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Meta-Analysis of Citizenship Education in Iran's Curricula with Emphasis on Citizenship Components

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: The objective of the present article is to analyze citizenship education in Iran's curricula with an emphasis on the components of citizenship education.
Methods and Materials: This article is applied in nature and has been conducted using a qualitative meta-analysis method. The statistical population of this study includes all research sources related to the field of citizenship education within scientific databases over the past 23 years, encompassing a total of 178 domestic articles. The sample was selected purposefully in two stages. In the first stage, with the aim of examining the overall outcome of citizenship education in curricula, 48 articles were selected; in the second stage, to focus specifically on the components of citizenship, 20 articles were chosen.
Results: The findings indicated that citizenship education in Iran's curricula is not in a desirable state and that over the years, there has been no serious attention to citizenship education. Moreover, the high dispersion of citizenship education components indicates a lack of consensus among researchers.
Conclusion: The results of this meta-analysis reveal a serious challenge for citizenship education within Iran's curricular frameworks.
Keywords: *Citizenship education, Iran, components of citizenship, curriculum, qualitative meta-analysis*

1. Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of organizational development, the role of human resource management (HRM) has evolved from a purely administrative function to a strategic cornerstone of institutional performance and innovation. The transformation of HRM into a strategic tool is tightly interwoven with emerging trends in employee well-being, digitalization, talent retention, and work-life integration, all of which have fundamentally reshaped how organizations operate and compete. Within this framework, strategic human resource management (SHRM) plays a

critical role in aligning human capital capabilities with long-term organizational objectives, particularly in environments characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (Anderson, 2024; Roshani Ali Beneh et al., 2021). As global workforces grapple with the challenges of talent scarcity, employee disengagement, and workplace dissatisfaction, scholars and practitioners alike have increasingly turned their focus toward SHRM as a means of securing competitive advantage and sustainable growth (Rinawati et al., 2024).

The increasing interest in work-life balance (WLB) as a core dimension of SHRM underscores a significant paradigm shift. Where traditional HR practices often prioritized efficiency and control, modern frameworks emphasize employee satisfaction, flexible working arrangements, and psychological well-being as determinants of productivity and loyalty (Dousin et al., 2019; Saade & et al., 2022). The expansion of WLB policies across both public and private sectors reflects a growing recognition of their role in fostering organizational citizenship behaviors, reducing turnover intentions, and improving employee retention (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019; Maurya et al., 2021). Importantly, these changes are not limited to Western contexts; research across the Middle East and Southeast Asia confirms similar trends, indicating that WLB is a global imperative (Koon et al., 2023; Rinawati et al., 2024; Saade & et al., 2022).

In Iran, however, the implementation of strategic HRM practices and WLB policies remains sporadic and inconsistent, especially within governmental and semi-public sectors (Nazimi et al., 2022). The structural rigidity of administrative systems, along with a lack of integrated performance appraisal mechanisms, has hindered the holistic adoption of SHRM models. Empirical investigations suggest that many Iranian organizations continue to rely on outdated personnel management paradigms that are ill-suited to the demands of a knowledge-based economy (Maarefvand & Shafiabady, 2024; Mohammadi et al., 2023). This discrepancy has prompted calls for the design and institutionalization of localized SHRM models that not only incorporate international best practices but are also adaptable to Iran's unique sociopolitical and organizational landscape (Bahari & Taheri Rouzbahani, 2023; Fakhr Hosseini & Kaviani, 2023).

The development of such models necessitates an understanding of the dynamic interplay between individual competencies, organizational culture, and external institutional pressures. Studies have shown that employee empowerment, continuous learning opportunities, and value-based leadership are critical in fostering an engaged and high-performing workforce (Bahramian et al., 2023; Salman Al-Oda et al., 2024). Furthermore, the shift toward digital HR platforms and performance analytics has introduced new variables into the HRM equation, including algorithmic management, data-driven talent assessment, and predictive behavioral analytics (Mohammadi Yazdi et al., 2024; Sato et al., 2020). These tools offer unprecedented insights into employee behavior, but they also demand strategic frameworks that safeguard employee autonomy and align HR technologies with ethical and legal standards (Anderson, 2024).

The growing attention to organizational agility and innovation culture further reinforces the strategic function of HRM. As organizations seek to cultivate adaptability in response to rapid technological shifts, HR professionals must function as strategic partners who facilitate knowledge flows, interdisciplinary collaboration, and intrapreneurial initiatives (Ansari & Ghanbarinejad Moghadam, 2023; Keramati, 2021). Indeed, studies in both corporate and public-sector settings confirm that organizations with agile HR systems are more likely to exhibit superior innovation capacity and resilience in crisis situations (Rasoul et al., 2023; Sirghani et al., 2023). Human capital agility, defined as the ability of employees to quickly learn, adapt, and reorient themselves in changing contexts, has become a cornerstone of performance in dynamic markets such as agriculture, education, and digital commerce (Bahramian et al., 2023; Mohammadi Yazdi et al., 2024).

