Comparative Analysis of Gender Representation in Afghanistan and Iranian Primary School Textbooks

Fatema Haidari *, Mortaza Kazemi **

*Gender and Women Studies, Kabul University, Kabul, Afghanistan

fatema.farnaz20@gmail.com

**Comparative and International Education, Zhejiang Normal University, Zhejiang, China

mortezakazimi3@gmail.com

Abstract

Textbooks are almost the only learning materials for many reasons in Afghanistan and Iran that are have been using by both teachers and students during learning and teaching process. Consequently, when girls and boys enter the school environment, the portrayal of females and males in textbooks, shape their identity of gender roles and influence their attitudes. Furthermore, textbooks have great importance for the formation of the world perception of the child thorough education. Therefore, this research compares gender representation in current social studies textbooks that are designed by Ministry of Education and are teaching as an obligatory subject in both countries; Iran and Afghanistan primary schools. In the present study, two methods of analysis performed. First, quantitative method to measure the frequency of male and female portrayal in both text and illustration. Second, qualitative method, to analyze the values, and messages that text and illustration transmit to the users. Findings shows that there are significant gender biases in both countries' social studies textbooks of primary school.

As a result, the findings would help the stockholders and teachers to take the gender balance and equality in account, and might help the textbooks' contributors to consider gender equality in the next revisions of textbooks.

Keywords: Gender equality, representation, textbook, social studies, gender stereotypes and bias

1. Introduction

Social studies is a critical tool in rapidly changing world since it deals with the human relationship and the way society works (Crisolo, O.R., et al., 2021). Due the significatn role of social studies

in present world, the current research has been merely focused on the representations of women in the social studies textbooks of two nieghbor countires.

However, textbooks have traditionally served as a tool of conveying national cultural values, while some have argued that textbooks content is unfairly influenced by privileged groups of people within communities who attempt to provide a hegemonic view of power and control (Heyneman, 2006). One can infer that in most patriarchal societies, educational materials are dominated by men and served in favor of men powers within societies. In the other hand, it is suggestively important to make sure that education systems, particularly textbooks are not gender biased.

Besides the tremendous efforts to eliminate gender biases from the textbooks across the globe, from India to US, several school textbooks consulted by the youngest children continue to convey clichés (Roberge, 2023). For instance, A 25 years review shown in indai that there are still some common types of gender stereotypes in the form of women invisibilities, powerless qualities association, and traditional roles inspite of gender-based curriculum reforms (Kadri, 2022). Moreover, a study conducted to examine recently published English textbook of middle school in Pakistan. The findings shown that women are excluded from textbook to a large extent as compared to their counterpart. Moreover, women were represented as emotional, sentimental, dependent, and kindhearted who were taking care of household chores. While men were represented as brave and adventurous who were associated with different outdoor activities (Hussain, et al., 2023).

Another research findings demonstrate that male proper nouns have outnumbered their counterpart female once and the gender imbalance can be inferred from presentation of more male pronouns with (60.6%) percentage compare to (39.4%) female pronouns. Out of 13 skilled occupations mentioned in the textbooks, 2 (15.4%) were assigned to women, while 11 (84.6%) were assigned to men characters. Gender firstness and topic domination are other forms of gender biases found the in the textbooks of Ethiopian textbooks (Mengistie &nWorku , 2020). Correspondingly, a study concerning gender stereotypes in Moroccan EFL textbooks findings revealed less visibility of female characters in illustrations, and were attributing them to gender based traditional professions and subordinate roles. Furthermore, the misrepresentations of female were evident by depicting them as dependent, submissive, and insufficient (Benlaghrissi, 2023).

Dewi et al. (2022) findings from analysis of Indonesian senior high school English materials based on five categories of gender biases: visibility, firstness, social role, domestic role, and masculine generic forms demonstrate that women are still invisible in the text and illustration of examined textbooks. Moreover, nouns and pronouns firstness are in favor of male whereas women were depicted in the domestic roles of child caring, house cleaning, and serving their husbands. However, from the three textbooks, just one of them contained masculine generic forms (Dewi et al., 2022).

However, gender stereotypes and misrepresentation has been detected in the U.S., the EU, and in African and Asian countries. This problem risks falling short of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where SDG-4 aims to ensure the inclusive, equitable, and quality education (Reina& Sierra, 2023). In addition, the gender stereotype is harmful whenever it is restricted women's and men's capacity to advance their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and make choices about their lives (UN, 2022).

2. Statement of the problem

Gender disparity remained one of the challenges for reaching equality in Education in both countries; Iran and Afghanistan. Both countries have cultural similarities since they shared a long historical period and heritages, both of them are Islamic and conservative countries, and according to their constitutions, Islamic law (Sharia) is the only source of legislation in both countries. Therefore, the researcher found enough reasons to compare these two countries in case of learning and teaching materials.

