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6

Critical Analysis of the "Neighborhood" Concept in the Fundamental Transformation Blueprint of Iran's Education System

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Abstract

Education is a social function that influences the process and product of human life. In this regard, the "Document of Fundamental Transformation in Education" (DFTE) on the horizon of 2026 in Iran, highlights the importance of the "neighborhood" in the spatial aspects of educational performance and the interaction of schools with the surrounding environment. It also addresses the neighborhood as an entity whose core is the "pivot point of the government and the people in the growth, excellence, and progress of the country," along with identity, intellectual, epistemic, behavioral, etc. characteristics. However, since, on the one hand, the prevailing neighborhood pattern is more a result of economic stratification or the municipality's service zoning than a reflection of agreed-upon theoretical features or educational elements, any imbalance in a path leads to an imbalance in products. This study, by understanding the deficiencies in the concrete contents related to the "neighborhood" phenomenon, considers it a deviating obstacle on the path to achieving the lofty goals of DFTE. It addresses the question of "how to define the neighborhood for the realization of educational justice." The results of this critique indicate that the "neighborhood" should be understood as an "epistemic" position. In other words, achieving "educational justice" as outlined in DFTE involves the simultaneous and corresponding explication of the two natures, namely "equilibrium educational content" and "restrictive nature of space for the realization of heterogeneous functions," leading to the production and reproduction of a phenomenon called the "education-oriented neighborhood.

Keywords: Development; Neighborhood; Educational Justice; functional heterogeneity; Equilibrium content

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7

In the pursuit of achieving "educational justice," how should the concept of "neighborhood" be conceptualized?

Extended Abstract

The Document of Fundamental Transformation in Education (DFTE) outlines Iran's strategic vision for education, positioning the school as a central institution for societal development in accordance with Islamic Revolution values. Justice is its core normative principle, and the "neighborhood" is framed as the spatial-social platform for educational interaction, engaging with religious, cultural, and scientific institutions to promote educational justice. Critically, the DFTE leaves "neighborhood" undefined structurally and functionally, risking ambiguity in policy implementation. This recalls Perry's (1929) neighborhood school concept but without adaptation to Iran's contemporary socio-geographical realities. In development theory, sustainable progress hinges on human capital formation through knowledge, skills, and cultural competence (Nübler, 2011). Yet, globalized development norms often neglect local values, prompting calls for indigenous, context-specific frameworks. The DFTE implicitly equates its realization with "educational justice," aligning with social justice principles that vary by socio-historical context (Fainstein, 2014; Harvey, 2003; Putnam, 2000). This requires locally functional definitions rather than universalist approaches. Two variables—educational content and educational social space—are key to fostering an "education-oriented neighborhood." Content distribution can follow equality, equity, or equilibrium models, while social space reflects the lived environment of educational practic. Historically, Iran's nomadic heritage and municipal focus of neighborhoods question their institutional role in education. However, development literature views neighborhoods as sites of social cohesion, asset-based growth, and participatory planning (Freestone, 2000; Aiello et al., 2010; Parker, 2003; Pinnergar, 2012). The study concludes that DFTE's goals require an epistemic, rather than geographic, definition of neighborhood. Achieving educational justice depends on integrating equilibrium-based content with spatial constraints to produce adaptable, localized educational environments. an "epistemic" position should be established for the "neighborhood," not as a political orgeographical area. The realization of "educational justice" or DFTE should be pursued through understanding the "neighborhood" with a specific focus on "education," in the dual nature of "content-space." This implies that to produce and reproduce an "education-oriented neighborhood," the dual nature of "equilibrium educational content" and "space's restrictive nature for harmonious functions" should be simultaneously elucidated.

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