

EFL Textbooks — Cultural Gateways?

The Depictions of Outer and Expanding Circle Cultures in Two Swedish EFL Textbooks Aimed at Upper Secondary School and the Correlation of the Depictions With the Steering Documents



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Abstract

This study examined how outer and expanding circle cultures were depicted in two English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks aimed at English 5 in Swedish upper secondary school. Moreover, it was investigated to what extent these depictions aligned with the steering documents by helping students fulfil the aims related to intercultural competence (ICC). In order to develop ICC, students must see various cultural depictions. Therefore, textbooks were investigated because their important educational status results in them relaying cultural depictions to students. Thus, students must seize opportunities to reach the required aims with these depictions. Otherwise, teachers need to combine teaching materials. The textbooks *Viewpoints 1* (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017) and *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014) were investigated due to their popularity, and their depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures, texts which describes cultural aspects and/or ways of life, were chosen as material. An inductive qualitative content analysis was employed, and the depictions were interpreted with postcolonial theory which demonstrated underlying patterns. Also, various topics, which illustrates the depictions in positive, negative, or neutral contexts, were noted.

This study concluded that Eurocentric norms and inner circle cultures were promoted through the depictions, whereas outer and expanding circle cultures were mostly portrayed negatively. Furthermore, the depictions only partially aligned with the steering documents in helping students develop ICC because no deep cultural aspects were presented. Hence, students may not be able to develop their identities with the assistance of the examined textbooks due to the omittance of cultural diversity and Swedish source culture which they could have contrasted with. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a minor promotion of the acceptance of cultural differences which can partly develop ICC. Consequently, teachers must arguably use varied materials to help students fulfil the required educational aims.

Keywords: Culture, EFL, Textbooks, Sweden, Upper Secondary School.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1 Aim and research questions	3
2. Background	4
2.1 Sweden in a global context	4
2.2 Swedish textbooks	5
2.3 Relation to the curriculum	5
2.4 Theoretical framework	6
2.4.1 Culture	6
2.4.2 Inner, outer, and expanding circle cultures	7
2.4.3 Source, target, and international culture	9
2.4.4 Intercultural competence	9
2.4.5 Postcolonial theory	9
2.5 Literature review	11
2.5.1 Inner circle norms are promoted	12
2.5.2 Target cultures dominate	12
2.5.3 Cultural diversity and aspects are lacking	13
2.5.4 Identifying the research gap	14
3. Method and material	16
3.1 Material	16
3.2 Method	17
4. Results and analysis	20
4.1 <i>Viewpoints 1</i>	20
4.1.1 Rendezvous with evil	21
4.1.2 <i>Boy kills man</i>	22
4.1.3 Love and prejudice	22
4.1.4 Analysis of <i>Viewpoints 1</i>	23
4.2 <i>Solid gold 1</i>	25
4.2.1 Watch your step	26
4.2.2 So where you from?	26
4.2.3 Analysis of <i>Solid gold 1</i>	27
5. Discussion	29
5.1 Method discussion	29
5.1.1 Limitations	29
5.2 Results discussion	30
5.2.1 Cultural depictions in Swedish EFL textbooks	30
5.2.2 Cultural depictions and the steering documents	32
6. Conclusion	34
7. References	37
7.1 Material	37
7.2 Reference literature	37

1. Introduction

Textbooks are important assets in teachers' educational repertoires. Albeit an increasing number of teachers decide to use various teaching materials, textbooks still bring structure and inspiration to lessons. Teachers' sole educational use of textbooks can however be problematic because students may not receive enough cultural diversity from chosen publications due to textbooks not being officially examined for their quality (The Government Offices, 2019; The Government Offices, 2021, pp. 72-74). Nevertheless, by ensuring the inclusion of diverse and non-stereotypical cultural depictions in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching material, teachers who normally rely on textbooks give their students opportunities to develop cultural identities and intercultural competence (ICC).

Intercultural competence is individuals' abilities to understand and contrast social/cultural phenomena and values. This is important for students to develop early on in their education because they need to establish their identities to partake in global communities. ICC thereby allows for intercultural communication, communication between people from various cultures, by enabling understanding of social values (Leung et al., 2014, pp. 490-491). In the diverse Swedish EFL classroom, where culturally aware and respectful students are promoted by the steering documents, ICC is a crucial aspect (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d. a, n.d. b). Therefore, cultural depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures in two EFL textbooks, aimed at 16-year-olds studying the first upper secondary school English course, are examined in this study.

The terms outer and expanding circle cultures are based on Kachru's (1989) categorisation of English usage. Kachru stated that outer circle countries use English as an official and/or second language, whereas expanding circle countries use English as a foreign language (Kachru, 1989, pp. 127-133). Hence, cultural depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures

are portrayals of cultures in countries where English is not the native language. The English usage in these countries decides their status in EFL textbooks. These depictions are examined because their incorporation of cultural aspects should help students develop ICC. If few and/or surface-based depictions are conveyed, teachers must arguably use other materials for developing students' cultural abilities as required by the steering documents (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d. a, n.d. b).

In order to analyse these cultural depictions, an inductive qualitative content analysis is applied to the material. This methodology enables me to discern topics and patterns by coding and categorising the content. Also, a postcolonial framework is employed in the analyses because it assists me in interpreting why certain depictions occur due to societal values. Patterns of the depictions are also compared to the aims of the steering documents which demonstrate if students receive opportunities to develop ICC. Consequently, this study is relevant to EFL teachers because it demonstrates educational aspects that must be considered in a globalised and diverse society. These aspects may not be apparent while choosing teaching materials, and they are thereby parts of what makes this study important to contemplate.

The further necessity for this study comes from a research gap in the field of cultural depictions in EFL textbooks. Research about cultural depictions in EFL textbooks has been executed internationally, but few studies that investigate Swedish EFL textbooks have been conducted to the best of my knowledge. Importantly, the few Swedish studies that do exist have examined textbooks aimed at LPF94 and the former version of LGY11 — syllabi that are no longer used (Kearney & Kolm, 2011; Olsson, 2020). This study therefore compares in-use textbooks with the updated steering documents, LGY11, for English 5. A major difference in the contemporary syllabus is that students should be able to contrast individual cultural aspects with others (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d. c, p. 7). Thus, this

topic is essential to investigate because it is important to see to what extent students receive diverse cultural perspectives and tools needed for developing ICC from in-use Swedish EFL textbooks. Otherwise, it may be difficult for students to develop into respectful international citizens which is necessary in a globalised world (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d. a, n.d. b).