In Iran as a developing country there is gender disparities in different spheres of social lives. According to UNICEF (2011), in 2003, the Iranian parliament ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) but the Guardian Council refused and the matter is still on the table. This report stated that Iran and Sudan are the only two countries in MENA region that have not ratified the CEDAW (UNICEF, 2011). In addition, according to The Global Gender Gap Report (2018), filling the gender gap is not acceptable since first survey of World Economic Forum. For instance, in 2006 the country scored 0.580, and ranked 108. But in 2018, the country scored 0.589, and ranked 142 among the 149 countries (Zahidi et al., 2018). Furthermore, researches have been shown that women underrepresented and were less

visible in teaching and learning materials (Rezai, et al., 2021; Hall, 2014; Foroutan, 2012; Azad, 2019).

Similarly in Afghanistan, there are gender disparities in different spheres of life as well, particularly in education. According to data form the Afghanistan National Education profile in 2014 from the education policy and Data Center, 36% of boys aged 7-12 are out of school, compared to 53% of girls the same age. At the secondary level, 47% of boys aged 13-18 are out of school, and 72% of girls. This data shows a huge gap between girl and boy students. According to National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-2012, in primary education, the gender gap has increased slightly form 14% in 2005 to 16% in 2011-12 (Huber, 2015). In addition, studies have been reported gender parities in school textbooks of different subjects and in all educational level (Orfan, 2021; Nazimi &Hatifi , 2023).

Promoting gender equality and persuading the community and government to support gender participation in different spheres is crucially vital in both countries. Therefore, evaluation of gender visibility and representation in textbooks are much more vital for reaching the education equality, as well as for building a democratic society. As far as the knowledge of researcher concerns, no comparative studies have been conducted to examine gender representation in social studies textbooks of Iran and Afghanistan. So, this study was designed to illustrate how gender representation looks-like in Afghanistan and Iran primary school textbooks. Hence, this research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. How represented gender in the content, images and student activities in Grade 4 Iranian and Afghanistan primary school social studies textbooks?
2. How visible are women in contents, student activities and illustrations of currently in use primary social studies textbooks?
3. How we can mitigate the negative impacts of gender parity and discrimination on students' socialization?

3. Purpose of the study

Textbooks and learning materials are representing the tangible curriculum that is closest to students' hearts and minds, thus the messages that textbooks deliver have a powerful impact on learners (especially in early years) and on the society more broadly. As printed materials, they benefit from the respect people commonly have for the printed word: in many societies, one tends

to think that whatever is written or printed in a book, including a textbook, must be right and true (Hanoi, Do Son, 2010). Therefor the purpose of this study is: first, to reveal and analyze the gender status and representation in social studies textbooks in primary school. This in turn would help the textbooks contributors to take it into account for the revision of textbooks. At the same time, it would help the teachers and educators to become aware of gender invisibility, underrepresentation, and misrepresentation in textbooks that they are using as a resource. Second, to figure out supportive role of textbooks in elimination of gender disparity and biases. That would help education practitioners to reach the education for all and education quality. Thus, the research findings would be helpful for students, parents, and particularly for teachers & education practitioners to provide the students with more gender sensitive teaching and learning materials that promote gender equality and eliminate gender parities.

4. Literature Review

Research findings concerning gender representation in school textbooks of all over the world are actually inconsistent, where a majority of studies indicate gender stereotypes and gender biases more of less existed (Guo & Wang, 2023). For example, content analysis of gender representation in Saudi Arabian family education textbooks published after the launch of the Saudi Vision 2030 reform initiatives, revealed that despite the first theme of raising young women awareness of their rights and responsibilities, the three subsequent themes; exclusion of girls and women from the text and image, stereotypes of girls and women, and lack of female role model undermined the women empowerment principles. The findings suggest that women were vastly underrepresented in the content, image and text example of three examined textbooks. For example, girls and women were excluded across the three textbooks examples, scenarios, and activities that represented prestigious jobs and STEM majors. Moreover, except in grade 12 Health and Women Education textbooks where a female doctor is depicted with erased face, males were presented in the text, images, and activities as businessmen, engineers, doctors, scientists, teachers, salespersons, company owners, and interior designer, and engaging in physical activities and sports. In the other hand, women were mostly represented as mother, wives, sister and daughter attributed with domestic chores. It is worth to mention that the textbook of grade 10 referred to the women as having a highly paid job, but it did not specify the type or title of the job, so that could be a great opportunity to present a role model for young girls to select their future career based on (Aldegether, 2023).

