

Gender (In)Equality in Mandated English Language Textbooks in Iran: Teachers' Perceptions and Implications

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EFL textbooks play a challenging role in underpinning or imposing certain ideological values, such as gender-related values on students. Thus, this inquiry examined Iranian high school teachers' perceptions of the issue in the mandated EFL textbooks (Vision series). This study adopted an exploratory descriptive method with a qualitative approach to collect and interpret the data. The population comprised all members of the Iranian high school EFL teachers' channel from whom, thirty teachers were selected through a volunteer sampling method. As the study concurred with the COVID-19 pandemic, a researcher-made semi-structured interview was administered via WhatsApp and Telegram. Then, the responses were analyzed and interpreted using thematic analysis via the Nvivo 12 software. The data analysis showed a majority of the teachers believed in the unequal representation of male and female characters in the series. Moreover, it was held that gender representation has educational effects on students' learning motivation, desire, and educational goals through the creation of gender stereotype roles. The findings revealed the permanence of male dominance in the textbooks and highlighted the must for the stakeholders to address gender inequalities as one of the most crucial sociocultural concerns of Iranian EFL educational textbooks.

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Introduction

Adolescents and children are constantly receiving new beliefs and perceptions from the environment. Gender stereotypes and biases become ingrained in an individual's mind as early as childhood. They impact the toys children play with, their educational experience in general, as well as their future life and profession (Michelis, 2023). When it comes to the educational context, the system teaches students how to dress, how to behave, and how to look at people in society. Some gender stereotype roles are assigned to each sex from the very young age which might be modified or reinforced by human and environmental elements (Alimadadi et al., 2022, Bahatacharya, 2017; Mahmood et al., 2022; Ramsey, 2004; Vu & Pham, 2021).

Educational institutions can be considered influential in establishing certain gender-related values due to their cultural, social, political, or economic powers in a society (Canale, 2021; Durrani et al., 2022; Ward & Lucas, 2023). In reality, educational materials play a key role in shaping stereotypes, explicitly or implicitly, via languages, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, and cultural knowledge. They notify students about the expectations of society, markers of social identity and prestige, and how their values will be assessed grounding on those markers. While examining the materials, this aspect is called "societal curriculum" and can affect students' understanding of gender group identity (Sedmak, 2022; Stewart et al., 2018). If students are regularly exposed to materials that present gender stereotypes (through pictures, practices, lexicons, characters, and role models), they are likely to internalize the idea as their default perspective (Brill & Pepper, 2008; Mahmood et al., 2022). Students perceive their identity and culture as valuable as reflected in the materials' discourse and characters (Alimadadi et al., 2022).

Several inquiries of educational materials have investigated 'gender' from a female/male binary standpoint. In 1972, Weitsman et al. designated a gender inequality in portraying female characters in children's books and discovered females' illustrations were eleven times less than those of males. Nonetheless, some research since then indicated more instances of female representation (Deanne et al., 2001). In the 1990s and early 2000s, research done on educational software displayed females were represented less than males, and one study found that the gender gap increased from preschool to high school grades in the textbooks (Chappell, 1996; Sunderland, 2000; Syairofi et al., 2022). In some cases, these portrayals may show ethnic identities (Dabbagh, 2016; Weitsman et al., 1972; Wingman, 2021), traditional female activities or behaviors, or women being overweight or secondary in the context (Al

Kayed et al., 2020; Elyas et al., 2020; Sheldon, 2004). Tabatadze and Gorgadze (2023) examined Georgian language textbooks and reported gender inequality in teaching languages. Moreover, Angelia (2021) as well as Syairofi et al. (2022) reported gender inequality in Indonesian elementary, junior, and senior high school textbooks.

Some recent studies have shown the variability of gender representation in children's books (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Matthew et al., 2020). Kuraedah et al. (2023) examining Arabic textbooks based on gender representation found a biased portrayal of genders in favor of male characters while Koss and Paciga's study of textbooks (2020) reported no instances of gender representation inequality. John and Bickford (2018) discovered female characters were signified to some extent more than male characters whereas another study of educational textbooks indicated a higher rate of male characters (Lopez-Sa'ez et al., 2020). Even in some countries ranking highly in gender equality indices, there exists gender inequality in the textbooks (Ji & Reiss, 2022; Vu & Pham, 2021). Curaming and Curaming (2020) investigated gender representation in the English textbooks used in Philippines primary schools and found male dominance and gender gap in the textbooks. A study on Brazilian primary education showed gender-biased attitudes were even visible in physical and sports activities (UNESCO, 2022). Kostas (2021) in a study on the discursive positioning of femininity and masculinity in school manuals found that hegemonic masculinity discourses were emphasized in the textbooks.

