

Development of Literacy Growth in Iran over the last 50 Years: Women, rural areas and the Elderly in deprivation

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Abstract

This research was conducted to assess the growth of literacy and awareness of illiteracy in the entire country. The required information was collected by documentary and library methods. The statistical data about literacy of 6 years old and above population over the years from 1966 to 2016, obtained from the public database website of the statistical Center of Iran and the statistical yearbook of 2012. The findings show that in the last 50 years, the rate of illiteracy in Iran has always fallen, and this trend has been faster Slope for the first decades. The rate of illiteracy in the female population in urban and rural areas is always lower than that of men. Although the trend of the literacy rate was increasing, it is different for urban and rural areas, especially in recent years, to detriment of the second group. According to statistics, the rural literate population (male and female) declined somewhat in the years 2006 to 2016. Although the reason for this is not clear to us, however, there is a concern that the development of education and combating illiteracy in rural areas was not as serious as cities. In addition, women rural are more vulnerable than men. Illiteracy rates are also higher in deprived provinces, as well as among the elderly. Thus, there are four challenges issues in fighting to illiteracy including deprived provinces, rural area, women and the elderly. These groups have been more vulnerable to illiteracy and it is more difficult to overcome injustice in these groups.

Keywords: illiteracy, population, education, rural and urban.

Introduction

Education is one of the key pillars of development in any society. Literacy in developing countries is considered as an indicator of progress, and combating illiteracy for all the growing societies is an ideal goal that leads to cultural, economic and social development. As Salehi (2010: p. 8, quoted by Pourmadzan and Amiri Mikal, 1393) states: "No development and evolution without development and cultural development is possible and desirable. For example, any country that has been achieve to independency in agriculture, before that has been victorious in eradicating illiteracy and spreading culture. Also, in some countries, they created or strengthened national unity on the basis of culture, then organized the country on the basis of the economic, social, and political movements towards sustainable development. Also, Sam-Aram (1374) emphasis on literacy as one of the major factors of rural development. The results of his study show that after the literacy, the level of knowledge and culture of the villagers has been improved, and they have become more successful in speaking and listening

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interactions and the use of simple books and journals. Literacy causes women to exclusion from isolation and entre into the political-social arena (Pourmoadzen and Amiri, 2014).

According to the definition of statistical Center of Iran, a literate person is a person who is able to read and write plain text in Persian or any other language, whether or not they have official qualifications. In this definition, the first grader of elementary school and literate leavers the literacy campaigns are called literate (Statistical Yearbook of 2015, p. 660). Today, however, literacy is a fundamental skill for learning how to learn, how to do a work, and how to live together. According to this view, today eradication of illiteracy is not the goal but the goal is, participation and engagement in lifelong learning through universal access to written culture. Therefore, literacy is a life-long learning path rather than a basic education (Hakimzadeh et. al. 1394).

The first major step towards combating illiteracy in Iran was officially taken in 1936. This year, the Board of Ministers approved the adult education codebook, and the Ministry of Education was obliged to establish a school for adults, all over the country, which then renamed to Adult Education in 1956. Then this task was given to the Corps of Science in 1963. On September 8, 1965, the World Congress on Illiteracy was held in Iran. At this important event, education ministers and delegations from the eighty-eight countries of the world convened the meeting under the supervision of UNESCO in Tehran. Since then, the United Nations has been declared this day as the World Illiteracy Fighting Day, and in Iran, there have been several ways to combat illiteracy. After the revolution of 1979, this task was given to the literacy movement (Askariani, 2005).

"According to Article 1 of the 595 Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, the Ministry of Education is required to increase the attraction rate of 6-year-olds by blocking the input of illiteracy, through creating the flexibility and applying the necessary innovations in methods, educational standards, procedures and official trends. But, the study of the actual coverage rate and the survival rate of the elementary education and the results of the census of 2011 indicate the emergence of new illiterate. Comparing the profile of 6-year-olds eligible for registration with the information of students enrolled in the 2010-11 school year, 55344 of children are out of school. In other words, the actual coverage at this age is 95%. According to the census of 2011, 236,000 illiterates were reported in the age group of 6 to 9 years, which is equivalent to 1.8% of the total population. On average, about 85,000 of 1st to 4th grade elementary school students leave schools annually "(Eradication Program for Illiteracy in the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2014).

