

GLOBAL ELT COURSEBOOKS AND EQUALITIES LEGISLATION: A CRITICAL STUDY

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Equalities legislation in the United Kingdom (UK) aims to protect the rights of all residents by identifying nine characteristics that can cause discrimination. This legislation requires institutions offering programmes in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) to include positive representations of these protected characteristics in their learning content. However, many ESOL programmes draw heavily on global coursebooks—materials published for a global market—which tend to avoid equalities issues.

This article describes a study that analyses global coursebooks from this UK equalities perspective, exploring how the characteristics are represented within these resources. Findings appear to suggest that the global coursebooks featured in the study are at odds with UK equalities legislation; rather than promoting diversity and inclusion, they legitimise and endorse the hegemonic normativity that fuels discrimination. We conclude the materials are an inappropriate source of core content for any ESOL programmes seeking to address the equalities agenda.

Keywords: equalities legislation, ESOL, global coursebooks, TESOL, UK Equality Act 2010

The Equality Act 2010, a United Kingdom (UK) Act of Parliament that applies to Scotland, Wales and England, was created to give legal protection to people in relation to nine named protected characteristics that are acknowledged as having the potential to make people vulnerable within society, namely: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation (United Kingdom [UK] Government, 2010). Following the Act, the Equality Duty was developed in 2011, and also adopted in Northern Ireland, making it a UK-wide policy. In its aim to “eliminate unlawful discrimination . . . [and] advance equality of opportunity” (UK Parliament, 2019, item 139), the Equality Duty requires education providers to actively promote the equalities agenda through curriculum design and content. In addition, Scotland’s Equality Strategy presents a vision that focuses education providers on “ensuring equality for all and modelling practices in eliminating discrimination, promoting equality and diversity and addressing inequity” (Education Scotland, 2017, p. 3).

Given their requirements to locate learning in the students’ own contexts and to actively tackle discrimination, it is perhaps surprising that the core content of many ESOL programmes in Scotland is sourced from global ELT coursebooks—defined by Gray (2015) as “that genre of English language textbook which is produced in English-speaking countries and is designed for use as the core text in language classrooms around the world” (pp. 151–152). These materials have received criticism for a variety of reasons, which we discuss briefly in the literature review below. Our main concern though, and

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the focus of this article, relates to how global coursebooks address the equalities agenda. We present findings from a study which, unlike previous studies, analyses and evaluates global coursebooks through the lens of equalities legislation. Our single, overarching research question asked to what extent the global coursebooks in our study allow ESOL practitioners to fulfil the requirements of equalities legislation in Scotland. Using the Equality Duty's nine protected characteristics as an analytical framework, the study applied critical discourse analysis techniques to explore how each characteristic is represented in two popular global coursebooks, with a view to assessing the extent to which these books comply with the Duty in their representation of protected groups. While the study is located in the Scottish context, the findings have significance for users of global coursebooks in any context who are concerned, for legislative or other reasons, with the promotion of the values that support and protect all members of society, particularly those who are vulnerable to discrimination. Our findings also contribute towards a broader understanding of the wider socio-political implications of representation in ELT materials.

Literature Review

Legislation, Policy and the ESOL landscape in Scotland

In presenting the background and context to this study, it is important to recognise that ESOL students in the UK tend to be from diverse and varied backgrounds. Ward (2007) has characterised ESOL students in the UK as "often socially excluded and living in poverty" (p. 54), and Cooke and Peutrell (2019) describe them as "likely to be economically disadvantaged and therefore unable to access their full set of rights" (p. 4). In Scotland, a recent study suggested that most college ESOL practitioners regard their students as being on low incomes, vulnerable or at risk, and suffering from exclusion or marginalisation (Brown, 2019, p. 194). Furthermore, as pointed out in Scotland's ESOL Strategy, "ESOL learners cut across all of the protected characteristics" (Scottish Government, 2015, p. 22). Many arrived in the UK under the protection of the 1951 Refugee Convention (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] UK, 2021), having experienced persecution because of aspects of their identities. Once in Scotland, refugees and other migrants are potentially vulnerable to discrimination as a direct result of protected characteristics that set them apart from the majority population. The need for equalities legislation, therefore, is particularly great among ESOL students.

