

## **Intersection of Gender, Globalization, and Religion in Local and Globalized ELT Textbooks in Iran**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper examines gender representation in two textbook series: Solutions, published by an international publisher, and the Iran Language Institute (ILI) series, written by local writers. Evidence of gender representation is drawn from the analysis of their religious content in the narrative texts and the illustrations. The analysis of gender representation is guided by six criteria: visibility in pictures, visibility in text, firstness, character activity, occupations, and topic dominance. The findings indicate that in both textbook series, males exhibit greater visibility and dominance in relation to character and occupation. The gender representation varies significantly. These results substantiate previous investigations conducted elsewhere, highlighting the gender imbalance in textbook representation. The examination of gender representation at the intersection of religion in local textbooks also revealed that intersectionality in social sciences can further perpetuate gender bias in educational materials. These findings serve as a call to action for textbook authors and education policymakers to prioritize gender equality representation within the context

of religion and globalization in language education textbooks authored by local writers. This research holds implications for language teaching approaches fostering intercultural competence, specifically in English as a lingua franca.

*Keywords:* Gender, global materials, local materials, materials development, TEFL

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## INTRODUCTION

The teaching and learning of English have gained momentum as many people worldwide seek to learn the language for general, academic, and/or professional purposes. Textbooks tend to serve as the intended curriculum in EFL contexts and constitute one of the salient constituents of ELT as a global enterprise, raising awareness in learners about the culture and values of the target language. Although globalization in education has been identified as an important area of research, gender representation in globalized education remains under-researched.

Considering the psychological aspects of gender and identity, there is still room for advancing progressive feminist ideas by means of textbooks, which have the potential to influence the way learners perceive gender roles and contribute to the process of gender socialization at school. It is, therefore, extremely important to analyze textbooks from different perspectives to gain a more comprehensive view of the hidden curriculum reflected in such materials (Hassaskhah & Abdollahi, 2021). Many content and linguistic analyses of educational materials (e.g., Ghajarieh & Salami, 2016; Hamdan, 2010; Nakhostin & Alimorad, 2022; Rakati et al., 2022) have focused on gender representation and the extent to which it is reflected in textbook textual and visual content.

Blumberg (2008) highlights the salience of gender representation in the hidden curriculum and maintains that the curriculum is an important medium for

gender socialization in educational settings. Social beliefs and cultural norms reflected in language are constitutive elements of gender, which explains why they are consequential for younger students in education. Visual content in textbooks can affect, if not shape, the minds of young students regarding gender norms.

The present study undertakes a comparative investigation into gender representation in global textbooks selected from the Solutions series and the local textbooks selected from the ILI series at the pre-intermediate level. Numerous academic studies on gender representation in education have been conducted, but many have approached the topic from a Western perspective without explicitly considering the intersection of gender, religion, and globalization. Researchers such as Agni et al. (2020), Ghajarieh and Salami (2016), and Hassaskhah and Abdollahi (2021) have explored this area without deeply examining the influence of religion on gender representation. Additional studies are needed to investigate in detail the representation of gender and take into account the religious and cultural mores of societies, which are the determining factors in gender stereotypes and bias. This study aims to provide empirical evidence on gender and the intersection of gender with religion and globalization in the context of education in Iran as an Islamic country.

Research incorporating Islamic literature in language classrooms, exemplified by Irwansyah et al. (2021), can offer a well-rounded viewpoint on the role of religion

in education. This study follows the current trend of research exploring religion in education, seeking to remain unbiased and inclusive of different religious beliefs. An important dimension of this study is to ascertain whether Iranian women using local versus global textbooks are discriminated against with respect to gender, globalization, and religion. While many studies have investigated the role of gender in school textbooks, the intersection of gender and globalization in this epistemological site needs to be explored in view of the paucity of empirical evidence. Likewise, the intersection of gender with other factors such as religion, race, and identity is also an under-researched area.

