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Research Paper

Culture and Gender Representation in ELT Textbooks: A Comparative Analysis of Iranian and Turkish Series

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Abstract

Acknowledging the inextricable link between language and culture, English language teaching (ELT) textbooks hold a critical role in fostering intercultural competence. However, careful consideration must be paid to the selection and representation of cultural content within these materials. Therefore, the present study investigated the culture and gender representations in ELT textbooks, with a specific focus on two series of locally published textbooks in Iran (*Prospect 1,2,3*) and Turkey (*İngilizce Ders Kitabı 4,5,6*) taught in junior high schools. Firstly, we selected culturally rich conversations from the textbooks series, and drawing upon Cortazzi and Jin's framework, we probed the portrayal of cultural dimensions in the conversations, aiming to assess if the textbooks provide new information and broaden the students' cultural understanding. Secondly, we analyzed gender representations in images of the textbooks using Kress and

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Van Leeuwen's semiotic categories. The depiction of male and female characters in the textbooks' images, considering aspects such as activity/passivity, visual framing, and power dynamics were analyzed. The findings indicated that both series of ELT textbooks, particularly those in Iran, fall short in expanding the students' worldview and cultural awareness. Moreover, the gender analysis revealed a significant gender imbalance, with male characters depicted as more active, dominant, and powerful, while female characters are marginalized and portrayed in passive roles. Furthermore, all female characters are fully clothed, contrasting with Turkish textbooks where diverse clothing styles are depicted. The findings emphasize the significance of developing culturally inclusive and gender-balanced ELT materials. The results seem to be beneficial for creating textbooks that promote cultural understanding, challenge stereotypes, and foster a more equitable educational environment.

Keywords: Culture, ELT Textbook, Gender, Locally Published Textbooks, Gender Imbalance, Stereotype

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1. Introduction

Language and culture are widely recognized as inseparable, with their interrelatedness considered crucial for understanding both (Byram, 1997). Brown (1994, p. 165) underscores this notion stating that “one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture”. ELT textbooks, as important tools for language acquisition, should incorporate elements of the target as well as learners' own culture (Tomlinson, 2012). However, it has been observed that textbooks may inadvertently bolster cultural stereotypes and biases, leading to disadvantages in the learners' social behavior (Matsuda, 2012). For instance, some textbooks ignore or, just superficially consider the students' own culture (e.g., Abdullah & Chandran, 2009; Adaskou et al., 1990), which might lead to imbalanced depiction of cultural topics, inevitably falling short of fostering

communication competence, or even making intercultural communication challenging for learners.

Another prominent social issue that has received extensive scholarly attention alongside culture is gender (e.g., Ohara & Saft, 2003; Tanaka & Fukushima, 2002) and its representation in textbooks is known to have significant implications for learners' perceptions and actions in education and society (Davis & Skilton-Sylvester, 2004). Gender representation in textbooks is assumed to reflect societal attitudes, capable of impacting learners subconsciously, which can potentially lead to certain social disadvantages (Skliar, 2007). Halliday (1977), views textbooks as sociological and semiotic means of sharing the meanings that constitute the social structure. The visual dimension of ELT textbooks is also considered to be of immense significance as it can potentially contribute to gender inequality and stereotypes (e.g., Del-Teso-Craviotto, 2006; Erden, 2009; Ladegaard, 2010).

Textbook design must address limitations tied to specific individual or group interests and ensure balanced gender representation to avoid inequality (Sunderland, 1992; Thomas & Philips, 2004). Notably, Sunderland (1992) identifies three specific ways in which the inclusion of gender can exert influence on learners. Firstly, the ascription of limited social, behavioral, and linguistic roles to female characters within textbooks precludes the cognitive and communicative empowerment of female learners. Secondly, if females are portrayed in a restricted number of roles with minimal agency, this can engender feelings of "offense, insult, or oppression," ultimately leading to demotivation. Thirdly, such limited characterizations reinforce "male primacy" in communication models, thereby imposing this dynamic on the entire classroom (Sunderland, 1992, p. 85). In consequence, meticulous attention to mitigating biased portrayals of specific interests or groups,

coupled with the implementation of equitable gender representation, is paramount in textbook design.

Recognizing the importance of cultural inclusiveness and balanced gender representation in fostering intercultural awareness and promoting equitable societal values, the present study offers a twofold contribution to the existing literature: addressing the representation of culture and gender in instructional materials, specifically ELT textbooks. By doing this, the study can identify potential biases, stereotypes, or omissions that exist in current materials. This awareness can serve as a starting point for curriculum developers and textbook authors to critically examine and revise their content, ensuring that it reflects diverse cultural perspectives and promotes cultural inclusiveness. This study also goes beyond analyzing solely local ELT textbooks in Iran and also includes Turkish ELT textbooks for comparative purposes. By broadening the scope beyond a single educational context and encompassing textbooks from two neighboring nations with historical and religious ties, the study endeavors to shed light on how gender and cultural diversity are addressed and depicted in educational materials. This comparative approach can help curriculum developers understand the nuances and variations in representing culture and gender across different educational contexts. It is hoped that more contextually relevant and culturally sensitive materials could be created when such insights are incorporated into the design and development of ELT materials.

2. Review of the Literature

2.1 The notion of culture in ELT materials

Language and culture are closely intertwined, whereby cultural values and beliefs profoundly shape the use and evolution of language. This phenomenon is particularly evident in English, which has transcended its historical origins and become a globalized language embraced by diverse

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populations. (e.g., Brown, 2012; Marlina, 2014; McKay, 2012; Pennycook, 2003; Sharifian, 2008). People of various backgrounds have used English to communicate their own cultural values and traditions, because language has the effect of being "embedded in the culture of the country where it is used" (McKay, 2003, p. 12). He argues that interlocutors who do not share experiences, need cultural understanding and sensitivity in order to understand differences, compromise effectively and make their national culture understood.