The potentially vulnerable positions that migrants find themselves in, and the role that ESOL can play in promoting the equalities agenda, has been acknowledged by the Scottish Government in many of its own policies. The Adult ESOL Strategy, for example, declares that "ESOL provision helps to advance equality of opportunity for all individuals" (Scottish Government, 2015, p. 22). Government funding for ESOL has been provided to Further Education (FE) colleges and Community Learning and Development (CLD) organisations since the Adult ESOL Strategy was first launched in 2007, with the aim of ensuring that "all Scottish residents for whom English is not a first language have the opportunity to access high quality English language provision" (p. 6).

Wider education policy in Scotland also promotes the equalities agenda: a recent policy paper on the Scottish FE sector, where the majority of ESOL provision takes place, states that equality sits "at the heart of the college sector" (Scottish Government, 2018), and that colleges "serve our most deprived communities, as well as those with additional support needs; older students and women; care-experienced students; and those from a Black and Minority Ethnic background" (n.p.). The CLD sector, which also caters for ESOL students, identifies inclusion as one of its stated core values, with CLD providers described as "valuing equality of both opportunity and outcome, and challenging discriminatory practice" (Community Learning and Development [CLD] Standards Council, 2021). These policy initiatives demonstrate that ESOL providers in Scotland have an obligation to directly address and promote equality, inclusion and the rights of vulnerable groups within their teaching.

The Scottish Government's commitment to an inclusive approach to ESOL is also compatible with the methodological approaches that are widely advocated in the Scottish ESOL context. Adult learning in Scotland is largely driven by the Social Practice Model, which requires that "delivery should be contextualised by tutors so that it suits the unique goals and aspirations of each learner" (Galloway, 2016, p. 96). Consequently, the Scottish Government's 2014 Statement of Ambition on adult learning declares that "learning opportunities will be designed with, and for, students based on their interests and the skills they bring" (Scottish Government, 2014, p. 8). The importance of involving students in decisions about learning content is also explicitly stated in Scotland's ESOL Strategy, which includes the objective that "ESOL students co-design their learning experience" (Scottish Government, 2015, p. 21).

The Global Coursebook

Global coursebooks are designed to appeal to as many different teaching contexts as possible, based on "the questionable assumption that 'one size fits all'—regardless of the social, geographical and educational context of use" (Gray, 2015, p. 3). Littlejohn (2012) identified that this drive for universal appeal has led to an increasingly standardised approach, one that draws heavily on the profit-oriented concepts of neoliberalism and McDonaldization. Gray (2015) also concludes that "the extreme market-sensitivity of ELT publishing" undermines capacities for global coursebooks to adequately address the equalities agenda as "commercial considerations—rather than ethical or educational concerns—are seen to be paramount" (p. 175). One feature of this 'one-size-fits-all' approach is the tendency for global coursebooks to avoid certain topics that could be perceived as sensitive, controversial or taboo in some parts of the world; these proscribed topics are generally referred to as PARSNIPs: politics, alcohol, religion, sex, narcotics, isms, and pork (Gray, 2001, p. 159). Bollas (2020) observes that the avoidance of such topics entails an absence of any references to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA+) people or issues pertaining to sexuality and gender identity, and that "learners' motivation is affected by this invisibility" (p. 141). Similarly, Gray claims that "the relentlessly heteronormative framing of identity in ELT [. . .] means that lesbian and gay students are either silenced or forced into challenging the ways in which they are positioned" (Gray, 2015, p. 187). For both Gray and Bollas, global English language teaching (ELT) materials not only fail to promote non-heteronormative lifestyles, but they routinely fail to include them altogether, thereby de-legitimising those lifestyles and undermining individuals that the Equality Act 2010 seeks to protect. Furthermore, Block and Gray (2014) claim that the avoidance of such topics means "students can be deprived of a vocabulary for talking about the world and denied access to conceptual frameworks for thinking about their place in it" (p. 46).

