

Human Rights and Citizenship Education in Higher Education Institutions in Iran: Achievements and Challenges

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THE CURRENT CONSTITUTION OF IRAN recognizes many human rights and freedoms (Articles 19 to 42 under the title “Rights of the Nation,” Chapter Three).¹ Accordingly, before referencing any other legal document in Iran, diverse activities must be undertaken to introduce and educate about these rights. Furthermore, Iran is a state-party to several international human rights conventions,² and has repeatedly submitted periodic reports to their monitoring bodies. Similarly, Iran has presented several rounds of periodic reports to the United Nations Human Rights Council within the framework of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).³ Naturally, the international commitments arising from the conventions to which Iran is a state-party, the recommendations stemming from the UPR, and the observations of the special rapporteurs of the United Nations Human Rights Council addressed to Iran also require educational and promotional activities at the national level to ensure better compliance.⁴ These legal foundations have led to a focus on human rights education in Iran for many years.

In general, the trends in Iran regarding human rights education should be evaluated in two separate historical periods. The first period is before the 1979 revolution in Iran, which was under the rule of the Pahlavi kingdom and the political system coordinated with the American government and the Western countries, and the second period, which continues until now, is the period of the formation of a new political system called the Islamic Republic of Iran.

During the reign of the Pahlavi dynasty, due to the positive relations of the Iranian government at the time with Western countries especially the United States, several notable events occurred from a global perspective. These include Iran’s participation as one of the initial signatories of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the hosting of the first World Conference on Human Rights in 1968 in Tehran, the capital of Iran, and

the accession to several international human rights conventions, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Convention Against Discrimination in Education adopted by UNESCO, and various binding documents from the International Labour Organization regarding the protection of workers' rights.

During this same historical period, some of the Shah's associates in Iran, although they did not have a good record of respecting people's rights and their misdeeds led people to revolt and stage a revolution against the government of the time, nevertheless, in order to maintain their prestige in international forums, created a formal and not very active mechanism called the Iranian Committee for Human Rights. One of the tasks of this Committee was to publish a magazine in Persian with less than fifty pages in order to translate some international human rights documents and publish news of the activities of the Committee.⁵

During those years, some professors and academic figures also included not very deep discussions of developments related to international human rights documents in their courses on international law or international relations. Alongside these scattered activities, some religious figures in Iran also worked during those years to publish and promote human rights or some of its related areas, such as women's rights from an Islamic perspective. Similarly, some history professors and national culture experts focused on disseminating and promoting certain historical records of human rights recognition in Iran's history, dating back 2,500 years to the reign of Cyrus the Great, when the vast territory of Iran included many of today's countries, and the charter left by him emphasized respect for certain human rights.

However, in the second period, which now spans over forty-five years, significant developments have occurred that have collectively impacted the trends in human rights education. During the first decade after the 1979 Revolution, Iranian society was engaged in an eight-year defense against the imposed war by Saddam Hussein, the then ruler of Iraq (Iran's western neighbor). For this reason, all official and non-governmental institutions focused on the issue of protecting the country and resisting foreign aggression, especially since Western governments including the United States,

supported and allied with Saddam in attempting to overthrow the new post-revolution political system in Iran.

During these years, relations between Iran and international human rights mechanisms were also negative because Iranian officials believed that Western governments supporting the aggressors against Iran were trying to use international human rights mechanisms as a tool against the new government. With the end of the war and the beginning of reconstruction in Iran, a new atmosphere naturally emerged at the national level and in Iran's foreign relations with other countries and international forums. Among other things, the interactions of the Iranian political system with the United Nations human rights mechanisms gradually entered into a process of diverse cooperation, and Iran took steps to submit its periodic reports to the treaty monitoring bodies, and accountability to the subordinate rapporteurs of the then United Nations Commission on Human Rights (predecessor of the Human Rights Council) also became more serious.

During the second decade after the 1979 revolution in Iran, internal developments and demands of the people in Iran made the discourse of seeking rights and freedom more prominent. Thus in the final years of the second decade (exactly May 1997), in the presidential elections, a person won the people's votes whose main slogans were reformism and the advancement of public rights and freedoms. In this same decade, the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission was established as an independent national institution for the promotion and protection of human rights in Iran.⁶ Iran ratified a few more human rights conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Subsequently, in the third decade after the Iranian revolution, civil activities in the field of rights and freedoms also developed more seriously, and official centers put various activities on the agenda in response to the demands of the people.

Among the activities during this period was the establishment of a project to enhance the capacities for human rights education and research in Iran,⁷ in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme and the Faculty of Law and Political Science at the University of Tehran, which began its activities in May 1999. Following the implementation of this agreement, the Human Rights Research Center was established at the University of Tehran in January 2001 as one of the university's research institutions.⁸ During the same period, a UNESCO Chair on Human Rights, Peace,

and Democracy was created at Shahid Beheshti University.⁹ Additionally, the Master's program in human rights was approved by the higher education decision-making bodies of Iran in the law faculties of four universities, which was swiftly implemented with student admission and educational activities commencing.

