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Representation Matters!

– How Representation of Queer Identities in EFL Material Supports LGBTQIA+ Inclusion in the EFL Classroom

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1 Introduction

In the last decades of TEFL¹ research it has become evident that ELT² materials lack representation of sexual diversity and gender diversity (see Nelson 2006, Gray 2013b, Paiz 2015, Merse 2017). At the same time, the EFL³ classroom's inherent abilities to portray identity options, picture aspired versions of reality to its students, as well as to negotiate cultural differences with its students cannot be denied (see Shardakova and Pavlenko 2004, KMK 2021). With rising awareness for the existence, lives and struggles of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other non-cisgender, non-heterosexual (LGBTQIA+) people comes rising awareness for LGBTQIA+⁴ students.

Even in Germany, where same sex marriage has been legal since 2017, more than 80% of LGBTQIA+ youth face discrimination and harassment based on their sexual and gender identity in their daily lives (cf. Krell/Oldemeier 2017). Over 50% of them experience said discrimination and harassment in school (cf. *ibid.*). Hence, it is of no surprise that “27% of LGBTI students (15-17 years old) in Germany say [they] were hiding being LGBTI at school” (FRA 2013: 3). Consequently, these numbers call for more education on, de-stigmatization and awareness-raising about LGBTQIA+ identities and topics in school, so that queer⁵ students can feel safe in their educational environments. This thesis focuses on the implementation of queer representation and queer inclusion in EFL materials and the EFL classroom based on the curricular guidelines for English in the German federal state of Lower Saxony. It aims to educate on and raise awareness about the situation of queer students in the EFL classroom and the possibilities of queer inclusion. In the English curriculum for mixed-secondary-school level (grades five to ten) it is explicitly stated that “[the] diversity of sexual identities need to be dealt with in class” (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 6, own translation) and constitutes an important part of the educational mission. Yet, amongst the queer students in Germany only 30% recall queer issues being addressed in school “positively or in a balanced way” (FRA 2013: 3). Hence, the question emerges how the EFL classroom can ensure that LGBTQIA+ students are

1: TEFL = Teaching English as a Foreign Language

2: ELT = English Language Teaching

3: EFL = English as a Foreign Language

4: In this research the acronym LGBTQIA+ is used to refer to all people identifying as something other than heterosexual and/or cis-gender. The plus at the end symbolizes all other queer identities not listed with a letter in the acronym. Hence, it also includes e.g. queer people of Colour and Two-Spirit indigenous people. If the authors quoted in this research used a shorter acronym, their chosen acronym will be quoted, but all other queer identities will be meant as well.

5: The term ‘queer’ will be used interchangeably with the acronym LGBTQIA+, as it functions as an umbrella term for all non-heterosexual and non-cis-gender identities.

adequately included. Adequate queer representation in the EFL classroom can combat harmful stereotypes and prejudices against LGBTQIA+ people and their ways of life in linguistic and social contexts. Thus, this thesis will answer the question how adequate queer inclusion in the EFL classroom can be happening by focusing on the positive impacts that representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues in EFL materials can have on queer inclusion.

The thesis starts with a literature review in chapter 2, which will give an overview over the literature used and the research findings proving the severity of the exclusion and omission of queer identities and issues in the EFL context. Afterwards, chapter 3 will concentrate on the question of why queer inclusion generally matters by referring to queer theory as the theoretical framework. Chapter 4 will put queer inclusion into the context of the TEFL curriculum in Lower Saxony by focussing on the connections that can be found between LGBTQIA+ inclusion and the competences and standards that are to be reached through learning the English language which are specified in the core curriculum. Following, chapter 5 will examine why queer inclusion matters specifically in the EFL context and the context of language learning. In chapter 6 the focus shifts towards what queer representation in EFL materials looks like right now, what an adequate queer representation is constituted of and how English teachers and publishers of ELT materials influence queer representation. Furthermore, chapter 7 will explore answers to the research question in what ways queer identities can be represented in the EFL classroom and EFL materials. Therefore, subchapter 7.1 will focus on the implementation of thematic anchors as a means of queer representation and inclusion, inspired by Merse's 2017 research. Moreover, I suggest ten thematic anchors, expand them with questions of queer inquiry to challenge heteronormativity and allocate them to lower-level English learners, intermediate- and advanced-level. Hence, subchapter 7.2 will additionally answer the question of how queer representation can unfold in ELT materials apart from the (lower-level) topics of family and relationships. Afterwards, subchapter 7.2 will present ways of queer representation and implementation throughout various material modalities. Lastly, the paper finishes off with a conclusion in chapter 8.

2 Literature Review

In his dissertation “Other Others, Different Differences: Queer Perspectives on Teaching English as a Foreign Language” Thorsten Merse (2017) discusses the possibilities and involvement of queer perspectives into the TEFL context. In his research Merse found that “LGBT experience is pushed to supplementary, i.e. peripheral, materials if it is represented at all” (2017: 249) and that “it is up to the teacher (and possibly also the learners) to expand on or adapt the coursebook, or actively challenge its heteronormative make-up in the classroom” (ibid.: 251). Merse finds that the German market for TEFL materials is slowly making progress to incorporate lesbian and gay depictions, yet any other genders despite the binary gender roles of male and female are not depicted at all (cf. ibid. 252). He identifies two ways of LGBTQIA+ representation in German TEFL materials: First, “depicting [a queer character] throughout a whole coursebook” and second, “[linking] the exploration of gay and lesbian issues with a thematic anchor” (ibid.: 256). To combat the failure of the educational systems to sufficiently include LGBTQIA+ characters and topics in ELT materials, Merse suggests precise guidelines that help to comprehensively include LGBTQIA+ perspectives into TEFL materials. He presses on the point that a forthright and significant representation of LGBTQIA+ characters and topics is needed for it to be recognised by students (cf. ibid.: 255). Additionally, he emphasizes the need for “balanced and varied representations with a stress on multiperspectivity and multivoicedness so as to avoid shallow and one-sided portrayals” (ibid.: 257). Lastly, he highlights the need of the LGBTQIA+ representations to not feel superficial but to put them in meaningful context (cf. ibid.: 257).

John Gray analysed ten textbooks in 2013 for lower-level English learners produced in the UK. He analyzed lower-proficiency materials as the topics of family and relationships are introduced there, opening concrete possibilities to talk about LGBTQIA+ ways of life. However, Gray found out that there is an “avoidance of any representation of clearly identified LGBT characters” and that relationship-regarding topics seem to be “exclusively heterosexual matters” (Gray 2013b: 49). Additionally, he examined whether queer topics such as marriage equality, queer rights or queer vocabulary are mentioned and similarly found that they are not mentioned at all (cf. ibid.: 47 and 49). He concludes that there are no tasks at all referring to or mentioning diverse sexualities in the ELT textbooks and that

students are never asked to activate their prior knowledge on any LGBTQIA+ topics whatsoever (cf. *ibid.*: 49). Moreover, “[o]n the few occasions when homosexuality could be inferred [e.g., a storyline of two male best friends living together], the textbook tends to provide clarification to the contrary lest readers get the ‘wrong’ idea” (*ibid.*: 50).

In his study from 2015, Joshua Paiz examined 45 textbooks and texts for ELT regarding their representations of heteronormativity, which describes the social notion of heterosexual relationships being seen as normal and all non-heterosexual relationships and non-heteronormative identities being excluded and seen as inferior. He saw relevance in his study, as the materials used in ELT classrooms can impact the learners’ identity formation through depicting what is culturally acceptable in the target culture and what is not acceptable (cf. Paiz 2015: 79). Paiz analyzed the “average degree of heteronormativity reflected in the sample of ESL [English as a Second Language] reading texts/textbooks” (*ibid.*: 80) and furthermore compared the findings regarding the different publishers, proficiency levels, formats, and publishing years. He rated the samples on a scale from 1, not being heteronormative, to 3, being heteronormative, and found an overall score of 2.82, meaning all the samples were mostly heteronormative (cf. *ibid.*: 87ff). The reason for the score being a little lower than 3, is that some textbooks chose to use gender neutral terms, e.g., partner instead of wife or husband, which is seen as more inclusive, yet all textbooks fail to explicitly mention any queer characters or issues (cf. *ibid.*: 86). Paiz states that heteronormativity also takes the form of avoiding any topics or exercises that might question the heterosexual norm (cf. *ibid.*: 89). Additionally, he found that the different proficiency levels of beginner, intermediate and advanced “did not return any statistically significant difference” and all portrayed “a high degree of heteronormativity” (*ibid.*: 90). Finally, Paiz concludes that the ELT materials are of not much help when it comes to addressing LGBTQIA+ topics in the EFL classroom and appeals to all EFL teachers to take educating about these important topics into their own hands, yet to be mindful of the challenges and responsibilities that come with them (cf. *ibid.*: 92).

