

Factors Affecting a Curriculum Based on Citizenship Legal Literacy Education

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aimed to identify the factors affecting a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education in order to improve the quality of civic education in Iran's educational system.

Methods and Materials: This applied and developmental study was conducted using an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design. In the qualitative phase, the statistical population included experts in education, curriculum planning, social sciences, and citizenship rights. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through 15 semi-structured interviews, which continued until theoretical saturation was achieved. The qualitative data were analyzed using MaxQDA software through open, axial, and selective coding. The extracted themes were then organized to develop a conceptual structure for a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education.

Findings: The inferential findings supported a multidimensional structure for citizenship legal literacy education. The analysis indicated that five key components formed the core of the proposed curriculum model: citizenship rights education, values and beliefs, practical empowerment, development of social interaction, and media and digital literacy education. These components represented interrelated knowledge-based, attitudinal, behavioral, and social indicators. The findings showed that emphasis on citizens' rights and responsibilities, justice-oriented attitudes, dialogue skills, social participation, legal awareness, responsible media use, and digital literacy plays a decisive role in designing an effective curriculum for educating law-abiding and participatory citizens.

Conclusion: The results suggest that citizenship legal literacy education in Iran requires a shift from the mere transmission of theoretical concepts toward a competency-based, participatory, and practice-oriented curriculum. Such a curriculum can contribute to strengthening civic awareness, promoting legal responsibility, enhancing social participation, supporting educational justice, and preparing students for active and responsible citizenship in contemporary society.

Keywords: Citizenship rights; elementary curriculum; legal literacy; citizenship education; civic education

1. Introduction

Citizenship education has become one of the central concerns of contemporary educational systems

because schools are no longer expected merely to transmit academic knowledge; rather, they are required to prepare learners for responsible participation in complex legal, social, political, cultural, and digital environments. In

modern societies, citizenship is not limited to formal membership in a nation-state, but includes awareness of rights and responsibilities, respect for law, commitment to justice, civic participation, ethical interaction with others, and the ability to act responsibly in both physical and virtual spaces. From this perspective, education functions as a key institutional mechanism for cultivating citizens who can understand social rules, respect legal norms, participate in public life, and contribute to collective well-being. Citizenship education is therefore closely connected with democratic learning, social cohesion, justice-oriented education, and the development of individual and collective responsibility (Edinyang et al., 2023; Veugelers, 2021; Windle, 2025).

The increasing complexity of social life has made legal literacy an essential dimension of citizenship education. Citizenship legal literacy refers to learners' capacity to understand their basic rights and obligations, recognize legal and civic structures, interpret social rules, respect the rights of others, and apply legal knowledge in everyday situations. In educational contexts, this form of literacy is particularly important because children and adolescents encounter legal and ethical issues in school relationships, family life, peer interactions, digital communication, social participation, and future professional roles. A curriculum that integrates citizenship rights and legal literacy can help students move beyond passive obedience to rules and develop reflective, responsible, and participatory orientations toward law and society. Previous studies have emphasized that education plays a decisive role in promoting citizenship rights, strengthening civic awareness, and cultivating rights-oriented attitudes among students (Afghari, 2021; Dehghanzadeh & Jafari, 2021; Farajzadeh & Faraji, 2022).

In curriculum studies, citizenship education must be designed as a coherent, multidimensional, and developmentally appropriate program rather than as a fragmented set of moral recommendations or isolated textbook topics. A citizenship-oriented curriculum should include cognitive, affective, behavioral, social, and practical dimensions. The cognitive dimension involves knowledge of rights, duties, laws, social institutions, and democratic principles. The affective dimension includes commitment to justice, equality, responsibility, empathy, respect for diversity, and attachment to civic values. The behavioral dimension refers to participation, dialogue, cooperation, conflict resolution, and law-abiding conduct. The social dimension emphasizes interaction, collective responsibility, and engagement in civic institutions. Such an integrated

view is consistent with curriculum models that consider citizenship education, sustainable development, and professional development as interrelated educational priorities (Saadati et al., 2023; Vaziri Aghdam et al., 2020).

