Gender and Peace Education in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Political instability, war and conflict for long periods and insufficient educational opportunities in this country have exacerbated women's inequality, and women's role in contributing to development in Afghanistan has been ignored. However, the current government have ensured that there are greater opportunities for women to have access to education. Advocates of peace education believe that gender equity is important to bring about positive peace. This article reports on a study that examined school textbooks in use in Afghanistan since 2004 and demonstrates that while there is some content that relates to girls and women, it is minimal. It is argued that the textbooks need to be improved if the role of women and their rights are to be recognised.

Introduction

Gender equality as a social value is still a new concept in Afghanistan and people have doubts about equal rights of and equal roles for men and women in Afghan society. According to Reilly (2015, 334), "on nearly any index of those nations where women suffer the greatest, Afghanistan remains constantly identified within the top ten year after year". Political instability, war and conflict for long periods and insufficient educational opportunities in this country have exacerbated women's inequality, and women's role in contributing to the country's development has been ignored (Heinrich Böll Foundation 2006). Lack of access to education for women has been reinforced

by beliefs based in the religious and familial tradition of the country (Kissane 2012).

The philosopher Amartya Sen (1999a, 128-9) identified education as perhaps the clearest route to "economic development, political stability and ultimately peace". Peace education aims not only at negative peace, or the absence of war, but also at positive peace, to address direct, structural and cultural violence, and to empower students with a peaceful consciousness that condemns discrimination by respecting all human beings equally (Galtung 1990; Grewal 2003; Bajaj and Chiu 2009; Kester 2010; Reardon1988). Recognition of gender and gender equality is a core aspect of peace education (Harris and Morrison 2013; Standish 2016; Webel and Galtung 2007).

This article provides a brief discussion of the importance of education for stability, development and peace, and then gives an historical account of women's education in Afghanistan. This is followed by an explanation of the importance of gender in the concept of peace education. The article then looks at a study from a peace education perspective of the school curriculum that includes an examination of how gender is integrated into school textbooks at the primary level, using directive qualitative content analysis. This study shows that although gender is an important element of peace education, it has barely been covered in the Dari language and in Algebra textbooks of grade 4th of school curriculum under the Afghanistan Islamic Republic Government (AIRG) where there is a lack of representation of girls and women.

Importance of education for stability, development and peace.

> "[E]ducation is perhaps one of the most important tools for human development and the means by which successive generations develop the values, knowledge and skills for their personal health and safety as well as for future political, economic, social and cultural development. This is one of the reasons for the global emphasis on achieving universal, free and compulsory primary education" (UNICEF 2011, 17).

Education systems are important facets of social stability and individual development. Sociologist Emil Durkheim, discussing the importance of education in society, argued that education socializes individuals to become citizens, leading to social solidarity and stability (Durkheim1956; Sharepour Mahmoud 2009). The educational theorist Freire noted that the quality and methods of education are important for educating students towards change. Similarly, Paolo Freire emphasised the need to raise the critical consciousness of learners as a means for social change (Freire 2005; Bartlett 2008). Drawing from educational scholarship, international bodies such as the United Nations Educational Scientific Cultural Organization (UNESCO) focus on and recognize the importance of education for development, promotion of human rights and maintaining peace, stating that

[E]ducation shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (UNESCO Education Report 2000, 74).

Peace requires an environment where both men and women are able to practice their essential rights and play their roles equally and meaningfully towards development. Education is an essential human right and prerequisite for peace and development in any country and particularly countries in conflict. Thus, generally education is essential for individual development towards social change and stability, poverty reduction, practicing human rights and bringing peace to any society, particularly to societies in conflict like Afghanistan. Afghanistan is one of the countries that has a long history of conflict. In Afghanistan people, and particularly women, have not had adequate access to education opportunities as an essential human right. Women and girls in Afghanistan experience huge obstacles receiving education in practice (Jeaniene 2005).

