

Educating for a Culture of Peace: A Comparative Analysis of Educational Policies, Discourses, and Practices in Iran and Italy

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Abstract: This study analyzes how education contributes to fostering a culture of peace in Iran and Italy. Peace is a commitment to a better future based on shared values, through dialogue, tolerance, respect, and understanding, and begins with access to education and the creativity and innovation that come from cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2013). Today, peace has received particular attention in textbooks and official educational policies. Using primary sources, including the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Charter of Citizens' Rights, and the National Curriculum, alongside policy and curriculum documents from Italy, this research examines whether and in what ways the education systems of the two countries foster a culture of peace, and identifies differences in the documents and their implementation in educational contexts. By examining educational materials in relation to key components of peace education, including human rights, cooperation, solidarity, inclusion, and appreciation of cultural diversity, the findings show that values related to peace are affirmed in both contexts; however, in practice, they reflect different political, cultural, and social priorities. In Iran, education emphasizes national identity and defense, while in Italy, there is a greater focus on democratic citizenship and inclusion (Commissione europea/ EACEA / Eurydice, 2024). However, in both countries, strengthening peace education with inclusive practices emerges as a fundamental path to creating more just and cohesive societies.

Keywords: Peace Education; Inclusion; Comparative Study.



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1. Introduction

Peace extends beyond the absence of war to encompass social and cultural conditions grounded in equality, mutual respect, and inclusion (UNESCO, 1996). Peace is the existence of conditions in which societies experience low levels of violence (Anderson, 2004). In the Dehkhoda Dictionary, which is a Persian dictionary, "peace" means reconciliation, compromise, and tranquility, and is used in contrast to war and conflict; it also refers to consent (agreement) and truce (temporary peace) in the resolution of hostilities (Dehkhoda Dictionary, 1946). A more detailed definition in Italian of peace is offered by the Treccani¹ "peace" is Condition of normality of relationships, of absence of wars and conflicts, both within a people, a state, orga-

nized groups, ethnic, social, religious, etc., and externally, with other peoples, other states, other groups. precisely a situation contrary to a state of war, which refers to nations that, by regulating their mutual relations based on mutual agreements and without resort to force, can pursue the normal development of their economic, social, and cultural life(<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/pace/>). According to the Islamic Encyclopedia, Peace in Islam means compromise and has always been considered desirable. In some verses of the Quran, such as Surah An-Nisa, verse 128, peace is expressed as resolving disputes. Sheikh Kulayni narrates from Imam Sadiq: Peace is permissible between Muslims, except for peace that makes what is lawful forbidden or what is forbidden lawful (<https://wiki.ahlolbait.com>).

Goal 16 united nation is about promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. People everywhere should be free from fear of violence and feel safe in their lives, regardless of their ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. Structural injustices, inequalities and emerging human rights challenges are putting peaceful and inclusive societies further out of reach. To meet Goal 16 by 2030, action is needed to restore trust and to strengthen the capacity of institutions to secure justice for all and facilitate peaceful transitions to sustainable development(UN, 2025).

In Western countries, peace emphasizes international understanding and cooperation (Martin, 2005). There is a concept behind peace in three religious systems, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic. According to the New Testament, Jesus Christ declares, “My peace I leave with you,” and “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.” Although definitions of peace often vary and hypocrisy is not uncommon, most people have a positive predisposition toward peace, consistent with the ideals of these religions (Baresh & Webel, 2017). Thinking about peace is important today. Our own understanding and views of peace, both as a condition and as a value, cannot be underestimated (Indrani, 2016). As highlighted in Lederach's work, education plays a fundamental role in peace processes. Lederach considers education to be one of the key strategies for peacebuilding, as it is a vital pillar for promoting a culture of peace (Lederach, 1995). The Declaration (UN, 1998) states that “a culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, traditions, modes of behavior and ways of life. The Preamble to the UNESCO Statute emphasizes that “[s]ince wars begin in the minds of women and men, the defense of peace must also be built in the minds of men.” After the world wars, when violence, racism and anti-Semitism were taught in schools, legitimized by pseudoscience and reinforced by systematic propaganda, using modern culture, UNESCO was founded based on peace(<https://www.unesco.org/en/vision>).

