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Determining Dimensions and Components of Ethical Curriculum in Iranian Education System (A Qualitative Study)

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Modern educational systems, in addition to facilitating the transmission of knowledge, serve a pivotal function in the moral and cultural development of learners. In light of the significant role that ethics occupies within the Iranian educational framework and the existing deficiencies in the curricula, the current investigation aims to conceptualize and implement an ethics-centered curriculum in education.

Methods: This research, employing the Delphi methodology alongside the insights of subject matter experts, delineated and assessed the pertinent indicators essential for the advancement of this program.

Results: In the preliminary phase, 52 indicators were derived from the content analysis of antecedent studies, and subsequent to a process of refinement and contextual adaptation informed by expert opinions, 6 additional indicators were incorporated. Ultimately, the 58 certified indicators were systematically categorized into 9 fundamental domains, encompassing objectives, content, pedagogical and learning methodologies, resources and facilities, customs and traditions, temporal considerations, the roles and attributes of educators, the roles and attributes of learners, and assessment. The findings of the research indicate that the formulation of an ethics-based curriculum, while fortifying moral and social values, contributes to the equilibrium of knowledge and education within the educational system.

Conclusions: By proffering a practical framework, this investigation facilitates the design and execution of a coherent initiative aimed at enhancing the moral education of students.

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Introduction

Ethics, as a fundamental component of the development of the human personality and the establishment of social relations, serves a crucial function in fostering a healthy and sustainable existence (Azimpour, 2019; Narvaez & Bock, 2014). The discourse surrounding ethical issues has historically held significance within educational and cultural frameworks, and it continues to retain its relevance across various epochs of human civilization. In light of the advancements in empirical sciences and technology during the modern and postmodern periods, certain ethical values have been diminished; however, the challenges emanating from the reduced emphasis on ethical education have once again accentuated the necessity for instruction in this domain (Naji et al., 2024). Ethical education not only fortifies appropriate individual conduct but also reinforces the foundational human principles and shared values within the sociocultural context of communities (Eftekhari et al., 2022). In Iran, particularly within the educational framework, literature is recognized as a pivotal and influential domain capable of effectively conveying and elucidating ethical concepts. This exquisite and intellectually stimulating art form not only encapsulates emotions and sentiments but also holds significant potential in shaping human and societal values. Consequently, the establishment of an ethics-oriented curriculum in literature can offer an effective platform for augmenting and enhancing students' moral comprehension. This curriculum must be meticulously structured to accurately represent moral dilemmas through relevant narratives and poetry, thereby providing students with a more profound grasp of these concepts. Given the critical and sensitive nature of adolescence and youth, which constitutes a vital phase in the development of individual personalities and values, the instruction and exploration of these concepts during this period is of paramount and irrefutable significance. This developmental stage is characterized by individuals being profoundly influenced by their social, cultural, and educational surroundings, enabling them to potentially emerge as responsible and informed citizens with a more nuanced understanding of moral principles in the future (Kapur, 2015; Zare Rashnudi et al., 2024). The subject of moral education has historically garnered the attention of intellectuals and religious authorities due to its pivotal role in shaping human destinies and societal structures (Althof & Berkowitz, 2006). Furthermore, among philosophers, moral education has been regarded as a form of human education, which is why Kant posited that the essence of education lies in moral instruction, asserting that moral education represents the ultimate and highest tier of educational

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attainment, thereby completing the educational endeavor (Heydarizadeh et al., 2018). Moral principles encapsulate a sense of obligation and dedication to others and are shared among a collective (Gunawan & Gunawan, 2019). Morality, as the plural of ethical conduct, refers to an intrinsic quality that has permeated the human spirit, whereby actions and behaviors, aligned with this characteristic, emanate from individuals without necessitating conscious deliberation (Hajidehabadi & Ghobadian, 2016). The emphasis on ethical considerations and significantly contributes to the formative years of adolescence and early adulthood, moral pedagogy as it profoundly impacts the cultivation of values in youth and enhances the development of personality characteristics, ethical frameworks, social comportment, and competencies such as intercultural communication, critical analysis, and decision-making (Bourke et al., 2019; Huff & Frey, 2005; Johansson et al., 2011).

