



Castledown

 OPEN ACCESS

# Intercultural Communication Education

ISSN 2209-1041

<https://www.castledown.com/journals/ice/>

*Intercultural Communication Education*, 8(1), 2313 (2025)

<https://doi.org/10.29140/ice.v8n1.2313>

## The Intercultural Potential of Language Activities: Investigating the Implementation of Intercultural Learning in Three Austrian EFL Textbooks



JASMIN PESKOLLER

*University of Innsbruck*

In the context of globalisation, classrooms have become meeting places for learners from an increasing variety of backgrounds. Intercultural education, anchored in many national curricula, is considered a key approach to doing justice to this growing plurality among students. In relation to fostering learners' intercultural (communicative) competence, language education plays a particularly important role. As textbooks determine much of the current teaching practice, it is vital to examine what kind of intercultural student engagement they can promote. While existing research has largely focused on cultural representations, less is known about how language activities support intercultural learning. This paper reports on a study that examined 897 activities included in the three most widely used Austrian English as foreign language (EFL) textbooks, based on a specifically developed 21-item criteria catalogue. Dichotomous coding was applied, allowing for individual and overall conclusions about the textbooks' potential for intercultural learning. The findings indicate that, beyond frequent references to regional studies and occasional prompts for self-reflection, implementation remains limited and tends to be superficial. Unexpectedly, the oldest textbook in the sample demonstrated the strongest integration of intercultural learning. However, the consistently rare engagement with difference, prejudice, and ethnocentricity across all three textbooks underscores the urgent need for a more future-oriented and equity-focused revision of EFL materials.

In Zeiten der Globalisierung haben sich Klassenzimmer zu Begegnungsräumen für eine zunehmende Vielfalt an Sprachen und Kulturen entwickelt. Interkulturelle Bildung, wie sie in zahlreichen nationalen Lehrplänen verankert ist, gilt als zentraler Ansatz, um dieser Pluralität gerecht zu werden. Dem Sprachunterricht – insbesondere dem fremdsprachlichen Englischunterricht – kommt dabei eine besondere Bedeutung zu. Da Lehrwerke einen Großteil der Unterrichtspraxis prägen, ist es entscheidend zu evaluieren, welche Formen interkulturellen Lernens durch ihre Aktivitäten gefördert werden können.

---

**Copyright:** © 2025 Jasmin Peskoller. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.  
**Data Availability Statement:** All relevant data are within this paper.

Während kulturelle Repräsentationen in Lehrwerken bereits vielfach untersucht wurden, bleibt weitgehend offen, inwieweit die darin enthaltenen Sprachlernaktivitäten zur Förderung interkulturellen Lernens beitragen. Dieser Beitrag präsentiert eine Analyse von insgesamt 897 Aktivitäten aus drei aktuell genutzten Englischlehrwerken der Sekundarstufe I in Österreich. Mithilfe eines eigens entwickelten Kriterienkatalogs mit 21 Kategorien wurden die Aktivitäten dichotom kodiert, um Aussagen über das lehrwerkspezifische sowie das übergreifende Potenzial für interkulturelles Lernen über alle drei Lehrwerke hinweg treffen zu können. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass interkulturelles Lernen – abgesehen von der Thematisierung landeskundlicher Inhalte und vereinzelter Reflexionsanlässe – überwiegend nur oberflächlich und in geringem Maße umgesetzt wird. Überraschenderweise weist das älteste Lehrwerk der Stichprobe den höchsten Umsetzungsgrad interkultureller Dimensionen in seinen Aktivitäten auf. Die insgesamt geringe Auseinandersetzung mit Differenz, Vorurteilen und ethnozentrischen Sichtweisen unterstreicht die Notwendigkeit einer bildungsgerechten und zukunftsorientierten Weiterentwicklung von Lehrwerken.

Keywords: textbooks, intercultural learning, EFL, lower secondary education

---

## Introduction

The globally increasing scope of diversity in societies has transformed classrooms into meeting places for learners from a variety of linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Preparing learners to participate successfully in this increasingly multilingual and multicultural global society has become a central educational goal. In this regard, discourse on intercultural learning has gained importance and has become a fundamental principle in numerous policy documents, particularly in the European context (e.g., Council of Europe, 2020; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Specifically, fostering students' intercultural communicative competence has evolved into one of the primary objectives in foreign language education (Council of Europe, 2020).

In order to achieve this goal in classroom practice, teaching materials, particularly textbooks, play a central role. Textbooks constitute the foundation of language education (Fäcke & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2017), as they both influence the way language is taught and provide insights into teaching practice (Rose & Galloway, 2019). By analysing these “windows to the world” (Risager, 2021), essential impulses for the improvement of language education can be derived (Kurtz, 2018). In addition, the revision of teaching materials informed by the findings of textbook analyses can contribute to sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. Given their central role in language education, it is essential to examine how textbooks may foster intercultural learning.

For the purpose of this study, intercultural learning is understood as an educational approach that actively engages with cultural plurality as a resource, challenges processes of exclusion and discrimination, and fosters empathy, encourages perspective-taking, and cultivates reflexivity in relation to cultural encounters. It goes beyond the transmission of factual knowledge about national cultures, as traditionally associated with *Landeskunde* (Römhild & Gaudelli, 2022; Schumann, 2019), and instead promotes critical engagement with diversity and openness toward different ways of knowing, being, and doing. In this sense, intercultural learning encompasses cognitive, affective, and action-oriented dimensions; is grounded in learners' *Lebenswelt*; and contributes to creating respectful, inclusive, and dialogically engaged classroom environments (Peskoller, 2023a, 2023b, 2025). A substantial body of research has examined cultural representations in language learning materials across educational and geographical contexts (Abd Rashid & Engku Ibrahim, 2018; Messekher, 2014; Risager, 2018, 2021;

Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Silvia, 2015; Sobkowiak, 2015; Song, 2013; Syrbe & Rose, 2018; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020; Vali, 2017). However, many of these studies have found that such representations often reflect stereotypical, essentialist, or homogenising views of culture. In response, McConachy (2018) has proposed strategies to harness such portrayals as entry points to develop learners' critical and interpretative skills.

In addition to research on textbooks' content, numerous studies have investigated teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards intercultural learning and the related pedagogical approaches (Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018; Brunsmeier, 2016; Kehl et al., 2024; Munandar & Newton, 2021; Nguyen et al., 2016; Svarstad, 2021; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020). Another strand of research has explored the potential of literature to foster intercultural learning, highlighting its role in promoting empathy, critical reflection, and cultural awareness (Kreft, 2020; Matos & Melo-Pfeifer, 2020).

However, despite the inclusion of intercultural learning in various national curricula, there is limited insight into how the processes associated with it are initiated in textbook activities, with a notable lack of data from lower secondary English as a foreign language (EFL) education (Anton, 2019; Göbel, 2019; Hoff, 2020; Victoria & Sangiamchit, 2021). In addition, despite the publication of a fundamental decree on intercultural education in Austria (Bundesministerium für Bildung, 2017), no reports can be found on the inclusion of intercultural learning in Austrian (language) classrooms.

Addressing these shortcomings, this article reports on an empirical study examining the implementation of intercultural learning in the activities of three Austrian EFL textbooks using a generated criteria catalogue. The term *intercultural potential* refers to the extent to which textbook activities can support or initiate specific dimensions of intercultural learning. This includes, for example, opportunities for self-reflection and perspective-changing, or discussions of differences and diversity in meaningful ways. Analysing the intercultural potential of textbook activities thus allows the identification of both strengths and gaps in how materials may contribute to the development of intercultural competence.

In the following section, I examine the intersection of intercultural learning and language education in Austria and discuss the role of textbooks in fostering intercultural learning. Having outlined the objectives and relevant research questions, I then present the findings of the empirical study. Lastly, I discuss implications for material revision and contemporary language education.

### Language Textbooks and Intercultural Learning

Providing the main source of content (Alter, 2020; Rose & Galloway, 2019) and being used for the design of approximately 80–90% of class time (Harwood, 2014; Kurtz, 2018), textbooks form the basis of foreign language education (Fäcke & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2017). Specifically, they “constitute a particular genre as they are products intended to be tools for a specific social practice: teaching and learning” (Risager, 2018, p. 10). Although the status of textbooks varies between countries and schools, scholars agree that they hold a prominent role for English language education, especially at the lower secondary level (Anton, 2019; Kurtz, 2018).

