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Intercultural Discourse Analysis of Persian Textbooks in Iranian Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

Intercultural discourse is a contemporary approach to dialogue among cultures. Its aims include laying the groundwork for international interaction and institutionalizing flexibility and adaptability among countries in pursuit of a new world order. Human values, gender equality, flexibility and resilience, peace and altruism, the rejection of racism, environmental protection, and similar themes are among the core intercultural concepts. Persian-language textbooks provide a suitable vehicle for teaching these concepts and can play an important role in developing students' intercultural skills. This study used a mixed quantitative–qualitative design based on content analysis to determine the frequency of intercultural topics in Persian textbooks for Iranian secondary schools and to critically assess how these topics are represented. The statistical analysis shows that twelve intercultural topics—including linguistic and literary interaction, tourism, the environment, the literature of other nations, and transcendent human values—appear in the textbooks, with the literature of other nations accounting for the largest share. Grade 12 and Grade 9 have the highest and lowest frequencies, respectively. Although intercultural components are addressed at every grade level and valuable topics such as the environment and tourism are covered, the findings indicate that many intercultural topics are absent from these textbooks, that those present occur at a very low frequency relative to the total number of pages, and that in some cases the textbooks adopt a negative or skeptical stance toward intercultural topics.

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1. Introduction

In the twentieth century, the intensification of economic activity, the mass production of goods, and the formation of interwoven economic and social networks began to transform the cultural landscape of the world. Travel undertaken for commercial and political purposes gave human relations a new character, and in the following decades the spread and popularization of internet communication accelerated this change, producing, intentionally or not, new patterns of lifestyle and behavior that are referred to as globalization. As Ashcroft et al. (2014) put it, "globalization is the process by which individual lives and local communities are affected by global economic and cultural forces. In practice, globalization is the process by which the world becomes a single place." From its inception, globalization has attracted both supporters and opponents, and this clash of views persists today. Opponents regard it as a deliberate project of neocolonialism whose ultimate aim is to reduce human beings to one-dimensional creatures (Rafi, 2016). From this perspective, globalism does not necessarily mean valuing people's lives; rather, it steers the cultures of different groups in directions favored by commercial enterprises. Some critics of globalism view it as a trap that undermines democracy and welfare, and regard globalization policies as a deceptive means of imposing economic policies on other nations. With the support of the mass media, this process has intensified the desire for product variety and consumerism even in the most remote parts of the world. These critics even describe sport as a cultural commodity in deceptive packaging that can serve to advertise the goods of globalists (Martin & Schumann, 1999).

Despite these pessimistic views and the criticisms leveled at globalization in the present century, including the claim that it is a conspiracy by powerful states to weaken and exploit weaker nations, this is not the view of all scholars. Many researchers in the field of culture regard globalization as a gradual process of socialization among nations and of promoting collective thinking. Indeed, "the development of culture is an inherent part of this process, which increases rationality and materiality in modern societies—a process that increasingly deprives individuals of independent thought and makes them ever more dependent on social processes" (Slevin, 2001, p. 184). This view regards globalization as an opportunity to foster cultural coexistence, enabling diverse peoples, groups, and nations to become familiar with shared cultural norms and to converge on a common approach to respecting human rights. For example, a Chinese scholar, in an article titled "Globalization Research from a Chinese Perspective," after explaining the relationship between economics and globalization and the historical rivalry between China and the West, argues that in Chinese intellectual circles globalization does not mean alignment with Western culture; rather, in China "a large number of scholars are well aware that Western countries are still the

leaders of the globalization process, but, with the exception of a few, the others believe that globalization should not be equated with Westernization" (Center for Cultural–International Studies, 2009, p. 170). Some politicians generally maintain that their opposition to globalization is intended to safeguard regional values against Western encroachment. Watson (2004), however, argues in *Cultural Pluralism* that, alongside promoting a culture of leisure and consumerism, globalization also brings government accountability and, above all, civil liberties. For this reason, sensitivity to globalization is greater in developing countries.

On this basis, a direct relationship can be identified between globalism and culture: as globalization advances, local culture tends to be transformed into a pervasive, international culture. The most fundamental and classic definition of culture is that of the English anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor, who defines it as the complex whole comprising knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and all other capabilities and habits acquired by humans (Mansournejad, 2001). With the dominance of an international outlook, all of these cultural elements are subject to change. Governments adopt different positions according to their overall policies. In the pessimistic view, global culture is presented as cultural imperialism; Tomlinson (2001), in *Globalization and Culture*, argues that in this view cultural imperialism is explained in terms of "domination," such as American domination over Europe, the domination of the modern world over the traditional world, and the domination of capitalism over everyone. On the other hand, this development can be regarded as a means of promoting "civility" and an opportunity to adopt valuable subcultures from other nations and even to introduce one's own national culture to others. Some scholars consider civility to require a particular type of communication, termed "phatic communication," whose purpose is to sustain and strengthen social relations rather than to transmit information (Moeini Alamdari, 2001).

