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Content Analysis of the Sixth-Grade Elementary Social Studies Textbook from the Perspective of Attention to Components of Citizenship Skills within the Developmental Process

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The present study aimed to analyze the degree of attention paid to components of interactive citizenship skills in the sixth-grade elementary social studies textbook and to determine the relative importance of each component within the developmental process.

Methods: This applied research employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative) using content analysis. The research population included the entire sixth-grade social studies textbook (14th edition, 2025). The units of analysis comprised texts, images, activities, and worksheets. An analytical framework based on five components of interactive skills (civic participation, responsibility, cooperation, respect for differences, and communication skills) was designed. Quantitative data were analyzed using Shannon entropy.

Results: The findings indicated that the component "Respect for Differences" had the highest weight (0.398), while "Responsibility" had the lowest weight (0.093). Other components were ranked as follows: Cooperation (0.219), Civic Participation (0.176), and Communication Skills (0.133). Qualitative analysis revealed that the textbook emphasizes recognizing differences and cooperation within predefined frameworks, while skills related to active agency, constructive criticism, and public participation received less attention.

Conclusions: Overall, the textbook promotes a model of a "passive, ethics-oriented citizen" more than an "active, critical citizen." Revising the content to incorporate practical components of civic participation, social responsibility, and complex communication skills is essential for educating active citizens within their developmental journey.

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Introduction

Textbooks play an irreplaceable role beyond transmitting basic knowledge; they are instrumental in realizing the "hidden curriculum" and shaping the cognitive, attitudinal, and identity structures of future generations (Apple, 2004). Among these, elementary social studies textbooks serve as a pivotal arena for political and cultural socialization, bearing the responsibility of transmitting norms, values, and competencies related to citizenship (Banks, 2008). However, in a world facing complex challenges such as multiculturalism, social divides, and the need for participatory governance, traditional models of citizenship education—which predominantly emphasize rote learning, conformity, and individual duty—are inadequate for the needs of evolving societies. The new paradigm emphasizes nurturing "active citizens": individuals who are not only aware of their rights and responsibilities but are also equipped with advanced interactive skills to participate effectively, critically, and responsibly in public spheres within democratic and pluralistic societies (Council of Europe, 2018; Schulz et al., 2018).

These "interactive citizenship competencies," central to participatory and justice-oriented models of citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004), enable individuals to engage dynamically and constructively with "the other" and social structures. Based on the research literature, key components of this construct are defined as follows: Civic Participation (conscious and voluntary engagement in collective decision-making processes), Social Responsibility (a sense of commitment and accountability extending beyond the individual sphere towards the social system and environment), Cooperation (the ability to engage in effective teamwork to achieve common goals), Respect for Differences (active acceptance of diversity and the ability to interact constructively with different cultures, religions, and viewpoints), and Complex Communication Skills (including reasoning, persuasion, active listening, and dialogue management) (Hoskins & Mascherini, 2009; OECD, 2018).

The educational system of the Islamic Republic of Iran, relying on its specific theoretical foundations, presents a hybrid model of the "ideal citizen," intertwining components of religious identity, ethics, nationality, and responsibility. High-level documents and the official national curriculum outline the educational aim as nurturing individuals who are "faithful, responsible, knowledgeable, and capable, committed to Islamic-Iranian ethics, and eager for the country's progress" (Social Studies Curriculum Guide, 2019). The sixth-grade social studies textbook, as the

primary executive document of this program, is tasked with embodying these aims through text, images, and activities. However, the core research problem lies in this question: Is the content representation in this textbook aligned with the objective necessities of fostering active citizens in today's complex world? More precisely, what is the relationship between the declared objectives and the "practical priorities" reflected in the content?

Although previous studies (e.g., Rezaei et al., 2019; Ghorbani & Mirzaei, 2021) have examined aspects such as citizenship rights or social skills in textbooks, a clear gap exists in research that employs a quantitative-mathematical method (like Shannon entropy) to systematically analyze the content of the sixth-grade textbook with a focused emphasis on the components of "interactive citizenship skills." This study aims to address this gap by seeking to answer the following main research question: To what extent and with what priority does the sixth-grade elementary social studies textbook address the five components of interactive citizenship skills (civic participation, responsibility, cooperation, respect for differences, and communication skills)? Answering this question not only provides an objective picture of the hidden orientations within the curriculum but can also serve as a basis for informed content revision aimed at strengthening the foundations of active citizenship in Iran's education system.

Material and Methods

This applied research employed a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative). The main method was content analysis within a descriptive-analytical research design.

Participants and Sampling: The research population was the entire sixth-grade elementary social studies textbook (14th edition, 2025, published by the Textbook Publishing Company). The entire book was analyzed as the sample (census method).

Instruments and Materials: The primary material was the textbook itself. The data collection tool was a content analysis checklist designed by the researchers based on the theoretical framework of interactive citizenship skills. This checklist included five main components and their operational indicators (see Table 1).

Table 1. Content Analysis Framework Based on Components of Interactive Citizenship Skills

Component	Operational Definition	Sample Indicators
Civic Participation	Active involvement in community, school, and neighborhood affairs through decision-making, collective action, and oversight.	Suggesting solutions, participating in student council elections, surveys, collaborating on community projects.
Responsibility	A sense of commitment and accountability towards oneself, others, society, and environment.	Completing tasks, obeying rules, conserving resources, helping others, feeling responsible for the community.
Cooperation	Effective teamwork to achieve a common goal.	Conducting group projects, dividing tasks, helping teammates, compromising for team progress.
Respect for Differences	Acceptance, tolerance, and valuing of cultural, ethnic, religious, and ideological differences.	Learning about Iranian ethnicities and other nations, avoiding mockery, listening to different opinions.
Communication Skills	Ability to establish effective verbal and non-verbal communication, including expression, listening, and dialogue.	Expressing personal opinion, active listening, respectful debate, assertive communication.

