

Educational Policies in Iran and Their Intellectual Roots; The First Pahlavi Era (1925-1941)



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ABSTRACT: This article examines the roots and educational policies of Iran during the first Pahlavi era (1925-1941). During this period, Reza Shah initiated serious efforts to modernize and centralize public education, aiming to create a strong, unified central government through educational and cultural policies that emphasized the Persian language and limited linguistic diversity. Schools were mandated to use standardized textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education, and non-Persian languages were restricted. Similarly, ethnic and religious minority schools faced pressure to adopt Persian as the language of instruction. These policies, with a nationalist focus on Aryan identity, aimed at cultural homogenization. The article also notes that these policies and educational structures have persisted beyond the 1979 revolution and continue to influence Iran's educational system today.

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

The first Pahlavi era represents a significant turning point in modern Iranian history. Many analysts consider Reza Shah's reign as the beginning of modernization in Iran. During this time, the modern state was born, and the growing state bureaucracy took on the responsibility of organizing social affairs. Among the key areas of focus was formal public education, which grew under the Ministry of Education and became a powerful arm of the state in advancing cultural policies.

When Reza Shah came to power, Iran's educational system was backward and disorganized. In fact, until the early 20th century, there was little consideration for the state's involvement in education. This issue gained attention during the Constitutional Revolution (1906), and after the issuance of the Constitutional Decree, the Ministry of Education was officially established. At the same time, compulsory education for both boys and girls for six years was mandated. However, the necessary mechanisms to enforce this law were not provided for many years.

Despite these challenges, efforts to organize the country's educational system continued. With the new constitution passed by parliament in 1911, school management was officially placed under the control of the government, ending the era when "anyone could open a school" (Matthee, 2003: 187). Nevertheless, by the time Reza Shah assumed power, only a few schools were operating under government supervision. "Before the establishment of modern schools, education in society was conducted in three main ways: religious schools, local traditional schools 'maktab khaneh', and private tutoring at home" (Hamed, 2016: 101). In recent years, schools run by religious minorities (such as Armenians and Jews) and foreign schools were also added. "Overall, when Reza Shah took power in 1925, the total number of students in public and private schools across the country barely reached 50,000" (Matthee, 2003: 188).

However, Reza Shah was determined to put the country on the path of education and expand his authority in this domain. For instance, according to available statistics, "the number of elementary schools increased from 340 in 1923 to 1,048 in 1931 and 1,366 in 1935. During the same period, the number of teachers grew from 440 to 5,601 and then to 6,805, while the number of students increased from 43,025 to 126,052 and then to 170,077" (Matthee, 2003: 192).

These educational reforms had broader goals beyond increasing literacy and public knowledge, such as centralization, homogenization, and nationalism (Hamed, 2016; Matthee, 2003). We will further elaborate on these concepts. It is essential to note that these policies laid the foundation for the educational system and, despite numerous political and social transformations, including the 1979 Islamic Revolution; they still persist in some layers and continue to influence our current lives.

One significant example is the hegemony of the Persian language in the education system. According to Article 15 of the Iranian Constitution (1979), the government is obligated to provide the necessary groundwork for teaching the literature of other languages. However, despite the passage of 45 years since the constitution's adoption, this article has not been implemented due to political and administrative reasons. This issue has perpetuated the marginalization of non-Persian cultural groups. Unfortunately, there are no official and accurate statistics on the number of non-Persian-speaking children. The PIRLS study estimates that about 50% of children speak a language other than Persian at home. Domestic studies place this number at around 75%. In another study, 11% of

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fourth-grade children reported that they "never" speak Persian at home (Allah Karami et al., 2017). And the majority of those who fail the first and second grades are from non-Persian-speaking backgrounds (Plan and Budget Organization, 2017). This reality presents a large population of children who are outside the official lingual-cultural framework, and their educational issues are often overlooked.

Thus, this article is not limited to a purely historical topic but is an attempt to understand the current situation based on its historical roots. We will first briefly review the policies and actions of the first Pahlavi period and then delve into the intellectual and theoretical roots of these policies. In essence, we aim to explore the ideas and thinking behind the educational policies, particularly homogenization and centralization.

