Representation of Iranian Islamic Culture in High School English Textbooks: A Case Study of the Vision Series

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to critically examine the representation of Iranian Islamic culture in English language textbooks, specifically the Vision series used in high schools, within Iran's socio-political context. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 60 EFL teachers through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Analysis of textbook content revealed that while the series includes references to various Iranian ethnicities, there is a notable emphasis on regional representation, particularly in Vision 2. Quantitative findings indicated that teachers acknowledged the importance of integrating artistic and cultural elements of Iranian identity, supported by a statistically significant mean score reflecting their appreciation for such content. Qualitative insights highlighted diverse attitudes among teachers; some expressed satisfaction with cultural representation, whereas others emphasized the need for more Islamic elements. This variation corresponded with the educators' experience levels and familiarity with the curriculum. Overall, the study underscores that a balanced approach to English language instruction can enhance linguistic proficiency while fostering cultural identity, advocating for the development of educational materials that respect local cultural contexts and contribute to a meaningful language learning experience for Iranian students.

1. Introduction

The study of language education within the context of Iranian Islamic culture presents a crucial intersection of linguistic, educational, and sociopolitical dynamics. Iranian

Islamic culture, defined as a synthesis of Iran's pre-Islamic heritage and Islamic values, encompasses the traditions, identity, and ideological frameworks shaped by the nation's historical, religious, and ethnic diversity. As a civilization with deep roots in both its ancient Persian past and its contemporary Islamic republic, Iran's educational system reflects this dual heritage, particularly in its approach to foreign language instruction. This research focuses on cultural representation in English language textbooks, specifically the Vision series, to analyze how these materials navigate the dual imperatives of teaching English as a global lingua franca while preserving national and Islamic identity.

The study of cultural representation in English language textbooks examines how a society's values, traditions, and identities are portrayed through language, images, and narratives, shaping learners' understanding of their own culture and that of others. In the context of Iran's Vision series, this involves balancing depictions of source culture (e.g., Persian heritage, Islamic traditions), target culture (e.g., Western customs), and global culture (e.g., universal themes), while navigating ideological tensions. Explicit representations, such as references to Nowruz or images of mosques, coexist with implicit messages about social norms, reflecting Iran's effort to preserve national identity amid globalization. This dynamic is further complicated by the country's ethnic diversity and resistance to perceived Western cultural dominance, making cultural representation a politically charged aspect of language education.

Theoretical frameworks like critical pedagogy and the acculturation model highlight the power dynamics inherent in cultural representation, questioning whose narratives are prioritized and how learners negotiate identity. In Iran, where English is both a tool for global communication and a potential ideological threat, textbooks like the Vision series must carefully integrate Islamic values, Persian history, and regional diversity while avoiding Western cultural imperialism. This dual mandate underscores the broader challenge of fostering linguistic proficiency without compromising cultural sovereignty, a tension that defines Iran's unique approach to ELT and offers insights for other postcolonial contexts grappling with similar dilemmas.

The Iranian government's ambivalent stance toward English, labeling it the "enemy language" due to geopolitical tensions while tacitly acknowledging its global utility, has created a paradoxical educational landscape. Since 2018, English has been banned in primary public schools, with preference given to languages like Russian, Chinese, and German (Strauss, 2018). Yet, demand for English remains high among middle- and upper-class families, who seek private instruction to secure socioeconomic mobility. This tension underscores the broader ideological struggle between linguistic imperialism, as critiqued by Kumaravadivelu (2012), and the preservation of national identity through localized curricula. Fairclough (1992) further highlights how educational texts often serve ideological functions, privileging certain worldviews while marginalizing others, a dynamic acutely felt in Iran's state-sanctioned textbooks.

To interrogate these complexities, this study employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative content analysis of the Vision series with qualitative insights from teacher questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The acculturation model provides a theoretical lens to examine how social variables (e.g., ethnic representation) and affective factors (e.g., teacher attitudes) mediate language learning in Iran's ideologically charged classrooms (Schumann, 1986). By evaluating the prominence of ethnic groups like Azeris, Kurds, and Persians, as well as Islamic cultural elements (e.g., religious holidays, hijab representation), the research addresses gaps in literature

on localized ELT materials and their efficacy in fostering cultural identity amidst globalization. Bakhtin's (1981) concept of "ideological transformation" further illuminates the discursive strategies through which learners negotiate identity in foreign language education.