In addition, social and psychological factors, including employee perceptions of justice, belonging, and identity, significantly influence the success of SHRM initiatives. The relational climate within an organization plays a mediating role in shaping strategic thinking and organizational alignment (Roshani Ali Beneh et al., 2021). Without cultivating trust and participatory culture, even the most well-designed SHRM interventions may fail to deliver sustainable outcomes (Aazami et al., 2023; Nazimi et al., 2022). In the context of public institutions—where bureaucracy and political appointments often undermine HR meritocracy—this becomes even more pressing (Nejati Karim Abad & Seyyed Nagavi, 2019; Rahpeyma et al., 2024).

The literature also emphasizes the role of HRM in managing knowledge workers—individuals whose productivity depends on cognitive capacity rather than manual labor. For such workers, HR strategies must

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accommodate professional autonomy, lifelong learning, and individualized career paths (Sato et al., 2020). Targeting these needs requires a fundamental rethinking of traditional job classifications, appraisal criteria, and motivational schemes (Anderson, 2024; Rinawati et al., 2024). Moreover, cross-sector evidence shows that strategic HRM can significantly enhance job satisfaction and health-related quality of life, especially when tailored to the needs of physically active versus sedentary employees (Keramati, 2021).

In line with these global insights, scholars have proposed various models to contextualize and operationalize SHRM in Iran. For example, studies have proposed integrating strategic HR indicators within the national curriculum for public servants (Mohammadi et al., 2023), developing talent pipelines in the energy sector (Sirghani et al., 2023), and linking performance metrics with national governance frameworks (Fakhr Hosseini & Kaviani, 2023; Maarefvand & Shafiabady, 2024). Yet, the lack of systematic benchmarking, insufficient investment in HR technologies, and resistance to cultural change continue to pose challenges (Nazimi et al., 2022; Rasoul et al., 2023).

Consequently, this study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by critically analyzing the effectiveness of SHRM models in the Iranian public and private sectors with an emphasis on employee well-being, knowledge integration, and digital transformation. Drawing on the multidimensional constructs of HR agility, work-life balance, employee engagement, and organizational innovation, this study seeks to identify the enablers and inhibitors of strategic HR deployment in contemporary organizational contexts (Anderson, 2024; Bahari & Taheri Rouzbahani, 2023; Rinawati et al., 2024). The study also pays close attention to sectoral disparities, particularly in terms of policy alignment, HR competency development, and cultural receptivity to strategic reform (Aazami et al., 2023; Mohammadi Yazdi et al., 2024; Nazimi et al., 2022).

By synthesizing findings from empirical studies and theoretical models across a wide range of domains—from education and health care to public governance and industrial production—this research not only identifies gaps in current HR practices but also proposes actionable recommendations for the strategic transformation of HRM in Iran.

2. Methods and Materials

The approach of the present article is qualitative and based on meta-analysis. Meta-analysis can be defined as the systematic study and review of previous research. In fact, when multiple studies have been conducted on a specific topic, it is possible to re-examine all of them, compare them, and synthesize their findings into a unified conclusion (Zahedi & Mohammadi, 2006). In this article, based on the research objective, a qualitative meta-analysis method was employed. In qualitative meta-analysis, instead of statistical aggregation, the focus is on interpretation, and the main goal is to generate new knowledge through the critical integration of existing findings while preserving the originality of qualitative data (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). In this method, unlike quantitative meta-analysis which is inferential in nature, more emphasis is placed on descriptive statistics, and identifying frequency and percentage is considered a key aspect of the analysis (Hejazi & Habibzadeh, 2024).

The research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, the overall outcome of citizenship education in the curriculum was examined, and the focus of the second stage was on the components of citizenship. In the first stage, all texts and studies conducted over the past 23 years, i.e., from 2001 to 2024, were reviewed. The statistical population in this stage consisted of 178 articles available in domestic databases, from which 48 articles were selected purposefully and subjected to in-depth analysis. The selection criterion for these articles was their explicit emphasis on the desirability or lack thereof of the status of citizenship in Iran's curricula.

In the second stage, to examine citizenship education in curricula more precisely with a focus on citizenship components, all studies related to citizenship conducted between 2011 and 2024 using content analysis were analyzed through qualitative meta-analysis. The reason for selecting this timeframe was the absence of articles related to the components of citizenship in domestic databases prior to 2011. In this stage, the statistical population included all domestic studies related to content analysis of citizenship from 2011 to 2024, totaling 42 articles. From these, 20 articles were purposefully selected and reviewed. The articles were extracted from domestic scientific databases including SID, Noormags, Civilica, Ensani, and Magiran.

