

## Identifying the Components of the Moral and Social Education Curriculum for Lower Secondary Schools in Hormozgan

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study aimed to identify and validate the core components of a moral and social education curriculum model tailored for lower secondary schools in Hormozgan Province, Iran.

**Methods and Materials:** The research employed a qualitative design using the classical grounded theory approach as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 30 experts, including educators, curriculum specialists, and policy advisors in the field of moral and social education. Participants were selected based on academic expertise or practical experience in teaching or policymaking for moral education at the lower secondary level. Data analysis was conducted in three coding phases—open, axial, and selective—to construct a comprehensive conceptual model. Coding was manual and iterative, ensuring conceptual saturation through constant comparative analysis.

**Findings:** The findings revealed seven core dimensions of the curriculum model: causal conditions, background conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, main phenomenon, outcomes, and facilitating factors. Causal factors highlighted the need to improve cognitive, emotional, and skill-based educational goals. Strategies emphasized the integration of values into teaching methods, evaluation systems, and technological tools. Intervening conditions such as teacher readiness, institutional support, and infrastructural adequacy were found to be critical. Outcomes included enhanced student engagement, moral reasoning, psychosocial well-being, and teacher awareness. Facilitating factors—such as administrative backing and favorable social attitudes—were identified as pivotal for successful implementation.

**Conclusion:** The proposed model offers a holistic, culturally responsive, and theoretically grounded framework for designing and implementing moral and social education curricula in lower secondary schools. By addressing developmental, institutional, and cultural variables, the model supports the formation of ethically conscious and socially responsible students, adaptable to Iran's diverse educational contexts.

**Keywords:** Moral Education, Social Education, Grounded Theory, Curriculum Design.

## 1. Introduction

The design of any curriculum, particularly one centered on values, must be grounded in a well-structured framework of philosophical, psychological, and sociological principles. Moral education is not merely a compartmentalized subject area, but a cross-disciplinary, integrative process that encompasses learners' emotional development, ethical reasoning, social participation, and spiritual identity. In this context, the work of Aghili et al. provides foundational insights into the philosophical and theological basis of moral education in Iran's primary educational system (Aghili et al., 2018), further advanced by efforts to embed the Raḍavi tradition into curriculum design (Gholampour et al., 2021). Such indigenous frameworks emphasize the centrality of divine virtues, self-purification, and social justice as core elements of the educational mission.

Curriculum theorists increasingly emphasize the need for a holistic and context-sensitive moral curriculum model that accommodates cultural norms, developmental psychology, and sociopolitical realities. Malaki and Alipour Moghaddam identified and validated the principles of moral education curricula through extensive empirical inquiry, reinforcing the notion that moral education must be systematically scaffolded around clearly defined objectives and culturally grounded values (Malaki & Alipour Moghaddam, 2022). In line with these principles, Khandani et al. proposed a model for ecological citizenship education at the junior high school level, highlighting the intersection of ethics, civic responsibility, and environmental awareness (Khandani et al., 2023).

Research suggests that students' exposure to moral content should begin in early childhood and continue progressively through adolescence. This spiral model of value education has been operationalized in several countries, including Japan, where Bamkin observed the significant role of class time and broad curriculum integration in moral instruction at the elementary level (Bamkin, 2020). Similarly, Özgünlü et al. illustrated how Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) principles have been systematically embedded in Turkey's early childhood curriculum to nurture empathy, cooperation, and ethical awareness from an early age (Özgünlü et al., 2022). These international examples highlight the global convergence toward affective-moral competence as a foundational educational goal, resonating with Cho's emphasis on

cultivating emotional self-regulation as part of moral development (Cho, 2023).

In Iran's context, the role of hidden curriculum in transmitting values is increasingly recognized. Bafarani et al. argue that moral intelligence can be effectively cultivated through the latent structures of school environments, including teacher behavior, school culture, and institutional rituals (Bafarani et al., 2021). Talebi et al. similarly found a strong correlation between hidden curricula and students' social responsibility, affirming the need to integrate both explicit and implicit strategies into curriculum models (Talebi et al., 2022). These findings align with Tajri's proposition that ethical curricula, especially at the elementary level, must reflect maternal and familial roles, suggesting a culturally nuanced approach that transcends classroom boundaries (Tajri, 2021).

The conceptualization of moral and social education must also account for evolving societal expectations. As Hashemi and Tabrizi's comparative analysis demonstrates, national curricula increasingly reflect global civic values while preserving indigenous priorities (Hashemi & Tabrizi, 2023). Similarly, Khaleghi et al. provided empirical evidence of how a well-designed citizenship ethics curriculum can enhance altruism and prosocial behaviors among adolescents, reinforcing the behavioral impact of values-based instruction (Khaleghi et al., 2023). These studies illustrate how curriculum frameworks can translate ethical theories into tangible social outcomes.

