

The Social, Political, and Religious Values of Tolerance in School Textbooks of Kurdistan Region of Iraq (History Textbooks as a Sample)

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the political, social, and religious values of tolerance in school textbooks, specifically in history textbooks for the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades in Kurdistan Region. The research question is: what are the political, social and religious values of tolerance in the school textbooks for basic education? The methodology used to answer this question is, content analysis by taking paragraphs as well as direct and indirect concepts as units of analysis. The tool of the research is a list of values made by the researcher herself and by getting benefit from the literature review. The results showed that not all the values listed were present in the three textbooks and that these values were distributed randomly without considering their exigency.

Keywords: Kurdistan Region of Iraq, History textbooks, Tolerance, Basic School.

Introduction:

Tolerance, diversity, peaceful coexistence, and respect for other ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups are among the values that have to be enhanced in the educational system. Scholars agree that educational institutions are not limited to enhance the cognitive development of students, but these institutions are the perfect place for the upbringing of new generations, as well as the consolidation of tolerance and acceptance of others. Educational institutions can become active and productive to develop learners' capabilities and skills. Hence, they are extremely important venues where tolerance can be taught to the future generations. Also, they can be the best antidote for intolerance, by bringing together students from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds providing them the chance to discover the different is not the synonym of dangerous (Goodwin, et al,2002).

After 2003 war in Iraq and the removal of Saddam Hussein's regime, the country opened up to the world after decades of isolation and oppression. Unfortunately, Iraq has not achieved political stability since then and there has been an urgent need to build a new Iraq. This task requires a new set of reforms in all sectors including the educational sector which plays the major role in such circumstances. This could be achieved by embracing a new and an updated curriculum and philosophy of education which enable the Iraqi students to cope with the new and continuously changing world. That's why the Iraqi constitution (2005) has guaranteed free education for all Iraqis in all stages and obligatory in the primary and intermediate stages. However, this has not been enough. The Iraqi government, in collaboration with Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), carried out many initiatives to develop and innovate the Iraqi Educational system by setting new values and objectives and by developing new curriculum up to the international standards, as well as by improving the quality of textbooks (UNESCO,2012).

Among the many educational aims and objectives in the new Iraqi curriculum, tolerance and respect for all, captured the attention of the researcher. Therefore, this study is conducted to explore and count the tolerance values included in the written curriculum, specifically in history textbooks in Kurdistan Region. This sample is chosen because of two main reasons: First Kurdistan Region is a part of Iraq and it follows the Iraqi constitution and has same educational objectives. Second, history textbooks are considered one of the best means to transfer knowledge, values, and ideologies to the young generation (Commisso, 2004).

Literature Review:

Due to its exigency, tolerance values in school textbooks captured the attention of many researchers. However, numerous quantitative and qualitative studies

looked at different textbooks to explore, comment, and count messages of tolerance those textbooks deliver.

Afdal (2004) conducted a study entitled " Tolerance and Curriculum: Conceptions of tolerance in the multicultural unitary Norwegian compulsory school." His research questions were how is tolerance understood in the intentional and perceived curriculum in Norwegian compulsory education? The sample of the study consisted of three schools with five teachers in each school and the curriculum of the 10-year compulsory school (C97). As for the methodology used, the researcher used a qualitative case study by considering Norwegian compulsory education as a main case, and the three domains of curricula (perceived, formal and ideological) as sub cases. In addition to that, he conducted interviews and text analysis of the C97 and the academic articles. The results showed that tolerance was presented in the three domains of curricula in different ways and there is a lack of communication on tolerance among them.

Miller & Session (2005) described the use of a Contextual Teaching and Learning approach (CTL) in infusing tolerance and diversity education along with Social and Personal curriculum into an inclusive Social Studies class in grades 7&8, provided with sample lessons.

