



THE SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LOW RATE OF BOOK READING IN IRAN

Mohammad Taghi SABZEHEI^{1*}, Ali MORADI²

¹ Assistant Professor of Razi University,

² Associate Professor of Sociology, Eslam Abad Branch, Islamic Azad University, Eslam Abad-e-gharb, Iran.

* Corresponding Author

Email: MOH_SABZEHEI@YAHOO.COM

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this article is to identify the dimensions and causes of low rate of book reading in contemporary Iran. This article based on the theory of modernization. This study adopts library study as well as secondary analysis of some field researches. The results of the research show that despite the growth of urbanization, literacy, higher education and the growth of the middle class, book reading in Iran has not increased significantly over the past decades. The main reason for the low rate of book reading in Iran is the uneven development or the gap between economic growth and the growth of public culture over the past decades. However, there are other reasons for the low rate of book reading, such as the weak cultural capital of families, the weakness of the general and high education system in the promotion of reading, illiteracy and the lack of literacy of about 40% of Iran's population, the lack of the formation of a community of readers, the lack of books and general libraries and weak cultural and literary institutions.

Keywords: Cultural Problem, Book Reading, Per Capita Reading, Habit of Studying, Library.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, Iran has developed in the process of modernization regarding its various dimensions, such as urbanization, middle class' growth, literacy and the growth of the number of students in proportion to population per capita. According to the Population and Housing Census in 2015-2016 (Persian year 1395- from April 2015 –march 2016), 74 percent of the population of Iran is urban; the amount is anticipated to increase to 77 percent in 2020-2021 (Persian year 1400). 87.60 percent of the population of Iran (90.87 percent of the urban population and 78.52 percent of the rural population) were literate in 2016; in addition, 4.400.000 students were studying at 2600 Iranian universities in 2016 (Report of Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran, 2016). The student per capita has been around 5505 for every 100,000 in population which is close to that of developed countries. Urban population's growth, bureaucratic growth and the growth of universities have led to the growth of the middle class. According to figures provided by President Deputy Management Development and Human Capital, the number of government employees was about 3,985,488, in 2014, moreover; about 4.5 million people were retired and pensioner. In general, there has been about 8.5 million wage-earning households in Iran in 2014 (Report of President Deputy Management Development and Human Capital, 2014). The household size in Iran is about 4 million people ($5.8 \times 3 = 5.25$); thus, about 5.25 million people of Iran's population, or about a third of the country's population, are wage earners or pensioners and with a deficit of even 5 Million as labor-wage earners and retired workers, it can be concluded that around 20,000,000

new middle-class people have been formed only in the public sector of Iran. According to modernization theories, including Daniel Lerner's theory, urbanization and the growth of literacy should lead to psychological and social changes in individuals and the society, therefore; based on the process of modernization, we are expected to see the growth of book reading in Iran. However, the statistics do not show such a link between urbanization, literacy growth and university education, the growth of the middle class and the increase of the level of book reading. One of the characteristics of today's Iranian society is the low book reading. Examining the dimensions of low rate of book reading in Iran, the issue can be considered as a cultural one, with indicators such as low per capita reading, the lack of public libraries, low number of books and the decrease in published books. The statistics show that Iranian society reads books less than ever. According to statistics from various cultural centers, the average daily reading in Iran is less than 13 minutes per day, which is lower than most of the neighboring countries as well as more economically deprived countries than Iran; half of the population of the country does not read books at all, and the other half reads just one book a year. While the Japanese people read about 47 books each year, and 65 percent of South Koreans are readers. Books were the 23rd consumer goods of the Iranian households in the 1991, declining to 55th in 2014; the book count decreased from 11,363 in 1979 to 2073 in 2014 (see www.parse.com). Since reading is one of the factors and indicators of cultural growth in each country, the low book reading level of Iranians is a cultural problem and an obstacle to comprehensive and sustainable development; therefore, reading and its evaluation are very important.

METHODS

This study adopts library study as well as secondary analysis of some field research. The most important authentic documents of Iran's national surveys are about reading books having been analyzed secondarily. Furthermore, the results of some authoritative research on book reading have been analyzed through meta-analysis as well.

