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# A Critique of the Content of the Textbooks of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Turkey and Afghanistan

## ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted with the aim of critically examining the materials and content presented regarding the countries of Turkey and Afghanistan in the textbooks of the Islamic Republic of Iran, using a library-based method. To achieve the objectives of the research, the sixth-grade social studies textbooks from the five years leading up to 2023 were reviewed. For data collection, all the materials and content presented in the textbooks, as well as independent sources and teacher's guides, were examined. The results showed that different indicators were used to explain the content related to the two countries, which were then compared in the final worksheets; however, the criteria and standards for comparing and examining the countries were not specified. Moreover, the comparison of the two countries—Turkey, as the western neighbor, and Afghanistan, as the eastern neighbor—is fundamentally questionable. The findings further revealed that, considering the cultural, social, climatic, geographical, political, and even governmental structures, the two countries need to be introduced and compared accordingly. Therefore, it can be concluded that these two countries differ significantly in general indicators such as geopolitical position, per capita income, access to the sea, popular culture, type of governance, international status, mineral resources, and access to oil. Climate also represents a meaningful point of divergence. The neglect of the aforementioned indicators has weakened Afghanistan's position in comparison with Turkey and has generally created a less positive perception of Afghanistan, a friendly neighboring country, among students, while Turkey is portrayed as having a higher status.

**Keywords:** Turkey, Afghanistan, comparison, neighbors of Iran

## Introduction

One of the most important topics raised in the textbooks of students in every country is the introduction of its neighboring countries. In Iran's textbooks as well, an effort has been made to introduce Iran's neighbors to students through various lessons and textbooks. In these presentations, comparison has been used as a form of creativity to make the content more effective and memorable (1).

However, not all neighboring countries have been introduced, and in the comparisons made, influential conventional indicators have not been respected. This selective introduction, focusing on one western neighbor (Turkey) and one eastern neighbor (Afghanistan), has shaped student perceptions in such a way that Turkey appears to occupy a higher status, while war-torn Afghanistan with its unstable conditions is devalued. This has indirectly contributed to the belittlement of nearly half a million Afghan students enrolled in Iranian schools during the academic year 2022–2023 (2, 3).

We must not forget that Iran, as one of the most significant hosts of Afghan migrants, has mobilized all its facilities for this war-stricken yet resilient community. Nevertheless, in terms of content presentation in textbooks, the recognition and appreciation of Afghanistan as a friendly neighbor has not been given the same level of attention as countries such as Turkey and Azerbaijan (4). The present article seeks to provide a fair critique of the current situation and to propose recommendations for improvement.

The method of inquiry is purely library-based, relying on documentary research in written sources about Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey (5).

**Main Research Question:** Has the content and information related to Turkey and Afghanistan been accurately presented in the textbooks?

**Hypothesis:** It appears that the material and content provided have not been able to properly convey the intended concepts of the authors.

## Theoretical Framework

The indicators for analyzing and comparing the two neighboring countries of Afghanistan and Turkey can be defined as follows (6):

1. Geopolitical position
2. Access to the sea
3. Mineral resources
4. Access to oil
5. Culture
6. History
7. Regional and international status
8. Type of governance
9. Historical and religious identity

In such comparisons, the relative positioning of countries can be decisive. Access to the sea facilitates large-scale trade, and this remains one of Turkey's most important developmental indicators (1).

## Geopolitical Position

Afghanistan and Turkey are located on the eastern and western borders of Iran and have been introduced to Iranian students merely because of their geographic proximity. To clarify this issue, Afghanistan is situated in the heart of Asia without access to the sea, relying on Iran and Pakistan as its nearest maritime outlets to reach the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean. Through these routes, Afghanistan can benefit from maritime connections (5).

In contrast, Turkey enjoys access to the sea on all sides, occupying a privileged international position. Its control of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits further enhances this strategic significance (4).

In terms of area and population, Turkey again enjoys superiority. With a territory of 783,562 square kilometers, Turkey ranks thirty-fifth in the world, with a population exceeding 85 million, nearly double that of Afghanistan, which occupies an area of 652,860 square kilometers and has a population of around 40.5 million (1, 3).

