

WCES-2011

## Citizenship values in school subjects: a case-study on Iran's elementary and secondary education school subjects

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### Abstract

In this research, using 'cultural reproduction' theory, level of Citizenship Values presence in elementary and secondary school subjects of Islamic Republic of Iran's education system has been critically studied. Selected textbooks to be analyzed include four kinds of school subjects that concept-wise can whether implicitly or explicitly contain material relevant to democratic Citizenship Values. The method utilized in this research is "critical discourse analysis" in order to trace and extract the footprints of values concealed in school subjects. The research results demonstrate that in these books the concepts such as contentment, satisfaction, patriarchy, religious superiority, obedience, and submission are presented more.

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*Keywords:* Citizenship values, right-based citizenship, duty-based citizenship, critical discourse analysis, school subjects;

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### 1. Introduction

In a society, the amount of people's familiarity with the concepts related to "citizen" and citizenship goes back to the concept of social/cultural values' socialization. Like all other values, social/cultural values are mainly internalized through family and education institutions. Citizenship values are produced by modern politics as well as social, political and cultural circumstances of French revolution and Industrial revolution. After French revolution individual, social and political rights and freedom were posed as the values of a modern society and still are of a great importance in modern societies. These values are transferred to the society's individuals via education system. Throughout the public education held mandatorily by education institution of different countries, norms and citizenship values are transferred to children and adolescents so that the child as a citizen becomes aware of his self-related rights and assignments as well as those related to other citizens, government and other social institutions, that is how he can resurrect his rights violated by surrounding individuals or institutions and can play his role as a citizen of that society. The totality of education institution plays an important role in conveying citizenship values; however school subjects amidst various components of education institution are of a centre and significant place. The main goal of this study is to identify the way citizenship-related values are represented in school textbooks of Islamic Republic of Iran's education system. School textbooks of post-revolutionary Iran are distinguishingly different from

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those of pre-revolutionary era which is due to Islamic nature of Islamic Republic of Iran that differentiates from the former regime.

The question that is to be answered in this study is the way citizenship values are represented in the textbooks of Islamic Republic of Iran's elementary level, and that whether these texts inspire a commitment-based citizenship or a right-based one. And that whether these textbooks emphasized commitment and duty or right?

## 2. Theoretical approach

Citizenship is a civil status; the loftiest social status one can attain in any democratic society. Citizenship is a combination of rights and commitments of a citizen in his own country. Citizenship status grants individuals rights that cause them and their properties to be protected (Arieh & Boyer, 2005, P. 34). The concept of citizenship is defined differently in different theoretical approaches (see Turner, 1993; McKinnon & Monk, 2000; Richardson, 2000). In this research citizenship values are divided into two categories: right-based values and duty-based values, each of which involves a combination of citizenship values. Right-based citizenship values are, namely security, freedom, welfare, equality, participation; and for duty-based citizenship values are, namely law-obedience, respect, and commitment to society. It is worth saying that either one of both right-based and duty-based citizenship values could have been divided into more specified and accurate components, however since citizenship values have been discussed so generally and indirectly in elementary and secondary levels' textbooks, were have also categorized them generally. The theoretical approach of this study is the "cultural reproduction theory" (Bourdieu, 1993; Althusser, 1973; Gramsci, 1971) relying on which and using critical discourse analysis theory, the concept of "citizenship values" in elementary and secondary levels' school textbooks will be studied.

In this study, our choice of school textbooks is affected by cultural reproduction theory. In all the three above-mentioned thinkers' ideas educational institution particularly school has key position. In regard to "cultural reproduction theory" generating ideas and thoughts corresponding to the society's present circumstances, cultural institutions specifically educational institution takes steps towards reproducing present order, through which they grant continuity to social/economical inequalities. In such a situation, more recent generations consider the past order as a natural and usual issue and that is how society' inequalities continue during the time.

