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Curriculum Matters: An Analysis of Primary Schools' National Curriculum in Afghanistan Post 9/11

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Curriculum Matters: An Analysis of Primary Schools' National Curriculum in Afghanistan Post

9/11

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CURRICULUM MATTERS: AN ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS' NATIONAL CURRICULUM IN AFGHANISTAN POST 9/11

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Abstract

  Recent education reforms in Afghanistan aim to transform the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes of its citizens, as well as the overall political, religious, and cultural environment. However, there is little research on what role curriculum plays in these education reform efforts. This research thesis aims to analyze the new curriculum and textbooks for the primary school level and examine how and to what extent the new curriculum and textbooks reflect the goals and objectives articulated in the national educational policy and strategic plan. Using a qualitative document analysis approach, this study is based on a discourse analysis of curriculum and textbooks, while also examining how the curriculum addresses the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiatives. In particular, this study focuses on examining how the new curriculum and textbooks are tackling the teaching of tradition, religion, moral values, and gender. The goal is to understand how political ideas are contemplated in the primary school textbooks. Additionally, the text and image analysis in the textbooks examines to what extent the curriculum reflects the agendas and interests of national elites, local communities, and policy makers in Afghanistan education system articulating to address gender gap, religious studies, teaching nationalism and morality to students.

Keywords: Curriculum Analysis, Primary Schools, Afghanistan, Content Analysis

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

After years of Taliban rule (1996-2001) and ongoing political unrest, an entire generation of Afghan children and youth has been deprived of education. During the Taliban era, schools were accessible only for boys and schools for girls were totally abandoned. Schools were transformed into *madrassas,* placing more emphasis on Islamic education and Arabic language instruction rather than language arts and mathematics. During the United States military operations to dismantle al-Qaeda and its base of operations in Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power, almost all schools were closed throughout the country, even for boys, for almost three months. According to Education International, schools in Afghanistan were re-opened on March 22, 2002; however, Afghanistan's education system faced numerous challenges (Mandela & Machel, 2002). Guimbert et al (2008), cited UNICEF (2002) estimated that 80% of the country's schools were completely destroyed, while the remaining 20% were in poor condition.

After September 11, 2001, when the Taliban was expelled from Afghanistan and following the formation of the Islamic Transitional Government in Afghanistan in 2002, education was identified as a crucial mechanism "to develop human capital based on Islamic principles and respect for human rights by providing equitable access to quality education for all to enable them to actively participate in sustainable development, economic growth, stability and security of Afghanistan" (Ministry of Education, 2015). The Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE) has been deeply committed to improving education opportunities for all students at all stages of education as a basis for quality learning outcomes. In Afghanistan, the curriculum relies heavily on textbooks for teaching.

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The main focus of the curriculum is to implement an inclusive plan that aims to enhance access, quality, relevance, and management of educational delivery mechanisms. With this aim, the Afghan MoE began to develop a new curriculum framework in 2002. According to the MoE's 2006 strategic plan, curriculum was identified as an important mechanism of the overall reform efforts, because it constitutes the heart of the education system in Afghanistan (Ministry of Education, 2006). In particular, the curriculum encompasses the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that a nation wants their children to learn and embrace.

According to the Afghan MoE curriculum framework, at the end of 2002, during a national workshop organized by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), members of key non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and an education consulting company working in Afghanistan developed a draft of the new curriculum framework reflecting these ideological changes (Ministry of Education, 2003). The draft curriculum was written through consultation with senior members of the interim government's Ministry of Education, as well as representatives of international agencies. In 2003, the MoE Compilation and Translation Department approved the curriculum framework. The preface to the framework emphasizes that "when young people enter the world of work, as a result of the implementation of the new curriculum, they will be good Muslims, civilized human beings and true, self-reliant Afghans" (Ministry of Education, 2003, p. 11). Importantly, the preface highlights the need to "foster national unity and social cohesion" in an effort to cultivate Afghan identity so that "students will reinforce and broaden the Islamic vision

and religious principles in a non-extremist way" (p. 21). While this language may reflect the involvement of international writers, it also highlights a new direction toward peace and unity among the Afghan officials and ministers who were part of this consultative process.

Although curriculum development is usually presented as an objective and technical process, political ideologies and economic interests underpin this process (Jones, 2009). Often dominant powers dictate the direction of new curriculum to reflect national ideology. From 1986 to 1992, for example, USAID provided 50 million dollars to fund the design and development of jihadist curriculum for Afghan youth (Coulson, 2004). The curriculum relied on counting bullets and bombs to teach math and on jihadist references to teach literacy (Davis, 2002; Spink, 2005; Woo & Simmons, 2008; Jones, 2009, Burde, 2014). Furthermore, images and content of the curriculum designed and taught during the Taliban era aimed to raise warlords. In particular, to teach basic math skills, curriculum would include the images of weapons. As per Burde (2014), "Researchers identified a link between curriculum content and learning and behavior outcomes potentially leading to conflict" (Ahmad, 2004; Gasanabo, 2006; Stöber, 2007; UNESCO-IBE, 2004). Currently, however, the main aim of the curriculum is to teach equality, morality, democracy, and good aspects of life. The messages should contain peace, unity, equality, respect, and equal opportunity for all.

Since 2001, the new government in Afghanistan has emphasized educational access and equity, specifically focusing on education for all - girls as well as boys. However, schools are increasingly on the front line of a war between the Afghan government and Taliban insurgents and allies. In the 1980s, some Afghans opposed government-backed

schooling as a means of rejecting the Soviet regime; today, many continue to see resistance toward schooling as a way to defeat the government. Specifically, citizens have questioned the underlying ideologies of the national curricula backed by government. This analysis paves the path and opens the gate for further research and raising questions for better quality and equity in the education sector.

This thesis examines the primary curriculum and textbooks in Afghanistan, first providing an overview of the curriculum development framework developed in 2002 and its operationalization in school textbooks. Content analysis also reveals how the curriculum and textbooks reflect the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) initiatives. In particular, this study examines how the new primary school curriculum approaches the teaching of tradition, religion, moral values, and gender. It concludes by questioning the relevance and usefulness of this curriculum for the Afghan people, and its ability to address the challenges that Afghan people face.

Background

Culture, Tradition, Religion and their Influence on Education and School Curriculum

Afghan culture has been around for a very long time, tracing its history to at least the time of the Achaemenes Empire. The type of work that people engage in is divided along ethnic and regional lines in Afghanistan. According to Lamer & Foster (2011), the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan is the Pashtun (including Kuchis), comprising 42% of Afghans. The Tajiks are the second largest ethnic group, at 27% of the population, followed by the Hazaras (9%), Uzbeks (9%), Aimaq (4%), Turkmen (3%), and Baluch (2%). The 4% of other minor ethnic divisions consists of Nouristani, Pashaei, Pamiries, Kyrgyz, and some others. However, the literature does not provide a definitive number of its ethnic

groups as the numbers vary depending on sources. Afghanistan is translated as "House of the Afghans" or "Land of Afghans." The constant changes of ethnic groups between regions and Afghanistan has contributed to the cultural, linguistics and ethnic diversity of this country (Baiza, 2013). The nation's official languages are Dari and Pashtu. Most of the other languages are tribal and rural society languages, with different regions of the country having their own native language such as Uzbeki, Turkmani, Pashaei, and some others. While these ethnic groups differ in language and culture, they do share some common characteristics. Religion is a common thread that binds all these people. Almost all Afghans follow Islam and it dominates much of their personal, political, economic, and legal lives. The strongest tie among these various groups is their Islamic religion. The overwhelming majority of Afghans (about 99%) are Muslims. About 84% of Afghan Muslims are Sunnites and about 15% are Shiites (mostly the Hazaras). Some small groups of Hindus, Sikhs, Parsis, and Jews are scattered in the towns.

An important figure for the Muslims in Afghanistan is the *mullah* (a male religious leader or teacher). Any man who can recite the Quran from memory can be a mullah, but the mullah may not understand either the words or the meaning. Quran is in Arabic language. Mullahs memorize Quran in Arabic, which is not a local language of Afghanistan. The mullah conducts the Friday sermon and prayers, marriages, and funerals. Mullahs also teach the laws and doctrines of Islam to both adults and children. Mullahs arbitrate local disputes, based upon Islamic legal principles, and they are called upon to provide advice and resolution of many other physical, social, and personal problems, including such things as medicines, local water disputes, or a family feud. In some of the

more remote rural areas, the local mullah and the local *khan* (property owner) dictate what their followers may or may not do.

Cultural, religious, social, and security situations have influenced the development of education in Afghanistan. In some parts of the country, the development of education has been restricted due to the above-mentioned factors. Several hundred schools for girls have been destroyed, burned or closed by extremists, especially in southern parts of the country. The religious, ideological, and ethnic differences in Afghan society have also influenced and sometimes disturbed the progress and functioning of the education system. Afghanistan is going through a period of political reform along with social and economic changes that will have a profound influence on the future of education in Afghan society. The progress of education in Afghanistan will depend on culture, religion, traditions, good governance, relevant and imaginative strategies, adequate financial resources, and continued support of the communities.

Politics, Economy, and Society

Education, politics, and economy play an important role in the rehabilitation and development of Afghanistan. Since 2002, the government, with the assistance of the international community, has made efforts for the expansion of educational opportunities for Afghan children and young people. Educational development during the twentieth century reflected the traditional nature of the society. Modern education, which was developed in the 1950s and continued in the 1960s and 1970s, has influenced the education development; however, it has not received as much attention and focus as it deserves. During the three Anglo-Afghan wars (1839-42, 1870-80, and 1919), Afghanistan became a buffer zone between Russian and British advancements in central and south Asia. Thus,

it has experienced periods of conflict, especially during the last two decades of the twentieth century, which had a devastating effect on Afghan society, its social and economic infrastructure, and most of all education.

The roots of modern politics in Afghanistan are derived from the 1960-70s, when many of the political movements took part in the civil wars and today's political scene started taking shape. While the new generation was undergoing education and training in the 1960-70s, therefore politics influenced educational institutions. Various student political groups came into existence because of politicized education being taught in different educational institutions, which has been observed by scholars and researchers. Giustozzi (2010) argues that the surviving activists of the 1960-70s tend to view students of the post-2001 period as much more conservative as they tend to view students of the post-2001 period as much more conservative as their predecessors do. The control of the educational system by Islamist or fundamentalist groups from 1992-2001 left a major cultural imprint on the way the new generation thinks, even if most of the students did not have a clear understanding of the political ideologies of the Islamists or the Taliban. Even the Afghans who studied outside of Afghanistan as refugees experienced a variety of educational opportunities that ranged from NGOs to host nations; this exposure inspired a growing demand for education amongst refugee returnees whose education experience in refugee camps had inspired their belief in the potential for a brighter future (Hassan, 2006). The Afghan experience in Iran and Pakistan diverged widely. Because most Afghan refugees in Pakistan lived in camps scattered in the tribal zone, those in Iran were concentrated in urban areas and lived in densely populated urban housing. The refugees in Pakistan can have more conservative attitudes than their own parents from the educated

middle class. In fact, their own sons and daughters have criticized often parents for their liberal attitudes (Giustozzi, 2010).

