Management Strategies and Engineering Sciences 2026; 8(2):1-14



Analyzing the Components of International Educational Systems in Alignment with Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document of Education

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Received: 2025-10-09 **Revised:** 2026-03-11 **Accepted:** 2026-03-18 **Published:** 2026-03-30

Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the components of international educational systems and explain their alignment with Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document of Education. The study was applied in purpose and employed a qualitative approach within an interpretive–critical paradigm using a comparative–analytical design. Data were collected through document analysis of official documents and policy reports of ten international educational systems—including Singapore, Swiss Matura, the International Primary Curriculum, Australia, Cambridge, the International Baccalaureate, Brussels, France, Britain, and Geneva—interviews with ten principals, teachers, and graduates of these schools, and the views of experts in the philosophy of education, curriculum planning, and educational policy obtained through interviews and focus groups. Data were analyzed using directed content analysis, deductive thematic analysis, and comparative matrix analysis. The findings revealed four main components across all systems: curriculum, student characteristics, teacher and principal characteristics, and educational leadership and management, with common emphasis on active learning, competency development, process-oriented assessment, teacher professionalization, instructional leadership, and evidence-based decision-making. Components such as active learning, interactive instruction, participatory management, and teacher professionalization are potentially compatible with the Fundamental Transformation Document. However, elements that weaken national and religious identity or prioritize transnational standards over indigenous objectives require revision or exclusion. The study concludes that international experiences should be utilized through critical localization, selective adaptation, and conceptual reconstruction within the cultural and identity-based foundations of Iran's education system.

Keywords: *Comparative education, Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, International educational systems, Localization*

How to cite this article:
Hosseini Tavasol, A., Mirzaei, N., & Kamali, N. (2026). Analyzing the Components of International Educational Systems in Alignment with Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document of Education. Management Strategies and Engineering Sciences, 8(2), 1-14.

1. Introduction

Education systems are increasingly required to operate under conditions of rapid technological change, economic restructuring, cultural diversification, new patterns of social interaction, and shifting expectations regarding the competencies that learners need for participation in contemporary societies. As a result, educational reform can no longer be understood merely as the revision of textbooks, the modification of administrative procedures, or the expansion of access to schooling. Rather, reform increasingly involves the coordinated transformation of curriculum, teaching and learning processes, student competencies, teacher professionalism, school leadership, governance mechanisms, assessment systems, and the institutional capacity to respond to changing social needs. International experiences demonstrate that educational systems are continually reconstructing their policies and institutional arrangements in response to these pressures, although the form, direction, and normative foundations of such reforms differ substantially across national contexts. For example, the legal and institutional modernization of the Chinese education system illustrates the importance of

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policy and regulatory architecture in educational development, while comparative examination of Iran and Sweden similarly highlights the contextual differences through which educational goals, structures, and practices are organized [1, 2]. Consequently, comparative examination of international educational systems can provide an important basis for understanding alternative reform pathways, provided that foreign experiences are interpreted in relation to the cultural, institutional, and policy context of the receiving educational system.

The increasing significance of comparative educational analysis is particularly evident as countries seek to balance international developments with nationally defined educational priorities. Educational systems inevitably interact with global knowledge flows, technological innovations, international assessment cultures, new pedagogical practices, and changing conceptions of human development; nevertheless, the adoption of international practices does not necessarily lead to desirable outcomes when institutional, cultural, and ideological differences are overlooked. Comparative research on teacher education, for example, has demonstrated that recruitment, preparation, and professional development arrangements can vary substantially between educational systems and that apparently successful practices need to be understood within the structures that sustain them [3]. Likewise, contemporary analyses of gifted education indicate that policy intentions, educational practice, and students' socio-emotional experiences may not always correspond, demonstrating that educational quality depends not only on formal policy design but also on how policy is translated into institutional practice [4]. These observations underscore the importance of moving beyond descriptive comparisons of national systems toward an examination of the components, relationships, and underlying assumptions through which educational models function.

For Iran, this issue has particular importance because educational development is expected to occur within the normative and strategic framework established by the Fundamental Transformation Document of Education. The document provides an overarching orientation for transforming education in accordance with national, cultural, ethical, identity-related, and developmental objectives and therefore constitutes an essential reference point for evaluating both domestic reforms and potentially applicable international experiences. Studies examining the macro-policies of the Fundamental Transformation Document have emphasized its intended role in directing the development of the national education system [5]. At the same time, analyses of the general policies for transforming Iranian education have identified continuing challenges in translating strategic orientations into effective organizational and educational practices [6]. Research concerned with the concept of the standard school has likewise attempted to derive characteristics of an ideal educational institution from transformation-oriented policy documents [7]. These studies suggest that the central challenge is no longer merely articulating reform aspirations, but determining how those aspirations can be operationalized through coherent educational structures and how useful experiences from other systems can be selectively reconstructed within Iran's own educational framework.