Theory

In this article, the weakness of book reading in Iran is analyzed based on the theory of modernization and the opinions of three classical and contemporary scholars. One of the scholars of this view is William Agberner, who proposes the theory of "cultural lag". In Agberner's opinion, different parts of a society are interdependent, and a disorder is created when they change at varying rates. Therefore, changes in material culture are accepted much faster than changes in immaterial culture (Rubington and Weinberg, 2010). Neil Smelser, a renowned thinker of modernization, believes that economics, politics, religion, family and social classes undergo some changes in the developed countries as a result of modernization of societies; however, their changes are not synchronous and irregular in the course of modernization; this leads to a social disorder (Smelser, 1968: 129). A kind of precedence and posteriority is created in the course of modernization, which keeps societies from systematic development and causes them a crisis and disarray. Smelser likens the status of the developing society to an enormous animal that walks with moving each one of its organs; sometimes it moves its organs synchronically and sometimes asynchronously. Samuel Eisenstadt believes that the tendency to change is inherent in all human societies, but the specific processes of change in each society are closely related to the specific features of the institutional structure of that society, and therefore the speed and direction of changes from one society to another is different (see



Eisenstadt, 1964: 49-55). He explains the process of changes in terms of distinction. In Eisenstadt's view, the specialized institutional contexts are separated and, at the same time, interdependent in the process of modernization. But this process does not necessarily lead to changes in the entire sub-systems. Although differentiation is the main characteristic of the process of change in the society, it may lead to other anti-technological and developmental processes in certain circumstances such as "unbalanced development", "regressive", "De differentiation" or "collapse" (see: Eisenstadt, 1963).

Dimensions of the problem

Low book reading in Iran can be studied from a variety of dimensions; here we confine it to four main dimensions: per capita reading, reading ratio, the number of published books, and the lack of books in libraries.

Per capita reading

The most general definition of per capita reading is the average study period of one person per day. However, this definition is not always true, and instead, the number of books or the number of pages read in a day can be used to define the per capita reading. One of the important dimensions of the book reading problem is the low per capita reading (printed and non-academic) in the country. Six national surveys of Iranian cultural indicators have been conducted from 1974 to 2011, in which reading is one of the indicators studied. The first survey was carried out in 1974, the second in 1999, and four other surveys were conducted in 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 respectively. As you can observe in Table 1, per capita reading in Iran varies between 7 and 18 minutes which is a very low amount when compared to the international rates.



Table 1. Per capita reading and reading ratios based on national measurements conducted from 1974 to 2011

No.	The name of the survey	execution time	Executor's Name	Statistical population	Sample size	Per capita reading	Reading ratio (%)
1	Cultural tendencies and social attitudes in Iran	1974	Center for Thinking and Research of the Radio and Television Organization	The total of 15 year olds and above in urban and rural areas	5000 people	Not reported	28
2	Iranian Cultural Behaviors	1999	National Design Bureau of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance	The total of 6 year olds and above in 28 provinces	13976 families with a population of 65,440 people	52 minutes a week (7:43 PM per day)	43
3	National survey of Indices of Public Culture	2008	Secretariat of Public Culture of the Country	The total of people over 12 in urban and rural areas	2029 people	18:00 PM per day (considering reading the Qur'an)	
4	A survey of indices of public culture in the country	2009	Secretariat of Public Culture of the Country	The total of people over 12 in urban	17096 people	108 minutes a week (15:26 a day)	52.7

				and rural areas			
5	A survey of indices of public culture in the country	2010	Secretariat of Public Culture of the Country	The total of people over 12 in urban and rural areas	17,000 people	118 minutes a week (16:51)	53.3
6	A survey of indices of public culture in the country	2011	Secretariat of Public Culture of the Country	The total of people over 12 in urban and rural areas		91 minutes a week (13:00 minutes per day)	47.8

Source: General Culture Scheme of the Country

The rate of per capita reading in Iran (the average of the four surveys is about 12.5 minutes per day) is much lower than that of other developed countries. According to the International Center for spending time, the following results have been obtained from a study on the extent of reading in 22 countries in 2010:

Table 2. Ranking the rate of reading books obtained from the International Center for Time spending time in 2010

Countr	Per capita reading (min)	Countr	Per capita reading (min)
Finland	46	Poland	25
Estonia	36	Slovenian	22
Germany	34	Belgium	21
Netherlands	31	France	20
Norway	39	Australia	20
Sweden	31	Japan	17
Latvia	26	Italy	17

Reading ratio

The high proportion of non-book-readers' population in the country is one of the characteristic features of the problem of low reading in Iran. As it is seen in Table 3, half of the literate population of the country does not read books at all. Although the ratio of reading in the past four decades has increased from 28% in 1974 to 47.8% in 2011, still around half of the literate population of the country is not reading at all. For example, the question of reading non-academic books has been asked in the survey of indices of public culture in Iran in 2011; the answer to this question has resulted in the identification of readers' ratio according to their characteristics. (Report of the Council for the Public Culture of Iran, 2012). According to the results of this survey, 47.8 percent of the total number of literate students in the country in 2011 read non-academic books, whereas; 50 percent of the subjects did not read any non-academic books. According to Table 3. 27,418,884 (47.8%) of the total literacy population of the country read books; this number increased to only 4% over the past two decades. According to these figures, 28,680,841 (50%) of the literate population have not read any books.

