Death in Iranian Primary and Secondary Education

La muerte en la educación primaria y secundaria iraní

Hamide Hadjnorouzi
DEPARTMENT OF PEDAGOGY, AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF MADRID (SPAIN)

Agustín de la Herrán Gascón
DEPARTMENT OF PEDAGOGY, AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF MADRID (SPAIN)

Juan Carlos Sánchez-Huete
DEPARTMENT OF PEDAGOGY, DON BOSCO CENTRE FOR HIGHER STUDIES,
COMPLUTENSE UNIVERSITY OF MADRID (SPAIN)

Abstract

Although death is approached differently in different cultures, all cultures regard it as a natural and social phenomenon. However, its interpretation and associated beliefs vary from culture to culture and greatly condition it. The aim of this study is to investigate how death is conceptualised in primary and secondary education in the Iranian education system. The study adopted a three-pronged approach through interviews with twenty experienced teachers, linguistic analysis of references to death in the Qur'an and examination of compulsory theology textbooks for religious studies at primary and secondary levels. The results revealed a tendency to use different linguistic resources and constructs to conceptualise death, emphasising the role of culture. The importance of hegemonic belief systems and personal experience in educational processes is highlighted, including approaches to death in education and, in general, in the treatment of death, whether as a physical phenomenon or through religion.

Keywords: death education, pedagogy of death, Islamic education. textbooks, Iran.

Resumen

Aunque la muerte se aborda de manera diferente en distintas culturas, todas las culturas la consideran un fenómeno natural y social. Sin embargo, su interpretación y las creencias asociadas varían de una cultura a otra y la condicionan en gran medida. El objetivo de este estudio es investigar cómo se conceptualiza la muerte en la educación primaria y secundaria dentro del sistema educativo iraní. El estudio adoptó un enfoque de tres vertientes: entrevistas con veinte docentes experimentados, análisis lingüístico de las referencias a la muerte en el Corán y examen de los libros de texto obligatorios de teología para estudios religiosos en los niveles de primaria y secundaria. Los resultados revelaron una tendencia a utilizar diferentes recursos lingüísticos y constructos para conceptualizar la muerte, con un énfasis en el papel de la cultura. Se destaca la importancia de los sistemas de creencias hegemónicos y la experiencia personal en los procesos educativos, incluyendo los enfoques sobre la muerte en la educación y, en general, en el tratamiento de la muerte, ya sea como fenómeno físico o a través de la religión.

Palabras clave: educación sobre la muerte, pedagogía de la muerte, educación islámica, libros de texto, Irán.

1. INTRODUCTION

Presenting a comprehensive definition of death, or the experience of death, is challenging, as there is no complete consensus on it, even in terms of its medical description. This complexity is compounded when it comes to cultural perspectives on death. Regardless of its definition, every culture has its own view of the event itself. This is illustrated by Kellahear's (1990) distinction between «acceptable» and «good» deaths, based on how prepared the person was at the time of death and how emotional and dramatic it was. Another factor that affects people's perception of death is what happens afterwards. For example, while some religious and cultural traditions, such as Hinduism, believe in rebirth and the repetition of death, others believe that life and death only happen once (Gire, 2014).

There are conflicting views on the nature and origin of what is known as death anxiety. Not all cultures show a fear of death (Leming & Dickinson, 2016); furthermore, death anxiety is not instinctive, and people acquire it during their lives (Moore & Williamson, 2003). Kalish (1985) believed that fear of death may develop through early socialization, separation and experience of the unknown. Children gradually acquire the knowledge that any dangerous situation can have consequences, so they develop a fear of anything that threatens their existence. Any experience of separation, beginning at the stage of infancy, can trigger the fear of death. In addition, the unknown nature of what occurs during the state of death can create anxiety.

To explain «death anxiety», different theories have been applied in the literature. Among them, the most prominent are thanatophobia (Sigmund Freud); terror management theory (Ernest Becker); wisdom; ego integrity versus despair (Erik Erikson); and Edge theory (Kastenbaum). Freud attempted to relate death anxiety, also known as «thanatophobia», to unresolved childhood conflicts. In Becker's view, in coping with death anxiety people drew on what is known as terror management theory (Burke, Martens and Faucher, 2010; Tam, 2013), which refers to the inherent desire shared by humans and animals for self-preservation. In Erickson's theory of death anxiety, people in their later stages of life achieve «ego wholeness» if they are satisfied with their life. Lack of life satisfaction, on

the other hand, leads to death anxiety. Edge's theory of death anxiety proposes that it originates in people's desire to survive life-threatening situations (cited in Pandya et al., 2021).

Although death is an inseparable part of our lives (Wong, 2008), it is often avoided due to the anxiety it triggers emotionally, cognitively and experientially (Lehto & Stein, 2009; Cheng, 2017; Kennedy et al, 2017; Stylianou & Zembylas, 2018). Parents, caregivers and educators often avoid discussions of death in order to protect children (Mahaon et al, 1999; Papadatou, 2002; Friesen, 2020). The denial of death has blurred the boundary between fact and fiction and hindered an appropriate emotional reaction to the topic (Fagnani & Tagocci, 2021), leading scholars to observe that while in some cultures there is an avoidance of death, in others there is what could be called an «education», which includes an approach to and philosophy about death itself.

Consequently, it may be affirmed that the term «death education» refers to «any educational activity organized by institutions to facilitate understanding of death and bereavement» (Wass, 2004, in Fagnani, 2021). This concept encompasses the meaning of death, attitudes towards it, the grieving process, etc. Death education is as important as other school subjects, such as mathematics, science and language, because it helps students learn to think and act in the face of death and other moments in life (Shim, 2020). It has even been suggested that death education should be integrated into school curricula in the same way that character, moral and sexual education are included. «Death and dying, by their very nature, lend themselves to a multidisciplinary approach. The topic could be integrated into various learning areas including the Social Studies, Science or English curriculum» (King-McKenzie, 2011, p. 517).

