

## Designing a psychological capital curriculum of consist optimism for Higher Education

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to design a psychological capital curriculum consist of optimism for Iranian higher education.

**Methodology:** The research methodology was qualitative content analysis of deductive category system. The research domain consisted of all sources, articles, and printed and digital books related to psychological capital and a targeted sampling method was used. Data analysis was conducted through subject coding. The findings were derived from 50 conceptual codes that were categorized into 16 components and main categories of optimism. To validate the model of psychological capital curriculum, 10 experts from the field of curriculum and educational psychology contributed using Lawshe coefficient, with components below 62%, three components were deleted. **Finding:** the results showed that the identified targets for optimism included four components of reality, self-regulating growth, responsibility, and bravery. The obtained content showed that components of planning, self-excitation education, communication approach, positive thinking, and relationship between the current status and the past one need to be considered in optimistic curriculum. The results also identify education and two components for teaching methods of optimism: interpretative pattern and individual teaching pattern. For evaluation, three components of evaluating the interpretation and explanation, assessing the change in behavior, and an assessment of the correct and unfair practices of social communication were identified. **Discussion:** The present study, as a model for designing a curriculum for psychological capital based on optimism for Iranian scholars and planners of higher education, allows understanding and applying the elements of the curriculum to develop psychological capital in students.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's world, due to attention to higher education and its increasing importance, experts in this field have sought to study the variables related to academic achievement and effective strategies to meet students' academic and psychosocial needs in order to promote quality of education and improve the academic performance of students (Mohebbi, Shahnay Yeylugh, Sharifi, 1393). In this regard, higher education curricula play an important role in achieving the goals of higher education (Norouzzadeh et al., 1390). According to this, the curriculum is continually changing and continually updated by specialists because the aging and lack of modernization and improvement of curricula reduce the effectiveness of courses and academic disciplines (Fathi & Ejargah, 1389).

## 2. literature Review

A curriculum can be considered a means of modifying the mind. Such a syllabus encompasses a range of opportunities which are intended to grow and intensify all types of intelligence, and its content consists of activities in which individual differences are considered and various methods of learning and teaching are applied that is appropriate to any intelligence and its evaluation is in the same direction (Yarmohammadian, 1393). In this regard, if we consider education as a goal-oriented system composed of components with mutual interactions, we find that the purpose of education is to facilitate learning and its components, such as instructor, educational content, learning environment, etc., which all contribute to the achievement of each other's goals. Therefore, the curriculum must be designed in a way that is accounted for and organized (Yarmohammadian, Bahrami, Foroughi, 1388). According to Stark and Latokka (1997), changes in curriculum are widespread and responsible in the world's advanced countries and universities, and this change helps the higher education system to consider the needs of the community. Today, one of the important concepts that needs to be considered in higher education studies is the concept of psychological capital, which is very important as one of the indicators of positive psychology (Mohebbi et al., 1393). Psychological capital is a positive psychological state and a realistic and flexible approach to life (Lutzan, Yusef, and Avoliv, 2007).

Researchers believe that individuals with a psychological capital, in stressful situations, are less likely to be tense and can better address their own problems. Such people are less affected by daily events and at a high level of psychological well-being (Robinson et al., 1998). In addition, having a psychological capital increases the creativity and innovation of individuals (Lutzan et al., 2007). Therefore, identifying this component in individuals is considered as a means of fostering their innovation (Joffrey, 2012). The psychological capital is a composite and interconnected structure that consists of four structures: 1- hope (sustainability in the target and, if necessary, a path toward the goal for success, 2- optimism (having a positive citation about the success of the present and future), 3-resistant (Lutzan et al., 2007). For researchers, each of the components is considered to be a positive psychological capacity, which has valid measurements and is associated with functional outcomes (Lutzan et al., 2007). So that in an interactive and evaluative process they can give meaning to a person's life and lead to the continuation of an individual's effort to deal with stressful situations (Hozouri et al., 1392).

