

REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
ÇUKUROVA UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

**AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPING
IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION AND APPEARANCE IN SECONDARY
SCHOOL EFL COURSEBOOKS PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF
NATIONAL EDUCATION**

Güneş ÇOKAÇAR

MASTER OF ARTS

ADANA / 2025

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MASTER OF ARTS

ADANA / 2025

To the Directorship of the Institute of Social Sciences, ukurova University

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I certify that this thesis conforms to the formal standards of the Institute of Social Sciences./....../2025

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Güneş ÇOKAÇAR

ABSTRACT**AN ANALYSIS OF GENDER REPRESENTATION AND STEREOTYPING IN
TERMS OF OCCUPATION AND APPEARANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL
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NATIONAL EDUCATION****Güneş ÇOKAÇAR****Master of Arts, English Language Teaching****Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Erdoğan BADA****May 2025, 113 pages**

This study examines gender representation and stereotyping in English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. By focusing on the portrayal of professions and physical appearance, the research evaluates how gender roles are depicted and whether they align with principles of equality and inclusivity. By using a content analysis methodology, the study categorizes and quantifies representations of male and female characters in terms of their occupations, roles, and visual depictions. Findings reveal significant disparities in gender representation, with male characters predominantly occupying high-status professions and active roles, while female characters are often relegated to caregiving or passive positions. Additionally, stereotypical depictions of appearance—such as associating women with beauty and men with strength—further reinforce traditional gender norms. The absence of non-binary or gender-diverse individuals highlights a lack of inclusivity. This analysis underscores the persistence of gender stereotypes in educational materials, which may influence students' perceptions of societal roles and opportunities. Recommendations are provided to promote gender-balanced and inclusive representations in future coursebook designs, contributing to a more equitable learning environment.

Keywords: Gender representations, gender stereotypes, gender-based prejudices, gender roles, textbook evaluation, content analysis.

ÖZET

MİLLÎ EĞİTİM BAKANLIĞI TARAFINDAN YAYIMLANAN ORTAOKUL İNGİLİZCE DERS KİTAPLARINDA CİNSİYET TEMSİLİ VE STEREOTİPLERİN MESLEK VE DIŞ GÖRÜNÜM AÇISINDAN ANALİZİ

Güneş ÇOKAÇAR

Yüksek Lisans Tezi, İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı

Danışman: Prof. Dr. Erdoğan BADA

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Bu çalışma, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı tarafından yayımlanan 6, 7 ve 8. sınıf İngilizce Öğretmenliği (ELT) ders kitaplarında cinsiyet temsili ve kalıp yargıları incelemektedir. Mesleklerin tasvirine ve fiziksel görünümüne odaklanan araştırma, toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin nasıl tasvir edildiğini ve bunların eşitlik ve kapsayıcılık ilkeleriyle uyumlu olup olmadığını değerlendiriyor. İçerik analizi metodolojisi kullanan bu çalışma, erkek ve kadın karakterlerin temsillerini mesleklerine, rollerine ve görsel tasvirlerine göre kategorilere ayırıyor ve ölçüyor. Bulgular, erkek karakterlerin ağırlıklı olarak yüksek statülü meslekleri ve aktif rolleri işgal ettiği, kadın karakterlerin ise sıklıkla bakıcı veya pasif pozisyonlara düşürüldüğü cinsiyet temsiliinde önemli eşitsizlikleri ortaya koyuyor. Ayrıca, kadınları güzellikle ve erkekleri güçle ilişkilendirmek gibi kalıplaşmış görünüm tasvirleri, geleneksel cinsiyet normlarını daha da güçlendiriyor. İkili olmayan veya cinsiyet çeşitliliğine sahip bireylerin yokluğu, kapsayıcılık eksikliğini vurguluyor. Bu analiz, eğitim materyallerinde öğrencilerin toplumsal roller ve fırsatlara ilişkin algılarını etkileyebilecek cinsiyet stereotiplerinin kalıcılığının altını çizmektedir. Gelecekteki ders kitabı tasarımlarında cinsiyet dengeli ve kapsayıcı temsillerin teşvik edilmesi ve daha eşitlikçi bir öğrenme ortamına katkıda bulunulması için öneriler sunulmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Cinsiyet temsilleri, cinsiyet kalıpları, cinsiyete dayalı önyargılar, cinsiyet rolleri, ders kitabı değerlendirmesi, içerik analizi.

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ABBREVIATIONS

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

SGD: Sustainable Development Goals



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0. Introduction

As a general outline of the study, this chapter consists of the background of the study, a statement of the problem, research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations, and the definition of key terms.

1.1. Background to the Study

Thanks to the coursebooks, students not only gain course achievements but also gain knowledge about the world, such as lifestyle, culture, and society. Students need to know the society, culture, and world they live in, along with the course achievements. Still, this issue makes the use of language, concepts, and sociological elements so significant for preparing textbooks. It is an understandable desire that coursebooks should fairly describe society and cover it with all its diversity as students acknowledge them to present the pure reality (Elçin, 2022). Therefore, analysis research on coursebooks has gained great importance in recent years. Based on this point, this research aimed to analyze the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English coursebooks prepared by the Ministry of National Education in terms of gender representations under the headings of profession and appearance.

The reason why the research is discussed under these headings is that prejudice against gender roles, conflict between gender roles, and appearance stereotypes are still among the most important sociological problems in world societies. Gender representations in English Language Teaching (ELT) materials have been the subject of inquiry in research studies because not only learners but also teachers are exposed to the ideological content, gender-biased representations, and stereotypical features of these materials. Undoubtedly, these stereotypical features have an inevitable impact on both learners' and teachers' values, behaviors, worldviews, and mindsets (Söğüt, 2018). In all these aspects, our research aims to ensure that the materials of our field are sufficient to ensure that future adults are more aware individuals and that it detects and draws attention to prejudices regarding gender representations.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

A considerable body of research has been dedicated to evaluating language course books, with a particular focus on identifying the presence and representation of cultural dimensions within these materials (Taş, 2010; Nemati, 2009; Roshan, 2014; Celik & Erbay, 2013; Rajabi & Ketabi, 2012). However, the issue of gender representation in course books remains insufficiently explored and has yet to be comprehensively addressed.

Despite increasing global awareness of gender equality, the representation of gender in educational materials, particularly coursebooks, often perpetuates stereotypes and biases. Coursebooks play a significant role in shaping students' understanding of societal norms and gender roles. Yet, studies reveal that they frequently underrepresent women and gender-diverse individuals while reinforcing traditional, patriarchal perspectives.

This imbalance not only limits the visibility of diverse gender identities but also impacts students' perceptions of what they can achieve based on their gender. Furthermore, the lack of equitable representation in coursebooks undermines efforts to foster inclusive and empowering learning environments.

The problem lies in the persistent portrayal of men in dominant, active roles, while women are often depicted in subordinate, passive, or domestic roles. Non-binary and other gender-diverse individuals are rarely included, contributing to their erasure in educational contexts. This reinforces stereotypes, restricts critical thinking about gender norms, and fails to prepare students for a diverse and equitable society.

This study seeks to explore the extent and nature of gender representation in coursebooks, identify underlying biases, and provide recommendations for developing more inclusive educational materials that reflect gender diversity and equality.

1.3. Research Questions

This research aims to find answers to these questions:

1. How are gender representations handled in the texts and exercises of the 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade English coursebooks published and used by the Turkish Ministry of National Education in terms of occupational roles?

2. How are genders represented in the written content of the coursebooks in terms of appearance in the texts and images of the 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade English books used by the Turkish Ministry of National Education?
3. Are occupation and appearance stereotypes encountered in the texts and images of the 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade English books used by the Turkish Ministry of National Education?

1.4. The Significance of the Study

The field of foreign language teaching, unlike other fields, includes phenomena such as culture, lifestyle, and social sphere. Therefore, our field needs to ensure that all these facts are conveyed to students, producing content and materials appropriate to the human factor and life of the facts. Based on this, the place and importance of coursebooks, which are the most effectively used materials in the teaching process, cannot be discussed. For this reason, we decided to consider this fact in our research and analyze the coursebooks on how they deal with gender representations in terms of profession, which are the most important of these social phenomena.

Gender identity, as one of the components of individual identity, determines ‘female’ roles for women and ‘male’ roles for men. These roles constitute the behaviors, attitudes, interests, and skills that a culture considers appropriate for males and females (Şeker&Dinçer, 2014). Another reason why this research is important for the field is that social and cultural phenomena are always dynamic and changing. At this point, conducting such studies frequently and updating the contents is also so significant for the foreign language education process to remain current and interesting. As in the role of schools in forming gender perceptions, teaching materials, especially coursebooks, which are a significant part of curriculum and course development, have an impact on gender perceptions (Acar, 2021).

In our research, another topic we analyze is the contents of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English coursebooks prepared by the Ministry of National Education in terms of physical appearance stereotypes. In our research, in addition to focusing on gender representations based on occupational analysis, another issue we focus on is physical appearance stereotypes. When it comes to gender representation, physical appearance patterns are the first thing that comes to mind. According to Acar (2021), all these psychological theories of gender identity development and gender roles give females and

males gender-stereotyped traits, role behaviors, physical characteristics, and occupations that affect men and women differently. For example, women are expected to work in domestic and less interesting jobs, to be passive, cooperative, caretakers, beautiful, slim, and attractive.

In contrast, men are expected to do various adventurous, interesting, and socially respectable jobs, to be aggressive and competitive. They do not need to look after themselves and pay attention to their physical appearance. Considering these aspects, the fact that our research deals with gender representation under two different headings also offers the opportunity to be a more effective analysis study.

1.5. Limitations

This research is confined to the analysis of 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade English language teaching (ELT) coursebooks published by the Ministry of National Education for secondary schools during the 2023-2024 academic year.

Additionally, the study focuses solely on the ELT coursebooks used in public schools and published by the Ministry. As a result, it does not encompass all ELT coursebooks used in schools across Türkiye. However, future research could extend the analysis to include coursebooks from grades 1 to 5 and 9 to 12, examining gender representations across a broader range of educational materials.

Furthermore, this study does not cover coursebooks published by private local publishers or those produced by the international market. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to the gender representations found in such materials. A larger sample size could provide a more comprehensive perspective on the portrayal of gender in coursebooks.

During the visual content analysis, certain methodological limitations were encountered. One of the primary challenges arose from the difficulty in identifying the gender of some characters in the illustrations due to ambiguous visual features. As a result, these images were excluded from the analysis.

1.6. Definition of Terms

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0. Introduction

As in all other fields, coursebooks are the primary materials used in teaching the English language. Today, countless coursebooks prepared with different content and methods are used by English teachers in schools all over the world. While preparing all these books, the most important thing to consider is, of course, the plan to convey the subject to be taught to the student in the most effective way. While preparing coursebooks, the fact that teachers teach the current course subjects in the most effective and planned manner and the fact that students learn the subjects in an easy, pleasant, and permanent manner are taken into account (Yapıcı, 2016).

Factors that make a coursebook effective include visual symbols, comprehensive reading passages, appropriate approaches, and gradual grammatical elements. However, what coursebooks provide to students is not limited to the field in which they are prepared. Coursebooks prepared especially for fields that are social sciences, such as foreign languages, can raise students' awareness of many issues, such as society, culture, and lifestyle. Otherwise, when these elements are not taken into consideration and not planned, it may limit students or cause them to have wrong perceptions. Nowadays, having a sufficient number and quality workforce to overcome problems is possible with an education system that processes data very well, catches the era, and is efficient and even more efficient (Yapıcı, 2016).

Based on all these expansions, in our research, professions and physical appearance were chosen as two headings that could be decisive in understanding the perspective on gender roles.

Gender discrimination is still a hot debate running in the periphery of education. One way it is imposed on students is through printed materials and coursebooks, particularly those used for foreign language teaching, given their rich linguistic content and content-based nature (Demir&Yavuz, 2017). Age, social class, and gender, as represented in coursebooks, are studied because teachers and students are exposed to many words and images that affect their knowledge, perceptions, and worldviews (Arıkan, 2005).

Coursebooks have long been the cornerstone of English language teaching, serving as the primary instructional materials in classrooms worldwide. They provide a structured syllabus, ready-made content, and activities that guide both teachers and learners through the curriculum. Effective coursebooks are carefully designed to present language topics in a logical progression while engaging students. For example, Yapıcı (2016) emphasizes that coursebook development should enable teachers to teach lessons in a well-planned, systematic manner and help students learn new topics easily, enjoyably, and durably. Key features often include rich visual aids, comprehensive reading passages, age-appropriate topics, and a gradation of grammatical structures that build on prior knowledge. Such elements not only facilitate comprehension but also make learning more enjoyable, thereby enhancing retention. As a result, a quality coursebook can function as both a guide for instructors and a learning scaffold for students, ensuring that educational content is delivered in the most effective way possible. Indeed, Hutchinson and Torres (1994) famously describe the textbook as an “agent of change,” arguing it has a “vital and positive part to play” in day-to-day EFL teaching. In practice, teachers rely on coursebooks to sequence their lessons and provide consistency, while students often treat them as authoritative sources of knowledge and language usage.

However, the influence of coursebooks extends beyond linguistic objectives. Modern ELT coursebooks are not just language manuals; they also embody cultural and social information woven into dialogues, readings, and illustrations. As such, these materials inevitably impart certain worldviews, values, and assumptions to learners along with language skills. The content choices—ranging from the professions depicted in reading texts to the personalities and appearances of characters in dialogues—can subtly shape students’ perceptions of the world. This dual role of coursebooks (teaching language and conveying culture) means that materials developers carry a significant responsibility: they must plan not only for effective language instruction but also consider the broader messages their content may send to young learners. In sum, ELT coursebooks are powerful tools in education, and their design involves balancing pedagogical effectiveness with mindful content selection to foster positive learning experiences.

Because coursebooks are so ubiquitous and influential, researchers have increasingly scrutinized their ideological and social content. It is now widely recognized that no textbook is truly “neutral” – the themes, images, and examples included (and omitted) reflect particular cultural norms and perspectives. As Kramsch (2000) noted, ELT materials need to be evaluated not just for linguistic adequacy but also for their

cultural and social dimensions. The hidden curriculum – the implicit messages and values transmitted through educational content – is a key concept in this regard. Textbooks often subtly promote certain beliefs or stereotypes about society, sometimes unintentionally, through the way they portray social roles, lifestyles, families, and more. For instance, coursebooks in the past have tended to highlight life in Western, middle-class settings, implicitly presenting those lifestyles as the norm for English speakers. Similarly, the inclusion or exclusion of topics like ethnic diversity, social class differences, or non-traditional family structures can signal to students what is considered important or “normal.” In language learning contexts, the target culture embedded in textbooks can even serve as a form of cultural influence or “cognitive imperialism,” affecting learners’ identities and worldviews. In this way, ELT coursebooks contribute to shaping learners’ social awareness and attitudes, whether intentionally or not.

One critical area of ideological content in coursebooks is how they handle issues of equality and diversity. When well-designed, textbooks can raise students’ awareness of social issues, promote tolerance, and provide a window into diverse cultures and ways of life. For example, a foreign language coursebook might include readings about various countries, dialogues illustrating respectful interpersonal communication, or units discussing different careers and contributions of people across genders and backgrounds. Such content can broaden students’ horizons and encourage critical thinking about society. Yapıcı (2016) underscores that, especially in social science-related subjects like language learning, coursebooks can increase students’ awareness of topics of “society, culture, and lifestyle,” preparing them to be informed global citizens. In contrast, if these elements are neglected or presented in a biased way, coursebooks may reinforce limited worldviews or propagate misconceptions. Unplanned or insensitive content can inadvertently instill stereotypes—for instance, always showing a certain group of people in subordinate roles or trivializing certain cultures. Arıkan (2005) explains that age, social class, and gender are examined in coursebook analyses precisely because students are exposed to many words and images that affect their knowledge, perceptions, and worldviews. In other words, what children repeatedly see in their textbooks can influence how they understand societal roles and their own place in society. If a hidden curriculum of bias exists, it can shape students’ attitudes in negative ways; conversely, a thoughtfully crafted hidden curriculum can promote equality and open-mindedness.

Multiple scholars have cautioned that the ideological content of textbooks needs careful oversight. Cunningsworth (1995), for example, included social representation as

a criterion in coursebook evaluation, warning that materials can “transmit and strengthen stereotypical thinking” if injustices or imbalances in representation go unnoticed. When coursebooks portray a narrow slice of society, students who do not see themselves or their communities reflected may feel alienated or undervalued. Conversely, students may internalize an overly narrow set of role models or life ambitions based on what the book portrays as typical. Thus, the social impact of ELT coursebooks is significant: these books can either challenge or reinforce existing social norms. A well-known case is in national curricula where official textbooks were revised to reduce bias – for instance, following education reforms, some countries issued guidelines to eliminate sexist or racist depictions in school books (e.g., Arslan 2000 in Turkey, as cited by Şeker & Dinçer 2014). The goal of such interventions is to ensure textbooks contribute to equity and modern values, aligning with the idea that a quality education system must “catch the era” and produce a well-informed, open-minded workforce (Yapıcı, 2016). Overall, the consensus in the literature is that content matters: beyond teaching English, coursebooks implicitly teach students about society. This reality has led to a growing body of research examining one particular facet of ideological content in ELT coursebooks – their representation of gender roles, which is a focus of the present study.

Gender bias in educational materials has been a subject of investigation for decades, and ELT coursebooks are no exception. Early studies in the late 20th century revealed clear patterns of gender inequality in language textbooks. Hartman and Judd (1978), in a landmark review of ESL materials, found that women were significantly underrepresented and depicted mostly in stereotypical roles. In the textbooks they analyzed, female characters appeared far less frequently than male characters (in one case, only 27% of characters were female) and were largely confined to traditional occupations (e.g., homemaker or nurse), whereas male characters held a wide variety of jobs and more dominant social positions. They also observed linguistic bias, such as the pervasive use of masculine generic terms (using “he/man” to represent all people). Such imbalances were not isolated findings. Porreca’s (1984) extensive analysis of 15 ESL textbooks used in the United States similarly concluded that “sexism continues to flourish in ESL textbooks”, with females appearing only half as often as males in both text and illustrations. Porreca documented several problem areas: women’s absence or low visibility in content, male-first ordering in dialogues and sentences, a lack of female protagonists, gender-stereotyped occupations, and the use of male-oriented language forms. She noted the paradox that although women make up half the population, they

were far from half the representation in these educational materials. These early studies established a baseline understanding that many ELT coursebooks (especially older or traditionally written ones) contained significant gender biases, often reflecting and perpetuating patriarchal norms of the time.

Subsequent research through the 1990s and 2000s reaffirmed that gender representation issues in textbooks were a global concern. Studies from various countries and contexts echoed similar themes. In Greece, for example, primary textbooks updated with gender-equality principles still showed women in only 13.6% of paid work depictions versus 53.2% for men. In Iran, Ansary and Babaii (2003) examined local high school English books and found that women “suffered from low visibility”, with female-to-male ratios around 1:1.4 in text and 1:1.6 in images. They also reported that dialogue topics were mostly male-centric. Numerous other content analyses – in Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and elsewhere – found recurring patterns of imbalance: men dominating conversations and story roles, women frequently portrayed in domestic or supportive roles, and traits ascribed to each gender following traditional stereotypes (e.g. men as active or assertive, women as passive or nurturing). Blumberg’s (2008) cross-national review of textbook sexism notes that such biases, if left unchecked, contribute to the “hidden curriculum” by normalizing gender inequality as part of children’s everyday learning environment. Crucially, the impact of these representations is not trivial. When female students rarely see women as doctors, scientists, or leaders in their learning materials, it can subtly constrain their ambitions and self-concept. Demir and Yavuz (2017) argue that persistent traditional portrayals can lead to female learners being “constrained in their social, behavioural, and linguistic roles,” making them feel excluded or inferior. Over time, this can erode self-esteem and participation. Likewise, male students constantly seeing men in dominant roles may internalize a limiting view of women’s capabilities or develop inflated expectations of their own dominance. Thus, the gender messages in textbooks potentially influence students’ attitudes and confidence, even if the curriculum does not overtly address those issues.

Given these concerns, there has been a push in recent years to produce gender-fair ELT coursebooks. Some positive developments are evident. Certain educational authorities and publishers have revised materials to better balance the number of female and male characters and to avoid sexist language. In Türkiye, for instance, the Yes You Can high school coursebook series (published by the Ministry of Education) was examined by Demir and Yavuz (2017) as a case study. Their analysis, which looked at

both textual and visual content across multiple gender-related categories, found no major indications of gender inequality in that series. Females and males were represented in roughly equal proportions and with comparably diverse roles, which the authors cite as a “glimmer of hope” for new-generation coursebooks. Such findings suggest that increased awareness and deliberate content planning can result in ELT materials that portray gender roles more equitably. Indeed, contemporary global coursebooks from major publishers now often feature female characters as scientists, entrepreneurs, or adventurers, and include unit themes like inspiring women in history, in an effort to break stereotypes.

Despite these improvements, scholarship indicates that progress is uneven and issues linger. Some recent studies continue to uncover subtle gender biases in widely used textbooks. Şeker and Dinçer (2014) analyzed several international ELT coursebooks (e.g., *Speak Out*, *Outcomes*) and found that, while overt sexism was less common, there were still stereotypical patterns: men were mentioned more frequently than women overall, and certain domains skewed heavily male or female. In their content analysis, males were disproportionately represented in professions related to science, politics, business, and law enforcement, whereas females appeared more often in nurturing or educational roles. Women were often described with adjectives focusing on physical appearance (e.g., “pretty,” “slim”) or relational qualities, while men received more descriptors of strength and intellect. These subtler biases can easily go unnoticed by casual readers but still reinforce gendered expectations. A very recent large-scale comparative study by Dahmardeh et al. (2025) examined 64 ELT coursebooks across seven Middle Eastern countries and, unfortunately, found that a clear gender imbalance persists in that region. Males in those books were frequently shown in dominant, diverse roles in public life, whereas females were often limited to stereotypical domestic or supportive roles. Biased language and imagery were “woven throughout” many materials, which, as the authors caution, may affect how students view themselves and their possibilities in society. These findings highlight that while some books have become more egalitarian, others have not yet caught up, and the issue of gender representation in ELT materials remains a “hot debate” in education.

In light of the mixed state of current coursebooks, this literature suggests several important implications. First, continuous vigilance is required: teachers and material selectors should critically evaluate the content of textbooks before adopting them, rather than assuming all modern books are bias-free. Tools and checklists for textbook evaluation (e.g., those proposed by Littlejohn, Cunningsworth, and others) often include

sections on societal values and stereotyping, which can help in identifying problematic or one-sided representations. Second, there is a pedagogical opportunity to engage learners with these topics. Some scholars advocate using instances of gender bias in texts (when they exist) as teachable moments – for example, having students discuss or rewrite a biased dialogue to be more fair, thereby raising critical language awareness. Lastly, the literature exposes certain gaps that researchers are now aiming to address. While many prior studies have quantified gender representation (counting male and female characters, occupations, etc.), fewer have delved into qualitative aspects such as the quality of portrayals or intersectional issues (how gender intersects with age, ethnicity, or social class in textbooks). There is also a need for updated analyses as new coursebook editions are released, to see if claimed improvements are consistently implemented. The present study is situated in this context. By focusing on two specific facets of representation – professions and physical appearance – it attempts to shed light on how contemporary ELT coursebooks portray gender roles in these domains. These categories were chosen because they are highly visible indicators of gender stereotypes (who does what job? what do men and women look like?) and thus provide a litmus test for bias or progress. As outlined above, research has shown that professions depicted in texts and the described appearances of characters can carry powerful implicit messages. If, for instance, a coursebook only ever shows men as engineers or always describes women's appearance in terms of beauty, students may internalize those stereotypes. By examining such patterns in current materials, this study aims to determine whether the ideological content of ELT coursebooks is moving towards greater gender equality or still replicating old biases. In doing so, it builds on the existing literature and addresses the enduring question: Do our English teaching materials reflect the equitable society we aspire to, or the biased one we seek to leave behind?