A systematic review of 11 articles concerning gender equality shown that there are gender stereotypes, gender bias, and women underrepresentation in English textbooks of China, where more recent studies depict that the textbooks writers had paid attention to the issue of gender equity and made some efforts but still there was sort of gender stereotypes (Yan-huan, 2022). Similarly, a research conducted to evaluate the gender representation in the primary school books of Italy published in early 2000s. The findings shown that for every ten females protagonists, there were sixteen male with leadin roles, thus, female characers may not be wholly invisible, but they are centainly obsecured by the stronger male presence. There were fifty different occupations attributed to men, whereas fifteen professions assigned to women, simlialary, the masculine professions were much more prestigious and rewarding than their counterpart. Moreover, asymmetric adjectives stereotypically were attributed to female and male characters and men were depicted in more open areas than female ones (Biemmi, 2015).

Research finding concerning the sexist occupational representation in English textbooks of Iranian high school revealed that the total frequency of the occupational roles of male is more than female ones. Men were found to have 16 different occupations, while women were attributed to 4 different roles, and also men were manifested in high-statues jobs, whereas women were depicted in limited and mundane stereotypical professions such as teacher, nurse and secretary (Bahman, 2020). Although most studies indicating gender inequality in primary and high school textbooks of Iranian, Hall (2014) research findings indicates void of gender inequality to some extent. She stated that while the second textbook demonstrate a sharply defined indoor activities of women and outdoor activities of men attributions, females in the first textbooks were not restricted to passive indoor activities, instead they were enjoying active outdoor activities such as playing ping pong, visiting the art gallery and eating at a restaurant (Hall, 2014). Azad (2020) findings from images analysis of high school textbooks demonstrates that males were represented as playing a more active role and females were mostly depicted as the reactive and goal participants. Moreover, the analysis of gaze direction shown that males were frequently portrayed as looking at the viewer whereas their counterparts were mainly imaged as looking away from the viewer (Azad, 2020).

Furthermore, the researcher stated that women were substantially underrepresented while men are significantly overrepresented in both illustration and text of high school English textbooks of Afghanistan. Moreover, a limited social roles were allocated to women whereas a wide range of

social roles were associated to their counterpart. Surprisingly, men were more frequently illustrated than women in domestic roles. Besides, masculine generic forms such as "mankind" were widely used to refer to both women and men, gender firstness were in favor of men and most of the dialogue were initiated by male characters (Orfan, 2021). Nazimi & Hatifi (2023) findings revealed that there are more pictures of male than female characters in grade 7 Afghanistan school English language subject, where men were associated with more prestigious occupations. Furthermore, women were involved in more traditional activities such as cleaning, washing, teaching, cooking and housework, whereas men were dominated praying, playing, gardening, shepherding, mechanic, and studying activities (Sayed Zahir Nazimi & Kamran Hatifi , 2023).

To conclude, across the world, gender parity has been found in the textbooks of all education level and patriarchal ideology perpetuated as norm in education, while some countries like Australia and Zimbabwe are incorporating a bit more gender equality into visual representations (Roberge, 2023)

5. Methodology
5.1. Materials
Grade 4 social studies textbook currently used in Afghanistan and Iran primary schools are selected to serve as the corpus of present study. These textbooks provided by Ministry of education as a compulsory source of teaching process in primary school in both countries. The description of the textbooks is presented in detail in the (Table 1):

Table 1. textbooks specifications

Title	Publisher/Authors	Grade	Date of publication	Number of pages
Social Studies for Grade 4	Afghanistan Ministry of Education/Mohamad Rafiq Momand, Mohamad Faruq Omerkhil, and Samea Waez	4	2017	99
Social Studies for Grade 4	Iran, Ministry of Education /Learning and Teaching Materials Controlling Organization, Offset Company.	4	2018	114

5.2. Research Method

Two methods of analysis were undertaken for the present study. First, quantitative method to observe the visibility and representation of male and female in both text and illustration. As Pingel (2010a) stated that quantitative method in textbooks analysis is used to measure aspects of text in terms of frequency and space. This method can tell us a great detail about where the emphasis lies and about selection criteria, but nothing about values and interpretation (Pingel, 2010a). Therefore, for illustrating the values and interpretation of the text, the qualitative method has been undertaken to dig much more deeply the text, and illustration to reveal what does the text tell us, and what messages does illustration transmit. As Pingel suggested that the distinction between the two approaches should not be made too definite, because they complement each other (Pingel, 2010a).