David Rhodes examined the prevalence of heterosexism in the school context in Australia in 2017. He defines heterosexism as “either explicit or implicit discrimination or prejudice based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the ‘normal’ sexual orientation”

(2017: 230). In his research he found that the Australian school system is not sufficiently including LGBTQIA+ students nor addressing queer topics satisfactorily in the classrooms (cf. *ibid.*: 231). He argues that besides covering (queer) sexual health topics in biology classes, the language classroom opens manifold “opportunit[ies] to explore alternate ways of being in the world”, hence queer topics should be included in the language classroom (*ibid.*: 234). At the same time, he criticizes stereotypical representations of queer identities and points to the need of having authentic representation in classrooms and classroom materials to not portray a shallow view on what it means to be queer (cf. *ibid.*: 235). Rhodes states that students “need to be provided with tools to challenge homophobic language such as cultural awareness about LGBTIQ people” (*ibid.*: 236), hence, he highlights the importance of teaching queer-appropriate vocabulary and educating about terms that are seen as insults to the LGBTQIA+ community, so that heterosexual and queer students can express themselves accurately and take part in conversations and discussions around queer topics without being offensive (cf. *ibid.*). Lastly, Rhodes urges teachers to be aware that the “language of the classroom should always be inclusive” (*ibid.*: 237), as teachers enable learning through discussions and through their choice of language, they can contribute to either promoting or challenging heterosexism and heteronormativity (cf. *ibid.*: 240).

Through the literature research it becomes evident, that representation of queer characters and topics in ELT materials is scarce and the representational practices that are used do not always do the importance of the representation justice. Most of the work to include queer topics into the EFL classroom is imposed on teachers and students. The findings indicate that there is a lot of change needed for ELT materials to represent, include, and address a wider part of today’s society.

3 Why Queer Inclusion Matters (Theoretical Framework)

For centuries, the heterosexual norm in society has been questioned and more diverse sexual and gender identities have arisen as means of self expression and ways of life. As social environments are gender- and sexuality-encoded, sexual identity labels and gender identity labels are used as self-ascriptions or used by others as external ascriptions to contextualize each other in society (cf. Huch and Lücke 2015: 7, own translation). School constructs an important social place for its students, where not only knowledge is conveyed, but also possibilities for identity development are presented and enabled (cf. *ibid.*, own translation). Therefore, said contextualization of one's own and others' sexual and gender identities also happens in school environments and schools should support diverse views on sexuality and gender by including queer issues and identities wherever possible.

The theory that best supports the inclusion of queer identities in school environments is the queer theory. To understand what queer theory encompasses, one must understand the origin of the word queer. It was "originally adopted to mark the appearance of something or someone 'odd' or 'strange' and later exercised as a slur predominantly for gay men" (Giffney 2009: 2), because gay men had been seen to be different and 'strange' compared to the heteronormative society where relationships between men and women only were seen as acceptable. Nowadays, the word queer "has been reclaimed [...] with anger and pride to signal an activist insurgence against homophobia" (*ibid.*), meaning that queer has become a term for self-identification used by people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community. As stated above, the word queer and hence, queer theory, arose out of a need to stand up against discrimination and oppression from the normative heterosexual society. Furthermore, the term heteronormativity describes the social scheme of heterosexuality being seen as the norm in as that heteronormativity

makes heterosexuality seem coherent, natural and privileged. It involves the assumption that everyone is "naturally" heterosexual, and that heterosexuality is an ideal, superior to homosexuality or bisexuality. (FRA 2009: 25)

Broadening this definition with the aspect of gender, leads to the realisation that additionally,

[h]eteronormativity implies a view of sexuality as strictly procreative and responding to a gender binary that aligns biological sex, gender identity, gender expression, gender roles, and sexual orientation, within a rigid, dichotomic, complementary, male–female gender schema. (Bem 1974 qtd. in Ferrari et al. 2021: 2)

As long as described heteronormativity is prevalent in our society, being queer will always be looked at as ‘different’ and hence, realizing and forming one’s own identity outside of the heterosexual norm will be entangled with numerous struggles.

Therefore, queer theory investigates from an LGBTQIA+ point of view and proves the discrimination, oppression and eradication of queer identities and topics in the heteronormative society. Henceforth, it confirms the need of adequate representation of queer identities and issues in everyday life institutions, such as schools, to prevent and confront queer erasure and to raise awareness and visibility for all LGBTQIA+ identities and matters.

Looking at secondary schools in Germany, it can be argued that covering queer issues will positively contribute to teaching about cultural understanding, being that becoming aware of, and learning about one’s own and other people’s cultural identity is part of the English curriculum (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 8, own translation). A more in-depth discussion of the English curriculum for Lower Saxony can be found in the next chapter. Additionally, Rhodes supports the need for LGBTQIA+ education in schools, as he states: “Schools remain the most significant spaces in which heterosexism is reinforced” (2017: 230). Concurrently, he sees a lot of potential in schools when it comes to advocating for LGBTQIA+ inclusion as schools “are also places where heterosexism is increasingly being contested” (ibid.). Rhodes argues that due to the “deafening silence around issues of sexuality and gender” (2017: 231) schools and “formal education [are] failing to adequately meet the information needs of LGBTIQ youth” (ibid.). Yet, as schools have a “clearly defined duty of care owed to students by teachers” (ibid.: 233), teachers need to educate on and de-stigmatize LGBTQIA+ topics. Firstly, by including queer issues in class, teachers will appeal to all their students regardless of or especially because of their sexual identity and support their identity formation. Secondly, teachers who include queer identities and issues in their teaching contribute to breaking down harmful stereotypes that (straight) students might have. Considering that “peers may deny each other access to certain identity

positions through peer norms” (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, Volman 2019: 47) it is of great importance that teachers responsibly lead the class by educating them on the equality of all sexual identities and teaching students the negative effects their prejudices and exclusionary social standards have. Consequently, including LGBTQIA+ issues into the classroom contributes to stopping discrimination and harassment of queer students in its roots, broadens their sociocultural knowledge and gives them opportunities for self-identification.

4 Queer Inclusion and the TEFL Curriculum of Lower Saxony

In Germany, the educational missions for each school subject and each school level are contained in core curricula. Each of the 16 federal states has their own curricula. In the German school curricula queer inclusion falls under the broad umbrella term of sex education. Since 1968 all subjects in German schools share the responsibility to educate on sexuality through multiple viewpoints (cf. Siemoneit and Windheuser 2021: 246, own translation). Merse explains that “sex education [additionally to the biological aspects] also has to address ethical, social and cultural questions pertaining to sexuality” (Merse 2017: 181). Moreover, sexuality should not only be considered a class topic but a “component of human interaction in school internal spaces” (Siemoneit and Windheuser 2021: 244, own translation) as well. Merse found that “in most of the German federal states, sex education is a cross-curricular responsibility which is also required to cover an explicit focus on sexual and gender diversity as a topic” (2017: 179). Therefore, all “individual school subjects are called for when it comes to linking their subject-specific inventory with the potentiality of teaching about sexual and gender diversity” (ibid.: 186). This demonstrates the need for the EFL class to be implementing queer issues to fulfill the cross-curricular educational goals. Additionally, the students will benefit from education about sexual and gender diversity, as it supports and expands the EFL classrooms’ inherent culture specific contributions to language learning. Furthermore, it is important that EFL teachers are educated about and can contribute to queer inclusion and issues, because “the EFL classroom as a part of the larger institutional context that a school provides must be prepared to respond adequately to specific questions and issues related to sexuality” (ibid.: 182).

Looking into the core curriculum for English at mixed-secondary-school level (grades five to ten) in the German federal state of Lower Saxony, the educational mission is described as the aim to teach principles of autonomous and cooperative language learning (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 5, own translation). These are supposed to help students achieve communicative and intercultural competences in the English language, which will help them find their place in society and be an openminded and empathetic human being (cf. ibid., own translation). Additionally, the curriculum says that in the context of Europe’s political, cultural, and economic development, the English

language is supposed to be a tool for peaceful understanding between people, to learn more about foreign cultures, to be prepared for linguistic challenges in education, occupation, and society, and to foster one's moral values (cf. *ibid.*, own translation). Moreover, the core curriculum explicitly states that besides "social, economic, ecological, political, cultural and intercultural phenomena [and] problems of sustainability, [the] diversity of sexual identities" (*ibid.*, own translation) must be dealt with in class. Therefore, this confirms that educating on and talking about diverse sexualities and queer issues in the EFL classroom is embedded in the EFL curriculum for Lower Saxony. Hence, queer inclusion aids the fulfillment of the educational mission.