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3. Findings and Results

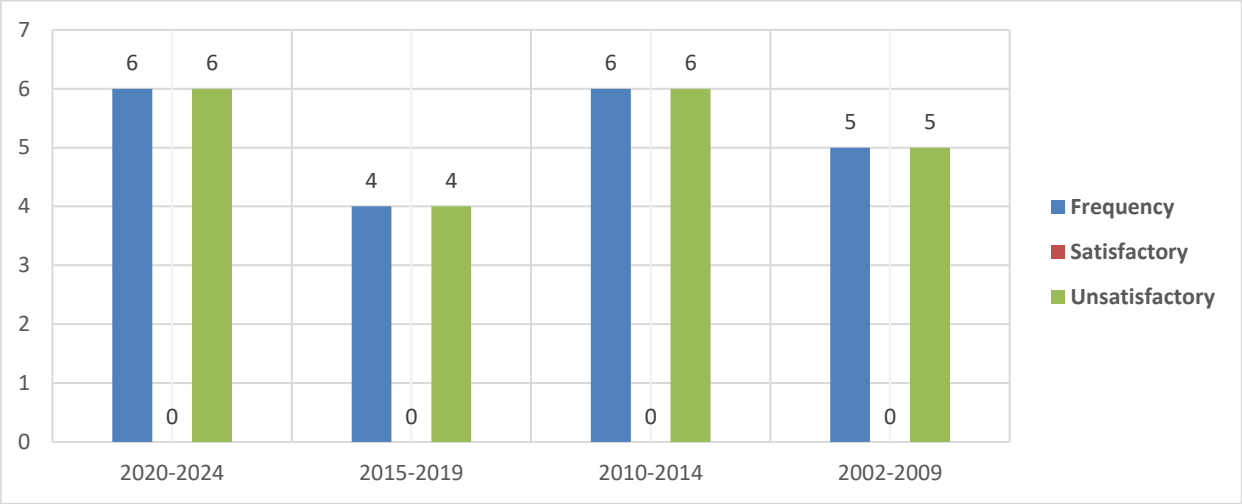
The findings of the study include both descriptive and qualitative results, as explained in accordance with the research method across two stages.

Descriptive Findings – Stage One

The studies reviewed in the first stage were divided into three distinct categories. The first category included 21 studies focusing on either the state of citizenship education at a specific educational level or on the goals, principles, and concept of citizenship within the curriculum. Given that the reviewed studies span from 2001 to 2024, this period was divided into four five-year intervals for better interpretation. The results are illustrated in Chart 1.

Figure 1

Analysis of Citizenship in Iran's Curricula – Category One



As depicted in Chart 1, six studies were conducted during the first five-year period (2019–2024); four studies in the second period (2015–2019); six studies in the third period (2010–2014); and five studies in the fourth period (2005–2009). These studies examined the objectives, principles, or conceptualization of citizenship in curricula at different educational levels. The results across all four periods reveal that citizenship education in Iran's curricula has not been in a desirable state and has received little serious attention over the years. All 21 studies, representing 100% of the research in this category, reported an unsatisfactory state of citizenship education.

The second category in the first stage also included 21 studies. These focused on the presence of citizenship content in textbooks such as *Social Studies* or *Sociology*, where a greater expectation exists for the inclusion of citizenship-related concepts. The results are shown in Chart 2.

Figure 2

Analysis of Citizenship in Iran's Curricula – Category Two

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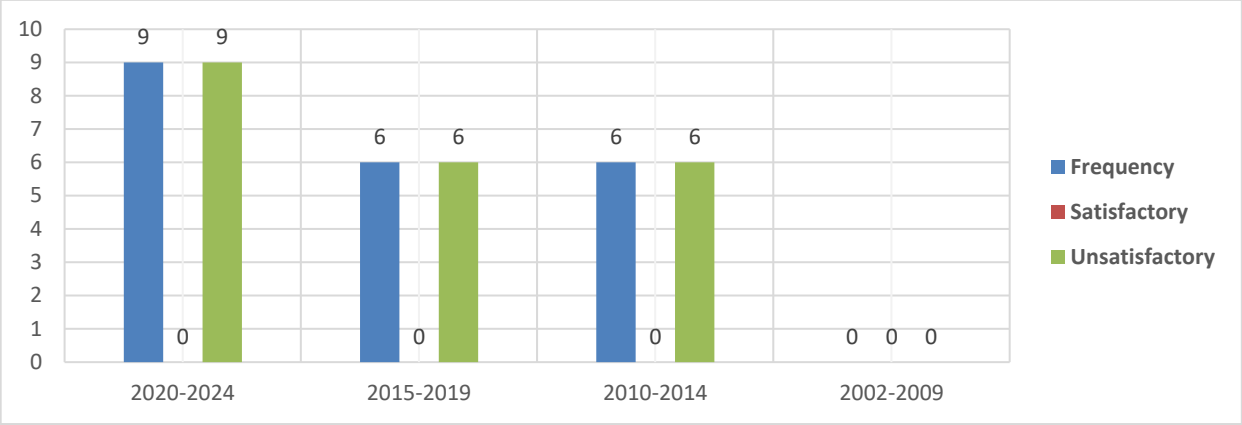
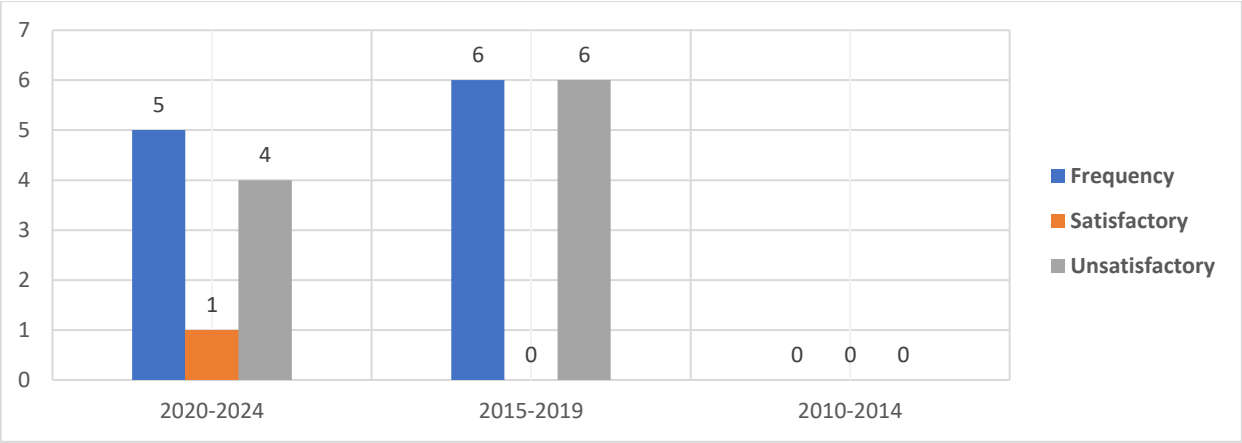