Moreover, they are culturally meaningful documents that provide culture-related contents and reflect what Risager (2018, p. 10) calls the “dominating discourse of language (and culture) teaching and learning”. As they are developed on the basis of national curricula—which, in many contexts (including Austria) mandate the integration of intercultural education—textbooks are expected to embed dimensions of intercultural learning (Anton, 2019; Lütge, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2020; Vali, 2017). In this regard, Risager (2018, p. 223) notes that textbooks seemingly maintain “two foci: on the one hand, language and language learning, on the other hand, culture, society, and the world and intercultural learning. The two

foci are interrelated”. As such, teaching materials are crucial mediators of cultural meaning and can support the development of a pluralistic, heterogenous, and dynamic understanding of culture (Anton, 2019).

Moreover, textbooks may offer particular affordances for intercultural reflection. Precisely because they are removed from the pressures of real-time intercultural encounters, they may foster greater learner reflexivity and deeper insight into the conditions for successful or unsuccessful intercultural contact. As Sercu (2000, p. 387) observed—albeit over two decades ago but arguably still relevant today—“the absence of potential pressures arising from real-time contacts, textbooks seem to hold better chances for promoting pupil reflexivity on and understanding of the various factors contributing to the success or failure of intercultural contacts.”

Textbooks are both essential tools for improving the quality of language education (Kurtz, 2018) and vital indicators of how intercultural dimensions are implemented in classroom practice. Therefore, serving both pedagogic and research purposes, textbook analyses constitute a relevant area of study in language education to uncover “strengths, limitations, and hidden ideologies” (Rose & Galloway, 2019, p. 138). Discussing essential analysis criteria for language textbooks in relation to intercultural communication, various authors have listed aspects such as empathy, cultural interpretative patterns, the destruction of stereotypes and the consideration of learners’ cultural diversity in the classroom.

In the context of intercultural learning, scholars have frequently criticised language materials for privileging cultural practices typically associated with countries in which English is an official language while ignoring the actual plurality of English users in a global day and age (Nguyen et al., 2020; Syrbe & Rose, 2018; Vali, 2017). As EFL learners are “more likely to use English in contact situations with other speakers from the expanding circle as opposed to speakers from within the inner circle” (Syrbe & Rose, 2018, p. 152), Nguyen et al. (2020, p. 14) stated that EFL materials need to “move away from monocultural English models and embrace English variations as well as linguistic pluralism”. In this regard, researchers in language education in Germany indicated shortcomings in explicitly discussing multilingualism, multiethnicity, and cultural plurality, as well as recognising learners’ diversity in teaching materials (Anton, 2019; Fäcke & Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2017).

Scholars have thus pleaded for English textbooks to adequately illustrate the diversity of contexts the language is used in and to express the dynamic and fluid nature of culture (Syrbe & Rose, 2018). Furthermore, the need for EFL textbooks to become more localised, include a variety of perspectives, and promote learners’ cultural awareness and identity has also been voiced in the field (Dinh & Sharifian, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2020; Risager, 2021, 2023; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020; Tomlinson, 2012; Vali, 2017). Importantly, scholars have emphasised that textbooks should provide incentives for students “to develop critical awareness of processes like Othering, stereotyping, minorisation and racialisation” (Risager, 2018, p. 143) to support the formation of a “reflexive, open, and globally aware language learner” (Weninger & Kiss, 2013, p. 695). Solely focusing on cognitive dimensions “may lead to pupils acquiring a body of (instrumental) *savoirs*, but probably not to their acquiring intercultural skills and attitudes which they can independently apply to hitherto unknown intercultural situations” (Sercu, 2000, p. 389).

Overall, Cortazzi and Jin (1999, p. 198) have argued the following:

[O]ne would expect EFL or ESL textbooks to reflect a range of cultural contexts and to include intercultural elements. One would expect materials that raise learners’ awareness of intercultural issues and enable them to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of communicative contexts. One would expect English-language teaching

(ELT) curriculum design and evaluation, including textbook evaluation, to include consideration of culture and intercultural communication. Surprisingly, none of these are necessarily what happens.

More than 20 years later, the question is whether this observation still holds for EFL textbooks. Before investigating this further, I briefly examine the educational realities in Austria by referencing the essential educational policy documents.

### Intercultural Learning in Austrian (Language) Education

In Austria, English is taught as the first foreign language in a national context where German is the dominant language of instruction. At the same time, linguistic and cultural diversity in classrooms has been steadily increasing: The proportion of learners with first languages other than German has risen by 52% in the last decade, with 34.8% of learners in Austrian *Mittelschulen* speaking a different home language in the school year of 2022–2023 (Statistik Austria, 2024). Among the most frequently spoken first languages besides German are Turkish, Serbian, and Croatian (Statistik Austria, 2024). This increasing multilingualism reflects a growing plurality of learners' identities, experiences, and backgrounds across Austrian classrooms. To address these developments, the Austrian government embedded the concept of intercultural learning as the second of 10 fundamental interdisciplinary teaching principles in the national curriculum for general education as early as 1992 (Bundesministerium für Bildung [BMB], 2017). Accordingly, educators are expected to foster classroom cohesion by recognising learners as equal contributors to the learning community and by appreciating their individual strengths and skills. Core areas for teachers' consideration include the close connection between language and culture, the aim of mutual understanding, and broader questions of identity, belonging, and cultural practices. The curriculum also emphasises the importance of including multiple perspectives and maintaining a respectful, open classroom climate, particularly with regard to questions of migration and social diversity (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung [BMBWF], 2023a).

In the curriculum for foreign language education specifically, intercultural competence is defined as a key teaching goal. Language teachers at both the lower and upper secondary levels are therefore required to engage with topics that foster a nuanced understanding of cultural diversity and promote sensitivity to both similarities and differences. This includes encouraging reflection on students' personal experiences and realities, as well as developing a critical, open-minded stance towards stereotypes and clichés (BMBWF, 2023a). While the framework formally applies to all foreign languages, English holds a particularly prominent role as the first and most widely taught foreign language in Austrian schools. All approved textbooks must align with national curricular requirements, which also include attention to diversity, multilingualism, and intercultural learning. In light of the growing linguistic and cultural plurality, the Ministry of Education also issued a fundamental decree on intercultural education in 2017 to support teachers in operationalising the concept in practice. The decree defines intercultural education as a holistic pedagogical approach grounded in appreciation and respect, viewing identities as dynamic and intercultural awareness as essential for successful learning (BMB, 2017). Despite the strong positioning of intercultural education in Austrian policy, however, the Teaching and Learning International Survey (OECD, 2020) revealed persistent insecurities among Austrian educators when working in culturally diverse classrooms. Of the 4133 lower secondary teachers surveyed, only 13.6% felt (well) prepared to teach in a multicultural setting. Moreover, nearly half reported difficulties adapting their teaching to reflect the diversity of their students (OECD, 2020). This frequently observed insecurity (Chilla & Vogt, 2017) often leads language teachers to reduce the broader aims of intercultural learning to narrow forms of *Landeskunde* or regional studies (Römhild & Gaudelli, 2022).

## Methods

Against the backdrop of increasingly diverse student populations and the continued centrality of teaching materials in language education, the implementation of intercultural learning in language textbooks merits critical examination. As Weninger and Kiss (2015) argued, the activity level is a particularly fruitful unit of analysis for studying the cultural potential of teaching materials. In response to the limited empirical data from German-speaking lower secondary EFL contexts (Anton, 2019; Brunsmeier, 2016; Schäfer, 2016) and a lack of insight into Austrian educational realities, this study was guided by the following research question:

*To what extent is intercultural learning implemented in the activities included in Austrian lower secondary EFL textbooks?*

This textbook analysis aims to explore how far current EFL teaching materials in Austrian lower secondary classrooms promote intercultural learning and align with national curriculum goals. On the basis of these findings, implications can be drawn for revision of the material and for understanding how educational policy is translated into the textbook content. Moreover, the generated criteria catalogue for intercultural learning offers a practical tool for evaluating language activities in various educational contexts.

## Materials

To investigate the implementation of intercultural elements in language learning materials, a total of 897 activities were sampled from the three state-approved EFL textbooks most frequently used in Austrian eighth-grade classrooms. This grade marks the final year of lower secondary education and the fourth year of formal English instruction. Textbooks were selected according to the annually published list of approved teaching materials issued by the Federal Ministry of Education, Science, and Research (BMBWF, 2023b).