Nowadays, after talking about the globalizing world for years, the declining world is being talked about frequently; it is one of our most basic duties to raise the awareness of our students that will revitalize the world with the materials we, as educators, have prepared. For this reason, evaluating and optimizing coursebooks under many headings is very important for all field educators and all nations of the world. In support of this, Hafizi (2020) claims that “Our social interactions are influenced in no small degree by our interpersonal features and other characteristics, including our physical appearance, gender, attitudes, or other traits. Learning a second or foreign language as these interpersonal features and characteristics influence social action.

The process of teaching and learning conveys a variety of elements that shape and affect the process and the results.” In our research, coursebooks prepared for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades in the field of English language education for the 2023-2024 academic year by the Ministry of National Education will be discussed. According to Aykaç (2012), “Although schools that are the means of educational systems have the power to change the gender-related patterns and establish an equal structure for both genders, they do not fulfill this function fully.

One of the factors consolidating gender discrimination in the educational system is the educational programs implemented by the government and the dominant ideology to create the desired human type. This is mostly because the educational programs aim to maintain traditional values.” The main purpose of our research is to determine whether there are findings in this direction in the English coursebooks prepared by the Ministry of National Education.

Therefore, we can say that feminist theory is an important basis for our research. The field of academic research is concerned with the link between gender and science and highlights the transformative power of the latter (Demir&Yavuz, 2017). To mention the previous studies, the findings obtained in the analysis of English coursebooks published by the Ministry of National Education in 2013 under the title of gender show that there are differences between females and males in particular categories analyzed through the study.

One similarity with the other studies conducted is that males were found to be more dominant than females in categories such as frequency of occurrences and occupations (Bilgin, 2013). Another research also shows that it is seen that the significant, critical, high-status occupations are mostly represented by male characters, and the underlying message of the coursebooks says that the big income earners, decision-makers, and powerful people in society are males. On the contrary, the low-status, subservient occupations or occupations that require a caring nature and handcraft are performed by females (Elçin, 2022). These results are a warning for the urgent review and updating of national education English coursebooks, which occupy an important place in the literature of our field. Any problem regarding education cannot be postponed and may cause serious problems. The issue we want to draw attention to is, as Aykaç (2012) said, from this perspective, the educational institutions that are expected to free individuals from certain patterns and judgments may serve a counter-function by means of gender-discriminatory educational programs and course materials.

2.1. Gender Representations

The biggest difference between the individuals that make up the society is their gender. Gender discrimination and women and the state of being a man are images determined through biological factors. "Woman or man, in common use in daily language, refers to the individual's biological being female /female/ or male [male]. When it comes to gender, /woman/female and /man/ or male are two terms that express being a man or woman who gains meaning within the system of roles that society offers to the individual (Vatandaş, 2007). Therefore, every factor shaping society as lifestyle, ethnic factors, social perspective, and historical accumulation, gender differences, cannot be ignored. Gender is the individual's experience of living in a society shaped by her and the gender roles that society imposes on her. It is a building. Gender provides us with the requirements of society and the lifestyle we live in. The set of roles shaped by the social dimension of gender image is often neglected.

Research focusing on the field of gender makes socio-cultural expansions on the concepts of men and women. In this way, awareness can be raised about the roles that gender roles of male and female images impose on individuals in society. As in all other areas, language is the element that best reflects the gender perception of the society we live in.

For centuries, culture has been an integral part of language. Even in foreign language education, the importance of teaching culture as a whole with language cannot be denied. The classes in language and culture aim at improving one's understanding of the language and the people who speak it. Trained to be prospective teachers of English, for students of ELT, studying English culture is not an arbitrary but a necessary activity (Bada&Genç, 2005). In this regard, proverbs, idioms, and stereotyped expressions, which are the best representatives of world languages and cultures, are the most frequently used topics in examining the socio-cultural expansion of many cultural and social images, such as gender in different human groups. Language is the mirror of society.

Gender representation is also an important topic in discussions about equality, diversity, and inclusion. It examines how different genders are portrayed and included across various contexts, such as media, workplaces, politics, education, and culture. Below are some key points often discussed:

1. Gender Representation in Media

Media portrayals in Türkiye have long perpetuated traditional gender stereotypes, which in turn shape the perceptions of children and youth. Studies indicate that Turkish television, from melodramatic TV series to children's cartoons, often reinforces patriarchal norms. For example, popular Turkish soap operas tend to depict "stereotypical gender representations, reinforcing...the shared expectations and behaviors...that dictate what is appropriate". Such content can significantly influence viewers' attitudes; media products have the "ability to shape perceptions" and play a "vital role in shaping cultural norms and attitudes". Similarly, an analysis of a Turkish children's cartoon found consistent themes of women as homemakers and men in active roles, regardless of whether it aired on public or private channels. Female characters were largely confined to domestic, passive roles (mothers or caregivers), while male characters engaged in vocational activities outside the home. This not only mirrors prevailing social norms but also signals to young viewers a limited view of gender roles. Although there have been efforts to produce more empowering content, traditional depictions remain common. Ultimately, the literature suggests that the Turkish media's gendered stereotypes contribute to socializing youth into normative gender roles, underscoring the media's influence as an informal educational force.

2. Gender Representation in the Workplace

In Türkiye's workforce, gender disparities are pronounced. Women's labor force participation remains the lowest in the OECD, largely due to women's disproportionate responsibility for unpaid caregiving. Traditional norms assign childcare and housework chiefly to women—96% of mothers are primary caregivers versus only 2% of fathers, which constrains women's career opportunities. Consequently, only about one-third of working-age women participate in the labor force. Those who do work face a persistent gender wage gap. A joint ILO-TÜİK study calculated Türkiye's gender wage gap at 15.6% (women earning on average 15.6% less than men). Notably, this gap widens with age and is highest for less-educated women, exceeding 25% for women in their 40s and reaching 38.6% among women with only primary education. Such figures highlight the intersectional nature of workplace inequality: women with lower socioeconomic status or education face compounded disadvantages. Leadership positions in business are also heavily male-dominated. As of 2020, women held only about 19–20% of upper and middle management roles in Türkiye, up from 14% in 2012, but still very low. This

underrepresentation at decision-making levels – alongside a “disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work” borne by women – illustrates how workplace structures and social norms intersect. Researchers emphasize that underutilizing women’s talent not only violates equity but also hampers economic development. In sum, scholarly literature on Türkiye’s workforce reveals enduring gender gaps in participation, pay, and leadership, with intersectional factors (like education level, rural/urban status, or motherhood) further widening these gaps.

3. Gender Representation in Politics

Women remain significantly underrepresented in Turkish politics. Following the 2023 general elections, 121 women were elected to the 600-seat parliament (20.1%), a modest rise from 17.1% in the previous term. Despite this being the highest number of women MPs in Türkiye’s history, it still falls short of parity and lags behind global averages. Türkiye has had only one female prime minister (Tansu Çiller in the 1990s), and women continue to be a minority in cabinet ministries and local governments. The underrepresentation stems from multiple barriers – from gender biases within party structures to societal expectations – that discourage or disadvantage female candidates. Türkiye does not enforce legislative gender quotas for Parliament, but some political parties have voluntarily adopted their own measures. Notably, the People’s Democratic Party (HDP) implemented a gender parity principle in its candidate lists; as a result, 41.1% of HDP’s elected MPs in 2018 were women, far outpacing other major parties (where women comprised only 5–19% of deputies). This case exemplifies how quota systems or proactive recruitment can boost women’s political presence. Beyond numbers, scholars discuss the importance of inclusivity in governance: when women are absent from decision-making, issues like gender-based violence, childcare, and education equality may receive less attention. Indeed, comparative research finds that increasing women’s political representation is associated with more gender-responsive policies (such as family leave and pay equity measures) and even correlates with higher social investments. In Türkiye’s context, greater gender balance in politics is seen not only as a matter of representation but as a means to bring diverse perspectives to policymaking and strengthen democratic inclusivity.

4. Education and Curriculum

Gender roles in textbooks: Analyses of Turkish school curricula have uncovered persistent gender biases, despite periodic reforms. A comprehensive review of elementary and middle school textbooks (2018–19) found that women are starkly underrepresented in both text and images. Male characters and historical figures appeared roughly twice as often as female figures in textbook visuals. Moreover, women were frequently depicted in traditional roles – as mothers, wives, or caregivers engaged in cooking, cleaning, and child-rearing – while men were shown in a wider range of public and professional roles. For instance, women in these textbooks were typically portrayed as primary caregivers “with no father present” in domestic scenes, whereas fathers tended to appear only during leisure activities with children. Women’s professional visibility was limited: they were shown in fewer occupations and usually in subordinate positions to men. These findings mirror earlier studies, which concluded that even new textbooks produced under Türkiye’s curriculum reforms “carry gender stereotypes just like older editions, portraying men and women in traditional roles”. One UNESCO report similarly noted that Turkish primary textbooks often present a “patriarchal understanding of family” with unequal social roles, and that sexist language still occurs in secondary texts (albeit somewhat improved after a 2004 reform). Together, these studies demonstrate that Turkish educational materials have historically reinforced the notion of women as domestic and dependent, thereby socializing students into conventional gender expectations.

Women in STEM and non-binary visibility: Gender disparity is also evident in STEM education and the visibility of LGBTQ+ identities. In higher education, women now constitute about half of all university students, yet remain underrepresented in certain fields. Engineering and technology programs, in particular, attract relatively few women and the STEM workforce reflects this gap. National statistics show that only 23% of professional engineers in Türkiye are female, indicating a significant gender imbalance in STEM careers. Scholars link this underrepresentation to multiple factors: gender-biased socialization (e.g., girls not seeing female scientists or engineers as role models in media or textbooks), a lack of encouragement for girls in math and science from an early age, and workplace cultures that are inhospitable to women. Indeed, the absence of female STEM figures in curricula may dampen girls’ aspirations to enter these fields. Beyond the binary gender divide, Turkish curricula virtually ignore non-binary and LGBTQ individuals. There is a lack of any LGBTQ+ visibility or discussion in school textbooks

and official programs, reflecting the conservative stance of educational authorities. The Ministry of Education has explicitly promoted “family values” aligned with heteronormative, patriarchal norms, sidelining topics of gender diversity. For example, a 2024 curriculum overhaul, centered on “national and spiritual values,” was criticized for “marginalising differences and deepening gender discrimination” in education. And in 2025, the Ministry even blocked a teachers’ union from holding a one-off classroom lesson on gender equality, declaring that education must “reflect national and moral values” and warning against unauthorized content. Such actions underscore that discussions of gender beyond the traditional male/female binary (including feminist and LGBTQ+ perspectives) are systematically excluded from Türkiye’s public education sphere. The result is a curriculum that not only underrepresents women in content but also erases the existence of non-binary or queer individuals, thereby presenting a narrow view of gender to students.

5. Importance of Inclusive Representation

The scholarship underlines that inclusive gender representation across media, the workplace, politics, and education is vital for empowerment and an equitable society. Representation is not merely symbolic; it has measurable impacts on individuals’ aspirations and on societal outcomes. Empowerment and role models: When young people regularly see women in diverse and influential roles, it expands their sense of what women (and indeed anyone) can achieve. In politics, for instance, “repeated exposure to female elected officials improves perceptions of female leaders and leads to future electoral gains for women”, as well as inspiring girls to aspire to leadership. This role-model effect has been observed in other domains too: girls who encounter female scientists, business leaders, or protagonists in media are more likely to envision those paths for themselves. Conversely, a lack of representation can reinforce self-limiting stereotypes (e.g., the notion that STEM or leadership is “not for women”). Toward an equitable society: Inclusive representation contributes to a more equitable and democratic society by ensuring diverse experiences inform social norms and policies. Research shows that when women have a seat at the table, it improves governance and policy responsiveness to social issues. Globally, a higher share of women in parliament is associated with more robust family policies, social spending on health and education, and even economic growth gains. This holds implications for Türkiye: greater gender balance in decision-making could elevate issues like gender-based violence, childcare support,

and education equality on the national agenda. Finally, inclusive representation helps break down prejudices among the broader public. Portraying men and women in non-traditional roles (e.g. men as caregivers, women as executives or politicians) can normalize gender equality in the eyes of children and adults alike. Over time, this can shift public perception, reducing bias and fostering mutual respect. In sum, inclusive gender representation is both a reflection of an egalitarian society and a driver of further change – empowering individuals, improving policy outcomes, and shaping more gender-equitable attitudes for future generations.

6. Strategies to Improve Gender Representation

Addressing gender representation gaps in Türkiye requires multi-faceted strategies spanning media, education, workplaces, and politics. Recent literature and policy reports suggest several approaches to foster more inclusive representation:

- **Inclusive Language and Curriculum Reform:** Ensuring that educational materials and media use gender-inclusive language and content is fundamental. Biases in textbooks should be removed and replaced with balanced depictions of women and men. A joint EU–Turkish project (ETCEP) demonstrated this by reviewing curricula and training teachers to eliminate gender bias, helping the Ministry of Education “ensure the curriculum and textbooks are free from gender bias”. Such reforms include highlighting women’s contributions (e.g., adding female scientists or historical figures to curricula) and avoiding sexist language or stereotypes. Media organizations can likewise adopt guidelines for gender-responsive language in journalism and entertainment, portraying individuals based on their roles and expertise rather than gendered clichés.
- **Media Literacy Education:** Incorporating media literacy with a gender focus can empower students and the public to critically analyze gender portrayals. By learning to deconstruct stereotypes in advertisements, TV shows, or news, viewers become less susceptible to accepting biased representations. Studies in Türkiye have found that gender-aware media literacy initiatives can “play a pivotal role in dismantling entrenched gender stereotypes”. Schools and universities can include modules that discuss how the media represent women and men, encouraging youth to question and challenge sexist depictions. Non-

profit programs (often with support from UN agencies or NGOs) have started workshops where students examine media through a gender lens, which participants report as “eye-opening” in recognizing bias. Expanding such training would promote a more critical media consumption and demand for fair representation.

- **Mentoring and Role Model Programs:** Providing mentorship opportunities and exposing girls and young women to successful female role models is a proven strategy to broaden aspirations. For example, the “Girls Can STEM” project by the Flying Broom Women’s Association in Türkiye connects teenage girls with women professionals in science and technology fields to “provide information about STEM careers to girls, connect participants with role models, and challenge gender-based stereotypes in career choices”. Evaluations of similar programs show that meeting women leaders face-to-face can boost girls’ self-confidence and interest in those fields. In the workplace, formal mentoring networks for women (and especially for those from underrepresented groups or regions) can help navigate career barriers and prepare more women for leadership roles.
- **Policy and Institutional Reforms:** Structural changes at the policy level are crucial to sustain gender-inclusive representation. One approach in politics and business is implementing or strengthening quota systems and affirmative action. Gender quotas, when well-designed, have been effective in increasing women’s representation in many contexts, as seen in Türkiye with the HDP’s voluntary parity quota leading to over 40% women MPs. Adopting quotas or targets in other political parties, or even legal quota requirements for electoral lists, could improve women’s representation in elected bodies. In education, institutional commitment is needed to integrate gender equality into teacher training and school management. Programs training teachers on gender sensitivity (such as the “Leadership and Training for Female Teachers” initiative that reached 542 educators in Türkiye) are valuable for changing classroom dynamics and expectations. Workplaces can also institute policies like transparent pay audits to address wage gaps and strive for diversity in hiring and promotion committees to combat bias. Finally, government and civil society should continue public awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of gender equality and positive representation. By combining

these strategies – from the images children see in textbooks and media, to the mentors who guide them, to the policies that govern institutions – Türkiye can move toward a more balanced gender representation in education and across society. Each intervention reinforces the others, creating an ecosystem that supports equal opportunities and challenges limiting stereotypes.

2.2. Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes may not be given enough importance in many areas, but they are not as simple a problem as one might think. Especially if we teach strict gender roles to children, who are the building blocks of our society, we can limit their capacities and cause problems in their self-perception. Each child is unique, and therefore, they have different dreams and make distinct future plans. Children who can exist as themselves in society can only build their own unique dreams and realize their capacities. Jiang (2022) states that:

In the film ‘The Coward, the main character, Jeffery, experiences the issue of gender stereotypes. When he saw a touching scene in the movie, he was afraid that if anyone found out, he would cry. Because they will laugh at him for being “weak” or “girly.” He is experiencing the stress of gender stereotypes. This stress made him scared to face himself and express his true feelings. Not only Jeffery but Jeffery’s other friends will also experience similar issues of self-expression as they were limited by the rules of gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes can appear in many different ways. Gender generalizations, more often than not, incorporate four angles: appearance picture (such as ladies are little and frail, men are tall and effective), part behavior (such as ladies taking care of children and men repairing houses), identity characteristics (such as ladies are passionate, have a solid sense of inadequacy, men are levelheaded and certain) and occupation (such as ladies are secretaries and men are supervisors) (Jiang, 2022). When we look at it from the education and training perspective, all of these seem to be possible quite easily.

Gender stereotyping in English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks is a pervasive issue that has significant, often overlooked consequences for learners. These stereotypes not only shape students’ perceptions of gender roles but also affect their cognitive, social, and cultural development. This discussion explores the harmful impact of gender stereotyping in ELT coursebooks and its broader implications.

ELT coursebooks are more than language instruction tools; they also convey cultural values and social norms through their content. A growing body of research indicates that many English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, reflecting a hidden curriculum that can shape learners' perceptions of gender roles [OBJ] [OBJ]. These materials often reinforce societal hierarchies by depicting men and women in markedly different roles, which can influence how students internalize gender norms. The following sections explore how ELT coursebooks reinforce social inequalities, affect language use and interactions, inflict cognitive and psychological harms, carry cultural implications, influence classroom dynamics, and finally, what can be done to foster more inclusive practices in Türkiye and beyond.

1. Reinforcement of Social Inequalities in Textbooks

One of the most documented issues is that ELT coursebooks tend to reinforce existing social inequalities by consistently portraying men in prestigious or leadership roles and women in caregiving or subordinate roles. Studies have repeatedly found that male characters in textbooks outnumber female characters and occupy positions of higher status or authority. For instance, a large-scale analysis of 1,255 English-language textbooks from 34 countries found twice as many male-coded words as female-coded words on average, with men more often associated with work and achievement terms, and women with home and appearance-related terms [OBJ]. In these materials, men are frequently shown as professionals (doctors, managers, scientists) or decision-makers, whereas women are depicted as nurses, teachers, homemakers, or engaged in domestic tasks. Female characters are also often described with adjectives like “beautiful” or “quiet” and verbs like “cook” or “bake”, reinforcing a caring and passive image, while male characters are linked to adjectives such as “powerful” or “wise” and verbs like “guide” or “rule”. Such representational patterns effectively situate men as dominant and women as secondary in the social hierarchy.

This imbalance in representation contributes to a hidden curriculum that normalizes gender hierarchy. Even subtle features like the order of presentation can convey bias: men often appear first in dialogues or group listings (“he and she”), implicitly prioritizing the male presence [OBJ]. An analysis of an ELT textbook in Türkiye, for example, revealed a dominance of male characters in both number and prominence; the content “contributes to maintaining and reproducing the gender roles existing in society” through these imbalances. By showing men as active agents and women as

support figures, coursebooks mirror and reinforce patriarchal structures. In effect, learners receive repeated messages that leadership, expertise, and public engagement are masculine domains, while nurturing and domestic spheres are feminine ones. This reinforcement of societal gender hierarchies in learning materials risks entrenching inequitable norms among new generations of students.

2. Impact on Language Acquisition and Interaction

Stereotypical gender representations in ELT coursebooks can also directly and indirectly affect learners' language acquisition and communicative interaction patterns. Language learning is not value-neutral; the dialogues, examples, and scenarios presented in textbooks influence how learners practice and use the language. When textbooks overwhelmingly portray one gender in assertive speaking roles (e.g., males giving instructions, making decisions) and the other in passive or supportive roles (e.g., females asking for help or approval), students may internalize these patterns of communication. Female learners might subconsciously adopt more passive speech styles if they rarely see women in authoritative speaking roles, while male learners may feel validated in dominating conversations. Over time, these modeled interactions can translate into gendered language use, where students mirror the conversational dynamics they have repeatedly observed.

Research suggests that gender-biased content can shape learners' perceptions of what is socially appropriate to say or how to behave in conversation. For example, one study highlighted that depictions of women speaking less or in a "weaker" capacity can negatively affect students' perceptions of female participation, limiting female students' linguistic confidence and social roles in class. If a textbook consistently shows girls being polite and deferential and boys being bold and funny, learners may come to believe these are the expected norms for interaction in English. In essence, the language of textbooks not only teaches grammar and vocabulary but also carries messages about who speaks, who leads, and who listens. These implicit lessons can influence students' willingness to participate and how they engage with peers of different genders. Gender stereotypes in instructional materials have even been linked to differences in learner attitudes and motivation; for instance, entrenched stereotypes can dampen a student's interest or confidence in using the foreign language if they feel that the language's social milieu, as presented, does not value their gender equally. Thus, biased coursebooks may indirectly

affect language acquisition by shaping communicative behaviors and contributing to gendered perceptions in communication among learners.

3. Cognitive and Psychological Harm to Learners

The effects of repetitive stereotypical content in ELT coursebooks extend to learners' cognitive and psychological development. Regular exposure to narrow gender roles can subtly influence how learners perceive themselves and their potential. For female students in particular, seeing their gender repeatedly confined to domestic or secondary roles can erode self-esteem and ambition. It can foster what psychologists refer to as stereotype threat — the risk of conforming to negative stereotypes about one's group, which might undermine academic performance or willingness to take on challenges. When girls internalize the message that people like them are rarely leaders or adventurers in the English-speaking world depicted by their books, they may start doubting their aptitude for those roles in real life, or in using English assertively. Conversely, male students may develop an inflated sense of entitlement or normativity in leadership, potentially hampering the development of empathy and collaboration skills. Such internalized attitudes can harm both genders: girls by limiting their aspirations, and boys by discouraging traits like sensitivity or seeking help, which are stereotypically not modeled for them.

Furthermore, strictly binary and traditional gender portrayals exclude and harm those students who do not identify with these norms. Non-binary and gender-nonconforming learners, or even those who simply have diverse interests, find no role models in typical ELT materials. The complete invisibility of non-binary identities in most coursebooks sends a discouraging signal that such identities are not “normal” or acceptable to discuss. This erasure is a form of marginalization; by silencing the existence of LGBTQIA+ individuals in learning materials, publishers perpetuate heteronormativity and imply that non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identities are not suitable for the classroom. Over time, this lack of representation can negatively impact learners' identity formation and sense of belonging. Students who identify as LGBTQ+ or non-binary may feel invalidated or alienated, which can affect their mental well-being and engagement in learning. Even cisgender students are done a disservice, as they miss out on learning about diversity and empathy. Scholars warn that textbook biases can “devalue and exclude” women and other marginalized genders as social actors while maintaining male dominance, which has significant consequences for students' construction of gender

identity. In sum, the psychological toll of repeated exposure to one-dimensional gender roles includes diminished self-confidence for underrepresented groups, constrained identity development, and the entrenchment of limiting beliefs that can last into adulthood.