Considering the significance of this issue, since school age is the time when the foundations of children's and adolescents' perceptions and experiences are formed, a focus on gender justice in the educational curriculum seems inevitable. The results of the previous studies demonstrated the role of educational agents in maintaining the status quo of biased gender stereotypes in education and male and female students' future professional development (Al Jumiah, 2016; Meier & Henderson, 2007). Moreover, high school students are at the heart of education as they should prepare to enter society, and exposing them to stereotyped and gender-biased materials would have serious implications for their future lives. Hence, mis-/underrepresentation of a gender would result in the construction of false identities in that gender leading to their self-efficacy underestimation. It would also influence their competence in school and their future outlooks. The findings of previous research also highlighted the decreased presence of women in highly competent professions, originating from the educational setting (UNESCO, 2022). Lopez-Sa'ez et al. (2020) also pointed to the influence of gender identity and gender

orientation in textbooks on high students' values and beliefs. Hence, the materials specifically designed for this group were the focus of this research.

Additionally, it should be noted that despite the abundance of studies on the effects of gender inequality around the world, there is a lack of desired influence on our educational systems. Current literature displays that gender inequalities are still evident in materials development in Iran (Afshar, 2015; Aljuaythin, 2018; Amerian & Esmaili, 2014; Hashemian et al., 2020; Javani & Tahriri, 2017; Sadeghi & Maleki, 2016; Sedmak, 2022; Sulaimani & Elyas 2018; Tabatabaei, 2016; and Vu & Pham, 2021 to mention some). These inequalities are visible in adopting educational content, teaching resources, and specific task assignments. These continuing gender-related concerns drive the need for more research in the area to prevent gender inequality in educational textbooks.

Thus, considering the critical place of high school textbooks in shaping students' social and cultural 'mindsets', this research was conducted on the mandatory high school EFL textbooks in Iran. A reason for addressing 'gender' in EFL textbooks is that a language cannot be separated from cultural and gender-related issues. Therefore, as a response to the sex-gender system dominance as well as the influence of teachers' perceptions and practices on the promotion of a truly gender-free educational environment, this study aimed at examining teachers' perceptions regarding gender representations in government-mandated EFL textbooks (Vision series) in Iran. Moreover, attempts were made to see whether there is an implicit ideology behind the biased representation of gender in EFL textbooks.

Method

Design

This study adopted an exploratory descriptive method with a qualitative approach to collect and interpret the data. The qualitative analysis dealt with the description of the themes extracted from the participants' perceptions using thematic analysis. The data were examined carefully to identify the common themes and patterns of ideas that appeared repeatedly.

Participants

The population encompassed all members of 'the national high school EFL teachers' channel' from whom thirty teachers who showed their consent to take part in the interview were selected via voluntary sampling method. They were Iranian female and male teachers, with the age range of 25 to 60, and had one to ten years of experience teaching mandated EFL textbooks, the

Vision Series (Vision 1, Vision 2, and Vision 3), in high school. The study concurred with the COVID-19 Pandemic; therefore, all phases of the inquiry including explaining the purpose, obtaining consent from the participants, and gathering data were conducted online via Telegram and WhatsApp. It should be mentioned that ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, anonymity, explaining the purpose of the study, and obtaining consent from the participants were observed.

Instruments

A semi-structured interview was designed and implemented to obtain educators' perceptions toward gender representation and gender (in) equality in the mandated EFL textbooks, *Vision Series*. The interview questions were designed based on the objectives of the study comprising seven main questions drawn from the Teacher's Perception Questionnaire (Notash & Nuri, 2016) to elicit the participants' perceptions toward the pedagogical effects of gender representation in the textbooks and how it might potentially affect students' motivation, desire, future choice of field of study and career, and so on (Appendix A). Also, it sought to probe if the participants realized any implicit ideology presented via gender representation in the series. The validity of the questions was approved by three TEFL PhD holders in the field. The reliability of the interview questions through Cronbach's alpha was found to be .83.

