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**Research Paper**

**Etiquette and Value-based Online English  
Language Instruction in the University Context  
across Gender: Variations in Attitudes**

**Hassan Mollahosseini**

*PhD Candidate, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Humanities, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran*

**Parviz Alavinia<sup>1</sup>**

*Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Humanities, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran*

**Sima Modirghameneh**

*Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature,  
Faculty of Humanities, Urmia University, Urmia, Iran*

**Abstract**

The current study explored the effect of value-based reading instruction on EFL learners' attitudes towards human social values and etiquette. Seventy-three university students were randomly assigned to Select Readings Group (SRG, n = 37) and value-based reading group (VRG, n = 36). Participants were assessed through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires in terms of their attitudes towards values and awareness of etiquette, prior and successive to the treatment. The instructional materials used for the experimental group were reading comprehension passages based on human values, and passages with etiquette topics. The results of two-way ANCOVA showed a significant difference between SRG and VRG in terms of their attitudes towards values and awareness of etiquette. Furthermore, gender was found not to have a significant effect on the treatment results. The results also confirmed an increase in learners' interest in etiquette and value-

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author: [p.alavinia@urmia.ac.ir](mailto:p.alavinia@urmia.ac.ir)

based topics in reading comprehension courses. Findings are discussed in relation to the incorporation of values in the contents of English textbooks and EFL classrooms to enhance positive attitudes towards values.

**Keywords:** Content-Based Instruction, Etiquette, Moral Stories, Value-Based Instruction

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## 1. Introduction

Character education is one of the essential objectives of education and family caring (Park & Peterson, 2006). The concept of *moral education*, which is a part of character education, is considered as conveying knowledge, values, beliefs, and attitudes that can help learners become informed, concerned, accountable, and caring citizens, who appreciate and believe in the concepts of justice, fairness, and human welfare (Nucci, 1987). Narvaez and Lapsley (2008) state that the dilemma for the teacher educators is either integrating and implementing moral education indirectly as part of the hidden curriculum in schools or positioning it in the curriculum publicly, explicitly, and intentionally. They finally express their sympathy with the latter one. Furthermore, previous research in this area emphasizes the integration of moral education programs with the curriculum rather than treating them as separate and specific program or unit (Nucci, 1987).

Although the focus of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) is teaching the language itself, the contents of the materials carry more than mere language content. It is believed that moral and ideological content, discussed as *covert grammar* (Brown, 1997), is often hidden in textbook content and curriculum materials. Textbooks, exercises, illustrations, examples, and teaching methodology convey and deliver particular messages including moral, ethical, and political perspectives, which are inevitable

(Brown, 1997). The issue has been the focus of many language educationalists who see the contents of the EFL/ESL materials as a *Trojan Horse* carrying ideology, hegemony, and as an English dominance tool that may be at odds with the educational goals defined and desired by the educational system. Among other reading materials, EFL textbooks can act as the instructor, the material, and the ideology in foreign language settings (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). The metaphor of *Trojan Horse* was used by Cooke (1988) in the realm of language teaching for the first time to portray a process in which English may be welcomed in a country at first, but then cause worry because it prevails and influences the native language(s) and cultures including values. As the definition implies, it is considered as an undesirable phenomenon with unwanted consequences, as it poses a threat to local cultures and languages, more specifically for the value system of the target community.

The concerns about the potentiality of language learning materials and learning environment to act as a Trojan Horse in the SLA context imply that there is a belief in the effect of hidden content on changing or even shaping the language learners' attitudes and beliefs. In an optimistic and pragmatic view, the implication could be expanded to the overt delivery of specific content, so English language instruction can serve as the manifest medium of delivering moral education or character education. In this perspective, English language teaching has been considered as one of the carriers of moral education (Brown, 1997; Johnston, 2002; Shaaban, 2005). Social scientists have proposed ESL/EFL, language arts, literature, and social studies to be used as media to carry intertwined topics of international issues, peace education, and moral education to the learners (Ryan, 1993; Sanchez, 1998; Shumer, 1999). Embodying a vision of a better and more humane life in teaching is recommended by Giroux and McLaren (cited in

Brown, 1997). Thus, manipulating the classroom environment, materials, realia, and including authentic value-based content in textbooks can serve as the media of carrying these topics. To this end, substituting textbook materials, especially reading sections, with value-based reading passages and investigating its effect on changing learners' attitudes as well as the role of gender constitute the focus of the current study. It is aimed to substitute the current reading textbook in university context with an alternative material of reading comprehension passages with special content of values and etiquette. This can provide an opportunity to compare two types of texts in shaping or changing learners' attitudes to values and in increasing/decreasing their awareness of the etiquette issues. It is thought that the learners' experience of the value-based and etiquette-related reading materials can open a chance for researchers to investigate their experience of the course and study their reaction to the specific materials provided.