In continuation of the developments in the third decade after the Iranian Revolution, from 2005 to 2010, a "Cluster Project on National Capacity Building for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Greater Access to Justice" was concluded between Iran and the United Nations Development Programme with the participation of eight Iranian governmental and non-governmental institutions including the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, Mofid University, the Tehran Bar Association, the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission, the Deputy of Education of the Judiciary, the Professional Association of Journalists, and the Organization for the Defense of Victims of Violence. The Cluster Project was implemented in Iran for five years (2005 – 2010). In the course of this project implementation, numerous educational activities were implemented throughout Iran.¹⁰

During these years, dozens of civil society organizations were established to work on various human rights and citizenship issues. In the judiciary, an institution called the Human Rights Headquarters was also established, which, over the past years, has pursued the implementation of certain educational programs.¹¹

Since then, human rights education in Iran has gone through multiple phases, including higher education, school education, and general education or in-service training for personnel of government institutions. Currently, the level of technical



Final Report on Cluster Project on National Capacity Building for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Greater Access to Justice, 2011 and some published books.

knowledge of human rights among trained personnel in Iran is quite advanced, with hundreds of specialized graduates in the field of human rights. Dozens of books and hundreds of specialized articles on human rights have been published in Iran;¹² consequently knowledge on human rights in this area has reached high levels compared to the past and in comparison to some countries. However, given the vast geography of Iran, its population of over eighty-five million, and the dynamic nature of human rights issues alongside related national and global developments, there are still significant educational needs. Continuous efforts are necessary to strengthen capacities and address gaps and deficiencies.

Considering the general explanations above, this article provides an overview of the status of human rights education in higher education institutions in Iran in response to the following questions:

- What content does the Master's Program in Human Rights in law schools include? What achievements has it resulted in, and what challenges does it face?
- What is the status of human rights or citizenship education in other academic levels or non-law disciplines at universities in Iran?
- How is human rights education implemented in religious educational centers in Iran, which are considered part of higher education institutions?
- What capacities, challenges, and future prospects are currently associated with the processes undertaken so far?

Naturally, this article will not address educational activities carried out at other levels in Iran, such as human rights or citizenship education within the school system, which covers millions of students, teachers, and the families of students. Nor will it delve into human rights or citizenship education aimed at the general public, delivered in various forms by civil society organizations or the media, or in-service training programs for government employees or private sector staff. Each of these areas requires separate and dedicated studies.

Master's Degree in Human Rights in Iranian Universities - From Establishment to Outcome

Human rights as a field of study was approved as a Master's degree program in Law in Iran on 4 March 2001 by the higher education authorities. Starting in 2003, it began admitting students at four universities in the country: the University of Tehran, Shahid Beheshti University, Allameh Tabataba'i University¹³ (all located in the capital, Tehran), and Mofid University, located in the city of Qom. Since 2018, the University of Mazandaran, located in northern Iran, has also been granted permission to establish this program.¹⁴ Hazrat Masoumeh University in the city of Qom, which is an exclusive university for women, also obtained this authorization in 2021 and has been offering this program for two years.¹⁵

There are no restrictions for graduates of any undergraduate discipline to enter the Master's Program in Human Rights. Anyone who passes the national entrance examination can enroll in this program. However, if the accepted individual's undergraduate degree is not in law, they must complete a series of prerequisite courses. In the core curriculum of this program, students are required to study and complete a set of mandatory courses. Additionally, they must enrol a specific number of elective courses from the available options and pass their examinations. Overall, students must successfully complete thirty-two units within two years. The specialized and mandatory course titles for this program include:

- Critique of the Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights
- Civil and Political Rights
- Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
- Solidarity Rights
- State and Human Rights
- Global Institutions and Mechanisms for the Protection of Human Rights
- Regional Institutions and Mechanisms for the Protection of Human Rights
- Human Rights from the Perspective of Islam
- The Impact of International Human Rights System in Iran
- Human Rights Education
- Legal Texts in English

- Research Seminar
- Thesis.

The elective courses in this program, from which students must obtain a specific number of credits after passing the corresponding examinations, are as follows:

- Anthropological Basis of Human Rights and Cultural Diversity
- Women's Rights
- Children's Rights
- Labor Rights
- The Right to Self-Determination and the Rights of Nations
- Fair Trial and Judicial Management
- International Non-Governmental Organizations and Protection of Human Rights
- Refugee Rights
- Freedom of Expression, Assembly, and Association
- Protection of Minority Rights.¹⁶

Given that each law faculty offering a Master's program in Human Rights admits five to ten students annually through national examination, dozens of students have graduated in this field after more than two decades since the program's inception. Numerous theses on various human rights topics have been prepared and defended, with many subsequently published as books. During this period, dozens of academic and educational seminars have been organized by the human rights departments of universities offering this program. Additionally, the implementation of this program has led to the training of new faculty members, many of whom have become instructors in this field or have been actively involved in various human rights education initiatives across the country.

One of the professors in the Human Rights Program at Shahid Beheshti University has stated in an article that from the beginning of this program in the second half of 2003 until the end of 2015, five hundred students have been admitted to the Human Rights program in Iran, of whom approximately four hundred have graduated.¹⁷ Nine years (2015 to 2024) later, dozens of others have also graduated from the program.

As evident from the course titles of the Master's Program in Human Rights, the majority of the subjects taught to students in this discipline are based on international legal standards, and only one two-unit course out of the thirty-two units of the master's degree is dedicated to the subject of human rights from the perspective of Islam. It is due to this inherent characteristic that graduates of this program, since a PhD in Human Rights has not yet been established in Iran, often pursue their doctoral studies in International Law if they wish to continue their education.

One of the challenges faced by graduates of the human rights program is finding employment after completing their studies. For this reason, if they enter common legal professions such as judiciary, advocacy, or legal consultancy, they must be familiar with the technical aspects of these professions and integrate their human rights knowledge into other specialized areas relevant to those jobs. Otherwise, their human rights knowledge will not be useful. In practice, many graduates of this field are recruited by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), where they engage in educational activities in various areas of human rights and citizenship rights. There are also many human rights graduates who join educational institutions, including the Ministry of Education, and play a role in educating students. Additionally, some have entered universities as lecturers, where they focus on teaching human rights and citizenship topics in various formats.¹⁸

The final point is that professors in the field of human rights are often individuals with the necessary academic and practical qualifications who can play a role in various educational programs outside the universities, whether for governmental or non-governmental organizations or for the general public in multiple areas of human rights. These professors have also authored and published numerous books over the years on various human rights topics or have prepared many articles that have contributed to the public knowledge of human rights in Iran.

