

GENERATION GAP IN KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL: MODERN ANTI-SOCIALISM

Majid Mokhtaridoust^a, Azam Ghavidel^b, Susan Amiri Farsi^c, Mehdi Damaliamiri^d

^{a, d} Humanities College, Bu-Ali Sina University, Hamedan, Iran.

^{b, c} Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

^a Corresponding author: mokhtaridoost@gmail.com

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Abstract: To become parallel with the progress and advancement in the western world, the educational authorities in Iran decided to modify the educational curriculum in two different aspects. The first aspect was to enter ethical teachings in text books so that the students become familiar with Islamic doctrine and the second was to update the scientific content of the text books to make the students familiar with the modern science of the world. In the first dimension, as the students became familiar with ethical foundations theoretically, they could not use them in practice and the conflict of theoretical ethics taught in schools with the realities of society caused the students be far and far from what the books taught. On the second dimension, the continuous modifications of textbook content based on trial and error created an atmosphere in which the students with one academic year difference had to learn different materials especially in basic courses of physics and mathematics. The students entering the universities in sequential years could not match their knowledge with each other. Above all, the difference of ethical teachings confronted the students with a paradox in behavior and skills. In one textbook, the students were advised to spend most of their time alone to think about the creator of universe and then one year later they were recommended to associate their life more and more with others. Educating skills to students based on ethics differed from year to year varying in different levels and status. This paper discusses the outcomes of these modifications in textbooks and the students' involvement in these

changes to clarify the direction of social development and human resources.

Keywords: Curriculum, education, ethics, development

INTRODUCTION

The right to education is well established in international covenants. Every child has the right to education, as articulated in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reaffirmed in numerous meetings and agreements since then, including the Regional Conferences on Education (1960-1966) of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the Convention on the Children's Rights (1989), and at conferences such as the World Summit for Children (1990), the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand (1990), the World Education Forum in Dakar (2000), and the Millennium Declaration (2000)[1]. Empowering girls and boys through education is partly a matter of national policy and planning. So, governments should be encouraged to shift the gender awareness into the mainstream of national education sector plans.

National Education System In Iran

According to the 2010 census, the total population of Iran is 74 733 230. Rural population in Iran consists of about 33 per cent of the total population. More than half of the country's population are the active group within the age range of 15-64 while about 46% of the total population are under 14 years of age[2].

Thus, as to the age of the population, Iran is one of the youngest among the countries of the world. This demands the careful planning for education and national curriculum. As to Iranian education system, Article 30 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran states, "The government is duty bound to prepare free education facilities for all people in elementary and secondary schools upon graduation from high school. Higher education should be made available to all aspirants as the self-sufficiency of the country prescribes. The education system of Iran consists of one year of Pre-School (Kindergarten), five years of Primary School, three years of Guidance School, three years of Secondary School, and one year of Pre- University Programs. The Ministry of Education is in charge of pre-higher education. Pre-School education is a one year period in which 5 year old children are prepared for the primary stage. In bilingual areas where Persian is not their mother tongue, they will be taught the Persian language. The Primary School for children in the age group of 6-11 is the first stage of formal education. In Iran education is centralized just like other aspects of life and text books are surrogates curriculum which are prepared by (The office of programming and compiling text books) which itself is a subsidiary unit of (organization for educational planning and research). The office of programming and compiling text books is responsible for preparing text as well as teaching plans for primary, secondary and high school levels. Teachers are obliged to teach these books. Text book preparation is a lengthy process because only a handful of specialists are working on books and because they are responsible for preparation of books for all levels [3].

Discrimination and Intolerance In Iran's Textbooks

The Ministry of Education of Iran is of the view that education is a way of worshipping God, a concept which clearly indicates the relationship between education and religion.