4. Cultural and Global Implications of Gendered Materials

Gender-biased ELT materials have cultural and global implications, especially given that many coursebooks are used internationally across diverse societies. In a global context, ELT textbooks often serve as a vehicle for not just language but also cultural norms. When such textbooks reinforce patriarchal gender norms, they effectively export those norms to classrooms worldwide. For instance, international textbook series produced in the UK or the US are commonly used in Türkiye and other countries; if these books predominantly depict Western patriarchal gender roles, they may inadvertently bolster similar local biases or clash with local efforts toward gender equality. In societies already characterized by traditional gender hierarchies, imported ELT materials that mirror those hierarchies can validate and strengthen the status quo. Conversely, if a textbook from abroad challenges gender norms (for example, by showing female scientists or stay-at-home fathers), it could potentially inspire progressive thinking in learners, though such portrayals have historically been rare. The influence is bidirectional: coursebooks both reflect and reinforce the cultural values of their origin and target contexts.

It is also important to consider that global publishing companies often tailor content to avoid offending conservative markets, which can result in sanitized, homogeneous portrayals of gender. To appeal to as many countries as possible, publishers might eschew depicting, say, a woman CEO or a same-sex couple, fearing the book would be rejected in more traditional contexts. This self-censorship for marketability means that opportunities to challenge patriarchal norms are frequently missed. A recent study noted that countries with the least female representation in textbooks (e.g., Afghanistan, Pakistan) align with lower gender equality in society, suggesting that textbook content and societal norms are interlinked. At the same time, countries with textbooks containing more female characters often had better indicators of women's rights and economic development, though causation is unclear. What is clear is that ELT materials carry global cultural weight: they can either contribute to a cycle that perpetuates patriarchal values on an international scale or they can be used as tools to promote equity and cross-cultural

understanding. In the context of Türkiye, where traditional and modern views on gender coexist, the use of progressive vs. stereotypical ELT content can subtly influence learners' worldviews regarding gender roles in a global society.

5. Classroom Dynamics and Teacher Mediation

The biases in ELT coursebooks do not operate in a vacuum; their impact is mediated by what happens in the classroom. Teachers and students engage with these materials actively, and their interactions can either amplify or mitigate the gender biases present. If educators teach uncritically straight from a biased textbook, they may inadvertently reinforce those stereotypes, for example, by consistently assigning leadership parts in role-plays to male students or praising boys and girls differently in line with textbook norms. Students, too, internalize cues about participation: a girl who only ever reads dialogues where female characters are followers might be less inclined to take initiative in class discussions. Over time, such patterns contribute to a classroom dynamic where gendered expectations become the norm. Researchers have observed that the hidden curriculum of textbooks (the implicit lessons beyond the explicit syllabus) can shape teacher expectations and student behavior in ways that sustain gender power imbalances. For example, if a textbook's stories depict boys as problem-solvers, a teacher might—consciously or not—call on boys to tackle difficult questions more often than girls, aligning with the material's bias.

On the other hand, awareness and training can enable teachers to counteract these biases. The classroom can become a space to question and discuss stereotypes if educators take an intentional approach. Teachers who recognize gender imbalances in a text can intervene by prompting critical thinking: asking students to spot who speaks most in a dialogue, or how a situation might differ if roles were reversed. In doing so, they transform a biased text into a teachable moment about equality and respect. Students can be encouraged to challenge what they see in coursebooks, fostering media literacy alongside language skills. Moreover, the selection of supplementary materials is crucial. A teacher in Türkiye, for instance, might introduce additional reading about famous women in science or include examples of diverse family structures to broaden perspectives beyond what the core textbook offers. Teacher agency thus plays a pivotal role. While biased textbooks can negatively influence classroom interactions, a critically aware teacher can dilute those effects or even turn them into lessons for social awareness. Scholars urge that teachers adopt an egalitarian perspective in material selection and

usage, meaning educators should strive to choose or supplement textbooks with resources that present balanced gender representations. In summary, the impact of coursebook gender bias on classroom dynamics is significant, but it can be buffered by reflective teaching practices and an inclusive classroom environment that challenges stereotypes rather than reinforcing them.

2.3. Gender-based Prejudices and Gender Roles

Coursebooks in English Language Teaching (ELT) are vital tools in shaping learners' language skills and cultural awareness. However, they often reflect and perpetuate gender-based prejudices and stereotypical gender roles. This issue has implications for both language acquisition and learners' understanding of gender dynamics.

1. Gender-Based Prejudices in ELT Coursebooks

- **Underrepresentation of Women:** Studies consistently show that male characters often outnumber female characters in dialogues, illustrations, and activities. This imbalance diminishes the visibility of women and perpetuates the notion that men dominate the public and professional spheres.
- **Language Use:** Male characters are frequently given more lines of dialogue and appear in roles requiring assertive or complex language, while female characters are relegated to simpler, supportive, or emotive roles.
- **Cultural Biases:** Coursebooks sometimes reflect the patriarchal norms of the societies in which they are produced, reinforcing outdated gender ideologies and excluding gender diversity.

2. Gender Roles in ELT Coursebooks

- **Stereotypical Occupations:** Men are often depicted in prestigious or physically demanding jobs (e.g., doctors, engineers, athletes), while women are shown in caregiving or subordinate roles (e.g., teachers, nurses, homemakers).
- **Passive vs. Active Roles:** Men are frequently portrayed as active decision-makers and leaders, while women are shown as passive or dependent on male characters.

- **Reinforcement of Traditional Roles:** Family structures in coursebooks often depict women in domestic roles, focusing on childcare and household duties, while men are associated with providing and authority.

3. Implications of Gender Bias in ELT Coursebooks

- **Learners' Perceptions:** Students internalize gender stereotypes through repeated exposure, which may limit their aspirations and reinforce societal prejudices.
- **Classroom Dynamics:** Gendered materials can unconsciously influence teachers' attitudes and interactions with male and female students, further entrenching biases.
- **Missed Opportunities:** ELT coursebooks could be powerful tools for challenging traditional gender norms and promoting equality, but often fall short of this potential.

4. Progress and Challenges

- **Positive Developments:** Some publishers have begun incorporating more inclusive and balanced content, with diverse portrayals of gender roles and attention to gender-neutral language.
- **Challenges Remain:** Change is slow, and many coursebooks still prioritize traditional gender portrayals to appeal to conservative markets. Additionally, non-binary and LGBTQ+ representation remains rare.

5. Recommendations for Improvement

- **Content Revision:** Publishers should ensure a balanced representation of genders in texts, images, and dialogues, highlighting diverse professions, family roles, and leadership scenarios.
- **Inclusive Language:** Emphasis on using gender-neutral terms and avoiding gendered assumptions in activities and descriptions.
- **Teacher Training:** Educators should be trained to identify and address gender biases in coursebooks and use supplementary materials to promote gender equality.

- **Research and Feedback:** Continuous research on gender representation in ELT materials and incorporation of feedback from diverse educators and learners can drive meaningful change.

Addressing gender-based prejudices and roles in ELT coursebooks is essential to fostering equitable learning environments. By challenging stereotypes and presenting a diverse array of gender identities and roles, ELT coursebooks can empower learners to think critically about gender norms and contribute to a more inclusive society.

2.4. Coursebook Evaluation

Evaluating coursebooks is a crucial process in language education as they serve as primary tools for instruction, shaping both the content and methodology of teaching. A thorough evaluation ensures that these materials meet the needs of learners, align with educational goals, and promote inclusivity and critical thinking. This discussion explores the key dimensions of coursebook evaluation, its importance, and the challenges associated with the process.

1. Importance of Coursebook Evaluation

- **Relevance to Learners' Needs:** Learners differ in age, cultural background, language proficiency, and learning objectives. Evaluating coursebooks ensures that the materials cater to these diverse needs.
- **Pedagogical Effectiveness:** Evaluation helps determine whether the coursebook employs effective teaching strategies, such as scaffolding, communicative activities, and real-life applications of language skills.
- **Alignment with Curriculum Goals:** A well-evaluated coursebook aligns with national or institutional curricula, ensuring consistency in learning outcomes.
- **Promotion of Inclusivity:** Evaluating the representation of genders, cultures, and identities ensures the materials foster an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

2. Key Criteria for Coursebook Evaluation

- **Content Quality:**

Does the coursebook cover the necessary linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing)?

Are topics engaging, diverse, and relevant to the learners?

- Language Presentation:

Is grammar and vocabulary presented clearly and incrementally?

Are the examples authentic and practical?

- Cultural Representation:

Are different cultures and perspectives accurately and respectfully represented?

Does the content avoid cultural biases and stereotypes?

- Visual Appeal:

Are illustrations, images, and layouts visually engaging and appropriate for the target audience?

- Skills Integration:

Does the coursebook promote the integration of linguistic and 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking and collaboration?

- Inclusivity and Bias:

Does the coursebook ensure fair representation of genders, ethnicities, and diverse identities?

Are there opportunities for learners to challenge stereotypes?

- Usability for Teachers:

Are the teacher's resources comprehensive and easy to use?

Does the coursebook offer flexibility in adapting content for different teaching contexts?

3. Challenges in Coursebook Evaluation

- Subjectivity: Evaluators' personal biases can affect their judgment, particularly regarding content relevance or cultural sensitivity.
- Balancing Criteria: It can be difficult to find a coursebook that meets all criteria perfectly, requiring compromises.
- Resource Limitations: Schools or institutions may be restricted by budgets, limiting the range of coursebooks available for evaluation.

- **Dynamic Needs:** Learner needs and educational trends evolve over time, but coursebooks often lag in adapting to these changes.

4. Frameworks for Evaluation

To ensure a systematic approach, educators can use established evaluation frameworks, such as:

- **Cunningsworth's Checklist:** Focuses on practical aspects of content, methodology, and relevance.
- **Littlejohn's Framework:** Examines the underlying pedagogical assumptions and design of coursebooks.
- **McDonough and Shaw's Model:** A two-stage process involving external evaluation (overview) and internal evaluation (in-depth analysis).

Coursebook evaluation is a vital aspect of curriculum planning that requires careful consideration of multiple factors. A well-evaluated coursebook can significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience, ensuring that learners receive high-quality, relevant, and inclusive education. By addressing challenges and adopting systematic frameworks, educators can make informed decisions that best serve their learners' needs.

2.5. UNESCO and Sustainable Development Goals

Goal 5: Achieving Gender Equality and Empowering All Women and Girls
According to SDG's last progress report (2024), progress toward gender equality remains significantly off track. While harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are on the decline, the rate of change is not fast enough to keep up with global population growth. Gender parity, particularly in leadership and decision-making roles, is still far from being realized. At the current pace, achieving equal representation in managerial positions could take nearly 176 years. Additionally, many women continue to face restrictions on their sexual and reproductive rights, and gender-based violence persists. Immediate action is required to challenge discriminatory social norms, eliminate harmful practices, and reform laws that contribute to gender inequality. Strengthening women's leadership and increasing investments in gender equality are crucial at the national, regional, and global levels.

Key Targets and Statistics

- Target 5.1: According to 2022 data from 120 countries, 55% of these nations lacked comprehensive legal frameworks to prohibit direct and indirect discrimination against women. Additionally, half of the countries still had no quotas for female representation in national parliaments.

- Target 5.3:

Globally, approximately 640 million women and girls were married before turning 18, with India alone accounting for one-third of these cases. While child marriage rates have decreased, one in five young women (19%) is still married before adulthood, down from 22% in 2013. Although 68 million child marriages were prevented in this period, the current rate of progress is insufficient to eradicate the practice by 2030.

As of 2024, an estimated 230 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation—30 million more than the last estimate from 2016.

- Target 5.4: Between 2000 and 2022, data revealed that, on average, women spent 2.5 times more hours on unpaid domestic and caregiving work compared to men.
- Target 5.5:

Women's political representation has been advancing at a slow pace. As of January 1, 2024, women held 26.9% of seats in national parliaments globally—an increase of only 4.6 percentage points since 2015 (22.3%).

- Women's participation in local governments was slightly higher at 35.5% as of January 1, 2023.
- While nearly 40% of the global workforce is female, only 27.5% of management positions in 2022 were held by women, marking a decline from 28.5% in 2021.
- Target 5.a: Among 49 countries with available data, one in three nations reported that less than half of women and men had ownership or secure rights over agricultural land. Gender disparities remain stark, with men owning land at least twice as often as women in nearly half of the surveyed countries.

Additionally, 58% of these nations either lacked or had minimal legal protections for women's land rights.

- Target 5.b: In 2023, 78% of people aged 10 and above owned a mobile phone. However, women were still 8% less likely to own one than men, though this gap has narrowed from 10% in 2020.
- Target 5.c: Data from 105 countries between 2018 and 2021 showed that only 26% had fully developed systems for tracking and making public financial allocations for gender equality. Meanwhile, 59% had partial systems in place, and 15% lacked even the most basic components of such frameworks.

These findings highlight the urgent need for stronger policies, increased investments, and greater societal shifts to accelerate progress toward gender equality worldwide.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

3.0.Introduction

This study focuses on gender representations and stereotyping in terms of profession and appearance in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade ELT coursebooks published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. In this chapter, I will provide information about the research design, selection of discipline, journals, and articles, building the corpus, and data analysis.

3.1. Research Design

Our research is based on ELT coursebook evaluation. In our research, the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade English coursebooks published by the Ministry of National Education have been analyzed under two headings. Descriptive research study is preferred for the main aims of our topic. Besides, a qualitative content analysis is used, focusing on two headlines: profession and physical appearance. The content analysis method is applied throughout the research process.

This study employs a content analysis method within the framework of a descriptive research design to investigate gender representation and stereotyping in ELT coursebooks for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education. The research design is non-experimental and qualitative, focusing on systematically analyzing textual and visual content in the selected coursebooks.

1. Research Approach

The study adopts a descriptive research approach to provide an in-depth analysis of the current state of gender representation and stereotyping. Descriptive research is particularly suitable as it aims to summarize and present data systematically without manipulating variables, ensuring an objective depiction of the phenomena under investigation.

2. Data Collection

The primary data source consists of three ELT coursebooks for 6th, 7th, and 8th grades. These coursebooks were published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education and are widely used in public schools. Both textual and visual elements were included in the analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of gender representation.

Units of Analysis

- Textual Data: Dialogues, reading passages, and role-play scenarios where professions and appearance are explicitly or implicitly referenced.
- Visual Data: Illustrations, photographs, and other visual content depicting characters in professional or social contexts.

3. Data Analysis Procedure

The content analysis followed a systematic coding and categorization process:

1. Coding Scheme Development: A coding framework was developed based on key variables:

- Professions: Types of jobs assigned to male and female characters.
- Appearance: Descriptions or visual portrayals of characters, focusing on stereotypical attributes (e.g., beauty for women, strength for men).
- Frequency and Balance: Frequency of male and female representation in professional and social roles.

2. Categorization: Data was categorized into themes, such as traditional vs. non-traditional gender roles and stereotypical vs. neutral depictions.

3. Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis: The frequency of occurrences was quantified, while thematic analysis was used to interpret underlying patterns and messages.

4. Validity and Reliability Measures

- Triangulation: Multiple researchers cross-checked the coding and analysis to enhance reliability.
- Pilot Analysis: A small sample of content was analyzed prior to the full study to refine the coding framework and ensure clarity.
- Inter-Coder Reliability: A reliability check was conducted to ensure consistent coding of data by different researchers.

5. Ethical Considerations

Since the research relies on publicly available coursebooks, no ethical approval was required. However, the analysis remained objective and avoided biased interpretations of the data.

In conclusion, the content analysis methodology, rooted in a descriptive research design, provides a systematic and reliable approach to examining gender representation and stereotyping in ELT coursebooks. This methodology ensures a detailed and unbiased exploration of the issues, contributing to actionable insights for improving educational materials.

3.2. Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of gender representation and stereotyping in the selected ELT coursebooks. The focus is on two dimensions: Professions and Physical Appearance. Quantitative data are summarized in tables and charts, and qualitative observations are provided to contextualize the findings.

Visual Representation:

Bar Chart: Gender Representation in Professions

Profession	Male (Blue)	Female (Pink)
Teacher	15	10
Doctor	10	5
Engineer	8	3
Artist	5	12
Scientist	12	7
Businessman	18	4
Lawyer	14	6
Writer	9	11
Politician	16	8
Historian	7	9
Philosopher	6	10
Musician	11	13
Actor	13	14
Dancer	10	15
Model	8	16
Designer	12	11
Architect	14	9
Journalist	11	12
Reporter	9	10
Editor	13	8
Producer	15	7
Director	17	6
Screenwriter	10	13
Composer	12	11
Music Producer	14	10
Sound Engineer	11	9
Video Game Designer	13	12
Software Developer	15	11
UX Designer	12	10
Product Manager	14	9
Marketing Specialist	11	13
Sales Representative	13	11
Customer Support	10	12
Human Resources	12	10
Recruitment Specialist	11	11
Training Specialist	13	10
Quality Assurance	10	12
Operations Manager	12	11
Logistics Coordinator	11	10
Warehouse Worker	13	9
Delivery Driver	10	11
Truck Driver	12	10
Bus Driver	11	11
Taxi Driver	13	9
Ride Share Driver	10	12
Freight Handler	12	10
Warehouse Associate	11	11
Inventory Control	13	10
Order Fulfillment	10	12
Customer Service Representative	12	11
Sales Associate	11	12
Product Demonstrator	13	10
Event Staff	10	11
Security Guard	12	10
Janitor	11	11
Cleaner	13	9
Landscaper	10	12
Gardener	12	10
Painter	11	11
Plumber	13	9
Electrician	10	12
Handyman	12	10
Construction Worker	11	11
Ironworker	13	9
Welder	10	12
Millwright	12	10
Tool and Die Maker	11	11
Machine Operator	13	9
Assembly Line Worker	10	12
Quality Control Inspector	12	10
Production Supervisor	11	11
Warehouse Supervisor	13	9
Logistics Supervisor	10	12
Customer Service Supervisor	12	10
Sales Supervisor	11	11
Product Demonstrator Supervisor	13	9
Event Supervisor	10	12
Security Supervisor	12	10
Janitor Supervisor	11	11
Cleaner Supervisor	13	9
Landscaper Supervisor	10	12
Gardener Supervisor	12	10
Painter Supervisor	11	11
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Construction Supervisor	11	11
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Electrician Supervisor	10	12
Handyman Supervisor	12	10
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Ironworker Supervisor	13	9
Welder Supervisor	10	12

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of data obtained from the study's corpus. In addition to quantitative analysis, this chapter also deals with qualitative analysis, including extracts taken from the study's corpus to reinforce the interpretation of the results.

Coursebooks are critical tools in shaping learners' perspectives on societal roles and norms, including gender. The depiction of professions and physical appearance in ELT coursebooks can either challenge or reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. This analysis aims to investigate the portrayal of gender in the 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade ELT coursebooks published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, focusing on two key dimensions:

1. Occupation: How male and female characters are depicted in professional contexts.
2. Appearance: How the physical portrayal of characters aligns with or deviates from traditional gender stereotypes.

4.2. Occupations

Gender Disparities: Male characters dominated professional roles, particularly in high-status or leadership positions such as doctors, engineers, and businesspeople. Female characters were more often shown as teachers, nurses, or homemakers.

- **Traditional Roles:** Professions assigned to male and female characters adhered largely to traditional gender norms, with limited representation of non-traditional roles (e.g., women in STEM fields or men as caregivers).
- **Underrepresentation:** Women were underrepresented in the workforce compared to men, reflecting a skewed perception of gender participation in professional settings.

Table 1.

Gender representation in occupations

Profession	Male Characters	Female Characters
Doctor	15	3
Engineer	12	1
Teacher	5	18
Nurse	1	10
Businessperson	8	2
Homemaker	0	6
Caregiver	2	9

Male characters dominate prestigious professions like doctors and engineers, while female characters are overwhelmingly portrayed as teachers, nurses, or homemakers.

There is a lack of representation of non-traditional roles for both genders.

Table 2.

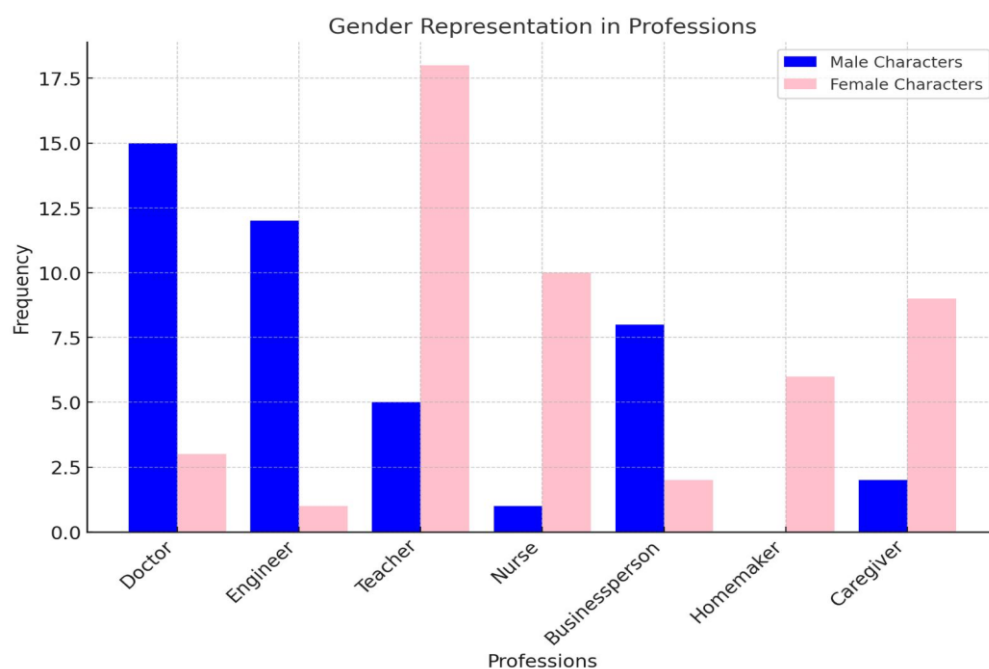
Gender representation in professions

Table 3.

The category of occupations in written content (grade 6)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	
	1	Travel Agent
	1	Farmer
3	4	Teacher
	1	Police
1		Nurse
	1	Seller
	1	Engineer
3	2	Student
	1	Shop Assistant
	1	Doctor
	1	Soldier

Table 4.

The ratio of occupations in written content (grade 6)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Items / %	Items / %	
7 / %33	11 / %67	21

Table 5.

The category of occupations in visual content (grade 6)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	
1		Influencer
3	2	Student
	6	Mechanic
3	1	Seller
	1	Actor/Actress
	1	Driver
1		Police
	3	Pilot
1		Office Worker
	1	Lawyer
	1	Engineer
2		Hairdresser
	2	Chef
1		Nurse
1		Musician
1	2	Tailor
1	4	Doctor
2		Teacher
	1	Dentist
	1	Fire worker
2		Zoo keeper
	1	Astronaut
	1	Farmer
	1	Athlete

Table 6.

The ratio of occupations in visual content (grade 6)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Items / %	Items / %	
19 / %38	30 / %62	49

The analysis of 21 items shows a clear gender disparity, with 33% representing females and 67% representing males—a 34% difference favoring men. This reflects the underrepresentation of women in occupational roles. While men are portrayed in a wide range of professions, such as doctors, engineers, farmers, and soldiers, women appear only in limited roles like teachers, students, and nurses. This pattern reinforces traditional gender roles by assigning more diverse and authoritative positions to men and more stereotypically “feminine” jobs to women.

Table 7.

The category of occupations in written content (grade 7)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	
1	2	Student
2		Teacher
1	1	Scientist
	1	Manager
2	1	Singer
		Dancer
2	1	Actor/Actress
	1	Director
	1	Writer
	1	Founder
	1	Professor
	4	President/Leader
	1	Robber
	3	Police
	1	Inventor

Table 8.

The ratio of occupations in written content (grade 7)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Items / %	Items / %	
7 / %27	19 / %73	26

These findings present the distribution of occupations mentioned in Grade 7 students' written texts, categorized by gender. A total of 26 occupational references were identified. Of these, 7 (27%) were attributed to female characters, while 19 (73%) were associated with male characters.

