement element (How far have they progressed in learning?)	1. Evaluation of the language learning program through (descriptive evaluation, written-oral tests and observation of behavior, initial, formative and final evaluation) 2. Increase self-confidence and motivation in the learner 3. Lack of comparison of student performance with another student 4. Paying attention to learners' differences in terms of individual, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, gender, etc. 5. Use a variety of methods and tools tailored to the content and learning levels 6. Parental involvement in the evaluation process

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Discussion

The design and validation of the reading literacy curriculum model were considered in this study. According to the research findings, it can be said that:

The concept of reading literacy in the curriculum perspective means providing the possibilities for students to find a broad horizon to study and read in their formal education and personal life. Therefore, they can perform reading with love and passion, along with a deep understanding and evaluation of the text to make more connections between their teachings and real life.

The idea of reading literacy curriculum is a kind of conscious and organized effort to lead the learner to a deeper understanding and evaluation of texts. Therefore, they can analyze, deduce, and draw conclusions from everything they read while having a high level of understanding.

According to the proposed model, reading education and strengthening reading literacy requires the cooperation and participation of all elements and institutions. The family and parents are responsible since the birth of their child, and they play an important role in fostering literacy in the student together with the school and formal and informal institutions.

Based on the proposed model, the objectives are not predetermined, but multiple and may be defined for the classroom and the school based on the issues that occur in the society. Meanwhile, attention to the local language and cultural and linguistic differences also affect the type of goals and should be considered.

Content should be designed and developed in such a way to provide opportunities for social interactions of all students considering their linguistic and regional differences that decrease in self-confidence and cause reading disorders. While considering the differences, it should familiarize the learner with the types of texts and how the process of comprehension and analysis and evaluation of texts to increase the motivation and comprehensive interest, to provide the ground for continuous study along with deep understanding.

Appropriate individual and group activities, play, narration, reading, book reading, storytelling free reading, visual style, role play, puppet style, complete behavior, poetry and anthem reading, problem solving, metacognitive strategies, reading and news reporting, radio School, TV presenter, summary writing, game-based reading instruction, Jigsaw technique, etc. should be used as interviewed experts for the most important teaching-learning methods. Using active methods helps the student to get acquainted with different types of texts to analyze and critique the desired text.

Evaluation methods in this model are not similar to conventional methods, which is more process-centered. In this method, and especially during group discussions, teachers ask students to analyze the texts to shed more light on the text.

The proposed model is consistent with the findings of Jafari Saani et al. (2008) in the “Content” element. Jafari Saani et al. emphasized on paying attention to comprehension processes to increase inclusive ability to analyze and evaluate texts. The proposed model cited critical literacy as the most important tool for in-depth reading by Krug (2010) study entitled “Can Students Read Beyond a Text?” Moreover, the evaluation element in the proposed model is consistent with Fajardo’s (2016) research in terms of attention to genuine evaluation. He reported the assessment methods of students as writing narratives or interpretive and explanatory essays, as well as evaluating texts based on intellectual puzzles.

Principles and Foundations

One of the advantages of this designed model is the development of principles and foundations for the reading literacy curriculum of the elementary school of Iran. The reason is that every program must consider principles

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and move in that direction.

This program was originally designed based on the Akker ten-suggestion model, and there is no element called Principles and Needs Assessment in the Akker model. Therefore, the researcher developed the principles, foundations and needs assessment before the objectives and other elements of the curriculum based on the research background and comparative study to match the program with the above documents.

There are three types of models in designing a curriculum, which are based on three sources of information (student, subject, and community). The first model is the student-based model as a source of information, the second model is the study subject as a source of information, and the third model is the society-based pattern as the source of information. Of course, each of these models has its advantages and disadvantages. The present foundations emphasized all three sources of information including student (the appropriateness of the program to the abilities, needs, and interests of the children), the study subject (the activity of studying and reading is the key to success in other subjects), and society (Reflection of the principles, values and policies of school, family and society in the concepts of reading and promotion of reading culture and attention to indigenous and local culture and emphasis on reading and reading lifelong and active). Therefore, a model based on all three sources of information has been used in designing this curriculum, but with a student-centered approach. In a way, it can be said that a combined model has been used, which is mentioned in the principles and foundations of the present research (learning to read is student-centered, skill-based and integrated). The game-based learning and strategy-based learning are emphasized as a prerequisite for learning in principles and foundations of this model.

Needs assessment

Paying attention to the situations and requirements of the executive environment and the implementation of programs in different environments makes it necessary to pay attention to the issue of needs assessment in the curriculum. Curriculum experts have long sought what should be taught in schools. What topics should be covered in the curriculum? Who and at what level should make program decisions? And most importantly, what are the main criteria for developing and implementing a curriculum? All of the above questions revolve around a fundamental issue, which is measuring needs and using the results of curriculum decisions.