METHODOLOGY

To examine the dominant ideas of a historical period, one can use countless documents and archives. Therefore, it was necessary to identify and limit the sources. After reviewing documents, school yearbooks, newspapers, local and national sources, and consulting with several historians and archival researchers, I selected the *Journal of Education* as the primary source for data collection.

The *Journal of Education* was the first specialized journal in Iran in the field of educational systems, published by the Ministry of Education. It started publication in 1925 and continues to this day in the form of a scientific-research quarterly. One of the key features that makes this journal suitable for our study is the prominent presence of elites, scholars, and policymakers of that time. Additionally, the journal presents fundamental debates and diverse opinions. In this article, issues of the *Journal of Education* from the First Pahlavi Era (1925-1941) have been reviewed. To analyze the collected data, we used thematic analysis (TA), a method for identifying patterns of meaning within a data set. The aim of thematic analysis is to identify the main themes and sub-themes under each theme (Clarke & Brown, 2013).

Educational Policies and Actions of the First Pahlavi Era

Reza Shah sought to create a cohesive, powerful, and developing nation. These goals inevitably required the establishment of a centralized state. However, the regime did not limit itself to consolidating political and administrative power; it extended its efforts into cultural and educational domains, which resulted in cultural homogenization and the imposition of central values on peripheral areas.

The government's policies for expanding education were part of a broader plan for shaping the nation's culture. At the outset, in 1921, a council known as the *Education Council* was established to design the country's cultural policies, including those in the educational domain. This council, through the establishment and management of educational institutions, pursued the overall objectives of the state. These institutions worked in close collaboration and complemented each other's efforts, functioning like sub-systems within a larger system. For example, the *Academy of Persian Language and Literature* (established in 1935) aimed to strengthen the Persian language by purging foreign words, particularly Arabic words, from the language. The approved vocabulary of this academy was disseminated through school textbooks, official publications, and newspapers.

Another significant institution was the *Organization for the Cultivation of Thoughts* (1938), which organized ideological lectures in major cities. The organization's activities were advanced through schools. One example was the near hundred lectures organized for school teachers on topics such as Iranian nationalism, notable figures in Iran's history, and discussions of national monuments (Hamed, 2016: 162). The state's cultural bureaucracy was growing, and the government had long-term plans for the standardization of schools. Standardization was pursued on multiple levels—from the content of textbooks to curricula, from students' uniforms to the physical environment of schools, and from teacher recruitment to evaluation methods.

The *Higher Council of Education* took the first step in 1925 by mandating a commission of experts to revise textbooks at both the primary and secondary levels. Prior to this, schools were free to choose books from the market. Schools were now required to have their textbooks approved by the Ministry of Education. Twelve years after the establishment of Reza Shah's reign, the publication of any book without the ministry's supervision was deemed a violation. In 1929, the government undertook the task of compiling educational books. From that time until 1938, the content of books changed periodically until the Ministry of Education succeeded in printing the first uniform textbooks for all primary and secondary grades in 1939 (Hamed, 2016: 171). This centralized system continues to this day, with schools operating within the framework of government-published textbooks.

Another aspect was the restructuring of educational levels. In 1928, the government, inspired by the French educational system, announced that schooling would consist of two levels: primary (six years) and secondary (six years). The secondary level was further divided into two three-year stages. In 1929, the Ministry of Education was reorganized, dividing the country into nine educational regions, each with its own budget and management under the supervision of the Ministry. However, this division was not intended to adapt the educational programs to the environmental and cultural conditions of the regions, but rather to strengthen the central government's presence throughout the country. In the following years, the ministry's bureaucracy grew, with 6,000 employees by 1934 and in 1935; a unified uniform was introduced for elementary school students (Matthee, 2003).

In 1929, Reza Shah personally decided to educate and literate the vast number of nomadic children. This goal was pursued in the ministry's reorganization plan (1931), which started with a budget of \$100,000 that year. "The first experiment of the plan, which established Persian as the sole language of instruction, was implemented in 1930 among the Turkmen in northern Iran." The program

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later expanded to include the nomadic children of Kurdistan, Baluchistan, Luristan, and Qashqai tribes (Malekzadeh, 2021). None of these groups were Persian-speaking, and teaching in Persian posed significant challenges.

