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Islamic Ideologies, National Identity or Intercultural Competence: A Critical Content Analysis of Iranian EFL Textbooks

Abstract

This study critically analysed the content of the Iranian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) textbook series, *Prospect*, to examine the representation of Islamic and Iranian ideologies and the potential implications for the development of intercultural competence among Iranian learners. Using a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis, the study investigated the frequency and categories of Islamic and Iranian ideological content in the textual and visual components of the textbooks. The findings indicated a strong emphasis on the inclusion of Islamic values, traditions, and cultural elements throughout the *Prospect* series, accounting for 54% of the overall textual content compared to 46% for Iranian elements. The visual representation exhibited the same imbalanced distribution, with Islamic imagery continuing to dominate the visual representations. The qualitative analysis further revealed that the textbook content reflects a concerted effort to incorporate Islamic ideologies, including religious beliefs, practices, and moral teachings, across various categories such as content, language, visuals, cultural references, and values. While the textbooks did include some Iranian cultural elements, the overall approach suggests an aim to align the materials with the ideological priorities of the Iranian government and educational system. These results raise concerns about the *Prospect* series' ability to foster true intercultural competence among learners, as the limited inclusion of international or target culture elements

may hinder their preparation for effective cross-cultural communication. The study calls for a more balanced and inclusive approach to cultural representation in Iranian EFL textbooks, one that integrates both local and global perspectives to better meet the needs of language learners in a globalized world.

Keywords: content analysis, cultural representation, EFL textbooks, intercultural competence, Iranian ideologies, Islamic ideologies

The role of language education in shaping national identity and promoting ideological beliefs has been a subject of significant scholarly interest (Gheitasi et al., 2022; Pennycook, 2017; Phillipson, 1992; Wang, 2016). Fairclough (1992) pointed out that texts are always biased, and serve an ideological purpose, and are in the interests of particular social groups. Textbooks and materials used in language teaching normally present a certain type of worldview (Aliakbari, 2004). Bakhtin (1981, cited in Wang, 2016, p. 3) noted that learning a foreign language entails a process of “ideologically becoming,” which denotes experiencing a process of constructing and developing a new identity through studying the ideologically-loaded discourse. Language textbooks, in particular, are often considered vehicles for the dissemination of cultural and ideological values (Abd Rashid & Ibrahim, 2018; Abdollahzadeh & Baniasad, 2010; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Liu, 2005; Shardakova & Pavlenko, 2004). In the context of Iran, the Iranian EFL textbooks have been the focus of several studies exploring how they reflect the country’s Islamic and national identity (e.g., Abbasian & Biria, 2017; Behnam & Mozaheb, 2013a; 2013b; Cheng & Beigi, 2012; Gheitasi et al., 2022).

Language textbooks are not neutral artifacts and “can be examined as a social product” (Abd Rashid & Ibrahim, 2018, p. 2). As Yamada (2006) believed, a textbook is not merely a commercially available reference book used in a language teaching program, it also serves as an important means to deliver political and ideological orientation. Textbooks are imbued with cultural, social, and political ideologies that shape the content and presentation of the material (Foster & Crawford, 2006; Keles & Yazan, 2023; Mandarani et al., 2021; Pennycook, 2017; Uzum et al., 2021; Weninger & Kiss, 2013). The selection and organization of topics, the choice of texts and visuals, and the ways in which language is used all reflect the underlying ideological biases of the textbook authors and publishers (Phillipson, 1992). Iranian EFL textbooks are particularly noteworthy for their emphasis on Islamic and Iranian national identity (Derakhshan, 2024; Gheitasi et al., 2022; Gheitasi et al., 2020; Jorfi et al., 2022; Mozaffarzadeh & Ajideh, 2019). According to Aliakbari (2004, as cited in Gheitasi et al., 2020, p. 151), “there are views that see ELT in Iran as no more than a representation of the Persian or Islamic ideology that lacks the

target cultural content necessary for successful intercultural communication.” As a key component of the Iranian EFL curriculum, the *Prospect* series has been an important vehicle for disseminating these ideological beliefs.

The *Prospect* series, which is the primary focus of this study, is a set of Iranian EFL textbooks that have been in use since 2013. These textbooks have been the subject of several studies that have examined how they reflect the country’s Islamic and national identity (Ajideh & Panahi, 2016; Baghermousvay & Nabifar, 2016; Pasand & Ghasemi, 2018; Shirvan et al., 2016; Shojaei & Noormohammadi, 2016). Shirvan et al.’s (2016) study, for example, found that the *Prospect* series “intends to teach English to the students while heeding the most possible attention to the Islamic-Iranian culture and identity” (p. 82). The textbooks included numerous references to Islamic and Iranian cultural elements, such as religious holidays, historical figures, and traditional customs. Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) also noted the prevalence of Islamic and Iranian ideological content in the *Prospect* series, observing that in the textbooks “culture is mainly limited to Islamic traditions, national ceremonies and festivals” (p. 62).

