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Analysis of Intercultural Competence and Gender Representation in Iranian EFL Coursebooks



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ABSTRACT

This article examines intercultural competence and gender representation in the latest locally developed English language coursebooks which are taught in Iranian primary and secondary schools. The study uses content analysis to investigate the extent to which gender is portrayed in coursebooks and also how much these coursebooks reflect equality between men and women. In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis was conducted to a certain extent. For the first phase of the research, images, names, roles, and topics oriented towards women and men in the reading passages and conversations were analysed. Moreover, since the present study examined intercultural competence within the English language coursebooks, the coursebooks were scrutinised in order to capture every instance in which the eleven aspects of intercultural competence are shown or indicated. The findings revealed that in the newly developed coursebooks, gender imbalances could be observed to a great extent, with males being the dominant gender in names, characters, images, and texts. Intercultural competence was also found to be a major difference between genders, where the books showed higher intercultural competence for men in Emotion, Empathy, and Perspective-taking (EEP) and Intercultural Relations (IR) aspects. Women were shown to be higher in Knowledge of Diversity (KD), but there was no difference in Intercultural relations (IR). Since in these coursebooks, male authors outnumber their female counterparts, it might be beneficial to add more females to an authority's board of authors. Authors are also encouraged to develop coursebooks that promote gender equality by following guidelines provided by Iran's authorities.

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1. Introduction

Human beings use languages as well as culture and values for intended socialisation (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Some researchers (eg Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003) believed that there is an association between language and gender, highlighting the impact of lack of balanced representation of gender on people and societies which is generally termed as sexism (Hall, 2014). Valentine (2004) also defined linguistic sexism as the use of words that arbitrarily assign roles or characteristics to people on the basis of sex or gender.

Several scholars (eg Wightman, 2020, Van Der Silk, 2015) studied the issue of gender in teaching foreign languages in different places around the world. Wightman (2020) found that the number of girls in language classes is higher than boys (60% versus 31%), they tend to learn the language they are acquiring more quickly, and they manage to obtain academic degrees more than boys. Van Der Silk (2015) studied those immigrants learning Dutch as a second language and used a large-scale data set of 27119 language learners. The results revealed that female language learners outperformed males in the productive skills of speaking and writing, but there was no significant difference between males and females in the receptive skills of listening and reading. This is true but the fact that there are more girls than boys should not exert a great effect on teachers' and students' behaviour in language classes. To be more exact, there must be no discrimination among boys and girls both in classrooms and teaching materials. Rifkin (1998), in particular, claimed that excluding females from language coursebooks adversely affects their ability to understand the target language as

well as its culture. As a result of discrimination against a certain group of people because of their gender or colour, education can lead to very damaging effects on pupils' development along with their academic and career prospects in the future (Lee, 2018).

As a result of globalisation, the English language is becoming a lingua franca, the language of transcultural mobility and of hybridity (Baker, 2017). Yang (2018) contends that English learners face specific challenges in modern intercultural contexts because "social rules are constantly changing; what is appropriate varies according to the linguistic and cultural background of the interlocutors and the specific context in which they communicate" (Yang, 2018, p.361). There are many instances of miscommunications and misconceptions caused by the differences in discourse as influenced by culture (Kramsch & Zhu, 2020). Several research studies have proved that language and culture are intimately connected, and they are inseparable (Chau & Truong, 2019; Corder, Roskvist, Harvey, & Stacey 2018; Prapinwong, 2018; Ramirez, 2018). As such, Vaganova's (2019) recommendation of communicative competence has yielded to the proposal of intercultural communication competence (ICC), defined as the ability of second language speakers to mediate or interpret the values, beliefs, and behaviours (the 'cultures') of themselves and others and to serve as a bridge or indeed an interface between people who are from different cultures and languages.

The present study examines intercultural competence and gender representation in English language coursebooks in Iran's secondary schools. An empirical analysis of the gender representation and intercultural competency in six English language coursebooks (Prospect 1, 2,

3 and Vision 1, 2, 3) used in Iran's secondary schools is presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intercultural Competence

Developing intercultural communication skills can be considered a central objective of foreign language education (Byram, 2008; Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). This will allow learners to effectively communicate across diverse linguistic and cultural worlds. Through the study of intercultural competence, people can cultivate their cultural sensitivity, reflect on ethnocentrism, cultivate an open attitude, and, in general, achieve a healthy disposition (Schachner, 2019).