1.1 Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this essay is to examine how outer and expanding circle cultures are depicted in two English 5 textbooks. Moreover, this study will investigate to what extent these depictions align with the aims related to ICC of the syllabus for English 5 and curriculum for Swedish upper secondary school. The research questions are:

- How are outer and expanding circle cultures depicted in two Swedish EFL textbooks written for the upper secondary school course English 5?
- To what extent do the cultural depictions align with the steering documents by helping students fulfil the aims related to ICC?

2. Background

In this section, the context for this study is initially demonstrated (2.1 and 2.2), connections between the Swedish curriculum and this study are evaluated (2.3), important concepts and the postcolonial framework are discussed (2.4), and previous research is reviewed (2.5).

2.1 Sweden in a Global Context

The status of English in Sweden is important to discuss because English has due to several variables, such as colonialism, become one of the most spoken languages in the world owing to its position as an international language — language communicated between both native and non-native speakers (McKay, 2010, pp. 90-95). Due to the extensive usage of English in Sweden, many students learn English outside of school through, for instance, exposure to social media and TV. Therefore, it is essential that schools adapt to learner needs and help students develop aspects of English, both as a language and subject, that they may not experience otherwise (Sylvén, 2013, pp. 309-310, 316). Students must thereby receive opportunities to understand several cultures to create an accepting global society, which is promoted by the curriculum (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d. a).

Consequently, the learning and development of various cultural aspects and ICC is important in a diverse society because students develop their identities while contrasting their values with multiple cultures. According to Statistics Sweden (n.d.) 2, 046, 731 people who permanently resided in Sweden during 2020 were born in another country, and many identify with various cultures due to their heritages. Of course, there are also people who are born in Sweden that identify with several cultures, such as second-generation immigrants, and not necessarily Swedish culture. Multiculturalism is thereby a major aspect of Swedish society which needs to be considered in educational contexts. Hence, EFL textbooks should be cultural gateways for students to participate in a multicultural society.

For students to receive opportunities to develop individual identities while contrasting with other cultures in a multicultural society, as required by the steering documents, they need various cultural representations in EFL material (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d. a, n.d. b). Using English as an international language also require students to understand cultural aspects of native and non-native speakers. Otherwise, their unawareness could inhibit intercultural communication.

2.2 Swedish Textbooks

Swedish textbooks are not evaluated by an authority in terms of the quality of content. Instead, teachers decide if they are educationally suitable (The Government Offices, 2019). The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (2021) stated that teachers often make unqualified decisions about teaching materials. There is therefore a risk that the aims of the steering documents are not fulfilled because teachers may use inapt textbooks for teaching certain abilities.

However, there is a limit to how much freedom textbook authors can allow themselves. According to Ammert (2011) there are always societal agents, such as politicians or researchers, who affect the content of textbooks by participating in societal arenas. These discussions lift values society deems students need to develop into ideal citizens. Consequently, these values are incorporated into textbooks to make them attractive (pp. 29-33). Hence, there is a need for research that examines if the aims of the steering documents can be fulfilled with the assistance of textbooks which are all affected by norms.

2.3 Relation to the Curriculum

The connections between this study and the steering documents must be lifted to demonstrate the educational relevance of this study. According to the curriculum, students should be able

to identify with Swedish culture but also develop individual identities. Additionally, students should partake in their cultural heritages, which develops their cultural understanding and respect, while the syllabus encourages them to understand social and cultural values in English speaking areas while comparing them with their own (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n. d. a, n.d. b). Consequently, for students to reach these aims they need education and material that help them develop ICC. This study is thereby advantageous for understanding to what extent English 5 textbooks enable students to fulfil the aims of the steering documents connected to ICC.

As a result, this study enables teachers to see if two popular textbooks incorporate diverse cultural depictions. If textbooks do not scaffold students to reach their aims, they should not be the solely used educational materials because they do not allow students to develop essential abilities. Teachers can therefore benefit from this study by developing their understanding of which cultural aspects that must be incorporated to fulfil the required aims.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the postcolonial framework and concepts employed in this study are defined. Initially, culture is delineated due to its essentiality for understanding the applied concepts. Otherwise, the theoretical framework will be difficult to grasp.

2.4.1 Culture

Culture is a multifaceted albeit important concept in this study, and it must thereby be defined. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2010), culture is related to three variables: ways of living, cultural manifestations, and beliefs (p. 370). Nonetheless, the

meaning of the concept has been debated extensively (Williams, 1981/1989; Featherstone, 1992; Inglis, 2004; Eagleton, 2016).

Eagleton (2016) stated that culture is too complex to be defined in one manner. Instead, culture can be interpreted in four different ways: it can represent cultural manifestations such as art, an individual's advancement of knowledge and/or spirituality, values and traditions, or ways of living — these interpretations can overlap. However, Eagleton claimed that defining culture as ways of living is complicated due to multiple interpretations (pp. 1-10).

Featherstone (1992) also concluded that societies project their cultures as unique due to multiculturalism which convolutes a general concept definition (pp. viii-viii). Nonetheless, Inglis (2004) argued that culture is an advantageous concept because of its “moral force, aesthetic authority, [and] practical usefulness . . .” (p. 135) if applied with a set definition.

Consequently, the definition applied to this study is that culture embodies different societal values, ways of life, and cultural manifestations. Moreover, culture is connected to ethnicity and/or nationality, which is essential. Thus, there are always underlying societal reasons for cultural depictions, which can be explained by the utilisation of postcolonial theory.

