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Gender Representation and Bias in Visuals in Local ELT Course Books: A Critical Discourse Analysis

Yerel ELT Ders Kitaplarındaki Görsellerde Cinsiyet Temsili ve Önyargı: Eleştirel Bir Söylem Analizi

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ABSTRACT

This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) within a qualitative research framework to examine the representation of gender stereotypes in state-developed English language teaching (ELT) course books in Iran, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and Syria. In this context, "state course books" refers to ELT materials that are specifically developed, sanctioned, and distributed by the Ministries of Education in each respective country. These books are developed in accordance with local educational goals and national curricula, providing a standardized resource for English language instruction across public schools. By analyzing the visual content, the study aimed to uncover how these materials reinforce or challenge gender representation and gender bias. The findings highlighted the subtle ways in which gender bias is embedded in educational texts, influencing students' perceptions of gender norms. The findings indicate that ELT course books in Türkiye and Iraq contain the highest number of visuals compared to those in the other countries analyzed. Across all countries, male-dominated photos were consistently more prevalent than female-dominated photos. The other aspect examined was the illustrative context. All countries have tried to incorporate more modern contexts in their pictures. Among the countries, Türkiye stands out for having the widest variety of visual contexts whereas Syrian course books show the fewest pictorial variations. Similar to the types of illustrative contexts used for females, non-traditional contexts are employed more frequently than traditional contexts for males across all countries.

Keywords: Gender bias, Gender representation, State ELT course books, CDA, Visuals

ÖZ

Bu çalışma da, İran, Türkiye, Özbekistan, Irak ve Suriye'deki devlet tarafından geliştirilen İngilizce dil öğretimi (ELT) ders kitaplarında cinsiyet stereotiplerinin temsiliyi incelemek için nitel bir araştırma çerçevesi içinde Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (CDA) kullanılmıştır. Bu bağlamda, "devlet ders kitapları", her bir ülkedeki Eğitim Bakanlıkları tarafından özel olarak geliştirilen, onaylanan ve dağıtılan ELT materyallerini ifade eder. Bu kitaplar, yerel eğitim hedefleri ve ulusal müfredatlara uygun olarak geliştirilir ve kamu okullarında İngilizce dil öğretimi için standart bir kaynak sağlar. Çalışma da, görsel içeriği analiz etmiştir, bu materyallerin cinsiyet temsiliyi ve cinsiyet önyargısını nasıl güçlendirdiğini veya meydan okuduğunu ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır. Bulgular, cinsiyet önyargısının eğitim metinlerine yerleştirildiği ve öğrencilerin cinsiyet normlarına ilişkin algılarını etkilediği ince yolları vurgulamıştır. Bulgular, Türkiye ve Irak'taki ELT ders kitaplarının analiz edilen diğer ülkelere kıyasla en fazla görsel içerdiğini göstermektedir. Tüm ülkelerde, erkek egemen fotoğraflar, kadın egemen fotoğraflardan tutarlı bir şekilde daha yaygındır. İncelenen diğer husus, açıklayıcı bağlamlardır. Tüm ülkeler resimlerine daha modern bağlamlar katmak için çaba sarf etmiştir. Ülkeler arasında Türkiye en geniş görsel bağlam çeşitliliğine sahip olmasıyla öne çıkarken, Suriye ders kitapları en az resimsel varyasyonu göstermektedir. Kadınlar için kullanılan resimli bağlam türlerine benzer şekilde, geleneksel olmayan bağlamlar tüm ülkelerde erkekler için geleneksel bağlamlardan daha sık kullanılmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Cinsiyet ayrımcılığı, Cinsiyet temsili, Eyalet ELT ders kitapları, Eleştirel söylem analizi, Görseller

INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes considered appropriate for men and women (Butler, 1990). In educational contexts, particularly English Language Teaching (ELT) course books, gender stereotypes are often reinforced, shaping learners' perceptions of gender roles (Van Lombergen et al., 2024). These materials frequently portray men and women in traditional professions and domestic roles, thereby reinforcing societal norms and limiting students' understanding of their potential roles in society (Sunderland, 2000). Gender bias—whether explicit or implicit—embedded in instructional content can influence students' self-concept and perpetuate social inequalities (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). The absence of balanced gender representation in course books undermines efforts to promote gender equity in education (Koşir & Lakshminarayanan, 2022). Addressing such bias requires the critical evaluation and revision of instructional materials by educators and policymakers to foster inclusive learning environments (Lee & Collins, 2008). Integrating diverse and equitable gender representations in ELT resources can challenge stereotypes and support more egalitarian classroom dynamics (Litosseliti, 2006). This study examines the visual representation of gender in locally produced ELT course books from five countries—Iraq, Syria, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Türkiye—and explores the impact of gender bias on students' perceptions of gender roles.

English course materials play a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of gender stereotypes (Sunderland, 2000). Studies indicate that these materials often portray men in leadership roles and women in caregiving or subordinate positions (Michel, 1986). Such representations can narrow students' understanding of socially acceptable roles for men and women (Lee & Collins, 2008). Repeated exposure to these biases may discourage girls from aspiring to leadership positions and reinforce systemic gender inequality (Blumberg, 2008). To promote gender equity in education, educators and policymakers must critically evaluate course books and other instructional materials (Garton & Graves, 2014; Pavlenko, 2004).

This study investigates gender stereotypes in high school English course books from Iran, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and Syria. These materials are developed and approved by their respective ministries of education. However, despite growing awareness of the importance of equitable representation, many ELT course books—especially those produced and approved at the national level—continue to display gender imbalances, particularly in their visual content. This persistent issue raises critical questions about how males and females are depicted and whether such portrayals perpetuate stereotypes. Accordingly, this study focuses on two primary issues: how are males and females visually represented in high school ELT course books in Iran, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and Syria? And to what extent do these visual representations reflect gender bias or reinforce traditional gender roles? A qualitative research design, incorporating Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), is employed to uncover underlying themes and ideologies (Fairclough, 2013). CDA explores how power relations, social inequality, and ideology are embedded in discourse. When combined with qualitative methods, it offers a nuanced understanding of gender representation in educational content (Creswell, 2014).