The textbooks of the Islamic Republic of Iran have changed since 1979. There is a movement to make the textbooks compatible with the post-Revolution political system. Through textbooks, Iran hopes to transform school children into devout Muslim citizens with little regard for the world beyond Iran. This Islamic discourse claims to be the political model for the world and, with this in mind, educates and prepares the next generation for this responsibility. In other words, Iran's curriculum reflects the political system's ideal human being and society. Textbooks play an important role in shaping and socializing students. In countries like Iran, where the government is a key factor in preparing and controlling school curricula, and where educational

environments lack the freedom to criticize the textbooks' content, a student's learning is restricted to what has been prescribed for him to learn. In fact, the children of Iran are not learning as much as they could about international standards of human rights as envisioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations conventions on civil, political, social and economic rights.

METHODOLOGY

This study assesses the content of current Iranian school textbooks in order to understand the textbook content with Iran's educational approach and interpretation of concepts to compare the knowledge of different generations attending the schools. Therefore, three consecutive generations are considered from 1979 to 2010 in a 10- year division. This study is based on a detailed assessment of 50 compulsory school textbooks (published in 1980,1991 and 2007) covering the sciences, humanities, and religious subjects from Grades 1 to 11, totalling some 5000 pages. This assessment included a statistical analysis of 3,000 textbook images, a content analysis of 400 lessons in the textbooks in all grades, and a qualitative analysis of the textbooks to evaluate all forms of knowledge transferred to students.

Textbook Characteristics in Common

Studies show that the Islamic Republic in Iran has remained committed to the nationalist idea of an Iranian Islamic nation and that the Islamic Republic has only shifted from "Iran Time" to Islam Time." However, a review of the textbooks of the Islamic Republic of Iran demonstrates that the goals of the regime of Iran are not simply nationalist, but expansionist. The measures of the Islamic government for making the textbooks more Islamic has forced Iranian students to face a kind of identity crisis, because the Iranians are not actually cut off [from] the world [as the regime desires] and the global culture affects them in various ways [4&5] The textbooks often describe this political order as "sacred" and warn that criticism of the regime constitutes opposition to divine "will." This has led to a generation that suffers from psychological problems. A Study of Social Studies textbook in Iran tells us that Social studies textbooks in Iran have been rewritten since 1979 to achieve the socialization of children into Islamic political thought. There have been presented different ideas about the world and international relationships. Iraq was once considered to be the enemy country while now it is the brother country. Explicit political textbooks are used to teach state-approved values and political behaviours while preparing the children to become citizens in a country with a narrowly-defined framework of governmental ideology [6]. Drawing red lines is the basic teaching

for the students to know their enemy or friends while this red line has no definite status in social life. For the first generation, it was believed that every person must be a soldier of Islam to reinforce the foundation of the government while later, there are seen some words of personal respects and freedom [7]. Scientific textbooks have undergone the same trend. Science must be adapted with the Islamic teachings. What is known to be in contradiction with religious doctrine may be removed from the textbooks. Therefore, the theories of evolution as stated by Darwin cannot be seen in the textbooks. The power of analysis has become feeble in students as they are going to memorize the newest formulas without any exact awareness from their application. The values propagated in the textbooks are shaping the way the next generation of Iranian citizens will view the outside world and the majority of the country's population. The textbooks stress the dichotomy between Iran and its declared enemies and promote antagonism toward the non-Muslim world. With the change of international relationships and the status of pros and cons of sanction against Iran, the enemies replace the friends and vice versa. The study of English textbooks for students revealed that all instances of men and women talking/walking with each other are related to the father/daughter dyad, mother/son dyad, or sibling relationships. This is, again, in line with Islamic laws where men and women who do not share family or blood relations are not allowed to socialize together without a chaperone present while in pre-revolution textbooks, there were seen a lot of pictures in which men and women went hand in hand. Women suffered most obviously from low visibility". The ratio of females to males was 1 to 1.4 in text and 1 to 1.6 in illustrations. Of the total 40 topics in dialogues, 27 topics were found to be male-dominated. The main journeys propagated in the pre-revolution books were to Shiraz or Isfahan, but after the revolution religious cities became the destination of journeys. An excerpt from the book of literature clearly shows this matter "My family and I went to Mashhad two years ago". We went to the holy shrine several times" The excerpt refers to a religious ritual in Shi'ite Islam. Shi'ite Muslims usually visit the tombs of their Imams and the most important religious city is Mashhad located in the north province of Iran [8]. Among the reforms of text books, the story of mathematics courses is interesting and informative. The former secondary mathematics curriculum reform for the Mathematics and physics strands in Iran, started in 1972 and lasted until 1992. This reform was heavily influenced by the concepts of "New Math" of 1950s and 1960s. In this curriculum, geometry, trigonometry and algebra courses remained unchanged throughout the four years of secondary education, the approach to calculus changed from a