In fact, homogenization through the Persian language, as a symbol of Aryan Iran, was at the core of the regime's cultural and educational programs. Before this, education in religious minority schools and foreign schools was conducted in languages such as Turkish, Armenian, and English. The government not only banned instruction in languages other than Persian but also aimed to replace these languages and dialects with standard Persian through schools. Border provinces schools and schools belonging to religious and foreign minorities became the targets of these policies. The first step was to expand schools in border regions. In 1926, the Ministry of Education allocated the entire budget for elementary school establishment to five border provinces (Matthee, 2003). From then on, the teaching of Persian language, history, and geography in provinces such as Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Baluchistan, Khuzestan, and Turkmen regions was pursued with particular intensity. In addition to establishing schools and making education in Persian compulsory, Persian-speaking teachers were dispatched to these regions, creating a situation where the teacher and students did not share a common language for communication (Rasouli et al., 2016).

Simultaneously, pressure on foreign schools increased. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of War intervened to prevent the establishment of new foreign schools. In 1927, the government pressured schools that taught in Armenian or Turkish to replace their language of instruction with Persian. In religious minority schools, "education was affected by changes in Persian language instruction, course materials, school names, holidays, and extracurricular activities" (Shahmoradi & Rahmanian, 2019: 19). In 1932, foreign schools were banned from enrolling Iranian students. These policies ultimately led to the closure of foreign and minority religious schools (Naimati & Edavari, 2013) (Sajjadi & Khosravanzadeh, 2021).

The regime's efforts to create linguistic unity were part of a broader attempt to consolidate central power over the periphery, and they caused numerous problems. At the same time, they became a significant component of the regime's nationalist ideology.

As Matthee and Hamedani point out, nationalism was a key feature of the educational system during Reza Shah's reign. But what was meant by nationalism? During the Constitutional Revolution, a form of civic nationalism emerged, which meant that all ethnic and cultural groups in the country would unite under one national flag. During Reza Shah's reign, however, the cultural atmosphere shifted from civic nationalism to ethnic nationalism centered on the Aryan race (Zia-Ebrahimi, 2018). Another scholar has described this process as a transition from liberal nationalism to authoritarian nationalism (Moallem et al., 2020).

In addition to imposing Persian throughout the provinces, ethnic or authoritarian nationalism infiltrated literature, history, and geography textbooks. History, in particular, gained significant importance as a group of intellectuals began constructing a new narrative of the country's history centered on the Aryan race. In this narrative, the emphasis was not just on Aryan ethnicity but on the Aryan race. Iranian history began with the Achaemenid Empire (as the glory of the Aryan race), which was described as a period of grandeur and beauty. In contrast, the post-Islamic era (with the dominance of the Arab race) was portrayed as a period of decline and decay. Textbooks became the most important tools for disseminating this new ideology in the country. "Aryan race-based identity became a fundamental element in the history textbooks of this period, with a focus on the superiority of the Iranian race, its connection to Europeans, and its distinction from the Arab race" (Bigdeli & Marseli, 2017: 20). Of course, Aryanism was only one aspect of authoritarian nationalism. "In these textbooks, the Shah serves as the central figure around which Aryanism, patriotism, and praise of the Aryan race are temporarily articulated" (Moallem et al., 2020: 115). Another study shows that in the history, geography, and Persian literature textbooks of this era (37 books), the concept of 'Shah' appears 2,353 times, making it the most frequent concept related to Iranian identity (Shakoor & Ali Akbari, 2014).

These ideas were not only embedded in textbooks but were also reflected in extracurricular activities such as celebrations and public events, where poems and articles aligned with the regime's cultural objectives were presented. "For instance, in Tabriz, a speech praised the superiority of the Aryan race, and another speech denounced the Mongol soldiers' massacres and the imposition of the Turkish language on the people of Azerbaijan, advocating for the revival of the Persian language in this province" (Naebian & Ghalizadeh, 2010).

There are many examples like these that previous researchers have explored. Here, we aim to take a step back and examine the thoughts and ideas behind these actions.