In her study Horton (2009) made a qualitative analysis for the Palestinian and Israeli civic and history text books to find out whether the claims of the American mass media about the hatred in the Palestinian textbooks, is true or not. The results showed that, however the blame on Israel for the current situation is clear, there is no evident and explicit hatred or jihadist claims in the Palestinians textbooks. There were more open-mindedness and objectivity in the Israeli textbooks concerning topics such as the rights and understanding of others. However, the both nations' textbooks cannot avoid being partial in narrating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Teff-Seker (2012) conducted a study entitled (Peace and Tolerance and the Palestinians "Other" in Israeli Textbooks) aimed to determine whether the Israeli educational program complies with international standards in terms of peace education and the establishment of a culture of peace. He analyzed the Israeli textbooks' content and the message they teach regarding peace and tolerance towards Palestinians. The sample of the study consisted in 149 textbooks of Hebrew language and literature, History, Geography, Civics, Jewish and Bible Studies, and Arabic Language. Grades 1-12 were samples. The findings showed there were many messages of peace and tolerance towards Palestinians.

A study conducted by Khader (2012) examined the Malaysian experience in developing national identity, multicultural tolerance and understanding through teaching curricula and its possible applications in the Jordanian context. The study

explored the practice of tolerance and understanding among Malaysian students. The sample of the study was the Malaysian and Jordanian national and civic curricula for the fourth and tenth grades. The study employed more than one methodology including textual analysis, interviews, as well as observations. The results showed a difference in the concerns of Jordan and Malaysian national and civic curricula: the Malaysian ones emphasized on national identity, tolerance and nation-building whereas the Jordanian ones emphasized on loyalty to the regime and the nation as a whole.

Education in Kurdistan Region-Iraq:

- **Iraq:**

Prior to the mid 1980's the Iraqi education system was one of the best in the region. A high literacy rate among people and high percentage of population had access to elementary school. However, this did not last for a long time. After 1990 the country entered in a decade of embargo and isolation from the rest of the world. As a result, the educational system worsened dramatically. There was a shortage of qualified staff, funding, textbooks, motivated teachers, and poor educational planning. In addition to that, enrollment rates in schools declined significantly, especially among low-income families. In 2000 a survey showed that 23.7% of children were out of school and certainly the main share was for females (UNESCO, 2003).

Being a system based on religion, human, and social values the objectives of the education in Iraq were to bring up a disciplined generation that believes in God and is loyal to the country and the Arab nation. In sum, it aimed to create a generation devoted to God and to the nation (UNESCO, 2011).

After 2003 many efforts have been done for the sake to improve the educational system in Iraq. The Iraqi government paid a major attention to the improvement of education. Mainly, it focused on the re-enrolment of children to the primary schools, especially the girl, as well as, improving the quality of teaching by developing the quality of teachers and curriculum. In fact, with the Federal Constitution of 2005, the education sector was refined. Some notable regulations were issued in order to contribute to the development of education. The first step towards the improvement of education was declaring the right of free access to education for all citizens, the right of learning in one's mother tongue, making the primary education compulsory, and encouraging scientific research (UNESCO, 2014)

The new main aims of the new Iraqi educational system can be summarized as following:

" young people in Iraq should become (a) successful lifelong learners able to operate confidently in a knowledge economy and rapidly changing environment, (b) confident and productive individuals, (c) proud and responsible citizens of Iraq and the wider world. The underpinning values are: The Iraqi identity, tolerance and respect for all, social justice (i.e. respect of human rights; gender equality; inclusiveness; social cohesion), democracy and sustainable development" (UNESCO,2011, P.7)

In the Iraqi education system, the government has the main role. Ministry of Education is in charge of preschool, primary and secondary schools. Higher education is run by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. Arabic is the language of education in the whole system with the exception of the faculties of Medicine and Engineering. The academic school year starts from September to June. October is the starting of the academic year for the higher education. In order to be admitted to the higher education students must hold a Secondary School Certificate or a certificate from one of the Vocational Secondary (Technical) Institutions. Student must have obtained a minimum 50 out of 100 as a final grade for all classes. Only students with the highest grades are eligible to enroll in faculties of Medicine, Architecture, Engineering, and Science (EP-Nuffic, 2015).

