

Content analysis of “Religion and Life” curriculum in the high school program in Iran in terms of the emphasis on students’ creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness

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Abstract

The emphasis put on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in high school “Religion and Life” curriculum was surveyed. The study was carried out as a content analysis work with a study population of three “Religion and Life” textbooks and three teacher’s guidebooks in Iranian high school program. The whole content of the books were studied so that the sample group was the same as the study population. Data collection tool was a researcher designed inventory based on theoretical foundations and literature review. Validity of the tool was supported by instructors in the School of Educational Sciences. Analysis units were the sentences in the textbook and teacher’s guidebooks. The results showed that the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness of students was at a low level in the objective section of the curriculum. In addition, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in students was at a very low level in the content of textbooks and teacher’s guidebooks. Therefore, a revision of the content the books by authors and curriculum planners is recommended.

Key Words: Creativity, Critical Thinking, Self-assertiveness, Curriculum, Content

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Introduction

To achieve internal learning, a curriculum should be relevant to learners' needs. Given that religion plays a notable role in providing mental and social peace for man, it can be a valuable help for the youth and students to achieve peace and preserve their mental health. Development of a healthy and balanced personality and realization of talents of the teenagers, which is a serious concern in Islamic trainings, are achievable through a suitable education and an omni-aspect growth.

Textbook is highly accentuated in the centralized education system of Iran; so that the majority of educational activities are conducted within the framework of the textbook (Yarmoohamadian, 2016).

Content is one of the elements in any curriculum. It encompasses knowing, skills, processes, and values and students interact with it throughout the education or instructing-learning process (Nourian, 2016).

Development and codification of textbooks should be based on the principles of curriculum planning. Relevance of content to needs, interests, and life experiences of students is an aspect to be taken into account in curriculum planning. Additionally, in some cases there are more than one practical guideline for choosing the basic content for a continuous education and opportunity of learning activities (Mashayekh, 2010).

There are at least two types of content recognizable in a course; 1- written content or the textbook, which is studied by the students and 2- oral content or the explanations given by the teacher and in the teaching style (Fathi and Ajarghah, 2016).

The textbook content that is more efficient in proving the ground for development and growth of thought is also more efficient in preparing capable, creative, and innovation individuals. Such content also helps preservation of independence, growth, and development in society. Content is a tool to achieve educational objectives, so that it is essential to ensure its relevance to the goals. It is comprehensive when all the elements of knowledge, information, mental skills, social needs, attitudes, values, tendencies, and skills are covered. Moreover, this is more important in Iran with a centralized curriculum planning system (Maleki, 2016).

The term “creativity” is derived from “create” and “creative” (Thomas L., 2001). The entry “creativity” in Silimi Dictionary of Psychology reads “creativity is the desire and tendency to create, which is potentially available in everyone at any age. It is directly correlated to social and cultural environment and this natural tendency needs a suitable environment for actualization” (Shahhosseinign and Kavousi, 2017).

Creativity is to add a new perspective to a situation, challenge, or an issue to achieve

new opportunities, which have not been known before (Cholman, 2005). Creative individuals do not stop with the known fact, tend to have a strong analyzing ability, accept open and flexible methods, try to see new uses and functions in things around them, and tend to be disciplined and persistent. Creativity also entails a sort of playfulness; however, it is nowhere close to conceding defeat easily (Veston 2014, translated by Boeiri).

A review of the references about creativity and innovation indicates that the different terms used for creativity all are rooted in one's thought and way of thinking. In fact, a creative individual tends to have an explorer and creator mind. A thinker observes daily life phenomena and affairs and sees things that are hidden from the eyes of ordinary people. In addition, they tend to find new uses for resources and facilities that are invisible to ordinary people. Creativity means to employ mental capabilities to create a new thought or concept. That is why in many references, the terms “creativity” and “innovation” are used interchangeably and some authors believe that creativity is a spiritual and mysterious process that cannot be described, while some believe that creativity is not achievable (Khademian, 2009).

Critical thinking is way of thinking about anything, any content, and any issue, through which the individual improves and upgrades their quality of thinking using skillful analysis, assessment, and recreation. Critical thinking is

the disciplined process of the mind to actively and skillfully think, analyze, combine, and assess the information collected through observing, analyzing, contemplating, and reasoning. Such thinking is used to guide and control one's action and belief (Fathiazar et al., 2013).

Another definition of critical thinking is brought in by the US Association of Psychology (1990), which conveys the idea that critical thinking is perceived by us as purposeful and self-constructed judgement that leads to interpretation or analysis, assessment, and deduction. It also contains an explanation that is based on reason, evidence, and conceptual, orderly, and systematic explanation with textual concerns based on which a decision is made (Smith and Stom, 1999; cited from Maleki, 2007).