International research on citizenship education shows that the concept is interpreted and implemented differently across societies according to political culture, educational traditions, social needs, and institutional priorities. In some contexts, citizenship education is linked primarily to national identity and social order; in others, it is associated with democratic participation, global responsibility, intercultural understanding, or social justice. Comparative approaches indicate that global citizenship education has expanded the meaning of citizenship by emphasizing transnational responsibility, cultural plurality, human rights, and awareness of global challenges (Hou, 2022; Veugelers, 2021). However, the global expansion of citizenship education has also created conceptual tensions, particularly regarding the balance between national citizenship and global responsibility, civic obedience and critical agency, cultural belonging and universal human rights, and moral education and political participation (Estelles et al., 2021; O'Flaherty et al., 2025).

One of the major challenges in citizenship education is that curricula may emphasize normative ideals without providing students with opportunities to practice citizenship in real educational settings. If citizenship education remains limited to abstract definitions of law, rights, democracy, or social responsibility, students may not acquire the skills required for civic action. Therefore, citizenship legal literacy should be linked to active learning strategies, participatory classroom practices, problem-solving activities, and real-life civic experiences. Studies have shown that citizenship education can improve students' civic knowledge when it is implemented through purposeful learning processes (Pangalila & Winoto, 2022). Similarly, problem-based learning and digital modules have been proposed as promising approaches for integrating global citizenship education into subject-based learning because they connect conceptual understanding with practical inquiry and decision-making (Subramaniam & Rajoo, 2025). These approaches suggest that legal literacy should not be taught merely as information, but as a practical competence.

The school as an educational organization also plays a decisive role in shaping citizenship behavior. Students learn citizenship not only from formal curriculum content, but also from organizational culture, teacher behavior, peer relations, classroom management, disciplinary practices, and

opportunities for participation. Research on student citizenship behavior and long-term relationship orientation in educational settings highlights the importance of institutional relationships, student engagement, and supportive educational environments in shaping civic behavior (Dang et al., 2023). From a management perspective, citizenship behavior has also been examined in relation to organizational commitment, job satisfaction, political behavior management, and ethical conduct in educational institutions (Namjofard et al., 2025; Riadi et al., 2025). These studies indicate that citizenship is not only an individual disposition, but also a product of organizational norms, leadership practices, institutional justice, and participatory structures.

In this regard, the design of a citizenship legal literacy curriculum requires attention to both content and implementation. Curriculum design is not simply the selection of topics; it involves determining objectives, learning experiences, teaching strategies, assessment methods, teacher roles, institutional supports, and mechanisms for adaptation to learners' needs. The development and validation of curriculum models in teacher education and specialized educational contexts demonstrate that curriculum planning must be systematic, evidence-based, and responsive to the characteristics of learners and educational settings (Rahimi et al., 2022; Tayebi Masouleh et al., 2022). In the context of citizenship legal literacy, this means that the curriculum should be structured around clear components, measurable indicators, and practical learning outcomes that can guide teachers, school managers, and policymakers.

The elementary-school period is particularly important for citizenship legal literacy because early schooling forms the foundation of students' social identity, moral reasoning, rule understanding, and interpersonal behavior. At this stage, students begin to understand fairness, responsibility, cooperation, rights, duties, and the consequences of social actions. Therefore, citizenship rights education should be introduced through age-appropriate concepts, classroom practices, stories, role-playing, group activities, and school-based participation. Research in Iran has emphasized the need for strategies that promote citizenship rights among elementary-school students and has highlighted modern strategies for teaching citizenship rights in schools (Afghari, 2021; Shahiwand et al., 2023). These findings are significant because they show that citizenship legal literacy should be embedded in the early curriculum rather than postponed to later educational stages.

At the same time, citizenship education must be inclusive and sensitive to social diversity. A curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy should not reproduce exclusion, inequality, or cultural homogeneity; rather, it should cultivate respect for difference, equal dignity, and social justice. Critical perspectives on educational citizenship emphasize that struggles for justice are deeply connected to how schools define belonging, rights, voice, and participation (Windle, 2025). Moreover, research on educational institutions has shown that schools can sometimes reproduce homogeneity and inequity if citizenship is taught in ways that privilege dominant identities or suppress difference (Janoski, 2023). Therefore, citizenship legal literacy must include explicit attention to equity, inclusion, cultural plurality, and the rights of marginalized groups.