typical rule-based to a rigorous one, and new courses were added to the old curriculum. The new courses were Modern Mathematics with different content in each grade, for 3 to 4 h per week, including sets and logic for grade 9; relations and functions, matrices, vectors and groups for grade 10; vector space, logic and switching, linear programming and number theory for grade 11; and fields and rings, number theory, and matrices for grade 12. The thought beyond the mathematics teaching and text books was so vigorous that most university lecturers were satisfied with the level of students' knowledge coming from high schools to university. After the Islamic revolution, the mathematics curriculum at the secondary level in Iran changed to a great degree as a result of the reform of 1992, without a noticeable change in the geometry textbooks, and still, the only existent reasoning was deductive reasoning. However, there was a growing dissatisfaction among students regarding the geometry textbooks, and the Ministry of Education asked to change geometry textbooks that were published in 1992 and 1993. As a result of the latest effort, the geometry I and the geometry II differed dramatically from the earlier ones considering the aims, the visions, the content, the approach, and the educational purposes, and more clearly, the ways in which the notions of proof and reasoning were dealt with. In the new secondary mathematics curriculum in Iran, there is only one Mathematics course for all ninth graders (first year secondary), and they choose their strands and streams within each strand after finishing this year. For those who enter the Mathematics and Physics stream, the compulsory courses include Mathematics I & II, Statistics and Modelling, Geometry I & II, Algebra and Probability, Calculus, and the pre-university (12th grade) curriculum includes Differential and Integral Calculus, Discrete Mathematics, Linear Algebra and Analytic Geometry. These studies showed that most students merely memorized facts, definitions, and proofs to pass the geometry courses. The outcome was a chaos. The graduates of high school who could not enter the university upon finishing their studies and had to wait one year to attend university national exam were forced to study subject they had never been taught in schools. The most abstract topics in mathematics were added to the text books to make the students familiar with the science and knowledge of the modern world. This situation called for yet another change of the geometry textbooks within a new reformed mathematics curriculum this is especially important, since the educational system in Iran is highly centralized and national textbooks play a significant role in determining the curriculum. The authors of the new textbooks envisioned teaching and learning as a social activity and the professional development program was designed to reflect this view. The

