

Construction of Gender through Textbooks: The Case of Iranian Junior High School English Textbooks¹

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Abstract

Despite a body of research into gender representation in textbooks for English as a foreign language, little empirical evidence has been published on Iranian English textbooks. To fill this void, the present study examined gender representation and construction in a recently developed Iranian English Language course book series. In so doing, Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis was employed to extract the underlying gender-related ideologies in this series. The results showed that despite Iran's gender-sensitive education and policy, contemporary Iranian school textbooks in the public sector suffer from gendered role stereotyping, such as favoring males over females in unequal and equal relations, more tangible representation of male roles in topical categories, and the imposition of socially acceptable male and female activities through overrepresentation of subject positions. It was concluded that including gendered perspectives in such textbooks may generate biased ideologies in society. This study should, therefore, be of value to practitioners wishing to develop and implement gender-free textbooks and curricula.

Resumen

A pesar de la amplia investigación sobre la representación de género en los libros de texto de inglés como lengua extranjera, se ha publicado poca evidencia empírica sobre los libros de texto de inglés iraníes. Para abordar esta deficiencia, el presente estudio examinó la representación y la construcción de género en una serie de libros de texto de inglés iraní recientemente desarrollada. Para ello, se empleó el modelo de Análisis Crítico del Discurso de Fairclough para extraer las ideologías de género subyacentes en esta serie. Los resultados mostraron que, a pesar de la educación y las políticas iraníes con perspectiva de género, los libros de texto escolares iraníes contemporáneos en el sector público adolecen de estereotipos de género, como la preferencia por los hombres sobre las mujeres en relaciones desiguales e igualitarias, una representación más tangible de los roles masculinos en categorías temáticas y la imposición de actividades socialmente aceptables para hombres y mujeres mediante la sobrerrepresentación de las posiciones de los sujetos. Se concluyó que la inclusión de perspectivas de género en dichos libros de texto puede generar ideologías sesgadas en la sociedad. Por lo tanto, este estudio debería ser de utilidad para quienes deseen desarrollar e implementar libros de texto y currículos sin perspectiva de género.

Introduction

A textbook is a curricular material that appears as a book that includes manuscripts or pictures that simplify the achievement of educational goals. It can be utilized to fulfill two aims: education and socialization (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Curdt-Christiansen, 2017; Friedman, 2021). Generally, the educational purpose of textbooks deals with spreading knowledge, skills, and attitudes through assisting the teaching and learning process (Olson, 1989). Textbooks can also be very helpful for teachers with little experience; thereby, they are capable of managing the teaching and learning process in their classes through pre-set classroom activities, sequences, and objectives framed in the textbooks (Richards, 2001).

It also facilitates socializing students through depicting and transferring both social values and norms. However, along with the values, such as humanity and individual rights, textbooks can be used to impose and represent the desired ideologies of the communities to which the students belong. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009) stated that "In their interpretation and presentation of knowledge, textbooks are a vehicle for norms, values and models of social behavior through the representations that they contain" (p. 16). Simply put, a textbook has a role as an ideological agenda (Phillipson, 1992) "[...] to promote a certain belief system and legitimize an established political and social order" (Apple & Christian-Smith, 2017, p. 10). These ideologies embedded in textbooks carry the dominant groups' intended beliefs, which aim at modifying and guiding people's thoughts (Widdowson, 2007). One of these social values that is mostly affected by the ideological powers is the gender perspective. Gender-related values are always employed in textbooks as an influential socialization medium that influences students directly and the community indirectly in constructing knowledge and attitudes towards gender equality (Davidson Films, 2010).

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Thereby, governments and thought-controlling systems in societies are able to implicitly inject their ideological perspectives into the fresh minds of youngsters (Camase, 2009). Hence, it could turn into a major hazard if the imposed ideologies by the powers encourage gendered perspectives (Rawłuszko, 2021; Suissa & Sullivan, 2021).