Vajak, Izadpanah, and Naserian, (2021) assessed Iranian EFL learners' attitudes, knowledge, awareness, and skill based on intercultural factors in learning and education. The researchers used a quantitative approach to study 400 secondary school pupils, 215 EFL learners and 185 non-EFL learners, in the summer term of 2019, including both males and females. The results indicated that taking English classes in institutions was effective in improving their intercultural competence, at least in the Iranian context. The study also showed that EFL learners had greater intercultural competence than non-EFL learners.

By using a qualitative approach within the research tradition of action research, Otálora Fajardo (2018) attempted to identify intercultural representations in an English coursebook used by students of the sixth grade at Colegio Gimnasio los Pinares in Medellín, Colombia. According to the results, some general representations of interculturality were observed; however, a latent gap existed between the culture of the first

language and the target one because the culture was not explicitly represented.

Homayounzadeh and Sahragard (2015) evaluated how well six ESL textbooks represented sociocultural identities in order to promote intercultural communication abilities among learners. Using the participants' face-saving and politeness strategies, the researchers analysed the conversations in the books. According to the results, Top Notch and Summit English language books provided learners with sufficient cultural exposure to develop their cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity.

2.2. Gender Representation in Coursebooks

Language teaching materials have been subjected to numerous studies on gender representation in the classroom (Cunningsworth, 1995; Foroutan, 2012; Hall, 2014; Khan, Sultana, Bughio, & Naz, 2014; Lee, 2014 & 2018; Mustapha & Mills, 2016; Rifkin, 1998). According to some scholars (eg Teliousi, Zafiri, & Pliogou, 2020), coursebooks promote gender stereotypes directly through their content (ie girls are portrayed as dependent and fearful, while boys are portrayed as active and aggressive). As a result, this may influence how pupils think, feel, and behave.

There is, however, some evidence that students may resist and (re)negotiate such content (Pakula, Pawelczyk, & Sunderland, 2015; Thornbury, 2013). This behaviour, according to Bandura (2003), is a consequence of social learning theory. Consequently, if students encounter stereotypical portrayals of their gender in coursebooks, they will follow such attitudes and behaviours in their daily lives. It is claimed that pupils regard coursebooks as accurate, trustworthy and unquestionable (Mustapha,

2012). As a result, most of the messages would be accepted by them without hesitation. Students receive and accept these messages, which are usually the authors' gender preferences, through text or visual media. Gender stereotypes in a coursebook could negatively affect pupils' motivation, which in turn could adversely affect their learning (Sunderland, 1992). Moreover, this could have very adverse effects on pupils as it might stay with them for their whole life, impacting different aspects of their lives like their careers, social lives, values, behaviour, or even their self-esteem (Lee, 2018).

Coursebooks play a key role in English Language Teaching (ELT) as they help learners experience a new world filled with characters who may share different values and cultural norms. Mills (1995) emphasises the importance of coursebooks in forming students' thinking and ideas, as well as assisting them in experiencing the world beyond the classroom (Reid Soler, & Wearmouth, 2003). This is also where linguistic sexism may occur (Demir & Yavuz, 2017), a form of sexism that is "much more profound and subtler than other forms of sexism" (Porreca, 1984, p. 705).

In the 1970s, Hartman and Judd (1978) conducted the first study on the issue of gender discrimination within ELT coursebooks. Since then, there have been various reports and researches on gender stereotypes and discrimination in ELT coursebooks both locally produced or globally published in Europe and America.

In an investigation of two junior secondary school English language coursebooks in Indonesia, Tyarakanita, Drajadi, Rochsantiningsih, and Nurkamto (2021) evaluated how gender stereotyping is

represented. The findings indicated that both coursebooks depicted gender stereotypes in which the social role of males was predominately portrayed in comparison to that of females, both in visualisations and in the writings. Gender stereotyping needs to be taken into consideration when developing language coursebooks by writers.

A study by Shahnaz, Fatima, and Qadir, (2020) in Pakistan revealed that illustrations and contents of the published children's books and magazines included fewer images of females compared to males. In spite of the increase in female representation in front page pictorial, in-story pictorial and in-story characters, their proportion remains small compared to that of males.

Setyono (2018) carried out a critical discourse analysis in the Indonesian secondary school context. The researcher investigated visual and textual elements of EFL coursebooks focussing on images of women from a feminist perspective. In the analysed coursebooks, mainly female characters expressed gendered discourses that most often perpetuated gender biases and stereotypes, though some of these discourses represented constructive images of women.