Cultural Linguistics explores and discusses the relationship between language and cultural concepts (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008) with culture playing a vital role in communication (Sharifian, 2011). Thus, to effectively navigate cultural diversity in English-speaking multicultural communities, interlocutors need cultural understanding and sensitivity (McKay, 2003). Canagarajah (2005) emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness in effective communication for multicultural communities that employ English as a lingua franca. Most scholars (e.g., Brown, 2012; Matsuda, 2012; McKay, 2012) even argue that teaching culture should take precedence over Teaching Language materials. According to Maley (2010), the choice of culture and how it is presented in teaching materials has major impacts on how learners view the outside world. Therefore, scholars have stated the urgent need for presenting multiple cultures in English teaching materials and investigating the representation of cultural conceptualizations (Brown, 2012).

Textbooks serve as the primary source of cultural content and vehicles for transmitting ideologies (Hinkel, 1999). However, the representation of culture in ELT materials has been problematic. Grammar often overshadows cultural content, and textbooks frequently overlook or superficially address the users' own cultures (Abdullah & Chandran, 2009; Adaskou et al., 1990). This limited representation of culture in ELT materials fails to provide a

comprehensive understanding of cultural diversity. Addressing this gap requires the inclusion of cultural elements that are accessible and interpretable by English learners worldwide (Fageeh, 2011). Thus, it is essential to develop ELT materials that cater to both local and global needs, enabling English learners to effectively navigate multicultural environments.

2.2 ELT Textbooks in Iran and Turkey

The history of English teaching in Iranian high schools dates back to 1938, when an Iranian-American committee developed English books for Iranian students. Pre-revolution materials spanned from 1939 to 1979, using the Direct Method and Reading Method. Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, English teaching was not regarded very highly due to a perceived association between English and American culture. Post-revolution textbooks were revised in 1982-1990 and renamed "Pre-University" in 1991. The *Prospect* and *Vision* series, based on Communicative Language Teaching, were introduced from 2013 onwards for junior and senior high school students.

Language teaching in Turkey relies on course books provided by the Ministry of Education, which are distributed to elementary, intermediate, and high schools. The ministry offers free English ELT books, among other educational materials, published by local publishers and selected through a rigorous review process. English is the sole foreign language taught in public schools, reflecting Turkey's strategic position as a crossroad between Europe and Asia and the importance of English as the main language of international communication. The implementation of the Communicative Method in the 1997 curriculum marked a significant milestone in English language teaching in Turkey. Subsequent changes in 2005 further emphasized communicative approaches and led to the development of locally published textbooks for Turkish state primary schools.

2.3 Studies on culture representation in ELT materials

American/British culture used to dominate the cultural content of ELT textbooks, and such a focus seemed to be accepted or even welcomed by most researchers (e.g., Hatori, 1975; Hino, 1988). From 2000 onwards, however, different cultures began to appear in textbooks and be investigated in various research studies. These studies challenged the notion of target culture because it was deemed unwise to view American/British cultures as the ultimate aim for learners who would most likely use English to communicate with various ethnic groups across the globe due to the changed pattern of English use in a globalized age (McKay, 2003). Therefore, the need has been highlighted for the inclusion of local or source culture alongside target and foreign target cultures (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). As a matter of fact, local culture has been reported to play a major influence on the cultural content of ELT textbooks in several countries such as Kuwait (Hajjaj, 1981), Iran (Majdzadeh, 2002), Spain (Garcia, 2005), and the United States (Basabe, 2006); however, such textbooks have not been viewed very highly on the grounds that they lack sociocultural richness or a discernable concern for a specific target culture (Olajide, 2010). Overall, ELT textbooks ought to adequately reflect the diverse cultural facets, as they serve as a primary resource for many teachers in their instructional practices (Amerian & Tajabadi, 2020). However, in practice, certain English textbooks exhibit an imbalanced representation of culture, either favoring the source culture (e.g., Aoumeur & Zian, 2022; Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019) or the target culture (e.g., Derakhshan, 2021; Gheitasi et al., 2020; Vahdat et al., 2020; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021), sometimes forgetting about the international culture types of different nations (e.g., Kusumaningrum et al., 2023). The existing gap between local culture and other cultures can be attributed to factors such

as local policies, political constraints imposed on textbook publishers, or the perspectives of the textbook writers (Baleghizadeh & Shayesteh, 2020).

The significance of the English language in Iranian society has prompted extensive research analyzing from different angles a variety of English textbooks employed in the Iranian context. Notably, research has extensively examined culture-related variables in locally produced EL textbooks used in Iranian educational settings. It is important to note the existence of two distinct groups of studies. The first group focuses on examining locally developed textbooks intended for use in state high schools. The second group, on the other hand, concentrates on analyzing the content of books that are locally produced specifically for use in private language institutes.

In one notable example from the first group of studies, the Iranian ELT textbook, *Vision 1*, currently used in public secondary schools, was subjected to analysis. The researcher specifically examined its cultural content and found it to be deficient in meeting the cultural requirements necessary for familiarizing students with the target culture (Derakhshan, 2021). Furthermore, the textbook was criticized for placing excessive emphasis on the aesthetic aspects of culture, followed by semantic, sociological, and sociolinguistic/pragmatic dimensions, thereby giving disproportionate weight to the source culture (Gheitasi et al., 2020).