### Mineral Resources

Both Turkey and Afghanistan possess considerable mineral reserves. Turkey is especially rich in iron ore, chromite, bauxite, coal, and copper, while Afghanistan holds significant deposits of lithium, iron ore, copper, gemstones, and other minerals. However, insecurity and weak infrastructure make resource exploitation in Afghanistan highly challenging. In contrast, Turkey has been able to utilize its resources more effectively, contributing to its economic growth and superior standing (2, 4).

### International Position

Turkey is located at the strategic crossroads connecting Asia and Europe, serving as a crucial energy transit hub for Europe. This provides Turkey with a much more favorable position compared to Afghanistan. Alongside Iran and Saudi Arabia, Turkey is considered one of the three major regional powers influencing and shaping the Middle East, whereas Afghanistan lacks such a status (5).

### Culture, History, and Governance

Although both Turkey and Afghanistan are introduced as Islamic countries whose populations are predominantly Muslim, the interpretations of Islam differ significantly. Turkey presents itself as a Muslim-majority but secular-governed state, while Afghanistan has often projected a harsher, militant image of Islam, further widening the cultural and ideological gap (7).

Culturally, Afghanistan may be considered an extension of ancient Iran, inheriting its historical richness. Turkey, on the other hand, draws on the legacy of the Ottoman Empire, which distinguishes its cultural identity from Afghanistan's (4).

In terms of governance, Turkey has a system recognized internationally and broadly accepted within the global community. Afghanistan's current rulers, however, are recognized by only a few countries, creating an additional dimension of disparity (1).

### Review Concerning Turkey

In order to examine the content related to Turkey, we attempted to reproduce the textbook page verbatim within the article and then analyze the materials presented for both countries (1). On page 125 of the *Sixth Grade Social Studies* textbook, two neighbors of the Islamic Republic of Iran are discussed. At the beginning of the chapter, it emphasizes that one eastern and one western neighbor should be studied. If the goal is to examine each country individually and to present the designed content in order to clarify concepts, there is no problem. However, if the intention is to present the concepts through comparison between the two countries, exposing them to judgment by students with limited and classified information, then the choice of countries becomes very significant (2).



**Figure 1. Sixth-Grade Social Studies (2023–2024)**

The textbook states:

“Turkey has experienced many ups and downs throughout different historical periods. In ancient times, this land was conquered by the Achaemenid Empire. Turkey was for many years under the influence of the Eastern Roman Empire. Later, during the Islamic period, it became the center of the Ottoman Empire. For this reason, many historical monuments from different eras remain in this country. The Hagia Sophia Mosque, which has now been converted into a museum, and the Sultan Ahmed Mosque in Istanbul are among the magnificent buildings of this country” (1).

The authors begin the introduction of Turkey with this historical preamble, emphasizing that in ancient times the territory was once part of the Persian Achaemenid Empire, later fell under the Eastern Roman Empire, and ultimately, with the rise of Islam, became the center of the Ottoman Empire. After World War I, the Ottoman Empire collapsed, giving rise to modern Turkey, which spiritually regards itself as the heir of the Ottoman Empire. Even contemporary political aspirations toward a renewed Islamic empire under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan are mentioned (4).

The authors, with a subtle tone, highlight that Turkey was once part of Iran and then occupied by the Eastern Roman Empire, but through Islam it rose to the Ottoman Empire. This implicitly underscores Iran’s historical depth and regional power in comparison with Turkey, which is praiseworthy. It also questions Turkey’s current ambition of forming a new Islamic empire, given its contemporary policies, Western alliances, NATO membership, and political-economic ties with colonial powers—factors that are not well received by the peoples of the region. By comparison, Iran holds higher legitimacy among Muslim nations, while Afghanistan, in this discussion, is imagined in the weakest possible position (5).



**Figure 2. Sixth-Grade Social Studies (2023–2024)**



**Figure 4. Sixth-Grade Social Studies (2023–2024)**

The textbook further states:

“Turkey is one of the countries that every year attracts many tourists from around the world, both for its beautiful natural areas and sunny coasts and for its historical monuments. This country gains a significant portion of its income from tourism” (3).