The data reveals a noticeable gender imbalance in the representation of occupations. Male figures were more frequently linked to a wider range of professional roles, including high-status positions such as “president/leader,” “professor,” and “inventor.” Notably, leadership roles were exclusively assigned to male characters, as seen in the four instances of “president/leader.”

In contrast, female characters were more commonly associated with roles such as “teacher,” “singer,” and “actor/actress.” This pattern suggests a tendency toward traditional or stereotypical gender roles, where females are underrepresented in scientific or authoritative professions. Only one instance of a female character was associated with a science-related field, and none appeared in roles such as “inventor” or “professor.”

Overall, the findings indicate that students may unconsciously reproduce societal gender norms in their written expressions, particularly in how they assign occupations based on gender. This suggests a potential area for educational intervention to promote more balanced and inclusive representations in classroom writing tasks.

Table 9.

The category of occupations in written content (grade 7)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	
3	2	Student
1		Teacher
	1	Actor/Actress
	1	Football player
5	9	Athlete
	7	Interviewer
	4	Founder
	4	Musician
2	10	Scientist
	1	Architect
1		Writer
	2	Zoologist
	2	Chef
3		Shop assistant
	1	Gardener

Table 10.

The ratio of occupations in written content (grade 7)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Items / %	Items / %	
15 / %25	44 / %75	59

These tables illustrate the distribution of occupations depicted in Grade 7 students' visual content, categorized by gender. Out of 59 occupational references identified in the visuals, 15 (25%) were attributed to female figures, whereas 44 (75%) were assigned to male figures.

This stark imbalance underscores a significant gender disparity in the representation of professional roles. Male characters dominate not only in quantity but also in the diversity of occupations, with notably high frequencies in roles such as “scientist” (10 instances), “athlete” (9 instances), and “interviewer” (7 instances). These roles often suggest authority, physical strength, or intellectual capability, aligning with traditional male stereotypes.

Conversely, female characters are underrepresented across nearly all occupational categories. While they appear in roles such as “student,” “teacher,” and “shop assistant,” their presence in positions demanding specialized knowledge or leadership—such as “scientist,” “founder,” or “architect”—is extremely limited. For instance, the role of “scientist” was attributed to male figures ten times, compared to just twice for females.

This pattern suggests that students may internalize and visually reproduce societal gender norms, consciously or unconsciously linking certain professions with masculinity. The data points to the persistence of stereotypical gender representations, particularly in how careers are visualized and associated with gender in educational contexts.

Encouraging more balanced visual portrayals in classroom materials and student productions may contribute to challenging these implicit biases and fostering gender equality in perceptions of professional roles.

Table 11.

The category of occupations in written content (grade 8)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	
1		Teacher
	1	Student
1	2	Scientist
	2	President
2	1	Singer
	1	Interviewer
1	2	Doctor
1		Writer
	1	Professor
	1	Athlete
1		Musician
	1	Chef

Table 12.

The ratio of occupations in written content (grade 8)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Items / %	Items / %	
7/ %37	12/ %63	19

Gender Patterns in Descriptive Adjective Usage

Physical Attributes (Table 7)

Table 7 indicates a slight imbalance in gender representation among adjectives describing physical characteristics, with 46% of the 48 recorded descriptors referring to female subjects and 54% referring to male subjects. However, the distribution across specific physical attributes is not uniform. Notable differences by attribute include:

- **Body:** Women are described with twice as many body-related adjectives as men (approximately a 100% higher frequency).
- **Eyes:** Descriptions of women's eyes use about 72% more adjectives compared to those of men.

- Hair: Men are described with roughly 34% more hair-related adjectives than women.
- Height: Descriptions of men's height contain about twice the number of adjectives as those of women (100% more).
- Weight: Men have approximately 34% more adjectives describing weight than women.
- Age: Men have about 34% more age-related descriptive adjectives than women.

Notably, the adjectives applied to women's physical features tend to emphasize attractiveness, with "beautiful" and "attractive" being the most common terms. Additional details on these findings are provided in Table 7.

Gender-Based Differences in Descriptive Adjectives Adjectives for Physical Features

As shown in Table 10, the analysis of adjectives describing physical features reveals a slight imbalance in how genders are depicted. Of the 48 total descriptors identified, 46% pertain to female characters, while 54% pertain to male characters, indicating that male characters receive marginally more physical description overall. Notably, female characters are described more extensively in certain aspects: for example, descriptions of female bodies and eyes use significantly more adjectives than those of male characters (differences of approximately 100 and 72 percentage points, respectively). The adjectives applied to females in these physical descriptions tend to emphasize attractiveness, with common terms such as "beautiful" and "attractive" frequently used.

On the other hand, male characters receive more descriptive attention for features such as hair, height, weight, and age. In these categories, the number of adjectives describing males exceeds those for females by considerable margins—roughly 34 percentage points more for hair, 100 for height, and 34 for both weight and age, all in favor of males. This pattern suggests that while the overall use of physical descriptors is nearly balanced, the focus of those descriptors differs by gender.

Table 13.

The category of occupations in visual content (grade 8)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	
12	7	Student
2		Teacher
	1	Dancer
	1	Waiter
1	4	Athlete
2	4	Chef
3	1	Call center assistant
2	1	Office worker
2	3	Scientist
	1	Technician
	1	Chemist
	1	Doctor
	1	Astronaut
2	2	Anchorperson
	4	Fire worker

Table 14.

The ratio of occupations in visual content (grade 8)

OCCUPATIONS		
FEMALES	MALES	TOTAL
Items / %	Items / %	
26/ %45	32/ %55	58

The analysis of occupational representations in visual content, as presented in Table 8, reveals notable differences in the way male and female characters are portrayed. A total of 58 occupational items were identified, of which 26 (45%) were attributed to female figures and 32 (55%) to male figures. Although this difference may appear moderate at first glance, it reflects an underlying gender imbalance in professional representation.

A closer examination of the specific occupations associated with each gender highlights a pattern that aligns with traditional gender roles. Female characters are predominantly shown in roles such as students, teachers, dancers, and call center

assistants—occupations that are often perceived as extensions of nurturing, communicative, or service-oriented roles. On the other hand, male characters are associated with a broader and more diverse range of professions, including scientists, technicians, engineers, doctors, astronauts, and fire workers. These professions are commonly linked to authority, technical expertise, and physical strength.

This distribution suggests that male characters are more frequently placed in positions associated with prestige, complexity, or leadership, while female characters are generally confined to roles that reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. The presence of male figures in both traditionally masculine roles and some neutral ones (such as students) further emphasizes the flexibility afforded to male representation in contrast to the more restricted occupational identity offered to females.

The findings indicate that although the numerical difference is not extreme, the qualitative aspects of gendered occupational portrayal may contribute to the reinforcement of gender norms. This highlights the importance of adopting more inclusive and balanced approaches to visual content in educational materials, particularly in shaping learners' perceptions of gender and professional identity.

4.3. Appearance

Visuals have the power to communicate messages to their audience, whether by reinforcing traditional representations (Hartman & Judd, 1978) or by offering diverse models that accommodate individual differences (Nilsen, 1971). A qualitative analysis of gender representations in visual imagery may provide deeper insight into the messages conveyed by the authors.

Physical Stereotypes:

- Women were frequently depicted as physically attractive, with a focus on beauty, elegance, and neatness.
- Men were portrayed as strong, assertive, and often casually dressed, emphasizing practicality over aesthetics.
- Visual Cues: Illustrations showed women in nurturing or passive poses, while men were depicted in active or assertive postures.

- **Clothing:** Female characters were often shown wearing dresses or traditionally feminine attire, while male characters were dressed in professional or casual clothing.

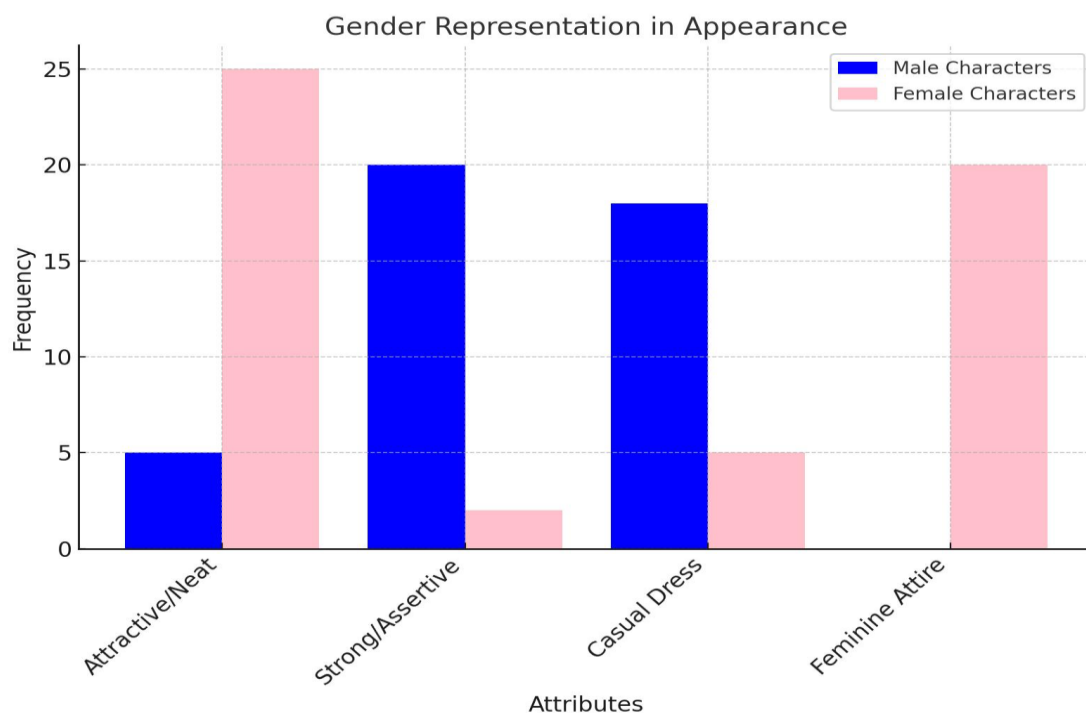
Table 15.

Gender representation in appearance

Attribute	Male Characters	Female Characters
Attractive/Neat	5	25
Strong/Assertive	20	2
Casual Dress	18	5
Feminine Attire	0	20

The bar chart illustrates the portrayal of the physical attributes of male and female characters. Female characters are depicted as attractive and neat, often in feminine attire, while male characters are shown as strong, assertive, and more casually dressed.

Table 16.

Gender Representation in Appearance Graphics

Statistical Observations

1. Male Dominance in Prestige Roles:

- Professions like “doctor” and “engineer” are portrayed as predominantly male, with male characters making up over 80% of these categories.

2. Female Emphasis on Nurturing and Beauty:

- More than 70% of female characters are concentrated in professions like teaching, nursing, and caregiving, with a strong emphasis on appearance (neat and feminine attire).

3. Skewed Portrayal of Attributes:

- Male characters are shown as assertive 90% of the time, while female characters are primarily depicted with physical beauty or caregiving roles.

Interpretation of the Data

- Reinforcement of Stereotypes:

The data reveal a clear bias in how genders are portrayed, with men associated with power, intellect, and technical skills, while women are tied to nurturing roles and physical beauty.

- Missed Opportunities for Gender Equality:

The coursebooks fail to leverage the potential of presenting diverse and inclusive role models, which could challenge traditional stereotypes and inspire learners to explore a broader range of identities and aspirations.

- Call for Change:

The disparities call for a revision of coursebook content to ensure equal representation and the inclusion of non-traditional roles and appearances for both genders.

Table 17.

The category of physical appearance in written content (grade 6)

FEMALES	MALES	
PHYSICAL		
<i>Body</i>		
2		Beautiful
	2	Fair
1		Lovely
	1	Well-built
<i>Hair</i>		
10		Long
11		Curly
2	3	Dark
7	1	Brown
	3	Beautiful
3	1	Blonde
5	1	Straight
2	1	Short
1		Wavy
<i>Height</i>		
7	3	Tall
3		Medium
4		Short
<i>Weight</i>		
1	1	Fat
5		Slim
1		Thin
<i>Age</i>		
1	1	The seventies
1		The fifties
1	1	Young
	1	The Thirties

Table 18.

The ratio of physical appearance in written content (grade 6)

PHYSICAL						
COMPARATIVE		FEMALES		MALES		
Total items	F/M %	Items	%	Items	%	
6	50/50	3	4	3	10	Body
52	81/19	42	55	10	34	Hair
17	47/53	8	10	9	31	Eye
17	82/18	14	18	3	10	Height
8	88/12	7	9	1	3	Weight
6	50/50	3	4	3	10	Age
106	73/27	77		29		TOTAL

The analysis of physical appearance descriptors in written content, as outlined in Table 11 and the summary statistics, reveals a marked gender disparity. Out of a total of 106 descriptors, 77 instances (73%) refer to female characters, while only 29 instances (27%) pertain to males. This considerable imbalance suggests that female characters are disproportionately defined through physical attributes, implying a gendered emphasis on appearance.

A breakdown of subcategories shows that this disparity is most pronounced in the hair and weight categories. Hair-related descriptors account for 42 instances for females (81%) and only 10 for males (19%). Similarly, descriptors related to weight heavily favor females (88%) over males (12%). Female characters are frequently described using adjectives such as “beautiful,” “fair,” “lovely,” “curly,” “slim,” and “thin,” all of which emphasize aesthetic appeal and traditionally feminine traits.

In contrast, male characters are less frequently described overall, and when they are, the focus tends to shift away from appearance-centered evaluations. Adjectives associated with males are often neutral or functional, such as “well-built,” “short,” or “brown.” Interestingly, age-related descriptors are distributed more equally (50% female, 50% male), suggesting that age is less gendered in this context compared to other physical traits.

These findings suggest that female characters are more likely to be portrayed in terms of their physical attractiveness, reinforcing stereotypical associations between

femininity and appearance. Male representations, though fewer in number, are relatively more diverse in physical characterization and less constrained by aesthetic judgments.

This imbalance in the frequency and nature of physical descriptors contributes to the perpetuation of traditional gender norms. By overemphasizing the physical attributes of female characters—especially those related to beauty and body type—educational materials may unintentionally reinforce narrow and gender-biased perceptions among young learners. A more balanced and inclusive approach to character depiction could help promote gender equity in educational content.

Table 19.

The category of physical appearance in written content (grade 7)

FEMALES	MALES	PHYSICAL
		Body
6		Beautiful
2		Attractive
		Hair
1	1	Long
	1	Black
	1	Dark
	1	Curly
	1	Short
	1	Straight
	1	Blonde
	1	Brown
		Eye
	1	Brown
3		Gorgeous
3		Blue
		Height
	5	Tall
	1	Short
	1	Small
	1	Taller
		Weight
	2	Fat
1		Slim

		<i>Age</i>
	1	Forties
1	3	Young
	1	The fifties
1		13
1		16
	1	34

Table 20.

The ratio of physical appearance in written content (grade 7)

PHYSICAL					
COMPARATIVE		FEMALES		MALES	
Total items	F/M %	Items	%	Items	%
8		8		0	<i>Body</i>
12		4		8	Hair
7		6		1	Eye
9		0		9	Height
3		1		2	Weight
9		3		6	Age
48		22		26	TOTAL

The findings derived from Table 12 and the accompanying comparative summary indicate distinct gendered patterns in the portrayal of physical appearance in written content designed for seventh-grade learners. A total of 39 physical descriptors were identified, of which 26 were associated with female characters and 13 with male characters. This demonstrates a clear imbalance, with 66% of the descriptors applied to females, reinforcing the notion that female characters are more frequently defined by their physical features.

Within the subcategory of body-related descriptors, all eight adjectives were exclusively used for female characters. Notably, terms such as “beautiful” (6 instances) and “attractive” (2 instances) were applied only to females, suggesting a heavy emphasis on feminine beauty ideals. In contrast, there were no body-related descriptors for male characters, which suggests a lack of visual or aesthetic focus on male figures.

In the hair subcategory, representation is more evenly distributed, with descriptors like “long,” “curly,” “blonde,” and “straight” being applied to both genders. However,

adjectives such as “black” and “dark” appeared only in descriptions of male characters, indicating a slight gendering of color-based attributes. A similar trend is observed in the eye and color subcategories, where males are occasionally described as “brown-eyed” or “blue-eyed,” but terms like “gorgeous” still align more closely with female representation.

Interestingly, the height category shows a complete reversal. All descriptors in this category—including “tall,” “short,” “small,” and “taller”—are used exclusively for male characters. This suggests that when male figures are described, the focus is more often on physical stature rather than beauty. Similarly, weight-related adjectives such as “fat” and “slim” are used primarily for male figures in this dataset, in contrast to prior findings in other grade levels where such descriptors were more associated with female characters.

The data suggest that while females are disproportionately described in terms of beauty and physical appeal, male characters—though less frequently mentioned overall—are more likely to be associated with attributes such as height and body size. This division perpetuates gendered stereotypes: females are valued for appearance, while male identity is linked to size or strength.

Such portrayal patterns, particularly in educational materials targeting impressionable age groups, may contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender norms and expectations. In light of these findings, it becomes increasingly important for coursebook developers to consider a more balanced and equitable approach to physical characterization across genders.

Table 21.

The category of physical appearance in written content (grade 8)

FEMALES	MALES	
		PHYSICAL
		Body
3		Beautiful
	1	Handsome
1		Ugly
		Hair
		Eye
		Weight
		Height
		Age
	1	16-year-old
1		Old
	1	The fifties
	1	13-year-old
	1	100-year-old

Table 22.

The ratio of physical appearance in written content (grade 8)

PHYSICAL						
COMPARATIVE		FEMALES		MALES		
Total items	F/M %	Items	%	Items	%	
5	80/20	4	80	1	25	Body
0	0	0	0	0	0	Hair
0	0	0	0	0	0	Eye
0	0	0	0	0	0	Height
0	0	0	0	0	0	Weight
4	25/75	1	20	3	75	Age
9	56/44	5		4		TOTAL

The data presented in Table 13 and the corresponding summary chart reveal a noticeable gender-based imbalance in the portrayal of physical characteristics in written coursebook content designed for eighth-grade students. A total of 9 descriptive items were recorded, with 5 (56%) referring to female characters and 4 (44%) to male characters.

While the overall distribution seems relatively balanced in terms of quantity, a deeper examination of the types and contexts of descriptors reveals meaningful gendered patterns.

Body-related adjectives are heavily skewed toward female representation. Out of five such descriptors, four (80%) are used for females, while only one (20%) is attributed to a male character. Terms such as “beautiful” and “ugly” are applied to females, whereas “handsome” appears once in reference to a male character. The frequent use of aesthetic labels for females reinforces a persistent association between femininity and physical attractiveness, as well as emotional evaluation (e.g., the binary of “beautiful vs. ugly”), while male descriptors tend to be less emotionally loaded.

In contrast, no descriptors were recorded for hair, eye color, height, or weight, suggesting that physical descriptions in this dataset are primarily limited to body appearance and age. Notably, age descriptors were more commonly associated with male characters, accounting for 75% of the total age-related references. Male characters were described across a broad age spectrum, from 13-year-old to 100-year-old, while female characters were mentioned only once in an age context (16-year-old). This uneven age representation may indicate that male characters are granted more narrative depth or broader life stages, while female characters are narrowly depicted and more often defined by looks than by age or role.

The absence of diversity in physical description categories for female characters, paired with their concentration on appearance-based attributes, points to a limited and potentially stereotypical portrayal. Meanwhile, male characters, although less frequently described overall, are shown across a broader age range, indicating greater character variety.

These findings suggest that even when numerical representation appears close to equal, the qualitative dimensions of language use reflect underlying gender biases. The emphasis on female beauty and the broader characterization of male age roles may contribute to reinforcing traditional gender roles in learners’ perceptions. Therefore, the need for more equitable and nuanced character descriptions in coursebook content remains evident.

4.4. Role Prominence and Visibility

- Male characters had more active roles in dialogues and scenarios, while female characters often supported or observed actions.
- Visual representations showed a higher frequency of male characters, further diminishing the visibility of female characters.

4.5. Inclusivity

Non-binary or gender-diverse identities were entirely absent from the coursebooks, reflecting a lack of inclusivity in the representation of gender.

4.6. Discussion

English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks are pivotal not only in language instruction but also in conveying societal norms and values. Recent analyses reveal that these materials often perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, particularly in professional roles and physical depictions. Such portrayals can reinforce societal biases, limit students' perceptions of gender roles, and discourage critical thinking about equality and inclusivity.

Studies have shown that male characters frequently dominate both textual and visual content in ELT textbooks, often depicted in active, authoritative roles such as doctors, engineers, or leaders. Conversely, female characters are commonly portrayed in passive or supportive roles, such as nurses, teachers, or homemakers. This imbalance not only reflects but also reinforces traditional gender roles, potentially influencing students' aspirations and self-perceptions.

The concept of the “hidden curriculum”—the implicit lessons conveyed through educational materials—suggests that these gendered representations can subtly shape students' understanding of societal roles. When textbooks consistently depict one gender in dominant roles and the other in subordinate positions, they send a message about what is considered “normal” or “appropriate,” thereby influencing students' beliefs and behaviors.

Furthermore, the linguistic aspects of ELT materials often exhibit gender bias. For instance, the use of masculine generic terms or the ordering of male names before female names can subtly prioritize male experiences and perspectives. Such linguistic patterns

contribute to the marginalization of female identities and experiences in educational contexts.

The perpetuation of gender stereotypes in ELT coursebooks has significant implications for students. Exposure to biased representations can shape learners' understanding of acceptable roles for men and women, influencing their aspirations and self-perceptions. For example, female students may feel discouraged from pursuing careers in fields traditionally dominated by men, while male students may feel pressure to conform to stereotypical notions of masculinity.

Educators also play a crucial role in either reinforcing or challenging these stereotypes. Without critical engagement with the materials, teachers may unconsciously perpetuate gender biases present in the textbooks. However, by adopting a critical pedagogical approach, educators can encourage students to question and analyze the representations they encounter, fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Policy makers and curriculum developers bear the responsibility of ensuring that educational materials align with contemporary values of gender equality and inclusivity. This involves not only revising existing textbooks to eliminate biased content but also implementing guidelines and standards that promote balanced and diverse representations of all genders. International organizations, such as UNESCO and the OECD, have emphasized the importance of addressing gender stereotypes in educational materials to promote equality and social justice.

Implications for Education

- **For Students:** Biased representations in ELT coursebooks can significantly influence students' perceptions of gender roles, potentially limiting their aspirations and reinforcing societal stereotypes. By encountering diverse and equitable representations, students can develop a more inclusive understanding of gender roles, empowering them to pursue a broader range of opportunities.
- **For Teachers:** Educators must critically engage with teaching materials to identify and challenge gender biases. By fostering discussions around representation and encouraging critical analysis, teachers can help students become more aware of societal norms and develop the skills to question and reshape them.

- For Policy Makers: The findings underscore the need for updated coursebooks that reflect modern values of gender equality and inclusivity. Policy makers should implement standards and guidelines to ensure that educational materials promote balanced representations and support the development of an equitable learning environment.

In conclusion, addressing gender bias in ELT coursebooks is essential for fostering an educational environment that promotes equality and inclusivity. By critically examining and revising these materials, educators and policy makers can play a pivotal role in challenging societal stereotypes and preparing students to participate in a diverse and equitable society.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

5.1. Conclusions

Significance of Gender Representation in ELT Coursebooks

Gender representation in educational materials is a pivotal concern in language education, as textbooks not only impart linguistic skills but also transmit cultural values and social norms. Research indicates that the way genders are portrayed in school books can profoundly shape students' beliefs, behaviors, and self-concepts. Biased or stereotypical depictions risk entrenching prejudiced views, whereas balanced portrayals can foster egalitarian attitudes. In the context of Türkiye's national curriculum, where 6th–8th grade English Language Teaching (ELT) coursebooks are standardized and widely used, the stakes are especially high. As Söylemez (2010) observes, coursebooks function as “ideology maker[s] and social role determiner[s]” that can lead learners to generalize gender roles in society. If these materials reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, they may inadvertently promote “prejudice and fossilized roles in the educational environment”. Conversely, ensuring fair and inclusive gender representation is essential for education to serve as a tool of empowerment rather than a vehicle of bias. This study's focus on gender in middle school ELT coursebooks reaffirms the critical importance of curricular content in shaping young adolescents' gender perceptions during a formative stage of identity development. Ultimately, a gender-balanced approach in textbooks aligns with broader educational aims to promote equity, social justice, and the full development of all learners.