Procedure: First, the analytical framework (Table 1) was finalized. Then, two independent coders analyzed the entire textbook content (including texts, images, activities, and worksheets) based on this framework. The unit of analysis was the thematic sentence or visual element representing any of the indicators.

Data Analysis: For quantitative analysis, after calculating the frequency of each component, the Shannon entropy method was used to determine the weight and importance of each component. The steps included: forming the frequency matrix, normalizing the matrix, calculating entropy (E_j), calculating the degree of deviation (d_j), and finally calculating the weight (W_j) for each component. Inter-coder reliability was assessed using Scott's Pi coefficient, which was 0.87, indicating satisfactory agreement. Qualitative analysis was performed concurrently to provide a deeper interpretation and contextual understanding of the quantitative findings.

Results

Quantitative Findings (Shannon Entropy): After coding and forming the frequency matrix, the five steps of Shannon entropy were computed. The final weights of the components are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of Component Weight Calculation Using Shannon Entropy Method

Component	Entropy (E_j)	Degree of Deviation (d_j)	Final Weight (W_j)
Civic Participation	0.951	0.049	0.176
Responsibility	0.974	0.026	0.093
Cooperation	0.939	0.061	0.219
Respect for Differences	0.889	0.111	0.398
Communication Skills	0.963	0.037	0.133

As shown in Table 2, the component "Respect for Differences" has the highest weight (0.398), making it the most emphasized component in the textbook. "Responsibility" has the lowest weight (0.093). The ranking of components based on importance is as follows:

1. Respect for Differences (0.398)
2. Cooperation (0.219)
3. Civic Participation (0.176)
4. Communication Skills (0.133)
5. Responsibility (0.093)

Qualitative Findings: The qualitative analysis of the content, aligned with the quantitative results, revealed the following:

- **Respect for Differences:** This component is mainly addressed through *introducing* and *describing* the diversity of Iranian ethnicities, Islamic architecture, and ancient civilizations. The approach is largely cognitive ("knowing about") rather than skill-based ("interacting with").
- **Cooperation:** Emphasis is placed on structured group work within classroom activities (e.g., "do this activity in groups"). However, deeper skills necessary for effective cooperation—such as conflict resolution, distributed leadership, and collaborative decision-making—are not taught.
- **Civic Participation:** This concept is narrowly defined and often reduced to "obedience" (following school/class rules) and "harmony within the family." Participation in broader public affairs, collective problem-solving, or civic initiative is scarcely present.
- **Communication Skills:** While "dialogue" and "expressing opinion" are mentioned, they are often framed as a means for sharing pre-approved information or personal feelings. Skills for critical debate, persuasive argumentation, and negotiating differing viewpoints are not developed.
- **Responsibility:** The focus is predominantly on *personal* and *moral* responsibility (e.g., doing homework, being tidy). The concept of *social responsibility*—entailing critical awareness of social issues and a sense of agency to address them—is marginal.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the sixth-grade social studies textbook promotes an image of a "passive, ethics-oriented citizen" more than that of an "active, critical citizen." The textbook's clear prioritization of "Respect for Differences" and "Cooperation"—though valuable in themselves—signifies an emphasis on social cohesion, harmony, and collective identity from a top-down perspective. This aligns with the overarching goals of Iran's national curriculum, which seeks to foster a unified national and religious identity (Social Studies Curriculum Guide, 2019). In contrast, components essential for independent civic agency and critical engagement—namely "Civic Participation," "Social Responsibility," and "Complex Communication Skills"—are afforded significantly less weight. This imbalance suggests that the textbook functions more as a transmitter of established norms and cultural knowledge than as a tool for empowering students with the skills to analyze, question, and actively participate in their society. This finding is consistent with previous analyses of Iranian textbooks that noted a prescriptive and transmission-oriented approach (Ghorbani & Mirzaei, 2021; Rezaei et al., 2019).

The marginalization of active citizenship skills creates a gap between the stated educational objectives of nurturing "capable and responsible" individuals and the implicit curriculum that favors conformity and adaptation. While fostering social harmony is important, an education system aiming to prepare citizens for the complexities of the 21st century must also equip them with the competencies for participatory democracy, critical thinking, and responsible social action, as emphasized in international frameworks (Council of Europe, 2018; OECD, 2018).

The use of the Shannon entropy method in this study provided a precise, mathematical ranking of the components, moving beyond simple frequency counts to reveal the *latent priorities* embedded in the curriculum. This methodological approach offers curriculum developers a clear, objective picture of where emphasis lies and where strategic additions are needed.

Conclusion

In summary, this mixed-methods content analysis reveals that the current sixth-grade social studies textbook primarily cultivates a model of citizenship centered on passive acceptance of differences, cooperative compliance, and individual moral duty. To align with the necessities of educating active citizens for a complex, interconnected world, a fundamental revision of the content is recommended. This revision should intentionally and practically incorporate skill-based activities

related to civic participation, foster a sense of critical social responsibility, and develop complex communication and dialogue skills. Future research could extend this analysis to the entire social studies textbook series across elementary grades and investigate the impact of such content on students' actual civic attitudes and behaviors.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Ethics statement

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by ethics committee of University of Zanjan.

Author contributions

All authors contributed to the study conception and design, material preparation, data collection and analysis. All authors contributed to the article and approved the submitted version.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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