



Research paper

Colonial acts in Norwegian EAL textbooks – Relations between coloniser and colonised

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses representations of colonial acts and the relationship between coloniser and colonised in EAL (English as an Additional Language) textbooks produced for grades 5–7 in Norwegian schools. Multimodal and critical discourse analyses are used to analyse the textbook series. We present five extracts from these textbooks that exemplify findings common to all the textbook series. Findings show that tokenism, exclusion and marginalisation are still common in textbooks. Implications for teachers are discussed, together with the need for them to gain greater critical awareness of teaching materials and to develop their own knowledge of colonialism, and its effects.

1. Introduction

Colonial acts and their effects socially, politically, and economically are of vital importance in understanding the modern-day histories, societies and perspectives of colonised peoples. Traditionally, textbooks used for the subject English as an Additional Language (EAL) in Norway focused the United Kingdom (UK), and on countries that were colonised by the British Empire, in particular North America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Other countries outside these four, have either been briefly mentioned or not included in EAL textbooks. Pupils have learned about the power relations between coloniser nations and colonised peoples through textbook portrayals, which often reflect the dominant discourses on colonisation in society of the time, and in which the perspective of the coloniser has often taken precedence. An understanding of the position of English as a world language requires knowledge of colonialism and its impact globally, and how it has formed the current lives and societies of colonised states and peoples. While the examples used in this article are from textbooks published for the Norwegian curriculum, the findings can have relevance for assessing textbooks used in other countries where topics relating to colonialism are taught.

By “colonial acts”, we mean the physical settling of one group of people from outside the country on the lands that are inhabited by another group of people. We focus on the interface between colonised

and coloniser, the effects of colonial acts on colonised peoples, and their representation in textbooks, either through explicit or implicit reference. Our article relates discussion to decolonisation in educational settings, and in particular how content can be included in textbooks to encourage pupils’ understanding of and engagement with issues arising from the colonial past, and to redress inequalities and historical power imbalances that are results of colonialism. In Norway, these discussions have particular significance due to the Norwegian state’s historical oppression of the Indigenous people of Norway, the Sámi people. Pupils are required in all subjects’ curricula to learn about historical injustices against the Sámi, about Sámi society, culture and identity, and about modern day political and social issues that affect the Sámi. The EAL curriculum requires pupils to learn about Indigenous peoples in other countries to increase awareness of similar issues in other countries.

In our project, we investigated textbooks for grades 5–7 (ages 11–13) produced to fulfil the requirements of the EAL curriculum in Norway (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019). English as an Additional Language (English is learnt as the primary non-native language for the majority of Norwegian pupils) is a compulsory subject for grades 1–10 in Norwegian schools, and by the age of 11–13, most pupils will be intermediate level learners. We have analysed the English Language textbooks produced by three major publishing houses, which dominate the market for school textbooks in Norway: Aschehoug’s *Quest* (Bade et al., 2022a,b), Cappelen Damm’s *Engelsk* (Solberg et al., 2020)

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and Gyldendahl's *Explore* (Edwards, Omland, Royer, & Solli, 2020a, 2020b–2022). Using an integrated multimodal and critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010; Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020; van Leeuwen, 2008), predefined categories were applied to textbook illustrations, texts and tasks to investigate the relations between coloniser and colonised.

This article presents the findings of our research by focusing on texts that exemplify major trends in the data collected. We have divided these into three sub-topics: colonial acts in contemporary settings, colonial acts in historical settings, and textbook representations of former colonies in the English-speaking world in a modern setting. Our article aims to answer the following research questions: firstly, how are colonial acts portrayed in textbooks; secondly, how are relations between coloniser or colonised depicted; and thirdly, what may be the implications for these findings for teachers' use of similar texts in the classroom?

1.1. Theoretical framework

Tuck and Yang define colonisation as “the expropriation of fragments of Indigenous worlds, animals, plants and human beings, extracting them in order to transport them to – and build the wealth, the privilege, or feed the appetites of – the colonisers, who get marked as the first world” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 4). With this expropriation came political, economic and cultural conquest and control of territories and peoples in other parts of the world, and colonial powers’ “perception of reality in which they saw themselves as superior” (Eriksen & Jore, 2023, p. 139). This perception creates “a form of relational experience wherein the ‘native’ is obliged to regard themselves as deviant, deficient and ‘other’ in their home country” (Poudel et al., 2022, p. 1), and can lead to native peoples devaluing their own cultural legacy in comparison to that of the coloniser (Poudel et al.).

In our study, we focus on how colonial acts and their effects on colonised people's histories, cultures, societies, and identities are represented in EAL textbooks. We have chosen to use the term *coloniser* to describe the nations that historically were colonial powers, and *colonised* to describe the peoples who were subjugated. While the colonial acts referred to in textbooks may lie in the past, relations between coloniser and colonised continue to form global societies and accepted knowledge today (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018), and are reflected in the structure of educational institutions and in what is taught in schools (Battiste, 2013).

Representations of colonial acts in the selected textbooks are assessed from a decolonial perspective. Decolonisation not only refers to the physical removal of colonial rule from colonised countries, as many of the countries mentioned in the textbooks have already gained independence, but also to the decolonisation of societies that have been affected by colonial systems, attitudes and cultures. Decolonisation requires an awareness of how colonial ideologies have shaped the educational curricula in colonized countries, and an openness to recognising “different and legitimate ways of knowing and doing that are not currently part of the educational process” (Battiste, 2013, p. 115), and that are part of the Indigenous or colonised peoples’ ways of knowing or ways of being. In doing this, “we will need to go beyond addressing how colonial patterns are kept in place at the level of knowing [...], and also look toward the level of being” (Eriksen & Stein, 2022, p. 226). This engagement with “being” can include considering identity, ways of knowing, and ways of finding meaning in the world. It also entails an awareness of colonial influences in education, that perspectives in educational materials can be from colonisers’ rather than the colonised people's perspective, and that alternative perspectives need to be included.