The history of formal education in Afghanistan

The history of formal education[1] in Afghanistan illustrates that Afghan women and girls have experienced both progress and setbacks, due to political instability as well as cultural issues (Kazim 2005; Javid 2002). Formal education was established in the country between 1868 and 1878, but Afghan girls could only access formal schooling in 1921, almost fifty years later. When formal education began in Afghanistan schooling was only for boys. During the period of monarchy in Afghanistan from 1747 to 1973, the only king who genuinely supported women's education was King Amanullah Khan (1919-1929). Afghanistan's liberal King Amanullah Khan and his wife established the first school for girls and supported female students' higher education in Afghanistan and abroad (Kamgar 2002; Husham 2015; Baiza 2015), but Amanullah Khan faced conservative resistance that halted women's education for years (Javid 2002; Samadi 2001; Baiza 2015). It was not until 1973 when the next Afghan ruler who supported women's education came to power, Daoud Khan. He ruled from 1973-1978 and changed women's social status during his leadership, ensuring that women's opportunities in education and employment were improved, girls' schools were established in Kabul, and the numbers of female students in schools and at university increased (Kazim 2005; Javid 2002).

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[1] Formal education comprises the official educational institutes and well-structured school programs, with a grading system, different forms, specific timetables, separate modules, annual examinations and uniforms.

However, when, the Taliban, the extremist group that ruled in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, took over power, women's education was banned absolutely (Husham 2015; Baiza 2015; Shayan 2015; Adkins 2016). The action of forcing female teachers home also had a devastating effect for both boys and girls, as most teachers were women (Alvi 2003). The impact of Taliban rule lasted long after the Taliban were defeated in 2001. According to Alvi (2003) adult literacy rates were very low: 11.4 percent for men and only 2.8 percent for women. Nevertheless, despite continuing attacks and bombing of girls' schools by Taliban sympathisers in various parts of Afghanistan, Afghan girls were not deterred but became even more determined to pursue their education.

Afghan women and girls gradually were able to access education and employment. Millions of girls enrolled in schools and universities and found the opportunity to study abroad in specialized areas. Importantly, women's and girls' education has been supported by the country's constitution (Adkins 2016; Shayan 2015; Husham 2015) that specifies that 'the state shall devise and implement effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women' (Article 44, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan 2004). Generally, since 2003, the government of Afghanistan and the international community, civil society and women activists have worked hard to deepen the understanding of gender in Afghanistan and have made efforts to provide equal opportunities for both genders, girls and boys, particularly in education. Many projects have been implemented related to gender and the inclusion of men and women, boys and girls in the education sector in this country (Husham 2015; Samadi 2013; Heinrich Böll Foundation 2006; The Word Bank 2008). More recently, the Afghanistan Ministry of Education and the international community have made an effort to reform the education system with a peace education objective. On the website of the Ministry of Education is a message from the Minister that reads:

> Education is the fundamental cornerstone and a key pre-requisite for durable peace, stability and socio-economic development in every society – Afghanistan is not an exception. Development is about people, not infrastructure, aimed at bringing positive changes in behaviour and attitude of people. Education makes people think, behave, act positively, and promotes social co-existence.

Work between 2004 and 2016 particularly, and still in progress, has been undertaken on the school curriculum and on the development of new school textbooks (Jeaniene 2005; Husham 2015). This represents notable progress and advancement in education in this area.

However, while acknowledging all these efforts, it is clear that Afghan girls still face huge obstacles to receiving education in practice. Insecurity in the county, poverty at the family level and social and cultural constraints are major obstacles that challenge women's and girls' education in Afghanistan. The

Taliban retains power in many provinces where women and girls do not have a fair access to school and education. Schools and education centres, and students and teachers in areas under the control of the Taliban are at risk of attack (Adkins 2016). Half of the country's population are struggling with poverty, and thousands of families, due to poor economic situations in both urban and rural areas, cannot afford to support their daughters' education (Shayan 2015; SIGAR 2017). In addition, social and cultural beliefs limit women and girls' education. Many girls have to marry at an early age and cannot attend school after marriage; some girl students have to leave school after primary level due to cultural issues in their environments; in some families boys have the priority for education rather than girls; or families do not accept male teachers for female students in school and female teachers are not available in remote areas of Afghanistan (Shayan 2015). These social and cultural issues are a huge constraint on girls' education. Educating students from the early grades about boys' and girls' equal education rights and access is essential in order to address social and cultural limitations on gender.

Peace Education and Gender

There are many definitions of peace education. Often cited is the UNICEF statement that peace education is:

> … the process of promoting the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values needed to bring about behaviour changes that will enable children, youth and adults to prevent conflict and violence, both overt and structural; to resolve conflict peacefully: and to create the conditions conducive to peace, whether at an intrapersonal, interpersonal, intergroup, national or international level (cited in Fountain 1999, 1).

