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Designing a Multicultural Curriculum Model for Lower Secondary Education Based on the Philosophy of Islamic Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to design and validate a multicultural curriculum model for lower secondary education based on the philosophy of Islamic education.

Methods and Materials: An exploratory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. In the qualitative phase, relevant scholarly literature, policy documents, and semi-structured interviews with purposively selected experts in curriculum planning, Islamic philosophy of education, multicultural education, cultural studies, teacher education, and lower secondary schooling were analyzed using thematic analysis in MAXQDA. The extracted concepts were organized into philosophical dimensions, components, and indicators and used to develop the initial curriculum model. In the quantitative phase, a researcher-developed 40-item questionnaire based on five philosophical dimensions and 10 components was administered to 100 lower secondary teachers working in culturally diverse educational settings. Content validity was assessed using CVR and CVI, construct validity through exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring, and reliability through Cronbach's alpha. The proposed model was subsequently validated through three Delphi rounds with 15 experts. Quantitative analyses were conducted in SPSS.

Findings: The qualitative analysis yielded five philosophical dimensions—Human Identity, Educational Justice, Cultural Interaction, Rationality, and Social Cohesion—comprising 10 principal components. The questionnaire demonstrated satisfactory psychometric properties, with mean CVR=.79, CVI=.91, KMO=.837, a significant Bartlett test, $\chi^2(780)=2111.837$, $p<.001$, and a five-factor solution. Cronbach's alpha ranged from .820 to .900 across dimensions and was .940 for the total scale. Delphi validation showed increasing convergence, with the overall mean rising from .823 in Round 1 to .853 in Rounds 2 and 3, while the mean coefficient of variation declined from 1.79% to 1.05%. Friedman tests were significant in all three rounds, $p<.001$.

Conclusion: The findings support a coherent and expert-validated multicultural curriculum model grounded in Islamic educational philosophy and structured around dignity, justice, dialogue, rationality, and social cohesion, with potential applicability to lower secondary curriculum design and implementation.

Keywords: Multicultural Curriculum; Lower Secondary Education; Islamic Philosophy of Education; Educational Justice; Cultural Diversity; Curriculum Design; Delphi Method

1. Introduction

Contemporary societies are increasingly characterized by cultural, ethnic, linguistic, religious, and social diversity, and education systems are therefore expected to prepare learners not only for academic participation but also for constructive life in pluralistic communities. Schools are no longer culturally homogeneous spaces in which a single set of experiences, identities, and communicative practices can be assumed to represent all students. Rather, classrooms bring together learners whose cultural backgrounds, local traditions, languages, family experiences, and social identities may differ substantially. These differences can enrich educational experiences when they are recognized and incorporated into curriculum design, yet they may also become sources of exclusion, misunderstanding, stereotyping, or unequal participation when curricula remain insensitive to cultural plurality. Multicultural education has consequently developed as an important educational orientation for ensuring recognition, participation, equity, intercultural understanding, and meaningful inclusion within diverse learning environments (Nesterova, 2019; Parker, 2019; Saedi Abriz, 2026).

Multicultural education should not be reduced to the superficial presentation of cultural customs or occasional celebrations of ethnic difference. Its more substantive purpose is to reconsider how curriculum objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment practices, school relationships, and institutional structures respond to diversity and educational inequality. A multicultural curriculum seeks to represent multiple cultural experiences fairly, create opportunities for students to encounter perspectives other than their own, challenge prejudicial representations, and provide all learners with meaningful opportunities for participation and achievement. It also attempts to develop intercultural competencies such as dialogue, empathy, critical reflection, respect for difference, cooperative problem solving, and the ability to understand cultural identities without reproducing stereotypes. Research syntheses conducted in the Iranian context similarly indicate that multicultural curriculum design requires simultaneous attention to cultural recognition, social interaction, equality, identity, and educational processes rather than the mere inclusion of fragmented cultural information (Hamidizadeh, 2024; Norouzi et al., 2021).

The significance of this issue is particularly evident in countries such as Iran, whose social and cultural structure encompasses numerous ethnic groups, languages, regional

traditions, local identities, and cultural subgroups while also being shaped by shared national and religious frameworks. In such a context, curriculum design faces a dual responsibility. On the one hand, it must recognize students' diverse cultural experiences and avoid marginalizing local or minority identities; on the other hand, it must contribute to social cohesion, shared citizenship, ethical commitment, and a common sense of belonging. A multicultural curriculum that overemphasizes uniformity risks suppressing meaningful forms of difference, whereas an approach that treats cultural differences as entirely disconnected may weaken opportunities for common understanding and collective identity. Iranian curriculum research has therefore increasingly emphasized the need for models capable of incorporating subcultures, cultural diversity, and shared identity within the formal educational system (Rouhi et al., 2022; Sadeghi & Azizi, 2022).

The philosophical foundations of curriculum design are especially important in addressing this balance. Curriculum is never merely a technical arrangement of subjects and learning activities; it also expresses assumptions about the nature of the human being, the purposes of education, desirable forms of social life, moral development, knowledge, justice, and responsibility. In the Iranian educational context, the philosophy of Islamic education provides a normative framework through which multiculturalism can be interpreted in relation to principles such as human dignity, *fitrah*, justice, rationality, ethical responsibility, dialogue, social solidarity, and recognition of human differences. From this perspective, cultural plurality need not be understood as inconsistent with Islamic educational principles. Rather, diversity can be approached within a moral framework that simultaneously protects human dignity, opposes unjust discrimination, promotes justice and mutual respect, encourages rational reflection, and sustains social unity (Bagheri, 2022; Khobir et al., 2021).

The principle of human dignity is particularly relevant to multicultural curriculum design because it establishes an ethical basis for equal respect toward students regardless of cultural, ethnic, or linguistic background. If every learner possesses inherent worth, educational content and interactions should not communicate that one cultural group is intrinsically superior to another. Similarly, the Islamic emphasis on justice implies more than formal equality; it requires educational arrangements that respond appropriately to differences in students' circumstances and provide equitable opportunities for participation and

development. The cultivation of reasoning and reflection further supports a curriculum in which learners examine stereotypes, question unjust assumptions, analyze cultural representations, and engage different perspectives through reasoned dialogue. In addition, the concept of social unity provides a foundation for understanding diversity within a broader framework of shared ethical, national, and religious belonging (Bagheri, 2022; Sadeghi & Azizi, 2022).

International scholarship likewise demonstrates that multicultural curriculum reform requires a multidimensional and context-sensitive approach. Banks-inspired approaches to multicultural curriculum reform have emphasized changes ranging from the inclusion of culturally diverse contributions to deeper transformation of curricular perspectives and opportunities for socially meaningful action. Recent applications of these ideas show that effective multicultural curricula should move beyond additive representation and enable learners to critically examine knowledge, social structures, cultural assumptions, and relations among groups (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2025). Similarly, multicultural curriculum programs developed in areas such as dance education have shown that culturally responsive learning can be integrated into subject-specific curricula when instructional content and activities are deliberately redesigned around diversity rather than merely supplemented with isolated cultural examples (Yim, 2024).

The practical implementation of multicultural curricula, however, remains challenging. Teachers must possess the knowledge, dispositions, and pedagogical competencies required to manage culturally heterogeneous classrooms and facilitate meaningful interaction among students. Research involving bilingual and multicultural educators has highlighted strategies such as culturally responsive communication, adaptation of learning activities, explicit attention to multiple perspectives, and collaborative classroom practices (Abduh et al., 2023). Cooperative educational approaches are especially important because multicultural learning depends on interaction rather than passive exposure to information about other cultures. Cooperative learning can create opportunities for students to encounter different perspectives, negotiate meanings, reduce social distance, and develop constructive patterns of cultural interaction when it is deliberately designed and facilitated (Taghavizadeh Golpayegani, 2023).

Teacher education is therefore a central prerequisite for multicultural curriculum reform. Teachers who have not been prepared to recognize cultural difference, examine their own assumptions, manage intercultural tensions, or adapt

teaching strategies may be unable to translate multicultural curriculum principles into practice. Recent studies have emphasized the need to revise pre-service teacher education so that diversity, equity, and inclusion become embedded in curriculum and professional preparation rather than treated as peripheral issues (Ajani & Govender, 2026). Experiential approaches such as multicultural microteaching have similarly been proposed as mechanisms through which future teachers can practice culturally responsive pedagogies and obtain feedback from relevant stakeholders before entering actual classrooms (Ambarini et al., 2025). In Iran, the development of a multicultural literacy curriculum for student teachers also reflects the recognition that successful implementation at the school level depends substantially on teachers' capacity to understand cultural diversity and transform curriculum principles into pedagogical action (Afzali et al., 2023).