According to Chart 2, the highest number of studies (9) were conducted in the first five-year period (2019–2024), representing approximately 42% of the research. In both the second (2015–2019) and third (2010–2014) five-year periods, six studies were conducted respectively. However, no studies were found for the fourth five-year period (2005–2009). The results across all three periods indicate that citizenship education within Iran's curricula remains in an unsatisfactory state and has not been adequately addressed in recent years. All 21 studies, or 100% of this category, reported undesirable conditions for citizenship education.

The third category consisted of 6 studies that examined citizenship education in high-level policy documents. The results are presented in Chart 3.

Figure 3

Analysis of Citizenship in Curricula – Category Three



As shown in Chart 3, five studies were conducted in the first five-year period (2019–2024), and six studies in the second period (2015–2019). No studies were conducted prior to 2010 due to the fact that key documents such as the *Fundamental Reform Document of Education* (2011) and the *National Curriculum Document* (2012) were released only after those years. The findings from the first and second periods indicate that citizenship education in Iran's upstream policy documents is in an unsatisfactory state and that these documents have failed to adequately address the importance of citizenship education.

Among the studies that reviewed policy documents, only one study—conducted by Farhadi and colleagues (2023)—found that "many indicators of citizenship education were reflected in the content of the Fundamental Reform Document of Education" (p. 211). The other ten studies recommended a revision of how citizenship education is conceptualized within these documents.

Qualitative Findings – Stage One

The results of the above analyses across all three categories indicate that, overall, school curricula in Iran suffer from deficiencies in the area of citizenship education, and that citizenship does not hold a priority position in Iran's curricular plans or policy documents.

The synthesis of the findings from Chart 1 shows that citizenship does not have a desirable status in the curriculum. This weakness is evident in the objectives, principles, and curriculum components, as well as in the examination of

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various citizenship education approaches. Moreover, the findings from Chart 2, in which researchers examined citizenship-related content across various textbooks—particularly in *Social Studies* and *Sociology*—also revealed that the components and indicators of citizenship education were addressed in an imbalanced and inconsistent manner.

Additionally, the findings of Chart 3 show that citizenship has not been sufficiently emphasized in high-level policy documents. A revision of these documents is necessary to ensure greater attention to the underrepresented components and indicators of citizenship education.

Descriptive Findings – Stage Two

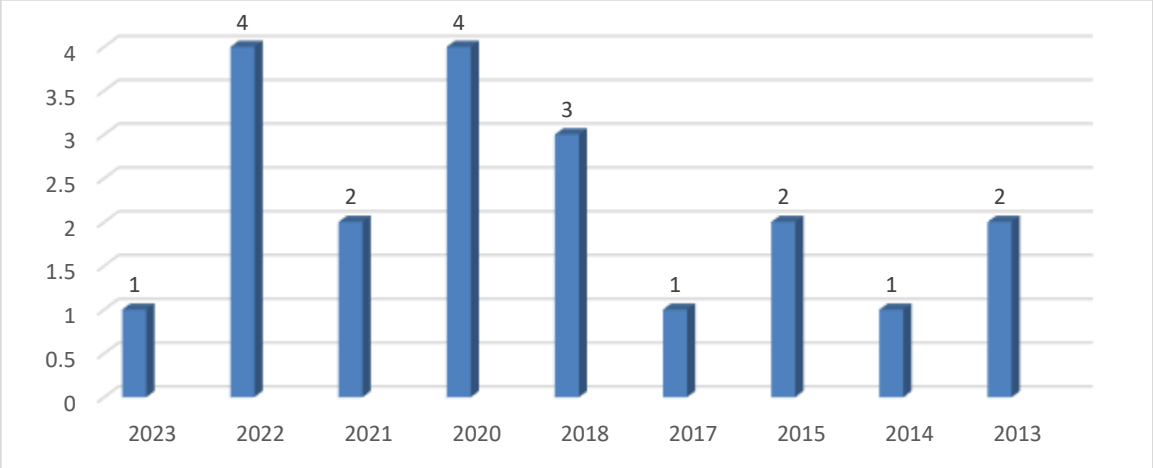
In content analysis research, scholars must identify indicators and components that encapsulate the target concept. The selected components of citizenship reflect the researchers' perspectives on the concept of citizenship, and the manifestation of citizenship in curricula becomes evident through these components. The main objective in this stage is to focus on the components selected by researchers, understand the rationale behind their selection, and determine the sources from which these components were derived.