The emotional and ethical dimensions of citizenship education are also essential. Legal literacy is not only a matter of knowing laws; it also requires moral judgment, empathy, responsibility, and the capacity to engage with difficult social and historical issues. Research on affective practices, difficult histories, and peace education shows that teachers may face emotional dilemmas when addressing sensitive civic topics in divided or conflict-affected contexts (Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021). Similarly, studies on young people and citizenship education indicate that learners' civic identities are shaped by social context, political experience, and educational opportunities (Sigauke, 2021). These perspectives suggest that a curriculum for citizenship legal literacy should help students develop both rational understanding and affective readiness for respectful civic engagement.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies has added a new and unavoidable dimension to citizenship legal literacy. Today, many civic interactions occur through social networks, online platforms, digital learning environments, and virtual communities. Students encounter issues such as digital rights, privacy, misinformation, cyberbullying, online responsibility, intellectual property, digital participation, and ethical communication. Consequently, citizenship education must be expanded to include digital citizenship and media literacy. Recent studies have emphasized the role of schools in digital citizenship education and students' responsibility in cyberspace (Sharifi et al., 2025). Other research has highlighted the importance of empowering civic engagement through digital citizenship education from a cross-cultural perspective (Rizal et al., 2025). These findings demonstrate that legal literacy in the contemporary

era must include the ability to understand rights and responsibilities in digital environments.

Digital citizenship curriculum design also requires attention to teachers' beliefs, school leadership, institutional practices, and sociotechnical imaginaries. Research on digital citizenship instruction in schools has shown that school leaders' beliefs and current practices influence the way digital citizenship is implemented (Suppo, 2023). Studies on teachers' perceptions of digital citizenship education in postdigital contexts further indicate that educational actors interpret digital citizenship through broader assumptions about technology, society, and the future of schooling (Webster, 2025). In addition, curriculum models for digital citizenship education have emphasized the need for integrated approaches that combine ethical, technical, social, and civic dimensions (Hatami et al., 2023). These studies support the argument that media and digital literacy must be treated as a core component of citizenship legal literacy rather than as an optional supplement.

In the Iranian educational system, citizenship education has been emphasized in policy documents and educational discourse, yet its conceptual and operational coherence remains a major challenge. Existing studies have identified components of citizenship-rights education and citizenship literacy in education, but the field still requires a more integrated curriculum model that connects legal knowledge, civic values, practical empowerment, social interaction, and digital responsibility (Dehghanzadeh & Jafari, 2021; Saadati et al., 2023). The need for such a model is intensified by contemporary social transformations, including the expansion of digital communication, increasing public awareness of rights, the demand for justice-oriented education, and the necessity of preparing students for responsible participation in civic life. Thus, a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy can contribute to strengthening the quality of civic education and aligning educational practice with the legal, ethical, and social needs of learners.

Despite the growing body of literature on citizenship education, global citizenship, digital citizenship, and citizenship rights, several gaps remain. First, many studies focus on citizenship education in a general sense and do not sufficiently conceptualize legal literacy as a distinct and necessary dimension of citizenship learning. Second, although some research has examined digital citizenship, fewer studies have integrated digital rights and responsibilities into a broader legal literacy curriculum. Third, in the Iranian context, there is still a need for an

expert-based model that identifies the main factors affecting a curriculum grounded in citizenship legal literacy. Fourth, many existing approaches emphasize knowledge transmission, whereas contemporary citizenship education requires a shift toward practical empowerment, social participation, ethical commitment, and media-critical competence. Addressing these gaps can provide a stronger theoretical and practical basis for curriculum planners, school administrators, teachers, and policymakers.

Therefore, developing a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy requires a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape students' civic knowledge, legal awareness, value orientations, participatory skills, social interactions, and digital responsibilities. Such a curriculum should prepare students not only to know the law, but also to respect it, critically understand it, apply it in everyday life, defend the rights of others, participate responsibly in social processes, and act ethically in digital environments. By integrating legal, civic, moral, social, and digital dimensions, citizenship legal literacy education can move beyond fragmented instruction and become a coherent framework for educating active, responsible, justice-oriented, and law-abiding citizens.

The aim of this study was to identify the factors affecting a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education in order to provide a conceptual basis for improving the quality of civic education in the Iranian educational system.

2. Methods and Materials

In this study, thematic analysis was used as the main approach in the qualitative phase in order to identify the dimensions and indicators affecting a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education from the perspective of experts. Thematic analysis is a flexible method in qualitative research aimed at identifying, examining, analyzing, and interpreting meaningful patterns in qualitative data. This process is formed through continuous and recursive movement among raw data, coded summaries, and final analysis, and it continues from the initial stages of data collection to the writing of the research report. The theoretical foundations of thematic analysis in this study were based on the perspectives of Braun and Clarke (2006) and Terry and Hayfield (2021), who regard thematic analysis as a dynamic, time-consuming process grounded in a deep understanding of semantic patterns within the text.