Furthermore, Demir and Yavuz (2017) pointed out that in ELT coursebooks, regardless of where or by whom they are published, women were presented with a smaller range of duties and roles than men. Sleeter and Grant (2017) believed that it is more common for male characters to appear in literature than female characters. It seems that the former enjoys more prestigious, lead roles, while female characters are portrayed less often and in supporting roles. Women are almost always given nurturing roles (Gupta & Lee, 1990) and inferior ones (Sakita, 1995), while

men are almost always present a better picture—especially when it comes to texts and images (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008).

A considerable amount of research has been published on coursebook evaluation in the Iranian context; however, the number of studies considering gender representation is still low. Dahmardeh and Kim (2020) carried out an analysis of gender representation in five English language coursebooks (Prospect 1–3 and Vision 1–2) designed for use in Iranian secondary schools for students whose ages range from 12 to 17. The result of content analysis revealed that gender representation in Iranian English coursebooks was imbalanced.

Goodarzi and Weisi (2020) examined three Iranian English coursebooks to determine how diverse cultures are represented through race, nationalism, gender, and intercultural communication of the characters. Examining the coursebooks revealed unequal cultural representation with mostly white and male characters. It is suggested that male roles were more prominent throughout the series. As a result, some of the leading ideologies in this series are prototyping Iranian and Islamic culture and values through the medium of English. There is a bias embedded in this series in terms of how races, cultures and genders are presented.

Another study is conducted by Hall (2014) and addressed the topic of gender representation in Iranian ELT coursebooks. The researcher's analysis suggested that Iranian ELT coursebooks do not adequately represent women.

According to all above-mentioned studies and many more, it can be inferred that gender and intercultural competence representation in coursebooks is an important issue and worth spending time and considering different

coursebooks published in different countries and Iran as well. Therefore, the present study was conducted to consider six Iranian English coursebooks with regard to their gender and intercultural competence representation aspects. The present study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

How is gender represented in Prospect 1, 2, 3, and Vision 1, 2, 3 coursebooks?

How is intercultural competency represented in Prospect 1, 2, 3, and Vision 1, 2, 3?

3. Methodology

3.1. *The Purpose of the Study*

This study aims to analyse the gender representation and intercultural competence within six newly developed ELT coursebooks which are taught at all Iranian secondary schools. The coursebooks are Prospect 1, 2, and 3, which are taught during the three years of lower-secondary, as well as Vision 1, 2, 3 which are taught during the three years of upper-secondary.

Whilst some research studies have been carried out on gender representation in Iranian ELT context, to the knowledge of authors, no study was found investigating all the newly developed coursebooks at the same time, while taking intercultural competence into account as well. In fact, this work is the first to look at the newly developed coursebooks in terms of the intercultural communication with respect to gender.

3.2. *Iranian Context*

Following the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the educational system has undergone many changes. In general, prior to the 1979 Revolution, the country was governed in a western style with a secular education system. Due to the aftermath of the revolution, the

educational system changed fundamentally, and it is claimed that present schools are Islamic-based (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020).

Presently, Iranian schools are either government-funded or privately run. The schooling system is divided into four levels: Pre-Primary which is an optional pre-school stage and is for children aged between 5 and 6 years old, Primary School and runs for 6 years for pupils aged between 6 and 12 years old, Lower-Secondary School runs for 3 years and for pupils aged between 12 and 15 years old, Upper-Secondary School runs for another 3 years for pupils aged between 15 and 18 years old.

All syllabuses, coursebooks, and teaching materials are prepared and developed by the Ministry of Education, which should be followed and used by schools and teachers throughout the country (Dahmardeh, Parsazadeh, & Parsazadeh, 2017, p. 60). More importantly, there is currently no other coursebook that Iranian teachers and students can access besides those published by the said ministry. Moreover, across the country, the business of teaching foreign languages is flourishing. Many language institutes are found in almost all cities. Despite the presence of numerous language institutes throughout the country, schools remain the primary source for foreign language exposure for students (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020).

Iranian schools require students to study at least two foreign languages for six years starting in lower-secondary. In almost every school, English and Arabic are offered as dominant foreign languages. Consequently, almost all students will enrol in these two language classes. It should also be mentioned that some schools offer other languages like German, French, and Spanish. However, English is becoming the

primary language taught to Iranians. In Iran, this is the dominant trend. After the first grade of secondary school, students usually receive English instruction three to four times a week. One distinctive characteristic of the private education system in the country is the use of English at the primary school level and even during pre-school. Most Iranian private schools teach and practise English at the elementary and secondary levels of general education.

