

The leadership of education based on the statements of Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved)

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to conduct a strategic analysis of the education system based on the statements of Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved). In this research, all statements related to the topic of education were examined using the official website of the Supreme Leader. A total of 188 documents—including speeches, messages, news items, and excerpts of statements—from the beginning of his leadership until the end of autumn 2023 were analyzed using thematic content analysis.

The research findings were categorized into 3 overarching themes, 16 organizing categories, and 43 basic codes:

1. Goals and Status of Education (comprising 4 categories)
2. Major Issues in the Education System (comprising 8 categories)
3. General Strategic Directions of Education (comprising 4 categories)

The analysis of these themes indicates that, from the perspective of the Supreme Leader, the educational system must be founded on Islamic principles, the nurturing of committed and capable human resources, intellectual and scientific independence, and resistance against imported models. This paper proposes a strategic model offering a framework for educational policymaking based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution.

Keywords: Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved), leadership, education, educational leadership

Introduction

One of the core priorities within the system of the Islamic Republic is the effective implementation of leadership and high-level policymaking across all sectors (Gharabaghi, Moghimi, & Latifi, 2021). Among these sectors, the education system stands out as a critical institution—described by the Supreme Leader as “the most important task of the country” (Khamenei, 2007).

Despite its central role in the nation’s governance and its contribution to comprehensive national development, the education system faces numerous challenges. These include managerial instability, structural fatigue, excessive politicization, dependence on Western models, and an entrenched culture of routine operations. There are also pressing issues related to teachers—such as their financial well-being, professional development, shortage, and the limited capacity of teacher training universities. Problems with textbooks and curricula are also evident, including an overemphasis on rote memorization, overloaded content, and insufficient attention to critical thinking. Additionally, the system struggles with gaps in moral education and guidance, a lack of adequate infrastructure, and various other concerns (Shahriari, 2023).

These challenges point to an urgent need for innovation in leadership and macro-level policymaking in education. Addressing them requires foundational transformation grounded in core principles, structural reform, and creative, context-aware solutions. In fact, key strategic documents—such as the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education and the National Curriculum Document—have been developed precisely to respond to these systemic issues.

It is essential to understand that leadership and policymaking in education are not value-neutral. They are informed by underlying doctrines, each rooted in the philosophical framework of a specific school of thought (Shafritz & Borick, 2008: 138). Therefore, any attempt to resolve these challenges must be based on Islamic philosophy while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of time and place. As Ayatollah Motahhari (2009: 457) has emphasized, anything that ignores the context of time and place—or fails to engage with it—is bound to become obsolete.

In this regard, the insights of Imam Khamenei—as both the leader of the Islamic Republic and a respected scholar grounded in Islamic philosophy—carry significant weight. His guidance reflects not only religious doctrine but also a deep awareness of the sociopolitical

landscape. According to Article 110 of the Constitution, one of the Supreme Leader's core responsibilities is to define the general policies of the Islamic Republic. His nuanced understanding of contemporary challenges and his ability to interpret religion in light of modern realities make his views a vital point of reference in national discussions, including those on education (Danaeefard, Bagheri Kani, & Khani, 2015: 106).

Moreover, in times of uncertainty, conventional models of leadership often fall short and must be reconsidered (Bush, 2021: 192). However, such reconsideration demands a rigorous and thoughtful approach—one that is both epistemologically sound and contextually aware. It calls for a critical engagement with scholars who are well-versed in Islamic teachings and deeply familiar with the complexities of society and its key institutions. Imam Khamenei, who has long emphasized the importance of education and training, stands as a foremost authority in this domain. His speeches and writings offer a rich and reliable resource for research and policy development in the field of education.

In leading the education system at a macro level, the Supreme Leader plays a guiding and enabling role—charting the course, articulating key objectives, and equipping educational leaders to implement his vision. His emphasis on the challenges faced by teachers underscores the importance of this responsibility:

“What we do is facilitation and groundwork; we help the process move forward. We are not the executors; we advise the Ministry of Education, we make recommendations to the Management and Planning Organization, to the honorable President himself, to the relevant officials, and to provincial authorities. Otherwise, the leadership body does not carry out executive tasks in this sense at all; it is the government that must act—this is the government's responsibility, and rightly so, it is the government that must carry out these duties.” (May 2, 2005)

This form of leadership manifests across all tiers of the education system—from national policymaking and administrative management to day-to-day operations within schools and classrooms. However, the focus of this study is specifically on leadership at the macro level, where strategic direction and overarching policy are shaped, rather than on operational or frontline leadership.

Given the importance of this topic, all public statements made by the Supreme Leader regarding education—from the beginning of his tenure up to the end of autumn 2023—were collected from his official website. These statements were then subjected to thematic analysis, resulting in their classification under three broad themes that reflect different aspects of educational governance.

The first thematic focus centers on the goals and overall status of the education system—areas the Supreme Leader has consistently described as critical to national governance. Underestimating the significance of education is seen as a serious strategic misstep. As noted in the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, a clear understanding of the system's position and its high-level objectives is a necessary starting point for any meaningful reform.

Transforming the educational system in line with the values and vision of the Islamic Republic involves striving toward a future in which, by the year 2025 (1404 SH), Iran ranks first in the region in terms of economic strength, scientific progress, and technological development. This vision also includes fostering an identity rooted in Islamic-revolutionary principles, becoming a source of inspiration for the broader Islamic world, and playing an active and constructive role in international affairs (Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, 2011, p. 8).