Here the emphasis is placed on Turkey’s tourism industry. Yet, the critical question arises: if Iran also possesses beautiful coastlines, abundant historical monuments, and even better conditions in some respects, why is Iran’s tourism revenue not comparable to Turkey’s? This gap may be understandable for parents who are aware of Iran’s current situation and limitations, but how will a teacher explain this to students? In the teacher’s guide, no adequate explanation is provided for this question, and again Afghanistan, in this context, appears in the weakest possible light (2).

By introducing Turkey’s tourism, an ambiguous issue is raised in students’ minds without providing a logical or proper answer. This is problematic given that Turkey, like Iran, often presents itself as a center of the Muslim world, claiming to defend the interests of Muslims (4).

Continuing with the presentation, the first image selected to represent Turkey is that of Turkish adolescents, unlike the introduction of Pakistan or other countries where images of children were shown. Perhaps this was intended to highlight the age similarity between Turkish adolescents and sixth-grade students in Iran. Two mosques are depicted—the Hagia Sophia and the Sultan Ahmed Mosque—which underline Turkey’s historical depth. However, unlike the depictions of some other countries, no modern scenes of Istanbul or Ankara are provided. The pattern continues with the introduction of cuisine and handicrafts, encouraging students to review further materials in the worksheets (1).

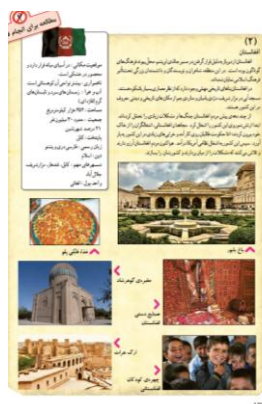
As with other countries, an effort has been made to use comparable indicators in Turkey’s introduction. Yet, there are subtle differences justified by Turkey’s importance relative to other neighbors. For instance, “painted pottery” is introduced as a Turkish handicraft. However, painted pottery is not originally unique to Turkey; it evolved in many civilizations such as China, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India, and Iran. Despite this, the practice is attributed to Turkey, while in fact it has long been common across the region, including Iran. Similarly, Turkish kebab—already familiar to Iranian students—is presented as a national dish specific to Turkey (3).

The two mosque images used in Turkey’s presentation may also create inconsistencies. Whereas one might expect a combination of an Islamic monument and a modern symbol of contemporary Turkey, the authors chose only two mosques. This may reflect a particular vision of Islam in Turkey, distinct from the Iranian conception of Islam, and possibly at odds with the image promoted through Turkish satellite channels accessible to Iranian households. The “real” Turkey, of course, differs substantially from these media portrayals, yet students’ cultural understanding is shaped by both textbook content and external cultural inputs (7).

Finally, unlike the earlier introductions of four other countries, Turkey's introduction features a table providing a concise summary. While creative, this tabular presentation does not compel deeper learning; it encourages only superficial reading. If the material had been presented narratively, as in the earlier cases, it might have had a stronger impact. The authors themselves stress, however, that these contents are not part of student evaluation (6).

### Review of the Content on Afghanistan in the Textbooks

After Turkey, the textbook devotes one page to Afghanistan. In fact, for neighboring countries such as Azerbaijan, Armenia, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan, two pages have been allocated; however, for the introduction of Turkey and Afghanistan, each has been given only one page. The text reads: "From ancient times, because Afghanistan lay on the Silk Road, it has been a junction of diverse cultures. In this region, great poets, writers, and scholars emerged under the influence of Islamic culture. Afghanistan contains important historical monuments that are architecturally magnificent. The Blue Mosque in Mazar-e Sharif, the Bamiyan Valley, and the Minaret of Jam are among the famous historical and scenic sites in this country. For several decades, the people of Afghanistan have endured many wars and hardships. First, the Soviet army occupied this country. Afghan mujahideen expelled the occupiers from their land; however, the Taliban came to power and caused vast destruction. Then the country fell under U.S. military occupation. At present, the people of Afghanistan hope and strive to remove the problems and rebuild their country." (1).