It also increases the resistance and resilience of individuals to achieve their goals (Parker et al., 2001). Some scholars in their studies consider these structures as related to each other and consider the commonalities of these variables (Norman et al., 2010). In other words, psychological capital is considered to be a "higher order" construct, which means that these four variables are combined and form a whole synergy, and it is expected that the whole structure is more effective relative to its single variables (Lutzan, Lutzan and Lutzan, 2004). In academic studies, optimism is recognized as one of the most important factors. Researchers believe that realistic optimism plays an important role in promoting self-efficacy and

increasing individual performance (Lutzan et al., 2007). Optimism is a combination of optimistic attitudes about oneself, people, objects, events, and the universe of nature in general, according to which a person expects good and hopeful results depending on his abilities in the world and its events (Schwarzer & Luszczynska, 2005).

Optimism believes that positive outcomes are likely to occur (Hozouri et al., 1392). Researchers believe that optimism is related to well-being and generally optimists are healthier and happier. Because people have good expectations and positive perceptions about their lives, they believe that the future has their own implications (Tahmasebian et al., 2011). The same confidence in the future will create a positive feeling in the person and will increase the psychological compatibility in them (Carver et al., 1994). In this regard, Seligman believes that optimistic people, in the face of their failures and achievements, consider their success to their inner abilities, and in the face of failures, they attribute external factors for the failure (Simar Asl & Fayyazi, 2008). Such people, even if they are faced with challenging problems and incidents in life, are optimistic about the future and believe that they can solve problems by their own efforts. They can also use positive coping strategies to face this situation and this can lead to their mental and physical well-being (Carver et al., 1989; Yousefi, 2003). Carver and Shearer (1981) argue that optimism is a steady state that determines the path of an individual in order to reduce the difference between his/her current behavior and his/her goal (Jafar Tabatabaei et al., 1392). Therefore, optimism or having a general expectation that good events will occur more in the near future than bad ones can affect the behavior of individuals and the way to cope with stressful life events and problems (Taylor et al., 2000).

Several research findings on optimism have shown the importance of this component in life. Kiafar et al. (1393) showed that there is a correlation between motivation and optimism, factorism and optimism, strategic thinking and optimism, and the sum of hope and optimism beliefs can predict the student's academic motivation. The results of the research conducted by Mohebbi Nouredin and colleagues (1393), have shown that there is a significant positive relationship between the psychological capital and its four components with the goals of excellence, functionality and academic performance, while there is a significant negative relationship between the psychological capital with poor-performance. The results of research by Alibeik et al. (1391) indicate that optimism education has been effective in improving the quality of life of students in all areas (overall quality of life, physical health, mental health, level of independence, social relations, environmental conditions, and spirituality). Shabani et al. (1391) showed that by increasing the level of self-efficacy, social support and student optimism, the feeling of subjective well-being increases, and these three variables play a direct and indirect role in increasing the sense of mental well-being. Tahmasebian and colleagues (1390) have shown that optimism in adulthood is associated with better progress in university education, athletic performance, and family and work-life adjustment.

The results of Young et al. (2013) have shown that the dimensions of psychological capital (self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience) can increase the descriptive power of students. Ruthing et al. (2007) in their research findings showed that optimism predicts people's performance in homework, high scores and reduces academic burnout. Regarding the above mentioned and considering the importance of the component of optimism as one of the four components of psychological capital, the main objective of this research is the design of a psychological capital optimism curriculum for higher education that can be used to raise and upgrade psychological capital in higher education. Based on this, the following question arises: What is the design of curriculum (goals, content, teaching methods, evaluation) based on optimism for higher education?

