



A Comparative Study of the Educational Perspective of Charles Dickens and Houshang Moradi Kermani on Child Rights: A Case Study of *Oliver Twist* and the Children of the Carpet Weaving House

Saeed Rahimipour¹ (Corresponding author)

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Received: 26 May 2020 Revised: 11 July 2020 Accepted: 09 August 2020 Online: 08 November 2020</p>	<p>The word "child" indicates a new concept and one of the achievements of the new civilization, while the concept of the rights of the child is more recent. For this reason, ignoring the rights of the child has become a global challenge recently that has had its impact on art and literature. Iranian society is no exception and child rights have been approached from different angles. Since the power of literary forms such as poetry, short stories, and novels on educating people and increasing their awareness of children's rights is great, the purpose of this article is the comparative analysis of two works by Charles Dickens and Iranian writer Houshang Moradi Kermani from the perspective of children's rights. The research method is analytical-inferential and the statistical population includes all the works of the two selected authors. The research sample is limited to two books, "Oliver Twist" by Charles Dickens and Bachehaye Qalibafkhaneh [The Children of the Carpet Weaving House] by Houshang Moradi Kermani, which have been purposefully selected. The method of data collection is documentary and the method of data analysis is thematic content analysis. The research findings indicate the commonalities of the two novels in revealing children's living conditions as the main and central theme of the stories. Another common denominator of the two novels is the concern of both authors about children's rights and the identification and explanation of their problems. While Dickens's goal is to reform society in favor of child rights, Kermani has tried to awaken the conscience of the people - without creating tension - by using language of humor against exploitation of children.</p>
<p>KEYWORDS</p> <p>Child Educational Perspective Law Story Dickens Kermani</p>	

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Farhangian University, Tehran, Iran, Email: rahimipour@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

Literature Despite the evidence that throughout history, humans have loved and supported their children by following instincts, it must be said that accepting a period of growth called "childhood" had no precedent before the emergence of a new civilization. In fact, "society's treatment of children in many cases is the same as treatment of adults and maturity, intellect, authority and responsibility similar to adults have been expected from them" (Bray, 2005). For example, from the point of view of education, it should be said that Plato believed that the human soul is composed of three parts: intellect, will and lust. According to this classification, the child has not yet reached perfection in any of these areas and therefore must be educated and supervised in advance (Brasil, 2005). Aristotle also considered human grace to be superior to other animals of intellect, a trait in which the child has not reached the highest level of perfection. This idea of a child is a common cultural heritage that did not belong only to ancient Greece. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, an educator of the eighteenth century, considered children to be by nature healthy people who are corrupted by society or school (Naqibzadeh, 2019). The English philosopher Thomas Hobbes believed that humans are inherently evil. He also believed that rebellious and chaotic children are born and it is the responsibility of parents to limit such characteristics with discipline (Volvi, Seidi, Safaei Moghadam, & Hashemi, 2017) Unlike Hobbes, the English philosopher John Locke believed that children are born without any characteristics - such as evil or good. According to Locke, the child is born inherently obedient and submissive to the educator (King, 1998).

For this reason, human history is full of violence against children who could not meet the expectations of adults. While the family and society must provide the ground for the all-round development of children, the neglect of children's rights can cause irreparable damage to the body of the family and the next generation of society. Childhood is the most sensitive and risky period of human life; for this reason, in the system of creation, he has put parents at the service of raising children so that they can grow and flourish according to their talents and interests. Children are more vulnerable than other people in society for various reasons such as small size, congenital problems, disease, inability to adapt to the environment and lack of cognitive development (Ataiee, 2005). However, the emergence of a new civilization after the Industrial Revolution, the expansion of the Modern educational systems, psychologists' findings on the developmental stages and the increase of people awareness have led many human societies to recognize the concept of

"childhood" as a distinct period from other periods of life and to affirm the acceptance of children's rights (King, 2007).