**Figure 4. Sixth-Grade Social Studies (2023–2024), p. 126 (1)**

From ancient times, Afghanistan—by virtue of its position on the Silk Road—has been a meeting place of diverse cultures. "There is no doubt that 'Iran' was the ancient name for all these lands, and that Greater Historical-Cultural Iran encompassed this entire domain. We agree with such an understanding of 'Ancient Iran'; however, there is a difference between that Greater Historical Iran and the present political boundaries of Iran; aligning these two precisely is not correct." In historical terms, Afghanistan became independent with the separation of Herat from Iran; yet, according to historians, it was not consistently "under Iran's canopy," and in the time of Nader Shah or earlier eras, either all of Afghanistan or the city of Herat was at times under Iranian control, or divided among Iranians, Indians, and others, and thus was not conceived as a modern independent state with present political borders. My point to the textbook authors is that they could have used concepts such as Greater Iran or Ancient Iranian Culture in describing Afghanistan—especially given that all the regional countries, particularly Afghanistan and Tajikistan, were part of that Greater Iran. Although they possessed separate political sovereignties at various times, all these countries bear a rich Iranian cultural legacy; more importantly, Iran and Afghanistan both speak Persian, a feature unmatched by a third country in the same way. Therefore, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, and others share a deep cultural commonality with Iran, and Afghanistan has inherited this orientation (4, 7).



The text then refers to the emergence of renowned poets nurtured by Islamic culture; however, it would have been appropriate to highlight the poets shared across the Iranian world since antiquity. Although Afghanistan's modern political independence is less than three centuries old, the cultural commonality between Iran and Afghanistan extends back many centuries. Thus, one could name shared poets from pre-modern Iran and the Islamic periods and, by introducing a few of them, inspire students' literary curiosity—an opportunity that has been overlooked (4).

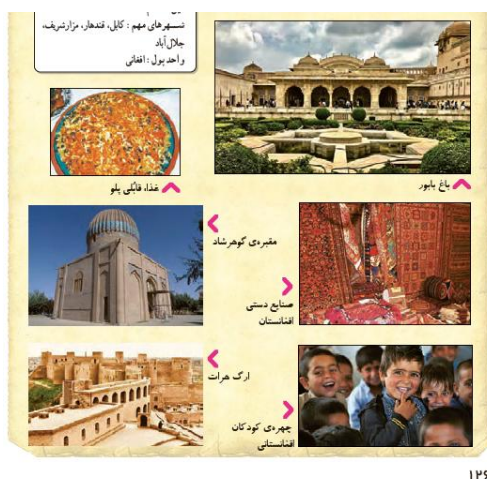
Iranian and Afghan poets of past centuries include figures such as Sanā'ī of Ghazna, Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad of Balkh (Rūmī), and Nāṣer-e Khosrow of Qubādiyān, among others. These poets lived in different historical eras, and their works continue to attract attention and affection among Iranians; they are equally meaningful to the peoples of Iran and Afghanistan and bring the two nations closer together. The textbook states, "In this region, great poets, writers, and scholars emerged under the influence of Islamic culture." Yet it appears that Afghanistan's deeper past is overlooked, which, in effect, dismisses the pre-Islamic heritage of Ancient Iran. Afghanistan long formed a part of Iran's civilizational sphere, and although, for well-known reasons, Afghanistan and other countries were separated from Iran's geography, one cannot detach them—alongside Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, and even Iraq and Bahrain—from the broader Iranian cultural continuum. In this passage, Afghanistan's past is framed primarily under Islamic influence; it would have been preferable, as with other countries, to consider both Afghanistan's history and that of Ancient Iran (4, 7).

For introducing Afghanistan, the text begins with the Silk Road—one of history's principal arteries—of which Afghanistan was one of the caravan halts connecting East and West. Afghanistan, situated amid diverse cultures, thus advanced considerably. However, restricting the account to the Silk Road effectively neglects the grand culture of Ancient Iran and severs Afghanistan culturally from Iran—an omission the authors have, whether intentionally or not, committed (4).

"In Afghanistan there are important historical monuments that are architecturally magnificent. The Blue Mosque in Mazar-e Sharif, the Bamiyan Valley, and the Minaret of Jam are among the famous historical and scenic sites in this country." Of the three sites cited as Afghanistan's historical heritage, two—the Blue (Kabud) Mosque and the Minaret of Jam—belong to the Islamic period; by contrast, the surviving statues and antiquities in the Bamiyan Valley attest to Afghanistan's ancient antiquity—or, more aptly stated, the deep antiquity of the Iranian world—which here has not been sufficiently addressed (7).