By expression, we refer to the opportunity or ability to express oneself in a proper and authentic manner, to respect one's feeling and thought, and to recognize one's strengths and weaknesses (Sajedi, Atashpor, Kamkar, Samsam Shariat, No 39, 2009). One's ability to express oneself is a critical social competency. Poal Akman used the expression rules to express social unanimity to decide when to express what feeling property (Golman, 20017).

An important personal and social skill and ability is to express feelings, desires, wishes, thoughts, and opinions clearly and explicitly without any disrespect to others' rights. Such ability is called courage, decisiveness, or the tool

of self-assertiveness (Sadatian, 2016).

Given the important and specific position of “Religion and Life” textbook in Iranian educational system and its role in personal and social lives of students and the importance of self-esteem, responsibility, and self-actualization for teenagers and for the society, the present study is a survey of the emphasis put on self-esteem, responsibility, and self-actualization in “Religion and Life” curriculum in the high school program.

Literature review

Faeghe Aal Agha (2012) conducted a research work titled “content analysis of Experimental Sciences textbook of 2nd grade junior high school in terms of Gilford creativity.” She concluded that the emphasis on developing subjective creativity (divergent thinking) was at low level.

Thi Bich Lieu Tran, Thi Nhat Ho, Sarah V. Mackenzie, Long Kim le (2017) carried out a studied titled “codification of the measures of assessing creativity teaching course.” They surveyed the content of chemistry, history, foreign language, mathematics, and teacher’s guidebook for creativity development in students. They concluded that with a suitable and effective content, textbooks can be positively effective in teachers’ performance. In addition, they showed that teachers play a colorful role in development of creativity in students.

In a study titled “surveying the relationship between tendency to

critical thinking and educational achievement of students in Meshkin Shahr-Iran” Nourizade (2014) concluded that there was a significant relationship between tendency to critical thinking and educational achievement of students.

Eskja Vero, and Edi Puka (2018) carried out a study on students to examine the role of university as an educational institution in motivating critical thinking in students. They found that critical thinking should be a part of the teaching process and textbooks should pay more attention to it.

Khani et al. (2014) performed a study titled “the effects of life skills (expression) education on improvement of mental health indices and quality of life in students.” They concluded that life skills education can be helpful in improvement of the quality of life.

Abdurrezzak Gultekin Aysel, A. Ozdemir, Funda Budak (2018) surveyed the effects of assertiveness on communicational skills of nursing students. The subjects received assertiveness and self-assertiveness education in light of communicational skills. They found that the assertiveness and self-assertiveness education had a positive effect on communicational skills and educational, social, and life achievements.

Research Questions

Main question:

To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in Religion and Life curriculum?

Subordinate questions

1. To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in the approved objectives of Religion and Life curriculum?
2. To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in Religion and Life textbooks?
3. To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in Religion and Life teacher’s guidebooks ?

Methodology

The study was carried out at two stages following a mixed research method. Stage one was carried out through descriptive method to study the theoretical foundations. To this end, the latest and most relevant information was searched in information banks. Moreover, using search engines, websites about creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness were checked. Books and journals pertinent to the subject of study were also studied. Based on the findings about the theoretical foundations, an inventory for content analysis was designed to carry out the survey.

Stage two was carried out through content analysis where, using the collected information, the content in the textbooks pertinent to creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness were interpreted and elaborated. The concepts and all elements of Religion and Life textbook in high school program

were examined and evaluated to determine the emphasis put on the elements under study.

Study population at the stage two of study were the Religion and Life curriculum at 10th, 11th, and 12th grades in the academic year 2013-2014. The books are designed by Research and Programming Organization. The sample group was representative of and the same as the study population and the sample size was equal to the study population. Research tool was an inventory to analyze the content of Religion and Life textbooks and teacher’s guidebooks that covered self-esteem, responsibility, and self-actualization. Validity of the tool was approved by instructors in the School of Educational Sciences. The research tool includes content analysis list of textbooks and teacher’s guide books including components of creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness. Using the content analysis list, the textbook of religion and life of high school period in Iran was studied. The case frequencies observed in textbook and teacher’s guidebooks attend to the proportion of their volume. The frequency components proposed were divided to total number of sentences and then the percentages of each of them was calculated and compared to the result. The content analysis list of curriculum is produced from analyzing written books in way of social needs and analyzing many theses about social needs in educational system of the country. Next, the list was studied and analyzed by 10 university

professors and their opinions were used in compiling the list (using Delphi method and gathering curriculum expert`s opinions). Thus, the content has validity. To evaluate the reliability in this study content analysis work was carried out by one of the expert colleagues on curriculum. In this study, the correlation coefficient between

independent variables is equal to 74% approximately which indicates the reliability of the tool.

Findings

How much emphasis paid in creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness ?