Preliminary findings reveal that while the Vision series includes references to Iran's multicultural fabric, regional and Islamic representations are uneven. For instance, Vision 2 emphasizes regional diversity through images of handicrafts and historical sites, yet Islamic themes are often relegated to superficial symbols (e.g., headscarves) rather than integrated into pedagogical content. Teacher interviews, meanwhile, reflect divergent perspectives: experienced educators praise the textbooks' cultural nods, while newer teachers critique their lack of depth in addressing Iran's Islamic ethos. These disparities underscore the need for materials that reconcile global communicative competence with meaningful cultural preservation, a balance critical to Iran's educational sovereignty in an era of globalization.

By contextualizing the acculturation model within Iran's socio-political climate and leveraging mixed-methods rigor, this study not only maps the current state of cultural representation but also proposes pathways for curriculum development. Its contributions extend beyond Iran, offering a framework for nations grappling with similar tensions between global English and local identity in an increasingly interconnected world. The following research questions were formulated:

Research Question 1: Which ethnic groups are most prominently featured in the visual context of the English Vision textbooks?

Research Question 2: What aspects of Iranian Islamic national identity are represented in the English Vision textbooks?

Research Question 3: What are teachers' attitudes toward the cultural representations and aspects of Iranian Islamic national identity presented in the English Vision textbooks?

2. Review of Literature

The theoretical foundations of cultural representation in language education were first systematically articulated by Schumann (1978) through his groundbreaking Acculturation Model. This model revolutionized the understanding of second language acquisition (SLA) by positing that learners' success depends fundamentally on their ability to adapt socially and psychologically to the target language community (Lee, 2020). Schumann's work (1978, 1990) introduced key concepts like "social distance" and "psychological distance" to explain why some learners achieve greater proficiency than others, particularly in foreign language contexts where direct contact with native speakers is limited. His framework established culture as a central rather than peripheral concern in language learning, a perspective that continues to influence contemporary research (Barjesteh & Vaseghi, 2012a). The model's enduring relevance lies in its recognition that language acquisition involves not just cognitive processes but complex negotiations of identity and belonging.

Building on these foundations, the late 20th and early 21st century saw growing critical engagement with the cultural dimensions of language teaching (Li, 2024). Buttaro's (2004) seminal critique exposed how many ESL programs uncritically reproduced American middle-class values while marginalizing learners' actual socio-cultural realities. This work coincided with broader disciplinary debates about the fundamental relationship between language and culture, crystallized in Sardi's (2002)

articulation of two competing paradigms: one viewing language and culture as inseparable, the other advocating for their separate treatment in instruction. These discussions gained particular urgency in postcolonial educational contexts, where concerns about linguistic imperialism and cultural hegemony prompted reevaluations of curriculum design and pedagogical approaches. The period thus marked a crucial transition from viewing culture as a neutral backdrop to language learning to recognizing it as a contested terrain of ideological struggle.

Psychological perspectives introduced in the 2010s significantly deepened the understanding of culture's role in education. Pyszczynski et al.'s (2015) application of terror management theory to cultural studies provided a robust theoretical framework for understanding why cultural representations matter profoundly in educational settings. Their work demonstrated how cultural systems function as existential buffers against mortality anxiety, explaining the deep emotional investments individuals and societies have in particular cultural narratives and symbols. This psychological lens proved especially valuable for analyzing how national education systems navigate the tension between preserving cultural identity and engaging with global knowledge systems, offering insights into both resistance to and appropriation of foreign cultural elements in local contexts (Tajeddin & Bahrebar, 2017).