Illiteracy is more pronounced in the elderly population. "According to the census of 1976, 89% of elderly people aged 60 and older had been illiterate. This figure was 95% for women and 80% for men. In 1986, 83% of the elderly population was illiterate, while in 1996, 77% of them were illiterate. In terms of sex, in 1996, about 54% of men and 46% of women were literate. While this ratio among the population of 60 years old and more for men was 76% and for women, it was 24%. In 1996, about 85% of the urban population was literate and 15% illiterate, and in the same year, in a population of 60 and more urban, 33% were literate and 67% illiterate, but in the population 60 years old and more rural, 10% literate and 90% illiterate. The aforementioned cultivars are significantly different from national cultivars. The proportion of elderly illiterate to literate is 12 times more than of whole illiterate people to the literate "(Amir-Sadri and Soleimani, 2012). This suggests that preventing illiteracy is more effective than fighting it; when children have left their school, they will have little chance of coming back in the next few years.

However, some research suggests that going to school or attending literacy classes is not a criterion for literacy. Smith-Greenaway (2015) studied the demographic data of 31 African countries and found that illiterate is not much relevance to school attendance. Many people after a long time of school attendance did not have the necessary skills, on the other side, some people were illiterate in other ways without schooling. Even literacy today have broader implications and includes different

communication practices such as the use of audio, visual, digital and Internet tools. In this regard, Pilgrim and Martinez (2013) analyzed the term "literacy" from the 20th-century terminology approach and, based on its documentation, summed it up into several components as follows: "Information literacy: the ability to recognize when information is required and the ability to find, evaluate and effectively use of the information (Ala, 1989). MultiLiteracy: Multiple ways of communicating and creating meaning, including modes such as visual, audio, spatial, behavioral and gesture (New London Group, 1996). New Literacy: Using New Technologies for Data Collection and Transfer (Coiro et al, 2008). Digital Literacy: The ability to find, evaluate, use, share and create content using information technology and the Internet (Cornell University, 2009). Web literacy: Knowledge and the use of specific skills needed to locate, analyze and transfer information on the Internet"(Pilgrim and Martinez, 2013). But in many countries, the minimum standards of reading and writing literacy are still out of reach. UNESCO (2017) reports that illiteracy rates in the world have declined dramatically over the past 50 years, and that the Percentage difference of men and women has declined, however, by 2016, about 750 million adults out of the world were illiterate, Two thirds of them were women. In this regard, the World Bank affiliated with UNESCO reported that in 1977, the world's literacy rate for the population aged 15 was up 69.02% and in 2016 it reached to 25.88%, which means an average of nearly 14% of the world's people are not literate to read and write. Of course, this figure for the industrial and advanced countries is of zero. A half of these people are Live in 20 countries: Afghanistan, Benin, Bolkino Faso, Central Africa, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Iraq, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan.

This research conducted to understand the process of literacy developments on the basis of country statistics of illiterate population. In this regard, the trend of changes in the resent 40-year period in which information was available. Who is the ratio of women and men to these developments, the ratio of urban and rural, as well as the factor of age, is considered in this survey. With the comparisons between these categories, this phenomenon will become clearer.

Methodology

The present study is a documentary survey in witch data is extracted from the Statistical Yearbooks (of Iran) and Internet Portal of the National Organization for Planning and Budget (National Statistic Portal). In these documents, the statistical tables of the "Education" section are the basis for action, and information from the censuses of the whole country from 1966 to 2016 has been used within the framework of the research objectives. These information has been based on the Census over the entire country.

Findings

The nation's literate population

Table 1 shows the statistics of the country's literate population for the years 1966 to 2016 by sex. The statistics are based on Census reports and show number of literate people aged 6 years and older, except for the year 1966, that people over 7 years of age and above have been operating. The cell's digits are in thousands. Accordingly, in 1996, the total number of literate aged 6 and older persons in the country was 62667000, of whom 32913000 (52, 52%) were men and 29754000 (48.47%) were women.

Table 1: Literate aged 6 and older Iranian population for the years 1966 to 2016 by sex

Census	Total	Male	Female
1966	5556	3928	1628
1976	12877	8198	4679
1986	23913	14078	9835
1991	33966	19091	14875
1996	41582	22465	19118
2006	54082	28835	25247
2011	57362	30126	27236
2016	62667	32913	29754

Table 2 shows Iranian population of 6 years and older by settlement (urban or rural) and gender. This table shows that the percentage of literate men has continually been higher than literate women. The peak of this difference was in 1966 and gradually decreased. Also, the difference in the ratio of literate women and men in rural areas was greater, as in the latest census, the difference is about twice the size of the cities. The difference between the statistics of literate male and female in rural areas has decreased until 2011, but unlike in the year 2016, it has slightly increased.