**Table 1** *Textbook Sample*

| Textbook                          | Abbrev. | Year | Authors             | Pages      | Units     | Activities |
|-----------------------------------|---------|------|---------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| <i>Prime Time 4 Coursebook</i>    | PT4     | 2021 | Hinterberger et al. | 192        | 16        | 365        |
| <i>MORE! 4 Student's Book</i>     | M4      | 2018 | Gerngroß et al.     | 156        | 14        | 289        |
| <i>English to Go 4 Coursebook</i> | ETG4    | 2006 | Westfall & Weber    | 144        | 16        | 243        |
| <b>Total</b>                      |         |      |                     | <b>492</b> | <b>46</b> | <b>897</b> |

To contextualise the activities examined in this study, Table 2 presents an overview of the unit themes and corresponding number of activities in each of the three textbooks (see Peskoller, 2023b).

**Table 2** *Contents of Textbook Units*

| Unit | PT4                       | M4                      | ETG4                    |
|------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1    | Going abroad (21)         | Welcome to Ireland (20) | What's new? (13)        |
| 2    | New York (17)             | Whodunit (23)           | Make it to the top (16) |
| 3    | Intelligent machines (16) | New York, New York (18) | Join us! (14)           |
| 4    | Going to the limit (27)   | A working life (19)     | Down under (16)         |

(Continued)

| Unit | PT4                           | M4                          | ETG4                      |
|------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5    | Television and streaming (24) | Hungry? (18)                | The police report (14)    |
| 6    | Blogs (21)                    | Kids make a difference (13) | Eureka! (13)              |
| 7    | Play IT safe (20)             | Travelling Down Under (13)  | Is the past perfect? (14) |
| 8    | Sustainability (24)           | Obsessed! (17)              | Luck of the Irish (16)    |
| 9    | Express yourself (31)         | Body talk (20)              | On a binge (14)           |
| 10   | New Zealand (26)              | A fair world (15)           | The math whiz (15)        |
| 11   | Coming back (16)              | Ready for reading (19)      | My second family (13)     |
| 12   | The Understudy – a play (10)  | Space (14)                  | From the inside out (14)  |
| 13   | Incredible inventions (31)    | A school mag (15)           | Buy now, pay later (12)   |
| 14   | Work hard; play hard (20)     | Talking turkeys (9)         | Today and tomorrow (14)   |
| 15   | Awesome ads (30)              |                             | It's festival time! (13)  |
| 16   | Fact detectives (31)          |                             | This is me! (6)           |

To systematically assess the textbooks' intercultural learning potential, a criteria catalogue was developed and applied in the analysis. The 897 activities from 46 textbook units were coded dichotomously according to whether they fulfilled any of the 21 criteria for intercultural learning, which were grouped into seven macro-dimensions. This catalogue was developed prior to the analysis and is outlined in Table 4.

### Generating a Criteria Catalogue

A criteria catalogue for intercultural learning, with a focus on language activities, was developed through a comprehensive literature review of scholarship in English and German published over the past 25 years. The review focused on theoretical–conceptual work on intercultural education (e.g., Dervin, 2020, 2023; Freitag-Hild, 2018), empirical studies on intercultural learning in foreign language education (e.g., Brunsmeier, 2016; König & Ruf, 2022; Vali, 2017), and curriculum and policy documents relevant to the Austrian EFL context (e.g., BMB, 2017). While the development of the catalogue was shaped by the goals and principles of intercultural education, it was also informed by established approaches to textbook analysis, including Risager's (2023) cultural discourse framework and Weninger and Kiss's (2015) criteria for cultural engagement in textbook activities. These perspectives supported the deductive development of criteria, ensuring both conceptual validity and analytical rigor. Table 3 outlines the stages in the development of the catalogue.

**Table 3** *Phases in the Creation of the Criteria Catalogue*

| Phase                       | Contents                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Criteria generation phase   | Collecting criteria on the basis of theoretical–conceptual work, empirical studies, and educational policy documents; rephrasing, arranging, and (if required) translating of items |
| Criteria revision Phase I   | Reduction and adaption of the criteria (integrating, condensing, and omitting items) on the basis of research talks, peer feedback, and considerations of surveyability             |
| Criteria revision Phase II  | Reduction and adaption of the criteria (revising and rearranging of items) on the basis of a pilot phase in which the criteria were applied to the activities of five sample units  |
| Criteria revision Phase III | Final adaption of the criteria on the basis of the conducted textbook analyses and precise item definitions clarifying the conditions for (not) coding                              |

Following the three revision phases, the final criteria catalogue comprised 21 items that reflect current academic thinking as well as institutional frameworks and priorities. These items were grouped

into seven macro-dimensions following Freitag-Hild's (2018) proposed framework for inter- and transcultural learning activities. While originally developed for the use of literary texts to promote intercultural learning in EFL classrooms, the framework provided a fitting structure for categorising and organising the 21 items in this criteria-led analysis (see Table 4). The catalogue aimed to operationalise a dynamic, processual understanding of culture that resists static or essentialist representations—perspectives that remain prevalent in many textbook materials. A detailed account of the development of the criteria catalogue, including literature selection, category refinement, and pilot coding, is provided in Peskoller (2023b), which presents a revised version of the criteria as the product of a comprehensive mixed-methods study.

### Coding the Language Activities

The coding process followed three distinct cycles to enhance intra-coder reliability. In the first round, I coded the activities dichotomously, progressing from front to back through each textbook. In the second round, the order was reversed, moving back to front and alternating textbooks unit by unit. During this phase, I extracted all activity instructions into Excel tables, highlighting ambiguous cases. These cases were then discussed in collaborative sessions with my research colleagues, which helped refine and specify the definitions of the criteria (see Table 3). The final round involved a cross-check of all coded activities. The complete revised criteria catalogue, along with illustrative textbook examples, is presented in Table 4.

**Table 4** *Criteria Catalogue with Sample Activities*

| Category                    | Question                                                                                    | Sample activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Warming up (WU)</b>      |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| WU_knowledge                | Does the activity include the learners' previous knowledge?                                 | ETG4_U9A8: "Talk about the law in Austria. What do you know about the law in Austria? Is it the same as in England?"                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| WU_experiences              | Does the activity include the learners' cultural experiences?                               | M4_U9A7: "Read the questions. Take a few minutes to think about them. Make notes of your thoughts. [...] 1 Which countries have you been to? 2 How many people from different cultures have you met?"                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Self-Reflection (SR)</b> |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| SR_analysing                | Do learners have to analyse their personality or personal life stories?                     | M4_U5A10: "Talk for 3–4 minutes about your eating habits. Talk about:<br>* what you eat for breakfast/lunch/ dinner<br>* what your favourites are and how often you have them<br>* what you totally dislike<br>* what your intake of healthy/unhealthy food is [...]<br>* if eating together with your family plays an important part" |
| SR_sharing                  | Do learners have to express and share their opinions, perspectives, or personal experience? | ETG4_U11A6: "In a small group, do a mapping about life in England, the USA, or Australia. What do you think it is like? What would you expect to see, do, or experience?"                                                                                                                                                              |

