

The Causes of Inadequate Development In Educational Status And School Design In Iran In Recent Century

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Progressive development and the future of a state largely depend upon its educational systems and each nation expresses its personality in the system it adopts for its schools. The level of a country's social development can be understood through the status of schools in that country. In our country, Iran, the most comprehensive institution responsible for the education and training of human resources is the Ministry of Education, which is answerable for about one quarter of Iran's population. In the years 2009-2010, this includes 1,180,000 teachers, 48,000 schools and 455,000 classrooms. These serve 6,000,000 primary students, 4,300,000 middle level students and 4,600,000 students in high school. Among these 15 million students, 1,200,000 students are at the first-year primary level (Figure 1). According to the deputy of Nosazi¹ institution, there are 26,610 non-resistant² schools, 32,000 destructive damaged or decayed schools and 5,000 schools leased³ in the country. Currently, 15,484 classes run on a two-shift schedule, funded by 3 trillion Rials (about \$300 million in US dollars) donated yearly by benevolent Iranians⁴ who have given their large and effective role in delivery of schools in Iran.



Figure 1



Figure 2

¹ State Iranian organization of school (renovation, development and mobilization) which is sub-collection of Ministry of Education

² Non-resistant buildings are some of schools which are very weak against earthquake and may be destroyed.

³ - Ministry of Education rent some of buildings are leased as a school from private and government institutions. Some of them are big houses, big home gardens, and older big houses and so on.

⁴ - One of the good traditions in Iran is that many schools are constructed by righteous people and of course the Ministry of Education and Nosazi institution support them in design and management of the school.



Figure 3

Built by the government with the aid of charitable funding, about 1500 schools⁵ pay no attention to quality of education; such schools are designed and built every year. Out of 15 million students, 9 million study in two-period schools. Solving this problem and eliminating all two-period schools would cost 210 trillion Rials (US\$21 billion), which has not been allocated. However, the Iranian news agency announced at the start of the new academic year that 31 percent of new schools, in mobile and semi-mobile types, will be formed in tents and Kapars⁶ for 53 thousand students. (Figures 2 and 3)

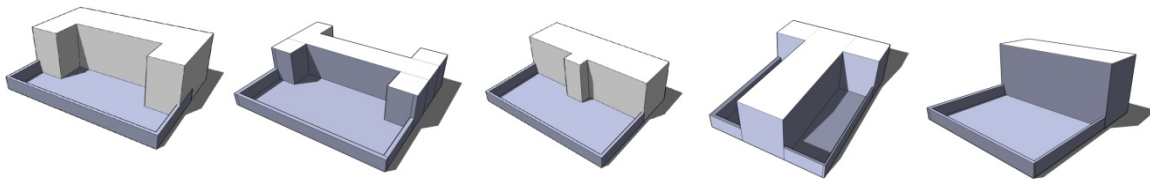


Figure 4

Nowadays, the reality is that education under prevailing conditions - considering the high capacity which had previously existed in Iranian education and school design⁷ - is very weak in the quality of resources training, whether in management or education levels, and in school architecture. The author has searched diligently to discover why we have so few well-designed and suitable schools and why education systems and school design, which are related, cannot advance in Iran. What causes led to our present backward education system?

⁵ - Most schools have a box-like form like and classrooms-based model which is built throughout this country

⁶ - Kapor is a form of house or school made in warm regions and the main materials are palm tree branches that are woven together to create a dome-like form.

⁷ - For more detail, please see the article " History of Architecture Schools in Iran" by Samaneh Irvani - published in www.designshare.com

Centralization in the education system

When the Ministry of Education was created simultaneously with the construction of Darol-Fonon school (before its name was Ministry of Olume and before that Maaref), due to the increasing population and demand for free education, the educational system has had central administration over aspects of school architecture and educational planning. Although the Ministry of Education constantly asserts that it is decentralizing, the reality is that all the works and decisions have been managed from one institution; schools in this country have very few choices for self-determination.

In the past thirty years, we have seen schools which have been designed and constructed throughout the country with regard to our varied weather and climate, but unfortunately they follow limited models of school design. These are the "box" model and the classroom-based model, which have dominated Iranian school design for over 100 years without regard to changes in education philosophy (for more detail, please see Figure 4).

In recent years, because of the increasing diversity of materials and quality construction, the structure of schools is better and more beautiful than in the past. But no changes have been created in the classroom-based model and "cells and bells"⁸ model planning for most control over students in schools, as shown in Figures 5 and 6. This repetition of similar models and patterns is because we have gone away from Iran's unique cultural and architectural contexts and forgotten their principles. The state-centralism in Iranian organization of schools has led to models and patterns which reflect nothing except the desire to build a school whose only aim is building a shelter for a number of students who will all learn the same thing at the same time in the same place for several hours each day. For more detail, please see Figure 7 and 8.