Table 2: Iranian population of 6 years and older by settlement and gender

Census	total				urban						rural					
	Male		Female		Total		Male		Female		Total		Male		Female	
	No. ^a	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1966	3928*	70.70	1628	29.30	3833	68.99**	2442	63.73	1390	36.27	1723	31.01**	1485	86.19	238	13.81
1976	13926	51.36	13187	48.64	8628	67.02	5145	59.63	3483	40.37	4246	32.98	3053	71.85	1196	28.15
1986	14078	58.87	9835	41.13	15507	64.94	8765	56.52	6742	43.48	8371	35.06	5287	63.16	3084	36.84
1991	19091	56.21	14875	43.79	21725	64.17	11903	54.79	9822	45.21	12128	35.83	7114	58.66	5014	41.34
1996	22465	54.02	19118	45.98	27857	67.10	14861	53.35	12996	46.65	13661	32.90	7565	55.38	6096	44.62
2006	28835	53.32	25247	46.68	39096	72.35	20625	52.75	18471	47.25	14939	27.65	8183	54.78	6756	45.22
2011	30126	52.52	27236	47.48	43048	75.08	22358	51.94	20690	48.06	14287	24.92	7752	54.26	6534	45.74
2016	32913	52.52	29754	47.48	48305	77.12	25048	51.85	23257	48.15	14334	22.88	7849	54.76	6485	45.24

a. The numbers are by 1000 b. Urban and rural proportions

The focus of this study was on illiteracy in the country, which seemed to be a clearer explanation of this phenomenon, but in most cases, the statistics for the population of the total age of 6 years and older were not available.

Figure 1 shows the percentage of illiterate people by sex. This chart illustrates the trend towards reducing illiteracy over the past 50 years. According to the latest census of 2016, 15.8% of the female population and 9% of the male population still are not able to read and write. According to the census of 2016, the illiteracy rate in the entire population is a significant value of 12.4%. In other words, about 8.84 million of population in age 6 and older are not able to read and write.

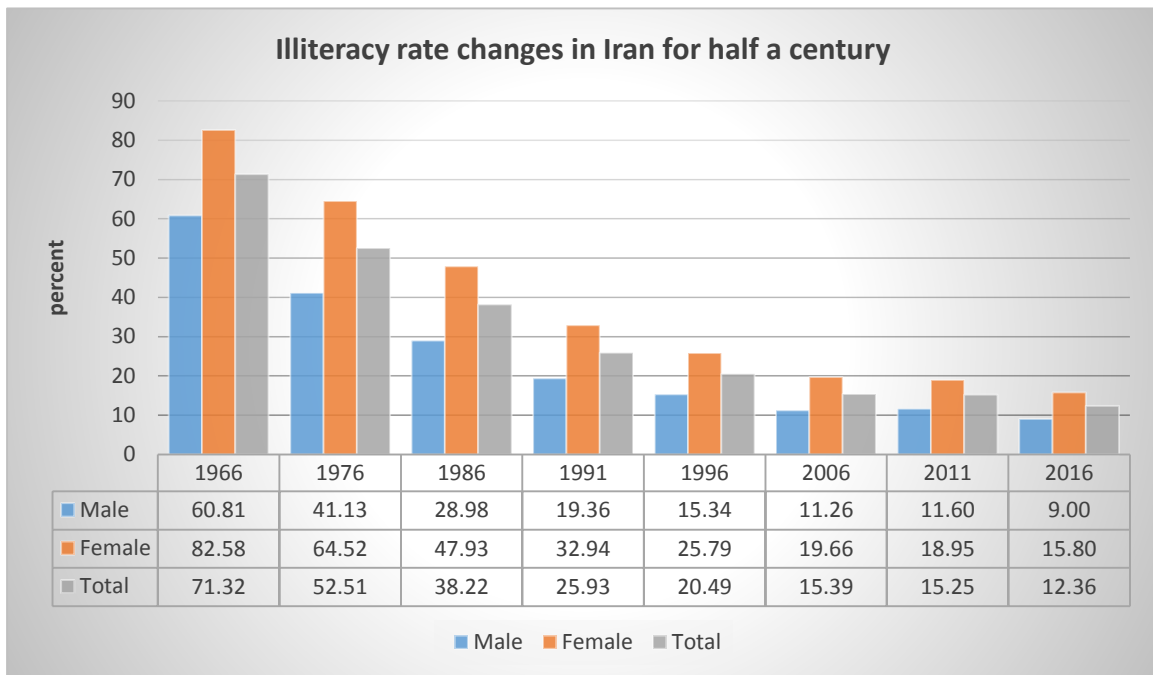


Figure 1: Percentage of illiterate people by sex

Changes in the literacy rate of Iranian men and women over the last half century

We would have liked to focus on illiteracy data, but we were confronted with information constraints. Therefore, in the following analyzes, the literacy rate is based on the simple frequency.

Figure 2 shows the growth of literacy rates of men population of 6 years and older, which indicates a gradual increase in the number of literate people over time.

