"Pragmatic Theory in Education: The Case of Iran"

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The application of pragmatic theories, particularly Dewey's views, in pedagogy has brought about significant transformations in educational systems worldwide. However, in the case of Iran, the implementation of pragmatist theories in education has faced various challenges. This paper examines the Iranian educational system, focusing on the obstacles hindering the application of pragmatist theories for children aged 8-12. It explores the characteristics of pragmatist theories and analyzes three dimensions of the Iranian educational structure: (1) defining childhood, child marriage, and child labor; (2) the social backgrounds of education in Iran; and (3) the educational facilities necessary for effective pedagogy. The conclusions highlight political factors and the absence of a robust educational model as the main barriers to realizing pragmatist pedagogy for Iranian children aged 8-12.

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Keywords: pragmatic theory, pedagogy, educational systems, challenges, iran.

I. INTRODUCTION

In his Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle shows that moral understanding requires moral training (Aristotle, The Nicomachean Ethics 1104a). He further suggests in his Metaphysics that even our knowledge is influenced by our behavioral habits. However, this Aristotelian insight has often been overshadowed by a dualistic metaphysics and marginalized voices that opposed this tradition. Within this dualistic framework, human action was considered irrelevant to truth, as truth was believed to reside in a separate world of ideas. In the modern age, this tradition came under scrutiny, primarily by philosophers such as Nietzsche, Marx, and Schopenhauer. (Aristotle.

(2009). However, it was pragmatists who systematically criticized the division between truth and practice. By emphasizing the unity of truth and practice, pragmatists expanded our understanding of the world and ourselves, including our perspectives on pedagogy.

John Dewey stands as a prominent philosopher of pedagogy in our time. As Putnam argues, Dewey's focus on the philosophy of pedagogy is not accidental but rather an extension of his pragmatist approach (Putnam, 2004: 105). One of the key features of pragmatism is its alignment with the ideals of the Enlightenment while also being critical of certain Enlightenment principles such as independent reason, individualism, and ahistoricism. Pragmatists remained loyal to the ideals of the Enlightenment, particularly humanism. However, their concept of humanism differed from Kant's abstract notion of the human or the ideal man in early religious thought. They focused on the concrete human, shaped by practice, and believed that truth and essence were constructed through this process. According to pragmatists, truth is not preexisting but rather built through practice. Thus, understanding and morality should be developed through practice, fostering personal and critical thinking instead of merely accepting inherited notions. (Dewey, J. (1916).

Pedagogical implications of education have long been discussed and integrated into educational systems, drawing upon the works of Dewey (Czujko, 2013). In Iran, although some works of pragmatism pioneers have been translated into Persian, the core concepts of pragmatism, such as experience and reconstructing experience, have not been effectively integrated into the education system. (Bernstein, R. J. (2010). This can be seen in the exclusionary nature of the philosophy of education in Iran, as evident in the later act called

the "Fundamental Reform Act of Education." (Misak, C. (2013).

This paper aims to investigate the pivotal elements of pragmatist pedagogy and explore why this pedagogy has not been implemented in Iran. Specifically, we will examine obstacles and issues related to the accessibility of education in Iran, focusing on the criterion of reconstructing experience as a core concept of pragmatic education. Our primary focus group is children aged 8-12, and we aim to identify the challenges these children face in their educational process in Iran.

As Hegel proposed in his dialectical method, the part must be observed in relation to the whole, and understanding the whole is only possible through its connection with its parts. (Hegel, G. W. F. (1977). An analysis that disregards this interconnectedness is bound to be incomplete or one-sided, as Hegel argued. Therefore, assessing the role of children in Iran and studying the obstacles they encounter in their personal and educational development requires an examination of the dominant structures of Iranian society. Furthermore, children's educational problems cannot be isolated to specific areas or institutions. Problems at home, school, and in society are interconnected. By adopting Hegel's methodology, we aim to conduct an immanent critique of these problems, illustrating their interrelationships, mutual influences, and their impact on children's education. (Hegel, G. W. F. (1969). It is important to note that Iranian children face numerous educational challenges beyond the scope of this article. Here, we primarily address the main problems, and in the main body of the text, we will explore additional issues concerning children's education. Preconditions and secure environmental components are crucial for embracing the reconstruction of experience as a pragmatist theory. Without these preconditions, certain aspects such as the reconstruction of experience cannot occur. Research questions related to child marriage, child labor, teaching methods, and mother-tongue education highlight some of these preconditions.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a rigorous narrative review approach to investigate and critically assess the challenges associated with the accessibility of education for children aged 8-12 in Iran. The primary objective of this review is to offer a comprehensive overview of the key issues influencing the educational experiences of this particular age group within the Iranian context.

Stage 1: Identifying the Research Question

The primary research question guiding this review is as follows: "What are the challenges encountered by children aged 8-12 in their educational journey within the Iranian context?"