The school curriculum must also reflect the broader cultural environment in which learners live. Studies of ethnic diversity and global education suggest that meaningful inclusion of diversity requires educational spaces in which different identities can be recognized without being segregated from broader social and civic learning (Gube & Bryant, 2025). Comparative research on multiculturalism and acculturation similarly shows that educational responses to diversity vary according to whether they emphasize assimilation, separation, marginalization, or integration; among these possibilities, models that combine maintenance of cultural identity with constructive participation in the wider society offer a more balanced basis for multicultural education (Lee, 2025). This issue is particularly relevant to the Iranian context, where curriculum design must simultaneously support cultural plurality and strengthen common social belonging.

Recent experiences from other educational systems further show that multicultural education becomes more effective when it is embedded in official curriculum frameworks rather than left to isolated teacher initiatives. Examination of multicultural education within Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum has demonstrated the importance of policy-level support, curricular flexibility, and opportunities for contextual adaptation to local cultural realities (Raihani et al., 2025). Studies of multicultural Islamic education in family and community contexts likewise suggest that values such as tolerance, mutual respect, coexistence, and recognition of cultural differences can be nurtured through educational practices aligned with Islamic ethical principles (Mukhsin et al., 2024). These findings reinforce the

argument that multicultural and Islamic orientations should not necessarily be treated as competing paradigms; when conceptually integrated, they can provide mutually reinforcing foundations for ethical engagement with diversity.

The developmental stage of lower secondary education gives this issue additional importance. Students at this level are undergoing significant cognitive, social, moral, and identity development. They become increasingly capable of abstract reasoning, critical evaluation of social issues, awareness of group identities, and sensitivity to inclusion and exclusion. At the same time, prejudices, stereotypes, and rigid assumptions regarding social and cultural groups may become more salient during adolescence if they are not addressed educationally. A curriculum designed for this stage should therefore provide structured opportunities for students to examine cultural differences, develop dialogue and conflict-resolution skills, analyze social and media representations, and build a sense of belonging that accommodates both shared identity and cultural variation. Curriculum research focused on lower secondary education has already emphasized the importance of designing models responsive to students' emerging educational, cultural, and social needs (Moslehi, 2024).

The lower secondary level is also suitable for systematic curriculum modeling because curricular experiences at this stage are sufficiently structured to permit alignment among objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment, and broader educational outcomes. Iranian research on curriculum model development at this educational level demonstrates the feasibility of constructing and validating multidimensional models that translate theoretical concepts into operational curricular elements (Jaberi Safa et al., 2023). However, designing a multicultural curriculum requires an additional level of conceptual sensitivity because the model must link cultural diversity to questions of justice, identity, human dignity, pedagogy, and social cohesion rather than simply introduce new content areas.

Another challenge concerns the actual organization of culturally diverse classrooms. Differences in linguistic background, regional location, school resources, and classroom composition may influence the feasibility of multicultural teaching practices. Experiences from multigrade and heterogeneous educational settings indicate that instructional organization must be sufficiently flexible to respond to students with varying backgrounds and learning conditions (Toudeh-Ranjbar et al., 2022). Therefore, a workable multicultural curriculum model

should not be limited to philosophical ideals; it should specify practical implications for instructional strategies, learning environments, teacher roles, and assessment procedures so that its components can be translated into ordinary classroom practice.

The relationship between multicultural education and emerging technologies has also become increasingly important. Digital environments can broaden students' access to cultural materials, narratives, audiovisual resources, and interactions beyond their immediate locality. Recent evidence suggests that artificial intelligence may support multicultural curriculum implementation by facilitating differentiated content, access to diverse cultural representations, and adaptive educational experiences, although its feasibility depends on pedagogical design, ethical safeguards, technological readiness, and expert oversight (Qin & Zhou, 2026). In the context of lower secondary education, these possibilities imply that a contemporary multicultural curriculum should also consider virtual and blended learning environments rather than assume implementation exclusively through face-to-face classroom instruction.

At the same time, technological resources cannot substitute for a coherent conceptual framework. Without clearly defined philosophical principles and educational objectives, digital resources may reproduce the same stereotypes, exclusions, or superficial representations present in conventional curriculum materials. The central challenge is therefore to establish a model in which cultural diversity is anchored in a consistent philosophy of education and subsequently translated into curriculum objectives, content, pedagogy, assessment, teacher competencies, and learning environments. Research on multicultural curriculum reform repeatedly demonstrates that implementation problems often emerge from fragmentation between policy intentions, curriculum structures, teacher preparation, and classroom practice (Ajani & Govender, 2026; Raihani et al., 2025; Saedi Abriz, 2026).

Iranian studies have made important contributions to identifying components of multicultural education, multicultural literacy, subculture-sensitive curricula, and principles relevant to culturally responsive education (Afzali et al., 2023; Hamidizadeh, 2024; Norouzi et al., 2021; Rouhi et al., 2022). Other work has addressed specific domains such as multicultural art education grounded in Iran's ecological and cultural diversity, demonstrating the value of context-specific curriculum design rather than importing generalized models without adaptation (Nakhzari

Moghaddam & Akbari Borang, 2025). Nevertheless, an important gap remains in integrating these insights into a comprehensive lower secondary curriculum model explicitly grounded in the philosophy of Islamic education. Existing studies frequently emphasize either the identification of multicultural components, teacher-related requirements, subject-specific curriculum development, or general educational principles, while fewer studies have systematically connected Islamic philosophical foundations with operational curriculum elements at the lower secondary level.

This gap has practical as well as theoretical consequences. Without an integrated model, multicultural education may remain dependent on individual teachers' personal initiatives or be reduced to episodic cultural activities that do not affect the deeper organization of the curriculum. A comprehensive model should clarify what students are expected to learn, which philosophical principles justify those expectations, how diverse cultural content should be selected and represented, which teaching strategies encourage intercultural dialogue and critical reflection, how learning should be assessed, what competencies teachers require, and what forms of school and technological support are necessary. It should also reconcile two objectives that can sometimes be mistakenly treated as contradictory: respect for cultural diversity and reinforcement of common Iranian-Islamic identity. In this respect, the philosophy of Islamic education may provide a coherent normative basis through principles of dignity, justice, reason, dialogue, responsibility, and social solidarity (Bagheri, 2022; Khobir et al., 2021; Sadeghi & Azizi, 2022).

Accordingly, the present study was conducted to design and validate a multicultural curriculum model for lower secondary education based on the philosophy of Islamic education.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, in which the qualitative phase preceded and informed the quantitative phase, to design and validate a multicultural curriculum model for lower secondary education based on the philosophy of Islamic education. This methodological orientation was selected because the research problem required, first, the exploration and identification of theoretically and contextually grounded components of a multicultural curriculum and, subsequently, the empirical assessment and expert validation of the

resulting model. The research process therefore consisted of four interconnected phases. In the first phase, qualitative evidence was collected and analyzed to identify the principal philosophical dimensions, components, and indicators of the proposed curriculum model. In the second phase, the initial model was constructed by integrating the qualitative findings with the theoretical foundations of Islamic education and the major elements of curriculum design, including objectives, content, teaching-learning methods, assessment, the role of the teacher, and the learning environment. The third phase involved a descriptive cross-sectional survey designed to assess the extent to which the identified components were reflected in current lower secondary educational practice. In the fourth phase, the proposed model was subjected to expert validation through a three-round Delphi procedure. This sequence ensured that the quantitative instruments and validation procedures were derived from the exploratory qualitative findings rather than imposed on the study in advance.

The qualitative phase drew on two complementary sources of evidence: relevant scholarly and policy documents and semi-structured interviews with knowledgeable participants. The documentary corpus comprised specialized literature, authoritative studies, educational policy documents, and other relevant sources addressing multicultural education, curriculum planning, the philosophy of Islamic education, cultural and linguistic diversity, educational justice, teacher education, and lower secondary schooling. These documents were treated as qualitative data sources rather than as a separate statistical population. Interview participants were selected through purposive sampling on the basis of their scientific expertise, research background, professional experience, and familiarity with curriculum studies, Islamic philosophy of education, multicultural education, cultural studies, teacher education, or educational practice in culturally diverse settings. Particular attention was given to individuals capable of explaining both the philosophical foundations of Islamic education and the practical requirements of multicultural schooling. Qualitative recruitment continued on the basis of informational adequacy and the contribution of participants to the conceptual development of the model.