The intersection of gender and globalization is a complex concept that requires further clarification to understand the specific relationship between them. Intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1989), investigates how social categorizations such as gender, race, and class overlap and shape people's societal experiences. Globalization involves the multifaceted processes of global interconnectedness in terms of economy, politics, and social issues. The present intersectional inquiry delves into understanding how gender-related issues are influenced by and contribute to globalization, such as how global economic systems that fund globalized textbooks may perpetuate gender inequality and how gender biases in society affect the content of such textbooks. In the case of local textbooks, it is expected that such educational materials prescribed

by the education ministries of different countries reflect gender biases existing in what Ulum and Köksal (2019) describe as "the source society or state" (p. 72). To address this perplexing intersection, the study on gender representation in localized and globalized textbooks used in a private institute in Iran investigates how gender is portrayed in educational materials at the intersection of religion, globalization, and localization.

The present study accordingly addresses these research questions:

RQ1: How is gender represented in the ILI textbooks written by Iranian writers and in the Solutions textbooks published by an international publisher?

RQ2: How is the intersection of gender and religion represented in the narrative text (linear form) and the illustrations (non-linear form) in the local and globalized textbooks?

## Literature Review

Gender bias and stereotypes are shaped and reproduced through language (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). In this context, critical discourse analysis represents an important area of linguistics in recognizing the constitutive role of language in shaping such beliefs and bias, and a considerable number of studies have explored the construction of gender in textbooks and other epistemological sites. These studies extend from the 1990s (e.g., Rifkin, 1998) to more recent years (e.g., Lee, 2018; Rakati et al., 2022) and focus on ascertaining

the criteria to assess the equity of gender representation in textbooks and on the representation of gender as found in various corpus studies. Different tools of analysis were used, including Critical Discourse Analysis (Sulaimani & Elyas, 2018) and corpus linguistics tools (Lee, 2018).

Textbooks and other resources improve students' ability to learn. EFL/ESL textbooks focus on developing the four language skills and play a crucial role in language teaching and learning. Materials developers have to deal with a number of criteria for creating textbooks to cater to the needs of students (Ghajarieh et al., 2023). Choosing and evaluating appropriate textbooks is a complex matter, and most institutions choose textbooks according to what publishers offer and make available.

Numerous studies highlight gender disparities in textbooks. Lee and Collins (2006) found persistent gender stereotyping in Hong Kong EFL textbooks. Lee (2018) explored gender representation in Japanese EFL textbooks, revealing ongoing gender biases despite government initiatives and advancements for women. Variations in the portrayal of women and men in the fields of numeric balance and gender stereotyping have been identified in different series of textbooks. A recent study in the Iranian context undertaken by Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020) analyzed "English for School Series, Prospect," which was recently prescribed by the Iranian Ministry of Education. The study found "some gender consciousness" with "low female visibility" (p. 1107). Recent gender studies

have explored the intersection of gender with other social factors. A study by Cheng and Beigi (2012) analyzed Iranian EFL textbooks and found that they predominantly focused on religious and cultural activities, highlighting the intertwining of gender, religion, and education in this context.

In a study by Sulaimani and Elyas (2018), the intersection between globalization and education was examined through a global series used in Saudi Arabia. The study recommended a glocalized edition. Ulum and Köksal (2019) further explored this under-researched field and found that EFL textbooks, both globally and locally created, heavily reflect the ideology and hegemony of inner and expanding circle cultures. A scholarly investigation into gender representation in English educational textbooks indicates that this topic can be examined within the context of religion and globalization. The textbook representation of gender is influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, as well as worldwide trends and values. By examining gender representation in locally developed textbooks at the intersection of religion and globalization, one can identify and address biases and stereotypes while advocating more inclusive and diverse gender portrayals. Additionally, this analysis can raise the awareness of educators and students regarding intercultural concepts in foreign language acquisition, as they may encounter gender issues in the target language that were not present in their native language. For example, an Iranian student with only a single pronoun representing

both genders in their native language may unknowingly reproduce gender biases by defaulting to “he” in generic pronouns when communicating in English.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design of the Study