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

To collect relevant literature, an extensive search was conducted across reputable academic databases, including PubMed, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and Web of Science. The search process involved the utilization of pertinent keywords such as "education challenges," "children aged 8-12," "Iran," and "educational accessibility." Boolean operators "AND" and "OR" were used to refine search results. The lead author carried out this initial search process between January 2022 and April 2023, resulting in the identification of 350 peer-reviewed articles.

Stage 3: Study Selection

The inclusion criteria for article selection encompassed both qualitative and quantitative studies that addressed the challenges faced by children aged 8-12 within the Iranian educational system. Inclusion criteria included studies published in English, studies focusing on educational challenges within the specified age group, and studies conducted within the Iranian context. Exclusion criteria consisted of non-English articles and studies focusing exclusively on higher education. Through a systematic screening process, a final selection of 45 articles was deemed relevant and incorporated into this review.

Stage 4: Charting the Data

To ensure a systematic analysis and organization of data, all selected articles were meticulously

documented in an Excel spreadsheet. This spreadsheet cataloged essential information from each article, including author names, publication years, research methodologies employed, main findings, and key challenges identified.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarizing, and Reporting Results

The culmination of the review process involved the comprehensive analysis of the charted data. Themes and findings extracted from the included articles were meticulously organized into distinct sections. The presentation of results in the subsequent sections is guided by their relevance to the overarching research question, focusing on highlighting the primary challenges and issues faced by children aged 8-12 within the Iranian education system.

By embracing a narrative review methodology and systematically adhering to the above-stated stages, this study endeavors to provide a thorough understanding of the barriers and obstacles affecting the accessibility of education for children aged 8-12 in Iran.

III. OVERVIEW OF IRAN'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Here, we survey the main components of the pragmatist philosophy of pedagogy, drawing on which we seek to account for the fundamental problems of education in Iran. But before that, we must provide a summary of Iran's government structure.

3.1 Religious Structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its Role in Iranian Children's Lives

The official nomenclature of the "Islamic Republic of Iran" underscores the central role of Islamic principles in the country's legal and societal framework. It is stipulated in the Iranian Constitution that all laws, including the constitution and criminal laws, should be in accordance with Islamic laws. In the event of a conflict between different legal codes, Islamic laws take precedence (Constitution of IRI: Article 15). Within this framework, religious institutions hold significant authority, and their responsibility includes ensuring that the laws conform to Islamic principles. (Afary, Janet. 1906-1911.)

Of particular importance is the Guardian Council, known as Shoraye Negahban, which plays a pivotal role in harmonizing enacted laws with Islamic tenets. This council is responsible for evaluating the compatibility of the established laws with Islamic principles.(Banakar,Ziaee,2018)

It is essential to note that within any religion, including Islam, there exist diverse interpretations and understandings. These interpretations can vary, encompassing mystical, rational, and fundamentalist perspectives. For instance, Saeed (2006) highlighted the multitude of interpretations of the Quran, the sacred text of Islam, among Muslims. However, the Islamic Republic predominantly adheres to conservative and traditional interpretations prevalent in the Islamic world. This interpretation of Islam places significant emphasis on jurisprudence (Fiqh), a cornerstone of the legal system. (Wael B. Hallaq.2011.)

Fiqh, the body of Islamic jurisprudence, derives regulations governing personal conduct and societal rituals from the Quran, traditions, and the sayings of the Prophet, as well as the teachings of the Twelve Imams of Shia Islam. This comprehensive legal framework allows the governing regime to exert influence over various aspects of individuals' lives, including those of children. This is rooted in the nature of Islam itself, as it is a religion with an extensive and ancient Sharia law system. In Shiite Fiqh, even the most intimate and private aspects of individuals' lives are expected to conform to Sharia laws. (Ali, J. A. (2019).

The primary challenge faced by children in Iran relates to their definition within this religious and ideological context, which differs from international standards. This disparity results in significant difficulties when addressing the issues affecting children. The initial step in resolving these challenges is to recognize and acknowledge children as distinct individuals with specific rights that correspond to their age and stage of development.

3.1.1 Pedagogy and Child's Life

Educational systems often prioritize adult perspectives and objectives over the interests and needs of children. This approach dictates what children should learn, with the aim of preparing them for their future roles as adults. However, such pedagogy seldom seeks to enhance the quality of life or promote the creation of more desirable forms of existence, even if these involve some risk. Instead, it focuses on maintaining control over children's desires and energies.

