



Representation of Foreign Countries in the Curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Case Study: Social Studies in Secondary Education)

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article type: Scientific Research Article history: Received: 2025-11-17 Received in revised form: 2025-11-30 Accepted : 2026-12-15 Available online: 2026-07-25 Keywords: Representation, Foreign Countries, Social Studies Curriculum, Secondary Education.	Objective: School textbooks consistently reflect political orientations aligned with the dominant political-social system. This is because one of the fundamental missions of the educational system, and more specifically the curriculum, is political socialization. Accordingly, a significant portion of textbook content, either explicitly through formal curriculum objectives or implicitly through hidden curriculum elements, conveys the ideological orientations of political systems. One manifestation of political socialization is the portrayal of foreign governments in school textbooks. Based on this premise, the present study was conducted with the aim of examining the representation of foreign countries in the social studies curriculum of secondary education in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Therefore, the study seeks to answer the central question: 'What image of foreign countries is presented in secondary-level social studies textbooks in the Islamic Republic of Iran?' Method: The study employed a mixed-method content analysis approach (quantitative and qualitative). The statistical population consisted of social studies textbooks for lower secondary education during the 2024–2025 academic year (1403–1404 in the Iranian calendar), and the entire population was selected as the sample. Data were collected using a researcher-developed checklist. The content validity of the indicators was confirmed through the Lawshe Content Validity Ratio (CVR) based on expert evaluations. Data reliability was established with an inter-rater agreement coefficient of 98%. Data analysis was conducted using frequency tables, percentages, and the chi-square test in the quantitative section, and thematic analysis in the qualitative section. Findings: The findings showed that there were a total of 540 references to indicators related to the representation of the outside world. Among these, the highest frequencies belonged to the indicators of "Identification of Enemies" with a frequency of 245 (45.37%), and "Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them" with a frequency of 163 (30.18%). These were followed by the indicators of the "Necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states," "Familiarization with allied/neighboring countries," and "Rejection of domination/rejection of subordination and independence in foreign policy neither (Neither East nor West)," with frequencies of 45 (8.33%), 40 (7.4%), and 37 (6.85%), respectively. The indicator "Support for the oppressed, liberation movements, and defense of Muslims' rights" had the lowest frequency, at 10 (1.85%). Conclusion: Analysis of the textbooks indicates that within the curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the identity and image presented of different countries are largely shaped by the prevailing ideology. In addition to introducing students to various countries, the curriculum appears to represent national identities in accordance with the existing political paradigm and the relationship between Iran's political system and other political systems.

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Introduction

The world as portrayed through media serves as a powerful source of meaning about the social world, because the continuous and repeated media representation of others has a significant influence on audiences' thoughts, perceptions, attitudes, and actions, to the extent that they often perceive these representations as reality itself. Therefore, in social and political communication, the stereotypical images created by media and embedded in our minds have a substantial impact on how we perceive one another (Pakzad and Jebelli, 2015 AD/1394 SH: 2).

For this reason, official media occupy a prominent and highly sensitive position within the political structure of states (Golbach and Sonin, 2014: 165). Accordingly, analyzing official media in nation-states can reveal the position and image constructed of other political systems and nation-states (Salim, 2007: 133).

One of the principal instruments for transmitting political beliefs and values in centralized educational systems is the national curriculum (Mansouri and Yahyaei, 2023 AD/1402 SH: 184). In centralized political systems, all learners are influenced by a single medium in the form of a national textbook; therefore, textbooks play a significant role in shaping representations of different nation-states (Wiseman, 2021: 248). Consequently, the relationship between the educational system and the political system and its institutional components has long attracted scholarly attention, to the extent that education can be regarded as one of the main agents of political socialization. Political socialization, which is achieved through the political curriculum, refers to the cultivation and transmission of values, attitudes, skills, and awareness that foster a sense of responsibility and active participation in political affairs. It also develops the ability to evaluate and monitor political matters in order to prevent potential deviations of governments from accepted norms and desired ideals (Gholtash, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 51).

Moreover, specific policies regarding curriculum content are approved by political authorities and implemented in schools. Therefore, political decisions made outside the educational system can alter students' and the public's mental images and perceptions of individuals and groups (Alaghehband, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 72). Curriculum is considered one of the most important elements in directing the educational system and serves as its core (Abedini Baltork and Nili, 2014 AD/1393 SH: 2). It provides an appropriate platform for delivering knowledge, shaping attitudes, and teaching skills to students, adults, and primary decision-makers (Nour al-Dahr Yazdi, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 74).

In the country's current centralized educational system, the curriculum's primary output is textbooks, which are used nationwide. Textbooks are also regarded as one of the most important and widely used media within the educational structure. They contain written content, images, and exercises designed and developed to achieve educational objectives (Niknafas and Aliabadi, 2013 AD/1392 SH: 140). Furthermore, textbooks, as learning tools, do not merely convey explicit messages; like any other medium, they can also contain implicit or hidden messages (Nouriyani, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 81). As influential media, they can play an effective role in raising students' awareness and shaping their understanding of social and political issues (Abedini Baltork and Saffar Heydari, 2022 AD/1401 SH: 284).

One of the school subjects that specifically addresses students' political socialization is Social Studies. Accordingly, the representation of the outside world and the portrayal of foreign nation-states in the Social Studies curriculum can concretely reflect the broader orientations of national policy. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand the image of foreign nation-states presented in secondary-level Social Studies textbooks.

One of the key theoretical frameworks for understanding the formation of mental images of the outside world is the concept of representation. Representation refers to a set of processes through which the meaningful actions of objects or behaviors in the real world are interpreted and assigned meaning. In this sense, representation is a symbolic practice that reflects an independent external world (Barker, 2009 AD/1388 SH: 66). In other words, representation means presenting reality in a particular way, which may occur verbally, in writing, or visually. Based on this understanding, representation, because of its influence on the real world and social realities, has become one of the most important tools through which dominant ideologies exercise influence over other groups. That is, representation enables various forms of power to communicate the objectives and functions of their policies to audiences through different media such as books, films, and similar platforms, thereby shaping people's ideas and attitudes (Ramezani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 121).

Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer the following question: 'What image of foreign countries is presented in secondary-level Social Studies textbooks?'

1. Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

With regard to the portrayal of foreign countries, two conceptual frameworks can be identified as the theoretical foundations of this study. One framework concerns the portrayal of foreign countries within curriculum discourse and the theory of the

political curriculum. Another influential framework on representation and image construction is Stuart Hall's theory of representation.

Hall argues that representation is the use of language to express meaningful ideas about the world around us and serves as a tool through which meaning is constructed. Through language, meanings can be transmitted to and exchanged with other members of society. Consequently, our thoughts, emotions, and ideas are reflected within culture through language. Based on this perspective, Hall considers representation to be part of the circuit of culture, connecting meaning and language to culture, because culture is concerned with shared meanings, and we can understand these meanings only through a shared language (Ramezani, 2021 AD/1400 SH).

According to Hall's theory of representation, there are three general approaches to representation:

A) Reflective Approach

According to this perspective, the primary function of language is to imitate or reflect nature. Language acts as a mirror that reflects the true meaning of events existing in the external world exactly as they exist. Hall illustrates this idea by explaining that the image or word *rose* is a sign and should not be confused with the actual plant that exists in reality. However, he emphasizes that human thought cannot always operate through direct interaction with real objects, such as a real rose growing in a garden, and that abstract concepts and signs are sometimes necessary in the realm of thinking and understanding.

B) Intentional Approach

Regarding this approach, Stuart Hall argues that systems of representation merely express what the author or communicator intends to convey. In other words, words carry the meaning that the speaker or writer intends to communicate. However, Hall identifies shortcomings in this perspective, one of which is that individuals cannot be regarded as the sole and unique source of meaning in language construction. This is because such an approach turns language into an entirely private game, whereas language is fundamentally a social system.

C) Constructionist Approach

This approach consists of two dimensions: the semiotic dimension (which examines how meaning is produced through representation and language) and the discursive dimension (which examines the effects, consequences, and broader politics of

representation). According to this approach, meaning does not depend on the physical or material characteristics of signs but rather on their symbolic functions. In fact, this theory is based on the assumption that phenomena and objects do not inherently possess meaning; rather, humans create meanings through systems of representation, concepts, and signs.

Accordingly, Hall argues that nothing meaningful exists outside discourse. This does not imply a denial of the external and material world; rather, it means that what carries meaning is the linguistic system, not the external material world itself. Human beings communicate with one another by drawing upon their systems of cultural concepts and linguistic systems, or other representational systems, and through these processes, meanings are constructed (Ramezani, 2021 AD/1400 SH: 178).

Therefore, based on Hall's theory of representation, the image presented of different countries in the curriculum of the Islamic Republic of Iran can be understood as embodying the meanings and interpretations through which the political system seeks to portray other countries to students.

In addition, the portrayal of foreign countries in the curriculum can also be examined from the perspective of political curriculum theory. According to scholars of political thought, curriculum is inherently political and addresses concepts such as values, the hidden curriculum, domination, popular culture, and identity (Fathi Vajargah, 2016 AD/1395 SH: 87).

A political curriculum is defined as a curriculum that, through educational processes and methods, seeks to cultivate stable perspectives and attitudes regarding broad and evolving local, national, and international political and social issues, as well as political and social events and phenomena, among learners. These perspectives are intended to become internalized so that they manifest in learners' behavior across different times and contexts.

From the perspective of political theorists, curriculum plays an important role in shaping and consolidating students' various political, cultural, and social identities. Consequently, political curriculum studies should examine both the explicit and hidden effects of the educational system, as conveyed through educational media, on people's attitudes and behavior (Yousefzadeh Chousari and Shahmoradi, 2016 AD/1395 SH).

Therefore, through the political curriculum, the educational system engages in the process of transmitting and internalizing the norms and values of the political system of society among students and fostering their political development. In other words, the educational system pursues the objectives of political socialization through curricula and textbooks such as history, geography, social studies, and similar subjects

(Alagheband, 2017 AD/1396 SH: 90). Based on this perspective, and given that curriculum is inherently a political construct; the portrayal of different nation-states can be considered part of the process of political socialization.

A considerable body of research has examined the representation of the outside world and the portrayal of countries in media. However, a substantial portion of these studies has focused on non-official media, while others have examined visual media, including television networks. For example, Moradifar and Omid (2021 AD/1400 SH), in a study titled "Trump's Image Construction of Iran through Twiplomacy (Twitter Diplomacy)," showed that the representation was constructed through two concepts: "The image of self (the United States) and the image of the other (Iran)."

Regarding the image of self, the findings suggest that Trump sought, on the one hand, to present himself as restoring American power and to demonstrate stronger performance than Obama. Through this portrayal, Trump represented the United States as a trustworthy and democratic actor confronting Iran, which was depicted as a state seeking nuclear weapons and disrupting U.S. security and the international order. On the other hand, Trump portrayed Obama and the Democratic Party as actors undermining American power, arguing that by supporting Iran's national and regional objectives, they exhibited weak resolve and unstable leadership.

Regarding the image of the other, Iran was represented as an enemy of the United States, portrayed as disrupting the international order and as possessing an authoritarian political system with deficiencies in democratic governance.

Ejazi et al. (2020 AD/1399 SH), in a study titled "The Impact of Mainstream United States Media on U.S. Foreign Policy Toward Iran (2007–2020)," found that American media, by amplifying issues such as Iran's nuclear program, not only negatively influenced the perceptions of U.S. political elites toward Iran but also contributed to the development of unfavorable attitudes among American political leaders toward Iran.

Sepehri (2018 AD/1397 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran in American Television News Networks," found that American networks, including NBC and CNN, sought to construct an image of Iran based on discursive components such as Iran's support for terrorism, the polarization of "Us" versus "The Other," Iran's unreliability, public dissatisfaction within Iran toward the government of the Islamic Republic, and, more broadly, the presentation of a negative image of Iran aimed at promoting Iranophobia.