2.4.2 Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circle Cultures

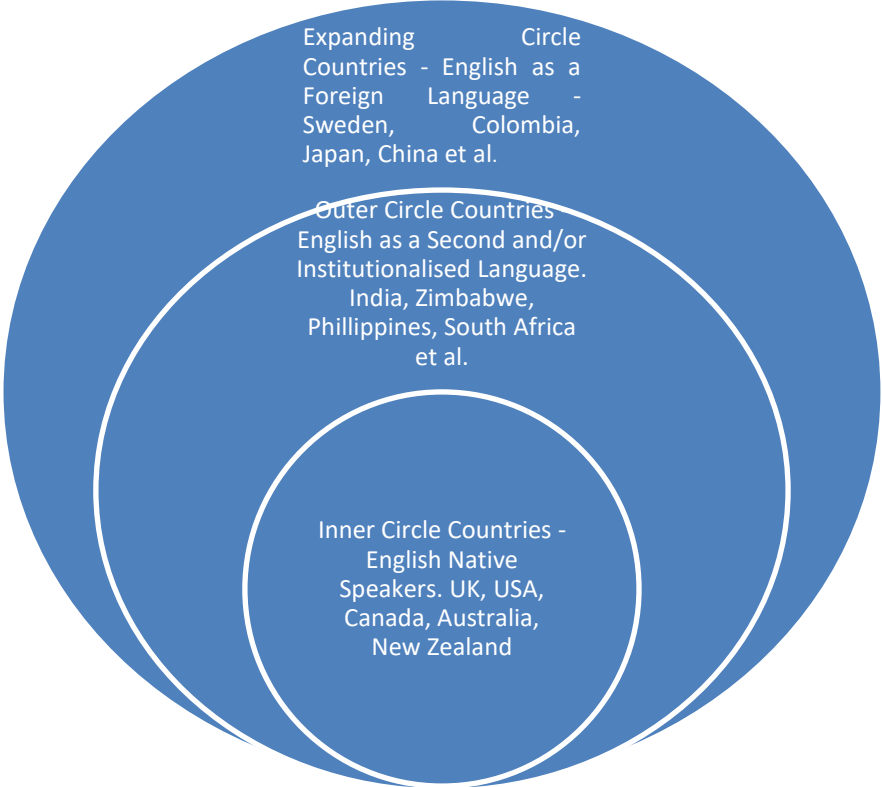
The concepts inner, outer, and expanding circle cultures are based on the World Englishes paradigm and Kachru's (1989) concentric circle model. Kachru explained that the model categorises inner circle countries as native speakers of English, the outer circle countries as using English as a second and/or institutionalised language, whereas the expanding circle countries use English as a foreign language (pp. 127-133). The outer and expanding circle countries also have their own English varieties which have developed during the globalisation process (McKay, 2010, pp. 89-91). These varieties are for instance Indian English from an outer circle country, and Swedish English from an expanding circle country. Therefore, inner,

outer, and expanding circle cultures are cultures in countries that either use English as a first, second, or foreign language. This is a beneficial way of defining cultural depictions in EFL textbooks because cultures are categorised after how English is used in their societies. Hence, this division of English use is employed to decide target cultures and content promotion. This categorisation thereby illuminates which cultures are included in Swedish EFL textbooks depending on their English usage.

The status of English has changed in some countries since Kachru's (1989) categorisation. Earlier, Zimbabwe was seen as an expanding circle country according to Kachru's model, although English was an official language. Kachru's categorisation has therefore been criticised for its inconsistency, among other variables, in categorising countries to the respective circles. However, if the categorisation is employed with consistent requirements, this issue can be solved. Consequently, due to the current and official position of English, I classify Zimbabwe as an outer circle country.

Figure 1:

Model based on Kachru's (1989) concentric circles



2.4.3 Source, Target, and International Culture

Hardy (2004) stated that content in English language teaching (ELT) textbooks adhere to either source, target, or international cultures. Source culture content is based on aspects of the culture that the textbook is aimed at, in this study Swedish culture, to teach students English. Hence, students practice English while incorporating Swedish cultural perspectives, such as the promotion of democracy, whereas content aimed at target cultures examine cultural aspects in countries where English is the native language. Additionally, content aimed at international target cultures incorporates aspects of various cultures regardless of their English usage (p. 22).

2.4.4 Intercultural Competence

According to Leung et al. (2014) the general definition of intercultural competence is people's abilities to communicate with individuals from several cultures and engage in various local and/or global cultural arenas. These abilities can be context specific which means that some cultural aspects are more or less important depending on where the cultural exchange is occurring (pp. 490-491). For instance, it is more relevant for Swedish upper-secondary-school students studying abroad to understand how to address teachers than it is for them to know differences between business ventures. Having discussed essential concepts, I can now outline the postcolonial framework.

2.4.5 Postcolonial Theory

This study employs a postcolonial framework because it is beneficial for explaining how cultures are portrayed due to societal values. Postcolonial theory was a reaction on the aftermaths of colonialism where many countries had been colonised by "Western powers" and cultures and languages of the colonies were abolished. Thus, when the colonies gained

independence in the second half of the 20th century, the enforced societal structures were criticised (Hiddleston, 2014, p. 1.; Loomba, 2015, pp. 39-40) Loomba (2015) stated that former colonies wanted to demonstrate resistance, anticolonialism, and the effects of colonialism through mediums such as literature (p. 182). Thereby, postcolonial theory demonstrates how colonisers enforced their cultural values and how these values still affect former colonies. Svanström (2017) argued that these values often included the portrayal of the colonised as the opposites of the colonisers. Thereby, the colonised were presented as dirty and savage, whereas the colonisers were promoted as clean and civilised. This is called “othering” and means that cultures that were different from “the West” were portrayed negatively (pp. 745-748). Wintle (2021) explained that values which predict “the West” as superior are Eurocentric (p. 19).

According to Wintle (2021), Eurocentrism is defined as viewing Europe and European values as superior. Eurocentrism is globally prevalent which makes the employment of postcolonial theory in this study interesting (pp. 15-16). By examining cultural depictions, societal patterns can be illuminated with the help of postcolonial concepts. Cultures that are given certain attributes, and are portrayed as “others”, can also be highlighted with postcolonial theory. The sole promotion of inner circle cultures, such as Eurocentric values and the normalisation of their cultures, is also a part of “othering”. Even if an inner circle culture is not geographically European, they still promote Western values because they share English as a first language and therefore European values. This is essential in the relaying of stereotypes and Eurocentric values. If certain cultures are seen as “the others”, the students do not develop ICC. Moreover, depicting some cultures in positive contexts and others in negative can create segregation in the classroom and society which increases xenophobia.

However, postcolonial theory cannot be employed in this study if the critique aimed at its unawareness of contemporary variables is not discussed. Shohat (1996) stated that the term

postcolonial can be problematic because it assumes that society is not currently affected by colonialism (pp. 323-325). Moreover, McClintock (1996) argued that the merging of all postcolonial effects risks the cultural diversity of former colonies because their history and values are seen as an entity. Nonetheless, McClintock regarded the postcolonial framework as advantageous to explain contemporary values but encouraged its users to carefully consider the term (pp. 254-257).

Despite the critique, postcolonial theory is useful for explaining why certain values are placed upon cultures. Due to its extensive ideas about Eurocentrism affecting cultural perspectives, such as “the othering”, it is a relevant framework to employ in the analyses. Without it, it would be difficult to explain current cultural depictions due to the global effects of colonialism. Thus, inhibiting the aim of this study.