In contrast, the pragmatist approach places the child at the center of pedagogical decision-making. According to this perspective, children play a critical role in determining how education should be conducted. They learn through their experiences, and learning itself is regarded as a form of doing. Consequently, pragmatists argue that educational curricula should be driven by the needs and experiences of children.(John J. McDermott, 1981)

The concept of experience is a fundamental aspect of pragmatist pedagogy. John Dewey, a prominent pragmatist, emphasized the need for the reconstruction of experience. Dewey's view is that no experience can provide an absolute, unchanging answer to life's challenges. Instead, human experiences should continuously adapt and evolve. Dewey's definition of experience extends beyond mere feelings and encompasses the connections between experience and thought. It arises from human interactions with the environment. (Troels Nørager 2010)

Efficiency, another key principle in Dewey's educational philosophy, is intrinsically linked to his instrumentalism. (Andrew Pollard,1985). Dewey argued that pure science and applied science are interdependent, mutually influencing activities. He opposed the separation of instrumental and final values, underscoring their interdependence.(Knud Illeris,2007)

In Dewey's view, the method of teaching involves presenting fresh material to students as a means of problem-solving and addressing objections. It also requires providing students with the tools to access information, data, experimental explanations, and empirical knowledge, allowing them the freedom to experiment and learn through trial and error. This approach promotes a student-centered and child-centered pedagogy, emphasizing flexibility and adaptability on the part of the teacher. (Daniel Muijs,2007)

Pragmatism contends that curricula should be rooted in life, and a primary concern is to nurture and account for children's interests. When children engage in experiments and experiences, they assume greater responsibility for their learning. (William F. Pinar,2006)

In contrast, when children are presented with predetermined solutions by authority figures, such as teachers and scientists, they are unable to apply these solutions to their own experiences. Additionally, the presented solutions may fail to capture the children's interest since they have not personally engaged in the problem-solving process. Educational systems often view childhood as a mere preparatory phase for adulthood, focusing on the acquisition of skills required for adult life. This perspective not only neglects the unique qualities of childhood but also overlooks individual differences among children, seeking to standardize them. (Mary Renck Jalongo and V. Sue Haverstock ,2008)

The loss of the joy of learning and the gradual erosion of the world of childhood discoveries can have detrimental psychological and social consequences. Childhood should not be seen as a phase to be rushed through but rather as a period with valuable qualities. Preserving the spirit and characteristics of childhood can benefit individuals throughout their lives, contributing to happiness and a sense of fulfillment.(John Dewey (1902)

Unfortunately, in the Iranian educational system, childhood is often perceived differently. This discrepancy is apparent in the broader definition of childhood in Iran.

The fundamental challenge faced by children's development in Iran revolves around the definition of a "child," which diverges from international standards. This distinction gives rise to numerous issues when addressing children's

concerns. The first step toward addressing these problems is recognizing children as unique individuals and acknowledging their rights, as stipulated for children.

In Iran, childhood and its transition are intricately connected to the institution of the family. Childhood is considered a preparatory stage for entering into family life.

While most countries recognize coming of age at 18, in Islam, this transition is delineated by different standards. Girls are considered to come of age at 9 years, while for boys, the age is 15 (Peyvandi, 2011: 153). Additionally, reaching puberty or displaying signs of physical maturity can mark the transition to adulthood. Age, as a fixed criterion, is not always necessary. These fluid and variable definitions of childhood give rise to various issues, which will be further explored.

In Iranian legal contexts, the term "child" is characterized by ambiguity and vagueness, with multiple definitions existing in different laws. Some definitions are based on religious coming-of-age standards (9 for girls and 15 for boys), while others draw from the legal age of marriage (13 for girls and 18 for boys).

Remarkably, in Iran, celebrations are held to mark children's maturity. These festivities symbolize children's readiness to fulfill their religious duties, including marriage and parenthood. The fact that such celebrations are primarily held within educational institutions reflects how children are perceived within the educational system. This perspective has consequences, including early marriages among children and their subsequent effects, which we will discuss later.

3.1.2 Gender Issues

Another significant ideological dimension within the Islamic Republic of Iran that shapes the understanding of childhood pertains to gender and sexual orientation. Under the religious framework endorsed by the Islamic Republic, LGBTQ individuals are not recognized as distinct gender categories. The official definition of a child in Iran acknowledges only two gender categories: boy and girl, disregarding other gender variations. Consequently, children who do not conform to the established norms of religious laws regarding their gender or sexual orientations must conceal their true selves, including their sexuality, personality, and religious practices, right from an early age.

The Iranian government enforces strict punitive measures, including hanging and imprisonment, against any form of non-normative sexual orientation. Moreover, these inclinations are generally stigmatized and condemned within Iranian culture. The absence of freedom to express personal and sexual orientations and desires, coupled with self-censorship, presents significant challenges for children.

Regrettably, due to the closed nature of the Iranian government and the cultural restrictions concerning sexual orientations, there are no official statistics or comprehensive studies available in this area. Furthermore, conducting research or experiments addressing these problems is severely limited. Nevertheless, it is undeniable that children in Iran face psychological and personal difficulties, as well as instances of sexual abuse (given the taboo nature of other sexual orientations) and harassment. These challenges remain a pressing concern.(Ziba Mir-Hosseini,2010)

3.1.3 Child Marriage

Defining Childhood and the Consequences of Ambiguity: A Case Study of Early Marriages in Iran.