Coming to terms with the idea of death is complex for both adults and children, but for the latter, due to their limited life experiences and cognitive developmental capacities, it is even more difficult. According to Herrán and Cortina (2012), the way children view death depends on three factors: (1) vitality: from a child's point of view, the death of a leaf is not the same as the death of an ant, a lizard or a dog; (2) size: the death of an ant is not valued equally as that of a person; (3) closeness: they care more about the death of their own pet than that of others (Herrán & Cortina, 2012). Education in death can help children acquire the intellectual capacity to

understand this overwhelming concept, overcome their fears and cope with unwanted feelings when confronted with them. The associated fears and anxieties can lead young people to form misconceptions about death and dying. Education around death can help them free themselves from these misconceptions and to recognize it as a natural phenomenon, within the capacities of their stage of development (Labinowicz, 1980; Clark Schramm, 1998).

According to Pinar's (1992) theory, the «concept of death should be integrated into everyday conversation and the daily curriculum, and not treated as [an] exotic topic… of extreme anxiety» (p. 99). It can be deduced that death, as an inevitable phenomenon, should be included at all levels of the education system (from early childhood to university), as it is rooted in the realities of life. Death is a difficult subject to raise; thus its inclusion in school curricula would give teachers and students the opportunity to discuss it freely and openly. If we see education as a prerequisite for human happiness and general well-being, education in death cannot be excluded, since it is as important as other life issues (Crase & Crase, 1977).

Textbooks contribute significantly to the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Abdelraheem & Al-Rabani, 2005). In addition to being a rich source of information, they help students understand concepts and values that are of great importance in real life. Textbooks are the maps that guide teachers in deciding what content to present to students and to what depth (Benell & Mukyanuzi, 2005). The various actors involved in teaching, such as teachers, learners and stakeholders, rely heavily on textbooks for the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Moulton, 1997; Biekeye, 2010; Chisholm, 2013; Kira & Bukagile, 2013).

The inclusion in textbooks of a concept such as death, which in the 21st century is still considered taboo and unpleasant or frightening to talk about, should be undertaken with caution in order to avoid fostering misconceptions about the subject and to provide an appropriate context for conveying more realistic knowledge. Although this study does not claim to do this, it may serve to pave the way to that end.

Although there are some studies in the related literature that address the topic of death in Iran, they mainly concentrate on the literary con-

ceptualization of the theme of death in Persian literature and Islamic religious texts. The most notable research includes: (1) «Phenomenon of Death in Nahj al-Balagah» by Kargaret et al. (2022); (2) «Corpus Study of the Linguistic Resources of Conceptualization of Death in Persian» by Ghuchani and Julaie (2018); (3) «The Concept of Death in Forogh Farakhzad's Poems» by Ariyan and Talkhabi (2020); (4) «The Concept of Death in Molana's Poems» by Abasi and Khosravi (2017); and (5) «Metaphors of Death in Religious Texts» by Agha Golzade and Pourebrahim (2013).

Few studies have been devoted to death education in Iran. They mostly address the topic in terms of children's understanding of death (Karimi, 1993) and education encompassing the concept in Islamic instruction (Nesari, 2010; Ashouri, 2015). It can be argued that no study to date has addressed the inclusion of the topic in the Iranian education system in terms of how it is conceptualized in the Islamic Education textbooks used for teaching religion as a curricular subject. The Islamic religion conveyed by these textbooks, in addition to the cultural baggage they pass on, may be very revealing as an object of research.

The education system in Iran is dominated by Islamic thought and teachings, predominantly reflected in Islamic Education textbooks. As argued above, analyzing textbooks in terms of different factors, including content (Cigler, 1997; Jurman, 1999; Turk Skraba, 2005, Kramar, 2009; Zupanič, 2014; Mithans, 2020), and investigating how death is included in these books, may be of use in relation to the following research questions: (1) can these textbooks be seen as a representation of death education study materials? (2) Can the inclusion of death in education be useful in helping students to achieve an understanding of death? And if so, then: (3) is education on the topic through Islamic instruction an appropriate method or not?

The aim of this study, then, is to determine how death is conceptualized in Islamic primary and secondary education in the Iranian education system. This objective is divided into three more specific objectives: (1) to ascertain how death is understood by primary and secondary teachers in the Iranian education system; (2) to understand the meanings of death in the Quran; and (3) to describe how death, and associated terms and

expressions, are conceptualized in compulsory primary and secondary school Islamic Education textbooks.

The study highlights the importance of addressing these issues in the Iranian education system and may serve as a starting point for researchers interested in the same topic. Gaining a multidimensional view of the topic, through this study and other research, may be useful in determining the strengths and weaknesses of the inclusion of death in current curricula and, furthermore, finding new ways of providing students with appropriate death education in Iran. The integration of such studies may help to strengthen Iran's education system in general and the quality of textbooks in particular.

2. METHOD

2.1 Study design

A mixed methodology was chosen to respond to the study objectives. This approach draws on the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain a holistic and integrative view that can yield what Creswell (2005) calls «well-validated and well-founded conclusions» (p. 217). Mackey and Gass (2005) stated that it is increasingly common for researchers to «represent and discuss quantitative and qualitative data in the same report, or to use methods associated with both types of research in a process sometimes known as split methods or multiple methods» (p. 164). The study was conducted in three interrelated phases with a strong global character.

A mixed methodology was chosen to respond to the study objectives. This approach draws on the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to obtain a holistic and integrative view that can yield what Creswell (2005) calls «well-validated and well-founded conclusions» (p. 217). Mackey and Gass (2005) stated that it is increasingly common for researchers to «represent and discuss quantitative and qualitative data in the same report, or to use methods associated with both types of research in a process sometimes known as split methods or multiple methods»

(p. 164). The study was conducted in three interrelated phases with a strong global character (*Figure 1*):