Peace education should empower students with a knowledge of conflict resolution, an understanding of conflict dynamics, and communication skills to manage relationships peacefully (Harris 2004; Johnson D and Johnson R 2010). It is claimed that there is a transformative element to peace education that will lead to long lasting peace by maintaining mutually beneficial, harmonious relationships (Harris and Morrison 2013; Kester 2010; Page 2008). The limitations for peace education in intractable regions (Salomon 2002) and fragile states (Robiolle-Moul 2016) are acknowledged, with Robiolle-Moul's research pointing out the many technical, political and institutional challenges.

An important element of peace education is gender equality (Standish 2016; Harris and Morrison 2013; Brock-Utne 2009) and educating students on gender from an early age provides key opportunities in response to social and cultural constraints (Brock-Utne 2008). Educating children from the early grades will help address the social and traditional beliefs of stereotypes which oppose women's education in general. Training students from the early classes of school about men and women as equal human beings and having equal rights

and equal roles is a vital aspect of peace education (Brock-Utne 2008; Boaz Yablon 2009).

Peace education is about teaching equality, justice and respect for all human beings, so recognition of gender, gender equality are a core aspect of positive peace (Harris and Morrison 2013; Standish 2016). There is concern from peace educators that women tend to be invisible in the learning material available to children. As Brock-Utne points out, even though women frequently

> build the backbone of peace organisations, they are seldom given credit for their work… Conflicts which are solved non-violently or the work for peace, especially the work of women for peace, do not find their way into history books. This naturally has consequences for peace education. It is difficult to educate about peace when the textbooks youngsters are required to read are mostly on war (Brock-Utne 2009, 105).

Study of Peace Education in Afghan School Textbooks

This research studied the Afghanistan School Curriculum through the analysis of Dari Language and Algebra subject textbooks for grade 4th of school which have been in use from 2004. As part of the study conducted in 2018 from a peace education perspective, this article addresses the specific question: to what extent has gender integration have been considered in the Afghanistan's school textbooks (2004 – 2018) from a peace education perspective? While there is a range of gender identities, this study focuses on the male and female genders, and will look at the visibility or invisibility of girls and women.

Research Framework

The Peace Education Curricular Analysis or PECA project framework, is an analysis of the school curricula of different countries related to the peace education content in the curriculum. Katerina Standish who created the PECA framework, has carried out a number of studies, include investigations of the National Curricula of Australia, England, Scotland, Sweden, Saudi Arabia, Mexico and New Zealand, looking for peace education elements within the school curriculum (Standish 2015; Standish and Kertyzia 2015; Standish and Joyce 2016; Standish 2016; Standish and Talahma 2016; Standish and Nygren 2018; Kertyzia and Standish 2019). These studies so far published demonstrate some interesting findings and provide initial information that could be used to evaluate peace education programs that are being operated globally without previously having "being subjected to any act of empirical validation" (Harris and Morrison 2013, 219).

For this article, only one aspect of the Standish's PECA framework which is "gender mind" will be discussed, as the basis for analysis of gender

integration in the school curricula though textbooks in Afghanistan.[2] The PECA framework identifies peace education elements, values and context that are consistent with the literature on peace education. While Afghanistan is not a Western nation, many of the donor agencies providing support and advice for Afghanistan's peacebuilding and education make recommendations consistent with Western values (Husham 2015; Jeaniene 2005).

The three main areas of peace education content according to the PECA analysis are: *recognizing violence, resolving conflict non-violently, and creating environments for positive peace*. This third element, creating environments for positive peace, includes sub-categories of peace zone, peace bond, social justice, eco mind, link mind, gender mind, resilience, wellbeing and prevention (Standish 2016). Gender mind is the aspect of this framework that is the focus of this article. Gender mind is defined as awareness that humans comprise men and women with equal rights and equal roles (Standish 2016). Based on this definition, the study analysed the content of school textbooks and recorded information related to gender mind.

Research Design

The PECA project framework serve as a model for this study using a content analysis method. Content analysis is a valid research method for studying communication material and to systematically analyse text (Krippendorf 1989). The content analysis method is particularly appropriate for analysing secondary sources of data such as books, documents, newspapers and diaries (Krippendorf 2004; Harris 2001).