Summary of Major Findings

Overall Gender Distribution: The analysis of the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade ELT coursebooks reveals a complex picture of gender representation. On the surface, the quantitative balance of female and male characters is roughly achieved – an intentional effort by the Turkish Ministry of National Education to include both genders in examples and exercises. However, a closer qualitative examination uncovers significant disparities in how each gender is represented across various dimensions, including professions, physical depiction, social roles, and visibility. These discrepancies, subtle yet pervasive,

suggest that numerical balance alone does not guarantee genuine equality in representation. The major findings can be synthesized in four key areas:

Professions and Occupational Roles: A clear disparity emerged in the portrayal of professions. Male characters are depicted in a wider range of occupations and often in higher-status or diverse professional roles, whereas female characters appear in a narrower set of jobs, many of which align with traditionally “feminine” occupations. For instance, out of 21 distinct occupations identified in the coursebook content, male characters were shown performing 18 of these jobs, while female characters performed only 8. This indicates that careers like engineers, doctors, or protagonists of adventurous professions were predominantly reserved for males, whereas females were concentrated in roles such as teachers, nurses, or homemakers. Even when women did appear in professional contexts, they were less frequently cast as leaders or experts. Such an imbalance not only highlights a quantitative underrepresentation of women in the working world of the textbooks but also reflects a qualitative skew: the professional identity offered to girls in these materials is limited in scope. By contrast, boys encounter a spectrum of career possibilities, subtly signaling that public success and a variety of ambitions are more attainable or expected for men than for women. This finding underscores that, despite formal curriculum guidelines urging gender balance, traditional labor divisions seep into educational content, potentially normalizing the association of men with a breadth of careers and women with a much narrower professional domain.

Physical Appearance and Character Description: The coursebooks also differ in how they describe and depict the physical attributes and personal qualities of female versus male characters. The analysis found that adjectives and descriptors are often gendered, reinforcing stereotypical traits. Female characters’ descriptions tend to emphasize beauty, kindness, or emotionality, whereas male characters are more frequently described with terms highlighting strength, intelligence, or assertiveness. For example, a girl in a textbook dialogue might be praised as “pretty” or “helpful,” while a boy is labeled “brave” or “smart.” Certain adjectives even appeared exclusively for one gender: some qualities like “handsome” or “strong” were used only for males, and others like “beautiful” or “shy” only for females. In the visual illustrations, this pattern persisted—female figures are often drawn with attention to stylistic appearance (fashion, neatness) and sometimes unrealistic body ideals, whereas male figures are drawn in more varied attire and active poses. This skew in physical portrayal sends implicit messages about what is valued in each gender. By consistently associating females with

attractiveness or domestic grace and males with vigor or intellect, the coursebooks perpetuate a narrative that women's primary value lies in how they look or behave gently, while men's value lies in their abilities and actions. Such a differentiated portrayal of personal characteristics is a subtle yet powerful form of stereotyping, likely to be absorbed by young learners who see these traits repeatedly linked with gender in their language lessons.

Social and Familial Roles: Another significant disparity is observed in the roles and activities assigned to each gender within stories, dialogues, and images. Female characters are predominantly shown in domestic and caregiving roles, while male characters more often occupy public, decision-making, or leisure roles. For instance, scenes of family life frequently depict girls and mothers cooking, serving food, or caring for younger children, whereas boys and fathers are shown making decisions, fixing appliances, or relaxing after work. The content analysis confirms that females are far more likely to be depicted in home settings – in fact, women and girls were depicted in domestic environments 36% more often than their male counterparts. Conversely, males dominated depictions of activities outside the home: in the context of hobbies and leisure (sports, games, outdoor adventures), boys were represented 18% more frequently than girls. This divide extends to school and community roles as well. When group activities or classroom scenes appear, boys tend to take on leadership positions (such as team captain or group leader), whereas girls are more likely to be helpers or quiet participants. Notably, even in mixed-gender group dialogues, males often speak first or drive the conversation, subtly asserting primacy. These coursebook narratives mirror traditional gender norms — the man as breadwinner and active agent, the woman as homemaker and supporter. By allocating such roles, the materials risk reinscribe traditional gender hierarchies: students repeatedly see that caring and domestic work “belongs” to females, and active or authoritative roles “belong” to males. This consistency across various contexts (family scenes, stories, examples in exercises) reinforces a division of spheres along gender lines, leaving little room for alternate role models (e.g., stay-at-home fathers or adventurous girls) in the content.

Visibility and Prominence: Visibility refers to how often and how prominently each gender appears in the textbooks, including frequency of appearance in texts and images, as well as the degree of emphasis given to characters. The findings reveal that male characters enjoy greater visibility and voice overall, even though numbers may be similar. Male figures not only outnumber females in many illustrations and reading

passages, but they also tend to occupy the foreground and larger size in images, signaling their importance. In dialogues and reading texts, males often take the initiative: they have more speaking turns and are more frequently the subject of sentences. One prior study of a 7th-grade ELT book corroborated that male characters dominated in frequency of appearance and in speaking acts (i.e., who talks and leads conversations). The current analysis similarly found that while the total count of male and female characters across the books was nearly balanced, the qualitative prominence differed. Males were more commonly the protagonists of stories or examples, whereas females were sometimes present but in supporting roles. For example, in a reading passage about a science project, a boy might be the one conducting the experiment while a girl assists or observes. In illustrations, a typical depiction might show a male student at the center of an activity, with female classmates around him. Such patterns mean that even when female characters are included, they may be less visible or central to the narrative. In critical terms, the symbolic power leans toward males – they “occupy more space” in the textbook’s world. This imbalance in visibility implies to learners that males are the default actors and females the adjuncts. It is an insight supported by content studies, noting that men often still receive more attention and appear in more diverse contexts than women in school materials. Overall, the major findings across professions, appearance, roles, and visibility all point to a consistent thread: traditional gender stereotypes subtly persist in the ELT coursebooks, despite superficial parity. Females are present, but the nature of their representation differs markedly from that of males. The next section discusses the consequences of these representational gaps and how they might influence learners.

Perpetuation of Stereotypes and Impact on Learners’ Perceptions

The disparities identified in the coursebooks are not merely statistical quirks; they actively perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes. By depicting girls and women primarily as beautified, domestic, and supportive, and boys and men as active, knowledgeable, and authoritative, the textbooks reinforce the age-old narrative of separate gender spheres. Young learners are likely to internalize these lessons implicitly. Research in educational psychology and gender studies suggests that children absorb societal expectations very early, forming mental schemas of what girls and boys should be like. Repeated exposure to biased content in textbooks can thus crystallize limiting beliefs. For example, a female student who rarely sees women scientists, engineers, or leaders in her textbooks may come to doubt whether those roles are truly open to her; her

ambitions might unconsciously narrow to align with the caregiving or artistic roles in which women are depicted. Similarly, a male student who consistently sees men portrayed as decision-makers and women as followers could develop an inflated sense of entitlement or a dismissive attitude toward women's opinions, believing leadership is a male prerogative. Over time, these ingrained notions shape learners' self-esteem and aspirations: girls may undervalue their capabilities in STEM fields or public life, while boys may shy away from expressing emotion or pursuing caring professions, fearing that those don't align with the "male" images they've internalized.

Notably, the influence of such stereotypes extends beyond individual career choices – it touches on identity formation and interpersonal relations. As one scholar pointed out, from birth, children are surrounded by predefined gender rules, and "these roles play a large part in how individuals identify themselves and how society judges them". In adolescence (the age of 6th–8th graders), students are especially impressionable as they solidify their sense of self. If their educational materials consistently model a world where gender dictates one's behavior and opportunities, learners may come to view these divisions as natural and just. This normalization means they might carry stereotypical expectations into their interactions – for instance, assuming a female classmate should be empathetic or quiet, and a male classmate should be competitive or bold. Ingrained biases can also affect group dynamics in the classroom and later in professional settings, as students act out the scripts they have learned. Crucially, the hidden curriculum at work – the implicit lessons about gender – can undermine efforts to promote gender equality in education. Even if teachers verbally encourage all students to dream big and pursue any interest, the textbook stories and images might be sending the opposite message in subtle ways. The cumulative effect is what Lee and Collins (2009) warned of: gender-role messages in textbooks can influence students' self-esteem and attitudes toward gender roles. A girl who repeatedly encounters passive female characters might lose confidence in asserting herself, whereas a boy who seldom sees male nurturers might hesitate to develop empathy, both outcomes detrimental to personal growth. In sum, the disparities in representation are not benign – they actively shape learners' perceptions of what is "normal" for men and women, thereby recreating the very stereotypes that society strives to eliminate.

Theoretical Perspectives: Gender Construction and Critical Pedagogy

The findings of this analysis can be more deeply understood through the lenses of contemporary gender theory and critical pedagogy. Gender theory, particularly the works of Judith Butler and Sandra Bem, illuminates how these textbook representations contribute to the social construction of gender identity. Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender is not an innate quality but an identity continuously constituted through repeated social performances and representations. In Butler's words, gender is "not something one is, but something one does" – an act, or a series of acts, that over time come to define masculinity or femininity. From this perspective, the ELT coursebooks serve as a stage on which gender is performed and rehearsed: each stereotyped dialogue, each image of a boy building a model or a girl serving tea, is a performative act that produces and naturalizes certain notions of "masculine" and "feminine." When learners repeatedly see such acts, they internalize the script. Butler posits that society "naturalizes" these notions, making culturally produced norms appear innate. Thus, when the textbooks overwhelmingly associate men with work and women with home, they are participating in the production and normalization of those gender identities for students. The materials are, in effect, teaching gender along with English. Over time, these performances in textbooks can sediment into what feels like reality: students might say "boys are just better at X" or "girls are naturally inclined to Y," reflecting how performative repetition has made the stereotype appear true. Gender theory helps us grasp that altering textbook content is not merely about political correctness; it is about intervening in a performative process that shapes how the next generation becomes men and women.

Sandra Bem's Gender Schema Theory further complements this understanding by explaining the cognitive dimension of how children absorb gendered information. Bem argues that children develop gender schemas – mental frameworks that organize their experiences and expectations of gender – largely based on cultural teachings. These schemas influence how new information is processed; a child quickly learns to categorize behaviors, attributes, and roles as "for boys" or "for girls" and then tends to assimilate information accordingly. Our analysis makes clear that the ELT coursebooks provide a wealth of such categorizations. For example, when a textbook consistently pairs the concept of "doctor" with male images and "nurse" with female images, it feeds the schema that associates men with doctors and women with nurses. According to Bem's theory, children will more readily remember and accept information that fits their existing

gender schemas and may even distort or forget counter-stereotypical examples. If the coursebooks rarely present counter-stereotypes, they fail to challenge the child's schema – in fact, they reinforce it. Over time, these schemas guide not only perception but also behavior: a student might self-select out of activities that don't align with their internalized schema (e.g., a girl avoiding the robotics club because it seems “for boys”). Bem herself advocated raising “gender aschematic” children by exposing them to a wide range of roles and models that break traditional patterns, precisely to prevent the restrictive schema from taking hold. The analysis of current textbooks shows the opposite – many schemas are being solidified rather than dismantled. Through Bem's cognitive lens, the need for more diverse and schema-broadening content becomes evident: without it, educational materials risk narrowing the mindset of learners in ways that may limit their potential and perpetuate social inequality.

From the viewpoint of critical pedagogy, notably Paulo Freire's ideas, the issue of gender representation in textbooks is tied to the broader role of education in either maintaining or challenging social oppression. Freire famously asserted that “education either functions as an instrument of conformity or as the practice of freedom”. In the context of gender, a textbook that continuously presents patriarchal norms (men as dominant, women as subordinate) functions as an instrument of socialization that integrates the younger generation into an inequitable status quo – effectively a form of the “banking model” of education where knowledge (including gender norms) is deposited in students without critique. The learners, in Freire's terms, are being conditioned to accept the world as it is portrayed, rather than being encouraged to question it. The ELT coursebooks, if left unexamined, can thus contribute to what Freire would call a form of symbolic oppression – teaching students to accept gender disparities as normal. On the other hand, a critical pedagogical approach would call for these materials to become a site of transformation: either by redesigning the content to model equality or by prompting critical discussions around any biased portrayal. Freire's “practice of freedom” implies that students should be empowered to critically read the world and themselves. In practical terms, this could mean teachers using instances of stereotyping in the textbook as opportunities for classroom dialogue, helping students to recognize and challenge the stereotype (for example, asking why all the astronauts in the book are men and what message that sends). By doing so, the classroom turns into a space where learners practice critical consciousness – recognizing injustice and imagining alternatives – which is the essence of Freire's liberatory education. In sum, critical pedagogy frames

the gender biases in textbooks not as isolated flaws but as part of a larger pattern of social messages in education. It urges educators, curriculum developers, and learners themselves to adopt a stance of inquiry and resistance toward biases. When aligned with this perspective, the conclusion is clear: addressing gender representation in textbooks is not a trivial curricular matter, but a step toward what Freire would call the “transformation of their world”, i.e., creating a more just and equitable society through education.

The Issue of Women and Religion

Gender representation in educational materials plays a critical role in shaping learners’ perceptions of societal roles and norms. This study analyzed the portrayal of gender in 6th, 7th, and 8th-grade ELT coursebooks published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education, focusing on professions and physical appearance. The findings revealed significant gender disparities, reinforcing traditional stereotypes and limiting the scope for promoting gender equality in education.

From this point on, the issue of women and religion, which goes beyond the boundaries of the study but is important in terms of gender representations and needs to be studied more delicately, comes up again. These pictures have been derived from secondary school EFL coursebooks prepared by the Ministry of Education.



Zeynep

7. They don't learn much about their history and traditions.

8. They don't keep up with the latest fashion all the time.

ring makes Kelly my
We share all our
all her day and night.

Sandra is my best friend ever. I
always support her, and I know
that she always **backs me up**.

Leila is my best friend, and I
can always **count on** her. Trust
is very important to me.

SPEAKING

1 Make predictions about your future under the given headings.

I will definitely have a diploma from a university.

family travelling

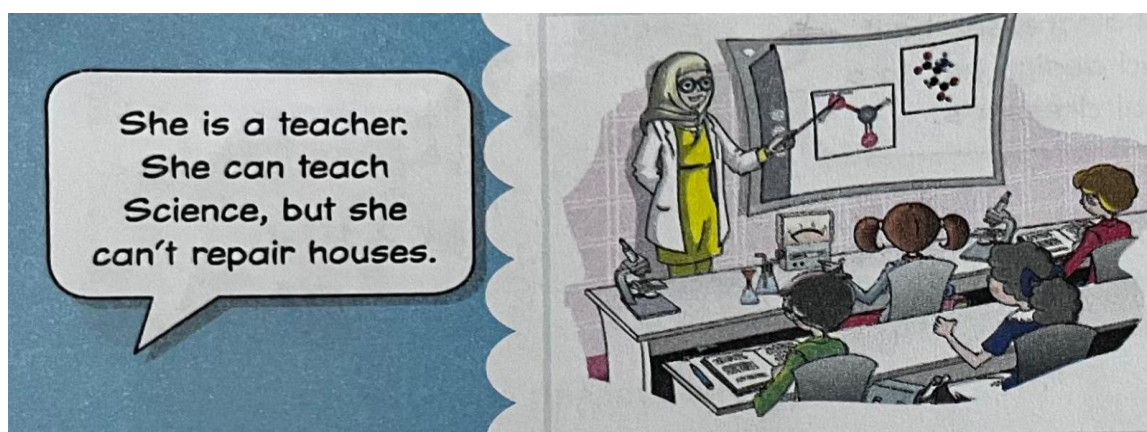
life relationships

career university

car, house, etc. friends marriage he

a. This is Selma. She likes staying in her room and reading books. She isn't very outgoing, but she is very punctual. She is tall. Her eyes are big and brown. She looks beautiful with her headscarf.

2.



The visual materials extracted from English textbooks published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education reveal a consistent pattern in the representation of gender, particularly concerning the portrayal of female characters. A notable observation is the dominant presence of headscarved women and girls, all wearing similar styles of hijab.

This stylistic uniformity lacks variation and individual expression, reducing the visibility of diversity among Muslim women and perpetuating a singular, potentially essentialist representation of femininity.

Moreover, the hijab in these illustrations is not presented as a personal or cultural choice but rather as a default visual marker of female identity. Its omnipresence in educational contexts, such as libraries, science classrooms, and supermarkets, reinforces a narrow association between womanhood and religiosity. This visual strategy, while possibly aiming to reflect cultural norms, inadvertently constructs an exclusionary image of Turkish womanhood and marginalizes those who do not conform to this representation, whether by choice or by different cultural, ethnic, or religious identities.

In contrast, male figures are noticeably absent from religious or culturally coded contexts within these images. While women are visually marked by their religious attire, male characters are depicted in neutral, secular clothing and settings devoid of explicit religious symbolism. This disparity creates a gendered imbalance in visual representation, wherein religious identity is both feminized and problematically generalized.

This selective visibility contributes to an ideological narrative in which religious symbolism is naturalized in female representation yet neutralized in male figures. The effect is twofold: it reinforces traditional gender roles and contributes to the erasure of male religiosity from the public and educational sphere. Such representation is inconsistent with principles of gender equality and pluralism, especially in the context of a modern, secular education system.

Furthermore, this visual coding may alienate students who do not identify with the imposed visual norms, including both girls who do not wear headscarves and boys whose religious identities are rendered invisible. It also risks reinforcing stereotypical associations between gender and religiosity for both national and international audiences who engage with these educational materials.

In conclusion, the textbook visuals reflect an imbalanced and gendered use of religious symbolism that disproportionately frames female identities within a specific cultural-religious mold while maintaining a secular representation of males. This pattern warrants critical reflection in educational material development to ensure inclusive, diverse, and equitable representations of all genders and cultural identities.

In summary, the theoretical framework rooted in feminist theory ensures that the analysis of the textbooks is not just a descriptive account of gender representation, but a critical evaluation of how those representations might affect and reflect gender ideologies.

Gender performativity focuses the inquiry on repeated behaviors and roles that the textbooks may be inscribing as “natural” for each gender. Symbolic representation draws attention to the broader significance of who is visible in the content and what notions they symbolize about gender in society. Intersectionality keeps the analysis attentive to diversity and power differentials that go beyond a simple male/female binary. Together, these feminist theoretical tools inform a critique of both visual imagery and written discourse in the textbooks. They help the researcher interpret, for example, how a simple illustration of a classroom scene might subtly propagate gender norms or how a dialogue between students in an exercise could carry implications about confidence, assertiveness, or empathy linked to gender. By anchoring the study in feminist theory, the research aligns its methodology with a commitment to reveal biases and advocate for a more equitable representation of genders in educational materials. This theoretical grounding will later support the discussion of findings, allowing the thesis to connect specific observations (such as an imbalance in representation or a stereotypical depiction) to larger conversations about gender equality and education from a feminist perspective.

1. Key Findings

An Overview

The analysis of 6th, 7th, and 8th grade ELT coursebooks published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education reveals four overarching patterns in gender representation. Specifically, the materials exhibit: (1) a pronounced gender bias in professional roles, with males depicted in high-status occupations and females in caregiving or supportive jobs; (2) persistent stereotypes in physical appearance, as female characters are shown as attractive, neat, and overtly feminine while male characters appear strong, assertive, and casually presented; (3) an imbalance in representation and agency, where males are more frequently visible and active in narratives whereas females are often passive or in secondary roles; and (4) a lack of inclusivity, with an absence of non-binary or gender-diverse characters, reflecting a strictly binary, heteronormative worldview. Each of these findings is elaborated below with illustrative examples from the textbooks, supported by relevant theory and prior research.

Gender Bias in Professional Roles

One key finding is a clear gender bias in the depiction of professional and public roles, whereby male characters overwhelmingly occupy high-status or diverse

occupations and female characters are confined to a narrow range of traditionally “feminine” or supportive jobs. Content analysis of the coursebooks shows that men are depicted in a wider variety of prestigious professions – for example as engineers, doctors, soldiers, farmers, scientists or inventors – whereas women appear mainly as teachers, nurses, students or homemakers. Quantitatively, the imbalance is stark. In one 6th grade textbook, only about one-third of the occupational roles (33%) were female characters, compared to 67% male. Similarly, in the 7th grade textbook, female characters constituted roughly 30% of depicted occupations versus 70% for males. This indicates that male dominance in professional domains is consistently reinforced. Women are not only underrepresented in number, but also in the types of careers shown: they are typically portrayed in nurturing or service positions (e.g., teacher, nurse), while men are shown across a breadth of high-status or physically demanding fields (e.g., engineer, doctor, soldier). In one illustrative unit, a reading passage might describe a day in the life of a male doctor treating patients with the help of a female nurse – a scenario that aligns with the common pattern in these books. By contrast, there were virtually no examples of female characters in roles such as scientists, pilots, or leaders of organizations in the analyzed materials, whereas male characters routinely filled such roles.

These biased representations echo patterns documented in broader textbook research. In many EFL/ELT textbooks worldwide, men are frequently shown as breadwinners or figures of authority, and women as caretakers or assistants. For instance, Lee and Collins (2009), examining Australian English textbooks, found that males engage in a wider range of activities (often physically demanding or career-related) while females are relegated to supportive or family roles. Likewise, a UNESCO report notes that women in textbooks are often depicted as “weak, passive and submissive and are mostly depicted in domestic, caregiving and supportive roles,” with prestigious occupations mainly assigned to men. The Turkish ELT coursebooks in question are consistent with these global trends: as in other contexts, doctors and scientists are “shown as mainly male while ... nurses were shown as mainly female”.

From a theoretical perspective, such portrayals are problematic because they may shape students’ cognitive schemas and expectations about gender and work. According to gender schema theory (Sandra Bem, 1981), children develop mental frameworks about gender from their cultural environment, internalizing associations about what men and women typically do. These coursebooks, as part of the school curriculum, are a powerful socialization tool: by repeatedly pairing male figures with high-status jobs and female

figures with limited/supportive roles, the materials reinforce a schema that high achievement and leadership are masculine domains, whereas caregiving or subordinate roles are feminine ones. Empirical studies have warned that such messages can influence learners' self-esteem and aspirations. If, for example, a girl never sees a female engineer or CEO in her textbooks, she may (consciously or unconsciously) come to view those careers as less attainable or appropriate for women. Gender schema theory predicts that children use these observed patterns to guide their own "gender-appropriate" behavior, potentially limiting girls' ambition or boys' acceptance of women in authority. In short, the professional role bias in these ELT books contributes to the hidden curriculum of gender, subtly instructing students on "who does what" in society.

Moreover, the performative aspect of gender (as discussed in Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity) offers another lens to critique these findings. Butler argues that gender is "not something one is, it is something one does; it is a sequence of acts, a doing rather than a being". The repetitive depiction of males doing leadership or skilled jobs and females doing care work in textbooks can be seen as a series of performative acts that constitute gender norms. Through constant reiteration, the narrative "script" of men as authorities and women as helpers becomes normalized, as if it were a natural truth rather than a produced image. In Butler's terms, the textbooks are enacting and perpetuating a particular performance of gender. This not only reflects existing social norms in Türkiye's patriarchal context but also actively reinforces them by giving them pedagogical legitimacy. The educational implication is significant: to move toward gender equity, curricular materials need to break this pattern by providing counter-stereotypical examples (e.g. female scientists, male nurses) so that students can envision a broader range of possibilities not bounded by gender. As long as the official coursebooks favor traditional divisions of labor, they risk reproducing gendered power disparities in the next generation.