Other studies have revealed that representations of reality in global coursebooks tend to promote specific ideologies over others. A study by Copley (2018), for example, finds that global coursebooks appear to promote values commonly associated with neoliberal ideology, such as individualism, competitiveness and consumerism. Given that ESOL students in the UK often occupy more disadvantaged, precarious socio-economic positions within society, these studies suggest that global coursebooks are unlikely to provide the personalised and highly contextualised content that Scottish education policy expects.

The above discussion implies that global coursebooks are not particularly appropriate for the ESOL classroom, and yet they play a major role in many community- and college-based ESOL programmes in Scotland. In a survey of Scottish FE ESOL practitioners, 57% of respondents identified "materials published for a global ELT market" as their primary resource, with a further 18% citing global materials as their secondary source of content (Brown, 2018, p. 251). As Scottish Government policy discourse requires a model of ESOL that develops capacities for students to have their own voices heard, to have their rights respected within society, and to function effectively within an inclusive society, our concern is that global coursebooks may in fact undermine practitioners' capacities to comply with government legislation.

Methodology

Aims and Approach

The purpose of our study was to explore the representation of people with protected characteristics in global ELT coursebooks, with a view to evaluating the extent to which they comply with relevant equalities legislation, and to evaluate their appropriateness for the Scottish ESOL context. While our findings are likely to be of particular interest to ESOL providers who are required to comply with Scottish and/or UK equalities legislation, we anticipate that they will also be of interest to anyone who is concerned with equality, diversity and inclusion in ELT materials.

Given its concern with addressing social inequality and exclusion, the study adopts principles of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), within which “any theoretical and methodological approach is appropriate as long as it is able to effectively study relevant social problems such as those of sexism, racism, colonialism and other forms of social inequality” (van Dijk, 1995, p. 17). Our study went beyond linguistic content to incorporate complex, multimodal semiotic landscapes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012) into our analysis. It sought to analyse each coursebook from an equalities perspective, and therefore used the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 as the analytical framework within which these CDA techniques were applied.

Selected Publications

Two publications were selected for analysis, both at Intermediate level: the fourth edition of *New Headway Intermediate* (Soars & Soars, 2012; Soars et al., 2010), and the second edition of *Outcomes Intermediate* (Dellar & Walkley, 2016). The *Headway* series is widely regarded as one of the most successful and influential coursebooks in ELT history, while *Outcomes* is a more recent addition to the global coursebook market. Both books are well-known and well-used in Scottish ESOL, legitimising their inclusion in this study.

Positionality and Limitations

As ESOL practitioners with over 30 years’ combined experience in Scottish ESOL contexts, it is important for us to acknowledge our positionality as insider researchers embedded within the research context. As such, it would be methodologically unsound for us to attempt to approach this study from a detached, objective perspective—hence our use of CDA and an interpretive approach to data analysis. Our previous discussion of global coursebooks no doubt reveals that we had reservations about their appropriateness for the Scottish ESOL context prior to conducting the study, which could imply that the study is compromised by researcher bias. However, we wish to stress that our scepticism surrounding global coursebooks and equalities legislation is grounded in our own lived experiences as ESOL practitioners in Scotland. Cohen and Crabtree (2006) point out that interpretive research “assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know” (n.p.). Having used, or attempted to use, global coursebooks in the Scottish context, we are aware of tensions that exist in relation to these resources and the equalities agenda. In this study, our familiarity with the Scottish FE and CLD sectors, the varied profiles and needs of ESOL students, and the role of practitioners in policy implementation all combine to place us in a strong position to provide informed, contextualised and meaningful interpretations of the research findings.