5.3. Importance of the study

Besides tremendous efforts in recent decades, gender inequality remains as a challenge for both governments of Iran and Afghanistan. For example, in new strategy plan of Ministry of Education of Afghanistan that published in 2016, one of the core objectives of this strategy plan is to provide equitable access and reach equality in education up to 2021 (MoE, 2016). Similarly in Iran, The Sixth National Development Plan focused on empowering women by eradicating illiteracy among women and girls, eliminating gender gap in education, improving women's life expectancy, and reducing maternal death (UN, n.d.).

Therefor conducting research in support of gender equality via textbooks is crucial because of many reasons: 1) The role of textbooks as cultural touchstone; According to UNESCO document (1983) school textbooks in particular are a very important medium in the teaching and learning process. For teachers, they are an aid in preparing lessons and a source of prose passages; but for pupils they are often the only cultural touchstone. In practice, they operate as an institution giving official sanction to the values that they express (UNESCO, 1983). 2) The child identity formed in earlier childhood, in the same time gender biases, as all other biases, are usually inculcated quite early in both school and out-of-school (such as family or peer) settings. Consequently, textbooks, especially in early years, may be central to the way learners shape their understanding of themselves, the others and the world, based on which they develop their attitudes and patterns of behavior. 3) In conservative communities like Afghanistan and Iran, supporting gender equality through textbooks is essential and effective. Because through textbooks which are

using by both male and female students, we can eliminate the gender bias and stereotypes by transforming the discourses about gender equality and by supporting of male and female students to form biases free identity.

6. Findings

In this research, collected data is analyzed base on two sections: Section One shows the result of the quantitative analysis and is presented the frequency of characters in both text and illustrations. In Section Two, determines the qualitative analysis of the corpus and is presented in case of gendered-oriented topics and gender-linked occupations possibilities.

6.1. Section One. The Quantitative Analysis

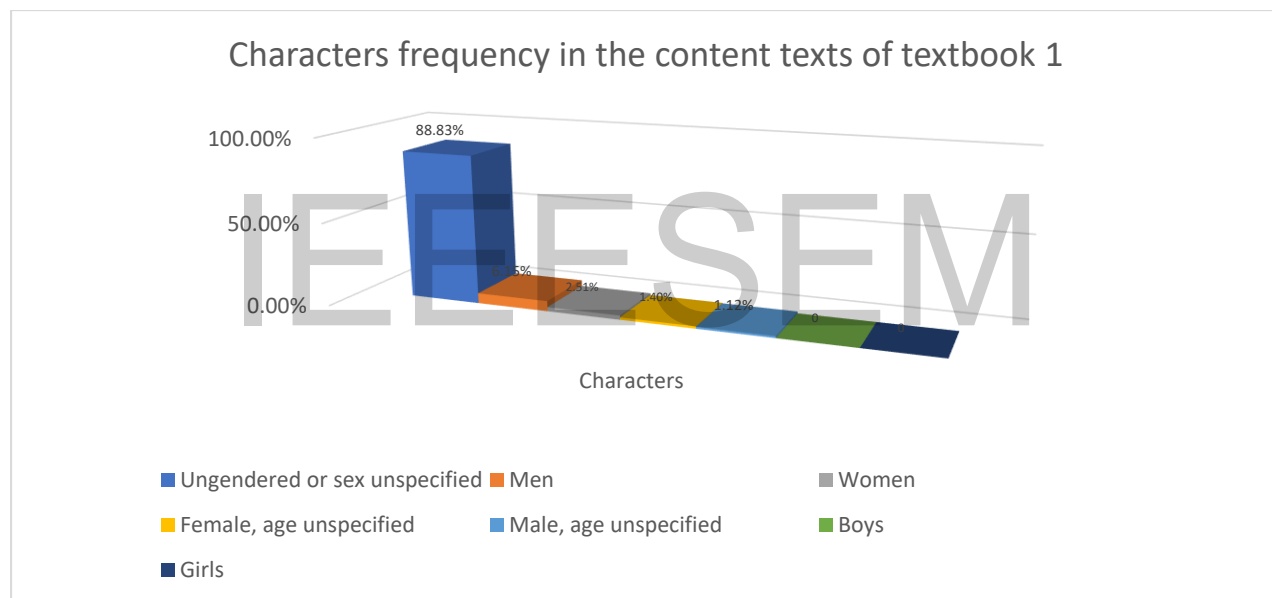### 6.1.1. Gender visibility in text, exercise and illustrations of textbook 1[1]

Figure 1. gender visibility in Afghanistan textbook.