3.3. The Framework for Analysis

3.3.1. Frameworks for Gender Representation

The texts, messages, themes, ideas, and photos throughout six secondary school English coursebooks were analysed using content analysis. The term "content analysis" refers to a method of analysing qualitative data in research, which allows generalisations to be drawn from them in connection with the categories of research interest (Haggarty, 1996; Krippendorff, 2004). According to Taylor (2003), there are two ways to conduct a content analysis: latent and manifest content. This study was carried out using manifest content analysis as it refers to evidence that is directly seen such as the words in an interview or within the texts (eg pictures and names for men and women) or in other media of social communication, including television, radio, and cinema. For example, names and pictures representing men and women, or images that indicate gender roles, can be counted as they are physically present in the texts (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Foroutan 2012).

To examine the topic in questions, photos, images, names, roles, and the topics related to females and men in conversations and reading passages were examined. According to scholars

(Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020; Love & Park, 2013; Selvi & Kocaman, 2021), the number and gender of individuals in each image were analysed. Thus, clothing, physical appearance, and contexts were used to identify gender (eg male/female). Further, similar to Dahmardeh and Kim (2020), and Khalid and Ghania's (2019) work, this research is based on the frequency of appearance, and individuals were selected as the unit of analysis. Thus, the number of individuals was counted in each image or photo. In addition, roles and occupations were also examined taking gender differences into consideration, following Cunningsworth's (1995), Dahmardeh and Kim (2020), and Susanti, Suryati, and Astuti's (2021) work.

3.3.2. Framework for Intercultural Competence

Moreover, the intercultural competence, according to Solhaug and Kristensen (2020), consist of four factors. The first factor is called empathy, emotion, and perspective taking (EEP-short name: empathy) and includes eight items. Scale points in this factor are based upon the person's understanding of injustice and unfairness, prejudice and bias, empathy, and finally emotional involvement. The person enjoying this factor shows respect for and willingness to act in support of the other person who is a victim. For example, if one of their friends is treated unfairly, he will speak for them. The second factor which is a kind of self-assessment, is a combination of self-assessed knowledge of diversity and includes three items of self-assessed cognitive competence. This factor includes the person's knowledge of other people's religion and inequality between boys and girls. The third factor is identified as

intercultural awareness (IA, short name: 'awareness') and consists of two items. Awareness is here considered as a trait which is activated by emotional or cognitive experiences, bringing about positive attitudes towards victim individuals or groups and taking actions in support of these individuals or groups. Items on this scale range from indifference to being aware of how others are treated. This factor is related to the person's attitude towards racist language, jokes, and statement which might offend certain groups or persons. It in fact measures how much the person understands the victims in such situations and puts themselves in their shoes. The fourth factor seeks to measure self-assessments of the person of his interpersonal relations (IR, or 'relations') based on their understanding of others and their personal experiences in establishing relationships with people coming from different backgrounds. The two items here cover issues such as how much we know about people coming from other countries, cultures, and family backgrounds, as well as making relationships with them.

The purpose of this approach was to find out about the different aspects of representation of males and female, as well as intercultural competence which are included in the selected coursebooks.

4. Data Analysis

The researchers conducted the data collection, coding, and analysis themselves. A PhD student independently coded whole units from the coursebook Vision 3 to ensure that the data analysis was reliable. Before moving forward, the results were compared, and differences discussed with the supervisor. Later on, two professors from Departments of English language at two

different universities were requested to review the final report. Table 1.1 shows an extract from data collection and analysis based on the information collected from Vision 3. (The numbers next to some of the entries indicate their frequency of appearance.)

For the gender representation part, all the names, characters, and images were found and categorised based on the gender they represented. Besides these, all the texts and dialogues were scrutinised for any trace of elements or phrases indicating one of the genders. The detailed procedure for each of these elements are discussed in the following sections.

Table 1 Extracts of data from vision 3

	Male	Female
Unite 02		
Name	Majid Mehran Sina Bijan	Mina Zohre
Role	Teacher Student police doctor	Teacher Mother
Photo	6	0

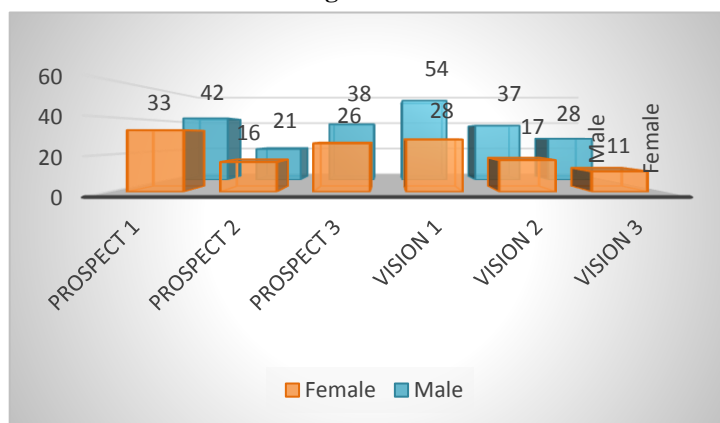
5. Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this study was to figure out how intercultural competence and gender are represented in English language coursebooks in Iranian secondary schools. To this end, texts and images of English coursebooks in Iranian secondary schools were analysed in terms of names, roles, images, and conversations.