The Roots of Educational Policies

As mentioned earlier, the *Journal of Education* provides valuable insights into the intellectual foundations of the government's educational policies. Analyzing the content of this journal reveals two distinct intellectual currents. The dominant, hegemonic current consists of the ruling theorists whose ideas shaped many of the policies of that time. The second current comprises critics, whose voices are faint and hard to discern in the historical record. The main difference between these two currents lies in their understanding of modernity. The dominant group embraced an imported and imitative form of modernity from the West, while the critics sought to construct a context-specific modernity based on the unique features of Iranian society.

In the following sections, we will explore how the "imported modernity" of the dominant intellectuals led to centralization and homogenization.

Before delving into this discussion, let us first review the main characteristics of this group of intellectuals:

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Serious Criticism of Iranian Society and Concern about Iran's Historical Backwardness: Advocates of imitating modern societies were highly critical of the current state of affairs and were concerned about Iran's historical backwardness.

Negative View of Islam and Islamic Civilization: This group of thinkers regarded the advent of Islam and the Arab conquest of Iran as the primary cause of Iran's decline. Accordingly, they harbored a vision of a kind of renaissance, which entailed a return to pre-Islamic Iran. A key aspect of their thinking was their disregard for the era of greatness and splendor of Islamic civilization and Iran's power during the post-Islamic period.

Romantic and Mythical View of Pre-Islamic Iran: These theorists, proponents of imitating modern societies, should be described as antiquarians. They held an idealized, mythical view of pre-Islamic Iran and sought to return to that era. Interestingly, the theoretical foundations of this approach were also borrowed from the theories and ideas of Western thinkers.

Viewing the West as Utopia and Ideal: The modern world and the West represented an ideal society for this group of Iranian intellectuals. Based on a linear view of history, they saw the developed Western countries as the desired future and, therefore, believed that the West should be considered the ultimate model for development.

Imitation of Developed Western Countries as the Solution to Iran's Development: According to the central tenets of their thinking, this group of intellectuals saw the solution to Iran's backwardness in following the lead of developed Western countries. They believed that by adopting the policies and programs of these countries and transferring modern institutions to Iran, the historical backwardness of Iran could be overcome, and the country could achieve development.

As mentioned earlier, a small group of critics opposed this viewpoint, emphasizing the historical and social contexts of development. However, their voices were not reflected in the government's policies and actions. On the other hand, the proponents of imported modernity had a strong voice in both the political system and civil society. Traces of this perspective can also be found in the Journal of Education. Based on the articles reviewed, the understanding of modernity led to centralization and cultural homogenization through three intellectual and practical channels: (A) adopting curricula from Western societies, (B) constructing history, (C) and the issue of national language.

Centralization and Homogenization

A) Adopting curricula from Western societies:

One of the primary aspects of imitating modern societies was the adoption of policies and programs that these countries had implemented. A review of the ideas of the prominent intellectuals and the policies of the Pahlavi government shows that borrowing from Western societies, specifically France, encompassed everything from large-scale policies to smaller programs in education. **Two key concepts** within this theme are **the top-down approach to development and education**, and **the quest for nation-building through a shared ideology**.

• Top-down Approach to Development and Education

As mentioned earlier, those who advocated for the imitation of modern societies held an authoritarian, top-down approach to development, and by extension, education. This approach viewed the state as the primary driver of development, with the government tasked with formulating, planning, and executing the policies. In this view, society's role in development was limited to obedience and compliance. The formation of this perspective can be attributed to three factors.

The first factor is the role of strong and authoritarian governments in European development. Even contemporary development theories recognize the significant role of governments in fostering development. In this sense, one can justify the emphasis placed on the state's role in development by these intellectuals. However, their focus on state power extended beyond such a reasonable view, as two additional factors reveals.

The second factor is connected to the country chosen for imitation. In general, Iranian intellectuals modeled their understanding of modernity on France, a society where the state had a dominant role in reforming society through top-down methods.

The third factor can be found in the events and turmoil following the Constitutional Revolution. The disorganization and chaos in the political system and the managerial structure of society after the revolution, coupled with the failure to achieve the intended outcomes, deeply disappointed Iranian intellectuals. As a result, they turned away from liberal and freedom-based approaches, embracing authoritarian, order-oriented perspectives instead.