## **2. Literature Review**

Scant research has been conducted in recent years with predominantly two major orientations. In one orientation, the researchers in this field have focused on the moral/social contents of course books or teacher talk in classroom settings. They have tried to explore and analyze the contents of the books and the teacher talk to extract the moral/social message of the texts and also the interaction between teachers and students, which may contain moral/social-orienting content. Li (2016) examined the cultural values conveyed via texts and illustrations in EFL textbooks currently in use in China. He concluded that the national curriculum had been employed in EFL textbooks. The values he revealed were nationalism, deference, diligence, collectivism, and equitable gender roles. Similarly, in Thailand and the Philippines, Aglasi and Casta (2017) extracted the different values included in the textbooks and compared them to the prescribed value-based

curriculum, to reveal relationships, and analyze the aspects of content, presentation, and function. They extracted six main themes on values, i.e. personal, social, environmental, educational, spiritual, and moral values.

Likewise, Nadhif (2017) examined the religious discourse and moral values structure in the Indonesian official English textbook *When English Rings the Bell* for high school students. He identified dominating ideologies and the discourse categories of religious and moral values. For example, he stated that beauty was equal to white skin and straight hair in the analyzed textbook. The findings revealed that the English textbooks in Indonesia did not contain fables, and that local Indonesian stories had not been sufficiently included (Setiawan & Fahriany, 2017). Another similar study in the same context (Indonesia) was conducted by Setyono and Widodo to investigate the cultural content of an EFL textbook which was nationally adopted. The researcher mainly investigated multicultural values embodied in the EFL textbook organized for senior high school students (Setyono & Widodo, 2019). They found that respect for cultures of others; avoidance of conflict and peace with life and nature; and appreciation of different cultural products were the dominant themes in the EFL textbook.

In another study in the Indonesian context, Istiqomah (2019) studied the moral values represented in the reading materials of the Contextual English textbooks and the students' responses to moral values. The textbooks were for senior high school students. Their descriptive qualitative research showed that the author was fairly successful in integrating moral values and reading materials and making students have a positive response. In another Southeast Asian context, Hong Kong, Feng (2019) analyzed primary and secondary EFL textbooks to investigate value-based content of the textbooks. The results showed that the didactic education of good citizens

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was the major concern in these textbooks, whereas children's critical thinking development was ignored.

In the second group and the less frequent works, studies have been implemented by deliberately including moral/social behavior content in language textbooks with a special focus on the outcome of such programs. In a study in Colombia, Mejia (2003) investigated human values in the EFL environment. She revealed that economic and domestic problems resulted in inappropriate behaviors in classes. She claimed that students lacked two human values of tolerance and self-esteem. She also maintained that after holding a workshop, she had attained some positive changes in students' attitudes and behavior towards their parents and teachers. The students' tolerance increased and they showed interest in the workshop which gave evidence of an increase in their self-esteem.

In a similar vein, another study was implemented in the African context of Cameroon. The aim was to investigate the status of English in Cameroon, including English for global education. The universal human values were included in the EFL program. In her study, Focho (2011) reported an increase in the learners' motivation and awareness of global human values. She concluded that integrating human values in EFL instruction empowers learners personally and socially.

In the context of Israel, where students live in a sharply divided society of Israeli Arabs and Jewish people and face increasing violence day by day, Abu Rass (2014) designed a project to encourage values that help students grow morally, intellectually, and emotionally. The study participants were Arab student teachers majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in a teacher training college in Israel. She claimed that both the students and the student teachers evaluated the program very positively and were eager to have more chances to enjoy it. In a similar study, Ali (2018) incorporated the

values of moderate Islam into an EFL class for undergraduate students in Indonesia. He demonstrated the lecturer's critical role in incorporating the values of moderate Islam in the classroom setting. Alhakim and Sumardiono (2020) also conducted action research and used value-based stories as reading texts to investigate the students' reactions based on their experiences of the texts. They extracted positive responses to positive sentences in the readings and concluded that students' positive responses showed that they were open, and able to discern good and bad behaviors. They also found that students could read and evaluate the phenomena based on their different educational backgrounds. Thus, they evaluated the course as beneficial in fully understanding the texts.

There is moral education in Iran from elementary school to graduate level. Religious instructional courses are taught in every level in Persian language to different ethnic students. However, the contents of the moral education courses are mostly Islamic Shi'ite perspectives to moral and social issues. Additionally, the EFL textbooks in Iran predominantly include Shi'ite religious and cultural practices (Cheng & Beigi, 2012). Although in some cases global values go together with Islamic values, many globally accepted values are absent in EFL textbooks. Moreover, etiquette issues are the cultural and social dimension of human life, which are completely ignored in Iranian EFL textbooks. For instance, Neighborhood Etiquette, as far as the current researchers are informed, has not been the topic of any reading comprehension passage in any Iranian EFL textbook.