The focus on Islamic and Iranian ideologies may have implications for the development of intercultural competence among learners, as it may limit their exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and inhibit their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural exchange (Maghsoudi, 2020). Intercultural competence, or the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations, is widely recognized as an essential skill in our increasingly globalized world (Byram, 1997; Deardorff, 2006). Language education, in particular, is seen as a key domain for the development of intercultural competence, as it provides learners with the linguistic and cultural knowledge necessary to engage in cross-cultural communication (Byram, 1997; Kramsch, 1993). However, the extent to which language textbooks, such as the *Prospect* series, contribute to developing intercultural competence is an ongoing debate, and the books, however, were found not to sufficiently deal with metacultural and intercultural knowledge development (Soodmand Afshar et al., 2018). As Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) note, “the range of cultural topics represented in the series is rather narrow and very limited in its account of intercultural elements, and it is solely constrained to local matters” (p. 55). These findings indicate a need for the inclusion of more cultural topics in the textbooks and it highlights that more attention should be devoted to developing the students’ intercultural competence by the inclusion of tasks or activities directed to other cultures and communities. In the case of the *Prospect* series, the emphasis on Islamic and Iranian ideologies may limit learners’ exposure to diverse cultural perspectives and inhibit their ability to engage in meaningful cross-cultural exchange.

Consequently, this study aims to critically analyse the content of the *Prospect* series to better understand the ways in which Islamic and Iranian ideologies are represented and the potential implications for the development of intercultural competence among Iranian EFL learners. By examining the frequency and categories of Islamic and Iranian ideological content in the textbooks, the study seeks to contribute to the ongoing dialogue around the role of language education in promoting intercultural understanding.

Literature Review

The Integration of Islamic Ideologies in Iranian Educational Materials

The substantial influence of Islam in defining Iran's educational policy and curriculum is reflected in the incorporation of Islamic ideologies in educational materials used in the country. Religious studies, ethics, and literature are among the areas where Iran's Islamic republican educational system has been most influential (Künkler, 2019; Nuriman & Fauzan, 2017). The goals of this integration are to encourage students to identify with their religion, develop a feeling of moral responsibility, and impart Islamic values (Abrahamian, 2021).

Islamic education is a core subject in Iranian schools, covering various aspects of religious knowledge, including Quranic studies, Islamic history, ethics, and Islamic law (Abrahamian, 2021). The Quran, as the central religious text of Islam, is often studied and memorized by students, instilling a deep understanding of Islamic teachings (Petrushevsky, 1985). Islamic ideologies are also integrated into other subjects, such as literature and social sciences, providing students with an Islamic perspective on topics related to society, morality, and governance (Moghadam, 2019).

The integration of Islamic ideologies extends to the visual and material aspects of textbooks, featuring images, illustrations, and calligraphy related to Islamic art and architecture, as well as Islamic symbols and motifs, reinforcing the Islamic identity of Iran (Moghadam, 2019). This integration aims to nurture a strong religious identity among students, promoting the values of the Islamic faith, including piety, righteousness, and moral responsibility (Kadivar, 2014).

Critics argue that the integration of Islamic ideologies in Iranian educational materials may limit critical thinking and diversity of thought, restricting the exploration of alternative ideologies and perspectives (Arjmand, 2004). However, proponents argue that this integration fosters a sense of cultural identity, moral values, and social cohesion among students (Takim, 2000).

Islamic Ideologies in Iranian EFL Textbooks

The inclusion of Islamic ideologies in EFL textbooks used in Iran reflects the influence of Islam on the educational system and the country's cultural context. Iran, as an Islamic republic, aims to inspire Islamic values and promote religious identity among its citizens, including in the field of foreign language education (Jorfi et al., 2022; Simbuka, 2021). Iranian EFL textbooks often incorporate Islamic values and teachings alongside language learning objectives. Islamic themes and references are integrated into reading passages, dialogues, and cultural sections, providing learners with exposure to Islamic culture, history, and religious concepts (Jorfi et al., 2022). This inclusion serves to reinforce the cultural and religious identity of Iranian students. Language exercises and activities in Iranian EFL textbooks also integrate Islamic ideologies. For example, vocabulary exercises may include words related to Islamic rituals, holidays, or terminology, and grammar exercises may incorporate examples that reflect Islamic cultural practices or values (Mehdipoor et al., 2021; Simbuka, 2021). These integrations aim to help students develop not only their language skills but also their knowledge of Islamic concepts and terminology.

By incorporating Islamic content into language learning materials, the educational system aims to strengthen the connection between language education and the cultural and religious heritage of Iran. However, critics argue that the imposing Islamic ideologies in Iranian EFL textbooks may limit learners' exposure to diverse cultural perspectives, ignore intercultural communicative competence, and hinder critical thinking (Babaii, 2023; Hamdi, 2023). It is suggested that a balanced approach that includes a broader range of cultural content could enhance learners' intercultural competence.

Empirical Studies

The literature review reveals a substantial body of research that has examined the representation of culture and ideology in Iranian EFL textbooks. These studies have employed diverse methodological approaches, including content analysis, interviews, and questionnaires, to investigate the presence and use of Islamic and Iranian ideologies, as well as the inclusion of intercultural competence, in the textbooks.

Baghermousvai and Nabifar (2016) conducted a qualitative analysis of dialogues and conversations in *Prospect 2*, finding that the textbook utilized the source culture and included elements such as attire, tradition, and Islamic concepts. Similarly, Shojaei and Noormohammadi (2016) investigated the representation of local identity aspects, including characters, locales, apparel, foods, drinks, and professions, in the *Prospect* series. Their findings indicate that the

personal aspect of identity ranked highest, while the religious aspect received the lowest score.