## 3. Method

In this study, critical discourse analysis theory (Fairclough, 1995, 1989) has been used. Critical discourse analysis theory (Fairclough, 1995, 1989) is based on description, interpretation and explanation of relations among language, social actions and social world. Critical discourse analysis theory can be used as a means of analyzing contexts, interactions and social actions in local, institutional and social domains. In Fairclough's idea, the studied phenomenon should be primarily looked at as a context, afterwards as a produced thing, next as a thing consumed (interpreted) by others, and eventually we should related it to the social life and social context. Critical discourse analysis is defined as the critical search for the power relations in the current language of everyday's life and thus it can be used as a method in different domains. In this study, school textbooks of elementary and secondary levels, as the texts that contain power relations inside, are being analyzed. And it is being tried to investigate citizenship-related power relations, namely what kind of power relations is flowing surrounding the depicted concept of citizenship in class texts, and that whether the concept of citizenship is mostly defined by duties or right.

Textbooks selected as sample for critical discourse analysis include 19 school texts of elementary and secondary school subjects. The sampling model which led to choosing 19 texts was two-phase sampling. In the first phase of sampling target-based method has been used: considering the key subject of this study (citizenship values) "*Farsi*" [Persian], "*Talimate Ejtemaiy*" [Social ethics training], "*Talimate Diny va Farhange Eslami*" [Religious and Islamic culture training] are intentionally selected as sample books and the rest of the books are eliminated, that is because issues related to citizenship values are mostly found in selected books. In the second phase, theoretical sampling method (Strass & Carbin, 1999) is used. Theoretical sampling helped us select texts that are more related to this study's theoretical approach, namely reproduction theory and citizenship concept. The result was selecting 19

subjects of the three mentioned books: 14, 3 and 2 units from “*Farsi*” [Persian], “*Talimate Diny va Farhange Eslami*” [Religious and Islamic culture training], and “*Talimate Ejtemaiy*” [Social ethics training], respectively.

Table 1. Selected Units from School Textbooks

Number	Title of Unit	School textbooks	Grade	Level
1	Ingune Bashim	Farsi	5	Elementary
2	Fadakaran	Farsi	3	Elementary
3	Hame dar barabare ghanoon barabarand	Talimate diny va farhange eslami	1	Secondary
4	Sarzamine eftexhar va hamase	Farsi	2	Secondary
5	Farzande mellat	Farsi	2	Secondary
6	To niki mikono dar dejle andaz	Farsi	5	Elementary
7	Kare niko kardan az porkardan ast	Farsi	4	Elementary
8	Esteghlal azadi jomhoriye eslami	Talimate ejtemaiy	5	Elementary
9	Ghanoone asasi	Talimate ejtemaiy	5	Elementary
10	Morvarid	Farsi	3	Elementary
11	Name-i be doost-i dard ashena	Farsi	3	Secondary
12	Foro bordane khashm chegune momken ast	Talimate diny va farhange eslami	3	Secondary
13	Parcham	Farsi	2	Elementary
14	Hadese hichgah khabar nemikonad	Farsi	1	Secondary
15	Shahzade-e khoshbakht	Farsi	4	Elementary
16	Pasdari az zabane parsi	Farsi	3	Secondary
17	Royaye zibaye zendegi	Farsi	3	Elementary
18	Basij	Talimate diny va farhange eslami	2	Secondary
19	Man ba digaran fargh dalam	Farsi	4	Elementary

## 4. Results

Investigation done on 19 selected units demonstrate that both of right-based and duty-based citizenship values are defined in religious discourses and to some extent national discourse, which itself contradict some of right-based citizenship values in some cases. For a thorough investigation of the way citizenship values are represented in school textbooks each of these values is separately discussed.

### 4.1. Duty-based citizenship values

#### 4.1.1. Respect

“Respect” duty indicates individual’s respect for other citizens and their rights. Amongst studied units only one of the unit’s contents emphasized tolerance. The way tolerance is described in this subject is as if it points the disadvantages of excitement and wrath and is defined through religious (Islamic) discourse as ignoring your own right so as individual tolerance is referred to as a part of Islamic ethics and as an act to satisfy God.