It seems that the study of values in EFL/ESL materials is a relatively new trend. Among all of the aforementioned studies, a few researchers have investigated the effect of teaching values on changing attitudes; almost no study is found to investigate the effectiveness of teaching etiquette awareness through EFL materials. Most studies in this field are descriptions of integrated values and ideology in the textbooks. In addition, the descriptive

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studies which focus on the value content of the textbooks are basically carried out in East and Southeast Asia. In addition, the studies in which the researcher has deliberately included some values in textbooks or in the curriculum are mostly undertaken in the South American context. Accordingly, these issues instigated the researchers of the current study to pose the following research questions:

1. Do value-based reading topics significantly affect EFL learners' attitudes toward moral and social issues across gender?
2. Do etiquette-based reading topics significantly affect EFL learners' attitudes toward moral and social issues across gender?
3. What kind of variation, if any, does value and etiquette-based reading instruction bring about in participants' attitudes to values and etiquette and interests in the topics?

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

There were 112 ethnic Azerbaijani, Kurdish, and Armenian bilingual, as well as Persian monolingual undergraduate students at the beginning of the study. They were randomly selected among many university students who were studying the general English course at Islamic Azad University of Urmia. This number, due to missing data as well as homogeneity purposes, was reduced to 73, including 37 (22 females and 15 males) participants in the SRG, and 36 (20 females and 16 males) participants in the VRG (Table 1).

The participants were 18-24 and they were all in B1 level according to CEFR framework which was ensured by means of a placement test.

**Table 1**

*Participants' Profiles*

| Gender | Group                     | <i>N</i> |
|--------|---------------------------|----------|
| Female | SRG                       | 22       |
|        | Value-Based Reading Class | 20       |
| Male   | SRG                       | 15       |
|        | Value-Based Reading Class | 16       |



### **3.2 Instruments and Materials**

The materials and instruments were a set of reading comprehension passages, a questionnaire, a placement test and a set of semi-structured interviews.

#### **3.2.1 Instructional Materials**

The primary purpose of conducting this study was to compare the effect of two different types of content on students' attitudes towards values and their awareness of etiquette. Two types of passages appropriate for the English proficiency level of participants were, thus, needed. Chapters from the Select Readings (pre-intermediate) book were chosen for teaching to the comparison group. It is usually taught in most universities in Iran as the general English textbook and is aimed to enhance university students' reading skills and vocabulary. Some passages with value-based topics and etiquette tips were developed (proper to B1 level according to CEFR levels) for the experimental group. The reading texts contained six chapters, each chapter comprising a persuasive reading comprehension passage adapted from psychotherapy, psychology, and inspirational websites as well as a moral story, related to the topic of the reading text in the same chapter. For persuasive passages, a content analysis was done by three psychology experts and the required changes were implemented accordingly. The difficulty index of each text was calculated by the researchers and necessary changes were applied to make them appropriate to the pre-intermediate level. The chapter topics and respective titles were *Helping Others*, *Taking Self Responsibility*, *Judging Others*, *Racism*, and *Forgiveness*. Also, the Etiquette Section included *Cellphone Etiquette*, and *Neighborhood Etiquette* topics. In addition to the reading texts, vocabulary building and reading skills tips were included in each chapter. The persuasive passages contained psychological and logical arguments about the topic to give students a

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positive viewpoint toward the values and the moral passages that contained inspiring stories.

### **3.2.2 Attitudes towards Values and Etiquette Questionnaire**

Developing a new questionnaire when there is no suitable questionnaire to explore the constructs addressed in research would be the optimum approach (Estabrooks & Wallin, 2004), and this was what the researchers in the current study opted for due to inaccessibility of a proper questionnaire to suit the study objectives. Some questions posed for each construct were reviewed and scored by seven experts in the field of psychology for content validity. For each item, the content validity index (CVI) was calculated, and those not passing the threshold were omitted or revised. Finally, each value construct included six Likert scale items, and the etiquette tips part included twenty items. The reliability index of the questionnaire proved to be within acceptable limits, that is 0.83 for Value items and 0.78 for etiquette items using the Cronbach alpha. The values section included items for *Helping Others*, *Taking Self Responsibility*, *Judging Others*, *Racism*, and *Forgiveness*. Likewise, the etiquette section included *Cellphone Etiquette* and *Neighborhood Etiquette* items. Different parts of the questionnaire had the items specific to the values and etiquette topics included in the reading materials for the experimental group.

### **3.2.3 Placement Test**

The researchers used the Oxford Quick Placement Test (2004) version 2 to eliminate the students who were not in preintermediate level of proficiency from the study. Originally, it is a paper-based test examination, but due to the lockdown conditions caused by Covid-19 pandemic, the test was administered online through Microsoft Forms online and was automatically scored. The time allocated for the test was 30 minutes *according* to the guidelines of the exam.