If such unequal perspectives toward genders appear in textbooks, they can bring about serious effects on teenage students. It may affect the way they recall and comprehend materials (Good et al., 2010; Namaziandost et al., 2018), choose their university majors and future careers (Blickenstaff, 2005; Potter & Rosser, 1992; Van Houweling et al., 2020), and understand social equality, values, and behaviors (Amare, 2007; Lu, 2018; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008). Among these issues, gender equality plays a major role in shaping learners' world knowledge about genders. According to Wodak (1997), gender is the "socially, culturally or psychologically constructed differences" between men's and women's roles and relations (p. 3). However, if the differences are reproduced and reinterpreted unjustifiably by the educational systems through the textbooks, their consequential effects will be perpetual in societies for decades (Baten et al., 2021; Suissa & Sullivan, 2021). Thus, to avoid possible gendered perspectives in textbooks, meticulous and persistent surveillances are required during and after developing any educational textbooks.

It is obvious that English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks are no exception in this regard, as they may also hold embedded gendered perspectives. Such gender bias in ELT materials may exacerbate gender differences and, consequently, may hinder gender equality (Dahmardeh et al., 2025; Vu & Pham, 2022). This issue in ELT materials has also been investigated by many scholars in the field. Perhaps, such studies were triggered by Hartman & Judd (1978) since before that research, publications on gender-representation in ELT textbooks had been confined to small-scale reports (Ariyanto, 2018). However, as Demir and Yavuz (2017) expressed, males are generally represented more than females in nearly all ELT textbooks. Such an imbalance in gender representation in Iranian ELT textbooks has been previously reported in some studies. For example, Foroutan (2012) concluded that male dominance was prevalent in all the textbooks. In another study, Hall (2014) reported gender inequality in Iranian ELT textbooks and claimed that the low visibility of female characters is evident in the textbooks.

What connects these studies is the utilization of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the guiding framework in examining the distribution of institutionally unequalled power in terms of access to linguistic resources. Investigating access to discursal events and their relationships with the social inequalities "as it is expressed, signaled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use" (Wodak, 2001, p. 2) are indispensable principles of CDA, which assumes that language is basically ideologically invested, and it is not a neutral means of sending messages. Additionally, discursal events establish "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world" (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002, p. 1) both from the perspectives of the producer (the writer, the speaker) and the consumer (the reader, the audience). Thus, CDA, as a research method, seeks to obtain a better understanding in terms of the underlying ideological system of discourse and how this discourse works to affect its context and addressees. In this way, a linkage can be found between CDA and gender studies, which are devoted to examining gender identity and gendered representation, as they similarly attempt to identify and analyze social inequalities regarding gender-related issues. This gendered ideological imposition, which is known as the systematic direction of thoughts toward prototyped perspectives about genders, can be reflected and practiced in school textbooks (Blumberg, 2008; Parker et al., 2017); therefore, analytical examinations of school textbooks can provide information on any underlying biased gendered perspectives.

These examinations are strictly necessary when new textbooks are introduced to the market. In 2013, a series of English textbooks (*Prospect 1, 2, & 3*⁵) was published to be taught at Iranian public junior high schools. However, since Iran is known as a patriarchal society, under-investigating gender representation in the newly published textbooks can bring about consequential effects on students (Mir, 2020; Mortazavi & Poelker, 2017; Nayyeri, 2013; Sattari, 2020). Therefore, examining gender bias in this series is of high priority. This study aimed to investigate how ELT textbooks represented men and women and their social roles in an Iranian context. In so doing, Iranian junior high school English textbooks were chosen and analyzed through Fairclough's (2015) model of CDA, namely, female and male characters, social roles, and their positions. To guide the study, the following question was raised:

⁵ Alavimoghadam, B., Kheirabadi, R., Rahimi, M., Davari, H. *Prospect 1* (2013), *Prospect 2* (2014), *Prospect 3* (2015). Iran School books Publication Company.

How are female and male social roles, and their positions, represented in newly published Iranian ELT textbooks?

Literature Review

After Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, the educational system experienced fundamental changes to establish Islamic rules in its schooling system (Foroutan, 2012). In this regard, all the public and private schools must follow the government's educational orders and use their prescribed textbooks (Dahmardeh et al., 2017; Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020). According to Lahelma (2014), schooling is considered to be an important factor in forming students' perspectives on gender. These gender-based worldviews in schooling systems are mostly shaped through textbooks, as they are constantly being used by the students and are considered to be trusted resources (Moore, 2020). If the learning materials hold biases in presenting genders, they can produce adverse effects on the target students in comprehending social roles and status of genders (Dhillon & Meier, 2022; Evans & Rawlings, 2021). Their adverse effect may produce unjustified perspectives in learners that rarely or never change.