Procedure

After preparing and confirming the interview questions, it was first piloted with 20 participants with similar characteristics to the study sample to ensure the comprehensibility and relevance of the questions. Then, since the study concurred with the outbreak of the Coronavirus, the purpose and objectives of the research were explained to the national group of high school teachers on Telegram and WhatsApp, and thirty teachers from different cities who had experience in teaching the textbooks were selected based on volunteer sampling method. The interview questions were sent to the participants to be answered in written format and returned to the researchers. To precisely extract the themes, all the phrases determining the patterns of ideas were extracted using the 'Thematic Analysis'. Finally, the extracted themes were transcribed and analyzed by the Nvivo 12 software.

Data Analysis

To investigate the research questions, the participants' responses to the semi-structured interview were

analyzed based on thematic analysis using the Nvivo software, a sample screen print of which specified to the first question is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Sample Screen Print of the Nodes Specified to the first Question in Nvivo12 Software

Nodes			
Name	Files	References	
[-] No effect		1	1
[-] In case of correct training		1	4
[-] Effective		1	1
[-] Through students' learning Motivation		1	1
[-] Through students' pedagogical desires and aims		1	1
[-] Through creating stereotypes gender (patriarchy or feminism)		1	4
[-] Through empathy and imitation		1	1
[-] Through the transmission of culture and customs		1	2
[-] Through participation in social roles		1	2
[-] Through influencing the minds and mindsets of students		1	1

Question 1
<p>It has little effect on learning the content, except for a small effect on the conversation.</p> <p>Representation of gender is effective in education, students may have perceptions that harm learning can only be done by one gentleman and indirectly frustrates the student from learning multiple languages.</p> <p>It is effective through influencing the minds and mindsets of students.</p> <p>Through empathy, it can have a significant impact on the deeper education process.</p> <p>Creating the wrong view of the superiority of men over women, causes complications and restrictions in girls and creates problems in society due to their sense of hatred towards boys.</p> <p>Magnifying a particular gender subconsciously affects the conscience of individuals and leads to patriarchy or feminism.</p> <p>Since the social roles of men are prominent and the social and professional roles of women are poorly represented, the social role of women in the minds of students is questioned.</p>

Findings

In what follows, the themes and the subthemes extracted from the responses are presented.

Question 1: What is your perception of the pedagogical effects of gender representation in 'Vision Series'?

The themes and subthemes extracted from participants' responses to this question are reported in Table 1.

Table 1*The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes in Interview Q1*

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No Effect		
In case of correct training	8	15.76
The Second Theme: Effective		
Through students' learning Motivation	2	3.17
Through students' pedagogical desires and aims	2	11.68
Through creating stereotypes gender (patriarchy or feminism)	8	39.29
Through empathy and imitation	2	4.65
Through the transmission of culture and customs	4	15.08
Through participation in social roles	4	20.98
Through influencing the mindsets of students	2	3.17

As Table 1 illustrates, there are two themes here: 'No effect' and 'Effective'. The first theme had one subtheme: 'In case of correct training' with the frequency of four female and four male teachers. On the other hand, the second theme had seven subthemes: 'Through students' learning motivation' mentioned by two male teachers; 'through students' pedagogical desires and aims' showed the frequency of 2 and 'through creating stereotyped gender' held by 8 teachers (four female and four male). Moreover, 'through empathy and imitation' showed the frequency of two while "through the transmission of culture and customs"

was chosen by four female teachers. Also, two female and two male teachers pointed to the subtheme 'through participation in social roles' and 'through influencing the mindsets of students' was mentioned by two female teachers.

Question 2: Are there any significant differences between the representations of male and female characters in the textbooks?

Table 2 shows the themes and subthemes extracted from participants' responses to this question.

Table 2*The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes of Interview Q2*

Themes And Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No Difference		
Because of gender representation equality	8	17.92
The Second Theme: Significant Difference		
More pictures of males than females	10	21.15
The presence of more male characters in conversations and reading texts	4	13.08
The presence males actively and females passively and vulnerably	2	6.54
The presence of more male labels and nouns	6	12.59
Males' larger share of verbs indicating action and possession	2	5.00
The presence of more male characters as powerful people with important social roles	2	9.93
The presence of fewer females in society than males	6	15.90

As shown, the two themes: 'No significant differences' and 'significant difference' were extracted from the responses. The first theme with one subtheme: 'Because of gender representation equality' was mentioned by eight teachers (three female and five male).

On the other hand, the second theme had seven subthemes: 'More pictures of males than females' held by five female and five male teachers; 'the presence of more male characters in conversations and readings'

stated by two female and two male teachers; 'the presence of males actively and females passively and vulnerably' with the frequency of two; 'the presence of more male labels and nouns' was mentioned by four female and two male teachers; both 'males' larger share of verbs indicating action and possession' and 'the presence of more male characters as powerful people with important social roles' showed the frequency of two; and finally, six female teachers referred to 'The presence of fewer females in society than males'.