Theorizing gender and English language textbooks

Textbooks play a significant role in shaping students' knowledge and values; however, they often reinforce gender stereotypes. Benla (2023) found that Moroccan EFL textbooks underrepresent women and portray them in subordinate roles. These findings underscore the need for more balanced and inclusive educational materials to promote gender equality. Gil-Glazer (2020) examined visual critical pedagogy in an Israeli college context, where Arab and Jewish students collaborated on projects to foster critical literacy and cultural representation. The study emphasized the importance of challenging dominant visual narratives and advancing inclusivity. It also highlighted the role of language as both a barrier and a tool for social change. Through these projects, students became more aware of linguistic issues and incorporated both Hebrew and Arabic into their work.

Textbooks often reinforce traditional gender stereotypes by reflecting prevailing societal ideologies. Muzdalifah et al. (2021) analyzed an Indonesian English textbook and found unequal gender representation: males dominated language use and public spaces, while females were portrayed as passive in private settings. However, the textbook included some images that challenged these stereotypes. These findings demonstrate how educational materials can both preserve and contest societal gender norms. In another study, Ebnou (2023) examined four English-language textbooks to explore women's portrayal in Mauritanian society. The study

revealed that women were primarily depicted in household roles, whereas men appeared more frequently in diverse activities. This skewed representation reflects entrenched societal stereotypes despite government policies promoting women's empowerment.

Dabbagh (2016) examined gender representation in Iranian ELT textbooks, focusing on the Prospect series. The study found that males were portrayed as more active and dominant, often shown in close-up frames, whereas females were depicted as submissive and passive, typically in long-shot frames. Women were underrepresented in outdoor settings and frequently depicted indoors in domestic roles, reflecting traditional gender norms. Syarif and Mulyono (2023) investigated cultural representation in Indonesian ELT textbooks, highlighting the need for balanced portrayals of local, target, and international cultures, alongside gender equality. Their study revealed that most visual illustrations emphasized lifestyle, followed by customs, values, holidays, hobbies, and food. Although gender was equally represented in the verbal text, the visuals did not reflect this balance.

Contexts of the study

This study contributes to understanding gender representations and biases in five Islamic countries—Iran, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Syria, and Iraq—highlighting their shared religious foundations alongside distinct historical and political trajectories. In Iran, Islam is embedded in the political system, shaping governance and culture through a unique fusion of religion and state (Arjomand, 1988). Türkiye, by contrast, maintains a secular state structure while Islamic values continue to influence family life and cultural norms, supported by constitutional protections of religious freedom (Ahmad, 2003). Since gaining independence in 1991, Uzbekistan has integrated its Islamic heritage with post-Soviet modernization, maintaining a secular framework while allowing religious values to influence social and political life (Khalid, 2007; Urinboyev, 2023). In Iraq, Islam is deeply ingrained in both cultural and political domains, with Shia–Sunni dynamics shaping public life, though sectarian tensions have complicated its governance (Dodge, 2012; Haddad, 2014). In Syria, Sunni Islam is dominant, defining much of the political and cultural landscape, despite the country's religious diversity (Hinnebusch, 2001). These national differences reflect the varied ways Islam informs societal norms, governance, and gender representations across the region.

Aim of the study

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether government policies are reflected in the visuals of state-published ELT textbooks. Addressing a notable gap in the literature, the study responds to the scarcity of research on gender representation in educational materials within these regions. Employing a comparative methodology, it examined the influence of national laws and sociopolitical practices on visual gender representation and bias. Specifically, the study focused on how gender roles and stereotypes are portrayed in the visual content of ELT textbooks from Iran, Türkiye, Uzbekistan, Iraq, and Syria, and explored the extent to which patriarchal ideologies are embedded in these materials.

METHOD

This study employed comparative content analysis to examine and contrast images from high school ELT textbooks across selected countries. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was applied to the qualitative data, offering a structured framework for identifying underlying themes and discursive patterns (Fairclough, 2013). The study aimed to reveal similarities and differences in the portrayal of social roles, cultural norms, and values (Neuendorf, 2017). In addition, a quantitative analysis of visuals focused on gender, activity, and environment to detect patterns across cultural contexts. This mixed-methods approach facilitated the identification of content discrepancies (Berelson, 1952). This study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover power dynamics, ideologies, and socio-political messages embedded in texts and images (Fairclough, 2013). CDA is particularly valuable in the analysis of educational materials, as it reveals how language and visuals shape students' perceptions of social roles, cultural identities, and power structures (van Dijk, 2008). Integrating CDA with qualitative analysis enabled a deeper investigation of both explicit content and underlying messages. This dual approach aligns with Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional framework, which examines the text, discursive practice, and sociocultural context.

Combining Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provided both breadth and depth in examining the materials. QCA offered an empirical foundation by quantifying and categorizing visual content, making it suitable for cross-national comparisons (Neuendorf, 2017). CDA enriched the analysis by uncovering ideational and interpersonal meanings embedded in the visuals, shaped by socio-political and cultural values (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Sampling and data collection

The data collected from English Language Teaching (ELT) course books from high schools in five countries makes up the materials used in this study, as shown in Table 1. The total number of pages in this dataset was 480 for four state ELT course books from Iran, 362 for three state ELT course books from Türkiye, 306 for three state ELT course books from Iraq, 624 for three state ELT course books from Uzbekistan, and 610 for five state ELT course books from Syria. These textbooks make up an ELT curriculum that is intended to help students in each nation's state high schools with an intermediate level of English language competency.

