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Extended Abstract

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The Necessity of Attention to Fantasy in Children's Persian Textbooks

Hojatolah Omidali* (Corresponding Author)
Fatemeh Soltani

Introduction

Childhood is one of the most sensitive stages in the formation of individual and social identity, and appropriate educational tools can shape the mental and behavioral destinies of future generations. Fantasy stories, with features such as world-building, a break from the rules of the real world, and multilayered symbolism, have a high capacity to stimulate imagination, strengthen empathy, teach moral values indirectly, and improve problem-solving skills. Despite the consensus in classical and modern theories (Tolkien, Mohammadi, and others) regarding the educational and cognitive role of fantasy, field reviews show that this genre has an absolutely small share of material in students' Persian textbooks.

Method, Review of Literature, and Purpose

The present study is descriptive–analytical. At the theoretical stage, the genre of fantasy and its structural and functional components were re-examined to establish criteria for identifying fantasy elements in curricular texts. Then the content of all Persian textbook lessons from elementary to secondary levels (grades 1 through 12) was examined, and a total of 212 lessons were analyzed. The aim of the research is

* Assistant Prof of Persian Language and Literature, Arak University, Arak, Iran.
H-omidali@araku.ac.ir

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to determine the frequency of fantasy's presence, to explain its educational and cognitive functions, and to present a proposed model for the systematic integration of fantasy into textbook content.

Discussion

Quantitative analysis results showed that out of 212 lessons, only 8 contained fantasy elements, which is a very small share given the well-recognized importance of fantasy in nurturing imagination and cognitive skills. From a qualitative perspective, the existing fantasy content was largely limited and scattered, lacking purposeful instructional mechanisms or alignment with students' cognitive developmental levels.

A review of functions indicated that fantasy can serve as a complementary tool for language instruction and critical thinking, a vehicle for indirect teaching of moral concepts, a means to strengthen emotional intelligence, and a context for practicing problem-solving skills. Moreover, evidence from cognitive neuroscience indicates that active imagination is associated with strengthening the brain's default mode networks, which play roles in creativity, empathy, and long-term planning.

In response to critics who call fantasy an escape from reality, theoretical data and examples (Tolkien; Nodelman) and global cases (such as the role of fantasy in progressive education systems) show that, in addition to increasing reading motivation, fantasy can create a bridge between the classical literary heritage and the needs of today's learners. Based on the findings, two main strategies are proposed: (1) the deliberate and selective inclusion of fantasy works appropriate to each grade level; (2) infusing the essence of fantasy into non-fiction texts (historical re-creations, fantasy educational narratives, animations, and educational games).

Conclusion

The study shows a striking structural and content gap for the fantasy genre in students' Persian textbooks, and its negative consequences may range from reduced opportunities to cultivate creativity to weakening the indirect teaching of moral and social values. Given fantasy's multilayered role in strengthening imagination, empathy, and problem-solving ability, it is recommended that educational authorities and textbook authors: (a) develop a clear criterion for identifying fantasy and incorporate it into the textbook authorship cycle; (b) hold specialized workshops on developing fantasy content for textbook authors and teachers; (c) prepare curricular maps based on fantasy subgenres appropriate to developmental stages; and (d) conduct longitudinal studies to measure the educational and behavioral effects of introducing fantasy into the curriculum. Implementing these strategies can move fantasy from the margins into the center of education and create a suitable environment for raising an inquisitive, creative, and ethically minded generation.

Keywords: Persian textbooks, imagination, fantasy

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