Question 3: Does gender representation in the textbooks present a particular ideology? If YES, what is the reason?

The third interview question themes and subthemes extracted from the participants' attitudes are presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3

The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes of the Interview Q3

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No Specific Ideology		
Because the goal is only education	۴	4.22
The Second Theme: Specific Ideology		
Because of equal rights for male and female	6	13.37
Because of the male authors, designer and voting page	4	13.92
Because of the reducing presence of females in society and social roles	6	17.04
Because of the patriarchal look and gender inequality in the textbooks	12	25.10
Because of the transfer of traditional Iranian-traditional culture	8	23.22

'No specific ideology' and 'specific ideology' were the two themes extracted here. The first theme had one subtheme: 'Because the goal is only education' which was held by two female and two male teachers.

The second theme had five subthemes: 'Because of equal rights for males and females' mentioned by two female and four male teachers; Four female teachers pointed to the subtheme 'because most authors and designers are male' while four female and two male teachers referred to 'reducing the presence of females in society and social roles'. Moreover, 'because of the patriarchal look and gender inequality in the textbooks'

showed the frequency of 12 teachers (seven female and five male); and 'the transfer of traditional Iranian culture' subtheme was mentioned by four female and four male teachers.

Question 4: Is the presence of females and males (gender representation) effective on students' learning motivation? If YES, how?

The themes and subthemes extracted from the participants' attitudes toward this question are reported in Table 4.

Table 4

The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes of the Interview Q4

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No Effect		
Only effective in learning the content	2	11.35
The Second Theme: Effective		
By creating gender stereotypes (patriarchy or feminism)	10	36.35
By creating competition between students	4	7.98
Through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people	10	28.19
Through impact on the minds and subconscious of students	4	13.30

As the Table shows, two themes were extracted: 'No effect' and 'Effective'. The first theme with one subtheme 'Only effective in learning the content' was mentioned by two male teachers. The second theme included four subthemes: 'By creating gender stereotypes (patriarchy or feminism)' mentioned by six female and four male teachers; 'by creating competition between students' was held by four female teachers

while 'through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people' was stated by eight female and two male teachers. Lastly, two female and two male teachers pointed to the subtheme 'through the impact on the minds and subconscious of students'.

Question 5: 'Is the presence of female and male characters (gender representation) effective on students' pedagogical desires and aims? If YES, how?'

Table 5 displays the themes and subthemes referring to the teachers' ideas concerning the fifth question.

Table 5
The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes of Interview Q5

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No Effect		
Only effective in learning the content	2	2.46
The Second Theme: Effective		
Through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people (scientific, artistic and sports)	8	22.77
Through passivating one gender by further representing the opposite gender	8	32.86
Through the impact on motivation	12	38.03

As it is illustrated, 'No effect' and 'Effective' were the themes extracted from the responses. The first theme with one subtheme: 'Only effective in learning the content' was held by two male teachers. The second theme had three subthemes: 'Through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people' showing the frequency of eight female teachers; 'through passivating one gender by further representing the opposite gender' stated by six female and two male teachers; and

'Through the impact on motivation' stated by 12 teachers (two female and ten male).

Question 6: "Is the degree of the presence of females and males (gender representation) effective on students' future choices of fields of study? If YES, how?"

Table 6 shows the themes and subthemes extracted from the participants' responses to this question as well as their frequencies and percentages.

Table 6
The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes of the Two Themes

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No Effect		
Because of its dependence on discovering talent and interest	6	12.86
The Second Theme: Effective		
Through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people	12	33.95
Less representation of a gender in social roles has inhibitory effect on the choice of scientific, artistic and sports disciplines by that gender	10	43.69
Through the desire for the opposite sex	2	7.11

Two themes were extracted for this question; 'No effect' and 'Effective'. One subtheme was drawn from the first theme: 'Because of its dependence on discovering talent and interest' stated by two female and four male teachers. Alternatively, the second theme had three subthemes: 'through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people' held by six female and six male teachers; 'less representation of a gender in social roles has an inhibitory effect on the choice of

disciplines by that gender' was stated by eight female and two male teachers while 'through the desire for the opposite sex' was pointed by two female teachers.

Question 7: "Is the degree of the presence of females and males (gender representation) effective on students' future choice of career? If YES, how?"