Extending the focus beyond Iran, Jorfi et al. (2022) compared the cultural content of the Iranian textbook *Vision I* and the Egyptian textbook *Hello I*, finding that *Vision I* had a more limited number of cultural elements compared to *Hello I*, although both textbooks lacked in-depth cultural information. Gheitasi et al. (2020) also evaluated the cultural content of the *Vision* textbook series, reporting that the textbooks contained the most cultural content associated with Persian as the source culture, with a primary focus on the aesthetic sense of culture.

Researchers have also explored the inclusion of intercultural competence in Iranian EFL textbooks. Mozaffarzadeh and Ajideh (2019) examined the trend of addressing culture in Iranian ELT textbooks before and after the Islamic Revolution, concluding that the cultural contents were neglected both pre- and post-revolution, leading to insufficient materials for teaching communicative language and intercultural competence. Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) specifically investigated the representation of cultural points and the development of intercultural competence in the *Prospect* series, finding that the range of cultural topics was rather narrow and that the textbooks were limited in their account of intercultural elements. Building on these findings, Bagheri Nevisi and Reisi (2024) conducted a comparative study of Iranian and Afghan secondary English textbooks, focusing on the representation of culture and intercultural interaction in the conversation parts. Their results revealed that social interaction was the most frequent category for the representation of culture, while superficial interaction was the most frequent category for intercultural interactions.

Abbasian and Biria (2017) further explored the representation of national, international, and target cultural content in Iranian ELT textbooks, finding that the textbooks covered a restricted range of international and target cultural content, as well as limited national culturally familiar content.

Overall, the empirical studies reviewed highlight a consistent pattern of findings. The Iranian EFL textbooks, particularly the *Prospect* and *Vision* series, tend to emphasize Iranian and Islamic ideologies, with a limited inclusion of intercultural competence and a narrow range of cultural topics. The gap in the existing literature is the lack of a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the *Prospect* series, which is the focus of the current study. The previous studies have examined the cultural and ideological representation in these textbooks, but a more thorough and rigorous analysis is needed to fully understand the extent and nature of the inclusion of Islamic ideologies, national identity, and intercultural competence. The current study aims to fill this gap by conducting a critical content analysis of the *Prospect* series, exploring the frequency and categories of Islamic ideologies and their relationship with national identity and intercultural competence. It tries to provide valuable insights

into the cultural and ideological representations in the Iranian EFL textbooks, which can inform future textbook development and teacher training initiatives.

Therefore, this study aimed at going into more details to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. How frequently are the Islamic and Iranian ideologies used in textual and visual items of the Iranian EFL textbooks of *Prospect* series?
2. What categories are the Islamic ideologies used for in the Iranian EFL textbooks of the *Prospect* series?

Methodology

Research Design

The present study adopted a content analysis approach to critically examine the representation of Islamic ideologies and national identity in the Iranian EFL textbook series, *Prospect 1*, *2*, and *3*. Content analysis is a well-established research method that allows for the systematic, objective, and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication (Berelson, 1952). This approach enables both quantitative and qualitative analysis of textual and visual elements within the textbooks.

For the first research question, the study employed a quantitative content analysis using an ideological framework model developed by Ramirez and Hall (1990) consisting of five main categories to determine the frequency of Islamic and Iranian ideologies used in the textual and visual items of the *Prospect* series. For the second research question, a researcher-made checklist was developed to qualitatively analyse the categories and underlying reasons for the inclusion of Islamic ideologies in the textbooks.

Materials and Instruments

The corpus for the study consisted of the three EFL textbooks in the *Prospect* series, which are prescribed by the Iranian Ministry of Education for use in primary high schools.

To address the second research question, a researcher-made checklist, "Recognizing Islamic Ideologies in EFL Textbooks," was developed. This checklist which consisted of seven categories, was designed to identify the broad reasons and categories behind the inclusion of Islamic ideologies in the

Prospect series. Each category contained specific questions to guide the analysis of the textbooks.

The first category was Content and Topics, which focused on whether the textbook included content related to Islamic beliefs, practices, or religious concepts, among other things. The second category was Language and Terminology, which examined whether the textbook used Islamic-specific vocabulary or terminology, Arabic words or phrases, and Islamic expressions. The third category was Visual Representations, which looked at whether the illustrations, photographs, or images in the textbook depicted Islamic symbols, mosques, or Islamic attire, among other things. The fourth category was Cultural References, which examined whether the textbook included references to Islamic cultural practices, traditions, or customs, as well as examples of Islamic art, literature, or music. The fifth category was Perspectives and Values, which focused on whether the textbook promoted Islamic values, ethics, or moral teachings in its lessons or stories, and whether it presented Islamic perspectives on social, political, or ethical issues. The sixth category was Bias and Representation, which examined whether there were any instances of bias, stereotyping, or misrepresentation of Islamic beliefs or practices in the textbook, and whether it presented a balanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic ideologies, taking into account diverse interpretations within Islamic traditions and practices. The final category was Language Skills Integration, which looked at whether the textbook incorporated language skills practice related to Islamic topics or contexts and whether there were exercises or activities that encouraged students to engage with Islamic themes through language practice.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collection process involved a comprehensive examination of the *Prospect* series, including all textual and visual components. The researchers carefully reviewed each lesson and unit, identifying and cataloguing all instances where Islamic and Iranian ideologies were present. This included textual references, terminology, visual representations, and cultural elements.

