

Fostering Patriotic Feelings in Secondary School Students Through the Theatrical Staging of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's Drama "Padarkush"

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Abstract: This study reports the ascertaining (constatative) stage of a broader pedagogical experiment examining how the theatrical staging of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's drama Padarkush ("The Patricide", 1911) – widely regarded as the first original drama in Uzbek national literature – can be used to strengthen patriotic feeling among secondary school students. Before implementing the staging-based formative intervention, a large-scale diagnostic survey was conducted to establish the baseline level of patriotic understanding achieved through conventional, text-based study of the drama. A 15-item structured questionnaire, scored on a 0–3 point scale for each item, was administered to 259 tenth-grade students from five general secondary schools (No. 1, 2, and 12 in Urganch city and No. 38 and 39 in Urganch district, Khorazm region). The instrument assessed students' comprehension of the drama's characters and central conflict, their grasp of Behbudi's patriotic ideas, and the depth of personal, affective identification with the play's message. Descriptive analysis showed an overall mean score of 1.84 out of 3 (61.3% of the maximum), with 21.7% of responses reaching the highest level, 44.0% a satisfactory level, 30.9% a low level, and 3.4% a very low level of understanding. Item-level analysis revealed that students performed comparatively well on questions requiring plot comprehension and moral evaluation of characters, but noticeably weaker on items requiring deep personal identification with national heritage, biographical knowledge of Behbudi, and the internalization of patriotic self-identity. These findings indicate that conventional textual instruction develops factual and moral comprehension of Padarkush more successfully than its affective, identity-forming dimension, providing an empirical rationale for the formative stage of the experiment, in which theatrical staging – as an embodied, experiential method – is implemented specifically to strengthen this underdeveloped affective component of patriotic education.

Keywords: Patriotic education; drama pedagogy, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, Padarkush, Jadid literature, theatrical staging, ascertaining experiment, diagnostic survey, experiential learning, civic consciousness.

Introduction: The formation of patriotic feeling in the younger generation is one of the central strategic tasks of the modern educational system of the Republic of Uzbekistan. State programs on spiritual and moral education repeatedly emphasize that patriotism cannot be cultivated through declarative instruction alone; it must be grounded in the emotional, historical, and moral experience of learners, and the national literary heritage occupies a privileged position as a resource through which such experience can be constructed in the classroom and beyond it.

Among the works most frequently invoked in this context is Padarkush ("The Patricide"), written in 1911 by Mahmudkhoja Behbudi – publicist, educator, and one of the principal figures of the Jadid enlightenment movement in Turkestan. Padarkush is conventionally regarded as the first drama in the history of Uzbek literature and occupies a foundational place in the national dramatic tradition. Its plot centres on an ignorant, conservative father who refuses to provide his son with a modern, enlightened education and instead leaves him exposed to idleness and corrupting

company; deprived of moral and intellectual guidance, the son descends into gambling and criminality and ultimately kills his own father in a dispute over money. The drama thus functions as a didactic warning addressed to the Turkestani society of its time: the refusal of enlightenment and modern schooling does not merely harm the individual but threatens the moral and social fabric of the nation itself. It is precisely this fusion of personal tragedy with a call to national awakening that has made Padarkush an enduring vehicle for patriotic and civic education in contemporary Uzbek schools.

A substantial body of pedagogical scholarship, including the author's own prior publications, has examined the ideological content of Padarkush, its didactic and moral-educational significance, the methodology of its textual analysis in literature lessons, and its place within the broader legacy of Jadid pedagogical thought. This literature has convincingly established the drama's value as curricular content. However, an important methodological question has received comparatively little systematic empirical attention: does the manner in which the drama is taught specifically, whether students encounter it as a text to be read and discussed or as a text to be physically embodied and performed – make a measurable difference in the depth and durability of the patriotic attitudes it is intended to cultivate?

Educational drama theory offers strong theoretical grounds to expect that it does. Vygotsky's account of imaginative play as a mechanism through which children internalize socially and culturally significant meanings, Dewey's principle of learning by doing, and the process-drama tradition developed by Heathcote and Bolton all converge on the claim that embodied, first-person enactment of a narrative produces forms of understanding and affective engagement that reading alone does not reliably produce. Augusto Boal's notion of the spectator becoming an active participant – a “spect-actor” – further suggests that performance can transform a passive moral lesson into a lived rehearsal of civic agency. If these theoretical claims hold for the specific case of Padarkush, then the theatrical staging of the drama, organized as an extracurricular pedagogical project, should produce stronger gains in patriotic attitudes than conventional in-class textual analysis of the same material.