The statistical population of this section included scholars and experts in the fields of education, curriculum studies,

social sciences, and citizenship rights, who were selected through purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling. The data collection process continued until theoretical saturation was reached, and a total of 15 academic experts were interviewed. These individuals held doctoral degrees and had specialized experience in fields related to the research topic. Theoretical saturation was achieved in the twelfth interview; however, three additional interviews were conducted to ensure the completeness of the data.

In the first stage of analysis, the researcher identified meaning units by repeatedly reviewing the texts of the semi-structured interviews and immersing herself in the data. Then, salient concepts were extracted through open coding, and the data were organized in the form of initial labels. Subsequently, similar and equivalent codes were categorized into initial themes, and subthemes and main themes were developed based on semantic patterns. In the review stage, these themes were compared with the dataset to ensure their accuracy and coherence. Finally, the confirmed themes were redefined and named, and their narrative structure was organized within the framework of the research findings.

At all stages, the credibility and trustworthiness of the data were ensured through expert review, participant review, and accurate documentation of the analytical procedures. The final analysis was conducted using MAXQDA software, which made it possible to organize codes and themes within a conceptual network. Finally, the result of the thematic analysis served as the theoretical basis for designing the proposed curriculum model based on citizenship legal literacy education in the quantitative phase of the study.

3. Findings and Results

By approaching the units under study and conducting interviews with 15 experts in the fields of education, curriculum studies, social sciences, and citizenship rights, the initial data were collected. These individuals were selected through a combined purposive–snowball sampling

method in order to ensure diversity in specialized perspectives and experiences in analyzing the factors affecting citizenship legal literacy education. All participants held doctoral degrees and had academic experience at the ranks of professor, associate professor, and assistant professor, indicating their high level of expertise and familiarity with the theoretical and practical issues of curriculum. The mean age of the participants was approximately 50 years, representing a professionally balanced combination of educational generations with transformative and functional perspectives. Of the total participants, two were women and thirteen were men; despite the predominance of men in the sample composition, gender diversity was maintained in the interviews, allowing for the examination of attitudinal differences in the thematic analysis. The diversity in academic rank and executive experience among these experts enabled the interview data to provide a comprehensive picture of scientific and practical perspectives on the research objective and to serve as the basis for thematic analysis in the subsequent stages.

Table 1 shows the conceptual structure extracted from thematic analysis in the qualitative phase of the study, which was obtained through the process of open, axial, and selective coding of the interview data collected from 15 experts. The purpose of presenting this table is to demonstrate how the components and indicators of a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education were developed and to explain the relationship among different levels of coding. The data presented in this table are the result of a precise analysis of the semantic representations of the interviewees, organized systematically based on the method of Braun and Clarke. The table shows how the main themes of citizenship education were extracted from experts' perspectives in the form of five key components. These components present a clear picture of the overall structure of the desired curriculum model and demonstrate the knowledge-based, value-oriented, skill-based, and social dimensions of citizenship rights education within an integrated framework.

Table 1

Extracted Components and Indicators

Axial Codes	Open Codes	Interviewee Codes
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Citizenship rights education	Enhancing awareness of citizenship duties and obligations; familiarity with fundamental citizenship rights; awareness of legal rights and duties; knowledge of constitutional and civil laws; understanding concepts of human rights and democracy; understanding legal structures and social institutions	E1, E4, E6, E7, E8, E10, E12, E13, E15
Values and beliefs	Strengthening a sense of citizenship responsibility; strengthening respect for law and social order; commitment to justice and equality; acceptance of cultural and social diversity	E1, E2, E3, E7, E8, E10, E11, E14, E15
Practical empowerment	Skills of civic dialogue and negotiation; skills of peaceful conflict resolution; skills of analyzing legal and civic issues; ability to participate actively in social processes	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E7, E8, E9, E12, E13
Development of social interaction	Participation in civic associations and organizations; promotion of interpersonal interactions based on citizenship rights; responsibility toward society; creation of internal commitment to human values	E3, E4, E6, E7, E8, E10, E11, E12, E14, E15
Media and digital literacy education	Awareness of rights and responsibilities in cyberspace; identification of fake legal news and misinformation; observance of civic ethics in the online environment	E2, E3, E5, E8, E9, E11, E12, E13, E14