Above figure shows the visibility of characters in grade 4 social studies textbook of Afghanistan. According to the chart, female, male and ungendered characters appeared 358 times in text. Moreover, the majority of characters are ungendered or sex unspecified (88.83%). But a comparison between women (2.51%) and men (6.15%) shows a difference of (3.64%). Therefore, it suggesting that there is a numerical imbalance in the visibility of women and men characters in text. However, the comparison of female, age unspecified (1.40%) and male, age unspecified

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[1] We use textbook 1 instead of Afghanistan textbook and textbook 2 instead of Iran textbook later on.

(1.12%) showed favorable visibility of both sexes. But there is not any character of children from both sex in the text.
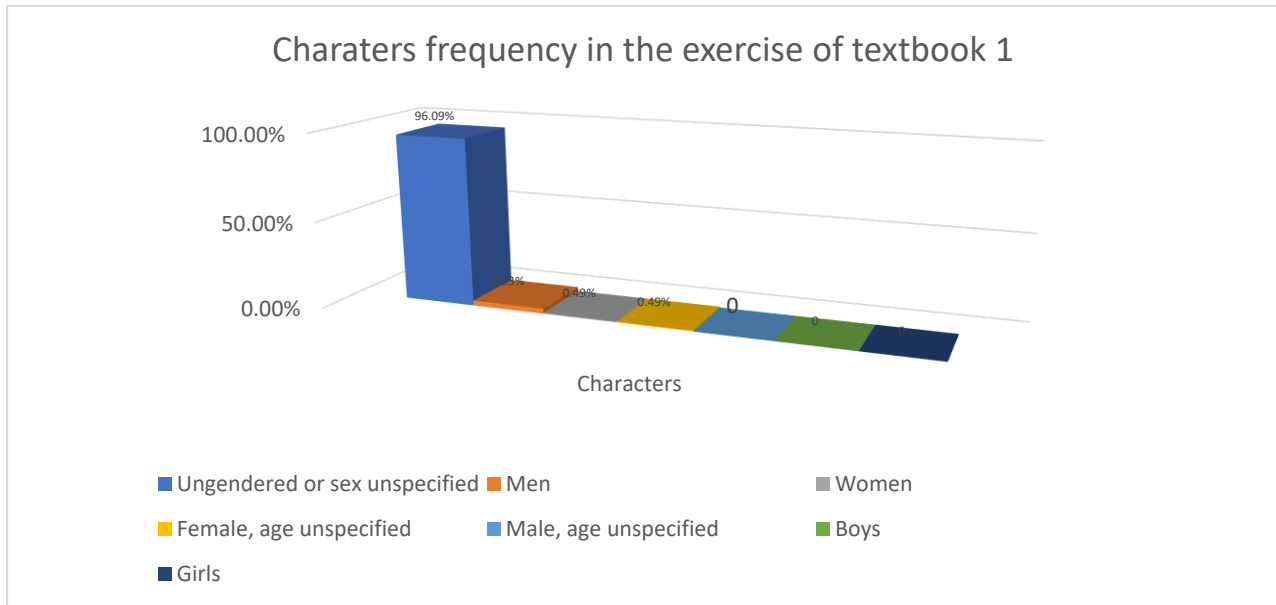

Figure 2. characters frequency in the exercise of Afghanistan textbook.

According to figure 2, female, male and ungendered characters appeared 205 times in exercises. Similar to the text, the majority of characters related to ungendered or sex unspecified (96.09). But the comparison of women (0.49%) and men (2.93%) shows clearly imbalance visibility of women and men in the exercises. Adversely, comparison of female, age unspecified (0.49%) and male, age unspecified (0 %) illustrated favorable visibility of female characters. Same as to the text, in the exercises, there is not any character that related to the children.
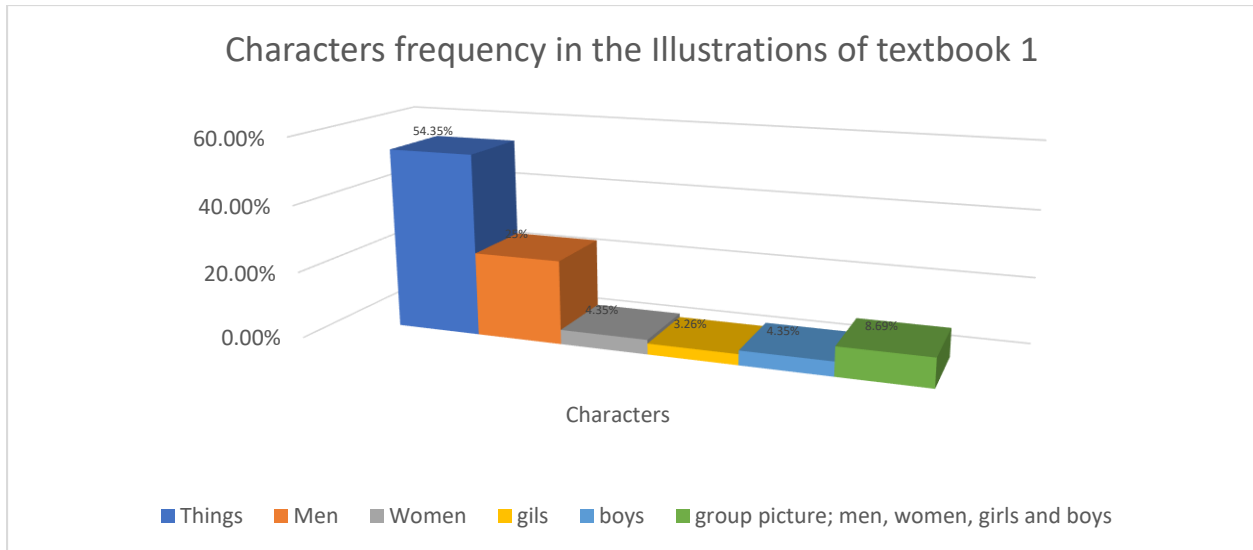
Characters frequency in the Illustrations of textbook 1