The domain encompassing beliefs, worship, and moral education is regarded as the most pivotal among the six educational domains, possessing not only a distinct identity but also necessitating its manifestation across all other educational spheres. Nonetheless, this area has been insufficiently addressed in practical applications and at the micro-level of curricular design within the educational framework. Empirical findings indicate that the aspect of moral education within the realms of belief, worship, and morality has been overlooked in the educational framework (Aghili et al., 2019). This oversight has been so pronounced that it has led some scholars to assert that ethics and moral education curricula have been inadequately addressed within the overarching educational system (Afkari, 2014).

Contemporary Iranian society epitomizes a populace that is acutely in need of moral instruction; the moral crisis represents the most pervasive challenge, affecting all dimensions of social crises and adversities, thereby casting a shadow over every aspect of human existence (Hajidehabadi & Ghobadian, 2016). Furthermore, a salient issue confronting modern education pertains to the realm of moral education. Consequently, moral education has consistently constituted one of the primary and enduring objectives of educational systems globally (Akan, 2021). The significance of moral education within the educational framework is both evident and irrefutable. Fundamentally, ethics and moral education represent one of the foundational cornerstones of human culture. Additionally, moral education occupies a vital role within the educational curriculum, tasked with

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fostering the scientific and practical moral capacities of students (Hajidehabadi & Ghobadian, 2016).

In the context of the Iranian educational system, despite the pronounced emphasis on the significance of ethics and moral education within official documentation and curricular outlines, these principles are not comprehensively or effectively integrated into the current curricula and pedagogical approaches. Research indicates that moral education, as one of the essential pillars of the educational framework, has been inadequately addressed and necessitates enhancement and reform within curricular structures. This neglect is particularly evident in subjects such as literature, which possesses substantial potential for conveying moral and humanistic concepts. Hence, the central focus of this research is to investigate the methodologies for establishing an ethics-oriented curriculum within the literature course of the Iranian educational system. This study aims to identify prevailing deficiencies while proposing solutions based on the Delphi technique, thereby laying the groundwork for the implementation of a suitable moral curriculum in this discipline.

Material and Methods

This research used the Delphi technique. In this technique, a group of observers manages and guides the process of evaluating the indicators. This iterative process is conducted through multiple successive rounds to attain the most favorable outcomes. The Delphi methodology facilitates the attainment of precise and holistic results by leveraging the scientific and specialized insights of subject matter experts. Considering the nature of this investigation and the significance of incorporating specialized perspectives, a purposive sampling approach was employed. In this context, ten experts who are either directly or indirectly engaged in executive or research domains pertinent to Islamic universities were selected. The criteria for the selection of these individuals were predicated upon their experiential knowledge and academic credentials to ensure the validity and reliability of the data gathered. Within the Delphi framework, the autonomy of the experts' perspectives is accentuated; consequently, they deliver their opinions without direct interaction with one another to avert the potential influence of alternative viewpoints. This methodology is executed in a series of stages; in such a manner that at each stage, the gathered opinions are systematically analyzed and feedback is relayed anonymously to the participants. Through this

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mechanism, individuals are afforded the opportunity to amend or revise their perspectives as necessary. The overarching aim of this iterative process is to attain a consensus grounded in the expertise and profound knowledge of the participants, thereby enhancing the precision and comprehensiveness of the research indicators.

To delineate the indicators for the establishment of an ethics-based curriculum within the Iranian educational framework, a cohort of experts with diverse specializations was employed. The initial group comprised professors and researchers in the fields of educational sciences and curriculum development. This cohort, with its specialized knowledge in educational planning and the instruction of values and ethics within the educational milieu, possesses the capacity to identify and formulate ethics-based curricula. The subsequent group consisted of specialists in Islamic education and Islamic ethics, who, given the impact of ethical programs on the foundational principles of Islamic education in Iran, are equipped to discern values and ethical standards that align with the prevailing religious culture. This amalgamation of experts offers a multifaceted and comprehensive perspective, thereby facilitating the accurate identification of indicators essential for the establishment of an ethics-based curriculum.