2.5 Literature Review

Previous research about cultural depictions in EFL textbooks is quite sufficient. However, Swedish studies on this subject are few as far as I know, whereas the international research field on both EFL and global textbooks, textbooks used regionally and globally, is well researched. Nonetheless, the relevancy of previous research does not decrease if textbooks written for other contexts than Sweden have been investigated. These aspects are important research variables which demonstrate potential connections of EFL textbooks to cultures that hold discursive power albeit international contexts should be encouraged. Furthermore, EFL and global textbooks incorporate the same general aims — the development of students’ ICC. Otherwise, students would not be able to engage in a globalised world, and EFL would not be taught if this was not the goal. This does thereby not affect the relevancy of research on global textbooks.

2.5.1 Inner Circle Norms Are Promoted

The promotion of inner circle norms often occurs in Swedish EFL textbooks. Wilhelmson (2016) and Kearney and Kolm (2011) have examined cultural representations in various Swedish EFL textbooks for English 5, and they found that inner circle norms, Eurocentric and European cultural norms, rule over cultural depictions. However, their research has been compared to the former version of LGY11, whereas this study compares its results to the updated steering documents.

Kearney and Kolm (2011) found that inner circle cultural values, values closely related to Christianity and European cultural heritages, are promoted as normative (p. 49). Thus, the cultural “othering” occurs when cultures are negatively depicted as different from promoted Eurocentric ideals. Wilhelmson (2016) also stated that the examined textbooks promote inner circle cultures because most texts portray them. Students are thereby exposed to target cultures rather than source or international cultures (p. 22). Consequently, both studies demonstrate a tendency in English 5 textbooks to promote inner circle cultures and Eurocentric values, whereas most outer and expanding circle cultures are excluded (Kearney & Kolm, 2011; Wilhelmson, 2016).

2.5.2 Target Cultures Dominate

The promotion of target, source, or international cultures in EFL textbooks has been investigated internationally, but the cultural promotion seems to depend on the context the textbooks are written for. Most previous research argued that target cultures, such as American and/or British culture, were promoted in the examined textbooks (Dehbozorgi et al, 2014; Nguyen & Sudsuang, 2019; Tajeddin & Pakzadian, 2020; Xiang & Yenika-Agbaw, 2021). Tajeddin and Pakzadian (2020) found a promotion of inner circle cultures in one of their examined global ELT textbook series. The other series were more lenient towards

international culture, but cultural diversity was still lacking (pp. 12-13). Dehbozorgi et al. (2014) and Nguyen and Sudsuang (2019) also stated that most examined EFL textbooks in Iran and Vietnam depicted inner circle cultures. Nonetheless, source cultures were prevalent in some textbooks, and Vietnamese textbooks also promoted international cultures. In contrast, Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw's (2021) study showed that Mongol source culture was omitted and target cultures promoted (pp. 336-337). This can possibly hamper the development of ICC.

The differences between research results, such as the incorporation of source cultures, are possibly the results of EFL textbooks being written for specific contexts. This allows for several perspectives on cultural promotion because societal values must be incorporated for the textbooks to be educationally accepted (Ammert, 2011, pp. 29-33). Hence, this is important to consider in this study because textbooks can demonstrate if a global identity is sought for or if other values are more important.

2.5.3 Cultural Diversity and Aspects Are Lacking

Cultural diversity in EFL and global textbooks is lacking. Several studies have concluded that EFL textbooks do not incorporate diverse cultural depictions or aspects (Kearney & Kolm, 2011; Gómez Rodríguez, 2015; Wilhelmson, 2016). Kearney and Kolm (2011) stated that their investigated Swedish EFL textbooks incorporate cultural diversity through the usage of texts from authors around the world but few informative depictions. However, they argued that these depictions often solely focus on cultural aspects such as traditions or attitudes (p. 49). Wilhelmson (2016) and Gómez Rodríguez (2015), who examined the content of three EFL textbooks to see if they included deep and/or surface cultural aspects, also argued that their examined textbooks lack cultural aspects which help students develop ICC. Wilhelmson (2016) observed that the examined depictions mostly portray everyday life and/or issues and

not aspects which could deepen students' cultural understanding (p. 22). Gómez Rodríguez (2015) claimed that the examined EFL textbooks, which are aimed at basic, intermediate, and advanced English users in several educational contexts, did not help students develop ICC. The cultural depictions focused on surface cultural aspects such as food rather than deep aspects such as ethics (p. 178).

Nevertheless, two recent studies suggest that contemporary EFL textbooks are more culturally inclusive than older textbooks. The results nonetheless indicated that more cultural aspects are needed to develop students' ICC and demote stereotypical depictions (Raigón-Rodríguez, 2018; Larrea Espinar & Raigón Rodríguez, 2019). Rueda García and Atienza Cerezo (2020) also found that examined depictions of non-native English speakers in global textbooks did not promote diversity because the non-native speakers often depended on native speakers' narratives. Therefore, these depictions did not offer students opportunities to develop their identities (pp. 292-293). Albeit the texts were aimed at A1 students, basic users of English, on The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, a scale to measure language abilities created by the Council of Europe, they are still written for young adults in a globalised society, like the examined textbooks in this study, which makes their study relevant (Council of Europe, n.d).

2.5.4 Identifying the Research Gap

All examined previous research thoroughly analyses cultural depictions and aspects in EFL and global textbooks. They create a research field in which this study can contribute with necessary results due to the vacancy of research on Swedish in-use EFL textbooks. The research field lacks Swedish perspectives of in-use EFL textbooks and their connections to the updated syllabus because earlier studies have examined LPF94 and the previous version of LGY11. This research gap is essential to fill because it is important to see if Swedish EFL

textbooks give students diverse cultural perspectives and tools needed to develop ICC. Without ICC, students may not be prepared to make global contacts, thus potentially not fulfilling neither learner needs nor the aims of the steering documents. Moreover, the employment of postcolonial theory in this study contributes with a different perspective on cultural depictions in EFL textbooks. Earlier Swedish studies have used a cultural model for categorising EFL-content or created a theoretical framework by combining language didactics and cultural studies (Wilhelmson, 2016; Kearney & Kolm, 2011).

3. Method and Material

Below, the material is presented and evaluated. Finally, the methodology and research process employed in this study are described.

3.1 Material

The material examined in this study consists of cultural depictions from two Swedish EFL textbooks aimed at the upper secondary school course English 5. The textbooks are:

- *Viewpoints 1* (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017)
- *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014)

Viewpoints 1 (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017) is published by Gleerups, whereas *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014) is published by Studentlitteratur. Both textbooks are aimed at university preparatory programmes to make this study coherent (Gleerups n.d.; Studentlitteratur n.d.). This delimitation was necessary due to the restricted scope of this study. Nevertheless, the textbooks are not supposed to be used in the vocational programmes which decreases the generalisation, external validity, of the results. EFL textbooks for university preparatory programmes were chosen because of the deeper immersion of the programmes into the English subject compared to the vocational programmes. This immersion allows students deeper subject knowledge and therefore more content to investigate (The Swedish National Agency for Education, 2014, pp. 15-16).