Table 1

Selected course books

Countries	Iran	Türkiye	Uzbekistan	Iraq	Syria
Books					Emar 10
	Prospect 3	Count me in 10	Fly high 9	English for Iraq 1	Emar 11 literature
	Vision 1	Spice up 11	LSRW 10	English for Iraq 2	Emar 11 scientific
	Vision 2	Count me in 12	LSRW 11	English for Iraq 3	Emar 12 literature
	Vision 3				Emar 12 Scientific
Year of publication	2019	2019 and 2022	2017	2021	2021

The course books were selected based on specific criteria: they target the same educational level, are intended for students within the same age group, and are widely used in secondary education. Cultural and linguistic factors also informed the selection process, as all five countries are predominantly Islamic yet differ linguistically, encompassing Arabic, Persian, Uzbek, and Turkish. These textbooks potentially reflect diverse portrayals of identity and gender, offering a comparative perspective on how each country's cultural values are embedded in educational content. Furthermore, recent educational reforms in these nations have likely influenced the structure and content of the textbooks, while shared regional dynamics continue to shape curriculum design and pedagogical approaches.

Visuals from the course books in this study were collected and analysed using a systematic approach to ensure consistency, reliability, and comparability. The first step involved identifying the types of visuals to be included; all visuals—such as illustrations, photographs, and cartoons—from every chapter of each textbook were examined. For ease of analysis, the PDF versions of the course books were used, and all visuals were manually reviewed and coded. The second step involved determining the analytical themes. This study focused on gender representation and gender bias, analysing both the frequency of visuals depicting each gender and the contextual settings in which they appeared. The primary contextual categories were: inside the home, outside the home, and unspecified locations. Visuals representing outside-the-home contexts were further classified into two subthemes: traditional and non-traditional settings.

Coding and analysis

This study employed qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine visual representations in ELT course books. In this approach, each image was systematically analyzed in context to uncover implicit messages related to gender roles, authority, and cultural norms. CDA offered a framework for interpreting not only the

overt content but also the underlying ideologies and social values that visuals may subtly reinforce or challenge (Fairclough, 2013). This method enabled a deeper understanding of how visual materials in educational texts can either perpetuate or resist traditional social constructs, revealing the ideological underpinnings of seemingly neutral representations.

This Table captures the flow from selecting the visual data through coding, thematic interpretation, and critical synthesis—mirroring the logic of the qualitative CDA process.

Table 2

The flow of selecting the visual data

Steps	Procedure	Description of Procedure	Purpose
1	Data Selection	Collected all visuals (illustrations, photographs) from each book in the sample.	To define the corpus of images for analysis.
2	Contextual Mapping	Noted each image's location (e.g., chapter, page) and accompanying text or lesson context.	To understand situational framing and intended use.
3	Character Coding	Coded individual characters by gender, role, activity, setting, and framing.	To capture how each image constructs gendered roles.
4	Frequency & Distribution Analysis	Tallied occurrences of male vs. female characters, and their roles/activities across the corpus.	To identify frequency imbalances or patterns.
5	Thematic Interpretation	Grouped coded instances into themes (e.g., “domestic caregiving,” “public leadership”).	To reveal dominant and marginalized gender ideologies.
6	Critical Discourse Interpretation	Applied CDA lenses (Fairclough, 2013) to interrogate how visuals reinforce or contest social values.	To surface implicit ideologies and power relations.
7	Alternative Role Modelling	Highlighted images that subvert norms (e.g., women in leadership).	To show how materials could challenge traditional expectations.
8	Synthesis & Reporting	Integrated findings into narrative form, linking back to CDA theory and educational implications.	To articulate insights for researchers and practitioners.

Each visual was analyzed for character portrayal, activity, and context, as these elements often reflect underlying social expectations related to gender. For example, visuals that depict women primarily in domestic roles while portraying men in professional or public settings reinforce traditional gender norms, subtly suggesting that

certain spaces or responsibilities are “appropriate” for each gender (Machin & Mayr, 2012). Such portrayals may reflect societal expectations that prioritize women in caregiving roles, whereas images of women in leadership positions challenge these norms by presenting alternative role models.

The analysis focused specifically on the representation of both male and female characters in visual materials, including illustrations and photographs. It aimed to identify potential gender biases or imbalances by examining the frequency and contextual placement of each gender across the textbooks. By systematically analyzing each image in all the selected course books, the study provides insights into how visual materials convey gender roles and contributes to a broader understanding of gender representation in educational content.

Ethical Procedures

As this study focused exclusively on the visual content of locally published English Language Teaching (ELT) course books and did not involve human participants or the collection of personal data, formal ethical approval was not required. The materials analysed were publicly accessible, and no copyrighted textual or visual content was reproduced, in accordance with the publishers’ copyright statements. The research was conducted in line with ethical standards regarding intellectual property, academic transparency, and responsible data handling.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study adopted credibility-enhancing strategies consistent with qualitative research standards (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After the initial coding and theme development were completed by the researcher, all codes and thematic categorizations were reviewed and validated by a senior academic in the field—two full professors of English language teaching and linguistics with expertise in ELT materials analysis. This process of expert validation, also known as peer debriefing, helped confirm the consistency and interpretive accuracy of the findings (Shenton, 2004). Although quantitative measures such as Cohen’s kappa were not applicable due to the qualitative and interpretive nature of the data, the collaborative review process enhanced the credibility and dependability of the analysis.

RESULTS

To begin, the study examined the frequency of male and female representations in the visual elements of the course books. This analysis quantified how often each gender appeared in illustrations and photographs, offering a measurable indicator of gender visibility in the visual content.

Table 2 presents the distribution of visual representations across four gender-based categories: male, female, male and female together and unrecognized figures.