From a structural standpoint, curriculum design must incorporate participatory, research-based, and interdisciplinary approaches. Metaji Nimvar et al. assessed the ethics and social responsibility content in HRD-related education, concluding that ethical education requires both content revision and pedagogical innovation to remain relevant and impactful (Metaji Nimvar et al., 2023). Douglas further contextualizes this in the broader discourse of educational sociology, arguing that curriculum is inherently a social construct shaped by ideologies, power relations, and cultural narratives (Douglas, 2023).

To effectively implement a moral and social education curriculum, especially in a diverse province like Hormozgan, it is critical to address background and contextual variables. These include socio-economic challenges, cultural diversity, and infrastructural disparities that affect both access and receptivity to values education. Hojjati et al. highlighted the importance of teaching critical and creative thinking as foundational competencies in moral development, particularly in settings where conventional

rote learning dominates (Hojjati et al., 2021). Likewise, Zhang et al.'s cross-cultural investigation into teachers' perceptions of moral education curricula revealed that educator beliefs, pedagogical autonomy, and institutional culture significantly influence curriculum enactment (Zhang et al., 2022).

Educational planning in the moral and social domain must also engage teachers as key stakeholders. According to Aghili (2020), educators' awareness of moral education principles, combined with institutional support, plays a decisive role in the effectiveness of curriculum models (Aghili, 2020). This is echoed by Gandomkar et al., who employed grounded theory to design a secondary-level moral curriculum and identified teacher engagement and contextual alignment as core variables for success (Gandomkar D, 2019). Moreover, Gholampour et al.'s focus on spiritual traditions in moral instruction provides a culturally legitimate platform for aligning curriculum goals with societal expectations in religious regions (Gholampour et al., 2021).

Finally, the implementation of a successful moral and social curriculum in Hormozgan must reflect not only theoretical foundations and pedagogical strategies, but also consider dynamic processes of curriculum evaluation and reform. Alwadai and Alhaj's study in Saudi Arabia emphasized the importance of teacher voice and localized value frameworks in shaping moral curricula, a perspective that resonates strongly in ethnically diverse contexts like southern Iran (Alwadai & Alhaj, 2023). Likewise, Talebi et al. underscored the role of institutional structures and evaluation systems in ensuring the consistency and accountability of values education (Talebi et al., 2022).

In conclusion, the identification and validation of moral and social education components for Hormozgan's lower secondary schools must be rooted in both global research and localized educational realities.

## 2. Methods and Materials

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. The qualitative phase focused on identifying key components of the moral and social education curriculum using the classical grounded theory approach, based on the framework introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967). The design aimed to build a conceptual model grounded in empirical data from educational experts and practitioners.

Participants in the qualitative phase were purposefully selected based on two essential criteria: academic expertise and practical experience. Academic expertise referred to individuals with proven scholarly engagement—through publications or research—in the field of moral and social education. Practical experience required participants to have direct involvement in lower secondary education, specifically with a minimum of 11 years of service in either boys' or girls' schools.

The participants included two main groups: subject matter experts and experienced teachers, as well as policymakers and senior administrators involved in curriculum design and educational governance. These individuals were drawn from a wide population that encompassed school principals, advisory teachers, senior Ministry of Education staff, members of the Supreme Council of Education, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament), and the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution. Semi-structured interviews continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, meaning no new significant insights were emerging, and the sample size remained flexible according to the researcher's judgment.

### 2.2. Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews, designed to elicit rich, detailed insights into the participants' experiences and perspectives regarding the moral and social education curriculum. These interviews followed a flexible protocol that allowed interviewees to elaborate on key themes while enabling the interviewer to probe emerging concepts. The interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for further analysis. The flexibility of the semi-structured format facilitated the exploration of both predefined and emergent themes, aligning well with the grounded theory methodology. The interview questions were developed based on a preliminary literature review and were refined through expert consultation to ensure relevance and clarity.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

The data analysis process was conducted manually and concurrently with data collection, following the three-stage coding process central to classical grounded theory. The first phase was open coding, in which interview transcripts were examined line by line. This involved conceptualizing and categorizing data fragments, assigning labels to ideas, and identifying commonalities, patterns, and conceptual

relationships. These open codes were then grouped into initial categories based on shared attributes and theoretical relevance.

The second phase was selective coding. In this stage, a central category—defined as the core concept that integrates all other categories—was identified. Coding efforts then concentrated on data segments that were directly related to this core category and its associated subcategories. Data not relevant to the emerging central theme were excluded from further analysis.

The third phase was theoretical coding. This phase aimed to articulate how the categories related to one another in a conceptual model. During this process, categories were integrated and refined to construct a theoretical storyline that explained the relationships among core components of the moral and social education curriculum. The researcher employed either Glaser and Strauss's proposed theoretical code families or derived theoretical codes directly from the data. Theoretical coding culminated in a graphical model and narrative framework illustrating the dynamic interplay among curriculum components.