A – Based on the Year of the Study

The studies reviewed in the second stage consist of 20 articles extracted from domestic databases, all of which employed content analysis methods. These studies span the period between 2011 and 2024. In terms of frequency, the highest number of studies—four articles each—were conducted in 2020 and 2022, together accounting for 40% of the total. The year 2018 followed, with 15% of the studies. No relevant research was found for the years 2011, 2012, 2016, 2019, or 2024. These trends are illustrated in Chart 4.

Figure 4

Frequency of Studies by Year of Research



B – Based on the Source for Component Selection

The analysis shows that in 14 out of the 20 articles (70%), researchers explicitly referred to one or more sources for selecting the components of citizenship. In contrast, 6 articles (approximately 30%) did not reference any specific sources for extracting the components. These findings are displayed in Chart 5.

Figure 5

Frequency of Studies Based on Source for Component Selection

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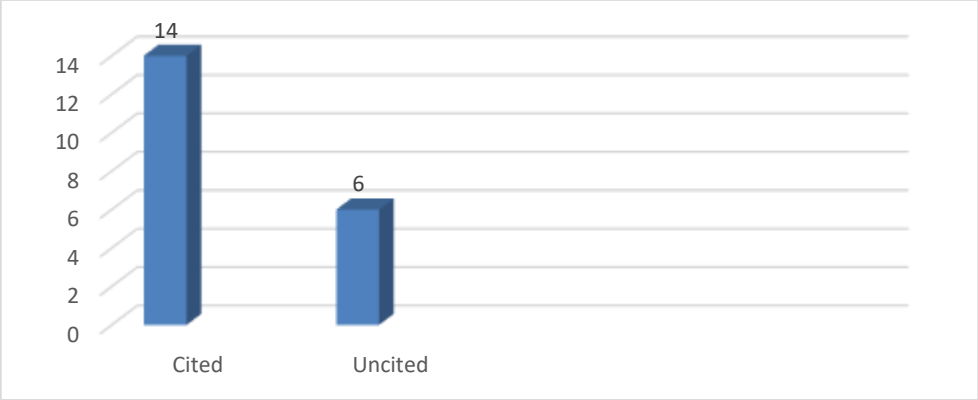
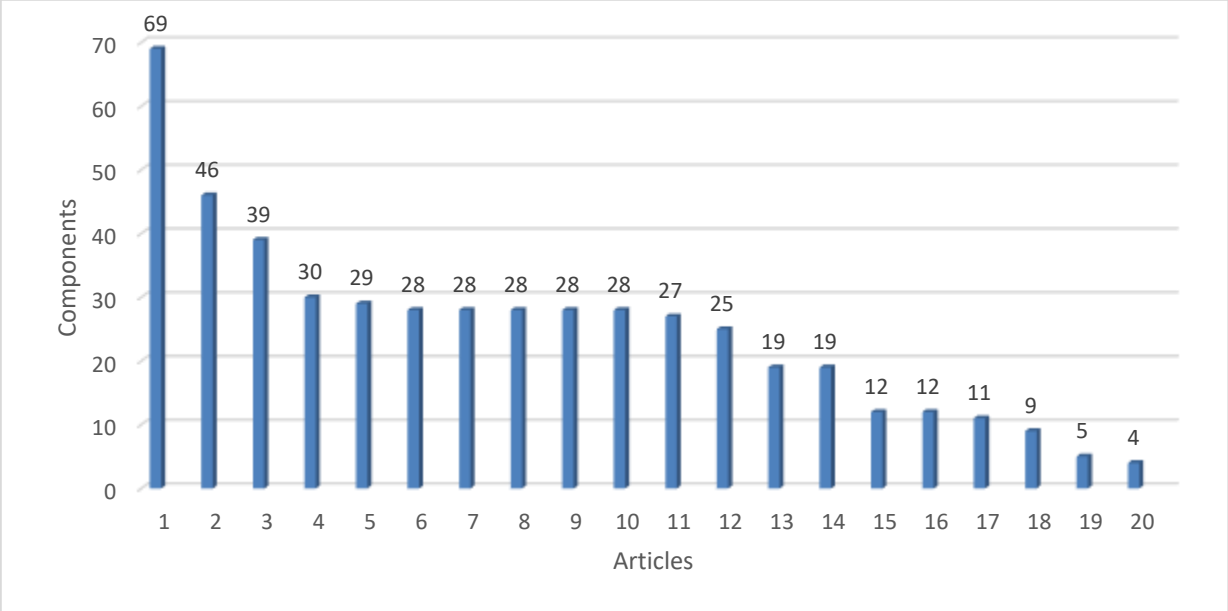


C – Frequency Based on the Number of Components Considered

The number of citizenship components considered by researchers varied widely, indicating significant dispersion. This clearly shows that the researchers did not use a uniform set of components for their analyses, which logically leads to variations in results. Despite this inconsistency, the overall findings still indicate an undesirable status of citizenship education in the curricula. The frequency of studies based on the number of selected components is shown in Chart 6.