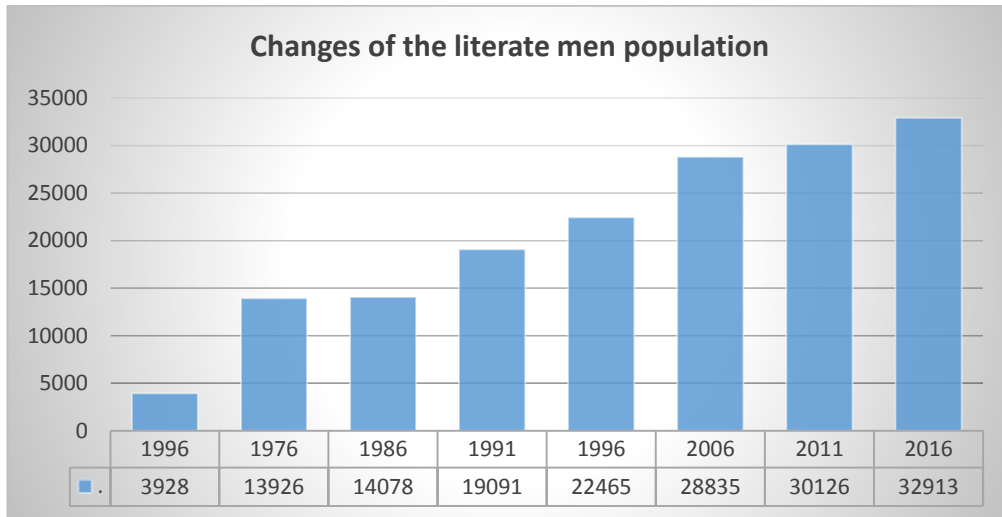


Figure 2: population of literate men on 8 census
The numbers are by 1000

Changes of literate men population of urban and rural areas

Figure 3 compares the population of urban and rural literate men over time. As this chart shows, increasing in urban literate men is far higher than that of rural literate men. Also while the literacy rate in cities has steadily increased, in rural areas since the year 2006, even about 334,000 people have been reduced.

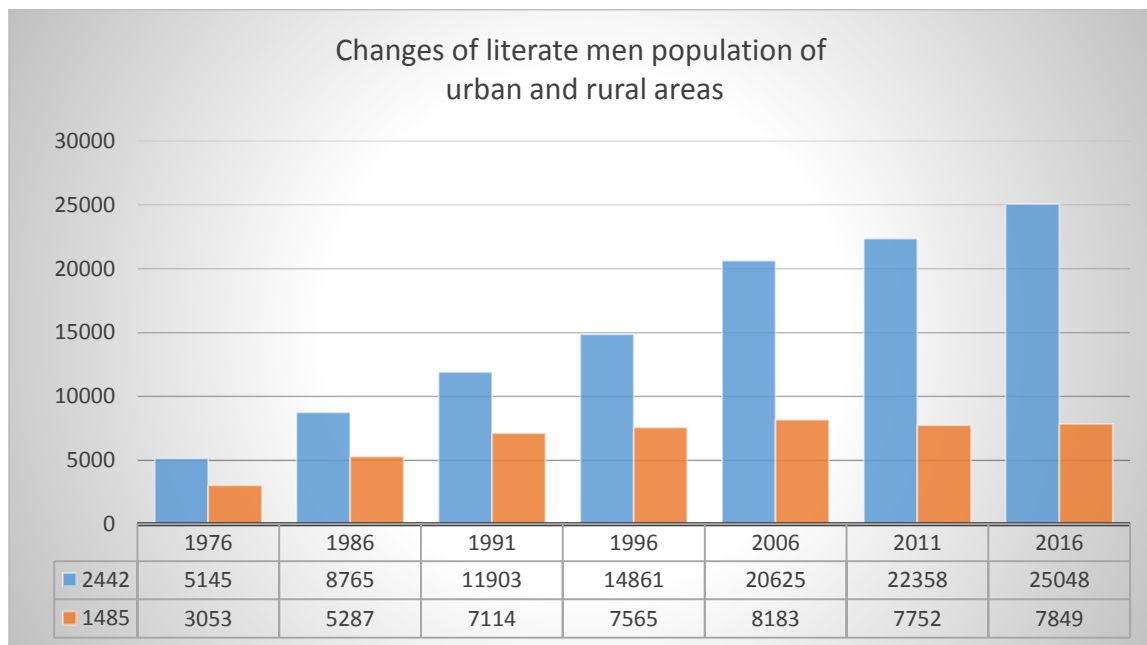


Figure 3: Comparison of the population of urban and rural literate men over time
The numbers are by 1000

Changes in women's literacy rates

Figure 4 shows the growth of literacy rates in the population of women aged 6 and older. This chart shows the gradual increase of number of literate women over time.