In essence, each interview underwent a rigorous coding cycle. Following each interview, a line-by-line, sentence-by-sentence, and paragraph-by-paragraph analysis was conducted, with distinct conceptual labels assigned to each segment of data. This yielded a large volume of preliminary concepts. These concepts were then clustered into categories based on their attributes, dimensions, and theoretical relevance, laying the foundation for the final set of curriculum components. This grounded analysis ensured that the resulting model was fully derived from the lived experiences and expert insights of the participants.

### 3. Findings and Results

In the present study, the researcher initiated the data analysis process by engaging deeply with the interview transcripts, interpreting meaning directly from the text. This interpretive engagement served as the foundation for generating initial codes, which emerged organically from the data. These codes were then grouped into meaningful clusters based on their similarities and differences, ultimately forming broader categories through systematic organization. The coding process unfolded across three

essential phases: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, following the classical grounded theory model. At the outset, interview transcripts were analyzed line by line to derive primary concepts aligned with the research questions. These raw insights were continuously refined through constant comparison and thematic clustering.

Open coding involved fragmenting the data into discrete units and labeling key ideas, which were then categorized by thematic relevance. For instance, early interview questions explored participants' experiences with the moral and social education curriculum for lower secondary schools in Hormozgan, prompting reflective responses such as: "I believe we must now accept that excessive focus on instruction and neglecting moral and social education has led to psychological and behavioral crises in students, preventing them from fulfilling their roles in society." This excerpt clearly underscores the causal relevance of integrating moral and social components into the curriculum. Another respondent emphasized, "Contemporary approaches have significantly enhanced students' learning levels," implicitly suggesting the transformative role of technologies such as artificial intelligence and Industry 4.0 in modern pedagogy.

These individual codes were gradually refined and re-examined using constant comparative methods. The result was the identification of 276 open codes, which were then clustered and reduced during axial coding into five major thematic domains: curriculum dimensions and components, causal conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and outcomes. These thematic categories served as the framework for modeling the grounded theory curriculum structure, offering a comprehensive response to the study's core research questions.

In response to the first interview question—*What are the causal factors in developing a curriculum model for moral and social education?*—participants identified a wide range of themes that were coded and categorized through grounded analysis. These causal factors were clustered into four major thematic areas: the need to structure goal-setting principles, the need to improve cognitive goals, the need to enhance affective goals, and the need to develop skill-based goals. A total of 25 initial codes were extracted from expert statements, which are shown in the table below.

**Table 1**

*Main Categories of Causal Factors in Designing a Moral and Social Education Curriculum*

Main Theme	Initial Codes
Causal Factors in Curriculum Design (25 codes)	
<i>Need to Structure Goal-Setting Principles (5 codes)</i>	Balanced focus on cognition, attitude, and behavior; identifying foundational social values; aligning goals with students' developmental needs; emphasizing higher-level goals; ensuring coherence and integration among objectives.
<i>Need to Improve Cognitive Goals (8 codes)</i>	Developing social identity; fostering local and Islamic identity; promoting cultural and social values; deepening understanding of adolescent needs; strengthening higher-order thinking; raising awareness of social harms; familiarizing educators with virtue-based competencies; emphasizing indigenous and local culture.
<i>Need to Enhance Affective Goals (8 codes)</i>	Strengthening awareness of self and others' rights; encouraging motivation for achieving personal and social competencies; fostering reflective attitudes toward social harms; cultivating interest in religion, spirituality, and self-knowledge; promoting values such as identity, freedom, justice, anti-discrimination, peace, and cooperation; recognizing the value of physical and mental well-being.
<i>Need to Develop Skill-Based Goals (4 codes)</i>	Building lifelong learning skills (critical thinking, problem-solving, abstract reasoning); equipping learners with attitudes and competencies for meaningful social participation; developing social analysis skills; enabling ethical judgment and moral comprehension.

These findings illustrate that the foundation for curriculum design in this field must address a comprehensive range of developmental domains, emphasizing not only what students should know, but how they should feel and act as moral and social beings in contemporary society.

In response to the second question—*What are the facilitating factors in implementing a curriculum model for*

*moral and social education?*—interviewees highlighted various enabling elements that support the operationalization of such a model. The 11 identified concepts were categorized into four overarching enablers: managerial support, human resources, policy-level backing, and changing societal attitudes. These factors are summarized in the following table.

**Table 2**

*Facilitating Factors in Implementing a Moral and Social Education Curriculum*

Identified Codes	Category	Facilitating Factors (11 Codes)
Motivational policies to implement moral and social education; incentive-based strategies; positive administrative attitudes	Managerial Support (3 codes)	
Younger teaching staff; motivated and enthusiastic new educators; high academic qualifications of teachers	Human Resources (3 codes)	
Simplification of regulations in the field; accelerating and correcting implementation processes	Policy Support (2 codes)	
Improved public perception of qualitative evaluation; increased societal value of moral and social education; greater emphasis on psychological, emotional, and social factors compared to purely cognitive aspects	Changing Societal Attitudes (3 codes)	

These findings suggest that moral and social education cannot be treated solely as a classroom issue but must be viewed as a systemic priority involving institutional culture, teacher training, regulatory frameworks, and societal readiness. The presence of motivated teachers and receptive administrators, combined with favorable public discourse and strategic policy changes, can significantly improve implementation.