In 1998 a self-financed Open College of Education was opened in Baghdad as another attempt to develop the quality of education in Iraq. The central campus was in Baghdad and it had other brunches in other 8 governorates. After 2003 the college was supported by the government and subjects taught in the college were distributed in nine areas: Islamic studies, Arabic language, mathematics, physics, history, physical education, art education, and educational psychology (UNESCO, 2011)

- **Kurdistan Region:**

The Kurdistan Region-Iraq is located in the north of Iraq. It shares borders with Turkey from the north, with Syria from the west, and with Iran from the east. After the uprising of the Iraqi people against Saddam Hussein's regime in 1991, Kurdistan Region of Iraq was declared a no-fly zone and the Iraqi forces retreated from the region. Consequently, Kurdistan Region was recognized as a federate region in north Iraq by 2005 constitution. Kurdish and Arabic are official languages (Vernez, Culbertson and Louay, 2014).

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has 19 ministers and a national assembly of 111 seats. The region consists of three governorates: Duhok, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah . Its total population exceeds 5 million (Sharif, 2013).

As a part of Iraq, the educational system in Kurdistan region was affected by the many conflicts that crossed the country since early 20th century until now. The infrastructure was damaged. It lacked school buildings, inequality between rural and urban areas, as well as, the inequality between males and females in school enrolment.

Nevertheless, and despite all the challenges, Kurdistan Regional Government, since its establishment, aimed to pursue the path of reform and development with great focus on education. As a result, there were new learning objectives, an extension of the compulsory years of education to grade 9 instead of grade 6, and a strong tendency to establish a civil society by focusing on human rights and democracy (Osler and Yahya, 2013).

Furthermore, many other reforms have been implemented since 2009 which aimed to reach the international standards. A new and challenging curriculum is introduced which replaced the old system of three levels of school by two levels only: basic (grades 1-9) and secondary (grades 10-12). Teachers must hold minimum a bachelor degree. Consequently, faculties of basic education and new colleges of basic education were opened (Vernes et al, 2014; KRG, Ministry of Planning 2013).

Currently the mission of Ministry of Education in Kurdistan Region is to develop an educational system that prioritize the upbringing of a fully equipped generation and active citizens who appreciate and evaluate the principles of a civil and democratic society. Furthermore, its plans for future foresees an increase in school enrolment, providing high quality k-12 education, improving higher education and increasing transparency and accountability (KRG, Ministry of Planning. 2013).

Ministry of Education has a large number of employees that approximately accounts for the 23% of the total government employees. It has 12 General Directorates which deal with all the educational matters and concerns. The school year starts in the middle of September and ends in the middle May. Students spend five hours a day for six days in school. The academic year is divided into two semesters. At the end of each semester students take exams. Students from grade 4-12 must pass all the exams in order to be able to transit to the next grade except for the first, second and third grade. They pass without taking exam. Determinant examinations are taken in the 12th grade according to their results the students can join the college (Vernez et al, 2014).

The Ministry of Education in Kurdistan Regional Government now has 1,031,604 students, 86,580 teachers and 5,323 schools (UNESCO, 2010).

To be taken in consideration that the influx of Syrian refugees and the Iraqi IDPs (1.5 million), has a great impact on Kurdistan Region and specially its education system, nearly 325,500 of them are under 18 years of age, however not all of them are enrolled in school, Kurdistan Regional Government will need \$ 195.5 million to stabilize the education sector, all this happens while the region was already suffering from a fiscal crisis started in the early 2014 (World Bank, 2014).

The structure and organization of both the Iraqi and Kurdish education system is shown in the Table1 and Table2.