These textbooks were thereby chosen because they are aimed at English 5, the first English course of upper secondary school, and incorporate the most cultural content. If their cultural depictions do not align with the steering documents, essential societal values may be lost to students early on in their education. Therefore, it is important to ensure that students receive opportunities to develop their ICC with the assistance of the textbooks. EFL textbooks from these publishers were chosen because they are well known in Sweden and have been used

during the last few years. This has been confirmed by students who attend or have recently attended upper secondary school. The textbooks were also chosen because of their connections to LGY11.

There are however both advantages and disadvantages with researching textbooks. Firstly, textbooks are beneficial for examining which cultural depictions are educationally promoted. Albeit most teachers do not use textbooks constantly, textbooks inspire lessons and can be used as learning tools which make them essential to investigate. Ammert (2011) stated that textbooks are cultural manifestations that relay values which various societal agents want the students to learn. Otherwise, the textbooks would not be bought (pp. 28-37). Thus, cultural depictions in textbooks can reveal power structures. The disadvantage with researching textbooks is that they age and become irrelevant for future educational contexts. Consequently, they can no longer be used for demonstrating contemporary values or educational problems.

3.2 Method

An inductive qualitative content analysis was conducted to analyse the cultural depictions, and the results were compared to the Swedish curriculum and syllabus for English 5. The method was employed because it allowed the material to illustrate underlying agendas. Instead of deciding what to expect beforehand, the reading of the content resulted in a categorisation and coding of the material. Thus, the content analysis allowed me to find patterns that demonstrated integrated social values. The advantages of an inductive qualitative content analysis are therefore that it allows for a deep analysis and interpretation of cultural manifestations and their impact on student development (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005, pp. 1-2). Hence, it brings attention to values that may/may not correlate with the steering documents.

However, there are disadvantages with using a subjective method because it is not certain that the study can be completely recreated. This is due to subjective interpretations of the content that others may not comprehend. Thus, it can be argued to have low transferability. Nevertheless, a transparent research process allows for an understanding of why certain interpretations were made, which therefore does not decrease the trustworthiness of the results.

This research process started with the reading of several textbooks aimed at English 5. Textbooks that incorporated cultural depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures were seen as relevant for this study, and those that incorporated several depictions were thereby chosen. Consequently, texts that compared cultures, described cultural aspects and/or values, traditions, and ways of life were selected as material, and various incorporated topics were identified. These depictions were later analysed with an inductive qualitative content analysis, and patterns in them became clear. If the cultures were depicted in a positive, negative, or neutral context was also noted. This is important to consider in the analyses because the portrayals of cultures with negative, positive, or neutral topics allow for certain interpretations. If a depiction incorporates topics associated with specific contexts, this may alter students' cultural perspectives. The depictions were also categorised as portraying outer or expanding circle cultures which allows for interesting interpretations depending on the status of the cultures in the English as an international language paradigm.

It is also important to note that the tone in the depictions affect how they are interpreted. This is considered during the analyses but makes it difficult to categorise some topics — my interpretations thereby steer the analyses. These interpretations, with the employment of postcolonial theory, demonstrate how outer and expanding circle cultures are depicted. Finally, the results were compared with the aims of the steering documents to see to what extent the students had received tools to fulfil them.

Table 1

Examples of topics that may be interpreted as positive, neutral, or negative.

Positive	Neutral	Negative
Love	Cultural Differences	Trafficking
Friendship	Superstition	Murder
Acceptance	Traditions	Racism

The use of the aforementioned methodology strengthens the internal validity because it demonstrates that the results come from my content interpretations. However, ensuring that the analyses are focused on relevant aspects is important because the internal validity may decrease otherwise. A clear overview of my interpretations also increases the external reliability. Without this, it is difficult for readers to understand individual connections to the theoretical framework. Additionally, my interpretations were not directly translatable to the components of the steering documents. This made it difficult to see to what extent the material scaffolded students. Consequently, the content was coded into several knowledge categories based on the steering documents: the students' understanding of current events/social and cultural phenomena/values in different circumstances and areas where English is used, the students being able to compare their knowledge/experiences with cultural content while developing their identities, and the students understanding the worth of cultural diversity while becoming prepared for contacts/communication between countries and cultures (The Swedish National Agency for Education, n.d a; n.d b).

Furthermore, there are no apparent ethical aspects to consider in this study. This is due to the examination of textbooks, and not people, which results in research practices that do not endanger individual privacy.

4. Results and Analysis

The content and my interpretations of it are presented below. Initially, the cultural depictions in *Viewpoints 1* (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017) are presented, and they are followed by the depictions in *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014). These depictions are progressively analysed with the assistance of the postcolonial framework.

4.1 Viewpoints 1

Viewpoints 1 (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017) includes one cultural depiction of an expanding circle culture and two depictions of outer circle cultures, which are presented in the tables below. The depictions are novel extracts, but only one author originates from the depicted country. Kearney and Kolm's (2011) statement that diversity in Swedish EFL textbooks is represented by texts from diverse authors is not represented here (p. 49). Instead, mostly authors from inner circle cultures depict outer and expanding circle cultures which can relay Eurocentric values.

Table 1

Cultural depictions in Viewpoints 1

Topic	Culture
Trafficking, Violence, Death	West African, Outer or Expanding Circle Culture (Most likely Nigeria, Outer Circle Culture)
Criminality, Abuse, Murder, Friendship	Colombia, Expanding Circle Culture
Forbidden Love, Racism, Xenophobia	India, Outer Circle Culture

Table 3

The categorisation of topics found in the cultural depictions

Positive	Neutral	Negative
		Trafficking
		Violence
		Death
		Criminality
		Abuse
		Murder
	Forbidden love	
		Racism
		Xenophobia
Friendship		

4.1.1 Rendezvous With Evil

The first depiction is an excerpt from *Ibarajo Road* (2012) by Harry Allen which takes place in an imaginary West African country (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017, p. 123). However, Allen has spent many years in Nigeria which likely has affected the Yoruban character names (The Quarto Group, n.d.). Thus, Nigeria is most likely what this depiction portrays. The excerpt depicts life in West Africa from a white and privileged male's point of view. This can be problematic because the text is the only depiction of an African country in the textbook, and it is told by an individual who may not fairly represent it. The text, "Rendezvous With Evil", portrays how the main character and his friends trap human traffickers and rescue a baby. One of the antagonists also dies in the commotion (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017, pp. 123-125).