For the quantitative analysis, the researchers conducted a systematic count of the frequency of Islamic and Iranian ideologies in the textual and visual items of the textbooks. The data were organized into tabular forms to facilitate the statistical analysis and to provide a clear representation of the distribution and prevalence of these ideologies throughout the series.

In the second phase, the researcher-made checklist was employed to investigate the underlying reasons and categories for the inclusion of Islamic ideologies in the *Prospect* series. The researchers closely examined the textbooks, using

the checklist as a guiding framework to identify and categorize the various ways in which Islamic ideologies were incorporated into the textbooks.

The qualitative analysis, guided by the researcher-made checklist (Appendix A), involved a detailed examination of the textbooks to identify the specific categories and reasons for the inclusion of Islamic ideologies. The researchers carefully reviewed the textbooks, noting the presence of Islamic content, terminology, visual representations, cultural references, perspectives and values, and instances of bias or misrepresentation. The data were then organized and categorized according to the seven main categories of the checklist, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the underlying motivations and approaches used in the incorporation of Islamic ideologies in the *Prospect* series.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses provided a multifaceted approach to investigating the representation of Islamic ideologies and national identity in the Iranian EFL textbooks. This methodological approach enabled the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the extent and nature of the inclusion of these elements, as well as the potential implications for language education in the Iranian context.

Results

Content Analysis (Quantitative Part)

The present section comprises materials that embody the cultural heritage of Islamic and Iranian societies, which have been methodically organized and presented in tabular form. The textual components within this section encompass linguistic elements that convey the cultural and ideological characteristics of Islam and Iran. Furthermore, the visual components incorporate terms such as “Quran” and “Hafez,” which function as endorsements or symbols of Islamic and Iranian ideologies to varying degrees.

Table 1
The Frequency of Textual Representation of Islamic vs Iranian Ideologies in Prospect Series

Books	People & Identity		Places		Ceremonies		Names		Dressing	
	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.
Islamic vs Iranian										
<i>Prospect 1</i> Student Book	2	3	–	4	–	–	69	55	17	–
<i>Prospect 1</i> Work Book	10	–	2	6	5	–	45	42	8	–
<i>Prospect 2</i> Student Book	6	8	3	22	4	–	25	9	2	–
<i>Prospect 2</i> Work Book	3	5	18	26	6	–	–	–	1	–
<i>Prospect 3</i> Student Book	7	8	1	9	8	8	55	30	–	–
<i>Prospect 3</i> Work Book	3	2	–	10	9	9	23	27	3	–
Total	31 54%	26 46%	24 23%	77 77%	32 65%	17 35%	217 57%	163 43%	31 100%	0 0%

Table 1 presents an analysis of the frequency of textual representation of Islamic versus Iranian ideologies across the *Prospect* series of textbooks. When examining the overall trends across all the textbooks, the data suggests a higher representation of Islamic elements compared to Iranian elements. Aggregating the totals, Islamic references account for 54% of the content, while Iranian references make up 46%. This disparity is particularly evident in certain categories, such as Dressing, where all the references are to Islamic styles with no representation of Iranian fashions. The Names category also shows a stronger Islamic influence, with 57% of the names being Islamic compared to 43% Iranian. The same story goes for the Ceremonies categories with the total 65% for the Islamic culture and only 35% to the Iranian ones. However, the distribution is not uniform across all the examined areas. In the Places category, Iranian elements actually outnumber the Islamic ones, accounting for 77% of the total references respectively. This indicates that while Islamic ideology may be more pervasive overall in the textbooks, certain domains, such as locations, do exhibit a more pronounced Iranian influence. These findings provide valuable insights into the cultural and ideological framing present in the *Prospect* series materials. The data reveals a complex interplay between Islamic and Iranian elements, with Islamic ones more dominating the textbooks.

Table 2
The Frequency of Visual Representation of Islamic vs Iranian Ideologies in Prospect Series

Books	People & Identity		Places		Ceremonies		Names		Dressing	
	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.	Is.	Ir.
Islamic vs Iranian										
<i>Prospect 1</i> Student Book	5	3	–	3	2	–	–	–	27	–
<i>Prospect 1</i> Work Book	6	2	3	3	–	–	–	–	11	2
<i>Prospect 2</i> Student Book	5	4	8	8	3	–	–	–	3	–
<i>Prospect 2</i> Work Book	–	6	7	2	–	–	–	–	3	–
<i>Prospect 3</i> Student Book	6	4	3	2	11	6	–	–	28	3
<i>Prospect 3</i> Work Book	6	–	–	4	6	10	2	1	16	–
Total	28 59%	19 41%	21 48%	22 52%	22 58%	16 42%	2 75%	1 25%	88 94%	5 6%