2. Peace Education and Its Contradictions: Research Questions Emerging from Iran and Italy

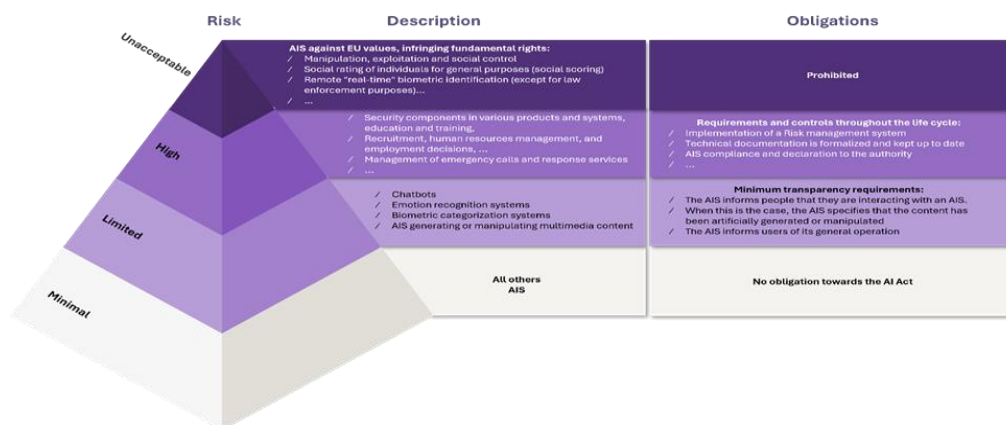
Peace education develops knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that change people's mindsets, attitudes and behaviours. Peace education is transformati (Castro, & Galace, 2008).

Education for peace is a moral imperative, given the rejection of all forms of violence. Religious traditions, ethics, and spirituality have articulated principles that

all strive for peace. The importance of all forms of life, not only human life, but also other forms of life in nature, is a social ethic (Indrani, 2016). There is too much confusion in the nuances of the meaning of peace and peace for some can represent a bad life for others. To give an example, two people disagreed about the same textbook used in schools in Iran (whether it promoted war or not). Some time ago, the geopolitical journal Limes published a special issue dedicated to Iran, the June 2024 issue, accompanied by official YouTube channel (Marelli, 2024). One article raises the question of whether schools in Iran foster a culture of peace, suggesting they did not (because students are given the Iranian Manual of the Defender of the Revolution). However, in one of the video contributions, an Iranian speaker argued that textbooks emphasizing military defense were not, in practice, taken particularly seriously (Marelli, 2024, 50:35). This raises a crucial question: What is the reality? Do official ministerial documents and the national constitution convey a peace-oriented outlook? At the same time, how does the situation compare to that of Italy? In Italy, as Ilaria Beretta(2025) notes, the armed forces are increasingly entering schools. Recent episodes include a class from Brindisi visiting a military barracks, students in Siracusa carrying out PCTO, activities in a military arsenal, and images of armed soldiers appearing in a school brochure in Messina. Portolano emphasizes that universal values are non-divisive and that national defense is a legal right, emphasizing the volunteer work and preservation of historical memory carried out by the armed forces (Orlandi, 2025).

Alain Bertoz discusses the relationship between control, tolerance, and prejudice, noting that new generations are practicing killing in a virtual world, where killing is divorced from its emotional and real-world consequences (Berthoz, 2021, pp. 221-223). Violent video games can make aggression acceptable, desensitize adolescents to violence, and increase the likelihood that they will engage in violence in their real-life interactions (Borrego-Ruiz & Borrego, 2025).

Figure 1: 4 levels of AI risk, with autonomous weapons falling into the unacceptable category; Source: <https://www.riskinsight-wavestone.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/IA-Act-EN-v3.png>



3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a comparative qualitative research design to examine, how peace is represented in educational discourses in Iran and Italy. Comparative analysis `widely used approach in the humanities and social sciences (Vigour, 2011) allows the systematic examine identification of similarities and differences between the two cases (Sajadi et al., 2017). The research focuses on the intersection of official policy documents, curriculum content, and the socio-cultural contexts in which education operates.

3.2. Data Collection

The corpus of analysis consists of official educational documents, curricular guidelines, and textbooks that explicitly or implicitly address peace-related themes. The analysis study is based on primary Persian-language sources, including the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran (1980), the Charter of Citizens' Rights (2016), the Vision Document of Iran for the Year 1404, and selected textbooks.