Most recently, empirical research has applied these theoretical advancements to concrete analyses of language teaching materials. Gheitasi et al.'s (2020) comprehensive study of Iran's Vision series represents a particularly significant contribution, employing quantitative methods to systematically map cultural representations in officially sanctioned textbooks. Their findings revealed a clear prioritization of Persian (L1) cultural elements, especially in aesthetic domains, reflecting deliberate policy choices about national identity construction through education. However, as Lu et al. (2025) and other contemporary scholars note, this approach raises important questions about whether such representations adequately prepare students for the complexities of intercultural communication in global contexts. Current research thus grapples with balancing cultural preservation with the development of cosmopolitan competencies, reflecting the field's ongoing evolution from theoretical models to practical implementations in diverse educational settings.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in foundational and evolving perspectives on the role of culture in language education, beginning with John Schumann's influential Acculturation Model (1978, 1990). Schumann's model emphasized that second language acquisition (SLA) is not solely a cognitive endeavor but one deeply embedded in the learner's social and psychological integration with the target language community. He introduced the concepts of "social distance" and "psychological distance" to explain variances in language learning success, especially in environments where learners have limited access to native speakers. This marked a paradigmatic shift in SLA research by positioning culture as central to language learning rather than a peripheral concern. Schumann's emphasis on identity negotiation and socio-psychological adaptation laid the groundwork for subsequent scholarship on cultural representation in educational contexts (Barjesteh & Vaseghi, 2012b) and continues to inform contemporary approaches to language pedagogy.

Subsequent decades saw critical expansions of this cultural lens, particularly through examinations of how language education can perpetuate or challenge dominant

cultural ideologies. Buttaro (2004) critiqued the unreflective reproduction of American middle-class norms in many ESL programs, highlighting the disconnect between curricular content and learners' lived experiences. This critique aligned with Sardi's (2002) distinction between two paradigms: one asserting the inseparability of language and culture, and another advocating for their compartmentalization. These theoretical tensions became especially salient in postcolonial education systems, where concerns about linguistic imperialism and cultural hegemony necessitated a reimagining of pedagogical frameworks. Rather than viewing culture as a static, neutral backdrop, scholars began to treat it as a dynamic, contested space shaped by ideological struggle, power relations, and historical context, raising new questions about whose cultures are represented and validated in language curricula.

From the 2010s onward, psychological theories such as terror management theory, as applied by Pyszczynski et al. (2015), added depth to these cultural critiques by explaining the emotional and existential stakes of cultural representation in education. Their work showed how cultural worldviews function as buffers against mortality anxiety, thereby intensifying the attachment individuals and institutions have to specific narratives and symbols. This framework has proven instrumental in understanding national educational policies that emphasize cultural preservation while navigating the pressures of globalization. Recent empirical studies, such as Gheitasi et al.'s (2020) analysis of Iran's Vision series, demonstrate how these theoretical insights translate into practice. By revealing a strong emphasis on Persian cultural content, these studies expose underlying policy choices aimed at constructing national identity. However, as Jiaqi Li (2024) and others have argued, such approaches may limit students' readiness for intercultural communication. The present study builds on these theoretical and empirical insights to examine how educational materials balance cultural identity preservation with the cultivation of global competence in contemporary language classrooms.

4. Methods

4-1. Research Design
The study employed a mixed-methods design, beginning with the collection of qualitative data to explore participants' perspectives and experiences in depth, followed by the gathering of quantitative data to measure and validate the patterns identified. This sequential approach allowed for an initial rich, contextual understanding through qualitative methods, which then informed and guided the subsequent quantitative phase, providing a comprehensive and nuanced analysis of the research problem.

4-2. Participants
The participant pool for this study consisted of 60 EFL teachers experienced in teaching the Vision series of books from both female and male high schools in Shahrekord City, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Iran. Among the 60 participants, 38 were female and 22 were male, with ages ranging from 22 to 50. They were selected using a convenience sampling method (Gass & Mackey, 2005) through the Shaad application, which provided access to teachers across various educational areas within Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province. This selection process ensured a diverse representation of teaching experiences and backgrounds.