The study used a multiple case study design (Yin, 2003) with textbooks to explore the connection between gender and language education’s local and global material development. Content analysis (Mayring, 2000, 2014) was applied to identify subcategories and themes related to gender. The data were coded and categorized based on existing literature while keeping an open mind to discover new codes and themes during analysis. The corpus was examined for additional themes, and Holsti’s (1969) reliability coefficient was used to calculate the number of agreements per total coding decision. The coefficient was 0.72, indicating satisfactory consistency between the researcher and the assistant. The study’s second phase explored the role of religion and gender using Cheng and Beigi’s (2012) model to analyze data from global versus local textbooks.

### Data and Data Analysis

The study analyzed two sets of textbooks, the Solutions series (global) and the ILI series (local), to compare their effectiveness. Pre-intermediate textbooks were chosen as students commonly use them. The ILI series, created by Iranians, is widely used in Iran, with over 300 branches. The Solutions

series by McMillan Press is a popular global textbook used in many language institutes nationwide. Three textbooks from each series were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in tables. A chi-square test was conducted using SPSS-18 software to determine the differences between the two sets.

### Procedure

The content of the selected books from the ILI and Solutions series was analyzed in accordance with themes emerging in the related literature to examine gender representation. The target textbook series was scrutinized to ascertain how gender was represented in terms of (1) ‘visibility in pictures (Hall, 2014); (2) ‘visibility in the text’ (Hall, 2014); (3) ‘firstness (Bahman & Rahimi, 2010); (4) ‘character activity’ (Stockdale, 2006); (5) ‘occupations’ (Atay & Danju, 2012); and (6) ‘topic dominance’ (Stockdale, 2006).

Below is a brief description of the themes used for examining textual and visual content to ascertain gender representation:

- i. Visibility in pictures has to do with the appearance of men and women in textbooks and the relative numbers of such representations. It is ascertained by counting the number of times males and females appear in texts.
- ii. Visibility in the text is related to the frequency of proper nouns (e.g., Hassan, Bill), nouns (e.g., boy, daughter), and generic antecedents (e.g., him, she, herself, her) in

all passages. It is ascertained by counting the number of times proper nouns, nouns, and generic antecedents used in all passages.

- iii. Firstness refers to the order of appearance of two gender-related nouns or pronouns. That is, when two gender-related nouns or pronouns are used as a pair in a text, such as boys and girls or he/she, the noun/pronoun appearing first can be interpreted as enjoying a higher status.
- iv. Character activity refers to the types of activity performed by men and/or women in the textbooks. The distribution of activities associated with each gender (e.g., reading, playing music, truck driving, judging, playing tennis) was counted to ascertain character activity.
- v. Occupation refers to a job, career, profession, and any other work carried out by a woman or man. The focus is on the occupational roles given to men and women in the textbooks. The type of occupations and their frequency were calculated for both genders to determine the occupations assigned to males and females.
- vi. Topic dominance refers to the control of talk by either males or females. The reading passages and dialogues were closely scrutinized to find out the sex of the main

character that exercises control over the dialogues or texts, as well as the frequency of speech turns.

In analyzing local textbooks, religion's relationship with gender issues was examined using Cheng and Beigi's (2012) model. The analysis encompassed religious content, including lexical items, narrative texts, and dialogues to establish references to Islamic concepts. These themes were investigated to determine the impact of religion on the textual and visual content of the textbooks: (i) women's clothing, (ii) attire of men and women, (iii) women's use of makeup, (iv) physical closeness, (v) interaction between men and women (talking or walking together), (vi) portrayal of men and women in traditional family roles, (vii) men and women driving, (viii) men and women sitting together alone, and (ix) representation of relationships.

## RESULTS

### Gender Representation in Globalized and Local Textbooks

The Solutions and ILI series textbooks were analyzed in terms of visibility in pictures, visibility in text, firstness, character activity, occupation, and topic dominance.