This inclusion fits the core values of the Norwegian national curriculum, stating that pupils’ “insight into our history and culture is important for developing the identities of pupils and their belonging in society” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). The curriculum in Norway is not aimed at decolonisation. However, references in the core curriculum to “diversity and variation”, “cultural

understanding” and “the indigenous people's perspective”, and in particular Sámi perspectives, (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2017) may indicate small steps in this direction.

2. Educational and textbook approaches in textbooks

In this article, we consider textbooks as “cultural artefacts; as repositories of meaning about languages, people, places and the world” (Weninger, 2018, p. 1). This wide spectrum of topics forms social practices and widely held beliefs and attitudes that can be related to colonisation through the recreation and reinforcement of the colonial relations as:

Societies’ dominant elites select the meanings and practices that textbooks represent as legitimate and truthful. This process of selection is guided by the social, economic and political interests of dominant groups and typically entails the exclusion of the knowledge and culture of marginalised social groups (Weninger, 2018, p. 2).

Earlier studies show that the dominant discourse in textbooks is that of the coloniser, and mention of colonial acts and the coloniser's role is minimised or excluded (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017; Eriksen, 2018; Murray, 2021; Olsen, 2017). This exclusion could be argued to be “sanctioned ignorance” (Spivak, 1999) by the state, implying that the omission of content produced by colonised individuals and groups from textbooks is not accidental, but rather a strategy of promoting a self-image whereby the nation-state is presented as infallible (Eriksen & Jore, 2023). Following this strategy, difficult events that are part of colonial history, such as Norwegian settlement on Sámi lands, are either removed from textbooks, downplayed, or portrayed as belonging to a historical time with little or no relation to the present (Gjerpe, 2021). This exclusionary or tokenistic approach to the teaching of colonial acts means that inequalities go unchallenged, and can help to conceal unfair power relations and structures. The dominant societies’ attitudes and majority positions then become normative in teaching (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020).

Central to Norwegian understandings of identity and self is the notion of “imagined sameness” (Åberg, 2022), an idea that all people in Norway are treated equally. The inclusion of material requiring engagement with colonial acts and coloniality can challenge the teacher's own worldview, and a wish to avoid confronting Norway's own colonial histories. In Åberg's study, Norwegian teachers express discomfort when talking about cultural difference and challenging these ideas of ‘sameness’, which can lead to avoidance of conversations about differing power relations and about colonial relations in the classroom. The exclusion can be linked to Meløe's “dead gaze” or “ignorant gaze” (Saus, 2006, authors' translations), where a teacher's own culturally contingent understanding of the world will affect how they represent this world within their classroom. If this understanding excludes or marginalises minorities, this is likely to be reflected in teaching materials and practices. Similarly, in textbooks, textbook authors will portray their own understanding of culture.

Previous studies also show that in textbooks, culture is presented as object-based and in descriptions that are largely factual (Lund, 2016; Murray, 2021). Cultural knowledge is portrayed as static, rather than being conceptualised as “a set of meanings and interpretive repertoires imbued with values” (Weninger, 2018, p. 3). In illustrations, one-sided representations of Indigenous peoples worldwide, generally in traditional costume, reduce cultures to specific, often exotic characteristics and focus on differences (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017; Eriksen, 2018; Mortensen-Buan, 2016). These portrayals often fit the “Heros and Holidays” approach, as described by Banks (1989), where inclusion is mainly reserved for certain days of the year and/or limited to the mention of famous people. Such content is selected from a mainstream perspective, chosen because it is well-known throughout society, rather than because it is of particular importance to the minority groups (Banks, 1989). As a consequence, the colonisers' perspectives and interests dominate in textbooks, and the colonised peoples' perspectives

and interests are minimised or ignored.

Historically, in textbooks in Norway, absence, meaning the complete exclusion of content concerning colonised peoples, and specifically the Sámi, was not uncommon (Olsen, 2017). Greater attention to diversity in curricula has led to the greater inclusion of materials concerning colonised peoples. However, these materials tend to be tokenistic, and without in-depth discussion of issues relating to societies or individuals (Eriksen, 2018; Lund, 2016; Murray, 2021). Tokenism can lead to individuals and cultures being reduced to stereotypes or essentialist portrayals based on a perception of group behaviours (Murray, 2022). In Norway, this can be seen as a tendency towards “textbook Sápmi” (Sápmi is the name of the land area where the Sámi people live. It stretches across parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia), where Sámi culture is presented as a single entity and internal differences are not mentioned (Gjerpe, 2021). These simplified portrayals can lead to the erasure of diversity and difference (Gjerpe, 2021), or a focus on difference over communality, creating:

Dichotomies between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’, the ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’, and the ‘same’ and the ‘other’. They can contribute to ethnocentrism [...], establish power imbalance, patronize the other, close doors to our environment, and hide and justify negative actions (Dervin, 2016, p. 11)

These portrayals can also cause the “othering” of minorities, and an “us” and “them” perspective (Olsen, 2017; Smith, 2021), which sets a group of people apart and excludes them from mainstream or majority society (Murray, 2022). This othering can reflect “the colonizers’ sense of superiority, their sense of mission as the world’s civilizers, depends on turning the Other into a barbarian” (Kelley, 2000). Exclusion can be shown in texts by the use of ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’, where ‘we’ is the dominant group in a society, while ‘they’ and ‘them’ are used to refer to minority groups (Smith, 2021). There lies a danger in this use, as “definitions of the Other which are produced by the West are so powerful that they obliterate any recognition of non-western realities” (Holliday, 2020, p. 44). In such situations in the classroom, educational materials which ignore minority pupils’ realities and identities can lead them to feel excluded and alienated from the ‘we’. One way of redressing this issue in textbooks is to give greater space to materials created by Indigenous and other colonised peoples. Olsen talks of an “indigenisation” of teaching materials, where “representations of indigenous peoples and issues to a bigger or smaller extent add an indigenous perspective, listen to indigenous peoples or even are written by indigenous authors” (Olsen, 2017, p. 72). By including such perspectives teaching materials can avoid stereotyping and essentialist portrayals, and rather “nurture Indigenous knowledge, dignity, identity, and integrity” (Battiste, 2013, p. 66).