Accordingly, the study first examines the system's goals and its intended status, followed by an analysis of the broader importance of education in three key areas: human development, social progress, and the building of Islamic civilization.

After establishing this ideal future state, the study then explores the current challenges facing the education system. These challenges, derived and prioritized based on the frequency of the Supreme Leader's references, include: reliance on Western educational models, teacher-related concerns, outdated institutional structures, curriculum and textbook issues, politicization of education, the disconnect between learning and moral development, unstable management, and a widespread culture of short-term thinking and routine-based administration.

To move from the current state to the envisioned future, it is essential to articulate a set of overarching orientations. These orientations provide the guiding principles and conceptual frameworks for implementing meaningful, long-term strategies in education.

According to Imam Khamenei's guidance (may his presence endure), these guiding principles include: adopting a needs-based approach to education, emphasizing justice as a foundational element, upholding state responsibility and oversight in the education sector, and promoting meritocracy in educational leadership and administration.

One key theme that recurs throughout the Supreme Leader's statements is the call for comprehensive transformation—particularly as outlined in the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education. This theme is rich with research potential and merits deep investigation in its own right.

Although various efforts have already addressed different aspects of this transformation, the present study focuses solely on those elements of the Supreme Leader's statements that directly correspond to the conceptual framework of educational governance, in order to avoid repetition and maintain a clear and concise analysis.

1. Review of the Literature

Previous research in the field of educational governance based on the statements of Imam Khamenei (may his shadow be extended) can be categorized into two main groups:

1. Research Related to Educational Governance

Studies such as those conducted by Eizan, Ghaderi, and Shirbegi (2019), and Habibi, Azimi Aghlagh, and Madani (2021), have primarily focused on educational governance at the school level and the role of educational leaders in improving instructional processes. These studies have largely defined governance as a supervisory process at the operational level, with limited attention to broader dimensions and strategic policymaking. Similarly, the study by Mohammadi Pouya and colleagues (2021) examined teachers' experiences regarding the policies of educational leaders; however, their perspective remained confined to the operational level and did not engage with the overarching views of the Supreme Leader regarding national governance.

2. Research Based on the Statements of Imam Khamenei in the Field of Education

Studies such as the books *The Intellectual System of the Supreme Leader Regarding Education* and *Khesht-e-No* have collected and categorized his statements; however, these works have remained largely descriptive and

have paid limited attention to strategic analysis and the development of managerial models.

The study by Seyed-Tabatabaei and Fereidouni (2017), titled *A Model for Extracting the Educational System's Issues Based on the Statements of Imam Khamenei*, addressed existing problems within the education system but lacked a framework for envisioning the desired state and defining strategic orientations. The article by Danaeefard, Bagherikani, and Khani (2015), titled *Understanding the Strategic Priorities of Educational Transformation from the Perspective of Imam Khamenei*, identified transformation priorities, yet its conceptual model differs from that of the present research and does not cover the three core themes (the desired state, the current situation, and strategic directions).

Additionally, the study by Javadi, Birami, and Hosseini (2020), titled *A Strategic Analysis of the Importance of Education in the Supreme Leader's Intellectual Framework*, employed a grounded theory approach to extract categories and themes related to the importance of education, but did not address the challenges and the current situation of the educational system.

2-1. Distinctiveness and Innovation of the Present Study

This study, by integrating two domains—macro-level educational governance and the analysis of the statements of Imam Khamenei (may his shadow be extended)—and employing a thematic analysis approach, follows three fundamental steps:

Depicting the desired state (the goals and position of education in human development, social development, and the building of civilization);

Analyzing the current state (major issues such as dependency on the West, teachers' livelihood challenges, and the outdated nature of the educational system);

Proposing overarching orientations (needs-based approach, justice-centered approach, state guardianship, and meritocracy).

This comprehensive approach introduces a novel framework for educational policymaking grounded in the discourse of the Islamic Revolution—an approach that has not been previously addressed in existing studies.

3. Research Methodology

3-1. Research Design

This study aims to provide a strategic analysis of the education system through the lens of the statements made by Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved). Adopting a qualitative, exploratory approach, the research employs thematic analysis to systematically examine and interpret his discourse. This method was chosen for its flexibility and its strength in identifying meaningful patterns within textual data, making it particularly well-suited to the objectives of this inquiry.

3-2. Population and Sample

The statistical population of the study consisted of all statements made by Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved) regarding education, from the beginning of his leadership period until the end of autumn 1402.

Sampling was conducted purposefully using the "census method," resulting in the analysis of 188 documents, including speeches, messages, news reports, and selected statements.

3-3. Data Collection Method

The data were collected through the official information portal of the Office for the Preservation and Publication of the Works of Grand Ayatollah Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved). The criteria for selecting documents were as follows:

1. Direct relevance to the topic of education;
2. Temporal diversity (covering different periods of leadership);
3. Content diversity (including speeches, messages, and interviews).

3-4. Data Analysis Method

Various methods exist for thematic analysis; however, in general, the thematic analysis process can be divided into three major stages:

1. Text fragmentation and description,
2. Text interpretation and elaboration,
3. Text reintegration and synthesis (Razavi & Johari, 1401: 163).