Haghbin (2018 AD/1397 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran in the Russian News Agencies RIA Novosti and Interfax," found that with the expansion of military and security cooperation between Iran and Russia, particularly during the

Syrian crisis, and the parallel development of economic relations, Iran was portrayed positively in these news agencies and ultimately represented as Russia's principal partner and ally. However, this partnership was described as fragile and unstable due to Russia's desire to maintain a regional balance of power, its insistence on preserving relations with all Middle Eastern actors, especially Israel, and its pursuit of its own national interests.

Forghani and Bakhshandeh (2017 AD/1396 SH), in a study titled "The Impact of Foreign Policy Discourse on News Coverage: The Representation of the United States and the United Kingdom in Major Iranian Newspapers During the Conservative and Reformist Periods," demonstrated that major Iranian newspapers reflected the foreign policy positions adopted by the Iranian government of the time when covering developments related to the United States and the United Kingdom. Accordingly, during the Reformist period, when foreign policy emphasized détente and de-escalation, the United States and the United Kingdom were represented positively in major newspapers. In contrast, during the Conservative period, when tensions with the West increased, these countries were represented negatively.

Nazari and Nemati Anaraki (2017 AD/1396 SH), in a study titled "Reverse Orientalism in the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting's News Representation of the West," found that the West was frequently represented through discursive components such as racism, support for terrorism, human rights violations, Islamophobia, colonialism, violence, and arrogance (hegemonic dominance). According to the authors, such representations challenged Western norms and values.

Nemati and Nazari (2016 AD/1395 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of England in State Broadcasting News: A Discourse Analysis of the 9 PM News Bulletin," found that news coverage in this program predominantly represented England through discursive themes such as Islamophobia, support for Zionism, criminality, conspiracy, colonialism, and violence.

Pakzad and Jebeli (2015 AD/1394 SH), in a study titled "A Comparative Study of Foreign Television News and People's Mental Framework of the Outside World: With Emphasis on the Palestinian Crisis," found that continuous coverage of events in Palestine on foreign television news influenced audience conceptualizations and shaped public perceptions toward viewing Palestine as characterized by instability, unrest, and violence, while identifying Israel and the United States as the two actors responsible for conflict and occupation.

Azizi (2013 AD/1392 SH), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran in American High School Textbooks," found that Iran was commonly represented in U.S. secondary school textbooks through themes such as: "Anti-Western Iran, important

Iran, troublesome Iran, oil-rich Iran, weak Iran, Islam as a threat, and justifications for U.S. actions in Iran."

Hashemi (2009 AD/1388 SH) found that school textbooks, in relation to peace education, emphasized issues such as preserving national cohesion and territorial integrity, identifying enemies, familiarizing learners with the colonial policies of powerful Western countries, recognizing imbalances of power and international political, economic, and cultural exchanges, and confronting external threats and aggression.

Ivana and Suprayogi (2020 AD), in a study titled "The Representation of Iran and the United States in Donald Trump's Speech: A Critical Discourse Analysis," found that Iran was portrayed as a country pursuing nuclear ambitions and engaging in terrorist activities, while the United States was represented as a powerful and invincible nation. The findings also showed that Trump was portrayed as a figure highly aware of his country's political conditions and capable of identifying Iran's weaknesses. Moreover, as president, he called upon both the American people and countries around the world to cooperate in achieving global peace. Consequently, the study suggested that countries around the world supported U.S. actions and expressed serious concern regarding Iran's conduct.

Duncombe (2016 AD), in a study titled "Representation, Recognition, and Foreign Policy in Iran-U.S. Relations," examined the impact of how one country's representation of another influences foreign policy behavior. The findings showed that these dual representations of self and other generate identity narratives for both countries that contribute to mutual misrecognition and intensify tensions between Iran and the United States in the context of nuclear negotiations.

Jaspal (2014 AD), in a study titled "Representing the Zionist Regime: Anti-Zionist Mass Communication in Iran's English-Language Media," found that these media outlets, acting as spokespersons for Iran, adopted and promoted a strong anti-Zionist position by refusing to recognize the Israeli state and civilian population and by constructing the Zionist regime as a terrorist threat that should be collectively confronted by the Islamic world. In other words, these media sought to export anti-Zionist ideology to international audiences and globalize this ideological perspective. According to the study, this process could contribute to the delegitimization of the State of Israel, increased antisemitism, negative intergroup relations, and greater isolation of Israel.

Therefore, a review of the research literature indicates that a substantial portion of previous studies has focused primarily on visual media and social networks, while textbooks, as a widespread and influential medium, have received comparatively less

attention. Accordingly, the present study seeks to examine textbooks based on indicators related to the construction and representation of the outside world.

2. Research Methodology

This study employed a descriptive-analytical approach and falls within the category of applied research, using a mixed-method content analysis design (quantitative and qualitative). To answer the research questions, the pages of secondary-level Social Studies textbooks, including text, questions, exercises, and images, were examined and analyzed through document analysis.

To accomplish this, the first stage involved developing indicators related to the portrayal of foreign countries through the research synthesis technique (meta-synthesis). Research synthesis refers to the production of new knowledge by clarifying relationships and differences across reports from individual studies that had not previously been examined collectively. This method involves the purposeful selection, review, analysis, and integration of primary research reports addressing a similar topic.

Accordingly, previous studies concerning the political representation of nation-states and political systems in the research literature were first identified, searched, and selected; subsequently, themes related to the representation of foreign countries were extracted.

The statistical population in this stage of the study included all documents and records available in the databases of the Islamic World Science Citation Center (ISC), Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR/SID), Magiran, and Google Scholar. Sampling was purposeful, and the sample consisted of all available documents relevant to the topic. Collection of sources and documents continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Out of 58 retrieved studies, 23 studies were selected based on their degree of relevance to the present research. Data analysis was then conducted using an inductive approach, and the main themes were developed, as presented in Table 1.

Subsequently, to examine the indicators of the representation of foreign countries in thematic form, frequency counts and percentages were calculated. Qualitative data analysis was also conducted, and examples of these indicators were presented.