There is also a deeper, more fundamental reason for why these intellectuals adopted such an approach. They were highly critical of Iran's history and the essential elements of its social fabric. Key aspects such as ethnic and religious diversity and the presence of Islam were seen as major obstacles. Consequently, their vision of a homogeneous, centralized nation-state required a break from society's historical past. For these intellectuals, a powerful, development-oriented government was the only viable option.

They openly supported the use of force and coercion in achieving modernity. Specifically, these thinkers believed that the only way to overcome Iran's historical backwardness was through top-down, enforced development. This view extended to the realm of education as well. For example, in one article, the author explicitly emphasized the necessity of coercion in education, calling for the elimination or exclusion of groups who resisted the government's policies:

"In my opinion, the time has come to implement fundamental reforms... just as the borders of our country have been firmly closed to foreigners with the sharp sword and powerful hand of our leader, we must similarly close the open and unguarded gates of the Persian language, not only to new foreigners, but also to those who have already entered. Only those who become one with us,

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adopting our language and principles, should be allowed to stay. As for those who do not, let us show them the door without hesitation."

(Dowlatabadi, 1934)

- **Nation-building through a Shared Ideology**

Intellectuals aligned with the Pahlavi regime and proponents of Western modernity viewed national development through an ideological lens. According to this perspective, history follows a linear path, with all societies ultimately progressing toward modernity. In this process, all nations must follow the same trajectory. In this view, the Western countries represented Iran's future, and thus their policies and actions should be replicated step by step in Iran. This ideological stance included elements such as secularism, nation-state building, ethnic centrism, a unified language, and similar ideas derived from the foundations of modernity in the West.

One article aligned with cultural homogenization and the imitation of the West tried to link ethical and humanistic principles with the concept of nation-state building. In the article, the author presented nationalism as a means to achieve ethical and human ideals: *"In the modern era, humanity's greatest aspiration is to achieve universal brotherhood and eternal peace across the world. Psychology and sociology teach us that such lofty goals cannot be achieved without scientific and logical approaches, including the expansion of education globally and taking into account the principles of the development of nations over time. Thus, the best and most logical method is to move from multiplicity to unity, from nationalism to the unity of mankind and the brotherhood of nations."* (Gonabadi, 1965).

B) The Construction of History

Another crucial concept within the framework of imported modernity is the construction of history. This theme is central because it serves as a foundation for other concepts. Constructing a new historical narrative both legitimizes the process of imitating Western modernity and paves the way for a historical break, justifying the push for a "renaissance" and a return to pre-Islamic Iran.

This historical discontinuity required a reinterpretation of Iran's past by intellectuals. Through this reinterpretation, a new narrative of Iran's history was constructed, establishing a black-and-white dichotomy. This dichotomy, in turn, created the intellectual framework necessary to justify a break with the past and the need to return to an imagined glorious pre-Islamic era. The central focus of this new historical narrative was the Aryan nation-state, a form of ethnic-centered nationalism based on Western ideas of modernity. The intellectual roots of suppressing ethnic and linguistic diversity can be traced to this historical construction and the effort to establish an Aryan nation-state.

Two key concepts are central to the construction of history: **the emphasis on organizing an authentic ethnic identity for nation-building and the selective and disconnected approach to history.**

- **The Emphasis on Organizing an Authentic Ethnic Identity for Nation-Building**

The intellectuals who sought to imitate Western modernity were focused on constructing a modern nation-state, replicating what had occurred in the West. They aimed to establish this nation-state without paying attention to the unique characteristics of Iranian society and its historical development. Consequently, many of their ideas were disconnected from the social and historical realities of Iran. A notable example of this is the issue of ethnic nationalism.

The core of these intellectuals' efforts to create a nation-state was centered on constructing a narrative that portrayed Iranians as an Aryan people. Historically, ethnic nationalism had no place in Iran's social and political life. Iranian society had always been ethnically diverse, and over time, people had grown accustomed to living in such diversity. Neither of the major religions in Iran's history—Zoroastrianism and Islam—advocated ethnic or tribal superiority.