Human Rights and Citizenship Education in Various Academic Disciplines in Iran

In Iranian universities, undergraduate students of all disciplines are required to complete a few general education courses in addition to the specialized courses related to their field of study. These courses amount to a total of twenty-two units, which are part of the one hundred forty units

of the curriculum, including mandatory and elective courses for each field of study.¹⁹ Among the general courses, courses such as Introduction to the

Constitution of Iran or Economic and Social Rights in Islam provide a basis for entering into human rights discussions.

Also, since 2018, the Ministry of Science of Iran has required that the course “Familiarity with Citizen Rights,” which covers topics related to human rights and citizenship, should be included in the general courses at universities.²⁰ In this context, some universities have announced that they have implemented this directive.²¹ For this purpose, books have also been commissioned by the Ministry of Science or authored by researchers to be utilized in universities for this course.²²



Essays on Citizenship Rights



“Human Rights in Islam” curriculum

In addition to this course, the undergraduate law curriculum at all universities and higher education institutions in Iran includes a mandatory two-credit course titled “Human Rights in Islam.”

This course was previously optional but was added to the list of required courses following the latest revisions to the law curriculum in Iran.²³ Naturally, instructors teaching this course are expected to engage in comparative analyses of human rights from the Islamic perspective with the international human rights standards. Furthermore, undergraduate law students are required to complete several credits in constitutional law and international law. These courses typically introduce students to topics such as public rights and freedoms within Iran’s constitutional framework, human rights, international organizations, and other related issues.²⁴

In addition to the law program, students in other fields such as political science, regional studies, and international studies are also introduced to human rights topics through mandatory courses like “Introduction to International Organizations” or “The United Nations.” In recent years, there has been a growing trend for students in other undergraduate programs, such as sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and certain Master’s programs in law (such as international law, public law, economic law, energy law, medical law, communications law, intellectual property law, environmental law, family law,²⁵ international criminal law, and juvenile criminal law) to engage with human rights topics within their curriculums. This trend aims to expand education and expertise in this field.²⁶

The expansion of human rights discussions in Iran has led to students in fields such as engineering and medical sciences increasingly engaging with human rights topics in diverse ways. These engagements include integrating human rights themes into their studies, participating in academic discussions, or writing theses on related topics. Additionally, through scientific seminars or student association activities, these students often organize sessions to discuss human rights issues or contemporary topics from a human rights perspective. However, in some cases, active students have faced negative repercussions for their critical activities directed at official institutions. Examining these instances requires a separate and thorough study.

Another important point in this regard is that students and professors from various fields at the doctoral level engage with human rights topics in different ways within Iran’s higher education institutions. The strongest connection with human rights topics is observed among students and pro-

fessors in fields such as public law, international law, political science, international relations, philosophy of law, religious studies, global studies or women studies. Consequently, numerous dissertations on various human rights topics have been authored and defended in these fields over the past two decades in Iran.²⁷ Professors in these disciplines have also produced a diverse range of publications, including books and articles, on subjects related to human rights.

Lastly, in the higher education system of Iran, various scientific associations are active, some of which specifically focus on human rights or the rights of particular groups of people, such as children, or on studies related to the United Nations or peace studies. Most of these associations have active journals and informative websites that continuously publish specialized content. Although the primary activities of these associations are research-oriented, they also engage in diverse educational activities that are often directly related to human rights topics, and therefore should not be overlooked.²⁸ Additionally, the research outputs of these associations are also beneficial and usable for those active in the field of human rights education in various contexts.

Human Rights Education in Higher Education Centers for Scholars and Experts in Religious Sciences

The centers of higher religious education, which consist of scholars and researchers on religious knowledge, naturally have significant influence in Iran. According to Article 4 of the current Constitution of Iran, all laws and regulations must be enacted in a manner that does not contradict Islam.²⁹ This necessitates continuous contact between religious thinkers and university professors in order to identify appropriate religious solutions for transformation, reform, and innovative thinking, which can then be utilized in the administration of societal affairs. Similarly, academics can assist religious scholars in understanding various topics so that, after sufficient comprehension of the subject, the scholars can issue views based on religious sources in each case.

In religious higher education centers, which generally have their own management and are separate from universities and higher education institutions affiliated with the Ministry of Science, there has been a significant increase in educational activities related to human rights, especially in terms

of aligning international human rights standards with Islamic perspectives, for several years. In this regard, some religious studies centers have implemented educational courses or authored research books on the subject. Furthermore, in some academic disciplines, particularly in the fields of jurisprudence (Islamic law), philosophy, or social and political studies from an Islamic perspective, topics related to human rights have been discussed or are currently subjects of scholarly debate.³⁰ In religious centers, as in Iranian universities, several academic associations have been established, some of which have engaged in human rights activities and contributed to the education of human rights and public freedoms.³¹ In religious centers, some instructors have made the results of their education in the field of human rights available to the public in the form of books or audio files.³²

In religious education centers, in order for a student to obtain a level 3 degree (equivalent to a master's degree) or a level 4 degree (equivalent to a doctorate in universities), they must write and present a thesis at the end of their studies. In these theses, there are several topics related to human rights, which indicates that within the educational environment of religious studies, individuals are inclined to focus their research assignments on human rights and related issues as part of their academic journey.