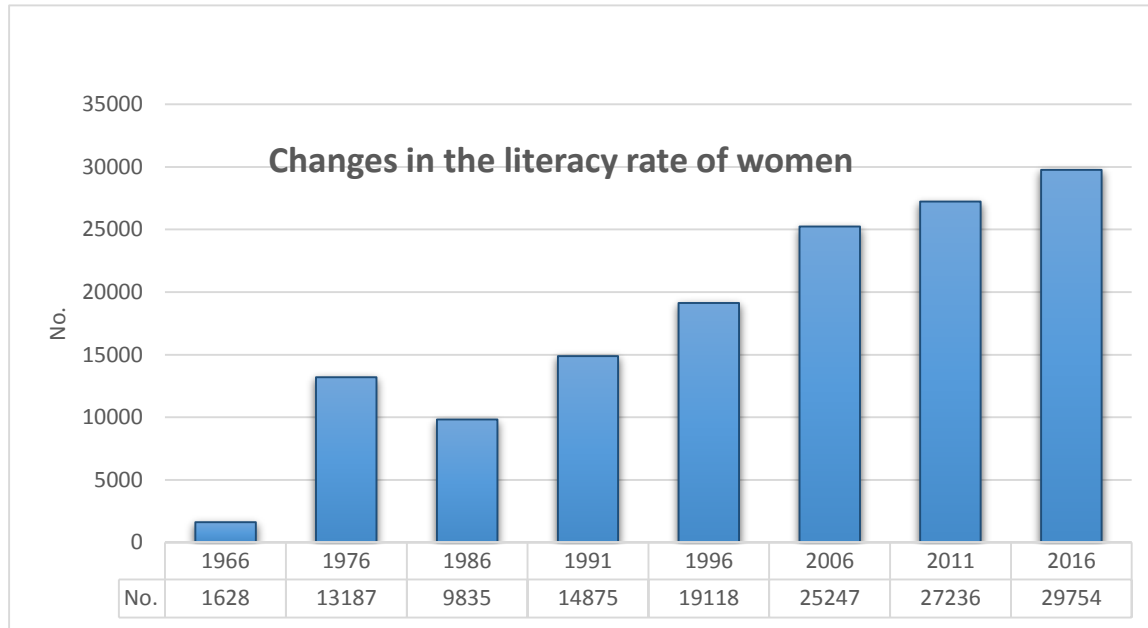


Figure 4: population of literate women on 8 census
The numbers are by 1000

Changes of literate men population of urban and rural areas

In Figure 5, the number of literate women in urban and rural has been compared over time. As the chart shows, the rate of increase in urban literate women is far more than that of rural women. While the literacy rate in cities has steadily risen, but in rural areas since the year 2006, even about 271,000 have fallen.

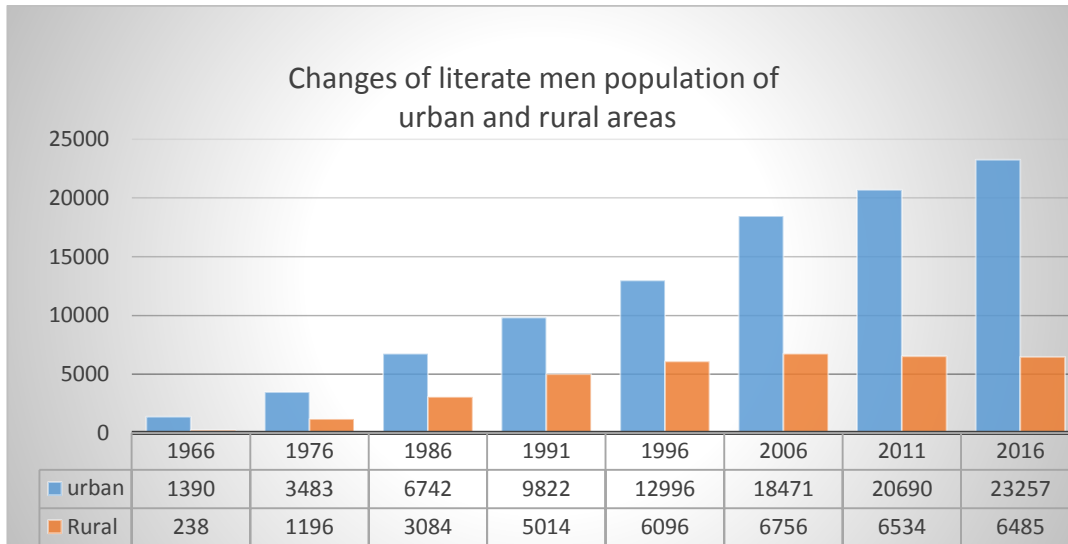


Figure 5: Comparison of the number of literate women in urban and rural
The numbers are by 1000

In line with the difference in the growth rate of urban and rural literate people, Figures 6 and 7 are drawn to compare the statistics of literate women and men in urban and rural areas, respectively. Figure 6 shows that in cities literacy rate for women is grown in consistent with men, while according to Figure 7 in rural areas, literacy rate for women is grown in consistent with men by 2006, but in the past 10 years it seems a decreasing trend.