Following this process, data analysis in the present study was also conducted in three main stages:

1. Open (Descriptive) Coding:

- Extraction of 43 basic codes from the texts;

- Identification of initial concepts;
- Example: The code “importance of human training” was extracted from a statement regarding human capital.

2. Axial (Interpretive) Coding:

- Categorization of basic codes into 16 organizing categories;
- Establishment of relationships between concepts;
- Example: The category “importance of education in human development” was formed by combining several basic codes.

3. Selective (Integrative) Coding:

- Formation of 3 overarching themes;
- Mapping of the thematic network;
- Validation through expert review.

3-5. validity and Reliability

To ensure the credibility of the study, the following strategies were employed:

- Review by an expert in the field of philosophy of education and a research team specialized in education;
- Presentation of samples from the coding process along with supporting documentation;
- Alignment of the extracted themes with upstream policy documents and academic research studies.

3-6. thical Considerations

- Maintaining fidelity in quotations;
- Accurate citation of sources;
- Avoiding any personal or biased interpretation.

This methodology, with its emphasis on a systematic research process and transparency at various stages, has facilitated the production of valid and reliable findings.

The results of this study can serve as a sound basis for macro-level policymaking in the country's education system.

4. Categorization of Themes: "Educational Governance Based on the Statements of Imam Khamenei"

During the present study, 43 basic codes extracted from the statements were organized under 16 organizing categories, and ultimately, the organizing categories were grouped under 3 overarching themes.

The table below presents a sample from the initial stage of thematic analysis, where the basic codes are displayed:

Table1: Sample of Descriptive Coding

Basic Codes	Statement	Code Symbol
Importance of Human Development	For a country, a civilization, and a nation, human capital is the most important asset of all; that is, even if you possess wealth, without proper and qualified human capital, you will not achieve anything significant.	13980211
The 12-Year Golden Opportunity	If our education system—which holds nearly twelve of the most formative years of a person’s life—functions effectively, it will ensure that the youth who are developed, molded, and shaped within this system will be far less susceptible to fundamental changes when faced with future events.	13850503
Generation Training	The mission of the education system is to nurture an entire generation; from a mid-term perspective, it seeks to prepare a generation for the upcoming era.	13960217

In the second stage of the thematic analysis process, through continuous and repeated comparison of the basic codes generated in the previous stage, organizing categories were developed.

To form the organizing categories, multiple basic codes that were conceptually and semantically coherent were grouped under a single organizing category.

Through this process, 43 basic codes were categorized under 16 organizing categories.

Table 2: Sample of Interpretive Coding

Organizing Categories	Basic Codes
Importance of Education in Human Development	Importance of Human Development (Repeated 23 times among the basic codes)
	The Golden Twelve-Year Opportunity (Repeated 7 times among the basic codes)
	Generation Training (Repeated 5 times among the basic codes)
	Importance of the Role of Education Teachers (Repeated 4 times among the basic codes)
	Importance of Nurturing Elites (Repeated 2 times among the basic codes)
Importance of Education in Social Development	National Progress Dependent on Education (Repeated 18 times among the basic codes)
	Education as the Foundation for the Country's Future (Repeated 13 times among the basic codes)
	Education as the Nation's Most Important Endeavor (Repeated 5 times among the basic codes)

In the third stage of the thematic analysis process, the organizing categories derived from the data were classified. The following table presents the conceptual categorization of the organizing categories. As previously mentioned, in this stage, 16 organizing categories were grouped under 3 overarching themes.

Table 3: Integration of Categories

Overarching Themes	Organizing Categories
Goals and Status of Education	Necessity of Addressing Objectives
	Importance of Education in Human Development
	Importance of Education in Social Development
	Importance of Education in Civilization Building
Major Issues in Education	Issue of Dependency on the West
	Issue of Teachers
	Issue of Outdated Education
	Issue of Textbooks and Curriculum

4-1. Theme of the Goals and Status of Education

Effective policymaking in any field requires, first and foremost, a clear understanding of that field's current state and significance. This includes a careful examination of its goals and long-term aspirations to construct a well-informed vision of the desired future. However, critical institutions like the education system are sometimes undervalued or misunderstood—leading to misguided decisions, such as excessive privatization or outsourcing of educational responsibilities.

Given the pivotal role of education, it is essential to begin by emphasizing the importance of clarifying its goals. A meaningful understanding of the education system's position and purpose must consider its wide-ranging influence on human development, social progress, and the advancement of civilization.

As previously mentioned, through a process of initial and secondary coding, categorization, and thematic analysis, a total of 13 core codes were ultimately grouped into 4 organizing categories, all falling under the overarching theme of “The Goals and Status of Education.” Accordingly, and in alignment with the Supreme Leader's statements and thematic priorities, the discussion proceeds in the following sequence:

- the necessity of addressing educational goals,
- the importance of education in human development,
- the importance of education in social development, and
- the importance of education in civilization building.