In many cases, religious studies centers or the researchers and professors themselves seek assistance from institutions such as the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission to access specialized resources and information on international human rights standards, or to jointly conduct educational courses in the field of human rights. The main city where prominent religious studies institutions and scholars are concentrated in Iran is Qom, which is located about one hundred twenty kilometers from Tehran (the capital of Iran). This proximity facilitates the ability of university professors (in Qom, Tehran and other cities near Qom) to implement various joint programs with religious studies centers in Qom.

Considering that, as previously mentioned, the course "Human Rights in Islam" is part of the law curriculum in Iranian universities, many graduates from centers of Islamic studies have developed the academic capacity to work in universities after obtaining the necessary academic qualifications (such as a Ph.D.). They can serve as instructors for this course or other similar courses related to rights and public freedoms across various academic disciplines.³³

It is worth noting that within centers for the study of Islamic sciences, there is no singular perspective on human rights. Instead, a diverse range of intellectual approaches can be identified. In a general classification, three intellectual approaches can be distinguished from one another. Some hold a traditional perspective on understanding religious sources, which often leads to greater conflicts with international human rights standards. Others, on the opposite end of the spectrum, adopt a reformist or modernist approach to understanding religious sources, asserting that there is more than 90 percent harmony between international human rights standards and Islamic perspectives. A third group takes an intermediate approach, acknowledging areas of overlap between religious viewpoints and global human rights standards while also recognizing points of divergence or diversity of perspectives. Each of these three intellectual currents naturally reflects its specific views in its educational programs and research publications. Furthermore, serious dialogue is ongoing between scholars representing these perspectives and university academics, fostering a dynamic exchange of ideas.

This diverse spectrum of thought is espoused by numerous individu-

als and institutions at various academic levels, ranging from the highest religious scholars to young students. The following publications, for example, by several prominent religious scholars highlight the significant differences in their opinions: *Philosophy of Human Rights* by Professor Javadi Amoli (Esra Publishing, 5th edition, 2006), *Human Rights from the Perspective of Islam* by the late Professor Mohammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi (Imam Khomeini Educational Institute, 2009), *The Treatise on Rights* by the late Professor Hossein Ali Montazeri (Sarayi Publishing, 7th edition, 2015), the *Fiqh and*



Books on religion and human rights

Life volumes containing the views of the late Professor Yusuf Sanei (Fiqh al-Thaqalayn Institute Publishing, the 2000s), and also the *Proceedings of the International Conference on the Rights of the People and the Religious Government in the Thoughts of Imam Khomeini* (founder of the 1979 Iranian Revolution), four volumes (Orouj Institute Publishing, 2015). Aside from these first-rate religious scholars, dozens of books and articles have been written by researchers in religious sciences with diverse viewpoints on human rights, especially over the past two decades in Iran, written in Persian or Arabic.

Concluding Remarks

Human rights education in any country serves as a foundation for effectively benefiting from scientific and experiential training, and contributing to comprehensive development and observance of everyone's rights. Therefore, all nations need to pursue and implement such education at various levels, from pre-school to primary and secondary schools, then in higher education institutions, and subsequently in workplaces and communities. A society that neglects human rights education essentially paves the way for intolerance among individuals and the emergence of various rights violations and injustices. No individual can be a beneficial member of society or even for themselves without adequate awareness and the necessary capabilities and skills to play a positive role in their personal and social life. The role of higher education in implementing a national education program in any country is highly impactful, as higher education institutions not only train educated professionals for all sectors of national administration but also produce the most significant scientific works that can be utilized in educational programs across all levels of society, primarily within the higher education system of countries.

As reviewed in the present study, the subject of human rights education in Iran, like in many other countries, has grown significantly over the past two decades. Overall, the training efforts carried out in Iran's higher education institutions are remarkably extensive and noteworthy. If we are to summarize the successes or capacity-building efforts in the field of human rights education within Iran's higher education system, the following points can certainly be emphasized:

1. Over the past two decades, the topic of human rights education in Iran's higher education system has been firmly established in various forms, so that, in addition to the existence of a specialized human rights program at the master's level in the field of law, human rights studies and education have been integrated into numerous other disciplines and at various levels in universities and religious higher education institutions. What has occurred in Iran during this period has no comparable precedent in the past;

2. Through human rights education in Iran's higher education system, dozens of instructors and hundreds of graduates, both male and female, have been trained with a focus on human rights. Similarly, thousands of professors and students, both male and female, Muslim and non-Muslim, from diverse ethnic backgrounds, have engaged in discussions on human rights across various academic fields in universities throughout different provinces of Iran or in religious higher education institutions,³⁴ thereby enhancing their specialized knowledge in this area. In this process, dozens of books on human rights have been authored or translated, hundreds of articles on various human rights topics have been published, and hundreds of theses focusing on human rights issues have been written at the master's or doctoral levels.

The following publications are some of the specialized books on human rights education that have been authored or translated by academic researchers:

- Mahya Saffarinia (Translator), *OHCHR Handbook on National Human Rights Plans of Action*, Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission, 2008;
- Bagher Ansari and Others (Translators and Compilers), *Human Rights Education*, Majd Publications, 2009;
- Reza Eslami and Colleagues, *Human Rights Education*, Majd Publications, 2014;
- Bahram Mostaghimi and Others (Translators), *Human Rights Education: International Legal Approaches and Solutions*, Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission Publications, 2008 (The author of this article is one of the translators of sections of this book);



Human rights books

- Mohsen Moghimi Kakhki (Translator), *Human Rights Education in the International System*, Jihad Daneshgahi of Qazvin Publications, 2022.