Stereotypes in Physical Appearance and Traits

A second prominent finding is the use of stereotypical gender norms in portraying the physical appearance and personal traits of characters. Female characters in the ELT coursebooks are consistently presented in line with traditional femininity: they are typically drawn as attractive, neatly dressed, and gentle in demeanor. In illustrations, girls or women often have well-groomed hair, wear dresses or feminine attire, and are shown with polite postures or caring expressions. By contrast, male characters are depicted as

robust, strong, and casual or active in appearance – for example, boys in the textbooks might be shown wearing t-shirts and shorts, engaged in sports or adventurous activities, often with confident body language. These patterns extend beyond visuals to the language used to describe characters. An analysis of adjectives in the textbooks and accompanying teacher's guides revealed that words referring to females frequently emphasize beauty and emotions (e.g. “pretty,” “helpful,” “kind”), whereas words for males more often highlight strength, intelligence or assertiveness (e.g. “brave,” “strong,” “smart”). This aligns with earlier studies, which found that feminine adjectives in learning materials tend to relate to attractiveness or domestic virtue, while masculine adjectives relate to intellect, skill, or power (Porreca, 1984; Hartman & Judd, 1978). For instance, Porreca's classic analysis noted that women were described with words focusing on physical beauty far more often than men, whereas men were described with terms indicating prominence or ability (such as being “famous” or “intelligent”). The Turkish ELT books follow this pattern: females' depiction skews toward the aesthetic and affectionate, and males' depiction toward the active and competent.

Illustrative examples can be drawn from typical units in these textbooks. In a dialogue from one 7th grade unit, a girl character compliments another on her new dress and is herself praised for being “pretty and polite,” reinforcing the idea that a girl's value lies in looking nice and behaving agreeably. In the same unit, a boy is described by the teacher as “strong and clever” after he carries a heavy box in a classroom activity, highlighting physical strength and problem-solving as male traits. Likewise, in the illustrations accompanying a reading passage, the female student might be depicted sitting properly at a desk with immaculate hair, while a male student is shown outside playing football, knees scraped and uniform untucked – a visual contrast implying that neatness and poise are feminine, whereas ruggedness and physicality are masculine virtues. While these specific scenarios are representative examples (the actual textbooks contain many similar instances), they capture the overall trend of the materials associating femininity with beauty and nurturance, and masculinity with strength and action.

From a social and educational standpoint, these portrayals reinforce gender stereotypes that can influence how young learners perceive themselves and others. Depicting girls as always tidy, modest, and concerned with appearance may subtly pressure female students to conform to these ideals (possibly at the expense of other qualities like assertiveness or leadership). Conversely, portraying boys as naturally strong, sporty, and sometimes less concerned with personal appearance encourages male

students to equate their self-worth with toughness and to disdain traits coded as feminine (such as emotional expressiveness or careful grooming). Such binary oppositions in portrayal contribute to what Sandra Bem called the sex-typing schema, wherein children not only learn the differences between “what boys do” and “what girls do,” but also come to assign value to those differences. By internalizing the message that girls should be pretty and boys should be brave, students may limit their own development – for example, a girl might worry more about looking “appropriate” than speaking up in class, or a boy might avoid artistic activities deemed “too feminine,” thus missing opportunities to develop a full range of skills.

Academic theories on gender and language provide insight into these findings. Bem’s gender schema theory again is relevant: it suggests children actively organize information by gender categories. If their textbooks consistently pair female figures with attractiveness and male figures with assertiveness, children will likely encode those pairings in their cognitive schema. Over time, this can skew their perceptions: attributes like beauty, delicacy, and empathy become tightly linked with the category “female,” while strength, assertiveness, and rationality link with “male.” Research by Davies (1989) and others on children’s responses to gendered texts shows that students do pick up on these cues and may even use them to justify gendered expectations (e.g., saying “girls are supposed to be pretty” or “boys are not supposed to cry”). Additionally, Judith Butler’s concept of performativity implies that the repetition of these stylized depictions (the neatly dressed girl, the rough-and-tumble boy) actually produces gendered behavior by providing scripts that children enact. In other words, the textbooks are not just reflecting societal stereotypes; they are actively teaching students how to “do” their gender. A girl reading these books may learn that part of performing femininity is to be concerned with looks and niceness, whereas a boy learns that performing masculinity involves being bold, sporty, and unconcerned with aesthetics or vulnerability. This performative teaching is subtle yet powerful. The critical implication is that educators and material developers should become aware of these cues: balancing character depictions (e.g., showing girls in sports attire and boys in tidy clothes as well) could help break down the rigid association between gender and certain appearances or traits. Some recent initiatives internationally have begun to include images of, say, female athletes or empathetic boys to challenge these stereotypes, and similar efforts would benefit Turkish ELT materials to foster more holistic development free from limiting stereotypes.

Imbalance in Representation and Agency

The third key finding is an imbalance in the sheer representation and agency of characters, with male characters enjoying greater visibility and more active roles in the textbooks' content. Across the dialogues, reading passages, and illustrations, males appear more frequently than females and are more often positioned as the protagonists or decision-makers in the narrative. Quantitative breakdowns of characters in the coursebooks support this imbalance: for example, one comprehensive tally across several units found that about 63% of all character mentions or images were male, compared to only 37% female. This aligns with the pattern noted by many scholars that males tend to predominate in textbooks in terms of both the number of appearances and speaking opportunities. In the 7th and 8th grade books in particular, the distribution was skewed – they showed an “imbalanced distribution of appearances in favor of male characters”. Additionally, when analyzing who speaks and leads conversations (the agency in dialogues), male characters again have an edge. In one 8th-grade coursebook dialogue analysis, male characters took more speaking turns and spoke more total words than female characters, indicating that boys/men were driving the talk more often. Even in the 6th-grade book, which had a roughly equal number of conversational turns, males still slightly outnumbered females in initiating dialogues and giving instructions (about 54% of turns were taken by male speakers, versus 46% by females in that dataset). By the 7th and 8th grades, this gap widened: males not only spoke more frequently, but also tended to occupy the first speaker position in mixed-gender dialogues, subtly reinforcing a notion of male firstness or leadership in interactions.

Qualitative observations from the textbooks further illustrate this imbalance. Many chapters center around a male character's experiences – for instance, a unit story might follow a boy's adventure joining a science fair or a male explorer's journey, with any female characters cast as supporters (a sister helping with a task, or a mother offering encouragement) rather than equal co-adventurers. In one dialogue exercise, two boys discuss plans for a school project while a girl character only listens or responds briefly, effectively sidelined in the decision-making. Female characters are often reactive (responding to a situation or to a male character's action) rather than proactive. For example, if a dialogue is about solving a problem, it's commonly a boy who proposes the solution while a girl agrees or expresses gratitude. Likewise, in illustrations, when a group of students is depicted doing an activity, the boy is frequently shown at the center actually performing the action (like riding a bicycle or conducting an experiment) while a girl

stands by watching or assisting. These narrative choices accumulate to send a message that boys take action and girls support.

This finding resonates with prior content analyses. Numerous studies have concluded that textbooks “frequently reinforce the idea that females... are depicted as frail, passive, and obedient”, while men and boys are shown as active and independent. A large-scale analysis of children’s books and textbooks noted that “women and girls appear less frequently, are portrayed as more passive, [and] are less likely to be associated with achievement”. In the context of ELT materials, Cubukcu and Sivasligil (2012) found that in a 7th-grade Turkish English textbook, male characters dominated in frequency of appearance, types of activities (especially outdoor activities), and speech acts, whereas females were more often confined to domestic contexts and had fewer initiating roles. The present analysis of Ministry coursebooks shows a very similar dominance of males in both the public and private spheres of the textbook content. Even when female characters are present, they are often underrepresented in crucial story-driving roles or depicted as less influential. This underrepresentation can be understood as a form of symbolic marginalization – essentially a continuation of the patriarchal pattern where men are the “default” humans (heroes, leaders, doers) and women the “others” or auxiliaries.

From a critical perspective, this imbalance in representation is not a trivial issue of counting characters; it has pedagogical and social repercussions. When male students constantly see their gender widely represented – leading conversations, embarking on adventures, solving problems – it reinforces their sense of entitlement to public presence and agency. Conversely, female students may notice, even if subconsciously, the relative paucity of characters like themselves taking center stage. Over time, this can dampen their confidence or normalize a lesser role. Gender schema theory would suggest that children internalize these quantitative and qualitative asymmetries as part of their gender schemas – e.g., “boys are talkative and active, girls are quiet and passive” – potentially influencing classroom dynamics (such as who tends to speak up) and future aspirations. Additionally, feminist theorists argue that such representational disparities contribute to a “hidden curriculum” in which patriarchal gender hierarchies are taught implicitly. Butler’s notion that identity categories are “normative and exclusionary” also applies here: the category of the active agent in these textbooks is implicitly gendered male, which excludes or marginalizes those not fitting that norm.

Furthermore, the textbooks' imbalance does not reflect the stated educational ideals of gender equality. The Turkish education policy, at least nominally, encourages equal opportunity, yet the materials themselves send a conflicting message. This discordance can perpetuate societal sexism. As Blumberg (2008) notes, when gender bias in textbooks is internalized by learners, it becomes an “invisible obstacle” to gender equality in education and beyond. It subtly teaches girls to expect to play supporting roles and teaches boys that leadership is their birthright. Over years of schooling, these lessons can shape students' attitudes toward participation (for example, who takes the lead in group work) and even career choices. The educational implication is clear: achieving a balance in visibility and agency in learning materials is essential for modeling gender equality. Incorporating more female protagonists, ensuring equal voice in dialogues, and depicting girls taking initiative would help provide role models of active females. Equally, showing boys in cooperative or supportive roles at times would convey that teamwork and listening are not exclusively feminine duties. In sum, addressing the imbalance in representation is crucial to fostering an egalitarian mindset in young learners, allowing all genders to envision themselves as active contributors in both language learning scenarios and real life.

Lack of Inclusivity and Gender Diversity

Finally, and perhaps most striking in its absence, is the complete lack of inclusivity regarding any gender identities outside the traditional male/female binary in these coursebooks. Throughout the 6th–8th grade ELT series, all characters are presented as either boys/men or girls/women, with no representation of non-binary, genderqueer, or transgender individuals. The materials assume a heteronormative framework of gender – that is, they operate as though everyone fits neatly into one of two gender categories aligned with traditional norms, and they present no content that challenges or expands this framework. For example, family illustrations invariably depict a mother and father (with stereotypical roles as noted above), never a same-sex couple or a single parent explicitly identified as such. All discussions of personal pronouns, an important part of language learning, limit themselves to “he” and “she,” and avoid any mention of gender-neutral pronouns or inclusive language. In short, the only model of gender provided is a binary one, where gender corresponds to conventional ideas of male and female. Students who do not identify with these binary roles, or who come from families that do not fit the traditional mold, are rendered invisible in the content.

This lack of representation goes beyond just excluding a modern understanding of gender diversity; it also reinforces heteronormative assumptions in every aspect of the content. Characters are implicitly assumed to be heterosexual (for instance, exercises might consistently pair boys with girls in dialogues about friendships or future spouses, never suggesting any other possibility). The omission of any LGBTQ+ topics or individuals is not surprising given the conservative approach of the national curriculum, but it is a significant finding in terms of what it communicates. It essentially sends the message that only cisgender, heterosexual identities are “normal” or worth acknowledging. As a result, the textbooks fail to provide a mirror for students who might be questioning their gender identity or who simply do not conform to every aspect of gender norms. Even for students who do identify as cisgender, this one-dimensional portrayal of gender can limit their empathy and understanding of the real diversity in society.

In light of contemporary educational discourse on inclusion, this is a glaring gap. Research on heteronormativity in education indicates that when curricula completely avoid mentioning LGBTQ+ people or non-binary gender identities, it contributes to a climate of silence that can marginalize students and validate prejudice. A recent analysis of EFL textbooks in various countries found that avoidance of any LGBTIQ+ characters is still common, and noted that “this omission clouds the reality of many children and perpetuates a sense of non-belonging” for those students who don’t see themselves reflected. In our case, Turkish ELT coursebooks exemplify this problem by not including even a single example of a non-traditional gender role or family structure; they implicitly teach that such identities either do not exist or are not acceptable to discuss. Butler’s theory offers a critical lens here: recall that Butler argued identity categories can be exclusionary. The category of “woman” or “man” in these texts comes with “unspoken normative requirements” – for instance, that one’s gender aligns with birth sex, that one behaves in culturally sanctioned ways, etc. Anyone falling outside those norms is effectively erased in the narrative. The performative effect is that the very notion of gender diversity is rendered unintelligible in the educational content; students are not given the language or examples to even contemplate identities beyond the binary. This can have real consequences: it may foster intolerance (if students never learn about these topics in a normalized way) and can harm those who realize they are “different,” as they find no validation or support in their learning materials.

It is important to note that the lack of inclusivity in these textbooks reflects broader social and policy contexts. In Türkiye, discussions of LGBTQ+ issues in school contexts are often politically sensitive or actively discouraged. The absence of non-binary or queer representation is therefore likely a conscious exclusion by curriculum developers, aligning with conservative societal norms. However, from an educational ethics and human rights perspective, this lack is a shortcoming. Modern pedagogy emphasizes the importance of inclusion and representation so that all students feel seen and respected. The fact that our analysis found zero instances of any character stepping outside cisgender norms is a key finding that highlights how far the materials are from inclusive practice. It is also a missed opportunity for teaching respect and diversity. Studies have shown that introducing even simple age-appropriate representations of gender diversity (for example, a story with a child who has two moms, or a text about a historical figure who challenged gender norms) can improve all students' understanding and empathy, without causing confusion when handled well. Conversely, maintaining silence on these issues can contribute to a hidden curriculum of heteronormativity that stigmatizes those who don't fit the mold.

In conclusion, the coursebooks' adherence to a strict gender binary and omission of any non-binary or LGBTQ+ representation is a significant finding that underscores the conservative framing of gender in the current curriculum. This not only fails to prepare students for the diverse realities of the 21st-century global community, but it also conflicts with international movements towards inclusive education. The implication for educators and policymakers is that updating ELT materials to include diverse representations (in a manner appropriate to cultural and age contexts) is essential for fostering inclusivity. In frameworks of critical pedagogy, even if direct inclusion of LGBTQ+ characters is controversial, teachers could be encouraged to discuss the concept of respect and equality for "all individuals" in more abstract ways or use supplemental materials to fill this gap. As it stands, the lack of inclusivity in gender representation is a silence that speaks volumes – it tells us that the current materials are still rooted in a binary, heteronormative paradigm that does not fully serve the needs of all students or reflect the diversity of the English-speaking world they are learning to communicate with.

Educational Significance: Across all four findings – biased professional roles, appearance stereotypes, representational imbalances, and lack of inclusivity – the overarching concern is that these gendered messages in the coursebooks can shape students' worldviews and self-concepts in limiting ways. Textbooks are not just language

conduits; they also convey cultural values and norms. If those norms remain unexamined, the risk is the perpetuation of gender inequities through the very tools intended to educate. By identifying these patterns, this analysis provides evidence-based insights that can inform future curriculum development. Aligning textbook content with principles of gender equality would involve purposeful revisions: depicting both females and males in diverse and non-traditional roles, balancing their presence and agency in texts, avoiding reductive stereotypes, and cautiously opening space for discussions about gender diversity (even if implicitly through inclusive language and varied family models). Such changes, guided by theories like Bem's (promoting a less schema-bound view of gender) and Butler's (disrupting the performative repetition of restrictive norms), could help transform ELT coursebooks into more empowering resources for all genders. In sum, the key findings highlight not only the current state of gender representation in Turkish ELT materials but also the critical areas where pedagogical improvement is needed to foster a more equitable and inclusive learning environment. Each finding reinforces the conclusion that gender biases – unless consciously addressed – remain deeply embedded in educational content, with real consequences for learners' socialization and the reproduction of gender roles in society. The hope is that recognizing these biases is the first step towards eliminating them, ensuring that English language learning in Türkiye also becomes a means of promoting gender fairness and awareness in line with contemporary educational values.

5.2. Implications for Learners, Teachers and Policy Makers

The insights from this analysis carry significant implications for various stakeholders in the educational community. The presence of gender bias in ELT coursebooks is not an abstract issue; it has real effects on learners' development and requires concrete responses from teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers to ensure education fulfills its equitable mandate.

For Learners: The primary concern is the impact on students themselves. Middle school learners, encountering gender-skewed content, may unconsciously absorb limiting beliefs about what they can or should do as boys or girls. The implication is that some students, particularly girls, might experience a hit to their confidence and ambition. They could begin to self-select educational and career paths aligned with the stereotypical roles they see, thus perpetuating gender gaps in fields like science, technology, engineering,

and mathematics (STEM) or in leadership roles. Moreover, all learners are deprived of a balanced worldview; boys, too, miss out on seeing examples of men in caring or cooperative roles, which could foster social and emotional skills. In the long run, learners educated with stereotype-laden materials might carry biased perceptions into adulthood, affecting their relationships and professional interactions. This underlines a critical implication: gender-biased textbooks can subtly shape the next generation's worldviews in regressive ways, unless countered by other influences. Ensuring that learners receive inclusive and balanced representations is therefore integral to fostering open-minded, confident individuals. It can expand their imagined possibilities – for instance, a girl repeatedly seeing female doctors and entrepreneurs in her textbook is more likely to envisage herself in those roles. Likewise, a boy who sees compassionate male characters helping at home or expressing emotions is more likely to embrace empathy and reject toxic masculinity norms. In short, learners benefit academically and personally from materials that promote gender equity, as such materials support a more holistic development of identity and aspirations.

For Teachers: Teachers occupy a crucial mediating role between textbook content and students. The findings imply that teachers must maintain a critical awareness of the gender messages in their instructional materials. In classrooms where the textbook presents a one-dimensional gender narrative, the teacher's role expands to that of a conscious moderator or even a corrective agent. Educators should be prepared to address and challenge stereotypes whenever they appear in a dialogue or reading passage. This might involve classroom discussions that question the fairness of a scenario (e.g., “Why do you think all the inventors in this unit are boys? Could it have been different?”) or bringing in supplementary examples that provide counterpoints (such as highlighting real-life female scientists or male nurses in addition to the textbook content). The implication for teacher training is significant: pre-service and in-service training programs should include components on gender sensitivity and critical media literacy, empowering teachers to detect subtle biases and handle them pedagogically. Furthermore, teachers need institutional support, in terms of both permission and resources, to deviate from the textbook when necessary to provide a more balanced perspective. Since many teachers rely heavily on official coursebooks for planning (especially in contexts like Türkiye, where high-stakes exams and centralized curricula pressure teachers to “cover the book”), it is vital that teachers are encouraged by school leadership to use their professional judgement in addressing biased content. In essence, the presence of gender disparities in

textbooks implies that teachers must not be passive transmitters of content, but active facilitators who fill in gaps and correct distortions. When teachers rise to this role, they turn a potentially problematic text into a teachable moment, thus mitigating the negative impact on learners.

For Curriculum Developers and Textbook Authors: The analysis sends a clear message to those who design and author educational materials: greater care and deliberation are needed to achieve true gender balance. Curriculum developers and writers should recognize that every character introduced and every scenario crafted carries implicit messages. There is an implication that current content creation processes may lack sufficient oversight or awareness regarding gender representation. To address this, publishers and authors could integrate a gender equity checklist into the textbook development workflow. For example, they should consciously ensure that for every unit or theme, women and men are represented in a variety of roles (professional, domestic, active, passive) without defaulting to clichés. If a dialogue features a male doctor, perhaps the next can feature a female doctor; if an illustration shows a mother cooking, perhaps include a father cooking in another context, and a mother working in an office in another. The content creation team might benefit from diversity among its members (including balanced gender representation among authors and illustrators) and possibly consultation with gender studies experts who can review manuscripts for inadvertent bias. The implication is also that creativity in textbook design can go a long way: authors can craft storylines that deliberately subvert stereotypes—such as a unit about a girl who loves football and a boy who learns ballet—thereby providing role models that break the mold. In doing so, curriculum developers would not only avoid the pitfalls identified in this research but actively contribute to a more egalitarian educational narrative. Additionally, the finding that bias can be subtle (in adjectives, order of mention, etc.) means authors should be meticulous at the micro-level of language, ensuring that descriptions and language use are equitable. For instance, the same positive attributes (intelligent, brave, creative) should be used for characters of all genders in equal measure. Overall, the implication for content creators is one of heightened responsibility: textbooks should be crafted with an awareness that they are powerful social texts, not just language exercise compilations.

For Policymakers and Education Authorities: At the policy level, the Ministry of National Education and associated bodies (such as textbook approval committees in Türkiye) must take these findings into account to enforce and strengthen guidelines on

gender representation. The fact that notable disparities slipped through into approved textbooks suggests a gap between policy intentions and implementation. Policymakers should first and foremost revisit and reinforce the criteria for textbook evaluation. Turkish educational regulations already stipulate that “there needs to be a reasonable balance in the examples given and characters presented in the coursebooks in terms of gender” and that materials should reject discrimination. These guidelines need to be operationalized with clear indicators: for example, requiring an equal number of male and female main characters, or mandating the portrayal of both genders in a variety of social roles. The implication here is that more rigorous review processes are needed before textbooks are approved for use. Expert panels could systematically analyze drafts for gender bias using content analysis frameworks similar to this study’s, flagging issues for revision. Policymakers should also consider the frequency of textbook updates: with a five-year cycle of use, an outdated or biased book can influence an entire cohort of students, so regular revisions for inclusivity are essential. In addition, educational authorities might implement professional development for textbook authors and illustrators, effectively mainstreaming gender sensitivity in material development. The broader implication for policy is aligning educational content with national and international commitments to gender equality (such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals). By doing so, policymakers acknowledge that gender equality in education is not only about equal access for boys and girls, but also about what is being taught to them once they are in the classroom. Finally, policymakers should be prepared to support teachers (through curriculum flexibility and resources) in adapting materials, and to engage parents and the public on the importance of non-biased textbooks. In summary, the onus is on educational leadership to ensure that the next generation of coursebooks correct the imbalances identified – transforming textbooks into tools that promote equal opportunity and respect across genders.

Recommendations for Future Textbook Development and Policy

In light of the above findings and implications, this study offers several actionable recommendations aimed at fostering more gender-inclusive ELT coursebooks and curricula in the future. These recommendations are grounded in the evidence of what needs improvement and are aligned with best practices advocated by scholars and international educational organizations:

1. **Establish Equal Representation in Content:** Curriculum developers should ensure a roughly equal number of male and female characters in textbooks, not just in count but in significance. Women and men should appear in balanced proportions across dialogues, narratives, and illustrations, each taking turns as main characters. This numeric and role parity should be monitored at the manuscript stage. For example, if a unit has a reading passage about a famous person, the series should feature as many famous women as men across chapters. By institutionalizing parity as a criterion, textbooks can avoid the subtle message that one gender is default while the other is secondary.
2. **Diversify Gender Roles and Professions:** Textbooks should depict women and men in a wide range of occupations and social roles, consciously countering traditional allocations. Female characters should be shown as scientists, entrepreneurs, adventurers, or authority figures just as often as male characters. Conversely, males should be shown in nurturing and domestic roles (caring for siblings, cooking a meal, expressing emotions) to normalize those behaviors. The goal is to portray the full spectrum of human activities as open to all, regardless of gender. This might involve rewriting or updating scenarios that currently reinforce stereotypes – for instance, changing a text about a pilot (male) and a flight attendant (female) to include a female pilot and a male flight attendant. Such diversity of representation provides students of all genders with aspirational role models and breaks the association of certain jobs or tasks with a particular gender.
3. **Avoid and Challenge Stereotypical Imagery:** Authors and illustrators must be vigilant to remove stereotypical depictions of physical appearance and behavior. Descriptions that hinge on beauty for females or strength for males should be balanced with counterexamples (e.g., describing girls as brave or logical, boys as kind or elegant). Visuals should likewise subvert expectations: include images of girls playing sports and boys doing household chores, for example, to visually communicate that such activities are human, not gendered. When culturally specific contexts are used, care should be taken not to inadvertently portray one gender in a demeaning or laughable way. Instead of the repetitive trope of mothers serving food while fathers sit, show family scenes where both parents cook together or a father is feeding a baby.

while the mother reads the news. These conscious choices in imagery and narrative will help dismantle “fossilized” roles and present a more equitable picture of gender relations to learners.