Table 1. Distribution of emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness

	Objectives			Textbooks			Teacher`s guidebooks		
	10 th	11 th	12 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	10 th	11 th	12 th
Creativity	3	4	0	5	0	0	4	4	8
Critical thinking	3	3	4	4	0	0	3	10	2
Self-assertiveness	16	19	28	12	0	0	46	63	71
Number of pertinent sentences	22	26	32	21	0	0	53	77	81
Total sentences	114	91	74	1001	1241	1502	1890	1890	3459
%	19.29	28.57	43.24	2.09	0	0	2.7	40.7	0.05

To analyze Religion and Life curriculum in high school, the content of objective, textbooks, and teacher`s guidebooks were examined. In general and given the table above, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in the objectives of curriculum at 10th, 11th, and 12th grades were 19.26%, 28.57%, and 43.24% respectively. The level of emphasis on these elements in the content of the textbooks of 10th, 11th, and 12th grades were 2.09%, 0%, and 0% respectively. These figures in teacher`s guidebook of 10th, 11th, and 12th grades were

2.8%, 4.07%, and 0.05% respectively.

In short, out of 114 sentences in Religion and Life textbook of 10th grade, only 22 were related to creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness. Out of 91 sentences of the 11th grade textbook, only 26 sentences were related to creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness. Finally, out of 74 sentences of the 12th grade textbook, only 32 sentences were related to creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness.

At the objective section of the 10th grade curriculum, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 19.26%, which is a small percentage (low). At objective section of the 11th grade curriculum, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 28.57%, which is again a small percentage (low). At objective section of the 12th grade curriculum, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 43.24%, which is a small percentage (low). Therefore, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum in high school was at a low level.

In the 10th grade textbook the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 2.09%, which means the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum of 10th grade was at a low level. In the 11th grade textbook the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 0%, which means the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum of 11th grade was at a low level. In the 12th grade textbook the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and

self-assertiveness was 0%, which means the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum of 12th grade was at a low level.

In the 10th grade teacher’s guidebook the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 2.8%, which means the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum of 10th grade was at a low level. In the 11th grade teacher’s guidebook, the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 4.07%, which means the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum of 11th grade was at low level. In the 12th grade teacher’s guidebook the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness was 0.05%, which means the emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life curriculum of 12th grade was at a low level.

Secondary question one: To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in the approved objectives of Religion and Life curriculum in the high school program?

Table 2. Distribution of emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in the objectives of Religion and Life curriculum in the high school program

	10 th		11 th		12 th	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Creativity	3	2.63	4	4.39	0	0
Critical thinking	3	2.63	3	3.29	4	5.40
Self-assertiveness	16	14.03	19	20.87	28	37.83
Total	22	19.29	26	28.57	32	43.24
Pertinent sentences	22		26		32	
Total sentences	114		91		74	
%	19.29		28.57		43.24	

To analyze the objectives, the teacher’s guidebooks were surveyed using the researcher designed inventory. As listed in the table above, the emphasis on the elements creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade teacher’s guidebooks was 19.26%, 28.57%, and 43.24% respectively.

With 14.03% emphasis, self-assertiveness was given the highest level of emphasis in the 10th grade teacher’s guidebook and creativity (2.63%) had the lowest level of emphasis. In the 11th grade teacher’s guidebook, self-assertiveness (20.87%) and critical thinking (3.24%) were given the

highest and lowest emphases respectively. In the 12th grade teacher’s guidebook, self-assertiveness (37.24%) and creativity (0%) were given the highest and lowest emphases respectively.

Clearly, self-assertiveness was given the highest emphasis in all the three teacher’s guidebooks and creativity was less emphasized in the three books.

Secondary question two: To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in Religion and Life textbooks in the high school program?

Table 3. Distribution of emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in the content of Religion and Life textbooks in the high school program

	10 th		11 th		12 th	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Creativity	5	0.49	0	0	0	0
Critical thinking	4	0.39	0	0	0	0
Self-assertiveness	12	1.19	0	0	0	0
Total	21	2.09	0	0	0	0
Pertinent sentences	21		0		0	
Total sentences	1001		1241		1502	
%	2.09		0		0	

To answer the secondary question two, the validated inventory that is designed based on the theoretical foundation was used. The most important feature of the inventory is its consistency with goal analysis inventory. The content of Religion and Life textbooks and teacher’s guidebooks of 10th, 11th, and 12th grades were analyzed. The analysis unit was the sentences in the lessons, questions, practices, and activities sections.

As listed in the Table above, out of 1001 sentences in the 10th grade textbook, 21 sentences were related to creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness. In the 11th and 12th textbooks 0 out 1241

sentences and 0 out of 1502 sentences respectively were related to creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness.

