



## Content Analysis of Farsi Textbooks of Iranian General Education Based on the Level of Attention to the World Literature: A Comparative Approach

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 27 November 2019            Revised: 18 December 2019            Accepted: 20 January 2020            Online: 21 February 2020</p>	<p>Different aspects of the world literature will lead to a better mutual understanding and development of “one common language” among people. Education systems through formal programs - by teaching subjects such as world literature - can nurture a peace-loving and human-friendly generation. On the basis of this idea, in this study Farsi textbooks of formal general education of Iran were studied using comparative method (content analysis). This comparison is done in order to understand the degree, nature, and the expression of world literature on Farsi books taught in Iran. The findings showed that the authors of the Persian literature books at the primary level provide less reflection of world literature on such books than that of those being taught at intermediate levels. In addition, much of this reflection and focus, at any level, has been on didactic genre in comparison to lyrical genre which plays a less important role and the epical genre which cannot be seen very much. Also in terms of how they are presented, it was found that the invasion and capture of authors in the world literature, the improper selection of literary works, and the absence of discussion on history of world literature are all the shortcomings of Farsi textbooks.</p>
<p><b>KEYWORDS</b></p> <p>Comparative Literature            Content Analysis            Farsi Textbooks            World literature</p>	

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## **1. Introduction**

All human achievements in the 21st century in different economic, societal, and political fields and rapid advancement in communication and technology have brought about dramatic changes. In line with such year by year changes, world culture is not an exception, nevertheless the international communities have adopted different approaches to create convergence among the societies in different cultural issues. Most of the societies would agree that one of the ways to avoid the global conflicts is cultural understanding and that many of such conflicts- like environment, health, human rights. which might be irrelevant to culture at first glance, would be solved if there is focus on similarities and mutual cultural understanding.

The attention to the role of culture becomes more significant when there is a multicultural society. Iran, as a country with great history, has long been considered as a bridge between the east and the west, a place where a lot of people with different ethnic, language, social, cultural and religious background have once settled down. This issue has made Iran a country with significant features even among its neighbors. Such features are as below:

- Iran is the birthplace of Persian language and most of the people who live in this land speak this language.
- Shia is the dominant religion in Iran and it is the biggest country in terms of its Shia population.
- Iran is made up of several tribes which gather geographically in one area even though they have different dialects or even different languages. Such tribes are Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Baluchi.
- The Islamic Republic of Iran and the political framework are influenced under the jurisdiction of Velayat -e- faghih.

These social and cultural differences can simply be a reason for contradictory ideas among people in Iran. In addition, such cultural differences between the Iranians and the people around the world might bring about some misunderstandings. For this reason, understanding and familiarity with the other traditions, cultures, behaviors, and renowned literary figures is a necessity for any Iranian.

In this situation, the young generation should be grown up accustomed to, from early ages, understanding the culture and civilization of the other nations by means of educational institutions like family, the education system, and the social- cultural institutions. Among these institutions, the role of the general education in creating the same cultural environment is more radiant now. The Education System can make changes in peoples' cultural attitudes. Changes that will, in the long run, result in living in a stable and peaceful world with even such cultural differences. In today's societies, the first forms of formal education that have direct influence on children's behaviors and thoughts start from school. School, just like family,

classmates, and the social media can make a great impact on the development of cultural understanding (Giddens, 2001). The education system of Iran can not only make the young generation familiar with the culture and civilization of the country, but it also may familiarize them with the culture and civilization of the other nations through textbooks, and extra-curricular activities like singing, acting, music classes.