3. Methodology and methods

3.1. Multimodal and critical discourse analysis

A multimodal and critical discourse analytical (CDA) stance is taken to textbook discourses related to Indigenous and other colonised peoples in the selected textbooks. A multimodal text employs a range of modal resources (visual, linguistic, spatial), all designed to inform, engage or sway a particular audience or target group. These modal resources contribute in different ways to giving meaning to a text, based on their affordances (Kress, 2010). In a multimodal representation, such as the textbook texts in our selection, the verbal text typically does the job of describing an event, while visuals show or illustrate the same event. Textbook authors can choose freely between semiotic resources in their text creation, yet they often draw on conventional ways of representing people and events through words and pictures (e.g., Habegger-Conti & Brown, 2017), and in ways that sustain certain viewpoints or discourse positions. As previously discussed, Indigenous or minority content in textbooks is traditionally selected and defined from a mainstream or

majority perspective. This bias can be reflected in multimodal texts, as semiotic resources work as “motivated signs” that “have arisen out of the interests of social groups who interact within the structures of power that define social life, and also interact across systems produced by various groups within a society” (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2020, p. 149).

CDA contains a “political concern with the workings of ideology and power in society; and a specific interest in the way language contributes to, perpetuates and reveals these workings” (Breeze, 2011, p. 495). Central to this concern is the idea that an imbalance exists between social actors in terms of the agency they are afforded and that discourses can contribute to both maintaining and changing this imbalance. CDA also aims to expose what assumed knowledge in societies consists of and recognises practices that are “to a greater or lesser extent ‘naturalised’, and hence be seen to be commonsensical and based in the nature of things or people, rather than in the interests of classes or other groupings” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 37). Naturalised discourses in society on colonisation and decolonisation affect educational systems, curricula content and classroom practices (Gee, 2014). As mentioned previously, studies of textbooks reveal discourses that reinforce historical inequalities. While the physicality of the colonial acts referenced in the textbooks is in many cases historical, these discourses remain until the present day, and the power relation “is predominantly exercised through the generation of consent rather than through coercion, through ideology rather than through physical force” (Fairclough, 2010, p. 531).

4. Method

4.1. Selection of materials

The material for analysis includes chapters from the most recent EAL textbook series produced by the three major publication houses in Norway and used in most Norwegian schools: *Quest* 5, 6 and 7 (Bade et al., 2022a,b), *Engelsk* 5, 6 and 7 (Solberg et al., 2020), and *Explore* 5, 6 and 7 (Edwards et al., 2020a,b, 2020b–2022). Each textbook contains chapters covering a range of genres and text types. For instance, factual texts feature fact sheets, and collages contain iconic representations of cultural artefacts, such as in a collage about the UK in *Explore* 5, which features the Underground sign, Big Ben and a cup of tea (Edwards, Omland, Royer, & Solli, 2020, p. 154). The chapters also include personal narratives, interviews with teenagers across the English-speaking world, and literary texts such as poems, rhymes, legends and novel excerpts. Therefore, our material encompasses both texts that were not originally intended for educational purposes, and material adapted or written specifically for an English-learning context.

The three textbook series’ distribution of topics related to countries in the English-speaking world follows a familiar pattern. Traditionally, topics in EAL teaching in Norway have focused mostly on the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States of America (USA). Although the curriculum now refers to the “English-speaking world” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2019), rather than specific countries, textbooks still tend towards this traditional approach. The grade 5 textbooks mostly provide content and contexts from the UK. The grade 6 textbooks focus on the USA, and the grade 7 textbooks feature texts about the English-speaking world outside the UK and the USA, and focus on contemporary and global issues, such as young peoples’ engagement with environmental challenges or endangered species.

The textbook texts we have chosen for our analysis include texts that explicitly or implicitly treat events and issues that touch upon colonial acts and the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised. The examples from our analysis presented illustrate typical features found across our material. This means that some textbooks and series are not represented in our analysis, although the features that are discussed are also to be found in these textbooks to a greater or lesser degree.

The text selection is divided into three overall topics that relate to acts of colonisation and the interaction between the coloniser and the colonised.

1. Colonial acts in contemporary settings
2. Colonial acts in historical settings
3. Textbook representations of former colonies in the English-speaking world in a modern setting

With a few exceptions, this organisation of the text material mirrors the distribution of topics across grades in the textbook series. Topic 1 deals with texts in contemporary British or American settings and includes elements that can be related explicitly or implicitly to colonial acts. The *Engelsk 5* text “A visit to the British Museum” (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020 a,b, p. 92–97), for example, features children in the British museum observing and discussing the museum’s collection of historical objects and how they were obtained. Topic 2 includes texts related to the act of taking land, and the exploration and settlement of colonies in the British Empire, including European immigration to the USA. Topic 3 covers texts about contemporary conditions in former colonies in the English-speaking world, with or without specific references to their colonial past. Our examples relate to both settler colonialism (e.g. Ireland, Jamaica and Australia) and non-settler colonialism (e.g. the Elgin marbles in the British Museum). Our examples are largely from the former category as this is most common in the textbook texts we have analysed.