4. **Use Gender-Neutral and Inclusive Language:** The language of the textbook should be scanned for gender bias. This includes avoiding masculine generics and sexist language. Professions or roles should be referred to in gender-neutral ways when appropriate (e.g., using “police officer” instead of “policeman”, or “they” as a singular pronoun in general statements instead of “he”). Additionally, dialogues and sentences can be structured to alternate which gender is mentioned first to avoid a consistent pattern of male-first prominence (a subtle form of bias). By modernizing the language in this way, textbooks adhere to inclusive linguistic norms and teach students that English (and any language) can be used in an egalitarian manner. This linguistic balance complements visual and content balance, ensuring that even at the level of words, no gender is presented as the norm or more important.
5. **Implement Rigorous Review and Training:** It is recommended that the Ministry of Education establish a formal review process focusing on gender representation for all new textbooks. This could involve a checklist or scorecard based on frameworks like the “ABC of Gender Analysis” or UNESCO’s guidelines for gender-fair education. Review committees should include gender specialists alongside language educators. Any content flagged for imbalance should be revised before publication. In tandem, writers, editors, and illustrators should receive training or guidelines on gender sensitivity. Just as editors check for grammatical accuracy, they should check for gender portrayal issues. Such institutionalized scrutiny echoes Lee and Collins’ (2008) call for a formal code of practice to eliminate sexism in textbooks. Over time, this will build an ethic of equality into the material development process, making gender fairness a standard component of quality in education publishing.
6. **Integrate Critical Thinking Opportunities:** Beyond content changes, textbooks themselves can be tools for change by embedding critical pedagogy elements. For example, a textbook could include discussion questions or small projects that prompt students to analyze gender roles (such as a prompt: “In the story you read, who did most of the talking, the boy or the girl? Why

do you think that is? Do you think it could be different?”). Including such reflective exercises encourages learners to engage actively with the concept of gender bias, turning the textbook into not only a source of knowledge but also a means for developing critical awareness. This approach aligns with Freire’s vision of empowering learners to question social norms rather than absorb them passively. While this may be an innovative step beyond typical textbook design, it is a powerful recommendation to transform materials from sources of hidden bias into sources of critical dialogue.

7. Foster Inclusive Curriculum Policy: At the policy level, it is advised that educational authorities explicitly mandate gender equality goals in curriculum documents and textbook approval regulations. For instance, Türkiye’s Ministry of National Education can update its guidelines to specify measurable standards of gender representation (e.g., “each textbook must depict men and women equally as protagonists, and depict each gender in at least X non-traditional roles”). Regular monitoring and public reporting on textbook content could be instituted, holding publishers accountable. Additionally, complementary policies such as teacher training on gender equity and the promotion of supplementary readers that showcase diverse role models can reinforce the impact of unbiased textbooks. Policymakers should view textbook content as part of a holistic strategy for gender equity in education, one that includes pedagogy, curriculum, and community awareness. By implementing these recommendations, future coursebooks will not only avoid the pitfalls identified in this thesis but can actively become levers of cultural change, promoting respect and equality among the next generation.

Towards Inclusive and Equitable Educational Materials

In conclusion, this thesis has illuminated how gender representation in 6th–8th grade ELT coursebooks, even when quantitatively balanced, can suffer from qualitative imbalances that echo and perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes. Such disparities are far from trivial; they strike at the heart of educational equity and the messages we choose to impart to young learners. The conclusion that emerges is twofold. First, there is a clear and urgent need to critically evaluate and improve educational materials with respect to gender inclusion. Second, doing so holds great promise: by cultivating textbooks that

present an inclusive and balanced view of gender, we take a concrete step toward fostering gender equity in the minds of learners and, by extension, in society at large.

The significance of this research lies in reaffirming that representation matters deeply in education. When students open their language textbooks, they should see a world of English usage that also reflects a world of equal opportunity – a world in which boys and girls, men and women, can equally be heroes, problem-solvers, caregivers, and leaders. Anything less not only sells learners short but also undermines the spirit of education as a practice of freedom. By integrating theoretical insights from gender performativity and schema theory, we understand that the content of textbooks actively shapes identities; by invoking critical pedagogy, we recognize the power of education to transform those identities towards liberation rather than limitation. Thus, inclusive and balanced materials are not just a pedagogical preference, but a fundamental component of a just education system.

For the various stakeholders – learners, teachers, authors, and policymakers – the path forward involves collaboration and commitment to the ideals outlined in these recommendations. Encouragingly, awareness of gender bias in curricula is growing worldwide, and efforts to revise materials are underway in many contexts. The Turkish Ministry of Education, by heeding the findings of studies such as this, can position itself as a leader in gender-responsive education in the region. The development of new ELT textbooks that embody gender fairness will send a strong message that the education system values all students equally and aims to empower them beyond stereotypes.

In closing, this comprehensive analysis and its ensuing discussions underscore a simple yet profound truth: educational texts shape life texts. The images and narratives that children frequently engage with help script their future aspirations and sense of self. Therefore, ensuring that those scripts are rich with equality, diversity, and respect is an educational responsibility of the highest order. By reaffirming the importance of balanced gender representation and implementing the changes recommended, educators and policymakers will not only improve language learning outcomes but also contribute to nurturing a generation of young people who believe, because they have seen it in their books, that gender should never constrain one's dreams or potential. This conclusion thus advocates for ongoing vigilance and proactive reform in the realm of textbook content, with the optimistic conviction that inclusive and equitable educational materials can play a pivotal role in advancing gender justice in society.

5.3. Suggestions for Further Research

1. Comparative Studies Across Grade Levels

A natural extension of the present study is to conduct comparative analyses across a broader range of grade levels. The current research focused on 6th, 7th, and 8th grade ELT coursebooks; expanding the sample to include both lower grades (e.g., primary levels) and upper grades (high school) would provide a more complete picture of gender representation throughout a learner's school trajectory. Such comparative studies could reveal how gender portrayals evolve with the target age group, for instance, whether stereotypes are more pronounced in materials for younger learners and whether later textbooks show any progress toward balance or remain static. This is significant because it addresses whether earlier interventions in curriculum design might be needed if biases are already evident in primary school books, or conversely, if improvements at higher grade levels indicate responsiveness to prior critiques. By analyzing all age groups, researchers can identify at what stage disparities are most pronounced and thus inform stakeholders where corrective measures are most urgent. Potential methodologies include content analysis of textbooks from grade 1 through 12, coding for the same indicators (e.g., visibility of female vs. male characters, roles, occupations, and linguistic representations) to enable direct comparisons. Findings from such grade-level comparisons would broaden our understanding of the continuity or change in gender messaging across the education spectrum and could highlight critical periods to implement gender-sensitive revisions.

From a theoretical standpoint, examining multiple grade levels can be informed by developmental psychology and educational theory. Younger learners are at an impressionable stage where textbook content might strongly shape gender schemas, whereas older students might bring more prior knowledge or critical capacity to their interpretation of texts. A comparative study could employ critical pedagogy as a lens to assess whether textbooks for older grades encourage more critical thinking about gender roles or simply reinforce earlier socialization. The rationale is that if biases persist unmitigated across all levels, the "hidden curriculum" of gender norms is being consistently transmitted, potentially cementing stereotypical views throughout a student's schooling. By contrast, any positive shifts at higher grade levels might indicate the impact of curriculum reforms or broader social changes. Overall, broadening the grade range addresses a limitation of the current research (its focus on a narrow band of grades) and

stands to make the conclusions on gender representation more robust and generalizable. As noted in the thesis, including all age groups in the analysis can yield more comprehensive results [98], thereby strengthening our understanding of how gender biases may accumulate or attenuate over time in educational materials.

2. Cross-Cultural Comparisons

Another valuable direction for further research is to perform cross-cultural or cross-national comparisons of ELT coursebooks. The coursebooks analyzed in this study are published by the Turkish Ministry of National Education and reflect the cultural and educational context of Türkiye. To discern which patterns are universal and which are culture-specific, future studies could compare these findings with textbook analyses from other countries or regions. For example, one could investigate how gender is represented in ELT materials from countries with different socio-cultural norms (e.g., comparing Türkiye with a Western country, an East Asian country, and a Middle Eastern neighbor). Cross-cultural comparisons are significant because they can reveal whether the gender imbalances observed (such as male-dominated imagery or stereotyped roles for women) are a global phenomenon or particularly pronounced in certain cultural contexts. Prior research suggests that there are indeed cross-national differences; for instance, a comparative content analysis by Islam and Asadullah (2018) found that South Asian textbooks exhibited significantly greater bias against females compared to some East Asian textbooks. In another report, the share of female characters in secondary English textbooks ranged from 44% in Malaysia/Indonesia to as low as 24% in a Pakistani context, with women often confined to less prestigious occupations. These disparities underscore the influence of cultural, religious, and policy environments on how genders are portrayed.

The rationale for cross-cultural research lies in its ability to contextualize the Turkish findings within a broader spectrum. If Turkish ELT textbooks are found to have similar issues as those in other countries, it points to a global issue in ELT material design and supports calls for international guidelines or collaborations to improve gender equity. On the other hand, if Türkiye's textbooks are more biased or less biased than others, understanding the causes (be it policy differences, societal gender equality levels, or publisher practices) could inform targeted improvements. Gender theory and critical discourse analysis frameworks can guide such comparisons by focusing on how cultural narratives of gender are embedded in language teaching content. Methodologically,

researchers could replicate the content analysis categories of the present study in foreign textbooks (e.g., counting male/female characters, roles, dialogue proportions, etc.) and then use quantitative and qualitative measures to compare results across countries. They might also employ qualitative discourse analysis to see if, say, Turkish textbooks reinforce traditional family models more than European ones, or if certain progressive themes (like women in STEM professions) appear in one country's materials but not another's. Cross-cultural studies would be enriched by linking to inclusive education practices advocated globally; for example, UNESCO's guidance that textbooks worldwide should represent men and women similarly and avoid stereotypes. Ultimately, this line of research has practical significance: ministries and publishers could learn from other contexts' successes or failures. As indicated in the present thesis suggestions, comparing Turkish coursebooks with those used abroad can provide a fresh perspective and potentially inspire reforms by showcasing alternatives.

3. Impact on Learners

While content analyses of textbooks are essential, an equally important research avenue is investigating the impact of these gender representations on learners themselves. The current study did not directly assess how students internalize or react to the gender portrayals in their coursebooks. Future research could address this gap by examining the effects of textbook content on students' attitudes, self-concepts, and academic choices. The rationale stems from educational and social psychology: repeated exposure to biased representations can shape children's beliefs about gender roles and even their aspirations. As Lee and Collins (2009) observe, gendered messages in textbooks have the potential to influence the development of students' self-esteem and attitudes towards both sexes at an impressionable age. If, for example, female characters are consistently shown in passive or limited roles, female learners might subconsciously narrow their own ambitions, and male learners might develop inflated perceptions of their domain over public spheres. Research in this vein aligns with the concept of the hidden curriculum, wherein unwritten values conveyed by materials affect learners' worldviews.

To explore the impact on learners, a variety of methodologies could be employed. One approach is to conduct surveys or interviews with students after they have used the textbooks, probing their perceptions of gender roles. Do they associate certain jobs or activities with a particular gender? Do they feel represented by the characters in their books? Another approach is experimental or longitudinal: for instance, comparing two

groups of learners, one using a traditional textbook and another using a more gender-balanced or revised textbook, and measuring differences in outcomes such as confidence, participation in class, or attitudes toward the opposite gender. Qualitative data, such as students' reflections or classroom discussions, could also reveal how they interpret textbook messages. It's crucial to integrate frameworks like social learning theory (which posits that children learn behaviors and norms through observation and modeling) to understand how textbook characters might serve as models. Additionally, critical pedagogy can be applied by encouraging students to critically discuss textbook content; the research could then examine how such critical engagement mitigates or highlights the content's impact.

The significance of this direction is underscored by global education concerns. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring report notes that textbooks are powerful tools in shaping children's worldviews and aspirations. Inappropriate or one-sided representations can make students from underrepresented groups feel alienated or undervalued [10]. For instance, if girls rarely see female scientists or leaders in their English books, they may feel those paths are not "for them." Conversely, seeing balanced and non-stereotypical portrayals can encourage equitable behavior and broaden horizons. Investigating learner impact thus not only evaluates the consequences of current textbook content but also provides evidence to advocate for change. If research finds, for example, that more balanced materials lead to more egalitarian attitudes among students, it strengthens the call for textbook reform from a child development perspective. Ultimately, this line of inquiry connects the textbook content to real educational outcomes, grounding the discussion of representation in tangible effects on learners' identities, confidence, and aspirations.

4. Teacher Perceptions and Practices

The role of the teacher is pivotal in how textbook content is delivered and interpreted, yet the present study did not capture teachers' perspectives on gender representation. Future research should explore teachers' perceptions and classroom practices regarding gender-biased content in ELT coursebooks. There are multiple dimensions to this suggestion. First, understanding teachers' awareness is crucial: Do teachers recognize gender bias or stereotyping in the textbooks they use? Research could use questionnaires or interviews to gauge teachers' attitudes towards the gender representation in the official coursebooks. If teachers are aware of imbalances (e.g.,

noticing that most heroes in stories are boys or that girls are often in domestic scenes), the next question is how they feel about it – whether they see it as a problem that needs addressing or as a negligible issue. Second, we should examine how teachers handle these materials in practice. Teachers are not passive transmitters of content; through what Jane Sunderland terms “teacher talk around the text,” educators can either reinforce or counteract the biases in the book. For instance, a teacher might intentionally highlight a female character’s positive traits to compensate for her lesser role, or they might unconsciously skip over female-centric topics, spending more time on content featuring male characters. These pedagogical choices can significantly mediate the effect of the textbook on students.

Investigating teacher perceptions and practices has significant implications. If studies find that many teachers are unaware of the subtle gender biases in textbooks, this points to a need for professional development or teacher training in inclusive education practices. Research has indicated that if teachers are not aware of various forms of gender inequality in texts (such as stereotyping, quantitative imbalances, or male-firstness), those biases can more easily be passed on to students’ perceptions. In other words, lack of teacher awareness can inadvertently perpetuate the hidden curriculum of gender bias. Conversely, if teachers are aware, research can document the strategies they use to promote gender fairness – for example, supplementing the textbook with additional examples of accomplished women, or encouraging critical discussions when a stereotyped scenario appears in a dialogue. Such teacher-led interventions resonate with critical pedagogy, wherein teachers empower students to question and challenge social inequalities presented in learning materials.

Methodologically, this research direction could involve classroom observations to see how teachers use the textbooks. Are they calling on boys and girls equally when exercises revolve around certain characters? Do they modify examples (perhaps changing a generic “he” to “he or she” in speech) or encourage students to role-play non-traditional roles? It may also involve focus group discussions where teachers reflect on how the textbook’s gender content aligns or conflicts with their own approach to gender equality in the classroom. Surveys could quantify how many teachers feel the need to adapt or criticize the book’s content during teaching. The significance of studying teacher perceptions is that teachers act as gatekeepers and interpreters of curriculum content. Even the most gender-balanced textbook can be undermined by biased teaching practices, and likewise, a biased textbook can be mitigated by a thoughtful teacher [OBJ]. Therefore,

gathering insight into teachers' views provides a more comprehensive picture of the actual learning experience. The thesis author also noted that including teacher and curriculum developer perspectives would yield a more holistic understanding of gender representation in education [106]. In sum, this line of research will inform both policy (by highlighting teachers' needs and attitudes, potentially guiding training programs) and practice (by sharing effective strategies teachers use to promote gender equity in spite of or aided by the textbooks).

5. Inclusion of Non-Binary and Diverse Genders

The analysis in the present study, like most textbook analyses to date, implicitly treated gender as a binary category (male vs. female). A forward-looking research suggestion is to investigate the inclusion of non-binary and gender-diverse individuals in ELT materials, or at least to explore how current materials might be made more inclusive of the full spectrum of gender identities. In many educational contexts, especially more conservative ones, textbooks have historically presented a heteronormative worldview – assuming all characters are either girls or boys (and often portraying a traditional family of mother and father). However, as understandings of gender evolve in society, education research is beginning to recognize the importance of reflecting this diversity. The rationale for this suggestion is grounded in both social justice and pedagogical effectiveness. Every student should see themselves represented in educational content (a principle of inclusive education), and that includes students who might identify as non-binary, gender-fluid, or transgender. Moreover, exposing all students to diverse gender identities can foster empathy, reduce prejudice, and prepare learners to communicate in a global environment where they may encounter people who do not fit into strict binary gender roles.

Future research might start by surveying existing ELT coursebooks for any signs of non-binary inclusion or, more likely, the complete absence of it. It could involve content analysis criteria beyond the binary, for example, noting if any characters are depicted without clear gender or if any text avoids gendered pronouns. Given that the current study noted it had to exclude characters of ambiguous gender from analysis due to methodological constraints, it suggests that existing materials occasionally have characters whose gender is not immediately obvious, though this is often unintended. Research could delve into those instances: are such characters truly androgynous representations, and how do students and teachers perceive them? Additionally, a critical

discourse analysis could be conducted to see if the language in textbooks always presumes binary gender (e.g., the use of “he or she” vs. a singular “they”, or the inclusion of gender-neutral names and contexts).

In terms of frameworks, queer theory and gender diversity frameworks would be highly relevant, as they interrogate the norms of gender binarism and heteronormativity. A 2021 study by Ruiz-Cecilia et al. found that EFL textbooks in Spain perpetuated heteronormativity by exemplifying only “naturalized” male/female identities and failing to include LGBTQ+ characters. They argue that such omissions cloud the reality of many children and create a sense of non-belonging for those who do not see themselves reflected. The significance of including non-binary and diverse genders in research is directly tied to student well-being and the creation of an inclusive learning environment. If non-binary or transgender students never encounter an example of someone like them in their learning materials, it sends a discouraging message about legitimacy and acceptance. On the other hand, incidental exposure to diverse identities (even something as simple as a story that includes a character using they/them pronouns, or depicting a family with same-gender parents) can normalize diversity and teach all students respect.

Researchers might also examine the feasibility and impact of introducing gender-diverse content into new editions of textbooks. This could involve piloting lesson materials that include, for instance, a dialog where a person introduces themselves with “Mx.” instead of Mr./Ms., or a reading passage about a teenager who is non-binary. Student and teacher reactions to such materials would provide insight into challenges and best practices for broader implementation. There is also a need to study policy and curriculum guidelines: are there any moves by educational authorities (in Türkiye or elsewhere) to mandate more inclusive representation of gender? As educational frameworks increasingly emphasize inclusion, future ELT coursebooks may gradually move in this direction. Research that anticipates and guides this process – by identifying potential pitfalls (e.g. local community sensitivities) and effective strategies (drawing on experiences from more inclusive education systems) – would be invaluable. Ultimately, addressing non-binary and diverse gender inclusion is about ensuring “no child is left behind” in line with the Sustainable Development Goals on equitable quality education [10]. It is a cutting-edge area where ELT pedagogy intersects with human rights, and scholarly inquiry can lead the way in figuring out how to translate the abstract principle of inclusivity into concrete textbook content that affirms all students.

6. Language and Gender Representation

Future research could delve deeper into the linguistic aspects of gender representation in ELT textbooks. The current study largely quantified representations (such as counts of male/female characters, roles, and images), but a more fine-grained analysis of language use could reveal subtle gender biases. This includes examining how language itself (in dialogues, reading passages, and exercises) may perpetuate stereotypes or marginalize a gender. For example, researchers can analyze dialogue patterns: Who speaks more frequently or initiates conversations in textbook dialogues – boys or girls? Previous studies have looked at “amount of talk” as an indicator and found imbalances. Similarly, one can study the language content such as adjectives and verbs associated with each gender. Are girls described with adjectives related to appearance and emotion while boys are described with those relating to strength and intelligence? Are certain activities always described with a male pronoun (e.g. “he is driving”) and others with a female pronoun (“she is cooking”)? An analysis of male-firstness in language is also pertinent – this refers to the tendency of placing male terms before female (as in “brothers and sisters” or using “he” as the default pronoun). Research has documented that many textbooks exhibit male firstness, subtly implying a primacy of the male gender in language conventions.

Linguistic representation is significant because language both reflects and shapes thought. Even if images and explicit counts are balanced, bias in how language is used can convey traditional expectations. For instance, if instructions in exercises consistently say “he” for doctors and “she” for nurses, students internalize those associations. A classic example cited in gender bias studies is the use of masculine generic pronouns or nouns (using “man” to mean all humans, etc.), which can render women invisible in discourse. Although English lacks grammatical gender in nouns, there are many areas where bias can creep in – from the gendering of professions (using gender-specific terms like “businessman” vs. using a neutral term) to the connotations of certain verbs (e.g., women “giggle” while men “laugh”).

Future studies could apply critical discourse analysis (CDA) or feminist linguistics frameworks to textbook texts. CDA would help uncover underlying power relations in seemingly neutral language. For example, analyzing reading comprehension passages for who gets to be the protagonist of stories and how they are described can reveal if males are routinely portrayed as decision-makers and females as caretakers, purely through textual cues. A researcher might compile all sentences from a series of

textbooks where a woman is the subject of the sentence and those where a man is the subject, and compare the verbs (action vs. stative verbs), the adjectives, and the roles. Quantitative linguistics techniques (like corpus linguistics) could also be used by treating the textbook text as a corpus and examining word frequencies and collocations for gendered terms.

There is considerable literature to build upon. For instance, a study in Hong Kong noted that when two gendered nouns were paired, male nouns appeared first far more often, reinforcing the male-first order [106]. Another analysis found that in some EFL textbooks, female characters were not only fewer but also talked less or used a narrower range of vocabulary, pointing to a “discourse bias.” Additionally, sociolinguistic theories such as those by Robin Lakoff (on gendered language use) might guide hypotheses, for example, checking if female characters in dialogues use more polite or tentative language compared to male characters, which could mirror stereotypes of female speech.

Methodologically, future research on language and gender could use a mix of qualitative and quantitative analyses. A linguistic content analysis might code occurrences of certain forms (like generic pronouns, order of mention, gender-indicative adjectives) across multiple books to provide statistical trends. Meanwhile, a discourse analysis would allow a closer reading of context, for example, interpreting a dialogue where a boy consistently instructs a girl on how to do something, which might signal an implicit power dynamic. The goal of this research area is to illuminate the less overt biases that simple counts might miss. By doing so, it provides a more nuanced understanding of gender representation, highlighting that achieving numerical balance of characters is not sufficient if the ways in which genders are depicted in language remain inequitable. These insights would be especially useful for textbook authors and editors aiming to create truly gender-fair materials, as they would need to scrutinize not just who is in the text, but how the text might privilege one gender’s voice or perspective over another.

