

Citizenship Education: A Fundamental Mission in Educational System

Ali Afsari, Abbas Anarinejad

Farhangian University, Shiraz, Iran

Abstract: Due to the seriousness of globalization during the two last decades, the issue of citizenship has become the most important contemporary social issue and has attracted those involved in educational systems of most countries in the world. Fostering curiosity, independent thinking, emergence of abilities and talents, and strengthening the senses are among the issues emphasized in the new century which can be set into motion through designing and implementing citizenship paradigms. In this line, given the general object of fostering humans' personality, educational system has the most fundamental role in researching about the important responsibility of citizenship education. Schools and academic programs play a vital role in the educational materials, teaching methods, and an appropriate place they offer for extending the citizenship culture. So, the main mission of educational system is to socialize learners and equip them with the necessary knowledge, values, and skills for living in a society, or in other words, citizenship education. Of course, it is important to note that paying attention to merely one factor in institutionalizing the citizenship properties does not suffice as many factors in society are involved in educating a citizen in the present and future society.

[Ali Afsari, Abbas Anarinejad. **Citizenship Education: A Fundamental Mission in Educational System.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):4600-4604] (ISSN:1097-8135). <http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 692

Keywords: citizenship education, citizenship properties and qualifications, educational system

1. Introduction

Due to the seriousness of globalization during the two last decades, the issue of citizenship has become the most important contemporary social issue particularly due to the fact that civil society is based on social institutions of citizenship system. Therefore, citizenship institutions such as the legislature and political sovereignty of people in form of democratic systems constitute the main basis of the civil society as a social and political system. Living in a civil society, thus, requires teaching and learning of civil morality and familiarizing with citizenship rights and responsibilities to, not only satisfy the different needs of individuals in a consistent manner, but also to develop stable social relationships. Although civil or citizenship education have been common in different forms in most countries, today, most people have not undergone the necessary training for performing social activities and this poses some problems in the society. As such, the necessity of citizenship education is felt particularly in the developing countries and is satisfied by an educational institution which has a main role in educating the society's citizens. Given the changes made in today's societies which are affected by industrialization, urbanization and communication, and globalization, citizenship education has a distinctive role in communities (Tobias, 1997).

Today, the survival and development of communities depends on active, participatory, informed and agent citizens, or in brief, agent humans. By informing individuals and specifically students about their rights and, consequently, the

vindication of those rights, they obviously become familiarized with their responsibilities towards the community, thus, the social order takes a more rapid trend and an active and dynamic society develops. Besides, solving the problems of the society and making some changes is achieved only through active participation of members of the society. If students are not informed about the civil, political and social aspects of their citizenship rights, the theoretical investment necessary for active participation in affairs cannot be obtained and citizens will not be able to properly convey their wishes to the political authority.

International assessments suggest that the developed countries have an active and critical citizenship education plan in their curriculum but this trend has not been fast enough in the developing countries. Therefore, citizenship education will be successful in obtaining its goals and objectives if it can foster informed, responsible and creative citizens and it cannot be achieved unless optimized citizenship training is practiced and citizenship culture is enhanced.

1.1. Citizenship education concept

Citizenship education is defined as the process of transferring knowledge, values, and attitudes required for participation and political stability of society from one generation to the next. The transfer involves several cases, such as Knowledge of the history and structure of political institutions, having the sense of loyalty due to the positive attitudes towards political authority, belief in

fundamental values, interest in political participation, and acquiring skills required for understanding general policies and monitoring them (Nikfar, 1378). Similarly, Elmolhoda (1379) considers citizenship education as a network of connected processes of the institutions which directly or indirectly deal with fostering the members of a civil society. That is why the nature of citizenship education is highly affected by the civil society concept. In this definition, the main concern and goal of citizenship education is to reinforce civil society and preserve the spirit of democracy in people.

In general, citizenship is a kind of reciprocal social agreement and a set of reciprocal rights of "the people over the state" and "the state over the people". It is also a general shared feeling towards national and social identity in a clear limit. Therefore, if the society needs useful and effective citizens, it should ascertain that they are educated through opportunities for acquiring necessary skills, abilities, and information. At present, most educational systems, specifically the higher education which has the heavy responsibility of educating professional and expert citizens of the society, have focused their plans on deep considerations and scholarly reviews and try to train qualified people who fit the present situation so they can find their place in the highly competitive market in which the primary role is the knowledge and professional qualifications. Although learners participate in citizenship rights and responsibilities regardless of social and political place, information and skill, it is evident that, as a citizen, their efficiency and ability in effectively performing their responsibilities in the postmodern and over-complex society depends on the quality and quantity of the capacities fostered in them.

Citizenship education is an investment for the future of a given country in all dimensions. To familiarize the citizens of a society with citizenship rights and to expect them to be responsible, we must start promoting their participating in various fields since childhood or, generally, conveying the values, insights and skills along with patterns and ways of participation in a civil and social society. Hence, we are in need of citizenship and citizen-oriented education.