Clearly, the aspects of language comprehension and production play a crucial role in the EFL curriculum. Students must learn how to understand, interpret, and produce the English language in all contexts of life. For example, students throughout grades five to ten of secondary school should be able to talk about their families, people, their daily lives, living conditions, preferences, and dislikes (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 21ff, own translation). Additionally, "the specific choice of the taught lexis and grammar depends on the class topics and must incorporate the individual interests and needs of students" (*ibid.*: 13, own translation). This should function as proof that students should be enabled to talk about their LGBTQIA+ friends or family members and themselves or their interests. Thus, students should be equipped with the linguistic means to be able to understand and produce queer-specific language. Clearly, queer vocabulary is needed for students to be able to fulfill the competences that are expected from them by the curriculum. Hence, queer inclusion on a linguistic level is supported by the EFL curriculum. What queer inclusion on a linguistic level can entail will be focused on in chapter 5.1.

Furthermore, cultural awareness and intercultural communication are core values of the EFL curricula in Germany. The English curriculum for mixed-secondary-school level (grades five to ten) for Lower Saxony discloses that the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) should "enable students to actively notice, understand, assess and evaluate English statements and expressions against the background of their own cultural identity" (*ibid.*: 8, own translation). This presupposes that students know about and are aware of their own culture and the role it plays in their identity. In today's German school

context culture is understood as more than the ethnicity of a person but as that society is always contested of various subcultures which can be defined by but are not limited to e.g., origin, gender, generation, social status, belief, and sexual orientation (cf. Freie und Hansestadt Hamburg: Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung 2011: 23 qtd. in Merse 2017: 182, own translation). Hence, being educated about the diversity of sexual identities, the LGBTQIA+ community and its culture, as well as being able to talk about their own experiences regarding sexual diversity should be a part of students' experiences in EFL class. Moreover, queer inclusion in the EFL class contributes to the curriculum's demand for students to "develop sociocultural knowledge, interest in, and awareness of their own and others' ways of life in order to deal with cultural differences in a respectful manner" (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 8, own translation). Besides awareness, especially the respect for and understanding of "other culture-specific ways of thinking, ways of life, values, norms, and living conditions" (ibid.: 34, own translation) should be taught and developed. Implementing queer issues and identities into the intercultural communicative approach in the EFL classroom offers great opportunities for students to learn about ways of life that differ from theirs and that show them differing ways of how culture and identity can be lived out. Hence, it becomes evident that queer inclusion should be considered an important and self-evident component of the intercultural communicative approach. Correspondingly, dealing with queer issues in the EFL classroom offers a multitude of aspects that foster intercultural understanding, awareness, and empathy. Specific themes and ways of implementation will be addressed in chapter 7.

5 The Importance of Representation in the EFL Context

“You can’t be what you can’t see” – Marian Wright Edelman

As civil rights and children’s rights activist and author Marian Wright Edelman’s quote suggests, it is difficult to become someone or something if one is not aware of the available possibilities. Conversely, once identity options are visible and represented, people start to realize that they could identify with the represented aspects as well. Put in the context of queer inclusion in the EFL classroom, it can be argued that the representation of queer identities and issues would offer students a variety of identity aspects which the students can implement into their worldviews, and which can support, enable, and positively impact their identity development.

To illustrate the power representation holds, Merse states that “with [queer] topics being explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, they move into the horizon of possibility” (2017: 185). Meaning if queer issues are not represented in the curriculum teachers might not be aware of them and will not teach them. As a result, under-representation of and/or ignorance to queer topics in the EFL context would bar students from gaining knowledge on queer issues and identity options, even though “students in language classrooms may be eager to engage with LGBT topics because they represent part of their lived experiences, either because of their own self-identification or through having queer acquaintances” (Paiz 2017: 350f). Furthermore, if queer issues and identities are not represented and instead heteronormativity would prevail, these “heteronormative pedagogies and materials may introduce latent, negative biases into the language classroom” (ibid.: 351) which can reinforce discrimination and exclusion of everything being seen as different, namely non-heteronormative identities and queer issues. Accordingly, queer representation in the EFL classroom is of great importance because prevailing heteronormativity leads to further marginalization of LGBTQIA+ identities and students.

In fact, the EFL classroom is not only a place where explicit knowledge is conveyed, but where intercultural communicative competences, understanding of social interactions and respect for cultural and societal differences is fostered and valued, as explained in chapter 4. These overarching goals are implicitly and explicitly worked on in each topic and subtopic dealt with in the EFL class. Each topic is accompanied and illustrated by materials teachers

can use to teach their class. These EFL materials illustrate characters and their lives, including their friends and family, their communities, their daily lives, and their struggles. The portrayal of the characters, situations and contexts aims to create alternate realities for students to have authentic and interesting language learning contexts (cf. Verhoeven, Poorthuis and Volman 2019: 49). Shardakova and Pavlenko refer to these created contexts in language learning textbooks as “‘imaginary worlds’” (2004: 27). Furthermore, the way the characters are portrayed and represented in EFL materials leads to either visibility or invisibility of certain identities and what they could entail. Hence, these ‘imaginary worlds’ in foreign language materials explicitly and implicitly depict identity options which are then made available to the students (cf. *ibid.*). According to Verhoeven, Poorthuis, and Volman, schools impact the formation of their students’ identities unintentionally and intentionally in numerous ways, said representation of possible identities being among them (cf. 2019: 35). Representation of topics or identities that students never heard of before or thought might not be of interest to them, “may invite them to adopt new interests, [...] and to try out new identity positions” (*ibid.*: 49). Hence, representing a wide range of identity options in EFL materials can lead to students’ awareness of identity possibilities for themselves and others. Additionally, not representing certain identities in language materials implements that they are not valued, which makes it harder for students with identities differing from the ones presented in the materials to become successful language learners (cf. Shardakova and Pavlenko 2004: 28). Thus, teaching about and representing LGBTQIA+ ways of life, identities and issues in an authentic and meaningful way will broaden the students’ knowledge, offer them opportunities to expand their own identities and conceptions of other people’s identities and supports to achieve the overarching EFL class’s goals of fostering understanding and respect for everyone regardless of culture or identity background.

On the contrary, if foreign language textbooks do not offer diverse representations, students – who all come from diverse identity backgrounds – will not be able to identify with the presented themes, contexts, or problems. Moreover, the foreign language materials might “deprive students of linguistic resources they need to position themselves in difficult interactions involving their gender, sexual, racial or ethnic identities” (Shardakova and Pavlenko 2004: 27). The linguistic aspect of queer inclusion will be dealt with in depth

in chapter 5.1. Furthermore, Shardakova and Pavlenko examined that discourses and topics in foreign language textbooks that have no similarities to the students' lives and their experiences can lead to a refusal of wanting to learn or to use the foreign language (cf. *ibid.*). Evidently, the representation of authentic, meaningful thematic contexts, queer, diverse identity concepts and corresponding linguistic input in foreign language materials is needed for all students to firstly, feel included into and secondly, motivated to contribute to the linguistic and cultural context the foreign language classroom offers.

Finally, Shardakova and Pavlenko summed the importance of representation up nicely when they asked:

[W]hat are the costs to our students and their linguistic investments of the kept-up pretense that all of us can identify with able-bodied heterosexual White males [and females] and experience similar learning trajectories? (2004: 32)

This quote insinuates the prevalence of normative, non-marginalized identity traits in foreign language materials which are mostly considered as superior to other identity traits. Moreover, it alludes to the sacrifices that learners with non-normative identities, in this context especially learners with queer identities, must make to be part of the language classroom. While 'able-bodied heterosexual White male or female' learners of English certainly exist, representing only those renders a privileged point of view and contributes to the invisibility of other identities in foreign language materials and classrooms (cf. *ibid.*: 33). Furthermore, the avoidance of representing queer- and other minority-identities in EFL materials leads to an avoidance of conversing about struggles, problems, and discrimination these minorities endure (cf. *ibid.*). Subsequently, not representing queer identities in the EFL classroom will "deprive the students of important linguistic means of self-presentation and self-defense [sic!]" (*ibid.*). Therefore, adequately representing queer issues would be beneficial to the normalization of LGBTQIA+ identities, the queer community, and their concerns. Through proper LGBTQIA+ representation in the EFL classroom, stereotypes against queer identities, queer ways of life and queer people could be linguistically and socially combated, and patterns of discrimination could be detected. Thus, queer inclusion and representation in the EFL class can help to destigmatize the queer community, oppose queer discrimination and harassment, and give purpose to (queer) students.

5.1 Inclusive Dimensions of Language

Language forms the way we speak about things or address certain topics. Specific linguistic means can unintentionally or intentionally create scenarios where identities, character traits, achievements or other possibilities are rendered invisible or are conditioned to certain norms. Queer theory is aware of “the significance of words and the power of language” (Giffney 2009: 6), hence queer inclusion needs to contain queer inclusive language. As “language has the power to mark out difference” (Merse 2017: 9) it is a powerful tool that can be used to recreate stereotypes, discriminate, and stigmatize queer people. At the same time, language has inherent possibilities to overcome stereotypical and discriminating linguistic expressions and to change from hurtful discourse to inclusive discourse. Consequently, the EFL classroom should “challenge harmful discourse in which stereotypes are cited and perpetuated, and develop a sensitivity for a more inclusive and empathetic language use” (ibid.: 182).