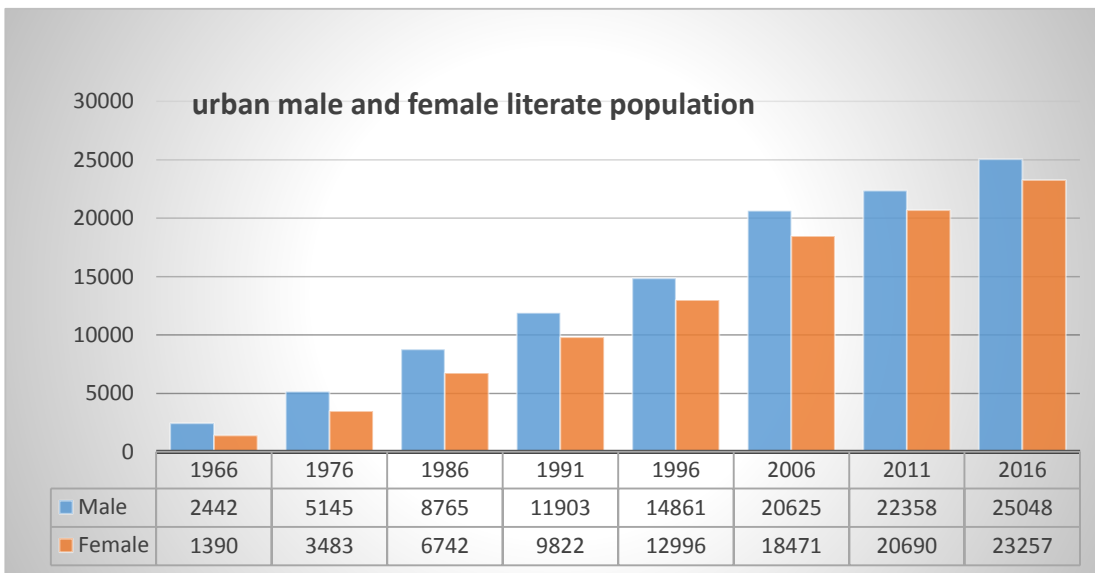


Figure 6: Comparison of literate population of male and female in urban area
The numbers are by 1000

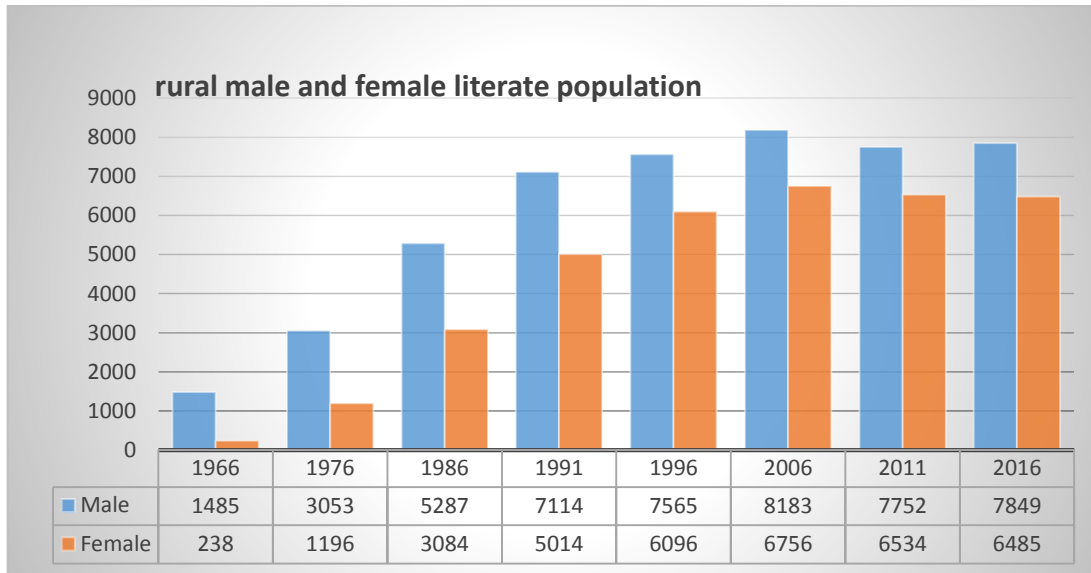


Figure 7: Comparison of literate population of male and female in rural area
The numbers are by 1000

Illiteracy rate of the elderly population

Table 3 shows the illiteracy rate of the elderly population by gender, age, and census year, and figure 8 illustrate this information too. This data shows that the illiteracy rate among the elderly has fallen from about 91 percent to 50 percent over half a century (the average of the last two rows of the first and second columns of Table 8). This information also shows that illiteracy rates have always been higher among people aged 65 and older, as well as in the female population.