Table1: The Structure and Organization of the Iraqi Educational System¹

| Iraqi Education System | |
|---|--|
| Pre- primary education | Official entry age 4, 2 years , non- compulsory |
| Primary education | Official entry age 6, Compulsory, Grades 1-6 |
| Secondary education grades (7-12) | Intermediate stage, official entry 12 years, grades 7-9, concludes basic education |
| Upper Secondary/ Preparatory/ Vocational stage | Theoretical entry age 15, 3 years |
| University and Higher education | 4 to 5 years |

Table2: The Structure and Organization Kurdish Educational System²

| KRG Education System | |
|--|---|
| Pre- primary education | Official entry age 4, 2 years , non- compulsory |
| Basic education | Official entry age 6, Compulsory, Grades 1-9 free of charge |
| Upper Secondary education | Theoretical entry age 15, 3 years non-compulsory |
| University and Higher education | 4 to 5 years |

The importance of the study lies in the following points:

1. It is the first study of its kind – as far as the researcher knows- to deal with tolerance in the Kurdish history textbooks.
2. The subject of the study is one of the most important and most discussed in the current era.
3. The study focuses on the history text books which are one of the main and most important social textbooks.

Limitations of the study:

The study analyzes history textbook in Iraqi Kurdistan Region for the academic year 2021-2022

¹ (UNESCO, 2010. p.24)

² (UNESCO, 2010. p.24)

The purpose of the study:

This study is conducted to find out the political, social, and religious values of tolerance in the Kurdish history textbooks.

. Methodology:

For the purpose of this study content analysis is used. It is described by (Weber, 1990) as the research method that involves a set of procedures to analyze a text by taking in consideration three elements; the sender of the message, the message and the receiver of the message (Weber, 1991). A quantitative analysis has been done by analyzing the three text books of "Social Subjects" for the seventh, eighth and ninth grades in basic schools, focusing on the parts dedicated to history and by looking at the repetitions and percentages of the values appointed by the researcher.

Study population and sample:

The population of the study consists of the textbooks of "Social Subjects" which consists of three subjects: geography, history and citizenship.

The sample of the study includes the parts dedicated to history in the above mentioned books. Pages numbers of the books are shown in the table below.

Table3: Titles and pages of the history textbooks

| | Title of the book | Grade | Quantity of pages |
|----|---|---------|-------------------|
| 1. | The Ancient History | Seventh | 71 |
| 2. | Islamic History | Eighth | 88 |
| 3. | Kurdistan's Modern and Contemporary History | Ninth | 117 |
| | Total | | 276 |

Instrumentation:

An appropriate tool was needed to carry out the analysis, therefore the researcher looked at the previous studies, as well as took some experts' opinions to conform a list of political, social, and religious values of tolerance.

Validity of the tool:

Validity refers to the procedures that the researcher follows to ensure that the tool of the study measures correctly and appropriately. In other words, validity estimates to which extent the tool is appropriate and adequate, and this should be done before the research is conducted (Mc Millan and Schumacher,2001).

So the validity of the tool is ensured by being presented to a number of experts in the fields of education and educational research.

Reliability of the tool:

Reliability refers to the similarity of the results in deferent forms of the same tool or occasions of data collection. It also indicates the freedom of the tool from error. From the five types of reliability the researcher used agreement because it is appropriate for the purpose of this study. Agreement is the degree to which two or more persons agree about what they have seen, heard or rated "in this case analyzed" (Mc Millan and Schumacher, 2001).

In order to find out the reliability, the researcher analyzed a part of the sample of the study then a colleague was asked to analyze the same part to prove whether the tool will give the same results by two coders or not, and by using Holsti's equation the reliability of the tool was approved as it reached (83%).

$$R = \frac{N_2}{N_1 + N_2}$$

Where "N is the total number of the coding decisions the two coders agreed upon, and N_1 and N_2 are the numbers of coding decisions by the first and the second coders (Li Cai, 2003, pp 13-14)"

Procedure of analysis:

After obtaining a proper tool, the researcher started the analysis by reading the three books. Paragraph is used as the unit of analysis.