Table 7 displays the themes and subthemes extracted from participants' attitudes on question seven.

Table 7*The Frequency and Percentage of the Subthemes of the Interview Q7*

Themes and Subthemes	Frequency	Percentage
The First Theme: No effect		
Because of its dependence on goals and interests	2	3.51
The Second Theme: Effective		
Through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people	10	15.97
Less representation of a gender in social roles as a reason not to choose a job	8	39.76
Through inducing certain jobs to females and males	6	21.99
Through the impact on the choice of their field	2	8.54
Through the desire for the opposite sex	2	8.17

As it is observed, two themes were extracted from the responses: 'No effect' and 'Effective'. The first theme included one subtheme: 'Because of its dependence on goals and interests' mentioned by two male teachers. The second theme had five subthemes including: 'through empathy and imitation of famous and successful people' held by ten teachers; 'less representation of a gender in social roles as a reason not to choose a job' held by four male and four female teachers while 'through inducing certain jobs to females and males' represented the frequency of two female and four male teachers. Moreover, 'through the impact on the choice of their field' was opted by two male teachers, and finally, 'through the desire for the opposite sex' displayed the frequency of two male teachers.

Discussion

The socio-cultural values construction and the experience of the concept of 'gender' constituted the explanatory core of this research. This research analyzed how English language teachers perceive gender representation in Iran's mandatory EFL textbooks. In addition, the study probed if there is an ideology in designing high school EFL textbooks in Iran.

The analysis of the participants' responses to the first question showed their belief in the strong pedagogical effects of gender representation in school textbooks through the transmission of "biased culture and customs" to the young and the effect on "students' mindsets" regarding the social roles of the genders. Also, they held this influence more through creating gender stereotypes. Considering the results of interview question two, the participants claimed there is an obvious "gender representation inequality" in the textbooks presented through images, conversations, reading texts, social roles, activities, etc. The findings are in agreement with those reported by Lestariyana et al. (2020), Setyono (2018), Syairofi et al. (2022), Vu and Pham (2021), a well as Kuraedah et al. (2023).

In response to question three, the participants reasoned that "because most of the textbook authors, designers, and stakeholders are male" and "because of the belief to reduce the presence of females in society", this idea is also visible in the textbooks. Moreover, some attributed the issue to "the patriarchal look and gender inequality in the society" and "the traditional biased culture" in Iran. The female invisibility and social role models in the textbooks would affect students' identities, an idea rooted in Iranian traditional gender expectations and attributions (Dahmardeh & Kim, 2020). The educational domination of these attributions restricts female students' expectations and talents influencing their future fields of study and professions. The educators asserted due to the male and female equal rights in the society and the point that the goal of education is to "guide" students to the right social and mental attitudes, it is important how the two genders are represented in the textbooks. However, most teachers believed the way genders are represented in the *Vision Series* presents a particular ideology: the patriarchal look and gender inequality transmitting traditionally biased Iranian culture.

In response to question four, the respondents expressed that gender disparity will influence students' learning motivation. The participants highlighted the significance of the issue since "it creates gender stereotypes (patriarchy or feminism)". Also, it is effective "through creating competition between the students" and "through the impact on the mindsets and awareness of students." In addition, they believed the effect would be "through empathy and imitation of famous and successful characters (scientific, artistic, and sports) portrayed in the textbooks." The findings are in line with those of Durrani et al. (2022), Kostas (2021), Mahmood et al. (2022) as well as Ward and Lucas (2023).

Regarding the fifth question, most teachers held the belief that gender representation is effective in students' pedagogical desires and aims and this influence would

be more through the impact on their motivation. Also, the participants stated that “passivating one gender by further representing the opposite gender” will impact students’ pedagogical aims and desires. In response to question six, most teachers saw gender representation as effective in students’ future fields of study as less representation of gender in social roles would have inhibitory effects on their choice of scientific, artistic, and sports disciplines. Additionally, considering the last question, the majority of EFL educators believed “less representation of a gender in social roles is a reason for students not to choose that job” and the effect would be “through imposing some certain jobs to females and males in the society”. Most of the participants held similar views on the presence of gender inequity or gender imbalance in the EFL textbooks and that the patriarchal belief is reinforced in Iranian English textbooks. These findings confirm those of Afshar (2015), Alimadadi et al. (2022), Amini and Oj (2017), Lee and Mahmoudi-Gharouei (2020), Miri (2019), and Wing-man (2021).