This evolutionary thinking culminated in the twentieth century, when numerous international conventions on the protection of the rights of the child were adopted by governments and international organizations. The prevailing idea of these conventions was to emphasize the fact that in many parts of the world children are doubly oppressed due to their inability to defend themselves. This oppression occurs at different levels, in different forms and by different people against children. In terms of the level of oppression against children, it can be divided into familial, social, national, and international oppression. Forms of violence against children are very diverse and include physical and psychological abuse. Also, usually parents, neighbors, political, religious and economic groups and governments are the main ones that ignore the rights of children (Snow, 2006). Despite increasing public awareness of children's rights and the passage of legislation, in many human societies, their rights are not respected yet.

According to the latest joint report of the WHO, UNESCO , UNICEF (2020), half of the world's children, or approximately 1 billion children, are exposed to physical, sexual or psychological violence, injury, disability and death every year because countries have failed to follow the strategies set out to support them. The UNICEF (2019) report also presents a disappointing global picture of non-compliance with children's rights. According to the report, "Every five minutes, a child dies as a result of violence. Every year, at least one billion children are exposed to violence. Four out of five children are subjected to some form of violent discipline in their homes. One in five girls between the ages of 15 and 19 has been victims of physical violence. More than 1 in 10 girls have been victims of sexual violence. And more than 240 million children live in countries affected by violent conflict – far too many of whom are victims of, witnesses to, and refugees from the ravages of war" (P.1).

In Iran, despite the adoption of various laws to protect children in recent decades, legal loopholes and cultural factors have not allowed the rights of children to be well respected (Jafari, 2018). In fact, due to the lack of reliable statistics in Iran, although officials have warned an increase in child abuse, there is no clear prospect of reducing violence against children. Moreover, lack of child-centered thinking in the law, in the eyes of the authorities, and in popular culture has deprived children of the possibility of proper development. Although Article 2 of the Law on the Protection of Children and Adolescents that was adopted in 2002 in Iran prohibits any education and harassment of children and adolescents that causes them physical, mental, or moral harm,

negligence in caring for children or humiliation and physical violence and their mentality does not face legal punishment.

One of the main problems for the realization of children's rights in Iran is the domination of the reactionary culture of patriarchy. If in society and the patriarchal family, the interests of men are the basis for organizing social relations, in democratic and advanced societies and families, the interests of the child are the basis of family and educational relations (Ghanizadeh & Mortazavian, 2019). Hence, the expansion of children's rights is one of the obvious indicators of the degree of democratization of any society. For this reason, despite the acceptance of paragraph 1 of Article 19 of the Convention on Rights of the Child by Iran - which obliges all member states to protect children against all forms of violence, neglect, abuse, exploitation and sexual harassment-, the deployment of all legal means and enforcement has not been that much promising. In practice, the level of violence against children still proves the disregard for children's rights (Volvi, Seidi, Safaei Moghadam, & Hashemi, 2017). Despite this globally and nationally disappointing picture of non-compliance with the rights of child, it must be acknowledged that violence against children has decreased in many human societies in comparison with the past. This is also true in Iran. On the one hand, the level of parental literacy has increased significantly compared to the past and on the other hand, the role of people such as social reformers, writers, psychologists, lawyers and media professionals should not be overlooked. These people have tried to defend children's rights in various ways in the last few decades. Among these influential social groups, the role of novelists and storytellers should be highlighted. The purpose of this article is to analyze the content of two fiction works by two famous writers, i.e. English writer Charles Dickens (1870-1812) and Houshang Moradi Kermani (1944-), a contemporary Iranian writer on the rights of the child from a comparative perspective. Depending on the overall goal of paper, the specific goals are:

- Identifying and analyzing children's rights according to its components in Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist*
- Identification and analysis of children's rights according to its components in Kermani's *House Carpet Weavers Factory*
- Comparison of similarities and differences between the two selected works according to the research topic.