### 3. Methodology

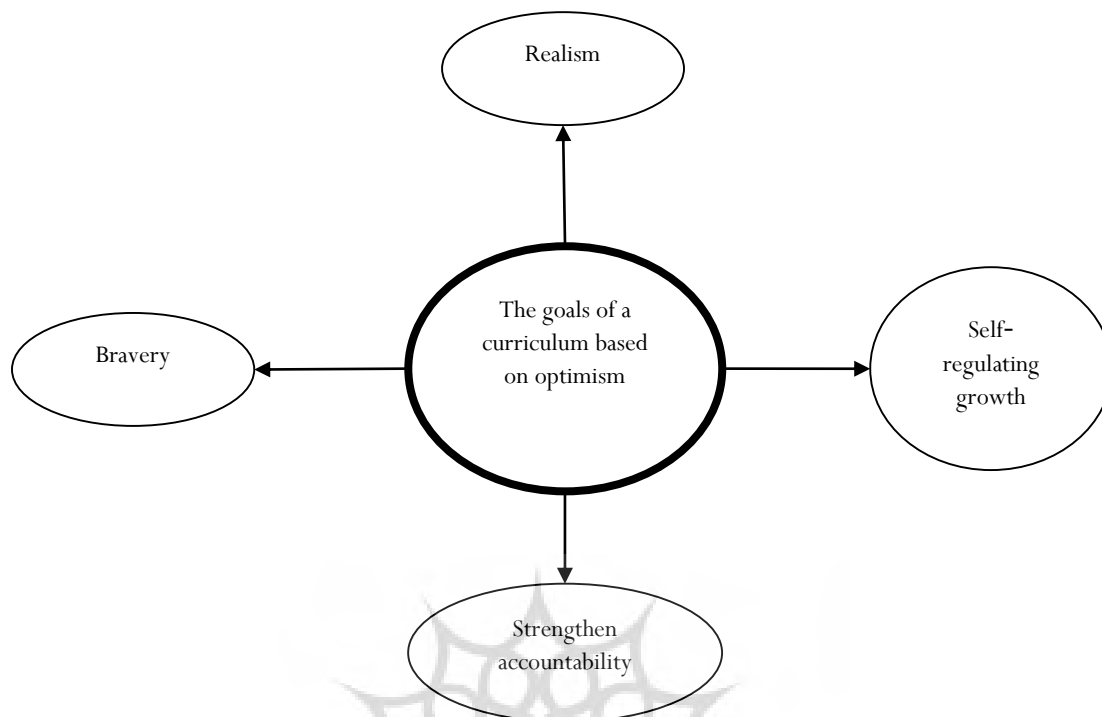
The research methodology was qualitative content analysis of deductive category system. The field of research in the content analysis section includes all available papers and scientific sources available in digital printing related to optimistic psychological capital. The sampling method was targeted sampling. In order to control the reliability of the research process, the researcher used the following strategies: 1) Collect raw data based on the search for related resources. 2) Extract basic concepts by summarizing the concepts derived from the raw data associated with the tables. 3) Categorize encoded concepts and present them in new tables. 4) Labeling the obtained categories and finding the main categories. 5) Categorize according to the research questions and replace them in the relevant tables. 6) At each stage, the actions taken were evaluated and revisions were made to obtain the final results. In this research, data analysis was performed with three open-axial encoding procedures. All available printed and digital sources that are related to psychological capital on optimism were based on open-coding, general concepts were formed and in the next stage, the obtained concepts were ranked and their main issues for mental capital cognitive-based optimism was presented in the form of curriculum elements, including goals, content, teaching methodology and evaluation.

### 4. Findings

This stage was performed based on the substitution concepts in the form of four elements of the curriculum including formulation of objectives, content development, teaching methods and evaluation, and then referred to the categories related to each element along with the model.

**Table 1.** Psychological curriculum based on the optimism component Objectives of optimistic curriculum

<b>Categorized concepts code</b>	<b>Alternative concepts code</b>
116. Acceptance of defeats and past retreats 129. Easy to get past 130. Acceptance of existing facts	Realism
101. The generalization of the sense of trust in the field of work and life 102. Not resistance to change 115. Comprehensive growth 121. Ability to analyze failures	Self-regulating growth
114. Determine tasks for yourself in pursuit of goals 122. Identification of controllable aspects	Strengthen accountability
103. No hesitance and fear of problems 143. Managing success in the best and most efficient way 144. Valuable both of themselves and others 148. Inducing risk to themselves and others	Bravery



**Figure 1.** The goals of a curriculum based on optimism

As it can be seen in Figure 1, the identified objectives of optimism curriculum include: realism, self-regulating growth, strengthen accountability, and bravery.