5.1.Names

Manifest content analysis in this study included names of both males and females. The following figure shows that, despite the fact that the number of names fluctuates throughout the coursebooks, male names were always more prevalent than females'. The findings are similar to those of Foroutan (2021) and Hall (2014) in the previously published coursebooks. These researchers found that in most of the texts, the male names outnumbered those of females. The results of the present study show that male names were used almost twice as often as females. This indicates some improvement; however, it is far from ideal (lack of gender imbalance). Bahman and Rahimi (2010) also concluded that most of the names, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives in the Iranian texts belonged to males.

Fig. 1 Names



Furthermore, while a relatively high proportion of names in lower-secondary were assigned to males, the proportion of males and females did not differ much. However, the difference between the two increased significantly in the higher grades, especially at upper-secondary.

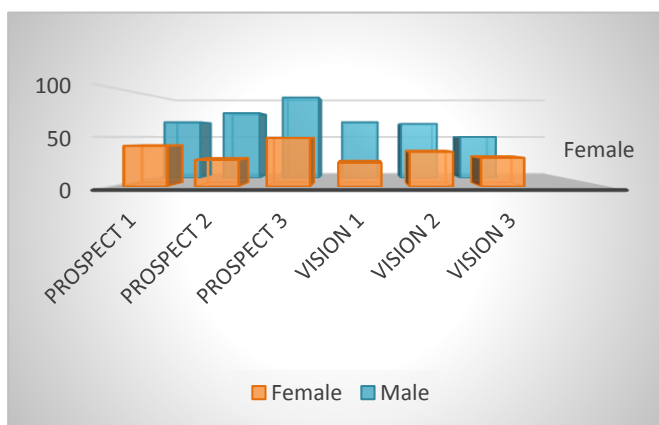
In these coursebooks, references are made to famous people such as scholars, but only a couple of female scholars are mentioned, while most of the others were male. Therefore, this may look an

extremely disappointing finding because it creates an impression, especially to female students, that males are more likely than females to become well-known scholars and this can lead to a decline in the self-esteem of the female students.

5.2. Characters

As regards the characters, roles were considered from two viewpoints: occupations (jobs) and family roles (eg father, sister, etc). Coursebooks featured many roles, with the following being the most frequent: Teacher, Student, Father, Mother, Uncle, Athlete, Patient, Passenger, Receptionist, Scientist, and Artist.

Fig. 2 Roles



As is evident from the graph, the higher number of references in all the coursebooks were given to males. It can also be seen that the number of male references was twice as big as the number of females throughout the entire series despite the fluctuation. This finding is also in line with those of Bahman and Rahimi (2010) and Elkholy (2012).

In addition, family/relative roles attributed to individuals were also examined. The percentage of females and males holding certain family/relative roles was very similar, which can be interpreted as encouraging.

The results suggested that role descriptions for males in the coursebooks were broad and varied, whereas for females they were quite limited. It is important to note that in modern Iran, women are a high percentage of the workforce and many of them are employed in professional occupations. However, the results suggest that careers like Police Officer, Waiter, Surgeon, Reporter, and Pilot were only associated with men (See Table 2). It has also been demonstrated in previous studies that school coursebooks worldwide have also portrayed gender role stereotyping. Renner (1997) and Wang (1998) found that most English coursebooks place fewer females and give them fewer roles and responsibilities than males. The results of this study are similar to the findings of Hall's (2014), Shahnaz et al. (2020), and Demir and Yavuz (2017). Their findings suggested that no matter where or by whom the books are published, the range of roles and duties envisaged for women are limited. Orfan (2021) also argued that as men occupied a broader range of roles than women, women played a relatively limited number of roles. As a result, now that the newly published coursebooks are out, it is clear that no improvements have been made in regard to jobs and occupations.