In this regard, research has reported that gender inequality in presenting genders exists in textbooks used in the educational system of Iran (e.g., Nayyeri, 2013; Tabatabaei & Mehri, 2019; World Economic Forum, 2020). Such gender bias in textbooks can also be found in Iranian English textbooks, as it is one of the compulsory foreign languages taught in every Iranian high school. All Iranian students are taught using six English textbooks during their six years of high school in classes given three to four hours per week.

Language and gender

Studies exploring the connections between gender and language were triggered when three important books were published: *Male/female language* (Key, 1975), *Language and women's place* (Lakoff, 1975), and *Difference and dominance* (Thorne & Henley, 1975). These books are intended to explore gender equality as well as deconstruct text-embedded gendered perspectives of gender. The authors of these books sought to increase public consciousness about the destructive nature of gender bias prevalent in texts and educational materials. Generally, perspectives toward the roles played by women and men and society's expectations of them are reflected and established in textbooks (Bell et al., 2006). Such expectations, which construct certain attitudes and behaviors towards gender, are highly dependent on a country's culture, policies, economy, and religions (Bell et al.). Culturally speaking, women are assumed to be suppressed groups who are negatively characterized as inactive, weak, dependent, and emotional, and men are positively shown as strong, active, independent, and rational (Fiske et al., 2002; 2002; Kaye & Pennington, 2016; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Moreover, these characterizations of women and men are not innate, but adhere to the social and cultural situation of each society.

On the other hand, gendered perspectives gender may be included in educational textbooks and school curricula (Kereszty, 2009). This could turn into a social hazard if the gender ideologies in the textbooks encourage gender inequality. These would-be biased perspectives could bring about irreparable social problems in the belief structure of the young students as Lee and Collins (2008) claim, "Learners, who generally attach great credibility and authority to educational materials, tend to absorb and assimilate the materials in minute detail without comment, and to be susceptible to their influence." (p. 128). Hence, educational textbooks can be regarded as tools of injecting and imposing gendered ideologies in societies (Carlson & Kanci, 2017; Gouvias & Alexopoulos, 2018; Lee, 2018).

CDA and gender-based studies

Before 1970, as McCarthy (1991) mentioned, studying language was confined to analyzing its fragments, but with the appearance of discourse analysis in various fields of study (such as linguistics, semiotics, and sociology), the scenario changed substantially. At the present time, discourse analysis includes interdisciplinary approaches that can be utilized to investigate various social issues in different types of research (Phillips & Jorgensen, 2002). Nowadays, CDA, as an outcome of discourse analysis, has attracted attention from different fields of study such as teaching, literature, and sociolinguistics. The main focus of CDA is considering language as a social phenomenon and concentrating on the sociopolitical dominance and inequality in texts. Van Dijk (2006) believes that CDA mainly deals with "the relationship between discourse and power" (p. 363). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) state that it aims to focus on social issues and how power and ideology are embedded in discourse, as discursive practices historically mediate social affairs; therefore, discourse can be considered as a kind of social action.

In this regard, Fairclough's (2015) model is considered to be one of the prominent models of CDA to conduct gender-based studies in ELT textbooks. One of the important uses of CDA is in gender-related studies in which the main concern of the researchers is to reveal the embedded discriminatory patterns between genders in texts. The presence of latent gendered dispositions in texts can be examined in terms of how certain necessary social values are tacitly transmitted through the "hidden curriculum," which produces embedded assumptions and practices of educational systems created by various actors within the school context (Skelton, 1997). During the last decades, as Gouvias and Alexopoulos (2018) claim, much research has been conducted to investigate gender bias in textbooks which reported similar stereotypes toward genders as females are passive, dependent, weak and physically attractive, males as active, independent and strong (e.g., Ariyanto, 2018; Coles, 1977; Gebregeorgis, 2016; Lee & Collins, 2008).