2. Research Background

Literature in every period has been a mirror of the reflection of the conditions and conditions of society (Dubey, 2013). One of the most important topics in fiction is paying attention to the child and his rights. Since many children have been oppressed from the past to the present, children's rights have been one of the most fascinating topics for writers and they tried hard to show hidden angles of this pervasive oppression (Corradi & Desmet, 2015). The consequence of this attention has been positive role of literary works - and especially fiction - in raising society's attention to children's rights. Meanwhile, Charles Dickens is one of the world's leading authors on children's rights, while Moradi Kermani has devoted most of his work to the subject of children over the past half-century. The research literature shows that many authors in various fields of science have paid attention to the content analysis of the works of these two authors. For example, in his recent research, Gunderman (2020: 1) believes:

“ Dickens probably did more than any other author to raise public awareness of the plight of children, laying the groundwork for a variety of social reforms. Physicians seeking an understanding of what poverty and exploitation look like from a child's point of view could hardly find richer sources of insight from works such as Dickens' novels including *Oliver Twist*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*”.

Abduelmajid, (2018:1) in his doctoral dissertation shows that:

“Dickens' works are effective means for criticizing social, economic, and moral issues in nineteenth century and to a great extent the at present time. The compassion and empathy portrayed in Dickens' works had developed the readers' social awareness to sympathize with any defenseless person. Additionally, the orphan children suffered more oppression and negligence; they neither enjoyed good health, nor acquired better education.”

Moja (2017) has also found that Dickens uses children as narrators in his works to show the social status of England in the early stages of the Industrial Revolution in childish language. Albertson (2017) examines the role of orphans in Dickens stories:

"reveals that the orphan child was a useful literary figure, as it appealed to Victorian sentiments and could thereby constitute the foundation for the author's moral claim. Additionally, Victorian readers were indeed influenced by their social context when reading the novel, as fiction and reality reciprocally illuminated each other. Thus, Dickens' portrayal of the young orphan boy in *Oliver Twist* invited readers to alter their perception of orphans in real life (p. 1).

Dutta (2014) also provides an overview of the situation of children in the Victorian era from the viewpoint of Dickens. He asserts that:

“In his novels, Dickens depicted the disorder, squalor, blight, decay, and the human misery of a modern industrial city. Victoria’s England was a child-dominated society. Throughout her long reign, one out of every three of her subjects was under the age of fifteen. By the end of the century, a vast majority of children lived in towns rather than rural communities. Poor children who survived infancy were often put to work at an early age. In the 1830s and 40s, poor children labored in textile mills and coal mines where working conditions often proved deadly. Child labor was not new, but as industrialization continued it became more visible, as masses of ragged, stunted children crowded the city streets” (P. 1).

Barbera (2014) also shows the role of Dickens in informing the affluent class about the plight of working children and expanding social awareness. Gholami and Judaki (2014) also cite Dickens as a critic of child rights and a social reformer. They reveal that:

"Dickens was a critic of The Poor Law and its administration, as well as the subject of child labor because of his own childhood experience. Moreover, his repugnance is also noted in the way he creates child characters like Oliver Twist who are exploited as child workers. Although Dickens directly suggests no social reform but he was actively involved in changing the lives of underprivileged people just like a reformist (P.1).

Twist (2011) emphasizes Dickens' role as one of the top ten authors in identifying and establishing children's rights in Western societies. In this regard, Massauda (2013) believes that Dickens had a social mission for himself:

“Britain was undergoing rapid changes during Charles Dickens life time therefore, he is considered to be one of the greatest English novelists who combined his literary career with a variety of social interests, some critic argue that he sees the novel as an important tool of social reform” (P.2).

Chakraborty (2008) also emphasizes the important role of Dickens and other writers in the realization of children's rights.

In Iran, many researchers have studied the works of Dickens and Moradi Kermani from the perspective of children's rights. For example, Kiani, Jahangiri and Hassan Shahi (2017) by examining how attention is paid to children's rights in Children of the Carpet Weaving House stories - with emphasis on labor rights in the Iranian legal system and international documents -