However, this group of intellectuals sought to reconstruct Iran's modern nation-state based on the idea of an Aryan race. They strongly opposed the presence of other ethnic groups in Iran and believed that inter-ethnic mixing was one of the main reasons for the country's decline. In this regard, one of the most prominent Iranian intellectuals, Ahmad Kasravi, criticized the invasions of the Turks and Mongols in an article. He wrote:

"On the one hand, the entry of the Turks into Iran and their dominance over Iranians for many centuries, followed by the destructive flood of the Mongol invasion and the heartbreaking stories that we all know, and on the other hand, the spread of distorted Sufi thoughts and the like among Iranians—these were the calamities that deprived Iran of its prosperity and also left no room for Iranian wisdom and knowledge to thrive." (Kasravi, 1934)

It is important to note that Kasravi's issue with the Turkic and Mongol invasions was not simply the material devastation or destruction of Iranian lands. Rather, his main concern was the permanent settlement of these groups in Iran and the resulting inter-ethnic mixing. He continued:

"It would have been far better if the Turks, after looting and plundering Iran, had returned to Turkestan without settling here. Similarly, it would have been better if the Mongols had been content with their four-year campaign of brutal massacres across regions such as Khorasan, Khwarazm, and Ghazni, and not launched a second invasion that ultimately established their rule over this land."(Kasravi, 1934)

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• Selective and Disconnected Approach to History

The selective and disconnected approach to history can be examined on two levels, both of which are interrelated. The first level concerns the black-and-white dichotomy in the historical narrative of Iran. According to this view, pre-Islamic Iran was a period of glory and prosperity, which turned into a nightmare with the arrival of outsiders and their new ideology. Intellectuals in this group sought to erase or downplay the post-Islamic era, presenting it as a dark period in Iran's history.

The second level concerns the disregard for the role of history in shaping the future. The belief that one can ignore significant portions of a nation's centuries-old history and build a new future based solely on selected parts is a simplistic and flawed notion. The writings of this group show that they did not fully understand the importance of history and the role it plays in shaping institutions over time. In one of his articles, Oveysi explicitly argued for the selective use of history, advocating that only certain aspects of the past be retained in education and the rest discarded.

"Our discussion is about the authors who today write textbooks for schools, relying on the works of our predecessors. These authors should be careful to separate the good from the bad in the information they include, rather than blindly accepting everything that has been passed down from previous generations. Not everything our ancestors deemed good is necessarily good for us today"(Oveysi, 1926).

His later remarks reveal that his view of history is rather narrow, seeing it merely as a source of lessons to be learned from. He continued:

"As I've said elsewhere, the wise driver must always keep their eyes on the road ahead, not on what lies behind them, except for those valuable lessons they have already learned. In life, too, people must focus on the future, drawing from the past only the significant lessons they can apply. That is why I wish for Iranians to draw a line between the past and the future, establishing a new life from today onward, learning a few lessons from the past but leaving the rest behind." (Oveysi, 1926).

C) The National Language Issue

No issue has been debated more than the national language, and the central focus of this debate was the establishment of Persian as the official and national language of Iran. The national language debate holds significance in two main aspects: nation-building and the role of education.

From the perspective of nation-building, Persian was seen as a key component in the construction of a unified nation-state. The intellectuals behind this movement believed that Persian was not only the language of the Aryan race but also the foundation for building a homogeneous and cohesive state. From the perspective of education, the government sought to standardize and promote Persian across the country.

The national language policy had five main components: 1.Promoting "pure" Persian, 2.Using a unified language as a tool for national unity, 3.Reducing other languages to dialects of Persian, 4.Emphasizing the elimination of regional dialects.

1. Promoting "Pure" Persian

One of the primary measures for constructing a nation-state centered around ethnic nationalism was the effort to remove any traces of other ethnic groups from the society. An essential aspect of preserving and expanding the national language involved "purifying" it, meaning protecting the national language from the influence of foreign languages. This entailed preventing the incorporation of words from other languages, particularly Arabic, into Persian. Given the anti-Islamic sentiment prevalent in the dominant ideology of the time, Arabic was viewed as the greatest threat to the Persian language. The educational curriculum emphasized this point: *"We should not allow the sweet Persian language to be so intertwined with unnecessary Arabic words that it becomes difficult to learn"*(Ghavami, 1976).