"For several decades, the people of Afghanistan have endured many wars and hardships. First, the Soviet army occupied this country. Afghan mujahideen expelled the occupiers from their land; however, the Taliban came to power and caused vast destruction. Then the country fell under U.S. military occupation. At present, the people of Afghanistan hope and strive to remove the problems and rebuild their country." The text proceeds to Afghanistan's contemporary situation—a history marked by war and bloodshed in recent decades: Soviet occupation, then, after September 11, U.S. intervention. The emergence of the Taliban over these decades has made Afghanistan replete with enigmas, war, misfortune, and migration. But does recounting these events serve as a moral lesson for Iranians, or should the student grasp Afghanistan's interests and considerations? (4).

Given the presence of several hundred thousand Afghans among our students and the close educational cooperation between Iran and Afghanistan, is it appropriate to portray Afghanistan only through the lens of war and enmity? Despite the book's publication in 2023–2024, it does not mention Ashraf Ghani's rise to power, the subsequent fall of the nascent republic, or the Taliban's return to power. Either the book, as with other countries, should have refrained from entering into governmental politics; or, upon doing so, it should have treated the matter fairly and with dignity, mindful of the honorable people of Afghanistan. Unfortunately, as with many articles and websites, Afghanistan is again presented primarily in terms of war, bloodshed, and the people's suffering (1, 2).



**Figure 5. Sixth-Grade Social Studies (2023–2024), p. 126 (1)**

As with other countries, the book includes an image of Kabul and the Bābur Gardens as symbols of Afghanistan’s antiquity or modernity; yet neither image fully conveys these intended meanings. The tomb of Gowhar Shād is presented as an Islamic symbol, and Afghan handicrafts are represented by carpets; the image of Afghan children shows them in traditional dress (7).

The Herat Citadel is depicted as a symbol of Afghanistan’s urbanity and civilization—or its historical narrative. Overall, the presentation of this set of contents regarding Afghanistan deserves deeper reflection. Afghanistan should be introduced to Iranian students, as other countries are, in ways that keep the primary-school knowledge base free from the themes of violence, war, poverty, and misery. Afghanistan readily lends itself to more constructive content design, especially since students can encounter the hardships of nations—particularly Afghanistan—in articles, social media, websites, and television, and draw lessons from them (3, 6).

### Comparison of Afghanistan and Turkey

The textbook presents two maps—one of Afghanistan and the other of Turkey—on the same page, placed before the students for comparison, and two activities are provided with several questions to better clarify the lesson’s objectives.

The first activity reads: “*Activity 1. Compare: Which countries and seas does Turkey have access to? What about Afghanistan?*” (2).

The first impression a student receives when viewing the two maps is clear: Turkey has access to the sea, while Afghanistan does not. If the objective is to review one of the natural features of these two countries, this is quite appropriate. However, framing Afghanistan’s entire position in terms of the “geographical compulsion” of being landlocked is justifiable only if the focus remains on the limitation of access to the sea. With this framing, Turkey—with its access to the sea—gains maritime transportation, shipbuilding, food industries, tourism, and the resulting job creation, which provides welfare for its people. Afghanistan, in contrast, lacks such benefits. This is the natural conclusion a student may draw from this question (5).



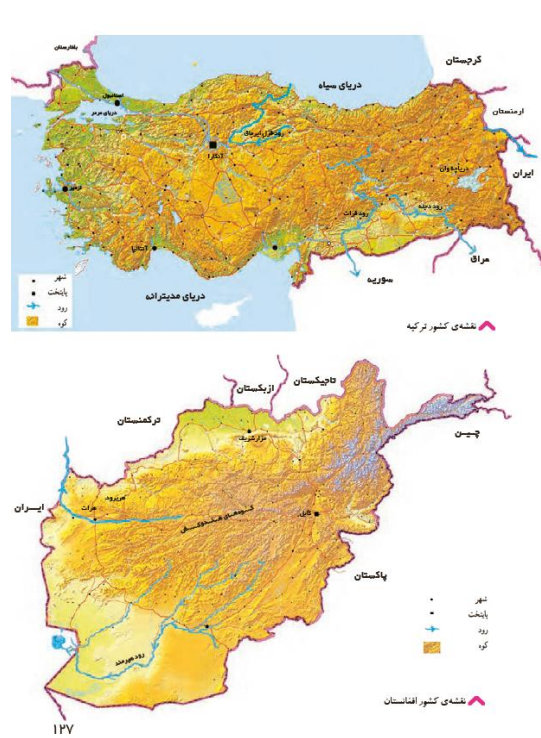


Figure 6. Sixth-Grade Social Studies (2023–2024), p. 126 (1)