Within the second group of studies, which centers around the analysis of locally developed ELT textbooks intended for use in private language institutes, as a noteworthy example, Mofidi and Hashemi (2019) investigated culture and its representation in the 'Act' series, using Cortazzi and Jin's (1990) model. The series consists of ten levels developing communicative language skills for adult learners, developed by Iran Language Institute (ILI). The analysis of 1581 visuals used in this series found a strong emphasis placed on international and source cultures, while the target culture received

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comparatively less attention. In contrast, Ashrafi and Ajideh (2018) analyzed the entire content of each unit of the ILI advanced series in terms of the big 'C' culture and little 'c' culture dimensions and reported the target culture to be the predominant one at the expense of the source culture. The reason for this discrepancy in results could be attributed to the utilization of different analytical models, as well as the inclusion of distinct content by the authors of these studies.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the variability in outcomes observed across studies examining Iranian textbooks may be ascribed to the existence of two discernible study cohorts. The first cohort undertook an analysis of Iranian textbooks implemented within conventional educational settings (state high schools) while the second cohort focused on Iranian textbooks utilized within private language institutes (e.g., Iran Language Institute/ILI), thereby encompassing distinct educational milieus and teaching objectives within these two cohorts. Hence, these two groups of studies encompass different educational contexts, target audiences, and instructional priorities, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of the distinctive features and implications of each group.

Another avenue of research delves into the comparison of how cultural content is portrayed in textbooks that are developed by Iranian authors and published within the Iranian context (referred to as locally produced textbooks) and the ones that are developed and published internationally but used in Iran. For example, Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) conducted a comparative investigation of culture portrayal in international (Top Notch series) and local (ILI) textbook series. They concluded that the localized textbooks had culturally neutral elements, with sociological values more prevalent than the aesthetic aspect of culture. In contrast, the aesthetic aspect seemed to be highlighted in the international textbooks focusing more on

intercultural aspects. Target language cultural elements were more prominent in the international textbooks.

Adopting a wider scope for his research, Hosseinzadeh (2021) explored two widely used textbook series in the Iranian context –Touchstone and Iran Language Institute (ILI). Regarding cultural content, the ILI textbooks encompassed all four types of cultural elements, albeit with varying degrees of emphasis. In contrast, the Touchstone series placed greater weight on the target culture and international themes, while the significance of the source culture was largely overlooked. Nonetheless, Tajeddin and Bahrebar (2017) explored the representation of cultural aspects in ELT textbooks, focusing on two textbook series extensively used in Iran, one global (American English File) and one localized (ILI English Series). The authors analyzed the cultural contents of the reading and dialog sections using a framework that considers aesthetic and sociological senses of culture. The findings revealed that the sociological sense of culture is emphasized more than the aesthetic sense, which is equivalent to big ‘C’ culture including the elements media, cinema, music, etc., in both series. Additionally, the localized series contained more culture-free contents compared to the global series. The study suggests that ELT materials should incorporate both sociological and aesthetic senses of culture to enhance learners' cultural understanding.

2.4 Studies on Gender Representation in Iranian ELT Textbooks

There has been extensive research exploring (in)equality of gender representation in the ELT instructional materials employed in Iran, often pointing to gender-bias. In one of the early studies, Davoodi (1999) investigated the representation of men and women in Iranian high school ELT textbooks and its significance in terms of sexism and gender bias. The findings highlighted a notable disparity in the depiction of male and female characters, with men being significantly overrepresented in the textbook

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pictures. This skewed representation led Davoodi to argue that the textbooks exhibited a clear prejudice against women and emphasize the need for more balanced and fair representations of both genders in educational materials. Ansary and Babaii (2003) examined the status of sexism in Iranian ELT textbooks from different perspectives, including sex-linked job prospects, forms of sex-based behavior, stereotyped sex roles, primacy, and the generic conception of men. The results of their study also demonstrated biased textbooks that provided students with an unrealistic and unjust portrayal of women, perpetuating gender discrimination. Further research studies (e.g., Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Fatemi et al., 2011; Dabbagh, 2016; Azad, 2020) also explored gender representation in Iranian ELT textbooks. These studies employed content analysis and various analytical frameworks to examine the manifestation of gender biases and stereotypes. The findings consistently revealed imbalanced portrayals of males and females, with textbooks failing to reflect the full range of roles and contributions of women in society. Overall, these studies collectively demonstrate the persistent presence of sexism, gender inequality, and biased representations of men and women in Iranian ELT textbooks.

Gender representation has also been compared across local and international textbooks. For example, Tajeddin and Janebi Enayat (2010) analyzed gender portrayal in international and local ELT textbooks, using quantitative and qualitative measures. Their study scrutinized characters' activities, gaze, visuals, body portrayal, and settings. In both textbooks, men were depicted as active, strong, and socially engaged, while women appeared less active, confined to traditional roles like homemakers, and objectified. This study highlighted enduring gender stereotypes and unequal power dynamics.

Given the significance of ESP in the field of ELT and the fact that ESP textbooks play a vital role in the dissemination of such ideologies, Janebi and Adel (2016) conducted a study examining the portrayal of gender in the images and content of the *Oxford English for Careers* series. The results indicated that women were more likely to be depicted in less significant contexts such as home and leisure, while they were less visible in outdoor spaces associated with power and social standing, such as the workplace. The study revealed stereotypical representations, with women being depicted as confined to domestic roles and men being portrayed as responsible for work and managing family relationships, with greater representation in workplaces and outdoor settings. An intriguing and noteworthy aspect of the findings in these studies is that despite employing diverse analytical models, some focusing exclusively on visual content, others solely on textual content, and some examining both, they all converged on a consistent conclusion: the absence of gender equality in the depicted representations of men and women within these books.