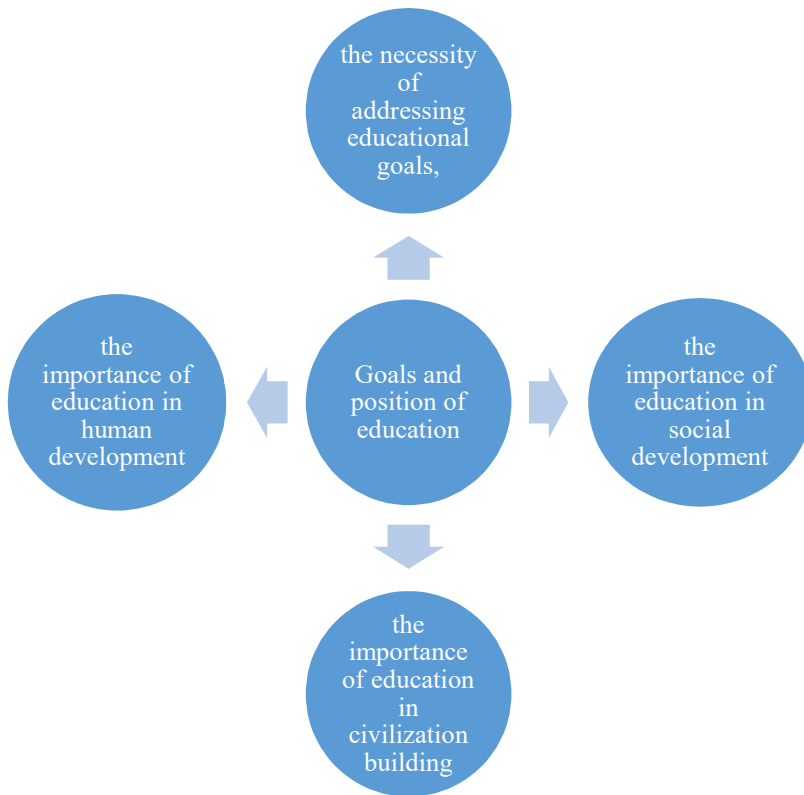


Figure 1: Theme of the Goals and Status of Education

4-1-1. Necessity of Addressing the Goals

Objectives evaluate, motivate, and direct organizational activities (Scott, 2003: 353). The determination of objectives at the operational levels, such as in schools, is based on goals set at the strategic and macro levels; however, defining these objectives is not necessarily a simple task. One of the factors often overlooked in goal or outcome models is that complex organizations, such as schools, tend to have multiple, and at times conflicting, goals (Hall, 2002).

Therefore, establishing clear objectives is particularly crucial for outlining the path toward effectiveness.

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements concerning the necessity of addressing educational goals, the primary basic codes were identified in the following two main categories, ordered by frequency:(1398/02/11)

1. Specification of objectives
2. Transformation based on objectives

Imam Khamenei believes that, for achieving transformation in the education system, the priority lies in defining clear objectives, and that these objectives must be firmly grounded in Islamic principles and aligned with the goals of the Islamic system.(1396/02/17)

4-1-2. The Issue of the Outdated Nature of Education

As previously mentioned, one of the problems facing the education system is its imported and imitative structure. However, what elevates this to a major issue in the current situation is the persistence in maintaining the same old, imitative system.(1395/02/13)

For years, we have operated within this imported educational framework without implementing any fundamental transformation, while Western countries themselves introduced significant changes and developed new methods.

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding the outdated nature of the education system, the primary basic code identified is: (1386/05/03)

1. Lack of modernization in education

In reality, the outdated and antiquated nature of the education system highlights the urgent need for renovation and transformation.

The failure to modernize the system has resulted in the continued dominance of old models characterized by rote memorization and overloaded curricula, distancing our educational system from new and innovative approaches.

4-1-3. The Issue of Textbooks and Curriculum

Among the existing problems in the education system—particularly those related to content—is the issue of textbooks and curriculum.

As previously explained, the outdated nature of the education system and the lack of modernization have resulted in the continuation of traditional methods focused on rote memorization, overloaded educational content, and a lack of attention to the attractiveness of instructional materials.

This has, in turn, led to a general disinterest among many students toward academic subjects.

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding the issue of textbooks and curriculum, the primary basic codes were identified in the following two main categories, ordered by frequency: (1378/02/12)

1. The issue of the attractiveness of textbooks
2. The issue of memory-centered education

One of the key reasons for students' interest in a subject is their comprehension of it. Unfortunately, textbooks are sometimes written in such a way that students cannot relate to them, perceiving the material as difficult and inaccessible, which naturally leads to disinterest.

In addition to the attractiveness of teaching methods, textbooks themselves must be rich in incentives to inspire the younger generation and ignite their enthusiasm.

According to the Supreme Leader, the writing style of textbooks must be appealing, innovative, and suited to contemporary needs.

As the Supreme Leader has said, our education system is predominantly memory-centered rather than thought-centered, and this orientation extends to the methods of teaching and evaluation. Such an approach fails to nurture creativity, innovation, and skill development. (1402/02/12)

4-1-4. The Issue of Education Without Upbringing

In the past, certain individuals argued that teachers should be solely responsible for both instruction and moral upbringing, and on that basis, advocated for the removal of the Vice-Chancellery for Upbringing Affairs from the structure of the education system. Imam Khamenei firmly opposed this initiative, rejecting the underlying rationale and warning of the serious consequences of an educational system divorced from moral and ethical development.

A review and content analysis of the Supreme Leader's statements on this matter—specifically the issue of education without moral guidance—led to the identification of several key basic codes. These have been organized below in order of frequency: (1378/02/12)

1. The issue of the elimination of the Vice-Chancellery for Upbringing Affairs
2. The weakness of upbringing programs

Although the policy of eliminating the Vice-Chancellery for Upbringing Affairs was eventually abandoned, the moral and developmental dimension of education remains significantly weak.