**Table 2.** Psychological curriculum based on the optimism component The content of the optimistic curriculum

Categorized concepts code	Alternative concepts code
134. The Importance of spontaneous planning for future improvement 136. Risk-taking as an opportunity for growth 137 Future as an opportunity to progress	Planning and self-reliance training
110. Clear communication without ambiguity 145. Trust 146. Acceptance and support of others	Education on communication
118. Reconstructing of existing situation 140. Emphasis on abilities 142. Projection of success in thinking	Relationship between the current status, self and the past
109. Positive thinking 123. Looking for opportunities 141. Positive thinking on thinking approach	Attention to positive thinking content

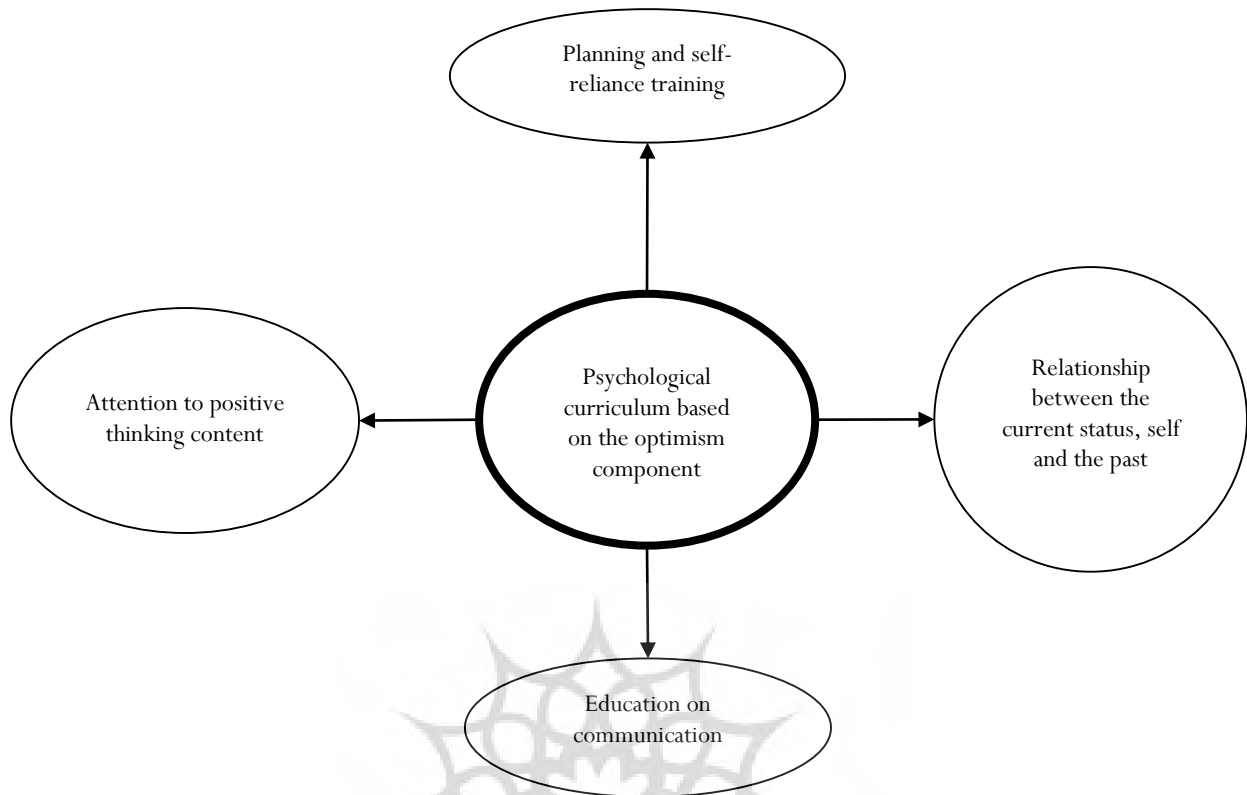
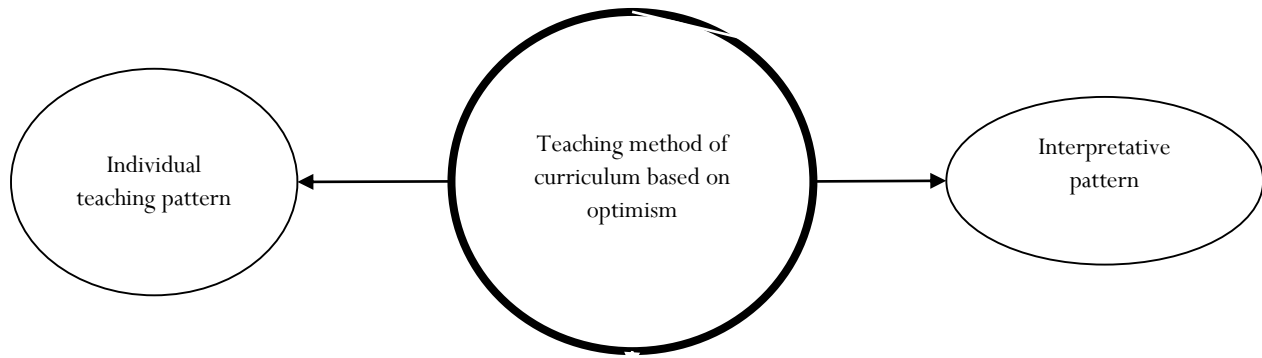