Questionnaire Reliability

In this research endeavor, the Kendall's W statistic was employed to assess the reliability of the data collection instrument. This method serves to evaluate the degree of concordance among the opinions of experts engaged in the Delphi process. At the final stage of analysis, the Kendall's W value was computed (W = 0.728), signifying a substantial level of agreement among the experts.

Moreover, the research indicators underwent examination and refinement across multiple stages utilizing the Delphi technique and expert insights. In such a manner that through successive stages, the reliability of the findings was affirmed by diminishing the extent of disagreement and augmenting consensus. The average level of disagreement during the concluding two Delphi stages was recorded at less than 0.3, which denotes the stability of the findings and the reliability of the measurement instrument. The results of these analytical processes indicate that the questionnaire and the derived indicators demonstrate commendable reliability and are sufficiently robust for application in research.

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Results

To effectively execute the Delphi method, the factors discerned from the literature review were initially disseminated to a cohort of 10 subject matter experts, who were subsequently solicited to assess each factor utilizing a five-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 to 5) with respect to their perceived effectiveness. Factors for which the aggregated score from the experts exceeded 3 were sanctioned for inclusion, whereas those that did not meet this threshold were discarded. Should the degree of consensus among experts in two successive Delphi phases register below 0.3, the determination of either endorsement or rejection of the indicator is deemed conclusive. Conversely, if the level of disagreement surpasses 0.3, the pertinent indicator is reintroduced to the experts for further evaluation via a questionnaire. Additionally, in instances where an expert lacks sufficient knowledge regarding an indicator, they are permitted to abstain from providing a response.

Table 1. Results of the first stage of the Delphi method

Row	Indicator	Average expert opinion
1	Personal ethics education	3.35
2	Social ethics education	4.36
3	Coordinated competence	3.37
4	Learning	3.23
5	Principles of goal formulation	3.26
6	Ultimate goals	4.03
7	General goals	4.15
8	Partial goals	3.12
9	Emphasis on agency and the role of the human resource as a model	3.17
10	Empowerment of the human resource	4.16
11	Flexibility in the concept of place	3.15
12	How to select content	3.45
13	Organize content	3.19
14	Develop content	3.16
15	Use of experiences	3.18
16	Suitable for the country's religious ideals	3.19
17	Suitable for the age of learners	4.01
18	Teaching and learning activities	3.68
19	Teaching methods	3.89
20	Holistic view	3.68
21	Creating intellectual visualization (creativity)	4.05
22	Educational development and diversity	3.02
23	Technology	3.98
24	Teaching aids	3.65
25	Connection with nature	3.74
26	Existence of a suitable environment	4.15
27	Cultural values	4.16
28	Cultural customs	4.35

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29	Scheduling educational hours	4.09
30	Planning for leisure time	3.26
31	Budgeting curriculum planning	3.48
32	Creating opportunities for progress	3.55
33	Recognizing abilities	3.89
34	Participation	3.66
35	Communication	3.57
36	Flexibility	3.69
37	The teacher's supervisory role	4.02
38	Sound judgment	3.06
39	Creating research groups	3.39
40	Commitment	3.58
41	Responsibility Acceptance	4.06
42	Conscientiousness	3.59
43	Self-development	3.45
44	Duty awareness	4.47
45	Learning ability	3.58
46	Updating and being up-to-date	4.68
47	Development and diversity in training	3.65
48	Hard work	3.81
49	Awareness of abilities	3.26
50	Evaluation methods	3.45
51	Evaluation criteria	3.68
52	Feedback to individuals	3.75

In light of the findings from the initial phase of the Delphi method and subsequent to the counsel of the experts, six additional variables were incorporated into the preliminary indicators. These newly introduced variables, accompanied by the average outcomes from the first round of Delphi and pertinent elaborations, were resent to the experts for their further input.