The data presented in Table 2 offers a detailed breakdown of the visual representation of Islamic and Iranian elements across the different *Prospect* series textbooks. Similar to the previous table, the analysis is structured around key categories. When analysing the overall trends, some interesting patterns emerge. In the visual domain, the data suggests a more balanced representation of Islamic and Iranian ideologies compared to the textual analysis presented earlier. Across all the textbooks, Islamic visual elements account for 59% of the total People & Identity category, while Iranian elements make up 41% in this category. This is a wider ratio than the 54% Islamic to 46% Iranian split observed in the textual analysis. The visual representation, yet again, appears to give more prominence to Islamic influences, where the Iranian elements are either on a par with or slightly exceed the Islamic ones. However, the Dressing category continues to exhibit a strong Islamic visual dominance, with 94% of the images depicting Islamic styles versus only 6% showing Iranian fashions.

These findings suggest that the *Prospect* series textbooks may be making a concerted effort to visually represent both Islamic and Iranian cultural elements, potentially aiming for a more exclusive and imbalanced portrayal in favor of Islamic ideologies. The data indicates that Islamic imagery still

maintains a slight edge overall, and visual content provides little equitable space for Iranian influences. This contrasts with the textual analysis, which showed a more pronounced Islamic bias. The very little divergence between the textual and visual representations points to a nuanced approach by the textbook authors, potentially seeking to offer learners a little comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the cultural landscape. However, the continued dominance of Islamic visual elements in certain domains, such as Dressing, suggests that there may still be room for further diversification and integration of Iranian cultural imagery across all aspects of the textbooks.

Content Analysis (Qualitative Part)

A comprehensive thematic analysis was also used to identify any references to Islamic religious ideologies or beliefs in the textbooks. Significant textual or visual sections relating to Islamic religious beliefs were meticulously examined and extracted, and a category label was assigned to each of these sections. This process was continued until all three textbooks and their corresponding workbooks had been thoroughly scrutinized, and a comprehensive inventory of every code generated was maintained.

By using the checklist, the researchers were able to identify the presence and frequency of Islamic ideologies in the textbooks. The checklist also allowed them to identify any potential biases or misrepresentations of Islamic beliefs and practices in the materials. This analysis helped inform future textbook development and ensured that they provided a balanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic ideologies and beliefs. The main Islamic ideologies represented in the books were the following categories: Dressing Style, Same-Gender Interaction, women-in-kitchen/men-in-yard, Islamic Rituals, and Islamic Republic Policy.

Dressing Style

In all six textbooks analysed, every female character was depicted wearing the hijab, which is a requirement in Islamic jurisprudence or 'Shari'ah'. This religious law mandates that women cover their entire body, except for their hands from the wrists down and their oval-shaped face from the forehead to the chin. This aspect was evident in all analysed images. The Islamic faith prohibits a non-mahram, which refers to a person who is not related to an individual by blood or marriage, from seeing a woman's body. This principle was clearly depicted in the series of textbooks under review. Bigger (2006) notes that the depiction of veiled women was distinct from women who opted for conservative dressing practices or those who were simply attired, implying

that the hijab was a result of the legal framework. The textbooks consistently portrayed female characters wearing the hijab, as a norm of Islamic practice:

Figure 1

Dressing Style for Women

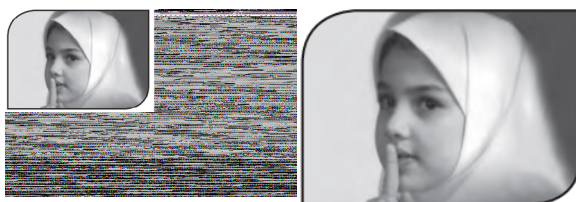


Prospect 1, SB, p. 63

Prospect 1, WB, p. 39

Prospect 2, SB, p. 26

Prospect 2, WB, p. 16



Prospect 3, SB, p. 24

Prospect 3, WB, p. 10

Note: SB: Student Book, WB: Work Book.

The principle of modesty was not exclusive to women in these textbooks. Men were also expected to dress appropriately, concealing the majority of their anatomy and physique with baggy and simple clothing, and to dress decently.

Figure 2

Dressing Style for Men



Prospect 1, SB, p. 52

Prospect 2, SB, p. 12

Prospect 3, SB, p. 16

The images in these textbooks conveyed the message that Muslim women ought to wear traditional garments such as the Chador, Maghnaeh, or Manteau that provide full coverage of the head and body. Men, on the other hand, are expected to wear loose-fitting, dark-colored clothing with long sleeves.

Same-Gender Interaction

After conducting a thorough visual analysis of the six textbooks, it was observed that male-female interactions were typically represented in the following categories: father-son, father-daughter, mother-son, mother-daughter, two male friends, and two female friends. Even in rare non-mahram situations, a sufficient physical distance existed between the two genders. The following examples illustrate this finding:

Figure 3

Same-Gender Interaction



Prospect 1, SB, p. 30

Prospect 2, SB, p. 34

Prospect 3, SB, p. 24

The aforementioned observations were in accordance with Islamic principles, which prohibit individuals of the opposite sex who are not related by blood or marriage from mingling in seclusion, without the presence of a chaperone.