The need for such reconstruction is reinforced by evidence that the Iranian education system continues to face interconnected structural, managerial, curricular, and governance challenges. Recent analyses of the governance problem system in Iranian education indicate that educational difficulties form an interdependent configuration rather than a collection of isolated deficiencies, meaning that interventions in one component may generate consequences for others [8]. Calls for dynamizing secondary education similarly emphasize the need to enhance the responsiveness and adaptability of educational structures to emerging needs [9]. Research on change management within the structure of Iran's education system further demonstrates the relevance of systematic organizational capacity for implementing transformation rather than treating reform as a sequence of disconnected administrative measures [10]. Moreover, the identification of student behaviors that occur outside established institutional rules draws attention to the complex interaction between formal regulations, school culture, learner behavior, and the broader organization of education [11]. Together, these findings indicate that meaningful transformation requires simultaneous attention to educational structures, institutional culture, learner needs, human resources, and governance.

Governance is particularly important because the effectiveness of educational reform depends substantially on how priorities are formulated, responsibilities are distributed, decisions are made, and institutional actors are held accountable. Studies of good governance in Iran's national education system have emphasized governance as a multidimensional requirement for improving the functioning of educational institutions [12]. Related research has

connected good educational governance with the pursuit of educational justice, suggesting that fairness, responsiveness, participation, accountability, and effective institutional arrangements are integral to the realization of equitable educational outcomes [13]. International experience likewise warns against reducing educational management to measurable performance alone. A historically informed critique of performance management in Australian higher education, for instance, illustrates how managerial systems and performance frameworks can reshape institutional priorities and professional practices in ways that require critical examination [14]. In addition, emerging scholarship on algorithmic governance suggests that artificial intelligence may increasingly influence educational policy, lifelong learning systems, and decisions concerning human development [15]. Thus, evaluating international educational systems requires attention not only to their instructional innovations but also to the governance assumptions underlying their operation.

Curriculum constitutes another central dimension of educational transformation because it links broad educational purposes to the actual knowledge, competencies, values, and learning experiences provided to students. Contemporary curriculum reforms increasingly emphasize active learning, competency development, learner participation, interdisciplinarity, and flexible combinations of face-to-face and technology-mediated instruction. The growing literature on flipped classroom design, for example, indicates that digitally supported reorganization of teaching and learning has become closely associated with broader processes of digital transformation and sustainable education [16]. Research on innovative virtual learning models in Iran similarly reflects efforts to reconsider conventional educational delivery and to develop learning environments that are more adaptable to new technological and pedagogical conditions [17]. Distance education also has a longer institutional and conceptual history within Iran's educational system, providing an important foundation for understanding the opportunities and challenges associated with nontraditional forms of instruction [18]. These developments suggest that curriculum analysis should address not only prescribed subject matter but also methods of learning organization, technological mediation, assessment, student agency, and the coherence between instructional innovations and national educational goals.

Digital transformation has, in fact, become one of the most influential forces reshaping educational systems internationally. Digital transformation affects organizational structures and leadership alongside pedagogy, curriculum, communication, and institutional decision-making. Research on digital transformation based on e-leadership in higher education demonstrates the importance of leadership capacity in integrating technological change with institutional development rather than treating digitalization as a purely technical process [19]. More specialized educational fields likewise illustrate the need to integrate technological and design innovation into professional education; research on Mashrabiya-inspired kinetic systems in architectural education, for example, demonstrates how dynamic technological approaches can connect educational environments with professional practice and culturally meaningful design traditions [20]. In entrepreneurship education, systematic analysis of innovative learning strategies has similarly highlighted institutional efforts to reduce gaps between existing educational provision and the competencies required in digitally transformed environments [21]. Such developments are relevant to comparative education because they show that technological innovation becomes educationally meaningful only when it is incorporated into curriculum design, institutional structures, professional preparation, and appropriate cultural contexts.

Artificial intelligence represents an especially significant dimension of contemporary educational transformation. Iranian research has increasingly examined both the general application of artificial intelligence in educational settings and the development of models for its systematic use in teaching and learning [22, 23]. Studies concerned with personalized learning further suggest that artificial intelligence may enable educational systems to respond more precisely to differences among learners by adapting content, learning pathways, and instructional support to individual characteristics [24]. Comparable international scholarship has discussed artificial intelligence as a potentially transformative force in the reform of national education systems [25]. At the higher-education level, systematic evidence indicates that the relationship between artificial intelligence and student engagement is partly dependent on the teaching methods through which AI-supported learning is implemented [26]. These findings caution against interpreting technological sophistication as an educational value in itself. Instead, the relevance of AI for educational reform depends on pedagogical purpose, teacher competence, assessment practices, ethical governance,

accessibility, and compatibility with the broader objectives of the educational system.

Despite the growing importance of digital technologies, teachers remain central to the quality and effectiveness of education. Technological tools may alter instructional practices, but they do not eliminate the importance of teachers' disciplinary knowledge, pedagogical understanding, professional judgment, communication skills, and capacity to respond to learners. A systematic review of teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in reading instruction demonstrates the continuing importance of integrating subject knowledge with knowledge of how particular content can be effectively taught [27]. The professional role of educators is also inseparable from questions of evaluation and ethics. Research on human-resource performance evaluation in higher education has highlighted the need to incorporate ethical orientations into the assessment of professional performance rather than relying solely on technical or output-based criteria [28]. From a broader educational perspective, the culture within which teachers and educational institutions generate and exchange ideas also matters; analyses comparing ideation within academic education with culturally grounded perspectives emphasize that creativity and intellectual development are embedded within broader cultural and value systems [29]. Consequently, the study of international educational systems must consider teachers and principals not only as implementers of prescribed curricula but as professional, ethical, cultural, and pedagogical agents.