While the study generated a rich dataset, we accept that it was drawn from a very narrow range of materials—only the Intermediate-level books from two global coursebook series. The study is limited further by focusing primarily on the student books, with references made to each teacher’s book, where relevant; additional supplementary resources (e.g., workbook, CD) were not included in the study. The decision to focus primarily on the student books was based on the fact that this is the primary source of content for both students and practitioners; not all institutions invest in all the supplementary resources, and students, therefore, may never encounter those materials.

Findings

The findings presented here are drawn from a large dataset generated by a qualitative analysis of the two publications. They reflect the multimodal nature of our study and have been selected to illustrate how each of the nine protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 is represented.

Age. Generally speaking, youth is presented positively in both coursebooks, but representations of older adults are less common, and also less positive. Headway features an 84-year-old Chinese man, Huanjun, along with his son, daughter-in-law and grand-daughter on p.11. Although Huanjun is described as the “centre” of the family, the semiotics created by the photo and text depict him as frail, inactive and holding the family back, keeping them “for now . . . in the old ways”. Students are invited to match the phrase “weak and unhealthy” to “frail” to describe Huanjun. The teacher’s book offers “elderly” to describe him and “out of step (not fitting in)” to describe the family. As the centre of the family, it seems that Huanjun is preventing the family from fitting into modern Chinese society, and that his age is the reason for this. Although the other three family members surround him, smiling, they seem like a unit that he is disconnected from as he stares blankly from the page. The lives of the rest of the family are described in some detail but all lexis relating to him implies ill-health and age-related infirmity. Another example of how age is portrayed in Headway (pp. 56–57) is its playing down of a person’s age in order to fit a narrative of youthful masculinity and power. Calvin Klein, the American fashion designer, is pictured, aged around 50, sitting nonchalantly next to his famous cosmetics and fashion brand logo—an image that conveys beauty, strength and success. Klein was in fact 70 years old at the time of publishing but a more up-to-date photo may not fit with the image of power that the book seems to be trying to convey.

Outcomes also presents rather negative images of older people, though perhaps less directly. In one double-page spread (pp. 32–33), a large photo features six older people involved in outdoor exercise. The saturation is very low, with most of the colour drained from the photo. The people are silhouettes, facing away from the camera, and appear to be exercising in isolation. These semiotic features combine to give a rather sad, depressing and negative representation of old age. ‘Culture notes’ in the teacher’s book give brief, useful information about the common practice of middle-aged and older people performing early-morning exercises in public places in Vietnam, where the picture was taken. However, nothing is done to exploit the potential for this image to open up a discussion about age, lifestyle preferences or the societal roles of different generations; students are simply asked to say where and when they think the photo was taken. An arguably more positive portrayal of older people exists in a text on p. 147 that describes a group of pensioners who formed a successful band. However, this text focuses on the pursuit of fame and opens with “Age is no barrier to becoming famous . . .,” belittling the societal challenges that many elderly people face. As with Headway, Outcomes tends occasionally to verge on the promotion of ageism, rather than presenting opportunities for a more balanced dialogue on age. Furthermore, the fact that this text focuses on how to achieve fame—as opposed to happiness, or equality, or social justice—assumes an acquisitive, materialistic ideal.

Disability. Perhaps the most notable thing about this protected characteristic is the lack of related texts or images, rendering people with disabilities largely invisible. Headway includes an image of the disabled musician Ian Dury (p. 33), who used a walking stick because of mobility issues caused by polio. However, the photo shows Dury from the waist up, and the task does not mention disability at all; Dury campaigned throughout his career to raise awareness about disability rights issues so this is a notable omission. The ‘erasure’ of his disability brings the semiotics here into the realm of stigma and patronisation. Notes in the teacher’s book simply suggest asking the students if they have any knowledge about him or his music.