Unlike the heavy emphasis placed on academic instruction, moral and character development has not received equivalent attention.

Unfortunately, many schools still either lack a designated upbringing vice-chancellor or have serious deficiencies in their upbringing activities and programs.

4-1-5. The Issue of Politicization of Education

One of the actions that devalues the education system is its political exploitation and the politicization of this critical institution.

As mentioned earlier, the importance and position of education must first be properly understood; once this is established, any factor that diminishes its status becomes a significant issue that must be addressed. Imam Khamenei (may his shadow be extended), with a compassionate perspective, has pointed to the politicization of education as a major threat to the education system, teachers, and youth.(17/2/1396)

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding the issue of the politicization of education, the primary basic codes were identified as follows, ordered by frequency:

1. The issue of political exploitation of education
2. The issue of political exploitation of youth
3. The issue of partisan perspectives within the education system

Various political parties and factions have consistently sought to misuse the education system for their short-term goals, particularly during elections and specific political circumstances.

Educational organizations must not become passive instruments manipulated by external environments. Protective or buffering strategies can mitigate the environmental impacts on internal school operations. The political maneuvering of individuals, interest groups, and alliances can significantly reshape the policymaking environments of schools (Hoy & Miskel, 2015: 397).

Despite numerous clear examples and long-standing emphasis on the influence of external environments, educational leaders often underestimate the broader environment's impact on their organizations (Scott and Meyer, 1991).

The Supreme Leader advises cultural officials, particularly those in the education sector, to refrain from political experimentation on the youth.

Even in the selection of managers, care must be taken to ensure that their primary concerns are aligned with the goals of education, rather than being driven by partisan and factional interests.

However, Imam Khamenei also emphasizes that politicization should not be confused with having political insight and analytical ability.

In reality, it is necessary neither to create divisions through political factionalism nor to remain indifferent to the ongoing issues of the country. (17/2/1396)

4-1-6. The Issue of Managerial Instability in Education

The education system is inherently oriented toward long-term objectives, the outcomes of which often emerge after extended periods. Achieving such far-reaching goals requires continuity and stability in leadership. Unfortunately, the education system in Iran has suffered from a lack of managerial consistency and has experienced more frequent leadership changes than many other government ministries.

A review and thematic analysis of the Supreme Leader's statements on the issue of managerial instability in education highlight a key basic code (dated 2/12/1402):

1. Frequent managerial changes within the education system.

Over the years, the Ministry of Education has seen the appointment and replacement of multiple ministers across different administrations. These shifts are typically accompanied by widespread changes at senior, mid-level, and even operational tiers of management.

Such instability significantly hampers the consistent implementation of long-term strategic plans—particularly those with twenty- to thirty-year horizons—ultimately threatening the realization of the education system's broader developmental goals.

4-1-7. The Issue of Routine-Driven Education

Routine-driven practices are a major affliction that affects many administrative bodies in the country, including the education system.

This phenomenon leads to decreased motivation and a lack of progress toward long-term and lofty objectives.

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding the issue of routine-driven practices in education, the primary basic code identified is: (12/2/1385 and 3/5/1386)

2. Breaking free from routine-driven practices in education

Routine-driven behavior refers to the repetitive and monotonous performance of tasks in a dull manner without any innovation or change.

Such an environment erodes hope and enthusiasm among individuals, leading to frustration and ultimately to the inefficiency of the administrative system.

When the goals and position of the education system are properly understood, and systematic and precise planning is conducted to achieve these goals—with clear definitions of roles and responsibilities—it becomes possible to overcome routine-driven stagnation by fostering excitement and motivation.

4-2. Theme of the Strategic Orientations of Education

Having established a clear understanding of the goals and status of education—and after identifying its major challenges—it becomes essential to define the macro-level orientations and strategic approaches of the education system, drawing on the guidance provided in the statements of Imam Khamenei. These strategic directions serve as a compass for aligning educational policy and practice with the broader vision of transformation and systemic reform emphasized by the Supreme Leader.

Adherence to these priorities is crucial not only for charting the right course but also for ensuring that the path taken toward reform is consistent with the values and objectives of the Islamic Republic. As Hoy and Miskel (2015: 416) note, the means of achieving a goal are just as important as the goal itself—underscoring the need for strategic clarity and principled execution.

As previously mentioned, through a structured process of initial and secondary coding, categorization, and thematic analysis, a total of 13 core codes were classified into 4 organizing categories under the overarching theme of “Strategic Orientations of Education.” Based on the frequency and emphasis found in the Supreme Leader's statements, the following directions have been prioritized:

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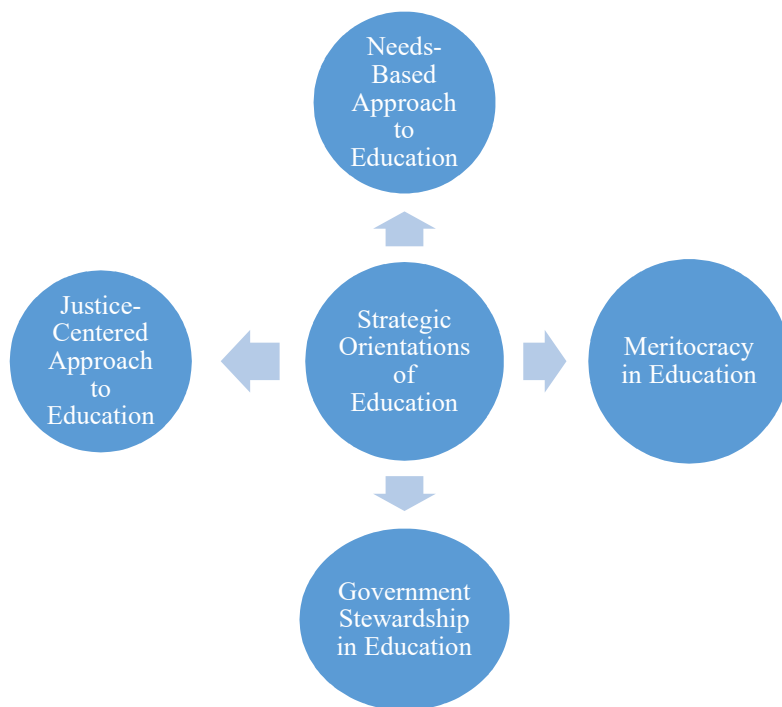


Figure 3: Theme of the Strategic Orientations of Education

4-2-1. Needs-Based Approach to Education

One of the fundamental and strategic orientations of education, the realization of which can resolve many of its current issues, is adopting a needs-based approach.

According to Imam Khamenei (may his shadow be extended), the current education system in our country is not rooted in our internal needs.

The imported and imitative nature of the system has led to a disregard for the nation's specific needs and traditions.

Thus, education must align itself with the actual needs of the country and adjust its orientation accordingly. (9/2/1388 Solar Hijri)

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements concerning the needs-based approach to education, the primary basic codes were identified as follows, ordered by frequency: (Source: Research Findings)

1. Emphasis on beneficial knowledge
2. Balanced distribution across educational disciplines

3. Practical and application-oriented curriculum
4. The issue of university-centrism
5. The misalignment of education with national needs
6. Transformation based on societal needs

One of the key expressions of a needs-based education system is the emphasis on beneficial knowledge (*'ilm al-nāfi'*). This concept refers to any field of learning that responds to the real and pressing needs of society, and it serves as a principal criterion for religiously valuable knowledge—extending far beyond the traditional confines of Qur'anic interpretation and Hadith studies. As Motahhari (2013: 15–18) explains, disciplines such as medicine, engineering, and management, when oriented toward the advancement and welfare of the Islamic society, are regarded as religiously significant. Conversely, even a large body of work in jurisprudence or philosophy may lack such value if it fails to address concrete societal issues.

From this perspective, prioritizing the identification of urgent social needs becomes a necessary step in reforming the education system (Khandan, 2012: 164). Accordingly, one of the core areas for transformation is the promotion of beneficial and forward-looking knowledge that directly contributes to the country's comprehensive development.

Given the nation's diverse needs across educational fields, the strategic distribution of human capital—especially among the youth, whom the Supreme Leader refers to as the country's most vital resource—is essential. Currently, a disproportionate number of top-performing students gravitate toward mathematics and experimental sciences, with aspirations of becoming doctors and engineers. However, there is a pressing demand for capable professionals in fields such as management, economics, law, and policy. Meeting this demand requires stronger educational guidance, investment in foundational sciences, and revitalization of the humanities.

Moreover, just as intellectual capacity is essential, so too is the availability of a well-trained and competent workforce. Therefore, greater attention must be given to technical and vocational education as a means of cultivating practical expertise and addressing labor market needs.

The existing education system, which remains largely reliant on outdated, memory-based approaches, has contributed to the ineffectiveness of many school subjects. Rote memorization continues to take precedence over meaningful, experiential, and deep learning, leaving students burdened with content that often lacks relevance in real life. Yet

the system holds great potential to equip students with essential life skills and values—such as the principles of an Islamic lifestyle, social cooperation, self-discipline, and respect for the rule of law.

Additionally, the pervasive culture of university-centrism and credentialism has further compounded the problem. Many of the country's urgent needs—particularly those that do not require advanced academic qualifications—remain unmet, while university degrees increasingly serve as mere credentials for accessing bureaucratic positions.

Taken together, these factors reveal a deep misalignment between the education system and the actual needs of the country. As such, a genuine and lasting transformation of the system must be grounded in a comprehensive reevaluation of those needs and a reorientation toward meeting them effectively.

4-2-2. Justice-Centered Approach to Education

Another major strategic orientation in the governance of education is adopting a justice-centered and justice-promoting approach, which requires appropriate metrics and indicators to be properly implemented. (19/2/1397)

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding the justice-centered approach to education, the primary basic codes were identified as follows, ordered by frequency: (Source: Research Findings)

1. Justice-centered perspective in education
2. Equal access to educational opportunities
3. Non-discrimination concerning gifted students
4. Strengthening public schools

For education to truly embody a justice-centered approach, it is essential that this perspective be deeply internalized within both policy and practice. Without a clear and consistent understanding of educational justice, the system risks becoming fragmented by multiple and potentially conflicting interpretations that can lead to misguided reforms and outcomes.