The desired characteristics of students constitute a similarly important analytical dimension. Contemporary educational systems increasingly seek to develop learners who are self-directed, creative, collaborative, digitally capable, socially responsible, and able to function in culturally diverse environments. Yet definitions of the "ideal learner" are not culturally neutral. Educational policies embody assumptions about identity, social roles, citizenship, opportunity, and the distribution of power. Recent analysis of education policy as a recursive system of gendered power illustrates how educational structures may reproduce social relations even when policies appear formally neutral [30]. In culturally diverse societies, multicultural education therefore requires deliberate policy design rather than the simple acknowledgment of diversity. The development and validation of a multicultural education policy model for Iran's public education system indicates the importance of reconciling diversity with the institutional and cultural purposes of national education [31]. Skill-oriented education raises comparable questions regarding the kinds of competencies educational systems prioritize and the policy discourses through which those priorities are legitimized [32]. Accordingly, comparison of international models should examine how student competencies, identity, cultural diversity, citizenship, and skill development are conceptualized and whether these orientations can be reconciled with Iran's educational philosophy.

These issues become particularly significant when international educational experiences are considered as potential resources for educational reform in Iran. The attraction of successful international models can encourage policymakers to reproduce visible institutional arrangements while overlooking the historical, cultural, economic, and organizational conditions that made those arrangements functional in their original settings. International comparison is most useful when it facilitates analytical learning rather than imitation. The Iranian educational system therefore requires a selective approach capable of distinguishing between universally useful educational mechanisms, context-sensitive practices that require modification, and components that may be inconsistent with national educational foundations. This distinction is particularly important given the diversity of reform domains simultaneously confronting educational systems, including curriculum modernization, teacher preparation, digital education, artificial intelligence, governance, multicultural education, student development, skills training, and leadership. The accumulated Iranian and international literature indicates substantial interest in each of these areas independently, but their interdependence calls for a more integrated framework capable of examining how curriculum, student characteristics, professional roles, and leadership arrangements function together.

Furthermore, educational transformation cannot be reduced to the adoption of isolated innovations because the effectiveness of each component depends on its relationship with the remainder of the system. Digital learning cannot achieve its potential without appropriate teacher competencies and leadership; artificial intelligence cannot support meaningful personalization without sound pedagogical design and ethical governance; student-centered learning requires corresponding forms of assessment and classroom management; and participatory governance is unlikely to produce sustainable improvement without organizational capacity and a coherent educational vision. Similarly, teacher professionalization requires alignment

among recruitment, training, evaluation, career development, and school leadership, while multicultural education requires connections among curriculum, identity formation, educational policy, and institutional culture. The international experiences reflected in recent research therefore suggest that educational quality emerges from systemic coherence rather than from the accumulation of individual innovations. For Iran, this observation is particularly important because the Fundamental Transformation Document itself represents a comprehensive vision of educational change, making it necessary to assess international experiences in terms of their systemic compatibility rather than merely their apparent effectiveness.

Although existing studies have generated valuable knowledge concerning educational governance, transformation policies, ideal school characteristics, teacher education, digitalization, artificial intelligence, multicultural education, human-resource evaluation, skill orientation, and organizational change, the literature remains comparatively fragmented. Individual studies generally focus on a particular policy issue, technology, educational level, professional group, or national experience. As a result, there remains a need for a structured comparative analysis capable of bringing together the principal components through which international educational systems can be understood and evaluating them against the normative and strategic requirements of Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document. Such an analysis is necessary because educational borrowing should involve more than identifying successful practices: it must determine what those practices are intended to achieve, how they interact with other components of the educational system, what cultural and institutional assumptions they embody, and what modifications would be necessary before they could contribute to national educational transformation. This perspective shifts comparative education from the question of which international system is "best" to the more analytically productive question of which components may be compatible, conditionally adaptable, or incompatible with the objectives and foundations of Iranian education.

Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to analyze the principal components of selected international educational systems and explain their degree of alignment with Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document of Education in order to identify components that can be adopted, critically adapted, localized, or excluded within the Iranian educational context.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Approach and Paradigm

The present study was conducted within the interpretive–critical paradigm. This paradigm enables a deep understanding of social and cultural realities as well as recognition of the historical contexts in which educational models are formed. In this study, the focus on understanding international school systems and analyzing their interaction with Iran's educational structures, based on the "Fundamental Reform Document of Education" (FRDE), necessitates an approach that goes beyond mere description and engages in critical reflection on the philosophy of education and the functions of international educational systems (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.2. Research Objective

In terms of purpose, this study is applied research, since its findings can be utilized in educational policymaking and in designing an indigenous model of international schools aligned with the Fundamental Reform Document. Accordingly, the study does not merely seek to produce theoretical knowledge; rather, it aims to feed valid data and models into the flow of educational decision-making and planning.

2.3. Research Type and Design

In terms of data type, this study adopts a qualitative approach while drawing on elements of the mixed-methods approach. Primary data were collected from documents, interviews, and focus group sessions, while descriptive quantitative data were used for supplementary ranking and comparison. The research design was formulated as comparative–analytical, based on directed content analysis and deductive thematic analysis.