Figure legend values shown on chart: 54.35%, (25%), 4.35%, 3.26%, 4.35%, 8.69%

Legend: ■ Things ■ Men ■ Women ■ gils ■ boys ■ group picture; men, women, girls and boys

X-axis label: Characters

Figure 3. Characters frequency in the illustration of Afghanistan textbook.

Based on the figure 3, 92 times characters appeared as illustration, of (54.35%) represented things and maps. (25%) of them related to men and only (4.35%) related to women, thus it shows a sharp numerical imbalance in the illustration of both sexes. Furthermore, the comparison of girls (3.26%) and boys (4.35%) shows a difference of (1.09%) stating that there is an imbalance between girls and boys illustrations. However, (8.69%) of the illustrations are related to group pictures of female and male characters.

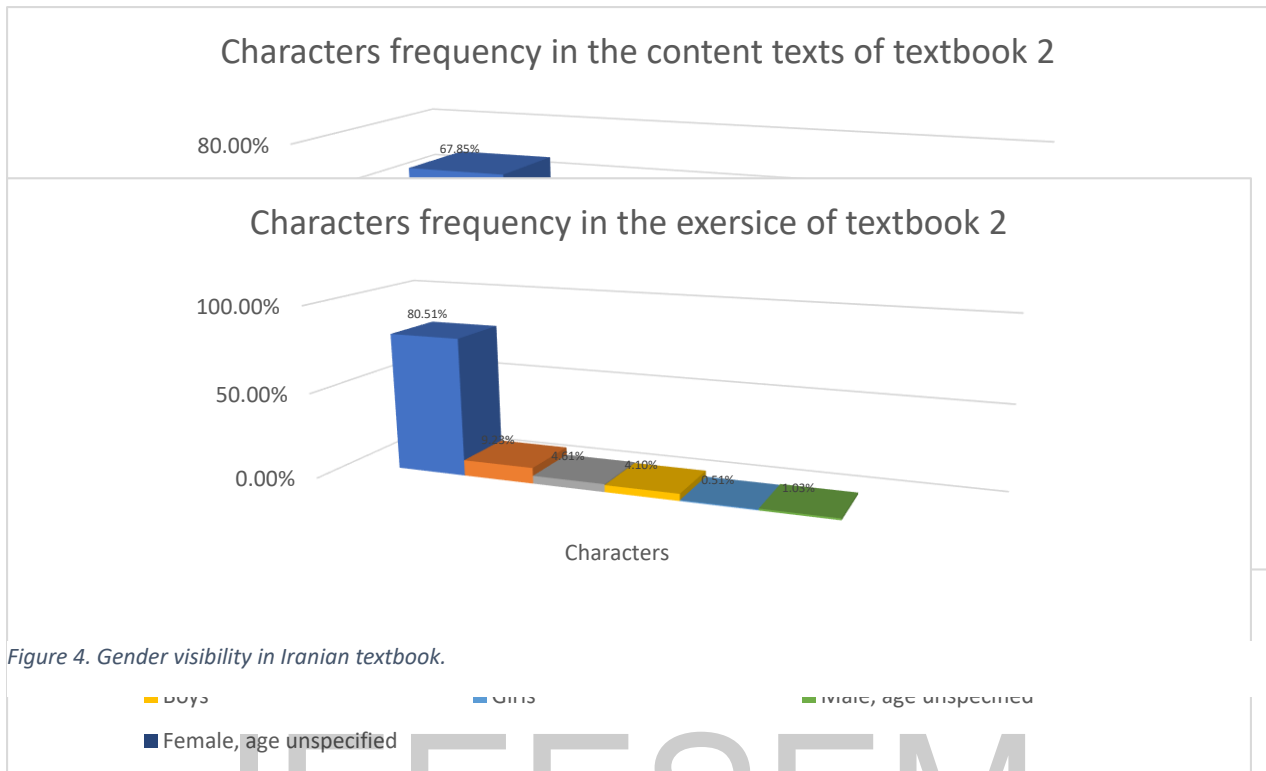## 4.1.2. Gender visibility in text, exercise and illustrations of textbook 2