When a justice-oriented vision is clearly defined and supported by genuine political will, its impact becomes visible throughout society—for instance, through the reduction of class-based disparities and the promotion of relative equity across different social strata. Achieving such equity necessitates ensuring that students in all regions have fair and equitable access to quality educational resources and opportunities.

It is important to clarify, however, that justice in education does not imply absolute uniformity. Rather, it requires recognizing and responding to individual differences, enabling learners to benefit in accordance with their unique talents and capacities. In this context, particular attention must be paid to gifted and high-achieving students, ensuring that the pursuit of equality does not inadvertently result in the neglect of exceptional potential.

A recurring emphasis in the statements of Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved) is the need to strengthen public education and to prevent the unchecked proliferation of costly private schools. Public schools should reach a level of academic and moral quality that inspires trust among families—so that attendance is a matter of choice, not merely a consequence of financial limitations.

This does not mean disregarding the innovations found in private educational models. Rather, it calls for a careful and balanced approach that allows for constructive learning from private initiatives, while ensuring that such practices do not compromise the integrity of the public education system or undermine its commitment to justice-based principles. (Khamenei, 12/2/1402).

4-2-3. Government Stewardship in Education

Education is a responsibility of the state, and the government is the custodian of the people's education and upbringing. Since politics is not separate from religion, in reality, religion itself also assumes responsibility for this matter. Thus, education has a sovereign nature, and ensuring its provision is one of the duties of the Islamic government. (Statements, 9/4/1386)

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding government stewardship in education, the primary basic codes were identified as follows, ordered by frequency: (Source: Research Findings)

1. The sovereign responsibility of the state in education
2. Opposition to outsourcing education

While some advocate for removing education from direct governmental oversight—citing reasons such as decentralization, budget concerns, and increased efficiency—Imam Khamenei (may his shadow be extended) firmly emphasizes that education must remain under state administration.

He warns against disorder and irregularities arising from actions such as

privatization of education, uncontrolled expansion of private schools, and the implementation of foreign frameworks like the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

It is noteworthy that while the Supreme Leader accepts privatization in other areas, such as certain sectors of the economy, his insistence on keeping education under direct government stewardship highlights the unique and distinguished role of this institution compared to other fields. (Statements, 12/2/1402)

4-2-4. Meritocracy in Education

Another key strategic orientation in the education system—related specifically to human resources—is the establishment of meritocracy, meaning that high-quality personnel should enter the education sector and managers should be selected whose main concern is the upbringing and training of revolutionary-minded individuals. (Statements, 17/2/1393)

Based on the review and data mining of the Supreme Leader's statements regarding meritocracy in education, the primary basic code identified is: (Source: Research Findings)

1. Recruitment of high-quality personnel

Transformation in any field requires motivated, committed, and competent human resources. Accordingly, managers appointed in the education system must be individuals who are dedicated to its goals, deeply concerned about its transformation, and capable of addressing its challenges with appropriate strategic orientations.

Otherwise, the presence of unqualified personnel will hinder the progress of the education system. (Statements, 11/6/1399)

5. Conclusion

Following a comprehensive review of the statements of Imam Khamenei (may his dignity be preserved), the initial coding process was conducted. At this stage, individual statements and concepts were identified and analyzed with a detailed, micro-level focus. Once the initial codes were established, they were refined through an integrative process in which similar items were merged, and succinct, representative phrases were assigned as secondary codes. These refined codes were then grouped into broader organizing categories, ultimately forming the foundation for the development of the overarching thematic structure.

According to the findings, all statements were categorized into three central and overarching themes titled:

“The Importance and Status of Education,” “Major Issues in Education,” and “Strategic Orientations of Education.”

Accordingly:

- For the first theme, the codes were placed under four organizing categories:

“Necessity of Addressing Goals,” “Importance of Education in Human Development,” “Importance of Education in Social Development,” and “Importance of Education in Civilization Building.”

- For the second theme, eight organizing categories were identified:

“Dependency on the West,” “The Issue of Teachers,” “Outdated Nature of Education,” “Textbooks and Curriculum,” “Politicization of Education,” “Education Without Upbringing,” “Managerial Instability,” and “Routine-Driven Education.”

- For the third theme, four organizing categories were presented:

“Needs-Based Approach,” “Justice-Centered Approach,” “Government Stewardship,” and “Meritocracy in Education.”

In total, 43 basic codes were derived from the Supreme Leader’s statements.

The approximate frequency of emphasis for each code, as observed in the statements, was also recorded and listed accordingly.

It is important to note that the organizing categories were developed in a data-driven manner. In the first theme, they were ordered by conceptual importance, while in the second and third themes, they were ranked by the relative frequency of occurrence.

Additionally, the basic codes within each theme were prioritized based on the estimated frequency of reference, and this number was indicated alongside each code.