which per se illustrate the age, time, wages, working condition, and child abuse as the most important components and themes of Kermani's work through simple and unobtrusive language and indirectly in the story of Children of the Carpet Weaving House. Mahmoudi and Gichi (2016), using a sociological approach to examine application of belief system in children's and adolescent fiction – and based on a case study of the works of Moradi Kermani - found that religious subjects have a significant role in his stories. Seyyedani (2014) in his research on especially behavioral disorders in children such as fear, anxiety, and depression has pinpointed them with reference to Moradi Kermani. Nourian Mohammadi (2012) based on the themes extracted in Moradi Kermani's story including economic problems, social inequalities, educational problems and unemployment has manifested child rights. Entezari and Jadeian (2011) in their analysis of children's fiction books found that most of them - as well as Kermani's works - paid more attention to the situation of working children in the past and did not pay attention to current changes in employment. Ansarian (2005) emphasizes that Moradi Kermani expresses the poverty of the people and especially the abuse of children with humorous language. Dehshiri (1999) considers one of the common features of the two authors in the excellent characterization of heroes. In their stories, Dickens and Moradi Kermani introduce and process the characters in a way that the reader can easily imagine his ideas in their minds. The two writers develop the characters and draw their appearances in precise details to express their inner characteristics as well as social and class conditions.

3. Research Method

The method of the present study is qualitative with a descriptive interpretive approach and the method of data collection is based on library research. Deductive content analysis is also used to analyze the data. According to the definition of Krippendorff (2004), in this research, content analysis is a research technique for objective, regular, and quantitative description of the explicit and implicit content of the studied texts. In this article, after a brief review of the works of both authors, the researcher focuses on examining and analyzing the content of the two famous works of Oliver Twist and the Children of Carpet Weavers' House. The content analysis of the stories was done according to the components considered as legal rights by lawyers regarding children's rights.

4. Results

The In this section, the characters of Charles Dickens and his famous work are examined and analyzed respectively. Then the introduction of Moradi Kermani's life and his works is considered. This section ends with the content comparison of the themes of the two books.

Charles Dickens: From Childhood to Child Characterization

Dickens' child characters have traits that may not sound unrelated to his own past life. Dickens was born into a middle-class family and was forced to work as a child due to family poverty (Duncan, Ziolo-Guest, & Khalil, 2010). Dickens's childhood and adolescence are associated with suffering and deprivation. These circumstances led him to focus on this aspect of human life in his works. As a result, Dickens's humanistic work paved the way for many social, economic, and legal reforms for children across the globe. Dickens' enlightenment showed that adults choose children to achieve their goals (Rose, 1984). In 1842, Charles Dickens traveled with his family to the United States, a memoir he collected and published in a book. In this travelogue, he criticizes slavery in the United States (Van Wesemael, 2017). However, among Dickens' works, *Oliver Twist* is a revolutionary work because he used a child as the protagonist. This novel clearly shows the hardships faced by poor children as well as the crimes committed due to poverty (Heidari, 2017). In the history of novel writing, Dickens has been perhaps the first writer to pave way for realization of the rights of the most vulnerable section of society, the children. He delicately displays the miserable conditions of children. The violence experienced by children in Dickens' stories is a mirror image of the social conditions of the time. In fact, by maneuvering the elements of the story, Dickens introduces and condemns the roots of the factors that lead to child labor. He also illustrates the economic problems of Victorian England following the destructive rules under which low-wage and very poor working conditions can be employed. The following extracts from the novel orientate our attention towards the manifestation of the theme at hand and illustrates the writer's tact in literary revelation of what he has had in his mind:

"There are a lot of inconveniences in the upstairs rooms, chimneys and many doors. Spiders are woven into the room and the ceiling. When Oliver enters the room, the mouse enters the room and then returns to its nest". (Dickens, 1837:127)

"It was dark and damp, full of cold, and it was a night in a safe, warm house where there was room for thanksgiving, but the homeless had to be hungry to die". (Dickens, 1837:165)

"The house was dirty and smelly, and the rats had added to its wear and tear, all of which were signs of famine". (Dickens, 1837: 28)

All of this was a sign of the plight of the poor, to which unemployment and crime were added. Dickens' novel depicts the challenges facing an industrializing class society. Dickens

explicitly attacked the oppressive laws of his day, but in reality, it did not benefit those in the grip of hunger.