2. A Unified Language as a Tool for National Unity and Nation-Building

One of the most significant aspects of the national language debate was its role in nation-building. A national language was seen as a key symbol and foundational factor in the creation of a unified, modern state. This issue gained even greater importance when the construction of the nation-state was approached ideologically, with history being reconstructed based on a single ethnicity and race. Persian was regarded by those who embraced the Aryan race theory as the most important evidence of an ethnically homogeneous Iranian nation. Therefore, one of the first steps toward building the nation-state in Iran was the promotion and widespread teaching of Persian as the national language. The suppression of other languages and even regional dialects was legitimized through this process.

In the articles reviewed in this study, three main points were emphasized regarding the national language. First, the idea that the Persian language was a fundamental factor in creating national unity was highlighted:

"In my view, the mother tongue is more important than any other factor in laying the foundations of nationality. What elevates the mother tongue to such a high level of importance is the use of a single national language in a country brings people closer to one another and fosters mutual understanding..." (Gonabadi, 1958).

Second, the authors strongly opposed teaching any foreign language, especially at the early stages of education. It is noteworthy that for these writers, a "foreign" language referred to any language other than Persian, even if it was a local language spoken by people in parts of Iran. One article states:

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"Given that the main goal of the educational system is nation-building and that the most important element of nationality is language and considering that childhood is the time when nationalistic sentiments are either strengthened or weakened, we must conclude that teaching a foreign language at this stage has irreparable consequences. Those who think they are helping by teaching young children a foreign language are unknowingly, working against our national identity" (Borazjani, 1956).

In another article, the author discussed the harm of teaching foreign languages to young children, arguing that language is not just a matter of communication but also conveys feelings, emotions, and culture. Teaching a foreign language leads to cultural estrangement, causing children to drift away from their own culture and become more attached to the foreign one. Interestingly, despite acknowledging the relationship between language, culture, and society, this article entirely overlooks the fact that a large segment of the Iranian population speaks languages and dialects other than Persian. The author wrote:

"Learning a foreign language has both positive and negative effects, and these two are complementary. If a person learns a foreign language early on, they will naturally develop an attachment to the culture of that nation, and in turn, their attachment to their own language and culture will often diminish, along with their national pride. A clear example of this is the behavior of conquerors towards the conquered. The first thing they do upon entering a country is to teach their language to the people for free because they know how much influence language has in fostering attachment to their own nation. A prime example of this is the Arab domination of Persia. When they overthrew the Sassanid Empire, they spread their culture by teaching Arabic to the people, so much so that for more than two centuries, the Persian language was virtually abandoned" (Borazjani, 1956).

The third point focused on the importance of enforcing strict language policies and elevating the status of the Persian language as a key educational objective. In one article, the author compared Iranian society with European countries, particularly France, and argued that those countries place far more emphasis on their national language than Iran does. He wrote: *"Skeptics mistakenly believe that strictness in university entrance exams regarding the mother tongue is exclusive to Iran. However, if we compare the knowledge of an Iranian student in Persian with that of an American or French student in their mother tongue, we will see that Iran has been more lenient and forgiving. The reason is that in those countries, a deep national pride is instilled from an early age, and even though they teach the mother tongue with more effective methods and greater care, many students still fail their language exams each year"* (Moftah, 1951).

Based on this comparison, the author recommended that the Ministry of Education take more serious and comprehensive steps in the training of Persian language teachers and the teaching of the mother tongue at all educational levels: *"It is essential for the Ministry of Education to show greater diligence and take more extensive measures concerning the training of Persian language teachers and the teaching of the mother tongue in all stages of education"* (Moftah, 1951).

3. Reducing Other Languages to Dialects of Persian

As mentioned earlier, intellectuals who supported the construction of an Aryan nation-state based their claims on a fabricated historical narrative. A clear example of this effort is the book *Azeri: The Ancient Language of the People of Azerbaijan* by Ahmad Kasravi (1925). In this book, Kasravi argued that the Turkish language spoken by the people of Iran was actually a dialect of ancient Persian. This argument was also paired with a racial claim, asserting that the Turks of Iran were ethnically Aryan. This idea was echoed in the articles published in the *Journal of Education*. One article stated:

"Throughout Azerbaijan, the dialects that were derived from Persian and Pahlavi were referred to under the general name of Azeri" (Tabatabaei, 1939).