Table 3. The population of readers and non-readers of the whole country in 2011

	Reading ratios	Estimated population of readers (people)
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Readers' population	47.8	88,427,418
Non-readers' population	50	28,680,841
Other (unspecified)	2.2	1,26,1957
Total	100	57,361,682

Source: Report of Public Culture Council of Iran, 2012

If we add the number of book readers (28680841) to the number of the uneducated population (9719712), we will have. 38, 400,553 people, indicating that about 70% of the population of 6 year olds and above do not read books at all (<http://donya-e-eqtesad.com/news/854824>).

Book Count

Another aspect of the issue of low book reading in Iran is the lack of circulation of published books and the declining trend of publishing. The circulation of books in Iran is very low compared to other countries and even the neighboring countries being poorer than Iran, and it is more unfortunate that the trend has been decreasing over the past four decades. The circulation of books in Iran has decreased to 500 copies in 2011 comparing to 3000 copies in the 70's. while the population of the country has increased by about two and a half times between these years; from about 33,000,000 in 1978 to 80,000,000 people in 2016 (<https://fa.wikipedia.org/wiki/> and <http://donya-e-eqtesad.com/news/854824>).

The number of books in libraries

Another dimension of the cultural issue of reading in Iran is related to the few number of books stored in libraries. According to the Institute of Public Libraries, the total number of books in Iranian libraries is 39,089,258, which is very small compared to the number of books in just one of the libraries in the developed countries.



Table 4. The number of books in the world's top 10 libraries in terms of book stores

List	Library name	Number (million volumes)	List	Library name	Number (million volumes)
1	American National Convention Library	151	6	National Library of the Parliament of Japan	35.6
2	British Library	150	7	Royal Danish Library	33
3	National Library of New York	51.3	8	National Library of China	31.2
4	Russian State Library	43	9	French National Library	31
5	National Library of Russia	36.5	10	Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences	20.5

Source: www.scipost.ir

According to the proposed criteria of the International Union of Librarianship Associations, there should be at least one and a half book in public libraries in developing countries per literate person. Based on this criterion, given that 85 percent of the Iranian population (80 million) was literate in 2017, there should be more than 100 million books in Iranian libraries. Since the total number of books in Iran's libraries is about 40,000,000; therefore 60,000,000 books is needed in Iran's public libraries.

Reasons

There are a lot of reasons for low book reading in Iran and they can be argued in researches. Many of the reasons being identified for the low reading in Iran are the effects of other causes and have a limited impact on the degree of reading in the country. However, there are other reasons that are more important being discussed in this article.

- One of the main reasons for low book reading in Iran is the weak cultural capital of Iranian families. According to various surveys, there is a relationship between the amount of parents' and children's reading. But for many reasons, parents read less in Iran and half of them do not read at all, or do not encourage their children read books, so that their children are not much familiar with books before entering school and university. The results of a research on university students show that 47.6% of the students were not much familiar with books before entering the university (Torkan Tabaar, 2005: 13). On the other hand, radio and television, cable, computers and, more recently, various computer and mobile social networks fill up a lot of parents' leisure time in Iranian families becoming serious rivals for books. According to researches on the ways of spending leisure time in Iran, the Iranian people spend their free time by watching TV (22.4%), meeting relatives (1/6) and resting in their houses (3.5). Only 0.1% of Iranian families consider books as a priority in their leisure time (Abdi and Goudarzi, 2009: 38). The results of a research on teens in Tehran show that 47.4% of adolescents' watch television, 13.7% read books, 12.5% hang out with friends, and 11% go to parks, 10.8% play computer games to spend their leisure time. 3/4% referred to other items (Mir Hosseini and Mohammadi, 2012: 29).
- Education office in all countries, including in Iran, is an important institution for promoting the development of reading literacy. However, it suffers from lots of problems in the field of reading, undermining its role in education, encouragement and promotion of reading. Some of the problems of education system in the field of reading books are the lack of books and libraries in schools, the lack of comprehensive educational policy on promoting and encouraging reading in schools, single text teaching method and the presence of non-reader teachers. According to the results of several field studies, Iranian school libraries have many failings, including a small number of books, the low attendance of students at school libraries, the out of date information of libraries, low budget, material failures such as the lack of study rooms and adequate reservoir as well as the lack of manpower (Khanifir et al., 2014: 91). According to the statistics of the modernization, development and equipping organization of Iranian schools, an average of 32.9% of the schools do not have any libraries. While in Sweden only 6% of schools do not have libraries. In Sweden, there are 20 volumes of books for each student and in Japan there are 14.8 books in schools. However, there is 1 book for each student in elementary schools of Iran, 1.5 books per student in middle schools and 2/24 books per student in high schools (Zare, 1999: 24). Another problem is the training of teachers who neither have had the libraries nor the habit of reading. Teachers who are not studying themselves cannot create the habit of studying in students.
- Another important reason explaining low book reading in Iran is the problems of higher education in terms of reading. Iranian universities do not encourage students to read books. In a survey on the status of students' reading, 51% of the respondents stated that the facilities of libraries are low and 45% of them believed that the professors do not motivate student to read non-academic books (Razavi and Rahim Dost, 2007: 60). In addition, the results of another survey on university students show that, in students' views, the role of the universities (including professors, curriculums, classmates, libraries, extracurricular activities and scientific and cultural associations) in terms of encouraging them to read was in an average level, and the reading rate of students dropped compared to before entering university (Razavi and Rahim Dost, 2007: 60). There are reasons for the failure of the