2.4. Research Population, Sample, and Scope of Study

The research population is multi-layered and was designed in correspondence with the three central research questions. The first layer concerns the identification of the four components of international schools—namely, curriculum, student characteristics, teacher and principal characteristics, and the leadership and management system—for which the official documents and policy reports of selected schools in countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, Turkey, the UAE, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom

were examined. The second layer addresses the explanation of similarities and differences among the models, in which data from six diverse international schools were combined through documentary analysis and semi-structured interviews with comparative education specialists. The third layer is devoted to analyzing alignment with the Fundamental Reform Document, in which the full content of the FRDE and the National Curriculum was used, and experts in the philosophy of education, curriculum planning, and educational policy were consulted and provided feedback through focus groups.

The research sample consists of ten international schools/educational systems from different geographical regions, as presented in Table (1).

Table 1. Studied Schools and Educational Systems

No.	School / Educational System	Country or Region
1	Singapore International Schools	Singapore
2	Swiss Schools (Swiss Matura)	Switzerland
3	IPC Schools (International Primary Curriculum)	Multinational
4	Australian Schools	Australia
5	Schools Based on the Cambridge Curriculum	UK and Other Countries
6	IB Schools (International Baccalaureate)	Multinational
7	International School of Brussels (ISB)	Belgium
8	French Schools	France
9	British International Schools	United Kingdom
10	Geneva Schools	France

In addition, ten human participants were selected from among principals, teachers, graduates, and former students of these schools using purposive sampling, in such a way that diversity in educational system, work experience, and gender was observed within the sample composition.

2.5. Data Collection Instruments and Methods

Data were collected from four main sources. First, documentary analysis covered official documents, policy statements, and reports of the selected schools, in addition to reports from international organizations including the OECD, UNESCO, and the IBO; for this component, a conceptual checklist based on the research axes was developed. Second, structured interviews were conducted with principals and teachers experienced in international schools. Third, semi-structured interviews were held with comparative education specialists to explain the similarities and differences among the models. Fourth, focus group sessions were conducted with experts in the philosophy of education, curriculum planning, and educational policy to determine the conceptual and value-based correspondence of the models with the Fundamental Reform Document.

2.6. Data Analysis Method

The collected data were systematically coded and analyzed. The analyses were predominantly qualitative, based on the directed content analysis and deductive thematic analysis approach. To answer the first research question, the data extracted from school documents were subjected to content analysis across the four main axes of curriculum, student, teacher and principal, and leadership and management. To answer the second research question, a comparative matrix was developed and completed to identify the commonalities and differences among the models. Finally, to answer the third research question, the resulting themes were compared with the key concepts of the Fundamental Reform Document through the process of open, axial, and selective coding.

2.7. Validity and Reliability (Credibility and Trustworthiness) of the Research

The corroboration of findings was ensured through several validation strategies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These strategies include source triangulation for the cross-verification of data, parallel review by two researchers and calculation of the coding agreement coefficient, sending a summary of the findings to the participants for feedback, drawing on expert opinion in the interpretation of concepts, and the researcher's continuous reflexivity to control potential biases. Moreover, the geographical diversity of the schools and the differences among educational systems were taken into account to enhance the transferability and generalizability of the comparative concepts.

2.8. Ethical Considerations

In the use of documents, only official and authorized sources were employed, and in the interview- and focus group-based components, informed consent was obtained from the participants, and the confidentiality of information and the anonymity of individuals were maintained. These measures are consistent with the requirements of the MSES journal regarding obtaining the necessary permissions and observing research ethics principles.

3. Findings and Results

The findings were derived from a directed content analysis of the documents, curricula, professional competency frameworks, and management models of ten international educational systems and schools, including Singapore International Schools, the Swiss Matura system, the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), Australian schools, the Cambridge curriculum, the International Baccalaureate (IB), the International School of Brussels, French schools, British schools, and Geneva schools. The analytical process was conducted at three levels: first, identifying the components of each system across four main dimensions; second, comparing similarities and differences among the systems; and third, aligning the resulting themes with the orientations and educational domains emphasized in Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document of Education and the National Curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The results indicated that the four dimensions of curriculum, student characteristics, teacher and principal characteristics, and management and leadership were present across all systems, although the degree of emphasis placed on each dimension varied.

In these systems, the curriculum is not merely a collection of subjects; rather, it serves as a framework for guiding students' holistic development, fostering competencies, and creating meaningful learning experiences. Analysis of this dimension, based on Tyler's framework, revealed that curriculum objectives extend beyond the transmission of knowledge and emphasize the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and global citizenship. Content has shifted toward integration and interdisciplinarity, while teaching and learning methods have moved toward active, student-centered approaches. In the area of assessment, sole reliance on final examinations has been replaced by process-oriented, performance-based, and self-assessment approaches. The details of curriculum components in the educational systems under study are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Curriculum Components in the International Educational Systems Examined