authors were going to notice the importance of the social context and reflected on it. It became important for them to place the subject matter in a social context and study its role in the development of the society. One of the purposes of the professional development program was claimed to show that teaching is a social activity and that it can be improved through collaboration and interaction. In Iran, according to the analysis of different parts of the content in the science textbook, it is seen that the authors are interested in presenting the contents in a descriptive manner and by graphs and pictures. These authors haven't paid attention to the actual works and used exercise and efforts a little. The results show that the science textbook in Iran has ignored the creative theories, analysis and problem solving. The amounts of the questions and assignments in Iranian text books has become sacrificed to introduce more and newer issues. In terms of the memorial-cognitive, and in Divergent thinking and in Evaluative thinking, the text books do not have anything to present. The content of The Iranian text books for questions and assignments have focused on mere Convergent thinking. The text books of history, also, underwent a great change after the revolution and turned in to the book of events and news. In 2002, the history text book for the third grade of high school was revised completely and was teeming with analytic content about the events. There were presented some objective analyses about some important events in the history of Iran. Some historic figures who had been introduced as the traitor in old textbooks were introduced in a new ground and their actions were appraised as revolutionary. It did not take a long time the author of the textbook was sent to the prison and the textbook was removed from the schools. The new text book of history again focused on the role of religious scholars and their role in revolution. On a micro level, the books are planned to introduce some ideas based on tradition and religions which are against the social attitude of the learned. Classification of these ideas are summarized as following. Women: Gender discrimination permeates Iran's textbooks. Women are accorded little importance as individuals, and their contributions to society outside the home are largely ignored. Females are consistently shown wearing hejab (headscarves), even when they are free to appear without. Girls younger than nine years old are shown with hejab, as are women in the privacy of their own homes. Women are not presented as independent individuals. Rather, they are a man's wife, mother, sister, or daughter. While women are allowed to work outside the home, such work is considered secondary to their primary roles as mothers and spouses. For example, it has been mentioned in the text book of religion and life "A mother whose husband earns sufficient income cannot say, 'My job demands that I

leave my child at the day care center every day,' and, in this way deprive her child from her constant love and attention." Despite the prominence of Iranian women in literature, filmmaking, painting, and other visual arts, very few female writers and artists are featured in the textbooks and their creativity is not recognized [9]. In the Farsi textbooks, male authors appear 10 times as many as female authors do. The statistical analysis of 3,115 images from all textbooks illustrates that women are only present in 21 per cent of the images related to professional environments. In contrast, women are depicted in 77 per cent of the images related to family, maternal responsibilities, and housekeeping.

Religious Minorities

The textbooks devote little attention to minority cultures, traditions, languages, or issues. While there is no direct hostility toward officially recognized religious and ethnic minorities, the textbooks constantly refer to Iranian society as a Persian-Islamic identity comprised of Muslim (Shi'a) people and thus fail to acknowledge Iranians of other religions or ethnic groups. The textbooks also express suspicion of ethnic minorities and denigrate certain religious beliefs. Religious Minorities: Sunnis, Zoroastrians, Christians (Armenians and Assyrians), and Jews are officially recognized minorities. The textbooks refer to these religions and their prophets with respect but elsewhere tend to overlook Iran's religious diversity: The text book of religious and life for high school students mentions "In certain parts of the country, some families may face difficulties due to floods or earthquakes. In such cases, our country's Muslim people rush to assist those afflicted." Ethnic Minorities: The textbooks recognize the languages and regions where certain nationally recognized ethnic minorities reside (Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, and Baluchistan). In several instances, however, they mention the dangers of separatist tendencies of ethnic minority groups and portray the efforts of these groups to gain autonomy as threats to the Iranian state. Iran and the West: The textbooks criticize the West (Europe, North America, and Russia) from four main angles: (1) Europe and the United States are portrayed as enemies of Iran's political independence; (2) the West conspires against the current Islamic regime and against Islamist movements generally; (3) colonial rule by Europeans was unjust to the Islamic countries of the Middle East, and the interests of Islamic countries conflict with those of Western countries; and (4) the Islamist discourse of the textbooks expresses opposition to the West as the birthplace of modern society and sees a clash of civilizations between the West and the Islamic world. Iran and the Region: All countries in the region share a common Islamic identity and civilization and are encouraged to create linkages to strengthen

themselves against the West (or "foreigners"). The textbooks criticize countries in the region that act as Western allies and are not in harmony with the Islamic Republic's anti-Western stance. In their view, the region's most important problem is the clash between Muslims and the Western countries that support Israel.