One way to facilitate cultural understanding is to pay attention to the subjects like world literature and teach it to the younger generation. According to O'Dea (2003, p. 2), "world literature is an elliptical refraction of national literatures." He added that world literature is not a set canon of texts but a mode of reading: a form of detached engagement with worlds beyond our own place and time. Aside from simple definition of the world literature, it is worthless to say that the world literature is the common concern of all nations. The literature that has gone beyond the local and native boundaries and has earned into an international level and made nations to join each other. In fact, the topics that form the world literature are the ones that make the people of the world closer to each other. What is important in world literature is understanding the other literature. In this way we can evaluate our literal potency and capacity with the other literatures and come to mutual understanding of cultures, because the literature of any nation is primarily made up of cultures and ideas that are rooted from cultures of other nations. This common ground is by any means a step toward knowing the same literal symbols in order to reach a global understanding of the common human problems (Akbari Beiragh, Pouyan & Asadian 2012; 38).

Regarding the importance of world literature, very valuable works have been reflected by renowned authors in Farsi textbooks. These authors are Shakespeare, Andra Gide, Schiller, Goethe, Alphonse Daudet, Tolstoy, Richard Bach, François Coppe, Nizar Qabbani, and Gibran Khalil Gabron. In formal school textbooks, the works of famous western writers have often been used and little attention has been paid to world literature of other nations like India, China or Africa. The other important point that is taken into account when analyzing the Farsi textbooks is the approach authors have adopted in selecting world literature works. What is of high significance here is the attention that the authors have directed on the literature genres and the selection of the most frequent genre of world literature in such textbooks. The world literature genres can be categorized into three groups of lyrical, epical, and didactic. If the purpose of the literature genre is to teach and educate, it is then called the didactic genre (Dad, 2005, p. 21). Lyrical genre is any kind of literature which is taken from human emotions which includes romantic, philosophical, spiritual, and religious issues. In this case there are also satire, eulogy, description of the beauty of nature, and many other cases (Hakemi, 2008, p. 16). Therefore most of the literal works of different schools of thought like Romanticism and Classicism, and the works of authors like Victor Hugo, Russo, Lamartine, William Wordsworth, Goethe, Tolstoy, Pushkin, Dante and etc. are of this genre. The epical genre is mostly the narrative poems which have serious tone and are said gloriously (Dad, 2005, p. 205). In the world literature, works like Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, Mahabharata by Vyasa, Aeneid by Virgil, and Paradise Lost by John Milton are all of this genre. In addition to the

above- mentioned literal works, it is important to determine the concepts and meanings of these works. Any literal works has its own concepts based upon the author's or poet's purpose. And understanding such concepts and their frequency are very important. Regarding what has been discussed so far, it is worth mentioning, in brief, the findings of a few researches concerning the importance of teaching the world literature to the students in Iranian schools.

In his study about "the Traditional Approaches to civilization education, globalization toward peaceful framework" Mac Donald (2003) emphasized on the importance of making students familiar with the 21st challenges. Thomas, Fredrick. Gzarra, and Smith, (1998) highlighted the teaching of issues like respecting the variety of cultures and educating multicultural and international issues, the focus on building relation with the people of the world, peace and etc. through understanding world literature. There have been several studies in this respect so far in Iran which are as below:

Sadzade (2019), in a case study under the title "critical review on newly- published books of Persian literature at the intermediate level" has investigated the structural and content problems of so-called books and mention the lack of focus on contemporary literature and the overemphasis on epical literature. Akbari Beiragh, Pouyan and Asadian (2012) in a study "Comparative Literature; the Role of Literal Figures in Globalization" emphasized the role of world literature in globalization. They highlighted that beside the role of economics and technology for globalization, increased international awareness depends also on understanding world literature. Hakimzade, R; Kiamanesh, A; Ataran, M (2008) found that subjects like Geography and Persian literature evaluated multiculturalism as positive when considering issues like health, human rights, media training and information technology. Mehrmohammadi (2006) emphasized on the necessity of converging educational methods of the education system of Iran with global goals in a study entitled "Education and Training; Culture and Globalization". Javadi (2001) discovered that teaching multiculturalism is an appropriate method not only for children to get rid of prejudice and ethnocentrism but also a good method in teaching them respect toward the other cultures and improving cross-cultural and intercultural relations.