The statistical population of the main study consisted of all Social Studies textbooks at the lower secondary level (Grades 7, 8, and 9) that were developed during the 2024–2025 AD/1403-1404 SH academic year by the Office for the Development of General and Secondary Education Textbooks of the Ministry of Education. To ensure precise

and reliable findings, the entire statistical population, that is, the full content of all Social Studies textbooks at the secondary level, was selected as the sample.

Table 1. Indicators of the Representation of the Outside World Based on the Research Literature

Indicator	Sources
Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them	Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Jafari Zadeh Bahabadi & Khalili (2014 AD/1393 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi & Vahabpour (2015 AD/1394 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi (2016 AD/1395 SH); Alipour (2014 AD/1393 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH); Hashemi (2009 AD/1388 SH)
Supporting the oppressed, liberation movements, and defending the rights of Muslims	Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi (2016 AD/1395 SH); Mansour (2023 AD/1402 SH); Rasouli Sani-Abadi (2012 AD/1391 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH); Safavi (2008 AD/1387 SH)
Rejecting domination and maintaining independence in foreign policy (Neither East nor West)	Alipour (2014 AD/1393 SH); Madani (2014 AD/1393 SH); Dehghani Firouzabadi (2016AD/1395 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH); Jafari Zadeh Bahabadi & Khalili (2014 AD/1393 SH); Shojaei (2010 AD/1389 SH)
The necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states	Madani (2010 AD/1389 SH); Jafari Zadeh Bahabadi & Khalili (2014 AD/1393 SH); Izadi (2016 AD/1395 SH); Mansour (2023 AD/1402 SH); Akbarzadeh & Ziarat (2019 AD/1398 SH)
Familiarization with allied countries	Haghibin (2018 AD/1397 SH); Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Paul & Adamson (1990 AD)
Enemy identification (recognition of enemies)	Mohammadi Mehr (2003 AD/1382 SH); Hashemi (2009 AD/1388 SH); Jaspal (2014 AD); Paul & Adamson (1990 AD)

Next, to assess the validity of the indicators of the representation of the outside world, the Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was calculated based on evaluations by specialists in educational sciences and political science. The results showed a CVR value of 1.00 for all indicators, indicating complete content validity of the indicators for measuring the intended variable.

Data reliability was also established using an inter-rater agreement coefficient of 98%. For data analysis, descriptive statistics (including frequency and percentage tables) were used in the quantitative section, while thematic analysis was employed in the qualitative section.

3. Research Findings

To examine the status of indicators related to the representation of the outside world in textbooks, the content was first analyzed using a researcher-developed checklist and assessed in terms of frequency and percentage distribution. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution and Percentage of Indicators of the Representation of the Outside World in the Secondary Social Studies Curriculum

Indicators	Grade 7 Social Studies		Grade 8 Social Studies		Grade 9 Social Studies		Total	
	Frequen cy	%	Frequen cy	%	Frequen cy	%	Frequen cy	%
Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them	1	2.77	23	11.44	139	45.87	163	30.18
Supporting the oppressed, liberation movements, and defending the rights of Muslims	1	2.77	8	3.98	1	0.33	10	1.85
Rejecting domination/rejecting subordination and maintaining independence in foreign policy (Neither East nor West)	11	30.55	1	0.49	25	8.25	37	6.85
The necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states	2	5.55	39	19.41	4	1.32	45	8.33

Familiarization with allied/neighborin g countries	3	8.32	35	17.40	2	0.66	40	7.40
Enemy identification (recognition of enemies)	18	49.97	95	47.24	132	43.56	245	45.37
Total	36	100	201	100	303	100	540	100

Based on the results presented in Table 2, indicators related to the representation of the outside world appeared a total of 540 times across the lower secondary Social Studies curriculum. The frequency varied across the textbooks examined: 36 instances in Grade 7 Social Studies, 201 instances in Grade 8, and 303 instances in Grade 9.

The findings further indicate that, within the lower secondary Social Studies curriculum, the highest frequencies were associated with the indicators of "Enemy Identification" with a frequency of 245 occurrences (45.37%), and "Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them" with a frequency of 163 occurrences (30.18%).

Next in frequency were the indicators "The necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states" with a frequency of 45 (8.33%), "Familiarization with allied/neighborin g countries" with a frequency of 40 (7.4%), and "Rejection of domination/rejection of subordination and independence in foreign policy neither (Neither East nor West)" with a frequency of 37 (6.85%). The indicator "Support for the oppressed, liberation movements and defense of the rights of Muslims" had the lowest frequency, with 10 occurrences (1.85%).

The qualitative analysis of the indicator "Introducing colonialism and imperialism and emphasizing the necessity of combating them" in the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook shows that this theme appeared once. The textbook states that:

"The main reason for the greed of certain colonial countries toward our country is precisely these abundant resources and capabilities, as well as the resistance of the people of this land against the bullying of others." (p. 50)

Similarly, the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook refers to examples and historical cases concerning the negative effects of colonialism on different countries. Among these are references to:

"The competition among colonial powers to gain access to the waters of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean," and "The establishment of military bases by colonial

powers such as the United States and England in order to secure their interests in dependent countries." (p. 128)

The textbook also discusses the challenges faced by Africans as a consequence of European colonial rule, stating:

"Over the past five hundred years, European colonialism, widespread genocide, civil wars, and repeated famines reduced the population of the African continent, while poor sanitation, the spread of various diseases, and droughts also hindered population growth." (p. 145)

In addition, the textbook explains European colonial practices in Africa as follows:

"When European colonial powers discovered and occupied the Americas, they abducted Africans and transported them as slaves to work on plantations and in mines. Between 1500 and 1800 CE, when millions of Black people were shipped to America, the horrific conditions in which slaves were kept during transportation caused several million of them to lose their lives along the way. In America, these enslaved people were sold to plantation and mine owners. They endured extremely harsh living conditions and were frequently subjected to severe punishment by their masters. Several centuries of colonial rule in Africa had such a profound effect on the continent that it deprived it of opportunities for growth and development." (p. 146)