4-3. Data Collection Instruments and Materials

To collect quantitative data on cultural representations and aspects of Iranian Islamic identity in the English Vision textbooks, the researcher developed a structured questionnaire. This instrument consisted of 20 items focusing on visual cultural elements such as clothing, food, interpersonal relationships, and other representations found within the Vision series. The questionnaire's internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a high reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .89$, confirming strong reliability across all items. Content and construct validity were established through expert evaluation by two experienced EFL professors from Shahrekord Azad University, ensuring that the instrument accurately captured the intended constructs. The questionnaire required approximately 30 minutes to complete and was distributed to a sample of 60 English language teachers. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study's objectives beforehand, and confidentiality of their responses was assured to promote honest and voluntary participation.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interview protocols were designed to explore teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward the cultural and Iranian National Islamic identity dimensions represented in the Vision textbooks. Ten English language teachers from Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province participated in these interviews. The interview questions probed participants' overall evaluation of the textbooks, their perspectives on the stated educational objectives, identified shortcomings, and suggestions for future revisions. Interviews were conducted in participants' workplaces or schools to provide a comfortable and familiar environment, with each session lasting approximately 20 minutes. Prior to the interviews, assurances regarding confidentiality and the non-impact of responses on professional status were communicated to encourage candid and reflective responses. Data collection for both the questionnaire and interviews occurred during the spring and summer of 1403 (Iranian calendar).

4-4. Data Collection Procedure

The study was conducted using a sequential mixed-methods design, beginning with the qualitative phase followed by the quantitative phase. Data collection took place during the spring and summer of 1403 (according to the Iranian calendar). Prior to data collection, the research objectives, ethical considerations, and procedures were clearly communicated to all participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant, with assurances of confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

In the first phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten English language teachers from various schools and language institutes in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province. These interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions and critical evaluations of how Iranian National Islamic identity and cultural elements were represented in the Vision textbook series. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes and was conducted face-to-face at the participants' workplaces. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission and later transcribed for thematic analysis.

Following the qualitative phase, the researcher administered a researcher-developed questionnaire to collect quantitative data. The questionnaire, which focused on cultural representations in the visual content of the Vision textbooks, was distributed to 60 English language teachers across the same region. Prior to distribution, the instrument was validated by two EFL experts and its reliability confirmed through a pilot test, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .89$. Teachers were given 30 minutes to

complete the questionnaire at their convenience, and they were reminded that participation was voluntary and confidential. The collected data from both phases were then analyzed to identify convergences and divergences between the qualitative insights and quantitative trends, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the research questions.

4-5. Data Analysis
The gathered information was analyzed using SPSS version 21 software. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency, were employed to respond to the research questions. For the qualitative data analysis, interviews were recorded and transcribed, after which a content analysis approach was implemented to identify common themes. Additionally, a frequency analysis method was utilized to calculate the repetition of responses.

5. Results
This section presents the results derived from a comprehensive analysis of the Vision series English textbooks, integrating both quantitative data and qualitative feedback obtained from teacher interviews. The findings aim to address the study's research questions by providing detailed insight into ethnic representation, the inclusion of Iranian Islamic and cultural identity, and the perspectives of educators regarding the adequacy and pedagogical effectiveness of the materials.

First Research Question: Ethnic Representation in the Vision Textbooks
An in-depth content analysis of the *Vision* series textbooks, *Vision 1*, *Vision 2*, and *Vision 3*, was conducted to systematically evaluate the extent to which ethnic and regional diversity is acknowledged and represented. This analysis was motivated by the need to assess whether the textbooks reflect Iran's multiethnic society and the cultural heterogeneity of its provinces. It was found that ethnic representation within these materials was predominantly visual. This includes illustrations and photographs depicting traditional clothing, regional handicrafts, historical architecture, and prominent geographical landmarks associated with various ethnic groups.

However, explicit textual references to specific ethnic groups, such as Kurdish, Azeri, Lur, or Baluchi communities, were notably limited or absent. The lack of embedded cultural narratives, dialogues, or descriptions that name and describe distinct ethnic identities suggests a superficial engagement with ethnic diversity. Table 1 presents the observed frequency of regional representations across the three textbooks. These regional mentions were used as proxies to estimate the level of ethnic inclusivity.