Table 3: Illiteracy rate of the elderly population by gender, age, and census year

Census	Total		Male		Female	
	60-64	65+	60-64	65+	60-64	65+
1966	90.9	91.9	84.3	86.4	97.9	98.3
1976	87.9	89.9	79.1	84	95	96.4
1986	80.8	84.9	72.5	77.5	91	92.8
1991	77.9	60.3	66.7	70	86.7	88.1
1996	72.9	79.3	62.3	70.3	85.7	89.5
2006	56.2	72.2	40.8	61.7	71.4	83.8
2011	50.7	70.1	34.8	58.8	65	81.4
2016	39.9	60.7	26.5	48.3	53	72.9

Figure 7 shows the illiteracy rates of elderly men and women for two age groups of 64-60 and 65 years and older from 1966 to 2016. The chart shows that the drop in illiteracy in the 65-year-old age group in general and women in particular was much slower.

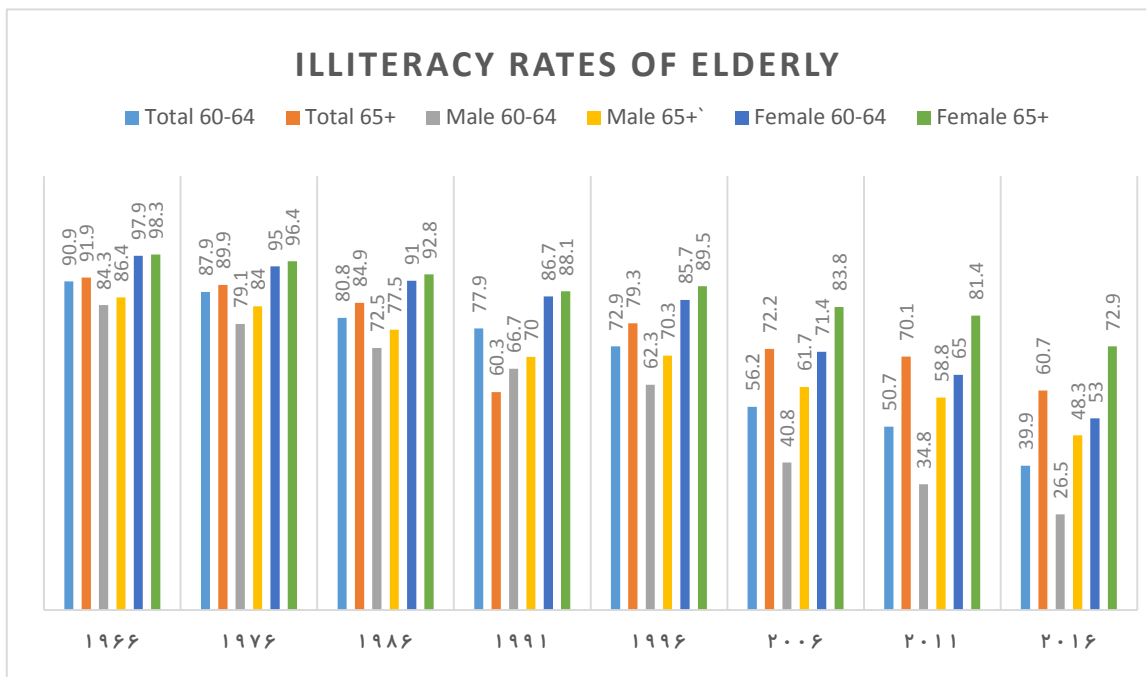


Figure 7: Illiteracy rates of elderly by and census

Settlement

In addition to gender and age differences in illiteracy rates, the province of the place of residence or, more specifically, the degree of deprivation has an important role in illiteracy statistics as well as gender disparities. Here are examples of cases to be mentioned.

As the results of the census in 2016 shows, the provinces of Tehran and Alborz with a rate of 6.5 and 7.8 percent have the least illiteracy rate, respectively, versus the provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, Kurdistan and West Azarbaijan witch have the highest rates of 24, 18.5 and 18 percent, respectively.

By combining the province of location and sex, in the province of Alborz, the rate of illiteracy is 8.9 for women and 5.8 for men, while in Sistan-Baluchestan province, the illiteracy rate is 29.2% for women and 18.8% for men; in Kurdistan province it is 25 and 22.2%, and in western Azerbaijan province it is 24.3% and 11.8% for women and men respectively.