"They rushed him to another section where you had to sleep on a hard, cold bed, which was a symbol of the manifestation of the gentle laws of England" (Dickens, 1837:10)

"Oliver was harassed, forced to work hard, ridiculed by everyone but not pity by anyone" (Dickens, 1837:3)

At the adult level, although people worked hard but were not paid fairly, they were attacked by factory owners.

"At work they were faced with situations that no one liked. They were not properly paid". (Dickens, 1837:11)

Dickens is a critic of the situation that sent people to their deaths whose manifestations are thematically detected in the following extracts.

"When the night was dark and cold and cloudy, others were waiting for the bell to ring the bell of life. Wow! These bells were a symbol of despair for him. A voice that was deep and empty and just a messenger of death" (Dickens, 1837:402)

"Saturday night was the only night when you could see more of life and think again about starting the day, starting Sunday". (Dickens, 1837:402)

What manifests itself most throughout Dickens' novel is the color and smell of materialism and violence that overshadows society as a whole? The children were malnourished but pretended that there was no problem. Childcare money was spent elsewhere:

"The old woman knew very well how much she would spend on the children and how much she would save for herself. She would take most of the children's weekly expenses for herself". (Dickens, 1837:6)

"Poverty and hunger are two things to cry out for, and Oliver is very natural". (Dickens, 1837:14)

"Oliver looked hungry as he entered the room with a piece of bread and a dirty cloth over his head". (Dickens, 1837:14)

In Dickens' novel, the exploitation of poverty is symbolized by forced labor on a farm by an evil old woman. Dickens warns of the impact of his bitter childhood experiences on children's

rights. Dickens himself is a victim of child labor, a victim he bitterly remembers years later. He blames the oppression on children because it had devastating effects on his personality, such as deprivation of education, work-related injuries, and low pay (Makati, 2008)

"I think you need a place to sleep tonight, don't you?" "Yes, I do". (Dickens, 1837:5)

"My life is like cold, dirty streets, and you gentlemen lead me to it, and I keep myself there, day and night, until I die". (Dickens, 1837:116)

Dickens shows that at that time children were sent to begging and girls to brothels, and their childhood and future lives were disgraced (Albertson, 2017). However, poverty was one of the main obstacles to reviving children's rights. The children depended on the family environment and its social, economic, and cultural conditions. The child's development was physically, mentally as well as personally and socially dependent on the condition in which the child lived (Barbera, 2014).

Houshang Moradi Kermani

He was born in 1944 in the village of Sirj in the province of Kerman, Iran. He lost his mother as a child while his father was unable to care for him due to mental illness. Moradi Kermani lived with his grandparents and studied in the same village until the fifth grade. Moradi Kermani's uncle was a teacher and had a great influence on his growth. After completing his primary education, he went to Kerman and in 1960 began working with the local radio and started writing. Moradi Kermani's first writing award was for "Children of the Carpet Weaving House", which in 1980 won the National Award of the Children's Book Council and the Hans Christian Andersen International Award in 1986 (Salajegheh, 2003)

In the first story of the "Children of the Carpet House" story series, an eight-year-old boy named "Namako" is rented to the owner of a carpet weaving workshop due to family poverty. In fact, cheap labor for children and adolescents is always considered by employers and most children and adolescents are exploited in workshops and factories. (Ebadi, 1992)

"The eyes and claws, tired and precise, were busy making and polishing small and large flowers, red and yellow, and green carpet foliage. Flowers formed under the fingers. The sound of knocking, the beating of girls, the whispers of girls and the cries of infants were accompanied by the monotonous and sad sound of "Naghsh Ko" (Moradi Kermani, 1998: 13)

Carpet weaver house was full of children, each of whom had to endure the unfavorable atmosphere due to the poverty of the family. The Caliph, the owner of the carpet weaver, beat and cursed the children and treated them terribly.

"The insults smelled of stale and sour and opium juice, the caliph was cursing and the flowers were blooming on the carpet". (Moradi Kermani, 1397: 17)

The children's food was prepared with cheap ingredients and often did not satisfy them. The children had to sleep at night in the same carpet weaving house as their place of living and home while they were infested with lice until morning. Moradi Kermani depicts the bitter reality of children's lives, which is accompanied by fatigue and hunger, homelessness, physical and sexual harassment, and escape which have been illustrated in various stories in the Carpet Weaving House with a pointy and precise pen.

