

Exploring the Inhibiting Factors of Curriculum Viability at Farhangian University Based on Faculty Members' Perceptions

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the pattern of inhibitors affecting the viability of curriculum programs at Farhangian University based on the perspectives of university faculty members. The research employed a qualitative approach using phenomenography. The study population included all faculty members and instructors in the fields of educational sciences and curriculum studies, of whom 18 participants were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol and analyzed through thematic analysis following the Braun and Clarke framework. The findings identified 14 basic themes and seven overarching themes, representing key inhibitors of curriculum viability. These included inhibitors related to innovation, adaptability, and system dynamism; curriculum design, structure, and planning; professional competence, motivation, and identity of instructors; assessment, quality, and learning outcomes; organizational interactions, governance, and policy-making; resources and infrastructural limitations; and generational gaps in communication and educational expectations. These overarching themes were synthesized into a geometric conceptual model. Overall, the results indicate that the viability of curriculum programs at Farhangian University is challenged by a complex set of structural, content-related, operational, evaluative, organizational, and generational inhibitors. Addressing these challenges requires fundamental revision, improved policy-making, and strengthened professional and organizational capacities.

Keywords: curriculum inhibitors; curriculum viability; faculty perspectives; Farhangian University.

Introduction

The curriculum is a fundamental and dynamic component of educational systems, functioning as a living entity that may experience dysfunctions affecting both educational quality and societal development (Abrahamson, 1978; Pian-Smith, 2009; Schemm et al., 1993; Khan et al., 2019). One key approach to evaluating curriculum quality is the concept of curriculum viability, introduced by Khan and colleagues (2021). Curriculum viability refers to the capacity of a system, organization, or process to sustain its activities, adapt to environmental changes, and maintain performance without depleting resources (Sterman, 2000; Meadows, 2008). In curricular contexts, this means delivering high-quality learning content, aligning with student and societal needs, responding to emerging technologies, and preserving its impact on learning outcomes and human resources (Mohammadi et al., 2022).

Assessing curriculum viability typically involves identifying its inhibitors from the perspectives of key stakeholders—learners (students) and educators (teachers and university faculty) (Khan et al., 2019, 2021, 2023). International studies, including Sikander et al. (2024), Malik et al. (2022), Lowery (2021), Khan et al. (2023), and Andronache (2015), as well as national studies such as Mohammadi et al. (2022), Pirzadi & Seyed Ali (2025), Hosseini Largani (2022), and Vaghari Zamharir et al. (2022), have explored this concept and its implications.

Farhangian University, as Iran's central institution for teacher education, plays a pivotal role in shaping the professional competence of future teachers and, consequently, the quality of student learning nationwide. Continuous assessment of its curricula is therefore essential to ensure sustainability and effectiveness. Despite the importance of curriculum viability at Farhangian University, no comprehensive study has examined its status and inhibitors within the institution. This study was designed to address this gap by exploring faculty members' perspectives on the inhibitors of curriculum viability. The central research question was: "What are the perspectives of Farhangian University faculty members regarding the inhibitors of curriculum viability in the university's academic programs?"

Methodology

The present applied study employed a qualitative design using Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) six-phase Thematic Analysis approach. The research population consisted of faculty members and instructors of Farhangian University in the fields of Educational Sciences and Curriculum Studies, from whom 18 participants were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria required at least five years of teaching experience at Farhangian University, prior involvement in developing or implementing teacher education curricula, and willingness and availability to participate in an in-depth interview. Semi-structured interviews served as the main data collection instrument, and sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Data were analyzed following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, during which inter-coder reliability was assessed and yielded an agreement coefficient of 0.89. Credibility of the findings was enhanced through member checking, comparison of analyses between the primary researcher and a second coder, and triangulation with theoretical sources.

Findings

Overall, the findings indicated that the viability of curriculum programs at Farhangian University is constrained by multiple structural, operational, cultural, and professional barriers, categorized into 14 basic themes and 7 overarching themes.

In this study, the thematic analysis process began with initial coding of the interviews with Farhangian University faculty members, yielding 587 raw codes, which were subsequently refined into 98 unique and purified initial codes. In the second phase, these were grouped into 14 basic themes. In the third phase, the 14 basic themes were consolidated into 7 overarching themes as follows:

- Overarching Theme 1: Inhibitors related to innovation, adaptability, and dynamism of the educational system (lack of alignment with scientific, technological, and environmental changes; resistance to change and innovation).
- Overarching Theme 2: Inhibitors related to curriculum design, structure, and planning (content and structural problems; limited autonomy and flexibility; weakness in needs assessment and scientific planning).

- Overarching Theme 3: Inhibitors related to the professional competence, motivation, and identity of educational implementers (weak competence and motivation of faculty; weak motivation and professional identity of students).
- Overarching Theme 4: Inhibitors related to evaluation, quality, and educational outcomes (weak evaluation and quality monitoring; weak linkage between theory and practice; weak professional outputs and outcomes).
- Overarching Theme 5: Inhibitors related to organizational interactions, management, and policy-making (weak stakeholder participation and organizational interactions; politicization and inefficient management).
- Overarching Theme 6: Inhibitors related to resources and infrastructure (deficiencies in resources and infrastructure).
- Overarching Theme 7: Inhibitors related to generational gap and educational communication (generational gap).

Finally, through in-depth reflection on the basic and overarching themes, the model of inhibitors to curriculum viability in Farhangian University's teacher education programs was developed and presented.

Conclusion

The study identified a wide range of structural, operational, cultural, and professional inhibitors that undermine the viability of curriculum programs at Farhangian University. These inhibitors were categorized into 14 basic themes and 7 overarching themes, including challenges related to innovation and adaptability, curriculum design and planning, professional competence and motivation of instructors and students, assessment and quality assurance, organizational interactions and governance, resource and infrastructure limitations, and generational gaps. A comparative analysis with prior national and international research revealed strong alignment between the present findings and existing global evidence in teacher education, indicating that many of these inhibitors such as limited flexibility, weak linkage between theory and practice, insufficient resources, resistance to change, and inadequate stakeholder participation are widely recognized as threats to the sustainability of teacher education programs. Consistent with previous studies, the findings highlight that the non-viability of curriculum programs is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon shaped by systemic, cultural, and organizational constraints. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and systemic approach that strengthens structural and professional capacities, fosters participatory and field-based curriculum development, enhances continuous professional development for instructors, stabilizes educational policy environments, improves learning infrastructures, and promotes shared understanding and collaboration among instructors, students, and schools. Collectively, these strategies are essential for improving the long-term viability and effectiveness of curriculum programs at Farhangian University.

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