The history of education had always been full of different perspectives and point of views to determine what should guide school curricula as the goal and purpose of education. As Tonz pointed out, the curriculum has long been the scene of conflicting views, namely the traditional thematic and child-centered approach. Traditionalists (subject-oriented) focus on adult values and accumulated human knowledge as a legacy of the past, and child-oriented sees the learner as an essential source of information in curriculum decisions. Gradually, attention to society and its basic needs became a source of information with social change, and a group called Social Behaviorists was formed who emphasized the use and usefulness of school curricula in solving people's problems in social life. Dewey (1902) published an article entitled "The Child and the Curriculum", and identified three main factors of learning, society, and subjects as the basic elements of the educational process. At the same time, he points out that these three factors are separate from each other. However, he emphasizes that the subject matter should be harmonized with the growth of the learner, and this requires a deliberate and intelligent reconstruction of the subject matter. Contrary to Dewey's enlightenment, the background of the curriculum, the subsequent amendments and actions were organized in such a way that one source ruled over other sources of information in each period. In fact, in the 1940s and even today, Dewey's followers tended to

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emphasize one or more of these principles than others (Bandak, 2014).

Ralph Tyler not only looked at the sources of information by asking four basic questions about objective, opportunity, method, and evaluation but also focused on the distinction between educational need and evaluation need. The same trend that Dewey introduced years ago was revealed in Tyler's model. Nevertheless, Dewey believed that these fundamental factors should be considered in a related way especially the subject matter should be reconstructed according to the needs of the students.

However, the history of the curriculum and the review of expert opinions regarding the need assessment show that most of them have examined need assessment as a component, whether in the development of the program or in the implementation of the program. Therefore, it seems necessary to pay attention to the topic of need assessment in the curriculum given the need to adapt curricula to the needs of students and society and harmonize them with changes and developments in the world and the importance of the participation of different social groups, parents and students in curriculum planning.

Logic

Akker added the element of "logic and reason" to Klein's nine elements. The purpose of logic is to answer one why for each element. Why choose this objective? Why choose this location? Why use this method to convey concepts? Why should learners learn the Elements of the Curriculum Logic Questionnaire? What are the objectives of learners to achieve? What do learners learn? How do learners learn? How does the teacher facilitate the teaching and learning process? What helps learners to learn? Whom do they study with? Where do they learn? When do they learn? How far have they progressed in learning? In this view, the pivotal role of logic causes the arrangement of elements of the curriculum elements to be in the form of spider webs.

There are several benefits to using a spider web model in identifying curriculum elements:

This model depicts the relationship between the different elements of the curriculum.

This model clarifies the pivotal role of logic and reason of curriculum in the planning explanation model.

It shows that the low quality of each element casts doubt on the whole curriculum.

Setting objectives

Setting objectives is one of the most important elements among the elements of the curriculum because other elements are formed and oriented based on and influenced by the objectives. Objectives are the foundation of educational planning and provide a general direction. Therefore, they are more related to general concepts. In this model, it has been tried to cover the objectives reading curriculum of the elementary school in a general and comprehensive way so that it can cause the growth of all dimensions of the student. Therefore, the objective element in this model is classified into three dimensions of skill, emotional, and cognitive, which is one of the advantages of this model. At the same time, a larger objective lies within the goals of developing the skill, emotional, and cognitive dimension, which is creating a successful life, active and lifelong learning, and increasing the power of inference and evaluation in each student.

Content

After setting the objectives of the curriculum, developing information, concepts, skills, and attitudes is essential to achieving objectives. The content element was categorized in line with the objectives in three cognitive, emotional, and skill dimensions, respectively. At the same time, it has been tried to consider the principles of the Iranian National Curriculum Document in selecting and organizing content in content development. An examination of the curriculum's emphasis on reading skills and strategies in Iran showed that the skill of read-

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ing a continuous text, recognizing the main concept of a text, explaining or providing a reason to interpret the text, comparing different texts and generalizing and concluding based on the text are taught to Iranian students one grade later on an average. The text comparison skills with personal experiences and predicting the next events of the text are taught to Iranian students two grade later on an average than other participating countries (Karimi, Kabiri, Bakhsh Alizadeh, 2017), which should be considered in the compilation of content and necessary amendments should be made.

Teaching methods

Teaching methods are responsible for the implementation of curricula. If the curriculum is considered as a theory, its implementation depends on teaching and teaching methods (Yarmohammadian, 2000).

Selecting the teaching methods depends on several factors. Some of them are the subject of the lesson, educational objectives, learners' experience, teacher's experience, educational facilities, time, etc. (Shabani, 2003). The predominant approach in this model is the use of combined methods so that the learner enjoys reading in addition to increasing students' reading skills and familiarity with reading strategies. The game-based approach, along with technical activities, with an emphasis on comprehension skills to enhance learners' composition, inference, and assessment skills, are methods that are consistent with the Iranian National Curriculum Document.