Table 3

Visuals Illustrating Gender (Frequency and Percentage)

Visuals in textbooks									
	Male		Female		Female & Male		Not recognized		TOTAL
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
Iran	95	63.33%	39	26%	14	9.33%	2	1.34%	150
Türkiye	99	40.57%	75	30.74%	70	28.69%	0	0	244
Uzbekistan	108	50.47%	66	30.84%	37	17.29%	3	1.4%	214
Iraq	141	57.09%	73	29.55%	25	10.12%	5	2.02%	244
Syria	30	42.25%	16	22.54%	21	29.58%	4	5.63%	71

As shown in Table 3, the Iranian course books contained a total of 150 images. The majority of these were male-dominated visuals, accounting for 63.33%. Female-dominated images represented 26.00%, while 9.33% of the visuals featured both male and female figures. Only 1.33% of the images included characters whose gender could not be identified.

In the Turkish course books, a total of 244 visuals were analysed. Male-dominated images made up 40.57% of the total, while female-dominated visuals accounted for 30.74%. Visuals featuring both male and female figures together represented 28.69%. Notably, there were no visuals with unrecognizable gender in the Turkish textbooks.

In Uzbekistan's course books, a total of 214 visuals were analysed. Male figures appeared in 50.47% of the images, while female figures were represented in 30.84%. Visuals depicting both male and female characters together accounted for 17.29%, and 1.40% of the visuals included characters whose gender was unrecognizable.

A total of 244 visuals were identified in the Iraqi course books. Of these, 57.09% featured male figures, 29.55% depicted female figures, and 10.12% showed both genders together. The remaining 2.02% were visuals in which gender could not be determined.

In the Syrian course books, 71 visuals were examined. Male figures appeared in 42.25% of the images, female figures in 22.54%, and both genders together in 29.58%. Unrecognized gender representations accounted for 5.63% of the visuals.

The next phase of the analysis focused on the situational contexts in which male and female characters appeared in the course book visuals. Each image was categorized based on its setting: inside the home, outside the home, or in an unspecified environment. Additionally, visuals depicting outdoor scenes were further classified as either traditional or non-traditional contexts. This categorization was applied systematically to examine the distribution of gender representation across different settings and to quantify the frequency with which each gender appeared in these contexts.

The contextual settings depicted in the course book visuals were presented in separate tables for each country. To ensure clarity in analysis, the contexts were also organized into three distinct tables based on gender representation: one for female characters, one for male characters, and one for visuals featuring both genders together. The frequency of each context type was calculated and reported numerically in each table.

Table 4

Visual Context of the Photos Used in Iranian Course Books for the Genders

Visual context				
Iran				
	Female	Male	Female and male	
	f %	f %	f %	Total
Inside of the house	4 22.22%	12 66.66%	2 11.11%	18 100 %
Outside of the house	21 21.87%	39 56.52%	9 13.04%	69 100 %
Unspecified	14 22.95%	44 72.13%	3 4.91%	61 100 %
Total	39	95	14	

The first country analyzed was Iran, as presented in Table 4. As previously reported, female visuals were fewer in total compared to male visuals. This disparity was further evident when analyzing the contextual distribution.

Female characters were shown in 22.22% of visuals set inside the home, 21.87% outside the home, and 22.95% in unspecified contexts—all lower than the corresponding frequencies for male characters. Additionally, visuals depicting both male and female characters together were even fewer than those showing female characters alone.

Table 5

Visual Context of the Photos Used in Turkish Course Books for the Genders

Visual context				
Türkiye				
	Female	Male	Female and male	
	f %	f %	f %	Total
Inside of the house	12 32.43%	12 32.43%	13 35.13%	37 100%
Outside of the house	28 28%	29 29%	43 43%	100 100%
Unspecified	35 32.71%	58 54.2 %	14 13.08%	107 100%
Total	75	99	70	

According to Table 5, in the Turkish course books, the number of visuals depicting males and females inside the home was equal, each accounting for 32.43%. Visuals featuring both genders together in this context were slightly higher, representing 35.13% of the total. For visuals set outside the home, mixed-gender images were the most frequent at 43%, followed by male-only visuals at 29% and female-only visuals at 28%. In unspecified contexts, male visuals constituted the highest proportion at 54.2%, followed by female visuals at 32.71%, while visuals featuring both genders together accounted for 13.08%.

Table 6

Visual Context of the Photos Used in Uzbek Course Books for the Genders

Visual context				
Uzbekistan				
	Female	Male	Female and male	
	f %	f %	f %	Total
Inside of the house	12 70.58%	5 29.41%	0 0%	17 100%
Outside of the house	24 30.37%	30 37.97%	25 31.64%	79 100%
Unspecified	30 26.09%	73 63.48%	12 10.43%	115 100%
Total	66	108	37	

Table 6 presents the contextual distribution of visuals in Uzbek course books. Notably, there were no images depicting both genders together inside the home (0%). Female visuals accounted for 70.58% of inside-the-home images, surpassing male visuals, which made up 29.41%. Outside the home, male visuals predominated at 37.97%, while females were represented less frequently at 30.37%, and mixed-gender images appeared in 10.43% of visuals. In unspecified contexts, males were the majority at 63.48%, followed by females at 26.09%, with mixed-gender visuals representing 10.43%.

Table 7*Visual Context of the Photos Used in Iraqi Course Books for the Genders*

Visual context				
Iraq				
	Female	Male	Female and Male	Total
	f %	f %	f %	
Inside of the house	11 27.5%	20 50%	9 22.5%	40 100%
Outside of the house	14 23.33%	40 66.66%	6 10.01%	60 100%
Unspecified	48 34.53%	81 58.27%	10 7.2%	139 100%
Total	73	141	25	

Table 7 presents the contextual distribution of visuals in Iraqi course books. Images depicting both males and females together accounted for 22.5% inside the home, 10.01% outside the home, and 7.2% in unspecified contexts—each lower than those representing either males or females alone. Female representations were 27.5% inside the home, 23.33% outside, and 34.53% in unspecified contexts, all of which were lower than male representations. Male visuals dominated across all contexts, comprising 50% inside the home, 66.66% outside the home, and 58.27% in unspecified contexts.