2.1. Educational system and citizenship education

The mission of educating at all times has been fostering generations of humans who meet the needs of the society, itself. Citizenship education, among the other things, has historically been one of the most important goals of the educational system. In other words, educational institutions in different societies has constantly made an effort to evolve democracy, local and national participation, social

and civil identity of the citizens through formal and informal planning. Hence, a school or a university is considered as a place to prevent the citizenship rights and responsibilities from different challenges and tough situations in life. Doubtlessly, educating good citizens is a main concern of most educational systems in many countries of the world, so it is placed at the forefront of the educational efforts and activities. It is also confirmed by the report of a study of citizenship education, i.e., the "International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement", (IAE), which states that all contemporary societies have the obsession of how to prepare their adolescence and youth for a citizenship and civil life, and how to teach them ways of participating in social issues (Tobias, 1997).

In rapidly changing world of today, humans should be capable of being updated along with the changes. They should be able to obtain the information, knowledge and skills necessary for a successful life through using various communication and information resources. As a member who has commitment to himself, family and society, they should be able to take part in all positive aspects of life and solve problems using the simplest means to collaborate with local, national and international societies. The mission of education, along with developing and nurturing human values, is to help learners to create and develop knowledge, acquire insight about how it works, employ it and use technology together with the modern science of their time so, despite the challenges of a new era in the unknown world of information and communication, they can successfully act in their individual and social life. On this ground, the educational systems present in the world have two main responsibilities. The first includes tactics and efforts for familiarizing the young generation to the results obtained from the experiences of the previous generations so that by adding up the experiences of successive generations gradually cultural investments developed to be offered to the young citizens to benefit from it in a quality individual and social life. The second requires the educational systems to equip their products, that is, the future learners and citizens of local and national society, with specialized knowledge and skills so, apart from the problem solving ability, they will be able to challenge the issues raised in the local, national and international society in the future. On the other hand, citizenship is lifelong processes so all people are in need of an education which suits citizenship in all stages of life. Education should help children and teenagers to grow as responsible citizens, be active participants in society's social and cultural affairs, successful interested learners, and honest and self-dependent individuals. In line with

establishing the citizenship properties, school should be a place to prepare the necessary and appropriate opportunities for experiencing and training in different spheres of life so the required grounds for meeting the individual, family and social need of students is satisfied (Share Pour, 2007).

3.1. Desirable properties and qualifications of citizenship

It is clear that the educational system of any country is affected by the system of values dominant over the society and, indeed, the citizenship education should also be performed in line with religious and national culture and identity of the society. So, citizenship life should involve the visible context related to the Iranian living environment in which students live. Following this path, it is possible to localize the training for the national and local citizenship life and, thus, to prepare for the universal citizenship training. On the basis of the above discussion, a desirable citizen should have specific qualification in three areas as following:

- 1) Civil cognition; is defined as a body of knowledge, information, and understanding of civil which involves the following items: awareness of the way information is obtained, awareness of the structure and performance of the government, view of the major parties of the country, society's events and accidents, social rules and regulations, and personal and international rights.
- 2) Civil ability; is defined as a body of skills, capabilities and abilities that each individual requires for living in any society which involves the following items: ability to cooperate with others, to perform the affairs independently, to make a logical decision and to behave on the basis of desirable religious and moral principles.
- 3) Civil view; is defined as a body of attitudes, beliefs and views necessary for a good citizen which involves the following items: accepting and respecting the diversity of the community, having independent beliefs, having spirit of responsibility, patriotism, tolerance, critical thinking, and appreciation of cultural heritage and religious and national identity.

This is with reference to the above properties that the great and vital mission of education in the globalization era makes sense. Accordingly, besides attending to general policies of the educational system, it is necessary to address the stage of deep understanding, obtaining the sense

of citizenship education and provision of school life so the required grounds for paying increasing attention to this great mission (educating civil citizen) of the educational system is prepared (Fathi, 2001).

4.1. The mission of educational system

The duty of education is to train citizens who can make an effort for developing a democratic society and its renewal. Educational system aims at educating a generation who, in the present complicated world, can both add to their knowledge and create a group atmosphere which results in a multi-dimensional and collective responsibility achieved by enhancing their capabilities of togetherness and imprinting.

If we accept education as a basis for producing the civil knowledge of students who are considered as the main agents of the reproduction of this cognition, we have actually confirmed that education is the same strategic investments in developing citizenship culture and political growth of the country. In this line, an efficient education compatible with today's needs is required to satisfy the following expectations:

1. Having useful, effective and practical training
2. Educating the adolescence and young generation based on criteria accepted by the society
3. Facilitating the process of individuals' socialization and learning the better standards of a healthy life
4. Guiding the adolescence and young generation towards optimal growth and development
5. Educating participatory, systematic, responsible and effortful humans through institutionalization of law, avoiding violence and dominance, and prevention from tension
6. Cultivating the culture of partisanship and practicing participation in handling school and society affairs
7. Strengthen faith, spirit of courage, patience against misery and suffering, seeking justice, work ethics, social discipline, consultation, cooperation and altruism and devotion.