Outcomes has some limited overt discussion of disability but it is framed in an unhelpful narrative. In a gap-fill exercise on p. 147, students are invited to complete the sentence “Physical disability is no barrier to a successful career.” Under the Act, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment

that “has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [their] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities” (UK Government, 2010, Section 2.1.6). This statement in Outcomes, therefore, is problematic, and potentially offensive to people whose disabilities entail real and significant barriers; to suggest otherwise could imply that disability is wrongly used as an excuse for lack of achievement. If the sentence was personalised as “My physical disability . . .”, this could open up discussion around disabilities and explore attitudes towards disability and related legislation. Another text in the same section tells the story of a bus driver who became disabled after attempting to defuse a bomb to save his passengers’ lives. The text appears to give the impression that sacrificing his health and livelihood to become a “national hero in India” was a positive trade-off. The book appears to be pushing the narrative that wealth and fame equate to personal success and happiness, that barriers are of one’s own making, and, therefore, that disability is irrelevant and no real barrier at all.

Gender reassignment. There is no explicit or implicit inclusion of any people with this protected characteristic. Any issues relating to gender reassignment or trans rights are completely omitted from both coursebooks.

Marriage and civil partnership. References and representations in both coursebooks tend to portray marriage as a heteronormative institution: something that happens between men and women in young adulthood and leads to having children. For example, on p. 13 Outcomes presents a ‘fairytale’ narrative of the storyteller’s parents meeting for the first time. A large photo of a family in crisis on pp. 14–15 appears to offer a counter-narrative to the fairy tale, but no alternative to heteronormativity. There is no mention of civil partnership as an alternative to marriage in either publication.

The promotion of heterosexual marriage, and the heteronormative notion of “settling down”, is particularly evident in a text called ‘My Crazy Uncle Joe’, on p. 109 of Headway. Joe is a man in his mid-20s who has no interest in getting married and who, despite graduating from drama school, seems happy to work in low-paid part-time jobs whilst in pursuit of an acting career. We are led to believe that his rejection of the normative values of marriage and materialism are enough to label him “crazy”. This label contributes to a very unhelpful narrative for anyone whose lifestyle choices do not conform to very conventional values. The use of the word “crazy” goes against a decade of campaigning by mental health professionals and support organisations across the globe such as Everymind, Mental Health Foundation, and NAMI. A study by Hwang and Hollingshead (2016) of the societal stigma regarding mental health conditions explored fourteen common “stigmatizing words” that have been identified as pejorative in relation to people with mental health conditions. This list includes the word “crazy”.

Pregnancy and maternity. Headway makes one overt reference to pregnancy on p. 38. An image shows a heavily pregnant woman, Hannah, looking expectantly at her male partner, Dan, as if waiting for him to impart information. In the text, Hannah expresses concerns about the effects of global warming on the world that their child is being born into, while Dan provides reassurances. Hannah is portrayed as emotional while Dan is her knowledgeable, capable protector. This section of the book reinforces the narrow view that pregnancy is something that happens to heterosexual women who, luckily for them, have a partner to look after them when they get emotional, as pregnant women are inclined to do. Imagery which could denote maternity—for example, a woman holding a baby—appears only once in Headway. The image, without related text, is also on p. 38 and forms a tiny part of a small photo of a group of people, perhaps climate refugees, walking in an empty desert.

In Outcomes, there are no images depicting pregnancy or maternity, suggesting rather bizarrely that this is not a subject of universal significance. An email on p. 150 of the book mentions that the writer and her fiancé are looking for “somewhere nice where we can start a family”, and the tasks in this section also include the words “pregnant” and “expecting”. However, all of this is part of a narrative in which pregnancy relates only to women, and only after their marriage to men.