Although Afghanistan did not follow the global trend of educational restructuring, it opted for its own way within the Islamic framework while still being completely organized by NGOs. The long dark years ruled by the oppressive regime of the Taliban from 1996 to 2001 created major educational, economic, and political damages to the country. This period was characterized as the most destructive in Afghanistan's history (Spink, 2005).

The Taliban promised to restore the "honor and dignity" of Afghan women, enforce Islamic laws, and eliminate corruption. Upon their accession, the Taliban dismissed all of the country's female civil servants such as doctors, nurses, teachers, and administrators, forced Afghan women to wear burqas, and closed girls' schools in all major cities. Despite these moves, Taliban always insisted that female education was not illegal in Afghanistan (Kaplan, 2006). The Taliban could not justify the banning of women's education purely on Islamic grounds given the presence of a robust female education in many Islamic countries. Converting the names of schools to "madrasa," the Taliban placed more focus on Islamic education and Arabic language, which was imposed on children due to Islamic and religious ideologies.

In the context of social and economic development, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan gave special attention to the development of education in the country. In 2002, with the support of UNESCO, the government established an Independent High Commission of Education to propose policy, objectives and strategies for the revival and development of education within Afghanistan. The Ministry of Education and Ministry of

Higher Education, in cooperation with UNESCO and other international organizations, prepared strategic development plans for primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and higher education. In cooperation with the international community, educational opportunities were significantly increased for Afghan children especially girls. Teacher education and higher education received more attention. The private sector participation was encouraged in the development of education and training, especially in higher education and technical and vocational education. This paved the way for all NGOs to play their role and implement their agendas in the education sector.

Gender

Gender equity is an extremely controversial issue in Afghanistan, particularly under the Taliban's rule. Afghans generally agree on the underlying principles of gender equity. The application of these principles varies from group to group; and there is a wide range of standards set for accepted female behavior, as well as differences in male attitudes toward the correct treatment of women. Contradictions arise between traditional tribal or ethnic practices, many of which are alien to the spirit of Islam. Further, the dictates of Islam are subject to diverse interpretation among reformists, traditionalists, and ultra conservatives. Debates between these groups can be highly volatile.

Historically, the conduct of women and men has been strictly governed by rigid tribal behavior codes, as much as by Islamic law. The concept of Hijab (veil or scarf) represents the physical appearing boundaries between men and women. This manifests as female seclusion, which is considered necessary for the protection of the women and their family honor. In Afghanistan, many women are considered to spend their entire lives in hijab "veiled" literally' with their full body covered. A hijab can vary from covering one's

head, to the wearing of the burka or chadri (the garment covering the body from head to toe, which women wear when in public). A family's social position depends on the public behavior of its female members a reality. Stepping outside prescribed roles and behavioral norms in public results in moral condemnation and social exclusion. The dictates of society place a burden on both men and women to conform. Under such circumstances, gender roles generally follow defined paths. Male roles reside in family economic welfare, politics, and relationships with outsiders; within the family they are expected to be disciplinarians and providers for aged parents. Female roles stress motherhood, child socialization, and family nurturing. Even among professional career-oriented women, family responsibilities remain a top priority. These gender roles are all considered/ accepted in the society socially, traditionally, and culturally.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

This section focuses on education in emergencies, explaining why Afghanistan is considered a country in a state of emergency and what implications this categorization has for education and curriculum reform. Particular attention is towards the concept of "official knowledge" in education reform, as well as its interaction with the formal and hidden curriculum.

Education in Emergencies

"Education in emergencies" refers to education for populations affected by unforeseen situations such as armed conflict or natural disasters. There have been more than 50 significant armed conflicts since the end of the Cold War – mostly taking place

within rather than between countries – and they have had a devastating effect on the lives of those in affected areas (Sinclair, 2001). According to Save the Children (2015), the term "education in emergencies" refers to is the provision of uninterrupted, high quality learning opportunities for children affected by humanitarian crises. Simply, 'education in emergencies' is about making sure children can still learn regardless of who they are, where they live or what's happening around them. Because modern conflicts are often of long duration and may be chronic in nature, the word "emergency" refers not only to initial non-formal education programs, but also to the establishment of formal education programs during the conflict, as well as the eventual re-establishment of community and governmental educational structures in a post-conflict environment. Education in emergencies is typically not an intervention of a month or a year, but a long-term, multi-year process that eventually merges with normal models of development. Afghanistan is considered be in a state of emergency due to its history, cold war, civil and tribal war among the different groups as well as being invaded by foreign countries.

Emergencies cause major disruption to education systems and Afghanistan is drastically affected by this. Schools and colleges are often damaged during armed conflict, or used for temporary accommodation of people rendered homeless or displaced by war or other similar disasters such as earthquakes, floods or hurricanes; and students, teachers and their families may seek safety in other countries as refugees. Sinclair (2007) cited that, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports that "in December 2005 there were 20.8 million people worldwide 'of concern' to the organization, including an estimated 8 million refugees, of whom 6 million are hosted by developing countries" (p.55.) Because of the cold war, many Afghans fled the country because of the cold war to

neighboring countries such as Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and many other including some western and European countries. In situations of chronic conflict, the quality of schooling may deteriorate. There could be different reasons for it, for instance, if governments are unable to distribute teacher salaries, due to security problems and/or lack of funds, if there are not many schools available that students could go to and so on. The early phases of educational reconstruction are also emergency-like, with the need to meet the urgent requirements of a large number of students quickly, despite a lack of buildings and other educational resources. There may also be problems related to access by education managers to rural areas due to issues including infrastructure deterioration continuing insecurity, lack of resources, and work force to handle educational management.

Children's enrollment in school in emergencies can be constrained by situational problems such as insecurity and household poverty, as well as poor educational quality leading to early dropout from school, and the breakdown of educational management systems (Sommers, 2002). Since prolonged insecurity has led to weak educational provision before the outbreak of armed conflict, there may be adolescents who need special help to enter or reenter primary schooling. Some of these adolescents may have been associated with militias as child soldiers, or were themselves married to combatants. Ensuring the right to education in such circumstances requires action to overcome situational barriers and to improve the functioning of the education system. As reported in "Education in Emergencies a Resource Tool Kit," there are 1,139,000 primary aged children out of school (UNICEF, 2006, p. 6). During the 1990s, many organizations provided support to education of emergency-affected populations, and the concept of 'education as a humanitarian response' gained ground (Retamal & Aedo-Richmond, 1998).

Quality education in regions of conflict emergencies is more difficult to define than under normal circumstances. Relatively low standards of some elements may be acceptable and still safeguard education quality under certain conditions. A good teacher in a school can provide relevant quality education. Midttun (2006) states that, "As a constant effort to connect preaching to practice, for instance, introducing peace in classroom, cleaning the classroom environment and convincing the teachers that putting the stick away makes a contribution to changing the culture of violence"(p. 5).

The role of education in conflict-affected countries has received increased attention during the past decade because of its significance for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) related to education. There has been an increasing awareness that Education for All (EFA) goals will only be achieved through success in accessing children in conflict-affected contexts, who are among the hardest to reach (International Save the Children Alliance, 2006). Governments have assigned various institutions and organizations to reach the EFA and MDGs. In Afghanistan, both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Higher Education have taken part in accomplishing these goals; however, education continues to be perceived as part of longer-term development, rather than as an immediate humanitarian response. Part of the problem is that the arguments that field workers use to justify more funding for education during the humanitarian phase are more about the need for earlier engagement with longer-term issues. This may be exacerbated where the international agencies involved in immediate responses are different from those involved in longer-term development aid for education; and where education sector personnel within local education authorities are not involved in the early stages. However, this area has developed significantly since the World Education Forum in 2000

and its resulting Dakar Framework for Action includes an explicit call for donor support to the field, which is now known as "education in emergencies" (Johnson & van Kalmthout, 2006). International agencies have come together in putting efforts along with the MoE and MoHe in Afghanistan to address the education needs for the Afghan nation.

Role of curriculum in the education transformation

Throughout the past decades, an increasing number of studies have highlighted aspects of education that have implications for conflict (Bush & Saltarelli, 2000; Smith & Vaux, 2003; Buckland, 2004; Davies, 2004; and Tawil & Harley, 2004) and suggest a number of reasons why educators should be cautious about how education is provided to a nation or in a country. Tyler (2013) in addressing the question what educational purposes should the schools seek to attain, points out that,

> No doubt, some excellent educational work is being done by artistic teachers who do not have a clear conception of goals but do have an intuitive sense of what is good teaching, what materials are significant, what topics are worth dealing with and how to present material and develop topics effectively with students. Nevertheless, if an educational program is to be planned and if efforts for continued improvement are to be made, it is very necessary to have some conception of the goals that are being aimed at. (p. 60)

Education in Afghanistan is heavily textbook driven. Curriculum and textbooks form the heart of education as well as the education system in Afghanistan; however, there is not a clear concept of the goals. It is important to investigate how education contributes to Afghan communities for various reasons. First, education may be perceived politically as a powerful tool for political development. This can take many forms, ranging from the use of textbooks in the development of liberal ideas, to nation building and, in extreme cases, political indoctrination. Second, curriculum can be perceived as an instrument for providing the knowledge and skills necessary for economic development and social

mobility. However, this may not include equity concerns, thus further excluding certain groups from economic and social benefits that education can provide as a whole. Third, education is a means by which social and cultural values are transmitted from generation to generation and, depending on the values concerned, these may convey negative stereotypes or encourage attitudes that explicitly or implicitly condone violence or generate conflict.

Through the analysis of education systems from an education in emergencies prospective, education is an underdeveloped area (Novelli & Smith, 2011). It is relevant for a range of professionals, including politicians, policy-makers, education administrators, teachers, parents, community activists, youth, and development workers. There are many entry points to the various levels of an education system and the development of conflict-sensitive education systems involves analysis of each of these. This includes a critical analysis of the political ideology driving a system, as well as its legislative, structural, and administrative features. These may have significant implications for non-discrimination and equal access to education. Novelli & Smith (2011) commented that, "The most contentious challenge in terms of international development is to find a way of raising critical questions about the form and content of education and its implications for relations between peoples, groups and nations" (p. 20). The difficulty will be in finding ways for this to be accepted internationally as a legitimate concern as part of improving the quality of education through textbooks.

The extent to which curriculum is a tool for political or ideological purposes may be evidenced by political involvement in operational matters, such as education appointments, deployment of teachers, or the determination of the curriculum. In many

circumstances, political elites want to use education for their own purposes. Although textbooks may carry the potential to increase participation and ownership, it may also leave education open to manipulation as part of local politics. This highlights the need for textbooks and curriculum analysis that identifies the political and economic influences operating within the education system in post-conflict environments.