Table 2. Results of the second stage of the Delphi method

Row	Indicator	Stage 1 mean	Stage 2 mean	Mean difference	Result
1	Personal ethics education	3.35	3.60	0.25	Confirmed
2	Social ethics education	4.36	4.30	0.06	Confirmed
3	Coordinated competence	3.37	3.50	0.23	Confirmed
4	Learning	3.23	3.40	0.17	Confirmed
5	Principles of goal formulation	3.26	3.41	0.15	Confirmed
6	Ultimate goals	4.03	4	0.03	Confirmed
7	General goals	4.15	4.05	0.10	Confirmed
8	Partial goals	3.12	3.40	0.28	Confirmed
9	Emphasis on agency and the role of the human resource as a model	3.17	3.60	0.43	Next stage
10	Empowerment of the human resource	4.16	4.03	0.13	Confirmed
11	Flexibility in the concept of place	3.15	3.20	0.05	Confirmed
12	How to select content	3.45	3.60	0.15	Confirmed
13	Organize content	3.19	3.25	0.06	Confirmed
14	Develop content	3.16	3.34	0.18	Confirmed
15	Use experiences	3.18	4	0.82	Next stage
16	Suitable for the country's religious ideals	3.19	3.20	0.01	Confirmed

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17	Suitable for the age of learners	4.01	4	0.01	Confirmed
18	Teaching and learning activities	3.68	3.89	0.21	Confirmed
19	Teaching methods	3.89	3.98	0.09	Confirmed
20	Holistic view	3.68	3.88	0.20	Confirmed
21	Creating intellectual visualization (creativity)	4.05	3.89	0.16	Confirmed
22	Educational development and diversity	3.02	3.28	0.26	Confirmed
23	Technology	3.98	3.88	0.10	Confirmed
24	Teaching aids	3.65	3.15	0.50	Next stage
25	Connection with nature	3.74	3.70	0.04	Confirmed
26	Existence of a suitable environment	4.15	4.04	0.11	Confirmed
27	Cultural values	4.16	4	0.16	Confirmed
28	Cultural customs	4.35	4.20	0.15	Confirmed
29	Scheduling educational hours	4.09	4.15	0.06	Confirmed
30	Planning for leisure time	3.26	3.15	0.09	Confirmed
31	Budgeting curriculum planning	3.48	3.10	0.38	Next stage
32	Creating opportunities for progress	3.55	3.34	0.21	Confirmed
33	Recognizing abilities	3.89	3.70	0.19	Confirmed
34	Participation	3.66	3.51	0.14	Confirmed
35	Communication	3.57	3.70	0.13	Confirmed
36	Flexibility	3.69	3.55	0.14	Confirmed
37	The teacher's supervisory role	4.02	4.15	0.13	Confirmed
38	Sound judgment	3.06	3.26	0.20	Confirmed
39	Creating research groups	3.39	3.34	0.05	Confirmed
40	Commitment	3.58	3.69	0.11	Confirmed
41	Responsibility Acceptance	4.06	4.02	0.04	Confirmed
42	Conscientiousness	3.59	3.39	0.20	Confirmed
43	Self-development	3.45	3.34	0.11	Confirmed
44	Duty awareness	4.47	4.25	0.22	Confirmed
45	Learning ability	3.58	3.34	0.24	Confirmed
46	Updating and being up-to-date	4.68	4.75	0.07	Confirmed
47	Development and diversity in training	3.65	3.26	0.29	Confirmed
48	Hard work	3.81	3.68	0.13	Confirmed
49	Awareness of abilities	3.26	3.40	0.14	Confirmed
50	Evaluation methods	3.45	3.40	0.05	Confirmed
51	Evaluation criteria	3.68	3.60	0.08	Confirmed
52	Feedback to individuals	3.75	3.70	0.05	Confirmed
53	Extent of training time	-	4.06	-	-
54	Communication with God	-	3.59	-	-
55	Cultural texture	-	4.26	-	-
56	Courage and sacrifice	-	3.81	-	-
57	Diligence and seriousness in work	-	3.26	-	-
58	Self-improvement according to evaluation results	-	3.48	-	-

An analysis of the findings from the second phase of the Delphi method reveals that, based on two fundamental criteria—namely, a mean difference of less than 0.3 between the initial and subsequent stages and a mean score exceeding 3—48 variables received approval. Variables exhibiting a mean difference greater than 0.3, in addition to variables 53 through 58, advanced to the third phase of the Delphi method. Table 3 delineates the outcomes from this stage.