(Continued)

| Category                                               | Question                                                                                                                                | Sample activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SR_reflecting                                          | Do learners have to reflect on their opinions, perspectives, or personal experience?                                                    | M4_U12A11: "Discuss in groups: 1. Do you think the colonisation of space will happen in your lifetime? Why (not)? 2. Would you like the idea of living in space? Why (not)? 3. Imagine you had to leave Earth. What would you miss most?"                                                                  |
| <b>Interpretation and change of perspectives (ICP)</b> |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| ICP_empathising                                        | Does the activity ask learners to empathise with other points of view and relativise their own cultural viewpoints?                     | M4_U10A8: "Work with a partner. For each blog entry, say how the writers feel and what they believe and want to achieve."                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| ICP_changing_perspective                               | Do learners have to change, discuss, or coordinate different perspectives?                                                              | ETG4_U3A3b: "If you were a member of AYS, which programs would you like? What would you do at the clubhouse?"                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| ICP_relating                                           | Does the activity encourage learners to relate new aspects or topics to familiar ones?                                                  | ETG4_U13A1: "Read the article and talk about it. What is money sense? Have you got money sense? Is money important to you? Why or why not?"                                                                                                                                                                |
| ICP_interpreting                                       | Do learners have to interpret visual and verbal cultural representations?                                                               | M4_U2A3: "Look at the information and say what motives the people might have had for the murder."                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Analysis and reflection (AR)</b>                    |                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| AR_exploring                                           | Does the activity allow learners to explore cultural practices or collect culture-related information?                                  | M4_U3A15b: "Check out another one of the sights of New York [...] on the internet and write a report about it (120-180 words)."                                                                                                                                                                            |
| AR_comparing                                           | Do learners have to compare cultural practices/dimensions by stating similarities and differences?                                      | M4_U9A7: "Read the questions. Take a few minutes to think about them. Make notes of your thoughts. [...] 3. What things are the same in other cultures as in your own? (food, family life, school life, sports, ...) 4. What things are different?"                                                        |
| AR_reflecting_differences                              | Does the activity ask learners to reflect on (cultural) differences?                                                                    | ETG4_U14A6b: "After you read: Choose a question and write a response. What else about Melanie sticks out? How is she different from others?"                                                                                                                                                               |
| AR_reflecting_prejudice                                | Does the activity ask learners to express, analyse, or reflect on racism, prejudice, or stereotypes?                                    | PT4_U7A8b: "Brainstorm with a partner how the story continues. Invent an ending to the story. The questions below may help you." How do the bullies react to the post? How does the boy from Nigeria? Why has the boy posted the comment at all? Does anyone show civil courage and stand up for the boy?" |
| AR_reflecting_criticalincidents                        | Do learners have to analyse and reflect on critical incidents or identify (culture-related) causes for misunderstanding in interaction? | ETG4_U5A3: "Complete the sentences with your own ideas. "If Jason had not been alone, ..." "If I had been there, ..."                                                                                                                                                                                      |

(Continued)

| Category                                  | Question                                                                                                                              | Sample activity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Negotiation and participation (NP)</b> |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| NP_discussion                             | Does the activity include discussions?                                                                                                | ETG4_U9A4: “Work in a small group. What do you know about drugs and alcohol? Do you think they are a problem at your school? Make notes.”                                                                                                                                                     |
| NP_roleplay                               | Does the activity include role plays or simulations?                                                                                  | PT4_U4A6e: “With a partner, think about Grace’s or Simon’s talk on the phone. Use your own ideas, write a dialogue and act it out.”                                                                                                                                                           |
| NP_encounters                             | Does the activity address encounters with another culture?                                                                            | M4_U7A8: Answer the questions: “1. What was Marlo’s problem with walking through the desert? 2. Why did she eat the worm in the end? 3. How did the Aborigines drink the water? 4. What could they tell from the footprints in the sand? 5. Why are bush flies important for the Aborigines?” |
| <b>Contextualisation (C)</b>              |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| C_building_relation                       | Does the activity build a personal relation to the learners by connecting to their interests or <i>Lebenswelt</i> ?                   | ETG4_U6A10a: “Work in a team. Think about problems in everyday life. What would make your life easier? What do you wish you had? Write down all of your ideas.”                                                                                                                               |
| C_recognising_diversity                   | Does the activity allow learners to recognise or explore the diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, or experiences in the classroom? | PT4_U5A10: “Design your own chart. [...] Ask people in your class. Design a pie chart. Summarise your results in 3–5 sentences.”                                                                                                                                                              |
| C_identifying_ethnocentricity             | Do learners have to identify ethnocentric perspectives in their own/ another culture?                                                 | ETG4_U5T1: “Read the chat. Then work in a small group and talk about what happened: Do you make racial jokes? Do you use racist language? Do you know someone who is racist? Do you think racism is a problem here?”                                                                          |
| <b>Meta-reflection (MR)</b>               |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| MR_reflecting                             | Do learners have to reflect on their intercultural learning process?                                                                  | ETG4_U12T8: “Work in a group and talk about what you have learned about the Oneida, the Amish, and the Hmong. What do you think is most interesting? What surprised you? What would you like to know more about?”                                                                             |

Having established the criteria, the textbook activities were coded to evaluate their alignment with intercultural learning dimensions. While several textbook activities included prompts related to visual materials, such as interpreting images, symbols, or multimodal texts, this textbook analysis did not investigate the visuals themselves. The focus was placed exclusively on the activity instructions and intended learner engagement rather than the representational content of the images. However, a number of tasks required the learners to interpret or respond to visuals, which were captured in the coding under the “ICP\_interpreting” criterion.

The outlined coding approach offered a structured basis for the subsequent comparative analysis across the selected textbooks, which is presented in the following section.

## Analysing the Textbook Data

The coded data were analysed holistically and contrastively using descriptive statistics, focusing on the frequencies and proportions of individual criteria and macro-dimensions. Comparative analysis across the three textbooks provided an insight into their relative strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in promoting intercultural learning. To classify the scope of intercultural engagement, activities that received at least one intercultural code were labelled intercultural learning activities (ICLAs). These were then further grouped by intensity:

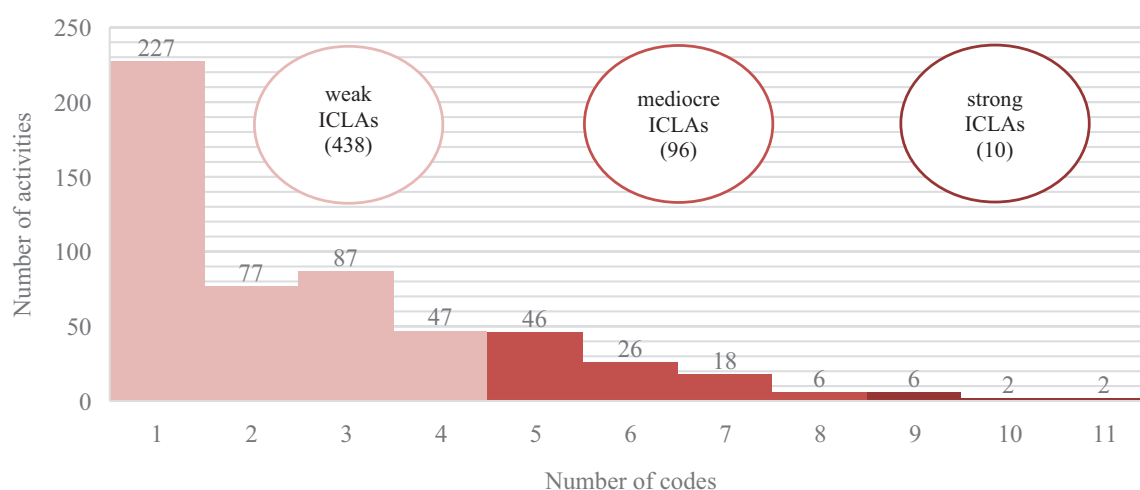
- Weak ICLAs: 1–4 criteria addressed;
- Mediocre ICLAs: 5–8 criteria addressed;
- Strong ICLAs: more than 8 criteria addressed.

This classification offered a more nuanced understanding of how deeply intercultural learning was embedded in textbook activities.

## Results

This section presents the findings of the empirical study that analysed activities in three Austrian EFL textbooks with regard to their implementation of intercultural learning. The activities in the sample were subjected to a criteria-driven analysis. In this section, I first provide insights into the whole dataset and then present the findings from the contrastive analysis of the three sources.

Among the 897 activities analysed in the course of the textbook survey, 544 received at least one coding, making up 60.6% of the sample classified as ICLAs. Figure 1 outlines the distribution of the three types of ICLAs in the sample.



**Figure 1** Overall Frequency of Intercultural Learning Activities

Figure 1 shows that no activity implemented more than 11 of the 21 categories outlined in the criteria catalogue for intercultural learning. The chart indicates a clear trend toward weak ICLAs, which comprise 80.5% of all ICLAs being classified as such. In particular, activities assigned exactly one code were highly prevalent and thus represent the dominant form of ICLAs in the sample. Furthermore, while 96 mediocre ICLAs were identified in the coding process, the sample of activities includes only 10 instances of strong forms. As can also be deduced from the preceding graph, 353 activities did not match any category, which makes non-ICLAs the largest subset in the sample. Except for one outlier,

the data suggest an inverse proportional relationship: as the number of codes required increases, the number of activities decreases. Interestingly, however, more activities obtained three codes (87 activities) than two (77 activities) in the textbook survey. This irregularity may point to natural clustering of certain intercultural dimensions in activity design and warrants further investigation.