Women-in-Kitchen/Men-in-Yard

Under an age-old Islamic tradition, men are traditionally expected to work outside the home and provide for the family, while women are responsible for managing household chores, raising children, and giving birth. Unfortunately, there has been a common misconception in Islamic communities that the kitchen is the ideal place for women. For a more thorough understanding of this issue, the following excerpts have been presented from *Prospect 1*:

- *What is your father's job? – He's a mechanic. (Prospect 1, p. 23)*
- *What is your mother's job? – She's a housewife. (Prospect 1, p. 23)*
- ...*My father is a farmer. My mother is a housewife... (Prospect 1, WB, p. 52)*
- ...*My father is a taxi driver. My mother is a housewife... (Prospect 1, WB, p. 71)*

Figure 4*Women-in-Kitchen*

Prospect 1, SB, p. 32

Prospect 3, SB, p. 52

Islamic Rituals

- Plentiful Islamic festivities, occasions, and rituals advanced Islamic customs and beliefs. Some of these Islam-centric ideas are: Eid al-Fitr (the spiritual festival that Muslims celebrate as the conclusion of the month-long abstaining phase recognized as Ramadan).

Fitr Eid is an important religious holiday in his country. (Prospect 3, SB, p. 57)

- Ghorban Eid is a significant Islamic festival that commemorates Ibrahim's (Abraham's) obedience to Allah's command to sacrifice his son Ismail (Ishmael). It is the second major Islamic holiday and is celebrated on a larger scale).

In Iran, the Jashn-e Taklif (Obligation Ceremony) is a significant event for primary school pupils. According to the regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Ministry of Education, every nine-year-old girl and fifteen-year-old boy must participate in this ceremony led by the schoolmasters. The religious instructors educate the students that they are now "Mokallaf," implying that they have reached the age of responsibility and should adhere to Islamic religious duties like wearing the hijab, praying, and fasting. This celebration marks their transition from childhood to adulthood.

...It was Taklif Celebration. I enjoyed it a lot.... (Prospect 3, WB, p. 79)

Another Islamic concept discussed was Ashura and Tashua. This spiritual occasion happened every year on the 10th day of Muharram and was a prolonged time of grieving observed to commemorate the passing of Husain ibn Ali, the third Imam of the Shi'ite community.

Numerous diverse religious ceremonies were frequently cited in the texts such as the Chanting of the sacred Quran (the Islamic holy scripture revealed by the prophet Muhammad), offering Salah (the act of communicating with Allah that Muslims perform five times a day), observing Sawm (a period of abstinence from food and drink for religious reasons), and pilgrimage to the shrines of Shi'ite Imams.

Who is very good at reciting the Holy Quran? (Prospect 2, WB, p. 13)

Does he recite the Holy Quran at the turn of the year? (Prospect 3, SB, p. 51)

The text talked about the mention of reciting prayers regularly, with the intention of subtly instructing that Muslims were obligated to offer Salat (Prayers) on a daily basis. Additionally, the observance of fasting was noticed, which involved the act of worshiping Allah by refraining from consuming food, drink, and other actions that could invalidate the fast, from the actual time of dawn until sunset.

...At noon we pray and have lunch... (Prospect 3, WB, p. 64)

...On Fitr Eid, Muslims don't fast... (Prospect 3, SB, p. 57)

A mosque—a structure utilized for Muslim worship—was depicted in various sections of the educational materials, both in written and illustrated formats.

Isfahan is very famous for its mosques and palaces. (Prospect 2, SB, p. 42)

Holy Prophet's Mosque. (Prospect 2, WB, p. 29)

Great mosques. (Prospect 2, WB, p. 33)

Jameh Mosque. (Prospect 2, WB, p. 26)

The act of visiting the tombs of their Imams was a religious practice among Shi'a Muslims. These tombs held great significance as sacred sites, and one prominent example was the revered sanctuary of Imam Reza, the eighth Shi'a Imam, situated in the northeastern region of Iran, specifically in Mashhad city.

These practices are considered fundamental in Islamic culture, as they are believed to bring blessings and spiritual benefits, or mark the conclusion of Ramadan. The *Prospect* series provides detailed explanations and instructions on the etiquette and importance of visiting Imams' tombs, offering students a comprehensive understanding of this ritual.

Figure 5
Islamic Rituals



Islamic Republic Policy

The corpus contained numerous references to other concepts associated with the Islamic Republic and the governing system’s doctrines in Iran. These references were particularly related to the Islamic administration in Iran, which aligns with the aforementioned Islamic ideologies. The celebration of the Islamic Revolution is a tribute to the protests that resulted in the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty and the emergence of the Islamic Revolution.

The literature classified those who died during the Islamic Revolution, whether in the Iran-Iraq conflict or as a result of terror tactics, as ‘shahids.’ This classification also extended to the nuclear scientists who were assassinated. The textbooks contained visuals that depicted these individuals in various contexts:

Figure 6
Shahids



In *Prospect 1*, certain historically significant days that hold great importance for the Islamic ruling system of Iran were explicitly listed. These include the start of the holy defense (Defae Mohgaddas), which refers to the Iran-Iraq 8-year war, the anniversary of the Islamic revolution, the Islamic Republic Day, and the commemoration of the liberation of Khorramshahr.