universities to promote reading books; first, the educational system of the universities of Iran is based on theoretical and methodological content, note-taking and having single books are still prevalent, and the evaluation system is based on exams not encouraging further researches. Second, university libraries are not equipped like schools. Third, universities do not have a comprehensive, precise and transparent policy to support, promote and increase reading. Fourth, in recent decades, university policies have been based on quantitative growth of students and over the last decade, it has led the way to privatization and attention to degrees. The results of a survey on the amount of reading at a university unit in Iran show that non-academic reading rate among students at this university is 5.62 hours per week (Adibizadeh and Shoja, 2008: 152). Another study, conducted by the Center for Thinking of Students on Tehran Universities' students in 2003, showed that about 62% of the subjects studied less than an hour a day. (Ashrafirizy, 2003). The results of another study show the mean of reading among university students is a minimum of 52 minutes and a maximum of 3 hours per week (Fazeli, 2007).

- Illiteracy and low literacy: One of the other reasons for low book reading in Iran is illiteracy which includes a large part of Iran's population. Based on the results of the census in 2011, the number of 6-year-olds and older in the country was 67,686,867 of which 57,361,682 people (84.6% of the population) were literate and 10,325,194 people (15.4% of the population) were illiterate (a selection of the results of general census of population and housing, 2011: 29). However, in Iran, in addition to the illiterate population, there are a large number of low literate people. According to the Iranian General Population and Housing Census in 2011, about 21 million people over the age of 17 have been illiterate and low-literate (with elementary education). There were 9,300,000 people with middle school education. A total of about 30,260,000 people - out of the total population of the 17 year olds and older- didn't have received their diploma.
- Another reason for low book reading in Iran is the lack of public libraries. In comparison with other developed or even less developed countries, the number of public libraries in Iran is much lower than its population. According to the International Conference on Librarianship and Information, there should be a public library for every 3 to 5 thousand people. If we set the minimum standard of 5,000 people, in 2016 (in which the population of the country was about 80 million) we would need about 16,000 libraries in Iran. While the total number of public libraries in Iran has been 3177 library in 2014, according to the statistics of the institution of public libraries, it means that there were a shortages of 12800 libraries in Iran. Although the impact of the lack of public libraries on the weakening of per capita reading is inconvertible, the demand for using public libraries in the country is also very low compared to other countries. In Iran, only 3% of the people of Iran are members of public libraries, while in advanced countries, 50% of the population is members of public libraries. According to the statistics of 2014, 2,000,000 people (out of the population of the country) were members of the public libraries.
- The lack of formation of book readers' community in Iran is another important reason for lower level of per capita reading in the country. A community of readers is not yet formed in today's society of Iran, and still there are very few writers who earn a living by writing. The number of professional book readers in Iran are less than 100,000, i.e. the members of both professional readers and professional purchasers. If we look at the history of



Enlightenment in Europe, it is observed that in that era (1715-1775) a community of readers was formed from the middle classes and the bourgeoisie who were thirsty for new knowledge and spent a significant portion of their money to buy books. Institutions such as science academies, halls, literary and cultural associations have contributed greatly to the growth of reading culture and laid the foundations for today's reading of Europe (see Himilton, 1992). Unfortunately, in Iran, cultural institutions and foundations and academies of science are very weak and do not perform their duties well enough in this regard.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that per capita reading, reading ratio, book count and the number of books in libraries in Iran are lower than those of the international standards and in some cases than neighboring countries or less developed countries. The weakness of reading in Iran is a social or cultural problem that has one main reason and several secondary causes. The main reason for the weakness of reading in Iran is the creation of a gap in the "book reading" compared to urban growth, literacy growth, quantitative increase in higher education and the growth of the middle class in Iran over the past few decades. In spite of this, other reasons include the weakness of the families' cultural capital, the weakness of the general education system, illiteracy and low literacy of about 40% of the population of Iran, the lack of formation of a community for readers, the lack of books and public libraries, and the weakness of cultural institutions and literary associations.

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