### **3.2.4 Interviews**

In order to better understand and explore participants' opinions, feelings and experiences about the topics and the course, and to triangulate the data collection regarding the attitudes to values and awareness of etiquette issues, a set of semi-structured interviews with VRG members were conducted via WhatsApp as a follow-up after they filled out the questionnaires in Time 2. Each interview took about 15 minutes. It comprised of general questions which could lead to specific questions raised during the interview, and started with general, open-ended questions, followed by the questions which arose during the interview. The general questions were “*What is your overall impression of the course?*”, “*What is your idea about the book?*”, “*What do you think benefits and drawbacks be in this course?*”

### **3.3 Procedure**

After randomly assigning the participants to two groups, the researchers informed them about the research to allow them to make decision regarding their willingness to participate.

At the outset of the treatment, a questionnaire of the values and etiquette tips was given to comparison and experimental groups (quantitative data collecting Time1), through online examination websites (Microsoft Forms & Google Docs). It took almost 20 minutes for the questionnaire to be completed by the participants. The comparison and the experimental groups were taught via online classes in 14 sessions of 90 minutes. At the end of the semester, both groups were reassessed regarding attitudes to values and awareness of etiquette (quantitative data collection Time 2). The value-based group was also interviewed through the WhatsApp application online.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

This study encompassed two data collection phases. The quantitative phase included pretests and posttests for attitudes towards values, and

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awareness of etiquette. The quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS version 26; two-way ANCOVA was applied to compare the two groups regarding the change of attitudes to values and awareness of etiquette. It is worth mentioning that before running two-way ANCOVA, all the prerequisites of the analysis were investigated, and found to be met.

The qualitative phase, on the other hand, included semi-structured interviews conducted through WhatsApp. In order to do thematic analysis, data were transcribed via verbatim transcription, and pertinent meaningful patterns were extracted by coding and generating themes.

## 4. Results

Preliminary checks were conducted to ensure that there was no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity, homogeneity of variances, homogeneity of regression slopes, and reliable measurement of the covariate for values and etiquette questionnaire data.

### 4.1 Change of Attitudes towards Values

One of the aims of the current study was to investigate the effectiveness of teaching value-based reading comprehension passages on changing attitudes towards the taught values. The descriptive statistics for the results of the values questionnaire of both the SRG (comparison group) and VRG (experimental group) are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Mean and Standard Deviation of the Posttest for Values Questionnaire*

| Group | Gender | Mean   | SD     | N  |
|-------|--------|--------|--------|----|
| SRG   | Female | 113.73 | 13.987 | 22 |
|       | Male   | 108.40 | 13.383 | 15 |
|       | Total  | 108.40 | 13.383 | 15 |
| VRG   | Female | 116.65 | 11.636 | 20 |
|       | Male   | 112.00 | 6.822  | 16 |
|       | Total  | 112.00 | 6.822  | 16 |
| Total | Female | 116.65 | 11.636 | 20 |
|       | Male   | 112.00 | 6.822  | 16 |

Dependent Variable: Values (Post-Test)

A two-by-two between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to assess the effectiveness of teaching value-based reading comprehension passages in changing the attitudes of university students for male and female participants. The independent variables were the type of program (teaching value-based reading comprehension texts) and gender. The dependent variable was the scores on the attitudes towards values questionnaire, administered following the completion of the intervention programs (Time 2). Scores on the questionnaires administered before the beginning of the programs (Time 1) were used as the covariate.

There was a significant group effect,  $F(1,68) = 10.9, p = .001$ , with an effect size of .139 (partial eta squared). Neither the gender effect nor the interaction effect was statistically significant, interaction:  $F(1,68) = .085, p = .771$ ; gender:  $F(1,68) = .315, p = .577$ . These results suggest that the two groups responded differently to the two types of interventions. The Value-based book group showed a more substantial increase in positive attitudes to values after participation in the program. Females and males, on the other hand, appeared to respond similarly to the type of program. Table 3 summarizes the results of statistical analysis.

**Table 3**  
*Two-Way ANCOVA Results for Attitudes to Values by Instruction Type and Gender*

Dependent Variable: Values (Posttest)

| Source               | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F      | Sig. | Partial Eta Squared |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----|-------------|--------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected Model      | 6922.344 <sup>a</sup>   | 4  | 1730.586    | 32.913 | .000 | .659                |
| Intercept            | 169.124                 | 1  | 169.124     | 3.217  | .077 | .045                |
| Etiquette (pre-test) | 6311.077                | 1  | 6311.077    | 120.02 | .000 | .638                |
| Gender               | 16.559                  | 1  | 16.559      | .315   | .577 | .005                |
| Group                | 577.530                 | 1  | 577.530     | 10.984 | .001 | .139                |
| Gender * Group       | 4.478                   | 1  | 4.478       | .085   | .771 | .001                |

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|                 |           |   |        |
|-----------------|-----------|---|--------|
| Error           | 3575.437  | 6 | 52.580 |
| Total           | 943539.00 | 7 |        |
| Corrected Total | 10497.781 | 7 |        |
|                 |           | 2 |        |

a. R Squared = .659 (Adjusted R Squared = .639)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

The adjusted means of the groups for values are represented in Table 4. It is seen that the adjusted mean for the Value-based Book group is greater than the mean for the SRG.