2.5 The current study

It has been observed that textbooks may inadvertently perpetuate cultural stereotypes and biases, leading to disadvantages in learners' social behavior. Similarly, the representation of gender in textbooks has significant implications for learners' perceptions and actions in education and society. Thus, this study recognizes the importance of cultural inclusiveness and balanced gender representation in fostering intercultural awareness and promoting equitable societal values. By examining the dimensions of culture and gender in locally published textbooks, the researchers seek to identify the dominant cultural aspects and assess the portrayal of gender roles. In addition to the analysis of local ELT textbooks in Iran, this study incorporates Turkish ELT textbooks for a comparative examination. This comparative approach

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aims to discern the similarities and dissimilarities in the representation of gender and culture between two textbook series, which originate from countries that share geographical, cultural, and religious proximity. This study, therefore, sought to provide plausible answers to the following research questions:

1. How is culture represented in locally published EFL textbooks of Iran and Turkey?
2. How is gender represented in the images of locally published EFL textbooks of Iran and Turkey?
 - 2.1 who is active in the images of the textbooks?
 - 2.2 Where is the gaze directed?
 - 2.3 What is the role of visual techniques in positioning gender?
 - 2.4 What does the clothing communicate?
 - 2.5 What are the frequent spaces in which the two genders are presented?

3. Method

3.1 Analytical frameworks

3.1.1 Culture Representation

In order to analyze the content of the conversations in the selected textbooks, we used one of the most complete lists of criteria for evaluating textbooks in terms of cultural values which is Byram's (1993) checklist including the following categories:

- a) Social identity and social group (social class, regional identity, ethnic minorities)
- b) Social interaction (differing levels of formality; as outsider and insider)
- c) Belief and behavior (moral, religious beliefs, daily routines)
- d) Social and political institutions (state institutions, health care, law and order, social security, local government)
- e) Socialization and the life cycle (families, schools, employment, rites of passage)
- f) National history (historical and contemporary events seen as markers of national identity)
- g) National geography (geographical factors seen as being significant by members)

h) Stereotypes and national identity (the “typical” symbol of national stereotypes)

The data collected through Byram’s checklist were then analyzed and classified into three culture types: source, target and international culture. Following previous studies (e.g., Gheitasi et al., 2020; Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019; Tajeddin & Teimournezhad 2014), the framework introduced by Cortazzi and Jin (1999) including three main categories to classify the cultural contents was utilized in this study. Target culture materials usually refer to the target culture. Source culture materials refer to textbooks that present language learner’s own culture, and international culture materials are related to textbooks which include a wide variety of cultures regardless of the students’ source or target language.

3.1.2 Gender Representation

In the study's second phase, gender representation in textbook images was analyzed using Goffman’s (1976) content analysis and Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2006) semiological approach. Variables like narrative role, gaze direction, body display, distance, and space were examined. Four positions were established for narrative role: (1) actor (initiating actions), (2) goal (receiving actions), (3) behavior (displaying non-transitive acts), and (4) reactors (responding to objects or circumstances). Gaze (eye-direction) was categorized into two types: one in which the participants are looking at the viewer, and one in which they are looking away from the viewer. Distance had three values: close-up, medium-shot, and long-shot, representing magnified images, equal space around participants, and a public view, respectively. Body Display refers to the way male or female characters are clothed and is divided into three subcategories: sparsely clothed (e.g., shorts), lightly clothed (T-shirt or tops), and fully clothed (business suit, scarf and

chador). Space had the values of home, office, street and community, leisure areas, and shop.

3.2 Textbooks

Two textbook series were examined in this study. The first, *Prospect* series, comprises three consecutive textbooks (*Prospect 1 to 3*) used in grades 7th to 9th of junior high school in Iran. Developed by the Ministry of Education since 2013, these books aim to enhance students' communicative competence by encompassing all language skills. Each textbook contains a varying number of lessons (eight, seven, and six, respectively), structured with sections like Conversation, Practice, Sounds and Letters, Listening, Reading, Speaking, Writing, and Your Conversation, revolving around topics such as travel, media, and health.

The second set, the *Ingilizce Ders Kitabi* series (4, 5, 6), is published in Turkey and used in junior high schools, including national Turkish and Imam Hatib schools under the Ministry of National Education. Each book in this series features 10 units focusing on common topics like Food, Family, and Holidays. Beginning with vocabulary introductions, these units conclude with project sections reviewing the materials. The books cover language skills, adapting their design based on students' proficiency levels. Lower-level books include more illustrations and enjoyable activities like Game Time or Song Time.

3.3 Sampling

All the conversations of the *Prospect* series (n=21) and *Ingilizce Ders Kitabi* series (n=40) were included in the analysis of this study. The inclusion of all the conversations for cultural analysis would provide the researchers with more accurate findings as they covered various topics designed for lower and higher levels of language proficiency. As for the image analysis of the textbooks to be used for gender representation, the selected images from the *Prospect* series (n=35) and *Ingilizce Ders Kitabi* series (n=122) had to

meet two criteria: (1) including human participants, and (2) being real images, not cartoons.

3.4 Coding procedures

The coding of the conversations was conducted by recruiting two researchers who had been familiarized with the coding scheme during a training session. The second author explained the analytical frameworks for the raters and trained them using some samples for both frameworks. Having learned the coding procedures, the raters conducted independent coding of the extracted samples. Then, two raters coded the conversations based on the abovementioned frameworks independently, and to ensure consistency in coding process, Cohen's Kappa agreement was calculated ($r = .80$). Similar to the first phase, two researchers examined the images separately to make sure of the data precision and Kappa coefficient was found to be .76, which is moderate but acceptable (Pallant, 2011).

3.5 Data analysis

After finalizing the content and picture analysis, descriptive statistics were used to evaluate the relative frequency of the cultural categories and gender categories with two levels of male and female. To facilitate data analysis at this level, tables were used to summarize the findings. Finally, chi-square statistics were used to compare the data extracted from two textbook series.

4. Results

4.1 Cultural dimensions

Regarding the first research question, the content of the conversations with similar topic from both textbook series were analyzed in terms of various dimensions of culture based on Byram's (1993) and Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework and the frequencies and percentages of those dimensions were computed (Table 1). Running Chi-square for this research

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question did not seem logical since most frequencies, especially in the case of *Prospect Series*, were zero.