In addressing the third interview question—*What are the barriers to implementing a curriculum model for moral and*

*social education?*—a total of 32 obstructive codes were identified and grouped into seven major themes: teacher-related limitations, administrative misalignment, infrastructural weaknesses, instructional constraints, data and evaluation challenges, tool-related issues, parental disengagement, and student-related limitations. The complexity and breadth of these challenges are outlined in the table below.



**Table 3**

*Inhibiting Factors in Implementing a Moral and Social Education Curriculum*

Identified Codes	Category	Inhibiting Factors (32 Codes)
Teachers' limited understanding of moral/social education philosophy; cognitive mismatch between students and teachers; insufficient explanation to teachers and parents; failure to create feedback opportunities; teacher reluctance due to workload	Teacher-Related Limitations (5 codes)	
Policy misalignment; inconsistency between upper and lower policy levels; lack of specialized personnel	Educational Governance (3 codes)	
Weak physical infrastructure; insufficient financial resources; bureaucratic restrictions; outdated equipment; absence of clear evaluation standards	Structural and Equipment Limitations (5 codes)	
Reduced effective teaching time; disrupted feedback mechanisms in moral/social instruction	Instructional Weaknesses (2 codes)	
Increased teacher workload; qualitative nature of evaluation tools; resistance to change; excessive data volume with poor extraction mechanisms	Data and Evaluation Challenges (4 codes)	
Lack of testing infrastructure in deprived areas; scattered and fragmented content; lack of feedback to students; inconsistency in textbooks	Tool-Related Issues (4 codes)	
Limited parental involvement; parents missing school meetings; lack of orientation sessions; inability of parents to support children; superficial form-filling; leniency due to absence of grades in the subject; low literacy impeding parental understanding	Parental Limitations (7 codes)	
Uniform expectations despite diverse student abilities; students' lack of motivation due to non-graded nature of the subject	Student-Related Limitations (2 codes)	

These findings demonstrate that barriers to implementation extend far beyond the classroom. They include systemic issues such as policy incoherence, teacher preparedness, evaluation design, and even broader societal factors such as parental literacy and community engagement. Addressing these challenges requires multi-level interventions, including training programs, infrastructural investments, revised policy frameworks, and culturally responsive engagement with families and communities.

Overall, the triangulated insights from experts provide a detailed, empirically grounded understanding of the causal, facilitating, and inhibiting factors that must be addressed in order to design and implement an effective moral and social education curriculum in lower secondary schools in Hormozgan.

In response to the fourth interview question—*What are the strategic factors for presenting a moral and social education curriculum model?*—a comprehensive set of 140 codes were extracted and classified into 16 main strategic categories, as shown in Table 4. These strategic components reflect a wide-ranging, integrated approach to curriculum development. They include principles for selecting and organizing content, emphasizing alignment with goals, cultural relevance, and promoting internal values through

content presentation. Equally important are teaching and learning strategies, with a strong focus on active, student-centered methods and the facilitation of socially rich learning environments. Experts also highlighted diverse assessment methods such as self-assessment, portfolio use, and skill-based evaluations involving teachers, peers, and parents. The application of modern technologies—like artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and machine learning—in classroom and teacher training contexts was also deemed essential. Moreover, the need for self-mastery programs, patience-building activities, and spiritual development plans was emphasized, aiming to instill virtues like humility, temperance, and resistance to moral vices. Complementary strategies included integrated learning programs for students and teachers, interactive storytelling, teamwork, scientific excursions, and dialogic teaching methods. Other themes included reinforcing ethical encouragement and constructive discipline, fostering inner balance, promoting self-knowledge and God-consciousness, and leveraging advice and moral preaching. Collectively, these strategic dimensions suggest that a holistic, multi-layered, and values-driven approach is essential for effective moral and social curriculum design.