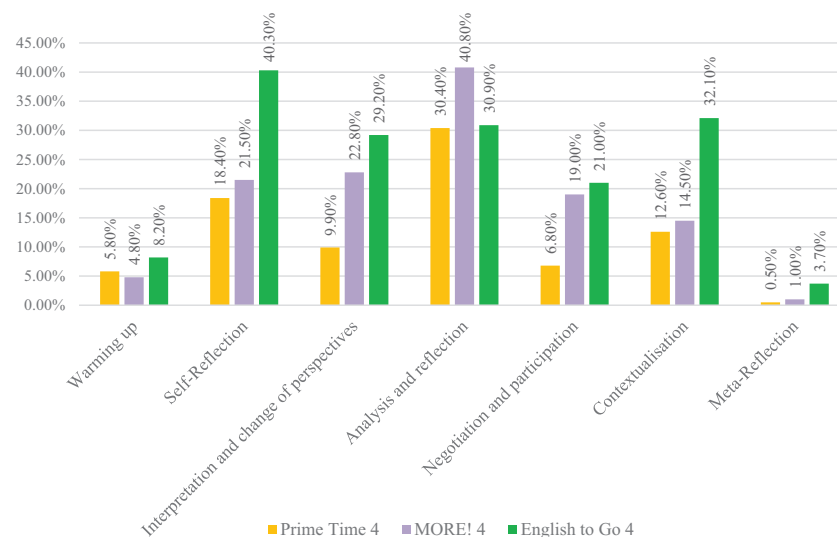
To supplement these preliminary findings, Table 5 presents a comparative analysis of the types of activities in the three textbooks and their respective intercultural characteristics.

**Table 5** *Properties of the Sample and its Subsamples*

| Textbook     | Activities | ICLAs (weak, mediocre, strong) | Codes       | Codes/activity | Codes/ICLA  |
|--------------|------------|--------------------------------|-------------|----------------|-------------|
| PT4          | 365        | 188 (169, 19, 0)               | 397         | 1.09           | 2.11        |
| M4           | 289        | 195 (159, 33, 3)               | 500         | 1.73           | 2.56        |
| ETG4         | 243        | 161 (110, 44, 7)               | 589         | 2.42           | 3.66        |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>897</b> | <b>544 (438, 96, 10)</b>       | <b>1486</b> | <b>1.66</b>    | <b>2.73</b> |

As indicated in Table 5, almost 40% of the 1486 allocated codes were assigned to activities in English to Go 4 (ETG4). On the contrary, the smallest number of hits in the criteria catalogue were made in Prime Time 4 (PT4). Moreover, approximately two-thirds of the activities in MORE! 4 (M4) and ETG4 had a reference to intercultural learning, while only slightly over half of the activities in PT4 were classified as ICLAs. With a total of 195 cases, M4 incorporates the most ICLAs, followed by PT4, providing 188 activities implementing one or more dimensions of intercultural learning. Although ETG4 has the lowest absolute number of activities and ICLAs, it contains the fewest non-ICLAs and the highest number of mediocre (44) and strong (7) ICLAs in the sample. On the contrary, despite revealing the highest total number of activities, PT4 obtained the fewest overall codes for intercultural learning. Moreover, while ETG4 and PT4 reveal a comparable proportion of weak ICLAs, the latter does not include any strong ICLAs and only occasional mediocre forms. If we use the relative values to assess the strength of the included ICLAs, ETG4 exhibits the highest mean coding value per activity both in relation to all activities and ICLAs. Thus, among the three textbooks, ETG4 demonstrates the strongest implementation of intercultural learning.

To identify the textbooks' individual strengths and potential shortcomings, Figure 2 visualises the share of activities receiving one or more codes in the seven macro-dimensions (see Table 4).



**Figure 2** *Proportion of Activities Coded for the Macro-Dimensions*

Investigating the macro-dimensions identified in the three textbook samples, Figure 2 shows that the highest proportions for six of the seven macro-dimensions were found in ETG4. Specifically, four of the seven macro dimensions are implemented in approximately 30% or more of activities in this source. By contrast, while M4 achieves an implementation rate of over 40% for analysis and reflection, this remains the only dimension that exceeds the respective value specified in ETG4. Although M4 and ETG4 reveal similar scores in connection with negotiation and participation, three other dimensions had an implementation rate of only approximately 20% in M4. On the contrary, PT4 exhibits a 30.4% realisation of analysis and reflection, scores 18.4% for self-reflection, and 12.6% for contextualisation, while the remaining four dimensions demonstrate a comparably weak implementation below 10%. Strikingly, ETG4 implements self-reflection and contextualisation significantly more strongly than the other two sources, as the textbook includes a form of self-reflection in 40.3% and contextualisation in 32.1% of its activities. Moreover, ETG4 implements interpretation and change of perspectives in almost 30% of its activities, while the respective value in M4 is seven percentage points lower and PT4 only reveals a weak implementation rate of roughly 10%. Lastly, the macro-dimension least allocated to activities in the sample are warming up and meta-reflection. Even though the proportions for these two dimensions remain below 10% in the three subsamples, ETG4 again emerges as the textbook most strongly incorporating them.

On the basis of the previously presented findings, the specific type of intercultural learning promoted in the activities is examined in greater detail. Table 6 presents the results obtained for the 21 categories and their seven superordinate macro-dimensions composing the criteria catalogue (see Table 4), contrasting their frequencies and proportions in the three sources.

Virtually identical absolute numbers for warming up were found in PT4 and ETG4, while ETG4 revealed the highest proportion of warming up activities. Regarding the two sub-categories of this macro-dimension, ETG4 and PT4 display similar distributions, whereas the activities in M4 seemingly put a focus on learners' cultural knowledge over experiences, with only two activities addressing the latter. While the data indicate that the WU categories are rarely integrated in one activity, the subcategories of self-reflection reveal more combination.

As previously outlined, ETG4 emerges as the textbook implementing SR the most strongly in the sample. Specifically, the sub-category with the highest proportion in all three textbooks constitutes SR\_sharing, which ETG4 implements in one-third of its activities. Additionally, the two categories SR\_sharing and SR\_reflecting appeared with similar frequency in both M4 and ETG4, whereas PT4 reveals diverging values as well as weak implementation overall. Strikingly, learners are encouraged to analyse their personality and life stories in almost quarter of the activities in ETG4, which is a significantly higher share than in the other two sources.

Turning to the dimension of interpretation and change of perspectives, the category most strongly implemented in all three sources is ICP\_changing\_perspective, and with similar numbers obtained for ICP\_empathising in absolute and relative measures in M4 and ETG4 but not so in PT4. Regarding ICP\_relying, all three textbooks reveal low degrees of incorporation. Lastly, the interpretation of visual and verbal cultural representations was applicable to a total of 35 activities in ETG4 and 27 activities in M4, with PT4 offering only 15 activities.

Regarding analysis and reflection, M4 implements this dimension the most strongly (see Figure 3). Despite ETG4 and PT4 dedicating approximately 30% of their activities to this macro-dimension, PT4 reveals a higher absolute number of activities (111) than ETG4 (75). In particular, the category AR\_exploring accounts for the majority of attributed codes in this macro-dimension and also constitutes the item with the highest scores in the entire sample. Looking at the other four AR categories, a