The quantitative phase focused on lower secondary school teachers working in educational settings characterized by ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity. Educational contexts demonstrating meaningful cultural diversity were first identified, after which accessible teachers meeting the study criteria were invited to

participate. Data from 100 lower secondary school teachers were ultimately collected and included in the quantitative analyses. Because teachers were recruited from accessible schools after the identification of culturally diverse educational settings rather than through a probability-based national sampling framework, the quantitative findings were interpreted as representative of the participating sample and were not generalized beyond this scope without caution. The expert-validation phase involved 15 specialists purposively selected to ensure multidisciplinary coverage of the principal domains underlying the proposed model. The panel included university professors and academic specialists in curriculum planning, curriculum studies, Islamic philosophy of education, Islamic education, multicultural education, cultural and ethnic studies, educational measurement and evaluation, teacher education, and lower secondary education, as well as experienced school administrators and teachers with direct experience in multicultural educational environments. Their professional experience generally exceeded 10 years, and several had more than 20 years of academic or educational experience. The same 15 experts participated in the successive Delphi rounds in order to permit the systematic examination of convergence in judgments across rounds.

Expert eligibility required relevant academic specialization or substantial executive or teaching experience in curriculum planning, Islamic philosophy of education, multicultural education, cultural studies, teacher education, or lower secondary education; familiarity with the Iranian educational system; a relevant research or professional record; and willingness to participate throughout the Delphi process. Experts were excluded from subsequent analyses if they failed to complete the Delphi questionnaire, withdrew from later rounds, or submitted responses that were substantially incomplete. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participation by teachers and experts was voluntary and based on informed consent, the objectives and intended use of the data were explained before participation, and identifying information was kept confidential. Participants were represented by codes in the research records and reports, and the identities of experts were not disclosed. The use of multiple qualitative sources, documentation of the coding process, peer review of qualitative interpretations, and preservation of an analytic audit trail were additionally employed to enhance the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the qualitative findings.

Multiple data collection instruments were used in accordance with the successive phases of the exploratory mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, a structured documentary-review framework was used to identify and examine relevant scholarly literature, specialized texts, educational policy documents, and authoritative studies related to multicultural curricula and the philosophy of Islamic education. The selected materials were read systematically, and sentences, phrases, or short textual passages containing information relevant to Islamic educational foundations, cultural diversity, curriculum elements, educational justice, human dignity, intercultural interaction, rationality, critical thinking, and social cohesion were treated as units of meaning. The documentary analysis was complemented by semi-structured interviews with experts and experienced educational practitioners. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended and neutral questions addressing experiences of cultural diversity in schools, the potential of Islamic philosophy of education to respond to multicultural realities, curriculum objectives, content selection and organization, teaching-learning strategies, the role of teachers, characteristics of the learning environment, assessment approaches, and institutional requirements for implementing a multicultural curriculum at the lower secondary level. The protocol was deliberately designed to avoid imposing the eventual dimensions of the model on participants. Follow-up and probing questions were used when necessary to clarify concepts, explore emerging issues, and obtain a more contextually grounded understanding of participants' professional experiences and interpretations.

Qualitative data management and coding were conducted using MAXQDA. The interview transcripts and selected documentary materials were repeatedly reviewed before coding. Initial meaning units were coded as closely as possible to the language of participants or the conceptual terminology of the documentary sources. Redundant, excessively narrow, or semantically overlapping codes were subsequently revised or merged, after which conceptually related codes were organized into broader components and philosophical domains. The qualitative analytical record was retained so that the progression from raw evidence to initial codes, refined codes, components, and final dimensions of the curriculum model remained traceable. Following the initial coding process, two specialists in curriculum planning and Islamic education reviewed the coding pathway, and disagreements or ambiguous classifications were

reconsidered through continuous comparison with the original data and the theoretical foundations of the study.

For the quantitative survey phase, a researcher-developed 40-item questionnaire was constructed directly from the qualitative findings and the conceptual structure of the preliminary model. The questionnaire was organized around five philosophical dimensions and 10 principal components and was designed to measure teachers' perceptions of the degree to which the identified characteristics of a multicultural curriculum were realized in lower secondary educational practice. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Before the main administration, the wording, clarity, conceptual relevance, and coverage of the items were reviewed. Content validity was evaluated by 15 experts using the Content Validity Ratio and Content Validity Index. The resulting mean CVR was .79 and the CVI was .91, supporting the content validity of the instrument. Items judged insufficiently clear, relevant, or representative were revised before final administration.

Construct validity of the questionnaire was examined using exploratory factor analysis with principal axis factoring. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was .837, indicating that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(780) = 2111.837$, $p < .001$. The analysis supported a five-factor structure consistent with the higher-order philosophical organization of the proposed model. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and the overall questionnaire demonstrated high reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .940. These psychometric procedures were undertaken to ensure that the survey instrument adequately represented the conceptual domains derived from the qualitative phase before its results were used to describe the current educational situation.

A separate Delphi questionnaire was developed for the model-validation phase. This instrument contained the proposed philosophical dimensions, curriculum components, elements, and indicators derived from the qualitative analysis and subsequent model-development phase. Experts evaluated the importance, adequacy, relevance, coherence, and applicability of the proposed components. The Delphi process was conducted in three successive rounds with the same panel of 15 experts. After each round, both quantitative ratings and qualitative comments were reviewed. Statements or components showing insufficient agreement or requiring conceptual

clarification were revised in light of expert feedback and returned to the panel in the subsequent round. Thus, the Delphi instrument functioned not merely as a rating form but as an iterative mechanism for improving the conceptual clarity, comprehensiveness, and practical applicability of the proposed curriculum model.

Qualitative and quantitative data were analyzed sequentially and subsequently integrated in accordance with the exploratory mixed-methods design. Qualitative data obtained from the documentary review and semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis supported by qualitative content analysis. The analytical process began with repeated reading of the materials to achieve familiarity with the data, followed by identification of meaning units relevant to the research question. The unit of analysis could consist of a sentence, phrase, or short passage referring to a philosophical principle of Islamic education, an element of curriculum design, or a requirement of multicultural education. The coding procedure proceeded through successive stages of open coding, refinement and consolidation of codes, axial organization, and selective integration. During open coding, descriptive and conceptual labels were assigned to meaningful segments of the data. During refinement, duplicate, highly specific, ambiguous, or overlapping codes were merged, redefined, or removed. In the axial stage, related codes were grouped into conceptually coherent components and broader philosophical domains according to semantic similarity, theoretical relevance, and their relationship to curriculum elements. During selective integration, these domains were connected around the central organizing concept of a multicultural curriculum model grounded in the philosophy of Islamic education. The resulting structure consisted of five philosophical dimensions and 10 principal components that provided the conceptual foundation for development of the preliminary model.

Several procedures were applied to strengthen the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis. Evidence was triangulated across interviews, specialized literature, and educational policy documents, while constant comparison was used to examine consistency between emerging interpretations and the original data. The movement from meaning units to open codes, refined categories, components, and final domains was documented to establish an audit trail. Peer examination by two specialists in curriculum planning and Islamic education was used to evaluate the coding structure, and disputed interpretations were reconsidered against both the raw qualitative material

and the theoretical framework. Credibility was therefore supported by triangulation and peer review, dependability by systematic documentation of analytical decisions, confirmability by retaining evidence supporting each component, and transferability by providing sufficient description of the participants, expert composition, instruments, and educational context.

Quantitative data from the 100 participating teachers were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum, were calculated for questionnaire items, components, and broader dimensions in order to characterize the reported level of realization of the proposed multicultural curriculum components in lower secondary schools. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Construct validity was evaluated through exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring, while the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin statistic and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to evaluate the adequacy of the data for factor extraction. The quantitative analysis was primarily descriptive and psychometric because its purpose was to assess the current status of the model components and evaluate the structure of the researcher-developed instrument rather than to establish population-level causal relationships.

Data from the three Delphi rounds were analyzed after each iteration. For every component or criterion, the mean and standard deviation were calculated to summarize expert judgments, and the coefficient of variation was computed as the standard deviation divided by the mean to assess the relative dispersion of responses. Changes in the coefficient of variation across the successive rounds were used as an indicator of increasing convergence and stability in expert judgments. Components displaying relatively greater dispersion or receiving substantive qualitative criticism were revised and resubmitted in the subsequent round. The Friedman test was also applied within Delphi rounds to examine differences in the relative ranking of the proposed criteria. Agreement was interpreted through the combined consideration of central tendency, dispersion, stability across rounds, and qualitative expert feedback rather than through a single statistical index.