Although the main character's friends are African and display kindness and bravery, the hero and narrator of the story is white. Thereby, this excerpt promotes Eurocentrism and a civilisation agenda due to a white saviour rescuing victims in another culture. These aspects are strengthened by this being the sole depiction of an African country. Consequently, students only receive one negative perspective of an African culture which may result in them associating it with violence and/or trafficking. However, one must consider that this and the following excerpt are parts of the section "The Danger Zone" which displays action-adventure literature.

4.1.2 *Boy Kills Man*

An excerpt from *Boy Kills Man* (2014) by Matt Whyman, a British author, is the only depiction of a South American country in the textbook (Matt Whyman, n.d.). The story transpires in Colombia and portrays two twelve-year-old criminals called Shorty and Alberto. Alberto is also an assassin who protects Shorty, and he therefore goes to Shorty's abuser's apartment and shoots him. Nonetheless, Alberto shows evidence of trauma, and he wants reassurance for the greater good of his crimes (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017, pp. 145-149).

Consequently, the sole depiction of a South American country involves violence and murder. The main characters nevertheless display guilt and a fierce friendship which show that they are more than criminals. However, students only see Colombian culture in a mostly negative context due to the domination of negatively associated topics. Hence, the lack of diverse cultural depictions results in students potentially viewing this culture negatively.

4.1.3 Love and Prejudice

The final cultural depiction is called "Love and Prejudice", and it tells the story of an Indian girl named Simran and her boyfriend Tyrone. Bali Rai has written *The Last Taboo* (2006)

which the excerpt is from. Simran's parents accept Tyrone but the pressure from the rest of the family is affecting their views of him. The community's isolation from the family is being blamed on Tyrone's skin colour by Simran's relatives. Therefore, Tyrone and Simran's relationship is seen as inappropriate because it affects the family negatively (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017, pp. 70-72):

'He's going to tell me to dump Tyrone, isn't he?' I said. 'I didn't say that – but you know how much his father means to him. After everything that happened when we got married... It's something that he's going to have to give a lot of thought-' 'But he did!' I complained. 'He said it was OK. He told me so.' 'He hadn't been threatened with losing a good job offer then,' . . . (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017, p. 72)

This depiction portrays Indian culture in a negative context where racism and xenophobia affect entire families. Albeit both Simran and her parents display understanding, they are still negatively affected by cultural values.

4.1.4 Analysis of *Viewpoints 1*

Outer and expanding circle cultures are mostly depicted in negative contexts in this textbook, and the depictions do not demonstrate various cultural aspects which could advance students' cultural understanding. Instead, students only become aware of problems that may occur, and their understanding of people's everyday lives thereby decreases. Therefore, they do not receive tools to understand or contrast several cultures. These results align with what Wilhelmson (2016) concluded; cultural depictions often focus on issues, whereas other aspects are omitted (p. 22). Furthermore, the lack of source culture material does not help students engage in intercultural arenas because they cannot relate their knowledge to their everyday lives. This variable was also found by Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw (2021) in their study of Mongol textbooks (pp. 336-337).

Nonetheless, there seems to have been an attempt to include cultural diversity by the incorporation of depictions from three different continents. Similar patterns were seen in two recent international studies of EFL textbooks. However, these contemporary textbooks omit various cultural aspects, which were tendencies also found in this study (Raigón-Rodríguez, 2018; Larrea Espinar & Raigón Rodríguez, 2019).

Thus, the previously analysed cultural depictions partially help students fulfil the aims of the steering documents. With these depictions, students take part of and develop an understanding of some current events and social/cultural phenomena while broadening their understanding of cultural diversity. However, they do not receive knowledge of deep cultural aspects, such as ethics, which could develop their ICC. Moreover, they neither receive opportunities to develop their identities nor contrast with various cultures due to the omittance of source culture and diverse depictions. Of course, students can have endured horrible experiences which make certain depictions relatable. In the end however, sole cultural depictions in negative contexts promote unilateral perspectives which can result in miscommunication and prejudice.

4.2 *Solid Gold 1*

Solid Gold 1 (Hedencrona et al., 2014) includes two depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures. The topics found in the textbooks, and the categorisation of them, are presented in the tables below.

Table 4

Cultural depictions in Solid gold 1

Topic	Culture
Superstition, Traditions, Fear	Zimbabwe, Outer Circle Country
Ignorance, Cultural differences	Czech Republic, Expanding Circle Country and USA, Inner Circle Country

Table 5

The categorisation of topics found in the cultural depictions

Positive	Neutral	Negative
	Superstition	
	Traditions	
		Fear
		Ignorance
	Cultural differences	

4.2.1 Watch Your Step

The first depiction, written by the Zimbabwean author Petina Gappah, is called “Watch Your Step”. Depicting superstition, the text describes parts of a boy and girl’s life in Zimbabwe. A woman named SisiBlandina warns them about what will happen if they jump over someone’s legs. Therefore, the girl, Chenai, jumps over the boy’s, Munya’s, legs. Consequently, Munya cries because he believes that his legs will stop growing, and SisiBlandina thereby forces Chenai to jump over Munya again to reverse the curse. However, Chenai crosses her fingers which makes Munya upset once more (Hedencrona et al., 2014, p. 31).

This depiction of Zimbabwean culture presents traditions as deeply rooted and unwanted by those who defy them. Therefore, students see Zimbabwe as a traditional society that allows superstition to steer people. As Kearney and Kolm (2011) stated in their study, Swedish EFL textbooks tend to “other” outer and expanding circle cultures by depicting them as different from inner circle cultures (p. 49). This is clear in the presentation of a girl defying superstition rather than a demonstration of various cultural aspects. Gappah nonetheless attempts to create an understanding of Zimbabwean values. However, with this being the only depiction of an outer circle culture *and* African country in the textbook, it displays Zimbabwe as upholding obsolete cultural aspects.

4.2.2 So Where You From?

The final cultural depiction contrasts an expanding circle culture with an inner circle culture. “So Where You From?” describes a Czech woman’s experiences with cultural differences in the USA. She is finding it difficult to accept American customs, such as conversing with strangers, when she wants to be anonymous. Several Americans also demonstrate ignorance while trying to be civil: “‘Where are you from?’ . . . ‘Czech Republic,’ I say. ‘Ah, Czechoslovakia,’ he says. ‘It’s actually the Czech Republic now,’ I explain politely . . .