"Intercultural discourse" is a concept born of the contemporary world and shaped by globalization, which underscores the necessity of communication among cultures. It differs from the concepts of intracultural or multicultural communication, which concern cultural interaction within a single pluralistic society, or cultural diversity. Some studies have referred to the concept as "transcultural communication" (Shoeiri & Bakhshaei, 2010). Intercultural communication is an international approach that emphasizes cultural convergence among countries so that such communication may lead to a shared language for better understanding of needs and for the formulation of inclusive rules. "Intercultural competence, as a life skill, includes the ability to think about foreign and native cultures with a fresh perspective and to approach different cultural situations with openness" (Sadidi et al., 2019). In this sense, intercultural discourse, viewed

positively, is a step toward bringing nations into constructive dialogue so as to better understand shared human needs and to devise effective rules. "The intercultural dimension is applied to societies in which there is a deep understanding of, and respect for, other cultures" (Hesami Kermani et al., 2022, p. 70). Intercultural concepts include human values, peace, flexibility and tolerance, gender, the environment, and similar concerns, all of which are shared human issues. Just as in multicultural societies such as Iran convergence among ethnic groups is necessary, this need is felt globally on a larger scale. Introducing different cultures, understanding and respecting religions, attending to a culture of peace, and promoting acceptance of diversity and plurality are among the topics of multicultural societies (Vafaei & Sobhaninejad, 2015). At the macro level, these and similar concepts may be regarded as the principal intercultural concepts of this discourse.

Cultural misunderstanding and a lack of empathetic understanding of others' beliefs are among the most serious obstacles to the realization of intercultural discourse. Such misunderstanding can occur in relations among individuals, within small groups, and in the cultural and political relations of states. For example, given the complex connections among people through migration and commercial, political, and recreational travel, as well as scientific and cultural exchanges on the internet within groups and working groups, a lack of mutual understanding and of prior education in tolerance and mutual respect can lead to failure and disillusionment in relationships.

Education is one of the most influential institutions for strengthening intercultural competence and can prepare children and adolescents, from the earliest years, to encounter the cultures of other nations and to live together culturally. According to culture researchers, one function of education is to teach the informal knowledge of culture, such as values, beliefs, behavioral rules, respect, and gender-related expectations, and teaching intercultural relations can help reduce prejudice, racism, and stereotypes and foster cultural flexibility and adaptability (Samovar et al., 2000). In recent years, increasing attention has been paid to teaching intercultural concepts, but this attention has focused on textbooks for teaching languages to students in other countries. These studies generally emphasize how intercultural concepts can be used alongside language instruction, particularly English instruction. For example, Byram argues that learners need not only knowledge and awareness about other countries but also skills, attitudes, and identity in order to communicate in intercultural situations (Byram, 2008, as cited in Abolhasani Chimeh, 2015). These studies are generally based on models that propose certain components as intercultural concepts for analyzing such textbooks; for example, Lazar (2019) presents thirteen aspects, such as objects, taboos, and proverbs.

School textbooks may be regarded as the principal instrument for teaching intercultural concepts, orienting students toward a transnational outlook and an international perspective. Among the textbooks used by Iranian students, humanities subjects such as literature, history, and social studies have considerable potential for teaching intercultural communication. Of these, literature, by virtue of its power of influence and its direct connection with culture, can offer a suitable setting for teaching intercultural concepts; that is, it can include poems, stories, and anecdotes that promote human values, a spirit of peace, and interaction and tolerance among people. "Literature is a way to better know oneself and a starting point for entering other societies. In literary texts we witness the reflection of the language, culture, and characteristics of different civilizations" (Saadatnejad & Farsian, 2019, p. 346). Among the various branches of human knowledge, literature has always been one of the most important arenas for the exchange of ideas. Throughout history, poets and writers of different cultures have been in contact with one another. In Asia, there has long been interaction among writers and poets in Persian, Turkish, and Arabic, creating an atmosphere of cordiality, acceptance, and tolerance. Literature and culture have never been separate; rather, "cultural studies emerged from literary studies" (Culler, 2006), and literature can therefore be an effective instrument for the cultural education of the younger generation. Alongside preserving national values and emphasizing national identity and religious beliefs, literature instruction can open students' horizons and prepare them for communication with different cultures and for entering diverse and even contradictory intellectual domains. According to culture scholars, literature is one of the six branches of human knowledge that cultural planners and ideologues use to achieve cultural goals (Fayyaz, 2010). Persian textbooks therefore merit particular attention.