Figure 6

Frequency of Studies Based on the Number of Selected Components



Qualitative Findings – Stage Two

In this stage, the characteristics and specifications of the content analysis articles—including the authors' names, research titles, methods, and sources of the selected components—are presented in Table 1. Each study is then critically analyzed in the same table with a focus on components of citizenship education.

Table 1

Meta-Analysis of Content Analysis Articles on Citizenship Education

No.	Authors and Year	Title	Method	Source of Components and Critical Analysis

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1	Golshani Geharaz & Heydari (2023)	Content Analysis of Third and Fourth Grade Social Studies Textbooks in Terms of Attention to Dimensions and Components of Citizenship Education	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components derived from Tazekand et al. (2013, p. 167). Tazekand et al. classified 28 components of citizenship education into cognitive, attitudinal, and skill-based domains (2013, p. 7).
2	Ahmadi et al. (2022)	The Evolution of the Concept of Citizenship in Primary Social Studies Curriculum	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components based on Tazekand et al. (2013, p. 13). The article explicitly identifies the source of its components.
3	Babakhani (2022)	Examining the Approaches and Goals of Citizenship Education in Iran's Educational System	Descriptive-analytical, qualitative	Mentions 19 components (p. 45) but does not reference any source or rationale for the selection of components.
4	Farhadi et al. (2022)	Position of Citizenship Education in the Fundamental Reform Document and UNESCO's 2030 Agenda: A Comparison with the UDHR and Cairo Declaration	Qualitative content analysis	Identifies 3 main components (cognitive, skill-based, attitudinal) and 28 subcomponents (p. 89), stating expert opinions were used (p. 92). However, components are actually derived from Tazekand et al. (2013), not credited.
5	Kouhi Aghdam et al. (2022)	Attitudes of Primary Students toward Citizenship Education and Influential Social Factors (Case Study: Reading and Social Studies Textbooks)	Mixed-method content analysis	Citizenship components collected via a researcher-made questionnaire and textbook analysis (p. 168); 46 components used, but no clear source or method of extraction stated.
6	Haji Alizadeh & Karimzadeh (2021)	The Extent to Which Social Studies Textbooks Address Educating Ideal Citizens in Iran	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Identified four components: lawfulness, participatory attitude, environment, and sustainable development (p. 95); no theoretical foundations cited for selection.
7	Babakhani (2021)	Critical Discourse Analysis of School Textbooks from the Perspective of Citizenship Education (2001–2021)	Fairclough-style critical discourse analysis	Identifies 29 value-based components related to citizenship (p. 21) but fails to cite any source. No distinction made between dimensions and components. Gendered citizenship is treated as a component (p. 22).
8	Babakhani & Salehi (2020)	Analysis of Citizenship Concepts in the 3-3-6 Curriculum Model (Case Study: Social Studies and Sociology Textbooks, 2018–2019)	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components classified into cognitive, attitudinal, and skill-based; sources include Saif Naraghi et al. (2009), Alikhani (2003), Jarnel (2010), Turner & Baker (2000), among others. Sources clearly cited, though most are over a decade old.
9	Khosravi & Samadi (2020)	Identification and Ranking of Citizenship Education Components in the National Curriculum Document	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Twelve components derived from theoretical literature (p. 128); however, no specific internal or external sources are mentioned.
10	Zakeri & Alipour (2020)	Examination of Civic Ethics in Fifth and Sixth Grade History Textbooks	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components adapted from Mahrouzadeh & Ramazanpour (2011); although ethical citizenship is conflated with general citizenship and lacks dedicated explanation, component source lacks direct relevance.
11	Golbahari & Rajabloo (2020)	Citizenship Education in Social Studies Textbooks (Grades 3–9) within the 3-3-6 Structure	Deductive qualitative content analysis	Uses articles by Marshall (2013), Castells & Davidson (2003), Ghiayasvand (2015), and experiential literature (p. 310). Uses 69 components with "etc." noted in tables, implying unsystematic inclusion. Sources not directly related to specific components.
12	Nikii et al. (2018)	Content Analysis of Fifth and Sixth Grade Social Studies Textbooks Based on Citizenship Education Components	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components based on Keshani Farahani et al. (2013) for Iranian-Islamic citizenship and Niknami & Madanlou (2008) for social-political citizenship. Sources explicitly stated.
13	Ahmadi & Keshavarz Dizajini (2018)	Position of Citizenship and Civil Rights Education in the Primary Social Studies Curriculum	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components derived from Tazekand et al. (2013, p. 62); clearly cited.
14	Sobhani Nejad et al. (2018)	Analysis of Core Components of Citizenship Education in Elementary Social Studies Textbooks	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Components adapted from Fathi Vajargah & Vahed Chookdeh (2019, p. 72). While sources are cited, the reason for using only 5 of the 6 original components is not clarified.
15	Mohammadi Afshari & Jahan (2017)	Content Analysis of Sixth Grade Textbooks Regarding Civil Rights	Thematic content analysis	Eleven components mentioned (p. 111), but no explanation is provided for their selection or the extraction method.
16	Sheikhzadeh Takapi et al. (2015)	Degree of Attention to Citizenship Education Components in the Fundamental Reform Document	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	States components were based on Nobarian et al. (2013); likely refers instead to Tazekand et al. (2013). Minor changes were made (e.g., exclusion of "family role" under cognitive components), but distinctions among subcomponents are unclear.
17	Homayouni (2015)	Attention to Active Citizenship Education in the Fundamental Reform Document	Thematic content analysis	Components based on Gholtash (2012), which identifies 19 components. The "religion" component was excluded; Gholtash's framework is progressivist in orientation.
18	Shoichi & Kazemizadeh (2014)	Content Analysis of Elementary Social Studies Textbooks (Grades 1–6) Based on Citizenship Education Components	Thematic content analysis	Components derived from literature and related studies (p. 261). 21 out of 25 sources match those used by Tazekand et al. (2013).