Queer inclusive language can help to avoid difficulties when teaching students new grammatical forms and practicing conversation. Being that in learning a new language it is important to know how to utilize correct grammatical forms and additionally to know how to produce correct gendered forms and contexts, it can be argued that gender and sexuality (which often expresses the relationships between people on a gender spectrum) will arise either as topics or in grammatical discussions. Furthermore, “[m]uch of the questioning focus in language classes – and most especially in beginner-level classes – is placed on the personal world of the learner” (Liddicoat 2009: 192). Hence, students will most definitely be given tasks to describe their family, talk about their friends, or characterize their partners. This poses difficulties for queer students or students with queer family members or friends if the teacher is not aware of the possibility of non-heteronormative answers in the classroom. Additionally, if teachers ask questions in heteronormative contexts, they risk their queer students to not feel addressed, to feel the need to lie about their reality to fit the grammatically gendered question of the teacher or even forced to out themselves (cf. Griffin 1992 qtd. in Liddicoat 2009: 192). Liddicoat supports the view that foreign language classrooms can make it especially difficult for queer students to express themselves, because

[t]he language classroom presents a potential conflict for the gay and lesbian [and queer] student in that it combines a heteronormatively constructed context with questions which makes self-disclosure a relevant activity. (Liddicoat 2009: 192)

Therefore, queer representation in the language that is used in the EFL classroom is important, otherwise the way the teacher and students speak can perpetuate heteronormative standards and exclude queer identities and students (cf. Paiz 2017: 358). Especially when referring to pronouns or gendered talk about partners in the EFL class - for example in the context of talking about friends and family and learning new grammatical structures - the teacher's oblivion to queer identities could lead to misunderstandings. For example, if a teacher asks a female student to describe her boyfriend and she then answers talking about her girlfriend, she does not adhere to the heteronormative norm which the teacher implied beforehand. Through expecting that "descriptions will be of the opposite sex when a description is of a partner" (Liddicoat 2009: 194) teachers who think inside the 'heteronormative frame' might think the student used the wrong gendered terms and failed to implement what they had just learned. Simultaneously, the students might get the feeling that their identity and partnership might not be taken seriously or do not fit in the EFL classroom context. Hence, the implicit assignment of a sexual identity by the teacher to the student plays a compelling role in how the teacher perceives the students' answers (cf. *ibid.*) and how or even if a student is willing to answer. Consequently, teachers should be aware of the power their language use and stereotypical or heteronormative thinking hold and should opt for gender-neutral descriptions, e.g., in this case partner instead of boyfriend or girlfriend, so that their questions are inclusive of student realities that do not adhere to the heteronormative standard.

Moreover, it is important for teachers not to let the heteronormative frame become the benchmark against which all student answers are measured (cf. *ibid.*: 196). The heteronormative framing in the EFL class leads queer students to having to overly explain and justify their answers, themselves, their identities, their family-constellations or partnerships to be understood by the teacher and the class. This could hinder students from partaking in the class more frequently, and therefore could reduce their learning growth. Paiz illustrates, that situations like the one described above highlight "the unconscious policing of identities available to students in the language classroom and how it limits their

productive ability” (2017: 351). Consequently, being aware of queer identities, non-heterosexual couples, and the queer use of pronouns and language are important factors for teachers and students to be able to communicate effectively with each other. Furthermore, knowing about, educating on, and hence representing the queer use of language as a teacher, opens possibilities for the students to express themselves regarding their queer friends and family members and foremost, to express and feel validated in their own sexual and gender identity. The use of queer inclusive language reflects the teacher’s acceptance of students for who they are and illustrates that students do not have to be afraid of negative backlash because of something so inherent to the human experience as one’s sexual identity. Hence, queer inclusive language will have the students feel safer in the classroom and leads to them participating more freely and being more motivated in the EFL class (cf. Steck and Perry 2018: 230).

6 Queer Representation in TEFL

As Gray has put it, the need for representation “arises out of a response to the related politics of erasure and misrecognition” (2013a: 6), especially regarding minorities such as “women, workers, ethnic minorities, religious minorities and those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [or other non-heteronormative sexual or gender identities]” (ibid.). Therefore, to combat the erasure of queer identities and their issues in the TEFL context, this chapter will discuss what an adequate queer representation in the TEFL context entails and further, what power teachers and publishers hold over queer representation in the TEFL context.

6.1 Authentic versus Tokenistic Representations

Before being able to talk about implementations of queer representation, it is necessary to define what a ‘good representation’ is constituted of. Presupposed that a good representation must align with the goals of the EFL curricula, queer representation should aim to be and take place in “authentic, meaningful and challenging settings” (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 9, own translation). Accordingly, the representation of LGBTQIA+ people and topics must go beyond a superficial stereotypical portrayal and must address underlying issues and concepts to be meaningful. Contrarily, it is evident that a representation that reinforces stereotypical thinking about queer people and/or that does not provide background information on sensible queer issues would be a ‘bad’ representation. Indeed, it is extremely important for queer inclusion to show true diversity of sexual and gender identities and the accompanying issues that go along with not conforming to heteronormativity, to avoid tokenistic representations or misrepresentations.

Tokenistic representations are harmful, being that they seem to include and support people from marginalized groups, yet do not address the underlying systemic inequalities that lead to the marginalization of these people (cf. Cambridge Dictionary 2013). Such tokenistic representations can be found in the early years of queer research and queer theory, where only lesbian women and gay men and their issues were focused on, and any other non-heteronormative identities were left out of the discussion (cf. Giffney 2009: 4). Regarding EFL materials, tokenistic representations could, for example, take place in

textbooks if in a task about human rights one of the fictitious characters might be portrayed as gay, but it is not discussed if he as a gay man has the same rights as heterosexual men. Another example could be a rainbow flag being visible in a picture, yet its meaning never gets explained. In these examples, the underlying issues of the diversity of identities and struggles within the LGBTQIA+ community are overlooked and the superficial mentioning constructs tokenistic representations (cf. Gray 2013a: 7). Moreover, in the TEFL and educational setting of a school, teachers need to be careful not to tokenize individual queer students or queer teachers to be the experts on all queer issues only because they identify as (one) part of the LGBTQIA+ community. Furthermore, while tokenistic queer representations highlight one person or one symbol to be representative of the whole LGBTQIA+ community and their issues, misrepresentations refer to “demeaning or stereotypical representation[s]” (ibid.: 6), e.g., a gay man being depicted as ‘less manly’ compared to a straight man or a bisexual woman being referred to as ‘indecisive’. As a result, misrepresentations lead to an extension of stereotypical and dubious portrayals of gender and sexuality and simultaneously do not leave any space for the stereotypically portrayed identities to change (cf. Selvi and Kocaman 2021: 125f.).

Thus, only depicting gay and lesbian identities in EFL materials – even if they might be the ‘easiest to understand’ from a heterosexual point of view – and reinforcing harmful (gender) stereotypes would not do queer theory and queer inclusion justice at all. To avoid tokenistic representations and misrepresentations in EFL materials, a variety of queer identities besides gay or lesbian, such as bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, or questioning, should authentically be implemented in queer representation. Additionally, underlying issues of erasure of LGBTQIA+ identities in real life should be addressed. Yet, moving away from tokenized representations does not mean each EFL material needs to include each possible sexual or gender identity probable. Instead, educating on and representing issues of discrimination, harassment or missing human rights - which all queer people face - are more important to be dealt with than the meticulous dissection of each possible gender or sexual identity (cf. Giffney 2009: 4). Consequently, in an approach to find better suited and more authentic ways of queer representation, queer representations should “move towards issue-based coalitional activism rather than identity politics” (ibid.). In doing so the “singular and therefore monolithic portrayal of [...] non-heterosexual

identit[ies]" (Merse 2017: 254) can be resolved and queer representation can be taken further than merely tokenistic misrepresentations.

