Shiraz University
Journal of Children's Literature Studies
Semiannual, ISSN: 2783-0616
Spring - Summer 2026

OPEN ACCESS

Extended Abstract

DOI: 10.22099/JCLS.2025.52709.2090

Representation of the Maturation Process in Adolescent Novels: A Comparative Study of *The Clown* and *Call Me Ziba*

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Introduction

Puberty represents a pivotal developmental stage in human life, characterized by extensive physical, psychological, and social changes, serving as a transitional phase between childhood and adulthood. This stage plays a fundamental role in shaping adolescents' individual and social identity and guides their lived experiences. Young adult literature, particularly novels, functions as a cultural and educational tool with the capacity to depict these experiences and offer strategies for navigating the challenges of puberty. When adolescents engage in empathetic identification with characters, they directly confront issues of growth and identity formation.

Despite the critical importance of this topic, a systematic analysis of puberty in Iranian adolescent literature—especially from comparative and gendered perspectives—has received limited scholarly attention. The present study focuses on two prominent novels of the 2010s: *The Clown* by Hoda Hadadi and *Call Me Ziba* by Farhad Hassanzadeh, examining the representation of various dimensions of puberty in female adolescent

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Article Info: Received: 2025-04-14, **Accepted:** 2025-09-30

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characters. These two characters occupy different stages of adolescence and undergo distinct psychological, social, and familial experiences. Their age and developmental differences provide a basis for a comparative study of the pubertal process, illustrating how male and female authors, through differing narrative approaches, depict the growth and identity formation of adolescent girls.

Method, Literature Review, and Objective

The scholarly literature on the representation of puberty in Iranian adolescent novels, despite the psychological and social significance of this developmental stage, remains limited and fragmented. Previous studies have predominantly focused on specific dimensions, such as physical, emotional, or cognitive aspects of puberty, while comprehensive, multidimensional, and comparative investigations are scarce. Domestic research, including works by Miralaei Amin (2017, 2018), Moradi (2018), and Binazir (2020, 2022), has analyzed puberty in adolescent novels, each emphasizing particular facets such as identity, gender roles, the body, and emotional experiences. International studies, such as Kaplan (2008), highlight adolescents' identity crises and social pressures, yet multidimensional and comparative analyses of puberty in Persian literary works have received little attention.

The present study aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the representation of various dimensions of puberty—including physical, sexual, emotional, cognitive, social, religious and spiritual, economic, and political—in two prominent Iranian adolescent novels: *The Clown* by Hoda Hadadi and *Call Me Ziba* by Farhad Hassanzadeh. Employing a qualitative approach based on comparative content analysis, the study purposefully selects female adolescent characters to illuminate how male and female authors differently portray the stages and processes of puberty. By adopting a multidimensional and gender-sensitive analytical framework, this research addresses existing gaps in prior studies and contributes to a deeper understanding of puberty representation in contemporary Persian adolescent literature.

Discussion

The findings of this study, based on the analysis of the novels indicate that the representation of puberty in these works exhibits fundamental differences in terms of the types of experiences depicted, intensity of engagement with reality, narrative structure, and gendered orientation. These differences are evident not only at the level of characterization but also in deeper dimensions such as relationships with the body, society, family, and identity.

In *The Clown,* Negar is an introspective and inquisitive character whose puberty unfolds primarily within cognitive, psychological, and spiritual domains. Her development occurs through mental reflections and familial and personal experiences, without direct confrontation with social structures. Puberty in this novel is depicted as a gradual and internalized process. The female author, with a sensitive focus on emotions and

individual growth, emphasizes intra-familial emotional interactions rather than direct engagement with social or gendered crises. This subdued approach reflects a pedagogical and balanced portrayal of adolescence.

In contrast, Ziba in *Call Me Ziba* is energetic and proactive, with her puberty shaped amid external crises such as poverty, social alienation, discrimination, and inequality. Ziba's experiences convey tangible social and political dimensions of puberty through critical language and rebellious behavior. Physical maturation is expressed symbolically and indirectly but more tangibly than in *The Clown*. The male author employs humor and everyday narrative techniques to portray bodily and gendered experiences in ways congruent with the cultural context of the novel.

Comparing the two characters, Negar represents introspective and spiritual puberty, achieving self-awareness through care and internal acceptance, whereas Ziba embodies protest-oriented and socially engaged puberty, reconstructing her personal and social identity through crisis and resistance. These differences partly reflect the authors' perspectives: Hadadi, emphasizing emotional and psychological layers, presents puberty as a gradual and familial phenomenon, while Hassanzadeh, adopting a structuralist view, portrays puberty as intertwined with society, power, and law.

Age and situational differences between the characters also influence the representation of puberty. Negar, in late adolescence, engages in reflection on identity and future pathways, whereas Ziba, at the onset of adolescence, confronts crises such as social rejection and identity loss, advancing her maturation from biological to identity and social dimensions.

Overall, the study demonstrates that representations of puberty in Iranian adolescent literature encompass a spectrum ranging from introspective to realistic, and from individual-centered to structurally oriented perspectives. Furthermore, a gender-sensitive analysis reveals that narrative orientation, thematic focus, and the portrayal of pubertal experiences are significantly influenced by the author's gender.

Conclusion

This study aimed to conduct a comparative analysis of the representation of various dimensions of puberty in the novels *The Clown* and *Call Me Ziba*, examining structural and discursive differences in the authors' perspectives on adolescence. The findings indicate that the experience of puberty in these works reflects not only the psychosocial realities of the characters but is also shaped by the author's gender, cultural context, and narrative structure. In *The Clown*, puberty is depicted as an individual, spiritual, and internalized process unfolding within the family and emotional sphere. In contrast, *Call Me Ziba* presents a socially grounded, realistic, and at times political portrayal of puberty, entangled with crises such as identity loss, poverty, and social discrimination.

These differences highlight two distinct approaches to adolescence: a contemplative perspective versus a critical, outward-facing perspective. The dimensions of puberty including physical, emotional, cognitive, economic, spiritual, social, and political are represented asymmetrically and with varying intensity across the

two novels, indicating that Iranian adolescent literature does not follow a uniform pattern in narrating puberty. The depiction of puberty is contingent upon changing cultural and psychological conditions.

The study underscores the importance of multidimensional approaches in the analysis of adolescent literature. Focusing solely on biological or psychological aspects, without considering social and cultural contexts, provides an incomplete understanding of this developmental stage. Moreover, a gender-sensitive analysis proves crucial for comprehending the narrative mechanisms of puberty. The findings offer a foundation for further research on comparisons between male and female authors, the evolution of puberty narratives in adolescent novels, and cross-cultural studies, contributing significantly to theoretical and critical analyses in the field of adolescent literature .

Keywords: Adolescence, Young Adult novel, *The Clown*, Maturation, Young, *Call Me Ziba*

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