These scientific contents are definitely useful for educational programs for any instructor. The organization of dozens of workshops or training courses on human rights is one of the significant outcomes in this field;

3. In the past three decades, Islamic studies in Iran, as well as studies related to other religions, have developed a significant connection with the topic of human

rights. This has led various researchers to write or translate valuable scholarly works in this area, organize educational programs, and conduct comparative studies between international human rights standards and Islamic sources. Additionally, interdisciplinary human rights studies or field researches in this area have seen notable growth in Iran.

4. The growth of human rights and citizenship education in Iran's higher education institutions has positively influenced the teaching of these concepts at other levels. This includes the education of humanistic concepts in schools, human rights or citizenship training for government employees and governing bodies,³⁵ and public or media education on human rights and citizenship. Overall, the discourse on human rights and related demands has been enhanced, becoming a part of public sociopolitical discourse, rather than being limited solely to elite or expert environments. Of course, in the discourse of human rights, there is no single interpretation of the concepts, and a variety of viewpoints can be found. Some are more aligned with international standards, while others offer more critiques of international norms or certain aspects of these standards.



Compilation of international human rights instruments translated into Persian language.

5. Independent and civil institutions have also played a significant role in the efforts of the past three decades to raise awareness about human rights in Iran. These institutions, based on their scientific capacity and capabilities, have naturally contributed to organizing various human rights education courses—albeit in informal education formats. Certainly, the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission is the most important independent national institution in this field. By engaging with numerous professors of law and other academic disciplines, the Commission annually conducts a variety of courses that are highly beneficial

for master's and doctoral students in diverse areas of human rights education. Additionally, it has been instrumental in producing specialized and technical content in this domain.³⁶

This institution has also sought to establish a form of continuity and synergy between human rights education at higher education levels, general education for the public, specialized training for government employees, and collaborations between academic institutions and Islamic studies centers.

6. In Iran, over the past two decades, there has been significant growth in the production of specialized content and various educational programs in the field of international humanitarian law or humanitarian rights from an Islamic perspective, which in itself requires a separate discussion to explore its dimensions.³⁷

Despite all the capacity-building efforts in the field of human rights education in Iran's higher education institutions, the existing challenges and shortcomings cannot be overlooked. Some of them are mentioned below:

- Undergraduate legal education, in general,³⁸ and graduate programs in law, including human rights, are largely focused on theoretical aspects. Students are less exposed to practical issues and the essential skills needed to apply their knowledge for problem-solving, which constitutes a significant weakness. This issue has led to a significant number of university graduates being unable to successfully pass practical tests when they enter institutions or organizations for employment. Alternatively, when they do enter an organization, they often need to spend considerable time working there to gain the necessary experience to demonstrate professional competence. This problem calls for reforms in teaching methods to enhance students' skills in human rights topics and, at the same time, to train students according to the country's needs in various sectors;
- Given that the field of law in Iran, after the 1979 Revolution, faces a kind of duality, where some legal rules are secular and derived from human intellectual experiences or the regulations of other countries, while others are based on Islamic sources, some university instructors tend to be more inclined toward secular, rational, and global experiences, while others are drawn to Islamic sources. This duality has also had its impact on the field of human rights studies and human rights education. Some instructors focus solely on teaching international standards and translating international texts and research, while others prefer to disregard or downplay international norms and instead discuss human rights based on religious principles. This sometimes creates challenges, especially when instructors or students lack the necessary knowledge in both international standards and Islamic sources, and are unable to establish the necessary connections and commonalities between these two frameworks. This challenge may prevent some of the mentioned instructors from effectively utilizing theoretical discussions to propose practical solutions for the real advancement of human rights;³⁹
- In Iran's foreign relations with certain Western countries, particularly the United States, tensions have persisted since the 1979 revolution.⁴⁰ Among Iranian officials and a significant portion of the Iranian public, there is a perception that the governments in conflict with Iran have never genuinely aimed to promote human rights in the country. Instead, they are believed to have consistent-

ly sought to advance their political objectives under the guise of various tools, including human rights. This perspective has naturally fostered a political, and even security-oriented, mindset towards human rights among many individuals. In such a context, human rights educators and students must always be cautious not to create the impression that the instructor or student is serving anti-national political circles, undermining national security, or opposing Islam. This sensitivity, in some cases, leads to a degree of self-censorship. Similarly, on the opposite end of the spectrum, some educators or students might be inclined to prioritize political concerns over legal education, thereby infusing academic discussions with non-academic motivations. This dynamic can, in some cases, even lead individuals to hesitate about pursuing a master's degree in human rights or about career prospects following graduation. In some cases, certain educational activities of individuals under the title of defense of human rights may lead to accusations against them, resulting in legal and judicial consequences;⁴¹

- Considering that most research and education related to human rights in Iran is conducted in Persian, it lacks sufficient visibility at the transnational level, particularly in English- or French-speaking academic communities. This limitation deprives educators and researchers of international critiques and perspectives on their national educational or research activities. If the extensive ongoing activities in Iran were to gain global recognition and presence, there would be a need to create opportunities for numerous academic dialogues and mutual exchanges, fostering scientific growth and development.

Of course, it is undeniable that the current educated youth generation in Iran often develops their foreign language skills, which enables them to easily utilize international resources or participate in global educational programs. Modern information and communication technologies have also provided suitable platforms for people around the world, including Iranian students, to expand their knowledge.