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Table 3. Results of the third stage of the Delphi method

Row	Indicator	Stage 2 mean	Stage 3 mean	Mean difference	Result
1	Emphasis on the agency and exemplary role of human resources	3.60	3.45	0.15	Confirmed
2	Use of experiences	4	4.15	0.15	Confirmed
3	Teaching aids	3.15	3.34	0.19	Confirmed
4	Budgeting of curriculum planning	3.10	3.19	0.09	Confirmed
5	Expansion of training time	4.06	4.35	0.29	Confirmed
6	Connection with God	3.59	3.40	0.19	Confirmed
7	Cultural texture	4.26	4.19	0.07	Confirmed
8	Courage and sacrifice	3.81	4.02	0.19	Confirmed
9	Diligence and seriousness in work	3.26	3.17	0.09	Confirmed
10	Self-improvement according to evaluation results	3.48	3.41	0.07	Confirmed

According to the findings from the third stage of the Delphi method, as illustrated in Table 3, 10 definitive variables were ratified. Cumulatively, 58 variables were certified, which were subsequently categorized into 9 distinct domains based on the experts' assessments. These 9 domains encompass objectives, content, pedagogical methodologies, tools and facilities, cultural norms and traditions, temporal factors, the educator's role and characteristics, the learner's role and characteristics, and assessment.

Discussion

The current investigation was undertaken with the objective of examining the integration of an ethics-oriented curriculum within Persian literature textbooks utilized in Iranian educational systems. Initially, 52 indicators were derived through an analysis of the content of prior research, which were subsequently localized employing the Delphi technique and expert insights, and were meticulously filtered in accordance with the subject matter under scrutiny. Within the framework of the Delphi method, 6 additional indicators were incorporated into the original set based on expert evaluations. These indicators encompass the duration of instructional time, the relationship with the divine, cultural context, valor and sacrifice, steadfastness and diligence in work, and personal development as per evaluative outcomes. The primary objective of this study is to enhance students' literary and linguistic competencies, in conjunction with fostering a morally-driven disposition that adheres to humanistic and societal principles. The duration of instructional time pertains to the establishment of an appropriate temporal allocation for imparting ethical principles alongside literary content, thereby underscoring the continuity of the educational

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experience. The relationship with the divine, as an essential element, fortifies religious and spiritual convictions. Cultural context signifies the imperative of tailoring educational content to align with local and societal values. Furthermore, valor and sacrifice contribute to nurturing a spirit of altruism and accountability. Steadfastness and diligence in work highlight the significance of discipline and effort within the educational process. Ultimately, personal development grounded in evaluative outcomes underscores the importance of self-assessment and ongoing individual enhancement through performance appraisal.

Collectively, these indicators will facilitate the cultivation of an informed, dedicated, and ethically aware generation. The validated indicators were categorized into 9 distinct groups. These 9 categories consist of objectives, content, pedagogical methods, resources and facilities, traditions, duration, the role and characteristics of the educator, the role and characteristics of the learner, and assessment.

Each of these categories fulfills a critical role in shaping and effectively executing the curriculum. The "objectives" category is devoted to elucidating educational values and aspirations, thereby delineating the moral and cognitive accomplishments that students are expected to attain upon completion of their education. "Content" pertains to the selection and organization of educational materials to ensure that the literary content aligns with ethical tenets, thereby providing a foundation for the cultivation of ethical character. "Teaching-learning methods" refers to the strategies employed by educators to impart ethical and literary concepts, emphasizing the significance of effective interaction between the instructor and the student. "Resources and facilities" highlight the relevance of educational tools such as texts, technological instruments, and instructional environments that enhance the quality of the learning experience. "Traditions" underscores the necessity of aligning curricula with cultural and societal norms to render educational materials meaningful and comprehensible for learners. "Duration" emphasizes the strategic management and allocation of educational time to address ethical topics in conjunction with literary concepts. The discourse on "The Role and Characteristics of the Teacher" underscores the significance of the educator's function as both a moral and pedagogical exemplar, elucidating traits such as patience, empathy, and pedagogical proficiency. In contrast, "The Role and Characteristics of Learners" accentuates the proactive engagement of students within the educational paradigm, as well as attributes including diligence, accountability, and self-awareness.

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The segment titled "Evaluation" addresses methodologies for assessing the degree to which educational and moral objectives are fulfilled, thereby facilitating the enhancement of the educational experience through constructive feedback and introspective assessment. This thorough categorization furnishes a framework through which all dimensions of education and training can progress in a unified manner towards the formation of a curriculum oriented towards ethical principles.