**Table 4**

*Mean Differences in Attitudes to Values by Instruction Type Controlling for Gender*

| Group | Mean                 | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|-------|----------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
|       |                      |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| SRG   | 110.288 <sup>a</sup> | 1.216      | 107.861                 | 112.715     |
| VRG   | 116.032 <sup>a</sup> | 1.226      | 113.586                 | 118.479     |

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Values (Pre-Test) = 112.41.

Figure 1 shows that the adjusted means of values questionnaire for males are greater than females in both comparison and experimental groups. However, according to Table 3, the interaction effect of gender and group is not significant. Thus, gender does not have a significant effect on the interaction.

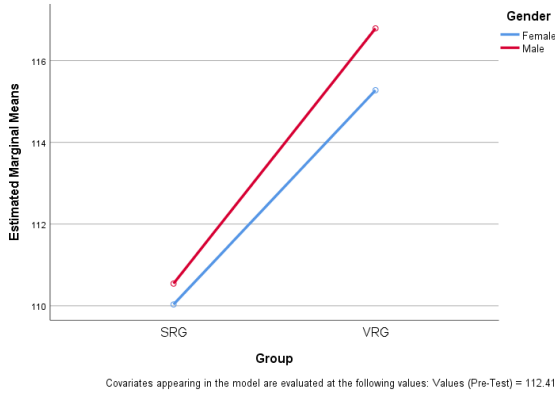


Figure 1. Estimated instructional mean differences in attitudes to values

#### 4.2 Change in Etiquette Awareness

The second aim of the study was to investigate the change in awareness of etiquette. The descriptive statistics for the results of etiquette awareness of the SRG and VRG appear in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Descriptive Statistics for “Etiquette Awareness” (Posttest)*

| Dependent Variable: Etiquette (Posttest) |       |       |                |    |
|------------------------------------------|-------|-------|----------------|----|
| Gender                                   | Group | Mean  | Std. Deviation | N  |
| Female                                   | SRG   | 80.32 | 9.105          | 22 |
|                                          | VRG   | 86.15 | 8.437          | 20 |
| Male                                     | SRG   | 72.73 | 15.299         | 15 |
|                                          | VRG   | 84.50 | 7.146          | 16 |
| Total                                    | SRG   | 77.24 | 12.395         | 37 |
|                                          | VRG   | 85.42 | 7.824          | 36 |

A two-by-two between-groups analysis of covariance was conducted to assess the effectiveness of teaching value-based reading comprehension book on changing the etiquette awareness of university students across gender. Scores on the questionnaire of etiquette administered before the programs initiated (Time 1) were used as the covariate.

The results of two-way ANCOVA analysis showed a significant group effect  $F(1,68) = 21.034, p < .001$ , with an effect size of .236 (partial eta

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squared). Neither the gender effect nor the interaction effect (Table 6) was statistically significant:  $F(1,68) = .002, p = .966$ ; gender:  $F(1,68) = .689, p = .409$ . These results suggest that the experimental and the comparison groups responded differently to the two types of interventions. VRG showed a more substantial change in awareness of etiquette after participation in the program. Females and males, on the other hand, appeared to respond similarly to the type of program.

**Table 5**

*Two-Way ANCOVA Results for Etiquette Awareness by Instruction Type and Gender*

Dependent Variable: Etiquette (Posttest)

| Source               | Type III Sum of Squares | f | Mean Square | F      | ig.  | Partial Eta Squared |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---|-------------|--------|------|---------------------|
| Corrected            | 3948.967 <sup>a</sup>   |   | 987.24      | 13.580 | .000 | .444                |
| Model                |                         |   |             |        |      |                     |
| Intercept            | 1428.076                |   | 1428.07     | 19.644 | .000 | .224                |
| Etiquette (pre-test) | 2192.703                |   | 2192.70     | 30.161 | .000 | .307                |
| Gender               | 50.116                  |   | 50.11       | .689   | .409 | .010                |
| Group                | 1529.165                |   | 1529.16     | 21.034 | .000 | .236                |
| Gender * Group       | .137                    |   | .137        | .002   | .966 | .000                |
| Error                | 4943.553                |   | 72.699      |        |      |                     |
|                      |                         | 8 |             |        |      |                     |
| Total                | 491091.000              |   |             |        |      |                     |
|                      |                         | 3 |             |        |      |                     |
| Corrected Total      | 8892.521                |   |             |        |      |                     |
|                      |                         | 2 |             |        |      |                     |

a. R Squared = .444 (Adjusted R Squared = .411)

b. Computed using alpha = .05

The adjusted means of the two groups for etiquette awareness are summarized in Table 7. Adjusted mean for the VRG is greater than the mean for the SRG.