In 1994, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement conducted a study on different and mutual properties of citizenship education in 24 countries of the world. At the end of the study, the researchers suggested a valid method for consistent conceptualization of approaches to citizenship education on the basis of

the objectives considered for these practices which involves three general goals as following:

- 1) Education on citizenship
- 2) Education via citizenship
- 3) Education for citizenship

Education on citizenship aims at preparing students and individuals to gain sufficient knowledge and understanding the national history and structures of life. Education via citizenship requires students' and individuals' learning via performing completely dynamic activities of participatory experiences in school or local community. Education for citizenship involves the two aforementioned processes and equips the students and individuals with a series of tools (including knowledge, understanding the skills, insights, values and trends) and enables them to have an active and logical participation in roles and responsibilities with which they encounter in their adulthood. This process connects citizenship education to the entire experience of the students (Bagheri&Bagheri, 2010).

In order to educate committed and responsible citizens, besides changing the goals, methods, and roles of teachers and students, we are required to review and change the planning of curriculum and those in charge of planning the curriculum and academic materials so, instead of an independent and detailed approach, we must use a general approach in academic planning. In this line, resorting to an interdisciplinary approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the complicated facts of the present world. In other words, we need a holistic education; the knowledge divided to separate parts in schools and higher education centers must be put together so learners can obtain a comprehensive understanding of the facts the world systems encounter. Furthermore, by substituting flexible and easily-transferred systems and reducing difficulties and stagnation of thought, we can act more successfully when encountering the real needs of learners and the universal and civil society. Actually, by demonstrating flexibility and creating some variations in time, location, approach and curriculum, we can keep up with the requirements of a universal education. As such, by decentralizing the curriculum at school and local level, making the academic plan interdisciplinary, training teachers according to the changes made in the curriculum, making teachers adopt to various academic approaches, adopting curriculum with challenges and opportunities of information technology and professionalizing it, collaboration among institutions and formal and informal academic centers and non-academic centers, the important goal of educating, effective, helpful,

and informed citizens at national and international level can be achieved.

The question raised here is that, along with disappearance of national boundaries, which items should be included in curriculum so active and informed universal citizens are educated? Since the duty of academic centers is to educate citizens, it would be useful to understand how citizenship is defined in academic centers. Some of the elements involved are as follows:

- Comprehensive knowledge on the world's political systems
- Comprehensive knowledge on the world's economic systems
- Critical thinking skill for analyzing issues related to political and economic affairs
- Inter-cultural communication skills
- Opportunities for practical participation as active citizens
- Opportunities for revealing sympathy towards others

2. Discussions

Due to the fact that citizenship education is considered as a national duty and its goals require exact planning, developing approaches and new and novel strategies to be achieved in the future, as shown by universal experiences, it cannot be implemented merely within the responsibilities of schools and formal educational system of the country. So, it is necessary to set up training courses for educating citizens with standards higher than those common in schools and academic centers and the entire society, namely family and school and other religious, political, cultural and social institutions start dealing and sincerely cooperating with this training. Then, we would be able to create a logical coordination between what is taught at school as a citizenship education and what is common in house, parish, area, and national society. In this way, the culture common at school will not be contradictory with norms and values present in society; rather, both of them complement the process of citizenship education and strengthen the inclination to accept social responsibilities and group work required for a healthy citizenship life. It is noteworthy that mass media and information devices such as radio and television have an important role to play in achieving this goal

Acknowledgements:

Authors are grateful to Farhangian University, Shiraz for financial support to carry out this work.

Corresponding Author:

Abbas Anarinejad

Farhangian University, Shiraz, Iran

References

1. Ashtiyani, M., FathiVajargah, K., & Yamanidouzi Sorkhabi, M. (2006). Including citizenship values in curriculum for teaching at primary school, 17(5).
2. Bagheri, SH., & Bagheri, H. (2010). Methods of citizenship education and role of education in institutionalizing it. The national symposium for approaches, challenges and strategies of citizenship education curriculum. Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht.
3. Khosravi, M. & Ibrahimi, Z. (2005). Globalization and education. The first national symposium for globalization and education (1st Ed). Jahad-e Daneshgahi Publication, Tehran.
4. KhatibZamani, N. (2007). Citizenship education: Need of today's society. Keyhan Newspaper.
5. Share Pour, H. (2007). Sociology of Education. SAMT Publication, Tehran.
6. Shahidi, N. (2010). Application of interdisciplinary curriculum for citizenship education at school. The national symposium for approaches, challenges and strategies of citizenship education curriculum. Islamic Azad University, Marvdasht.
7. Ameli, Reza. (2001). Globalization communication, citizenship and religion. Social science review, 18.
8. Elmolhoda, J. (2000). Outlook to civil education from Islamic point of view. Symposium of Islamic Education. Abed Publication, Tehran.
9. FathiVajargah, K. (2002). Citizenship education curriculum: A hidden priority for educational system. Iran, Research Journal, Isfahan University (Humanities), 14(2), p. 181.
10. Nikfar, M. R. (1999). Violence, human right, civil society. Tarhe No Publication. Tehran.
11. Fathi, K. (2001). Required Characteristics for good citizenship. Australian Curriculum Studies Association. Canberra, Australia.
12. Tobias, R. (1997). The boundaries of education for active citizenship: institutional community. Context, SECUTER AOTEARO, New Zealand.

12/2/2012