Undeterred, he continues, ‘My friend’s grandfather was from Czechoslovakia’” (Hedencrona et al., 2014, p. 32). The narrator becomes annoyed but mostly seems to miss the anonymity of the Czech Republic (Hedencrona et al., 2014, pp. 32-33).

Albeit the Czech Republic is a European country and not deterred by Eurocentrism, this depiction shows it to be affected by cultural differences and ignorance. In the depiction, Americans are portrayed as obnoxious, whereas Czechs seem socially detached. The contrasting of the two cultures is interesting and creates an understanding of how cultural differences can inhibit communication — important factors for students to grasp. Nonetheless, the depiction becomes stereotypical toward *both* Americans and Czechs even though the narrator is from an expanding circle culture.

4.2.3 Analysis of *Solid Gold 1*

The cultural depictions in this textbook are written by people originating from the portrayed cultures. Kearney and Kolm (2011) also found this tendency in the textbooks they examined. Moreover, their examined depictions also seem to solely focus on attitudes or traditions, which are variables also found in this study (p. 49). This demonstrates that the difficulty in developing students’ ICC by omitting multiple cultural aspects is still present in contemporary textbooks.

Nonetheless, the aims of the steering documents can be partially fulfilled with the assistance of the examined cultural depictions. The first depiction helps students understand a part of Zimbabwean culture that may affect Zimbabwean individuals’ lives and communication. Thus, students see cultural phenomena and values while they partly prepare themselves for global communication. The second depiction of Czech and American culture is more nuanced due to an illumination of stereotypes and ignorance against expanding circle and inner circle cultures. Also, misunderstandings due to cultural differences are highlighted

which help students develop an understanding of how these differences can hinder intercultural communication. Moreover, cultural diversity becomes normalised due to the rejection of prejudice by a promotion of global relationships.

Nevertheless, no Swedish source culture or abundant diversity is integrated into the textbook. This makes it difficult for students to compare themselves with various cultures. However, students may have experienced similar situations while communicating with native speakers. Thus, they can partly expand their cultural knowledge and ICC by examining the depictions.

5. Discussion

In this section, aspects of the employed methodology and the results of this study are discussed. Additionally, limitations of this study are illuminated.

5.1 Method Discussion

The methodology and my interpretations of the content must be discussed to show my awareness of potential weaknesses in this study. Large amounts of data in the cultural depictions could easily have confused interpretations. However, the topic categorisation of the depictions counteracted this and centered the analysis on the subject. Otherwise, a loss of focus would have decreased the internal reliability.

Furthermore, the effect of my cultural filters, individual cultural values and their effects on my worldview, in this study must be discussed to achieve a transparent research process. Individual backgrounds will always affect interpretations, and cultural values are therefore important to be aware of when individual interpretations steer research outcomes. This could happen due to a misunderstanding of social cues or by giving meaning to cultural aspects that may not be important to someone from the depicted culture. Thus, to retain the reliability of this study I had to be aware of my cultural perspectives and their effects on content interpretations. Moreover, my European values also make me a part of Eurocentric perspectives in various senses. However, the topic categorisation and postcolonial framework employed in the analyses have assisted me in examining the textbooks in a different light. Consequently, I have noticed variables that may have been overlooked otherwise.

5.1.1 Limitations

A study this small has its limitations which have resulted in this study only examining two in-use EFL textbooks. Thereby, future studies should examine cultural depictions in a larger pool

of textbooks, both for vocational and university preparatory programmes, because their results could more easily be generalised to the Swedish educational system. Nonetheless, the relevance of the examined textbooks, due to their usage and the comparison to updated steering documents, results in this study still having educational bearing.

5.2 Results Discussion

As stated in the analyses, there are many implications of cultural depictions demonstrating Eurocentric values as normative in the examined EFL textbooks. Thus, outer and expanding circle cultures are mostly negatively portrayed as different from inner circle cultures. The content therefore solely correlates with the steering documents to a certain extent.

5.2.1 Cultural Depictions in Swedish EFL Textbooks

The cultural depictions in the examined EFL textbooks portray cultures in various ways. However, inner circle cultural aspects are portrayed as normative because various cultures are rarely incorporated. Therefore, inner circle target cultures are promoted, by the othering and exclusion of cultural diversity, and Swedish source culture is omitted. This differs from some international research where source cultures were incorporated albeit target cultures were promoted (Dehbozorgi et al., 2014; Nguyen & Sudsuang, 2019).

Moreover, when outer and expanding circle cultures are incorporated, they are often depicted as “others” because problems or potentially problematic traditions are depicted rather than everyday events. This aligns with the results of Kearney and Kolm’s (2011) study which concluded that outer and expanding circle cultures in their investigated Swedish EFL textbooks tend to be portrayed as different compared to inner circle cultures (p. 49). This can especially be seen in *Viewpoints 1* (Gustafsson & Wivast, 2017) where the depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures are portrayed in negative contexts where violence, murder, and

racism are illuminated. *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014) also promotes a perspective of Zimbabwean culture as different by highlighting the opposition of traditions. Several studies have also concluded that there is a lack of cultural diversity and cultural aspects in EFL textbooks (Kearney & Kolm, 2011; Gómez Rodríguez, 2015; Wilhelmson, 2016; Raigón-Rodríguez, 2018; Larrea Espinar & Raigón Rodríguez, 2019; Rudea García & Atienza Cerezo, 2020). This research in correlation with the results of this study demonstrate that omitting cultural diversity and multiple cultural aspects in textbooks, regardless of the context they are written for, is common.

Furthermore, the inclusion of cultural depictions written by authors not part of the portrayed cultures promotes Eurocentrism because the inner circle authors' cultural filters affect their portrayals and may not result in correct depictions. This is especially important to consider when textbooks include few depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures, which inhibit students' ICC. This is different from what Kearney and Kolm (2011) found in their examined textbooks because they stated that authors from around the world depicted their own cultures (p. 49). Consequently, the risk of important cultural aspects being omitted decreased in their study. Nevertheless, I found that depictions in *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014) tried to create an understanding of peoples' actions and open students' eyes toward prejudice that they most likely will encounter in a globalised society, although the depictions do not incorporate multiple cultural aspects — the inclusion of cultural differences normalise them.