**Table 4**

*Strategic Factors in Designing a Moral and Social Education Curriculum*

Main Themes	Initial Codes
Strategic Factors (140 codes)	
Content Selection Principles (9 codes)	Alignment with goals; content diversity; emphasis on multimedia tools; behavior as content; reinforcement of ethical and social values; capability to teach values and roles; content that nurtures divine nature; ability to detect social harms; alignment with societal realities.
Content Organization Principles (8 codes)	Spiral curriculum model; balance between pre-set and emergent content; sequence and prerequisites; vertical and horizontal content alignment; integrative content; goal alignment.
Teaching-Learning Method Selection (5 codes)	Active, student-centered methods; alignment with objectives; facilitating experience sharing; using socially embedded approaches; indirect instruction for moral education.
Evaluation Methods (11 codes)	Self-assessment tools; multi-source evaluations (teachers, parents); practical skill assessments; qualitative tools (observation, interviews); student portfolios; peer evaluations; ICT-based assessment tools; continuous fair assessment mechanisms; use of media; e-evaluation methods; measuring applied knowledge and critical thinking.
Use of New Technologies (12 codes)	Smart classrooms; curriculum revision for new technologies; electronic content production; ICT in instruction and seminars; internet access; deep learning; NLP; machine learning; IoT; data mining; cloud computing; adversarial learning algorithms.
Curriculum Design Principles (5 codes)	Emphasis on research; subject-specific curriculum design; revision based on scientific advancements; aligning new teaching methods with goals; addressing developmental needs.
Programs for Self-Mastery (18 codes)	Self-discipline; virtue development; introspection; spiritual combat; self-assessment; self-control as the path to divine proximity.
Complementary Student Learning Approaches (16 codes)	Ethical-enrichment courses; role-play; responsible virtual media use; social inquiry; teamwork; problem-solving projects; active methods for critical thinking; cultural field trips; brainstorming; interactive modeling; discussions; lectures; class debates; storytelling; educational media use; social network integration.
Complementary Teacher Development (3 codes)	Research funding; participation in academic seminars; collaborative content development.
Patience Development Programs (5 codes)	Enduring hardship; patience in decision-making; resisting tempting desires; explaining patience and gratitude.
Ethical Encouragement and Punishment (6 codes)	Ethical discipline; positive reinforcement; moderation in correction; role of religious guidance; gradual discipline; consistent encouragement.
Programs for Attaining Spiritual Perfection (6 codes)	Pursuit of true happiness; cognitive and behavioral virtue development; transcending materialism; eternal salvation.
Inner Moderation (5 codes)	Balance in emotion and reasoning; moral equilibrium; prophetic behavioral models.
Humility and Modesty (3 codes)	Humble behavior; gratitude for blessings; learning from modest actions.
Fault-Finding and Moral Deficiency Awareness (2 codes)	Discretion in criticizing others; recognizing fault-finding as a moral flaw.
Programs for Enhancing Divine Love and Proximity (6 codes)	Reducing worldly attachments; resisting carnal desires; seeking closeness to God through purity and repentance.

In response to the fifth interview question—*What are the contextual factors influencing the implementation of the moral and social education curriculum?*—a total of 17 codes were identified and categorized into three main themes: environmental and economic conditions, infrastructural factors, and cultural-religious contexts. These background conditions, presented in Table 5, highlight the macro-level realities that affect curriculum implementation. Environmental-economic factors include economic sanctions, political instability, societal undervaluing of knowledge, and limited global engagement—all of which impact educational priorities and resource allocation.

Infrastructural weaknesses such as inefficient regulations, poor financial support, low institutional performance, and limited digital infrastructure also hinder effective curriculum deployment. Conversely, cultural-religious diversity—despite its complexities—was recognized as a potential asset. The religious orientation of Iranian society, its ethnic multiplicity, and the abundance of religious and cultural events were identified as conditions that, if harnessed appropriately, could enrich the implementation of moral and social education. These findings underscore the critical need to contextualize curriculum design within broader systemic and sociocultural frameworks.

**Table 5**

*Contextual Factors in Implementing a Moral and Social Education Curriculum*

Contextual Factors (17 codes)	Categories	Identified Codes
	Environmental and Economic Conditions (6 codes)	Economic sanctions; decline in societal valuation of knowledge; political instability; weakening of global relations; socio-cultural attitudes; historical impact of current education system structure
	Infrastructural Conditions (5 codes)	Weak regulations and legal processes; inadequate funding; poor institutional indicators and property rights; lack of meritocracy; IT infrastructure limitations; internet filtering
	Cultural and Religious Context (6 codes)	Religious culture; diversity of religious sects; high number of religious holidays; ethnic diversity; cultural variety; range of customs and traditions

Together, the strategic and contextual findings of this study provide a comprehensive view of the structural, pedagogical, and environmental requirements for a functional, values-based curriculum in moral and social education. This detailed analysis allows for targeted interventions that bridge pedagogical ideals with practical feasibility in the educational landscape of Hormozgan.

In response to the sixth interview question—*What are the outcomes of implementing a moral and social education curriculum model?*—experts identified a wide range of positive consequences categorized into eight main outcome domains, encompassing a total of 51 codes. These outcomes are detailed in Table 6. The most significant outcomes pertained to students, including enhanced quality of feedback, improved readiness for learning, increased motivation, greater emotional and cognitive development, and more sophisticated ethical-social decision-making skills. Moreover, students demonstrated greater satisfaction with the curriculum content and were better equipped to engage with ethical and social issues in society. Another major outcome category was teacher awareness, which

improved through professional development, participation in curriculum design, and increased sensitivity to local educational contexts. Other key outcomes included greater curriculum alignment with societal needs, improvements in the education system through better policy alignment and collaboration with local stakeholders, and enhanced learning environments marked by emotional support and cooperative curriculum planning. The model also led to more effective and holistic evaluation systems, emphasizing process-oriented, mixed-method, and self-assessment-based approaches aligned with curricular goals. Additional effects were observed in students' psychological capital and cooperation, such as increased self-confidence, critical thinking skills, peer solidarity, and classroom engagement. Lastly, there were significant improvements in mental health, including reduced anxiety, enhanced self-esteem, and lower competition-related stress. Collectively, these outcomes affirm the transformative potential of a well-designed moral and social education curriculum to impact learners, educators, institutions, and the overall school culture.