**Table 6** Frequency and Proportion of Activities Coded for Each Category

|                                                  | PT4        |               | M4         |               | ETG4      |               |
|--------------------------------------------------|------------|---------------|------------|---------------|-----------|---------------|
|                                                  | N = 365    |               | N = 289    |               | N = 243   |               |
|                                                  | n          | %             | n          | %             | n         | %             |
| <b>Warming up</b>                                | <b>21</b>  | <b>5.80%</b>  | <b>14</b>  | <b>4.80%</b>  | <b>20</b> | <b>8.20%</b>  |
| WU_knowledge                                     | 11         | 3.00%         | 12         | 4.20%         | 13        | 5.30%         |
| WU_experiences                                   | 11         | 3.00%         | 2          | 0.70%         | 10        | 4.10%         |
| <b>Self-reflection</b>                           | <b>67</b>  | <b>18.40%</b> | <b>62</b>  | <b>21.50%</b> | <b>98</b> | <b>40.30%</b> |
| SR_analysing                                     | 33         | 9.00%         | 38         | 13.10%        | 58        | 23.90%        |
| SR_sharing                                       | 67         | 18.40%        | 55         | 19.00%        | 81        | 33.30%        |
| SR_reflecting                                    | 29         | 7.90%         | 54         | 18.70%        | 77        | 31.70%        |
| <b>Interpretation and change of perspectives</b> | <b>36</b>  | <b>9.90%</b>  | <b>66</b>  | <b>22.80%</b> | <b>71</b> | <b>29.20%</b> |
| ICP_empathising                                  | 7          | 1.90%         | 25         | 8.70%         | 20        | 8.20%         |
| ICP_changing_perspective                         | 20         | 5.50%         | 42         | 14.50%        | 43        | 17.70%        |
| ICP_relating                                     | 6          | 1.60%         | 6          | 2.10%         | 9         | 3.70%         |
| ICP_interpreting                                 | 15         | 4.10%         | 27         | 9.30%         | 35        | 14.40%        |
| <b>Analysis and reflection</b>                   | <b>111</b> | <b>30.40%</b> | <b>118</b> | <b>40.80%</b> | <b>75</b> | <b>30.90%</b> |
| AR_exploring                                     | 107        | 29.30%        | 112        | 38.80%        | 70        | 28.80%        |
| AR_comparing                                     | 7          | 1.90%         | 9          | 3.10%         | 10        | 4.10%         |
| AR_reflecting_differences                        | 0          | 0.00%         | 1          | 0.30%         | 5         | 2.10%         |
| AR_reflecting_prejudice                          | 2          | 0.50%         | 3          | 1.00%         | 4         | 1.60%         |
| AR_reflecting_critical_incidents                 | 0          | 0.00%         | 1          | 0.30%         | 2         | 0.80%         |
| <b>Negotiation and participation</b>             | <b>25</b>  | <b>6.80%</b>  | <b>55</b>  | <b>19.00%</b> | <b>51</b> | <b>21.00%</b> |
| NP_discussion                                    | 20         | 5.50%         | 30         | 10.40%        | 38        | 15.60%        |
| NP_roleplay                                      | 4          | 1.10%         | 26         | 9.00%         | 10        | 4.10%         |
| NP_encounters                                    | 3          | 0.80%         | 5          | 1.70%         | 7         | 2.90%         |
| <b>Contextualisation</b>                         | <b>46</b>  | <b>12.60%</b> | <b>42</b>  | <b>14.50%</b> | <b>78</b> | <b>32.10%</b> |
| C_building_relation                              | 41         | 11.20%        | 36         | 12.50%        | 74        | 30.50%        |
| C_recognising_diversity                          | 12         | 3.30%         | 9          | 3.10%         | 11        | 4.50%         |
| C_identifying_ethnocentricity                    | 0          | 0.00%         | 4          | 1.40%         | 3         | 1.20%         |
| <b>Meta-reflection</b>                           | <b>2</b>   | <b>0.50%</b>  | <b>3</b>   | <b>1.00%</b>  | <b>9</b>  | <b>3.70%</b>  |

consistently low implementation rate of below 5% was identified. Hence, expressing, analysing, and reflecting on differences, prejudice, or stereotypes is practically not encouraged in the textbooks.

On the contrary, negotiation and participation is implemented in roughly one-fifth of the activities in M4 and ETG4 but was only discernible in 6.8% of the activities in PT4. Precisely, NP\_discussion

is included the most in absolute and relative measures in ETG4, with M4 and PT4 demonstrating a weaker implementation. With a total of 26, however, the highest number of roleplaying activities are found in M4, with ETG4 including 10 and PT4 having 4. Finally, encounters with another culture are addressed in relatively few activities across the sample.

Constituting the textbook's second strongest macro-dimension, ETG4 exhibits the highest absolute and relative scores for contextualisation. While M4 and PT4 reveal similar outcomes, these only amount to less than half of the proportion of ETG4. Specifically, *C\_building\_relation* emerges as the strongest category in this macro-dimension in all three sources, though it was coded in 30.5% of the activities in ETG4 and significantly less often in M4 and PT4. Across the sample, recognition of the existing diversity inside the classroom was included in a similarly low share of activities, ranging between 3.1% and 4.5%. While the learners are never asked to identify ethnocentric perspectives in PT4, M4 and ETG4 include rare instances thereof.

In connection with the last macro-dimensions, the obtained data demonstrate the scarce inclusion of meta-reflection as fewer than 10 activities ask learners to reflect on their (intercultural) learning process. With nine activities, ETG4 reveals the highest implementation of meta-reflection in the sample.

Notably, 10 of the 21 categories appeared fewer than 10 times in M4 and PT4, but this only applies to seven categories in ETG4. Adding to this observation, 13 categories were only identified in less than 4% of the activities in PT4. Overall, students are rarely encouraged to identify ethnocentricity or to reflect on differences, prejudice, critical incidents, or their cultural learning process. Alarming, only 3 of the 21 categories are implemented in over 10% of the activities in PT4.

### Summary

Due to their substantial role in shaping classroom content and pedagogy, particularly at the lower secondary level, textbook activities were selected as the primary object of analysis in this research project, with a specific focus on their potential to support intercultural learning (e.g., Harwood, 2014; Kurtz, 2018; Rose & Galloway, 2019). While Svarstad (2021) has noted that teaching materials often prioritise communicative competence over intercultural learning, this study revealed that certain textbook activities engage with dimensions of interculturality. These include activities that invite the learners to reflect on their personal life stories, explore diverse cultural practices, and foster openness to alternative life designs and experiences.

Despite 60.6% of activities being classified as ICLAs, the depth of implementation remains limited. Most activities received only a single code from the criteria catalogue, and only 10 of the 897 activities qualified as strong ICLAs. Key aspects such as reflecting on differences, prejudice, and classroom diversity are rarely addressed. This finding aligns with earlier studies (e.g., Brunsmeier, 2016; König & Ruf, 2022; Schleicher, 2017; Sobkowiak, 2015; Song, 2013; Usener, 2016) and stands in stark contrast to the requirements set out in Austrian education policy (BMB, 2017).

A comparative view of the three EFL textbooks revealed notable variation in their integration of intercultural learning, a pattern consistent with previous studies (e.g., Lobo-Serra, 2012; Vali, 2017). Surprisingly, the oldest textbook, *English to Go 4* (Westfall & Weber, 2006), demonstrated the most comprehensive and robust integration of intercultural learning. It showed the highest implementation rate across most of the 21 categories, with strong links to the students' personal experiences and an emphasis on discussion and self-reflection. These strengths are reflected in its high scores for the macro-dimensions of contextualisation and learner-centred reflection.

On the contrary, PT4, the most recent textbook in the sample, revealed the weakest implementation of intercultural learning. Only 3 of the 21 categories achieved an implementation rate above 10%. One possible explanation is the increased focus on the standardised school-leaving examinations introduced in Austria in 2014–2015, which may have led to a shift in textbook design priorities, favouring vocabulary, grammar, and language skills over content and critical engagement (BMBWF, 2024).

Notably, even the strongest-performing textbook, ETG4, included very few role-play activities, despite their recognised value for promoting empathy and openness (e.g., Blell & Doff, 2014; Usener, 2016; Vali, 2017). Across all three textbooks, opportunities for empathising, comparing, and critically reflecting—key elements of intercultural learning (Vali 2017)—were rare.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study has highlighted critical gaps between educational policy and textbook design, particularly regarding the depth and breadth of intercultural engagement in EFL materials. While some activities promote reflection and dialogue, most fall short of encouraging critical, empathetic, and nuanced intercultural learning. Building on these insights, future research could apply the developed criteria catalogue to EFL textbooks used in other educational systems and compare the respective findings across contexts. Additional analyses are also needed to explore whether similar patterns emerge when investigating textbooks from different educational levels or language subjects. Moreover, the data suggest potential cross-dependencies and inter-relationships among the 21 criteria, indicating that some may naturally cluster or co-occur in activity design—an insight that warrants closer examination in follow-up studies.