Studies of intercultural communication and related concepts have been conducted, but, as noted above, they generally fall within the field of foreign-language education. Iranian researchers have mostly examined the extent to which intercultural topics are used in textbooks for teaching Persian to non-native speakers (known in Persian by the acronym AZFA) and the criticisms that can be leveled at them. To the best of our knowledge, no study has specifically critiqued intercultural discourse in school Persian textbooks. Some related studies are as follows:

- Risager (1991), in a study entitled "Cultural references in European textbooks: An evaluation of recent tendencies," examined cultural references in European textbooks and, using four groups of cultural topics, including the group "international and intercultural concepts," investigated the principal intercultural topics reflected in these books.

- Saadatnejad and Farsian (2019), in an article entitled "Strengthening intercultural competence through literary texts and strategies for teaching it in French," drew on Gillian Lazar's model to examine three French literary texts from the textbook *Step-by-Step French Instruction* and investigated strategies by which French culture can be taught to learners through French literature in order to strengthen their intercultural communication ability.
- Khayat (2020), in an article entitled "A critical analysis of the content of French textbooks for the first and second years of lower secondary school for Iranian students from the perspective of language–culture teaching and its components," critiqued these books and concluded that the teaching of intercultural concepts in them is weak and that, alongside language instruction, they do not address the cultures of the source and target countries or their similarities and differences.
- Abolhasani Chimeh (2015), in a study entitled "Intercultural discourse in the textbook *Persian in Use*," examined the importance of representing cultural components in this book for strengthening intercultural discourse competence. The book teaches Persian to non-Persian speakers outside Iran, and the author argues that, through a kind of fixity and disregard, it fails to depict many components of Iranian culture, particularly the culture of recent decades.
- Mazhdakanlou (2022), in an article entitled "Critical discourse analysis of teaching Persian to non-Persian speakers with a focus on the sociocultural dimension of the AZFA discourse," examined the cultural teachings in AZFA textbooks. The findings showed that these teachings were produced on the basis of a conception of Iranian culture that does not correspond to reality, and, in the author's view, there is a significant gap between the perceptions of AZFA practitioners and the actual situation. The study criticized, among other things, excessive pride in ancient Iran and Islamic rituals and an ideological approach to AZFA instruction.
- Hesami Kermani et al. (2022), in an article entitled "In search of intercultural concepts in the works of contemporary artists," examined the reflection of intercultural concepts in the works of three contemporary painters (Anselm Kiefer, Ahmad Nadalian, and Jean-Michel Basquiat) and showed how art can create a kind of cultural affinity and move toward a shared language.

The present study aims to analyze and examine how intercultural concepts are reflected in Persian textbooks for Iranian secondary schools, as well as the manner in which these books are

written and developed with a view to teaching intercultural communication. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the principal intercultural topics reflected in Persian textbooks, and what is their frequency in each educational cycle?
- What is the frequency of intercultural topics at each grade level?
- What are the main positive and negative aspects of attention to intercultural communication in Persian textbooks?

2. Research Method

This study adopts a mixed quantitative–qualitative design based on thematic content analysis and was conducted using documentary and library methods. The primary sources are the Persian textbooks, and the secondary sources are books and articles related to the field of culture. The research instruments were note cards for the qualitative part and a content-analysis checklist for the statistical part. The statistical population comprises the Persian textbooks of the first (lower) and second (upper) secondary cycles (theoretical track) in Iran in 2025. The unit of analysis is the sentence. In counting the frequency of intercultural topics, the criterion was the number of times a topic or concept recurs within lessons and exercises, covering all pages of the books. These items were extracted in general terms and without positive or negative evaluation, and they do not signify attention to, or neglect of, these topics; rather, they are intercultural topics raised in the textbooks, most of which are treated positively and some negatively.

3. Findings

After extracting the intercultural topics and recording their frequency at each grade level and in each cycle, the research questions can be answered as follows:

A. What are the principal intercultural topics reflected in Persian textbooks, and what is their frequency in each educational cycle?