**Gender Representation in a Local ELT Textbook Series.** Table 1 summarizes the total frequency of gender representation in the ILI Pre-Intermediate series in terms of visibility in pictures, visibility in text, firstness, character activity, occupation, and topic dominance.



Table 1  
*An overview of gender representation frequencies in ILI pre-intermediate*

Gender representation	Male	Female
Visibility in pictures	164	75
Visibility in text	321	243
Firstness	8	0
Character activity	15	18
Occupation	10	4
Topic dominance	5	3
Total	523	343

Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of visibility in pictures, text, firstness, character activity, occupation, and topic dominance are displayed in Tables 2 to 7.

Table 2  
*Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of visibility in pictures*

Gender	Frequency
Male	164 (68%)
Female	75 (31%)

Table 2 reports the frequency and percentages of pictures connected to each gender at the ILI pre-intermediate level. Males statistically outnumbered females (68% vs. 31%), signifying that the authors were more concerned with including pictures of men rather than women.

Table 3 presents the frequency and percentages of the representation of masculinity and femininity in ILI pre-intermediate. The analysis indicates that

except for nouns, male proper nouns and generic terms outnumbered those of females.

Table 3  
*Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of visibility in text*

Gender	Proper nouns	Nouns	Generic	Total
Male	118 (60%)	6 (42%)	197 (55%)	321
Female	77 (39%)	8 (57%)	158 (44%)	243

The only instance in which men scored significantly higher than women was with respect to firstness (Table 4).

Table 4  
*Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of firstness*

Gender	Frequency
Male	8 (100%)
Female	0

As displayed in Table 5, out of 27 identified activities, females only took part in ten, such as taking English classes, playing the piano, and learning French, among which activities, namely visiting a fortune-teller and speaking emotionally about their own experiences, can be more expected from women in particular in Iranian traditional settings. By contrast, males performed seventeen indoor and outdoor activities, including playing sports (e.g., basketball and tennis), undertaking activities around the house (e.g., cutting the grass and putting the garbage out), and doing banking, which Iranian men mostly do.

Table 5  
*Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of character activity*

Gender	Male	Female
Character Activity	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Speaking to students</li> <li>2. Entertaining</li> <li>3. Having pain</li> <li>4. Having a speech</li> <li>5. Playing the piano</li> <li>6. Playing tennis</li> <li>7. Playing basketball</li> <li>8. Playing soccer</li> <li>9. Taking a nap</li> <li>10. Cutting the grass</li> <li>11. Cashing the check</li> <li>12. Renting an apartment</li> <li>13. Studying English</li> <li>14. Putting the garbage out</li> <li>15. Learning Chinese</li> <li>16. Doing homework</li> <li>17. Giving up smoking</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Suffering from depression</li> <li>2. Being busy</li> <li>3. Speaking emotionally about her experiences</li> <li>4. Being talkative</li> <li>5. Getting married</li> <li>6. Visiting a fortune-teller</li> <li>7. Taking English lessons</li> <li>8. Practicing the piano</li> <li>9. Learning French</li> <li>10. Burning the food</li> </ol>
Total	17	10

In Table 6, males were presented in a wider range and, overall, a higher level of employment than females (10:5) in ILI Pre-Intermediate. The analysis indicates that women occupied positions such as eye specialists, fortune tellers, and computer experts, with the exception of the portrayal of a woman as a taxi driver, which is a role often associated with men. In contrast, men

enjoyed a greater diversity of occupations ranging from lower-ranking roles such as truck drivers, newspaper boys, and repairmen to higher-ranking roles such as surgeons, civil engineers, English/French teachers, and doctors. However, working as a receptionist is associated with both genders.

Table 6  
*Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of occupation*

Gender	Male	Female
Occupation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. English teacher</li> <li>2. Mechanic</li> <li>3. Receptionist</li> <li>4. Newspaper boy</li> <li>5. Repairman</li> <li>6. French teacher</li> <li>7. Civil engineer</li> <li>8. Camera club coordinator</li> <li>9. Truck driver</li> <li>10. Doctor</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Receptionist</li> <li>2. Eye specialist (doctor)</li> <li>3. Fortune teller</li> <li>4. Computer expert</li> <li>5. Taxi driver</li> </ol>
Total	10	4



Table 7 shows that men dominate the topics of conversation and reading passages. In five cases, men initiated the interaction with their partners. The number of words

produced by men was 305 vs. 198 for females, and the number of their talks was almost twice more than their counterparts.