The present study was designed to test this claim empirically through a multi-stage pedagogical experiment consisting of an ascertaining (constatative) stage, a formative stage in which theatrical staging is implemented, and a control stage in which post-intervention outcomes are assessed. This article reports the ascertaining stage, whose purpose was to establish, on a broad and representative student sample, the baseline level of patriotic understanding developed through the conventional, text-based study of Padarkush that currently predominates in general secondary schools, and to identify precisely which dimensions of patriotic understanding are least developed by this conventional approach. Establishing this baseline is a methodological prerequisite for the subsequent formative stage: only by knowing where conventional instruction is weakest can the staging-based intervention be purposefully designed to address those specific gaps. The ascertaining stage was guided by the following research questions: (1) What overall level of patriotic understanding do tenth-grade students demonstrate after conventional textual study of Padarkush, as measured by a structured diagnostic questionnaire? (2) Which specific dimensions of understanding – factual-plot comprehension, moral evaluation of characters, biographical-historical knowledge, or affective and identity-related engagement – are most and least developed under conventional instruction? (3) What do these findings imply for the design of a subsequent formative intervention based on theatrical staging?

METHODS

Research design. The ascertaining stage employed a descriptive, cross-sectional diagnostic survey design, intended to establish the baseline level of patriotic understanding formed by conventional, text-based instruction on Padarkush prior to the introduction of a staging-based formative intervention. Rather than comparing two groups, this stage was designed to sample a broad and geographically varied student population, so that the resulting baseline would be representative of typical outcomes under existing instructional practice rather than of a single classroom.

Participants. The survey involved 259 tenth-grade students (aged 15–16) drawn from five general secondary schools: schools No. 1, No. 2, and No. 12 of Urganch city and schools No. 38 and No. 39 of Urganch

district, Khorazm region. All participating students had completed the standard literature curriculum unit on Mahmudkhoja Behbudi and Padarkush through conventional classroom instruction (textbook reading, teacher-led discussion, and written assignments) prior to the survey. Participation was voluntary and anonymous, with consent obtained from school administrations and class teachers in accordance with standard ethical procedures for educational research.

Instrument. A 15-item structured questionnaire (anketa-so'rovnoma) was developed by the author to assess two interrelated aspects of learning outcomes: (a) cognitive comprehension of the drama's plot, characters, and central conflict, and of Behbudi's biography and ideas (items 1, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15); and (b) the affective and identity-related dimension of patriotic education, including personal lessons drawn from the drama, self-assessed strengthening of patriotic feeling, and understanding of the conditions necessary for patriotic upbringing (items 2, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 14). Each item was open-ended and scored by trained literature teachers on a four-point scale: 3 points for a full, well-reasoned answer demonstrating deep and independent understanding; 2 points for a substantially correct but less developed answer; 1 point for a superficial or partially correct answer; and 0 points for an incorrect or missing answer. The maximum possible score per item was therefore 3, and item-level results are reported as means and percentage distributions across the four score categories.

Procedure. The questionnaire was administered during regular literature lessons under the supervision of the class teacher and the researcher, after the standard curricular unit on Padarkush had been completed through conventional instruction. Students responded

individually and in writing within a single 45-minute lesson. Completed questionnaires were coded and scored independently by two literature teachers according to a shared scoring rubric; scoring discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and the agreed score was retained for analysis.

Data analysis. Responses were tabulated by item and score category (3, 2, 1, and 0 points). For each item, the number and percentage of students in each score category were calculated, together with the item mean (on a 0–3 scale). An overall composite indicator was computed as the mean of the fifteen item means, expressed both on the 0–3 scale and as a percentage of the maximum possible score, and the aggregated distribution of all 3,843 individual item-responses across the four score categories was calculated to characterize the overall level of patriotic understanding attained through conventional instruction. Item means were further examined comparatively to distinguish dimensions of relatively stronger performance (cognitive-factual comprehension) from dimensions of relatively weaker performance (affective and identity-related engagement), in order to inform the design of the subsequent formative, staging-based stage of the experiment.

RESULTS

A total of 3,843 individual item-responses were collected from 259 students across the fifteen questionnaire items (259 responses per item for thirteen items; 215 responses for item 9 and 261 for item 10, reflecting minor variation in the number of students present or answering fully on those two items). Table 1 presents, for each item, the number of respondents, the percentage distribution across the four score categories, and the item mean on a 0–3 scale.

Table 1. Item-level results of the ascertaining-stage questionnaire (N = 259 students; items 9 and 10 have adjusted N as noted in the text).