Integration occurred after the principal qualitative and quantitative analyses had been completed. The components and philosophical dimensions derived from the qualitative

analysis constituted the primary conceptual architecture of the model, while the teacher survey provided empirical evidence regarding the extent to which these components were perceived to be realized in existing educational practice. The two sets of findings were compared to identify areas of convergence as well as discrepancies between the theoretically desirable multicultural curriculum and the situation reported by lower secondary teachers. The quantitative findings were therefore used to contextualize and assess the practical status of the qualitatively derived model rather than to replace the exploratory qualitative process. Finally, the preliminary model was modified in accordance with the findings of the three Delphi rounds, and the version demonstrating satisfactory expert convergence, conceptual coherence, comprehensiveness, consistency with the philosophy of Islamic education, and applicability to lower secondary education was retained as the final proposed multicultural curriculum model.

3. Findings and Results

The findings are presented in accordance with the five research questions. The qualitative phase first identified the philosophical dimensions, components, and operational indicators of the multicultural curriculum model. These findings were then used to formulate the proposed curriculum model and construct the researcher-developed questionnaire. Subsequently, the psychometric properties of the instrument and the perceived level of implementation of the model components were examined using data obtained from 100 lower secondary school teachers. Finally, the proposed model was validated through three Delphi rounds involving 15 experts.

The first research question concerned the core components of a multicultural curriculum model based on the philosophy of Islamic education. Analysis of the qualitative evidence derived from the documentary sources and semi-structured interviews resulted in five overarching philosophical dimensions comprising 10 principal components and 40 operational indicators. The five dimensions were Human Identity, Educational Justice, Cultural Interaction, Rationality, and Social Cohesion. The complete conceptual structure obtained from the qualitative analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Core Components and Indicators of the Multicultural Curriculum Model Based on the Philosophy of Islamic Education

Philosophical dimension	Main component	Indicators
Human Identity: Dignity and Fitrah	Human dignity	Emphasizing the equal worth and dignity of all human beings in curriculum objectives; avoiding cultural humiliation or discrimination in the learning environment; respecting the status and dignity of all students throughout the educational process; fostering respectful attitudes toward people irrespective of cultural differences
Human Identity: Dignity and Fitrah	Respect for cultural diversity	Familiarizing students with different cultures and ethnic groups in society; incorporating examples of cultural diversity into educational content; promoting positive attitudes toward cultural differences; avoiding cultural stereotypes in instructional materials
Educational Justice: Alawite Justice	Equality of educational opportunities	Providing equal learning opportunities for all students; considering cultural differences when designing educational activities; ensuring equal participation in the learning process; creating a fair educational environment for all students
Educational Justice: Alawite Justice	Cultural justice in the curriculum	Ensuring balanced representation of different cultures in curricular content; eliminating cultural stereotypes and discrimination from textbooks; providing opportunities for different cultural viewpoints to be expressed; considering students' cultural needs in curriculum design
Cultural Interaction: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding	Intercultural dialogue	Encouraging students to discuss cultural differences; establishing a classroom climate based on respect for different viewpoints; providing opportunities for students to express their cultural experiences; strengthening the ability to listen to differing perspectives
Cultural Interaction: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding	Empathy and mutual understanding	Developing empathy toward individuals from different cultural backgrounds; encouraging mutual respect in classroom interactions; using group activities to strengthen cultural interaction; teaching communication skills appropriate to multicultural settings
Rationality: Reasoning and Reflection	Cultural critical thinking	Encouraging students to analyze cultural issues; critically examining cultural stereotypes and prejudices; considering multiple perspectives on cultural issues; strengthening social and cultural analytical skills
Rationality: Reasoning and Reflection	Inquiry and reasoning	Encouraging students to raise questions concerning cultural issues; applying discussion- and reasoning-based instructional methods; providing opportunities to analyze different viewpoints; strengthening logical reasoning and thinking in the classroom
Social Cohesion: Unified Ummah	Cultural coexistence	Strengthening mutual respect among students from different cultural backgrounds; teaching skills for peaceful life in a diverse society; promoting cooperation and social participation; encouraging constructive interaction among students
Social Cohesion: Unified Ummah	Strengthening shared identity	Emphasizing common national and religious values and identity; strengthening a sense of belonging to Iranian and Islamic society; introducing the shared cultural heritage of society; explaining unity within cultural diversity

As shown in Table 1, the first philosophical dimension, Human Identity based on dignity and *fitrah*, positioned the intrinsic worth of the human person as the ethical foundation of the proposed curriculum. Human dignity required equal recognition of students regardless of cultural background and the elimination of degrading or discriminatory practices, while respect for cultural diversity required curricular exposure to the cultures and ethnic groups represented within Iranian society. Together, these components translated the Islamic conception of human worth into practical principles for curriculum objectives, content, classroom relations, and learning experiences.

The second dimension, Educational Justice grounded in the concept of Alawite justice, incorporated equality of educational opportunities and cultural justice in the curriculum. The findings indicated that multicultural curriculum design could not be limited to the symbolic representation of cultural groups; rather, it had to ensure equitable access to learning, participation, educational activities, and culturally responsive content. Cultural justice therefore required balanced representation of diverse

cultures, removal of discriminatory or stereotypical material, opportunities for students to articulate culturally different viewpoints, and explicit consideration of cultural needs in curriculum planning.

The third dimension, Cultural Interaction, was organized around intercultural dialogue and empathy and mutual understanding. This dimension emphasized that recognition of diversity should lead to interaction rather than cultural separation. Students were expected to learn how to discuss cultural differences respectfully, articulate their own experiences, listen to alternative perspectives, participate in cooperative activities, and develop empathy toward peers with different cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, the multicultural curriculum was conceptualized as a dialogical rather than merely informational approach to cultural diversity.

The fourth dimension, Rationality, consisted of cultural critical thinking and inquiry and reasoning. The qualitative findings indicated that students should not simply acquire descriptive knowledge about different cultures but should develop the capacity to analyze cultural phenomena,

question stereotypes and prejudice, compare alternative perspectives, and formulate reasoned judgments. Discussion, argumentation, questioning, social analysis, and critical examination of cultural representations therefore became integral to the proposed model.

The fifth dimension, Social Cohesion, incorporated cultural coexistence and strengthening shared identity. This dimension reflected the principle that recognition of cultural plurality need not weaken social integration. The model consequently combined respect for cultural differences with the development of common Iranian-Islamic belonging. Peaceful coexistence, cooperation, constructive interaction, common national and religious values, shared cultural heritage, and the concept of unity within diversity were identified as essential mechanisms for reconciling cultural plurality with social cohesion. Collectively, the five dimensions and 10 components constituted an integrated framework in which Islamic normative principles and practical requirements of multicultural education were mutually connected.

The Proposed Multicultural Curriculum Model for Lower Secondary Education

The second research question addressed the structure of the proposed multicultural curriculum for lower secondary education. On the basis of the qualitative findings, the model was formulated by connecting the five philosophical dimensions to the major elements of curriculum design, including objectives, content, teaching-learning strategies, assessment, the role of the teacher, the learning environment, implementation requirements, virtual delivery, and educational facilities. The overall purpose was to translate the philosophical dimensions identified in the qualitative analysis into an operational curriculum appropriate for students at the lower secondary level.

The general objectives of the proposed curriculum were to strengthen Iranian-Islamic identity while simultaneously promoting respect for the country's ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity; foster critical thinking, dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence among students; develop students' ability to understand, accept, and manage differences in accordance with the Islamic principles of human dignity, justice, respect, and responsibility; and provide conditions for students' social, moral, and spiritual development in multicultural educational environments. The specific objectives further required students to become familiar with the diverse cultures, customs, languages, values, and lifestyles found within Iran while interpreting them within an Islamic worldview. Students were also

expected to understand the roles of justice, morality, altruism, empathy, and dialogue in multicultural societies; develop skills in critical thinking, cultural conflict resolution, cooperation, dialogue, and mutual respect; recognize social phenomena such as cultural plurality, prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping and identify ways of reducing them; and acquire cultural and media literacy enabling them to critically analyze representations of cultural groups in different media and narratives.