Educational System/School	Goal Orientation	Content Organization	Teaching–Learning Methods	Assessment Approach
Singapore International Schools	Competency-based education, thinking, innovation, and future readiness	Integration of subject knowledge with 21st-century skills	Problem-solving, collaborative learning, and the use of technology	Combination of formative assessment and criterion-referenced assessment
Swiss Matura	Academic depth, intellectual independence, and university preparation	Relatively coherent, discipline-based organization	Analytical study, research, and scientific reasoning	Continuous assessment and standardized final examinations
IPC	Children's holistic development and international learning	Interdisciplinary, thematic, and unit-based	Hands-on activities, projects, and inquiry	Process-oriented assessment and documentation of learning progress
Australian Schools	General capabilities, citizenship, and lifelong learning	Linking content to capabilities and learning areas	Active, collaborative, and inclusive learning	Formative, performance-based, and feedback-oriented assessment
Cambridge	Academic mastery, critical thinking, and academic preparedness	Subject-based structure with clear educational standards	Analytical learning, inquiry, and research	Continuous assessment and standardized examinations
IB	Inquiry, international-mindedness, and balanced development	Concept-based, interdisciplinary, and inquiry-driven	Research, projects, dialogue, and reflection	Performance-based, formative, and self-assessment
International School of Brussels	Personal development, cultural diversity, and global responsibility	Flexible, intercultural, and student-centered	Collaborative and experiential learning	Descriptive assessment and continuous feedback
French Schools	Foundational knowledge, general culture, and intellectual development	Structured, subject-based, and grounded in the national curriculum	Guided instruction combined with analytical activities	Continuous assessment and formal examinations
British Schools	Academic achievement, character development, and responsibility	Based on the national curriculum and level-based standards	A combination of direct instruction, projects, and group activities	Classroom assessment and standardized examinations

Geneva Schools	Multiculturalism, peace, coexistence, and sustainable development	Interdisciplinary and responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity	Dialogue, participation, and experiential learning	Process-oriented assessment and attention to individual development

As shown in Table 2, the overarching theme is the "shift from content transmission to the cultivation of multidimensional competencies," which is aligned with the Fundamental Transformation Document's emphasis on holistic education. Alongside the curriculum dimension, the second key focus of the analysis concerns the characteristics and competencies that international systems envision for the ideal student. In these systems, the student is regarded as active, responsible, research-oriented, self-directed, and ethically grounded. Characteristics such as self-regulation, resilience, critical thinking, and social interaction were repeatedly emphasized across all the systems examined. Table 3 presents these characteristics and their respective components.

Table 3. Student Characteristics in the International Educational Systems Examined

Main Category	Extracted Components	Manifestations in the Systems Examined	Alignment with the Fundamental Transformation Document
Self-direction and self-regulation	Goal setting, time management, monitoring learning, and responsibility	IB, Cambridge, Singapore, and British schools	Emphasis on intellectual development, willpower, and responsibility
Thinking and problem-solving	Critical thinking, analysis, reasoning, creativity, and decision-making	Cambridge, IB, Australia, and Swiss Matura	Strengthening rationality, learning, and innovation
Social skills	Effective communication, teamwork, empathy, and participation	IPC, Australian schools, Brussels, and Geneva	Social development and preparation for collective life
Ethics and responsibility	Adherence to rules, honesty, respect, and accountability	IB, French, British, and Singaporean schools	Moral education and commitment to values
Identity and interculturality	Respect for diversity, dialogue, and intercultural interaction	IB, Brussels, Geneva, and IPC	Can be redesigned around Iranian–Islamic identity
Resilience and adaptability	Emotion regulation, flexibility, and constructive engagement with challenges	Singapore, Australia, and international schools	Promoting mental health and the capacity to cope with situations
Lifelong learning	Curiosity, inquiry, and intrinsic motivation to learn	IB, IPC, Cambridge, and Geneva schools	Emphasis on continuous learning and research orientation

The central theme of this section is the active and responsible student, which is compatible with the educational domains articulated in the Fundamental Transformation Document. The third dimension of the findings focused on the characteristics of teachers and principals. In these systems, teachers are recognized as facilitators of learning, assessors of the learning process, and behavioral role models, while principals assume the role of instructional leaders. The key components associated with these characteristics are categorized in Table 4.

Table 4. Characteristics of Teachers and Principals in the International Educational Systems Examined

Group	Main Categories	Extracted Components	Expected Function
Teachers	Professional competence	Subject expertise, instructional design, and classroom management	Effective implementation of the curriculum and creation of a learning environment
Teachers	Learning facilitation	Inquiry, project guidance, collaborative learning, and feedback provision	Activating students' roles in the learning process
Teachers	Educational assessment	Formative, performance-based, descriptive assessment, and learning-data analysis	Identifying learning needs and supporting continuous improvement
Teachers	Ethics and human relations	Fairness, respect, empathy, responsibility, and role modeling	Enhancing psychological safety and students' moral development
Teachers	Professional development	Continuous learning, participation in learning communities, and educational innovation	Updating professional competencies
Principals	Instructional leadership	Articulating a vision, guiding the curriculum, and monitoring learning quality	Aligning school activities with educational goals
Principals	Staff empowerment	Professional support, mentoring, feedback, and creating growth opportunities	Enhancing teacher motivation and effectiveness
Principals	Participation and communication	Interaction with students, families, teachers, and the local community	Expanding the school's social capital
Principals	Change management	Innovation, flexibility, conflict resolution, and evidence-based decision-making	Responding to the changing needs of the educational environment
Principals	Professional ethics	Fairness, transparency, accountability, and respect for human dignity	Strengthening trust and a positive organizational culture