Reviewing the classical studies exploring gender equality in textbooks, it can be observed that some studies mainly employed frequency and type counts to report inequality in the distribution of roles between genders. For instance, Coles (1977) investigated the number and type of gender roles in five educational materials and reported that males were represented more than females by a ratio of 3:1. He also revealed that in textbooks, females are presumed to hold just traditional and inactive jobs, while males had 73 different occupations. He found that women managed and owned little, while men held various jobs that needed skills and managerial ability. He concluded that such intentional under-representation of females in textbooks is in congruence with the ongoing ideological patterns in the societies, which are partly injected from governments and social bases.

On the other hand, some researchers have opted for CDA as the model of analysis to explore the gender bias in ELT textbooks. In a study, Ariyanto (2018) carried out a CDA study exploring how genders are portrayed in Indonesian English textbooks used at public schools. He utilized critical micro-semiotics to analyze the texts and illustrations of textbooks and reported that there were gendered impositions in the visual and verbal texts. His interpretation of these findings was that gendered discourses in the textbooks do not encourage gender equality and, in some cases, render stereotyped gender discrimination. He also concluded that gender stereotyping in educational materials is not confined to the boundaries of texts but is extended to the visual aspects of such materials.

Fairclough's (2015) model of CDA has been utilized by some researchers to examine gendered perspectives in textbooks. As an illustration, Gebregeorgis (2016) employed this model to analyze gendered perspectives in the *English for Ethiopia Student's Book*. His findings showed that the texts included in the textbook attempted to follow the current social directions on gender construction and the efforts to alter the existing state of affairs in prevalent gendered dispositions in the educational system of Ethiopia.

Some other studies have also compared gender awareness in ELT textbooks of two nationalities. For example, Lee and Collins (2008) investigated gender bias in the English textbooks in reflections of the later development of gender awareness in Hong Kong compared to Australia. Comparing ten Australian textbooks with ten Hong Kong textbooks, they showed that awareness of gender-based issues had influenced most gender-related terms in Australia and Hong Kong. They reported that the Hong Kong authors favored either "he" or "she" or "generic he", whereas their Australian counterparts were inclined to apply the generic form. The examination of the pictures in the textbooks revealed that Hong Kong textbook authors paid more attention to the visual presentation of women.

Similar research has been conducted in the Iranian context. In a study done by Bahman and Rahimi (2010), the researchers examined various excerpts of gender representation of females and males in three Iranian high school English textbooks. They attempted to investigate the words ascribed to females and males. Their results showed that the presentation of females and males in these textbooks was not equal, as the males' roles were more emphasized than those of females. Furthermore, these textbooks included so many male generics that females were practically invisible, which can be regarded as sexism in these textbooks.

More recently, Tahriri and Moradpour (2014) investigated a communicative series called *Top Notch* to extract any gender bias. Employing Fairclough's (2015) model, the researchers examined the textbooks based on three main aspects of gender: relations, positions, and content. Their findings indicated that the series displays both genders in a relatively balanced manner and represents both genders in a way that significantly diminishes the stereotypical norms that are often internalized by learners. Moreover, they

also concluded that this textbook has embraced the language of marketing and advertising, particularly through leveraging the representation of both genders, with a marginal emphasis on females.

Similarly, Goodarzi & Weisi (2020) investigated the representation of genders, cultures, and races in the Iranian senior high school *Vision Series*. The examination of these textbooks revealed that they did not present equal cultural representations. They also found that the dominance of white and male characters was evident. Moreover, they reported that males' roles were more stressed than those of females throughout the series.

Drawing upon the studies and their results above, conducting studies examining the issue of gender equality in educational materials is a necessity which is more tangible in governments with ideological patterns such as Iran. Therefore, this research is an attempt to unravel the underlying ideologically driven gendered stereotypes in a recently published Iranian English series (*Prospects*). Results would contribute to shedding light on the unknown status quo of gender equality in contemporary Iranian educational materials.