5. Method of analysis

Grouping textbook texts by topics constituted the introductory phase of the analysis. This process meant placing each textbook text in the context of its series, while also comparing the content of a given series with the overall material. Juxtaposing the textbook content from all three series revealed similarities and differences between their representations of the same or similar topics. Content or perspectives that are included in one textbook series are sometimes deemphasised in or excluded from another. This relatively broad scope of textbook representations thus offered a first impression of how each text contributes to sustaining or challenging established discourses about colonial acts and relationships between the coloniser and the colonised.

5.1. Analytical framework

With the above perspectives in mind, we applied a more refined analytical framework, integrating analytical categories from multimodal theory and CDA (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010, van Leeuwen, 2008; Kress, 2010) with the investigation of the selected material. Our aim was to explore the power structures and discourses embedded in these textual narratives. More specifically, our analysis considered how the different semiotic resources in verbal texts and images were employed in the representations of colonialism with regard to the *role*, *position*, and *agency of social actors*. Social actors in texts, such as the people inhabiting the English textbook pages, may be “activated” as agents in charge of processes and actions, or “passivated” and placed “at the receiving end” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 33) of actions taken by others. They may be positioned as “foregrounded” or “backgrounded”, or “excluded” in texts (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 52). Social actors, van Leeuwen (2008) explains, can be represented generically as members of a class or group, or as a “specific identifiable individual” (p. 35) or “personalised individuals”, or as “impersonalised” associated with, for instance, “a place or a thing” (p. 46). While social actors may be downplayed or avoided in texts, for instance through nominalisations or passives, their role may still be implicitly understood or inferred from a given discourse context (Fairclough, 1992).

In this way, we investigated verbal and visual elements, such as words or embodied features that empowered or disempowered social actors in relation to colonial acts, or foregrounded or backgrounded their actions or experiences. For example, a mention of colonial acts that solely includes the perspective of the coloniser without reference to the colonised, or that discusses the present without touching upon crucial

information from the past, may indicate the viewpoint from which the text content was chosen, and which content is deemed important or less important, or not worth mentioning at all. Thus, tensions may exist with regard to the agency allocated to the social actors, and between content that is emphasised and content that is deemphasised in the textbook texts.

6. Results

This section presents a detailed analysis of five examples from two of the textbook series, *Quest* (Bade et al., 2022a,b) and *Engelsk* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020–2022), which illustrate colonial acts related to the three overriding textbook topics, while applying the categories from the analytical framework. As indicated above, the examples are chosen for clearly exemplifying trends found in all textbook series.

1. Textbook representation of colonial acts in a contemporary setting

We have chosen two texts on the same theme to illustrate how colonial acts are presented in a contemporary setting. The texts, from two different grade 5 textbooks, cover the theme of visiting the British Museum and the artefacts found there. Both are set in contemporary times and include a dialogue between visitors.

Example one “A Visit to the British Museum” (Engelsk 5)

“A Visit to the British Museum” (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020 a,b, pp.92-97) covers three double spreads, with a visual representation and written text side by side. In this text, four pupils are being shown the Elgin Marbles. A “Talk and Tell” box follows on the last page, with questions for discussion and reflection. Visual elements to the left on each page are drawings depicting the pupils, and their teacher, Mr. Wilkinson, as they are introduced to the museum’s exhibition of the ancient Greek sculptures. Written texts, to the right, present a conversation between the participants, with pupils asking questions and the teacher and museum curator answering them.

After discussion of the age, craftsmanship and how they got to England, one pupil comments “England cannot steal objects from other countries! That’s illegal!”. Another pupil replies, “Look around! These sculptures are not the only things stolen!”. The teacher then moves the conversation along, but the text includes a final paragraph saying that Kathryn (one of the pupils), “is on her way, looking for the museum director. She will ask him to return the Elgin Marbles back where they belong”.

There are two references in the text to the verb “to steal”; one in which England, a colonial power, is the subject of the verb. This is also clearly linked to the idea of this being “illegal”, as this is mentioned in the following sentence. The items are to be sent back “where they belong”, making clear that they do not belong with the coloniser nation. The choice of these words encourages the reader to relate the actions to ideas of thieves and victims of robbery, although these aspects are not made explicit and must thus be inferred from the specific discourse context (Fairclough, 1992).

Similarly, the pupil’s response, “Look around! These sculptures are not the only things ...” makes implicit reference to other items in the museum that have been taken, among which are many items from colonised peoples. The text is followed up by questions, of which the final question is, “Why do you think there are so many things from around the world in the British Museum?”, inviting discussion of colonial acts. While there is no direct reference to colonised peoples and the effects of colonialism, this chapter makes implicit reference to them and to ethical questions regarding the collections in the British Museum. However, content is limited in the text and understanding the references made in the text requires a certain amount of previous knowledge about the British Museum, and about how the collections were obtained and the discussion on returning the objects. It is noteworthy that the authors have chosen one of the most famous and controversial items in the British Museum’s collection to focus on in this text.

In the accompanying drawing of the pupils and their teacher, pupils are depicted with different skin tones, indicating that some of them may be first- or later generation immigrants from former British colonies. In this way, the visual representation of the pupils, strengthens the implicit reference to former British colonies and colonial acts in the written text. In this text, the pupils are positioned as active agents, allowing them to question the presence of valuable items from other countries in the British Museum. The pupils' agency is mirrored in the visual representation through the pupils' embodied features, their self-assured posture, chins lifted, and active gesturing. Considering the illustration and the text together, visual and verbal elements interact to enable and model critical scrutiny of the text's topic on the part of young readers and their teacher.