At all levels of the education system, governance is a crucial issue (Smith & Vaux 2003, p.23). The arrangements that are in place for representation and participation in consultation decision-making, and governance may be potential sources of conflict, or they may be opportunities for inclusion and the resolution of grievances (Burde, 2004). Arrangements for transparency and accountability also reflect an education system's capacity to accept and address inequalities that might otherwise become sources of conflict. Furthermore, Bobbitt (2013) states that, "Society agrees sufficiently well as too many social shortcomings. Education needs to assemble them in as accurate and particularized a form as possible" (p. 17). Considering all these arguments, Afghan national curriculum could be a good source for pushing the political ideas and manipulating the nation by different powers that exist in the society.

In broader terms, the way in which education provision is implemented may compound inequalities and erode confidence in government's capacity to provide basic services (Pherali, Smith &Vaux, 2003. In such a situation, grievances are likely to become increasingly politicized, making it easier to mobilize support for violent conflict (Spinner-Halev, 2003). For example, during the civil war in Afghanistan the 'jihadist curriculum' was not only designed but also implemented to raise warlord children. Education can become a source of conflict depending on whether it promotes conformity to a single set

of dominant values (Leone, 2011).The extent to which any of these approaches make conflict more or less likely will be highly context-dependent.

At the practical level, there are many aspects of curriculum that have a bearing on conflict (Apple, 1990). When curriculum is conceived narrowly as the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next, it may be perceived as an extremely powerful tool to promote particular political ideologies, religious practices or cultural values and traditions. Dewey (2013) believed that "The school is a primarily a social institution. Education being a social process, the school is simply that form of community life in which all those agencies are concentrated that will be most effective in bringing the child to share in the inherited resources of the race, and to use his own powers for social end" (p. 35). The contemporary trend in many countries is to 'modernize' the curriculum so that it is defined in terms of 'learning outcomes,' where learning outcomes refer to skills, attitudes, and values as well as factual knowledge. They may include the development of 'generic skills' that include communication skills, the ability to draw on multiple sources of information and evaluate conflicting evidence, the development of media literacy, critical thinking and moral development (EFA, 2008). Within international development settings, there is a particular emphasis on 'life skills' as a means of providing child protections, social and health education. (UNICEF 2005) commented that, this whole idea and argument is that these types of skills are also helpful for peacebuilding.

Additionally, in terms of content, every area of the curriculum carries values with the potential to communicate implicit and explicit political messages. Bobbitt (2013) mentions that, "when curriculum is defined as including both directed and undirected experiences, then its objectives are the total range of human abilities, habits, systems of

knowledge etc." (p. 13). Many of these involve specialized areas of study. For example, the UNESCO (2003) position paper on the language of instruction highlights the importance of sensitivity to majority and minority languages and distinguishes between 'official' and 'national' languages. The choice of language in the educational system confers a power and prestige through its use in formal instruction. Not only is there a symbolic aspect, referring to status and visibility, but also a conceptual aspect referring to shared values and worldview expressed through and in that language (p. 13–14).

There are other aspects of curriculum that are considered crucial, like the teaching of history and the extent history education can become a tool for promoting particular versions of historical events or confronting, criticizing, or praising the past in other ways. Political dimensions in the way that languages and the lexicon are taught or used for disputed territories can be problematic. The content of teaching material for areas such as culture, art, music, and religious education often is drawn into controversy (Tawil & Harley, 2004). Such areas are sometimes referred to as 'national subjects,' in many instances tightly controlled by governments and regarded as essential tools for nation building.

The values represented in curriculum, textbooks, and many other learning resources are a further area of specialist concern. For example, the operation of a textbook policy may offer a Ministry of Education a way of guaranteeing a 'minimum entitlement' for all pupils to basic learning resources, particularly important in low-income countries and where equal access needs to be demonstrated. Afghanistan is one of those countries that is considered low-income. However, questions may arise about who controls or benefits from the materialization of textbooks, and about their content. In contested societies, arguments

regarding textbook content can also become religious, cultural, linguistic, and ideological battlegrounds. Textbook review processes have a long history. For example, there were joint initiatives on French-German textbooks during the 1920s; German-Polish cooperation following the World War II; and a US Soviet textbook project in the 1970s (Smith & Vaux, 2003). They raise sensitive issues about what might be considered offensive and by whom. A project reviewing Palestinian and Israeli textbooks has been underway for some years. Further examples include concerns raised by China and Korea about the treatment of World War II in Japanese textbooks and a critique of international assistance for the replacement of textbooks in Afghanistan (Spink, 2005).

Official Knowledge: Importance of Curriculum, Curriculum Content, and its Impact on Formal Curriculum
Education is a tripolar process, which consists of teacher, student, and the curriculum. In fact, curriculum forms the basis of the educational process. If education is accepted as the teaching-learning process, then both teaching and learning take place through the curriculum. Dewey's concept of education put a premium on meaningful activity in learning and participation in classroom. Unlike earlier models of teaching, which relied on authoritarianism and rote learning, progressive education asserted that students must be invested in what they were learning.(Dewey 2013, P.11)

Dewey (2013) argued that, curriculum should be relevant to students' lives. On the other hand, Bobbitt mentions, "Curriculum is entire range of experiences, both undirected and directed, concerned in unfolding the abilities of the individuals; or the series of consciously directed training experiences that schools for completing and perfecting the unfoldment" (p. 13). In this context, curriculum is like a two-sided coin: there is an official

or formal curriculum, which is designed and formally approved, and there is a hidden curriculum, which is implicit and less visible.

Official curriculum

Official curriculum (overt/formal/written curriculum) includes all the official documents in schools and other teaching institutions presenting the teaching planning (objectives, mission, final target, admittance, graduation, learning experiences, timing, school year program, norms, human resources, certification, interdictions, etc.). As Cuban (1995) stated, "The official curriculum is what state and district officials set forth in curricular frameworks and courses of study. They expect teachers to teach it; they assume students will learn it."(p.11) As Apple (1993) underlines, a national curriculum may be seen as a device for accountability to help us establish benchmarks so that parents can evaluate schools. Nevertheless, it also puts into motion a system in which children themselves will be ranked and ordered as never before. One of its primary roles will be to act as "a mechanism for differentiating children more rigidly against fixed norms, the social meanings and derivation of which are not available for scrutiny" (p. 231). Formal curriculum has its massive role and power over every student's life. In the politics of the textbook, Apple (1990) argues that textbooks (and the official curriculum more generally) are the source of "official knowledge" which is perceived by the public as valid and legitimate. Yet, he also notes that textbooks "serve as important arenas in which positive and negative relations of power surroundings the text will work themselves out" (p. 51). The formal curriculum preaches democracy, stresses academic knowledge, and understanding coping with daily life matters, and other life skills, however there are differences with the informal or hidden curriculum.

Hidden curriculum

School is a special place where a child is instilled with a set of knowledge. This set includes not only universal knowledge as literacy and mathematics, but also contextual knowledge about norms, attitudes and values delivered by the hidden curriculum. For example, Ryan (1987) suggests that hidden curriculum can "inculcate discipline, good conduct, punctuality, respect for authority, and other commonly held social values" (as cited in Wren, 1999). Various scholars distinguish several levels of hidden curriculum. For example, Jachim (1987) described two levels of hidden curriculum - the structure and the content. The scholar noted that structure of the school and classrooms communicate certain values and messages. For instance, classrooms organized in an orderly fashion with a teacher standing in front of the class emphasize hierarchy and implicitly frame teachers as authoritative figures. Similarly, the content of hidden curriculum transcends ideals and values through the ways teachers, students, and parents communicate within the school settings.

Brint (2006), on the other hand, attributed the main purpose of hidden curriculum to children's socialization. According to Brint (2006), three dimensions of socialization are being reproduced through hidden curriculum. Namely they are behavioral conformity, moral conformity, and cultural conformity. Behavioral conformity involves set of rules and activities aimed to train the body. Moral conformity is a set of rules that are legitimized as right and appropriate in the society. Cultural conformity is about "approved styles and outlooks" (Brint, 2006, p. 159). In Brint's (2006) words, "Students are described as "well disciplined" by authorities if they conform behaviorally, "good" if they are seen to conform morally, and "well adjusted" if they conform culturally" (p.158). Thus, it might be

suggested that hidden curriculum within dictatorial contexts would play an even more crucial role as schools would be expected to not only educate children, but also socialize them in the most effective and unthreatening ways for their governments. Nevertheless, often hidden curriculum is often being taught unintentionally (Jachim, 1987) and it may have both positive and negative effects on students (Wren, 1999). Thus, given the powerful influence of hidden curriculum on the ways children would most likely to conform behaviorally, morally and culturally, Wren (1999) urges scholars to pay specific attention to school rules, ceremonies, rituals and routines.

It has been documented that schools in various contexts are used as spaces for political and social control (Apple, 1993; Wren, 1999; Ball, 1990). Education and school curriculum are often reflect and largely defined by political, economic, and cultural struggles of the dominant groups to have control over their fellow citizens (Apple, 1993). Schools play a major role in not only transferring knowledge and skills to children but notably in cultivating values, norms, and attitudes that government desires to see in their citizens. Such explicit or overt school curriculum is widely known in academia as hidden curriculum - "the norms and values that are implicitly, but effectively, taught in schools and that are not usually talked about in teacher's statements or goals" (Apple, 1990, p. 79). As noted by Wren (1999), the academics often underestimate the importance of hidden curriculum or school culture, yet it has a tremendous effect on students' identities, behavior, and thinking.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Framework

The nature and form of education and its expansion have been influenced by the changing political contexts, the social and economic policies of successive regimes and governments, and parents' aspirations for the education of their children:

> Education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, and some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political, and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people. (Apple, 1993, p. 222)

This represents a major problem to students, schools, parents and society at large since children are being taught under prejudices. These children would then perpetuate these prejudices on a larger scale in their communities. That is where the differential power intrudes into the very heart of curriculum, teaching, and textbooks.

Education in most contexts is viewed as a state responsibility and obligation with regulation aimed at supporting universal access to basic schooling. Michel Foucault, arguing that from a different standpoint, developed a relativist view of knowledge in which power and knowledge are inextricably related. Modernist curriculum thinkers such as Lawrence Stenhouse and Jerome Bruner, argued that knowledge at its best reflects the optimum translation of this knowledge into the curriculum. Educators have to ask, if the same is expected from the national curriculum that will undoubtedly be linked to a system of national goals and nationally standardized instruments to better educate the nation.

National curricular goals and guidelines are essential to "raise standards" and to hold schools accountable for their students' achievement or its shortage (Apple, 1993).

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Education and its cultural, social, economic as well as political dimensions, make it one of the most difficult institutions to govern and manage. Rose and Greeley (2006) mention that, "State will and capacity go hand in hand. Without the capacity to make and implement policy, well-intended political commitments may be unrealized" (p .4). Who rules the state and what political will comes into play is hard to recognize and manage, and it will certainly take root in the education system.