In the first component, citizenship rights education, the main emphasis is placed on knowledge and awareness of individuals' legal rights and duties in society. Many interviewees regarded this component as the cornerstone of the desired curriculum. One expert, referring to the open code "familiarity with fundamental citizenship rights" in Interview 4, explicitly stated:

"If teachers and students do not know what rights fundamentally are and how they relate to everyday life, the other parts of citizenship education become meaningless. Legal understanding must first be institutionalized in school, not merely the memorization of legal provisions."

In the same regard, Interviewee 8, referring to the open code "understanding concepts of human rights and democracy," added:

"In education, we pay excessive attention to outward order and discipline, but we have neglected students' familiarity with democratic laws. A child must understand why he or she has the right to participate, not merely that he or she must obey rules."

These statements indicate that citizenship rights education should move beyond content transmission toward a critical and practical understanding of legal concepts.

In the second component, namely values and beliefs, the findings indicate the fundamental importance of civic ethics, social responsibility, and acceptance of diversity in the process of educating law-abiding citizens. One interviewee, referring to the open code "commitment to justice and equality" in Interview 10, stated:

"Justice and equality, as core values, must be interwoven throughout the curriculum. When students learn that the law applies equally to everyone, social trust is formed."

In Interview 3, an expert with experience in social sciences also referred to the open code "acceptance of cultural and social diversity" and stated:

"Students must see that cultural differences are neither a threat nor a source of discrimination, but part of collective

life. Through this, the curriculum must lead to law-abidingness based on social respect."

This component represents the attitudinal dimension of citizenship education and emphasizes that legal literacy cannot be sustained without ethical value-based foundations.

The third component, practical empowerment, reflects the skill-based aspect of citizenship education. In the interviews, experts believed that citizenship rights should be translated into skills related to civic action, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution. One interviewee, referring to the open code "skills of civic dialogue and negotiation" in Interview 7, stated:

"Educating citizens is not possible merely by explaining the law. We must create the capacity for dialogue and listening to opposing views in the classroom so that students can move closer to real civic action."

In Interview 5, referring to the open code "skills of peaceful conflict resolution," it was stated:

"Legal education must be accompanied by practicing real situations, such as resolving disagreements in groups or discussing the rights of others. Without practical experience, understanding the law remains superficial."

These views emphasize that empowering young citizens requires the integration of legal knowledge and social skills.

The fourth component, development of social interaction, focuses on the formation of human relationships within the framework of law and social ethics. The themes extracted from the interviews showed that many experts emphasized civic participation and social connectedness as indicators of citizenship development. For example, Interviewee 12, referring to the open code "participation in civic associations and organizations," stated:

"School must be the smallest experience of civil society; a place where students can become members of voluntary groups and practice citizenship."

In Interview 10, referring to the open code "creation of internal commitment to human values," it was stated:

“Commitment to society does not come from external awareness; it must become internalized. When individuals learn from childhood that respect for law creates solidarity, real social interaction is formed.”

Based on these data, social interaction is the connecting link between legal values and the collective performance of individuals in the educational environment.

The fifth component, media and digital literacy education, is considered an important innovation in the research findings, highlighting the importance of the digital world in citizenship rights education. Interviewee 9, referring to the open code “awareness of rights and responsibilities in cyberspace,” stated:

“In the age of social networks, lack of awareness of digital rights is itself a violation of the law. Schools must teach that being a digital citizen means being responsible in the online environment.”

Moreover, Interviewee 14, referring to the open code “identification of fake legal news and misinformation,” added:

“There is a large volume of distorted information in cyberspace; legal education must include media literacy so that individuals can distinguish between accurate and inaccurate news.”

This component shows that experts have recognized the importance of digital transformation in the process of citizenship rights education and emphasize the necessity of integrating civic education with media-related skills.