Elsewhere, the textbook refers to the colonial role of the United States, stating:

"After the Second World War, the United States surpassed the European powers and replaced them in dominating and exploiting the resources of countries that had previously been European colonies." (p. 147)

In the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook, colonialism is also discussed extensively. For example, the colonial practices of countries such as England, the United States, and France are described as follows:

"For the past several centuries, arrogant and hegemonic countries such as England, the United States, France, and others have engaged in the exploitation and plundering of various countries through colonialism and in different forms, using their resources for their own benefit and preventing their progress." (p. 48)

The textbook also identifies the colonial objectives associated with the Treaty of Turkmenchay, stating that:

"Russia entered the war with all its forces and equipment and, after defeating the Iranian army, imposed the Treaty of Turkmenchay on our country, a treaty even more disgraceful than the Treaty of Golestan. Under this agreement, Iranian territories north of the Aras River came under Russian control, and, as with the Treaty of Golestan, Iran was deprived of maintaining warships in the Caspian Sea and was required to pay indemnities." (p. 75)

The textbook further addresses this issue through an activity question that asks:

"In your opinion, why did Amir Kabir insist on not employing Russian and English teachers at Dar al-Fonun School?" (p. 79)

The implied explanation is that Amir Kabir's intention was to prevent the influence of the colonial governments of Russia and England within Iran.

In addition, the textbook continues by presenting historical examples of colonial concessions embedded in agreements between Iran, Russia, and England (p. 80).

The textbook also discusses the selection of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi by the United States as a means of advancing American colonial objectives, stating:

"He [Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi], like his father, was not chosen by the people and was dependent on foreign powers; therefore, he obeyed the plans and objectives of those upon whom he believed his continuation in power depended." (p. 93)

The textbook further describes the conduct of the Allied powers regarding the division of global influence during the Second World War, stating:

"At one stage of the Second World War, the leaders of the Allied powers came to Tehran to make decisions regarding the future of the war and the division of the world among themselves. The leaders of the United States, England, and the Soviet Union stayed in the Soviet embassy in Tehran from 27 to 30 November 1943 without informing Mohammad Reza Shah or even notifying him of their visit. After holding their meeting and making certain decisions, they returned to their countries without showing the slightest regard for the Shah of Iran." (p. 93)

In addition, the textbook explains the nature of American influence through capitulation (extraterritorial rights) in Iran, Japan, and South Korea, stating:

"The United States compelled the Iranian government not only to cover the expenses of American military personnel but also to grant them judicial immunity, or the right of capitulation (extraterritorial jurisdiction). Under this immunity, if Americans committed any crime in Iran, Iranian courts had no authority to prosecute them." (pp. 99-100)

The textbook then expands on this issue and explains that:

"The United States stationed its military forces in Japan and obtained capitulatory rights there. Accordingly, an agreement titled "SOFA" was concluded between Japan and the United States, under which, if a member of the American military or civilian personnel committed an offense or crime, the Japanese government was not authorized to take action against that individual, and only the U.S. military could prosecute them. At the same time, a similar agreement was signed with South Korea. Capitulation, with slight modifications, continues to be implemented." (p. 100)

Elsewhere, the textbook states:

"Over the past two hundred years, our country has faced not only domestic authoritarianism but also the policies of Western colonial powers (Europe and the United States)." (p. 125)

Therefore, the textbooks strongly emphasize colonialism and imperialism, particularly through historical examples involving interactions with Western countries.

In addition, the Social Studies textbooks attempt to emphasize support for the oppressed, liberation movements, and the defense of the rights of Muslims. For example, the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook states:

"Every day we witness that the people of Palestine are wounded or martyred as a result of the unjust attacks of the occupying regime of Jerusalem. Or we hear in the news that people in some countries in Asia and Africa are being killed due to drought, poverty, and war, conditions that are sometimes caused by the intervention of bullying powers. Upon hearing such news, we say: If only we were there to help those harmed and oppressed."

Similarly, the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook states:

"Today, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the oppressed people of all countries, especially Palestine." (p. 129)

The textbook also identifies Palestine as the most important issue facing the Islamic world and explains its significance as follows:

"The issue of Palestine and the injustice inflicted upon its people following its occupation by Zionist Jews is not merely an issue concerning Arab people, nor even solely an Islamic issue; rather, it is an issue of great importance." (p. 131)

Furthermore, the textbook presents support for the Palestinian people as both a religious and humanitarian duty, stating:

"In addition, it is the religious obligation and human responsibility of every free person that if enemies occupy a part of another country's territory and oppress its people, they should assist those people and struggle against the oppressors." (p. 131)

The discussion continues by stating:

"They did not allow people to feel that the issue of Palestine was part of the issue of Muslims and Iran, and that it was connected to Iran's future and progress." (p. 132)

Here, the textbook presents Iran's progress as being linked to the resolution of the Palestinian issue. It then refers to Quds Day as an expression of the importance of the Palestinian issue, stating:

"Imam Khomeini, for the first time in the history of Arab, Islamic, and Palestinian struggles, designated a day as Quds Day, as a symbol of the struggle against Zionism."

In addition, the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook, in the lesson "Iran in the Period after the Victory of the Islamic Revolution," also addresses this issue:

"From the very beginning of its establishment, the Islamic Republic of Iran supported liberation movements throughout the world; for this reason, it severed relations with the occupying regime of Jerusalem and supported the uprising of the Palestinian people for the liberation of their land." (p. 107)

Therefore, one of the forms of representation of foreign nation-states in the Social Studies textbooks is the emphasis on support for liberation movements and Muslim causes.

The Social Studies textbooks also attempt to portray "The rejection of domination/rejection of subordination and independence in foreign policy (Neither East nor West)" as a major policy orientation of the Islamic Republic toward foreign countries.