Zinali and Karimi (2016) argue that the absence of a clear demarcation between childhood and adulthood, based on scientific criteria and human rights principles, can have adverse implications, particularly concerning child victimization. Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child unambiguously characterizes a child as an individual under the age of eighteen, with the provision that the age of majority may vary under legal frameworks. However, the interpretation of this definition may, at times, diverge from the

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paramount interests of children. (Zinali, Amir Hamzeh, & Karimi, Tachara. (2016).

Within the Iranian context, the determination of childhood's age deviates from international norms, influenced by cultural relativism and Islamic standards. Early marriage stands as a significant concern faced by children in Iran, deeply rooted in religion, culture, and official regulations (Ahmadi, 2017: 53). Child marriage is not only tacitly endorsed but also actively promoted in the teachings and sayings of the official Shiite denomination in Iran. The government, through its media channels, advocates for child marriages, often utilizing religious justifications to counteract the declining youth population.

Religious tenets also contribute to the conceptualization of puberty and adolescence, offering justifications for child marriages. The consequence of these early unions frequently leads to school dropouts and profoundly constrains the educational and personal development of children in Iran. While official statistics pertaining to early marriages of 8-12-year-old children are lacking, circumstantial evidence and research suggest that a considerable number of children within this age bracket enter into marriage. The prevalence of underreporting and non-registration of many such marriages further complicates the issue. Alarmingly, there have been documented cases of marriages involving girls below the age of ten, in violation of legal restrictions. (Ahmadi, K. (2017).

The problem extends beyond the 8-12 age group, as per data from the National Organization for Civil Registration. In recent years, thousands of marriages involving girls under the age of 15 have been recorded. An estimated 20% of Iranian girls under the age of 18 are married, with divorces among girls aged 10-14 also on the rise. It is crucial to emphasize that these statistics exclusively reflect registered marriages, and the extent of unregistered cases remains unknown. The true scale of the issue becomes apparent when considering these unreported instances.

3.2 Child Labor

A significant issue arising from the failure to recognize childhood as an independent period is the pervasive problem of child labor. If childhood is not considered a phase that should be sacrificed for adulthood, in line with pragmatist principles (Dewey, 1958: 62), the practice of child labor should be unequivocally discouraged. Child labor is fundamentally rooted in the notion that children should be prematurely initiated into the responsibilities and tasks of adulthood. Although economic poverty is often a driving factor behind child labor, cultural elements are far from irrelevant. Regardless of whether child labor is predominantly influenced by cultural or economic forces, the result remains consistent: it obstructs the implementation of pragmatist pedagogy.

Regrettably, the availability of precise official statistics regarding the number of working children in distinct economic sectors, categorized by gender, weekly working hours, geographical location, and age, remains an elusive challenge in Iran. Official and unofficial statistics exhibit significant discrepancies, rendering the acquisition of an accurate count of working children aged 8-12 an arduous endeavor.

According to surveys conducted by Alipour (2019), an official representative of the Iranian Statistics Center, 92.17% of children are reported to be engaged in studies, while 1.82% are engaged in work without simultaneously pursuing an education. These surveys also suggest a concerning trend of children who work while attempting to balance their studies, with a rise from 0.90% to 1.21% in 2018 compared to prior years. (Alipour, Mohammad Sadegh. (2019).

However, in light of analogous statistics and additional contextual factors, it is likely that a substantial number of children aged 8-12 continue to labor while attempting to maintain their education. The act of child labor, whether it impedes educational access or diminishes its quality, remains a pertinent issue. The Statistical Centre of Iran's 2006 report highlights the gravity of the situation, where out of a total of 13,253,300 children aged 10-18, a staggering 3,600,000 were not attending school, with 1,700,000 directly

involved in labor. Among them, 1,670,000 were classified as "child labor," with 1,300,000 being boys and 370,000 being girls within the 10-18 age range. In a study published in 2019 for the World Day against Child Labor, the Center for Statistics and Information of the Ministry of Labor estimated that approximately 499,165 children aged 10-17 were involved in child labor. However, it is crucial to emphasize that official statistics in Iran are fraught with reliability issues, and anecdotal observations on the streets reveal a more extensive presence of children below the age of 12 engaged in child labor. (Statistical Centre of Iran (2006).

Moreover, the actual scope of child labor exploitation transcends official statistics. Hidden labor practices flourish within small industries, unregistered workshops, underground operations, domestic work, agricultural labor in rural areas, and other concealed sectors. These illicit occupations often remain unreported, as parents fear legal consequences or other repercussions. Consequently, children engaged in illegal and covert labor activities are often excluded from official censuses. For instance, Safakhani's (2016) study on children laboring in brick kilns underscores the impact of this form of child labor on their education and highlights the hazardous and grueling conditions endured by these young laborers. Brick kilns are recognized as one of the most perilous forms of child labor. (Safakhani, Samra. (2016).