Regarding all has been said, the present study aims to investigate the content of the Farsi textbooks of all the three educational levels of primary, middle and upper secondary education in terms the focus that has been directed to the world literature. In order to fulfill this aim, four questions have been proposed in this study:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the Farsi textbooks of primary, middle and high schools in terms of amount of world literature subject?
2. What are the similarities and differences between the three levels of education in terms of genres of the world literature?
3. What are the similarities and differences between the Farsi textbooks of the three levels in terms of the world literature's types of concepts and themes?

4. What are the most important challenges related to the teaching of world literature in Farsi textbooks?

## **2. Method**

The method of the current research is qualitative and is of Content Analysis Type; which is a method used to determine, analyze and report the pattern that exist in qualitative data. The steps of the content analysis are as follows: Observing the text, forming an appropriate understanding of the seemingly unrelated information, analyzing the qualitative data, systematic observation of the person, interaction, group, situation, and organization or culture, and converting the qualitative data to quantitative data (Abedi Jafari, Taslimi, Faghihi, & Sheikjzade, 2012, 153). The data were collected through the review of documents published by the Iran Ministry of Education, national reports, journals, books and especially all Farsi textbooks from Grade 1 to 12. The research procedure involved several steps: In the first phase, all PDFs of the Farsi textbooks were downloaded through the Ministry of Education website. It is worth mentioning that in Iran, all school textbooks are published only by the Ministry of Education and their content is the same for all students across the country. In the second phase, the researcher found 12 Farsi textbooks for all primary, middle and high secondary education with 428 lessons in total. In the third phase, the content of these lessons was evaluated according to the purpose of the research. The content or theme is the pattern in any data that describes and organizes the observations and interprets some aspects of a phenomenon (Ibid, 2012, p. 152).

## **3. Results**

The education system of Iran follows the pattern of 6+3+3 which means that pupils have to participate at primary schools for six years followed by 3 years of middle secondary school and 3 years of high secondary education. After these 12 years, students will be qualified to receive a diploma in different fields of study. In addition, the Farsi subject is one of the important subjects in the education system of the country which is devoted a couple of hours in all levels of education. Since the education system of Iran is centralized and most of the activities are being controlled by the ministry of education all over the country, the content of all these textbooks are similar for all students at all levels. Moreover, the contents of theses 12 Farsi textbooks have been prepared by authors who have been selected by the Ministry of Education. It should be noted that for content analysis, the frequency of different type of world literature based on the total number of lessons and number of pages of each book were studied at three main levels of Grade, schooling level (primary, middle and high secondary education), and total of 12 academic years (total pages) respectively. Regarding the above explanation, the findings of the research will be given according to each research question:

Question 1: What are the similarities and differences between the Persian textbooks of primary, middle and high school in terms of amount of world literature subject?

A review of the contents of the Farsi textbooks shows that Iranian students must study 428 lessons during the 12 academic years. The first similarity in all the three educational levels is that the number of the lessons in each book is approximately same and it range is between 30 -40. The second similarity is that in all three levels, only 10 percent of each book dedicated to the subject of world literature. The most important difference is the lack of any lesson related to the world literature in Grade 1, 2, 3, and 6 of primary education. This difference might be due to the fact that the authors of textbooks think that teaching the world literature is not an appropriate subject for the pupils since they are not well-qualified in reading and writing. The percentage of the amount of the content of the world literature in textbooks of primary schools is 2.6%, in middle schools is 9.8%, and for the upper secondary schools is 8.4% (Table 1). Out of 428 lessons in all textbooks only 24 lessons (5% of all lessons) is devoted to the world literature (Table 2).

Table 1. The contribution of the world literature based on the number of lessons categorized by educational grades

Grade	Number of lessons	Number of lessons related to the world literature	Percentage
First	39	0	0
Second	40	0	0
Third	39	0	0
Forth	38	3	7.8
Fifth	37	3	8.1
Sixth	37	0	0
Seventh	32	3	9.3
Eighth	27	3	11.1
Ninth	32	3	9.3
Tenth	35	3	8.5
Eleventh	35	3	8.5
Twelfth	37	3	8.1
Total	428	24	5.6

Table 2. The contribution of the world literature based on the number of lessons categorized by educational periods

Educational period	Number of lessons	Number of lessons related to the world literature	Percentage
Primary Education	230	6	2.6
Middle Secondary Education	91	9	9.8
High Secondary Education	107	9	8.4
Total	428	24	5.6

In addition, the number of pages devoted to the subject of world literature in the Farsi textbooks of all grades has been investigated in detail. Table. 3 indicates the total number of pages of each book in every grade, and the number of pages that have been devoted to the world literature.