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19	Tazekand et al. (2013)	Analysis of Citizenship Education Components in Secondary Social Science Curriculum	Content analysis using Shannon entropy	Identifies three main domains—cognitive, attitudinal, and skills—with 28 subcomponents (p. 6). Components drawn from both national and international literature (22 sources), though 14 subcomponents are based on only three or fewer sources. No specific scientific method used; method was library-based and literature review.
20	Ghaffari et al. (2013)	Content Analysis of Middle School Social Studies Textbooks Based on Citizenship Education Components	Quantitative content analysis	Nine components selected from Hashemi (2010), Arasteh Khah (2002), and Sotoudeh (2001), including social rights, responsibilities, justice, equality, participation, social order, control, and norms (p. 79). However, Hashemi (2010) only identifies five components, which are based on Afsharpoor (2004).

Based on the analysis of the above research findings, three categories of studies can be distinguished.

Category One: This group consists of researchers who used the article by Tazekand et al. (2013) as the source for their selected components. This includes 5 articles, accounting for 30% of the researchers. Compared to other studies, this article appears to have incorporated a greater number of sources to define components of citizenship, a characteristic not found in the other studies. Tazekand et al. derived their components from 22 national and international sources. The international sources range from 1999 to 2010, while the national sources span from 1998 to 2009. In this article, fourteen out of the twenty-eight components (50%) were derived from three or fewer sources, and the maximum number of sources used to extract any single component was five. Moreover, the 22 referenced sources were not selected based on any specific scientific method, nor did the authors make any mention of such a methodology. Nevertheless, considering the dated nature of the sources used in the article and the evolving nature of the citizenship concept, it is essential to identify new components that reflect the current national and global societal context.

Category Two: This includes studies that referred to sources other than Tazekand et al. (2013) to select their components. This category includes 8 studies, representing 40% of the researchers. Although these studies cited specific sources, they did not clarify the rationale or process for selecting the components or explain why they changed the number of components. In some cases, the referenced sources did not employ any structured scientific method for extracting the components. These studies are presented in Table 1.

Category Three: This category consists of studies that did not refer to any specific source for selecting citizenship components. It includes 6 studies, accounting for 30% of the researchers. Among these, 4 articles merely stated that the components were collected based on theoretical foundations but did not explicitly reference any sources. The remaining 2 studies did not even include such statements.

The conducted meta-analysis reveals more clearly the gap in identifying appropriate components for citizenship education. It is important to note that in meta-analysis, evaluation involves assessing the credibility of studies. This method allows for the identification and correction of potential errors. The purpose of identifying such errors is not to highlight the weaknesses of individual researchers but rather to reach an accurate synthesis and to highlight existing research gaps and needs.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study aimed to analyze the implementation and effectiveness of Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) in Iranian organizations with a focus on key dimensions such as employee well-being, work-life balance, performance management, agility, and talent retention. The findings revealed a significant discrepancy between theoretical frameworks and practical application of SHRM principles across public and private institutions. Most notably, while organizations had partially adopted SHRM language and terminology in their official HR documentation, these initiatives often lacked structural depth, alignment with long-term strategy, and integration with employee development systems. The most developed areas were performance evaluation processes and some aspects of knowledge management, whereas critical areas like work-life balance and agility of human capital remained largely underdeveloped.

One of the core findings was that although there is growing awareness of the importance of work-life balance (WLB), its practical implementation is inconsistent and often symbolic. Many organizations offered flexible hours or limited remote work arrangements, but these policies were not embedded within strategic workforce planning frameworks. This is consistent with prior studies indicating that WLB remains a global challenge despite its recognized impact on employee satisfaction and retention (Dousin et al., 2019; Rinawati et al., 2024; Saade & et al., 2022). In the

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Iranian context, the resistance to institutionalize flexible working is exacerbated by organizational cultures rooted in presenteeism and rigid hierarchies (Mohammadi et al., 2023). This gap between policy and practice continues to erode trust and employee engagement, especially among younger knowledge workers.

Moreover, the study showed that talent management practices—particularly in the public sector—suffer from fragmentation, lack of standardization, and an absence of strategic succession planning. While frameworks and models of talent identification exist, they are not systematically applied across organizational units. This aligns with research indicating that strategic talent management in Iranian organizations is still nascent and often limited to senior-level recruitment decisions rather than being integrated across employee lifecycles (Salman Al-Oda et al., 2024; Sirghani et al., 2023). Additionally, although training and development programs exist, they are rarely competency-based or linked to key performance indicators, which weakens their strategic value (Mohammadi Yazdi et al., 2024).