6.1. Example two - "A visit to the museum" (Quest 5)

In another textbook, *Quest 5* (Bade et al., 2020) the chapter "Hidden Treasures" includes a subchapter about the British Museum (p.156). It starts with fact boxes, presenting three items in the museum, the Ramses II statue, the Lewis Chessmen, and the Sutton Hoo helmet. The fact boxes about these items contain questions and answers, giving information about what they are, what they are made of, what they are used for and how old they are. There is also a question about where they come from, but apart from a one-word answer naming the country, there is no further reference to why items from other countries could have ended up in the British Museum. Discussion questions ask pupils to find information from the fact boxes and finally ask "Where do you have to go to visit the British Museum?". There is no further discussion of the museum, or why it is where it is, what is inside it and how the items came to be there. In comparison to the text from the *Engelsk 5* textbook, it is also noteworthy that of the items chosen for inclusion, two are uncontroversial, as they are from the UK, and the Egyptian item is not mentioned further. More famous and controversial items linked to colonial acts in the museum's collection have not been chosen.

The text following this introduction is a dialogue, "A Visit to the Museum", between two people talking about one of the items, the Lewis Chessmen, which are of Norwegian origin, but were found in Scotland. Both participants in the dialogue have female names, but no reference is made to their ethnicity in either the text or in the illustrations. Nor are the visitors led to question any of the items in the collection, thus positioning them as passive recipients of information. The only illustration in connection with the text is a photograph of the Lewis Chessmen. The dialogue about the chessmen, after mentioning that they were made in Norway, steers away from the origin of the items to discuss their age, what the pieces are made of and their link to the Harry Potter films. A related task asks pupils to act out the dialogue. The rest of the text moves on to an account of the excavation of the Sutton Hoo ship and a task encouraging pupils to create a dialogue to act out the discovery of the ship.

Juxtaposing the two textbooks' representations of a visit to the British Museum makes the differences in the two textbooks' choices highly visible. While the *Engelsk 5* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020 a,b) text represents young visitors as active agents empowered to interrogate the "naturalised discourse" (Fairclough, 2010) and the justification for the British Museum's collection, *Quest 5* presents the content from a conventional textbook position of "knowledge authority" (Ørevik, 2019, p. 229) that teachers and pupils may not think to question. This is problematic, as the controversial aspect of the British Museum and its links to colonialism and colonial acts are not mentioned at all in the *Quest* version. Therefore, engagement with important discourses may be overlooked or ignored in the classroom.

2. Textbook representations of colonial acts in historical settings

For this topic, we have chosen two extracts to exemplify the findings of our analysis. Both refer to colonial acts in historical settings, and how

the coloniser and the colonised are represented in these texts.

6.2. Example three - "Leaving Home" (Engelsk 6)

The first extract is from *Engelsk 6* (Solberg & Unnerud, 2020 a,b) and the chapter entitled "Crossing Borders", which includes a subchapter called "Leaving Home" (pp. 128–131), featuring a paragraph called "Exploring New Worlds":

Did you play explorer when you were small? Perhaps you travelled to new worlds on board an imaginary ship. Leif Erikson, Roald Amundsen, Gertrude Bell, James Cook and Christopher Columbus were all explorers. They lived in different times, but they were curious about new lands and new cultures. They left one world to discover a new one. And into new cultures they brought their language, beliefs, and ways of living. The locals weren't always so happy about that. (p.130)

This paragraph sets the tone from the start by addressing the pupil directly, asking "Did you play explorer when you were small?" and mentioning an "imaginary ship", suggestive of playing make-believe and of adventure. While such an approach can encourage young pupils' engagement with the topic, it also steers the text away from more serious and difficult aspects of colonisation and colonial acts. Several famous explorers are also mentioned; Leif Erikson, Roald Amundsen, Gertrude Bell, James Cook and Christopher Columbus. All of them were from Western, coloniser nations and are foregrounded in the text and given agency in their actions.

In this paragraph, colonisation is addressed briefly, but economic and political motives for exploratory travel and colonisation are not mentioned. The motivation is solely described as being "curious about new lands and cultures". The text continues, "They left one world to discover a new one. And into new cultures they brought their language, beliefs and ways of living. The locals weren't always so happy about that." These closing sentences gloss over the effects of colonisation. The use of the verb "discover" again shows the European perspective of this text, as they were discoveries only for the coloniser nations, and not for the native populations. There is no discussion of what it meant to bring European languages, beliefs, and ways of living "into new cultures", glossing over and avoiding mention of the practices of colonisation. The final sentence, mentioning "the locals" does not specify who they were, that they were native to the area, or that the Europeans were on their territory. While the Western colonisers are foregrounded as brave, personalised adventurers, mentioned by name and given agency, members of the colonised, the "locals", are represented as impersonalised, passivated and at the mercy of the Europeans' actions. In addition, to say that they "weren't always so happy" trivialises the experience of colonised peoples and ignores extensive acts of resistance to colonial powers. The use of "weren't always" also suggests that sometimes they were happy with being colonised, ignoring and disagreeing with the widely lived experiences of colonised people.

With regard to the illustrations attached to this paragraph, one shows an English explorer in expensive hiking gear, planting a British flag on top of a snowy peak. The explorer is shown to be happy, waving at the reader. Alongside this is a historical photo showing representatives of the British Empire meeting an Arab ruler in the early 1900s. In this photo, social actors are smiling and the meeting between cultures is portrayed as a joyful event. On the page opposite is a drawn illustration of an anonymous group of people, looking sad and worn out, many of whom with little clothing, and skinny bodies bent over in pain or tiredness in a barren landscape. The people in this group have a skin tone darker than the English people in the other illustrations. The dark skin tone and the size of the sun suggest that they are not from European countries. The latter group are cast generically through the employment of several embodied features — posture, skin colour and body shape. The juxtaposition of the above depictions shows that the English are portrayed in a stronger and more positive light than people from the

unnamed country. Inequality is very visible in these representations, with the colonisers being promoted as “the active, dynamic forces in an activity”, while the colonised are depicted as, passive, impersonalised social actors lacking in agency, and merely “undergoing” (van Leeuwen, p. 33) or suffering the actions of others.