IV. SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS OF EDUCATION

Drawing upon the foundational principles of pragmatist pedagogy, as championed by John Dewey, the educational approach prioritizes the fulfillment of four distinct desires inherent in children: the desire for social relationships, the desire for inquisitive exploration of objects, the desire for engaging in activities, and the desire for artistic interpretations. According to Dewey, when the curriculum is constructed upon these principles, it nurtures the natural growth of children. Pragmatists assert that school curricula should not exist in isolation from social contexts; instead, they should serve as platforms for the cultivation of democratic ideals. Curriculum content should draw from ordinary life experiences, enriched to align with educational objectives. (Dewey, John. (1988).

Dewey underscores the school's fundamental role as a social institution, and pedagogy, in his view, is a collaborative social process. The school environment should not alienate children from the broader social sphere; educational content and teaching methods should be collaborative, rather than competitive or self-centered, fostering a sense of social connectedness. Suppression of children's desires for exploration and change is discouraged. Children should be nurtured with the belief that well-being and welfare are collective pursuits requiring interpersonal relations. This educational approach aims to empower children to envision and create a desirable future society while addressing the flaws within their current social systems. (James, William. (1922).

In terms of evaluating children's tasks and activities at school, pragmatists advocate for criteria that are not rigid or unalterable. Instead, they propose flexible criteria adaptable to the subject matter and individual talents of children. Recognizing the diversity among children and respecting each child's uniqueness is central to the pragmatist perspective. (Dewey, John. (1958).

It is important to note that pluralism is a fundamental concept embraced by all pragmatists. Renowned pragmatists such as William James, John Dewey, and Richard Rorty identify themselves as pluralists. A significant critique of traditional educational systems within the pragmatist framework is the utilization of uniform educational methods and rigid, fixed content that presumes all children possess identical needs and desires. This approach often results in the wastage of children's time, energy, and talents as their individualities are suppressed. The pedagogical system tends to deliver fragments of various sciences that may not resonate with children's needs, thus fragmenting their unified experiences. Pragmatist pedagogy is rooted in the belief that a democratic pedagogical approach is essential. This approach demands that school

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curricula be connected to the broader social context and inspire children's inclination toward collaborative work and the initiation of independent projects.

However, within Iranian schools, a significant divergence from the pragmatist ideal is observed. There is a prevailing tendency towards uniformity, with school curricula being top-down, designed without considering the cultural and environmental diversity of students. The aim often appears to be the homogenization of students into a single, idealized persona. This practice, rooted not only in contemporary Iran but also in its historical context, departs from Dewey's vision of education, which seeks to nurture critical and questioning individuals. Dewey's ideals align with the Enlightenment vision of encouraging independent thought and the pursuit of individual understanding. Kant, in his work "What is Enlightenment?" emphasizes the importance of intellectual self-sufficiency and the development of critical thinking from childhood, underscoring that critical thinking in later stages of life is contingent upon early intellectual nurturing.

4.1 The School and its relationship with the society in Iran

The primary challenge in the Iranian education system, particularly concerning the age range of 8-12, lies in the absence of a collaborative and socially engaging environment within schools. One of the critical issues is the limited agency children have in selecting their preferred teaching methods. The prevailing hierarchical dynamics among teachers, principals, and assistant principals have fostered a top-down approach to education and discipline. This traditional structure, which formerly allowed for corporal punishment, remains deeply ingrained in Iranian culture. Even though corporal punishment has waned in recent years, other forms of punitive measures, such as verbal abuse and excessive assignments, persist. This punishment-oriented system tends to give rise to antisocial behavior, a lack of self-confidence, and imitation, rather than nurturing effective social participation, as advocated by Dewey's educational ideals.

In practice, the Iranian educational process is heavily influenced by systems of punishment and reward. Instead of engaging in learning activities with enthusiasm and curiosity, children often perform tasks hurriedly and without creativity, driven by fear of potential repercussions from their teachers. The role of teachers, regrettably, has been reduced to enforcing compliance through punishment, which stifles the inherent playfulness of childhood. Playfulness is frequently viewed negatively in schools, with teachers and principals equating politeness with unwavering adherence to their authority. Consequently, many children lack initiative and are primarily controlled or disciplined according to these conceptions of politeness, leading to high dropout rates among students of various ages. The situation has become so dire that, in 2018, the Minister of Education and Training in Iran went so far as to liken Iranian schools to prisons, with children feeling a sense of liberation when schools are closed. Attendance feels like imprisonment, highlighting the non-collaborative educational environment.

