




Research Paper

The components of Intercultural Philosophy in Iranian Elementary-School Social Studies Textbooks

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Received: 2021-04-07

Accepted: 2021-09-05

Abstract

Aim: The present study aimed to explore the components of intercultural philosophy in elementary-school Social Studies textbooks in Iran via inductive qualitative content analysis. The statistical population comprised all the Social Studies textbooks of grades 3 through 6 in the academic year 2019-2020. A sample equal to this statistical population was selected through purposive sampling. The unit of analysis was all the sentences and images in these textbooks. Upstream documents such as the theoretical foundations of the fundamental reform document of education, the Fundamental Reform Document of Education, the national curriculum, and the Constitution of Iran were also examined via document mining. Peer check was sought to ensure validity, and a two-stage revision of the codes was adopted to guarantee reliability. The content analysis of the books demonstrated four components of understanding and paying attention to others, pluralism, peace, and the independence of cultural identity. Overall, the findings revealed that little attention has been paid to all four components.

Keywords: *Intercultural philosophy; Social Studies textbooks; Iranian Elementary-School*

Introduction

The term intercultural philosophy was coined in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Pinn, 2011), based on the idea that rejects the existence of only a single or few philosophical traditions (Pius, 2016: 178). This concept supports a lifestyle that relies on dialog, peace, mutual understanding, and coexistence (Mosleh, 2013: 10). Although educational systems should be responsive to potential linguistic, ethnic, and cultural diversities (Mostafazadeh, Keshtiaray, & Qolizadeh, 2019), the centralized educational system of Iran is indifferent or even opposed to such differences and plurality of the Iranian society. Accordingly, the intercultural view is an educational priority in Iran.

In recent years, several studies have examined intercultural philosophy in Iran, the majority of which extracted the components of intercultural philosophy or education. For instance, Khazaei et al. (2020) proposed a conceptual model of intercultural education comprising four dimensions and 20 components. Asadi et al. (2019) also examined the characteristics of a peace-oriented syllabus based on the tenets of intercultural philosophy. According to Sanaei and Dehqani (2017), Kimmerle discusses the integration of horizons of understanding for intercultural dialog. Yariqoli et al. (2017) also reported that elementary-school textbooks do not pay attention to "others". According to Yusefzadeh and Fayyaz (2014), the Islamic view inspired by the Holy Quran and Sunna offers at least three foundations for mutual understanding to modern human beings. Makroni and Bolandhemmatan (2014) concluded that the content of elementary-school textbooks neglects concepts such as respecting different cultures, races, religions, and ethnicities. According to Shahri (2011), the majority of Iranian students have a moderate tendency to different ethnicities and show antipathy to one another's religions.

This concept has also been investigated by foreign scholars. For example, Ramirez (2016) showed the effectiveness of intercultural skills training for elementary education experts. Eppert et al. (2015) studied the value of intercultural philosophy in education. Hansson (2013) noted three factors that should be considered in intercultural dialogs. Luciak and Khan-Svik (2008) reported a change in orientation from ethnic-centrality to intercultural education. According to Ospino (2009), education is in charge of developing an intercultural approach. On the other hand, Panikkar (2004) mentioned the problematic nature of intercultural philosophy.

The central question of the present study was, "How do Iranian elementary-school Social Studies textbooks deal with and teach the components of intercultural philosophy?"

Methodology

The present study adopted the inductive (conventional) qualitative content analysis method. The statistical population comprised all the Social Studies textbooks of grades three to six in the academic year 2019-2020. A sample equal to this statistical population was selected through purposive sampling. Upstream documents such as the theoretical foundations of fundamental reform document of education, the Fundamental Reform Document of Education, the national curriculum, and the Constitution of Iran were also analyzed via document mining.