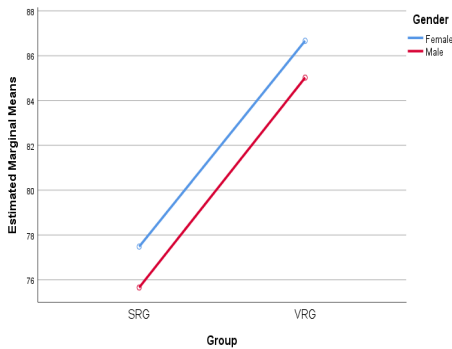


**Table 7**  
*Mean Differences in Etiquette Awareness by Instruction Type Controlling for Gender*

| Dependent Variable: Etiquette (Post-Test) |                     |            |                         |             |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| Group                                     | Mean                | Std. Error | 95% Confidence Interval |             |
|                                           |                     |            | Lower Bound             | Upper Bound |
| SRG                                       | 76.567 <sup>a</sup> | 1.428      | 73.719                  | 79.416      |
| VRG                                       | 85.843 <sup>a</sup> | 1.433      | 82.983                  | 88.702      |

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Etiquette (Pre-Test) = 77.08.

Figure 2 shows that the adjusted means of etiquette awareness questionnaire for females are greater than males in both comparison and experimental groups. However, the lines for female and male participants do not cross at any point. This confirms that there is no interaction effect of group and gender.



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Etiquette (Pre-Test) = 77.08

Figure 2. Estimated instructional mean differences in etiquette awareness

#### 4.3 Change of Attitudes towards Topics

To do an in-depth scrutiny of change of attitude towards values and awareness of etiquette, the obtained data were triangulated through a set of semi-structured interviews. This, moreover, was thought to expound participants' interests in value-based and etiquette-related topics.

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The analysis of the interviews showed that learners found the content of the value-based readings challenging and interesting; besides a change in their attitudes to these topics had taken place. Most of the students declared that they were not very interested in such topics before commencing this program, but at the end of the program, their attitudes had changed. The interest in topics had kept the learners' attention on the process of teaching. A change in their attitudes to values had occurred, and they reported a substantial impression they received from some topics. This confirms the results obtained in the quantitative phase that unveiled a significant difference between the two groups. They found the moral stories more interesting than persuasive reading texts in each chapter; etiquette tips, also, were perceived more useful than value-based topics across chapters. Here is a typical excerpt of a female student from the interview regarding the question "What is your impression of the topics?":

At the beginning, I didn't think that these topics be interesting, but I changed my mind during the semester. Moral stories were fascinating and useful. I used to believe in these values before, but now I notice them more because I know the philosophy behind them. For example, now I am more aware of not judging others, and I loved the reading about forgiveness. I had never noticed some of the tips which I studied in Neighborhood Etiquette chapter; I will try to consider them more in my life. I think vocabulary was a bit difficult; it would be better if they were easier.

Another male student commented in the following manner regarding the question "Do you feel any change in your beliefs about these topics?"

I had not thought much about these issues before. I prefer to learn about life lessons and moral issues now. Because I really felt that they (the readings) had an effect on me, maybe some of my views were wrong and I changed them by reading these lessons. However, I should say that we read about

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race and racism, and discussed about them, but still my opinion is the same as before about ... (an ethnic group).

And in response to the question probing which part of the readings was more interesting, he replied:

Teacher! moral stories were more interesting, but in order to better understand the passages (persuasive passages), we had to have a background of that topic before reading, I would say, it was really needed. I think it is necessary to include such courses, because they are more related to our lives, maybe in that case our culture would become a little stronger, and progress more, instead of making the students focus on irrelevant books. Thank you for including such topics. It was killing two birds with one stone. The purpose of this lesson was both English and life lesson, which I liked them. Thank you for all the informative stories.

And when the interviewer asked about the textbook language content he replied:

About vocabulary, oh, it was good. I noticed that some parts of readings were exactly the same as we use them in our own language, translated into English, but, in some cases I had a hard time understanding them.

It seems that participants experienced a new perspective to the values included in the reading passages. Although it was not the first time, they confronted such issues in their lives, noticing them in English learning context was a new challenge. In the second excerpt, the participant sees some of the other courses irrelevant to his life and compares this course with them. It shows that the content of the reading passages had a profound effect on his beliefs, and he had enjoyed the reading. His words show an increased interest in such readings.