Yet one must recall that the Soviet Union, with the ambition of accessing the warm waters of the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, invaded Afghanistan. Afghanistan for many years fell victim to Soviet policies. Today, countries must devise alternative strategies to overcome geographical compulsion or reduce its harms through investment and branding. Examples include countries like Qatar and Singapore, which overcame their limitations through investment in diverse sectors. Similarly, landlocked states such as Serbia, Belgium, Uzbekistan, and Hungary—among more than 45 landlocked countries—have compensated for this limitation through strategic investments (4).

The next question states: *“In your opinion, which country has a better geographical location? Why? Give reasons.”* (1).

This question requires clarification in the teacher’s guide, yet no objectives are explained there. On what basis should the teacher present this question, and according to what indicators should students judge? The first indicator—access to the sea—was already addressed in the previous question. Perhaps land area, the number of rivers, or other natural features could also be considered. However, whether intended or not, this question implicitly compares Afghanistan to Turkey, and due to the lack of strong indicators in Afghanistan’s favor, students will likely conclude that Turkey has the better location. Such comparisons unintentionally weaken Afghanistan’s cultural, economic, political, and social standing, especially in the eyes of nearly 600,000 Afghan students studying in Iranian schools, who constantly encounter such portrayals (3).

Another question reads: *“Compare the climate of Turkey and Afghanistan.”* (1).

Based on the content, students are expected to understand that Turkey’s climate ranges from mild and relatively dry to coastal and mountainous regions with variable conditions, while Afghanistan’s climate is characterized by cold winters and hot summers. Yet the wording used in the text draws students’ attention toward a positive interpretation in favor of Turkey. Comparing the climate of a coastal country with abundant rainfall, forests, plains, and agriculture to a mountainous and arid country prone to destructive floods inevitably results in a conclusion unfavorable to Afghanistan. Although the author’s

intention may have been only to introduce the climates of the two countries, the overall context leads to an unintended negative outcome (4).

The following question is posed: “*Compare the populations of Turkey and Afghanistan.*” (2).

According to the textbook, Turkey has a population of about 73 million, whereas Afghanistan’s is estimated at 30 million. This difference in population is attributed to Turkey’s geographical advantages, job opportunities, favorable climate, and internationally recognized governance, which together provide better welfare for its people. In contrast, Afghanistan, with an estimated population of 30 million, also has several million nationals living abroad as migrants—around 5 million in Iran alone, many of whom are schoolchildren. Therefore, even population comparisons distort the situation, implicitly portraying Afghanistan as weaker. For students, numbers become decisive indicators; thus, the ratio of 73 million to 30 million naturally makes Turkey appear superior (6).

Another question asks: “*What similarities do Turkey and Afghanistan have?*” (1).

This question seems meaningless when based only on the maps presented, since the maps reveal no obvious similarities. The teacher’s guide provides no clarification. If the intention is for students to look beyond the text, possible similarities might be that both countries are Muslim, both have mountains and rivers, and both have historic cities. However, in the limited scope of the textbook, the only meaningful similarity is Islam. Even this, however, is problematic, since the expression of Islam in Turkey and Afghanistan is profoundly different, and careless treatment of this point can confuse students about the cultural and religious identity of each country (7).

The textbook also highlights differences:

1. Different languages (Persian in Afghanistan, Turkish in Turkey).
2. Different climates.
3. Larger population in Turkey.
4. Tourism is flourishing in Turkey.
5. Turkey has a more cohesive government.
6. Afghan girls are denied education.

Such meaningful differences are numerous, but the question arises: what should teachers actually tell their students, and what outcome did the authors expect? Comparisons of Afghanistan and Turkey based on geography, climate, and current international status ultimately distract students and teachers and fail to achieve the authors’ intended educational goals (3).

Another question reads: “*Compare Turkey and Afghanistan culturally (religion, language, historical monuments).*” (1).