6.2 The Teacher's Attitude towards Queer Representation

Some may argue that EFL materials do not need to be altered to include LGBTQIA+ issues, as teachers could just add these topical nuances themselves. Yet, Paiz counters that this is not ideal and would overburden many teachers. Firstly, 'queering' the materials themselves would engross time most teachers do not have due to their normal workload, and secondly, especially early-service teachers rely on the materials to guide them through planning their lessons and they would not know how to or rather would not trust themselves to alter it, especially regarding topics they might not think of themselves as experts in (cf. Paiz 2017: 352). Accordingly, having queer representations in EFL materials would not only be beneficial to the students but to the teachers, as well. Moreover, if EFL materials represent LGBTQIA+ identities and queer issues it makes it easier for teachers to refer to these topics and make students aware of their existence. Being that teachers facilitate the exploration and discussion of the class materials, they can initiate and support students to actively examine the portrayed identity aspects (cf. Verhoeven, Poorthuis and Volman 2019: 36). Being able to work with existing queer inclusive materials and not having to worry about adequately 'diversifying' the materials themselves, teachers can focus more clearly on planning their lessons and on mediating the contents of the materials. Therefore, students would be offered a more professional class environment, and teachers would feel more certain and secure in running a queer inclusive EFL class if queer representations are adequately implemented in EFL materials.

Furthermore, since teachers are the ones guiding their students through the EFL materials and having them focus on certain topics, teachers hold the power to omit or accentuate certain aspects. Therefore, teachers who do not support the LGBTQIA+ community would be able to prevent conversations about queer issues arising regardless of the inclusivity of the materials. Hence, it is crucial for teachers to reflect on their personal beliefs and stereotypical thinking for them to not portray these on their students. Undoubtedly, being reflective of their own beliefs, their beliefs about their students and

the impact those have on students, is an essential and necessary part of being a good teacher (cf. Grimm, Meyer, Volkmann 2015: 19f.). Irrespective of their personal beliefs about the LGBTQIA+ community, teachers should always support their students in their identity development and should not hinder them from exploring and educating themselves on topics they are interested in. Additionally, being that “static teacher expectations limit adolescents’ ways to position themselves” (Verhoeven, Poorthuis, Volman 2019: 45) and the fact that “adolescents’ self-understandings are informed by their perceptions of their teachers’ expectations” (ibid. 46) of them, it becomes evident, that teachers need to be deliberate of their own expectations and prejudices they might have towards their students. Furthermore, as stated as educational goals in the curriculum for TEFL in Germany, it is important for teachers to aid their students to become young adults who can foster cultural communicative competence, can contribute to peaceful understanding between people and can accept others and their ways of life, e.g., people belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 5, own translation). Hence, it is important for teachers to teach about diversity and inclusion regardless of their personal opinions, so that students are enabled to not only academically but personally evolve and flourish in their school environment.

Besides, it is possible for queer issues to arise outside of the planned lesson structures, as well. Teachers need to be aware of the possibility of queer topics arising unexpectedly out of the students’ discussions or interests, even when they were not explicitly mentioned or dealt with in the class objective or ELT materials (cf. Merse 2015: 17). Teachers should welcome and incorporate the comments into their lessons and derive a “productive learning experience” (ibid.) from them, to create an open learning atmosphere where all students can feel safe in their identity and their curiosity. However, unexpected comments by students regarding queer issues can often be of homophobic nature (ibid.). Homophobic comments by students need to be addressed and should not go without intervention, as that would perpetuate a queer-hostile learning environment which would exclude LGBTQIA+ students. Rather, the teacher should prompt their students to critically reflect on the homophobic comment (cf. ibid.) and explain the gravity of their remarks on their (queer) classmates. Precise strategies for teachers on how to adequately deal with homophobic remarks by students need yet to be developed by future research.

However, it should go without mentioning that hate is not an opinion, it should never be endured in a classroom, and it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure a safe(r) learning environment for all students.

Despite the evidence showing that LGBTQIA+ representation in EFL materials would benefit teachers to lead a queer inclusive EFL class, queer inclusive TEFL materials are only slowly making their way into the mainstream educational materials market in Germany (cf. Merse 2017: 252f.). This implies that as of now, it is in the hands of teachers to decide whether they want to lead a queer inclusive EFL class and if so, how they want to implement queer inclusion into their lessons and materials (cf. *ibid.*: 251). As discussed above, a multitude of factors that can deter teachers from leading a queer inclusive EFL class exist, e.g., their unconsciousness to queer topics, their fear of not being able to adequately address queer topics and missing queer inclusive EFL materials. In an attempt to find solutions to this problem, chapter 7 will discuss TEFL topics and materials regarding their possibilities for queer representation.

6.3 Publishers' Attitudes towards Queer Inclusion in ELT Materials

Besides the teachers' attitudes towards queer implementation in the ELT classroom, publishers' attitudes towards queer inclusion play an important role regarding the published ELT materials and the perspectives they portray to the students and teachers. As Paiz points out, commercial publishers hold tremendous power over the prevalence of heteronormative standards in ELT materials through their publishing norms (cf. 2017: 353). Gray found that UK-produced ELT textbooks aimed at a global market depict little of what inclusive and diverse societies and real life are like, because publishers rather stick to conservative and standardised topics that have great promotional and commercial value (cf. 2013a: 8). Hence, it is more important to publishers to make great profit with ELT materials that is easy to market to a wide range of countries, as it is to represent important identity options and social issues to students. Therefore, Gray found that these textbooks lack "real use value" (2013a: 9) as they lack the possibilities to deal with socially important issues like queer inclusion, diversity, and discrimination.

When Gray interviewed ELT publishers in 2010, they explicitly told him that they were aware of the heteronormative nature of their ELT materials and that they purposefully include only heterosexual love interests in their materials aimed at teenagers (cf. 2010: 124). The senior editor Gray interviewed did voice concerns regarding the stringent exclusion of LGBTQIA+ issues yet argued that they must accommodate somehow as their main goal is to get the materials sold to a large audience (cf. *ibid.*). This shows the prevalence of profit-focused publishing strategies that do not fully consider the impacts their exclusion of queer topics has on the teachers and students in ELT classes. Gray states that “it is the conservative nature of the market that is to blame for the publishers’ reproduction of heteronormativity” (2013b: 51), yet at the same time affirms that it is unacceptable that publishers who regulate the content and contribute to the standards of the market abandon their responsibilities and try to force it onto the teachers to take queer inclusion into their own hands (cf. *ibid.*). Thus, Gray urges publishers to think outside the box of their heteronormatively influenced publishing practices and their desires to expand profits and pleads for the division of markets, so that less conservative markets can be provided with LGBTQIA+ inclusive materials (cf. *ibid.*: 52). Similarly, Merse prompts “publishers [to] reconsider the ways in which they activate and reproduce heteronormativity in the coursebook content” (Merse 2017: 258), so that a more inclusive coursebook landscape can be achieved and students and teachers alike can be equipped with queer inclusive and aware ELT materials.

7 Possibilities to Implement Queer Representation in EFL Materials

This chapter concentrates on how queer representation can take place in TEFL materials. As the studies conducted by Gray in 2013, Paiz in 2015 and the research conducted by Merse in 2017 suggest, queer inclusion and representation in EFL materials is scarce. As mentioned in chapter 2, LGBTQIA+ issues are either only mentioned superficially or in supplemental materials (cf. Merse 2017: 249) and are overshadowed by the prevailing heteronormativity found in EFL materials (cf. Gray 2013b: 49 and Paiz 2015: 90). To enable students access to queer inclusive education – which the educational system should, in order to meet its own standards, as discussed in chapter 4 – representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and queer issues in EFL materials is needed. As established in chapter 6.1, it is important for queer representation in EFL materials to move away from stereotypical and tokenistic representations and instead move towards the authentic and meaningful implementation of queer issues in the EFL classroom. Hence, the following chapter will introduce ideas on how queer issues can be implemented into existing TEFL topics so that an issue-based representation of queer topics and identities can be achieved. The connection of a TEFL inherent topic and ideas for queer representation is called a thematic anchor, as seen in Merse 2015 and 2017. Additionally, these thematic anchors will be classified into beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of English to combat the research gap of how queer inclusion can take place besides the lower-level topics of family and relationships. Furthermore, possibilities for authentic implementation of queer representations throughout various material modalities will be presented in chapter 7.2.

7.1 Thematic Anchors for Representing Queer Issues in the TEFL Context

In his research on how to make ELT materials more queer-inclusive, Merse found that representation of queer issues and identities in the EFL classroom can best occur when connected to topics that initiate students' exploration of queer issues in realistic, interesting, and appropriate thematic contexts (cf. 2017: 256). This goes hand in hand with Giffney's finding that issue-based representation of what it means to be queer is suitable, because "identities become not so much categories to be occupied, [...], but spaces to be

navigated, revisited, revised [and negotiated]" (2009: 5). The thematic anchors are supposed to initiate students to discuss meaningful topics of life with an attention to queer issues and their influence on being queer. Therefore, thematic anchors legitimize the handling of LGBTQIA+ topics in the EFL class (cf. Merse 2017: 256.). To create more decisive regulations of what could count as a thematic anchor, the observations regarding what a good queer representation entails, as discussed in chapter 6.1, will be implemented in the following.