Finally, the findings of the qualitative data analysis highlighted the fact that value and etiquette-based reading instruction provided the learners with

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information on the concept of *politeness* and helped them grasp the meaning of politeness in diverse situational contexts. In this regard, the analysis of the transcribed data underlined the existence of a main theme which was named *etiquette-induced politeness*. Regarding this theme, one of the participants noted:

Believe it or not, I did not think about the etiquette rules before you provided us with those texts. I think that I have hurt people's feelings unintentionally in different situations.

Finally, in like manner, another participant stated that:

I think that etiquette rules are the most important aspect of our communication since they tell people how polite we are and how well we understand acceptable behavior in the relevant settings.

#### 5. Discussion

This study was an attempt to substitute English language reading comprehension texts with value-based contents, and to investigate the content effect of the materials on shaping or changing the attitudes towards the values included. The results proved the usefulness of values and etiquette instruction via the medium of foreign language teaching (Abu Rass, 2014; Alhakim & Sumardiono, 2020; Focho, 2011).

Feather (1995) pointed out that the comprehension and appreciation of the consequential role of the values and etiquette in the regulation of human behavior depends on the individuals' knowledge about these concepts. He explained that values and etiquette constitute abstract concepts whose appreciation may not be possible during the early periods of the humans' life. This issue prevents the educators from apprising the learners at primary school about these concepts. Consequently, the learners are deprived of the opportunity to become familiar with the values and etiquette rules which are regarded to be the criteria for evaluating human behavior and appraising their

politeness in a specific society. Feather (1995) noted that the mainstream education at the higher educational levels does not provide the learners with satisfactory value-based and etiquette-based instruction. As he concluded, the second and foreign language learners may not be provided with these kinds of instructions during the process of language acquisition due largely to the lack of access to authentic value and etiquette-laden materials.

Likewise, Santrock (2007) pointed out that language learners' exposure to the materials which familiarize them with the relevant social and moral values and etiquette rules may have a beneficial and advantageous effect on their attitudes towards these concepts. As he explained, the learners' appreciation of various kinds of values and etiquette rules in academic settings is mainly influenced by the methodology of the classroom and its materials. That is, this kind of understanding does not predominantly depend on their personal characteristics such as their race, nationality, and gender among others.

Considering these issues, it can be contended that, in the present study value and etiquette-based reading topics significantly ameliorated the male and female EFL learners' attitudes towards social and moral values and etiquette rules since they were not influenced by the learners' gender, made the learners cognizant of the overriding and consequential role of these concepts in the regulation of their behavior in the society, and constituted fresh concepts of knowledge for the preponderance of the participants.

The findings are in line with character education manifesto objectives, which emphasize the development of moral education by teachers and schools. The results confirm the findings attained by Mejia (2003), who noticed a positive change in attitudes to human values and raising awareness to them. Moreover, the findings are in line with Istiqomah (2019), who extracted positive responses to moral values from students in a course in

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which Contextual English textbooks were taught. Finally, the results of this study confirm those of Focho (2011) who reported an increase in English learners' awareness of global human values after including universal human values in an EFL course.

As for the role of gender which is seldom explored in value-based studies, the researchers in the current investigation observed no significant role either in changing the attitudes to values or in awareness of etiquette by learning English through value-based English reading comprehension texts.

Birke (2001) averred that the genuine impact of gender on the process of learning may not be compatible and congruent with the stereotyped conceptions and perceptions of gender as a differentiating factor in social life. As she noted, gender is assumed to influence multitudinous aspects of the individuals' life in diverse situational contexts. According to her, the concept of gender has received considerable attention in the field of education due largely to the alleged influence of gender on the formation of the learners' frame of mind during the learning process. Notwithstanding, as she pointed out, the impact of gender on the students' learning process might be mediated by numerous factors including the learner-based factors such as personality traits and contextual factors like the teaching methodology and learning materials among others. As she concluded, this issue highlights the fact that gender may not be a determining factor in various educational settings.

Consequently, it can be argued that, in the present study, the impact of the learners' gender on their attitudes was mediated by a number of factors including the relevant teaching materials of the present study. More specifically, these materials prevented the male and female learners' gender from influencing their attitudes towards the values and etiquette rules. This implies that teaching values and etiquette can be beneficial for both genders through English language teaching courses, since gender distinction,

unlike the past, has changed in Iran, and the country which used to be a collectivist society, has now changed into a more individualistic nation (see Hofstede, 2011).

Students' interest in etiquette and in the value-based reading comprehension texts was another focus of this study. This issue was investigated through post-treatment interviews; the results revealed a positive attitude and interest in such topics.