Often, this is understood to mean that the state should provide education directly to promote state legitimacy. The latter is interpreted as the ability of the government to work for its nation and demonstrate equity among all groups in providing any kind of services. However, the government legitimacy manipulates and therefore influences students' actions, which is an important aspect of politics affecting most countries. Education is particularly given considerable attention. In cases as noted by Giustozzi (2010) who describes: "Student politics in Afghanistan has not been the object of much scholarly attention, but we know that student politics in the 1960-70s had an important influence on the development of political parties, which in turn shaped Afghanistan's entry into mass politics in the late 1970-80s" (p. 1).

Michael Apple's work has focused on the enduring power of the state and the structural activity that it can command by virtue of its control of both material and ideological apparatuses in society. He emphasized the power and potentiality of agency to check unstable state control. This constructs and moves the debate from justifications for knowledge structures to the politics of curriculum implementation. In this paper, the aim is to find out how the Afghan state controlled and tried to implement its responsibility and obligation with regulation aimed at supporting universal access to basic schooling and

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implementing the MDGs and the EFA goals. To what extent do the new Afghan national curriculum and textbooks reflect the goals and objectives articulated in the MoE's national educational policy and strategic plan? As Apple (1990) explains,

> The education system is not an instrument of the capitalist class. It is the product of conflict between the dominant and the dominated. The struggle in the production sector, for example, affects schools, just as it conditions all state apparatuses. Furthermore, because the state, including the educational system, is itself the political arena, school are part of social conflict. Education is at once the result of contradictions and the source of new contradictions. It is an arena of conflict over the production of knowledge, ideology and employment, a place where social movements try to meet their needs and business attempts to reproduce its hegemony. (p. 50)

Considering these arguments, this thesis is attempting to study how Afghan MoE in primary school curriculum is approaching the teaching of tradition, religion, moral values and gender. Apple's (1995, 2000) work attempts to illuminate the relationship between state, civil society, and the education system, revealing the power of texts in increasing its authority over the field of symbolic control. He mentions, "This control is designed to change 'the very consciousness of the society'" (Apple & Beane, 1995, p.56).

In accordance with the Afghan curriculum framework of 2003, the new curriculum fosters the development of students' personalities as human beings, good Muslims and true Afghans, supporting their comprehensive development as civilized persons, accomplished personalities, able to interact with other cultures and traditions. Education should provide equal opportunities for all students, males and females, children, youngsters and adults to develop as persons worshipping God, demonstrating self-confidence, patriotism and national unity, solidarity and respect of human rights. Education has to promote patriotic virtues, such as the defense of national independence, national governance and sovereignty, and to develop an interest to protect and enrich the national heritage. At the same time, it

has to promote values such as peace and equip students for fighting against all forms of discrimination (Ministry of Education, 2003).

Furthermore, article 43 of the Constitution of 2004 stipulates that Education is the right of all citizens of Afghanistan, which shall be offered free of charge up to the B.A. level (undergraduate level) in state educational institutes. In order to expand balanced education as well as to provide mandatory intermediate education throughout the country, the state shall design and implement effective programs and prepare the ground for teaching mother tongues in areas where they are spoken. Article 45 specifies that the State shall devise and implement unified educational curricula based on the tenets of the sacred religion of Islam, national culture as well as academic principles, and develop religious subject curricula for schools based on existing Islamic sects in Afghanistan.

Taking all these laws and basic regulations concerning education into consideration, this paper utilizes critical discourse theory to see how these policies have been translated into the textbooks. Furthermore, viewed as the source of "official knowledge," school textbooks serve as a mirror of how society perceives itself and how it projects itself nationally and globally. It is within this conceptual framework that, the analysis of Afghan primary school national curriculum is approached. The focus will thus be on the themes that influenced and shaped the Afghan identity in primary school children paying particular attention to understanding the meanings of text and illustrations that can shape the Afghan identity, religion, and sense of morality in children.

Methodology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power, abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. Critical discourse analysts take explicit position, and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality (Van Dijk, 2001). In particular, Van Dijk (2001) states that "CDA is not so much a direction, school, or specialization next to the many other "approaches" in discourse studies. Rather, it aims to offer a different "mode" or "perspective" of theorizing, analysis, and application throughout the whole field" (p. 354). A more or less critical perspective in such diverse areas as pragmatics, conversation analysis, narrative analysis, rhetoric, stylistics, sociolinguistics, ethnography, or media analysis may be found. Important for critical discourse analysts is the explicit awareness of their role in society. Continuing a tradition that rejects the possibility of a "value-free" science, they argue that science, and especially scholarly discourse, are inherently part of and influenced by social structure, and produced in social interaction. Instead of denying that a relationship exists between scholarship and society, analysts emphasize that this phenomenon should be carefully studied, and accounted for, within scholarly studies.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997, pp. 271-80) summarize the main tenets of CDA as follows:

1. CDA addresses social problems
2. Power relations are discursive
3. Discourse constitutes society and culture
4. Discourse does ideological work
5. Discourse is historical
6. The link between text and society is mediated
7. Discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory
8. Discourse is a form of social action.

Since CDA is not a specific direction of research, it does not have a unitary theoretical framework. Within the aims mentioned above, there are many types of CDA, and these may be theoretically and analytically quite diverse. Critical analysis of conversation is very different from an analysis of news reports in the press or of lessons and teaching at school. Yet, given the common perspective and the general aims of CDA, educators may also find overall conceptual and theoretical frameworks that are closely related. As suggested, CDA will ask questions about the ways specific discourse structures are deployed, in the reproduction of social dominance, whether they are part of a conversation or a news report or other genres and contexts. Thus, the typical vocabulary of many scholars in CDA will feature such notions as "power," "dominance," "hegemony," "ideology," "class," "gender," "race," "discrimination," "interests," "reproduction," "institutions," "social structure," and "social order," besides the more familiar discourse analytical notions.

Regarding the analytical focus of discourse analysis, scholars tend to concentrate on different categories, such as everyday discourse, daily conversations, texts (newspaper, literature, and scientific literature), images, or combinations of the above; or on non-discursive practices. "The role of the discourse analysis is thus not to get 'behind' the discourse, to find out what people really mean when they say this or that, or to discover the reality behind the discourse...On the contrary, the analyst has to work with what has actually been said or written, exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 21).

The purpose of this study is to understand how school textbooks have contributed to shaping of Afghan national identity, religion, gender biases and moral lessons. It examines the interplay between the political and religious agendas contained in the textbooks. As argued by several scholars and especially Sleeter and Grant (2011) debates about curriculum content can be understood broadly as struggles for power to define the symbolic representation of the world and of society that will be transmitted to the young for the purpose of either gaining or holding onto power.

For the purpose of this analysis, this paper focuses on the primary school first, second, and third grade textbooks that were published between 2011 and 2012. All the textbooks used in this study are approved and written by the Afghan Ministry of Education (MoE). Given the textbook are used nationwide and the market is supposed to be strictly controlled by MoE and all textbooks used in schools are distributed by the MoE. The textbooks used in this paper are available in the MoE website (www.moe.gov.af). For the purpose of this thesis, nine books were used. The books analyzed are Math, Dari (Language) and Life Skills textbooks for Grades 1, 2 and 3.

Rationale

This paper analyzes the primary education curriculum textbooks for the first, second and third grades based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to interpret the meaning of text and images in the curriculum. This thesis examines Dari (language), math, and life skills textbooks for the purpose of this study. These three grades are crucial because, these grades shapes the mindset of children and how children will use these the content of these books as the basis of their lives. In addition, teachers do not change for

every single subject inside the class and one teacher will be appointed to teach the same class throughout the day. Unlike first, second, and third grades, teachers change for every subject and hour in the rest of the primary, secondary and high school. For instance, in first, second, and third grades, one teacher will teach math, language, and life skills. However, in the fourth grade, one teacher will teach math, another will teach language and every subject will change.

Conceptualizing how the primary grades mediate the long-term effects of primary schools requires a life course paradigm that focuses attention on the social contexts in which individuals develop, the substantial influence that individuals have in producing their own development, and the importance of life transitions such as school entry as critical periods in development. Primary school may change children directly by building their skills or bolstering their abilities, and it may affect them indirectly by changing the beliefs or expectations of the people who surround the children (Entwisle, 1995). This explains how children are full-fledged players who shape their own schooling. For instance, children who do their homework contribute to their own cognitive growth, and those who enter school with the socioemotional maturity that teachers expect are positioned to benefit from the opportunities for growth offered them in first grade.

Life course transitions introduce individuals into new social contexts, reconfiguring their roles, changing their notions about themselves, and forcing them to learn to function in new institutional contexts. In making the transition from home to full-time schooling, for example, children must construct a self-image as a student, discover the norms and mores of the school learn how to get along with new peers and authority figures, and map strategies for mastering the necessary skills. In the new environment, they develop different

patterns of learning and different patterns of reliance on significant others to support that learning. Because these patterns tend to persist and can place boundaries on later attainment, it is important to consider the ways in which attending preschool helps children make a successful transition into first grade.

CHAPTER FOUR

Analysis

The textbooks used in this thesis are mandatory by Ministry of Education across all primary schools throughout Afghanistan. Analysis in this study is based on various instruments that have been developed and used elsewhere. The analyses includes however not limits, picture analysis, text and language analysis, and storyline analysis.

In this study, picture analysis involves an examination of what is presented in each picture, as well as what sort of messages the images convey from a gender, race, and nationality perspective. Furthermore, the images are studied to find out for what purpose they are used in the context and what explicit and implicit ideas are conveyed via pictures and illustrations. Analysis considers what kind of relations are there between pictures throughout different grades (First, Second and Third), and what hidden messages are included in those pictures. Images in the textbooks can be designated as individual or group pictures. In addition, stereotypes of the social class, racial, religious, gender biases, and association of tasks to gender are noted.

The text content of the textbooks will be interpreted to find out what aspect of gender, religion, morality, and nationalism they refer to, what do they mean, and how can these contents impact children in future. Rather than relying on quantitative analysis

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(counting particular words or images), the analysis relies on qualitative data, uncovering particular themes and ideas transmitted through curriculum.

Findings

The focus of curriculum is to implement an inclusive plan that aims to enhance access, quality, relevance, and management of educational delivery mechanisms. The guiding question of this study is to provide an overview of curriculum framework developed in 2002 and its operationalization in school textbooks for the first, second, and third grades. The broader goal is to convey the meaning of a centralized and uniform curriculum that is used throughout the country and aims to cultivate traditions, religious, and moral values and to equip students with knowledge. Further, the findings analyze major themes raised through the textual and image analysis of the contents in the nine different textbooks. These themes include religion, gender, nationalism, and morality. All the themes are discussed in detail bellow.