Thematic anchors can be constituted of a multitude of different topics that are of use to the EFL class and of interest to its students. Merse argues in favor of

keeping [the] large-scale themes that are already part and parcel of ELT pedagogy, and us[ing] these as a suitable matrix in which to embed a queer or LGBT focus as a 'natural' dimension of these topics. (2015: 18)

Hence, thematic anchors should negotiate societal or political structures, as the negotiation of these structures ensures a thorough and issue-based representational approach towards queer representation, as postulated by Giffney in 2009. Examples of said societal or political issues can be human rights, laws and legislations in (English-speaking) countries, discrimination, etc. Secondly, it is necessary for thematic anchors to be of interest, informative, and realistic to the students' lives and living conditions. That would contextualize queer representation in authentic, meaningful contexts and would "[demonstrate] how sexual issues are a core component of many everyday discourse domains and spheres of life" (Merse 2015: 18). Thus, topics like sports, vacations, job opportunities, friends or family would be possible thematic anchors to include representation of queer identities and issues. Lastly and certainly, thematic anchors need to correspond to the curricular guidelines. For instance, regarding the intercultural communicative approach, thematic anchors should include topics that lead students to discuss and assess topics against the background of their own (cultural) identity (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 8, own translation). Hence, the social facets of sexuality, namely "the emotional, spiritual, and the lived experiences of LGBTIQ people and the contributions that they have made to society" (Rhodes 2017: 233) can form a great basis for learning about and discussing sexuality, queer and social issues in the intercultural EFL class, as it aims to foster cultural awareness and understanding between people.

Additionally, implementing queer representation and inclusion into already existing themes of the TEFL class and curriculum “avoids tokenising an LGBT topic as something ‘exotic’ or ‘special’” (Merse 2015: 18). Consequently, when thematically following the curricular guidelines, choosing topics that negotiate societal concerns and are of interest and close to the realities of the students, thematic anchors can be used as a didactic-pedagogic strategy to implement LGBTQIA+ identities and issues into the EFL classroom. Moreover, the implementation of queer issues through thematic anchors is not limited to a specific material modality but can be applied to any EFL materials that deal with the contents of thematic anchors.

Hence, connecting queer issues to existing TEFL topics and broadening their perspective and frame of reference to include queer issues and identities is an important step towards furthering queer representation and queer inclusion in the TEFL context. Adhering to the guidelines constructed before, the following thematic anchors were thought of in an attempt to approach and define “TEFL-specific [queer] learning objectives” (Merse 2017: 185). The thematic anchors aim to inspire intentional inclusion of queer issues in the TEFL classroom across various themes known to TEFL without being bound to any specific material modality.

Thematic Anchor	Possibility of Queer Representation / Implementation	Level
Family constellations	Actively talk about queer family constellations.	1
Friends & Friendship	What does it mean to be an ally to queer friends?	1 - 3
Famous people	Actively show examples of queer famous people.	1 - 3
Human rights worldwide / politics	Address missing human rights for queer people. (E.g., when dealing with America, talk about the Florida Anti-LGBTQIA+ bills)	2 - 3
Different cultures and festivities / holidays	Investigate how cultural differences affect queer people. (E.g., include home-stories of queer families or queer people celebrating cultural festivities)	2 - 3
Vacation & cultural differences	What do queer people have to keep in mind when planning a or going on vacation?	2 - 3
Stereotypes	Disprove stereotypes against queer people and raise awareness of the negative effects of heteronormativity.	3
Discrimination	How does discrimination affect queer people?	3

Area studies / Globalization	How does globalization negatively or positively impact queer people?	3
Job opportunities / work life / pinkwashing	What does discrimination in the workplace look like for queer people? Do queer people have the same opportunities as heterosexual people? Do companies pinkwash?	3

Table 1: Thematic Anchors for Queer Representation in TEFL Classrooms, classified for beginner (1), intermediate (2) and advanced (3) learner-levels.

Clearly, following the representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues in ELT materials, actual exploration of the represented queer topics and identities is indispensable to “empower learners to understand, navigate and participate in such discourse” (Merse 2015: 15). Being that the themes and topics in the TEFL context have so far been mostly viewed through a heteronormative viewpoint because cis-gender and heterosexual identities are “always potentially present in language classrooms through images of heterosexually based societies” (Liddicoat 2009: 191), it is tremendously important to question these norms and expand the understanding of teachers and students to the equally possible non-heteronormative scenarios that can unfold within the themes. Said exploration, examination, and discussion of queer issues in the context of everyday life and in contrast to the heteronormative society is inherent to the queer inquiry approach for ELT as postulated by Nelson (cf. 2006: 7). This deconstruction of heteronormative narratives can unfold through questions that “are geared towards addressing the underlying norms and assumptions of the heterosexually organised [themes]” (Merse 2015: 18) and materials. The combination of queer inquiry and queer representation through thematic anchors will lead to

a continuum ranging from an en passant-representation that guarantees LGBT visibility to a deliberate and explicit negotiation of LGBT issues or matters and norms relating to sexual and gender identities. (Merse 2017: 258)

Especially, the highly heteronormative-presenting topics of family, partnerships, and marriage need to, and simultaneously offer many opportunities to, include queer identities. Namely, the teacher could indicate to the students that other family constellations besides mother, father, and children are possible and have them think of “alternative definitions of being a family [e.g.,] single parents, queer couples, and those who choose their own families due to the oppression they face from their biological ones” (Selvi and Kocaman

2021: 129). Questions to challenge the heteronormative standard could for example be questions like: Could these two boys/girls be more than friends?, What do you think about the father asking his son if he has a girlfriend?, Do you think the options of male and female on this document asking for your gender are enough? Thus, adequately using the thematic anchors to represent queer identities and issues only works if teachers and students alike are able to think outside the heteronormative standards of society and are “acknowledging, and giving voice to, learners of diverse sexual and gender identities, as well as including texts and teaching materials into classrooms that feature LGBT people and perspectives” (Merse 2015: 14). To do so, the thematic anchors are complemented with possible questions that aim to discuss heteronormative standards and to raise awareness for the LGBTQIA+ community. The full table with the questions challenging heteronormativity can be found in the appendix on page 37.

As shown in table 1, the thematic anchors and queer topics open manifold possibilities to explore, examine, discuss, and question topics of everyday life and of typical use in the TEFL classroom regarding their perpetuation of heteronormative standards and their inclusion or omission of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues. As illustrated, queer representation and inclusion in the EFL class is more than talk about different sexual or gender identities but is rather a negotiation and analysis of heteronormative societal structures, of what it means to belong to a community, of human rights and their absence, of discrimination, of self expression and identity processes and of what it means to be queer in a heteronormative society. These discussions, negotiations, and analyses are essential in understanding any LGBTQIA+ issue, being that “sexual identities are understood to be performative acts, that is, discursively instantiated and relationally enacted events” (Nelson 2006: 3) which can not be taught by merely referring to static and fragmentary definitions of what it means to be queer. Paiz adds, that the teacher can prompt said conversations around queer issues “through scaffolding activities and the activation of students’ prior knowledge gained through their lived experiences” (2017: 356), highlighting the need for the thematic anchors to be authentic and of interest to the students and for the classroom atmosphere to be welcoming for students to share their thoughts. Simultaneously, it is important for teachers to be aware of how being queer or having queer parents can influence a student’s life due to experiences of discrimination, exclusion or hate. Hence, if

there are queer students in the class, the teacher should be empathetic towards them and their experiences and should never force (queer) students to disclose information about their personal life that they do not feel comfortable sharing. Moreover, teachers need to be aware that when talking about topics like vacations or one's future, queer students do not have the same opportunities as heteronormative students. Hence, they might struggle more with these topics than their heterosexual classmates. Overall, the thematic anchors presented can be used to expand already existing classroom topics to include queer issues and initiate queer and social inquiry in the TEFL classroom. Furthermore, they create a link to the intercultural communicative competence approach of TEFL by "incorporating an additional layer of critical engagement" (Merse 2015: 16) with societal and cultural topics into the EFL classroom.