Figure 2. Psychological curriculum based on the optimism component

As can be seen, the contents obtained in the optimistic curriculum are planning and self-reliance training, relationship between the present situation and the past, attention to positive thinking content, and education on communication, which is depicted in Figure 2.

Table 3. Psychological curriculum based on the optimism component Teaching method of curriculum based on optimism

Categorized concepts code	Alternative concepts code
105. The important documented reasons as positive or negative 106. Interpretation and explanation in dealing with events in a positive or negative way 107. Attributing positive events to personal and permanent causes 108. Assign negative events to external and temporary agents 117. Without blaming self 126. In the evaluation of what it is not capable of	Interpretative pattern
128. Assigned person's success to abilities and efforts 138 - Hard working 150. Learning from past experiences and situations	Individual teaching pattern

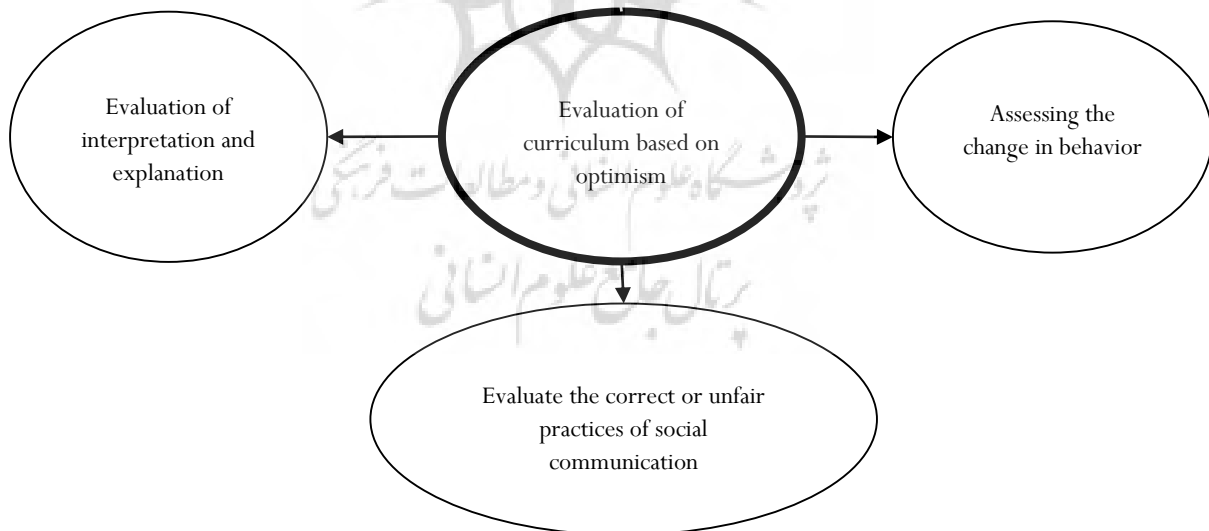


**Figure 3.** Teaching method of curriculum based on optimism

As it can be seen, the teaching methods identified for optimism are interpretative pattern and individual teaching pattern, which is shown in Figure 3.