Figure 5



Figure 6

Along with construction of schools in different regions of Iran, there is centralization in other programs associated with the education system. We centralize our educational

⁸ - when "cells and bells" was born in the world of education, till now, all of Iranian schools follow this pattern and the students and the teacher go and come out to their classrooms in certain times.

planning, planning and compilation of textbooks, distribution of curriculum content, educational content, the evaluation of students, the tests, the distribution of teachers and educators throughout in the country, profit-making schools, training of teachers and school administrators, and educational technology. As a result, we have lost creativity and innovation in management and design of our schools.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Reducing the status and worth of education in our society

Reflecting the rich national culture and Islamic teaching about the worth and status of education in Iran⁹, in recent years many changes have occurred in our education system to engage many problems. Educators, administrators, teachers, and architects have never failed to argue for education's strategic position in this society. Perhaps they suspected that the government did not support them and considered designing and building schools less important than designing or building a hotel, park, home, commercial space and so on. The teachers and school managers are seen as providing fewer social benefits than other occupations and that's why the government – despite all the slogans and promises - pays less attention to this large educational family.

Additionally, the role and impact of people and families are ignored in planning and designing schools¹⁰. In this educational system there is no connection between community and schools. Schools could be a part of the community and not separate or isolated from it. They should belong to everyone and not just the children. Low budgets for research and study, less than those in other advanced countries, is another problem in this system.

⁹ - For more detail, please see the article " History of Architecture Schools in Iran " by Samaneh Irvani- published in www.designshare.com

¹⁰ - In the early years of the Qajar era in Iran, before 1870 AM, most of our schools had a good and suitable relationship with their communities and community members could come to share educational facilities. Some such schools still remain in several major cities such as Esfahan, Tehran, Kashan and so on.

Regrettably, in spite of the abundance of learning research, educational planning and technology and learning environments that was accomplished in Iran, besides the existence of many skilled experts and scientists in the field of education, the relevant authorities and responders do not attend to this fresh information; they follow their previous principles and unfortunately do as they please.

Effects of political programs on education

Clearly, the education system lacks an integrated strategy and every four years, due to the turnover of senior administrators, the educational strategy will be changed. And due to the changing strategies, sub-managers will be changed and all or most decisions will be also changed. As a result many circulars and letters will be sent to all schools throughout this country, requiring them to implement these changes -- and again four years later this story is repeated.

In our educational programs we tend to take a one-dimensional approach. As long as we make decisions without an interactive and comprehensive attitude, our systems will not move to the front and will not progress. The Ministry of Education and Nosazi organization are more similar to an office than to a place in which to carry out cultural and research activities in a non-political form. Consequently, some projects will run parallel to each other and some will be conflicting and inconsistent. Even if we have one or more efficient groups, specialized in thought and action, the turnover of the managers in the Ministry of Education will make it hard to change viewpoints and long-term programs will not easily change.

Conclusion:

Currently, 15 million Iranian students spend the most critical years of their lives in schools. Attention to these young people is important for the future. Today, the task and purpose of education is not only the transmission of our cultural heritage, but also more importantly education should prepare the young for the life in society that is waiting for them and that they will build with their hands. *As David Orr¹¹ has said: the goal of education is not the mastery of subject matter but of one's person.* Research into governing education must show us how common education can accomplish important needs, constantly uplifting the young and allowing their abilities to flourish. At last, to achieve this goal, we need to change the management methods which deserve proper attention from the appropriate authorities:

- 1- Convert the system from centralization to decentralization and allow the schools to explore and update their creativity and innovation in school design and management.
- 2- Create and develop the strategic position for education and maintain it without needless changes.
- 3- Take full advantage of experts, especially in management and design of schools.

¹¹ – David W. Orr is the Paul Sears Distinguished Professor of Environmental Studies and Politics. He is also a James Marsh Professor at large at the University of Vermont. Born in Des Moines, Iowa and raised in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, he holds a B.A. from Westminster College (1965), a M.A. from Michigan State University (1966), and a Ph.D. in International Relations from the University of Pennsylvania (1973).

- 4- Encourage education managers to become familiar with new research and to apply it in their schools.
- 5- Reject the one-dimensional approach and move toward a multidimensional approach in management of educational programs.
- 6- Comprehensive and multilateral cooperation of community, parents, architects, planners with schools and supporting them by the government.



About Author:
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Samaneh Irvani has studied architecture at the graduate level. Her M.A. thesis was about the problems of disabled children in Iranian schools. Both disabled and normal students deserve high standards of education and educational facilities, but there are many obstacles for good school design. In recent years, she has created setting in which all children can easily read along with each other in "a school" where they are not separated from each other.

Irvani researches the relationship between school design and education. She has taught several courses about this topic in Iran's schools of architecture. She wrote an article "History of School Architecture in Iran" which is published on designshare.com. She also translated "The Language of School Design" into Farsi. She plans to convey new discoveries about the science of education and architecture to Iranian architects and planners. While she has worked for several architectural firms, the focus of her work is developing and promoting effective environments for lifelong learning.

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