Figure 1

Study design
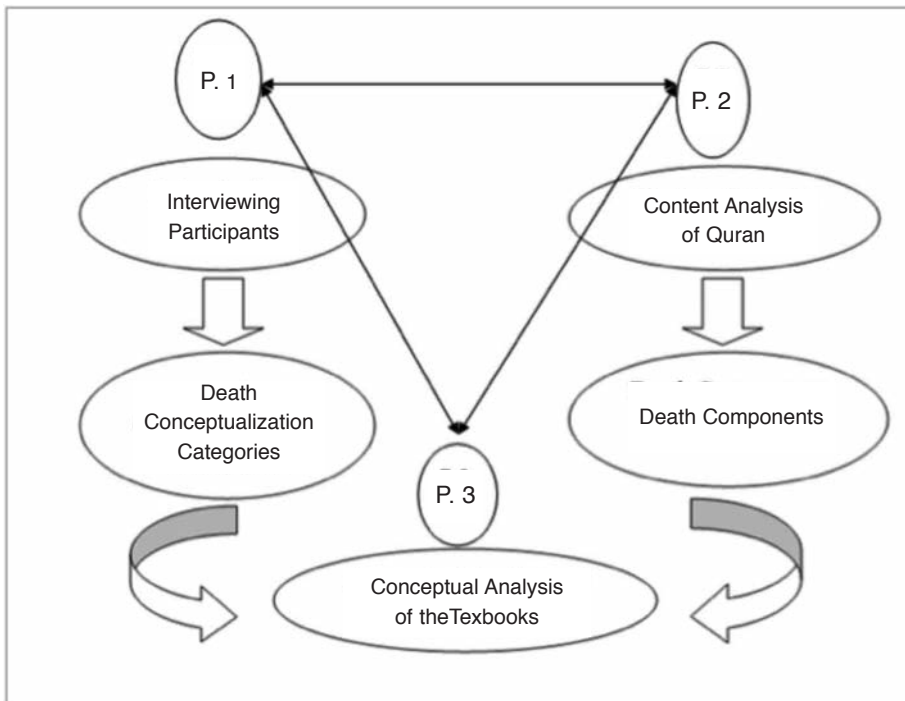
2.2 First phase

Participants in the first phase were selected through non-probability convenience sampling, according to the needs of the study. Care was taken to avoid bias; thus quotas were set by age, gender and teaching field (subject), which helped to balance the sample in terms of specific characteristics. The convenience sampling procedure was valuable and necessary for the research, given the difficult context of the country and the subject of the study. The inclusion criterion was: residing and working, or having worked, as a full-time teacher in Iran for at least ten years. The demographic characteristics of the participants are summarized in *Table 1*.

Table 1
Participants

Feature	Description
Gender	Women 12 Men 8
Age	Between 28--67 years old
Traininh qualifications	Diploma: 3 Bachelor's degree: 12 Master: 5
Employment status	Active: 14 Pensioners: 6
Levels of education taught	Primry and secondary education
Subjects taught	Theology: 10 Persian literature: 4 Science: 6

Teachers were interviewed individually in a semi-structured interview to explore in depth how they understood death. Due to the lack of a standardized interview appropriate to the context and participants, an *ad hoc* script was designed. As it was not fully open-ended, it did not address the complexities and challenges of phenomenological categorization (Creswell, 2013).

The script was validated for accuracy and consistency by three experts in death pedagogy, educational research and Islamic education and piloted among three subjects having the same characteristics as the eventual participants. To ensure the reliability of the five questions in the script, two experts were asked to rate each question in terms of whether it elicited the interviewed teacher's conceptualization of death. The questions were then compared for consistency using Cohen's Kappa. In addition, the K-value was interpreted according to Altman's (1991) guideline. The K-value obtained was relatively high and indicated very good agreement for all five questions (K= 1; $\alpha \le .05$). Lastly, five questions were finalized: «What is death in your opinion?», «How do you see death in life, in society?», «When thinking about death, what words/phrases come to your mind?», «If you needed to talk to someone about death, how would you do it?» and «Can you say some of the words or phrases which describe death, from what you have heard or read?».

2.3 Second phase

The texts studied were the Quran and the twelve theology textbooks for the different levels of primary and secondary education. Both materials are mandatory in compulsory education schools. It is their prescriptive character that is the criterion for their selection, insofar as it makes them representative of Islamic Education in Iran. The Quran is the reference text for the other theological textbooks. It is the holy book of Muslims all over the world and the fundamental source of Islamic information. The primary (1st-6th grades) textbooks are called *Gifts from Heaven (Islamic Education and Upbringing)*. The books cover different topics and include the following sections: «The Quran», «Theism», «Religious Characters», «Prophet and Prophecy», «Islamic Precepts», «Islamic Morality», «Islamic Rituals», «Imams and Muslim Leaders» and «The World and the Hereafter». Each lesson addresses one of these topics, specified with a different color so that the teacher and the students know what the main focus of the lesson is. The secondary (7th-9th grade) books are called *Message from Heaven (Islamic Education and Upbringing)*. At this level, the books cover Islamic issues under six categories: «Theology» or «Knowing God», «Resurrection and the Hereafter», «Knowing Islamic Leaders», «Journey to the Hereafter», «Islamic Morality» and «Islamic Society». All these categories are addressed in the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades except «Islamic Society», which is not included in the 7th grade. Secondary (10th-12th grade) textbooks are called *Religion and Life* or *The Quran and Islamic Education*. The Islamic content in the 10th-12th grade is discussed under two headings, namely: »Reflection» and «On the Way». The first section raises different Islamic topics in a reflective manner to stimulate thought on different areas. The second part addresses the future of human beings and the notion of the hereafter.

2.4 Data collection and analysis

Content analyses of the interviews (Phase 1), the Quran and the compulsory theological textbooks (Phases 2 and 3) /carried out. The third phase of the study also included a thematic analysis, valuable for its inductive approach to drawing interpretative conclusions from the codes identified.

Participants' responses to the interview questions constituted the data for the first phase of the study. After this data had been imported, it was analyzed in

context using NVivo 14 software. It was then analyzed again and recoded/classified in the light of Sharifian's (2011) theory of cultural conceptualization and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphors, finally yielding four categories: euphemism, metaphor, cultural schema and metonymy.

The study of references to death in the Quran was carried out to obtain both general and detailed ideas of what death means from an Islamic perspective. This investigation played a decisive role in achieving the primary objective of the study, providing insights into the concepts associated with death in the sacred text and in the design of the theology texts for compulsory education. The search for the meanings of death in the Quran used information from http://www.parsquran.com/, a source providing reliable searches in Arabic, Persian and English.