In another attempt, the number of pages that have been devoted to the subject of world literature was calculated in every educational level. Findings indicate that the world literature has been devoted at the highest degree (12.9%) to the middle secondary school textbook, and the primary education has included the lowest degree (3.4 %) (Table. 4). Of the 1624 pages of Farsi textbooks in all three periods, only 112 pages (6.8%) are dedicated to the subject of world literature. Of the 112 pages, the share of primary schools is 23%, middle secondary school is 30%, and high secondary school is 47% (Chart 1).

Table 3. The contribution of the world literature based on the number of pages categorized by educational levels

Grade	Number of book pages	Number of pages devoted to the world literature	Percentage
First	115	0	0
Second	114	0	0
Third	128	0	0
Forth	140	13	9.2
Fifth	140	13	9.2
Sixth	114	0	0
Seventh	167	23	13.7
Eighth	125	12	9.6
Ninth	138	17	12.3
Tenth	145	12	8.2
Eleventh	157	9	5.7
Twelfth	163	13	7.9
Total	1646	124	7.5

Table 4. The contribution of the world literature based on the number of pages categorized by educational periods.

Educational level	Number of pages	Number of pages devoted to the world literature	Percentage
Primary Education	751	26	3.4
Middle Secondary Education	430	52	12.9
Upper Secondary Education	456	34	7.3
Total	1646	112	6.8

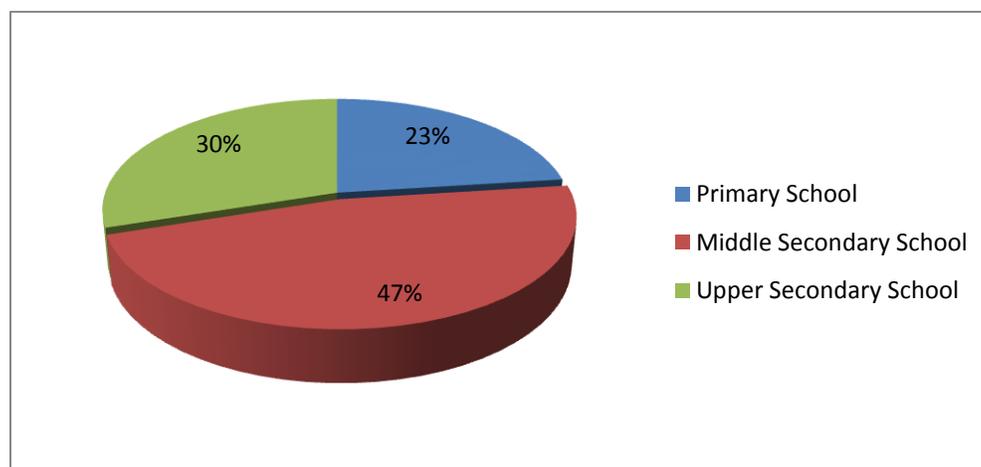


Chart 1. The contribution of the world literature based on the number of pages categorized by educational levels

Question 2: What are the similarities and differences between the three levels of education in terms of genres of the world literature?