With 1.19% emphasis, self-assertiveness had the highest level of emphasis in the 10th grade textbook and critical thinking (0.39%) had the lowest level of emphasis. In the 11th and 12th grade textbooks, the three elements of self-assertiveness, critical thinking, and creativity were neglected.

Secondary question three: To what extent creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness are emphasized in Religion and Life teacher’s guidebooks?

Table 4. Distribution of emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in Religion and Life teacher’s guidebooks in the high school program

	10 th		11 th		12 th	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Creativity	4	0.21	4	0.21	8	0.23
Critical thinking	3	0.15	10	0.52	2	0.05
Self-assertiveness	46	2.43	63	3.33	71	2.05
Total	53	2.80	77	4.07	81	2.34
Total	53		77		81	
Pertinent sentences	1890		1890		3459	
Total sentences	2.80		4.07		2.34	

To answer the secondary question three, the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade Religion and Life teacher’s guidebooks were analyzed using the content analysis inventory.

The emphasis put on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in the teacher’s guidebooks were surveyed using the content analysis inventory. The

analysis units were the sentences in the books so that the sentences pertinent to the elements under study were counted in the books. There are three Religion and Life teacher’s guidebooks and the chapters in each three books were surveyed separately.

Each chapter begins with a table of objectives, main concept, teaching aid tools, and assessment

methods. Section two gives recommendations about teaching method, activities, and learning assessment. Section three contains information and theoretical foundations about the topics covered in each chapter.

As listed in the table above, out of 1890 sentences in 10th grade Religion and Life Teacher's guidebook, 0.21% are about creativity, 0.15% are about critical thinking, and 2.43% are about self-assertiveness. Out of 1890 sentences in 11th grade Religion and Life Teacher's guidebook, 0.21% are about creativity, 0.52% are about critical thinking, and 3.33% are about self-assertiveness. In addition, out of 3459 sentences in 12th grade Religion and Life Teacher's guidebook, 0.23% are about creativity, 0.05% are about critical thinking, and 2.05% are about self-assertiveness.

Self-assertiveness had the highest level of emphasis in 10th (2.43%), 11th (3.33%), and 12th (2.05%) grade Religion and Life teacher's guidebooks.

Critical thinking had the lowest level of emphasis in 10th (0.15%), 11th (0.21%), and 12th (0.05%) grade Religion and Life teacher's guidebooks.

In short, the mean score of emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness the 10th, 11th, and 12th grades teacher's guidebooks were 2.80%, 4.07%, and 2.34% respectively.

In general, self-assertiveness and critical thinking had the highest and lowest levels of emphases respectively in Religion and Life

teacher's guidebooks in the high school program.

Discussion and conclusion

A combination of research methods were used to answer the main and secondary questions. At first, all the available references and literature (books, articles, and documents) on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness were studied. Then an inventory was designed based on the literature review to measure the emphasis put on the elements under study in Religion and Life curriculum in the high school program. The results showed that the highest level of emphasis in the 10th grade textbook and teacher's guidebook was on self-assertiveness equal to 1.19% and 2.43% respectively. The lowest level of emphasis in the 10th grade textbook and teacher's guidebook was on critical thinking (0.39%) and creativity (0.21%) respectively. Moreover, creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness all with 0% emphasis were neglected in 11th grade textbook. The highest and lowest levels of emphases in 11th grade teacher's guidebook were on self-assertiveness (3.33%) and creativity (0.21%).

There was 0% emphasis on creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in the 12th grade Religion and Life textbook, while the highest and lowest levels of emphasis in the 12th grade teacher's guidebook were on self-assertiveness (2.05%) and critical thinking (0.05%) respectively. Given the importance and gravity

of creativity, critical thinking, and self-assertiveness in high school curriculum, it is essential to fundamentally revise Religion and Life curriculum in the high school program.

Consistent with our results, Thi Bich Lieu Tran, Thi Nhat Ho, Sarah V. Mackenzie, Long King le (2017) maintained that textbooks content had an effective role in development of creativity in students.

In the same spirit, Eskia Vero and Edi Puka (2018) argued that critical thinking should be a part of the teaching process and more emphasis should be put on it in textbooks.

The present study is also consistent with Abdurrezzak Gultekin, Avsel A. Ozdemir, Funda Budak (2018) about assertiveness and self-assertiveness and their positive effect on social life. They argued that lack of self-assertiveness can be an indicator of lack of positive behaviors, educational achievement, and social life.

In a study titled "the effects of life skill education (self-assertiveness) on the improvement of mental health indicators and quality of life of patients" Khani showed that life skills education was highly effective in improvement of quality of life. Her results are consistent with the results of the present study. I advise for the next study of content analysis to use other methods like Mac Laughlin and Merrill to analyze the religion and life book's content wholesale.

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