Race. Headway contains an image of a black athlete on p. 68, performing a long-jump in an empty stadium. While the lack of an audience implies that no-one is interested in this athlete’s performance, the

large size of the image and the multiple shots of the athlete could be interpreted as a positive representation. However, an alternative interpretation is that the image promotes the stereotype that all black people are naturally good at sports. Disturbingly, the only apparent purpose of having this image on the page is to generate lexis relating to body parts; the image provides a visual, physical representation of a body, and nothing else. Reducing the athlete to nothing more than a physical specimen to be studied is dehumanising, and valuing a person only for their physicality could evoke connotations associated with slavery, particularly the transatlantic slave trade. In Headway, the ratio of clear photographic depictions of black African people to white Europeans is only 1:9. Furthermore, the average image size depicting black Africans is very small, with individuals mostly un-named and lacking related text. White characters account for 75% of the total photographic images of people in Headway.

Outcomes is more racially and ethnically diverse in its character representations than Headway, with white character images totalling just over 40%. There are similar problematic semiotics to those in Headway with regard to image size and anonymity, though not quite to the same extent. The 'culture notes' sections in the teacher's book provide limited but useful background information to help teachers understand some of the cultural norms and behaviours that the materials include. That said, some of these representations of diverse cultures are rather problematic. For example, pp. 118–119 contains an article about asylum-seekers arriving on Christmas Island in Australia. The inclusion of content that seemingly serves to highlight human rights issues and provide voices for people seeking refugee status can be regarded positively, but the messages on this page are somewhat confusing. On p. 118, an asylum-seeker called Hussain, one of a large group of young men who arrived by boat, is presented as a victim of persecution because he is a member of a minority ethnic group in Afghanistan, the country from which he fled. His story helpfully raises the issue of othering and the persecution of minorities. However, the focus of this narrative shifts from a story of racial persecution to one of materialistic entrepreneurship as he describes a successful business he has now started, implying that his main motivations for leaving Afghanistan were economic rather than humanitarian. The UK media often presents a confusing narrative on immigration by using the terms 'economic migrant' and 'illegal immigrant' interchangeably, and frequently omitting that the UK has long agreed to the obligations of the 1951 Refugee Convention (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR UK], 2021). The switch in narrative in the text adds to this confusion, and suggests that asylum seekers should be valued in economic rather than humanitarian terms. This makes these materials particularly problematic for use with students who are themselves asylum-seekers or refugees.

Religion or belief. No explicit mention is made of religion in either coursebook. In what is presented as a biography, Headway includes a text on Mother Theresa of Calcutta (p. 106) without mentioning that she was a Roman Catholic. This is particularly odd given the inclusion of lexical items such as "missionary", "God", and "convent", raising questions (but offering no guidance) as to how a practitioner might clarify such lexis without some kind of discussion of principles and practices of Christianity and Catholicism. The opportunity to discuss religion and belief is welcome, but there is an absence of structured tasks and guidance on how to exploit this content.

A similar omission of religion exists in Outcomes, where a text focuses on a Roman Catholic cardinal (p. 11), but makes no mention of his religion other than the use of the word "cardinal". Including religious figures while avoiding discussion of their particular religion seems to be as far as these coursebooks are prepared to go in their representations of religion or belief. Neither book invites students to discuss the role of religion or faith—or lack thereof—in their own lives.

Sex. While women are well represented in both coursebooks, little is done to challenge common stereotypes relating to gender roles. We have already discussed Headway's portrayal of a pregnant woman as emotional and reliant on her more knowledgeable male partner for reassurance. A further example of gender stereotyping in this book is a double-paged spread on pp. 50–51 in which three women from different countries describe their kitchens. They are all pictured smiling in their kitchen,

giving the impression that this is their domain, where they are happy. While the women live in different countries, none are helped by their husband, suggesting that the 'woman-as-homemaker' role is universal—the norm in every culture. Presenting women in this way could be used to stimulate wider discussion about gender roles, but there is nothing in the teacher's book to indicate that this is the intention.