Conclusions

A responsible education system makes all students feel they share an equal part of the educational society, supports their identity, and builds their self-confidence. The literature in the field of gender representation in education designates the continuation of gender biases and stereotypes in textbooks reinforcing the sex-gender binary. The advancement of education in and for gender equality necessitates renovating the traditional biased attitudes in favor of men to overcome the social and cultural consequences it will bring about (Menard-Warwick et al., 2014).

This study concluded that some gender stereotypes still do exist in the textbooks and females are underrepresented in elements of language use, images and pictures, and roles mentioned in the texts while males dominate the prominent positions in dialogues and texts. The participants emphasized that gender issues in EFL education should be carefully examined to probe whether certain EFL practices enforce particular ideological values of which both educators and learners may be unaware. In most cases, EFL textbooks implicitly reinforce what gender-related values society holds (e.g. females as responsible for household chores and males as responsible for social activities). This study’s results evidenced the constructive role of social and cultural knowledge transmitted from educational materials and its consequences for young education.

The findings of this study indicate that gender stereotypes in language education are deeply rooted in biased traditional attitudes in society. Gender

stereotypes affect male and female students’ paths and career choices as there are fewer women in science, technology, and engineering fields, and fewer men in the teaching, health, and social workforce (Bachore, 2022; Bahatacharya, 2017; Blažević, 2021). Education must prepare students to think outside the “gender box” (UNESCO, 2022), and there is a need to stand against gender inequality in and through education. This research results suggest that binary representation of genders and stereotypical portrayals prevent students from a clear and authentic understanding of how two genders are a part of a society.

The main goal of this research is to prompt stakeholders and EFL educators to work on softening the gender-biased system of education governing the young generation. As Brown and Jones (2001) explained, we need a significant change in the traditional biased attitudes regarding gender dichotomies to achieve gender equality in education. To eradicate gender inequality in society, we need to build social knowledge and overcome gender bias within the educational system. Thus, more comprehensive gender studies are indispensable to achieve diverse models of socio-cultural development.

The results of this research can have some implications for policymakers and curriculum designers to reconsider gender issues while devising textbooks. The results of previous research suggested some gender mindfulness, such as the use of gender-neutral language and male and female fair distribution in dialogue texts which can be a positive step in this regard (Miri, 2019). At a pedagogical level, educators may explain gender issues to their students to build gender-responsive awareness. This is because language educators not only teach language skills but also create students’ knowledge of such values as cultural and gender-related values (Sedmak, 2022; Widodo et al., 2018). Therefore, more research is imperative to examine how gender representations and their roles in society are presented in these materials; and to what extent the government-mandated EFL materials are in line with the findings and recommendations of the studies conducted in Iran and other countries considering gender representation issues; and to what extent the materials develop students’ social and cultural identity. Additionally, studies should be carried out to scrutinize how gender identities and values are displayed in language curricula at primary, high school, and higher education levels. Moreover, it is essential to investigate if high school educators have the opportunity to examine curriculum content regarding gender representation and gender equality and provide suggestions to inform pedagogical practices. Future educators should be trained to effectively contribute to

evaluating textbooks to expand gender equality in the educational system.

There were some limitations in conducting this study which restricted its scope of generalization. First, the sample size was small; thus, using a larger number of participants will add to the study's credibility. Also, the reliability of the results relies on the participants' sincere responses to the questions. The data were allocated virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic which might affect the results. Other studies are needed to conduct in-person interviews with more participants to present more valid data.

The paper explored high school educators' perceptions toward the manifestation of gender representation and practices in Iran's English language education. In sum, as EFL education cannot be separated from gender-related issues, the findings of this study offer insightful directions for more research in the area. Gender-related concerns in language education are motivating to investigate and discuss. We hope that our findings could be a motivation for growing critical studies on gender issues in less-taught languages in diverse environments. We hope that this study will pave new avenues for more scholarly research on gender and language education.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions (Authors, 2024)

1. What is your perception toward pedagogical effects of gender representation?
2. Is there any significant difference between the representation of male and female characters in the textbooks?
3. Does gender representation in the textbooks present a particular ideology? If YES, what is the reason?
4. Is the presence of females and males (gender representation) effective on students’ learning motivation? If YES, how?
5. Is the presence of female and male characters (gender representation) effective on students’ pedagogical desires and aims? If YES, how?
6. Is the degree of the presence of females and males (gender representation) effective on students’ future choice of field of study? If YES, how?
7. Is the degree of the presence of females and males (gender representation) effective on students’ future choice of career? If YES, how?