The proposed subject matter reflected these objectives. Curriculum topics included the concept of culture, cultural diversity, and multiculturalism in Iran; Islamic principles concerning encounters with diversity through Qur'anic teachings, traditions, and ethical principles; individual, social, religious, and national identity; Iranian ethnic groups, languages, and cultures; social justice, responsibility, and human dignity; dialogue, empathy, conflict resolution, and communication skills; multicultural challenges such as prejudice, misunderstanding, stereotypes, and discrimination; media representations of different cultures; responsible citizenship in a multicultural society; and school-based projects through which students could directly experience multicultural interaction. These topics were not conceived as an isolated multicultural subject detached from the rest of the curriculum, but as content capable of being embedded across appropriate lower secondary subjects and learning experiences.

The five philosophical dimensions identified in Table 1 provided the internal organizing logic of the proposed curriculum. Within Human Identity, curriculum objectives were expected to recognize the equal dignity of all persons, classroom practices were required to protect students from cultural humiliation or discrimination, and instructional content was expected to present examples of the cultural diversity of Iranian society without relying on stereotypes. Within Educational Justice, instructional activities had to accommodate cultural differences while ensuring equal learning and participation opportunities, and curricular materials were expected to represent different cultures in a balanced manner and permit the expression of culturally diverse viewpoints. Within Cultural Interaction, teachers were expected to create opportunities for intercultural dialogue, expression of lived cultural experiences, active listening, empathy, collaborative learning, and constructive communication. Within Rationality, students were expected to analyze cultural issues, challenge prejudices and stereotypes, ask questions, compare viewpoints, and employ logical reasoning. Within Social Cohesion, the curriculum

was expected to develop peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, cooperation, social participation, and shared Iranian-Islamic identity while explaining the compatibility of unity with cultural plurality.

Implementation of the model required corresponding revisions in curriculum objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment, and learning environments. General and specific curriculum objectives needed to be rewritten so that the identified multicultural components were explicitly represented. Textbook and instructional content required revision to incorporate cultural diversity, reduce stereotyping, and highlight shared ethical, national, and religious values. Teachers were expected to adopt pedagogical approaches that encouraged dialogue, questioning, critical reflection, and intercultural interaction rather than relying exclusively on teacher-centered transmission of knowledge. Assessment was similarly expected to evaluate students' understanding of and respect for cultural diversity, critical thinking, intercultural communication, collaboration, and their ability to apply ethical principles to culturally complex situations. The school environment itself was conceptualized as part of the curriculum and therefore needed to provide a psychologically and socially safe setting in which different cultural perspectives could be expressed without ridicule, discrimination, or stereotyping.

Appropriate curricular content included Islamic texts concerning ethnic and human diversity, justice, respect, and morality, including teachings associated with the principle expressed in the Qur'anic statement concerning peoples and tribes. The proposed content also included accurate and respectful introductions to Iranian ethnic groups, languages, traditions, and cultural practices, including those associated with Baluch, Turkic, Kurdish, Arab, Turkmen, Lur, Gilaki, and other communities. Local and national narratives and stories capable of fostering empathy and justice were considered appropriate, as were films, photographs, reports, and documentary materials depicting everyday life in culturally diverse communities. Experiential activities could involve comparing cultural customs, observing and critically analyzing stereotypes in media, and conducting school projects such as a "Cultural Week." Skills-oriented content was intended to develop dialogue, conflict resolution, recognition of prejudice, and respectful engagement with differences.

Teaching strategies were aligned with the Islamic philosophical framework and the social nature of multicultural learning. Cooperative learning was identified

as a central strategy because it permits students from different backgrounds to interact around shared tasks. Guided dialogue and classroom discussion were proposed for the examination of differing viewpoints, while case studies could be used to analyze cultural conflicts and ethically defensible responses. Role-play was considered appropriate for practicing intercultural interactions and perspective taking. Project-based learning could involve projects introducing the cultures of different regions and communities of Iran, whereas experiential learning could incorporate educational visits, observation, and engagement with culturally knowledgeable guests. Storytelling and the analysis of ethical and Islamic narratives could connect moral reasoning with cultural experience, and media-analysis activities could help students identify the ways in which different cultures are represented, simplified, stereotyped, or marginalized.

Assessment within the model was multidimensional. Formative assessment was intended to include teacher observation, analysis of classroom dialogue, and evaluation of group performance. Project-based assessment could be used for student presentations on different cultures or analyses of multicultural behavior and social situations. Performance-based assessment could evaluate role-play, dialogue, problem solving, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Self-assessment and peer assessment were incorporated to develop responsibility, reflexivity, and social accountability. Constructed-response examinations could also evaluate students' understanding of justice, cultural diversity, Islamic ethics, and the application of relevant principles to educational and social situations.

Implementation requirements extended beyond classroom pedagogy. Teachers required professional development in multicultural classroom management, culturally responsive teaching, dialogue facilitation, and recognition of prejudice and stereotyping. Educational authorities and curriculum developers needed to produce locally grounded, culturally appropriate, and Islamically compatible educational materials. Schools required an institutional climate supportive of dignity, respect, participation, and culturally diverse forms of expression. Administrative support was necessary for cultural projects and cross-curricular activities, and systematic communication with families and local communities was identified as another implementation requirement. A structured instructional package and teacher guide were also considered necessary to convert the conceptual model into consistently implemented classroom practices.

The model was additionally designed to be adaptable to virtual and blended instruction. Virtual implementation required multimedia resources introducing the cultures of different regions of Iran, online classes structured around group work and student participation, dialogue-oriented digital spaces such as discussion forums and virtual roundtables, and an online multicultural repository containing texts, images, audiovisual resources, local narratives, and student-produced cultural materials. Interactive tools, including quizzes, digital projects, collaborative tasks, and student podcast production, were considered suitable for extending multicultural learning beyond the physical classroom.

The required technological and physical resources were commensurate with these instructional strategies. Schools implementing the model would benefit from projectors or classroom displays and reliable internet connectivity, a multimedia repository of films, photographs, narratives, and cultural documentaries, collections of local and indigenous stories, and facilities supporting collaborative work, workshops, dialogue circles, and the sharing of cultural experiences. In virtual settings, access to microphones, webcams, laptops or comparable digital devices, and software for collaborative and project-based content production was considered necessary. The proposed model therefore extended from philosophical foundations to concrete objectives, content, pedagogy, assessment, implementation conditions, digital delivery, and infrastructure.

Development and Psychometric Evaluation of the Researcher-Developed Questionnaire

The third research question examined the characteristics of the questionnaire developed from the proposed model.

The instrument was constructed directly from the three-level structure of philosophical dimension, component, and indicator. Its first section recorded respondents' gender, length of teaching service, teaching field, and province or educational region. The second section consisted of the substantive questionnaire items. Each item operationalized a specific indicator derived from the model, and the complete 40-item questionnaire, organized according to the five philosophical dimensions, was retained for presentation in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire consisted of 40 items, with eight items allocated to each of the five philosophical dimensions and the items collectively representing the 10 principal components. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Content validity was assessed by the 15-member expert panel. Using Lawshe's Content Validity Ratio, items falling below the required value of .49 for 15 judges were removed or revised. Following this process, the mean CVR was .79 and the mean Content Validity Index was .91. Construct validity was evaluated by exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin statistic was .837, indicating adequate sampling suitability, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant, $\chi^2(780) = 2111.837$, $p < .001$. Five factors were extracted, corresponding to the intended five-dimensional structure of the instrument.

Internal consistency was evaluated with Cronbach's alpha for each philosophical dimension and for the complete questionnaire. As shown in Table 2, all dimensional coefficients were above .80, while the overall reliability coefficient reached .940.