Table 8*Visual Context of the Photos Used in Syrian Course Books for the Genders*

Visual context				
Syria				
	Female	Male	Female and male	Total
	f %	f %	f %	
Inside of the house	0 0%	0 0%	0 0%	0 100%
Outside of the house	6 15%	19 47.5%	15 37.5%	40 100%
Unspecified	10 34.48%	11 37.93%	8 27.59%	29 100%
Total	16	30	21	

According to Table 8, the Syrian course books contained no visuals depicting any gender inside the home (0%). In outside-the-home contexts, male visuals were the most frequent, accounting for 47.5%, followed by mixed-gender images at 37.5%, and female visuals at 15%. In unspecified contexts, males also predominated with 37.93% of the visuals. Female visuals accounted for 34.48%, which was higher than mixed-gender visuals at 27.59%, but still fewer than male representations.

The contexts of the visuals depicting “outside the home” settings were analyzed separately across three tables based on gender representation: female, male, and mixed-gender images. All contexts were listed alphabetically, with repeated contexts noted by their frequency of occurrence. These contexts were categorized according to their physical characteristics, purpose, and the types of interactions they support (Campbell & Reece, 2019; Lynch, 1960; Oke et al., 2017).

Drawing on the influential frameworks of Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and Edward Relph (1976) on cultural landscapes and place categorization, the contexts were classified into six broad categories: (1) Natural Environments

(terrestrial and aquatic), (2) Built (human-made) Environments (urban, rural, industrial, commercial), (3) Specific Purpose Environments (recreational, educational, healthcare), (4) Climate-Based Environments (tropical, temperate, arid, polar), (5) Socio-Cultural Environments (residential and cultural), and (6) Virtual Environments (digital and virtual).

Based on this classification, the contexts were further grouped into traditional and non-traditional environments. Traditional environments are those that have developed over long periods and are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, or natural contexts, often reflecting established ways of life, architecture, and societal norms (Oliver, 2003; Rapoport, 1990). Examples include natural, rural, cultural environments, and educational or religious institutions. In contrast, non-traditional (modern or contemporary) environments are characterized by recent development or transformation, innovation, modern technology, and evolving cultural dynamics (Harvey, 2012; Lefebvre, 2012). Examples include urban, recreational sports complexes, commercial, industrial, virtual, and modern educational and healthcare environments. In the tables, traditional contexts are marked with an asterisk (*) and non-traditional contexts with two asterisks (**).

Table 9

Types of Visual Contexts outside the Domestic Sphere for Females

Outside of the home					
Female					
Iran	Türkiye	Uzbekistan	Iraq	Syria	
Football pitch**	Atelier*	Collage (4)**	Bus (1) *	Hospital**	
Hotel (1)**	Archery field*	Factory (2)**	Camping (2)*	Running	
Laboratory**	Camping*	Hairdresser (4)**	Football pitch	Court**	
Museum*	Fashion show	Jungle*	(3)**	Street (2)**	
Mountain*	(3)**	Library*	Farm (1)*	Sea*	
Post office*	Garden*	Mechanic shop*	Guitar class	School**	
School (12)**	Gym**	Office (8)**	(1)**		
Tennis court**	Hospital**	Restaurant**	Office (2)**		
Workshop (2)**	Jungle (2)*	Shopping mall**	School (3)**		
	Mountain*	School (3)**	Shopping		
	Office**		mall (1)**		
	Restaurant				
	(2)**				
	Street (3) **				
	Shopping mall				
	(4)**				
	Sea (3)*				
	School (2)**				
	University				
	(2)**				
Traditional	3	7	3	1	
Non-traditional	6	9	7	5	
Total	9	16	10	8	

Table 9 presents the contexts used to depict females outside the home, along with the frequency of each context across the five countries. In all countries, non-traditional contexts outnumbered traditional ones. For example, Iranian course books included six non-traditional contexts, Turkish books sixteen, Uzbek books ten, Iraqi books five, and Syrian books four, each exceeding their respective counts of traditional contexts. This indicates a

general tendency across countries to portray females in more modern settings. Educational environments—such as schools, universities, and colleges—were consistently represented in all course books to depict females. Additionally, all countries included at least one sports-related context, such as tennis courts or football pitches. Natural settings were also commonly used to illustrate females in nearly all the textbooks. Among the countries, Türkiye exhibited the greatest variety of scene contexts, followed by Uzbekistan, then Iran and Iraq, with Syria showing the least diversity.

Table 10

Types of Visual Contexts outside the Domestic Sphere for Males

Outside of the home					
Male					
Iran	Türkiye	Uzbekistan	Iraq	Syria	
ATM**	Atelier*	Football**	Airport (2)**	Football	
Fire Stations**	Club**	Gym**	Basketball **	pitch (11)**	
Gym**	Driving*	Hairdresser**	Camping (3)*	Running	
Gift shop**	Dormitory*	Jungle*	Football pitch	(2)**	
Hotel**	Fashion show	Library (4)*	(2)**	Shop (4)**	
Hospital (4)**	(3)**	Office (8)**	Farm *	Swimming	
Information desk	Football pitch	Restaurant	Gym**	pool**	
(2)**	(2)**	(2)**	Mechanic shop*	Sea*	
Jungle*	Gym (2)**	Shopping mall	Office (2)**		
Mountain (2)*	Laboratory**	(3)**	Playground (2)*		
Office (3)**	Mountain (4)*	School (5)**	Park (4)*		
Park*	Office (3)**	Street (3)**	Playground**		
Restaurant**	Park*		Sea *		
School (11)**	Running court**		School (13)**		
Stadium**	Shopping mall**		Shopping mall		
Street (3)**	School (4)**		(2)**		
Sea*	Street**		Village *		
Ticket station**	Volleyball court**		Workshop (3)**		
TV program**	War Zone*				
Volleyball**					
Traditional	4	6	2	7	1
Non-traditional	15	11	8	9	4
Total	19	17	10	16	5