Statistical tools:

1. Repetitions and percentage.
2. Holstie's equation.

Findings:

The current study aimed to find out the political, social, and religious values of tolerance in the school textbooks by taking history textbooks of the seventh, eighth, and ninth grades of basic education as a sample. To do so, the textbooks were analyzed and the analysis showed that the history textbooks does not contain all the values appointed. Some of them are mentioned and others are ignored.

Also, there is no equal distribution of values as there is a great focus on the political values of tolerance and a weak representation of religious values of tolerance.

Identity occupies the first position. It was repeated 75 times with a percentage of (30.48%) followed by **citizenship** repeated 57 times and with the percentage of (23.17%). In the third position **belongingness** comes. It is repeated 27 times and reached the percentage of (10.9%), then comes **dialogue** repeated 22 times and reached the percentage of (8.94%). **Justice and peace** accounted for an equal repetition (14 times) and percentage (5.69%). Thus they occupy the fifth position. In the sixth position comes **equality** with 12 repetitions and a percentage of (4.87%). Furthermore, the value of **preaching Islam without violence** took the seventh position with a percentage of (2.84%). **Cooperation** was repeated twice and accounted the percentage of (0.81%) thus came in the eighth position. **Coexistence, accepting the difference, human relationship, and modesty** were repeated only once and reached the percentage of (0.40%). Finally, the rest of the values were not mentioned in the sample of the study. The following table shows the results.

Table4: The Results of the Analysis

| | The Social Values | Repetition | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--|------------|------------|
| 1. | Coexistence | 1 | 0.40 |
| 2. | Cooperation | 2 | 0.81 |
| 3. | Accepting the difference | 1 | 0.40 |
| 4. | Dialogue | 22 | 8.94 |
| 5. | Love | 0 | 0 |
| 6. | Peace | 14 | 5.69 |
| 7. | Human relationship | 1 | 0.40 |
| Political Values | | | |
| 8. | Citizenship | 57 | 23.17 |
| 9. | Belongingness | 27 | 10.97 |
| 10. | Identity | 75 | 30.48 |
| 11. | Freedom | 6 | 2.43 |
| 12. | Justice | 14 | 5.69 |
| 13. | Equality | 12 | 4.87 |
| 14. | Pluralism | 6 | 2.43 |
| Religious Values | | | |
| 15. | Respecting others' religions and their places of worship | 0 | 0 |

| | | | |
|--------------|--|------------|------|
| 16. | Admitting the freedom of other religions | 0 | 0 |
| 17. | Respecting the dignity of the others | 0 | 0 |
| 18. | Preaching Islam without violence | 7 | 2.84 |
| 19. | Preservation of the environment | 0 | 0 |
| 20. | Humility | 1 | 0.40 |
| 21. | Mercy | 0 | 0 |
| Total | | 247 | |

Discussion

In the view of the study findings, it has been observed that identity has had the major attention in the History textbooks. The Kurdish identity here is represented in two manners: the first is by shedding light upon the origins of Kurdish people in the ancient Mesopotamia, especially, in the seventh grade book "The Ancient History," emphasizing, particularly, on the historical roots of Kurdish people. The second is through documenting the struggle that Kurdish people have been through to obtain their rights. The ninth grade book entitled "the Kurdish Contemporary History" is dedicated for this purpose. Hence, Agbaria, Mustafa and Jabareen (2015) confirm that:

"It is safe to argue that cultural identities are not only a matter of historical roots but also a social paths routed by dialogue with others and by seeking recognition from them" (Agbaria, Mustafa and Jabareen, 2015, p 3).