Characters frequency in the content texts of textbook 2

80.00%   67.85%

Characters frequency in the exersice of textbook 2

100.00%   80.51%

50.00%

0.00%   %   4.61%   4.10%   0.51%   1.03%

Characters

Figure 4. Gender visibility in Iranian textbook.

Boys   Girls   Male, age unspecified

Female, age unspecified

As above figure demonstrates, 759 times female, male and ungendered characters have been appeared in the content texts of Iranian textbook. Almost the majority of characters are ungendered or sex unspecified (67.85%). But a comparison of women (2.37%) and men (24.11%) shows a big gap of (21.74%), suggesting that there is a huge numerical imbalance in the visibility of women and men characters in the text. Moreover, the comparison of boys (5.67%) and girls (0%) shows also unfavorable visibility of both sex. However, there is not any character of unspecified age from both sex in the text.

According to figure 5, there are 195 times characters appeared in the exercises, of (80.51%) are ungendered characters. but the comparison of women (4.61%) and men (9.23%) shows a big difference of visibility of female and male characters. Moreover, a comparison of boys (4.10%) and girls (0.51%) shows almost the same result. Besides, there is not any female, age unspecified characters, in the other hand, there is (1.03%) male, age unspecified characters.

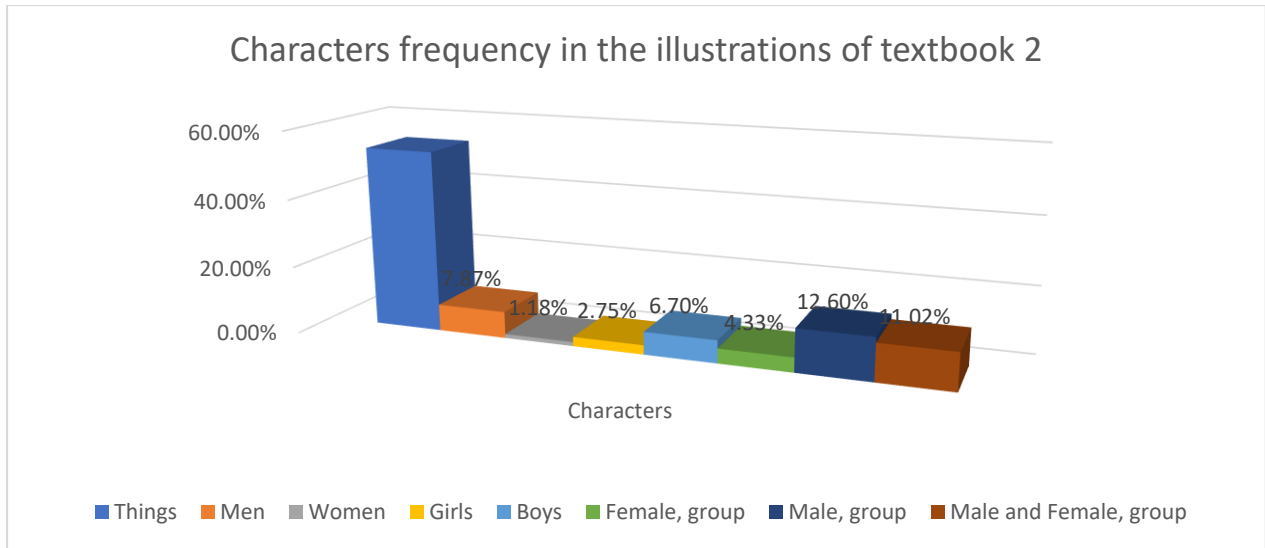*Figure 5. Characters frequency in the exercise of Iranian textbook*

Figure 6. Characters Frequency in the Illustrations of Iranian textbook

As figure 6 shows, 254 times characters appeared as illustration in both text and exercises that (53.54%) of them related to things. Only (1.18%) of them related to women and (7.87%) related to men, thus it shows a difference of (6.69%) imbalance in the illustration of both sexes. In addition, the comparison of girls (2.75%) and boys (6.70%) shows a visible imbalance between girls' and boys' illustrations. Moreover, (4.33%) related to female as a group, in contrast, (12.60%) of them represent male as a group. However, (11.02%) of the illustrations are related to group pictures of female and male characters.