To examine the Quranic perspective on the term «death», it was searched for in Arabic (*mawt*), Persian (*marg, mordan, morde*) and English (*death & die*) to avoid the possibility of missing words with the same meaning but expressed in different Arabic words. Poetic verses that included the word «death» were coded and analyzed according to the concept of death. The results were interpreted as teaching concepts of death, emphasizing that the Quran is literal in its approach to teaching about death.

In addition, data from the Islamic theology textbooks on the concept of death were collected and examined. This involved reviewing any allusions to the concept of death in cognate terms or cultural or religious phrases, identified by three experts in educational research and Islamic education (different from those in the first phase of the study). The experts were asked to code references as «relevant» or «not relevant» to the concept of death. To ensure the reliability of the coding process, Cohen's Kappa inter-rater reliability test was performed. The related terms and phrases were examined individually in terms of linguistic resources and meanings of death.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis of the first phase of the study indicated that participants conceptualized death using metaphors, cultural schemas, euphemisms, and metonymies. See *Table 2* below.

**Table 2**
Resources for conceptualizing death

Codes	Subcodes
Euphemism	death, departure
Metaphor	journey, dream, liberation, dawn, birth, change, flying, wave, sea, awakening, butterfly, step, sunset, smell, drink, peace
Cultural schema	God's blessing meeting with God, paradise, union with great souls
Metonymy	patience, grief, mourning, tolerance

The meanings of death in the Quran are systematized in Table 3 and their components or characteristics are represented in *Figure 2*.

Table 3
Meanings of death in the Quran

Codes	Subcodes
Revealing the reality after death	nature, unknown
Type and quality of death	dying, believing in God, fear of death / hard and terrifying death for unbelievers and sinners, not wanting to die, not believing in the afterlife, quality of death for believers, dying as a Muslim
Universality	everything dies, everyone tastes death
Inevitability	It always happens; it is impossible to escape death; every human being experiences physical death; death is written.
Irreversibility	asking God to return to the world, it is too late
Causality	Death is in God's hands
Being here (after death)	to return to God, to be remembered by God, resurrection, to discover the truth, rebirth, angels of death, soul being, soul taking, taking of lives

Figure 2
Components of death in the Quran
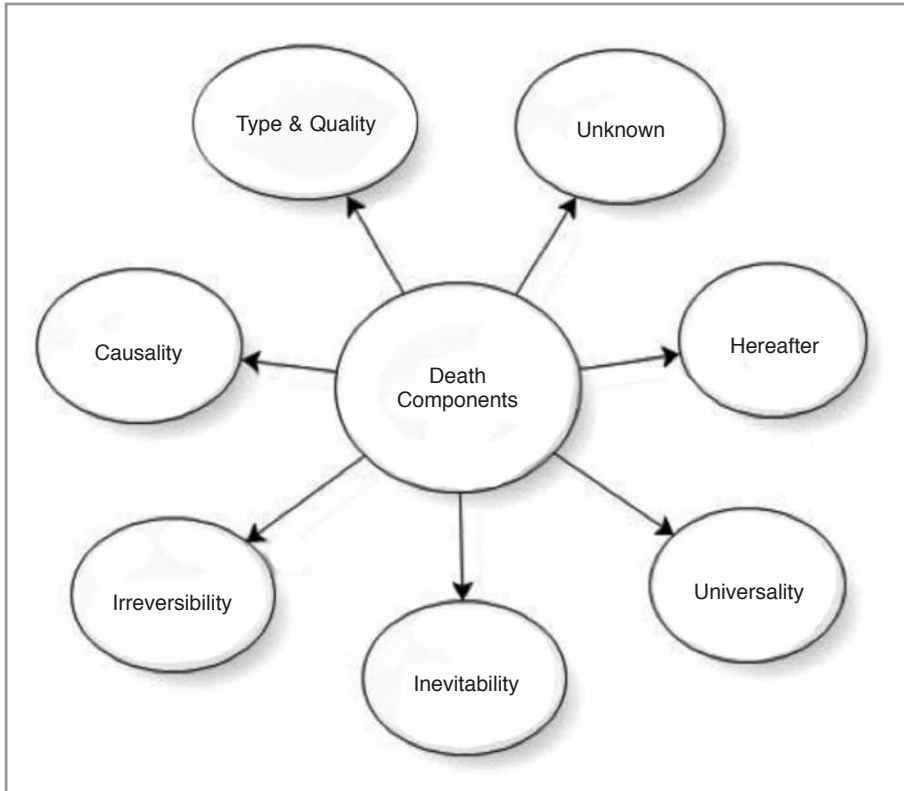
In the third stage of the study or Phase 3, three experts conceptualized death in the Islamic education textbooks using the following cognate terms or cultural or religious phrases:

- 1st-grade references to death: none.

- 2nd-grade references to death: none.

- 3rd-grade references: heaven, beyond, day of reckoning, entering the eternal world.

- 4th-grade references: death, final judgement, afterlife, martyrdom.

- 5th-grade references: heaven, hell, judgement day, martyrdom.

- 6th-grade references: death, stage, after death, afterlife, supreme life, other world, original life, eternal life, afterlife, heaven, hell,

return to life, restoring the human, restoring life, resurrection, judgment day, end of life, other growth, provisions, holy sanctuary, fire, martyrdom.

- 7th-grade references: death, destruction, terror, attending gift-giving ceremony, afterlife, taking life, relief, meeting two terrifying creatures, hell, heaven, meeting two smiling angels, closing eyes, journey, provisions, funeral, coffin, graveyard, the last moment, grave, torture in the grave, burying, Gabriel, enjoying the taste of heaven, leaving the world, approaching death, groaning, returning to life, place of peace, peace, key of blessing, door of bounty, easy and hard death, the way of happiness, doomsday, martyrdom, fainting.

- 8th-grade references: death, afterlife, resurrection, easy and difficult death, entering heaven, entering hell, unimaginable world, great gardens and glorious castle, end of sorrow and pain, meeting with prophets and saints, eternal life, hell, fire, terror, being surrounded by scorpions and snakes, doomsday, appearing with different faces, living in fire, that day, inevitability of death, death approaches people, request to return to life, how to die, departure, martyrdom, passing away.