A vocabulary activity on p. 47 of Outcomes mentions sex discrimination in the workplace and asks students to discuss whether discrimination is a problem in their countries. The inclusion of the topic of discrimination is positive but it forms a very small part of a single activity about rules in the workplace. While Outcomes has less overt stereotyping of the sexes, some of the semiotics, as with Headway, also imply a tendency towards patriarchal normativity. On pp. 36–37, for example, four pictures are used in a section entitled 'Hidden Talents'. Three of the pictures depict males performing martial arts in well-resourced conditions, while the fourth shows a group of women in what seems to be an empty room with no equipment. The tasks in this section are based around a listening text that features a woman who practices judo, but she is not pictured. In the listening text, it emerges that she prefers not to talk about her sporting achievements at work, and students are asked to speculate on why this is. The use of the images showing the segregation of the sexes, the women and girls practising sport in poorly-resourced conditions, and the listening text itself all suggest that women practising martial arts is not socially acceptable.

Sexual orientation. Neither coursebook makes any explicit mention of LGBTQIA+ identities, though there are some potentially ambiguous relationships that could be interpreted as non-heterosexual. Headway, for example, includes a female character called Sally on p. 69 who writes about her holiday in Peru, which she is spending with another woman. A picture shows the two women wrapped together in a blanket, physically close to each other. Nothing in the text or the teacher's book explicitly confirms that they are a couple, allowing scope for the practitioner and students to speculate on the nature of their relationship. However, the lack of guidance on how to develop a discussion on same-sex relationships out of these materials clearly does not facilitate such classwork.

In Outcomes, even ambiguous representations allowing opportunities for speculation are few and far between. A large double-spread image on pp. 104–105 presents a group of males, which could allow some speculative discussion about same-sex relationships. However, this opportunity is immediately removed with the use of the prompt "extended family", leading students to conclude that all the connections between the men are familial, not romantic.

Conclusion

Summary and Implications of Findings

The above findings suggest that, from a legislative perspective, the coursebooks' portrayals of protected characteristics are problematic, to say the least. Perhaps the most obvious issue is one of invisibility. A key requirement of the Equality Duty is to ensure positive representation of all people with protected characteristics within the curriculum, but our analysis revealed that there is no representation of trans or disabled people in either book, no mention of non-heterosexual relationships, and pregnancy and maternity are barely touched on. Both books contain multiple opportunities to address equalities issues, but they are routinely missed. For example, the inclusion of Ian Dury could potentially generate very interesting discussions about disability. Calvin Klein openly acknowledges that he has had relationships with both men and women, but Headway presents him as a heterosexual alpha male. Religious figures are represented in both books, but no mention is made of their actual religion. The failure to include meaningful content that mirrors multifaceted identities, particularly that of minority groups, gives the impression to any students (or practitioners) who belong to these groups that society does not recognise them. It also denies students the opportunity to learn useful language to express their own views on identities and lifestyles—and indeed to learn more about how these issues are perceived in the society

they are living in. For ESOL students who are now living in countries such as Scotland, this content is necessary to facilitate successful integration.

A further criticism is that these materials also include negative representations in relation to protected characteristics: pregnant women are emotional; old people are a burden; women belong in the kitchen and not the dojo; asylum-seekers are valued only for their economic potential; not wanting to get married means you must be 'crazy'. Confirming prejudicial stereotypes in this way is precisely the opposite of what the Equality Duty requires. It could be argued that Outcomes tries to create opportunities for such discussions by encouraging students to speculate beyond the images and texts. However, the Equality Duty requires education providers to actively promote positive relationships between people with diverse characteristics. Rather than leaving space for teachers and students to critique discriminatory worldviews, materials that genuinely comply with the Equality Duty should themselves explicitly challenge repressive normative values and present alternative positions. Furthermore, ambiguities and unanswered questions could potentially undermine the equalities agenda. There are no guidelines for practitioners on how to react if students raise equalities issues while engaging with ambiguous materials, leaving scope for negative, inaccurate or prejudicial views to flourish—or, at least, to go unchecked.