The use of differentiation strategy is emphasized in this model as one of the teaching methods for students with special needs to meet all the needs of students in reading, which is another advantage of this model. The students include talented students, those with learning and disabilities, bilingual learners, different needs of girls and boys, learners with social, emotional and behavioral problems, and those with different experiences, and cultural backgrounds. Students with special needs can benefit from education and curriculum appropriately when systematically designed differentiation strategies are used. Another method that was emphasized in this model was the use of game-based methods, plays, storytelling, reading, and so on.

Teaching-Learning Activities

The dominant approach in this element is to take advantage of the activities in which the student feels pleasure, happiness, and satisfaction while learning. Performing various programs of storytelling, play, narration, and teaching programs with poetry, anthem, song, etc.

Materials and resources

Materials and resources include tools, topics, environments, and people used to facilitate the learning process. The priority of these materials and resources of learning in reading curriculum of the elementary school is due to the fact that most of this field is practical with tools and equipment that include books, libraries, computers, magazines and publications, alphabet letters, colors, colored paper, music, and so on. Teachers and families, as well as human resources, posters, educational videos, media and television, textbooks, etc., are also materials and resources that are ranked next, respectively.

Time and location of learning

The general emphasis on the element of time in Iran's reading curriculum is on brief and varied activities. Time, in reading, somehow covers all the time of training because all the lessons, while being separate, also include the discussion of reading. However, the amount of time devoted to reading lesson in the elementary school is less than in the first-class PIRLS countries, which should be increased.

In the element of location, having appropriate, calm and welfare conditions of places and library equipment

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has been emphasized as the first priority. Students learn to read better in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe. The appropriateness of the space and equipment to the number of students, their characteristics, abilities and needs is also emphasized. Proper location and equipment should be used depending on the number of students and their abilities, as well as the type of activity. The use of classroom libraries, school-level libraries, and public and rural libraries are emphasized in the next priorities. It is important for the elementary school teachers to provide students with opportunities for free reading, active play, play, storytelling, narration, and more.

Grouping

Given the characteristics of elementary students, in this model, this model especially emphasized the number of class members so that the number of class members is not more than 14 people. Flexible grouping and grouping based on the nature of the activity, interests, abilities, and needs of learners are emphasized in this model. Groupings vary according to teaching and learning strategies, which are influenced by the content of the lesson (Fathi Vajargah, 2009).

Evaluation

The general spirit of evaluation methods in this model is to get out of quantitative evaluation and using descriptive and qualitative evaluation. The first priority of the evaluation method in this model is to use methods that increase self-confidence and inclusive motivation. Evaluation should not cause despair, frustration, fear and anxiety in the learner in line with the National Curriculum Document. Observing the daily behavior of learners during the learning process is emphasized in this model using skill checklist, notes, and a daily registry office is the second priority of the evaluation method. Teacher observations in elementary school may be more prominent than other methods in the evaluation program. The lack of comparing the performance of the learners with other students and paying attention to learners' differences including individual, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, religious, gender, etc., using a variety of methods and tools appropriate to the content and expected descriptive results, and the participation of teachers, students, and parents in the evaluation process are the next priorities of evaluation methods in this model.

Researchers suggest that:

- The reading literacy curriculum model can represent what has been missed in the existing curriculum.
- This model can be considered as a fundamental step as a very key part, in the evolution of the reading curriculum for the elementary school.
- The processes of comprehension and the role and importance of the mother tongue should be considered more.
- Choosing simple and everyday texts should be avoided in the content Cultivating reading skills along with evaluating student texts should be a priority.
- Active methods with the guidance of wise teachers and the use of library resources, storytelling, play, etc. should be emphasized in teaching-learning methods.
- The strategy of the evaluation of students should be changed from memory-centered and quantitative approaches to process-centered and qualitative approaches.

Students who have been accustomed to books and reading since they were children at home, saw their parents reading, enjoyed the appropriate pre-school education, grew "critically" in the formal school environment, had the appropriate educational content, were familiar with the techniques and methods of comprehension analyzes and evaluates any text in-depth examination and then accepts it. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen

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and grow this skill, which is not subject to one lesson and time, but is used in all courses and lifelong, which requires the cooperation of all institutions and officials.

1. The Officials of the Ministry of Education, the Educational Research and Planning Organization, and the General Directorate of Education are recommended to make the necessary content amendments and provide additional training materials to learners.

2. Education officials and school principals are recommended to prepare the necessary computer and library facilities to enhance reading literacy.

3. Elementary school teachers are recommended to pay attention to the individual differences of students in choosing the teaching method to engage students in reading by using the minimum facilities.

4. Execution and implementing all the educational programs and activities to having qualified, specialized, and trained teachers. Therefore, the education officials are recommended to hold in-service training courses for present teachers and pre-service courses for newcomer teachers, emphasizing the reading literacy curriculum model in the present study.

The last point is that this model is in the design stage. Thus, it is necessary to identify and analyze the barriers and damages to its production, implementation, and evaluation.

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