Table 1. Frequency of intercultural topics in the Persian textbooks of the lower and upper secondary cycles

Intercultural topics	**Lower secondary**	**Upper secondary**	**Total per component**
Environment	3	0	3
Flexibility and resilience	2	0	2
Children's rights	1	0	1
Eminent world figures	3	3	6
Literature of other nations	10	12	22
Linguistic and literary interaction among cultures	2	7	9
Transcendent human values	1	6	7
Tourism and travel	0	2	2
Iran–West relations	0	10	10
Iran and Muslim nations	3	2	5
Iran and Persian-speaking countries	1	1	2
Internet and virtual communication	1	0	1
Total per cycle	**27**	**43**	**70**

Examination of the Persian textbooks of the lower and upper secondary cycles shows that the topics and concepts related to intercultural discourse in these books can be summarized in twelve categories: (1) environment; (2) flexibility and resilience; (3) children's rights; (4) eminent world figures; (5) literature of other nations; (6) linguistic and literary interaction among cultures; (7) transcendent human values; (8) tourism and travel; (9) Iran–West relations; (10) Iran and Muslim nations; (11) Iran and Persian-speaking countries; and (12) the internet and virtual communication.

Statistical analysis of the intercultural topics shows that these twelve topics are raised 70 times in the Persian textbooks, 27 times in the lower secondary books and 43 times in the upper secondary books. In other words, approximately 39% of these occurrences appear in the lower secondary cycle and 61% in the upper secondary cycle.

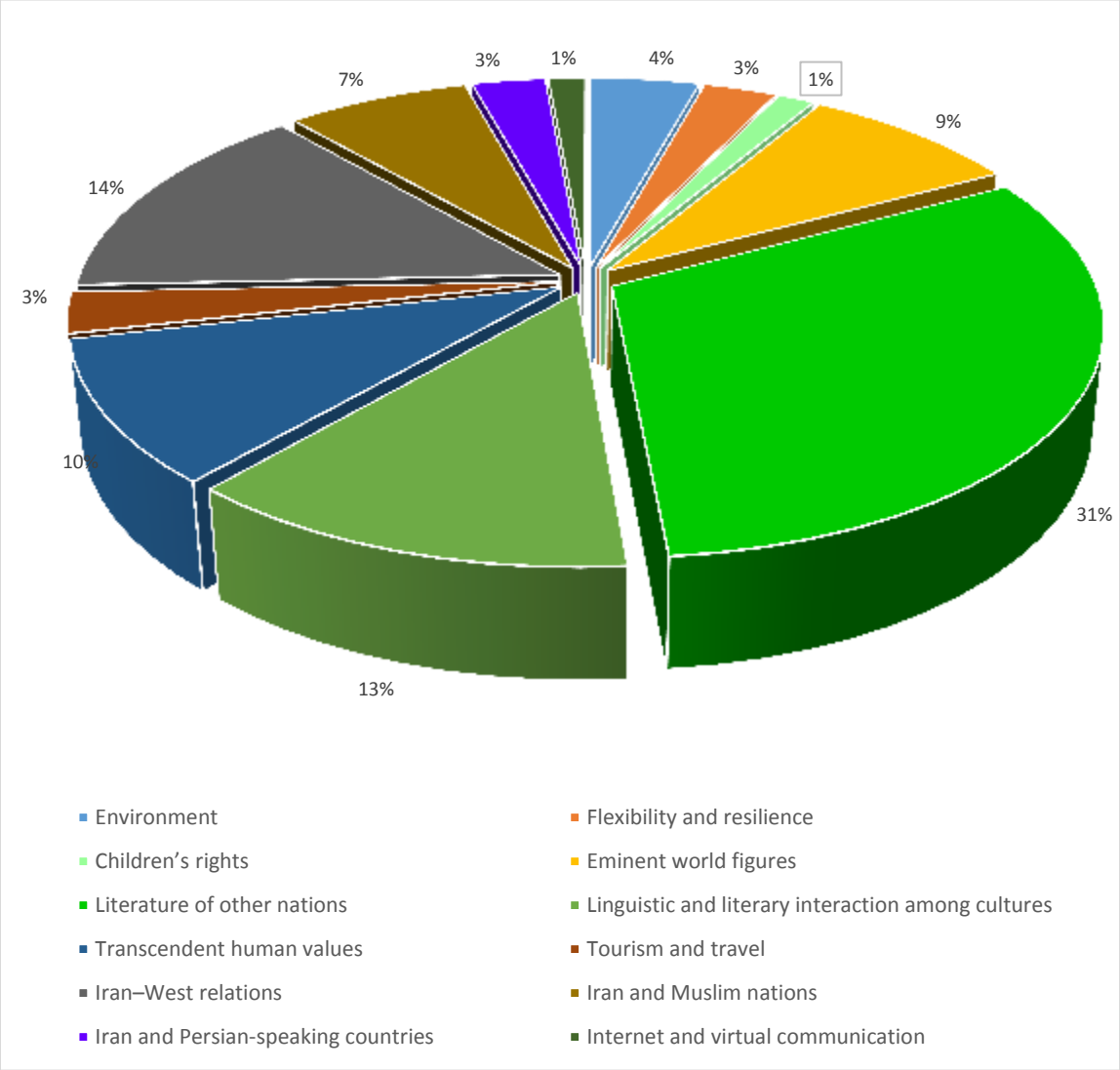


Figure 1. Share of each intercultural topic in the Persian textbooks of the lower and upper secondary cycles

The analysis shows that, among the intercultural topics identified, "literature of other nations" accounts for the largest share (31%), while "the internet and virtual communication" and "children's rights" each account for the smallest (1%). "Iran–West relations" and "linguistic, literary, and cultural interaction" are, respectively, the second and third most frequent topics.