6.3. Example four – “Captain Blood and the crown jewels” (Quest 5)

In Quest 5 (Bade et al., 2020), in the “Hidden Treasures” chapter, there is a story called “Captain Blood and the Crown Jewels” (pp. 162–167). This story is about an attempt by an Irish man to steal the crown jewels. Accompanying illustrations show two groups of social actors, Irish and English. Captain Blood is portrayed as plotting with his accomplices, and in various situations related to the story. He has red hair and small eyes, and never makes eye contact with the reader. The fact that his hat covers one eye in two of the three illustrations and his angry facial expression suggest that he is not to be trusted and is probably involved in criminal acts. By comparison, the English Beefeater has an open expression, and is short and round with a white beard and a kindly look. Both eyes are shown and are large and round. While all social actors in this story are given agency, the portrayal of the Beefeater, with his gaze directly addressing the viewer, makes it clear where the reader’s sympathies are expected to lie.

The impression given by the visual representation is reinforced by words used in relation to the characters. Captain Blood and his plan are referred to in terms such as “wicked”, “yelled”, “smirk” and “bad mood”. Questions about the text after the first part of the story ask pupils about Captain Blood and his accomplices, “Do they seem like nice people?”. As no positive terms have been used about them so far, it seems likely that this question will reinforce the negative image of these characters. Captain Blood’s motivation for stealing the crown jewels is mentioned briefly: “Why do you hate him so much, dad?” asked Holcroft. “He took away my land in Ireland, I lost everything!” yelled Blood. Yet, none of the tasks for this text ask the pupils to consider the right of an English King to take land in a different country and his motivation for doing so, nor are the methods used by the English for the colonisation of Ireland mentioned. There is no discussion in the text or in the tasks of why Blood might be (justifiably) angry about this.

The robbery is not a success, although the story ends by telling readers that the “King gave him a big piece of land in Ireland, like the one he lost”. Again, there is no discussion of why an English King was in a position to be giving away pieces of land in Ireland, nor is there any thought for the people whose land he is giving away. The use of the word “lost” suggests that it was an action by Blood himself that meant he no longer possessed his previous land, while earlier he says that the King took it away from him. The text tells us that after the robbery, Blood is “free and rich”, both of which are positively loaded adjectives. However, he still has not regained his land, and his success is dependent on a whim of the King, as the text tells us “Nobody knows why” he was given the land. There is an implicit understanding in this text that the Irish Captain Blood is dependent on the decisions and bounty of an English King. The King is clearly placed in a position of greater power and agency than Captain Blood. This relationship between coloniser and colonised is not explored or challenged in any way in this text. Pupils are left with an impression of the relationship between Irish and English in which one side is portrayed in a far better light than the other, without any insight into the complexities of this relationship. Thus, tension is created between what is present or promoted in the text and the content that is absent or subdued (Fairclough, 2003).

We have chosen a longer chapter to exemplify our findings about how former colonies are portrayed in textbooks with reference to their colonial histories, and how colonialism has affected their present-day peoples and societies.

6.4. Example five – “English-Speaking Countries” (Quest 7)

This extract from Quest 7 (Bade et al., 2020), from the chapter entitled “English-speaking countries” (pp. 37–97) opens with a double-spread map identifying four countries: Jamaica, South Africa, India and Australia, and the perspectives that will be considered in relation to these former colonies. Readers are told that they will “learn about English-speaking countries from four different continents” and “read, talk and write about animals, people and cultures that are typical for these countries” and also “compare their way of life” to their own. Before zooming in on each individual country, the author explains that these countries “were once part of the British Empire” and that due to their colonial past, they are all English-speaking. Each country has a fact box listing the capital city, population size, different languages spoken in each country, including English, and currency. The presentations of the four countries then follow the order given in the introduction and include short texts introducing young people from the countries. The chapter also includes texts on different countries’ heroes in sports, music and politics, including Jamaican runners Usain Bolt and Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, Pakistani 2014 Nobel peace prize-winner Malala You-safzai, Australian hip-hop artist, Baker Boy and South African President Nelson Mandela.

Considering two of the subchapters in more detail, about Australia and another about Jamaica, they differ noticeably in their focus. In the chapter’s account of Australia, there are explicit references to colonial acts and the interactions between coloniser and the colonised. The subchapter “The First Australians” includes a short paragraph on European colonisation of Australia.

7. Europeans arrive

The Aboriginal people were treated badly by the settlers from abroad. Many were killed or died from new diseases. Until 1969 the Australian government took Aboriginal children away from their families and placed them in white families. In 2008 the Australian government apologized for its past treatment of the First Nations people. (p.50)

While colonisation is alluded to, its effects are downplayed, as words like “arrive” and “treated badly” trivialise the Aboriginal experience. In the following sentence, the passive, “agentless” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 179) construction “Many were killed or died ...”, avoids the naming of an active subject, skimming over the details and downplaying the Europeans’ role in colonisation. The final two sentences in this extract do, however, include direct mention of one of the atrocities carried out by the Australian state against Aboriginal people, namely the removal of Aboriginal children, although the effect of this policy is not mentioned. Secondly, the apology, which was an important event in Australian history, is mentioned briefly. Accompanying this text is a photo of a young man playing the didgeridoo, depicting an Aboriginal traditional practice in a contemporary setting. One of the questions after the text asks pupils “What do you think about what happened to the Aboriginal people when the settlers came?” While it is questionable that the pupils will have enough information from this one brief paragraph to answer this question in any meaningful way, it does invite some classroom discussion of the colonial act and responses to it.