In articulating the derived outcomes, it is posited that virtuous conduct and commendable traits in individuals are of paramount significance, necessitating their proper cultivation and the utilization of profound ethical values. The distinctive rationale of the Holy Quran pertaining to moral enhancement is aimed at guiding individuals to attain a state of admirable moral attributes, rendering space for immoral behaviors non-existent. Consequently, alongside the familial unit, the educational institution emerges as a pivotal center for learning and moral refinement, with the establishment of an ethical curriculum within Iranian education representing a consequential advancement in the moral education and development of students. Hence, to facilitate the integration of an ethical curriculum within Iranian educational systems, it is imperative to devise a structured model that, when adopted, can be effectively implemented in the educational and developmental framework of Iran.

To achieve a conceptual model through expert consensus, 58 indicators sanctioned by the Delphi methodology were systematically categorized. Thus, it is deduced that the elements constituting an ethics-oriented curriculum in Iranian education encompass personal ethics education, social ethics education, foundational competencies, principles of learning, overarching objectives, general aims, specific goals, emphasis on the agency and function of human resources as exemplars, empowerment of human resources, adaptability concerning the educational environment, duration of educational engagement, methodologies for content selection, organization of content, content compilation, utilization of experiential learning, alignment with national religious ideals, compatibility with the learners' developmental stage, spiritual connection, instructional and learning activities, pedagogical approaches, a comprehensive perspective, fostering intellectual creativity, educational advancement and diversification, technological integration, educational resources, connection with the natural environment, the presence of a conducive atmosphere, cultural milieu, cultural values, customs and traditions, scheduling of

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educational sessions, planning for leisure activities, financial planning for curriculum development, provision of advancement opportunities, recognition of individual capabilities, participation, communication, adaptability, the oversight role of educators, sound judgment, formation of collaborative research groups, valor and altruism, commitment, accountability, conscientious engagement, self-enhancement, perseverance and dedication to tasks, attentiveness to learning capabilities, methods of assessment, criteria for evaluation, feedback mechanisms for individuals, self-improvement based on evaluative outcomes, and recognition of individual differences.

The findings of the investigation reveal that the elements constituting the ethics-based curriculum within the Iranian educational framework must encompass components that adeptly facilitate the advancement and execution of this initiative. Consequently, the scholarly community has underscored the significance of imparting individual and collective ethical principles, deeming it crucial for nurturing devout and morally upright individuals. Furthermore, other pivotal components include competency-based strategies, inclusivity, principles of goal formulation, agency in human resources, empowerment of educators, adaptability concerning location and timing, systematic organization of curricular content, integration of both domestic and international experiences, as well as alignment with the nation’s religious and spiritual ideals.

In conjunction with these facets, a focus on fostering a connection with the Divine through remembrance, engagement with the Quran and prayer, the application of suitable pedagogical methods, the diversification and enhancement of educational practices, the incorporation of technology, fostering a bond with nature, establishing an environment conducive to learning, as well as an emphasis on cultural, social values, traditions, and planning for recreational activities have also been accentuated. Moreover, aspects such as curriculum financing, the provision of avenues for advancement, the acknowledgment of students' individual and collective capabilities, participation in collaborative endeavors, enhancement of communication skills, teaching flexibility, the instructor's role in supervision, and the formation of research collectives represent additional critical elements of this model designed to elevate the caliber of ethics-based education. In addition, ethical virtues such as bravery, selflessness, dedication, accountability, conscientiousness, tenacity, personal development, industriousness, and integrity have been identified as fundamental for the cultivation of students' character. Suitable assessment

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methodologies, the establishment of evaluation criteria, the provision of constructive feedback to learners, and the adjustment of behaviors based on evaluative outcomes constitute other indispensable components. Ultimately, acknowledging individual variances and taking into account the distinct characteristics of students throughout the pedagogical process constitutes one of the fundamental tenets of the ethics-based curriculum model in Iranian education, aimed at fostering students' personal and social growth and facilitating meaningful learning on the journey towards excellence and virtue.

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Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of Islamic Azad University.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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