B. What is the frequency of each intercultural topic at each grade level?

The data show that Grade 12 accounts for a larger share of the intercultural topics than the other grades. Grade 11 ranks second, one occurrence behind. Grade 9 has the smallest share of intercultural topics.

Table 2. Frequency of intercultural topics by grade level

Intercultural topics	**Grade 7**	**Grade 8**	**Grade 9**	**Grade 10**	**Grade 11**	**Grade 12**
Environment	3	0	0	0	0	0
Flexibility and resilience	2	0	0	0	0	0
Children's rights	1	0	0	0	0	0
Eminent world figures	2	0	1	0	0	3
Literature of other nations	3	4	3	4	4	4
Linguistic and literary interaction among cultures	1	1	0	1	4	2
Transcendent human values	0	0	1	4	2	0
Tourism and travel	0	0	0	0	0	2
Iran–West relations	0	0	0	0	5	5
Iran and Muslim nations	1	2	0	1	1	0
Iran and Persian-speaking countries	1	0	0	0	0	1
Internet and virtual communication	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total per grade	**14**	**8**	**5**	**10**	**16**	**17**

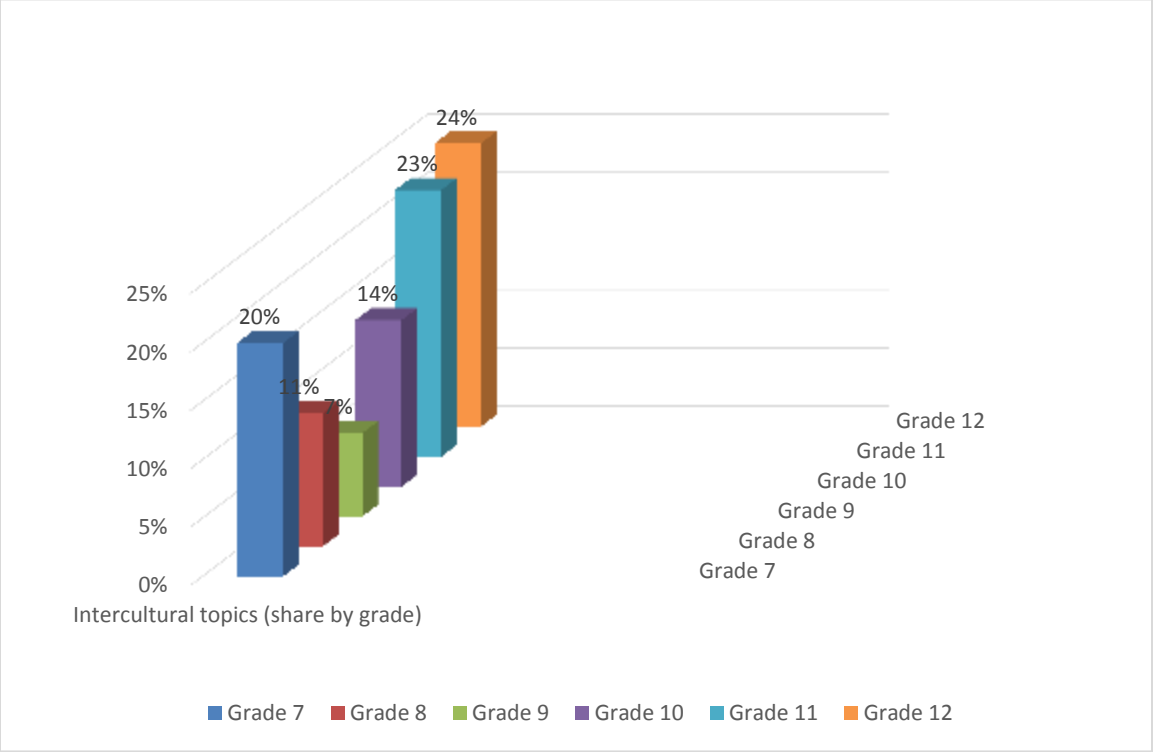


Figure 2. Share of each grade level in the intercultural topics

According to this figure, Grade 12 (24%) and Grade 9 (7%) account for the largest and smallest shares of intercultural topics, respectively.