The main purpose of this article is to explore to what extent gender integration is considered in the school primary textbooks under the Afghanistan Islamic Republic Government (AIRG) between 2004 to 2018 from a peace education prospective. Content analysis as the research method for this particular study analyses school textbooks as items of cultural value. Directive qualitative content analysis (Krippendorf 2004) has been used and illustrative statistics derived from summative or quantitative content analysis (Neuendorf 2002) are provided. The research data comprised two textbooks under the current government, Afghanistan Islamic Republic Government (AIRG). Two contrasting school subjects are examined for one grade: the textbooks for the grade 4th (Class 4) are the Dari Language and Algebra. The Dari[3] language is one of the main subjects in schools from class 1 elementary school to class 12 of high school in Afghanistan. The teaching of the Dari language is seen as reflecting the culture and social values of the nation and contains texts related to the importance of social and moral behaviour. Algebra is also one of the main subjects in school from class 1 in elementary school to class 12 of high school

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[2] A full account of the research can be found in Hafiza Yazdani (2020).

3 Dari is the first language subject of school according to the new curriculum. Both Dari and Pashto were declared the official languages of the state in the 2004 Constitution.

in Afghanistan. Algebra deals with numeration and counting formula, but the short text of this book is used to support social and culture values. The intention of this study is to investigate and reflect on the information that Afghan children are provided with near the beginning of their schooling at age 9 or 10. Classes 1 to 3 are a little too early to concentrate on content, so Class 4 was selected for this study.

The analysis of the Dari language textbook of Afghanistan Islamic Republic Government (AIRG) for Class 4, dated 1390 (2011),[4] involves a comprehensive and detailed examination of 154 pages, which contain 77 lessons, with each lesson followed by instructions for both teachers' and students' activity. The main part of the lesson is the discussion point for teacher and students. According to the Dari language subject instructions, the teacher teaches the lesson text, then repeats the main idea of the lesson and discusses it with students. After the lesson and discussion from the teacher's standpoint, students discuss the lesson's theme in groups and also write sentences or paragraphs about the lesson's topic or main idea. This practice structure is designed to reinforce the information for students.

Algebra textbook of the AIRG for Class 4, dated 1390 (2011), involves a comprehensive and detailed examination of 104 pages, which contains 39 lessons. This textbook consists of main calculation lessons with follow up practices, evaluation questions and homework questions. These homework questions are phrasal questions (questions in the form of narrative). The content of these questions addresses different topics.

Findings

Awareness of gender or that humans comprise men and women with equal rights and equal roles without discrimination contributes as a response to structural discrimination. Gender for this study means gendered language and the equal rights and roles of men and women or girls and boys. According to this understanding, information from the content of the Dari Language textbook for grade 4th of schooling under the AIRG has been recorded and coded under gender mind.

The Dari Language textbook for grade 4th has only three sentences relevant to gender mind in total.:

On page (86) there is a sentence on the role of men and women.
In villages, men and women are working together on the farm.
On page (138) there is a reference to education for both men and women.
Learning knowledge is obligatory for men and women.
On Page (104) both a boy and a girl are named.
Hameed's father bought three books for Nazia and Hameed. (Nazia is a female name and Hameed is a male name).

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[4] The official calendar used by the government in Afghanistan is the Solar Hijri Calendar..

Although there are only these three sentences relevant to gender mind in the textbook, there is some other evidence that schooling for both girls and boys is being considered. For example, the image on page (46) of the Dari language textbook demonstrates that there is an assumption that going to school is necessary for both girls and boys. The image shows a boy and a girl with their books and school bags.

Besides the above picture, one lesson of this textbook provides an example of a letter from a female student to her parents (110). Considering that a letter from a girl student to their parents generally means that schooling is considered essential for both girls and boys, this shows there is an intention by

education actors in Afghanistan to include girls in the education. In this context, this lesson of the textbook is generally relevant to gender mind.

P110:

Letter to mother

Objective of the lesson: students read and write the text, learn how to write a letter.

Question: Have you ever written a letter to anyone?

Date:

Dear Mother,

Greetings.

I kiss your hand from far way and send you my respects with all my heart. I hope you are well and happy. I am well till writing this letter.

Dear Mother, I assure you that I am trying my best to study hard. I attend school on time. I try to learn the lessons very well, and make myself and you proud. Our final exams will be soon, hopefully after the exams and announcement of the result I will come home to see you. Please do not worry about me.