- 9th-grade references: death, leaving the world, reasons for death, happiness in the afterlife, doomsday, end of the world, relief, happiness, martyrdom, departure, heaven, day of repentance.

- 10th-grade references: death, death by the hand of God, summoned, seeing the face of death, first death, hell, heaven, end of life's opportunities, stage, end, eyes shot, perish, destruction, beyond, after death, resurrection, end of physical dimension, spiritual dimension, wear out, sunset, sunrise, entry into the supreme world, real life, eternity, survival, relocation, awakening, doomsday, reward, punishment, guilt, death wish, meeting God, saving, reaching high levels, freedom, martyrdom, bliss, liberation, flying, meeting the prophet Mohammed, accepting God's invitation, invitation, perish, culmination of faith, return to life, return to life, summon, passage, resurrection, futility of life, return to earth, depart, departure, promise of God, eyes closed, pass easily, ask to return to life, renounce life, stage, purgatory, talk to angels, deceased, soul, moving, grave, horror in the grave, provisions, no

escape, what is death, records, departure, taking one's life, burying, asking for blessing, helping charity, resurrection, great earthquake, end of life on earth, judgment, consequence, relief, finding lost love, meeting God, length of life, traveler, journey.

- 11th-grade references: death, future, end, open the notebook of life, eternal world, provisions, happiness, home, where am I going, hometown, not to repeat life, burial, return to life, go to heaven, die ignorant, request to return to life, honorable death, rush to the other world, judgement, resurrection, disappearance, martyrdom, fainting, doomsday.

- 12th-grade references: death, death is written, death is in God's hand, it is what it touches, martyrdom, desire to die, dying at God's command, everyone tastes death, return, afterlife, day of reckoning, heaven, hell, martyrdom, departure.

The results of the first phase of the study revealed that the teachers interviewed used four linguistic resources to understand and interpret death: euphemism, metaphor, cultural schema, and metonymy. Considering that the twenty teachers represented a small portion of Iranian primary and secondary school teachers, there seems to be a strong interconnection between the understanding of death and the dominant Islamic perspective in Iran. Hence, regardless of the linguistic resource employed, participants conceptualized death in accordance with the Quran, seeing death not as «the end» but as a passage or shift to a «better state». Thus, the positive cultural image of death was general. The cases that associated death with negativity are, for the most part, subcategories of metonymy with content referring to those who observe the death of someone. Interpreted in the light of terror management theory, this assignation may be due to a self-protective tendency (Debora & Baker, 2022); in other words, «adherence to cultural beliefs that offer symbolic mortality», such as the Islamic «afterlife» or other beliefs, may offer an alternative to the instinctive fear of death.

As for the second phase of this study, aimed at understanding the components and characteristics of death in the Quran, the findings revealed that the main components or characteristics of death were «unknown», «universal»,« inevitable», «irreversibility», «causality», «type and quality» and «here/after». It should be noted that in the Quran these

components refer to the «finality» or «end» of life and to what is called the «first death».

The description of how death and associated terms and expressions were conceptualized in the compulsory Islamic Education textbooks for primary and secondary school showed that direct treatment of death was not predominant. In the first and second grades, it was avoided altogether, as the above list of terminology shows. It appears to be thought that at that age pupils are too young to understand death. From a psychological perspective, the absence of any mention of death does not coincide with children's ability to understand it at a basic level, as affirmed by Jubert (1993), who argues, following Piaget's observations, that at six to eight months of age the notion of object permanence already provides the prerequisites for the construction of a concept of death. Also, Herrán et al. (2000) observes that at two years of age the syntactic construction «is not there» (i.e. something has disappeared) is already a preconception of «partial death». Moreover, from the age of two, the first intuitions about the life cycle take place, around which the child bases his or her intuitive process.

In the 3rd grade textbook study, at the age of eight, direct reference to death was still avoided, but abstract ideas such as «heaven», «beyond», «day of reckoning», «entering the eternal world», etc. were raised. From the perspective of the Pedagogy of Death, the aim of Islamic teaching with the Quran and theology textbooks is not to educate with death in mind (Rodríguez et al., 2015), but for students to internalize the Islamic perspective on death. This approach is built on an intangible foundation: the belief in an «afterlife» described according to the Islamic vision. Moreover, from a very young age, abstractions that are literally incomprehensible at ages six to eight are inculcated, and there is an emphasis, in both primary and secondary school, on «martyrdom», which again coincides with the Quran's religious beliefs, which dominate textbook guidelines.

The concept of death and related concepts in these primary and secondary education textbooks are not psycho-pedagogically grounded, nor do they follow a pedagogical or didactic pattern. Their contents are organized according to a strict Islamic ideology, which defines the basis of the concept of death. This concept is presented as a sub-concept under the aegis of a structured belief in the «hereafter». «Heaven», «hell», and «martyrdom

are three didactic resources and conceptual supports for doctrinal elabora-tion, as shown in *Figure 3*:

Figure 3
Conceptual foundations of death in Islamic Education textbooks
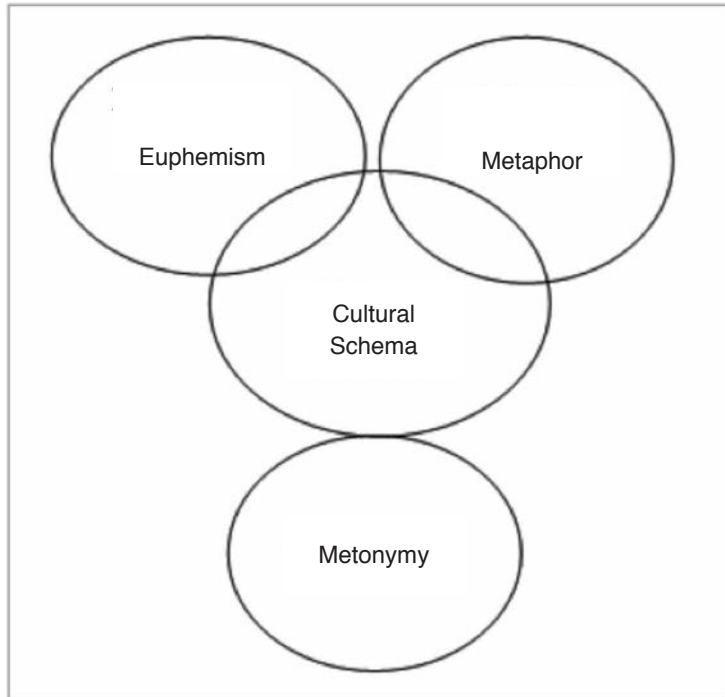*in primary and secondary school*
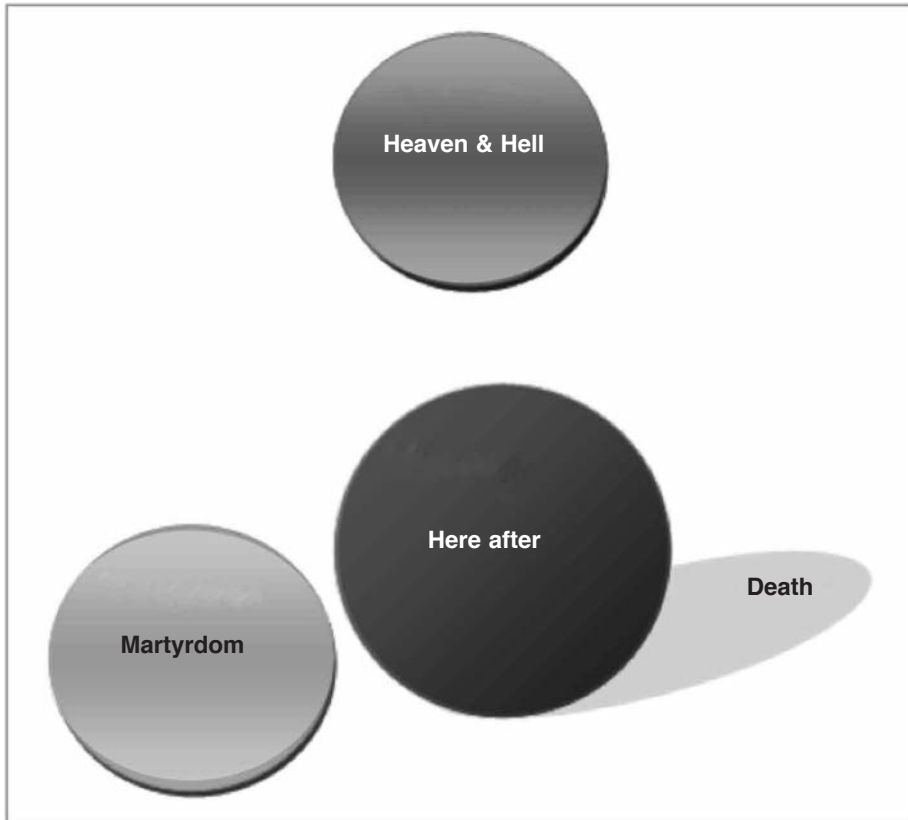
As for the conceptualization of death in Islamic Education textbooks in the Iranian education system, the content analysis revealed that all the linguistic resources used by the teachers in the first phase of the study were also used in the books. The difference was that the participants spoke of their direct and clear understanding of death, whereas in the books most of the cases identified were only hinted at. For example, the word «sanctuary», associated with «holy» in 6th–grade texts, is not used in reference to death, but evokes ideas of it. Other terms, such as «resur-rection», «heaven», «hell», etc. include a more obvious connotation.

Resources for conceptualization often overlap with cultural schemas. This is the case with metaphors such as «journey», «bridge», «stage», «passage», «liberation», «flying», «peace», etc., which have the same cultural basis: i.e., they are all conceptualized according to the preconceived idea that there is another life after death. This characteristic is shared by euphemistic conceptualizations; for example, (مردن کلحت, *pass*), has the same cultural connotation. The overlap between metaphor, euphemism, and cultural schema in the content of the school theology textbooks is shown in Figure 4. Metonymy, on the other hand, is a trope that is in principle less culturally loaded. For example, «grave» was one such case, found in 7th- and 10th-grade texts and used in a culturally religious sense - e.g. «torture in the grave» (7th-grade) and «horror in the grave» (10th-grade). This was referred to jointly with the term «pressure», based on the Islamic notion that the soul of the deceased person, if they have committed sins during their lifetime, is pressed and tortured in the grave. In Figure 4 conceptualizations through metonymy and cultural schemas meet at one point:

Figure 4

Conceptualization resources in Islamic Education textbooks

4. CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to ascertain how death is conceptualized in Islamic education at primary and secondary level in the Iranian education system. This was done using three specific lines of investigation: (1) how native Iranian primary and secondary school teachers understand death; (2) what are the components and characteristics of death in the Quran; and (3) how death and associated terms/expressions are conceptualized in compulsory textbooks for these stages. In the first phase of the research, it became clear that Iranian teachers associate their interpretation and understanding of death with four literary resources: metaphors, euphemisms, metonymy and cultural schema. The second phase of the study showed that the verses that include death in the Quran refer to it through the belief in the afterlife or «hereafter», associating it with «quality of death» and the «unknown nature of death». They also attribute to death characteristics such as universality, irreversibility, inevitability and causality, at the crossroads between the spiritual factors related to the afterlife and the biological death or first death, in Quranic terms. In the third phase, the examination of the death-related content of the compulsory theology textbooks revealed, on the one hand, that they do not follow any didactic pattern and, on the other hand, that Islamic Education is identified with a successive internalization of Quranic doctrine throughout the primary and secondary school years. According to the Quran, the «hereafter» component, or life after death, is the dominant construct, and death is subsidiary to it. The texts drew on the same literary resources used by the teachers in the first phase of the study, albeit with an overlap between conceptualizations through metaphor, euphemism, and cultural schemas. Metonymies were found to coincide with cultural schemas at some points. Meanings of death found in the Quran and applied in the theology books could be assimilated to religious constructs, while biological references to death were either very rare or served its spiritual aspect.