Table 7  
*Gender representation in ILI pre-intermediate in terms of topic dominance*

Initiator of conversation	A female (receptionist) A male (Mr. Hopkins) A male (Mr. Harris) A female (Carol) A female (Ellen) A male (repairman) A male (Mike) A male (Mark) Male = 5 / Female = 3
Number of words	By male = 305 By female = 198
Number of talks	By male = 42 By female = 26

**Gender Representation in a Globalized ELT Textbook Series.** Table 8 displays the

analysis results for the Solutions series as globalized English textbooks used in Iran.

Table 8  
*Gender representation frequencies based on textual and pictorial elements in Solutions pre-intermediate*

Gender in textual and pictorial components of solutions pre-intermediate	Male representation	Female representation
Visibility in pictures	159	85
Visibility in text	364	309
Firstness	16	0
Character activity	19	14
Occupation	9	5
Topic dominance	8	7
Total	575	420

*Note.* The table shows how women and men were represented through textual and pictorial analysis of solutions pre-intermediate.

Table 9 clearly shows that males versus females (159 to 85) have not been equally presented throughout Solutions (pre-intermediate), and the difference between the frequencies of the pictures was statistically significant. Such an imperfect balance between the distributions of males/females in the illustrations can implicitly represent that women’s achievements seem unequally important to the textbook’s authors.

In Table 10, masculinity was presented in a wider range and, overall, a higher level of application than females in *Solutions Pre-intermediate*. A close examination indicates that visibility in text for men was nearly 10 percent more than for females.

Table 11 displays that female names were followed after male names in all the coordinated expressions, showing a statistically significant difference between genders.

Only 16 instances of man-woman dyad were identified in the book, among which men appeared first. As a case in point, “father and mother” and “brothers and sisters” were the samples used in the textbook in which males came first.

Table 9  
*Gender representation in solutions pre-intermediate in terms of visibility in pictures*

Gender	Frequency	Asymptotic significance
Male	159 (66%)	0.00
Female	85 (34%)	0.00

Table 10  
*Gender representation in solutions pre-intermediate in terms of visibility in text*

Gender	Proper nouns	Nouns	Generic	Total
Male	208 (53%)	48 (55%)	108 (58%)	364
Female	191 (47%)	40 (45%)	78 (42%)	309

Table 11  
*Gender representation in solutions pre-intermediate in terms of firstness*

Gender	Frequency	Asymptotic significance
Male	16 (100%)	-
Female	0	0.00

The list of activities in Table 12 presents different activities performed by female and male characters in the textbook.

Table 12  
*Gender representation in solutions pre-intermediate in terms of character activity*

Gender	Male	Female
Character activity	1. Playing tennis	1. Skateboarding
	2. Making dinner	2. Ice skating
	3. Having exams	3. Playing guitar
	4. Doing some exercise	4. Burning hands
	5. Climbing	5. Visiting a friend
	6. Swimming	6. Doing extreme sports

Table 12 (continue)

Gender	Male	Female	
Character activity	7. Doing BBQ	7. Base jumping	
	8. Backpacking	8. Swimming	
	9. Getting lost	9. Code-breaking	
	10. Left the college	10. Playing piano	
	11. Writing letters	11. Watching a film	
	12. Gradening	12. Watching TV	
	13. Taking computer course	13. Eating sweets	
	14. Working long hours	14. Eating	
	15. Slicing the potatoes		
	16. Being on an island alone		
	17. Working hard		
	18. Reading		
	19. Playing volleyball		
	Total	19	14

A close look at Table 12 shows the almost equal distribution of activities between genders. In addition, female activities are not restricted to passive indoor activities such as watching television or reading a newspaper, as they also enjoy active outdoor roles such as doing extreme sports, base jumping, and playing instruments such as the piano and guitar. On the other side, men

were not restricted to a set of pre-defined traditional characters as activities such as slicing potatoes (which seems to be more feminine) plus some other activities, namely playing tennis and volleyball, were used for men.