So by teaching students their roots and their struggle for recognition we teach them to respect and tolerate others rights of existence and recognition, especially because of the fact that Kurdistan Region is a multicultural and multi-religious society. In addition to that, after 2003 and 2014 a great number of immigrants from different backgrounds were headed to the region. The World Bank report indicates that at the beginning of 2015 there were, 1300.000 Iraqi IDPs and 257.000 Syrian refugees for a total of 1.5 million. Although not all of them are resident in camps the majority of them are placed in the same host community and their children come in contact with each other weather in schools or in the neighborhoods (World Bank, 2015). Therefore, on the one hand the Kurdish government seems to emphasize on the Kurdish identity, and on the other to support and consolidate the bonds of love and tolerance among its citizens and residents.

As for citizenship, it came as the second value in terms of repetition. That's because developing this value in school textbooks is highly important. It is an essential tool to make students active and productive citizens devoted to the promotion of democracy in their nation, and encourage them to work for the sake and benefit of all racial, cultural, and ethnic groups (Banks, 2004).

It is highly important to promote the sense of belongingness in Kurdish students in order to be productive citizens in their society and avoid any behavior that will hurt or defame their country such as racism and intolerance. As for the reason Kurdistan Region is looking forward to obtain independence, therefore, it has to utilize all its resources for the purpose to build a strong country where human resource comes first and young minds must be equipped with the best of knowledge and values to play the role of society's elite in the future (Khush Bakht, et al, 2011).

Dialogue is the key and the first step towards tolerance. If we do not talk and exchange our ideas and our points of view how will we understand and tolerate each other? Peace and justice are of basic importance in the life of any society because justice guarantees peace and peaceful coexistence among the different components of the society. Therefore, the new Iraq (including Kurdistan Region) is seeking to be a democratic and a peaceful country (UNESCO, 2011). However, citing the value of peace only 14 times is not compatible with this vision. More consideration must be paid to this value in order to fulfill this aim.

Equality refers to the notion of individuals being treated as equals in rights and duties regardless of their cultural, religious, race, and ethnic differences. Therefore, education must be the vanguard in assuming such responsibility by teaching students to become equal citizens (Gutmann, 2004.). If this responsibility is taken, textbooks will be the source of harmony and equilibrium in any society, when everyone is taught to enjoy his/her rights and fulfill duties there will be no space for intolerance among them. Equality, repeated only 12 times from a total of 247 values, does not reflect the present and future vision of the Kurdistan Regional Government which stresses on the diversity of the Kurdish society and the idea that all groups must be given equal chances and treated equally (KRG Ministry of Planning, 2013).

Despite the fact that the Islamic philosophy of education enhances morals and virtues such as tolerance (Olatubsoun and Tanimowo, 2013) and the fact that eighth grade textbook is all dedicated to the Islamic history, however, there is a lack of the values that best identifies with the Islamic religion. The Middle East and the entire world in passing through a very critical situation due to the misconception and misinterpretation of the sacred books. Hence, textbooks must be an affective instrument to resolve this crisis by focusing on historical events that prevails the tolerance of Islam towards other religions. However, this is poorly done. In the list of the values prepared for the purpose of this study, only two Islamic values are mentioned, with low rank of repetition. Those values; preaching Islam with no violence and humility. The last value, in terms of repetition and percentage, which is human relationship again proves the inappropriate manner that these values are distributed and presented in the history text books, it is repeated once only in 276 pages this is not enough for this magnificent value.

Finally, the rest of the values such as love, respecting others religions, the right of worship, admitting the freedom of other religions, respecting the dignity of the others, preservation of the environment, and mercy are absent and underestimated in the history textbooks.

Recommendations:

In the light of the findings of this study the following recommendations may be considered to re-evaluate the tolerance values in the Kurdish textbooks generally and history textbooks specifically:

1. Investing in education for a more tolerant society.
2. Re-evaluating the whole educational system in the light of tolerance values.
3. Conducting a balanced distribution of political, social and religious values of tolerance in the history textbooks.
4. Emphasizing on moral education.
5. History textbooks should not depend on the simple narration of the historical events without considering the current situations and without the needs of the society. History textbooks should be the bridge between the past and the present and the key to resolve many of the current problems and misunderstandings caused by misinterpreting of the historical events.

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