The findings presented in Table 4 confirm that the professionalization of teachers' and principals' roles constitutes a common theme across the systems examined. Finally, the fourth dimension addressed educational management and leadership. Here, the school is viewed as a learning organization in which management has shifted from purely administrative functions toward participatory and accountable leadership. The key components of management and leadership are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Management and Leadership Components in the International Educational Systems Examined

Component	Key Indicators	Prominent Examples	Implications for Iran's Educational System
Instructional leadership	Focus on the quality of teaching, learning, and curriculum implementation	IB, IPC, Singapore, and Australia	Strengthening the principal's role as an educational and pedagogical leader
Participatory leadership	Involvement of teachers, students, and families in decision-making	Brussels, Geneva, Australian, and British schools	Developing councils and mechanisms for meaningful participation in schools
Distributed leadership	Delegation of responsibilities to educational and professional teams	Singapore, Australia, and IB	Strengthening learning teams and reducing managerial centralization
Quality assurance	Self-evaluation, external evaluation, data analysis, and continuous improvement	Cambridge, the United Kingdom, France, and Swiss Matura	Establishing a multidimensional school performance evaluation system
Learning organizational culture	Continuous learning, dialogue, innovation, and professional collaboration	IB, IPC, Geneva, and Brussels schools	Creating an innovative school environment characterized by organizational learning
School–family–community relations	Two-way interaction, information sharing, participation, and accountability	Australian, British, and international schools	Strengthening family participation in the educational process
Diversity management	Attention to cultural, linguistic, learning, and individual differences	Geneva, Brussels, IB, and IPC	Addressing students' regional, cultural, and individual diversity
Evidence-based decision-making	Use of educational data and stakeholder feedback	Singapore, Australia, and Cambridge	Developing an information system and data-driven practices in schools

In conclusion, the findings demonstrated that the four aforementioned dimensions operate as an interconnected system. The comparative examination of components such as active learning, attention to individual differences, and instructional leadership indicated that, although these components show considerable alignment with the orientations of the Fundamental Transformation Document, any adaptation of these international experiences should be contextualized in accordance with the cultural, religious, and historical foundations of Iranian education. Such contextualization is necessary to develop an appropriate and indigenous educational model.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study analyzed ten international educational systems across four interrelated dimensions—curriculum, student characteristics, teacher and principal characteristics, and educational leadership and management—and examined their alignment with Iran's Fundamental Transformation Document of Education. The findings showed that, despite substantial differences in cultural context, governance arrangements, and educational traditions, the systems shared several recurrent features, including competency-oriented curricula, active and participatory learning, multidimensional assessment, development of self-directed and socially responsible students, professionalization of teachers and principals, instructional leadership, stakeholder participation, quality assurance, and evidence-based decision-making. At the same time, the analysis indicated that these components cannot be transferred mechanically into the Iranian educational context. Some components demonstrated substantial compatibility with the Fundamental Transformation Document, whereas others required reinterpretation and localization, particularly where internationalization, cultural neutrality, or transnational standards could conflict with national, cultural, ethical, and religious orientations. This overall finding is consistent with research emphasizing that sustainable educational transformation requires systemic rather than fragmented reform. Studies of Iran's transformation policies have similarly demonstrated that educational development must connect structural change with broader national objectives and that transformation documents should function as operational frameworks rather than merely aspirational policy statements [5, 6]. The finding is also consistent with research describing the problems of Iranian educational governance as an interconnected system whose components influence one another and therefore cannot be addressed through isolated interventions [8].

With respect to curriculum, the findings revealed a clear movement across the examined international systems from curriculum as transmission of subject content toward

curriculum as a framework for developing multidimensional competencies. Critical thinking, problem-solving, inquiry, creativity, collaboration, lifelong learning, citizenship, and readiness for future social and professional demands were prominent across systems such as Singapore, IB, Cambridge, Australia, IPC, and Geneva. Content was frequently interdisciplinary or concept-based, while instruction emphasized inquiry, projects, collaboration, experiential learning, and learner participation. Assessment likewise extended beyond final examinations toward formative, performance-based, criterion-referenced, descriptive, and self-assessment approaches. These findings are supported by evidence showing that contemporary curriculum innovation is increasingly associated with active learning and technology-supported instructional redesign. The systematic review by Yang and Valcke indicates that flipped-classroom design can contribute to digital transformation and sustainable education by reorganizing conventional teacher-centered instructional processes [16]. Similarly, innovative strategies in digital entrepreneurship education have been associated with reducing educational gaps and reshaping institutional learning practices [21]. The results are also aligned with research on virtual learning models and distance education in Iran, which demonstrates the growing importance of flexible instructional arrangements and alternative learning environments [17, 18]. Even in specialized professional education, the integration of dynamic technological systems into architectural learning demonstrates the potential value of connecting curriculum with applied, interdisciplinary, and practice-oriented experiences [20]. Thus, the international systems examined in the present study appear to reflect a broader transition toward learning environments in which knowledge acquisition is integrated with competency development and authentic application.