The present study

This research aims to investigate how males and females are represented in the *Prospects* series for junior high school students. This research can be considered significant for several reasons. First, as the English series being taught at Iranian junior high schools has been introduced to Iran's Educational System (*Prospect 1, 2, and 3*) (Kheirabadi & Alevimoghaddam, 2016), and the previous series *Right Path to English* (Birjandi & Soheili, 2006) were reported to embody gendered dispositions (Ansary & Babaii, 2003), therefore, analyzing them in terms of embedded gendered perspectives seems to be necessary. Also, as English is the obligatory foreign language in Iranian high schools from Grade 7 on, if the textbooks contain gender bias and boost stereotypical thinking and beliefs, they will indirectly shape a gender-biased worldview for students. Although social perceptions about gender roles are changing in Iran, critics believe that the gendered views that are most prevalent are that males are the breadwinners and females are the homemakers. Given that education is a means of making changes in society (Välilmaa & Hoffman, 2008), if gender equality is effectively practiced and presented in school textbooks, its movements will experience fewer barriers in the future. Finally, since no research on gender representation in Iranian most recently published English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks (the *Prospect* series) has been carried out, the present study on the contemporary Iranian EFL textbooks will provide the required information for both curriculum planners and the Educational System on the status quo of gender equality in the EFL textbooks in public school to render the needed improvement.

Methodology

Materials

English as an obligatory subject is widely taught to all Iranian students from grades 7 to 12. Therefore, the investigation of the English textbooks regarding their gender representation and possible latent gendered ideologies is of high priority (Zarrinabadi & Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, 2017). In this study, the first three textbooks that are taught in grades 7, 8, and 9 were selected for examination. In the *Prospect* series, all four skills are practiced along with some vocabulary lists and basic grammatical structures. The textbooks, which were introduced to Iranian high schools from 2010 to 2015, seek to improve students' English communicative abilities. The series includes a student's book with an audio CD, a workbook, and a teacher's book. In this research, Fairclough's (2015) model of CDA was utilized to examine the conversations to disclose the gender representations in this series. Table 1 shows the number of units and conversations of the *Prospect* series.

Textbook	No. of Units	No. of Conversations
<i>Prospect 1</i>	8	16
<i>Prospect 2</i>	7	14
<i>Prospect 3</i>	6	12
Total	21	42

Table 1: Number of units and conversations

Model of analysis

Fairclough's (2015) model, based on Halliday's (1985) systemic-functional grammar (SFG) introduced the model of CDA to analyze gender representations in textbooks. In this model, content, social relations, and

subject positions are scrutinized to reveal embedded ideologically driven biases in textbooks. To operationalize this model in our study, the following steps were taken:

Content

A careful examination of the textbooks was carried out to categorize meaning-related aspects of gender representations into a set of numerical data. To do so, gender-related meaning dimensions were counted in terms of content, relation, and subject positions throughout the series, then the data gathered were recorded for subsequent comparisons. The logic behind analyzing the dimensions was checking which meaning aspects were emphasized or de-emphasized regarding gender-related issues, as these intentional meaning choices can reflect the latent ideologies of textbook developers.

Relations

To categorize social relations, the relations of the interlocutors in conversations, such as teacher-student and female-male relations in the three textbooks were counted. Then, the identified relations from all three textbooks were categorized into equal and unequal positions to detect any unequal positions in these relations and gender-related superiorities. It should be mentioned that the repetitions of the relations were also considered in the study. That is, the frequency of all the social relations a person with a specific position had, were counted as the data.

Subject positions

All the measures taken to embed ideological perspectives and meanings in text are normally in accordance with one another. These measures entailed three meaning dimensions of relations, subjects, and contents. As Fairclough (2015) said, "all three dimensions of meaning overlap and co-occur in practice, but it is helpful to distinguish them" (p. 46). Hence, the frequency of subject position occurrences was counted each time the interlocutors of a conversation were communicating. Five categories of gender-related positions were introduced: family, societal, commercial, occupational, and other subject positions. When the interlocutors happened to take more than one social position, saliency was the criterion for the selection of their social position. Meanwhile, if any position could not be fed into the categories, it was assumed to be position-free and was categorized into the other subject positions. Moreover, friendship was not considered as a subject position, as it was enumerated as a social relation, and repeating it in a new dimension would cause confusion.

To measure the inter-rater reliability (Cohen's Kappa) of the obtained data, both researchers analyzed the textbooks. Then, using SPSS software, the inter-rater reliabilities (21 situations and relations) of the data were calculated, resulting in 0.701, 0.812, and 0.823 for Prospect 1, 2, and 3, respectively (Table 2).