Table 2

Internal Consistency of the Researcher-Developed Multicultural Curriculum Questionnaire

Dimension	Number of items	Cronbach's α
Human Identity: Dignity and Fitrah	8	.879
Educational Justice: Alawite Justice	8	.850
Cultural Interaction: Dialogue and Mutual Understanding	8	.870
Rationality and Reasoning	8	.820
Social Cohesion: Unified Ummah	8	.900
Total questionnaire	40	.940

The coefficients shown in Table 2 indicated satisfactory to high internal consistency across all five dimensions. Social Cohesion showed the highest dimensional alpha at .900, followed by Human Identity at .879, Cultural

Interaction at .870, Educational Justice at .850, and Rationality and Reasoning at .820. The overall coefficient of .940 indicated strong internal consistency for the complete scale. Taken together with the CVR of .79, CVI of .91, KMO

value of .837, significant Bartlett test, and five-factor exploratory solution, these findings supported the content validity, construct-related adequacy, and reliability of the researcher-developed instrument within the present sample. Nevertheless, these results validate the instrument within the context of the present study and do not by themselves establish its measurement equivalence or generalizability across different populations and educational settings.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for the Components of the Multicultural Curriculum Model

Component	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SE	SD
Human dignity	100	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.0150	0.10106	1.01056
Respect for cultural diversity	100	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.3200	0.08820	0.88197
Equality of educational opportunities	100	3.00	1.50	4.50	2.7925	0.07563	0.75633
Cultural justice in the curriculum	100	3.75	1.00	4.75	3.0100	0.08682	0.86815
Intercultural dialogue	100	3.25	1.50	4.75	3.2300	0.06915	0.69147
Empathy and mutual understanding	100	2.50	1.75	4.25	3.0725	0.06458	0.64579
Cultural critical thinking	100	3.25	1.50	4.75	3.3300	0.07929	0.79287
Inquiry and reasoning	100	3.25	1.50	4.75	3.1850	0.07839	0.78385
Cultural coexistence	100	4.00	1.00	5.00	3.3925	0.07932	0.79316
Strengthening shared identity	100	3.00	1.75	4.75	3.4450	0.06923	0.69229

At the broader dimensional level, Social Cohesion had the highest mean score, $M = 3.4188$, whereas Educational Justice had the lowest, $M = 2.9013$. The mean scores for Human Identity, Cultural Interaction, and Rationality and Reasoning were 3.1675, 3.1513, and 3.2575, respectively. Thus, most dimensions were positioned around or moderately above the theoretical midpoint of the five-point response scale, whereas Educational Justice was slightly below that midpoint.

For Human Identity, the overall mean was 3.1675. Human dignity had a mean of 3.0150, whereas respect for cultural diversity had a higher mean of 3.3200. The pattern suggested a moderate to relatively favorable orientation toward recognition of dignity and difference, with stronger reported realization of respect for cultural diversity than of practices specifically associated with human dignity. The findings also indicated that these general orientations had not necessarily been translated uniformly into systematic curricular and instructional arrangements, supporting the need for more explicit integration of dignity and cultural recognition into educational content and classroom processes.

Educational Justice produced the lowest overall dimension score, $M = 2.9013$. Equality of educational opportunities, $M = 2.7925$, was the lowest-scoring component among all 10 components, while cultural justice

The fourth research question examined the extent to which the components of the proposed multicultural curriculum were perceived to be realized in existing lower secondary educational practice. Data obtained from the 100 participating teachers were analyzed at both the component and philosophical-dimension levels. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the 10 principal components.

in the curriculum had a mean of 3.0100. The results indicated that culturally responsive equality of opportunity represented the principal weakness in the current situation. In particular, greater attention appeared necessary to the ways in which cultural differences are considered when designing learning activities, assignments, opportunities for participation, and instructional content. The findings therefore identified educational and cultural justice as a major priority for curricular intervention.

Cultural Interaction had an overall mean of 3.1513. Intercultural dialogue reached a mean of 3.2300, while empathy and mutual understanding reached 3.0725. These findings indicated that intercultural interaction existed to a moderate degree in participating schools, but had not necessarily developed into a fully planned and systematic pedagogical process. Greater emphasis on explicit instruction in dialogue, active listening, perspective taking, empathy, and constructive management of cultural differences would therefore be necessary to strengthen this dimension.

Rationality and Reasoning had an overall mean of 3.2575. Cultural critical thinking had a mean of 3.3300 and inquiry and reasoning had a mean of 3.1850. Both components exceeded the scale midpoint, suggesting a comparatively favorable foundation for culturally oriented reasoning and critical reflection. Nevertheless, the findings indicated that

these capacities could be strengthened by embedding questioning, analysis, argumentation, comparison of viewpoints, and critical interpretation of cultural issues more systematically within classroom activities.

Social Cohesion had the highest overall mean, $M = 3.4188$. Cultural coexistence reached a mean of 3.3925, and strengthening shared identity had the highest component mean in the entire survey, $M = 3.4450$. Thus, mutual respect, cooperation, coexistence, and common Iranian-Islamic identity appeared to constitute relative strengths of the existing educational context. At the same time, the findings suggested that these strengths could be connected more

explicitly with the recognition and management of cultural plurality so that shared identity would operate alongside, rather than in place of, recognition of cultural diversity.

The fifth research question concerned the validity of the proposed multicultural curriculum model according to expert judgment. The model and its criteria were assessed by 15 experts over three Delphi rounds. In each round, mean scores, standard deviations, coefficients of variation, and qualitative comments were reviewed, and criteria requiring conceptual clarification or revision were reconsidered before the subsequent round. The criterion-level descriptive results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for the Delphi Criteria Across Three Rounds

Criterion/indicator	Round 1, $M \pm SD$	Round 2, $M \pm SD$	Round 3, $M \pm SD$
Human dignity	0.850 ± 0.017	0.950 ± 0.009	0.850 ± 0.010
Respect for cultural diversity	0.650 ± 0.018	0.700 ± 0.017	0.750 ± 0.010
Equality of educational opportunities	0.850 ± 0.016	0.850 ± 0.010	0.800 ± 0.011
Cultural justice in the curriculum	0.850 ± 0.007	0.950 ± 0.009	1.000 ± 0.000
Intercultural dialogue	0.750 ± 0.018	0.800 ± 0.015	0.850 ± 0.010
Empathy and mutual understanding	0.800 ± 0.019	0.850 ± 0.017	0.800 ± 0.014
Cultural critical thinking	0.850 ± 0.017	0.950 ± 0.009	0.850 ± 0.008
Inquiry and reasoning	0.850 ± 0.016	0.850 ± 0.009	0.800 ± 0.012
Cultural coexistence	0.700 ± 0.018	0.750 ± 0.016	0.800 ± 0.010
Strengthening shared identity	0.800 ± 0.015	0.850 ± 0.009	0.850 ± 0.011
Educational justice	0.850 ± 0.007	0.850 ± 0.015	0.800 ± 0.010
Cultural interaction	0.850 ± 0.017	0.850 ± 0.009	0.850 ± 0.012
Human identity	0.850 ± 0.008	0.950 ± 0.010	1.000 ± 0.000
Rationality	0.850 ± 0.015	0.850 ± 0.008	0.950 ± 0.010
Social cohesion	0.800 ± 0.017	0.850 ± 0.009	0.900 ± 0.009
Non-discrimination	0.850 ± 0.008	0.950 ± 0.008	0.900 ± 0.007
Attention to students' dignity	0.800 ± 0.013	0.850 ± 0.012	0.850 ± 0.008
Familiarity with different cultures	0.850 ± 0.008	0.900 ± 0.008	0.850 ± 0.009
Positive attitudes toward differences	0.850 ± 0.014	0.950 ± 0.009	0.900 ± 0.011
Avoidance of stereotypes	0.850 ± 0.008	0.850 ± 0.014	0.850 ± 0.006
Expression of cultural experiences	0.900 ± 0.015	0.800 ± 0.019	0.850 ± 0.011
Strengthening listening skills	0.800 ± 0.014	0.850 ± 0.015	0.850 ± 0.007
Teaching empathy	0.700 ± 0.014	0.750 ± 0.017	0.800 ± 0.010
Encouraging analysis of issues	0.800 ± 0.016	0.850 ± 0.014	0.850 ± 0.008
Teaching peaceful coexistence	0.900 ± 0.016	0.850 ± 0.011	0.850 ± 0.010
Promoting cooperation	0.800 ± 0.018	0.850 ± 0.016	0.850 ± 0.007
Constructive interaction	0.850 ± 0.015	0.800 ± 0.015	0.850 ± 0.007
Emphasizing shared values	0.900 ± 0.021	0.850 ± 0.014	0.850 ± 0.007
Strengthening belonging to society	0.700 ± 0.018	0.750 ± 0.012	0.800 ± 0.008
Introducing cultural heritage	0.800 ± 0.018	0.850 ± 0.015	0.850 ± 0.010
Unity within diversity	0.950 ± 0.007	0.900 ± 0.009	0.850 ± 0.009
D32	0.900 ± 0.016	0.850 ± 0.017	0.850 ± 0.011

Across the 32 Delphi criteria, the overall mean increased from .823 in the first round to .853 in the second round and remained at .853 in the third round. At the same time, the mean coefficient of variation declined from approximately

1.79% in the first round to 1.48% in the second round and 1.05% in the third round. The third-round criterion means ranged from .750 to 1.000, and standard deviations were uniformly low. The simultaneous stability of the overall

mean and decline in relative dispersion supported increasing convergence and greater stabilization of expert evaluations over the successive rounds.