The Italian case draws on official ministerial documents and educational guidelines, such as the Indicazioni Nazionali per il Curricolo (2012, 2018), the MIUR Guidelines for Peace Education and Global Citizenship (2017), and textbooks used in citizenship and constitution and history classes at the primary and lower-secondary levels and initiatives supported by the Ministry of Education and Merit (MIM)

3.3. Research Question

Do Iranian and Italian schools promote a culture of peace through their official curricula and policies?

4. Peace in Iran

Iran is made up of diverse ethnic, linguistic, religious, and racial minorities. The country has a rich and ancient history (Eslami-Somea & Movassagh, 2014; Mohajeri et al, 2025). It has experienced severe tensions in the past that have jeopardized peace for its people. In World War I, famine and death claimed the lives of one million Iranians (Majd, 2003). In World War II, Iran was occupied by Britain and Russia (Dadkhah, 2001). With the 1979 revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran was established, and shortly thereafter, an 8-year war with Iraq began (Shariati & Ghaffari, 2019). The interaction and dynamics of the "three cultures" in Iran (Iranian, Islamic, and Western) complicate conflict management in Iranian society (Holliday, 2016).

Iran's top-level documents address the issue of peace and peace education; in the Iran Vision 1404 document, the general policies of Iran's Fourth Development Plan have been outlined and communicated in the form of efforts to achieve social justice, deepen the spirit of cooperation and public participation, protect the environment, expand regional and international collaboration, avoid tension in relations with countries, strengthen constructive relations with non-hostile countries, and

consolidate relations with the Islamic world (Document of the Perspective of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Horizon 1404, 2003). In the sections related to foreign policy (Article 116) and citizen rights, it presents concepts such as “transparent and peaceful foreign policy”, “national interests and security”, “promoting and strengthening peace discourse”, “supporting human rights”, “combating violence and extremism”, and “supporting the oppressed” as the principles and duties of the state in line with national peace and security. In Articles 117, 118, 119, and 120, there is an emphasis on citizen rights and establishing peace and tranquility for Iranians inside and outside Iran (Citizen Rights Charter, 2016). The Constitution specifies the state's duties to achieve peace and national security, emphasizing efforts in peace discourse, human rights, and combating extremism (Iran Constitution, 1980). There are Six Features of culture of peace in Iranian Society (Eslami-Somea & Movassagh, 2014).

- Family Integrity
- Women's Movements in the Framework of Civil Society
- Large Number of Youth with Modern Inclinations
- Deep-rooted Ethnic and Religious Coexistence
- Cultural Traditions and Social Structure
- Compassion Inspired Mainly by Islamic Values and Shiite Teachings

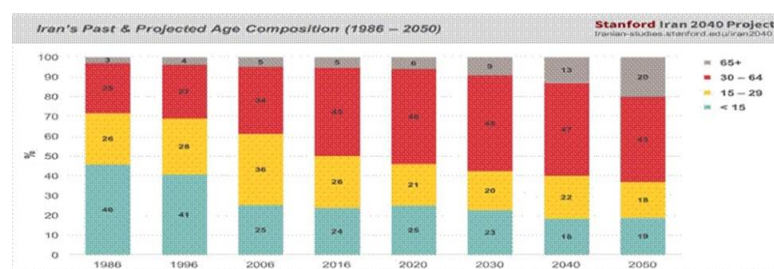
4.1. Peace Education as a Bedrock for Peace and Development in Iran

There are two general approaches to peace education: “education about peace” and “education for peace” (Shamshiri & Asadi, 2019). UNESCO emphasizes seven key components of peace education: cooperation and solidarity, human rights and democracy, internationalism, preservation of cultures, protection of the environment, self and others, and spirituality (UNESCO, 2023).

There are 4 paths in peace education 1. Philosophy education, Philosophical thinking education, Critical thinking education, and Global citizenship education 2. Forming a democratic society 3. Education for peace with an Intercultural approach 4. Forming a peaceful, peace-loving, and Peace-loving society (Shamshiri & Asadi, 2019).

For peace education in Iran, there are considerations: freedom of expression and the free flow of information; freedom of religion and belief; the rights of religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities; and women’s rights (Eslami-Somea & Movassagh, 2014). Iran’s demographic structure is also important for peace education. Children under 15, most of whom are primary or secondary school students, are the target population for this education (Roudi et al., 2017).

Figure 2: Iran’s Population Dynamics and Demographic (Roudi et al., 2017).