Overall, the content analysis of the data presented in Table 1 revealed that these five components interact with one another to form a coherent network of legal education. The themes begin with knowledge of rights and duties, deepen at the level of values and beliefs, are transformed into behavior through practical empowerment, are consolidated through social interaction, and are ultimately connected to the new sphere of citizens’ lives through media literacy. The interview texts, which include examples of real conversations between the researcher and experts, show that citizenship rights education in Iran requires a transition from the transmission of concepts toward the education of socially active and ethically oriented citizens. Therefore, Table 1 is not merely a summary of qualitative data, but also a theoretical framework for designing a future curriculum; a curriculum capable of integrating knowledge, values, skills, interaction, and media in order to cultivate a new generation of aware, committed, and law-abiding citizens.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to identify the factors affecting a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education. The findings of the qualitative thematic analysis revealed five main components: citizenship rights education, values and beliefs, practical empowerment, development of social interaction, and media and digital literacy education. These components show that citizenship legal literacy cannot be reduced to the simple transmission of legal concepts or the memorization of civic rules. Rather, it is a multidimensional educational construct that integrates knowledge of rights and duties, internalization of civic values, acquisition of practical skills, development of social responsibility, and responsible participation in digital environments. This finding is consistent with prior research indicating that citizenship education should be understood as a comprehensive educational process that prepares learners for active, ethical, and informed participation in society (Edinyang et al., 2023; Veugelaers, 2021; Windle, 2025).

The first component extracted in this study was citizenship rights education, which included awareness of citizenship duties and obligations, familiarity with fundamental citizenship rights, knowledge of constitutional and civil laws, understanding of human rights and democracy, and recognition of legal structures and social institutions. This result indicates that the cognitive foundation of citizenship legal literacy begins with legal awareness and conceptual understanding. In other words, students must first understand what rights, duties, laws, and civic institutions mean before they can engage responsibly in social and legal life. This finding is aligned with studies emphasizing the role of education in promoting citizenship rights and increasing students’ awareness of civic responsibilities (Afghari, 2021; Farajzadeh & Faraji, 2022). It is also consistent with the findings of Dehghanzadeh and Jafari, who identified citizenship-rights education as a core component of the national education system from the perspective of experts (Dehghanzadeh & Jafari, 2021).

This finding also supports the argument that citizenship education must go beyond general moral instruction and should include explicit attention to legal literacy. Many educational systems address citizenship through concepts such as respect, responsibility, cooperation, and national identity, but the present results indicate that these concepts remain incomplete unless they are connected to students’ understanding of rights, laws, duties, and democratic participation. Similar conclusions have been drawn in

international literature, where citizenship education is viewed as a means of preparing students for participation in democratic, social, and legal structures (Hou, 2022; Pangalila & Winoto, 2022). Therefore, a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy should provide learners with structured opportunities to understand legal concepts in relation to everyday life, school interactions, peer relationships, public institutions, and social responsibilities.

The second component identified in the study was values and beliefs, including responsibility, respect for law and social order, commitment to justice and equality, and acceptance of cultural and social diversity. This finding shows that citizenship legal literacy is not merely cognitive, but also deeply value-oriented. Legal literacy becomes meaningful when students internalize values that guide their conduct in relation to others and society. The emphasis on justice, equality, and diversity is particularly important because law-abiding citizenship without ethical orientation may result in passive conformity rather than responsible civic agency. This interpretation is supported by research emphasizing the moral, cultural, and justice-oriented dimensions of citizenship education (Veugelers, 2021; Windle, 2025). It also corresponds with studies that highlight the need to address equity, social justice, and inclusion in educational citizenship (Janoski, 2023).

The findings concerning values and beliefs are also consistent with the literature on global citizenship education, which emphasizes respect for diversity, ethical responsibility, and awareness of social interdependence. Comparative analyses of global citizenship education show that contemporary citizenship is increasingly shaped by cultural plurality, moral responsibility, and global awareness (Hou, 2022). Moreover, critical reflection is considered a central element in preparing teachers and learners to engage with global citizenship issues, because citizenship education requires the ability to question assumptions, understand others' perspectives, and reflect on justice and responsibility (O'Flaherty et al., 2025). Accordingly, the present study suggests that citizenship legal literacy curricula should not only teach students what the law says, but also why justice, equality, responsibility, and respect for diversity are necessary for sustaining lawful and democratic social life.

The third component was practical empowerment, which involved civic dialogue and negotiation, peaceful conflict resolution, analysis of legal and civic issues, and active participation in social processes. This result indicates that a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy must translate knowledge and values into actionable competencies.