Although the three specific objectives were addressed, reaching an overall conclusion does not seem to be an easy task. However, the study can conclude with several deductions. The first is that references to death in the teachers' views, the Quran and the compulsory Islamic education textbooks highlighted the dominance of Islamic ideology in Islamic Education in Iran's education system. This approach identifies religious indoctrina-

tion with education, a position that does not coincide with that of any other authors, discussing any religion (Herrán, 2018). In Islamic primary and secondary education in Iran, it is not possible to determine how death is conceptualized without the image of the concept of death in Islam, the dominant religious belief in the country. This religious conception is projected both in the reasoning of the teachers involved and in theology textbooks. The compulsory nature of these texts ensures their teaching and learning, which takes place through literary resources such as metaphor, euphemism, metonymy, and cultural schema. From a pedagogical perspective, the most important conclusions of the study are that there is a clear disregard for the teaching of death-related content with respect to the developmental characteristics of students in primary and secondary education. Theology textbooks for these stages do not seem to indicate the existence of a Pedagogy of Death (Herrán & Rodríguez, 2020) in the Iranian education system's curriculum. Consequently, the generic concept of death in education is identified solely with an internalization of Islam, due to the inherent characteristics of the context of the Iranian education system. In conclusion, a didactic poverty is found in the approach to this subject matter as it is encapsulated in the textbooks. This condition is shared with other secular education systems.

Conceptualizations of death that differed from those predetermined by the Islamic religion were found neither among the teachers nor in the compulsory textbooks for primary and secondary education. However, divergence and creativity are characteristic of human nature, although through brain plasticity and functionality they can be modulated and adapted to any context (Rim et al, 2019). This may explain the fact, perceived during the teacher interviews, that death is understood and socialized through the uniformity and prudence of a single-minded religion, for fear of deviating from its precepts.

In summary, the educational landscape in Iran highlights the role of religious «-isms» in shaping individual perspectives, with a focus on fostering minimal counterintuitive contexts (Fondevila & Martín-Loeches, 2013). Despite the potential impact on mental health acknowledged by some scholars (Gallardo et al., 2022), Islamic Education in Iran emerges as a powerful tool for religious representation. The portrayal of death in this context serves as a lens through which Islamic views are articulated.

However, it is essential to acknowledge the diversity of individual perceptions within this framework. While the religious alternative offers a hopeful and meaningful interpretation, aligning with beliefs in reunion with God, others may perceive death as the culmination of a material and empty existence. As a suggestion for future research, it is proposed to replicate this study in education systems elsewhere, particularly those characterized by the formal predominance of religious or political ideologies and belief systems. Exploring these themes across different contexts could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationships between education, religious beliefs, and individual and social perceptions of human existence.

BIBLIOGRAPHIAL REFERENCES

Abasi, Z., & Khosravi, A. (2017). Studying the evolving concept of death in Rumi's poetry based on Cognitive Metaphor Theory in the cultural model of the great chain metaphor. *Semiannual Journal of Mystical Literature Alzahra University, 9*(17), 7-29.

Abdelraheem, A. Y., & Al-Rabani, A. H. (2005). Utilization and benefits of instructional media in teaching social studies courses. *Malaysian Online Journal of Instruction Technology, 2*(1), 1-4.

Agha Golzade, F., & Pourebrahim, Sh. (2013). Death metaphors in religious texts: a cognitive semantics approach. *EIJH, 20*(4), 61-78.

Ariyan, H., & Talkhabi M. (2020). *Journal of Linguistic and Rhetorical Studies, 11*(22), 7-36.

Ashouri, M. (2015). راهکارهای آموزش مفهوم مرگ به کودکان اب تکنیربرقرآنورونواتاسلامی [Strategies for teaching the concept of death to children based on the Quran and]. *Marifat, 26*(6), 85-92.

Benell, P., & Mukyanuzi, F. (2005): *Is There a Teacher Motivation Crisis in Tanzania?*. DFID.

Biekeye, A. (2010). *Textbook policy: Govt throws the final shocker*. The Citizen.

Burke, B.L., Martens, A., & Faucher, E.H. (2010). Two decades of terror management theory: A meta-analysis of mortality salience research. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *14*(2), 155-195. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1088868309352321

Cheng, F. K. (2017). Buddhist perspectives on life and death: Overcoming death anxiety. *Athens Journal of Social Sciences, 4*(1), 67-88.

Chisholm, L (2013). The textbook saga and corruption in education. *Southern African Review of Education, 19*(1), 7-22.

Cigler, N. (1997). Kakšen je dober učbenik: kako napraviti, izbrati in uporabljati učbenike [What makes a good textbook. How to write, choose and use textbooks]. *Vzgoja in izobraževanje, 28*(2), 34-36.

Clark Schramm, D. (1998). *The Concept of Death Education on Children's Understanding of Death. Master's thesis*. Grand Valley State University.

Crase, D.R., & Crase, D. (1985). Death education in schools for older children. In H. Wass & C. A. Corr (Ed.), *Childhood and Death* (pp. 345-61). Hemisphere.

Creswell, J.W. (2013). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches (3rd ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Debora, C., & Baker, Z.G. (2022). *Death and Dying*. Boston University.

Fagnani G., & Tangocci, B. (2021). *La paura, la morte, i bambini*. L'Altra Medicina.

Fondevila, S, & Martín-Loeches, M. (2013). Cognitive mechanisms for the evolution of religious thought. *Ann. N. Y. Acad. Sci.* (1299), 84-90. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/nyas

Friesen, H., Harrison, J., Peters, M., Epp, D., & McPherson, N. (2020). Death education for children and youth in public schools. *International Journal of Palliative Nursing, 26*(7). 332-335.

Gallardo, R., Silva, P., & Castro, Y. (2022). The negative effects of religiosity-spirituality on mental health: A literature review. *Revista Costarricense de Psicología, 41*(1), 43-66. http://dx.doi.org/10.22544/rcps.v41i01.03

Ghouchani, B., & Julaie. K. (2018). ابزارهای مفهوم سازی زبانی در پیکره ای از زبان فارسی: رویکرد فرهنگی و شناختی [The conceptualization resources in a Persian corpus from a cognitive-cultural approach]. *Language and Linguistics, 14*)28(, 97-119.