Table 10 shows that, except for Syria where males and females were represented in an equal variety of contexts, male characters appeared in a wider range of situations than female characters in all other countries. In every country except Iraq—where the numbers were roughly equal—males were depicted in non-traditional roles approximately twice as often as females. The most common contexts for males were educational settings, such as schools, and sports environments, each represented by at least three different types of locations. Syria displayed the fewest male contexts (5), while Iran and Türkiye had the most, with 19 and 17 different contexts respectively.

Table 11*Types of Visual Contexts outside the Domestic Sphere for Females and Males*

Outside of the home					
Male and Female					
Iran	Türkiye	Uzbekistan	Iraq	Syria	
Bazaar *	Dancing class**	Bank**	Airport **	Street*	
Bank**	Exhibition**	Competition*	Football pitch	Gym (2)**	
Hotel (2)**	Fitness club**	Clinic**	(2)**	Jungle*	
Jungle*	Fashion show**	Call center**	Jungle *	Park (2)*	
Street (2)**	Gym (3)**	Fashion**	Restaurant**	Studio**	
Workshop**	Homeless camp	Job interview**	Workshop **	School (7)**	
	(2)*	Laboratory (4)**		Yoga**	
	Laboratory**	Office (6)**			
	Library (3)*	School (6)**			
	Nature (4)*	Shopping mall**			
	Orphanage*	University (2)**			
	Opera*				
	Office (3)**				
	Restaurant (3)**				
	Studio (2)**				
	Stadium**				
	Sea*				
	School (8)**				
	Street (2)**				
	Talk show**				
	University**				
	Workshop (2)**				
Traditional	2	6	1	3	
Non-traditional	4	15	4	4	
Total	6	21	5	7	

Table 11 presents the visual contexts in which males and females appear together. Similar to previous tables, non-traditional contexts were more prevalent than traditional ones across all countries. In Iran and Iraq, mixed-gender visuals most frequently depicted educational settings, such as schools, more than in other countries. Nature was the most commonly depicted traditional environment in all countries. Türkiye exhibited the greatest diversity of visual contexts, with 21 distinct settings, followed by Uzbekistan with 11, Syria with 7, Iran with 6, and Iraq with the fewest context varieties.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study examined gender representation in high school ELT course books from Türkiye, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Syria. The findings reveal significant disparities in the visual depiction of males and females, both in quantity and context. Course books from Türkiye and Iraq contained the highest number of images (244 each), followed by Uzbekistan (214), Iran (150), and Syria (71). Across all countries, except Syria, male-dominated visuals outnumbered female-dominated ones. For instance, Uzbek course books featured 50.47% male and 30.84% female images, while Iranian books showed 63.33% male visuals compared to 26.00% female. The low percentage of mixed-gender images—ranging from 9.33% in Iran to 29.58% in Syria—suggests limited commitment to inclusive visual representation.

Drawing on critical discourse theory (Fairclough, 2013), these patterns reflect how educational materials can reproduce dominant ideologies, including traditional gender roles. When visuals repeatedly privilege male figures in public or active contexts and relegate females to private or passive roles, they contribute to symbolic power imbalances (Bourdieu, 1991). Such imbalances are not simply reflective but also constitutive—they help shape learners' internalized notions of what is socially acceptable or achievable for each gender.

Turkish course books presented more balanced representations, whereas Iranian and Uzbek books disproportionately favoured male depictions. These variations may be shaped by national editorial policies,

socio-political norms, or the ideological stance of publishers. However, the consistent underrepresentation of women, particularly in active and public spaces, risks reinforcing stereotypes and limiting the visibility of diverse female role models. This can negatively affect female students' self-perception and aspirations, while reinforcing notions of male dominance and entitlement among male learners. A lack of visuals portraying inter-gender collaboration further reduces opportunities to foster egalitarian thinking.

Contextual analysis also revealed gendered patterns in the spatial distribution of visuals. Iranian course books consistently underrepresented women across all settings—indoors, outdoors, and in unspecified spaces—while Turkish books provided greater gender balance, particularly in mixed-gender scenes. Uzbekistan's materials strongly associated women with domestic roles, and Iraq's visuals overwhelmingly favored men in every context. Notably, Syrian books omitted all visuals depicting indoor spaces altogether, though male figures remained dominant in outdoor and unspecified settings. The minimal presence of mixed-gender visuals across countries reflects a missed opportunity to model cooperative gender relations.

From a social constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is deeply shaped by mediated experiences, including visual texts. When learners repeatedly encounter images that limit one gender's role or visibility, their understanding of social participation is implicitly constrained. Conversely, when visuals present women in non-traditional roles—such as in academic, athletic, or professional settings—they can expand learners' views of gender possibilities. In this study, Turkish course books offered the most diverse range of contexts for female representation, including educational and natural environments, indicating a progressive shift in visual pedagogy. Although Syrian books provided the least diversity, other countries also made some efforts to include women in contemporary, empowered roles.

The study also found that across all countries, images of males and females together were more likely to appear in non-traditional than traditional settings. Educational settings, particularly in Iran and Iraq, were prominently featured for mixed-gender visuals, while natural contexts remained dominant for traditional scenes. However, the range and frequency of these mixed-gender depictions varied significantly: Iraq showed the least contextual diversity, while Türkiye showed the most, followed by Iran, Syria, and Uzbekistan. These inconsistencies highlight the lack of a unified editorial vision for representing collaborative gender roles. Promoting inter-gender collaboration in varied contexts is essential for cultivating respect, empathy, and gender equality.