For example, the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook links national independence to economic self-sufficiency and reduced dependence on foreign countries, stating:

"Our country strives both to increase its production and to improve the quality of its products through advances in science and technology so that, economically, we will not become dependent on foreign countries." (p. 34)

The textbook also refers to Iran's resistance after the Islamic Revolution against the encroachment of dominant powers:

"After the Islamic Revolution, despite the aggression of enemies, not even one square meter of its territory has fallen into foreign hands." (p. 50)

In Grade 9 Social Studies, regarding Amir Kabir's efforts to limit foreign influence, the textbook states:

"In foreign policy, he [Amir Kabir] paid special attention to preserving the country's independence and sought to eliminate the influence of Russia and England in Iran." (p. 77)

The text on the same page also refers to public opposition to granting economic concessions to foreign powers that would increase their control over the country's wealth and markets:

"The Muslim people of Iran understood that granting economic concessions to Russia and England would lead to greater foreign domination over their country's sources of wealth and markets. Therefore, they opposed granting some of these concessions." (p. 80)

The textbook further refers to the Tobacco Movement as one of the broadest social movements formed in protest against granting economic concessions to foreigners, stating:

"The Tobacco Movement was the first serious movement by the people of Iran to free themselves from foreign influence and domination and to resist domestic oppression,

and its success strengthened people's self-confidence and their spirit of resistance and struggle." (p. 80)

Elsewhere, the textbooks depict the background to the nationalization of Iran's oil industry, stating:

"The competition among England, the Soviet Union, and the United States to gain greater political and economic influence in our country undermined the country's political stability and tranquility. It was under these circumstances that the conditions for the Oil Nationalization Movement emerged." (p. 94)

The consequences of oil nationalization are also presented as a response to foreign domination:

"After the nationalization of the oil industry, Dr. Mossadegh became Prime Minister in order to implement that law and remove foreign control over the country's resources and oil industry." (p. 94)

Elsewhere, by presenting Imam Khomeini's perspective on domination and resistance, the textbook states:

"Relying on religious beliefs and values, the Imam called on the people to stand against oppression and foreign domination over the country."

In addition, the textbook refers to public dissatisfaction with American influence and domination in Iran:

"After the coup of 28 Mordad [19 August 1953] and Mohammad Reza Shah's return to power, a new phase of American influence and domination over Iran began. At that time, the Iranian people were dissatisfied with the defeat of the Oil Nationalization Movement and the influence of foreign powers over their country." (p. 98)

Also, in relation to dependence and the loss of national independence, the textbook states:

"In an important speech, Imam Khomeini described granting judicial immunity to Americans as a humiliating act and contrary to the country's independence, and he strongly criticized the Shah for his dependence on the United States." (p. 99)

Elsewhere, public dissatisfaction with the political, economic, and cultural conditions of the country due to intervention by foreign powers, particularly the United States, is highlighted:

"The Pahlavi government was dependent on foreign powers and the influence and intervention of foreign countries, especially the United States, in Iran's affairs increased public dissatisfaction." (p. 101)

The textbooks also seek to promote religious identity and reinforce the necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states.

For example, in the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook, in a chapter titled "The Emergence of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula and the Rise of the Sun of Islam in Mecca," efforts are made to emphasize shared Muslim symbols, rituals, and beliefs. Various images of religious sites and mosques across the Islamic world are presented as symbols of common identity among Muslims (pp. 49-116).

Elsewhere, through presenting images of Masjid al-Haram, Karbala, and the massive Arbaeen pilgrimage of Imam Hussein, accompanied by the explanation that:

"Mecca and Medina, which are the holiest cities for Muslims, host hundreds of thousands of people each year during the Hajj pilgrimage and become the site of a magnificent and large gathering," the textbook further emphasizes the shared religious and cultural bonds among Muslims.

"Other large gatherings, such as the Arbaeen pilgrimage march, bring together millions of people every year," (p. 128) thereby referring to the religious and cultural unity of Muslims.

Furthermore, one of the reasons given for the importance of Palestine is that it is presented as the birthplace of the Abrahamic religions, which can demonstrate to students the role of Muslim unity in supporting and rescuing the Palestinian people:

"This land [Palestine] is the birthplace of the divine religions and the place where many prophets lived, and numerous holy sites are located there. For this reason, it is the focus of attention for many people around the world, including Muslims, Christians, and Jews." (p. 131)

The textbook also refers to the unity of Islamic nations for the elimination of Israel, stating:

"The only way forward in the struggle against Israel until its complete eradication is the unity of Muslims, the continuation of resistance, and the strengthening of the courageous protests and popular struggle (Intifada) of the people of this country." (p. 132)

Moreover, by presenting an image of the Great Mosque of Mali, as well as an image of the Hassan II Mosque, accompanied by the following description:

"The Hassan II Mosque is located in the city of Casablanca in the country of Morocco. With a height of 210 meters, it has the tallest mosque minaret in the world. The mosque is situated on the seashore, and part of it is built over the water," (p. 146) and also by providing a map of Muslim countries in Africa (p. 147), the textbook introduces students to Muslim countries and their mosques with the aim of strengthening the religious and cultural unity of Muslims worldwide.

Likewise, by presenting an image of a Shi'a mosque in the state of Michigan in the United States and providing information about Muslims in the Americas, the textbook emphasizes Muslim solidarity:

"Muslims also constitute a considerable population in the American continent, and there are important mosques in the United States." (p. 156)

On the other hand, the textbooks seek to emphasize familiarity with allied and neighboring countries.

For example, they devote particular attention to describing and introducing students to neighboring and allied countries such as China and Russia:

"At that time, silk was the most valuable and profitable commercial commodity that was exported from China to Iran and other lands." (Grade 7 Social Studies, p. 139)

Similarly, in the Grade 8 Social Studies textbook, in the lesson entitled "The Human and Economic Characteristics of Asia," images depicting the design, construction, and launch of a satellite in China, as well as an advanced train in Tokyo, Japan, are presented, and the following statement is made:

"China, Russia, India, South Korea, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Taiwan, and Malaysia are among Asia's powerful countries in the fields of economy, industry, and agriculture. Japan and Russia are members of the Group of Eight countries. China and India are also members of the BRICS economic alliance." (p. 117)

The textbook further states:

"Over the past two decades, China has been able, through new planning and by relying on its domestic capabilities, to significantly increase its production and exports, thereby improving both its economic income and the living standards of its people. Today, nearly all types of goods produced in China are exported to various countries around the world."