Table 1
Frequency of Regional Representations in Vision Textbooks

Region / Ethnic Group	Vision 1	Vision 2	Vision 3
Tehran	3	1	1
Lorestan	0	2	1
Azerbaijan	1	1	1
Kurdistan	0	1	0
Khorasan	2	2	1
Yazd	1	1	1

Fars	2	2	1
Qom	1	1	0
Northern Provinces	1	2	1
Isfahan	0	2	0
Total	11	15	7

As demonstrated in Table 1, *Vision 2* displays the highest number of regional references (15 instances), reflecting a relatively broader attempt to incorporate ethnogeographic diversity. In comparison, *Vision 1* includes 11 mentions, and *Vision 3* features only 7, indicating a downward trend in regional inclusivity across the textbook sequence. Certain provinces, such as Isfahan, are completely absent in two of the three volumes, and Kurdistan, a region with a significant cultural and political presence, receives only a single mention.

The consistently included regions, such as Khorasan and Fars, suggest a skewed focus on certain areas of the country, possibly due to their historical centrality or political prominence. However, this selective inclusion does not accurately reflect the full spectrum of Iran's ethnic mosaic. The analysis points to a narrow portrayal that lacks balance and comprehensiveness.

Moreover, the reliance on visual markers without accompanying narratives or sociocultural explanations fails to provide students with a meaningful understanding of Iran's ethnic plurality. The absence of detailed representation limits students' exposure to the linguistic, historical, and cultural contributions of minority groups, which is essential for fostering national unity grounded in mutual respect.

In summary, while the *Vision* textbooks do make some effort to incorporate elements of regional culture, this representation is limited in scope, inconsistent across volumes, and lacking in depth. For a more equitable and inclusive curriculum, future textbook revisions should move beyond symbolic visuals and integrate substantive, text-based content that gives voice to the diverse ethnic narratives that shape Iranian society.

Second Research Question: Representation of Iranian Islamic and Cultural Identity
The extent to which the Vision English textbooks reflect Iranian cultural and Islamic national identity was assessed using a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 60 EFL teachers, and qualitative insights were gathered via follow-up semi-structured interviews. The results from these complementary data sources provide a robust understanding of how cultural content is perceived in the educational materials.

As shown in Table 2, the descriptive statistics indicated a mean score of 40.26 (out of a maximum of 50), with a standard deviation of 7.37 and a standard error of 0.95. This high average suggests a generally favorable evaluation of the cultural representation by the surveyed teachers.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics for Cultural Representation

N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error
60	40.26	7.37	0.95

To test the statistical significance of this perception, a one-sample t-test was conducted against a test value of 30, which represents the hypothesized or expected average level of cultural content, based on the questionnaire's mid-point scale and curriculum benchmarks. The results of the t-test, presented in Table 3, show a t-value of 10.785 with 59 degrees of freedom and a p-value of .000, which is highly significant at the $p < .001$ level. The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference ranges from 8.36 to 12.17, further confirming that the perceived level of cultural content is not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful.

Table 3
One-Sample t-Test for Cultural Representation (Test Value = 30)

Group	t-value	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval
Total	10.785	59	0.000	10.26	8.36 to 12.17

These results suggest that teachers consistently perceive the textbooks as culturally rich, particularly in terms of showcasing Iranian customs, artistic achievements, and regional aesthetics. Many respondents praised the visual presentation of Iranian traditions, such as depictions of Nowruz celebrations, carpet weaving, traditional foods, and architectural sites, which they believed help students develop a strong sense of cultural belonging and national identity.

However, the qualitative interview data revealed a discrepancy between cultural and Islamic representations. While teachers appreciated the emphasis on Iran's cultural heritage, they noted a lack of depth in the portrayal of Islamic identity. The majority of Islamic references were found to be superficial, often limited to symbolic imagery such as headscarves, mosques, or prayer gestures, without meaningful elaboration on the values, history, or ethical teachings of Islam. Teachers expressed concern that this approach reduces Islam to a visual code, failing to engage students with the intellectual, spiritual, and sociocultural dimensions of the religion.