The increasing role of artificial intelligence and digital technologies in the examined educational landscape further strengthens this interpretation. Although technological sophistication varied among the selected systems, the findings indicated that technology becomes most meaningful when integrated into pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, and individualized learning rather than treated as an isolated educational resource. This interpretation is consistent with research demonstrating that the effect of artificial intelligence on student engagement depends substantially on the teaching methods through which it is incorporated into learning environments [26]. Iranian studies have similarly emphasized the potential of AI to transform teaching and learning and to contribute to personalized instruction [22-24]. International evidence also characterizes artificial intelligence as an important mechanism of education-system reform while simultaneously raising questions about implementation, institutional preparedness, and educational purpose [25]. At the organizational level, digital transformation depends on leadership that can coordinate technological adoption with human, strategic, and educational processes, a point supported by research on e-leadership and digital transformation in higher education [19]. Moreover, the emerging concept of algorithmic governance suggests that technological transformation increasingly extends beyond classroom tools into educational policy, decision-making, and lifelong learning systems [15]. Therefore, the present findings support the view that technologies compatible with Iran's transformation objectives may be adopted, but only when their pedagogical, ethical, governance, and cultural implications are explicitly considered.

The second major dimension concerned the characteristics expected of students. Across the systems studied, students were conceptualized as active, self-directed, responsible, research-oriented, collaborative, resilient, ethically aware, and capable of critical thinking and problem-solving. Self-regulation, goal setting, effective communication, teamwork, adaptability, curiosity, and lifelong learning were repeatedly identified. These characteristics demonstrate considerable compatibility with the Fundamental Transformation Document's emphasis on multidimensional human development. Nevertheless, the international systems also placed substantial emphasis on intercultural competence, multicultural interaction, and global or international identity. These features cannot simply be classified as either compatible or incompatible; rather, they require contextual reinterpretation. Research on multicultural education in Iran supports the need to design policies that recognize cultural diversity while preserving coherence with the purposes of the national education system [31]. Likewise, policy analysis concerning skill-oriented education demonstrates that competencies are not merely technical outcomes but are shaped by policy discourses concerning what educational systems consider valuable [32]. The present findings also resonate with analyses showing that education policy may reproduce implicit patterns of power and identity formation, including gendered structures, even when policies appear formally neutral [30]. Accordingly, the development of internationally oriented competencies should not be

detached from questions of identity, ethics, national belonging, and social responsibility.

A further important finding was that international models did not treat all students as a homogeneous population. Attention to individual differences, inclusive participation, cultural and linguistic diversity, socio-emotional development, and different learning needs was evident across several systems. This is particularly significant because educational excellence cannot be adequately achieved when institutional structures recognize only standardized academic performance. The review of gifted education policy and practice in England demonstrates that even learners formally identified as highly capable may experience misunderstandings or socio-emotional difficulties when educational policy and lived experience are insufficiently aligned [4]. Similarly, research concerning students' out-of-rule behaviors suggests that student conduct needs to be interpreted within the wider educational and institutional environment rather than reduced to individual noncompliance [11]. These studies support the present finding that a responsive educational system needs to recognize cognitive, social, emotional, cultural, and behavioral differences among students. Within Iran, however, such responsiveness should be framed within a coherent national conception of student development rather than imported as a culturally neutral model. The notion of the "standard school" derived from Iran's transformation documents may provide a useful indigenous reference for integrating learner-centeredness with nationally determined educational purposes [7].

The third dimension concerned teachers and principals. The results showed that teachers in the examined systems were increasingly expected to function as facilitators of learning, designers of educational experiences, assessors of learning processes, guides for inquiry and collaborative work, ethical role models, and continuously developing professionals. Similarly, principals were conceptualized less as administrative supervisors and more as instructional leaders responsible for educational vision, curriculum quality, staff empowerment, communication, change management, and professional culture. These findings are strongly supported by research emphasizing the inseparability of subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in effective instruction [27]. The findings also correspond with comparative evidence from teacher education showing that recruitment, preparation, and professional development systems play a decisive role in shaping the quality of teaching and educational outcomes [3]. Furthermore, ethics-oriented human-resource evaluation highlights the necessity of assessing educational professionals not solely through productivity indicators but also through professional and ethical considerations [28]. The cultural dimension of educational professionalism is equally important. Research on ideation in academic education suggests that creativity and knowledge production are embedded within cultural and value frameworks [29]. These studies reinforce the present study's conclusion that the professionalization of teachers and principals in Iran should combine advanced pedagogical competence with ethical responsibility, cultural awareness, and commitment to the educational objectives established by the Fundamental Transformation Document.

The findings regarding principals also closely intersect with the issue of organizational change. International systems frequently expected principals to manage innovation, support professional learning communities, respond flexibly to emerging conditions, and use educational evidence in decision-making. Such characteristics are particularly relevant to Iran because structural transformation cannot occur without leaders capable of guiding institutions through change. The change-management model proposed for the Iranian education system similarly underscores the need for systematic organizational mechanisms that support adaptation and transformation [10]. Calls for dynamizing secondary education likewise indicate that educational institutions need greater capacity to respond to changing social and educational requirements [9]. The findings therefore suggest that principal preparation in Iran should move beyond administrative regulation and procedural supervision toward instructional leadership, organizational learning, staff development, and evidence-informed change. However, these professional competencies should remain connected to the ethical and identity-oriented purposes of education rather than being reduced to managerial efficiency.