**Table 6**

*Outcomes of Implementing a Moral and Social Education Curriculum*

Main Themes	Initial Codes
Curriculum Outcomes (51 codes)	
Students (14 codes)	Improved feedback quality; readiness for learning moral/social sciences; active participation; comprehensive personal growth; decision-making opportunities; content satisfaction; inclusion of student interests; enhanced ethical-social motivation; deeper moral thinking; improved attitudes; specialized development; cognitive-emotional nurturing; ethical-social analysis.
Teacher Awareness (8 codes)	Awareness of educational changes; enhanced scientific competence through in-service training; research opportunities; decision-making roles; curriculum development participation; increased contextual sensitivity; tracking educational developments; improved professional competencies.
Societal Needs Alignment (1 code)	Matching curriculum content to community needs.
Educational System Improvement (2 codes)	Enhanced policy-making; school collaboration with local ethical-social experts.
Learning Environment Enhancement (2 codes)	Greater emotional support; collaborative student-teacher planning.



Evaluation Quality (10 codes)	Goal attainment analysis; curriculum refinement; attention to learner growth; diagnostic evaluation; attention to learner differences; process-based assessment; qualitative-quantitative diversity; professional judgment; learner participation; alignment with moral-social goals.
Psychological Capital and Cooperation (10 codes)	Learner-centeredness; talent identification; friendship and camaraderie; self-esteem; self-belief; critical thinking; experience sharing; energetic classroom climate; mutual understanding; teamwork.
Mental Health (6 codes)	Increased confidence; receptivity to criticism; reduced anxiety; lower stress; sense of safety; reduced competition pressure.

In response to the seventh interview question—*What is the core phenomenon in developing a moral and social education curriculum model?*—the experts collectively emphasized that the central phenomenon is the curriculum model itself, particularly its philosophical and structural dual foundation in moral education and social education, as presented in Table 7. In terms of moral education, key elements included respect for learners' dignity, balance in ethical obligations, preventive orientation in moral development, attention to individual traits and differences, centrality of piety, and emphasis on consistency, inclusivity, gradual development, and intrinsic moral protection. These reflect a philosophy rooted in Islamic ethics and developmental appropriateness. With regard to social

education, the experts highlighted the importance of enhancing human interaction, engagement with physical and social environments, behavioral modification through reward and punishment, role-playing, skill development, justice, and promotion of social well-being. Moreover, the model emphasizes curricular improvement, including updating teaching processes, promoting creativity and innovation, expanding educational opportunities, and achieving both qualitative and quantitative advancement. Altogether, these core concepts provide the theoretical and practical scaffolding of the curriculum model, integrating value-based pedagogy with actionable educational strategies.