Gender

The Gender Equity Goals in Education and Their Importance

Goals matter. UNESCO's Education for All (EFA) Dakar Goals (2000) calls for "Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality." Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 is to "Promote gender equality and empower women," and its Target 4 is: "Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of

Figure 1

education no later than 2015." Considering all the EFA and MDGs that have been in place while Afghan national curriculum were set, various national and international NGOs, such as UNESCO and the World Bank, were included in making decisions for the curriculum framework. This section reflects on various aspects of gender gaps that are included in the Afghan primary textbooks published by the Ministry of Education.

Afghan society has been very biased about gender representation. There is evidence across different textbooks of gender bias in both textual content and images. For instance, the first image of the girls or females more generally is that with the headscarf. Across all three grades, women are portrayed with headscarves no matter what age, or what setting, women are personified with their headscarves. This is how children would

Figure 2

imagine or expect women to be. Such images not only suggest what women should look like but also how the children should perceive women. Many other similar examples could be found in the textbooks analyzed for this research. These are all due to social influences that could be interpreted in various aspects as a result of tradition or more likely religion, which is so embedded in every aspect of life of both men and women. There are always textual and imagery examples of male dominance that undermine female existence. For example, "ذاکره به نذیر کاغذ داد. نذیر بر کاغذ خط نوشت." Zakira (female) brought paper to Nazir (male). Nazir wrote a letter." (First Grade, Dari, p. 43). This clearly mentions that Zakira brought the paper, because Nazir wanted to write a letter. The theme of this lesson was to teach the letter "Z" to students however, the male was given superiority and

the female had to serve him. In this context, Zakira the female brought the paper and Nazir wrote a letter on it. Whereas it could have been Nazir who got the paper and wrote a letter to Zakira. Further examples like this are "Nazir is Zakira's brother. Zakira loves her brother Nazir. Although, this could be Zakira is Nazir's sister and Nazir loves her sister. As a result, it could be seen that biases still exist for presenting gender.

The textbooks are overloaded with names of men. Female names appear less frequently compared to male names. For instance, in the first grade, names and pronouns like Baba (Grandfather), Padar (father), Javid, Saber, Zia, Ghiyas, Popal, Mateen, and Tawab… that are all male names can be seen throughout the different grade textbook. However, female names and pronouns associated with them like, Mother, Zakira, Soraya, Jamila and some others could be counted easily and are greatly outnumbered compared to male. For instance, in the first grade Dari textbook, the male names and pronouns associated with male are used 116 times; however, female names are used only 39 times. This means that men made up 77% of characters in the book, clearly demonstrating the over-representation of male names and pronouns. Similarly, the number of images that show male characters exceeds the number of images that contains female images no matter what kind of appearance.

Table 1. Frequency of representation of female and male characters in textbooks via images and illustrations

Grade Level	Female	Male
First Grade	**18.57%**	**81.42%**
Dari (First grade)	21.4%(6)	78.5% (22)
Math (First grade)	20% (4)	80% (16)

Life skills (First grade)	14.2% (15)	85.7% (90)
Second Grade	**9.51%**	**90.48%**
Dari (second grade)	17.3% (9)	82.6% (43)
Math (second grade)	0% (0)	100% (9)
Life skills (Second grade)	11.2% (11)	88.7% (87)
Third Grade	**6.86%**	**93.13%**
Dari (third grade)	11.7% (2)	88.2% (15)
Math (third grade)	0% (0)	100.% (15)
Life skills (third grade)	8.8% (9)	91.1% (93)

This obviously has an impact on girls' motivation, participation, and achievement in school, affecting their future life chances. Various studies have shown very similar results. As reported in one of the studies conducted for the EFA Global Monitoring report, "Unfortunately, however measured – in lines of text, proportions of named characters, mentions in titles, citations in indexes – girls and women are under-represented in textbooks and curricula" (World Education blog, 2016). Furthermore, achieving gender equality in education requires not only that girls and boys have an equal chance to participate in education, but also that students benefit from a gender-sensitive learning environment. Such distinctions can have a negative impact on how society perceives education. To elaborate more, reports have shown that, gender disparities have caused education to remain dismal in Afghanistan compared to other developing countries:

> The adult literacy GPI improved in all countries. Marked improvements are projected for Bangladesh (from 0.58 to 0.91), India (from 0.55 to 0.75) and Pakistan (from 0.53 to 0.66). However, gender parity in adult literacy will be achieved only in the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In Afghanistan, the literacy situation of adult women will remain dismal with a projected GPI of only 0.46 in 2015 (EFA global monitoring report, 2015).

Associating tasks to gender

Textbooks show male and female characters in highly stereotyped household and occupational roles. The textbooks portray women and girls as accommodating, nurturing, household workers, caretakers, cleaners, and girls as passive conformists, while they show men and boys as engaged in more impressive, noble, exciting and fun things, and almost none of the care-giving roles. Furthermore, textbooks include texts like " محمود در صحن حویلی ورزش میکند", which means that "Mahmood is exercising in the yard" (First grade, Dari, p. 32). Text excerpts such as this one not only mentions the male name, Mahmood, it also contains the message that exercising is for males. Whereas, there are no examples like this about females. However, sentences like, "مریم زردک را پخت" mean that, "Mariam (female name) cooked the carrots" (First grade, Dari, p.46). This associates the task of cooking with a female role, whereas a preceding sentence " صبور زردک آورد" suggests that men are responsible for tasks outside the house (e.g. bringing food home): "Saboor (male) brought the carrots" (First grade, Dari, p.46). Furthermore, a short reading for the primary grade just to teach children language alphabet also shows biases. In the following example, the main aim of the lesson is to teach the children the letter "ر" the example clearly shows relation of task to gender. "رازق آرد آورد. آرد را مادر رازق خمیرکرد. رازق خمیر را به نانوایی برد." This translates as "Raziq bought the flour, Raziq's mom made dough from the flour; Raziq took the dough to the bakery." This once again suggests, men are responsible for dealing with tasks outside of house. For example, to buy the flour from outside and bring it home; so that his mom could make the dough (which means it is her job to do it inside the house), and Raziq taking it out to a bakery is also a part of Raziq's job, because it is intended to be out of the house. Furthermore, the textbook clearly tells that the tasks of washing clothes

and vegetables, cooking, cleaning and taking care of children are mostly female tasks, which take place inside homes. However, tasks like buying groceries, playing and having fun, organizing events, having influential jobs like doctors, postman, and police officers are male jobs. Stereotyping tasks like being a nurse, secretary, cook and other low profile jobs are considered to be for females, not only in text excerpts but also in images.

Images further reinforce that women's roles include being nurses, caretakers, cleaners, and carrying on the jobs that are inside the house. Below several images are presented that show how women and
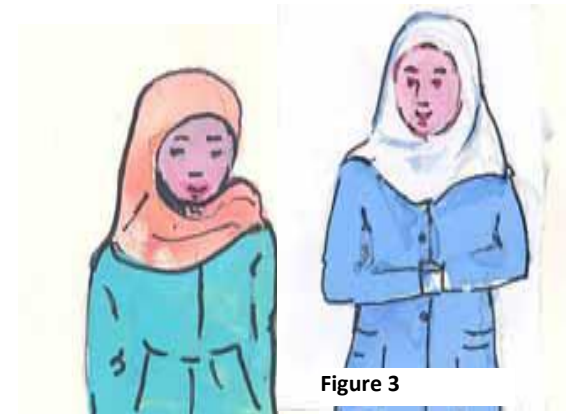

Figure 4

Figure 3

men are differentiated even in the images. For example, in these images women are shown cleaning the house, whereas men never appear in these roles. On the contrary, textbook images show how men are supposed to work outside the house. Various images portray men trying to build a house as masons, engineers, trying to fix broken things or having the main role in different occasions like taking decisions and solving arguments.

Furthermore, images of men show that they are fighting or playing wildly on the streets, climbing walls, and flying kites on the rooftops, which is stereotyping men and their actions. On other hand, there are images of women who are at home telling stories to children and only involved with other women. Even the interactions show that men

Figure 5

usually interact with men and women interact and communicate with women. All these characteristics shapes the mindset of children and the ways they will perceive male and female roles, not only in their families, but also in the society and in a larger setting like the country and later in the world. As shown in the image below, men are portrayed to be superior to women in the household. For instance, in this image, the man is sitting and enjoying his cigarette, whereas the woman has to sweep the area around where the man is sitting. This characterizes women as inferior to men. Children can get the idea that women always have to work and men can watch them without giving them a hand or helping them on the task they are performing.

In many similar images across all three grades, mothers are always shown as the caretakers of children, which is naturally very true. However, this can construct the idea that men do not assume a role in parenting. In addition, textbooks emphasize that men are not supposed to help. As pointed out earlier, various examples show that men are supposed to take care of tasks that are outside the house or require some power to be carried on, for instance, to build a house, to fix broken things, to left heavy things, even if it is teamwork like sports. However, girls are always associated with tasks that are light and soft and one cannot locate pictures that show women carrying things out of home or fixing or building things. Presenting such images stereotype male and female activities and will have a massive impact on the behavior and socio-emotional characteristics and mindsets of children. In addition, this can lead children to think that they should not perform specific tasks because they are associated with gender roles.

Further examples of such images of men being in groups, playing team sports, and lifting heavy stuff are prevalent throughout the books. Men playing games in teams,

building houses, being doctors, farmers and many other stereotypical men tasks are predominantly featured in primary school textbooks. Education is the key to eliminating gender inequality, to reducing poverty, to creating a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness, and to fostering peace. If these elements are addressed the gap between gender that exists now will eventually be addressed. One of the ways to address this gap would be including it in textbooks in an equal manner.

Religion

Religion is a popular topic to be considered as one of the major factors that affect people's lifestyles. Religion affects society and demography in sociological and psychological ways. Studies of religion promise to enhance and to address questions about belief, norms, and values; and exploring how religion (and, by extension, morals and culture) affect an individual's life.

Clearly, religion matters when choosing the marital partner, marriage, or divorce. Lehrer (2004) argues that religious affiliation matters because it has an impact on the perceived costs and the perceived benefits of various interrelated decisions that people make during their lifetimes.

To complicate matters, some leaders of religious organizations have used their spiritual influence to manipulate and abuse society members by imposing religious ideas upon them. Still others have made criminal use of religious institutions. The situation has sparked a debate on the limits of tolerance and has reawakened in some governments a tendency to control and restrict religious organizations, further undermining religious liberty in general. Bearing in mind that, Afghanistan is an Islamic country and 99% of its population consists of Muslims. This analysis reflects on the extent that religion is

discussed in the primary school textbooks by providing evidence from the textbooks in the three primary grades.