When we combine the factor of location with gender and province, we will see that the illiteracy rates of rural women and men are 37.7% and 35.8% respectively in Sistan-Baluchestan province, 36.6%, 19.3% in Kurdistan province And 34.8% and 17.7% in West

Azərbaycan province. In urban areas, the illiteracy rates of women and men are 20.2% and 11.6%, respectively, of Sistan-Baluchestan, 20.3% and 9.2% respectively in Kurdistan province and 19% and 6.8% respectively in West Azerbaijan province.

Discussion and conclusion

According to the analysis of census statistics in this study, the literacy rate in Iran over the past 50 years has been steadily growing. The growth trend was faster in the first decades, but gradually slowing down. There may be several reasons for this slowing in the growth of literacy statistics: the cultural upheaval caused by the 1979 revolution and the gradual decline in the number of illiterate people following the rise in literacy and the reduction of those who can be trained, as well as the demographic changes that a part of the illiterate population of the past had devoted to the elderly, which has gradually diminished their populations.

Comparison of urban and rural population statistics generally indicates that the growth of literacy in rural areas has stopped over the past 10 years. The reason for the diminution is not clear, it is unlikely that this decline would be due to the saturation of literacy rates and the very low drop in the illiterate population in the rural area, because if that were the case, the probability of this development in urban area would certainly be more. Hence, there is concern that rural area are not paying much attention to developing education and combating illiteracy as much as urbans.

The organization of literacy movement claims that one of the reasons for the decline in literacy rate between 2006 and 2011 was the lack of obstruction of the entrance of illiteracy. "During the aforementioned years, over 10 years an average of 22,000 illiterate people were born annually, and about 400,000 people left school in the first to fourth grade of primary school. In other words, during this period, a total of 510000 people have not enrolled or have left the school before the end of the first four years of primary school "(Literacy Movement Organization, 2014, p. 40).

Despite efforts to reduce illiteracy, the 2016 census shows that 12.4 percent of the total population of Iran is still illiterate. That is, nearly 9 million people aged 6 or older cannot read and write. As mentioned earlier, the education and enjoyment of people from literacy is the basis for cultural, social and economic development in society (Salehi, 2010). Therefore, barriers to the literacy process should be explored and eliminated.

Comparing the statistics of illiterate women and men shows that over the past 50 years, the illiteracy rate has always been higher for women than men. This difference is much higher among the elderly, Amir Sadeari and Soleimani (2012) found that the proportion of elderly illiterate to elderly literate is about 12 times the proportion of the total illiterate to the literate. When we examine the illiteracy rates in the elderly population, we are more likely to find out about women's minority status, as the illiteracy rate of men 65 and older in these 50 years has dropped by about 38 percent, while the illiteracy rate for women has dropped by about 25

percent. That is, we did not succeed in reducing the number of illiteracy among people, especially among women who were about 15 years old at that time. A look at global illiteracy reports around the world (UNICEF) shows that, with the exception of some advanced countries that have equal literacy rates between men and women, in other countries women are still lagging behind men.

In interpreting these results, it should be recalled that according to statistics from different censuses in Iran, the Iranian men's population has always been about 2% more than the female population. But the difference in literacy rates is often much higher. For example, in the last census, the number of literate women is about 4% lower than the number of literate men, which is twice the difference between the total populations of the two groups, which can be related to cultural issues in gender discrimination.

It can be said that combating illiteracy in Iran has four challenges: rural, deprived provinces, women and the elderly. These groups are more vulnerable and it is more difficult to overcome illiteracy in these groups. Provinces such as Sistan-Baluchistan, Kurdistan, and West Azerbaijan, apart from other deprivations, have more problems in the cultural dimension, which require more attention. It should be possible for all children to attend school to bring illiteracy to zero, since literacy at a later age is far more difficult and costly than preventing illiteracy at an early age.

Experience suggests that compensating for this opportunity is often not a great success, as illiteracy is not eradicated in much of the elderly population. Researchers (Hakimzad et al., 2015) referred to some illiterate problems in welcoming literacy, such as: household financial poverty, lack of motivation for illiterate people to attend literacy courses, populous households and parenting problems, socio-cultural characteristics, and Apply some restrictions in some areas, gender discrimination against women to attend literacy courses, occupation and job responsibilities, learning disabilities, lack of fluency in the language, and the dispersion of illiterate in some parts of the country.

Although a significant proportion of the world's population is still living in absolute illiteracy, literacy in the 20th century has found a concept beyond its traditional notion. Researchers have included multiple dimensions for information and communication through audiovisual, digital and Internet tools (Pilgram and Martinez, 2013). Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the fight against absolute illiteracy in Iran, simultaneously the goals Literacy must be revised to reach the modern notion of literacy, and new approaches to terminology will be taken to account to help advance the country in line with cultural development. This topic can also provide a new research perspective for research enthusiasts in this area to study public literacy according to the updated needs.

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