Table 1.*Cultural Categories and Dimensions in Prospect and Ingilizce Series*

Categories Dimensions	Source Culture		Target Culture		International Culture	
	Prospect	Ingilizce	Prospect	Ingilizce	Prospect	Ingilizce
Social identity & group	5 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Social Interaction	17 (34%)	6 (42.8%)	0 (0%)	10 (47.6%)	0 (0%)	4 (44.4%)
Belief & Behavior	7 (14%)	2 (14.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (11.1%)
Social & Political Institution	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Socialization & the life cycle	17 (34%)	6 (42.8%)	0 (0%)	10 (47.6%)	1 (2%)	4 (44.4%)
National history	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
National Geography	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (4.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Stereotypes & National identity	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	50(100)	14(100)	0(100)	21(100)	1(100)	9(100)

As illustrated in the table above, locally published ELT junior high school textbooks in Iran are national oriented referring to the students' own culture or source culture (98%) and only a few elements referring to international culture were observed (2%) and no content was related to the target culture. On the contrary, in *Ingilizce Series* all major cultural aspects (source culture, target culture, and international culture) seem to have received their share of attention, with the target culture being the most frequently referred one. In Appendix A, a conversation from *Prospect series* is illustrated where the source culture (Norooz) is emphasized. However, in *Ingilizce Ders Kitabı* series, one of the conversations focused on international culture (saving our planet) (see Appendix B).

Scrutinizing the cultural dimensions more precisely, we found that social interaction and socialization/life style were two cultural elements more frequently used in both Iranian and Turkish junior high school ELT textbooks. While these two elements were the most commonly used ones in all culture types in Turkish ELT textbooks in a descending order from the target culture to the international culture, the source culture was the only culture type within which the two elements were more frequently seen. Social interaction alludes to the circumstances and ways utilized in a certain group of society including verbal and non-verbal communication and characters' feelings, attitudes, values, and perceived problems. In case of the socialization/life style, topics such as family and school were covered more than the other items in these books.

The second high-frequency category covered in the *Prospect* Series and only found in source culture type was belief and behavior (14%) which included moral and religious beliefs and daily routines. Similarly, this cultural dimension within target culture was absent in *İngilizce* series and only once used in international culture type. Social identity and social group was the third most frequent category and included 10% of the cases in source culture type in *Prospect* series, whereas it was totally ignored in Turkish ELT textbooks. This category includes identification of certain groups within the nation, social class, majority and minority ethnic groups, and professional identity. The frequency of the next dimension, national geography, which refers to geographical features such as mountains, waterfalls, forests, etc., was found to be roughly the same in *Prospect* (4%) and *İngilizce* (4.7%) series, but unlike the Iranian ELT textbooks, this element was found in target culture not in the source one. Finally, the least frequent category in *Prospect* series was the stereotypes and national identity (2%) which was absent in *İngilizce* series.

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The overall results showed that junior high school textbooks published in Iran are oriented towards the local culture, while the in Turkish ELT textbooks both the target and international cultures have been represented besides the source culture and even more emphasis has been placed on the target culture. In other words, students learning English through *Prospect* Series are not provided with any information concerning the universal and target social and cultural viewpoints.

4.2 Gender representation

In order to address the second research question which deals with gender representation in locally published ELT textbooks in Iran and Turkey, the obtained data related to each category of the Kress and Van Leeuwen's (2006) *reading Images* framework is presented and analyzed separately. First, the frequency and percentage of the occurrence of each category along with its subcategories was calculated, and then a Chi-square test of independence or a Fisher's Exact Test, in case when the assumption of maximum expected count was not satisfied (e.g. in gaze direction), was conducted. Finally, post hoc tests were performed to determine which categories had significant differences in terms of gender.

4.2.1 Narrative role

The observed frequencies as well as percentage for all subcategories of narrative role across gender levels in both *Prospect* and *Ingilizce* Series are provided in Table 2. In *Prospect* Series, the only role in which females were found to be more frequently than males was 'goal' (M=25%, F=75%), while males and females were equal in this role in *Ingilizce* series. Male appeared more frequently in all other narrative roles in *Prospect* series, whereas females, compared to males, were more active participants in both 'actor' and 'behavior' roles in *Ingilizce* series. Males were seen more frequently only as 'reactor' in Turkish ELT textbooks (M = 51.7%, F = 48.3%). Altogether,

males were observed to have more social participation than females did in the local published ELT textbooks in Iran.

Table 2.

Narrative Role and Gender Cross tabulation for Prospect and Ingilizce Series

<i>Narrative Role</i>		<i>Prospect Series</i>		<i>Ingilizce Series</i>	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
actor	Count	23	11	112	128
	% within Social Participation	67.6	32.4	46.7	53.3
	% within gender	57.5	52.4	53.6	57.7
	% of Total	37.7	18.0	26.0	29.7
goal	Count	1	3	4	4
	% within Social Participation	25.0	75.0	50.0	50.0
	% within gender	2.5	14.3	1.8	1.9
	% of Total	1.6	4.9	.9	.9
behavior	Count	8	0	33	34
	% within Social Participation	100.0	0.0	49.3	50.7
	% within gender	20.0	0.0	15.8	15.3
	% of Total	13.1	0.0	7.7	7.9
reactor	Count	8	7	60	56
	% within Social Participation	53.3	46.7	51.7	48.3
	% within gender	20.0	33.3	28.7	25.2
	% of Total	13.1	11.5	13.9	13.0

To find whether this relationship between gender and social participation was significant, a two by four Chi-square test of independence was conducted for each textbook series. The results revealed a significant relationship [$\chi^2=8.177$, $df = 3$, $p = .042$] for the *prospect* series, but no such relationship was found between gender and narrative role in *Ingilizce* series [$\chi^2= .828$, $df = 3$, $p = .843$]. To find which subcategory of social participation significantly contributed to this significant relationship in Iranian ELT textbooks, post hoc comparisons were also performed, and the 'behavior' role ($p = .03$) was

found to have the highest contribution to the significant difference between males and females.