Religion in Dari, Math and Life Skill Textbooks

It does not matter what textbook throughout three grades one looks at, they all start with the calligraphy of Islamic verse of the Quran, "بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ" which is translated as "In the name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, and the Most Merciful." This means; no matter what book or what subject one wants to read, the influence of religion is noticed in the beginning of every book. In addition to the calligraphy, the very first lesson

Figure 6

Figure 7

in the Dari (language) textbooks, even if it is about teaching the alphabet, is the letter "ا" or" Aleph," the very first letter of the alphabet, and an example of "الله" meaning " God" or "حمد" (Hammd), which is the word always used to praise Allah. These either poems or texts are for praising Allah. This instance is only applicable to Dari textbooks across three grades. In addition to the Hammd, there is "نعت" "Naat," which is always used to speak highly of the prophet Muhammad. Both of them have very religious roots as well as they are being taught in the Dari textbooks. Similarly, the images that are included for these texts are religious. One of the different images used for Hammd is the picture of Makka, where all Muslims go for the Haj pilgrimage. The images accompanying the texts about Muhammad contain the pictures of the biggest masjid that is also located near Makka.

As a result, such texts and images in the beginning of the language textbooks are leading children to a religious path without giving them a chance to know what they want. This could also be interpreted that students must learn about religion in language textbooks without knowing and understanding larger implications. They are expected to be believers as soon as they learn to read.

Aside from the fact that there are separate religion textbooks, religion is taught in language textbooks among other language lessons. Moreover, religious examples are used throughout the books in different subjects. For instance, in language textbooks, for the purpose of teaching the student how to be a good student, the textbooks teach them religion. For instance, in the following excerpt the main idea of the lesson is to teach the children how to be a good student, which is associated with promoting religion.

"اسد یک شاگرد خوب است. وقتی که صبح ازخواب بیدار می شود، وضو می کند و نماز میخواند. به پدر و مادرش سلام می دهد بعد از آن ورزش می نماید. دست وروی خود را شسته و درس های مکتب را تکرار می کند، کتاب های مکتب را از روی تقسیم اوقات آماده می سازد. بعد از نوشیدن چای و خدا حافظی با پدر و مادرش، به طرف مکتب حرکت میکند. در مکتب معلم خودرا احترام کرده و با همصنفان خویش به بسیار محبت رفتار می کند."

(Grade 2, Dari, p. .)

> *Translation:* "Asad is a good student. When he wakes up every morning, he takes ablution and prays. Says hi to his father and mother. Then he works out. After cleaning, he repeats his school lessons. He arranges his school books according to the day's schedule. After breakfast and saying goodbye to his father and mother, he goes to school. In school he respects his teacher and behaves well with his classmates."

In the above excerpt, a good student is the one who wakes up early and prays. Even the salutation to parents is mentioned after prayer. This definitely shows how much religion is emphasized. Religion has been prioritized in many other textual examples as well. For instance, religion is encouraged as a solution to anger, fear, and happiness. If someone is

angry, they should read some verses of the Quran to calm their anger. If someone is scared

or afraid of something religion is the response. '' (لا حول ولاقوةالابالله) وقتی که قهر می شویم باید

"بگویم

"When we are angry, we have to say (there is no power but in God). (Grade 2, life skill

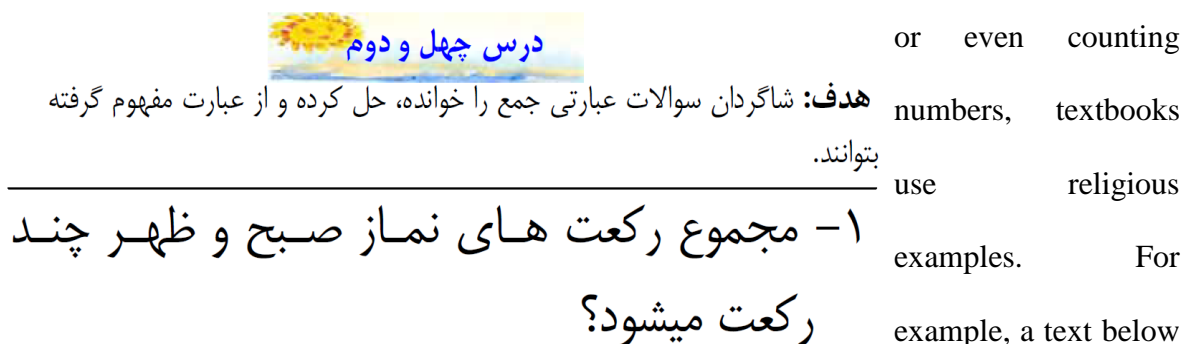P.51)

The same concept applies for fear or happiness.

خوشی یک نعمت آلله است. کسی که همیشه جگر خون یا قهر باشد دوستان خود را از دست می دهد. کسی که

بالای نعمت های خداوند شکر نکند همیشه خفه و نا امید می باشد

Translation

"Happiness is God's blessing. One who is always angry will lose their friends. One who is
not thankful to the happiness blessed by God will always be angry and hopeless" (Grade
2, life skill p. 55).

Prayer is taught as the only way to overcome anger, fear, and maintain happiness,

even emphasized to the point where if a person does not thank god, he will be hopeless.

This means that textbooks are trying to create a sense of fear and imposing this on children.

Religion has found a place in math textbooks, as well. There is some textual

evidence that shows how religion is taught via math. Below are examples that are gathered

from math textbooks from different grades, clearly illustrating how religion is presented

via math learning. For example, to teach students math skills, like addition or subtraction

or even counting numbers, textbooks use religious examples. For example, a text below asks, "What is the

درس چهل و دوم

هدف: شاگردان سوالات عبارتی جمع را خوانده، حل کرده و از عبارت مفهوم گرفته بتوانند.

۱- مجموع رکعت هـای نمـاز صـبح و ظهـر چنـد رکعت میشود؟

Figure 8

sum number of morning and afternoon prayers?" Before asking this question, the instructions mentioned, "Students should know the concept of the mathematical problems given and they should be able to learn about the concept and solve the problem." Here it is not only confusing if the textbook is talking about the math or the religious concept. In addition, there are various sects of the religion and the correct answer may differ based on the sect's practices. So why bring such an example that is not only religious, but also very confusing in the content? Furthermore, the following examples and questions illustrate the blurring of the lines between math and religion learning: "How many times do you have to walk around Kaaba?" or "How many days does a Muslim fast?"

Life skills textbooks contain drastic amount of examples that are religious. Pictures and texts present instances like teaching children religious topics, attending prayers at the mosque, going early mornings to mosques, and reciting the holy Quran are the leading examples that students encounter in textbooks. The following pictures show how students are supposed to be present in the mosque every day to undertake Islamic lessons taught by an "Imam" (religious scholar). In addition, as a part of the life skills they are expected to serve in the mosques. As shown in the Figure 13,

Figure 10

Figure 9

children are in a mosque and trying to arrange the shoes of elders who are coming and praying. They are taught discipline through religion. Other life skills, like respect to elders, is easily noticed in the religious context like mosques. In the texts, mostly

religious education is given more importance than the formal education. For instance in the following excerpt.

"ما به مسجد و مکتب میرویم. با همصنفان خود یکجا درس میخوانیم. درپاک کاری صنف و صحن مسجد ومکتب و اجتماع خود سهم میگیریم. مسجد و مکتب اجتماع کوچک از جامعه ما است. میخواهیم اساس زندگی خوب و صلح آمیزراازمسجد و مکتب یاد ابگیریم."

"We are going to the mosque and school. We study together with our classmates. We take part to keep our mosque, school and society clean. Mosque and School are a small part of our society. We want to learn the basis of our good and peaceful life from mosque and school." (Grade 3, Life skills, page. 2)

As it is obvious from this short text, religion is given a massive importance in the textbooks. To better explain the above excerpt, the word "Masjid" in the Dari, which refers to mosques, has always been given priority to school and society. Religion, not only in terms of education but also in terms of life situations, is paid greater attention. For instance, in the textbook it is written, "We want to learn the basis of our good and peaceful life from mosque and school." In various contexts, mosques are presented in the literature before mentioning schools, no matter if it is about education, life, peace, or life skills.

Despite the reality, that religion is considered very important in the daily life of every Afghan citizen; if it is emphasized more than enough like in the current textbooks, it will have side effects. One of the main reasons for this is that they are being taught based on what some religious scholars believe in, not what the religion teaches. They learn the version of Islam through other people's lens and idea that is translated in the books and they are not allowed for the most part to question religion at all. This will also cause children not to be creative anymore since they are not allowed to question about religion.

Nationalism

From the turn of the twentieth century until the year 1929, nationalism in Afghanistan was noticeable in the hegemonic institutions of the Afghan state, schools, newspapers, laws, and national public ceremonies such as the National Unity Day, Independence Day, and Loya Jerga or the Grand Assembly, as well as in writings of Afghan nationalists. Indeed, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Afghan state began not only to legitimate its rule by force but also by ideas. These ideas were instituted in the state's hegemonic institutions such as the schools, the army, and the ceremonies that propagated an 'Afghan' national idea. The country's first constitution (1923) defined and territorialized Afghan nationality in its article eight: "that everybody who was residing in Afghanistan without regards to their religious beliefs and affiliations was an Afghan citizen." This is one example of the development of nationalism in Afghanistan during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Figure 11

This section will examine, how nationalism is discussed in the current national curricula for the first, second, and third grades. Nationalism has been drastically emphasized across three grades in the curriculum. In almost all textbooks in all three grades, after the religious calligraphies there is an image of the Afghan flag with its three different colors. This appealing colorful image has a certain meaning. The black means that foreign invaders invaded Afghanistan. The red color means that there was a civil war

and much blood was shed. The green color represents peace after the Taliban was expelled and the civil war was over. The flag is definitely a symbol of patriotism and nationalism that encourages children to think about their home country. In addition, the image educates children not only about their country's flag, but also about the history that Afghanistan has endured.

Following the flag, the national anthem is written in three colors that are derived from the flag colors. The national anthem itself has a sense of patriotism and love for country and motherland, which is presented below and translated to convey its meaning. The national anthem always follows the flag of Afghanistan in the beginning of every single textbook.

Across three grades, every subject

This land is Afghanistan	دا وطن افغانستان دی
It is the pride of every Afghan	دا عزت د هر افغان دی
The land of peace, the land of the sword	کور د سولی کور د توری
Its sons are all brave	هر بچی یی قهرمان دی
This is the country of every tribe	دا وطن د تولو کور دی
Land of Baluch, and Uzbeks	د بلوچو د ازبکو
Pashtuns, and Hazaras	د پښتون او هزاره وو
Turkmen and Tajiks with them,	د ترکمنو د تاجکو
Arabs and Gojars,	ورسره عرب، گوجر دی
Pamirian, Nooristanis	پامیریان، نورستانیان
Barahawi, and Qizilbash	براهوی دی، قزلباش دی
Also Aimaq, and Pashaye	هم ایماق، هم پشه ییان
This Land will shine for ever	دا هیواد به تل ځلیږی
Like the sun in the blue sky	لکه لمر پرشنه آسمان
In the chest of Asia	په سینه کی د آسیا
It will remain as the heart for ever	به لکه زړه وی جاویدان
We will follow the one God	نوم د حق مودی رهبر
We all say, God is great,	وایو الله اکبر وایو الله اکبر
We all say, God is great	

In the national anthem, which every child sings every day in their school life, there are words and phrases that are sentimentally patriotic. For instance, words and phrases like

"pride of every Afghan," "sons are all brave," and "land of swords" teach children nationalism. Sometimes, while singing the national anthem during the morning gatherings, schoolteachers explain the meaning of these phrases in the national anthem. For example, the meaning of a "land of swords" means that the nation's swords are sharp and no one can invade Afghanistan anymore.