The results of this study seem to align with most Swedish and international research where the lack of cultural diversity and aspects result in the othering of outer and expanding circle cultures (Kearney & Kolm, 2011; Gómez Rodríguez, 2015; Wilhelmson, 2016; Raigón-Rodríguez, 2018; Larrea Espinar & Raigón Rodríguez, 2019; Rueda García & Atienza Cerezo, 2020). Outer and expanding circle cultures are often seen as different where traditions

are depicted in negative contexts or social issues are highlighted. In areas where the textbooks attempt to assist the development of ICC, they often do so on a surface-based level and therefore miss and/or simplify cultural aspects. However, the depictions in the EFL textbooks examined in this study differ from international research by omitting source culture. It is solely Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw's (2021) study of Vietnamese EFL textbooks, of the examined research projects, that align with these results.

In conclusion, authors of Swedish EFL textbooks must revise their cultural depictions and incorporate cultural diversity and aspects to ensure the development of student identities, ICC, and a respectful society. Teachers become aware of this dilemma by reading this study, and it helps them understand that entirely relying on the examined textbooks will not help students take part of various cultures or develop into global citizens.

5.2.2 Cultural Depictions and the Steering Documents

The cultural depictions in the examined textbooks partially align with the steering documents by helping students fulfil the aims related to ICC. All examined depictions lift cultural/social phenomena, values, and/or current events to some extent which align with the steering documents by helping students develop ICC. The focus on cultural differences can also assist in developing ICC, but the lack of cultural aspects, such as ethics and hierarchical structures, decreases students' chances of communicating internationally. Hence, their opportunities to fulfil the aims diminish. Moreover, the negative contexts associated with most depictions relay misconceptions and prejudice which hamper global communication. However, *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014) seems to retaliate against this by including perspectives of why prejudice can appear which deepens students' cultural knowledge and ICC. Nonetheless, the lack of cultural diversity and deeper cultural aspects could also lessen students' opportunities of developing ICC and their cultural identities because they do not receive

enough source culture or cultural content for them to contrast with. Thus, *all* required aims of the steering documents related to ICC cannot be fulfilled with the assistance of the examined cultural depictions.

All things considered; the examined cultural depictions partially correlate with the steering documents by helping students develop ICC. However, cultural aspects that help students develop their identities and cultural knowledge are few, and the portrayals of cultures in negative contexts do not advance students' understanding or respect. Authors of teaching materials should thereby incorporate more deep cultural aspects, cultural diversity, and source culture to ensure that students receive all necessary information for global communication. Nevertheless, the limited space in textbooks may make it difficult for authors to incorporate all important aspects. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to combine teaching resources if their chosen textbooks do not incorporate all essential aspects.

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine how outer and expanding circle cultures are depicted in two English 5 textbooks. Moreover, this essay investigated to what extent these depictions align with the aims of the syllabus for English 5 and the curriculum for Swedish upper secondary school related to intercultural competence. The aims of this study have been fulfilled with the results of the aforementioned research questions: “how are outer and expanding circle cultures depicted in two Swedish EFL textbooks written for the upper secondary school course English 5”, and “to what extent do the cultural depictions align with the steering documents by helping students fulfil the aims related to ICC?”.

The results of the first research question show that cultural depictions in Swedish EFL textbooks mostly depict outer and expanding circle cultures in contexts where people are negatively affected by cultural aspects, and/or current events. Like most Swedish and international research, this study has demonstrated that certain EFL textbooks do not promote cultural diversity (Kearney & Kolm, 2011; Gómez Rodríguez, 2015; Wilhelmson, 2016; Raigón-Rodríguez, 2018; Larrea Espinar & Raigón Rodríguez, 2019; Rueda García & Atienza Cerezo, 2020). Instead, textbooks confine outer and expanding circle cultures to a few depictions which often portray cultures as different compared to inner circle cultures. This “othering” promotes inner circle and Eurocentric values to the students. The incorporation of many inner circle cultures and frequent promotion of certain cultural aspects as different or negative do not help students develop their cultural identities or understanding of people’s lives from their own experiences. However, albeit the stereotypisation of an expanding circle culture occurs in *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014), an inner circle culture is portrayed correspondingly. Therefore, this stereotypisation seems to be intentional to promote critical thinking during intercultural communication. Nonetheless, students may not understand this, and it can therefore result in negative connotations of both cultures.

Also, the cultural depictions were found to partially align with the steering documents to help students develop ICC because only parts of the required aims can be fulfilled. The examined textbooks lift cultural aspects but not aspects which concern everyday life. Hence, students miss important values which decrease their opportunities to develop ICC. However, one depiction in *Solid Gold 1* (Hedencrona et al., 2014) seems to promote cultural differences and the understanding of them due to nuanced perspectives of how ignorance occurs. Consequently, a complex part of students' ICC can be developed. Nevertheless, there were no depictions of Swedish source culture which decrease students' abilities to contrast their own cultures with others. This is different from what some international studies have concluded because they indicated that source culture is prevalent in EFL textbooks (Dehbozorgi et al., 2014; Nguyen & Sudsuang, 2019).

Consequently, the depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures do not give students opportunities to develop all skills required by the steering documents. Therefore, teachers must complement textbooks with other teaching materials if textbooks are normally used. Otherwise, a globalised and accepting society, as promoted by the steering documents, cannot be reached. Thus, authors of Swedish EFL textbooks must demonstrate various cultural depictions of outer and expanding circle cultures which portray cultural diversity and do not promote negative stereotypes.

In conclusion, the results of this study are important for practicing teachers to consider. The results demonstrate that a varied repertoire of teaching materials which lift diverse cultures and aspects is important to incorporate for students to fulfil the aims related to ICC. Otherwise, an equivalent Swedish education will not be reached because students do not receive equal opportunities to develop their ICC or cultural identities, which is important for preserving cultural heritages, if they cannot express themselves and/or contrast with other

cultures. Thereby, for students to develop into respectful global citizens, and inhibit prejudice and xenophobia, teachers must regard these results as educationally essential.

Nevertheless, this study has only examined two EFL textbooks which make the results unsuitable to generalise to the Swedish educational system. Future research must therefore examine more textbooks aimed at both vocational and university preparatory programmes so all Swedish EFL teachers know how to approach the development of students' ICC in relation to the new steering documents. Additionally, a future study of inner circle cultural depictions in comparison to outer and expanding cultural depictions can illuminate portrayals of inner circle cultures in different contexts. These depictions can demonstrate the potential promotion of societal values, such as Eurocentrism, which may affect student opinions. Thus, this future research can help teachers understand the roles EFL textbooks have in potentially developing students' ICC and thereby preparing them for an intercultural community. Consequently, this developing knowledge of what depictions students need to cherish cultural diversity, as required by the steering documents, can advance essential international contacts in a global society.

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