Curriculum content, teachers' training, and students' media are important factors in peace education in Iranian schools (Povey & Rostami-Povey, 2012). In preparing textbooks, appropriate components for peace education should be considered. Indirect peace education can make the program more effective and efficient (Shamshiri & Asadi, 2019). In a peace-based curriculum, the teacher respects cultural heritage and is concerned with transmitting cultural heritage (Shamshiri, 2007). Research shows that peace education is needed in Iran, but the curriculum is lacking in content related to human rights, peace, democracy, tolerance, conflict management, and critical thinking (Eslami-Somea & Movassagh, 2014). Promoting peace education and empowerment in all sectors of society is the result of creating a "culture of peace" (Chowdry, 2004).

Table 1. Summary of Studies on Peace Education Components in Iranian Educational Documents and Textbooks

Authors	Document / Level Studied	Findings	Peace Components Emphasized	Peace Components Neglected / Missing
Falah Nodehi (2009)	Vision Document 1404; General Objectives of Education; Secondary Education Objectives	Analysis of alignment with UNESCO peace components	Vision Document: human rights & democracy; cooperation & solidarity; preservation of cultures. Secondary education: self & others most frequent.	Internationalism not considered; environmental protection & spirituality least frequent.
Ali Asgari (2013)	Elementary school textbooks	Components of human rights and peace uneven	Fundamental rights emphasized	Social, economic, and cultural rights least emphasized
Abedini Beltork & MirshahJafari (2013)	Primary textbooks	Imbalance in attention to peace components	Solidarity and cooperation highest	Negation of ethnic, racial, and religious distinctions lowest
Hajizadeh & Karami (2015)	Secondary school textbooks	Similar imbalance	Solidarity and cooperation highest	Ethnic, racial, and religious distinction components lowest
Marzooghi et al. (2017)	Higher education	No evidence of peace curriculum in universities	—	Lack of peace education courses in higher education
Eslami-Somea & Movassagh (2014)	Curriculum and textbooks (general review)	Curriculum insufficient; little reference to shared humanity	—	Belonging to humanity; commonalities with other nations

Shamshiri & Eftekhari (2021)	Multiple textbooks	Peace components below average	Compassion highest	Justice lowest
Sabzikarian & Athari (2023)	Social science textbooks (Grades 3–5, before/after FRDE)	Unequal distribution of peace components	Self & others, spirituality, environmental protection	Preservation of cultures reduced after FRDE
Valikhani et al. (2024)	Textbooks & documents	Rejection of global peace discourse	—	International/global peace due to Islamic vs non-Islamic framing
Atabak (2025)	National textbooks	Need for critical thinking, empathy, conflict resolution	—	Lack of peace-oriented pedagogies
Authors' textbook review (2024–2025)	“Defense Preparedness” textbooks (Grades 9–10)	Peace-related topics appear only in first chapters	Security, defense, sustainable security	Limited depth; ideological framing

A review of the articles revealed that there is no dedicated course or unit on “peace studies” in Iranian primary/high schools. Peace and peace education components are present in textbooks but are often partial.

5. Peace in Italy

Italy, located at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, has historically been a site of cultural convergence and conflict, shaping its approach to peace and citizenship education. After the end of the Roman Empire, it was divided into several small states and city-states for centuries continuing until unification in 1861. In World War I, Italy played a role in the Allied victory and in 1946, a referendum led to the birth of the Italian Republic (Casaccio et al., 2021).

Pacifism is mentioned in official Italian documents. Article 11 of the Italian Constitution states that Italy rejects war to resolve international disputes. The idea of non-violence, developed through the country’s long pacifist tradition, has shaped some peace education initiatives (Zicchittu, 2023). peace education in Italy is relevant, as the country is the destination of thousands of immigrants and the rise of misinformation and nationalist sentiments has increased discrimination and hatred towards immigrants (Tramma, 2003). Italian pacifists are the pioneers of peace education, including Ernesto Teodoro Monta, Aldo Capitini, Maria Montessori, Don Lorenzo Milani and Danilo Dolce (Pedrini, 2016). Other factors shaping Italy’s peace education include historical memory, Catholic values of peace, based on peace, and compassion, and EU membership rooted in democracy, inclusion and solidarity (Zeba et al., 2023).