4.2.2 Gaze Direction

As illustrated in Table 3, all ‘gazing at the viewer’ in *Prospect* Series was done by males and no female gazed at the viewer. In addition, a higher percentage of ‘gazing away from viewer’ was done by males than females. Since both variables had two levels, Yate’s continuity correction was used to examine the significance of association between variables. The results showed no significant relationship [$\chi^2= 1.243$, $df = 1$, $p = .265$]. The significance of association was also examined by Fisher’s Exact Test since the maximum expected count hypothesis for Chi-square was not satisfied by the data. The result of Fisher’s Test also revealed that the relationship was not significant ($p = .157$). In *Ingilizce* Series, unlike *Prospect* Series, more females than males gazed at the viewer and also away from the viewer (see Table 3). The results of Yate’s continuity correction for Pearson Chi-square showed no significant association between gender and gaze direction in *Ingilizce* Series [$\chi^2= .009$, $df = 1$, $p = .926$].

Table 3.

Gaze Direction and Gender Cross tabulation for Prospect and Ingilizce Series

Gaze Direction		Prospect Series		Ingilizce Series	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
at viewer	Count	5	0	33	36
	% within gaze	100.0	.0	47.8	52.2
	% within gender	20.8	.0	18.2	19.1
	% of Total	14.3	.0	8.9	9.8
away from viewer	Count	19	11	148	152
	% within gaze	63.3	36.7	49.3	50.7
	% within gender	79.2	100.0	81.8	80.9
	% of Total	54.3	31.4%	40.1	41.2

4.2.3 Distance

With regard to representation of males and females in images with different frames, the percentage of males' appearance, compared to females', in close up, medium-shot, and long-shot frames was higher (see Table 4). In contrast, in *Ingilizce* Series, females were also more frequently represented in both close-up and medium-shot frames; however, males were more frequently found in long-shot frames. The results of two by three Pearson Chi-square tests, however, revealed that the association between gender and distance was not significant in neither *prospect* series [$\chi^2= 2.326$, $df = 2$, $p = .313$] nor *Ingilizce* series [$\chi^2= .995$, $df = 2$, $p = .608$].

Table 4.

Distance and Gender Cross tabulation for Prospect and Ingilizce Series

		Prospect Series		Ingilizce Series	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
close-up	Count	8	1	43	49
	% within distance	88.9	11.1	46.7	53.3
	% within gender	33.3	9.1	24.0	26.3
	% of Total	22.9	2.9	11.8	13.4
medium-shot	Count	11	7	112	118
	% within distance	61.1	38.9	48.7	51.3
	% within gender	45.8	63.6	62.6	63.4
	% of Total	31.4	20.0	30.7	32.3
long-shot	Count	5	3	24	19
	% within distance	62.5	37.5	55.8	44.2
	% within gender	20.8	27.3	13.4	10.2
	% of Total	14.3	8.6	6.6	5.2

4.2.4 Body Display

Given the fact that sparsely-clothed representation of people in Islamic contexts is less likely to happen, no sparsely-clothed males or females in *Prospect* series and only two sparsely-clothed males in *Ingilizce* series were found. Therefore, for the purpose of statistical analysis, these two categories (sparsely-clothed and lightly-clothed) were collapsed into one category

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named 'not fully clothed' and the analyses related to this part were done with two variables of gender (male/female) and body display (fully-clothed/not fully clothed).

As shown in Table 5, presenting the data with this new categorization, no female who was not fully-clothed was found in *Prospect* series and only 3 males were found in these clothes. On the contrary, in *Ingilizce* Series, 37.9% of those who were not fully clothed were males while 62.1% were females. In the fully-clothed category, males were more frequently observed in both textbook series. In appendix A, the girls are fully clothed in *Prospect* 3, whereas women are lightly clothed in *Ingilizce* Series (see Appendix C).

Table 5.*Body Display and Gender Cross tabulation for Prospect and Ingilizce Series*

Body Display		Prospect Series		Ingilizce Series	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
not fully-clothed	Count	3	0	58	95
	% within body display	100.0	.0	37.9	62.1
	% within gender	15.0	0.0	31.9	50.5
	% of Total	9.7	0.0	15.7	25.7
fully-clothed	Count	17	11	124	93
	% within body display	60.7	39.3	51.7	42.9
	% within gender	85.0	100.0	68.1	49.5
	% of Total	54.8	35.5	33.5	25.1

To examine whether the differences were statistically significant or not two Chi-square tests were performed. The results showed no significant association between body display and gender, [$\chi^2 = .514$, $df = 1$, $p = .474$] in *prospect* series. Since the assumption of Chi-square, maximum expected count, was not satisfied in this data set, Fisher's Exact Test was also conducted. Similarly, the results ($p = .535$) did not show a significant difference in terms of clothing between males and females represented. Unlike *Prospect* Series, a significant association between the levels of gender and body display was found [$\chi^2 = 12.524$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$] in *Ingilizce* Series. In other words, while males were represented more fully-clothed in such

clothes as business suits, females were represented in more revealing clothes such as tops.