While this study is situated within the Austrian and broader European educational context, the issues it raises about the implementation of intercultural learning through textbook activities resonate with global discussions in the field. Research from non-European and Global South contexts (e.g., Setyono & Widodo, 2019; Song, 2013; Toledo-Sandoval, 2020) similarly highlights tensions between policy goals and textbook realities, particularly in terms of fostering meaningful opportunities for learner participation and intercultural reflection. Although a detailed comparative analysis lies beyond the scope of this study, future research could explore how the findings presented here align with or diverge from those emerging in other educational and socio-political settings. Such comparisons could illuminate both universal challenges and context-specific dynamics in integrating intercultural learning into language education, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and globally attuned understanding of the field.

Interviews with textbook authors could shed light on the rationale behind the (non-)inclusion of certain intercultural dimensions and provide insights into the development process of teaching materials. However, since textbooks unfold their full educational potential through interactions between teachers and learners (Martinez, 2011), investigating how they are actually used in the classroom remains equally essential—and has been largely underexplored. Comparing textbook intentions, as articulated in teacher guides, with actual classroom practice may reveal important discrepancies. This gap between material design and pedagogical use constitutes a critical area for further research towards the realisation of intercultural learning in contemporary EFL classrooms.

To address this, a follow-up case study is planned. Combining classroom observations, teacher interviews, and brief learner surveys, the study will adopt a mixed-methods approach and aims to generate a more holistic understanding of how intercultural learning is enacted in practice and how educators can be better supported in meeting this educational goal. These insights may inform both material development and pre- and in-service teacher training initiatives.

The findings underscore the need for comprehensive textbook revisions that support a stronger and more holistic implementation of intercultural learning. The current materials often fail to acknowledge learners' cultural diversity, a shortcoming that can contribute to feelings of exclusion, non-belonging, and cultural ignorance (Alter, 2020).

Notably, the weakest implementation of intercultural learning was found in the most recently published textbook, raising concerns about the translation of educational policy into practice. This suggests that the responsibility for realising certain dimensions of intercultural learning falls almost entirely on individual teachers, without sufficient support provided by the materials themselves. Textbook authors are therefore called upon to more consistently and deliberately integrate intercultural dimensions into future materials.

Given the influential role of textbooks in language education, textbook analyses remain essential tools for identifying shortcomings and opportunities for revision of the material. Studies of this kind can contribute to the refinement of language education materials and ensure that they reflect the demands of today's diverse and globalised EFL classrooms. The criteria catalogue developed in this study may also support teachers in evaluating the intercultural learning potential of their materials and in fostering critical, empathetic, and engaged learners across educational contexts.

### Declaration of Interest Statement

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

### Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study form part of a PhD project and are available upon request.

### References

- Abd Rashid, R. S. A. & Engku Ibrahim, E. H. (2018). English language textbooks and portrayal of culture: A content analysis. *MATEC Web of Conferences*, 150, 05076. <https://doi.org/10.1051/mateconf/201815005076>
- Alter, G. (2020). A sociological perspective on diversity in ELT coursebooks. In C. Lütge, C. Lütge & M. Faltermeier (Eds.), *The praxis of diversity* (pp. 137–173). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anton, D. (2019). Mehrkulturalität in Lehrmaterialien. In C. Fäcke & F.-J. Meißner (Eds.), *Handbuch Mehrsprachigkeits- und Mehrkulturalitätsdidaktik* (pp. 242–245). Narr.
- Aragona-Young, E. & Sawyer, B. E. (2018). Elementary teachers' beliefs about multicultural education practices. *Teachers and Teaching*, 24(5), 465–486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1435527>
- Blell, G., & Doff, S. (2014). It takes more than two for this tango: Moving beyond the self/other-binary in teaching about culture in the global EFL-classroom. *Zeitschrift Für Interkulturellen Fremdsprachenunterricht*, 19(1), 77–96.
- Brunsmeier, S. (2016). *Interkulturelle Kommunikative Kompetenz im Englischunterricht der Grundschule: Grundlagen, Erfahrungen, Perspektiven*. Narr.
- Bundesministerium für Bildung (BMB) (2017). *Interkulturelle Bildung: Grundsatzpapier 2017*. Retrieved 18 April, 2025, from [https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/2017\\_29.html](https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/ministerium/rs/2017_29.html)
- Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF) (2023a). *Bundesrecht konsolidiert: Gesamte Rechtsvorschrift für Lehrpläne – allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen*. Retrieved April 18, 2025, from <https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=10008568>

- Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF) (2023b). *Schulbuchaktion 2023/24: Allgemeinbildende höhere Schulen Unterstufe Oberstufe*. Retrieved 18 April, 2025, from [https://www.schulbuchaktion.at/sba\\_downloads/sba2023/Schulbuchliste\\_1000\\_1100\\_2023\\_2024.pdf](https://www.schulbuchaktion.at/sba_downloads/sba2023/Schulbuchliste_1000_1100_2023_2024.pdf)
- Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF). (2024). *Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich 2024*. Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung. <https://doi.org/10.17888/nbb2024.2>
- Chilla, S. & Vogt, K. (2017). *Heterogenität und Diversität im Englischunterricht: Fachdidaktische Perspektiven*. Peter Lang.
- Cortazzi, M. & Jin, L. (1999). Cultural mirrors: Materials and methods in the EFL classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 196–219). Cambridge University Press.
- Council of Europe (2020). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment: Companion volume*. Council of Europe. <https://rm.coe.int/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching/16809ea0d4>
- Dervin, F. (2020). Creating and combining models of intercultural competence for teacher education/training. On the need to rethink IC frequently. In F. Dervin, R. Moloney, & A. Simpson (Eds.), *Routledge research in teacher education. Intercultural competence in the work of teachers: Confronting ideologies and practices* (pp. 57–72). Routledge.
- Dervin, F. (2023). *Interculturality, criticality and reflexivity in teacher education*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009302777>
- Dinh, L. & Sharifian, J. (2017). Vietnamese cultural conceptualisations in the locally developed English textbook: A case study of ‘Lunar New Year’/‘Tet’. *Asian Englishes*, 19(2), 148–159. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2017.1279763>
- Fäcke, C. & Mehlmauer-Larcher, B. (2017). Forschungsdiskurse zur Analyse und Rezeption fremdsprachlicher Lehrmaterialien. Eine Einleitung. In C. Fäcke & B. Mehlmauer-Larcher (Eds.), *Fremdsprachliche Lehrmaterialien – Forschung, Analyse und Rezeption* (pp. 7–18). Peter Lang.
- Freitag-Hild, B. (2018). Teaching culture – intercultural competence, transcultural learning, global education. In C. Surkamp & B. Viebrock (Eds.), *Teaching English as a foreign language: An introduction* (pp. 159–175). J.B. Metzler.
- Gerngroß, G., Puchta, H., Holzmann, C., Lewis-Jones, P., & Stranks, J. (2018). *More! 4 Student's Book: Enriched Course*. Helbling.
- Göbel, K. (2019). Interkulturelles Lernen im Fremdsprachenunterricht. In K. Beuter, A. Hlukhovich, B. Bauer, & K. Lindner (Eds.), *Sprache und kulturelle Bildung: Perspektiven für eine reflexive Lehrerinnen- und Lehrerbildung und einen heterogenitätssensiblen Unterricht* (pp. 51–78). University of Bamberg Press.
- Harwood, N. (2014). Content, consumption, and production: Three levels of textbook research. In N. Harwood (Ed.), *English language teaching textbooks: Content, consumption, production* (pp. 1–41). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hinterberger, C., Lambert, D., Leitner, A., Scharf, E., Waba, S., & Zauner, M. (2021). *Prime Time 4: Coursebook*. ÖBV.
- Hoff, H. E. (2020). The evolution of intercultural communicative competence: Conceptualisations, critiques and consequences for 21st century classroom practice. *Intercultural Communication Education*, 3(2), 55–74. <https://doi.org/10.29140/ice.v3n2.264>
- Kehl, J., Krachum Ott, P., Schachner, M., & Civitillo, S. (2024). Culturally responsive teaching in question: A multiple case study examining the complexity and interplay of teacher practices, beliefs, and microaggressions in Germany. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 152, 104772. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2024.104772>