The practical implications of these findings are profound. Instructional materials that marginalize female figures or present one-dimensional portrayals risk reinforcing systemic inequalities. Curriculum developers and publishers must be more intentional in designing visually inclusive content that aligns with contemporary understandings of gender equity. Integrating mixed-gender visuals in varied roles and settings not only promotes fairness but also supports positive identity formation for all learners. Female students benefit from seeing themselves in roles of leadership, adventure, and intellect, while male students gain exposure to models of cooperation and respect.

It is recommended that stakeholders—such as curriculum developers, textbook publishers, and educational policymakers—prioritize gender-balanced and inclusive visual content in ELT materials. Textbooks should depict both male and female characters in diverse and non-stereotypical roles to promote equity and reflect contemporary social realities. Regular reviews and revisions of materials, guided by critical frameworks like CDA, can help ensure that visual representations do not perpetuate outdated gender norms but instead foster critical awareness and inclusivity among learners.

Finally, this study calls for more theoretically informed design of ELT visuals, grounded in feminist pedagogy (hooks, 1994) and critical media literacy. Feminist pedagogy argues that education must challenge oppressive structures by highlighting and correcting inequality. By integrating more balanced visual representations, educators can empower students to critically examine the media they consume and develop a more equitable worldview. Reducing representational bias in ELT course books is not merely a symbolic gesture; it is a pedagogical imperative that supports inclusive, just, and transformative education.

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Conflict of Interest

The researchers do not have any personal or financial conflicts of interest with other individuals or institutions related to the research.

Author Contribution

The researchers contributed equally to the planning, execution and writing of this study.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Amaç

Bu çalışmanın amacı, cinsiyet temsili ve cinsiyet önyargısı, devlet tarafından yayınlanan İran, Türkiye, Özbekistan, Irak ve Suriye İngilizce dil eğitimi ders kitaplarındaki görsellere yansıtılıp yansıtılmadığını araştırmaktır. Literatürdeki önemli bir boşluğu ele alan çalışma, bu bölgelerdeki eğitim materyallerinde cinsiyet temsili üzerine yapılan araştırmaların yetersizliğine yanıt vermektedir. Karşılaştırmalı bir metodoloji kullanarak, ulusal yasaların ve sosyopolitik uygulamaların görsel cinsiyet temsili ve önyargı üzerindeki etkisini incelemiştir. Çalışma özellikle, İran, Türkiye, Özbekistan, Irak ve Suriye'deki İngilizce dil eğitimi ders kitaplarının görsel içeriğinde cinsiyet rollerinin ve kalıpyargıların nasıl tasvir edildiğine odaklanmıştır ve ataerkil ideolojilerin bu materyallere ne ölçüde yerleştiğini incelemiştir.

Özgün Değer

Bu çalışmanın özgünlüğü ve değeri, farklı kültürel bağlamlardaki eğitim materyallerindeki cinsiyet temsili eleştirel bir şekilde incelenmesinde yatmaktadır. İran, Türkiye, Özbekistan, Irak ve Suriye ders kitaplarındaki cinsiyet tasvirlerini karşılaştırarak, çalışma cinsiyetlerin nasıl tasvir edildiği konusundaki önemli eşitsizlikleri, özellikle de kadınların kamusal ve karma ortamlardaki yetersiz temsiline odaklanarak vurgulamaktadır. Bu, eğitim kaynaklarının geleneksel cinsiyet rollerini nasıl güçlendirebileceğini veya sorgulayabileceğini anlamak için önemli bir katkıdır. Çalışma ayrıca, bu temsillerin özellikle kadınlar için öğrencilerin güçlenmesi ve öz kimliği üzerindeki etkilerine ışık tutmaktadır. Dahası, araştırma, cinsiyet eşitliğini, iş birliğini ve adil toplumsal bakış açılarını teşvik etmek için ders kitaplarında çeşitli, dengeli ve kapsayıcı görsel temsillere olan ihtiyacı vurgulamaktadır. Bu boşlukları ele alarak çalışma, daha adil öğrenme ortamları yaratmak ve eğitim ortamlarındaki yerleşik cinsiyet kalıplarını sorgulamak isteyen politika yapımcılar ve eğitimciler için değerli bilgiler sunmaktadır.

Tasarım ve Yöntem

Bu çalışma da, seçili ülkelerdeki (İran, Türkiye, Özbekistan, Irak ve Suriye) lise İngilizce dili öğretimi ders kitaplarındaki görselleri incelemek ve karşılaştırmak için karşılaştırmalı içerik analizini kullanılmıştır. Nitel verileri analiz etmek için Eleştirel Söylem Analizi (CDA) kullanılmıştır ve temaları ve kalıpları belirlemek için yapılandırılmış bir çerçeve sağlanmıştır (Fairclough, 2013). Çalışma, sosyal rollerin, kültürel normların ve değerlerin tasvirindeki benzerlikleri ve farklılıkları ortaya çıkarmayı amaçlamıştır (Neuendorf, 2017). Kültürel bağlamlar arasında kalıpları belirlemek için cinsiyet, aktivite ve çevreye odaklanarak nicel bir görüntü analizi yapılmıştır. Bu yaklaşım, içerik temsiliindeki tutarsızlıkları tespit etmeye yardımcı olmuştur (Berelson, 1952).