Several criterion-level trends further supported the validity of the model. Cultural justice in the curriculum increased from .850 in the first round to .950 in the second and reached 1.000 in the third round. Human identity similarly increased from .850 to .950 and then to 1.000. Rationality increased to .950 in the final round, and Social Cohesion increased progressively from .800 to .850 and then .900. Respect for cultural diversity, cultural coexistence, teaching empathy, and strengthening belonging to society also showed progressive increases across the three rounds. Some criteria, including human dignity, cultural critical thinking, unity within diversity, and teaching peaceful coexistence, displayed modest fluctuations across rounds rather than monotonically increasing scores; however, the small final-round standard deviations and decreasing overall coefficients of variation indicated that the panel's judgments became more concentrated despite these shifts in relative ratings.

The Friedman test was statistically significant in all three Delphi rounds. In the first round, $\chi^2 = 414.088$, $df = 31$, $p < .001$; in the second round, $\chi^2 = 391.726$, $df = 31$, $p < .001$; and in the third round, $\chi^2 = 377.969$, $df = 31$, $p < .001$. These results indicated that experts differentiated among the relative importance or adequacy of the criteria rather than rating all criteria identically. At the same time, the reduction in relative response dispersion across rounds, combined with iterative revision of statements based on qualitative feedback, provided evidence that the evaluation process moved toward a more stable expert judgment.

Taken together, the qualitative findings, questionnaire-development results, teacher survey, and three-round Delphi process supported a final multicultural curriculum model structured around Human Identity, Educational Justice, Cultural Interaction, Rationality, and Social Cohesion. The model linked these philosophical foundations to curriculum objectives, subject matter, instructional strategies, assessment, learning environments, teacher preparation, school-level implementation, virtual delivery, and educational resources. The expert-validation findings supported the conceptual coherence, comprehensiveness, and content adequacy of the proposed model. However, expert validation establishes the acceptability and conceptual validity of the model rather than demonstrating its educational effectiveness in actual school settings. Evaluation of its effects on students, teachers, classroom

interactions, and educational outcomes would therefore require subsequent pilot implementation and empirical intervention studies.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted to design and validate a multicultural curriculum model for lower secondary education based on the philosophy of Islamic education. The findings showed that the proposed model was organized around five overarching philosophical dimensions: Human Identity, Educational Justice, Cultural Interaction, Rationality, and Social Cohesion. These dimensions were further represented by 10 principal components, namely human dignity, respect for cultural diversity, equality of educational opportunities, cultural justice in the curriculum, intercultural dialogue, empathy and mutual understanding, cultural critical thinking, inquiry and reasoning, cultural coexistence, and strengthening shared identity. The model also translated these philosophical foundations into operational curriculum elements, including objectives, content, teaching-learning strategies, assessment, teacher roles, learning environments, implementation requirements, virtual delivery, and educational resources. In addition, the researcher-developed questionnaire demonstrated acceptable content validity, construct validity, and internal consistency, while the teacher survey showed that the perceived implementation of the model components ranged from moderate to relatively favorable. Finally, the three-round Delphi process showed increasing convergence among experts and provided evidence supporting the conceptual coherence and content validity of the proposed model.

The identification of Human Identity as one of the central philosophical dimensions indicates that multicultural curriculum design within an Islamic educational framework should begin with recognition of the intrinsic value of the learner. Human dignity and respect for cultural diversity were not treated as peripheral ethical principles, but as foundational criteria influencing curriculum objectives, content, interaction, and the overall learning climate. This finding is consistent with the Islamic philosophical perspective that education should be based on a view of the human being as possessing inherent dignity, moral agency, and developmental potential (Bagheri, 2022). It also corresponds with studies of multicultural Islamic education that emphasize respect for differences, tolerance, recognition of diverse cultural identities, and avoidance of

exclusion as compatible with Islamic educational values (Khobir et al., 2021; Mukhsin et al., 2024). The result therefore suggests that multiculturalism in an Islamic curriculum does not require the abandonment of a normative philosophical foundation; rather, Islamic concepts of human worth and moral responsibility can function as the ethical basis for recognizing cultural diversity.

The prominence of respect for cultural diversity also supports previous curriculum research conducted in the Iranian context. Research syntheses have consistently identified recognition of subcultures, cultural differences, and diverse cultural representations as essential components of multicultural curriculum development (Hamidizadeh, 2024; Norouzi et al., 2021). Rouhi et al. similarly emphasized the importance of ensuring that Iran's lower secondary curriculum gives appropriate attention to the country's different subcultures rather than relying on a narrowly uniform representation of national culture (Rouhi et al., 2022). More specialized work, such as the development of a multicultural art curriculum based on Iran's ecological and cultural diversity, has also demonstrated that curricular relevance is strengthened when local cultural realities are incorporated systematically rather than symbolically (Nakhzari Moghaddam & Akbari Borang, 2025). The present findings reinforce this position by showing that cultural recognition should be embedded across curriculum objectives, learning materials, and educational experiences.

Educational Justice emerged as another core dimension, consisting of equality of educational opportunities and cultural justice in the curriculum. The quantitative findings further showed that this dimension had the lowest overall mean among the five dimensions, and equality of educational opportunities was the lowest-scoring component among the 10 components. This result is important because it suggests that the principal challenge may not be the complete absence of positive attitudes toward diversity, but the translation of those attitudes into equitable educational structures and practices. Teachers may recognize cultural difference and support respectful interaction while still working within curricular systems that do not sufficiently adapt content, participation structures, learning opportunities, and instructional activities to culturally heterogeneous learners. This distinction between symbolic recognition and substantive equity has also been emphasized in multicultural curriculum theory and educational practice (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2025).

The relatively weaker position of Educational Justice is also compatible with research emphasizing that multicultural education requires more than adding culturally diverse examples to existing curricula. It requires rethinking whose knowledge is represented, whose experiences are normalized, how classroom participation is structured, and whether learners from different cultural backgrounds are given comparable opportunities to succeed (Nesterova, 2019; Parker, 2019). Recent research on teacher education for diversity and inclusion likewise indicates that one of the principal challenges of multicultural education lies in moving from formal commitments to diversity toward pedagogical and institutional practices that genuinely support equity (Ajani & Govender, 2026). The present findings therefore indicate that Educational Justice should be treated as a priority area in curriculum reform, especially through culturally responsive activity design, balanced representation in textbooks, and removal of cultural stereotypes and exclusionary assumptions.

Cultural Interaction, represented by intercultural dialogue and empathy and mutual understanding, was also identified as an essential component of the model. In the teacher survey, this dimension was situated around the moderate to relatively favorable range, suggesting that opportunities for intercultural interaction exist but may not yet be systematically institutionalized in lower secondary education. This finding aligns with research showing that multicultural learning becomes meaningful when students are provided with structured opportunities to communicate across differences, express cultural experiences, listen to alternative perspectives, and collaborate on common tasks (Abduh et al., 2023). Cooperative educational approaches are particularly relevant because they allow students to move beyond passive awareness of difference and participate in social encounters requiring negotiation, perspective taking, and shared problem solving (Taghavizadeh Golpayegani, 2023).

The emphasis on dialogue is also theoretically compatible with a multicultural curriculum grounded in Islamic education. From this perspective, interaction with difference can be understood as an educational opportunity for developing ethical responsibility, respectful communication, and reasoned understanding rather than as a threat to shared identity. The findings therefore support the view that multicultural education should not isolate cultural groups from one another or confine students to parallel identities. Instead, it should establish educational conditions in which differences can be expressed and examined within a

framework of mutual respect and common ethical commitments. Similar conclusions have emerged from studies of multicultural education in formal curricula, where effective implementation depends on opportunities for sustained dialogue and meaningful participation rather than only content diversification (Gube & Bryant, 2025; Raihani et al., 2025).

Rationality, comprising cultural critical thinking and inquiry and reasoning, was another relatively strong dimension in the present study. The teacher survey showed that cultural critical thinking was among the more highly rated components, while inquiry and reasoning also exceeded the theoretical midpoint. This result suggests that lower secondary education may already possess a foundation for developing analytical engagement with cultural issues, although this capacity still requires more deliberate curricular organization. The importance of critical thinking in multicultural education is widely recognized because students need to examine stereotypes, analyze competing narratives, question biased cultural representations, and evaluate social assumptions rather than merely memorize descriptive facts about different groups (Kim, 2025; Lee, 2025).