	Value	Asymptotic Standardized Error	Approximate Tb	Approximate Significance
<i>Prospect 1</i>	.701	.0652	12.520	.000
Number of situations	21			
<i>Prospect 2</i>	.812	.0522	14.634	.000
Number of situations	21			
<i>Prospect 3</i>	.823	.0431	18.543	.000
Number of situations	21			

Table 2: Inter-rater reliability (Kappa) of the textbooks

This study was basically conducted to reveal underlying gender-related ideological representations of Iranian junior high school EFL textbooks. To do so, content, relations, and subject positions were carefully inspected to decide whether the textbooks were adequately gender-balanced or whether any significant gendered bias was embedded.

Results and Discussion

This study sought to investigate the possible underlying gender-related ideologies embedded in Iranian junior high school EFL textbooks. To do so, all the characters in the textbooks were identified to examine the characters' gender, their relations, and subject positions. To examine the characters' relations, the frequency of equal, unequal, the overall relations in textbooks was scrutinized. In the examination of the unequal relations within conversations, it was revealed that equal relations in the textbooks were confined to 'Student-Student' and 'Friend-Friend', and equal relations were not similarly distributed between genders in these two categories.

As Table 3 illustrates, most interactants of 'Friend-Friend' relations were males (seven conversations); however, only four for both genders were found in 'Student-Student' relations. This might indicate the authors' emphasis on representing female students just inside the schools. Not showing females in an outdoor setting having conversations could bring about consequential challenges in terms of illustrations and topics in an Islamic context. Unsurprisingly, no equal relations involving both genders in one conversation in the *Prospect* series were reported to involve both females and males. Some examples of the pictures used for such conversations can be found in Figure 1. This can be explained from the Islamic view, which bans friendship between females and males. Moreover, co-education is not allowed in the public sector of the educational system of Iran, which deters Iranian authors from manifesting such situations. To some extent, the textbook authors are not to blame for it, as insisted on in the Fundamental Evolution Document of Education and Pedagogy, "teaching and learning foreign languages should be aimed at bolstering and spreading "the Iranian-Islamic identity" (Ministry of Education, 2018, p. 30). Therefore, in this case, the controlling ideology injected into the textbooks is prescribed by the governing system, which stops the authors from taking an independent decision in this regard.

	Females as 'X-Y'	Males as 'X-Y'	Female-Males as 'X-Y'
Student-Student	4	4	0
Friend-Friend	3	7	0
Total	7	11	0

Table 3: Frequency of equal relations



Note. Reprinted from Textbook 1, Page 10, 12, and 18; Textbook 2, Page 26 (From left to right, respectively).

Figure 1: Unisex conversations in *Prospect*

Unequal Relations (X-Y)	No. of Incidents	Female as 'X'	Male as 'X'	Female as 'Y'	Male as 'Y'	Females as 'X-Y'	Male as 'X-Y'
Student-Teacher	17	10	7	10	7	10	7
Clerk-Costumer	3	2	1	2	1	2	1
Parent-Child	2	1	1	0	2	0	1
Receptionist-Tourist	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
Police Officer-Citizen	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Total	24	14	10	13	9	12	9

Table 4: Frequency of unequal relations

As Table 4 shows, the frequency of equal relations is more than the frequency of unequal relations. Table 4 illustrates that out of the overall 42 relations, 85.7% of relations occurred between unequal social positions. Nevertheless, these unequal relations do not indicate any advantage of one position over the other. As Table 5 shows, 'Student-Teacher', 'Clerk-Customer', and 'Parent-Child' relations are the first three frequent relations in these textbooks. According to Table 4, no noticeable gender-related bias in unequal relations was visible; however, for the case of 'Teacher-Student', the number of female teachers

was higher than their male counterparts. This might be suggestive of a common belief in Iran that teaching is a suitable job for females. Additionally, the portrayal of 'Teacher-Student' as the leading relation in the textbooks may create the conception in students that English is a school subject, not a means of establishing communication with the world (Joo et al., 2020; Rao, 2019). Figure 2 shows some of the pictures assigned to the teacher-student conversations in the textbooks.



Note. Reprinted from Textbook 1, Page 6 and 30; Textbook 2, Page 18 and 34 (From left to right, respectively).