Now, it is stated that:

"Malaysia has also made significant progress in industry over the past two decades and has earned good income through it." (p. 118)

However, part of the descriptions in the Social Studies textbook refers to other Western and Asian countries, but what is clearly evident is that the textbooks, in their portrayal of countries, primarily emphasize allied, partner, or neighboring countries.

Another prominently emphasized theme in the textbooks is the issue of "Enemy recognition" (hostile awareness/discernment of adversaries). For example, in the Grade 7 Social Studies textbook, the United States and Zionism are described as enemies characterized as unjust and criminal:

"A Basij member is someone who passionately and courageously defends Islam, the Qur'an, and the Revolution against enemies such as the oppressive United States and

criminal Zionism, fights against oppressors, and remains friendly and humble toward people and always ready to help others." (p. 10)

Elsewhere, it refers to the martyrdom and injury of the Palestinian people as a result of attacks by the occupying regime of Jerusalem, as well as the deaths of people in some Asian and African countries due to poverty, drought, and war, which are attributed to the intervention of bullying powers:

"Every day we witness that the people of Palestine are wounded or martyred as a result of the inhumane attacks of the occupying regime of Jerusalem, or we hear in the news that people in some countries in Asia and Africa are killed due to drought, poverty, and war, which are sometimes caused by the intervention of bullying powers. Upon hearing such news, we say: if only we were there to help those harmed and oppressed." (p. 23)

It is also stated that, in violation of ethical and humanitarian principles, some countries such as the United States or the illegitimate state of Israel prevent the delivery of medical services and medicine to countries in need, thereby endangering the lives of thousands of innocent people in countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Syria or putting their health at serious risk:

"Despite the necessity of mutual assistance based on moral and humanitarian principles, some countries such as the United States or the illegitimate state of Israel prevent the delivery of medical services and medicine to countries in need, thereby taking the lives of thousands of innocent people in countries such as Iraq, Palestine, Yemen, and Syria or seriously endangering their health." (p. 23)

It is further stated that enemies have attempted to dominate the country:

"After the Islamic Revolution, despite the aggression of enemies, not even one square meter of its territory has fallen into foreign hands." (p. 50)

It also recalls the looting of Iran's archaeological artifacts and artistic treasures by countries such as France, England, and the United States:

"Before the Islamic Revolution, part of Iran's archaeological remains and artistic treasures were plundered by certain countries, especially France, England, and the United States." (p. 105)

Elsewhere, by assigning a research task about the moral characteristics and military capabilities of the courageous and powerful Iranian commander, Lieutenant General martyr Qassem Soleimani, who was unjustly assassinated by criminal American terrorists, and asking students to present their findings in class, the textbook also conveys an image of hostility associated with the United States to students.

The Grade 8 Social Studies textbook also repeatedly and explicitly, both directly and indirectly, reminds students of the concept of the "Enemy" and "Enemy Recognition."

For example, regarding U.S. and British support for Israeli actions against Palestine and Muslims, it states:

"The occupying regime of Jerusalem (Israel), with the support of the United States and England, in addition to suppressing the oppressed people of Palestine and occupying neighboring territories, engages in conspiracies and hostility against Muslims in the region."

At the same time, the textbook attempts to present the authority and stability of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the face of dozens of American military bases as those of an adversary:

"After the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani during his official presence in Iraq by the United States, and Iran's decisive response through a missile strike on one of the most important American bases in the region (Ayn al-Asad in Iraq), the pace of withdrawal of American occupying forces from the region increased."

It also presents an image of the detention of American military personnel after their illegal entry into Iran's territorial waters in 2015 (p. 130), and refers to the resistance of Iran's naval, ground, and air forces against the Iraqi Ba'athist regime:

"The brave sailors of the Islamic Republic of Iran, like the ground and air forces during the imposed war initiated by the Iraqi Ba'athist regime against Iran, fought with great courage and bravery in the waters against enemies, defended the country, and ensured that no disruption occurred in the movement of commercial ships or the import of goods into Iran."

Furthermore, regarding the duty of Muslims in response to the occupation of Palestine and the oppression of its people by Israel, it states:

"In addition, it is the religious duty as well as the human responsibility of every free person that if enemies occupy a piece of another country's land and oppress its people, they should come to the aid of those people and fight against the enemies."

However, the textbook attempts to distinguish Zionism from Jews. For example, it states:

"In the world, there are many Jews who are opposed to Zionism. Zionism is an aggressive political-ideological movement that considers the establishment of the State of Israel its ultimate goal and uses any means necessary to achieve it. By Zionism, we do not mean only the occupying state of Palestine; rather, the establishment and administration of the State of Israel is only part of the activities of this group. They are, in fact, major capitalists who have extensive influence in countries such as the United States and largely dominate that country's politics. Today, even some international organizations have fallen under the financial, military, propaganda and cultural policies of Zionist expansionism." (p. 132)

Also, in the Grade 9 Social Studies textbook, by portraying the enemies of Muslims, it states:

"The forced migration of the Palestinian people from the occupied territories, or the mass migration of groups of people from Afghanistan, Syria, or Iraq to neighboring countries, due to war conditions and the military occupation of their countries by Israeli and American aggressors." (p. 45)

It is also stated that:

"The attack of the terrorist (fear-inducing) group ISIS, with the support of the United States and its allies" (p. 46) led to the migration of the people of Iraq.