Maria Montessori spoke of peace in times of war. Her reflections conceive education for peace as a daily, concrete process embedded in educational practice. For Montessori education become the “weapon of peace,” capable of generating a more just and harmonious society. Peace represents a positive state of justice, love, and har-

mony, constructed through an active. This Italian vision conceives education as the privileged instrument of social transformation (Montessori, 1970a, 1970b, 2004). In 1986, the Association for Peace and Human Rights was founded, bringing together over 600 municipalities, provinces, regions and regional committed to promoting human rights, solidarity and international cooperation. Today, the National Network of Schools for Peace include more than 700 schools at all levels throughout Italy (scoledipace, 2025). Several peace education initiatives exist in Italy, but they are not part of an institutionalized government plan and therefore remain informal and influenced by political and cultural context. However, the national curriculum includes "Citizenship and Constitution" or also "civic education", covering topics aligned with peace education, social inclusion and acceptance of diversity (Guetta, 2019).

The Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) support many peace education initiatives (Guetta, 2025). The Ministry launched a program to strengthen implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda, promoting sustainability, peace, dialogue and the rule of law (UNESCO, 2020). Peace education is also one a main objective of the Italian Civil Corps National Service (Martinelli, 2002). It trains citizens who defend peace in the broadest sense (Balzano, 2024).

The MIUR Guidelines for Peace Education and Global Citizenship (2017), emphasize peace as a challenge for educating younger generations referring to a life in harmony with others, respect for human dignity and harmony with nature and the environment. Schools play a central role, through Peace education begins in the family and reaches the broader (Rossini, 2020). Working on these issues "is a challenging but vital field requiring passion, dedication and empathy" (Roubini, 2023, p. 6). Research on representations of war and peace has been influenced by developments in international relations (Hakvoort & Oppenheimer, 1998) and has gained attention during global instability (Shevlin et al., 2022; Weierstall-Pust et al., 2022). The ability to meta-represent complex elements such as peace and war is a critical challenge for the child's social and emotional development (Murray, 2019).

5.1. Peace Education in Textbooks in Italian schools

The Network of Schools for Peace was born after more than thirty years of effort to promote the permanent inclusion of peace and human rights education in the curriculum of all schools in Italy. Peace education has been part of Italian schools since the 1980s, thanks to the commitment of teachers and school administrators. Since 1995, promoted a network of schools and local authorities committed to educating young people about peace, justice, citizenship, human rights and responsibility. Educational efforts were intertwined with the Perugia-Assisi Peace March, launching annual "Peace at School" campaigns and projects in line with United Nations goals. In the International Year for the Culture of Peace in 2000, this work led to a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Education and the launch of the project "My School for Peace", a national civic and digital citizenship education program for schools at all levels (scoledipace, 2025). Peace education in Italian primary school textbooks remains implicit, moralistic and fragmented. To teach peace in a meaningful way, textbooks need to consider it as a transversal and interdisciplinary competence linked to citizenship, diversity and global responsibility (Guerrini, 2022). In the Italian educational tradition, history has a central role. While

in the past its objectives were mainly related to identity, today it aims to educate informed citizens with tools for critical analysis of reality, accompanied by innovations in teaching style (Monducci, 2015).

Table 2: Summary of Studies on Peace Education Components in Italian Educational Documents and Textbooks

Authors	Document / Level Studied	Findings	Peace Components Emphasized	Peace Components Neglected / Missing
Guerrini (2022)	Italian primary school textbooks (2000–2020). Fifth-grade textbook <i>Tutto Pepe</i> (Raffaello)	Textbooks show complexity in addressing peace education; symbolic/moral lessons common; peace often individualized. Several pages on rights and peace emphasizes global traditions, diversity, and cultural relativity	Peace linked to forgiveness, kindness, Christian charity; appears in citizenship education sections; cultural diversity highlighted in <i>Tutto Pepe</i> (fifth grade). Diversity and cultural relativity; global traditions	Rare linkage to civic responsibility or human rights; peace treated as personal virtue, not social/political value; limited critical thinking or conflict mediation tasks
Balzano (2024)	School community conflict-management activities	Peace education examined as learning how to manage conflicts in small groups	Learning peace through lived experience; context and timing of learning emphasized	Not focused on textbook content
Monducci (2015)	Italian history textbooks. Comparative pedagogical analysis	Extensive coverage of wars (WWI & WWII = 1/8 of pages); peace initially shown as post-war treaties; later includes peace-making through international organizations. Textbooks historically accurate and international in scope	Actions of the United Nations; international context in historical presentation. Comprehensive, up-to-date historical narratives	Peace is rarely treated beyond treaties or institutional actions; citizenship education only sometimes referenced; no specific peace-teaching methods. No explicit courses or structured methods for peace or conflict management
Damiani (2024)	Textbooks after Law 92/2019 and revised Indicazioni Na-	Peace integrated within citizenship, legality, and	Integration into Educazione civica	Peace is still part of broader frameworks,