Moreover, Iranian schools typically do not encourage social interactions among children during short breaks between classes, and group work is not emphasized. This lack of social engagement deprives children of the opportunity to acquire essential social skills. Pedagogy predominantly revolves around rote memorization, often tied to exam periods, which does little to foster genuine learning. Competition within this framework fails to contribute to educational progress; instead, it reinforces individualism at the expense of the social dimensions of education. Instead of playing for enjoyment and shared experiences, children engage in games to win or defeat their peers, perpetuating a win-lose mentality influenced by the adult world. It is essential to replace this spirit of competition with one of group collaboration. While some games may naturally involve winning and losing, creating a sense of rivalry by overly rewarding winners diverts children's focus from the core objective of better learning. It redirects their time and energy toward winning at all costs. In a more constructive educational environment,

games should stress teamwork over creating situations where only a select few can succeed. This can be achieved by tailoring tasks and activities to the unique interests and motivations of groups of children. Additionally, all children should have the opportunity to acquire general skills and engage in activities that cater to their individual needs and talents.

4.2 Educational Problems of Ethnic Groups

The most deprived areas in Iran are often situated in border regions, marked by political, racial, and religious tensions with the central government. Inhabitants of these border areas are primarily composed of ethnic groups, including Arabs, Baloch, Kurds, and Turks. The genesis of these tensions can be traced back to a period preceding the 1979 revolution, particularly during the Pahlavi regime. It was during this era that the concept of the nation-state and nationalism, inspired by the governance model of Ataturk in Turkey, was introduced to Iran.

Historically, Iran has been a melting pot of diverse ethnic groups, and while tensions between these groups and the central government are not novel, they have often stemmed from issues related to power distribution and the central government's perceived weaknesses. However, with the emergence of the Pahlavi regime's brand of nationalism, the very notion of ethnic identity was thrust to the forefront of Iran's political landscape (Abrahamian, 2005: 174). Nationalism, owing to its inherently exclusive nature, necessitates the construction of an "other" to sustain its dominant role. In the case of Iranian nationalism, this "other" was often the denial of the identities of various ethnic groups within its territories. This denial evolved into a significant political controversy that endured into subsequent governments. (Abrahamian, E. (2005).

The Islamic Republic, in contrast, endeavored to define itself more in terms of religious identity rather than a narrow nationalistic one. However, due to the structural constraints within the system, a form of nationalism persisted, and it has become more pronounced in recent years. Despite the central role of religion within the framework of the Islamic Republic, the government retains a nation-state structure. Notably, in recent times, the paradigm for defining the Islamic Republic has shifted toward a Shiite nationalist perspective, which has posed challenges for ethnic groups that identify more closely with their linguistic or religious affiliations.

4.3 Mother Tongue

In recent years, a prominent issue that has garnered significant objections pertains to mother tongue-based education in Iran. The prevailing educational system, influenced by political considerations and an aim to reinforce a specific brand of nationalism, has imposed restrictions on the use of mother tongues for instruction in regions where Persian is not the native language. These regions are home to various ethnic groups, each with its distinct mother tongue, including Arabic, Kurdish, and Turkish, among others. Opposition to this perceived discrimination has not only resulted in the sentencing of many civil activists but has also led to a complete prohibition of mother tongue-based education. This contentious issue not only represents a fundamental denial of the rights of ethnic groups but also imposes numerous challenges on children.

Many children in these regions, especially within the age group under consideration, either lack proficiency in Persian or struggle to communicate and comprehend the language at a level necessary for effective education. Numerous studies conducted in Iran have consistently indicated that students from Persian-speaking backgrounds tend to achieve higher acceptance rates and educational progress compared to those whose mother tongue is not Persian. Furthermore, during the initial years of education, when a child's grasp of the Persian language is still developing, failure rates tend to be notably higher.

Research, such as the study conducted by Moradi and Saifullah (2013), underscores the effectiveness of mother tongue-based education in fostering motivation, self-confidence, and preventing feelings of alienation among students. Nevertheless, the situation remains deeply

challenging. According to the second chapter and the fifteenth principle of the Iranian constitution, which addresses language, script, national date, and the official flag of the country, Persian is declared as the official and common language and script for the Iranian populace. While it permits the use of local and ethnic languages in press, mass media, and the teaching of their respective literatures, it refrains from allowing the use of mother tongues as a medium of instruction in formal education. (Moradi, F., & Saifullah, S. (2013).

It is essential to note that although the constitution seemingly supports the teaching of local and ethnic languages and literatures alongside Persian, this practice is conspicuously absent from the contemporary education system. As such, it is imperative to explore the implications of this gap between constitutional provisions and the practical implementation of language policies in Iran.

V. EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMS DUE TO THE LACK OF ENOUGH TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS

5.1 Learning through doing and Acting

At its core, pedagogy is grounded in the principle of learning through practice and experience. In this discussion, we seek to elucidate the pivotal concept that underscores the discipline, one intrinsically linked to pragmatism—the concept of usefulness. In the realm of education, the intersection of interests, skills, usefulness, and experience plays a crucial role. Pragmatist pedagogy emphasizes an active approach to learning, where children are encouraged to harness their personal experiences, ultimately cultivating their talents and preparing them for the intricacies of life. In this pedagogical context, the process of learning is redefined as learning by doing, experiencing, and actively engaging with the world.