The study also highlighted a lack of investment in digital HR infrastructure as a key barrier to the realization of SHRM goals. Despite global trends demonstrating how digital tools facilitate talent analytics, employee feedback systems, and agile workforce management (Sato et al., 2020), most Iranian organizations still rely on outdated HR information systems or fragmented databases. This results in inefficiencies in performance tracking, succession planning, and data-informed decision-making (Fakhr Hosseini & Kaviani, 2023). Furthermore, the disconnect between strategic goals and actual employee capabilities remains wide, largely due to underdeveloped competency frameworks and weak communication between HR departments and top management (Bahari & Taheri Rouzbahani, 2023; Rasoul et al., 2023).

One encouraging finding was that a small number of organizations—particularly in the knowledge-based private sector—demonstrated high levels of HR agility and alignment with strategic objectives. These firms emphasized continuous learning, participatory leadership, and innovation-driven job roles. Their HR models allowed employees to move across functions, access real-time feedback, and contribute meaningfully to cross-functional projects. These findings echo the work of (Ansari & Ghanbarinejad Moghadam, 2023), who emphasized the role of innovation culture in reinforcing strategic HR practices. Similarly, agility was positively correlated with organizational resilience, consistent with findings from sectors like agriculture and energy, where the volatility of the external environment necessitated rapid adaptation (Bahramian et al., 2023; Sirghani et al., 2023).

The relationship between SHRM and work-life balance also emerged as a crucial determinant of job satisfaction, particularly in sectors where emotional labor and extended work hours are common. In alignment with (Aziz-Ur-Rehman & Siddiqui, 2019; Maurya et al., 2021), this study confirms that perceived organizational support for WLB directly impacts employee retention and morale. In contrast, organizations that failed to recognize the strategic importance of balancing work and life commitments witnessed higher levels of burnout and turnover intention. This is further corroborated by (Koon et al., 2023), who found a direct correlation between authentic leadership, well-being, and WLB in Japanese organizations.

Interestingly, the study found that the presence of clearly defined competency frameworks significantly influenced the success of SHRM initiatives. Organizations that had invested in competency mapping, especially those operating within regulatory environments such as the Ministry of Industry or municipal governance, reported better alignment between HR strategy and organizational outcomes (Mohammadi Yazdi et al., 2024; Nazimi et al., 2022). This is consistent with (Aazami et al., 2023), who noted that strategic management in HR is more effective when mediated through social and digital platforms that enhance knowledge integration. In contrast, organizations that relied on outdated role definitions or generic performance metrics failed to leverage the full potential of their human capital.

Furthermore, the findings affirm the role of strategic employee relations in fostering a culture of shared vision and collective accountability. When employees perceived fairness in HR processes—such as promotions, performance reviews, and training opportunities—they exhibited higher engagement and greater alignment with organizational goals. This resonates with the work of (Roshani Ali Beneh et al., 2021), who demonstrated that a strong employee relations climate mediates the relationship between SHRM and strategic thinking. It also highlights the importance of interpersonal trust and communication as integral components of successful SHRM systems.

Finally, the study revealed that despite the proliferation of SHRM models in academic and policy circles, their diffusion into operational reality remains limited. Many HR departments continue to function reactively, focusing on administrative tasks rather than proactively aligning people

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strategies with business outcomes. This gap reflects a broader systemic challenge: the lack of strategic HR competencies at the leadership level. As noted by (Anderson, 2024) and (Maarefvand & Shafiabady, 2024), the transition from transactional to strategic HRM requires deliberate leadership development, cross-functional collaboration, and structural realignment.

One key limitation of this study lies in the heterogeneity of organizational contexts examined. The sample included both public and private sector organizations across diverse industries, which, while enhancing generalizability, may have diluted the sector-specific nuances of SHRM practices. Moreover, some of the data relied on self-reported surveys and interviews, which may introduce bias due to social desirability or organizational image concerns. Another limitation is the limited integration of longitudinal analysis. Given the evolutionary nature of SHRM adoption, a time-series perspective would have added greater depth to understanding the progression of strategic initiatives and their impact on organizational performance over time.

Future research should explore the longitudinal effects of SHRM on key organizational outcomes such as innovation capacity, employee loyalty, and adaptability in crisis situations. Sector-specific studies, particularly in healthcare, education, and municipal governance, could yield deeper insights into how SHRM can be customized to unique institutional challenges. Further, qualitative case studies examining best practices in digital HR transformation and employee experience design could enrich the literature. It is also recommended to investigate generational differences in HR expectations, especially as Gen Z increasingly enters the workforce, bringing with them new values and expectations related to flexibility, autonomy, and purpose-driven employment.

Organizations must invest in developing integrated competency frameworks that align hiring, training, and performance evaluation processes. HR departments should transition from operational centers to strategic business partners by embedding data-driven tools and decision-making systems. Emphasizing work-life balance should go beyond surface-level perks and be institutionalized in policy and practice. Leadership training programs focused on authentic communication, empathy, and participatory management will be essential in building trust and retention. Lastly, public sector reforms must prioritize the decentralization of HR authority and invest in capacity-building programs to enable strategic HR capabilities across all levels.

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

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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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.

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