Clearly, class objectives like family, friends or relationships which are dealt with in lower-level EFL classes are "discourse domain[s] in which sexual identities and heteronormativity become particularly tangible" (ibid.: 18). The following section will examine which discourse domains offer possibilities for engagement with queer issues for higher level EFL classes and older learners. Looking at the curricular guidelines for grades nine and ten in Lower Saxony, it becomes evident that societal topics and everyday life topics such as human rights debates and discrimination are well suited for older and advanced learners of English to practice their language and intercultural communicative skills (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 15, 19, 34, own translation). Even though it is extremely important to address societal problems such as discrimination, homophobia, and harassment of LGBTQIA+ people, teachers need to be careful to not let the representations of queer identities focus solely on negative experiences and instead should also represent the manifold positive facets inherent to the LGBTQIA+ community so that students can be offered a more balanced viewpoint of what it means to be queer (cf. Alter 2014/2015 qtd. in Merse 2017: 123). Examples of positive queer representations for older and advanced learners can include learning about famous people who identify as queer and serve as role models to the students or learning about different cultures where queer people are seen as an enrichment to society, e.g., Native American cultures. Especially discussions about societal topics, like globalization, job opportunities, stereotypes, and cultural differences, and regarding how each of these affects queer people

or vice versa, offer manifold opportunities for advanced learners to not only improve their intercultural knowledge of queer issues but to improve their vocabulary, their grammatic means of expression and their overall communicative competences. These topics correspond to the curricula expectation that advanced and older students (grade nine/ten and above) are expected to understand and communicate about topics from daily life, topics directed at the future and topics regarding jobs and working life (cf. Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 15, own translation). Furthermore, as “sexuality [and gender diversity] can be understood as one possible line of cultural difference” (Merse 2017: 183) a queer viewpoint on culture benefits students in acquiring the intercultural communicative competence anticipated for higher-level learners. Given that “sexual and gender norms intersect heavily with culturally meaningful events and situations, e.g., pursuing a hobby or studying at university” (Merse 2015: 19), the queer viewpoint on culture supports the ICC’s aim for the students “to acquire socio-cultural orientational-knowledge by means of exemplary themes and contents” (Niedersächsisches Kultusministerium 2015: 34, own translation).

Consequently, the inclusion of queer perspectives and identities through thematic anchors “creates an open classroom atmosphere and makes it clear that LGBT identities are welcome in class” (Merse 2015: 17). Moreover, queer representation reassures queer students or those who have queer family members and/or friends that they are accepted and embraced to introduce their own experiences and knowledge about LGBTQIA+ issues into the classroom discussions without having to hide or lie about their identity (cf. *ibid.*). In terms of the benefits for students who do not identify as queer, queer inclusion in EFL materials and the EFL class will give everyone the “opportunity to reflect on and negotiate issues of gender and sexuality, and broaden [the students’] horizon by changing into other viewpoints and recognising the limiting power of fixed normativities” (Merse 2017: 182). The thematic anchors constitute authentic and meaningful ways to implement queer issues into the TEFL classroom, foster intercultural understanding and communication and are close to the students’ interests. Therefore, thematic anchors offer genuine in-depth representations of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues irrespective of the material modalities the themes are represented in.

7.2 Queer Representations Across Various Material Modalities in the TEFL Context

Even though, the strategy of using thematic anchors to ensure proper queer representation in the EFL classroom works irrespective of the EFL materials used, the different material modalities indeed have specific possibilities inherent to them for queer representation. The possibilities for queer representation specific to certain material modalities will be discussed in this subchapter.

Firstly, the main written materials that are used in EFL classrooms are textbooks. Paiz states that textbooks hold a “normative role” (2017: 353) and serve as “cultural artifacts” (ibid.) in the EFL classroom. Being that textbooks provide and determine the topics that are dealt with and “the identity options that [are] made available to students” (ibid.) in the EFL classroom, it is of importance to be aware of the fictional community that is portrayed in the book. Shardakova and Pavlenko call these fictional communities ‘imaginary worlds’, which

[...] offer oversimplified and stereotyped identity options of FL [= foreign language] learners. These options, in turn, may influence – and at times even shape – the students’ motivation, degree of engagement with the target language and culture, and development of their intercultural competence. (2004: 27f)

It is important for textbooks to picture a diverse fictional community, so that all students can identify themselves with the depicted situations and identity options and therefore, have a greater motivation to deal with the textbook and the target language. Not actively picturing queer people and portraying queer issues in textbooks contributes to the prevalence of heteronormativity. Given that textbooks hold a normative role and represent a ‘typical’ society to learn English in as mentioned above, textbooks create “officially endorsed versions of social reality” (Gray 2013a: 6). Yet, in these official and normative versions of what society looks like that is presented to EFL students in TEFL textbooks, queer identities and issues are systematically omitted (cf. ibid.). Furthermore, the prevailing heteronormativity and the missing representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and queer issues in TEFL textbooks provide a hostile and excluding environment for queer students and queer allies, as everything regarding non-heteronormativity is seen as different and ‘weird’ (cf. Ghajarieh and Cheng 2011: 228). Consequently, to combat

the omission of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues, the imaginary worlds in textbooks would need to be changed so that heteronormativity is no longer “the standard in the microcosm of the textbook world” (Merse 2015: 14). Instead, textbook characters could be depicted as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or other, queer families could be presented, and the characters could join queer events like a queer-youth group or a pride parade. Additionally, real-life stories of queer teenagers and young adults could be shared in textbooks or written materials, as “narratives could form the basis for stimulating and challenging class discussions” (O’Mochain 2006: 57). Such real-life narratives can for example be found on the webpage wearetheyouth.org, which is recommended by Merse (2015) as it provides real-life stories of queer youth in the USA. With textbooks offering various possibilities for queer representation, e.g., through queer textbook characters or thematic anchors that are accompanied by pictures, texts, references to online media etc. (cf. Merse 2017: 253), they allow students to explore and investigate social topics outside of heteronormative standards and offer queer identity options to the students.

Furthermore, “[l]ove as a theme in literature and film [has been] represented as invariably heterosexual” (Gray 2013b: 50) in ELT materials, yet literature can be a great tool to implement the representation of LGBTQIA+ identities and issues into the EFL classroom (cf. Merse 2017: 182). Using literature that represents queer identities, queer daily lives, and queer issues in the EFL classroom can “initiate challenging encounters with cultural diversity [...] and extend learners’ experience beyond what is already known” (ibid.: 118). Queer representation in literature is important, as “[l]iterature without diversity presents a false image of what it is to be human” (Kwaymullina 2015: 2 qtd. in Rhodes 2017: 234). Additionally, LGBTQIA+ inclusive (children’s) picture books are a great way to precisely incorporate queer inclusion into the EFL classroom as they are “radically inclusive, boldly celebratory, and have no time for stigma or shame.” (Miller 2022: 6). Queer inclusive picture books deal with various topics from gender expression, over family, friends, love, death, religions, or discrimination to queer history and are therefore also suitable for readers older than the typical children’s book would suggest. For extensive examples of queer picture books that could be used in the EFL class,

Jennifer Miller's work "The Transformative Potential of LGBTQ+ Children's Picture Books" (2022) is highly recommended.

Lastly, Merse and Gray stated that movies can be a great way to implement queer perspectives into the EFL classroom (cf. Merse 2017: 182 and Gray 2013b: 50). Additionally, Merse argues to use new media materials to expand the typical written materials, like textbooks and literature, by other material modalities (cf. 2017: 127). Following his argumentation, media like movies, song lyrics, social media posts, YouTube videos, speeches, podcasts, radio interviews, news stories etc. can support the inclusive EFL classroom. These diverse media texts serve as important pieces of information which are authentic, close to the students' life and "can be adopted as the focus of discussion" (cf. Kappra and Vandrick 2006: 146). Examples of queer topics that can be dealt with through new media coverage are e.g., coming out stories, LGBTQIA+ awareness month, hate crimes against queer people, or queer history including the Stonewall riots and Christopher Street Day. Hence, texts from any new media modality can be used to either focus on queer specific topics and their presence in the new media or to enhance thematic anchors to implement queer representation in the EFL classroom, as they hold the possibility to depict "life narratives of LGBT and queer people [which are] invaluable teaching resources [and] offer in-depth insights into highly individual and genuine identity constructions" (Merse 2015: 18).

To conclude, ELT materials of any modality can serve "as a vehicle to transport discourses of sexuality into the classroom" (ibid.: 17). Therefore, queer representation is not limited to certain materials but transcends the modalities and can be found and implemented into various material modalities used in the EFL class.

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, queer representation supports the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ students in the EFL class by making queerness visible, educating on the normalcy of being queer and by standing up against discrimination and oppression of people part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

Foremost, queer representation should always be authentic and meaningful. To avoid tokenistic representation underlying issues of what it means to be queer and to belong to the LGBTQIA+ community need to be addressed. These include systemic inequalities like missing human rights, discrimination and oppression but are not limited to these negative aspects. Positive aspects of being queer that can be represented in the EFL class are for example the positive aspects of belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community and the freedom of self-expression many queer people find when being able to be their true selves. Regardless of the queer topics that are being discussed, queer representation should always take place in challenging settings, meaning that it should challenge the prevailing heteronormativity and the negative aspects that follow. To seamlessly include queer representation into the existing TEFL curriculum thematic anchors provide opportunities to challenge heteronormative standards, to negotiate societal, cultural and/or political issues and to be of interest, informative and realistic to students. When thematic anchors are used adequately and the TEFL topic is authentically connected with queer inquiry, thematic anchors make a great didactic-pedagogic strategy to include and represent queer identities and issues into the EFL classroom regardless of the material modalities used.