Given that there are still no official administrative positions in the country designed to make use of graduates in human rights or individuals with the necessary academic and practical expertise in this field, it is not the case

that, for example, a specific number of human rights experts are recruited as human rights advisors to ministries, or as human rights lawyers to pursue related specialized cases in official organizations. Similarly, they are not appointed as official advisors to parliamentary committees, or as teachers of human rights or citizenship rights in schools, or as human rights judges in the judicial system to handle specific cases or complaints.⁴²

The gap and deficiency regarding the connection between the output of academic institutions and executive, judicial, and legislative organizations result in harm for both sides. For someone who has studied human rights, it is a loss because they cannot apply their expertise in official institutions with a defined job. For governing authorities, it is a loss because significant public resources are spent on training dozens of professors and students in human rights over several years, yet most of them do not provide systematic, substantial assistance to official bodies. At the very least, their specialized consultations could offer solutions to help official centers achieve better governance.

Since a doctoral program in human rights has not yet been established in Iran, graduates of master's programs in human rights are naturally compelled to pursue their doctorates in other fields, such as international law or public law. Consequently, they cannot join higher education institutions as faculty members under the title of "Graduated with a Ph.D. in Human Rights." However, if they are hired as faculty members with doctorates in other fields, they still have the opportunity to introduce human rights topics to their students in various ways.

Considering the achievements and existing challenges that have been briefly addressed in this paper, it seems that the future outlook for the trends in human rights education at higher education institutions in Iran depends on how much the Iranian society can develop its strengths and existing capacities. In turn, it will need to overcome challenges and shortcomings through effort, perseverance, innovation, and patience. This can only be achieved through the collaboration of all branches of governance among themselves and with the people, as well as by fostering improved cooperation between Iranian society and other communities and nations. The more Iran's formal system strives to genuinely enhance the rights of its people and demonstrates a commitment to upholding human and citizenship rights, the more public trust will be strengthened. Consequently, dis-

cussions around human rights education will be taken more seriously, leading to greater public participation in addressing the country's challenges.

This is the best outcome for human rights education: the recognition of the inherent dignity of all individuals, the practical elimination of discrimination, the implementation of justice for all, and the progressive realization of human rights for everyone in their daily lives.

Hoping for a better and brighter future.

Endnotes

1 The current Constitution of Iran was ratified in December 1979 through a public referendum. In 1989, some amendments were made, which were again approved by the people through another public referendum. Aside from Chapter Three, various articles in the Iranian Constitution address human rights issues. For example, Article Two, which outlines the foundations of the political system, explicitly states that it must respect human dignity. Additionally, Article 156 describes the duties of the judiciary, stating that it should act to restore the rights of the general public. Moreover, the principles related to Iran's foreign policy clarify that the political system must always support the rights of the oppressed anywhere in the world.

2 To view the human rights conventions to which Iran is a party, refer to the relevant page on the website of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://tbinternet.ohchr.org>.

3 Iran has recently submitted its report for the fourth cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). For related documents, refer to: www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/upr/ir-index.

4 The history of the Islamic Republic of Iran's interactions with United Nations human rights rapporteurs over the past four decades has had many ups and downs and is itself the subject of extensive study.

5 The head of this Committee, Ashraf Pahlavi, was the sister of the king and absolute ruler of Iran at the time.

6 The Commission was established in Iran in December 1994 and its full-scale activities began in the fall of 1995. The then UN Human Rights Commission welcomed the establishment of this institution in Iran, pursuant to Resolution No. E/CN.4/RES.1996/64 on national institutions, see "1996/64. Regional arrangements for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Asian and Pacific region," E/1996/23, E/CN.4/1996/177, Commission on Human Rights Report on the Fifty-Second Session (18 March-26 April 1996), Economic and Social Council, Official Records, 1996, Supplement No. 3, para 17, page 209, available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/237721?v=pdf>.

7 This plan was adopted in line with final document issued in the Sixth Workshop on Regional Human Rights Arrangements in the Asian and Pacific Region (held in Tehran on 28 February to 2 March 1998).

8 In the following years, the Human Rights Research Center at the University of Tehran changed its identity based on the opinion of university officials, and its new name became the Institute of Public Law at the University of Tehran.

9 Following the conclusion of a joint memorandum of understanding between UNESCO and Shahid Beheshti University in 2001, the Chair was officially introduced as an interdisciplinary study center in the field of human rights, peace, and democracy at Shahid Beheshti University and independent of the various university faculties. Although not a UNESCO-affiliated initiative, a research circle within the university had been organized three years earlier working on similar issues.

10 A report on the extensive training courses that were implemented in Iran over the past five years in various fields of human rights is reflected in the following book by the Executive Secretariat of this project and the United Nations Development Program: *FINAL REPORT of Cluster Project on National Capacity Building for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Greater Access to Justice (2005-2010)*, Secretariat, UNDP, Gerayesh Publication, 2012.

11 This institution is initially known internationally in English as the Judiciary Human Rights Headquarters and later as the High Council for Human Rights of Iran.

12 In a bibliography published in Iran on the subject of human rights, hundreds of works, including books and articles, on the subject of human rights that have been presented in Iran in the last few decades have been introduced. The title of the book in question is as follows:

Nasrin Mosaffa, Monavar Mirzaei, *Bibliography of Human Rights Studies and Researches in Iran*, Ganje Danesh Pub.(Tehran-Iran), 2018, 644 pages.

Since the publication of this book, dozens of new works on the subject of human rights in Iran have been published, which should be considered in a new bibliography.

13 The admission of students in the Human Rights Master's degree program at this university was suspended for some reasons from 2009 to 2015, but the obstacle has now been removed.

14 This issue is reflected in the information provided by the law school of the University of Mazandaran: <https://law.umz.ac.ir>.