4.2.5 Space

As it is depicted in Table 6, workplace was the setting in which the characters in both textbook series were found more than other settings. In addition, males, in comparison to females, were more frequently represented in this context in both *Prospect* and *Ingilizce* series. However, interestingly, neither males nor females were represented to be passing their leisure time in *Prospect* Series, while it was not the case in *Ingilizce* series and out of 70 representations in leisure setting, 39 9 were males and 31 were females. Three people were represented in home, two were males (66.7%) and one was female (33.3%). Another difference between the Iranian and Turkish ELT textbooks in terms of gender representation in the rest of the settings was that the characters, no matter male or female, were scarcely found in the contexts of street, shop, and home. That is, only two males were represented in street and one female was represented in shop. Similarly, in the setting of home, two males and one female were observed. On the other hand, the frequencies for these settings were higher for both males and female in *Ingilizce* series. More females than males were depicted in the context of home (M= 21, F = 31), street (M = 9, F = 11), and shop (M=6, F=14). As an example, in *Ingilizce* Series, women could be presented in work places as well (see Appendix C).

Table 6.

Space and Gender Cross tabulation for Prospect and Ingilizce Series

Space		Prospect Series		Ingilizce Series	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
home	Count	2	1	21	31
	% within space	66.7	33.3	40.4	59.6
	% within gender	11.1	9.1	16.0	23.1
	% of Total	6.9	3.4	7.9	11.7

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work place	Count	14	9	56	47
	% within space	60.9	39.1	54.4	45.6
	% within gender	77.8	81.8	42.7	35.1
	% of Total	48.3	31.0	21.1	17.7
street	Count	2	0	9	11
	% within space	100.0	.0	45.0	55.0
	% within gender	11.1	.0	6.9	8.2
	% of Total	6.9	.0	3.4	4.2
shop	Count	0	1	6	14
	% within space	.0	100.0	30.0	70.0
	% within gender	.0	9.1	4.6	10.4
	% of Total	.0	3.4	2.3	5.3
leisure	Count	0	0	39	31
	% within space	.0	.0	55.7	44.3
	% within gender	.0	.0	29.8	23.1
	% of Total	.0	.0	14.7	11.7

The results of Chi-square test showed no significant association between space and gender [$\chi^2= 2.900$, $df = 3$, $p = .407$] in *Prospect* series, though the results of Chi-square test in this special case cannot be trusted since most cells (6 out of 8 cells) did not meet the maximum expected count assumption. This problem is usually solved by collecting more data, which was not possible in this case since the scope of this study was limited only to *Prospect* Series and all the three books had already been included in the study. Another way to fix this problem is to collapse categories, which, similarly, didn't work for this case due to the small numbers in each cell (e.g., zero values). Regarding the *Ingilizce* series, the results of Chi-square test showed no significant association between the levels of gender and those of space, [$\chi^2= 6.991$, $df = 4$, $p = .136$].

5. Discussion

The first purpose of this study was to discover representations of culture in the *Prospect* and *Ingilizce* series which are considered to be the locally published sources of teaching and learning English in junior high school in

Iran and Turkey, respectively. Regarding the cultural components of these ELT textbooks, the findings revealed that junior high school textbooks of Iran were geared to familiarize students with their own culture in English while paying little attention to international culture, and almost disregarding the target culture. Moreover, the dimensions of social and political institutions and national history were absent from the conversations. In contrast, Turkish high school textbooks were relatively more effective in fostering intercultural understanding by addressing all cultural aspects (source culture, target culture, and international culture), with a particular emphasis on the target culture. However, in general, ELT textbooks in Turkey and, to a more extent, in Iran, fell short in enhancing students' worldviews and intercultural awareness. As McKay (2003) noted, in order to communicate successfully, English as an International Language demands not just knowledge of one's own culture but also knowledge of other cultures.

Our findings align with previous studies (e.g., Gheitasi et al., 2020; Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021) which indicated that the material developers tend to prioritize the learners' native culture in their textbook content. This emphasis on L1 culture may hinder the development of learners' intercultural awareness, as noted by Majdzadeh (2002). Contrary to our findings, locally published ILI textbooks, as noted by Hosseinzadeh et al. (2021), encompassed all four categories of cultural content. Tajeddin and Teimournezhad (2014) reported that the majority of cultural elements in ILI textbooks were culturally neutral. It is worth noting that ILI books are only utilized in private language institutes rather than public schools, and the disparity in results may be attributed to the distinctive educational contexts in which these books are employed.

Overrepresentation of source culture can be seen as a way to avoid the dominance of Anglo-Saxon western culture (Mofidi & Hashemi, 2019) and

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prioritize "Islamic-Iranian" cultural content to counter the influence of English-speaking countries over developing nations (Pishghadam & Naji, 2012). They argue that localizing and preserving national culture and identity is a justifiable response to linguistic imperialism, which poses a threat to local languages and cultures. Therefore, external factors such as the perspectives of textbook writers, political constraints on publishers, and local cultural policies may contribute to this emphasis (Hamiloğlu & Mendi, 2010). However, it is believed that a certain degree of representation of the target or international culture is necessary for developing communicative language skills (Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014).

The evolving understanding of culture and its role in ELT has significantly influenced the analysis of instructional materials and textbooks as repositories of beliefs, ideologies, and concealed curriculum, expressed through texts and illustrations (McGrath, 2002). Previous research has presented a mixed perspective on the overrepresentation of local culture in ELT textbooks, acknowledging both its advantages along with the potential drawbacks mentioned above. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) remarked that being aware of one's own culture enables learners to better understand their cultural identity, introduce their culture to the world, and interact effectively with individuals from diverse cultures. However, it is crucial to expand the inclusion of multiple cultures in textbooks and actively involve students in comparing and contrasting their own culture and cultural conceptualizations with others.