Comparing Dickens and Moradi Kermani's Views of Child Rights

The content analysis of the two novels shows the similarities and differences between the two authors both in terms of literary style and attention to the subject of "children's rights". The first similarity is that both authors have paid close attention to poverty, class differences, and oppression of children in their works - and in particular the two books reviewed in the present study. The second point is the common inner feeling of the two authors in using the tools of novels, stories and literature to send their message to the people, officials, and those involved in the political, educational, and legal systems of society to pay attention to children's rights. The third aspect of similarity between the two authors is the critical look combined with bitter humor along with the use of words, sentences and paragraphs that strongly attack the social conscience of the society. The fourth characteristic is the freshness and novelty of the works of each of the two writers, which, despite the passage of time, still strongly influence the emotions and interests of the readers. The last similarity is that the works of each of the two authors are a combination of idealism and realism; with the difference that Dickens, with a critical view of society, intended to change and reform the norms in favor of children's rights, while Kermani's goal is more to present a sweet and fascinating story. Of course, it must be acknowledged that Dickens and Moradi Kermani have provided a suitable social platform for awareness of the formation of children's rights by raising children's problems. The general analysis of these works increases the transparency of the role of these authors in introducing and reviving children's rights and shows the role of literature in leading the way to explaining the rights of this defenseless spectrum of society. Both writers, despite writing in two different time and place situations, were able to make child rights a universal

concern by participating in the theme of child rights and mastering the characterization of their protagonists.

The analysis of the works of the two authors also shows differences. First, Dickens certainly has the grace of prioritizing Moradi Kermani over child rights in his work. For this reason, it can be said that Moradi Kermani, like many writers around the world, is inspired by Dickens' works. Secondly, Dickens's stories are especially related to the beginning of the industrialization period in the eighteenth century in England in urban areas, while Moradi Kermani's narrative mainly belongs to the atmosphere of rural Iran in the early twentieth century and landlord-peasant relations of the agricultural era. In fact, both writers directly and indirectly witness the emergence of conditions in their society, space and time that lead to their subtle expression through the subtle elements of the story in the form of a novel (Moja, 2017). Third, while Dickens's work in his time, as well as during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, had a tremendous impact on readers and was more in tune with the realities of industrial society, Moradi Kermani's works seem to be in line with new developments in Iranian society - especially in terms of economic changes which sound less coordinated. Moradi Kermani tales are mostly told in rural areas of Iran around 70 years ago, while today more than 70% of Iranians are urban dwellers, the lord-servant system has disappeared, the production of traditional carpets has greatly decreased and Iran's economy is mainly industrial and the superficial nature of child labour has changed.

5. Conclusion

Literature has been one of the most powerful sources in explaining human conditions throughout the ages. In this article, an attempt was made to write the role of two famous authors in describing and identifying the situation of children and children's rights. In both books, *Oliver Twist* by Dickens and *Children of the Carpet Weaving House* by Moradi Kermani, the theme of child rights has been examined. Analysis of the content of the stories shows that both authors address issues such as family poverty, general illiteracy, the inevitable but negative role of parents, inappropriate work environment, long working hours, deplorable health and food conditions, physical and psychological abuse, low wages and economic exploitation, and the trampling of natural rights have shown great interest in depicting the space of their stories. The findings also show that Dickens has performed an intellectual role model for many later intellectuals and writers due to his chronological precedence, while Kermani Kermani has been able to take great strides in introducing Iranian fiction to the world in recent decades. Another point that can be mentioned is

that both authors have been able to introduce many facts of children's lives to adults in the language of their protagonists, who are mostly children. The last and most important bitter fact is that despite the positive impact of writers such as Dickens and Kermani Kermani on the development of social thinking about the observance of children's rights, in many human societies the violation of children's rights can still be detected and seen. Perhaps literature can once again come to the aid of teachers and educational systems so that they can nurture a generation that respects the rights of the child.

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