The occupations of males and females portrayed in the textbooks are presented in Table 13 as follows:

Table 13

*Gender representation in solutions pre-intermediate in terms of occupation*

Gender	Male	Female
Occupation	1. Math teacher	1. Sportswoman
	2. Sailor	2. Musician
	3. Workmen	3. Sports coach
	4. Actor	4. Accountant
	5. Gardener	5. Inventor
	6. Charity fund-raiser	
	7. Teacher	
	8. Doctor	
	9. Army	
Total	9	5

The male occupations outnumbered females by a ratio of 9:5, which indicates that males were still present in traditional works, such as army men and sailors. In contrast, females were represented as an indoor occupation, such as an accountant, which does not need a great amount of contact with other men. Further, there were two occupations in the domain of sport, such as sportswoman and sports coach, which were mainly applied to females, which can represent the advancement of Iranian women in sports activities. Additionally, from the researcher’s point of view, it could

be seen that the occupation of “inventor” was a nontraditional role for females.

Table 14 presents the results of male-female topic dominance in dialogues and reading passages of *Solutions (Pre-Intermediate)*.

The analysis illustrated that males in eight cases and females in seven were the initiators of conversations, so significant dominance has been identified in the benefits of either gender. However, in the second comparison category, females uttered almost 200 words more than men in text.

**Comparison of Gender Representation in Local and Global Textbooks**

The current study also sought to examine whether the Solutions series and ILI series textbooks are significantly different in terms of gender representation. A Chi-square test was run to address the difference.

Table 15 demonstrates the results of the Chi-square between the Solutions and ILI textbook series.

Table 14  
*Gender representation in Solutions pre-intermediate in terms of topic dominance*

Initiator of conversation	A female (Martha) A male (Sam) A male (Sam) A male (Jack) A male (Ted) A male (Toby) A female (Mia) A female (Ryan) A male (Toby) A female (Beth) A female A female (Ryan) A male (Matt) A female A male (Max)
	Male = 8 / Female = 7
Number of words	By male = 795 By female = 969
Number of talks	By male = 101 By female = 99

Table 15  
*Chi-square between the Solutions and ILI textbook series in terms of visibility in pictures*

Chi-square	Asymptotic significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	0.003
Likelihood ratio	0.028
Linear-by-linear association	0.014

According to the chi-square results, there was no significant difference between the Solutions and ILI textbook series in terms of overall gender representation ( $\chi^2: 1.29 p > 0.05$ ). However, the globalized and local textbooks still depicted women less frequently in terms of visual, textual, and firstness parameters. In addition, the Solutions series had a higher number of female characters compared to the ILI series in terms of visual and textual representation, as well as character activities and topic dominance. Furthermore, the quality of activities and representation of women in pictures, as well as their activation in the text, was notably better in the case of the Solutions as a globalized textbook. For instance, women appeared more confident in the photos of this series and were portrayed engaging in various activities.

### **Intersectionality of Gender and Religion**

The intersectionality of gender and religion was analyzed through Kow and Beigi's (2012) model, given that in local Iranian textbooks, the element of religion plays an important role.

#### **Visual.**

##### ***Women's Apparel.***

The detailed analysis of the Solutions Series shows that in most cases, the women were portrayed without headscarves or any other head covering, except for one case in which a headscarf was a fashion statement. In another case, the weather was cold, and a female wore a hat. It is worth

mentioning that the outfits throughout the whole series were quite appropriate, with no revealing clothes, probably because the authors presumably intended to publish a textbook applicable in all contexts, even in religious settings. In addition, women in all cases were shown with natural and light makeup. However, women portrayed in the ILI books dressed modestly, adhering to the dress codes in Islam. Clothes appropriate for tasks in different situations allowed learners to participate more in class and teachers a chance to engage the learners in discussing the tasks. In general, men and women in ILI books were in modest Islamic style and not in flashy clothes, including long shirts, loose garments, and long dresses.