The second objective of the study was to scrutinize gender representations within the *Prospect* and *İngilizce* series using Kress and Van Leeuwen's framework (2006). Our findings reveal a notable disparity in gender representation between the *İngilizce* series and the *Prospect* series, with the former demonstrating a higher frequency of female actors and their presence

in a wider range of settings. This contrasts with a previous study by Skliar (2007) that examined Iranian and Turkish ELT textbooks, which identified a gender imbalance favoring male representations in both Iranian and Turkish materials. These discrepancies may be attributed to series-specific variations or shifts in gender representation over time. While our study highlights an increase in female representation in the *İngilizce* series, previous research on gender representation in ELT textbooks in Turkey (e.g., Bağ & Bayyurt, 2015; Diktaş, 2011; Özkan, 2013) often portrayed male prominence, indicating potential variations across textbook series or evolving gender portrayals.

In comparing our findings on Iranian ELT textbooks with studies conducted in Iran by Dabbagh (2016), Ansary and Babaii (2003), Bahman and Rahimi (2010), and Tajjedin and Janebi Enayat (2010), consistent patterns of gender representation were observed. These findings revealed a significant gender imbalance in the Iranian ELT textbooks, particularly in workplace settings where males were predominantly represented. However, it is noteworthy that our research diverges from most previous studies, which depicted a scarcity of female presence in workplace settings (e.g., Ansary & Babaii, 2003; Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Fatemi et al., 2011). In our study, females were more likely to be found in workplace settings, albeit with a lower frequency compared to males. This comparison underscores the interplay of cultural nuances and contextual variations in gender representations across different ELT textbook series, emphasizing the need for ongoing research to ensure inclusivity and representativeness in educational materials.

6. Conclusion

This study probed the cultural and gender representation in two series of locally published textbooks in Iran (*Prospect 1, 2, 3*) and Turkey (*İngilizce*

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Ders Kitabı 4,5,6). The findings of this study have implications for syllabus designers, advocating for culturally nuanced materials blending national, international, and target contexts. This integration fosters cultural familiarity and effective communication, aiding educators in supplementing missing elements and expanding students' comprehension of diverse contexts. Moreover, delving into gender and power dynamics within textbooks provides valuable insights for language educators, learners, decision-makers, and curriculum developers, shedding light on the gender equity aspects in EFL/ESL materials and equips educators to identify and rectify gender biases. These insights advocate for policymakers, educators, and editors to embrace gender-inclusive curriculum design, striving to mitigate biases and stereotypes pervasive in ELT textbooks. Despite the implications of this study, some limitations prompt consideration for further research directions. In this study, conversations were scrutinized for cultural representation, and gender representation through images was assessed. Further research could explore additional factors like textual language in reading passages with similar goals. Examining a broader range of textbooks used in schools would strengthen claims about these materials. Therefore, future research is urged to re-examine ELT materials in light of English's status as an international language linked to various cultural conceptualizations. Additionally, since the samples were analyzed by coders who were native speakers of Azari, the raters' judgements could have been influenced by bias, necessitating the undertaking of further studies by recruiting culturally and linguistically diverse raters. Finally, to gain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of culture and gender positioning in *Prospect* series, a comparison with textbooks published in other countries like Iraq and Saudi Arabia would be beneficial.

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Appendix A. Sample conversation and image from *Prospect 3: Festivals and ceremonies*.

Lesson 3: Festivals and Ceremonies

Conversation

Listen to the conversation between two friends.

Ethan: I just love New Year holiday!

Nasrin: Oh, yes, me too. It's really great.

Ethan: We normally visit our relatives in Nereez. It's fun!

Nasrin: Do you get New Year gifts too?

Ethan: Sure! We usually get money. I really like it.

Nasrin: Well... We always go to my grandparents' houses.

Ethan: That's nice! Does your grandmother cook the New Year meal?

Nasrin: Actually, she doesn't. My mother makes it.

Practice 1: Talking about Festivals and Ceremonies (1)

Listen to the examples. Then ask and answer with a friend.

Do you buy new clothes for the New Year? Yes, I do.

Do you and your cousin set the Haft Seen table? No, we don't.

Do young children color the eggs? Yes, they usually color them.

Do Chinese people buy gold fish for the New Year? No, they don't buy gold fish.

Practice 2: Talking about Festivals and Ceremonies (2)

Listen to the examples. Then ask and answer with a friend.

Does he recite the Holy Quran at the turn of the year? Yes, he does.

Does your father give you New Year gifts? No, he doesn't.

Does she have many friends? Yes, she has many friends.

Does your mom make a special food for Nereez? No, she doesn't make a special food.

Appendix B. Sample conversation from *Ingilizce Ders Kitabi* series



12. Listen and fill in the blanks with the words below. Then, act it out.

- cut down
- environment
- reduce
- reuse
- pick up
- litter

Teacher: What do you do to save the (1)

Student 1: Hmm... I always put my (2) in a bin.

Teacher: Nice. You should also (3) the litter.

Student 1: OK.

Teacher: People (4) many trees every year. We should plant trees, for example.

Student 2: Oh, yes. You're right.

Teacher: And, what about your clothes? You should (5) them.

Student 2: Reuse my clothes? How?

Teacher: Give them to your cousins or someone who needs them.

Student 3: How does this help to save the environment?

Teacher: Factories produce clothes. They use electricity and then, they pack the clothes. Vehicles bring the packages to the shops. And what do these vehicles also use?

Student 3: Fuel-oil? We should (6) fossil fuel use. Oh, my God! I can do many things to save the world.

Teacher: Yes. We can do many things.

Appendix C. Sample images from Ingilizce Ders Kitabi series

Use: policewoman, hairdresser, lawyer, saleswoman, pilot, architect, manager (One is extra.)



Mr. Carter works in a court.
He is a / an



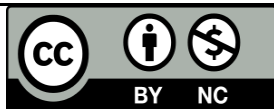
Mrs. Robinson works in her office.
She is a / an



Mrs. Hopkins works in a department.
She has a car and a uniform.
She is a / an



Mr. Brown works for an airline.
He is a / an



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