Textbooks contain images that show what students must do while singing the national anthem. As illustrated in the above paragraph, students gather to sing the national anthem every morning and textbooks include pictures of this patriotic activity. In the image below, young students in school are singing the national anthem. This picture even shows how students should stand and pay respect while they sing the anthem.
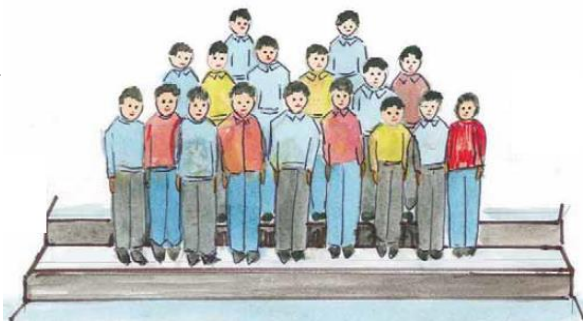

شاگردان درحالت خواندن سرود ملی

Figure 12

Furthermore, there are images that show how students imagine their home country in their minds. For instance, in the first grade life skills textbook, the first theme of the lesson is "Who am I?" This lesson teaches children about themselves. The picture associated with this theme is an image of a child thinking about Afghanistan and wondering who the people are on Afghanistan's map. In this image, students are prompted to think about their national identities. A map itself presents a country and its people belonging there. Then inside the map, there are pictures of people of various ethnicities, raising questions about a child's own ethnicity and his or her relation to other ethnic groups. A follow up question asks about a student's own ethnic identity, as well as about family members. This text teaches students to know more about their country, where they live

among different groups and how they relate to each other, and then about themselves and their family. This clearly shows that one of the aims of the lesson is teaching students a sense of national identity.

There are stories in life skills and Dari textbooks that emphasize nationalism and educate children about nationalism. For instance, the text below is from a life skill textbook that teaches students about nations and makes students think of different ethnic groups in Afghanistan. The text is taken from a story about the nations of our country.

Figure 13

"در کشور ما اقوام مختلف مثل برادر با هم زندگی دارند که هر کدام یکدگر را مثل برادر دوست دارند. قومهای مختلفت درافغانستان رسم ورواج های مختلف داشته و به رسم ورواج یکدگر احترام میکنند. همه قومهای که در افغانستان زندگی میکنند باید برای آبادی مشترک وطن شان یعنی افغانستان عزیزبا هم یکجا کارکنندواز استقلال و آزادی وطن خود مشترکاُ دفاع نمایند."

"In our country different nations live together and love each other like brothers. Different nations have different cultural norms and traditions and they respect each other's cultures

and traditions. All the nations that live in Afghanistan, in order to build their country (dear Afghanistan) have to work together and defend (fight for) their homeland's freedom and independence together." (Third Grade, Life Skills, p. 74)

In texts like this, there are strong messages transmitted to children. For instance, from the above-mentioned excerpt, "different nations have different cultural norms," this means that, initially there are differentiations between all these nations although they are all Afghans. Additionally, mentioning that different groups "have to work together," means that they were not working together previously, there are

Figure 15

Figure 16

Figure 14
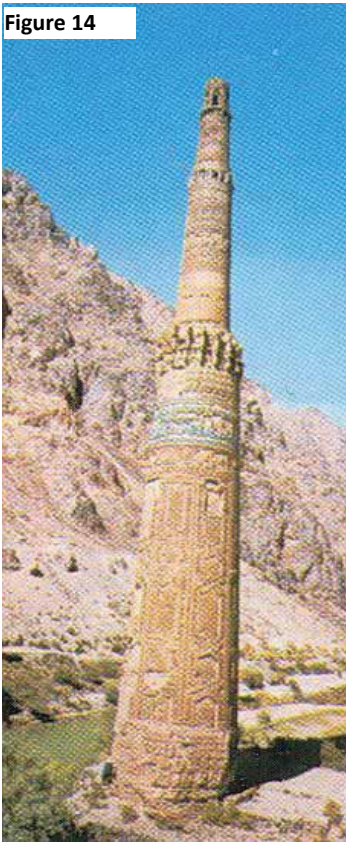
disagreements among these different groups, and not everyone agrees that they have to defend or fight for freedom and independence together. In addition to this, there are other themes and lessons in the textbooks that are related to nationalism, such as similarities of traditions and tribal cultures, urban and village life, languages of and people of the country. Indeed, there are numerous textual examples that refer to the history of Afghanistan as a 5000-year-old history, of which Afghans are very proud. Furthermore, there are patriotic poems in the textbooks that talk about the love of the country. In a similar fashion, there are pictures and images of historical places of Afghanistan that ask students if they are familiar with

the images and if they have visited there. There are themes of lessons that focus on learning about the country, for example, "Let's know our country." Under this theme, several topics discuss the flag colors and the name of the capital of Afghanistan. Lessons talk about holidays and how people celebrate them. Texts also ask students to name historic places (e.g., like the picture on the right) identify their location, and then describe these historical places. As homework, they have to talk to their parents about the history and historical sites of Afghanistan.

In addition, peace and unity are also discussed under most of the Nationalism topics. Two examples include: what is the meaning of peace and symbols of peace (dove)? In addition, how does peace connect the different groups? Such lessons teach children about nationalism and unity.
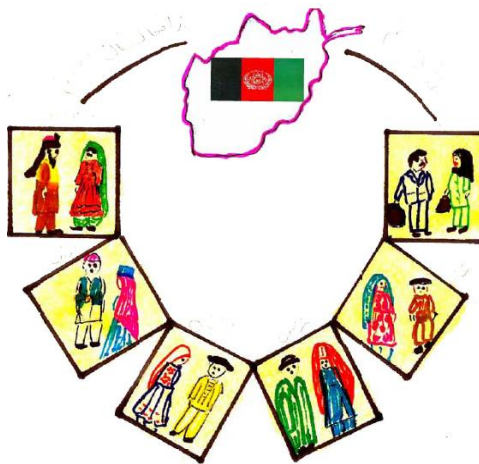

Figure 17

Learning about different tribes is a positive idea, however, when lessons emphasize differences and differentiations regarding clothes one wears, eye color, skin color, hair colors, this could be counter-productive. In the first grade life skills textbook, one text states "Variety between different tribes, clothing, languages spoken are like variety among flowers. All the tribes in Afghanistan are like the flowers that have varying beauty." (First grade, life skills, p. 75). Although, tribes are compared to flowers, the text can be interpreted as promoting differentiation and teaching children how to differentiate.

Morality

Developing and improving moral, sentimental, mental, physical nurturing capacities and sociable spirit of the students are important goals of the Afghan education system. The content of the new curriculum is organized with the purpose of equipping students with relevant and updated knowledge, based on not only factual information, but also highlighting concepts, relationships, and structures between concepts and facts, and between concepts, facts, and values. The new curriculum fosters the development of higher-level intellectual skills, emotional and social skills, as well as the development of positive/constructive attitudes. Raising moral children is greatly emphasized in the curriculum framework. Therefore, various lessons and themes are present that teach students moral lessons.

Figure 18

In the life skills textbooks, there are picturesque and textual themes that teach children moral lessons of life. For instance, some themes in the first grade life skills textbook are about good behaviors. In these texts, children are taught about telling the truth, standing in line and waiting for their turn, respecting elders, and helping others. As it is written in the first grade life skills textbook, "من درپاکی خانه همکاری کردم و در نانوایی به نوبت ایستادم", "I helped clean the house and I waited in line in the bakery." This not only teaches students to help clean, but also persuades them to clean if they did not help with cleaning before.

Being honest is considered very important and has an integral value in life. Textual and illustrative examples of how to be honest and tell the truth can be found throughout the

textbooks. For instance, in the first grade textbook, a child breaks a glass and tells her mom the truth. It is all illustrated via different images, revealing how the mother appreciates her daughter being honest about it. Similarly, there are instances of children playing and one of them mistakenly breaking their neighbor's window glass. He asks his neighbor for mercy and learns that he should think before he does something.

Positively, in the second grade life skills textbook most of the topics discuss such themes

Figure 21

as a child's role at home, respect to elders in family, mercy, child rights, helping others, group work in a society, listening to others, accepting faults, and apologizing. However, some illustrations and texts demonstrate violence. Unfortunately, the first several images and text excerpts exhibit violence. As shown

below; in the topic "my family," the main aim of the lesson is to compare the happy and sad families. The text says: ". در خانواده ما همیشه جنگ و جگرخونی میباشد" or, in English, "In our house there is always fighting and sadness." The images chosen illustrate violence. Children might learn a negative lesson from this. Alternatively, the fact

Figure 19

that, one person trying to beat the other two with a stick is normal idea and should be continued.

Figure 20

Figure 22

There are lessons that persuade children to have good manners. For instance, in one of the topics about the elders of the family, the text says, " در خانواده ما خردان و بزرگان در کار های خانه سهم می گیرند, " or in English "In our family, both children and elders take part in households." This teaches children that they should help their parents. However, in a theme named "child's role at home," the aim of the lesson is "students should know the roles of boys and girls in dividing housework." The accompanying picture shows a boy taking the dough to a bakery and a girl sweeping the house. While this picture shows that both children are helping their family, their duties are differentiated by gender, with the girl performing tasks inside the home and the boy is performing a task outside the home.

Group work is one of the other characteristics that is taught to children. Under the group work theme, the aim is to teach students about task division and help each other out. The text says, " و ما در پاک کردن مکتب و خانه حشر میکنیم. دروقت کار مشترک خوشخلق می باشیم، دعوا نمیکنیم. قبل از شروع کارمشترک وظیفه ها را تقسیم می کنیم تا کار ما زودتر تمام شده وخسته نشویم " (Second Grade, Life skill, p. 43) "We form groups when we want to clean our school or our house. While working together we always have a happy face on and we do not argue. Before starting group work we always divide the tasks so that we are not overloaded, tired and we finish the task early." This theme teaches the children the importance of group work and how it should be managed as well as what the benefits are to working in groups. Furthermore, it considers the behavior. Having a happy face means that students should behave well so that others who are working with them enjoy it.

CHAPTER FIVE

Limitation of the study

This study has several limitations. The limitations of this study include a relatively small sample. Of all textbooks published by the Ministry of Education (ranging from the first to twelfth grade), this study only focuses on nine textbooks in the first three grades. The textbooks that are included in this study are Dari (Language), Math, and life skills, all of which are only in Dari/Farsi Language. Although, the same textbooks exist in the second national language Pashto and other minor languages (like Uzbek and Pashaei), it was beyond the scope of this analysis. This study only included the Farsi language textbooks.