Gire, J. (2014). How death imitates life: Cultural influences on conceptions of death and dying. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture, 6*(2). https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1120

Herrán, A. de la (2018). Pedagogy in the face of religious indoctrination. *Conjectura: filosofia e educação*, 2-58. http://dx.doi.org/10.18226/21784612.v23.especial.1

Herrán, A. de la, & Rodríguez, P. (2020). Some bases of the Pedagogy of death. *Teaching Practice. Revista de investigación educativa, 2*(4), 35-141. https://doi.org/10.56865/dgenam.pd.2020.2.4

Herrán, A. de la, González, I., Navarro, M. J., Freire, V., y Bravo, S. (2000). *¿Todos los caracoles se mueren siempre? Cómo tratar la muerte en educación infantil*. De la Torre.

Herrán, A. de la, y Cortina, M. (2006). *La muerte y su didáctica. Manual para educación infantil, primaria y secundaria.* Universitas.

Jubert, J. (1993). La infància i la mort. *In-Fan-Cia: educar de 0 a 6 anys,* (74), 2-7. https://www.rosasensat.org/revistes/in-fan-cia/

Jurman, B. (1999). *Kako narediti dober učbenik: na podlagi antropološke vzgoje.* [How to design a good textbook: based on educational anthropology]. Jutro.

Kalish, Richard A. (1985). The social context of death and dying. In R. H. Binstock and E. Shanas (Eds.), *Handbook of Aging and the Social Sciences* (pp. 149-70). Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Kargar M., Sahrai, K., Ridapur, Y., & MirHosseini, Y. (2022). Phenomenon of death in Nahj al-Balagha; a qualitative study. *Journal of Contemporary Islamic Studies, 4*(2), 281-293.

Kellahear, A. (1990). *Dying of Cancer: The Last Year of Life.* Harwood Academic Publishers.

Kennedy C.J., Keeffe M., Gardner F., & Farrelly C. (2017). Making death, compassion and partnership 'part of life' in school communities. *Pastor Care Education, 35*(2), 111-123.

King-Mckenzie, E. (2011). Death and dying in the public school curriculum: Is there a place? *Journal of Emerging Knowledge on Emerging Markets, 3*(1). https://doi.org/10.7885/1946-651X.1061

Kira, E., & Bukagile, G. (2013). Perceptions of education stakeholders on the implications of the textbook release policy in Tanzania. *Journal of Education and Practice, 4*(10), 136-144.

Kramar, M. (2009). *Pouk* [Classes]. Educa, Melior.

Labinowicz, E. (1980). *The Piaget Primer: Thinking, Learning, Teaching.* Addison-Wesley.

Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1980). *Metaphors We Live By.* University of Chicago Press.

Lehto, R. H., and Stein, K. F. (2009). Death anxiety: analysis of an evolving concept. *Research and Theory for Nursing Practice. An International Journal, 23*(1), 23-41. https://doi.org/10.1891/1541-6577.23.1.23

Leming, M. R. Dickinson, G. E. (2016). *Understanding Dying, Death and Bereavement.* Cengage Learning.

Mahon, M. M., Goldberg, R. L., & Washington, S. K. (1999). Discussing death in the classroom: Beliefs and experiences of educators and students. *OMEGA. Journal of Death and Dying, 39*(2), 99-121. https://doi.org/10.2190/05y3-jc3e-jrmk-63ya.

Mithans, M., & Gremek. I. (2020). The use of textbooks in the teaching-learning process. In *New Horizons in Subject-Specific Education: Research Aspects of Subject-Specific Didactics* (pp. 201-228). University Press, Faculty of Education.

Moore, C. C., & Williamson. J. B. (2003). The universal fear of death and the cultural response. *Handbook of Death & Dying*, 3-13. SAGE.

Moulton, J. (1997). How teachers use textbooks: A review of the research literature. *Africa Bureau Information Center, 74,*1-38.

Nesari, G. (2010). آموزش مفهوم مرگ به کودکان براساس آموزه‌های اسلامی [Teaching the concept of death to children based on Islamic principles] (PhD thesis). University of al-Zahra.

Pandya, A, & Tripti, K. (2021). Death anxiety, religiosity and culture: Implications for therapeutic process and future research. *Religions, 12*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010061

Papadatou, D., Metallinou, O., Hatzichristou, C., & Pavlidi, L. (2002). Supporting the Bereaved Child: Teacher's Perceptions and Experiences in Greece. *Mortality, 7*(3), 324-339. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12010061

Pinar, W.F., & Reynolds, W.M. (1992). *Understanding Curriculum as a Phenomenological and Deconstructed text.* Teachers College Press.

Rim, J.I., Ojeda, J., Svob, C., Kayser, J. Drews, E., Kim, Y., Tenke, C., Skipper, J., & Weissman, M. (2019). Current understanding of religion, spirituality, and their neurobiological correlates. *Harv Rev Psychiatry, 27*(5), 303-316. https://doi.org./10.1097/HRP.0000000000000232

Rodríguez, P., Herrán, A. de la, & Cortina, M. (2015). *Educating and Living with Death in Mind.* Pirámide.

Sharifian, F. (2011). *Cultural Conceptualization and Language: Theoretical Framework and Applications.* Monash University.

Shim, S. H. (2020). The existential meaning of death and reconsideration of death education through the perspectives of Kierkegaard and Heidegger. *Philosophy and Theory of Education, 52*(9), 973-985.

Stylianou, P. & Zembylas, M. (2018). Addressing the concepts of 'bereavement' and 'grief' in the classroom: Children's perceptions, emotions and behavior. *OMEGA Journal of Death and Dying, 77*(3), 240-266. https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222815626717

Tam, K. P. (2013). Existential motive underlying cosmetic surgery: An analysis of terror management. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 43*(5), 947-955. https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12059

Turk Škraba, M. (2005). *Učbenik kot sredstvo za kakovostno učenje in poučevanje družboslovja* (Diploma thesis). Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana.

Wong, P. T. (2008). Meaning management theory and acceptance of death. In A. Tomer, G. T. Eliason, & P. T. P. Wong (Eds.), *Existential and Spiritual Issues in Death Attitudes* (pp. 65-87). Erlbaum.

Zupanič, K. (2014). *Pregled učbenikov za predmet spoznavanje okolja in mnenja učiteljev o nji*h (Diploma thesis). Faculty of Education, University of Maribor.