Table 2 Careers and roles assigned to males and females

Gender Neutral	Only Males	Only Females
scientist	scientist	housewife
worker	physician	librarian
principal	student	observatory staff

cook	teacher	researcher
student	poet	
physician	doctor	
teacher	professor	
doctor	author	
police	mechanic	
firefighter	police officer	
nurse	secretary	
inventor	labour	
dentist	cook	
farmer	taxi driver	
office employee	engineer	
actor	painter	
receptionist	florist	
driver	postman	
artist	waiter	
athlete	pilot	
scholar	shopkeeper	
	baker	
	patient	
	photographer	
	champion	
	soldier	
	TV host & guest	
	border force officer	
	officer	
	street sweeper	
	reporter	
	clown	
	cleaner	
	zookeeper	
	bullfighter	
	museum visitor	
	assistant	
	park ranger	
	rider	
	travel agent	
	translator	

	ticket seller surgeon	
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5.3. Images

At first glance, images and illustrations are probably the most obvious part of a coursebook that conveys a sense of gender representation. It has been demonstrated that learning is more effective when texts and illustrations are used together rather than when texts alone are used (Hashemifardnia, Namaziandost, & Rahimi Esfahani, 2018). An analysis of the books revealed that the newly published coursebooks still suffer from gender imbalance. The results showed that the male's image was depicted 733 times, while female's image was shown only 369 times, almost half of the images of the men. Overall, according to the number of images and photos, men were far more represented than women, regardless of the level of the book. (Sample photos taken from the coursebooks are provided in the Appendix A). This finding is similar to that of Dabbagh (2016), who stated that males were presented as active, looking at the viewer, and framed in a close-up format which signified their prominence and power in relation to females. While lower-secondary coursebooks had many images, upper-secondary coursebooks experienced a sharp decrease in the number of images. Even so, the gender balance in coursebooks did not appear to change.

Scholars like Hilliard (2014) argued that in today's world, the coursebooks tend to feature more gender equal representations of women, but it appears that in some places, images represent males more than females. Malik et al (2021) found, for example, that images depict more men than women in middle schools' coursebooks in

Punjab, Pakistan. Also, according to Orfan (2021) texts and illustrations in Afghan coursebooks tend to underrepresent women. Dabbagh (2016) painted the same picture about the Iranian secondary school books. Shahnaz et al (2020) claimed that while there have been some improvements in the depiction of females in illustrations and in story characters in Pakistani coursebooks, this change has not really affected the overall stereotypical representation of females since they are still the minority in occupations, as well as major and supporting roles.

Research studies of former Iranian coursebooks also revealed that males had dominated the illustrations and photographs (Dabbagh, 2016; Goodarzi & Weisi, 2020; Foroutan, 2012; Hall, 2014). Likewise, Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) found that most of the book's pictures depicted males more frequently. When female pupils observe that women are less presented than their male peers in the texts, they may feel that they are not important enough to be shown in the books (Orfan, 2021). Thus, once again the newly developed coursebooks seem to be failed in addressing the issue of gender representation in a balanced order.

5.4. Texts and Dialogues

The representation of males and females in texts and dialogues within all the coursebooks was also examined. While the previous research studies showed that male references in one coursebook increased and stayed the same in another between 1999 and 2012 editions (Hall, 2014), analysis of

the collected data in the present study suggested that male references were higher than female ones. This is also consistent with the findings of Shahnaz et al (2020) who found that females were rarely involved in conversations. In the majority of cases, men were represented as the sentence utterers. Most of the time, females were only portrayed as listening to males as conversations mostly occurred between males. Their speech consisted of typical and traditional phrases that demonstrate how narrow their activities are.

While Hall (2014) argued that there was a significant change in the female representation of dialogues between the 1999 and 2012 editions, our research seems to indicate a negative change. In each coursebook, there is a slightly higher frequency of male-to-male interactions based on the collected data than the conversations between females-to-females. Therefore, it can be argued that not only have the discussions and passages not been rewritten to promote gender equality, but the newly published coursebooks also fall dramatically short in terms of gender representation.

Based on the findings from this research, it appears that the representation of women in current Iranian English coursebooks is imbalanced. These findings align with many other studies of gender representation in ELT coursebooks (Dahmardeh et al., 2020; Demir & Yavuz, 2017; Foroutan, 2012; Hall, 2014; Hartman & Judd, 1978; Lee, 2018; Porreca, 1984; Sakita, 1995).

Approximately 8,000,000 Iranian male pupils attended schools in September 2021, while approximately 7,600,000 Iranian females did so¹.

In addition, according to the Statistical Centre of Iran, the total population of females in Iran is about 39 million, and the total population of males is about 40 million². While the gender disparity in the number of students of both sexes is not significant, the representation of the genders in ELT coursebooks is the opposite. As there are approximately equal numbers of males and females in Iran, it is expected that the ELT coursebooks would provide a balanced representation for both genders.