C. What are the main positive and negative aspects of attention to intercultural communication in Persian textbooks?

A quantitative and qualitative study of the lessons in the secondary-school Persian textbooks allows the positive aspects of these books, in terms of attention to intercultural discourse, to be summarized as follows:

Function of world literature in strengthening intercultural competence

One positive feature of the compilation of the Persian textbooks is the attention paid to the literature of other nations, which plays a significant role in acquainting students with the culture and literature of other countries. In these six books, a total of 22 lessons deal with world literature. By reading the poems of world poets or the texts of world writers, students become acquainted

with their imagery and rhetoric, their emotions and, above all, the thought and worldview of the writers of other nations, and they obtain a clearer picture of each country's cultural face, just as in the West the cultural face of Iranians is known through the poetry of Khayyam, Rumi, and Hafez.

In some grades, attention is also paid to literary interaction and mutual borrowing between Iranian and non-Iranian cultures. This approach should be explained in the context of comparative literature, which examines and analyzes the similarities and differences between literary works in two languages and studies their contexts and sources. "Comparative literature is an inherently transnational and intercultural discipline and therefore provides a suitable ground for creating, developing, and expanding intercultural relations and interactions. It broadens perspective and magnanimity and reduces the ethnic prejudices that give rise to self-aggrandizement and polemic among nations" (Anoushiravani, 2010). Accordingly, the topics concerning borrowing and imitation in these books are also significant from the standpoint of comparative literature. In the lesson "Literature Class" (OERP, 2025a: Grade 7), the text discusses Nima's fascination with the poetry of Hugo, one of the great poets of French Romanticism, which later led Nima to be influenced by this school; according to Shafiei Kadkani (2006, p. 50), this influence marked the beginning of a particular type of Romanticism in Iran. Shahriar, in turn, regarded himself as influenced by Nima and experimented with elements of Romanticism in his own poems (Shahriar, 2006, p. 744). This lesson indicates the starting point of the influence of French Romanticism on Persian poetry, which, in Shahriar's view, also led Nima to break with traditional forms.

One feature of the Persian language that indicates its antiquity and richness is its influence on the literatures of other nations. The belief that, in comparative literature, Persian language and literature have always been influenced rather than influential is mistaken. In comparative literature, many Eastern languages generally regard Western literature as the source and origin of borrowing and imitation. According to many researchers, however, "what places comparative literature and its related cultural studies under serious threat is the problem of self-aggrandizement and Western-centrism. This issue, also known as postcolonial critique, not only fails to produce mutual understanding and cultural enrichment but is also counted among the instruments for the spread of nationalism and cultural imperialism" (Zinivand, 2013). A study of sample lessons in the secondary-school Persian textbooks also shows that such borrowings and influences are reciprocal. In the lesson "Khan-e Adl" ("The Banquet of Justice"), the sentence "Is it not so that our guide, every evening, with a delightful voice, recites a few verses from your rapturous ghazals, so as to awaken the stars of the heavens and frighten the highwaymen of mountain and desert?"—which is part of a poem by Goethe, the renowned German poet—is related

to the poetry of Hafez (OERP, 2025e: Grade 11). The same book mentions two further borrowings: in the same lesson, Goethe's use of Sa'di's *Golestan* is discussed, and in the lesson "Azarbad," the story *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by the American writer Richard Bach is described as an adaptation, with changed title and characters, of Attar's *Mantiq al-Tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*), emphasizing the necessity of seeking truth and of perseverance (OERP, 2025e: Grade 11).

Another form of intercultural interaction in these books is the treatment of linguistic exchange and lexical borrowing, a noteworthy topic that shows Iran's cultural relations with other nations and acquaints students with the history of the Persian language and its antiquity and stability. Each of the three upper secondary books contains a lesson on linguistic exchange. In Grade 10, the lesson "Persianized Words" identifies words such as *hena* (henna), *jozve* (booklet), *na'na'* (mint), and *malat* (mortar) as Arabic in origin (OERP, 2025d: Grade 10). In the lesson "Persian Words in Arabic," the borrowing is reversed, and words such as *kahroba* (amber), *handese* (geometry), *barnamaj* (program), and *tazaj* (fresh) are identified as Persian in origin. Through this lesson, students learn that the interrelationship between Persian and Arabic is reciprocal and that it is not the case that only Arabic words have entered Persian (OERP, 2025e: Grade 11). Likewise, the lesson "The World of Persian Words" shows the back-and-forth movement of words such as *pijama* (from *pay-jame*), *kiosk* (from *kushk*), and *chamedan* (from *jame-dan*) and explains how, over thousands of years, such words entered Indian languages, Russian, English, French, and Turkish and, after changing form several times in passing from one language to another, eventually returned to Persian (OERP, 2025f: Grade 12). Teaching these linguistic exchanges plays a significant role in strengthening students' intercultural competence and their confidence in the strength of Iranian culture.