4. Eliminating Regional Dialects of Persian

The proponents of Western modernity in Iran were not only opposed to the use of non-Persian languages in the country but also sought to eliminate the various dialects of Persian. Their goal was for everyone in the country to speak Persian in a standardized form, referred to as "standard" or "proper" Persian. This policy was also modeled after what had occurred in Western countries, particularly France. In one article, the author explicitly labeled speaking with regional dialects as a defect, considering it shameful. He argued that the education system should instill in future generations a sense of embarrassment when speaking in anything other than standard Persian: *"The education system must encourage everyone to develop such a strong attachment to and familiarity with the national and common language that they gradually refrain from speaking in local dialects and find it distasteful and shameful for any educated Iranian to do so. There is no doubt that this embarrassing difference in dialects will disappear as a result"* (Tabatabaei, 1939).

THE CONCLUSION

In this article, we have shown that the Reza Shah regime aimed for centralization and cultural homogenization “in schools” and “through schools.” We briefly reviewed various actions taken in this regard. We then turned to the intellectual roots of these policies, demonstrating how the dominant current of Iranian intellectualism understood modernity and guided society and the state towards imitation of the West. According to the intellectuals of that era, the homogeneous nation-state was considered the backbone of modernity. The ideal of “one government, one nation, one ethnicity, one religion, and one language” represented the aspiration of Iranian intellectuals, which came at the cost of denying the existing ethnic and cultural diversity, constructing a fictional history for the country, and imposing a singular culture and language.

This reflects the familiar narrative of "imagined communities" as described by Benedict Anderson (Anderson, 2016), which has repeated itself in Iran as in many other countries (Hobsbawm, 1990). Anderson emphasizes the historically and socially constructed nature of nations and shows how, once a nation is formed, its members perceive themselves as an eternal collective and fabricate a historical narrative for themselves. This understanding of the nation peaked in the early 20th century with racism, fascism, and extreme forms of nationalism. However, the latter half of the 20th century witnessed the decline of such movements. Postmodernism emerged, characterized by a shift from authoritarian narratives to the autonomy of fragmented micro-narratives, defending the multiplicity and diversity of cultures (Bennett, 2005: 54). This cultural shift emphasizes the importance of culture in people's everyday lives, positioning culture as a domain for exploitation and resistance. Thus, the cultural rights of non-dominant groups gained ethical and political significance, becoming central to discourse. Among these discussions, Axel Honneth, through his concept of the "right to recognition," illustrates the deeper dimensions of the rights of culturally non-dominant groups (Honneth, 1995). Nancy Fraser, in dialogue with Honneth, redefines the concept of justice by emphasizing its political and cultural dimensions (Fraser, 2008).

In light of these developments, not only did many countries recognize cultural diversity, but multiculturalism also became a celebrated characteristic of state policies (Pharekh, 2000).

It seems that Iranian society has aligned with the currents of the early 20th century but has not integrated the critical movements of the latter half of the century into its cultural and political atmosphere. The state of the educational system, which is the subject of our study, confirms this assertion. Despite the 1979 Revolution and the Islamic government's efforts to implement ideological changes in the educational system (Fundamental Transformation Document of Education, 2011), the foundations laid during Reza Shah's reign continue to persist. The curriculum, educational content, textbooks, assessment methods, and the hiring and promotion of teachers are all centrally managed by the government (centralization). Furthermore, the dominance of the Persian language in schools remains unquestionable, and the Aryanist interpretation of history and geography continues to prevail (ethnic nationalism). This issue is not limited to educational programs; surprisingly, even critical and intellectual currents have largely neglected the diversity and plurality of cultures. For example, in academic studies concerning the status of bilingual individuals, most focus on academic success or cognitive development without addressing the recognition rights of these students. A century has passed since the modernization experience and the pursuit of development began, yet critics of centralization and cultural homogenization remain marginalized within political structures and civil society.

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