15 The launch of this program has been reflected on the university's website: <https://hmu.ac.ir/Category/category/5404/1>.

16 Taken from the following site, which introduces the Master's in Human Rights and related fields: <http://iranianpath.com/master/law/%D9%85%D8%B9%D8%B1%D9%81%DB%8C-%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B3%DB%8C-%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF-%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82-%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1-%D9%88-%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A7%D8%BA%D9%84-%D9%85%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A8%D8%B73283.html>.

- The curriculum and unit distribution for the Master's degree in Human Rights at Mofid University (excluding the final thesis) is available on the university's website: www.mofidu.ac.ir/?lang=en; www.mofidu.ac.ir/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%86%D8%A7%D9%85%D9%87_%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%85%D9%8A%D9%83_%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AA%D9%87_%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%B4%D8%AF_%D8%AD%D9%82%D9%88%D9%82_%D8%A8%D8%B4%D8%B1.pdf.

-Allameh Tabatabaei University has made the Human Rights program available to the public at the following address: <https://lpd.atu.ac.ir/file/download/page/1668402637-.pdf>.

17 Ansari, Baqer, (2019), *Critical Research on Humanities Texts and Programs*, Institute of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Year 19, Issue 12, March 2019, page 104.

18 Precise statistics on the employment status of human rights graduates in Iran have not been made publicly available.

19 In the directive issued by the Ministry of Science to universities and higher education institutions across the country, the titles of one hundred forty course units, including general courses, mandatory specialized courses, and elective specialized courses, are listed. For an example of this directive, which has been made publicly available by a non-governmental higher education institute in Qom, Iran, or by Al-Zahra University in Tehran, refer to the following sources:

- www.tolouemehr.ac.ir/images/uploads/13970612-4.pdf
- <https://economics.alzahra.ac.ir/Dorsapax/userfiles/Sub9/pdf/vaheddarsi.pdf>.

20 The Assistant Minister of Science in Iran announced in February 2019 that this matter has been communicated to the universities (according to the Iranian Students News Agency, dated 5 February 2019, news code 97111609105).

21 The University of Yazd, located in one of the eastern provinces of Iran, announced this matter on its website in June 2021.

22 For example, the preamble of the book *Introduction to the Fundamentals of Citizen Rights* written by Seyyed Javad Varai, published by the Research Institute of the Seminary and University in 2020, states that after the Ministry of Science approved the teaching of a course titled "Citizen Rights" in universities, it requested the publication of this book.

23 One of the legal scholars and authors of the book in this field has stated that, according to the resolution of the Council for the Transformation and Promotion of Humanities Sciences dated 13 November 2015, which reviewed and updated all undergraduate law courses, this change in status has occurred. See Hossein Javan Arasteh, *Human Rights in Islam*, published by the Research Institute of Islamic Culture and Thought, Winter 2018, page 2.

24 The study of fundamental rights in the undergraduate law program is conducted in three separate semesters, one of which focuses on the subject of public rights and freedoms and an explanation of the Iranian Constitution in this regard. International law is also taught in three separate semesters, in which students learn about human rights and international humanitarian law in one of the three courses of public international law.

25 The author of this article has published a book titled *Family in International Instruments: Rights and Duties, Achievements and Challenges*, published by SD Institute of Law in 2014. This book is used as a course textbook at the Ph.D. and Master's level in Family Law at various universities in Iran, and its content mainly explains the human rights aspects related to the family.

26 In some of the aforementioned master's degree programs, students must take mandatory courses in the field of human rights or human rights-related to their field of study, such as children, fair trial, media, patients' rights, or socio-economic rights, and introducing human rights topics is not based solely on interest and choice. In addition, see the latest titles of master's degree programs in law in Iran: Booklet for Registration and Participation in the Entrance Exam for Non-Continuous Master's Degrees, National Organization for Assessment and Evaluation of the Country's Education System, Academic year 2025, page 41.

27 There are no precise statistics available to us on the defended theses with human rights topics; however, estimates indicate hundreds of cases, as numerous higher education institutions in Iran offer doctoral programs in these fields and are distributed across various provinces. One of the officials from the Ministry of Science in Iran stated in 2023: "Currently, we have 2,183 higher education institutions in Iran, and with the implementation of the higher education reform plan, these universities will be merged, reducing their number to 400." (Quoted from Asr Iran, June 21, 2023, news code 894742). As of the time of writing of this article, no news has been published regarding the process of reducing the number of higher education institutions in Iran.

28 According to statistics from the Iranian Ministry of Science, more than one hundred fifty scientific associations in various specialized fields with the presence of faculty members from universities and higher education centers are currently active in Iran. For details of their names, scientific rankings, and activity reports, see the following sites: <https://isac.msrt.ir/fa>, <https://www.saref.ir/AssoType1-4>.

29 To implement this principle of the Iranian Constitution, a government institution called the Guardian Council of the Constitution has been established whose duty is to monitor all parliamentary enactments to ensure that they do not violate the Constitution or Islamic principles. After approval by this institution, every parliamentary resolution becomes law.

30 The number of these courses and the institutions involved in this subject is numerous, as many of the mentioned courses have been conducted in collaboration with the Office of the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission in Qom. Examples of programs held include an educational course on Islam and International Humanitarian Law organized by the Aema Athar Fiqh Center, a course on the theoretical and philosophical foundations of human rights in Islam and international human rights standards held by the Supreme Council of Islamic Wisdom and the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission, teaching a human rights course at Dar al-Hikma, and organizing educational courses on children's rights at the Aema Athar Fiqh Institute. Links to news about these events can be found on the websites of the respective institutions:

<https://research.markazfeqhi.com/taxonomy/term/5>

Shorten Address of sites: <https://shorter.me/TtHLO>, <https://shorter.me/oioVQ>
<https://edihe.ac.ir/docs/100>

31 More than twenty-five scientific associations have been established in religious seminars. For their names and reports on their activities, see the following websites: <https://anjomanhawzah.ismc.ir/>, <https://anjomanhawzah.ismc.ir>. Shorten Address of site: <https://shorter.me/7fILS>.