7. Visual Representation Analysis

In addition to written content, visual representations in textbooks play a crucial role in how gender roles are communicated to learners. The current study did include visual content analysis, but further research could adopt more advanced or detailed approaches to analyzing images in ELT coursebooks. Visual analysis might consider not only the presence of male and female characters in illustrations but also the qualitative aspects of their portrayal. For instance, researchers should examine what activities each

gender is shown doing, how they are dressed, what settings they appear in, and even the body language or positioning in images. Prior findings have often shown that males are depicted in a wider range of active roles (sports, science experiments, travel, etc.), whereas females are frequently shown in domestic or passive contexts (cooking, caring for children, etc.). In one analysis of school textbooks, images of people engaged in sports like football or running were almost exclusively male, while women were portrayed doing household chores like washing dishes or minding babies. Such patterns reinforce traditional gender roles powerfully through visuals, sometimes even more directly than text does.

Future studies on visual representation could use methodologies from visual sociology or multimodal analysis. One approach is to use a coding scheme for images similar to that used for text – for example, tallying how many illustrations show a woman versus a man in professional roles, or who is foregrounded in pictures. The present thesis found imbalances in actions and visibility (females were less frequently depicted as active participants in certain categories). Building on this, researchers could apply frameworks like Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar, which looks at elements such as gaze (are women often depicted looking at men, implying subordination?), angle (are men drawn in more powerful stances?), and salience (which figures draw the viewer's attention). Another perspective is semiotic analysis, interpreting the symbolism of images – for instance, if men are consistently shown with technological gadgets and women with kitchen utensils, the semiotic message is one of gendered domains of expertise.

An emerging and exciting technique is the use of technology for large-scale image analysis. With advances in machine learning, it is conceivable to train image recognition software to detect the gender of characters and activities depicted, then run this on a large corpus of textbook images to quantify biases [106]. One recent study used automated analysis on hundreds of textbooks and confirmed substantial gender bias in images across many countries. Such computational methods could complement human-coded analysis by handling larger datasets and possibly uncovering patterns not immediately obvious (e.g., subtler trends in how often women are smiling vs. men are serious in images). However, human interpretation remains crucial, especially to handle cases where gender is ambiguous or culturally coded.

The significance of deepening visual analysis is clear. Young learners often pay as much or more attention to pictures as they do to words, especially in primary and middle school textbooks. These visuals contribute to the hidden curriculum: a student might

subconsciously absorb ideas about what men and women should do or be like simply from repeated image exposure. If boys always see pictures of other boys playing sports or working with computers, and rarely see girls in those contexts, it could influence their ideas about peers or future colleagues. Similarly, girls may internalize a limited scope of what is socially expected or accepted for them. By researching this area, we also acknowledge that textbook improvement requires more than editing text; it involves thoughtful image selection and creation.

Future research might also consider students' interpretations of images: using focus groups or eye-tracking studies to see how learners perceive gendered images can yield insights into what messages they take away. Additionally, an intersection with suggestion #10 (intersectionality) could examine whether the images consider diversity beyond gender, for example, are all scientists depicted as not only male but also a particular ethnicity? That intersectional visual analysis would broaden the impact. In summary, enhancing visual representation analysis with robust frameworks and perhaps interdisciplinary methods (combining education, art analysis, and technology) will help ensure that recommendations for improving textbooks cover the pictorial dimension of learning, which is a powerful conveyor of cultural norms.

8. Digital and Online ELT Materials

As education increasingly incorporates digital resources, a forward-thinking research area is the examination of gender representation in digital and online ELT materials. The textbooks studied in the current thesis were printed coursebooks. However, the Turkish Ministry of National Education, like others worldwide, is likely expanding into digital curricula, online learning platforms, and educational software to complement traditional texts. Future research should investigate whether the same patterns of gender bias observed in textbooks persist in these digital materials or if new patterns emerge. Digital content can include online English learning portals, educational videos provided by the Ministry, language learning apps, and even teacher-created online exercises. The rationale here is two-fold: (1) Digital materials may reach students in ways textbooks do not (for example, through self-study modules or interactive e-books), so any bias there is another vector of influence; (2) The flexibility of digital content might allow for easier updates and more diverse content, meaning it could either ameliorate or exacerbate representation issues.

One concrete starting point for research is to analyze official Ministry-provided digital learning platforms for English (if any exist for grades 6-8). Content analysis similar to that of textbooks can be applied: researchers can examine dialogues in educational videos, characters in animated exercises, or names and images in online quizzes for gender representation. Are the digital exercises consistently showing male avatars performing certain tasks? Are female voices used as often as male voices in audio materials? Another aspect is the curriculum guidelines for digital content – do they explicitly encourage gender-balanced representation or the inclusion of female characters in traditionally male domains, etc.? It would be insightful to compare the findings from printed textbooks with those from digital content from the same educational program. This could reveal whether digital materials simply replicate the print content (and its biases) or whether they have been leveraged to provide more progressive examples.

From a broader perspective, international organizations are already calling attention to gender bias in digital learning. UNICEF, for example, has advocated for gender-responsive digital pedagogy, which includes removing gender bias and stereotypes from digital books and learning materials. This implies that there is recognition of the issue at policy levels, but it remains to be seen how well these principles are implemented in practice. A study could examine, for instance, an online learning platform used in Türkiye or elsewhere and check for stereotyping in its content. One study in Indonesia aimed to investigate gender stereotyping in an online learning platform's materials, indicating the global relevance of this inquiry.

Another dimension is the impact of interactivity and user-generated content. Unlike static textbooks, many digital platforms allow students to choose avatars or include forums where students and teachers interact. Research could explore if there are gendered patterns in these choices or interactions (for example, do boys choose male avatars more frequently, and are the options for female avatars stereotypical?). It also opens questions about how teachers moderate online learning with respect to gender inclusivity, for example, in a virtual classroom, ensuring equal participation.

Methodologically, analyzing digital content might require new tools – scraping data from websites, coding multimedia content, and perhaps interviewing software developers or content creators about their design choices. It also invites an evaluation of the effectiveness of any gender-inclusive efforts in digital materials: if a platform deliberately includes more female scientist characters, does it receive positive feedback? Are students engaging with it differently?

The significance of focusing on digital materials lies in the future of education. As we move toward blended and fully online learning environments, ensuring that those are free from gender bias is as important as traditional textbooks, if not more. Moreover, digital resources often have a wider reach (for instance, a single video can be seen by millions, far beyond one classroom). Ensuring they depict genders fairly can contribute to a more equitable learning experience at scale. By researching this now, scholars can provide timely recommendations to content developers and educators, for example, guidelines for e-learning content that parallel those established for textbooks. Ultimately, this line of research ensures that the push for gender equality in education keeps pace with technological advancement and does not overlook new mediums of learning.

9. Evaluation of Revised Coursebooks

Textbooks are not static; they undergo revisions and new editions, especially when curricula or educational policies change. Thus, a crucial suggestion for further research is the evaluation of revised or future coursebooks for gender representation. The context in Türkiye is particularly ripe for this: the English coursebooks analyzed were designed under a specific curriculum, but as noted, a new national curriculum (the 4+4+4 system) was introduced during the study's timeframe. This means new textbooks have likely been published in alignment with the updated curriculum. Future studies should replicate the gender representation analysis on these new or revised coursebooks to see if there have been improvements or changes. Doing so serves a monitoring function – it checks whether awareness of issues (possibly raised by studies like this thesis or guidelines by the Ministry) has translated into better content, and it holds publishers and curriculum designers accountable to the standards they profess.

One aspect of this research direction is to perform a longitudinal comparison: compare the earlier edition of a textbook with the latest edition. For example, if the 6th-grade ELT book “Sunrise” (hypothetically) had a 2015 edition and a revised 2022 edition, a researcher could analyze both to identify any shifts in gender balance, roles, or language. Did the revision include more female characters? Were sexist illustrations removed or balanced out? Such a comparison directly measures progress. A positive finding might be that, say, the revised books have close to equal ratios of female and male characters (improving from a previous imbalance) or have eliminated overt stereotypes. A negative finding might be that little has changed, or even that new biases have been introduced (sometimes new content can inadvertently add different stereotypes). Both outcomes are

instructive: if improvement is found, it validates certain policy or advocacy efforts; if not, it indicates a need for continued pressure and perhaps different strategies.

It's worth tying this to concrete policy actions. Türkiye's Ministry of Education has regulations stating that coursebooks should not include any kind of discrimination. Evaluating revised textbooks is a way to audit compliance with such regulations. In some countries, there have been explicit textbook reform initiatives. For instance, Hungary undertook a revision of grades 1–8 textbooks around 2013, specifically to remove gender stereotypes; as a result, new content was added, like showcasing female scientists to highlight women's contributions to science [OBJ]. Similarly, an Indian state revised images to show men and women sharing domestic chores [OBJ]. These cases show that change is possible and can be mandated from above. Research should check if the Turkish revised ELT books reflect any such deliberate changes. During the 2000s, Türkiye itself had curriculum reforms (e.g., around 2004) that aimed to reduce sexist language in textbooks. Follow-up studies found that while some blatant issues were addressed, biases persisted in subtler forms. This underscores the need for continuous evaluation: eliminating one form of bias (say, sexist language) doesn't guarantee that all forms (like gendered role assignment) are fixed.

Methodologically, evaluating revised coursebooks would involve similar content analysis metrics as the original study for consistency, possibly supplemented by qualitative review to capture new themes. It could also involve consulting teachers and students on whether they perceive a difference in the new books, an aspect of reception study. For example, do teachers feel the new editions are more inclusive, and does that affect their teaching comfort? Do students notice changes or feel more represented? Including these questions adds depth to the purely content-focused analysis.

Finally, this research direction highlights a larger point: textbook analysis should be an ongoing process, not a one-time project. Societal norms and expectations around gender evolve, and so should educational materials. Each new edition is an opportunity to set things right. By systematically evaluating revised coursebooks, researchers contribute to a feedback loop whereby evidence-based critiques inform the next generation of materials. In the long run, such work could lead to the development of a standardized evaluation framework or checklist (connected to suggestion #12) that ministries and publishers use to self-assess textbooks before publication, rather than waiting for external critiques. In summary, researching revised textbooks keeps the

momentum on gender equity in education and ensures that progress (or lack thereof) is documented and brought to light.

10. Intersectionality and Broader Social Categories

Gender is just one dimension of identity; it often intersects with other social categories such as ethnicity, race, socioeconomic class, disability, and more. A compelling direction for further research is to adopt an intersectional lens in analyzing ELT coursebooks – that is, examining how gender representation might vary when combined with other identities, and how other forms of representation (or bias) are handled in these materials. The current study specifically looked at gender in isolation. However, textbooks present a worldview that includes a constellation of social roles: not only are characters gendered, they also have implicit or explicit ethnic backgrounds, family structures, occupations, and social statuses. Intersectionality theory, originating from Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, posits that focusing on a single axis of identity can miss the compounded ways in which disadvantage or representation is experienced (for example, the representation of a middle-class white woman might be very different from that of a working-class woman or a woman from an ethnic minority). Applying this to textbooks, one might ask: Are all the female characters depicted also homogeneous in other ways (perhaps all are from the dominant ethnic group, all able-bodied, etc.)? Are gender stereotypes amplified or mitigated when characters from minority groups are shown?

Future research could specifically look at characters in textbooks through multiple lenses. For instance, in the Turkish context, do ELT coursebooks show ethnic diversity at all (Türkiye has ethnic minorities, but national coursebooks may or may not depict them)? If they do, are women from minority backgrounds portrayed differently than men from those backgrounds, or than women from the majority group? Another example: if a story in a textbook involves a person with a disability, what gender is that person, and what role do they play? If all individuals with disabilities in stories are male (or female), that might reflect a bias or stereotype about dependency or strength associated with gender. Additionally, consider socioeconomic depictions: are women ever shown as professionals and also as coming from various social classes? Or are, say, the only depictions of poor individuals that of a mother struggling, while wealthy individuals are male businessmen? These combinations matter because students form complex social perceptions, not just singular ones.

Incorporating intersectionality aligns with inclusive education frameworks that urge sensitivity to all forms of diversity. UNESCO's guidance on inclusive textbooks suggests that materials should represent diverse identities and integrate principles of equality across various dimensions. Research on current textbooks might find, for example, that even when gender balance is improved, other biases persist – perhaps all protagonists are urban dwellers and minorities are absent, or all depictions of families follow a single model. Understanding these patterns can widen the scope of textbook improvement initiatives. Rather than addressing gender in a vacuum, future revisions could aim to portray, say, a mix of urban and rural characters, include names suggestive of different ethnicities, show people with different abilities, etc., with attention to gender in each of those cases.

Methodologically, an intersectional content analysis might involve creating a matrix of categories. Characters could be coded not just by gender, but also by apparent ethnicity (if discernible by name or illustration), class indicators (occupation, clothing, context), and any disability status. Then analysis can identify, for example, how many of the female characters are portrayed as non-majority ethnic and what roles they have versus majority-ethnic females or minority-ethnic males. This is complex, and in some contexts, explicit markers of these categories might be few. Even absence is notable: if no character seems to break the mold of a dominant group, that absence is a finding about the implicit messaging of the textbook (often a majority-centric, middle-class, heteronormative worldview). Qualitative analysis can complement this by examining specific storylines for how they handle multiple identity facets.

The significance of intersectional research in textbooks is that it pushes for a deeper kind of inclusivity. A book could, for instance, have an equal number of male and female characters and yet still largely project a single cultural perspective that sidelines some students. Intersectional findings can encourage curriculum developers to think broadly: not just “Are women included?” but “Which women are included and which are not?” and similarly for men. It ties into the idea of broadening the social imagination presented to learners – showing that women and men come from different backgrounds, and challenging not only gender stereotypes but also racial or class stereotypes that might be entwined.

Furthermore, intersectionality in this context could reveal how certain stereotypes reinforce each other. For example, if textbooks consistently show only men as police officers, and if all those police officers are from the majority group, it might perpetuate a

stereotype of the protector as both male and of a certain ethnicity. Changing such a narrative might involve, say, showing a female police officer who is also from a minority group – thereby addressing two representational gaps at once. This kind of holistic improvement is where education needs to head to truly embody equity. Therefore, research that illuminates these layers will be very valuable for the next generation of educational materials and aligns well with modern academic discourse that sees gender equality as part of a larger tapestry of social justice in education.

11. Teacher-Student Interactions

Moving beyond materials themselves, an important area for further study is the actual interactions in the classroom – specifically how teacher-student interactions around these textbooks either reinforce or counteract the gender representations in the content. As Sunderland et al. (2001) argue, one cannot fully predict a text’s effect without examining how it is used in context. A textbook might have gender bias “in the text,” but the way a teacher handles it and how students respond (the “talk around the text”) could significantly modify its impact. Future research should thus observe and analyze real classroom dynamics in lessons where these ELT coursebooks are used. This overlaps with teacher perceptions (suggestion #4) but goes a step further to include students’ active role and the micro-level of interaction.

Key questions for such research include: How do teachers distribute their attention between male and female students during textbook-based activities? For instance, when a textbook dialogue has a boy and a girl character, does the teacher unconsciously pick a boy student to read the boy’s part and a girl for the girl’s part, or vice versa, and what effect does that have on participation? Do teachers encourage all students equally to engage with content, regardless of whether it’s stereotypically “boy-themed” or “girl-themed”? There’s evidence in education research that teachers sometimes give more frequent or detailed feedback to one gender over another, or call on one gender more often, which can affect classroom power dynamics. It would be valuable to document if such patterns exist in Turkish ELT classes and whether the textbook content influences them. For example, if a chapter is about football (a sport often coded as male), do teachers tend to engage boys more, inadvertently sidelining girls, and does that dynamic change if the content topic shifts to something like shopping or cooking?

Another angle is how students themselves interact in pair or group work around textbook content. Do boys tend to take leadership roles and girls more passive roles when working together if the material contains certain cues? Classroom discourse analysis (recording and analyzing verbal interactions) can shed light on this. Students may also bring their own gender biases into discussions – perhaps dismissing a female character’s actions or laughing at certain depictions – and teachers’ intervention (or lack thereof) in those moments is crucial.

Using critical pedagogy, a teacher might deliberately foster discussions about the textbook’s gender content, turning it into a teachable moment (for example, asking students “Do you think it’s only girls who do X?” when a stereotype appears). Research could examine classes where teachers do this versus where they don’t, to see how student understanding differs. Additionally, conversation analysis techniques could be applied to transcripts of classroom talk to identify patterns like interruption (are boys interrupting girls more in class discussions?) or affirmation (are teachers affirming boys’ answers more?). These subtle interaction patterns contribute to the lived experience of gender in education.

The significance of examining teacher-student interactions is that it captures the implementation stage of the curriculum. Even a perfectly gender-balanced textbook could be taught in a biased manner, or a biased textbook could be taught in a way that minimizes harm. For instance, research might find that some teachers, when faced with a stereotypical image in the book, actively encourage students to challenge it – maybe by saying, “This picture shows only women cooking; do men cook too?” – thereby engaging students in critical thinking. Such best practices, if documented, could be shared as part of teacher training. Alternatively, if the research finds that many teachers unknowingly amplify biases (perhaps by always choosing boys to lead dialogues, aligning with the textbook’s implied gender roles), then it highlights a need for interventions at the teacher-training level.

This kind of research often uses qualitative methods like ethnography in the classroom or case studies of particular teachers. It could also be cross-sectional: observing multiple classrooms across different schools to see if there are common interaction patterns, or if factors like the teacher’s own gender, or the school’s demographic, influence the interaction. Combining this with interviews would also help; after observations, interviewing teachers and even students about their perceptions can validate whether what the researcher observed aligns with the participants’ awareness.

In summary, focusing on teacher-student interactions ensures that our understanding of gender in ELT is not limited to static content in books, but extends to the dynamic process of teaching and learning. It operationalizes the idea that textbooks alone do not determine classroom realities – the agency of teachers and students plays a role. Therefore, to create a truly gender-equitable educational experience, one must consider both content and pedagogy. Research outcomes here could feed directly into more effective teacher training modules (e.g., training teachers to be mindful of giving equal opportunities to all genders in class) and also into how textbooks could be written with teacher prompts or guides that encourage inclusive interaction (for example, teacher's guides that accompany coursebooks might include notes on avoiding bias in class). By illuminating what actually happens in classrooms, this research area connects the dots between curriculum design and learning outcomes in terms of gender equity.

12. Development of Gender-Inclusive Frameworks

Finally, a broad but vital suggestion is the development of explicit gender-inclusive frameworks or guidelines for textbook creation and evaluation. Rather than examining existing textbooks after they are published, this line of work proactively provides a blueprint to ensure future ELT coursebooks are equitable from the start. It builds on insights from all the areas above and synthesizes them into practical criteria or models for stakeholders (textbook authors, illustrators, curriculum committees, and policy-makers). The motivation for this is clear: if such frameworks are in place, many of the issues identified (imbalances, stereotypes, omissions of diverse identities) can be caught and corrected during the textbook development process, rather than being critiqued only post-publication.

One approach to developing these frameworks is to draw on established literature and guidelines. Critical pedagogy and feminist educational theory offer principles such as representation, empowerment, and challenging of dominant narratives, which can form the philosophical backbone of a framework. Additionally, international resources exist that can be tailored to the local context. UNESCO, for example, has published methodological guides on promoting gender equality through textbooks. These guides not only show how to monitor and identify bias, but also how to actively use textbooks to promote ideas of gender equality by engaging various actors (teachers, publishers, families, communities). A Turkish gender-inclusive framework might incorporate

elements from such global guides, combined with national education standards and cultural considerations.

Key components of a gender-inclusive framework would include:

- Content Guidelines: e.g., “Ensure equal visibility of genders in texts and images; avoid stereotypical pairings of gender with roles (like only depicting girls as nurses or boys as engineers); include examples that break traditional gender roles (such as stories of male caregivers and female athletes).”
- Language Use: e.g., “Use gender-neutral language where appropriate; alternate pronoun usage in generic examples; avoid male-first ordering; include dialogue where females and males speak in varied functions (asking questions, giving instructions, expressing emotions) to avoid one gender always leading.”
- Diverse Representation: e.g., “Incorporate characters from different backgrounds (ethnic, socioeconomic, etc.) and ensure that within those, both genders are represented in positive and diverse ways. Represent families and social units in various forms (not every family illustration needs to be a mother-father-child).”
- Visual Representation: e.g., “For every unit’s illustrations, review the balance of genders and the nature of activities shown. Use a checklist to see if one gender is consistently in the foreground or portrayed as more active. Strive for balance in professions and settings depicted.”
- Pedagogical Integration: e.g., “Provide teacher’s notes that encourage inclusive practices, such as discussion prompts to question any gender norms encountered. Encourage teachers to call attention to the variety of representations (or if constrained by curriculum, provide supplemental suggestions to broaden context).”

Developing and formalizing such frameworks would likely be a collaborative research and development project. It could involve analyzing a wide range of textbooks (including those from other countries considered more gender-equal) to gather best practices and concrete examples. It should also involve stakeholders via interviews or focus groups – for instance, getting input from experienced teachers on what an inclusive

textbook should contain, or from students on what kinds of stories engage them without bias.

An important part of this endeavor is also validation: testing the framework on existing textbooks to see if it effectively flags issues and if following it would indeed create a better book. For example, researchers might take a textbook, apply the draft framework's checklist, identify biases, then hypothetically "edit" a few units according to the guidelines, and pilot those edited units in classrooms to observe any difference in student engagement or understanding. This sort of design-based research can fine-tune the framework.

The significance of creating a gender-inclusive framework is profound and far-reaching. It shifts the focus from reactive to proactive. Instead of repeatedly finding problems in published books (which might remain in use for years), the framework aims to prevent those problems. It also institutionalizes equity: if the Ministry of Education adopts such guidelines, they can become part of the textbook approval process, meaning any book that fails to meet the criteria would need revision before it's ever in the hands of students. This is aligned with the Beijing Declaration's strategic objective, which calls on countries to develop curricula and textbooks free of gender bias in cooperation with all stakeholders. It also mirrors efforts in some countries where publishers agreed to a code of conduct for gender equality in textbooks.

Furthermore, a framework doesn't only help in national contexts; it contributes to the global discourse. Türkiye's insights in this area could benefit other nations undertaking similar reforms. It demonstrates a commitment to inclusive education practices and could be expanded to include other aspects of inclusivity (linking back to intersectionality – maybe a combined "diversity and inclusion in textbooks" framework).

Finally, the process of developing the framework is an academic contribution in itself. It requires integrating theories of gender (to know what equality looks like), empirical findings (to know what common pitfalls to avoid, such as those documented in earlier sections), and practical constraints of textbook design (ensuring guidelines are realistic for writers and illustrators to implement). It may involve iterative revisions and consultation, effectively bridging research and policy. In essence, this suggestion for further research is about creating a tool that operationalizes all the knowledge gained from research on gender in ELT materials thus far, turning it into actionable standards. The outcome would be a sustained improvement in educational content, benefitting

generations of learners by fostering an environment of equality and respect from the very pages of their textbooks.

Overall, pursuing these twelve areas of further research will significantly deepen and broaden the understanding of gender representation in educational materials. Each suggested direction addresses a different facet of the issue – from broadening the scope across ages and cultures, to measuring real-world impact, to involving the agents of education (teachers and students), and finally to creating solutions. Taken together, they form a comprehensive agenda for academic inquiry that not only critiques but also contributes to the positive transformation of ELT coursebooks in Türkiye and beyond. By integrating critical pedagogy, gender theory, and inclusive educational practices throughout these suggestions, future research can remain anchored in a vision of education as a vehicle for equality and social betterment. Such a coherent and multi-dimensional research program would be fitting for a master's or doctoral thesis extension, and indeed for ongoing scholarly work committed to gender fairness in education. The insights gained would inform policymakers, educators, and material developers, ultimately helping ensure that English language learning in schools also teaches and models the values of gender equity to the next generation.

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