**Table 4.** Psychological curriculum based on the optimism component Evaluation of curriculum based on optimism

<b>Categorized concepts code</b>	<b>Alternative concepts code</b>
113. Dealing with external and internal environment changes 135. Looking for opportunities to build the future	Assessing the change in behavior
139. Love or being loved by others 147. Importance to empathy to others	Evaluate the correct or unfair practices of social communication
100. Increased ability based on positive feedback 104. Looking for positive change 125. Assessing what s/he gains	Evaluation of interpretation and explanation



**Figure 4.** Evaluation of curriculum based on optimism

According to the results, the evaluation components identified for the optimism include assessing the level of change in behavior, assessing the correct and unfair practices of social communication, and evaluating the interpretive style and explanation as shown in Figure 4.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

This research was aimed to design an optimistic curriculum for higher education. The research findings were presented in four elements of curriculum including goal development, content development, teaching method, and optimism-based evaluation. The goal of changing approach, reflect the improvement or maintain the status and it is reflecting a future process (Yarmohammadian, 1393). The goals of the curriculum facilitate the students approach to face challenges, and help them to face the challenges and succeed with the ability to make positive adjustments. According to some scholars, content is considered as the first step towards the realization of goals (Maleki, 1387. pp. 54). In explanation of this finding, it should be mentioned that this content can enhance individuals' ability to feel positive, increase interpersonal relationships, and believe in the future. In addition, by using content, people can also use positive thinking and anticipatory techniques in times of crisis, which will help them to enhance their communication skills. Because optimism which is a psychological characteristic influences people's attitudes when faced with problems and how they expect them to be the result of events. As some researchers believe, when extensive learning is possible for learners, teaching will be valuable. In other words, teaching facilitates to achieve learning in a variety of cognitive, attitudinal and skillful dimensions (Maleki, 1387). Regarding this subject, it can be inferred that the teaching method through providing opportunities for growth and through the search and use of others' experiences can be achieved by innovations in the university environment create more adaptability and increase motivation for dealing with the problems and decisions that they will face. By identifying the cause of these issues, these people are able to find the appropriate solution to influence their success and future. The evaluation activities will help the authorities to analyze the differences and educational changes that will allow them to work towards increasing the desired changes (Yarmohammadian, 1393). According to this, it can be mentioned that in the behavior of individuals, having a friendly attitude towards others can be considered as attention to the present and social acceptance. Such people are eager to adapt to change and are always looking for change. Believing in change, transformation, the dynamics of life, and this attitude that every event does not imply a threat to human health and safety will result in cognitive flexibility and positive thinking towards hard-pressed events and important situations.

The most important result of the research and the design of an optimistic syllabus is that we can promote people's optimism in such a way that they achieve positive thinking, courage, inner motivation, and faith in the future, and thus they can meet their basic human needs for kindness, relationships with others, self-assessment for education and individual development. Optimism as a general expectation that good events will occur more in the near future than bad ones can be reflected as a positive feature. Optimists consider risky activities not as threats, but as opportunities, and this helps them experience success rather than anxiety. For example, Seligman (1998) states that optimism in adulthood causes people to progress in different situations. The result is that optimism can occur at any age, and a cognitive and educationally constructive structure that increases through training, learning, learning, and experience. These results are consistent with the findings of Kiafar et al. (1393), Mohebbi Nouredin et al. (1393), Ali Beik et al. (1391), Shabani et al (1391), Tahmasebian et al (1390), Young et al. (2013), Ruthing et al. (2007). Accordingly, considering the importance of the component of optimism in human life, it is suggested that the authorities of the higher education institutions promote the level of awareness of students and faculty by creating the courses of optimism. Because attention to this component can have positive outcomes in the field of education, increase in internal motivation, positive thinking, self-regulation development in activities, improvement of interpersonal relations, resilience in the face of barriers and challenges, and ultimately increase academic performance for students. Limitations that can be mentioned in this study include non-



exhaustive results due to sampling type, and problems with the validity and reliability of data and tools and the involvement of personal opinions. In the following, the suggested model for elements of optimism curriculum is shown in Figure 5.