Notably, John Dewey, a prominent pragmatist philosopher, offers a critical perspective on contemporary educational theories, coining the term "experience equals art." Dewey contends that aesthetic and artistic experiences hold a superior position among various types of experiences. These experiences are esteemed for their intrinsic value and are characterized by emotive, intellectual, and practical dimensions. In Dewey's educational framework, the traditional approach of inundating children with information and data takes a back seat. Instead, the value and relevance of knowledge are contingent upon the capacity of the individual to translate it into action.

Crucially, pragmatism raises a fundamental question: Does adopting or rejecting a particular viewpoint translate into a practical difference in one's life? This pragmatic boundary discerns the useful from the non-useful and underscores the importance of education grounded in the personal experiences of children. In a pedagogical framework inspired by pragmatism, children are encouraged to explore, experiment, and act, providing them with the capacity to face real-life challenges. This methodology fosters a deep and creative form of learning.

In this pedagogical paradigm, children are not passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in their educational journey. Dewey's term "self-teaching" captures this concept, where teachers establish an environment that encourages children to experiment, act, and engage in activities. The role of the teacher evolves from a sole provider of knowledge to a facilitator of experiences, guiding children in their self-education. Collaborative learning and group activities enable children to collaboratively address a myriad of problems.

However, these principles encounter significant challenges in the current educational landscape of Iran. Educational systems that revolve around scores and competition often overlook the essence of collaborative and experiential learning, centralizing the teacher as the authoritative source of knowledge. The spirit of group collaboration and shared experiences is often lost in the pursuit of individual success.

Dewey's understanding of experience extends beyond mere engagement; it underscores the importance of reconstruction and reorganization

of experiences. Notably, not all experiences are created equal, and Dewey posits that the enrichment of experience arises from its reconstruction. Rather than limiting experiences, pedagogy should expose children to diverse problems, thus cultivating agile minds that develop a broad spectrum of talents. Through the process of actively engaging with the world, children are equipped to find solutions for a multitude of issues.

Yet, this philosophical approach faces two key challenges in Iran. Firstly, the predominant teaching method remains rooted in traditional teacher-student dynamics. Secondly, many regions of the country lack high-quality educational facilities, limiting opportunities for active, experience-based learning.

A pressing issue in the Iranian educational landscape is the growing trend of home-schooling. While concerns regarding the limitations of home-schooling are raised by education officials, they often overlook the roots of this trend. Many parents who opt for home-schooling are concerned that the current educational system fails to adequately address the development of crucial social skills. These parents endeavor to provide their children with the space to acquire essential life skills that formal education might not adequately foster.

5.2 Educational Facilities

Iran has a high percentage of the nomadic and rural population. However, there are no standard facilities such as schools, teachers, or pedagogical plans in many villages and nomadic populations. Sometimes, it is observed that children should commute long distances to the neighboring cities in order to have access to education. In several villages, students prefer to drop out of school because they have to travel for long distances to get there; since they do not have access to suitable transportation, or that it costs a fortune for their families, they prefer to give up education. The long distances, far from other problems mentioned above, sometimes lead to accidents and death. Furthermore, in those areas where there are elementary schools, there are not middle

schools. Therefore, children cannot continue their education when they are 11 or 12 or leave their home for schools at these early ages. For example, only in one border province of Iran (Sistan and Baluchestan), there is a deficit of 11000 teachers and 15000 classrooms. Moreover, some Iranian officials have reported that there will be an enormous deficit of teachers in the next five years.

Another problem derived from the lack of enough teachers and facilities is that in regions where there are nomadic people, 8–12-year-old children have to be in one classroom altogether. The teacher should divide her time for different levels. In other words, she should teach 5 different levels in one single day! Obviously, such ramifications decrease the quality of education drastically. Since in situations like this, students would not be in one class with their peers nor receive their proper curriculum.

In addition to these problems, the plan for combining schools has also exacerbated this problem. The minister of education first issued this plan in the ninth administration of the Iranian government. It claimed to increase the quality of education by combining schools with less than 15 students together. Despite many objections against this plan, Ahmadi Nezhad's administration set a precedent and this unfair plan is still practiced in small areas. Despite the fact that in the issued instructions, it was maintained that the plan should not leave out the necessary education of students, some of these students cannot continue their studies due to enormous obstacles that education far from home creates for them.

Its connection to the structure of the Islamic Republic, this time, lies in the economic issues. Despite its aggressive denial of Western systems, the economic structure of the Islamic Republic is built on the most brutal form of capitalism. The ninth administration (after the 1979 revolution), which executed the policies of combining schools, simultaneously enacted the most cases of privatization in Iran. This privatization could not be done on a standard basis without governmental intervention and interference. In the name of privatization, they put public sectors

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into the hand of certain people connected to the government, thus introduced a kind of state capitalism.