Diversity in the selection of foreign poets and writers

As noted earlier, in postcolonial critique, centering Western culture can damage the self-confidence of cultural and literary actors in other nations; despite the abundance of valuable literary works by Eastern writers and poets, greater authenticity appears to be accorded to Western works in global frameworks. Therefore, given the antiquity and maturity of Eastern literature, equal and fair attention to the literature of other nations provides a basis for cultural convergence and intercultural communication. A positive feature of the compilation of the secondary-school Persian textbooks is the use of literary works by Indian, Russian, and Arab poets

and writers alongside European and American authors. This plays a significant role in acquainting students with the worldview and literary styles of the great figures of Eastern literature.

Attention to environmental issues

Environmental protection is one of the most pervasive and important issues in the world today, and numerous conferences and studies are held every year on issues such as greenhouse gases and air pollution, deforestation, and the degradation of pastures and mountains. Literature can be a powerful instrument for raising awareness in this area. Today's writers and poets address a wider range of subjects than earlier authors did, and contemporary needs and issues receive greater attention. "The contemporary era leaves no doubt about the importance and necessity of deepening reflection on the relationship between humans and the environment. Literature and the arts play an important role in such reflection, and literature has long been a site for the representation of nature" (Javari, 2018). In the lesson "To Whom Should I Give My Little Heart?", respect for nature is appropriately recommended, and polluting the sea and killing animals are portrayed as improper (OERP, 2025a: Grade 7). Likewise, in the lesson "The Joy of Reading," love of nature and refraining from hunting birds are valued (OERP, 2025a, p. 82).

Attention to tourism

Travelogues have long been among the most important written works for introducing lands, cities, and places and describing their attractions, and valuable information on geographical, social, economic, and anthropological subjects can be extracted from them. In the contemporary era, the form and style of travel writing have changed, but it still appeals to those interested in travel and exploration. Knowledge of a nation's customs, national festivals and ceremonies, historical monuments, cultural centers, and the like can provide a basis for intercultural communication. Today, tourism has become an important industry for attracting capital and, at the same time, is regarded as one of the most important means of cultural export and of improving intercultural relations. Attention to this topic in textbooks can foster students' interest in learning about the history and culture of other nations. The lesson "From Pariz to Paris," a travelogue by Bastani Parizi, contains valuable material on the political history of the West and stresses the importance of travel and its achievements. Its subjects include the history of Greece in the preceding century, the history of Italy and Mussolini's rule, ancient Rome and its surviving monuments, the history of France and the Napoleonic wars (especially the Battle of Waterloo), and descriptions of cities such

as Athens and Brussels, all written with a flavor of admonition and wisdom. In the course of this travelogue, Bastani recalls the power of culture to change nations and the triumph of culture over political power and war; referring to his teacher's letter about visiting Hugo's tomb, he writes: "This letter set me thinking. I realized how powerful this writer's pen had been, that it had carried French culture and civilization even into the heart of a remote village of Iran such as Pariz—something that neither Napoleon's army, nor Charlemagne's forces, nor de Gaulle's speeches could have done" (OERP, 2025f, p. 62). This lesson is one of the most effective lessons in the Persian textbooks for strengthening intercultural discourse.

Alongside the positive aspects that can be enumerated in the planning and selection of Persian lessons from the standpoint of attention to intercultural topics, there are shortcomings and weaknesses in the treatment of lessons and in the choice of lesson topics that are at odds with the mission of international communication and intercultural interaction:

- *A small share of intercultural topics*

Persian instruction has great potential for promoting and institutionalizing culture, and the teaching of Persian could be turned into an opportunity for teaching intercultural concepts. However, the statistical analysis of the Persian textbooks demonstrates the opposite. Although the intercultural topics identified in this study are among the core concepts of this discourse, they do not exhaust it: important concepts such as self-confidence, the rejection of sexism, the rejection of racism, and freedom of expression are absent. Moreover, not all twelve intercultural topics that do appear are presented positively; for example, the internet and relations with the West are presented pessimistically. In addition, some topics occur at a very low frequency; for example, children's rights and the internet each appear only once, and some topics appear twice. The total of all twelve topics amounts to 70 occurrences, which is very low relative to the 1,008 pages of the Persian textbooks.