This finding also highlights an important distinction between multicultural knowledge and multicultural literacy. The latter requires the ability to interpret, evaluate, question, and respond to cultural representations in educational and social contexts. The multicultural literacy model proposed for student teachers in Iran likewise emphasized the importance of developing capacities that go beyond cultural familiarity toward interpretation, judgment, and responsible action (Afzali et al., 2023). In the present model, the inclusion of media analysis, discussion, reasoning, and examination of stereotypes extends this orientation to lower secondary students. This is particularly important because adolescents increasingly encounter cultural representations through digital and social media, where stereotypes and simplified narratives may be amplified. The inclusion of culturally critical inquiry therefore strengthens the model's relevance to contemporary educational conditions.

Social Cohesion received the highest overall mean in the teacher survey, and strengthening shared identity was the highest-scoring component among the 10 components. Cultural coexistence also received a relatively high score. These findings suggest that schools may already possess comparatively strong foundations in relation to cooperation, shared belonging, and common Iranian–Islamic identity. At the same time, the qualitative findings showed that social

cohesion should not be constructed through cultural homogenization. Rather, the model conceptualized cohesion as unity within diversity, in which common national and religious values coexist with recognition of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural plurality. This result is consistent with multicultural education approaches that reject both forced assimilation and cultural fragmentation, instead favoring integration that permits the maintenance of distinct identities alongside participation in a shared social framework (Lee, 2025; Nesterova, 2019).

The importance of shared identity is particularly significant in the Iranian context. Previous Iranian research has emphasized that multicultural curriculum design must recognize the country's subcultures while maintaining social solidarity and common identity (Rouhi et al., 2022; Sadeghi & Azizi, 2022). The present study extends this idea by locating common identity within the philosophical concept of social cohesion and connecting it to peaceful coexistence, shared cultural heritage, cooperation, and the idea of unity in cultural plurality. This combination may help avoid two opposing risks: a curriculum that suppresses diversity in the name of unity and a curriculum that recognizes difference without providing a framework for shared belonging.

The proposed curriculum model also showed that multicultural education should be implemented across the full structure of curriculum design rather than treated as a separate content unit. The model incorporated multicultural principles into objectives, content, teaching methods, assessment, teacher preparation, learning environments, and technological infrastructure. This multidimensional structure is consistent with broader multicultural curriculum scholarship emphasizing that genuine reform requires changes to the curriculum system rather than isolated additions to subject matter (Kim, 2025; Yim, 2024). The proposed integration of cooperative learning, role-play, project-based learning, case studies, storytelling, guided discussion, and media analysis is also supported by studies showing that experiential and participatory approaches are more suitable than purely didactic methods for multicultural learning (Abduh et al., 2023; Ambarini et al., 2025).

Teacher preparation emerged as a particularly important implementation condition. The proposed model requires teachers to facilitate dialogue, manage culturally heterogeneous classrooms, identify stereotyping, adapt learning activities, and support equitable participation. This finding strongly aligns with studies showing that multicultural curriculum reform is unlikely to succeed if teacher education does not explicitly prepare educators for

diversity, equity, and inclusion (Ajani & Govender, 2026). Experiential teacher education models, including multicultural microteaching, have also shown that teachers benefit from opportunities to practice culturally responsive methods and receive feedback before implementing them in actual classrooms (Ambarini et al., 2025). The findings therefore indicate that curriculum reform and teacher professional development should proceed together rather than as separate initiatives.

The inclusion of virtual implementation requirements further extends the practical scope of the model. The findings indicated that digital multicultural repositories, interactive online discussions, multimedia cultural resources, digital projects, and podcast production could support multicultural learning in blended or online environments. This aspect is especially relevant in light of recent research examining the feasibility of artificial intelligence in multicultural curriculum implementation. Such technologies may facilitate access to diverse cultural materials and differentiated learning experiences, although their educational value depends on appropriate pedagogical design and ethical oversight (Qin & Zhou, 2026). Consequently, digital technologies should be viewed as enabling tools within a clearly defined multicultural educational philosophy rather than as substitutes for pedagogical and ethical principles.

The psychometric results also supported the methodological adequacy of the researcher-developed questionnaire. The mean CVR of .79 and CVI of .91 indicated strong expert agreement concerning content relevance and representativeness. The KMO value of .837 and significant Bartlett test supported the suitability of the data for factor analysis, and the five-factor solution corresponded with the intended five-dimensional conceptual framework. Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .820 to .900 across the dimensions, with an overall alpha of .940, indicating high internal consistency. These findings support the use of the instrument within the context of the present study and show that the conceptual model could be translated into measurable indicators. The correspondence between the qualitative structure and the empirical factor structure also strengthens the internal coherence of the proposed model.

The Delphi findings provided an additional layer of validation. Across three rounds, the overall mean of the 32 criteria increased from .823 to .853 and remained stable in the third round, while the average coefficient of variation decreased from approximately 1.79% to 1.05%. This pattern

indicates that expert judgments became more concentrated over time even though experts continued to distinguish among the relative importance of different criteria, as demonstrated by the significant Friedman tests in all three rounds. The progressive increase in criteria such as cultural justice, human identity, rationality, social cohesion, cultural coexistence, and teaching empathy suggests that iterative expert review contributed to conceptual refinement and greater agreement. The Delphi process therefore supports the content validity, comprehensiveness, and internal coherence of the proposed model, while also confirming the value of multidisciplinary expert participation in curriculum development.

Overall, the findings suggest that a multicultural curriculum for lower secondary education can be coherently grounded in the philosophy of Islamic education when cultural diversity is interpreted through the interconnected principles of dignity, justice, dialogue, rationality, and social cohesion. This interpretation avoids presenting multicultural education and Islamic education as conceptually incompatible. Instead, it offers a framework in which diversity is recognized and protected while common ethical and social commitments are maintained. The result is consistent with studies of multicultural Islamic education that emphasize the compatibility of Islamic moral principles with tolerance, pluralism, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence (Khobir et al., 2021; Mukhsin et al., 2024). At the same time, the findings respond to context-specific concerns identified in Iranian curriculum research by linking recognition of cultural diversity with shared Iranian-Islamic identity and practical curriculum elements (Hamidizadeh, 2024; Norouzi et al., 2021; Rouhi et al., 2022).

A limitation of the present study is that the quantitative phase was based on 100 lower secondary teachers selected from accessible culturally diverse educational settings rather than through a nationally representative probability sample. Consequently, the descriptive results should not be generalized to all Iranian lower secondary schools without caution. The qualitative and Delphi phases also relied on purposively selected experts, which was appropriate for model development but may have limited the range of perspectives represented. In addition, the proposed model was validated conceptually and psychometrically but was not experimentally implemented in schools, so the study cannot establish its effects on students' attitudes, intercultural competencies, academic outcomes, classroom behavior, or school climate. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of the teacher survey did not permit assessment of

changes in multicultural curriculum implementation over time.

Future research should test the model with larger and more geographically diverse samples drawn from different provinces, ethnic and linguistic contexts, school types, and socioeconomic environments. Confirmatory factor analysis could be used to evaluate the stability of the five-dimensional structure, while measurement invariance should be examined across demographic and cultural groups. Longitudinal and intervention studies are also needed to determine whether implementation of the model produces measurable improvements in cultural literacy, empathy, critical thinking, educational justice, social cohesion, and students' sense of belonging. Future studies could additionally compare face-to-face, blended, and digitally supported versions of the model, investigate student and parent perspectives, and examine how particular curriculum subjects may require different forms of multicultural adaptation.

In practice, curriculum planners should integrate the five dimensions of the model into curriculum objectives, textbook development, teaching guides, classroom activities, and assessment frameworks rather than treating multicultural education as an occasional supplementary topic. Teacher professional development should prioritize culturally responsive pedagogy, dialogue facilitation, classroom equity, management of cultural conflict, critical media literacy, and recognition of stereotypes. Schools should create safe environments for the expression of different cultural experiences while reinforcing shared ethical, national, and religious values. Locally relevant cultural materials, indigenous narratives, collaborative projects, family and community participation, and digital multicultural resources should be incorporated systematically, and pilot implementation should precede large-scale adoption so that practical difficulties can be identified and the model can be refined under real educational conditions.

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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