This gap between quantitative satisfaction with cultural content and qualitative criticism of religious representation underscores a critical imbalance in the curriculum. The textbooks may succeed in promoting cultural awareness, but they fall short in integrating Islamic national identity in a way that resonates with students' lived experiences and socio-religious background. Teachers suggested that future textbook revisions incorporate narratives from Islamic history, ethical stories from religious texts, and discussions of national-religious events (such as Ramadan or the Islamic Revolution) to offer a more holistic portrayal of identity. In sum, the data indicate that while the Vision series performs well in cultural representation, it lacks the necessary depth in Islamic identity portrayal, pointing to an area for targeted curriculum improvement.

Third Research Question: Teacher Attitudes Toward Cultural and Islamic Content
The qualitative interview data provided a rich and multifaceted view of teachers' perceptions regarding the representation of Iranian culture and Islamic identity within the Vision textbook series. These perspectives varied significantly based on factors such

as teaching experience, ideological orientation, and familiarity with curriculum development principles.

Veteran teachers, many of whom had extensive classroom experience across different educational contexts, generally expressed a favorable view of the cultural elements embedded in the textbooks. They highlighted the strategic use of visuals, such as photographs and illustrations showcasing regional handicrafts, architectural monuments, and traditional clothing, as particularly effective in fostering a sense of national pride among students. These educators believed that the incorporation of such imagery helped to cultivate cultural awareness and appreciation, thereby reinforcing students' connection to Iran's rich historical and artistic heritage.

Nonetheless, even among experienced educators, there was a recurring concern regarding the limited and often superficial portrayal of Islamic identity. Many noted that the textbooks primarily represented Islam through external symbols, such as headscarves and mosque imagery, without offering deeper engagement with core Islamic teachings, values, or historical contributions to Iranian civilization. They suggested that the materials failed to address significant dimensions of Islamic thought, including ethical principles, philosophical insights, or the socio-religious impact of Islamic traditions on contemporary Iranian life.

In contrast, early-career teachers and those with more explicitly ideological or religious leanings voiced stronger critiques. They argued that the current content does not sufficiently reflect the Islamic foundations of Iranian identity and expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as a tokenistic approach to religious representation. For these educators, the textbooks should serve not only as language learning tools but also as instruments for moral and national education. As such, they advocated for a more intentional and integrative portrayal of Islamic values, including the inclusion of narratives from Islamic history, discussions of religious holidays and figures, and the moral lessons embedded in Islamic teachings.

Across both groups, there was consensus on the pedagogical importance of aligning educational materials with the cultural and religious realities of the student population. However, the emphasis differed: while experienced teachers prioritized balanced cultural exposure and student engagement, more ideologically inclined educators emphasized the role of education in reinforcing national and religious identity. These divergent perspectives underscore the complexity of curricular design in contexts where cultural, religious, and political dimensions are deeply intertwined.

6. Discussion

In Iran, English is the most popular foreign language, prompting many middle-class families to enroll their children in extracurricular courses to enhance future career opportunities. However, educational materials often present biased worldviews that can influence learners' identities (Aliakbari, 2004; Fairclough, 1992). With concerns over English linguistic imperialism and cultural globalization directed from core English-speaking countries (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, 2012), it is essential to critically evaluate and revise current English textbooks. This revision should ensure the inclusion of Islamic ideology and culture, addressing the cultural needs of Iranian society and fostering a language curriculum that respects and integrates local values while teaching English.

The data indicate that Vision 2 provides a richer representation of various Iranian ethnic groups compared to Vision 1 and Vision 3. This increase in representation aligns

with the arguments put forth by educators and researchers emphasizing the necessity of incorporating local cultural contexts in language teaching (McKay, 2003). By highlighting the diverse provinces and ethnic groups within Iran, the textbooks can engage students more effectively and foster a sense of national identity that celebrates multiculturalism. The prominence of regions such as Lorestan and Khorasan signifies an attempt to reflect Iran's rich cultural tapestry, which can serve to enhance learners' pride in their heritage and culture.