Table 4: Categorization of Themes of "Educational Governance Based on the Statements of Imam Khamenei (may his shadow be extended)"

Basic Codes	Organizing Categories	Overarching Theme
Specification of Goals (5)	Necessity of Addressing Goals	Goals and Status of Education
Transformation Based on Goals (3)		
Importance of Human Development (23)	Importance of Education in Human Development	
The Golden Twelve-Year Opportunity (7)		
Generation Training (5)		
Importance of Teachers’ Role in Education (4)		
Importance of Nurturing Elites (2)	Importance of Education in Social Development	
National Progress Dependent on Education (18)		
Education as the Foundation of the Country’s Future (13)		
Education as the Nation’s Most Important Task (5)		
Most Influential Connection with Society (5)	Importance of Education in Civilization Building	
Foundation for the New Islamic Civilization (4)		
Future Civilization-Builders (2)	The Issue of Dependency on the West	Major Issues in Education
Imported Nature of Education (14)		
The Issue of the 2030 Agenda (5)		
Westernization of Education (3)		
Confrontation with the International System of Domination (2)		

Basic Codes	Organizing Categories	Overarching Theme
The Issue of Teachers' Livelihood (5)	The Issue of Teachers	
The Issue of Teacher Training (3)		
The Issue of Teacher Shortage (3)		
Lack of Modernization in Education (9)	The Issue of the Outdated Nature of Education	
The Issue of Textbook Attractiveness (4)	The Issue of Textbooks and Curriculum	
The Issue of Memory-Based Learning (3)		
Political Exploitation of Education (3)	The Issue of Politicization of Education	
Political Exploitation of Youth (2)		
Partisan Perspectives in Education (2)		
The Issue of Eliminating the Upbringing Department (4)	The Issue of Education Without Upbringing	
Weakness of Upbringing Activities (2)		
Frequent Managerial Changes in Education (3)	The Issue of Managerial Instability in Education	
Breaking Free from Routine in Education (2)	The Issue of Routine-Driven Education	
Emphasis on Beneficial Knowledge (5)	Needs-Based Approach to Education	Strategic Orientations of Education

Basic Codes	Organizing Categories	Overarching Theme
Balanced Distribution Across Educational Disciplines (5)		
Practicality of Courses (3)		
University-Centrism Disease (3)		
Misalignment of Education with Needs (3)		
Transformation Based on Needs (3)		
Justice-Centered Perspective in Education (3)	Justice-Centered Approach to Education	
Equal Educational Opportunity (3)		
Non-Discrimination Concerning Gifted Students (3)		
Strengthening Public Schools (3)		
The Sovereign Responsibility of the State in Education (9)	Government Stewardship in Education	
Opposition to Outsourcing Education (2)		
Recruitment of High-Quality Personnel (3)	Meritocracy in Education	

Following the data mining and analysis conducted on the relevant codes and categories, a more precise cognitive analysis of educational governance based on the statements of Imam Khamenei can be presented.

To achieve this, it is essential to fully understand both the goals (desired state) and the challenges (current state) of the education system, and then to seek appropriate methods for achieving transformation. These methods, at the operational level, must be guided by the macro-strategic directions articulated by Imam Khamenei and addressed in this study.

In summary, the Supreme Leader's statements were categorized into three overarching themes in this research:

the Goals and Status of Education, the Major Issues of Education, and the Strategic Orientations of Education.

These thematic categories can provide valuable insights both for education officials and for stakeholders concerned with educational reform.

A brief overview of each overarching theme is as follows:

1. Theme of the Goals and Status of Education:

After emphasizing the necessity of addressing educational goals, the importance and objectives of education were discussed in three dimensions: **human development, social development, and civilization building.**

The connection between educational goals and these three dimensions highlights that the intended objectives of the national education system are aligned with the broader objectives of the Islamic Revolution and its five-stage realization process:

Islamic Revolution → Islamic System → Islamic Government → Islamic Society → Islamic Civilization.

The foundation for achieving this process is human development, which is one of the emphasized goals of Imam Khamenei for the education system.

2. Theme of the Major Issues of Education:

After outlining the desired state and identifying the aspirations to be achieved by the education system, the research addressed the current situation and the major issues emphasized in the statements of Imam Khamenei.

These issues, in order of frequency, include:

Dependency on the West, the Issue of Teachers, the Outdated Nature of Education, the Issue of Textbooks and Curriculum, Politicization of Education, Education Without Upbringing, Managerial Instability in Education, and Routine-Driven Education.

Referring to these as “issues” implies that they are problematic or complex matters requiring solutions, as they impede the organization's ability to achieve its goals (Faghihipour et al., 2021). Therefore, if solutions are not found for these challenges, the education system will inevitably face difficulties in achieving its designated objectives.

3. Theme of the Strategic Orientations of Education:

After assessing the desired and current states, the macro-oriented strategic directions outlined in the Supreme Leader’s statements were extracted to guide the education system towards its goals. These four main strategic directions are:

Needs-Based Approach to Education, Justice-Centered Approach to Education, Government Stewardship in Education, and Meritocracy in Education.

According to the Supreme Leader’s statements, when the strategic directions are clearly defined, it becomes possible to create a comprehensive roadmap that enables proper prioritization and prevents contradictory and redundant actions.

From the totality of these findings, it can be concluded that from the perspective of the Supreme Leader, the educational system must be based on:

- Islamic principles,
- The training of committed and competent human resources,
- Intellectual and scientific independence,
- Resistance against imported models.

The findings of this study are significant from two perspectives:

- **Theoretical:**
It offers a systematic framework for educational governance based on the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, which can serve as a foundation for future research.
- **Practical:**
The proposed framework can act as a roadmap for policymakers and senior managers in the field of education.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Formulation of a strategic document based on the identified three overarching themes.

2. Revision of the teacher training system with an emphasis on meritocracy.
3. Designing a monitoring and evaluation system based on the indicators derived from this study.

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