The subchapter about Jamaica opens with a map of the island in bright colours, repeated in representations of Rasta musicians, athletes, and the plentiful, abundant natural surroundings: fruits, seafood and sun. Below the map, there is a quote from Marcus Garvey, described in the text as “journalist, political activist and public speaker from Jamaica” saying: “A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots” (p. 76). The juxtaposition of the visual representation, the map and the verbal text contrast the happy, optimistic present with the country’s past and need for political activism. On the following page, the reader encounters two teenagers,

face to face. They are dressed in contemporary outfits and have trendy hairstyles. They dream of a future in sports or music, with reference to two Olympic medallists in track and field: Shelley-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Usain Bolt, and Jamaican musician: Bob Marley. The last part of the subchapter focuses on music and sport.

Both visual and written representations allocate agency to contemporary young teenagers, while other “potentially relevant voices” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 47), past and present, are, if not silenced, then subdued. There are remarkably few references to the colonial acts that shaped Jamaican history, and the people who experienced them. The only references are found in the quotation from Garvey, a mention of “The Africa Drum” in a paragraph on music; and the mention of the Rastafari way of life and religion in an account of Bob Marley. Garvey himself is referred to as a political activist, but there is no mention of the nature of his activism. One of the questions for this text asks, “Why is it important to know about the past, where we come from and our cultures?”. This is a relevant and interesting question, but it is at odds with the content of this subchapter, which does not inform about Jamaica’s past, making it hard, if not impossible, for pupils to answer this question with reference to Jamaica.

8. Discussion

This section discusses the findings emerging from the analysis of three textbook series for the EAL subject, grades 5–7, with respect to the series’ representations of colonial acts and the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised. The discussion attends to key characteristics of the textbooks’ portrayals of 1) colonial acts in both a contemporary and historical setting; 2) the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised; and 3) portrayals of the colonised. Lastly, we discuss possible implications of these findings for teachers’ use of similar texts in the classroom.

8.1. The portrayal of colonial acts in textbooks

In textbooks, portrayals of colonial acts in both contemporary and historical settings tend to be marginalised, albeit to varying degrees. In our analysis, we have considered texts that refer to the effects of colonial acts, socially, politically, and economically. Included in these are institutional acts, such as those exemplified by the text excerpts about the British Museum. In textbook material that aims to introduce pupils to this institution, it would seem both relevant and necessary to include some information about the colonial practices involved in the accumulation of valuable objects. Yet, in the second example, from *Quest 5*, the authors avoid all mention of the colonial nature of the British Museum. This contrasts with *Example one*, from *Engelsk 5*, which is about the same topic and is aimed at the same age group, but which addresses some problematic aspects of the museum’s colonial history. In addition, the visual representation of the young museum visitors signals their diverse backgrounds and active, critical engagement, and thereby underscores the verbal text’s critical attention to the British Museum’s collection of valuables from all over the world. However, while *Example one* draws attention to the problematic aspects of the British Museum, these aspects are not discussed widely within the scope of this text. Colonisation is referred to implicitly, but never explicitly. As it is, the references are tokenistic and the colonial aspect is marginalised, even in *Example one*.

This marginalisation has been shown as a common feature of texts in our analysis. An example of colonial acts in a historical setting, “Captain Blood”, includes two sentences referring to the English colonisation of Ireland. However, there is no further discussion of this point, its historical background and the effects of this colonial act on the Irish, thus marginalising the colonial experience. This text reflects examples of how the historical and present-day effects of colonialism can be downplayed or excluded (Gjerpe, 2021). Addressing problematic aspects of this text is left in the hands of the teacher, the teacher’s own knowledge and interest in the topic, and the level of discomfort they are willing to

accept in the discussion of these topics (Åberg, 2022). This discomfort can be connected to a lack of desire to face Norway’s own colonial past. A teacher’s own understanding of the world can affect how they represent the world within their classroom (Saus, 2006). If this understanding excludes or marginalises colonised peoples, then this is likely to be reflected in classroom materials.

8.2. The relationship between coloniser and colonised

Representations of colonial acts in textbooks include both the coloniser and the colonised, and the relationship between them. This relationship can portray inequalities which favour one side over the other and trivialise the colonial act. This is exemplified in the text excerpt “Leaving Home”, in the choice of words used to describe colonisation, such as being “curious” as a motivation for “exploring new lands and cultures” and the locals “not being happy” about being colonised. These words and expressions not only depreciate the colonial acts; they also sanitise and avoid engagement with and understanding of the nature of these acts. These expressions used in textbooks can be seen as a form of “sanctioned ignorance” (Spivak, 1999), and a determination to avoid mention of the colonisation is also traceable. In the discussion of Australia in “English-Speaking Countries”, the subjugation of the inhabitants by the colonisers is reduced to being “treated badly by the settlers”. “Badly” does not cover the scope of how they were treated, and “settlers” is chosen here, rather than “colonisers”, as settlers is a milder word. This text also avoids mentioning the colonisers’ role in the colonial act by saying “many were killed” (the use of the passive voice avoids mention of who did the killing). This reduction of the power of the colonial acts leads to a portrayal of colonisation that favours the colonisers’ perspectives, promoting them in a positive light and as “infallible” (Eriksen & Jore, 2023), while also depreciating the effects of colonisation on the colonised people’s attitudes to their own cultures and languages (Poudel et al., 2022).

This imbalance in portrayals of coloniser and colonised is found in numerous texts in our study. The colonisers are given more agency and are shown in a more powerful position, and their perspectives dominate, marginalising those of the colonised (Weninger, 2018). The coloniser is given agency, depicted as a successful individual (a climber at the top of a mountain), while the colonised are nameless people in a barren desert. They are associated with a place and natural environment, rather than a specific country, and thus “symbolically removed from the reader’s world of immediate experience” (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 36). In the photographic illustrations for this text, there is no negative aspect of colonisation shown. The text about Captain Blood also exemplifies this imbalance. The sympathies of the reader are biased towards the English side, by using negatively loaded words to describe the Irish and in the drawings in which the English Beefeater is portrayed as friendlier and more open than the Irish Captain Blood. These imbalances in the portrayals can dehumanise the colonised, as readers can relate more clearly to the figures who are shown with agency and individuality, and who are portrayed sympathetically in text and illustrations. The lack of individuality and agency in the portrayals can encourage or reinforce ethnocentric views in teachers and pupils, hiding negative actions and reinforcing power imbalances (Derwin, 2016).