The other limitation of this study is that it is descriptive, qualitative, and based on the content analysis study. However, it is also a strength of the study, because qualitative research enables the researcher to give rich contextual detail and interpretation of the analyzed texts and illustrations. Importantly, being born and raised in Afghanistan, the researcher may have some biases while interpreting the texts and illustrations and this could be a result of the system in which the author was educated. However, the author attempted to approach the analysis critically, sharing some of the analysis with colleagues from different backgrounds for feedback regarding possible interpretations. Feedback from academic advisors was solicited and they asked questions about how the education system would be affected, while trying to address the analysis critically and avoid author biases while questioning.

Furthermore, this analysis has only focused on textbook analysis (outside of the context of the actual classrooms). The study has not included observations of how the textbooks are used and curriculum being implemented in a classroom context. This can be

considered as a limitation of the study in a sense that, different teachers, schools, and communities might have their own interpretations of texts and this would influence the way they would teach these texts to the children. As Bruner (1957) stated, education is a social-reflexive process that must be negotiated in classroom on daily basis. He emphasized that the intelligent mind creates from experience "generic coding systems that permit one to go beyond the data to new and possibly fruitful predictions" (p. 234). Implementation of the same textbooks could be another further study topic worth observing.

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to conduct a content analysis of textbooks reflecting the new curriculum in Afghanistan's primary schools, which was designed to address the Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and approved by the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan in 2002. The study provided an overview of curriculum development framework and its operationalization in school textbooks, focusing on Math, Dari, and Life Skills subjects in three primary grades. Nine textbooks were analyzed, primarily relying on qualitative data analysis. An in-depth attention was paid to education in emergencies and how it had its impacts on these textbooks and their content. Furthermore, hidden and formal curriculum were considered for their strong influence on children lives.

Content analysis revolved around the four main themes: gender, religion, nationalism, and morality. These themes were chosen because they directly address the main aims of the national curriculum, especially the emphasis on teaching equality, morality, democracy, and good aspects of life. First, an in-depth analysis of the textbooks

from the gender perspective revealed that although efforts has been made to decrease the gender biases in textbooks, the issue is not yet well addressed. Textbooks generally under-represent women and girls in illustrations. For example, the majority of the pictures (ranging from 80% in the first grade and more than 90% in third grade) portray men and boys. In the third grade math, there are no pictures of women and girls at all. When women appear in textbooks (whether in illustrations or texts), their representation generally reflects patriarchal and religious traditions as well as gender stereotypes. In particular, textbooks predominantly portray women and girls wearing headscarves, revealing how culture, tradition, and religion intersect in shaping gender relationships and daily lives of women and men in Afghanistan. Furthermore, women are predominantly portrayed as silent and passive, while men are actively involved in various important activities. The tasks performed by men and women are also stereotyped based on gender, with women being portrayed as responsible for tasks around the house (and responsible for taking care of the family), while men are working outside the house. For example, grocery shopping, repairing things, taking leadership positions, and any tasks that involve strength and physical power are always associated with male responsibilities. Such portrayal stereotypes of female and male roles and responsibilities, influences how children think about gender relationships from the very first day of school. Furthermore, such portrayal not only undermines the abilities of women but also lacks fluidity in defining women overall. Looking at the current situation it can be realized that the effects of textbooks is drastic on how men and women act in society. Additionally, it was obvious from the textbooks that quality in education in emergencies is more difficult to define than under normal circumstances. Although the education quality is somehow

better now comparing it to the Taliban era or when the jihadist curriculum was implemented. However still, relatively low standards of some elements may be acceptable for education quality under certain conditions whereas these textbooks lack quality in many aspects of how to represent gender. The curriculum reflected a low quality in implementing the gender roles. Curriculum in general can be an amazing element to learn, stay up-to-date, communicate, and so much more, but it also has an ugly side when it misrepresents an idea and it usually happens through hidden side of the curriculum. There are examples in the textbook that is obsessed with trying to create a specific image of the women and men in children's minds, which just happens to be extremely unrealistic to the natural standards of women, and men in the real world in Afghanistan. Reflecting on gender in the textbooks, one can realize that weaknesses of presenting gender equally in educational structure and content contributes drastically to civil conflict. An education system that reinforces social fissures can represent a dangerous source of conflict. This idea is re-iterated in the 2002 EFA Monitoring Report, which stated that a "major concern in post-conflict situations is to avoid replication of educational structures that may have contributed to conflict." Overall, focusing on gender aspect of curriculum in this paper, I can argue that, gender equity is not addressed fully and male dominance is still persistently included in the textbooks.

Second, religion has a strong presence in the textbooks analyzed for this study. Religion is deeply embedded into people's lives and has its effects in all aspects of life in Afghanistan, including education. Religion, in this context Islam, has occupied perhaps the largest part of the textbooks, conveying the idea that all students are raised with the Islamic faith. There is no place for any other religions in the Afghan primary school

textbooks. All textbooks start with beautiful and colorful calligraphy of Quranic verses, they include multiple religious examples referring all students to Allah and Islamic ideologies, and they end with poems and praises about the Allah and the prophet Muhammad. Furthermore, being a "good child" is directly associated with praying every day and reciting the Quran. Overall, religion occupies a large and important space in different parts of the Afghan curriculum, shaping the ideas about a good child and citizen in Afghanistan. Covertly, the curriculum aims for the children to be raised with Islamic faith. Since Islam is the only religion taught in schools, none of the children will learn or realize about other religions practiced in the world. This will lead most of them to accept the faith blindly and rigorously. Schools may indeed and should teach secular values such as honesty, respect for others, courage, kindness and good citizenship. These values, however, must not be taught as religious tenets. The fact that most religions also teach these values does not change the lawfulness and desirability of teaching them. It is also appropriate for school officials to instill in students such values as independent thought, tolerance of diverse views, self-respect, maturity, self-reliance and logical decision-making. Religious conflict, between different religions or branches of the same faith, regularly plays a role in the children's life. One other concept that people have about religion in Afghanistan is that religion demands that people prove to God that they are worthy of heaven by doing good things. The good actions are always supposed to be associated with religion such as praying, reciting Quran and many more. In addition, people are not tolerant of religions ideas that are different from the one they follow. If religion is taught in schools then, it should inclusive and teach about all religions with all their similarities and differences, in order to pave the way for the children not to be

ignorant of other religions. This will also help them know and realize why they believe in the faith they practice. When, however, one has to grow up conditioned to believe what is right and wrong according to religion, and told that to doubt religion or question religion means to go to hell. It naturally makes the students become afraid of seeking true knowledge and act accordingly to ideologies that are imposed on children.

Third, textbooks reflect a strong sense of Afghan nationalism, highlighting state efforts of nation building in Afghanistan. For example, texts and illustrations teach students about national identity and nationalism from the very first pages of the textbooks, which always include the image of the flag and then the text of the national anthem. Multiple images of historical places or texts about historical sites are used to construct a sense of belonging to the nation-state. Furthermore, textbooks include examples of different tribes and ethnicities in Afghanistan, as well as information about how to differentiate among the different groups while encouraging peace.

Finally, the teaching of morality constituted a considerable part of the textbooks. Textbooks conveyed ideas about how to behave well not only within the family, but also in the society at large. Examples of health and hygiene, helping others, respecting parents and other elders, and honesty were discussed as the most important characteristics of a morally strong child. Importantly, the textbooks discussed morality not only philosophically, but also in terms of students' daily lives.

Overall, the analysis of the textbooks around the four themes - gender, religion, nationalism, and morality - suggests that textbooks and schools more broadly, are central mechanisms for "constructing" the idea of an Afghan child and citizen after years of Taliban rule (1996-2001). They attempt to instill in children the love of and pride in

Afghanistan (through nationalism), obedience to and respect of Islam (through religion), healthy lifestyles, family values, and honesty (through the teaching of morality), as well as particular gender relations that remain mostly biased against women. While the textbooks address some of the main goals of the national curriculum, - morality and good aspects of life - they seem to overlook some of the important principles related to equality and democracy, especially in relation to gender aspects. Textbooks do not portray women as being equal members of the society, as they limit their participation within the family to tasks in the house. Thus, the findings suggest that serious efforts are necessary to ensure a more balanced and fair representation of gender roles across the different subject areas and teaching/learning materials.

Broadly, this research study demonstrated that textbooks are important sites that constitute the political arena itself, reflecting the debates over what it means to be a "good" Afghan child. The national identity is formed during school age, and textbooks play an important role in transmitting these ideas to children. As Apple (1982) states, "Education is at once the result of contradictions and the source of new contradictions. It is an arena of conflict over the production of knowledge, ideology and employment, a place where social movements try to meet their needs and business attempts to reproduce its hegemony" (p. 52). It is therefore important to examine textbooks on an ongoing basis in order to critically analyze what ideas are transmitted through schooling and how these ideas envision the future of an Afghan society and its children.

In a general sense, this thesis has explored and identified the positive and negative faces of focusing on the potential role of curriculum and textbooks in school education in amplifying social divisions, and as a precipitating factor in relation to religion,

nationalism, gender and morality. This thesis not only contributes to the literature in Afghanistan, but also, pinpoints how the policies and ideologies are influenced by war. Additionally, this paper contributes to education in emergencies segment of the overall education system in Afghanistan by pointing out the effects of war on high profile stakeholders' mindsets. As the stakeholders' are trying to educate the younger generation, they are spreading what they have experience rather than teaching children what they need.

This paper points out the gaps to let the stakeholders become aware of their own potential role in serving as one of the underlying causes of the conflict when assessing language policies, images, text excerpts, pedagogical and structural approaches adopted when designing and writing the new curriculum. Furthermore, the destructive educational practices—when combined with such causal factors as poor control, and perceived threats to cultural identity and economic reasons—may fuel suspicion, hostility, ethnic intolerance, and violence. As it has been focused repeatedly in education in emergencies, there are a number of ways in which education can exacerbate hostility. These ways include the uneven distribution of education, including gender unequal representation, which is addressed in this paper. Education can serve as a weapon in cultural repression, as a leading example in this paper is how male dominance is hidden in the context. Further, denial that education is a weapon of war, the manipulation of history for political purposes, the manipulation of textbooks that overuse religion, and imposing nationalism and segregated education tends to reinforce inequality, lowered self-esteem, and stereotyping among children in their future lives. In a knowledge economy, education is the new currency by which nations maintain economic competitiveness and global

prosperity. This paper, by describing some of the challenges of writing and analyzing primary school textbooks can serve to enhance the quality of education. Additionally, it can be a good example for the education in emergencies segment; as a reference to how the images and texts can contribute in to the social views of education in a war torn country. Finally, expanding educational access and addressing the flaws are not just an urgent economic and social need. In many cases, it is literally a matter of ensuring children have positive views on life and society.

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