- König, L., & Ruf, W. (2022). Unterrichtspraktische Perspektiven auf kulturelles Lernen. In L. König, B. Schädlich, & C. Surkamp (Eds.), *Literatur-, Kultur- und Sprachvermittlung Research. unterricht\_kultur\_theorie: Kulturelles Lernen im Fremdsprachenunterricht gemeinsam anders denken* (pp. 421–440). J.B. Metzler.
- Kreft, A. (2020). *Transkulturelle Kompetenz und literaturbasierter Fremdsprachenunterricht: Eine rekonstruktive Studie zum Einsatz von fictions of migration im Fach Englisch*. Peter Lang.
- Kurtz, J. (2018). Ganzheitliche Englischlehrerbildung: Englischunterrichtliche Lehrwerke als vernachlässigte Bildungsinstrumente. In E. Burwitz-Melzer, C. Riemer & L. Schmelter (Eds.), *Rolle und Professionalität von Fremdsprachenlehrpersonen* (pp. 88–97). Narr.
- Lobo-Serra, M. (2012). *El aprendizaje intercultural en manuales actuales de ELE de nivel inicial utilizados en la secundaria en Austria – un análisis*. Universität Innsbruck.
- Lütge, C. (2016). Lehr-/Lernmaterialien und Medien zum Aufbau interkultureller Kompetenzen. In E. Burwitz-Melzer, G. Mehlhorn, C. Riemer, K.-R. Bausch & H.-J. Krumm (Eds.), *Handbuch Fremdsprachenunterricht* (pp. 456–459). Francke.
- Martinez, H. (2011). Kompetenzorientierung und Lehrwerke für Französisch und Spanisch: Zwischen Tradition und Innovation. *Fremdsprachen Lehren und Lernen*, 40(2), 83–105.
- Matos, A. G. & Melo-Pfeifer, S. (2020). *Literature and intercultural learning in language and teacher education*. Peter Lang.
- McConachy, T. (2018). Critically engaging with cultural representations in foreign language textbooks. *Intercultural Education*, 29(1), 77–88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2017.1404783>
- Messekher, H. (2014). Cultural representations in Algerian English textbooks. In S. Garton & K. Graves (Eds.), *International perspectives on materials in ELT* (pp. 69–86). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Munandar, M. I., & Newton, J. (2021). Indonesian EFL teachers' pedagogic beliefs and classroom practices regarding culture and interculturality. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, 21(2), 158–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2020.1867155>
- Nguyen, L., Harvey, S. & Grant, L. (2016). What teachers say about addressing culture in their EFL teaching practices: The Vietnamese context. *Intercultural Education*, 27(2), 165–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2016.1144921>
- Nguyen, T. T. M., Marlina, R., & Cao, T. H. P. (2020). How well do ELT textbooks prepare students to use English in global contexts? An evaluation of the Vietnamese English textbooks from an English as an international language (EIL) perspective. *Asian Englishes*, 62(4), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2020.1717794>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2018). *Preparing our youth for an inclusive and sustainable world: The OECD PISA global competence framework*. OECD. <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/Handbook-PISA-2018-Global-Competence.pdf>
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020). *Talis 2018 results (volume II): Teachers and school leaders as valued professionals*. TALIS. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19cf08df-en>
- Peskoller, J. (2023a). Unity in diversity: Exploring intercultural teaching and learning practices in secondary education and teacher training in Austria. In F. Dervin, M. Yuan, & Sude (Eds.), *Teaching inter-culturally 'otherwise'* (pp. 34–54). Taylor & Francis. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003345275-4>
- Peskoller, J. (2023b). *Interculturality in language education: A mixed methods study on the implementation of intercultural learning in Austrian lower secondary English as a foreign language classrooms* [Unpublished PhD thesis]. Universität Innsbruck, Innsbruck.
- Peskoller, J. (2025). Lebenswelt. In F. Dervin, H. R'boul, & N. Chen (Eds.), *New Perspectives on Teaching Interculturality Series. The concise Routledge encyclopaedia of new concepts for interculturality* (1st ed.) (pp. 135–141). Taylor & Francis Group.
- Risager, K. (2018). *Representations of the world in language textbooks*. Multilingual Matters.

- Risager, K. (2021). Language textbooks: Windows to the world. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(2), 119–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1797767>
- Risager, K. (2023). Analysing culture in language learning materials. Research timeline. *Language Teaching*, 56(1), 1–21.
- Römhild, R., & Gaudelli, W. (2022). Target Country, Target Culture. *Anglistik*, 33(3), 15–32. <https://doi.org/10.33675/ANGL/2022/3/5>
- Rose, K. & Galloway, N. (2019). *Global Englishes for language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schumann, A. (2019). Landeskunde im Kontext von Mehrkulturalität und Globalisierung. In C. Fäcke & F.-J. Meißner (Eds.), *Handbuch Mehrsprachigkeits- und Mehrkulturalitätsdidaktik* (pp. 192–195). Narr.
- Schäfer, L. (2016). Wie kann kulturelles Lernen im Englischunterricht der Sekundarstufe I in heterogenen Lerngruppen angebahnt werden? Erste Ergebnisse einer Design-Based Research-Studie. In S. Doff (Ed.), *Heterogenität im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Impulse-Rahmenbedingungen-Kernfragen-Perspektiven* (pp. 91–106). Narr.
- Schleicher, R. (2017). Diversität in Texten und Aufgaben in den Nationalen Bildungsstandards und in aktuellen Lehrwerken für den Anfangsunterricht Französisch. In C. Fäcke & B. Mehlmauer-Larcher (Eds.), *Kolloquium Fremdsprachenunterricht: Vol. 60. Fremdsprachliche Lehrmaterialien – Forschung, Analyse und Rezeption* (pp. 109–122). Peter Lang GmbH Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften.
- Sercu, L. (2000). *Acquiring intercultural communicative competence from textbooks: The case of Flemish adolescent pupils learning German*. Leuven University Press.
- Setyono, B. & Widodo, H. P. (2019). The representation of multicultural values in the Indonesian Ministry of Education and culture-endorsed EFL textbook: A critical discourse analysis. *Intercultural Education*, 30(4), 383–397. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2019.1548102>
- Silvia, X. (2015). The representation of culture in English textbooks prescribed for high schools in Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of English Education*, 2(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v2i1.1432>
- Sobkowiak, P. (2015). Developing students' intercultural competence in foreign language textbooks. *US-China Education Review B*, 5(12), 794–805. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2161-6248/2015.12.003>
- Song, H. (2013). Deconstruction of cultural dominance in Korean EFL textbooks. *Intercultural Education*, 24(4), 382–390. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2013.809248>
- Statistik Austria. (2024). *Statistisches Jahrbuch: Migration & Integration: Zahlen Daten Indikatoren*. Statistik Austria. [https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Migration\\_und\\_Integration\\_2024.pdf](https://www.statistik.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Migration_und_Integration_2024.pdf)
- Svarstad, L. K. (2021). A cultural Studies approach to interculturality in ELT. In M. Victoria & C. Sangiamchit (Eds.), *Interculturality and the English language classroom* (pp. 27–54). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Syrbe, M., & Rose, H. (2018). An evaluation of the global orientation of English textbooks in Germany. *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*, 12(2), 152–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2015.1120736>
- Toledo-Sandoval, F. (2020). Local culture and locally produced ELT textbooks: How do teachers bridge the gap? *System*, 95, 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102362>
- Tomlinson, B. (2012). Materials development for language learning and teaching. *Language Teaching*, 45(2), 143–179. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444811000528>
- Usener, J. (2016). *Lehrwerke und interkulturelle Kompetenz im Spanischunterricht. Analyse und Perspektiven* [Dissertation]. Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle.
- Vali, S. (2017). Textbooks and intercultural competence: An analysis of four English textbooks in Germany, Iran, the Netherlands, and Sweden. In C. Fäcke & B. Mehlmauer-Larcher (Eds.),

- Fremdsprachliche Lehrmaterialien – Forschung, Analyse und Rezeption* (pp. 123–149). Peter Lang.
- Victoria, M., & Sangiamchit, C. (2021). Introduction: Interculturality and the English language classroom. In M. Victoria & C. Sangiamchit (Eds.), *Interculturality and the English language classroom* (pp. 1–23). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Weninger, C., & Kiss, T. (2013). Culture in English as a foreign language (EFL) Textbooks: A semiotic approach. *TESOL Quarterly*, 47(4), 694–716. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.87>
- Weninger, C., & Kiss, T. (2015). Analyzing culture in foreign/second language textbooks. In X. L. Curdt-Christiansen & C. Weninger (Eds.), *Routledge research in language education. Language, ideology and education: The politics of textbooks in language education* (pp. 50–66). Routledge.
- Westfall, T. & Weber, C. (2006). *English to go 4: Coursebook*. ÖBV.