**Table 7**

*Identified Concepts and Categories Related to the Central Phenomenon*

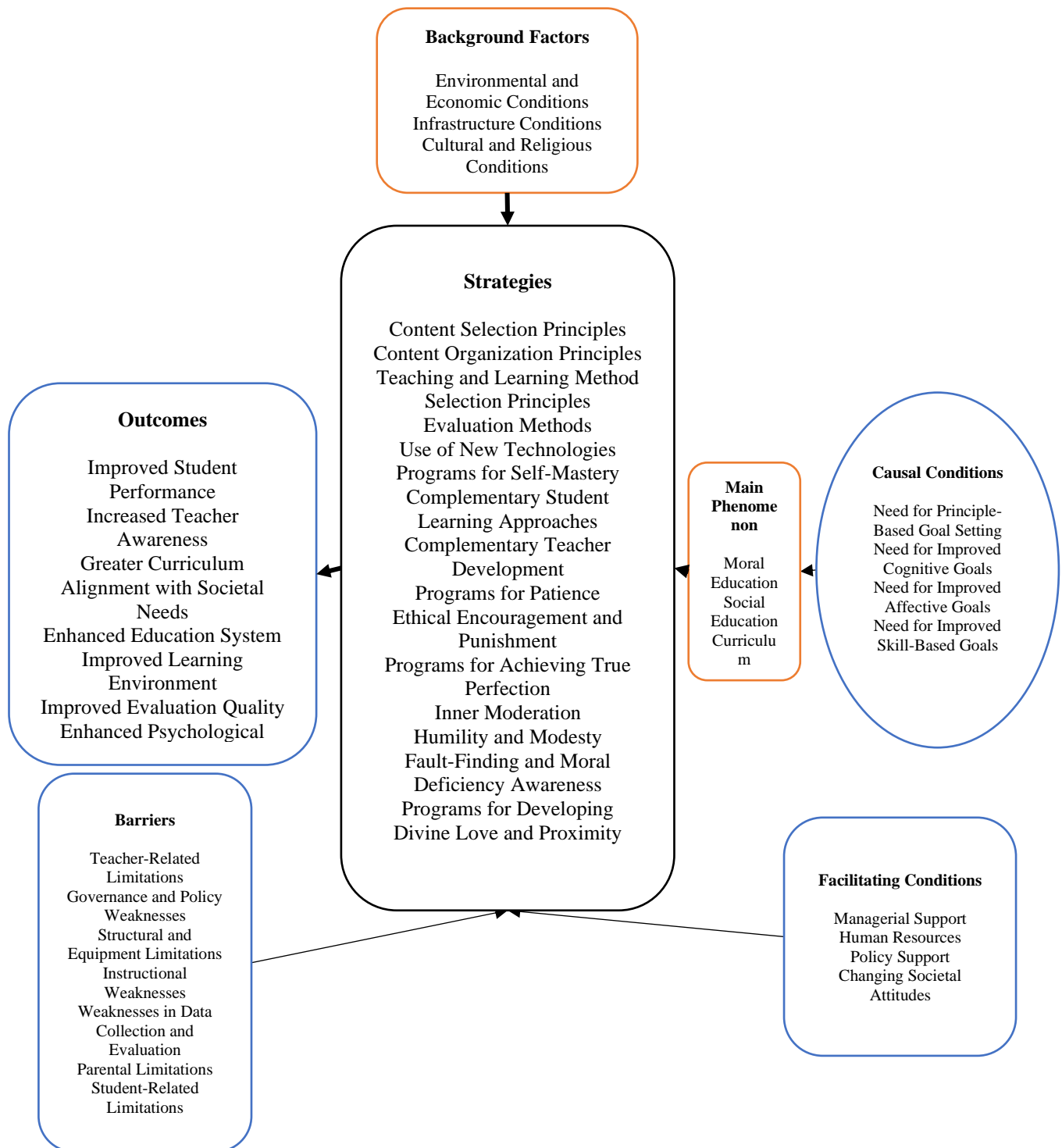
Core Phenomenon	Initial Codes
Moral Education (11 codes)	Respect for learners' dignity; balance in ethical obligations; emphasis on prevention over correction; consideration of learner individuality; centrality of piety; maintaining continuity; holistic ethical programming; humility in educators; content continuity; gradual ethical development; prioritizing moral immunity over restriction.
Social Education (7 codes)	Human interaction; physical environment engagement; behavior modification; role-playing; execution and supervision skills; social justice; social health.
Curricular Improvement (4 codes)	Process renewal; creativity and innovation; expanded educational opportunities; quantitative and qualitative educational development.

This synthesis of Tables 6 and 7 highlights how the curriculum model not only aims to produce outcomes across cognitive, emotional, social, and institutional domains, but

is also firmly anchored in a coherent theoretical framework that integrates moral integrity and social functionality at its core.

**Figure 1**

*Summary of One-Way ANCOVA Results on Posttest Scores of Social Adjustment Components (Controlling for Pretest Scores)*



#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study sought to identify and validate the core components of a moral and social education curriculum suitable for lower secondary schools in Hormozgan

Province, employing a grounded theory methodology. Through semi-structured interviews with 30 experts, a conceptual model was developed, encompassing seven key dimensions: causal conditions, background conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, main phenomenon, outcomes, and facilitating factors. The findings revealed a

multidimensional framework in which cognitive, affective, behavioral, and contextual elements intersect, indicating that any comprehensive moral and social curriculum must attend to both internal (learner-centered) and external (systemic and sociocultural) variables.

The causal conditions identified—namely the need for structuring principles in curriculum design and the enhancement of cognitive, affective, and skill-based goals—underscore a holistic approach to moral and social education. This aligns with Malaki and Alipour Moghaddam's research, which emphasizes that moral education must transcend abstract knowledge and cultivate values through structured objectives (Malaki & Alipour Moghaddam, 2022). The emphasis on affective and behavioral development also resonates with Cho's framework for emotional competence as an integral part of moral education, highlighting the interplay between emotional regulation and ethical behavior (Cho, 2023). Furthermore, Zhang et al. assert that teacher perceptions support such integrative approaches, recognizing the importance of balancing intellectual and affective learning in values education (Zhang et al., 2022).

The identified facilitating conditions—managerial support, human resources, policy endorsement, and shifts in societal attitude—further validate the assertion that curriculum implementation is not merely a pedagogical endeavor but a systemic one. This echoes findings by Hashemi and Tabrizi, who stressed the importance of educational policy and institutional support in successful curriculum reform efforts (Hashemi & Tabrizi, 2023). Likewise, Alwadai and Alhaj's study on Saudi teachers revealed the need for teacher empowerment and policy alignment in implementing value-based curricula (Alwadai & Alhaj, 2023). The data suggest that moral and social education can only be effective when educational ecosystems—comprising administrators, teachers, policymakers, and community stakeholders—work collaboratively to support its integration.