Your daughter

The following image is the Dari text of this letter.

نامه به مادر

پرسش:

۱- آیا شما گاهی به کسی نامه نوشته اید؟

مادر عزیز و مهربانم السلام علیکم،

تاریخ: ————————

از راههای دور دستها یت را میبوسم و احترامات قلبـی خـود را تقدیم می‌کنم. امید، زنده‌گی شما به خوشی و خوبی بگذرد. من هـم تـا تحریر این نامه صحت کامل دارم.
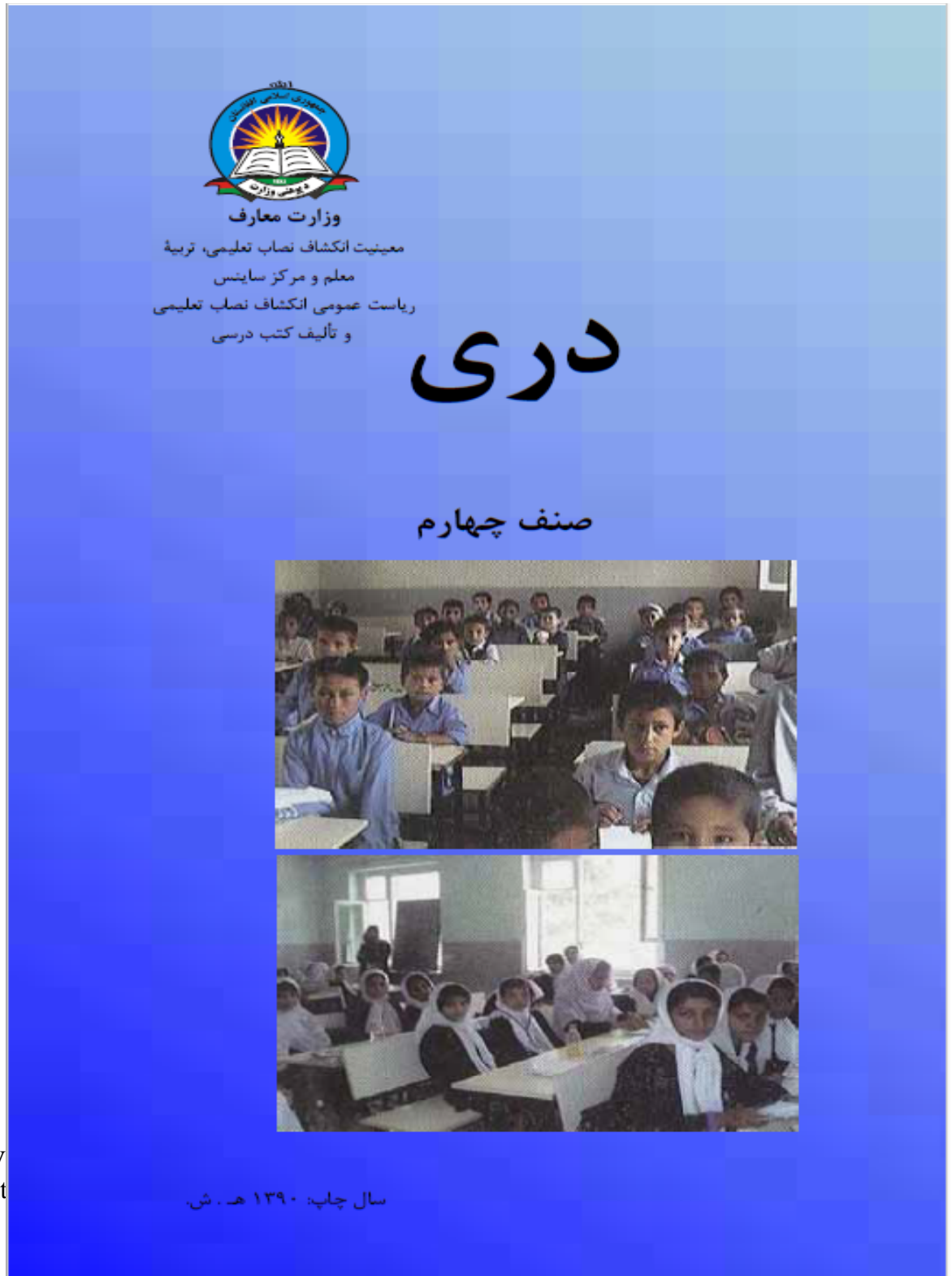
مادر عزیز!