Istiqomah (2019) pointed out that value-laden and etiquette-based instructional materials apprise the learners about the prominent role that the values and etiquette fulfill in the synchronization of the individuals' behavior in a relevant society. As he contended, these materials inculcate the underlying principles of politeness into the learners' minds and convince them that their behavior must be congruent with the behavior of their peers in diverse situational contexts. He concluded that the learners' appreciation of the import of the values and etiquette in human life ameliorates their attitudes towards these concepts.

Likewise, Mejia (2003) stated that the learners have a proclivity to acclimatize themselves to the requirements of the diverse situations. As he noted, when the learners become aware of the fact that polite behavior has an advantageous effect on their social status, they strive to specify, comprehend, and internalize the verbal requirements of politeness and acceptable social conduct. The researcher concluded that, the second language learners tend to adopt positive attitudes towards the instructional materials which provide them with sufficient information on the social and moral values and etiquette rules.

Considering the above-mentioned issues, it can be stated that in the present study value-based and etiquette-laden reading comprehension texts ameliorated the learners' attitudes to the relevant social and moral values and

etiquette rules due mainly to the fact that they inculcated the underlying principles of politeness into the learners' minds, persuaded the learners that their behavior had to be congruent with the behavior of their peers in various contexts, and encouraged them to internalize the verbal requirements of politeness and acceptable social conduct.

This study reiterated and confirmed outcomes of almost all of the studies mentioned in this article that revealed similar results regarding students' interests in value-based topics. For example, in the study of Abu Rass (2014), student teachers and the pupils evaluated the moral and intellectual training program in English learning context positively. Nevertheless, the novelty of this study was simultaneous inclusion of a persuasive text and a moral story for each topic of the values as reading comprehension texts, which provided the opportunity to compare the two types of texts. In the current study, it was found that students preferred moral stories to persuasive texts related to values; in fact, they referred to them as more impressive and challenging. They also found the topics challenging and maintained that such topics foster their critical thinking. Nevertheless, they positively assessed both types of texts. The findings, however, can be contrasted to the study undertaken by Alhakim and Sumardiono (2020), who used just value-based stories as reading texts, and students' responses were extracted based on their experiences of the texts.

The findings also resonate with those of Milson and Ekşi (2003) who found that secondary school teachers held positive competency beliefs as regards character education. Their beliefs on character education competency disclosed no statistically significant differences across gender, type of school they graduated from and seniority. The findings of the present study are also along the same lines as some other studies in the pertinent literature as



regards the positive perspectives teachers hold toward value-based instruction (Demirel, 2009; Milson & Ekşi, 2003; Şahinkaya, 2008; Tanrıku, 2008).

Most participants in Pane and Patriana's (2016) study concurred that environmental contents should be combined into the curriculum of character education in general subjects. They reported that environmental contents are very relevant and effective provided that they are utilized as supporting components for character education, inasmuch as the contents are useful for augmenting students' abilities. They concluded that environmental awareness could also ameliorate comfortable living, as when individuals carry out such practices, they are inclined to maintaining the sanitation, balance, and preservation of the physical environment. They culminated their study by reporting that the factor of comfortable living is very effective for improving the life quality of both individual and society. The findings, as can be seen, are in line with the findings of the present study in that students had positive attitudes towards value-based readings.

## **6. Conclusion and Implications**

The study investigated the efficacy of English language instruction through value-based reading texts in online classes in terms of any variations that occur in learners' attitudes. The outcomes provided evidence that such value-based topics influence the way learners perceive social and moral values. This means that teaching values and etiquette through the English medium can be an alternative to character education. Although the ultimate goal of TEFL/TESOL is English language teaching, the peripheral effect of text content on changing attitudes cannot be ignored, especially when the results can be controlled by deliberately manipulating the content. Hence, including value-based issues in EFL reading materials and in the curriculum can be beneficial for morally educating students, and guiding them to be more caring citizens. Since the participants in the study were almost adult

English learners, the results confirm that teaching values and etiquette is possible in adulthood regardless of gender.

Most students declared a change in their attitudes to value-based topics. They reported that they found the moral stories to be interesting, and the persuasive passages to be challenging. Although they found the moral stories more interesting than persuasive reading passages, they liked both types of texts. It is, thus, thought that including value-based and etiquette issues as reading comprehension topics can invoke the critical thinking ability of the learners, which is an essential part of learning. Consequently, both types of texts can be complementary in forming positive attitudes to such topics.

In this study, the treatments were carried out through online classes at the university level in Iran, where there is a very ideologically loaded education system. It can be replicated in other contexts where there may be a different system of education. Moreover, replicating the study in real classes instead of online classes is likely to reveal partially different results. Different age groups, additionally, can be compared and might yield more interesting and valuable results. Also, participants' area of interest in different value-based topics that may challenge their minds can be identified through interviews before conducting any treatment.

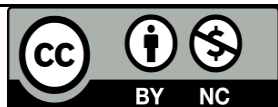
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