In order to answer this question, the content of all lessons related to the world literature in all three educational levels has been studied and investigated. The findings indicate that there are two main similarities between all three levels: First, none of lessons devoted to the world literature is of epical genre, Second, most of the world literature content has been devoted to didactic genre in all three levels. Moreover, the analysis of data has revealed the following differences between the Farsi textbooks:

- All of the lesson devoted to the world literature at the primary education are of didactic type,
- At the middle secondary education, 77/8 % of the world literature is of didactic type and 22/2 % is of lyrical type.
- At the upper secondary education, 33/3 % of the world literature is of didactic type and 66/7 % is of lyrical type ( Table 5)

Table 5. The contribution of each literature genre based on the number of lessons in each educational level

Educational Level	Number of lessons	Didactic genre	Lyrical genre	Epical genre
Primary Education	6	6	0	0
	100	100	0	0
Middle Secondary Education	9	7	2	0
	100	77.8	22.2	0
Upper Secondary Education	12	4	8	0
	100	33.3	66.7	0

Question 3: What are the similarities and differences between the Farsi textbooks of the three levels in terms of the world literature's types of concepts and themes?

After studying all lessons and investigating them in terms of their meaning, the topics and concepts which are mentioned in any textbook have been determined. The findings indicate that topics like piety, resistance, endurance, inequality, and etc. are the main topics and determining factors of the lessons. In general, such topics can be divided into three sub-topics of religion, homeland, and ethics. The similarity between the three educational levels is that the two topics of religion and ethics have been mentioned in all three levels. The difference among the three levels, though, is that concepts related to homeland have only been dealt with at the middle secondary schools (Table 6).

Table 6. The concepts reflected in the world literature lessons categorized by educational level

Educational period	Number of lessons related to the world literature	Concepts and topics of the lessons
Primary Education	6	Piety, confidence, being aware against enemy, Attention to the creatures of God Trustworthiness, Travel and experience
Middle Secondary Education	9	Kindness and pitifulness Determination and motivation Attending father's advice Inequality Utilizing time Love to the good deeds Disregarding the material life Being dexterous in drawing
Upper Secondary Education	9	Endurance against injustice Piety The need for expressing compassion Motivation and determination The need for love in doing daily activities The presence of God Patriotism True love Language and national identity

Question 4. What are the most important challenges related to the teaching of world literature in Farsi textbooks?

According to the findings of the research, some of the main challenges regarding the world literature being included in the Farsi textbooks are:

- The low contribution of the world literature for primary education

Even though the first years of the primary education is designed for pupils who have just started learning how to write and read the alphabet, it seems like that prior to learning how to read and write, it is necessary that the child get familiar with the main concepts of life, ethical and behavioral principles. Along with such education, teaching of the ethics of the other nations, making children familiar with the textbooks, people and the mental, literal attitudes of the other societies can develop child understanding of the world around him/her. Based on

the statistics provided, there has been no sign of the world literature in the grades of one, two, three and six. Jadidi mohammadbadi (2017) compared the two subject of Persian literature and the social studies of Grade 6 considering the national identity factors such as local literature, Iranian literal figures, and the national anthem and concluded that 89/6 % of national identity has been reflected in the school textbooks.

- The focus on didactic literature and the lack of attention on lyrical and epical types of world literature

According to the findings of the research, 64% of the texts and poets that have been selected from the world literature is of didactic genre. The overemphasis on guiding students has resulted in the lack of attention to the lyrical genre which has the most contribution of the world literature. Lyrical genre is the most important and common genre of the world literature and most of the spiritual aspect of human being is reflected into this genre; for instance, teaching philosophy to kids as a means of training them for life is one of the most important topics at the universities which is overlooked by the education system of the country. On the other hand, the epical genre of literature has had no reflection in all of the lessons of all grades; for instance, the well-known and the biggest, oldest epical European literary work Iliad and Odyssey has not been mentioned at all, and the students have not been familiar with any epical world literature genre in any educational levels.

- Lack of content arrangement and distortion of literature

In some of lessons which are related to the world literature, the Iranian authors distorted the original work which causes ambiguity and misunderstanding of what the main author had in mind, for instance, in one of the lessons of the Grade 8, called "the way to prosperity", there is this quote from Shakespeare that goes like "time is like a sea in which our life ship takes on its journey to the destination.... .", (The Ministry of education, 2019, Grade 8, p. 118). This quotation of Shakespeare continues once in quotation marks, once without it, in a way that the pupils cannot recognize whether the following sentences are from the author of the book or from Shakespeare. The book from which this lesson has been selected is called "in search of prosperity" which is seemingly the well-known book of the main author "Chris Gardner", however; the name of the author has not been provided for this lesson. Many of the lessons have also come with the phrase "altered and purified" and have destroyed the originality of the work.