#### 4.1.2. Commitment to the society

##### 4.1.2.1. Commitment to work and social duties

The critical investigation of selected units demonstrates that some units (units 1 and 11) have direct attention to work and effort, whereas social duties are partially determined and clarified. Pointing the “work” category is also different in different units. For instance, in unit no. 1 work is emphasized not as a social duty but in connection with individual success. In this unit terms such as “pain” and “gain” are aligned and the relation between success and hardship is frequently exemplified. In the unit no.1 examples are selected so that they involve both religious (Ayatollah Marashi) and national (Dr. Hesabi) figures which can stimulate religious and nationalist emotions to children. In the unit No. 11, “Work” category is mentioned in connection with countries’ development and

underdevelopment and calls for the fact that countries' underdevelopment can be removed by work, effort and endeavor, and here Japan and its work culture is mentioned. The second important point in either of the units is that despite the attempt to set a relationship between hardship and success, neither of the units has been able to teach children its mechanism. Indeed, procedures and approaches that call for obtaining the gain through the endeavor have not been mentioned. However, the units could have explained the mechanism through which "pain" and "gain" are related emphasizing order, planning, punctuality as well as effort and endeavor.

#### 4.1.2.2. *Commitment to the society and citizens*

Investigating selected units show that commitment to the society and its citizens are frequently emphasized in different units (units 3, 9 and 10). It is worth mentioning that in these units, commitment to the society and citizens finds meaning through Islamic discourse, and that the units' author invites the reader (children and adolescents) as the members of Islamic society to observe the rights of their religious brothers. In these units, the relations among the members of the society are based on God's determination and are defined based on Islamic orders and they are introduced as religious brothers. This commitment to the Islamic society and divine orders goes beyond martyrdom and sacrificing their life for the continuity of Islamic/religious society.

#### 4.1.3. *Defending the society*

Amongst citizenship duties and responsibilities, defending the society and country is a value that is paid much attention to (units 3, 13, and 18). In these units, defending the society and country have transformed to defending Islamic country and society and getting killed for the society and country is defined as being martyred for God and Islam, in other words defending the society and country is referred to as *Jihad*. This term is utilized as a defensive strategy when the country is invaded by the enemies. In another case, defending the society and county is expressed as preserving Persian language and protecting it from/against being damaged by boosting up its ethic dialects.

#### 4.1.4. *Law-Obedience*

The responsibility for recognizing laws and regulations and obeying them: Quantity-wise, the number of units that either directly or indirectly emphasizes citizenship values is a lot (for example, units 3, 19, and 14). In these units attempts have been made to point out the religious nature of laws, and to implicitly depict the superiority of Islamic laws over those of other countries. The laws divinity is said as the leading cause of obeying them (only in one case namely unit 14), rational reasons are mentioned to obey the law. More accurate investigations on studied units show that in these units the judiciary aspect of laws are more emphasized rather than the legal aspect so as in addition to emphasizing the judiciary aspect of laws, they are mainly introduced as a constraining agent rather than the one that can provide the members of the society with feasible possibility.

### 4.2. *Right-based citizenship values*

#### 4.2.1. *Freedom*

##### 4.2.1.1. *The right of social and political freedom*

Freedom is of the main and most significant democratic citizenship values. Among selected units, freedom is pointed as of its general meaning. This concept is attempted to be articulated through political Islam discourse (for example, unit 8). Describing social and political freedom, the texts confines it to Islamic laws and frankly announces that the laws of Iran's society are Islamic and that people consider it essential to obey Islam's laws. Another point regarding the representation of freedom values in school textbooks that should be taken into consideration, is that the concept of freedom on one hand is aligned with 1979's revolution and on the other hand contrasts with the pre-

revolutionary political system in a manner that it is claimed contrary to that era, in post-revolutionary time people can freely elect the officials of political system.