In another section, referring to the reasons for hostility between Israel and the United States and Iran, it states:

"From the very beginning of its establishment, the Islamic Republic of Iran supported liberation movements throughout the world; for this reason, it severed its relations with the occupying regime of Jerusalem and supported the uprising of the Palestinian people for the liberation of their land. Accordingly, the domineering and coercive powers, led by the United States, launched extensive activities to divert and destroy the nascent Islamic system." (p. 107)

Regarding conspiracies by enemies to assassinate revolutionary figures and people, it states:

"One of the criminal actions of counter-revolutionary groups such as the Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (Monafeqin), carried out with the support of foreign enemies, was the widespread assassination of revolutionary figures and political and cultural officials. As a result of these terrorist acts, many figures of the Islamic Republic system and close companions of the Imam were martyred. The Monafeqin even showed no mercy toward ordinary people and killed several thousand men, women, the elderly, and children."

The textbook further provides examples of terrorist actions carried out by the Mujahedin-e Khalq (including the assassinations of Ayatollah Motahhari, Martyr Beheshti, and Martyr Rajaei), which are presented as being supported by foreign enemies.

Regarding foreign military support for attempts to destroy the Islamic Republic, it states:

"It has been stated that during the Iran–Iraq war, foreign enemies of the Islamic Revolution (the United States, the Soviet Union, England, France, and Germany) provided military support to the Ba’athist regime of Iraq. At the same time that our country was engaged in extensive domestic counter-revolutionary unrest, the external

enemies of the Islamic Revolution imposed a devastating war upon the Iranian people."

On 22 September 1980 (31 Shahrivar 1359), Saddam Hussein, the head of Iraq's Ba'athist regime, with the support of some arrogant (hegemonic) powers, launched a war against Iran by ordering an attack on Khorramshahr and occupied parts of our homeland's territory. During the imposed war, various countries such as the United States, the Soviet Union, England, France, Germany, etc., provided the Iraqi Ba'athist regime with all kinds of equipment and intelligence support (p. 108).

Furthermore, images are presented of chemical weapons assistance provided by some European countries such as Germany to Saddam Hussein for chemical bombings of certain Iranian cities such as Sardasht, the U.S. attack on an Iranian passenger aircraft resulting in the death of 290 innocent people, and the U.S. attack on oil platforms in the final years of the imposed war. These are presented as evidence of military support and backing from foreign enemies of the Islamic Revolution (p. 109).

The textbook also refers to U.S. economic sanctions against Iran, stating:

"Another action taken by the enemies of the Islamic Revolution to increase pressure on the Iranian people and the Islamic Republic was the imposition of economic sanctions against our country. For the first time, shortly after the victory of the Revolution, the United States quickly imposed economic sanctions on Iran and confiscated many of Iran's funds in foreign banks or the country's assets abroad. Since then, these pressures and sanctions have been increased repeatedly under various pretexts, to the extent that even the Iranian people were deprived of access to some vital medicines."

It is also stated that psychological warfare by hegemonic powers such as the United States and England against Iran continues:

"Arrogant and bullying powers such as the United States, England, and their allies, after realizing that victory in a military war against the Islamic Republic of Iran was not possible, gradually entered into psychological warfare against our beloved country, which continues to this day."

Therefore, one of the most prominent images presented in the textbooks regarding foreign countries is the depiction of enemies, and this representation is constructed through historical examples and cases.

Conclusion

The results of the content analysis of the seventh-grade Social Studies textbook showed that, overall, the indicators of "Representation of the outside world" were

addressed 540 times. Among these, the greatest attention was given to the indicator of "Enemy recognition," with a frequency of 245 (37.45%).

In the next rank was the indicator of "Introducing colonialism and colonial practices and the necessity of fighting against it," with a frequency of 163 (30.18%). After that came the indicators of the "Necessity of unity among Muslim nation-states," "Familiarization with allied/neighbouring countries," and "Rejection of domination/rejection of being dominated and independence in foreign policy (neither East nor West)," with frequencies of 45 (8.33%), 40 (7.4%), and 37 (6.85%), respectively. The indicator of "Support for the oppressed and liberation movements and defending the rights of Muslims" had the lowest frequency, with 10 instances (1.85%).

Based on the findings, it can be stated that the Social Studies curriculum at the lower secondary level, in presenting and portraying foreign countries, follows a politically oriented approach grounded in national and historical values. In this approach, certain representation indicators, particularly "Enemy Recognition," are highly emphasized, while others receive comparatively less attention. Specifically, the authors of the textbooks place greater emphasis on "Enemy Recognition" and "Introducing colonialism and colonial practices and the necessity of fighting against it," whereas less attention is given to "Rejection of domination/rejection of being dominated and independence in foreign policy (neither East nor West)" and "Support for the oppressed and liberation movements and defending the rights of Muslims."

Accordingly, it can be concluded that the Social Studies curriculum at the lower secondary level addresses the indicators of foreign-world representation, derived from the foreign policy framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran, in an uneven and selective manner. This selective approach primarily highlights negative dimensions such as identifying enemies, external threats, and colonialism. This emphasis may increase students' awareness of security and political issues, as well as the history of colonialism and its role in shaping post-revolutionary political identity, potentially strengthening a sense of enemy recognition and awareness of colonial powers and resistance against them.

In the next stage, greater attention is given to allied countries and the unity of Muslim nation-states; although this attention would benefit from a more balanced and comprehensive approach, it may nonetheless influence students' understanding of the importance of cooperation and unity among Islamic countries and Muslims. However, comparatively less attention is given to concepts such as the rejection of domination, which may lead to an incomplete understanding among students regarding unity in the Islamic world, an issue that is currently strongly felt.

Given that textbooks are a powerful and widely used tool capable of influencing students' perspectives and attitudes by presenting specific information and concepts, careful reflection on the process of representing foreign nation-states is necessary. In fact, the current approach adopted in the Social Studies curriculum at the lower secondary level, due to its strong emphasis on enemy recognition and a pronounced depiction of external threats, may, while contributing to political and national identity formation and creating political distinctions, also lead to the formation of one-dimensional attitudes toward the outside world in learners' minds. It may further challenge the development of learners' political identity as active members of the Islamic Ummah and the global community.

Therefore, it is suggested that textbook authors and curriculum planners revise the content of Social Studies textbooks and strive to create a greater balance among the indicators of foreign-world representation, so that students can develop a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of global issues.

Ethical considerations

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Compliance with research ethics

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