Figure 2: Teacher-Student conversations in *Prospect*

Relational categories

The characters' relational categories in the textbooks were examined. According to Table 5, only two dialogues between females and males occurred in the textbooks. It is notable that one of these conversations took place between a mother and a son, and the other between a lost little girl and a male police officer (Figure 3). Although these conversations had interlocutors with different genders, the family relation in the first and the young age of the girl in the second cannot represent a great proportion of the conversational situations between genders. As stated earlier, the reason may reside in the resolution of the authors to adhere to Islamic orders, which ban intersexual relationships in societies. This Table also indicates a significant difference between 'Female-Female' and 'Male-Male' conversations, which reveals that the former is only one-third of the latter. Although this difference is not recognizable at first glance, as the readers proceed further through the three textbooks, it becomes more apparent that there are attempts to keep women on the margins. As Florent and Walter (1989) claim, this marginalized role of females in this series "...is so deeply engrained in our culture, our language, and our subconscious that it is difficult for us to avoid it in the production of language-teaching materials" (p. 182). However, this worldview from cultural and ideological bases in educational settings and language teaching textbooks seems to oppose a major goal of education, which is equal access of genders to social resources and roles (Aragonés-González et al., 2020; Esteves, 2018). Thus, maintaining variety in choosing social roles irrespective of gender can neutralize any intentional or unintentional attempts to marginalize genders.

Relations	Number of occurrences	Percentages of relations
Female-Male	2	4%
Female-Female	13	29%
Male – Male	31	67%
Total	46	100%

Table 5: Overall relations in *Prospect*



Note. Reprinted from Textbook 1, Page 32; Textbook 3, Page 68 (From left to right, respectively).

Figure 3: Male-Female conversations in *Prospect*

Subject positions

The subject positions in the conversations were categorized into four groups: *Family*, *Societal*, *Educational*, and *Occupational*. These positions were identified based on pictorial and contextual clues indicating the interlocutors' relatedness with a specific position. As the within-group comparisons in Table 6 suggest, educational positions have the highest frequency among the social positions between genders. It might be concluded from the authors' emphasis on locating most of the conversations in school contexts. Limiting the context of English use to schools may hamper the authenticity of the included talks in the textbooks as English, like other languages, normally takes place in miscellaneous contexts and the confinement of it to a specific context, i.e., schools, can reduce the contextual authenticity of the ELT materials (Ahmed, 2017).

	Family	Societal	Educational	Occupational
Males	3%	17%	44%	36%
Females	4%	24%	51%	21%

Table 6: Subject positions in *Prospect* with group comparisons

As Table 7 shows, although these series are developed to be taught in schools of both genders, a high degree of difference is noticeable between genders in social positions. As for *Family*, *Societal*, and *Educational* positions, females appropriated just one-third of the subject positions in comparison with males; they, however, possessed nearly the same number of occurrences in terms of occupational positions. It should be mentioned that most of occupational positions were limited to school contexts as females are typically teachers and school staff, limiting the developers of the textbooks to depicting schools as a more appropriate occupational target. This portrayal of school-related occupations as the most recurrent and appropriate could suggest that, partly and somehow purposefully, the textbook developers tried to impose ideological perspectives of the ruling system, that is, the educational system of Iran. However, a major role of ELT materials is to avoid any direct or indirect ideological impositions (Addison, 2011; Kazemi et al., 2017). Therefore, in order to widen students' perspectives and introduce miscellaneous occupational contexts to them, including various careers in educational textbooks, is of high importance.

	Family	Societal	Educational	Occupational
Males	67%	66%	62%	45%
Females	33%	34%	38%	55%

Table 7: Subject positions in *Prospect* with group comparisons

Conversation topics

The conversation topics were enumerated and tabulated in Table 8 to grasp a better understanding of gender representations and participation under each topical category. As Table 8 suggests, most female characters are interlocutors of the conversations dealing with education, home, work, and technology, while male characters are mostly distributed among topics concerning travel, personal information, names, occupations, and nationalities. Although in some cases, like education, it has been attempted to leverage females' positions and roles, it can be seen that the distribution of the genders within the topics is, to some extent, haphazard. It is worth mentioning that the *Prospect* series attempted to take an unbiased side in terms of overall gender representations in different topical categories. In some cases, some traces of gender stereotyping of social position can be found, which can be attributed to cultural and

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religious beliefs currently practiced in Iran. This finding highly correlates well with other studies such as those of Amini and Birjandi (2012), Goodarzi & Weisi (2020), and Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020). According to Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei, this ambivalence of the textbook developers in gender representation may be rooted in the fact that they are supposed to follow the government's policy on the one hand, and to write textbooks which accord with the international values in terms of gender equality on the other. However, employing textbooks to preach the government's ideological perspectives could divert textbooks from their educational purposes.