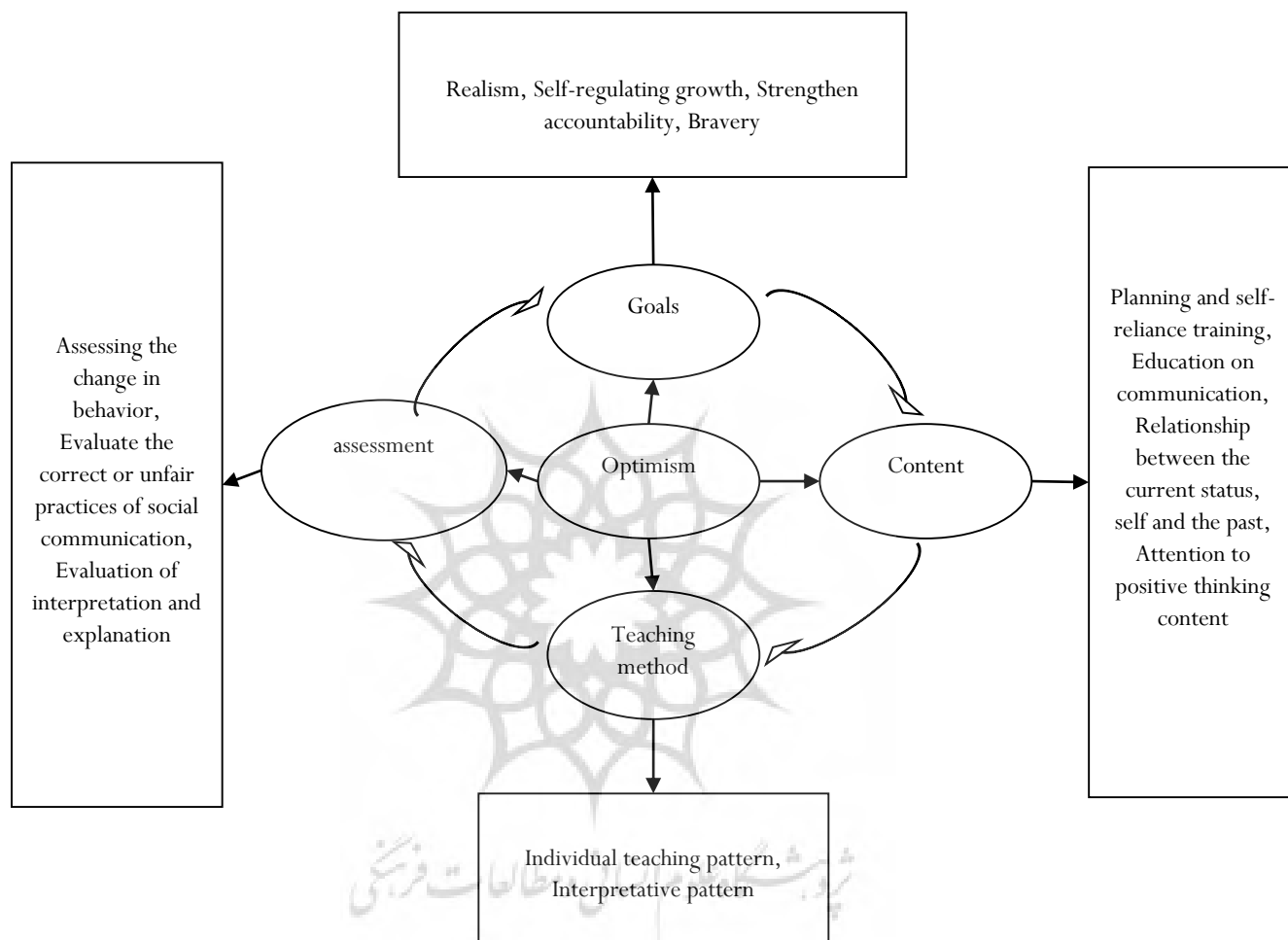


Figure 5. Proposed model for optimistic syllabus elements

In this research, Persian and Latin sources and articles were used as far as available, but some sources and articles could not be available due to limitations and were not used. Considering that the model of the curriculum of psychological capital is approved by the experts, it is suggested that future investigators examine the effectiveness of the model of psychological capital curriculum in higher education. It is suggested that this model be implemented in the general education system and study the degree of change and academic optimism. Considering the importance of psychological capital, this curriculum is required as an entrepreneurial unit as a unit of study at the university.

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