The findings regarding the representation of art and cultural features in the Vision textbooks, particularly with the notable significance found through the one-sample t-test, underscore a positive alignment with cultural representation theories. The high mean score suggests that the textbooks successfully incorporate elements of Iranian art and culture deemed important by the participants. This mirrors the views of Adaskou et al. (1990), who propose that cultural content in education should prioritize the aesthetic, sociological, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions of the target culture. Recent studies, such as those by Zarifian et al. (2021), also highlighted the importance of integrating cultural aspects in language education to foster critical thinking and identity formation. By including these artistic and cultural features, the Vision series supports not only linguistic competence but also cultural competence, enabling learners to appreciate their cultural context while learning English.

The variation in participants' attitudes towards the cultural aspects and Iranian National Islamic identity presented in the Vision textbooks reflects significant insights into teaching practices. The positive view expressed by experienced educators indicates that these textbooks can effectively convey Islamic and Iranian cultural values, thereby fulfilling the educational goal of instilling national pride and cultural awareness. However, the more critical perspectives from relatively newer educators suggest a potential gap in curricular content or instructional methodologies.

This divergence in opinions highlights the importance of continuous curriculum development to adapt to teachers' experiences and expectations. Recent scholars, like Kargar et al. (2024), emphasize the need for regular updates in educational materials to align with evolving educational objectives and cultural realities. As highlighted by Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger (2015), the ideological dimensions of identity must be critically examined in educational materials to ensure they resonate with both educators and students. A curriculum that is responsive to the cultural and pedagogical needs of its users can lead to a more meaningful and impactful educational experience.

The findings of the current study are subject to a set of limitations.This thesis focuses specifically on the English Vision textbooks used within the Iranian educational context, intentionally excluding other English language materials that may also contain cultural elements. The research centers primarily on the perspectives of educators rather than students or policymakers, allowing for an in-depth examination of teaching practices while limiting insights from a wider array of stakeholders. Additionally, the study is confined to a defined timeframe, which may not reflect potential changes in educational policies or cultural attitudes over time. The analysis may be subject to bias due to the researchers' subjective interpretations of cultural representation within the textbooks.

Future research should focus on exploring the long-term impacts of culturally responsive teaching materials, such as the Vision textbooks, on student engagement, language proficiency, and cultural identity development. Studies could investigate the experiences of diverse teacher populations to understand different perspectives on

cultural representation in language education. Additionally, research could examine the effectiveness of teacher training programs related to the use of culturally infused materials and their correlation with student outcomes. Investigating the role of technology in enhancing cultural representation in language learning, alongside comparative studies with other educational contexts could further enrich understanding of best practices in this evolving field.

7. Conclusion

This study explored the extent to which the *Vision* English textbooks used in Iranian high schools represent cultural, ethnic, and Islamic national identity. The findings demonstrate that while efforts have been made to include cultural elements, particularly through visual depictions and references to specific regions, the depth and consistency of these representations vary significantly across the three volumes. Vision 2 showed relatively greater inclusivity in depicting Iran's ethnic and regional diversity, while Vision 3 offered the least. The presence of traditional symbols, artwork, and provincial references contributes positively to fostering students' awareness of their national identity, but the lack of textual engagement with ethnic narratives and Islamic values highlights areas for improvement.

Teachers' evaluations offered further insight into how these cultural representations are perceived in practice. The results of the one-sample t-test confirmed that educators generally appreciated the incorporation of Iranian artistic and cultural elements in the textbooks. However, qualitative findings revealed a divergence in attitudes toward the depth and sincerity of Islamic identity integration. Veteran teachers tended to view the textbooks as culturally adequate, while newer educators were more critical, citing a superficial treatment of religious values and calling for a more comprehensive portrayal of Islamic and national identity. These contrasting views underscore the need for a curriculum that is not only culturally responsive but also pedagogically adaptive to the diverse perspectives of educators across generations.

In light of these findings, it is essential for future curriculum development efforts to prioritize inclusivity, authenticity, and relevance. Enhancing the representation of Iran's multiethnic and Islamic heritage through both visual and textual content can make English language education more culturally grounded and meaningful for learners. While the Vision series marks a step toward localized language instruction, continuous revision based on teacher feedback, evolving educational goals, and changing societal dynamics is crucial. Future research should extend the scope of investigation to include students, policymakers, and diverse instructional settings, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of how English language education can align with national identity and cultural preservation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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