Students should not only know their rights and believe in civic values; they must also be able to communicate, negotiate, resolve conflicts, analyze civic problems, and participate constructively in collective situations. This finding is consistent with research showing that citizenship education is more effective when it improves students' civic knowledge through active and participatory learning processes (Pangalila & Winoto, 2022). It is also compatible with research on problem-based learning and global citizenship education, which emphasizes the value of learning environments that connect knowledge with real-life problem solving and practical engagement (Subramaniam & Rajoo, 2025).

The importance of practical empowerment can also be explained through the gap between formal curriculum and lived citizenship. If students receive information about citizenship but do not practice dialogue, participation, and conflict resolution, citizenship education remains abstract and ineffective. The findings of the present study suggest that legal literacy education should use participatory methods, simulated civic situations, classroom dialogue, group decision-making, role play, and case-based analysis. These strategies can help students experience law and citizenship as practical realities rather than distant concepts. Similar implications can be seen in studies that focus on modern strategies for teaching citizenship rights in schools and on the need to cultivate citizenship capacities from early educational stages (Afghari, 2021; Shahiwand et al., 2023). Therefore, practical empowerment represents the behavioral core of citizenship legal literacy.

The fourth component was the development of social interaction. This component included participation in civic associations and organizations, promotion of interpersonal interactions based on citizenship rights, responsibility toward society, and internal commitment to human values. This finding demonstrates that citizenship legal literacy is also relational and social. Students learn citizenship not only through textbooks and teacher instruction, but also through peer relationships, school climate, group activities, participation structures, and experiences of belonging. This result is aligned with studies on student citizenship behavior, which show that educational institutions influence students' long-term relational orientation and citizenship behavior through institutional culture and relational experiences (Dang et al., 2023). It is also consistent with organizational perspectives on citizenship behavior, which emphasize responsibility, commitment, ethical conduct, and

constructive participation within educational organizations (Namjofard et al., 2025; Riadi et al., 2025).

The social interaction component also indicates that schools should be viewed as small civic communities. If students are expected to become responsible citizens, they must experience democratic interaction, mutual respect, participation, and collective responsibility within the school environment. This interpretation is consistent with research suggesting that citizenship education is influenced by classroom discussion, institutional norms, and opportunities for student voice (Estelles et al., 2021). It is also supported by literature on young people and citizenship, which emphasizes that civic identity is shaped by students' social contexts and opportunities for participation (Sigauke, 2021). Therefore, citizenship legal literacy education should be embedded in school culture and not confined to a single course or textbook.

The fifth component extracted in this study was media and digital literacy education, including awareness of rights and responsibilities in cyberspace, identification of fake legal news and misinformation, and observance of civic ethics in online environments. This finding is highly significant because it shows that citizenship legal literacy must be updated in response to digital transformation. In contemporary society, many legal, civic, ethical, and social interactions occur through digital platforms. Students must therefore learn how to protect their rights online, respect the rights of others, evaluate information critically, avoid spreading misinformation, and act responsibly in virtual spaces. This result is consistent with recent studies emphasizing the role of schools in digital citizenship education and students' responsibility in cyberspace (Sharifi et al., 2025). It is also aligned with cross-cultural research on digital citizenship education and civic engagement (Rizal et al., 2025).

The emphasis on media and digital literacy further supports the argument that citizenship education must be redefined for postdigital societies. Teachers' perceptions, school leaders' beliefs, institutional practices, and curriculum design all influence the quality of digital citizenship education (Suppo, 2023; Webster, 2025). In this regard, the findings of the present study are consistent with research on integrated digital citizenship curriculum models, which highlight the need to combine ethical, civic, technological, and educational dimensions in curriculum design (Hatami et al., 2023). The inclusion of digital literacy as one of the main components of citizenship legal literacy indicates that legal education in schools must address

cyberspace, online rights, digital responsibilities, misinformation, and civic ethics in virtual environments.

The findings of this study also show that citizenship legal literacy should be designed as an integrated curriculum framework. The five extracted components are not isolated dimensions; rather, they form a coherent network. Citizenship rights education provides the knowledge base; values and beliefs create the ethical and attitudinal foundation; practical empowerment develops behavioral competence; social interaction stabilizes citizenship in collective life; and media and digital literacy extends citizenship into contemporary digital spaces. This integrated structure is consistent with curriculum studies that emphasize the necessity of systematic model design, validation, and alignment among objectives, content, learning experiences, and educational outcomes (Rahimi et al., 2022; Vaziri Aghdam et al., 2020). It also aligns with research on citizenship-literacy components in education, which shows that citizenship literacy must be developed through multiple interrelated educational dimensions (Saadati et al., 2023).