- *Insufficient attention to a culture of tolerance and resilience*

Flexibility and tolerance of opposing views are important intercultural components and a precondition for any cultural dialogue. Indeed, the basis of cultural communication can be considered to be the acceptance of differing tastes and interests. Resilience and freedom from prejudice can lead individuals in various situations, such as studying in other countries, migration, and travel, toward coexistence and peaceful communication. Tolerance and leniency hold a special

place in Persian literature. Hafez is a poet who proclaims peace and tolerance, and he holds that human comfort in the world depends on friendship with friends and tolerance toward enemies: "The comfort of both worlds is explained by these two phrases: kindness to friends, tolerance toward enemies" (Hafez, 2010); elsewhere he advises that peace is better than war and strife: "O light of my eyes, peace is better than war and quarrel" (Hafez, 2010). Nevertheless, in the secondary-school Persian lessons, apart from two instances, no attention is paid to this component. In an important part of the lessons there is a pessimistic view of other cultures, particularly Western culture, rooted in the historical record of Western interference in Iran; accordingly, in 10 instances there is a negative stance and opposition toward Western culture and ideology. Another point that, in the view of some sociologists, conflicts with tolerance is excessive emphasis on ethnic and religious beliefs. Samovar (2000), in *Communication Between Cultures*, argues that emphasizing particular parts of history can lead to ethnocentrism and cultural prejudice; he even regards the West's emphasis on the history of the Industrial Revolution as an obstacle to intercultural relations. In the secondary-school Persian textbooks, a certain imbalance is observed in the treatment of religious rituals and intercultural concepts; there are 98 references to religious concepts, which appears disproportionate relative to the total of 70 intercultural references.

- *A negative approach to the internet and virtual communication*

Today the internet is an essential infrastructure for communication, and contemporary humans, in moving from the traditional era to the modern world, have begun a new era of intercultural relations. This technology has opened a new window to humanity, and the old mechanical world has given way to the modern electronic world. Despite its drawbacks, the internet has lifted many burdens from humankind, and technologically advanced countries have taken major strides in development with modern internet equipment. A skeptical attitude toward this technology can become a serious obstacle to competing with the rest of the world. Such an attitude toward the internet is present in the Persian textbooks: in the lesson "Humans, Technology, and Ethics," the view of the internet is skeptical and pessimistic: "If users of the internet and new technology do not adorn themselves with scientific ethics and human virtues and do not observe the boundaries of law, religion, moral and cultural norms, and the etiquette of chivalry, these tools will become like a destructive bomb" (OERP, 2025b: Grade 8). In general, the formulation of the lessons, including this one, is hortatory and moral, and previous research supports this claim (Heidari, 2019). In another statement in the same lesson, with reference to the internet, Western industry is introduced as a dangerous instrument: "The breaking of human dignity and glory and

the fading of manners and ethics are the fruit of the mechanical and science-intoxicated civilization of the West" (OERP, 2025b: Grade 8). Statements of this kind may convey to students, instead of motivation, a sense of disillusionment and pessimism, with the result that they fall behind the caravan of human progress.

4. Conclusion

The findings show that the environment; flexibility and resilience; children's rights; eminent world figures; the literature of other nations; linguistic and literary interaction among cultures; transcendent human values; tourism and travel; Iran–West relations; Iran and Muslim nations; Iran and Persian-speaking countries; and the internet and virtual communication are the principal intercultural topics reflected in the secondary-school Persian textbooks of Iran. According to the statistical analysis, the literature of other nations has the highest share, while children's rights and the internet have the lowest. The statistical analysis also shows that the highest frequency of intercultural topics occurs in Grade 12 and the lowest in Grade 9. Of the total frequency of intercultural components, the upper secondary cycle accounts for 61% and the lower secondary cycle for 39%, the larger and smaller shares, respectively. The qualitative analysis indicates that attention to the literature of other nations, diversity in the selection of poets and writers from different languages and cultures, and the treatment of important issues such as the environment and the tourism industry are positive features of the secondary-school Persian lessons with respect to intercultural communication. Nevertheless, the frequency of intercultural topics is very low relative to the total content of the secondary-school Persian textbooks; some components appear only once or twice, which calls for a review of the curricular topics and makes serious attention to intercultural concepts in the Persian textbooks necessary. Adaptability and flexibility, among the most important intercultural concepts, appear only twice, both in Grade 7. At the same time, the lessons exhibit an excessive formulation of political and ideological topics that conflicts with the phatic approach and with intercultural communication and needs to be moderated. Likewise, a pessimistic and skeptical judgment of the internet, as the most modern instrument of intercultural communication, may run counter to the principle of intercultural communication. Addressing these shortcomings could open a brighter horizon in global interactions and international communication for the younger generation.

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