Item (brief content)	N	3 pts %	2 pts %	1 pt %	0 pts %	Mean
1. Character evoking patriotic	259	6.6	43.6	46.7	3.1	1.54

Item (brief content)	N	3 pts %	2 pts %	1 pt %	0 pts %	Mean
ng (a)						
2. Character evoking patriotic ng (b)	259	22.8	52.9	20.1	4.2	1.94
3. Character traits of the Father)	259	18.5	45.2	35.5	0.8	1.81
4. Evaluation of Toshmurod's	259	21.6	47.1	29.7	1.5	1.89
5. Lesson drawn from arkush	259	25.1	52.9	20.5	1.5	2.02
6. Key aspects of patriotic ringing	259	22.8	50.2	23.9	3.1	1.93
7. Factors shaping youth iotism	259	23.9	42.5	31.7	1.9	1.88
8. Behbudi's notions of iotism	259	29.7	37.5	31.7	1.2	1.96
9. Main idea and relevance y	215	22.8	34.4	41.4	1.4	1.79
10. Knowledge of Behbudi's work	261	20.7	42.9	29.9	6.5	1.78
11. Lesson from Toshmurod's mple	259	24.7	37.5	32.8	5.0	1.82
12. National identity / respect	259	17.4	46.7	30.1	5.8	1.76

Item (brief content)	N	3 pts %	2 pts %	1 pt %	0 pts %	Mean
homeland						
13. Lessons for youth ringing	259	23.9	41.7	30.1	4.2	1.85
14. Personal contribution to patriotism	259	18.9	44.4	30.1	6.6	1.76
15. Central conflict of the na	259	26.6	39.0	30.5	3.9	1.88

The composite indicator, computed as the mean of the fifteen item means, was $M = 1.84$ on the 0–3 scale, corresponding to 61.3% of the maximum attainable score. The aggregated distribution of all 3,843 item-responses across the four score categories was as follows: 21.7% of responses received the highest score (3 points), 44.0% received 2 points, 30.9% received 1

point, and 3.4% received 0 points. Combining the two upper categories, 65.7% of responses reflected a satisfactory-to-high level of understanding, while 34.3% reflected a low or very low level – indicating that, although conventional instruction brings a majority of students to an adequate level of comprehension, a substantial minority remains inadequately prepared, particularly in the dimensions detailed below.

Table 2. Aggregated distribution of the 3,843 item-responses across score categories (composite $M = 1.84/3$, i.e. 61.3%).

Level of understanding	High (3 pts)	Satisfactory (2 pts)	Low (1 pt)	Very low (0)
Share of responses (%)	21.7	44.0	30.9	3.4

Comparison of item means reveals a consistent pattern. The highest-scoring items were item 5 (lesson drawn from the drama, $M = 2.02$), item 8 (understanding of Behbudi's notions of patriotism, $M = 1.96$), and item 2 (identification of the character evoking patriotic feeling, $M = 1.94$) – all items relying primarily on comprehension of explicitly stated textual content and straightforward moral evaluation. The lowest-scoring items were item 1 ($M = 1.54$, the item

with by far the largest share of 1-point responses, 46.7%), item 10 (knowledge of Behbudi's biography and creative work, $M = 1.78$, and the item with the highest share of 0-point responses, 6.5%), and items 12 and 14 ($M = 1.76$ each), both of which required students to reflect on the formation of their own national identity and personal patriotic feeling rather than to describe the text's content. Item 9, which required students to assess the contemporary relevance of the drama's central idea, likewise scored

comparatively low ($M = 1.79$) and had the largest share of 1-point responses among items with $N = 259/215$ (41.4%).

Taken together, these results indicate that conventional, text-based instruction on Padarkush is more successful in developing cognitive-factual comprehension of the play's plot and moral content than in cultivating the affective, identity-related core of patriotic education – that is, personal identification with national heritage, biographical-historical grounding in Behbudi's own life and reformist activity, and the internalized sense that the drama's lesson bears directly on the student's own civic and patriotic self-understanding. This asymmetry between comparatively strong factual comprehension (items 2, 5, 6, 8) and comparatively weak affective-identity engagement (items 1, 10, 12, 14) constitutes the principal empirical finding of the ascertaining stage and directly informs the rationale for the formative stage of the experiment.

DISCUSSION

The ascertaining-stage results show that conventional, text-based instruction on Padarkush brings a majority of tenth-grade students (65.7% of responses) to a satisfactory or high level of understanding, confirming that the drama's content is, in principle, well suited to patriotic education, as established in the author's earlier work on the ideological and moral-educational significance of the play. At the same time, the item-level pattern reveals a specific and pedagogically consequential weakness: students perform relatively well when a question can be answered by recalling or interpreting explicit textual content (items 2, 5, 6, 8), but perform markedly worse when a question requires them to connect that content to their own biographical knowledge of Behbudi (item 10) or to their own emerging sense of national identity and personal patriotic feeling (items 1, 12, 14). This is not a deficiency of factual teaching but a limitation inherent to the instructional method: reading and discussing a text primarily engages comprehension and moral reasoning, whereas the formation of identity and affect – the very core of patriotic feeling as opposed to patriotic knowledge – requires a different kind of pedagogical engagement. This distinction is well explained by educational drama theory. Vygotsky's account of imaginative and dramatic play as a