Content / Category	Female	Male
	Characters	Characters
1. Greeting and small talks, and customs around the world	2	2
2. Names, occupations, nationalities, and members of family	6	9
3. Home and work, world, abilities, technology, and education	8	1
4. Customs, holidays and traditions, and foods	6	5
5. Travel, personal information, and staying in a hotel	6	9
6. Time, date and weekdays, months of the year	3	2
7. Clothes, diseases, and weather	2	4
Total	33	32

Table 8: Content categories in *Prospect*

Overall, this research showed that, although relatively new in the market, this series still contains gender-bias in its conversations, which is in line with the findings of previous studies (Amerian & Esmaili, 2015; Bahman & Rahimi, 2010; Esmaili, 2011). In spite of the international ethics of developing ELT course books in terms of avoiding over- or under-representation of genders, the gendered bias in representing textbook characters is still identifiable in Iranian course books. Many textbook developers all around the globe are required to avoid the inclusion of cultural values and ideological perspectives that oppose gender equality and encourage the limitation of social roles and relations (Dahmardeh et al., 2025; Selvi & Kocaman, 2020; Vu & Pham, 2022)

Conclusions and Implications

Textbooks convey gender-related worldviews to their users, especially students, when they are studying and practicing the activities included in them. Therefore, textbooks can reinforce the target students' prevailing gendered stereotypes that are shaped in their society, and which will probably result in gendered perspectives and consequently, gender discrimination. This study revealed that gendered role stereotyping is still found in contemporary Iranian school textbooks in the public sector, such as favoring males over females in unequal and equal relations, more tangible representation of male roles in topical categories, and imposition of socially acceptable male and female activities through overrepresentation of subject positions.

Generally, gendered impositions embedded in the *Prospect* series can be an indicator of what hidden curriculum, which emphasizes that ideologies of the ruling systems in societies can be implicitly reflected in texts, and consequently, in textbooks. Hence, the cultural and religious context of Iran forces the course book developers to distance themselves from the international standards of ELT course books regarding gender representation and stick to the internal acceptability of the course books.

It should be noted that the male dominance manifested in school textbooks is not necessarily accepted by the whole Iranian society. It simply reflects the worldview of a small proportion of society and the imposed ideology of the current governing system in Iran, since all Iranian course books are filtered by the meticulous monitoring of the government's authorities. Thus, the Iranian textbooks are utilized by the government as a means of spreading thoughts and directing them to their intended beliefs (Davidson Films, 2010). Therefore, to shrink such gender bias and to reconstruct an equal atmosphere in society, developing a more gender-unbiased curriculum is a high priority. It is difficult at present to predict what consequences such gender bias in textbooks will have for the teenagers who are learning English from these textbooks. However, findings from other studies have revealed that students' worldview is influenced by the stereotypes they encounter in their textbooks (Law & Chan, 2004). Other studies should be carried out to discover the awareness of developers, practitioners, educational managers, and parents about the gender bias in teenagers' textbooks. Their views are of utmost importance in forming the way genders will be represented and portrayed in the minds of our future generations.

The results presented in this research represent a further step towards developing gender-free textbooks and helping textbook authors and curriculum developers find an unbiased position in terms of representing

genders in educational contexts. The results can help teachers become cognizant of the possible gendered perspectives in textbooks and establish gender equality among their students, since they can spread gender equality by assigning relevant roles to both genders in their classroom talks. Therefore, to reach an unbiased society, all the individuals involved with educating the younger generation should act as agents of redressing social inequalities, such as gender bias. Finally, although this study examined gender representation in an Iranian textbook series, some other issues to investigate in this series seemed to be beyond the scope of this study. Thus, more research is called for to examine gender equality in this series through analyzing the images and the adjectives that were employed to depict and introduce genders. Also, it could be illuminating to carry out a longitudinal study to examine the possible effects of over- or under-representation of gender on pupils.

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