The study also illuminated several intervening conditions that act as barriers to successful curriculum implementation. These include teacher unpreparedness, structural and infrastructural deficiencies, weak evaluation systems, and parental disengagement. Such findings support those of Bafarani et al., who highlighted the often overlooked but significant role of the hidden curriculum and how institutional gaps and teacher modeling affect students' moral learning (Bafarani et al., 2021). Similarly, Talebi et al. found that organizational and structural shortcomings

undermine students' social responsibility development, even when value-based programs are theoretically present (Talebi et al., 2022). These challenges suggest that moral education requires not just curriculum content but a conducive environment where ethical discourse is lived, practiced, and assessed meaningfully.

One of the most notable findings of this study pertains to the comprehensive set of strategic actions proposed for the development of moral and social competencies. These include principles for content selection and organization, the adoption of socially responsive teaching methods, the integration of modern educational technologies, and the inclusion of supplementary programs such as self-mastery, inner moderation, and humility. These dimensions reflect a sophisticated understanding of the moral development process, as similarly theorized by Aghili et al., who emphasized both spiritual and civic virtues in Iranian models of moral education (Aghili et al., 2018). Moreover, Özgünlü et al. highlighted the effectiveness of SEL-based strategies such as team-based activities, dialogue, and experiential learning in fostering moral reasoning among young learners (Özgünlü et al., 2022). The identified strategies also include the development of evaluative practices aligned with moral competencies, such as self-assessment, peer review, and formative feedback mechanisms, which were also strongly recommended by Gandomkar et al. in their grounded theory-based curriculum model for secondary schools (Gandomkar D, 2019).

The outcomes identified in the study further affirm the transformative potential of moral and social education when integrated systematically and reflectively. Key results include improved student performance in moral domains, increased teacher awareness, stronger alignment between curriculum and societal needs, and enhanced psychosocial outcomes such as teamwork, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. These outcomes resonate with the findings of Khaleghi et al., who showed that well-designed curricula lead to higher levels of altruism and prosocial behavior among adolescents (Khaleghi et al., 2023). Bamkin's analysis of Japanese moral education also confirms that when moral content is reinforced systematically, it leads to sustained behavioral changes and heightened civic engagement (Bamkin, 2020). The present study extends these observations by highlighting not just the educational but also the psychosocial outcomes of an effective curriculum model.

Additionally, the study reaffirmed the centrality of two interrelated phenomena—moral education and social

education—around which all other components are structured. The convergence of these domains within a unified curriculum model reflects the integrated nature of human development and civic life. Douglas argued that curriculum is a social artifact shaped by collective norms, cultural values, and institutional practices (Douglas, 2023), a view that reinforces the conceptual framework employed in this study. Furthermore, the inclusion of inner virtues such as humility, spiritual proximity, and ethical introspection links the findings to indigenous traditions such as the Raḍavi model, which Gholampour et al. advocate for its ability to bridge divine ethics and civic life (Gholampour et al., 2021).

The importance of cultural context in curriculum design cannot be overstated. Metaji Nimvar et al.'s analysis of human resources curricula emphasized the need for ethical content that is both culturally relevant and pedagogically rigorous (Metaji Nimvar et al., 2023). Similarly, Tajri's work on ethics-based maternal roles in education stresses that moral instruction must be culturally anchored, resonating with the familial and communal values of the learners (Tajri, 2021). In this study, the regional and cultural particularities of Hormozgan were central to model validation, ensuring that the proposed components are both context-sensitive and adaptable.

Despite its rigorous qualitative design, the study is not without limitations. First, the reliance on expert interviews, while yielding deep insights, may limit the generalizability of findings across diverse educational regions of Iran. Hormozgan's cultural, economic, and educational characteristics may not mirror those of other provinces. Second, while theoretical saturation was achieved, the number of participants remained relatively modest, and their perspectives may have been influenced by institutional affiliations or personal interpretations of moral and social concepts. Third, the study focused primarily on conceptual development and did not include an empirical test or pilot implementation of the proposed model, leaving its practical effectiveness unexamined.

Future studies should consider a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative model development with quantitative testing of outcomes in pilot schools. Longitudinal studies could explore the impact of moral and social education curricula on student behavior, civic engagement, and emotional well-being over time. Comparative research across provinces or even countries could further reveal how cultural and systemic variables mediate curriculum effectiveness. Moreover, future research could delve into teacher training models and how

professional development programs can be aligned with the ethical and social goals of curriculum reform.

To ensure the successful implementation of the proposed model, policymakers and educational planners should focus on institutional capacity-building, including infrastructural enhancement, teacher training, and curricular flexibility. School administrators must cultivate a culture that values ethical discourse and supports teachers in modeling moral behavior. Parental engagement should also be prioritized, with communication channels and participatory opportunities that allow parents to contribute to and reinforce moral instruction. Finally, continuous curriculum evaluation mechanisms must be embedded to monitor effectiveness and adapt the model based on student needs and societal shifts.

### Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

### Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

### Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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### Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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### Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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