	zionali 2018	sustainability frame-works		not standalone focus
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Baldacci (2022) and Balzano (2024) argue that education for peace must go beyond moral exhortation. In other words, peace education requires creating spaces in which learners can experience cooperation, empathy, and dialogue. However, textbooks remain powerful tools for shaping such experiences.

6. Discussion

Studies show that both Iran and Italy acknowledge the value of a culture of peace, but due to historical, cultural and political frameworks, these values are implemented differently. In Iran, the official documents of the Constitution and the Charter of Citizens’ Rights emphasize human dignity, moral commitment, social responsibility and national unity, and peace does not mean the absence of conflict, but rather moral resilience in the defense of identity. In Italy, by contrast, peace education is taught through the pillars of democratic citizenship, inclusion, solidarity and European identity enshrined in the Italian Constitution. In Italy, there is a strong emphasis on respect for diversity, dialogue, children’s rights and the prevention of discrimination. On the other hand, in Iran, despite geopolitical tensions and limited participation in international frameworks, civil society organizations have developed innovative educational programs with an emphasis on non-violence, conflict transformation and intercultural dialogue. Despite these differences, this study shows that in both countries, peace education is important for social cohesion and that both education systems could benefit from more inclusive practices, especially in multicultural contexts, to maintain peace education in the education system as a principle and not a symbol.

Table 3: comparative peace education in Iran and Italy

Theme	Iran	Italy	Comparison
Document	• Constitution (1979) • Charter of Citizens’ Rights (2016)	• Italian Constitution (1948) • National Indications for Curriculum (2012)	Both nations embed peace-related principles in foundational laws and curricula, but with different emphases.
Peace	Peace is linked to moral duty, national identity, unity, and ethical behavior.	Peace is linked to democratic citizenship, inclusion, social participation, and coexistence.	• Iran frames peace through <i>ethical–national and religious</i> values. • Italy through <i>democratic–inclusive</i> values.
Values	Morality, spirituality, national religious solidarity, social responsibility.	Respect for diversity, dialogue, cooperation, emotional and social develop-	Both promote values supporting peace, but Italy emphasizes pluralism while Iran

		ment.	emphasizes coherence and duty.
Curriculum	Curriculum integrates ethical formation, identity, resistance, and social harmony.	Curriculum stresses active citizenship, intercultural education, inclusivity, and human rights.	Both curricula include peace education but operationalize it through different cultural and political lenses.
Educational practice	Practices may reflect emphasis on discipline, moral duty, and collective identity.	Practices focus on participation, inclusion, rights-based learning, group collaboration.	Implementation of peace education varies more in practice than in policy documents.
Peace education approach	Peace is “responsible citizenship” through morality and national commitment.	Peace is “inclusive citizenship” through democratic values and cultural openness.	Different pathways, but both aim at social cohesion and stable societies.

7. Conclusions

Today, all societies call for peace, dialogue and respect for the rights of individuals. Students, teachers and their communities are killed, injured and displaced. And talking about peace in this environment is very challenging but necessary (Education International, 2025). This article examines peace education in the educational systems of Iran and Italy. In both countries, values such as respect, cooperation and social unity are important and are shaped by the collective good, which in Iran has a more religious approach. In Italy, peace is expressed through inclusive citizenship, respect for cultural diversity and active participation in a democratic society. These diversities reflect the socio-political, historical and religious trajectories of each country. However, both systems consider peace education as essential as a basis for building more just and cohesive societies. The study concludes that strengthening peace education requires, among other things, greater integration of inclusive practices, bridging the gap between official policies and implementation in classrooms, developing teacher training programs that foster intercultural competence, promoting teaching methods that integrate human rights, cooperation and solidarity into everyday school practices, and finally, that peace education, when based on inclusion, dialogue and respect, becomes a powerful tool for creating more just and harmonious societies across cultural contexts, thereby building peace based on inclusion in all societies.

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