Intolerance And Shi'ite Egocentrism

The textbooks present Iran's Islamic Republic as a sacred regime that has come into existence as a result of God's will and is built upon the traditions of the Prophet of Islam and the Shi'ite imams. Because it is sacred, this regime cannot be criticized. The textbooks perpetuate a dichotomy between the "self" and the "other," for instance between Iran and its enemies, between the godly and the infidel, or between the truly pious and the monafegh (the hypocrite), and this dichotomy fuels antagonism toward groups or individuals who are different. Islam is presented as the exclusive religion of social justice and the defender of the poor and oppressed both in Iran and abroad. The textbooks praise poverty as a social virtue and repeatedly discuss the simple lifestyles of important religious, political, cultural, and scientific figures. In Farsi text book, the students read "Einstein led a simple life and did not pay much attention to the clothes he wore." The citizen portrayed in the textbooks abandons his/her personal autonomy to be part of a larger group that comprises the religious society, family, village or city, nation, and Islamic community.

Socialization through Textbooks

The relationship between society and the individual is an important subject for educational researchers who study the social, political and economic impacts of education on people, and especially the ways in which successive generations are influenced by education. Language and learning are two major factors in socialization. Language, first as a product of socialization and later as a tool for furthers cultural learning plays a significant role. Children begin learning language several years before they encounter textbooks in schools. Nevertheless, textbooks help them improve both writing ability and verbal communication once they enter school. During the years of schooling, textbooks, as a direct and continuous method of imparting information to children, influence them more than any other source. To a great extent, teachers base the lessons they give on these written materials; as a result, children may communicate with their teachers through the texts. The second process of socialization, inseparable from language, is learning. Through the process of learning children acquire specific beliefs that influence their behaviour in daily life. In categorizing those moral values that appear in the elementary textbooks, we

may refer to two kinds: individual and social moral values. Those moral concepts which are related to social behaviour are dominant in the textbooks. Integration between religion and morality emanates from one of these relationships. i.e. the relationship between the individual and his/her creator. Gratitude towards God, therefore, is one of the items that frequently appear in the texts. Textbooks are saturated with warnings against those values which are considered from an Islamic point of view. Warnings against jealousy, lies, haste and tyranny are just some examples of this reaction. Moral values are taught to children through different forms of teachings including narratives, poems and even illustrations. Textbooks, accordingly, are full of the Persian poems and religious stories. From thirty-seven lessons of the Persian text (farsi) for the fifth grade (1994), eleven lessons, i.e. near 30% of all, are poems. The poems are cited from both old (like Saadi and Firdowsi) and new poets as from both male and female ones. In this particular text (Farsi for the fifth grade), the poems deal with moral subjects such as patience, effort, appreciating parents, peace, condemning tyranny, helping the oppressed, contentment and taking care of animals. Textbooks on social studies are the main sources for transferring social values to children. One of the main aspects of these texts is related to civil studies which discuss issues related to society, law and social relations. These textbooks are among those texts that underwent a wholesale change after the Revolution. The focus and concentration of the books on the life - after as taken from religious doctrine are against what is seen in media. The attempt to a better life is claimed to be achieved through spirituality while degrees of education are the priorities of a descent life.

CONCLUSION

Iran's textbooks aim to instil the Islamist Republic's ideology, based on religious doctrine, in Iranian youth. This has caused an amalgam of ideas transferred to students in different periods of study. They are inconsistent and unsystematic throughout the textbooks at the core of the curriculum in Iranian schools. The content and the context of the humanities and science textbooks were changed in secondary education in Iran. This is important considering the centralized system of education in Iran in which there is only one textbook for every subject nationwide. In this study, it was shown that the fluctuations and modifications of the text books for students brought about a knowledge gap for different generations while in some cases the bizarre ideas were incongruence with the humanistic thoughts. While the constructivists approach and promoting the cooperative learning are two bases of modern textbooks in modern countries, the Iranian

textbooks have ignored the psychological and realistic situations and implicitly reduce the students' capacities to adapt themselves with the situations ahead. The spread of theoretical subjects in the textbooks has forced the students to memorize the concepts resulting in the reduction of analytic power. The results of the research show that the most contents in Iranian science textbooks, while compatible with discoveries and findings, are concepts far from the facts.

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