##### ***Revealing Attire.***

Most pictures in the Solutions series adhere to moral standards. Women are depicted modestly, wearing sweaters or shirts, with occasional short sleeves or t-shirts. Men are consistently dressed casually and appropriately. Minimal bare skin is shown, typically below the elbows and knees. In the ILI books, women's heads were uncovered, but they wore long dresses or coats. Men in the Solutions series are also appropriately attired.

##### ***Female Appearance.***

The women in Solutions were wearing makeup, especially lipstick and jewelry, possibly to attract the learners' attention and promote Western culture. Their hair colors were mainly blond and black. In

the ILI Series, by contrast, the images were based on Islamic culture and natural light makeup was used in accordance with religious procedures. Muslim women are prohibited from using makeup to attract the opposite sex.

### ***Physical Proximity.***

In non-Muslim countries, interactions between people are more comfortable, and restrictions on relationships between men and women are fewer. The ILI series depicts that close blood relatives (mahram) can have close contact. The focus is on family relationships, following social norms, and Islamic regulations. While pictures show interaction between male and female classmates, they maintain distance and adhere to the rule against physical contact.

### ***Men and Women in New Roles.***

The Solutions series challenges traditional gender roles by depicting a more modern and equitable society. Women are shown engaging in roles traditionally associated with men, such as footballers and pilots. However, women are also portrayed as the central figures in managing the household and family responsibilities. In contrast, the ILI series often portrays middle-aged women as housewives, while men relax at home. Nevertheless, it includes images of women working as cashiers or travel agents, indicating increased female employment and responsibility in Islamic societies. In general, men are depicted as providers and protectors of the family.

### ***Dyadic Interaction.***

The Solutions series primarily depicts men and women forming dyads, discussing various topics such as weather, weekend plans, and class exams. These dyads involve friendships or classmates. In same-gender dyads, the relationships are typically partner-partner, classmate-classmate, doctor-patient, or teacher-learner, maintaining appropriate social distance. Dyads are also formed at the gym and during social gatherings, with men and women socializing and enjoying music.

### ***Equity.***

Some men and women illustrated in the Solutions series have white skin, while others have black skin. It reflects the situation in Western societies in which people of different races, colors, and cultures live together, and instructional textbooks can be seen as a device to train language learners and teach them how to live with others. It can also teach them that people have the same rights despite differences of color and religion. However, in the ILI series, only people with the same eye and hair color and ethnic backgrounds are shown. Despite the ethnic variety of Iran, which includes Turks, Kurds, and Lurs, different ethnicity is not represented in the pictures.

### ***Textual Material***

The study also analyzed words and dialogues in both textbook series and found that throughout the Solutions series, there are no words, expressions, or concepts that could be regarded as insulting Islam, inciting anti-



Islamic feelings, or disregarding Islamic restrictions. For example, although it has often been observed that in some other foreign-authored textbooks, dyadic groups of men and women or boys and girls are represented, no such scenes were found in the Solutions series.

While there are no anti-Islamic elements in this book series, Islamic practices are not featured either. It suggests that the series' authors aimed to create a textbook suitable for various religious orientations. Interestingly, the names of different characters in the ILL series are mostly foreign despite being published in Iran. However, a few common Islamic names are used. The topics discussed align with Iranian culture and Islamic beliefs, focusing on driving, campus events, education, and sports. Extramarital relationships are not mentioned in the book, carefully avoiding the activation of relational dynamics (van Leeuwen, 2008).

## DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that the Solutions textbooks offer a more nuanced and balanced picture of women than the ILI textbooks. Such gender imbalance or bias in the ILI textbooks is likely to reproduce gender bias in society through education, which, according to Blumberg (2008), can affect the educational progress of female students. In addition, the findings from the analysis of the ILI textbooks contradict the overall picture of gender equality in education, as reported in Western studies. The results concur with the studies undertaken by Ansary and

Babai (2003), Bahman and Rahimi (2010), Ghajarieh and Salami (2016), and Lee and Mahmoudi-Gahrouei (2020). The present research confirms the outcome of a related study by Ulum and Köksal's (2019), which shows the predominance of the expanding circle culture in locally authored EFL textbooks and the prevalence of the inner circle culture in globally written textbooks.

While a more gender-balanced picture was expected in advance in global textbooks, given that local textbooks are generally written with an emphasis on religious, social, and cultural aspects of the students' L1, the data obtained from a sample of Iranian local textbooks indicates a rather bigger gap in gender equality. It could be consequential for girls using local textbooks in Iran, particularly the younger ones from religious families who make up the majority of those who use the ILI series. The representation of religion in the ILI series, addressed in the second research question, also highlights a level of religiosity represented in them. In turn, it doubles the discrimination against girls using English textbooks produced locally. The global textbooks, however, tend to avoid religious topics as an integral component of globalization and inclusion.

The case of local and global textbooks in Iran is rather complicated, and the data obtained needs to be discussed with reference to the sociopolitical and religious milieu of Iranian society. English is taught in state and private schools. Many parents and adult English learners prefer shadow education in English institutes because better teachers and textbooks are employed. However, the findings of this study also

indicate that close attention should be paid to the content of the textbooks adopted for use in the shadow education sector. Although these textbooks provide ample exposure to English as a Foreign Language, the content may reproduce the kind of gender and religious bias that is prevalent in society. The ILI series, in particular, tends to disadvantage teenage girls. The picture looks far gloomier in the case of girls with financial difficulties, particularly those living in rural areas since they cannot even enroll at English institutes to enable them to improve their proficiency in English and broaden their vision of gender equality.

The results of the current study can hopefully shed more light on the intersection of gender, globalization, and religion and motivate international investigations on gender at the intersections of other social factors. A possible solution to address the issue of global versus local textbooks is to produce a glocalized edition of the global textbooks, as suggested by Sulaimani and Elyas (2018). The authors of this article have recently published a textbook in Iran with the help of a native English speaker in which many aspects of English as a global and local language were included in the textbook and taught to Iranian students.

## **CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study has shown how an imbalance in gender representation can affect local and global textbooks in terms of presenting a gender-neutral picture of men and women. The findings can be made available to

create EFL stakeholders' awareness in terms of gender imbalance and could perhaps contribute to the development of textbooks from a glocalized perspective to create a better balance in the representation of both genders. The findings could also contribute to establishing a framework to assist textbook writers in designing educational materials that help enhance a gender-fairer society in Iran.

In the Iranian context, the focus on religion is an important social factor in the development of textbooks, as it contributes to the construction of gender. Despite some negative aspects of globalization, a more balanced representation of women in global textbooks has the potential to open a new route to gender equality. To keep up with global changes, and in view of the changing world of education, textbook writers should not go to the extreme of eliminating important and harmless cultural beliefs and notions about gender and religion.

## **Recommendation for Future Research**

This study has undertaken research at the intersection of gender, religion, and globalization. A possible way forward is to evaluate local textbooks from other countries and compare their content with international textbooks in terms of gender. Teachers' guides can accompany existing textbooks to stimulate discussions on inequality on the grounds of gender, race, etc. Teachers, as the main stakeholders of textbooks, can play a significant role in raising their students' awareness. Textbook writers should be interviewed to give more detailed insights

into their conceptualizations of gender bias and gender equality when writing textbooks. Including students' voices and their points of view would be another avenue for future research in a different educational milieu. In Iran, religion plays a significant role in society, and educators and curriculum developers must present a fair and nuanced representation of women based on religious ideations, avoiding any partiality in textbooks. Future research should emphasize the significance of religion in educational materials authored by Iranians, as well as in those utilized in other Muslim countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia.

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