6.2. Section Two. The Qualitative Analysis
6.2.1. The gender firstness and occupation possibilities in textbook 1
The majority of contributors of the textbook (authors, artist, editors, etc.) are men. For instance, there have been 15 persons mentioned as contributors of this textbook that only one of them are woman.

In the textbook 1, three instances of man firstness were noticed, in the other hand, nine examples of woman firstness were observed. Therefore, the firstness of female are favorable and supportive. However, in page 7 of textbook 1, the role of male illustrated more active than female, such as "fathers trying to provide the necessities of the family and helping mothers on house chores and taking care of children, mothers beside housekeeping and taking care of children, doing some profession out door such as teacher and physician". Furthermore, there are totally 29 occupations

possibilities that mentioned in the text and illustrations. Hence, nine of them are related to females, fifteen of them are related to males, and just five of them related to both sexes.

6.2.2. The gender firstness and occupation possibilities in textbook 2

In the textbook 2, twelve instance of males firstness have been noticed, in the other hand, just 3 times the name of female came first than male. Thus, it shows quiet imbalance firstness of female and male characters. The roles of female were shown passive, as instance in page 10, there is a family discussion. Sohrab, his mother and his father are participating in the discussion, but the girl just sat quietly. Moreover, Sohrab's mother poses a problem, but his father presents the solution. Accordingly, in topics number 11, 12, 13 and 14, the role of females is invisible. In addition, there mentioned 13 occupation possibilities that one of them are related to females, 8 of them are related to males, and only 4 of them are related to both females and males.

7. Discussion

The analysis of findings has been stated that there is an imbalance in gender representation in both currently in use Afghanistan and Iranian grade 4 social studies textbooks. The findings are almost similar with the numerous studies in the areas of gender representations and gender biases reviewed earlier (Orfan, 2021; Aldegether, 2023; Azad, 2020; Bahman, 2020; Benlaghrissi, 2023; Biemmi, 2015; Roberge, 2023; Nazimi & Hatifi , 2023; Yan-huan, 2022; Guo & Wang , 2023). However, both examined textbooks contained gender stereotypes and gender biases in different rates. For instance, in the textbook 1, there are 88.83% gender unspecified characters, but there are 67.85% ungendered characters in textbook 2. Furthermore, comparison of ungendered characters in the exercises of textbook 1 (96.09%) and textbook 2 (80.51%) shows a significant difference.

Moreover, there is (3.64%) gap between women and men characters in the content texts of textbook 1. Similarly, in the exercise part of textbook 1 the gap is (2.44%). In contrast, findings from textbook 2 shows (21.74%) difference between men and women characters in the text part and also (4.62%) gap in the exercises part. Additionally, comparison of illustrations gap between both sex in the textbooks 1 and textbook 2 stated that, there is (20.65%) gap between men and women characters in the textbook 1. In the other hand, in textbook 2 the gap is (6.69%) which shows a noticeable difference. Accordingly, the difference between girls and boys characters, in the textbook 1 is (1.09%) but in the textbook 2 it is (3.95%) that stating clear gap. The comparison of findings from both textbooks revealed that:

- ❖ In the both textbooks there are gender underrepresentation in different parts of the textbooks such as content texts, exercises, and illustrations.

- ❖ Based on findings, textbook 2 shows more gap in gender, except in illustrations that show less gap than textbook 1.

- ❖ According to findings, firstness of male characters in textbook 2 is quite visible in many instances, but in textbook 1, the firstness of female characters are more favorable.

- ❖ In both textbooks, there are more occupational possibilities for male characters than female

- ❖ In both textbooks, the role of female illustrated more passive than their counterpart male characters.

8. Conclusion

The analysis of data form both textbooks revealed that there is an imbalance in gender visibility and representation in Grade 4 social studies textbooks in both Afghanistan and Iran. It is quite reasonable that both countries should take it in consideration to balance the representation of female and male characters in the next revision of their social studies textbooks.

Moreover, the supportive role of textbook to improve gender role in different spheres of life is crucially vital, therefore, all of textbooks contributors (authors, artist, editors, etc.), should take it into account. Although the female situation in education, based on UNICEF reports is more favorable in Iran than Afghanistan, but still there are gender disparities in different spheres of social life in both countries. The new generations supposed to identify their self without any kind of gender bias, gender discrimination, and gender misrepresentation, then on that time, we will be able to reach gender equality across the world.

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