8.3. Portrayals of the colonised

Earlier research has found that portrayals of the colonised in textbooks tend towards the reproduction of stereotypes, essentialist and static understandings of culture, and a choice of topics based on the majority society’s perspective on minority culture and interests (Banks, 1989). Our findings show that colonised peoples are included to a greater extent than in previous textbooks, such as in the subchapter about Jamaica, which mentions a variety of young Jamaicans, both male and female, who have contributed to different fields. Marcus Garvey, an important person for Jamaican history, is also quoted in this text. In the

first text on the British Museum, the pupils in the illustrations are from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

However, while this inclusion denotes a positive step in the direction of more content including colonised peoples, once again we see that the representations are tokenistic in form. Illustrations show people from different ethnic backgrounds and with different skin colours, without referencing where they are from, presenting them as a generic ethnic “other” (Murray, 2021). In collages and other illustrations, people are depersonalised and lacking in agency. These illustrations reduce colonised peoples to a few essentialist characteristics, largely based on skin colour and clothing, similar to the findings in earlier textbook studies (Brown & Habegger-Conti, 2017; Lund, 2016).

From a decolonised perspective and to fulfil the requirements of the Norwegian curriculum to include “diversity and variation”, “cultural understanding” and “indigenous perspectives”, space in textbooks should be given to colonised peoples’ ways of “being”, including identity, culture and knowledge (Battiste, 2013; Eriksen & Stein, 2022). As well as inclusion of colonised peoples’ perspectives, diversity and agency in the representations of colonised peoples should also be included (Dervin, 2016). We see some attempts at an “indigenisation” (Olsen, 2017) of teaching materials, with the inclusion of quotations, texts and content created by or about native peoples. However, this is of uneven quality across the textbooks. The viewpoints depicted in the textbooks are still mostly majority perspectives and questions do not encourage pupils’ further engagement with topics referring to colonisation or encourage them to consider Indigenous perspectives. Banks’ “Heros and Holidays” approach still applies (Banks, 1989), although there appears to be some movement away from this, with the inclusion of more references to people and events that are relevant for colonised peoples.

8.4. The implications of these findings for teachers’ use of similar texts in the classroom

Tokenism and minimalistic representations in textbooks mean that teachers may need to create teaching materials additional to the textbooks. How successfully the teacher does this will depend on their knowledge and background. Teachers need to be aware of how Eurocentric and settler ideologies have shaped the curricula and teaching materials created (Battiste, 2013), which in turn requires them to challenge their own understanding of identity and imagined sameness that have dominated in Norwegian society (Åberg, 2022). If the teacher’s approach is with Meløe’s “dead gaze” (Saus, 2006), there is a risk of no further discussion of the topic in the classroom. Even with the “ignorant gaze”, while learning more about the topic, pupils are unlikely to experience discussion that encourages them to challenge assumptions and majority positions (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020).

Teachers need training in critical awareness of textbook materials, so that they are able to recognise lack in depth and imbalances in representations. It is important for teachers to understand that textbooks are “not neutral vehicles for teaching language but ideologically shaped curriculum artefacts” (Weninger, 2018). Our findings also suggest that a critical gaze is required when teachers consider the teaching materials they use. Teachers should develop this gaze, which in turn can have implications for teacher educators. By equipping teachers with the pedagogical tools needed to be able to engage critically with textbooks, and to be able to assess representations of native peoples and representations of the power relations between coloniser and colonised peoples, they can promote real understanding and engagement in their pupils (Murray, 2023).

9. Conclusions

This study has considered how colonial acts are portrayed in EAL textbooks for grades 5–7 in Norwegian schools. Findings from across the three textbook series show that content concerning colonial acts is

largely excluded or minimised. Tokenism is widespread, meaning that references to colonial acts are superficial and skim over the effects on colonised peoples. Imbalances in power relations are reinforced or recreated through texts that give greater agency to the colonisers than to the coloniser. Textbooks still tend to focus on a limited number of colonised countries and marginalise or exclude colonial experiences in other English-speaking countries, for example, experiences of colonisation across the continent of Africa outside of South Africa are rarely if ever mentioned in textbooks. This trivialisation of colonisation includes a lack of discussion of settler and non-settler colonialism and how these approaches have affected native peoples in different ways.

These inequalities and lacking content concerning colonial acts in textbooks put the onus on teachers to approach teaching materials with a critical eye, redress inequalities in portrayals and add meaningful content to that found in the textbooks. This in turn needs to be addressed in teacher education.

While the findings in this article discuss tendencies found in Norwegian textbooks, colonial acts and their effects are part of global history and are included in curricula worldwide. The focus of this article is limited to textbooks used in the EAL subject. Further research could analyse how textbooks used in other subjects include colonial acts, to create a complete picture of what pupils are learning across the curriculum. The findings of this article and of future projects may be used as a basis for comparison and for further exploration of textbook representations of colonisation in textbooks in other countries, and to raise awareness among teachers regarding potential weaknesses in teaching materials.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Helen Margaret Murray: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Anja Synnøve Bakken:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

Neither of the two authors have any conflict of interest, including any financial, personal or other relationships with other people or organizations within three years of beginning the submitted work that could inappropriately influence, or be perceived to influence, their work.

Both authors have materially participated in the research and article preparation. Both authors have approved the final article.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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