Another important interpretation of the findings is that citizenship legal literacy should be responsive to learner diversity and educational needs. Although the present study focused on general curriculum design, its components can be adapted for different student groups and educational contexts. Prior research on validating a citizenship-education curriculum model for students with special intellectual-disability needs shows that citizenship education must be flexible and sensitive to learners' capacities and contexts (Tayebi Masouleh et al., 2022). Therefore, the proposed components in this study should not be implemented as rigid content categories, but as adaptable curriculum dimensions that can be modified according to students' age, cognitive development, cultural background, social experience, and educational needs.

The emotional and affective dimensions of citizenship education should also be considered in interpreting the findings. Although the extracted components emphasize knowledge, values, skills, interaction, and digital literacy, their successful implementation depends on teachers' ability to manage sensitive civic issues, legal controversies, social conflicts, and emotional responses in the classroom. Research on affective practices, difficult histories, and peace education shows that teachers encounter emotional dilemmas when teaching civic and socially sensitive topics (Zembylas & Loukaidis, 2021). Therefore, teacher preparation is essential for implementing citizenship legal

literacy curricula. Teachers must be equipped not only with legal and civic knowledge, but also with pedagogical, ethical, emotional, and dialogic competencies.

Overall, the findings of the present study are consistent with both national and international literature on citizenship education, legal literacy, digital citizenship, and curriculum design. They indicate that citizenship legal literacy education in Iran requires a transition from fragmented, concept-based, and textbook-centered instruction toward a comprehensive, competency-based, value-oriented, socially embedded, and digitally responsive curriculum. Such a curriculum can contribute to the development of students who understand their rights and duties, respect law and justice, participate responsibly in social life, resolve conflicts peacefully, engage with others ethically, and act responsibly in cyberspace. The results therefore provide a conceptual basis for curriculum planners, educational managers, teachers, and policymakers who seek to improve the quality of civic education and strengthen the role of schools in cultivating informed, responsible, and law-abiding citizens.

This study had several limitations. First, the qualitative phase was based on interviews with 15 experts, and although theoretical saturation was achieved, the findings reflect the perspectives of a specific group of academic specialists and may not fully represent the views of teachers, students, parents, school principals, and policymakers. Second, the study focused on the conceptual identification of factors affecting a curriculum based on citizenship legal literacy education and did not evaluate the actual implementation of such a curriculum in classrooms. Third, the data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and therefore the results may have been influenced by participants' subjective interpretations, professional experiences, and institutional backgrounds. Fourth, because the study was conducted within the educational context of Iran, caution should be exercised when transferring the findings to other cultural and educational systems.

Future research should examine the proposed components of citizenship legal literacy education through quantitative validation methods with larger and more diverse samples, including teachers, students, curriculum specialists, school administrators, and parents. Researchers are also encouraged to design and implement intervention studies to assess the effectiveness of citizenship legal literacy curricula on students' legal awareness, civic responsibility, participation skills, conflict-resolution ability, and digital citizenship behaviors. Comparative studies across different

educational levels and cultural contexts can provide deeper insight into how citizenship legal literacy should be adapted to learners' developmental needs. In addition, future studies may explore the role of teachers' competencies, school climate, digital learning environments, and educational leadership in the successful implementation of citizenship legal literacy programs.

Educational policymakers and curriculum planners should integrate citizenship legal literacy as a coherent and explicit component of school curricula rather than treating it as scattered moral or social content. Teacher training programs should prepare educators to teach legal concepts, civic values, dialogue skills, social participation, and digital responsibility through active and participatory methods. Schools should create opportunities for students to practice citizenship through classroom discussion, student councils, group projects, peer mediation, community-based activities, and responsible digital engagement. Curriculum content should be age-appropriate, culturally relevant, and connected to students' everyday experiences so that learners can understand the practical meaning of rights, duties, justice, law, responsibility, and ethical participation in both real and virtual environments.

Authors' Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to this study.

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

In this study, to observe ethical considerations, participants were informed about the goals and importance of the research before the start of the interview and participated in the research with informed consent. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences under the ethics code IR.KUMS.REC.1405.034.

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