Given the above analysis and its implications for the ESOL classroom, it is our contention that, when viewed through the lens of the Equality Duty, and when the nine protected characteristics are used as an analytical framework, the content of global coursebooks is not just problematic, it is wholly unacceptable.

Reasons for Agenda Dismissal

In order to understand their apparent dismissal of the equalities agenda, it is worth returning to previous research to consider the motivations behind global coursebook production. ELT coursebook publication is a highly-competitive industry with an estimated turnover of around \$194 billion (Jordan & Gray, 2019), with success measured in terms of global sales. It is therefore worth reinforcing Gray's (2015) point that the drive for universal appeal in order to maximise profits creates a tendency to avoid content that might challenge the existing views of potential customers. This results in the presentation of a rather bland, sanitised worldview that avoids potentially 'problematic' content, in accordance with principles of McDonaldization (Littlejohn, 2012). When the priority is to maximise profit on a global scale, any other factors—including the representation of specific identities—are automatically de-prioritised, especially if their inclusion is likely to reduce market share.

This globalist, profit-oriented approach is not only prevalent in ELT coursebook publication, but also in the training of ESOL practitioners. A key selling point for many TESOL qualification providers is that they develop capacities to teach in any context, which effectively means training teachers to follow the narrow curriculum that global coursebooks provide. Littlejohn's concern about this phenomenon is that "by setting out what needs to be done, what should not be done is simultaneously dictated" (Littlejohn, 2012, p. 295). By failing to develop capacities to successfully address equalities and social justice issues in the classroom, TESOL training courses can give ESOL practitioners the impression that it is wrong to do so. This may explain the continued prevalence of global coursebooks despite their rather obvious limitations in addressing the equalities agenda, and also why ESOL providers in Scotland do not seem to regard tackling social justice as part of their remit (Brown, 2019).

Another factor leading to problematic representation is the ideological positioning of global coursebooks. The aspirational and materialistic ideals presented in the texts in Outcomes (p. 147) about how to become famous, for example, support Copley's (2018) claim that global coursebooks promote neoliberal ideology. Our findings also support Block and Gray's (2014) contention that the promotion of competitive entrepreneurialism comes at the expense of more community-oriented ideals: very different narratives could be used in depicting the people who formed a band, or the bus driver who tried to defuse a bomb.

Recommendations

Using the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 as an analytical framework allows this study to reveal just how damaging, from both a social and a legislative perspective, global coursebooks can potentially be. Where legislation requires educational institutions to address social inclusion and social justice issues, global coursebooks act as an obstacle to this agenda. Alternatives do exist, however, and we would encourage any ESOL providers with an interest in promoting social justice to source more appropriate materials to address this. Authentic materials, for example, offer useful alternatives to commercially-published materials, and can be selected for their contextual appropriateness (Ahmed, 2017). In Scotland, using materials that students engage with in their everyday lives allows providers to follow the Social Practice Model more effectively. There are also published materials that value social justice and seek to challenge oppressive values, such as the Raise Up! coursebook series (Raise Up for ELT, 2021), which eschews profit-orientation, relying on volunteer writers and donating all profits to charitable causes. More locally, Stella et al. (2018) have produced open-access ESOL materials that explore LGBTQIA+ identities among migrants living in Scotland.

In terms of further research, we acknowledge that our study is limited by its scope and its methodology; larger, quantitative studies may help to yield more wide-reaching data about the representation of the nine protected characteristics in global coursebooks. Further research into the role of social justice issues in TESOL training courses, and the CPD needs of ESOL practitioners, would also be helpful.

Finally, while we acknowledge pragmatic reasons why an ESOL provider may choose to use a global coursebook as its principal source of content—a ready-made structure, a sense of direction, a series of cohesive tasks presented in an attractive format—lack of inclusion, and the undermining of non-normative values through stereotyping or clumsy representations lead us to conclude that global coursebooks provide, at best, a poor resource for any ESOL provider that wishes to promote an equalities agenda.

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