5.5. Intercultural Competence

Based on the framework that had been derived from the literature (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2020), fifteen items on the scale measured the different aspects of intercultural competence. The results obtained from the analysis of coursebooks are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 The frequency of the presentation of intercultural competences in the coursebooks

Aspect	Male	Female
EEP (Empathy, Emotion, and Perspective-taking)	4	2
KD (Knowledge of Diversity)	3	6
IA (Intercultural Awareness)	0	0
IR (Intercultural Relations)	13	6
Total	20	14

Different aspects of intercultural competence were named based on Solhaug and Kristensen (2020). Table 3 provides the results obtained

¹ <https://newsmedia.tasnimnews.com/Tasnim/Uploaded/Image/1396/08/14/13960814094446935124157510.jpg>

² According to latest census of the country in 2016 (<https://www.amar.org.ir/english/Population-and-Housing-Censuses>)

from the intercultural analysis of Iranian coursebooks. Generally speaking, the results of this study oppose those of Solhaug and Kristensen (2020), where they showed that women displayed significantly stronger intercultural competence than men. The main reason for this is that this study measured the level cultural competence as shown in coursebooks, but their study investigated the attitudes and knowledge of students themselves. Thus, it is clear that the contents of a coursebook mainly represent the minds and attitudes of a group of authors, who were mostly men in this context, but the results of the survey demonstrate the attitudes of a group of people. The second reason is that, this study was conducted in an Asian and Muslim country, but Solhaug and Kristensen (2020) studied the attitudes of students in two European countries, namely Denmark and Norway.

In terms of EEP (empathy, emotion, and perspective-taking) and IR (Intercultural relations), males demonstrated significantly stronger intercultural competence than females. Men showed the strongest ability for EEP (empathy) and IR (intercultural relations) four and thirteen times, respectively, compared to women, two and six times, respectively. To put it in simpler terms, the readings and texts contained examples in which men showed a concern for the victims of injustice or unfairness, hence higher EEP among men than women.

Our study, on the other hand, showed that both girls and boys reported different but high capabilities for having cross-cultural relationships. In regard to IR, both boys and girls had their highest score, out of the four aspects, in regard to the intercultural relations (IR) aspect. The frequency of this aspect among boys was 13,

and that of the women reached 6. However, it must be pointed out that, despite the fact that both of them had high frequency, the frequency of IR aspect was two times (13) among men as much as that of women (6). Compared with previous studies, the findings of the current study somehow support the previous research (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2020), who found no gender difference in IR aspect. It is clear that boys' competence in this regard is two times as much as that of girls. This finding seems to be a contradictory phenomenon since most of the previous studies found that women displayed higher intercultural competence and higher intercultural relations, except the study conducted by Solhaug and Kristensen (2020). This might be explained by the fact that since most of writers of this books were men; they might have decided to present a better picture of men in this regard. The second justification for this might be that the intercultural relations might be more influenced by the way boys and girls make friends and embrace inclusion. For one thing, intercultural competence matters in interpersonal relations, but there exist several gendered practices among friends and peers in situations where intercultural sensitivity is not needed much (Nielson, 2014; West & Zimmerman, 1987). For example, boys might more be self-reflective and gregarious. To put it in a nutshell, intercultural competence might be important in establishing intercultural relations and inclusive citizenship, but it may not be a decisive factor.

The fact that women were more knowledgeable in only one of the aspects and obtained a higher mark, KD, is opposing the results of the study in other three aspects. To be more exact, women showed that they had more knowledge of the difference, diversity, and

discrimination than men. This finding is in agreement with the results obtained by Solhaug and Kristensen (2020). They found that there was a moderate difference between women had men with regard to knowledge of difference, with women showing and possessing more knowledge in this regard. Holm, Nokelainen, and Tirri (2009) also concluded that female secondary school students showed more intercultural sensitivity and knowledge than the male students. In the same vein, the knowledge of women of this aspect was shown to be two times as much as the knowledge of men in the Iranian coursebooks. The reason for this might lie in the fact that women obtain female traits like being kind, caring, and compassionate better than men, as a result, these traits might be activated when they observe or interact with people coming from different backgrounds or minorities.

However, our findings also suggested that female perceive cultural awareness in the same manner as males. In fact, there was either no indication of cultural matters in the texts or no statement by the male and female characters in the coursebooks. This is in line with the results of previous studies in this regard (Gholami Pasand, 2018; Tajeddin & Teimourizadeh, 2014). Gholami Pasand (2018), investigating the degree to which Iranian secondary school English coursebooks represent and improve intercultural competence, found that Iranian English coursebooks represented very little information about cultural aspects and were mostly limited to Iranian culture. Taken together, these results suggest that intercultural empathy and relations were higher among males in comparison with the females. The results support that males are more likely to practise inclusive citizenship.