#### 4.2.1.2. *The freedom of expression and thought*

As one of the modern citizenship values, freedom of expression and thought is scarcely expressed in school textbooks. In these units expressing thought and ideas are articulated with constitutional revolution (1906 - 1911), 1979's revolution and in the some cases with religious society. Meanwhile, the consequences of freedom of expression and thought are both positively (unit 3) and negatively (unit 7) stated.

#### 4.2.1.3. *The freedom of ideas and religion*

Although the dominant atmosphere of the textbooks of Islamic Republic of Iran's education system is Shiite-based, in studied units, prominent points regarding religions different from Islam are stated (for example, unit 3). The coexistence of Christians with Muslims as well as their equal right which depicts justice in Islamic society is highlighted in studied units. However the critical investigation of these units demonstrates that a kind of religious superiority is implicitly present in these units and that the unit implies Shiite as the superior religion over other religions.

#### 4.2.2. *Equality*

##### 4.2.2.1. *Equality and indiscrimination based on gender, race, religion and language*

As one of the "modern citizenship values", equality (in race, gender, religion and language) is observable in some units. Lack of racial discrimination is emphasized in one of studied units (unit 11) as a factor contributing to development of the west. Differences are attempted to be expressed in the mould of countries' efforts. In the studied units, however there is more emphasis on men, Shiite religion and Persian language (see units 11, 3, 6, 7, 10, and 15). Altogether, equality as one of the most important "citizenship values" is described through Islamic Discourse.

##### 4.2.2.2. *The right of cultural and ethic minorities*

In some of studied books, the existence of different ethnicity with different cultures is obviously pointed (see units 2, 4), and attempts have been made to place them into Iran's territorial boundary and its Islamic Iranian culture. Using the religion to establish solidarity and unity among the present cultures and ethnicity in Iran's territory is Iran's territory is of significant points in studied units. In these units despite cultural/ethnic differences, the attempts have been made to internalize in children and adolescents the image of a nation-state.

#### 4.2.3. *participation*

##### 4.2.3.1. *Political participation*

In studied books, "social and political participation" are mainly expressed through the concepts of *Basij* (government-led mobilization) and 1979's Islamic revolution (see units 4, 3, and 8). To be more precise, political participation in pre-revolutionary era is referred to as the activities opposing the previous regime and in post-revolutionary era is in the form of *Besij* concept and Islamic, political activities.

##### 4.2.3.2. *The right of objecting the government*

Citizenship values of "objecting the government" either implicitly or explicitly is referred to (units 8 and 3). Like many other citizenship values, this value is defined in connection with religious society so as it is claimed that due to the presence of justice in Islamic/religious government, objecting the government has no negative consequences for the objector. Besides the religious expressions of this value, in some units the presented content is in a manner that negative consequences are supposed for the objection to the government, of course these governments are introduced as tyrant.

This citizenship right is referred to during the units, namely 1, 5, 6, 10, 11, 15. More careful and accurate investigation on mentioned units reveal that this value is mainly in connection with effort, endeavor and work culture and attaining them is directly dependent on the amount of people's effort and endeavor. Thrift is also one of the very common concepts in studied units which can be in relation with citizenship values, welfare and comfort.

#### 4.2.5. Security

As one of the citizenship values in studied units, security is referred to as both Islamic tradition and rational meaning. On one hand, it is claimed that, due to its Islamic nature and having Islamic justice, religious (Islamic) society brings about security; on the other hand it is emphasized in other units that observing the laws is the main cause of security for the members of the society. It is worth saying that in the cases where security is looked at from a rational and legal angle, the law is introduced as Islamic law.

To sum up, it can be claimed that all citizenship values have been articulated whether directly or indirectly inside political Islam's discourse, and that each of citizenship values should be found inside political Islam's discourse in connection with present signifiers. The religious, Ideological nature of Islamic Republic of Iran's elementary and secondary educational books is the main cause of it which attempts to socialize the students inside Islamic, social, political culture.

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