خاطر جمع باشید که من در در سهای خود کوشش زیاد می‌کنم. در اول وقت به مکتب حاضر می‌باشم. من تلاش دارم درس های خـود را خوب یاد داشته باشم تا باعث سربلندی خـود و شـما گـردم. امتحـان سالانهٔ ما نزدیک است انشاءالله بعد از اعلان نتایج به دست بوسی شما حاضر خواهم شد از طرف من خاطر جمع باشید.

(دخترتان . . . . . .)

The cover page of this textbook also pictures a class of female as well as male students. It shows that education for both boys and girls is important, and schools are for both sexes to receive education equally.

Findings of the Algebra Subject Textbook

وزارت معارف

معینیت انکشاف نصاب تعلیمی، تربیۀ

معلم و مرکز ساینس

ریاست عمومی انکشاف نصاب تعلیمی

و تألیف کتب درسی

دری

صنف چهارم

سال چاپ: ۱۳۹۰ هـ . ش.

The Algebra textbook of the AIRG has only one question related to gender mind (12). A question on page 12 of this book deals with boys' and girls' admission to school:

4340 students received admission in a primary school. If 1350 of them are boys, how many of them are girls?

Besides the calculation, this question narrates the integration of boys and girls in schooling, providing students with the idea that education is important for both girls and boys.

Discussion and conclusion

Gender as an important element of peace education is included in both the Dari language and in Algebra textbooks under the AIRG. One reference in the Algebra and three references in the Dari language textbooks are relevant to gender mind. There are also some images in the Dari language textbook demonstrating that going to school is necessary for both girls and boys (46). The notion of gender and education for girls and boys has been considered but only very minimally. Gender mind as an important element of peace education has been barely covered.

It would be possible to make minor additions to school textbooks at all levels of schooling if there was more text providing stories or simple narratives related to women and girls. For example, on page (46) of the Dari Language textbook, an image of a girl and a boy with school bags and books shows that the idea of gender and education for girls and boys has been considered, but the narrative related to the image is not about gender. The narrative is a poem on the country as homeland. This picture on page (46) of the Dari Language textbook could be accompanied by a narrative on the importance of schooling for girls and boys. In this way the idea of gender could be operationalized explicitly into the book's content. This helps to improve and change the negative mindset of a generation's attitude to gender discrimination to a better understanding of the roles of men and women and boys and girls in education, as well as more broadly in development programs (Brock-Utne 2008).

Education right is an essential human right, and both genders need to practice and access their rights and have opportunities to shape their own lives and contribute to the society (Kavazanjian 2010). Including information on gender and gender equality as an important element of peace education towards an international standard education system is crucial in the Afghanistan school curriculum, textbooks, and the pedagogy as a whole. Educating children with peace education information from the early grades will help students to learn about and gain respect for all human beings, equally and recognize both genders equally (Harris and Morrison 2013; Standish 2016).

More importantly, consideration of information on inclusion of gender in education system is a societal need towards long term social and cultural change and contributes to poverty reduction in Afghanistan. Considering gender integration and the increasing number of girls in school would help to

mitigate the economic underdevelopment in the country and may lead to greater incomes at family and community level. Having both men and women bringing money into the home can help to reduce poverty at the individual family level and contribute to transforming the community. Educating girls and women could significantly improve health care generally at home and in the community and reduce child mortality rates in the country. Educated women and girls would be more knowledgeable about health and wellbeing which would have very real and practical benefits (Kavazanjian 2010).

This study has featured evidence of how gender is integrated in Afghanistan's school textbooks, and recommends a study of more school textbooks to provide further evidence for the Afghan Ministry of Education that more needs to be done to better integrate gender equality in school textbooks and the overall teaching of the concept and importance of gender. A separate study of current school textbooks on gender mind or gender integration could help further knowledge and understanding of this gap. It is the time for the Afghanistan Ministry of Education and education actors in Afghanistan to consider gender as an important element of peace education and address the parity of information on gender in the content of school textbooks. Without a shift to place more emphasis on gender equality in the education system, women and girls will remain disadvantaged, and the important contributions that women make to society and to peace will be lost. Information on gender is not only important for peace education but is essential for social cohesion in this country.

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