32 For example, one book, *Islamic Human Rights System*, published by Makhs Andisheh in three volumes (2017, 2019 and 2021), is the result of the teaching of Mohammad Javad Arasta, one of the lecturers in the field of Islamic studies, who conducted a comparative analysis of human rights in Islam and some international human rights standards. Audio files of several years of teaching sessions of Arasta and some other religious experts including Mohammad Soroush Mahalati and Javad Varaie are available to religious scholars in Qom.

33 Among the lecturers of the Human Rights in Islam course in the field of Human Rights at Shahid Beheshti University are Rahim Nobahar, Ph.D. and Hossein Mehrpour, Ph.D., both of whom initially studied for years in Islamic sciences and then received their doctorates in specialized fields of law at the university. These two lecturers are also authors of books on human rights, whose books have also been used as teaching resources in some other universities in Iran. The titles of some of the works of these two well-known lecturers are the following: Rahim, Nobahar, *Islam and the Foundations of Human Rights*, Contemporary Publishing, 2023; Hossein Mehrpour, *The International System of Human Rights*, Information Publishing, 6th edition, 2017; *Human Rights in International Documents*, Information Publishing, 3rd edition, 2016; and *Human Rights and Strategies for Its Implementation*, Information Publishing, 2nd edition, 2009. Similar to these professors, there are a significant number of lecturers in Iran today who have both seminary and university education and who present opinions on human rights.

34 Only Muslims are present in the centers of Islamic religious studies.

35 In recent years, due to the growing emphasis on human rights and citizenship issues in Iran, several national documents have been adopted to ensure that these concepts are observed in governing bodies, and to provide stronger support for public demands. The Citizens' Rights Charter, issued by the President in December 2016, the Citizenship Rights Directive in the Administrative System, approved by the Supreme Administrative Council of Iran (issued in March 2017, and the Directive by the Head of the Judiciary, titled "Preserving Dignity and Human Values in the Judiciary," (2020) are some of the key documents that have been incorporated into the educational programs of the executive and judicial systems. For a sample of institutions implementing these educational programs, please refer to the website of the Jihad Daneshgahi Organization: <https://shorter.me/vj8de>.

36 Among the works published by the Commission is the translation of all international human rights documents into Persian, presented in five volumes. The details of this publication are as follows: Bagher Ansari (Translator), *International Human Rights Documents (1924–2015)*, Khorsandi Publishing, 2017.

37 In Iran, since 1999, the National Committee for Humanitarian Law has been established within the Iranian Red Crescent Society. This institution, along with the Tehran office of the International Committee of the Red Cross, typically pursues studies and promotional activities in the field of international humanitarian law in Iran. However, this specialized field is also seriously addressed in universities, higher education institutions, and by some independent organizations, such as the Iranian Islamic Human Rights Commission, in parallel with human rights initiatives.

38 Some researchers in Iran have highlighted this issue in their studies alongside other challenges, such as degree-oriented attitudes and the lack of emphasis

by many students on acquiring the necessary scientific knowledge and skills. For example, see Seyyed Hassan Vahdati Shobeiri, "Pathology of the Law Discipline in Iran," *Rahbord Farhang Journal*, Issue 19, Fall 2012, page 174.

39 Some human rights scholars in their research have recommended that in the Master's Program in Human Rights, it would be better to focus on human rights issues in Islam not just in a separate two-credit course among other courses of this program. The instructor should try to incorporate Islamic perspectives and introduce various viewpoints in all courses so that students can develop the necessary mindset to find common ground and establish coordination between the two international and Islamic perspectives in order to practically promote human rights in a society where the Constitution states that all regulations must not contradict Islamic principles. See Baqir Ansari, "The Human Rights Program in Iran in Relation to Its Connection with Islamic Thought," *Critical Research Journal of Humanities Texts and Programs*, 19th Year, 12th Issue, March 2020, page 117.

40 Western governments such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France supported the deposed kingdom of Iran in the years before the Iranian Revolution. After the revolution, during Saddam Hussein's imposed war against Iran from 1980 to 1988, these governments backed the aggressor, Saddam, the dictator of Iraq at the time. For political reasons, they have also consistently supported some groups opposing the Iranian government. This history of actions has fostered a negative perception of these countries among post-revolution Iranian authorities and has kept tensions alive. However, during the tenure of certain administrations, both sides have attempted to set aside these historical grievances, manage tensions, and strengthen paths of mutual respect and cooperation.

41 There are no precise statistics available regarding what has occurred in practice. According to what has been reported in the media so far, no individual has faced charges solely for teaching or instructing at the master's level in human rights. However, in some cases, individuals engaged in educational or non-educational critical activities aimed at what they perceive as defending human rights, whether related to issues inside or outside of universities, have faced certain challenges.

42 Some studies have described the lack of a national institution specifically dedicated to human rights education or the ambiguity in the laws regarding the institution responsible for comprehensive human rights education as challenges in the state of human rights education in Iran. See Fakhruddin Samadi, et al., "A Qualitative Study of Human Rights Education in Iran from the Perspective of Professors of Universities in East and West Azerbaijan," *Journal of Medical Law*, Special Issue on Human Rights and Citizenship, 1399 (2020), page 320.