The fourth dimension—educational leadership and management—revealed a common movement from centralized administrative management toward instructional, participatory, distributed, and accountable leadership. Quality assurance, school self-evaluation, stakeholder participation, use of educational data, school–family–community relationships, diversity management, and continuous improvement appeared prominently across the systems. These results align with Iranian studies identifying good governance as a central requirement for improving the national education system [12]. They are also consistent with

evidence linking good governance to educational justice, indicating that transparency, participation, accountability, responsiveness, and effective institutional coordination can contribute to more equitable educational development [13]. Nevertheless, international experience also demonstrates the risks associated with overly managerial approaches. Critical analysis of performance management in Australian higher education shows that performance frameworks can reshape educational institutions in ways that may prioritize measurable outputs over broader professional and educational purposes [14]. The present findings therefore suggest that governance innovations such as data-driven decision-making, accountability, and performance evaluation may be useful for Iran, but they should be subordinated to educational quality, justice, professional ethics, and the normative objectives of the national education system.

At a broader comparative level, the findings support the conclusion that educational practices cannot be detached from the legal, cultural, institutional, and historical contexts in which they have developed. The modernization of China's education system demonstrates how educational structures can be shaped through long-term legal and institutional design [1], while comparison between Iranian and Swedish education similarly illustrates that educational systems differ according to their governance traditions, organizational structures, and sociocultural environments [2]. Consequently, what appears to be a successful component in one system cannot automatically be assumed to generate similar outcomes elsewhere. This principle is particularly important for Iran because the Fundamental Transformation Document establishes specific educational, cultural, and identity-oriented expectations. Thus, international experience should function as a source of comparative knowledge rather than as a ready-made model for institutional transplantation.

Perhaps the most significant finding of the study was therefore the identification of a differentiated relationship between international educational components and the Fundamental Transformation Document. The results suggest three general possibilities: substantial alignment, conditional alignment, and non-alignment. Components such as active learning, critical thinking, competency development, continuous teacher learning, instructional leadership, participatory management, formative assessment, and evidence-based decision-making generally demonstrate substantial potential for alignment. Other components, particularly those related to international identity, cultural neutrality, unrestricted global standardization, or particular governance assumptions, require conceptual reconstruction and contextual adaptation. Finally, components that fundamentally undermine national and religious identity or displace indigenous educational goals with externally defined priorities may be inconsistent with the transformation framework. The practical implication of this result is that educational reform should avoid the false choice between complete acceptance and complete rejection of international experience. Instead, it should be based on critical selection, localization, and systemic integration. Such an approach provides a more defensible pathway for combining the strengths of international educational knowledge with the cultural, ethical, and developmental foundations of Iran's national education system.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, a substantial portion of the evidence was derived from official documents, policy frameworks, curriculum materials, and institutional reports; consequently, the analysis may reflect intended policies more strongly than the realities of everyday implementation. Second, although ten educational systems representing different geographical and organizational contexts were examined, they cannot represent the full diversity of international education worldwide. Third, the number of principals, teachers, graduates, former students, and educational experts participating in the qualitative components was relatively limited, and purposive sampling restricts the extent to which their experiences can be generalized. Fourth, judgments concerning alignment with the Fundamental Transformation Document necessarily involve interpretation, particularly for concepts such as identity, cultural diversity, competency, ethical education, and educational leadership. Finally, the study concentrated primarily on curriculum, student characteristics, teacher and principal characteristics, and leadership and management and therefore did not examine financial arrangements, physical infrastructure, socioeconomic inequalities, parental expectations, national examination systems, or technological access in equivalent depth.

Future studies should examine the identified components through in-depth case studies of schools in which selected international practices have actually been implemented within the Iranian educational context. Quantitative instruments could also be developed from the dimensions and subcomponents identified in this study and administered to larger samples of teachers, principals, students, parents, policymakers, and educational experts in order to test the

relative importance and applicability of each component. Longitudinal studies would be particularly valuable for evaluating whether localized forms of active learning, competency-based education, multidimensional assessment, instructional leadership, and participatory management produce sustainable changes in student achievement, identity development, social responsibility, teacher effectiveness, and school performance. Future research should also include classroom observations and analysis of everyday institutional practices so that differences between formal policy and actual implementation can be identified. Comparative studies of international schools operating inside Iran and comparable schools in other countries may further clarify how the same educational model changes when implemented under different cultural and policy conditions.

Educational policymakers and planners should avoid importing complete international educational models and instead evaluate their components separately in relation to national educational objectives. Potentially compatible practices, including active and inquiry-based learning, formative and performance assessment, teacher professional development, instructional leadership, school self-evaluation, stakeholder participation, and evidence-informed decision-making, can be adapted through carefully designed localization procedures. Teacher- and principal-development programs should strengthen the capacity to critically evaluate global educational practices and reconstruct them in accordance with Iranian cultural, ethical, and educational priorities. Before any large-scale implementation, selected components should be piloted in diverse schools and evaluated through academic, cultural, managerial, ethical, and stakeholder-based indicators. Policymakers should also establish a transparent framework for reviewing internationally oriented curricula and schools so that innovation and global engagement can occur without weakening national educational coherence, cultural identity, or the fundamental purposes established for the Iranian education system.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Acknowledgments

Authors thank all participants who participate in this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

Funding

According to the authors, this article has no financial support.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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