Figure 7

Historically Significant Days



Prospect 1, WB, p. 41

It appeared that in a religiously governed nation such as Iran, the ideas presently taught in history textbooks ought to be presented in an English language publication once more!

Fajr film festival (The Islamic Guidance and Culture Ministry is in charge of the festival) that takes place on the commemoration of the 1979 Islamic Revolution is also one of the cultural representations related to the governmental ideological aspects.

...I attended Fajr International Film Festival... (Prospect 3, SB, p. 82)

Rahian-e Noor is a group of political and religious caravans that travel to various tourist destinations in the southern and western regions of Iran to commemorate the sacrifices made by Iranians during the Iran-Iraq War).

Moreover, the Islamic Republic's opposition to Israel is evident in two of the pictures featured in *Prospect 3*.

Figure 8

The Islamic Republic's opposition to Israel



Prospect 3, SB, p.121

Prospect 3, SB, p.18

Prospect 3, SB, p. 82

The *Prospect* series of EFL textbooks feature a higher number of Islamic events compared to Iranian events, highlighting the prominence of Islamic holidays. In summary, the *Prospect* series of EFL textbooks includes numerous political aspects related to the Islamic Republic. This can be attributed to the focus and goals of each series, the intended audience, and the educational regulations in Iran.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the current study provide significant insights into the representation of Islamic ideologies, national identity, and intercultural competence in the Iranian EFL textbook series, *Prospect*. The comprehensive content analysis and qualitative investigation of the textbooks reveal a strong emphasis on the inclusion of Islamic values, traditions, and cultural elements throughout the series.

To provide an answer to the first and second research questions a thorough content analysis, both quantitatively and qualitatively, was conducted. Given the visual and textual content of the books, it was discovered that almost every section conveyed Islamic values and ideologies. Based on the tables provided in the Results section (Tables 1 and 2), it could be seen that Islamic values predominated in the category of people and identity, which the authors used to introduce students to the Islamic figures and values admired in Islamic culture. In line with the findings of the current study, Abdollahzadeh and Baniasad (2000) found that the government preferred to impose ideologies through textbooks when they looked at the role of ideology in English textbooks. Additionally, the majority of the ceremonies and events—textual or visual—were based on Islamic customs to teach the students about and prepare them. The study also showed that the series was limited to local issues and did not address cross-cultural issues. The same outcomes were found by Pasand and Ghasemi (2018) in their analysis of how cultural elements were represented in Prospects 1–3. They concluded that there was little cultural representation of the target culture and a significant amount of representation of Islamic culture.

The use of both Iranian and Islamic proper nouns was attempted, with a slight advantage going to the Islamic names, and it was also discovered that the number of proper nouns was more evenly distributed. Everyone was dressed according to the customary Islamic dress code, which mandated that women wear the Islamic hijab (a type of clothing style that is required for female Muslims) at all times. Only one visual representation of a local dress pattern was included in *Prospect* 3 along with the Islamic Hijab. In their analysis, Benham and Mozaheb (2013) investigated the depiction of men and women within Iranian high school EFL textbooks, tested against Islamic custom,

utilizing linear and nonlinear approaches. Or, to put it another way, the content and pictures of these textbooks were tested with regard to Islamic customs. Their findings confirmed the findings of the current study by concluding that all visual segments of the EFL textbooks of Iran must adhere to the laws and principles of the Islamic special way of dressing known as hijab. When it came to locations, the majority of the locations mentioned in the books were connected to various regions of Iran in the textual analysis, but in the visual analysis, the Islamic locations once again had an advantage. It is important to note that, in accordance with the relevant theoretical framework, the majority of these cultural representations were in favor of the local cultural context (whether Islamic or Iranian), and only a small number of international target cultures were introduced (Gheitasi et al., 2020). According to Ajideh and Panahi (2016) confirming more Islamic-Iranian cultures than the target or international culture, the textbooks are inadequate in fostering intercultural communicative competence.

Considering the second research question, the results of the current study showed that books were attempting to subtly teach some Islamic moral codes by exposing readers to Islamic ideologies while hiding Western culture from them. Clothing Style, Physical Interaction, Women at Home, Men Outside, Ideologies Related to Islam, and Ideologies Related to the Islamic Republic were the five categories under which these codes of conduct were divided. An effort was made to incorporate Islamic culture into each of these categories, including the way people dress, and interact with one another, the roles of men and women in society, holidays, religious ceremonies, and events related to Islam, as well as the Islamic political system.

No women were seen in the analysed textbook illustrations wearing anything other than the Islamic hijab in the first category, Clothing style. Similar to what Bigger (2006, p. 6) said, "Consequently, both men and women must dress modestly, which means they must cover their bodies with loose clothing or, in this case, the hijab."

The majority of the physical proximity among the characters of the series fell into the category of family members (Father-Son, Mother-Son, etc.), according to the analysis of the Physical interaction category, which was consistent with the research conducted by Haeri (1989). Regarding the third category, the analysis confirmed Cheng and Biglar (2012) who found, women were responsible for household duties while men were occupied with outside employment. A male-dominated family was regarded as the norm in this school of Islamic thought.