mechanism for internalizing culturally significant meaning suggests that a purely receptive engagement with a text – reading about a character's dilemma – is a fundamentally different cognitive-affective act from enacting that dilemma oneself. Dewey's principle that understanding is consolidated through active doing, rather than passive reception, offers a parallel explanation: the comparatively low scores on items 1, 10, 12, and 14 are precisely those items that ask students to do something with the material – to identify personally, to situate it biographically, to apply it to themselves – rather than merely to recount it. The process-drama tradition of Heathcote and Bolton, and Boal's notion of the spect-actor who moves from passive observation to active moral rehearsal, together imply that theatrical staging is a method specifically designed to strengthen exactly the affective, identity-related dimension that the ascertaining survey found to be weakest under conventional instruction.

These findings therefore provide a clear empirical rationale for the formative stage of the pedagogical experiment, in which students engage in the rehearsal and public performance of Padarkush as described in the methodological design of the broader study: script adaptation and character-analysis workshops addressing the historical grounding of Behbudi's ideas (directly targeting the weakness identified in item 10), embodied role-taking and improvisation exploring the personal and moral stakes of the drama's conflict (targeting items 1, 12, and 14), and a public performance intended to consolidate the personally rehearsed civic stance through communal recognition. Rather than replacing textual instruction – which the present results show to be reasonably effective for factual and moral comprehension – staging is best understood as a complementary intervention aimed specifically at the affective and identity-forming component of patriotic education that text-based teaching alone does not fully reach.

From a practical standpoint, the diagnostic pattern observed here supports a two-track approach to teaching Padarkush in general secondary schools: retaining conventional textual analysis for building comprehension of plot, character, and historical-ideological context, while introducing structured extracurricular staging activities – drama clubs, literature-week performances, or cross-curricular

projects linking literature, history, and civic education – specifically to deepen personal identification and self-directed patriotic reflection. Given that the weakest item in the survey (item 1, $M = 1.54$) concerned the identification of a character evoking patriotic feeling, and that the item most related to biographical grounding (item 10) showed the highest proportion of zero scores, teachers preparing a staging project should place particular emphasis on character-analysis workshops that connect the fictional figures of the drama to Behbudi's own biography and historical circumstances before rehearsal begins.

Several limitations of the ascertaining stage should be noted. As a single cross-sectional survey without a comparison group, it establishes a descriptive baseline rather than a causal effect; the actual impact of the subsequent staging-based intervention on these same dimensions is to be established in the formative and control stages of the experiment, which fall outside the scope of the present report. The sample, although substantial (259 students across five schools), was drawn from a single region (Khorazm) and a single grade level, which limits generalization to other regions and age groups. Scoring of open-ended responses, despite the use of a shared rubric and double scoring, retains an element of rater judgment inherent to qualitative-content assessment of this kind.

Future stages of this research should report the results of the formative intervention – in which the theatrical staging procedure is implemented with a subset of the surveyed population or a comparable cohort – measured with the same fifteen-item instrument, so that pre- and post-intervention scores on the specific affective-identity items identified here (1, 10, 12, 14) can be directly compared. Longitudinal follow-up several months after the staging performance would further clarify whether the anticipated gains in affective and identity-related understanding are durable rather than transient, and replication across additional regions and grade levels would strengthen the generalizability of both the diagnostic pattern and the staging-based remedy proposed here.

CONCLUSION

The ascertaining stage of this pedagogical experiment surveyed 259 tenth-grade students across five general secondary schools in Khorazm region to establish the

baseline level of patriotic understanding developed through conventional, text-based study of Mahmudkhoja Behbudi's drama *Padarkush*. The results show that conventional instruction brings a majority of students (65.7% of responses) to a satisfactory or high level of overall understanding (composite $M = 1.84/3$, or 61.3%), confirming the drama's suitability as content for patriotic education. However, a clear and consistent asymmetry emerged between comparatively strong performance on items requiring factual and moral comprehension of the text and comparatively weak performance on items requiring personal identification with national heritage, biographical grounding in Behbudi's life and work, and self-reflective patriotic engagement. This pattern demonstrates that conventional textual instruction, while pedagogically valuable, does not fully develop the affective and identity-forming core of patriotic education, and it provides a precise, empirically grounded rationale for the formative stage of the experiment, in which the theatrical staging of *Padarkush* is introduced as a complementary instructional method specifically targeted at strengthening this underdeveloped dimension. The study recommends that programs of patriotic education built around *Padarkush* and comparable works of the Jadid dramatic heritage combine textual analysis with structured staging activities, and it identifies the diagnostic instrument and item-level findings reported here as a basis for designing and evaluating that formative intervention in subsequent stages of the research.

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