Regarding education, apart from the recent attention to private schools, the right to education, which is one of the basic human rights, has been denied from students. By combining schools and assigning education to private schools, the government is practically evading its responsibility to provide free education. This delegation, not only in deprived areas but also in urban areas, ends up in an unfair education in which students do not receive the same quality of education.

The other side of the issue is the lack of education facilities in borderline and deprived areas of Iran. In a number of them, school facilities are impoverished; some classes do not have safety standards, but some occasionally take place outdoors. For example, using non-standard and insecure heating systems and buildings cause casualties every year in Iran. Iran's Minister of Education said this year that 42% of Iranian schools do not have standard and safe heating systems. In addition, he said that there are approximately 2000 classes made from mud and about 2000 portable classes. There is a high chance of disasters in these classes; for example, the accident of the girl school at Shin Abad could be mentioned in which a fire took place in 2012 because of a non-standard heating system. In this accident, 29 girl students got burned which two of them died and three of them lost their fingers. Last November, the ceiling of a classroom in an Iranian city collapsed. To take another example, according to an official in the renovation of schools, in just one Iranian province, heaters of 3500 classrooms are nonstandard; 32 percent of classrooms are not solid, and 26 percent are half-solid. This increases the possibility of an accident similar to that of Shinabad girls. In October 2021, the head of the Iranian Organization for the Renovation of Schools said that over 19 percent of Iranian schools should be demolished, rebuilt, and structural strengthening. He also reported that there are 4000 stone schools in Iran; that is, schools without ceilings or of very low standards, which might collapse at any time.

Another example, which recently has received much attention, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, is the financial difficulties of families that cannot provide PCs, smartphones, or tablets for their children to attend their courses. Apart from a huge number of school dropouts, more than a few young students have committed suicide because they did not have smartphones; there are many students who think of leaving their schools altogether. The Minister of Education said in an interview that out of 14 million students, just 10 million sign up in online educational systems, and more than 3 million could not sign up and attend online education due to not having smart devices or not having access to the internet. This latter group of students, many of whom are between 8 to 12 years old, are subjected to dropouts. The last February, the Deputy of Elementary School stated that just 89,000 students are left out from elementary education in the 2021 educational year. Three days before his report, the General Director of the Office for the Extension of Educational Fairness and Nomadic Education announced that the number of students who left the schools in elementary levels was 210,000. According to another statistics reported by the deputy minister of education and training, 25 percent of students dropped out of school because they did not have smart phones.

It is necessary to say that although this is not a problem only in deprived or borderline areas and is recurrent all around the country, it is more intense in these regions. For instance, in the villages of two towns in Iran alone, over three thousand orphans have been identified: children who cannot afford to pay even small amounts of money, such the small amount required for the print of their report cards, which is just one-fifth of one euro!

VI.   CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this study illuminate a spectrum of pressing educational challenges within the Iranian context, encompassing issues such as child labor, socio-economic disparities,

ethnic inequities, and shortages in both teaching staff and educational infrastructure. The statistical evidence underscores the severity of these challenges, underscoring the imperative need for immediate intervention.

In accordance with the data, a conspicuous gender gap in digital education access emerges among children aged 7-12, with 55% of girls and 45% of boys possessing such access. This gender-based discrepancy in digital education availability represents a significant hurdle in the pursuit of educational equity and opportunity.

Equally noteworthy are the obstacles associated with mother tongue education, which afflict 45% of children and manifest as substantial language barriers within the educational system. These statistics emphasize the urgency of addressing the underprovision of mother tongue-based education, as it bears a substantial impact on children's motivation, self-confidence, and the prevention of feelings of alienation.

The dearth of qualified educators poses yet another formidable challenge, with only 40% of the required teaching workforce available. This scarcity detrimentally affects educational quality, leading to larger class sizes and a restricted capacity to provide individualized attention to students. Furthermore, an alarming urban-rural imbalance exists in the distribution of teachers, with 55% concentrated in urban areas and a mere 10% serving in rural regions.

The cumulative ramifications of these challenges call for immediate and multifaceted action. The disparities observed in digital education access, mother tongue-based education, and teacher availability underscore the exigency of comprehensive reforms within the education system. It is imperative that substantial resources and investments be allocated to ameliorate the gender gap, institute inclusive educational practices, and ensure an ample supply of competent educators in both urban and rural domains.

Addressing these multifarious challenges necessitates a concerted approach, encompassing policy overhauls, precisely targeted interventions,

and the mobilization of resources. Endeavors should be directed at enhancing educational infrastructure, offering comprehensive training and support to teaching personnel, fostering inclusivity and cultural sensitivity, and prioritizing the educational needs of marginalized demographic groups. By addressing these formidable educational issues, Iran can take significant strides toward crafting an inclusive and equitable educational framework that affords every child the opportunity to flourish and unlock their full potential.

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