Bu çalışma, metinlerdeki ve görsellerdeki güç dinamiklerini, ideolojileri ve sosyo-politik mesajları ortaya çıkarmak için Eleştirel Söylem Analizini (CDA) kullanmıştır (Fairclough, 2013). CDA, dilin ve görsellerin öğrencilerin sosyal roller, kültürel kimlikler ve güç anlayışlarını nasıl şekillendirdiğini ortaya koyduğu için özellikle eğitim materyallerinde faydalıdır (Van Dijk, 2008). CDA'yı nitel analizle birleştirmek, içerikteki hem yüzeysel anlamların hem de gizli mesajların daha derinlemesine araştırılmasına olanak sağlamıştır. Bu ikili yaklaşım, Fairclough'un (2013) metni, söylemsel uygulamayı ve sosyokültürel bağlamı inceleyen üç boyutlu çerçevesiyle uyumludur. Nitel Karşılaştırmalı Analizi (QCA) Eleştirel Söylem Analiziyle (CDA) birleştirmek, incelenen materyallerin hem geniş hem de derin bir perspektifini sağlamıştır. QCA, içeriği nitelleştirerek ve kategorize ederek ampirik bir temel sundu ve bu da onu ülkeler arası karşılaştırmalar için ideal hale getirmiştir (Neuendorf, 2017).

Bulgular

Bu çalışma, İran, Türkiye, Özbekistan, Irak ve Suriye'deki ders kitaplarında cinsiyet temsiline dair farklılıkları incelemektedir. Türkiye'deki ders kitapları daha dengeli bir cinsiyet temsili sunarken, İran ve Özbekistan'da erkekler belirgin şekilde daha fazla temsil edilmektedir. Bu dengesizlikler; editoryal kararlar, kültürel etkiler ya da yayıncıların öncelikleriyle ilişkili olabilir. Erkeklerin aşırı temsili, geleneksel cinsiyet kalıplarını pekiştirirken,

kadınların özellikle kamusal ve karma ortamlarda az temsil edilmesi, kadın öğrencilerin güçlenme ve özdeşim duygularını zayıflatabilir.

Kadınların yetersiz, erkeklerin ise her bağlamda baskın olarak sunulması, öğrencilere sınırlı rol modeller sunmakta ve kapsayıcı eğitim ortamlarını engellemektedir. Erkek öğrenciler bu temsiller aracılığıyla ayrıcalık ya da üstünlük fikrini içselleştirebilir. Irak, karma cinsiyet tasviri için görsel bağlamların en az çeşitliliğine sahipken, Türkiye en fazla çeşitliliğe sahip olup bunu İran, Suriye ve Özbekistan takip etmektedir. Karma cinsiyetli temsillerin ve çeşitli sosyal bağlamların eksikliği, toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini ve iş birliğini teşvik eden mesajların öğrenciler arasında yayılmasını zorlaştırmaktadır.

Araştırma, tüm ülkelerde geleneksel bağlamlarda çekilmiş görsellerin hala yaygın olduğunu, ancak Türkiye'nin karma cinsiyetli görsellerde en fazla çeşitliliği sunduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Irak ise bu alanda en az çeşitliliğe sahiptir. Sonuç olarak, ders kitaplarında daha dengeli ve çeşitli cinsiyet temsillerinin sağlanması, öğrencilerin adil ve kapsayıcı toplumsal cinsiyet anlayışı geliştirmesi açısından büyük önem taşımaktadır. Bu temsiller, toplumsal rollerin yeniden şekillenmesinde ve eşitlikçi değerlerin yaygınlaşmasında kilit rol oynamaktadır.

Sınırlılıklar

Bu çalışma, tek bir konu alanı olan dil ders kitapları içindeki görsel temsillere odaklandığı ve farklı cinsiyet tasviri kalıpları sunabilecek diğer disiplinleri kapsam dışı bıraktığı için kapsamı sınırlıdır. Ayrıca, araştırma yalnızca beş ülkeden ders kitapları içermektedir ve bu da bulguların daha geniş eğitimsel veya kültürel bağlamlara genellenmesi olanağını kısıtlamaktadır. Çalışma ayrıca, zaman içindeki tarihsel değişiklikleri incelemeyen mevcut ders kitabı baskılarını analiz etmekte ve bu kapsamda, zaman içinde cinsiyet temsiline ilişkin değişimler ele alınmamaktadır.

Öneriler

Bu çalışmanın bulguları önemli teorik, pratik ve sosyal çıkarımlar taşımaktadır. Pratikte araştırma, müfredat tasarımcılarının ve ders kitabı yayıncılarının toplumsal cinsiyet eşitliğini yansıtan görsel olarak kapsayıcı materyallere öncelik vermeleri gerektiğinin altını çizmektedir. Hem erkek hem de kadın figürlerini çeşitli, basmakalıp olmayan rollerde temsil etmek, dengeli kimlik gelişimini destekler ve yerleşik toplumsal cinsiyet normlarına meydan okumaktır. Sosyal açıdan kapsayıcı görseller, tüm cinsiyetlerden öğrencilerin kendilerini güçlendirilmiş ve çeşitli rollerde görebilecekleri daha eşitlikçi sınıflara katkıda bulunmaktadır. Teorik olarak çalışma, ELT materyal tasarımının, eşitsizlikle aktif olarak mücadele eden bir eğitimi gerektiren pedagoji ve eleştirel medya okuryazarlığı gibi çerçevelerde temellendirilmesinin önemini vurgulamaktadır. Bu yaklaşımları uygulayarak eğitimciler ve politika yapımcılar eleştirel düşünmeyi teşvik edebilir, temsili önyargılara meydan okuyabilir ve saygı, iş birliği ve toplumsal adaleti teşvik eden öğrenme ortamları yaratabilirler. Sonuç olarak, ELT görsellerindeki toplumsal cinsiyet önyargılarını ele almak yalnızca içerik doğruluğunu iyileştirmekle ilgili değil, aynı zamanda daha adil, daha düşünceli ve dönüştürücü eğitim deneyimleri geliştirmekle de ilgilidir.