The following steps were followed: 1) specifying the objectives of the study; 2) selecting the sample; 3) adopting the (inductive) content analysis approach; 4) specifying the coding process; 5) applying the encoding process to the textbook iteratively to extract more information. This process continued until all the concepts were extracted and coded. The concepts were then formed into categories based on their similarities and differences. The final table of the categories was drawn up and sent to experts for confirmation. In fact, the validity of the study was ensured based on peer check; 6) revising the concepts in two stages to ensure reliability: once after coding 10%-50% of the categorized, and once at the end of the coding process; and 7) analyzing the coding results.

Results

The following components of intercultural philosophy were extracted from the textbooks:

Attention to and knowing others

Intercultural philosophy principally aims to replace “antagonism towards others” with “knowing others”. The Social Studies textbooks refer to Iran as the land of the Aryans who were composed of three ethnicities of the Medes, Pars, and Parthians, while only the Pars ethnicity is celebrated. The origin of current Iranian ethnicities is not mentioned.

Pluralism

According to intercultural philosophy, the truth, if existent, is dispersed among all cultures. The Social Studies textbooks only mention Islam and Zoroastrianism, and among different denominations of Islam, only Shia Islam is mentioned.

Peace

The textbooks do not directly mention peace and its components. Only page 94 of the fifth-grade Social Studies textbook briefly mentions this concept.

Independence of Cultural Identity

Intercultural philosophy believes in and respects the independence of identity as the fundamental principle of mutual understanding. The independence of cultural, national, religious, historical, scientific, linguistic,

and political identity is poorly discussed in the textbooks. Table 1 presents a summary of the findings.

Table 1. The concepts, subcategories, and categories of intercultural philosophy extracted from elementary-school Social Studies textbooks

Row	Concepts	Subcategories	Categories
1	Introducing Isfahan, Hamadan, Kermanshah, and Shiraz	Introducing Iranian cities (intracultural)	Attention to and knowing others
	Fars, Lor, Turk, Kurd, Gilak, and Baluch ethnicities	Mentioning different Iranian ethnicities	
	Introducing Azerbaijan, Armenia, Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Turkey	Mentioning Iran's neighboring countries (intercultural)	
	Commercial and cultural exchanges and similarities between Iran and its neighboring countries	Intercultural relations with neighboring countries	
	Introducing planet Earth as our home and mentioning the hazards and factors threatening it	Living in different parts of the world	
2	Mentioning Islam and Zoroastrianism	Religious pluralism	Pluralism
3	Cyrus the Great's respectful dealing with the people of conquered lands, respectful behavior towards friends	Tolerance	Peace
	Forgiving friends' mistakes, not making fun of others, and not finding faults with them	Mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence	
	Attention to other people's views and opinions, voluntary acceptance of Islam by Iranians	Lack of bigotry towards other people's ideas and beliefs	
	Empathy, forming empathy groups, etc.	Empathy	
	Imam Ali's efforts to instate justice	Justice	
	Dialog among family members, ethnic groups, etc.	Interaction and dialog	
4	Iranian nationality, patriotism	National identity	Independence of
	Intercultural similarities between Iran and other Muslim countries	Religious identity	
	Mentioning religious occasions	Religious identity	

Ecbatana historical region, etc.	Historical identity	Cultural Identity
Well-known scientists	Scientific identity	
Languages of Iranian ethnic groups	Linguistic identity	
Resistance against foreign forces, etc.	Political identity	

Discussion and conclusion

The qualitative content analysis of the textbooks yielded four categories of *knowing and paying attention to others, pluralism, peace, and the independence of cultural identity* as the components of intercultural philosophy. The textbooks paid little attention to all these components. As for the first component, the Pars ethnicity is celebrated more than other ethnicities. As for the second component, there is a greater emphasis on the dominant and official religion, denomination, and language of the country. The third component is mentioned only in one page of the fifth-grade textbook, and its relevant concepts are poorly discussed. Finally, little attention is paid to the fourth component and its subcategories. This study was limited by the fact that no causal relationship can be interpreted from the results. Children should be familiarized with the correct ways of establishing dialog from the outset. It is recommended that booklets with a simple language be designed for students for extensive reading and learning about respecting others' ideas and beliefs, mutual understanding, peaceful interaction and coexistence, and diverse cultures in Iran.

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