Simultaneously, it is without question that already queer inclusive ELT materials would be of great help to teachers regarding the implementation of queer inclusion. Unfortunately, global ELT materials publishers put profit over inclusion and rather stick to heteronormative coursebooks and materials so that they are marketable worldwide, including conservative markets that would not publish LGBTQIA+ inclusive content. Hence, the responsibility to include queer issues into the EFL classroom is in the hands of English teachers. Therefore, teacher training should already include queer inclusion. More information on queer inclusion in teacher training can be found in Paiz's 2017 research. Yet even if queer inclusive materials are present, teachers still hold the power to omit or

accentuate certain aspects of the materials worked with, which highlights the importance of queer inclusion being further implemented into official curricular guidelines. Furthermore, it is important that English teachers reflect on their own heteronormative biases and stereotypes they might have to not pass them on to their students and to educate themselves on queer identities and issues so that they can provide their students with a queer inclusive classroom environment.

Even though queer inclusive ELT materials are rare, there are many possibilities for teachers to implement queer identities and issues into the classroom by reading and discussing queer literature or using new media as starting points for discussions. From real life stories from queer people, (fictional) queer picture books, books or movies featuring queer characters to podcasts or social media posts negotiating what it means to be queer considering specific political, societal, or cultural events, manifold possibilities arise. Albeit literature, movies and new media generate a seemingly endless pool of possibilities for queer representation and inclusion, it can not be denied that choosing adequate representation of queer identities and perspectives that fits the EFL classrooms' themes can be a time-consuming task that would ultimately have to be done by dedicated teachers. However, there are resources, such as Thorsten Merses research, that can function as guidelines for teachers.

If queer inclusion is adequately done by using thematic anchors, queer inquiry and/or by dealing with a queer inclusive work of literature or new media, then queer inclusion positively contributes to the ICC approach of TEFL by raising awareness for the social and cultural aspects of sexual and gender diversity and fostering cultural understanding. Additionally, queer inclusion helps to raise awareness among (straight) students about the harmful effects of perpetuating heteronormativity and stereotypes and leads to reciprocal respect and understanding. Furthermore, questioning heteronormative standards raises awareness amongst all students for the (gender) biases and stereotypes prevalent in today's societies. Moreover, as EFL materials depict a target culture or target society in which English is practiced, queer representation leads to visibility of LGBTQIA+ identity options and can support students in their identity processes and development. Furthermore, queer inclusion caters to the needs of queer students or students with queer

family members or friends, by showing them that they are welcome as they are in the EFL class. In addition, queer inclusion will aid in meeting queer students' informational and linguistic needs by discussing queer issues and educating about queer linguistic means which are important for queer students' self-expression and self-defence. Moreover, as queer inclusion will show that queer students are welcome, it will make participating in the EFL class – which is driven by tasks around self-disclosure – accessible and less frightening for queer students. Hence, queer inclusion can improve queer students' motivation and participation in the EFL class, as queer inclusion offers them subjects of identification and topics close to their personal interests.

Following this thesis's prompt for queer inclusion in the EFL classroom, it might be interesting for future research to explore how teachers actually implement or do not implement queer inclusion in their EFL classrooms. Additionally, the developed thematic anchors provide many research possibilities, e.g., if teachers and students accept and utilize them and if they fulfill their aims of queer inclusivity. Furthermore, it will be interesting how students are affected by queer inclusion and what they can take away from it, regardless of their belonging to the LGBTQIA+ community.

All in all, with missing official queer inclusive TEFL coursebooks and materials it is mostly in the hands of teachers and students to engage with the heteronormative EFL materials in queer-sensitive, reflective, and heteronormativity-questioning ways. If implemented, queer inclusion and queer inquiry will support all students to become openminded and empathetic human beings that can peacefully find their place in society. Furthermore, queer inclusion leads to a safe(r) EFL classroom environment which in turn leads students to participate more freely in the EFL class. Therefore, queer representation in EFL materials and the EFL classroom aids the fulfillment of the goals of the curricular and educational guidelines for TEFL and actively fosters a queer inclusive TEFL environment.

9 Appendix

Thematic Anchor	Possibility of Queer Representation / Implementation	Level
Family constellations	When introducing vocabulary regarding family represent various family constellations besides a mother and a father having children. Besides single parents, patchwork families or children raised by grandparents, this theme could for example include gay/lesbian/trans/queer parents, families with more than two parents, families with queer children, chosen family that is not blood related. → Actively talk about Queer family constellations	1
Friends & Friendship	When discussing what it means to be friends and what friendship entails it is possible to talk about how to support Queer friends, e.g., correct use of their preferred pronouns, listening to their (queer specific) struggles and offering support, actively standing up against homophobia. Acknowledge that Queer friendships might bond over different topics than heterosexual friendships would, yet a friendship should always be supportive and caring. → What does it mean to be an ally to Queer friends?	1 - 3
Famous people	When talking about famous people or having students hold presentations about famous people, include and mention some that belong to the LGBTQIA+ community. E.g., Lady Gaga, Billie Eilish, Joe Locke, Elliot Page, Laverne Cox, Jorge Gonzalez, Elton John, etc. → Actively show examples of Queer famous people	1 - 3
Human rights worldwide / politics	When talking about other countries and their societies and regulations, address the human rights situation in the country dealt with. Are queer people allowed to exist? Do queer people have the same rights as heterosexual ones? How are queer people treated? What does living in that country as a queer person look like? What are the differences to the rights of Queer people in Germany? Are there countries where heterosexual and queer people have the same rights? Are the leading political parties for or against the LGBTQIA+ community? → Address missing human rights for queer people and the impact homophobic politics have on everyone. (E.g., when dealing with America, talk about the Florida Anti-LGBTQIA+ bills)	2 - 3
Different cultures and festivities / holidays	When talking about cultural differences, question not only how it would be different for a heteronormative person to visit that culture but also how it would be different for a queer person. Is that culture welcoming of queer people? Is that holiday/festivity divided into male and female activities, if so, how do non-binary or gender fluid people take part? What clothing options are there for gender-queer people if cultural clothing is strictly following a male/female dichotomy? Are there cultures where Queer people are especially welcome? (e.g., Native American cultures acknowledging two-spirit people) Are any queer specific festivities celebrated in that culture (e.g., Christopher Street Day)? → Investigate how cultural differences would affect queer people. → Include home-stories of queer families or queer people celebrating cultural festivities	2 - 3
Vacation & cultural differences	When dealing with the topic of vacation e.g., the textbook characters are going on vacation, planning vacations, Do's and Don'ts in other countries, differences to home country, ask the following questions: Are LGBTQIA+ people allowed in that country/state? Are there any anti-LGBTQIA+ laws? Are there punishments for being queer or openly showing support to the queer community? How are queer people treated there? Be aware that queer students and queer families can not visit the same countries/states for vacations as heterosexual students can, as they are legally not allowed to exist in a lot of countries worldwide and will get punished for being who they are. → What do queer people have to keep in mind when planning a or going on vacation?	2 - 3
Stereotypes	When addressing stereotypes talk about stereotypes against Queer people. Address the prevalence of straight and cis-gendered people in the media and society (= heteronormativity). Talk about the negative effects stereotypes against queer people can have (bullying, exclusion, loneliness, fear, etc.) → Disprove stereotypes against Queer people and raise awareness of the negative effects of heteronormativity	3
Discrimination	Discrimination affects all minorities. What kind of discrimination do you know? Have you witnessed discrimination against queer people? What microaggressions do Queer people face in their daily lives? Why is it difficult for queer athletes or famous people to be open about their sexuality? How can discrimination against queer people be prevented? Where can queer people affected by discrimination find help? → How does discrimination affect Queer people?	3
Area studies / Globalization	When discussing other countries like America, Australia or Canada, their ways of life and culture, a focus can be set on how globalization or subcultures create a friendly or harmful environment for LGBTQIA+ people in that country, e.g., are there certain queer-friendly cities/places in that country? What makes them queer-friendly or how are queer people excluded from cultural and social life? Do these countries include queer people differently than Germany does? → How has globalization shaped the cultural life of cities/countries and how does it negatively or positively impact queer people?	3
Job opportunities / work life / pinkwashing	When talking about job opportunities, be aware that queer students might face discrimination because of their sexual or gender orientation. Hence, deal with the topic of discrimination in the workplace. Investigate if queer people have the same opportunities as heteronormative people do. Are there any companies or jobs that actively support the LGBTQIA+ community? If so, in what way? If not, are companies exploiting the queer community, e.g., by pinkwashing? → What does discrimination in the workplace look like for queer people? Do queer people have the same opportunities as heterosexual people? Do companies pinkwash?	3

Table 2: Thematic Anchors for queer representation in TEFL classrooms, classified for beginner (1), intermediate (2) and advanced (3) learner-levels and complemented with questions interrogating heteronormativity.

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