From a cultural perspective, both countries are Muslim, though Afghanistan speaks Persian and Turkey speaks Turkish. As for historical monuments, students are supposed to compare Bamiyan Valley (which is absent from the images) with Hagia Sophia in Istanbul—an impossible task given the limited information provided. While mosque construction may be a commonality, the comparison of monuments is skewed and incomplete (7).

The textbook then asks: “*Why does Afghanistan, despite its historical monuments and scenic sites, not have a thriving tourism industry?*” (2).

This question places Afghanistan in direct comparison with Turkey, one of the world’s top tourist destinations. The implicit answer is Afghanistan’s instability and the presence of the Taliban. Yet even in comparison to Iran, this framing is problematic. Provinces such as Sistan and Baluchistan, despite their natural beauty, do not have flourishing tourism either. The purpose of the authors here is questionable, since the outcome is to portray Afghanistan as a nation of war and underdevelopment.

Finally, another question asks: “*Why have some people of Afghanistan migrated to other countries, including Iran? What hopes do you have for the people of Afghanistan?*” (3).

This framing, combined with the negative portrayal of Afghanistan in textbooks, perpetuates a sense of humiliation. Afghan students in Iran, reading the same content, are exposed to stigmatization, which in turn fosters negative perceptions, despair, and even marginalization. Such portrayals risk deepening social tensions and may indirectly contribute to delinquency or crime among marginalized Afghan communities (4).

## Conclusion

In introducing Iran's neighbors, a comparative method has been used to facilitate student understanding, placing Turkey and Afghanistan side by side. However, it would have been more appropriate to compare Afghanistan with Pakistan, given their closer cultural, historical, and social affinities. By setting Afghanistan next to Turkey, Afghanistan is implicitly positioned in a weaker stance. In the lesson on Turkey, reference is made to the Ottoman conquest and the country's prior subjugation under the Eastern Roman Empire, yet such historical depth is absent in the introductions of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Afghanistan. Afghanistan, too, shares an ancient common history with Iran, and highlighting this could have served as a stronger connection point for Iranian students.

While the section on Turkey emphasizes tourism and its flourishing industry, it simultaneously raises unanswered questions for students—such as why tourism in Iran does not thrive despite similar resources. This imbalance is further compounded by juxtaposing Turkey's booming tourism with Afghanistan's absence of it, effectively turning the lesson into an advertisement for Turkey's attractions.

Furthermore, although Turkey is presented as a Muslim country, the content neglects to mention its approximately 20 million Alawites. Just as Iraq's Shiite population is explained to students, this omission in the case of Turkey creates an incomplete and biased representation.

When it comes to Afghanistan, the focus is disproportionately placed on war, the Soviet occupation, the Taliban's rise, and the U.S. invasion. Yet the textbook, despite being published in 2022, omits mention of the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban's return to power, leaving teachers with inevitable challenges in classroom discussions. In fact, lessons on neighboring states should avoid transient political developments and instead highlight enduring cultural and civilizational aspects.

Another critical point is the presence of nearly 10 million Afghan migrants in Iran, many of whom study in Iranian schools and use the same textbooks. Around 95 percent of Iran's foreign student population is Afghan, and they are Persian speakers who directly absorb these lessons. Afghanistan thus occupies a unique position among Iran's neighbors, requiring more careful, respectful, and empathetic content. It is essential that textbooks foster solidarity between Iranians and Afghans, rather than reinforce negative stereotypes.

Instead of defining Afghanistan as a war-torn and impoverished country, the focus could shift to shared Islamic identity, ancient Iranian heritage, common traditions such as Nowruz, and the Persian language. Comparing Afghanistan with Pakistan, rather than Turkey, would also provide a more logical and constructive perspective. By contrast, questions like which country has the larger population, which has access to the sea, or why Afghans migrate, only serve to humiliate Afghanistan.

Ultimately, the comparison of Turkey and Afghanistan in its current form fosters division and perpetuates a negative image of Afghanistan. This is especially harmful when Afghan and Iranian students sit together in the same classroom, receiving content that implicitly ranks one nation above the other. Such narratives not only create a hostile mental environment but may also leave lasting wounds in the memories and identities of Afghan students. A fundamental revision of these materials is therefore both urgent and necessary.

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## Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

## Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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