- Inaccuracy in the name of the author, using the works of the unknown poets and writers, and improper citation

One of the major disadvantages of world literature lessons is the lack of precise reference to authors; there is simply no name of the person who created this literary work; for instance, in the example given earlier, it seems that the quotation is by Shakespeare, however; at the end, there is no mention of Shakespeare, and it has been said that the lesson is “being modified”. In another example lesson called “The other side of the window” from the same book, although the lesson is provided at the world literature section, there is no mention of the original author. Sometimes even the translation of the work is provided by no mentioning of the original author’s name. In the well-known lesson of “ The fox and the crow” for example, ( Grade 4 , p. 34) without asserting the name of the main author “ Jean de la Fontaine”, only the name of the Iranian author “Habbib Yaghmaei” has been put; the poet who translates the poem of Fontaine. Another shortcoming of the world literature section of the Farsi textbooks is that the sample taken from world literature is not in accordance with the thinking style of the main author; in this regard, the poem “Dawn” which is partly taken from “fifth symphony of south” by Nizar Qabbani, the well-known Syrian poet (Faris Textbook, Grade 10; p. 132) is a sample. Nizar Qabbani is well-known in the Arab world for his practice in sonneting with the theme of love (Heidari, 2012), however; the sample which is put into the Persian literature book is among very few examples of his works which is about praising endurance against war. Moreover, just when Abd al-Wahhab al-Bayati created his work called “Glory to Children and Olive Trees” for the sake of Palestinian children, Nizar Qabbani created his work in line with al-Bayati’s work entitled “Glory to the Long Plaits”. (Shafiei Kadkani, 1981). Needless to say that the poetry of Palestinian poets is one of the most prominent examples of resistance poetry in the world (Torabi, 2012) and the Iranian authors could make use of such themes for school textbooks. Besides, the Iranian authors did not consider literary works of well-known figures like Jules Verne, Christian Anderson, Roald Dahl, and etc. whose main interest were in children and youth literature. The last but not least is that the two books entitled “History of the world literature 1” and “History of the world Literature 2” which were taught as the two essential textbooks for Humanities students of high secondary school have now been removed from the school curricula. The omission of these two lessons has significantly diminished the importance and role of world literature for these young students.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present study shows that the educational system of Iran put emphasis on the topic of the world literature in all three educational levels and the authors of school textbooks have more or less considered the role of this subject. This attention has been given to 10 % of each educational period. For this reason, it is necessary that the curriculum designers devote much more content to the topic of the world literature in the school textbooks.

Since one of the priorities in the Iranian society is the attention to the ethics and religion, it seems that the education system of the country is reflecting this priority; that’s why the didactic literature genre can be seen more than any other genre in all educational level.

Although attention and focus on the ethical concepts is, in essence, appropriate and acceptable but overemphasis on this genre will make the other two lyrical and epical genre less important in a way that none of the educational periods have any reflection of the lyrical and epical genre and the lyrical genre is only paid attention to at the high secondary education. For this reason, it is essential that the curriculum designers pay close attention to the epical and lyrical genre, the most prominent works of this type, and devotion of these genres to the lessons of the textbooks.

Another important point is that the concepts and meanings of the lessons related to the topic of the world literature can be categorized into three titles of “religion”, “ethics”, and “homeland”. All the periods include the ethical and epical genres, but the homeland concepts have only been included in the high secondary education. The findings of the present study indicate many challenges in the Farsi textbooks regarding the topic of the world literature. As a suggestion, it is necessary that such shortcoming come to the immediate attention of those who are planning the curriculum and writing the textbooks of all the Iranian textbooks.

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