6. Concluding Remarks and Implications for Future Research

There exists some research on gender representation and the effects of negative stereotypes on pupils' minds. As a result, while the present study examined gender representations in the recently published Iranian ELT Coursebooks, the differences between boys' and girls' intercultural competence representation were also studied. A comprehensive review of six English language coursebooks taught in Iranian schools at lower and upper secondary was undertaken for this purpose. The findings revealed that females are quite underrepresented in these coursebooks. The evidence was gathered through careful examination of names, images, roles, and conversations.

Women are often depicted differently to men in coursebooks worldwide, a problem that is not limited to Iranian culture. As discussed in this article, the gender gap between the portrayal of women and men can be observed in many coursebooks around the world. Nevertheless, the degree of representation can vary depending on the context. To improve the situation in countries such as Iran and similar contexts, as suggested by Dahmardeh and Kim (2020), it is recommended that more females be included on the board of authors both in publishing house and in the books as authors. However, as already explained, adding more females may not necessarily improve the situation since both men and women can be sexist. However, it may be helpful for bringing improvements to the present situation.

Policy makers are also suggested to become aware of the negative impacts of imbalanced representation on female pupils and how this could impact their future lives and careers. Moreover, it is necessary to recognise that every

language and culture is unique, and there are variations in how women are represented in coursebooks across different countries (Lee & Collins, 2010). It is especially important to consider gender representation when discussing issues such as politics and religion in contexts such as Iran. Attempts to promote the idea that religion, especially Islam, is against women's rights and their presence in society should be limited. Contrary to popular belief, religions promote women's roles in society; as evidenced by the Holy Quran, which states many times that women and men are equal with each other³. When imbalances and unfair representation are observed and practised in such societies, especially in education, the blame should be attributed to misinterpretation and misunderstanding.

Since visual representation on the surface is one of the aspects of this study, further research should be conducted to analyse the semiotic systems of visual representation to better understand how stereotypes are represented in the gender and other aspects. What is more, it is important to conduct research with a variety of methodologies, including cultural and ethnic aspects (in which gender is also included) to illuminate particular ideologies that negatively affect people's perception and to reinforce those that have a positive impact.

The results of this study and similar research can be clarified in the light of inclusive citizenship. This theory submits that if a person aims to be an inclusive citizen, to participate in society, and to be integrated in the universal human society, they must be aware of, open to, and communicate with people coming from

different cultural, religion, and country backgrounds. These behaviours and attitudes are part of the inclusive citizenship theory (Fraser, 2003; Kabeer, 2005; Lister, 2008). This theory covers criteria, namely, practice of justice and fairness in treating people, recognition of the difference of the other, exercising control over one's own life, knowledge and interest to act for the benefit of others, and finally expressing solidarity through interacting with other peers. Moreover, in order to be inclusive, citizens should recognise the universality of differences, but not in the same degree everywhere. We might derive the axiom that people, specially educated ones, should recognise the differences rather than recognise the sameness of others based on the difference between genders observed in the coursebooks. A key concern in all teaching materials should be pluriversality and equality across differences in gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and social class, implied in freedom of thought and speech in the classroom. Teachers and material developers should take into account different values and attitudes towards diversity in class deliberations or debates (Habermas, 1996) regardless of group differences (Hess, 2009). We also suggest that students should be exposed to controversy regarding differences, and that teachers should create an atmosphere that encourages respectful dialogue. As a result, we believe that the norm of respecting difference-listening to, understanding, and accepting differences should be given greater weight than moral teachings or socially correct answers to moral questions. (Solhaug & Kristensen, 2020).

7. References

³ "Men will have a share of what they earn, and women will have a share of what they earn." (4:32)

"And according to usage, women too have rights over men similar to the rights of men over women." (2:228)

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Lesson 7

My Hobbies



Conversation

Listen to two students and their English teacher talking about their hobbies.



- Teacher:** Do you have any hobbies, Zahra?
Zahra: Yes, I do. I watch movies as a hobby.
Teacher: Interesting! How about you, Samira?
Samira: Well, I love reading.
Zahra: Really? What sort of things do you read?
Samira: Books, magazines, sports news on the Net, and sometimes poems.
Zahra: And how about you, Mrs. Emami?
Teacher: Actually, I don't have any hobbies. But I usually go to the gym in my free time.

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