Considering the principles of Islam, such as its rituals, festivals, events, and acts, the current study's conclusions supported the government's efforts to engage young people and piqued their interest in Islamic ceremonial occasions. Accordingly, it was discovered that some cultural, traditional, economic, and behavioral aspects of Islamic ideology were purposefully portrayed in the

Iranian EFL textbooks. They explained that the purpose of including these religious ceremonies was to arouse students' interest in adhering to and supporting these Islamic traditions (Tahir et al., 2021). There was no question that these memorial services and events could draw in a lot of people's attention, especially teenagers who can express their joy or grief through these memorials. Due to this, the authors made an effort to mention as many Islamic celebrations as they could. As Ali et al. (2019) concluded students were being indoctrinated with the government's ideologies through textbooks. Shah et al. (2013) reporting an excessive amount of Islamic content in Punjabi English textbooks, stated these ideologies needed to be dropped. Fundamentally, no particular school of thought should be practiced in EFL textbooks; rather, students should learn creative writing and speaking techniques that enable them to perform successfully in a communicative situation (Shah et al., 2013).

Because of some political constraints, it was clear from the results of the textual and visual critical analysis that the book's authors did not want students to become familiar with either the target culture or the global culture. Tajeddin and Teimourizadeh (2014) contend that it was impossible to learn a second language without also learning its culture. Therefore, it might be necessary for language acquisition to have some level of exposure to the target or global culture. Likewise, Alptekin (2002) and Schnitzer (1995) made arguments for the importance of intercultural competence. According to Abdullah and Kumari (2009), when students were not exposed to the target culture, there would inevitably be a cultural divide and a subsequent lack of language proficiency. Additionally, as Tajeddin and Teimourizadeh (2014) highlighted, students who were learning English may later put their own cultural identities in danger because they were unable to communicate and transfer their values with people from other cultures.

In summary, the study indicates that Islamic ideologies and representations are dominant across various categories, including people and identity, ceremonies, names, and dressing. This suggests that the textbook authors have made a concerted effort to infuse the materials with Islamic content, potentially to align with the ideological priorities of the Iranian government and educational system. The limited inclusion of international or target culture elements, as highlighted by previous studies, suggests that the *Prospect* series may fall short in fostering true intercultural competence among learners. This raises concerns about the ability of these textbooks to adequately prepare students for successful cross-cultural communication and understanding. The findings align with the concerns raised by scholars regarding the need for a more balanced and inclusive approach to cultural representation in language learning materials, one that allows for the integration of both local and global perspectives.

Building on the insights gained from this study, future research should explore the representation of Islamic and Iranian ideologies, as well as intercultural

elements, in a wider range of EFL textbooks used in Iran. Expanding the analysis to include other nationally developed series, such as the *Vision* series for secondary high school students, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the trends and patterns observed in Iranian EFL materials. Additionally, it would be valuable to investigate the perspectives of teachers and students who have used the *Prospect* series, as well as other EFL textbooks in Iran. Gaining insights into their experiences, perceptions, and the practical implications of the textbook content in the classroom could help shed light on the real-world impact of the ideological representations. This could inform the development of more culturally-responsive and inclusive language learning resources that better serve the needs of Iranian EFL learners. Furthermore, future studies could explore the reasons and justifications behind the inclusion of specific Islamic and Iranian elements in the textbooks, moving beyond the descriptive analysis provided in this study. A deeper examination of the decision-making processes and the underlying educational and political agendas could offer valuable insights into the motivations driving the textbook content.

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Appendix A

Checklist: Recognizing Islamic Ideologies in EFL Textbooks

1. Content and Topics:

- Does the textbook include content related to Islamic beliefs, practices, or religious concepts?
- Are there specific sections or units dedicated to Islamic culture, history, or values?
- Are Islamic holidays, events, or figures mentioned or discussed in the textbook?

2. Language and Terminology:

- Does the textbook use Islamic-specific vocabulary or terminology?
- Are there Arabic words, phrases, or Islamic expressions incorporated in the material?
- Are Islamic greetings or phrases commonly used in the textbook?

3. Visual Representations:

- Do the illustrations, photographs, or images in the textbook depict Islamic symbols, mosques, or Islamic attire?
- Are there visual representations of Islamic rituals, prayers, or religious gatherings?
- Are there visual depictions of Islamic historical figures, prophets, or important Islamic sites?

4. Cultural References:

- Does the textbook include references to Islamic cultural practices, traditions, or customs?
- Are there examples of Islamic art, literature, or music discussed or showcased in the material?
- Does the textbook highlight the contributions of Islamic scholars, scientists, or philosophers?

5. Perspectives and Values:

- Does the textbook promote Islamic values, ethics, or moral teachings in its lessons or stories?
- Are there instances where Islamic perspectives are presented on social, political, or ethical issues?
- Does the textbook encourage respect, understanding, or appreciation for Islamic culture and beliefs?

6. Bias and Representation:

- Are there any instances of bias, stereotyping, or misrepresentation of Islamic beliefs or practices?
- Does the textbook present a balanced and accurate portrayal of Islamic ideologies?
- Are diverse interpretations within Islamic traditions and practices taken into account?

7. Language Skills Integration:

- Does the textbook incorporate language skills practice (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) related to Islamic topics or contexts?
- Are there exercises or activities that encourage students to engage with Islamic themes through language practice?