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Reframing Global Poverty in Language Education

Global Insights from EFL Textbooks and
Teachers in Germany

Roger Dale Jones

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For my wife, Daniella, whose patience and open ear have steadied me more than she knows, and for my three daughters—Charlotte, Lillian, and Penelope—who remind me daily of what truly matters.

SERIES EDITORS' FOREWORD

In 1913, Thomas Edison said that “books will soon be obsolete in public schools.” In light of the advent of the motion picture, he claimed that “our school system will be completely changed inside of ten years.” With every newly emerging technology, a revolution of the school system was supposed to follow: film, radio, teaching machines, the internet, mobile devices, apps, artificial intelligence. Media technologies are crucial to education: there is no education without some form of media. Conflicts over the contents of textbooks or desires to ban media (from novels and textbooks to smartphones) from schools are discussed widely in the daily news. An astonishing number of stakeholders are invested in defining what ideas about ways of knowing, living, being, thinking, feeling, imagining, hoping, or fearing should be permitted to circulate among students in schools. Policymakers, educators, parents, activists, and of course young people themselves care deeply about the media used in their everyday education. These media shape and are shaped by the knowledges, affects, and skills which are considered desirable or even legible in the socio-political contexts in which they are produced and used.

Given the dynamics of contemporary developments in textbooks and other media designed or adapted for use in schools, the *Palgrave Studies in Educational Media* series takes stock of current research by focusing on three developments:

First, it emphasizes critical approaches to educational media. The majority of studies on educational technology tend to revolve around individual learning processes or best practices. At the same time, however, a rich body of critical work has been growing over recent decades which is informed by cultural, political, social and media theory, and science and technology studies. This work attends—empirically and conceptually—to the embeddedness of educational media technologies in cultural, social, and political processes, and to the historicity of the media used in education. If we see educational media as a highly contested and thus crucially important cultural and epistemic site, then perceptive and critical studies based on thorough research are important to further develop these carefully critical approaches to educational media as a matter of social concern.

Second, it welcomes scholarship across disciplinary boundaries. Today's vibrant and dynamic research and critical scholarship on education and technology stems from a broad range of disciplines, including sociology, history, cultural studies, memory studies, media studies and educational sciences, and also information, computer, and cognitive science. Traditionally, much of this research has engaged with specific disciplinary questions, and been published in separate disciplines, with limited reading across disciplines. Over recent years, critical studies of education and technology—or critical edtech studies—have been consolidated into the kind of interdisciplinary field which builds on previous conversations across disciplinary boundaries and communities. This series has endeavored to contribute to this consolidation.

Third, the series attends to multiple configurations of digital, postdigital, nondigital, or hyperdigital practices. Research, policy, and practice today are closely attentive to digital technologies. Yet looking at today's educational practices, it has become clear that while no social or pedagogical practices are entirely digital, very little in much of the world is entirely without digitally networked connections. Postdigital approaches—as both a diagnosis of the contemporary condition in which “digital” is undifferentiated from “nondigital,” and a critical approach to scholarship—have overthrown the notion of digital technology as new, innovative or a solution to wicked problems. Instead, technologies are seen as intimately interwoven with other materials in daily teaching and learning. The potentials and risks of digital education emit a fascination for politicians,

journalists, and others concerned with the future of education, and are undoubtedly important to consider. But the co-constitution of our world through multiple, ambivalent, situated media practices is the focus for fascinating research that opens new perspectives on the contemporary world and on possible, plausible and implausible futures.

Palgrave Studies in Educational Media offers a dedicated space to bring together research on these three developments. It encourages dialogue across disciplines within the emerging space of critical studies on educational media, educational technology, education, and media technology. The series showcases both empirical and theoretical work which understands these media technologies as sites of cultural contestation and socio-political forces. The focus lies primarily on schools, across all school subjects. The series is interested in both local and global perspectives, in order to explore how educational media are entangled with broader debates about continuity and change in today's society, about classroom practices, inclusions and exclusions, identifications, subjectivations, economies, infrastructuring, and global political projects. We particularly welcome contributions based on decelerated inquiry.

In this fascinating and important study, Dale Jones introduces Global Poverty Education as a meaningful component of the German EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom, and examines how poverty in diverse multiregional contexts is portrayed in EFL textbooks. This book fills a significant research gap, analyzing the most recent generation of German EFL textbooks (published 2013–2019), their production, influence, and the challenges surrounding them, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Unlike prior research, it focuses exclusively on global poverty and adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from sociology, political science, economics, and history. It also connects textbook analysis with teacher perspectives in order to embed the textbook contents within their everyday human-shaped contexts. Jones succeeds in showing how, despite their complex and sometimes incoherent production processes, textbooks in German EFL teaching remain central to how learners encounter and interpret global issues like poverty. They often do so in postdigital concert with digital products or other audiovisual media. While all textbooks are powerful educational and ideological instruments, Jones shows how foreign language textbooks in particular reflect social ideologies through what they include and exclude, shaping

learners' perceptions of global issues such as poverty and inequality in particular. Textbook research will be enriched by this study of not only the textbook representations themselves, but also how teachers—as the interpreters and mediators of textbook content—use and interact with these media.

Brunswick and Oldenburg,
Germany
October 2025

Eckhardt Fuchs
Felicitas Macgilchrist

PREFACE

This book is motivated by a deep concern with how global poverty is represented and addressed in English as a foreign language (EFL) education. Poverty is not only a pressing reality of our interconnected world, but also a profoundly complex and politically charged topic. It touches on economics, politics, social justice, and human rights—fields that extend far beyond the training and expertise of most language teachers and textbook authors. Yet in the framework of *education for sustainable development* (ESD), poverty education is increasingly expected to be part of EFL classrooms. My interest in this topic grew out of two parallel experiences. On the one hand, as a researcher and teacher educator, I observed how sustainability and social justice themes—particularly poverty—were gaining ground in curricula and textbooks in Germany and beyond. On the other hand, through my own involvement in textbook production, I saw first-hand the challenges that arise when authors are asked to present complex global issues without specialized training in the relevant fields. What might begin as a well-intentioned effort to promote empathy and awareness can quickly become oversimplified, one-sided, or inadvertently politicized. These pitfalls are not trivial, as they shape how young learners understand the causes of poverty, the people affected by it, and the kinds of solutions that are imagined as possible.

This book takes the German case study—with its unusually strong emphasis on ESD in EFL textbooks—as a lens through which to explore these issues. Drawing on textbook analysis and teacher interviews, I

examine how poverty is framed, what perspectives are highlighted or omitted, and what this reveals about the broader role of EFL in global education. My aim is not only to describe the current state of poverty education in language classrooms, but also to critically reflect on its challenges and to consider more balanced, interdisciplinary approaches that do justice to the topic's complexity. The research presented here has benefitted enormously from the generosity of colleagues, teachers, and students, whose insights and reflections have enriched my own thinking. I am especially grateful to those who engaged with me in candid discussions about the difficulties of teaching and writing about poverty in ways that are responsible, critical, and pedagogically meaningful.

Ultimately, my hope is that this book contributes to an ongoing dialogue about how language education can responsibly engage with global challenges. If it raises awareness of the complexities of poverty education, sparks debate about the risks and possibilities of ESD in the EFL classroom, or helps educators and researchers alike to approach the topic with greater nuance, then it will have achieved its purpose.

Klagenfurt am Wörthersee,
Austria
15 September 2025

Roger Dale Jones

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Competing Interests The author has no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this manuscript.

EXPLANATION OF GERMAN TERMS

Realschule: The Realschule in Germany is a mid-level secondary school (grades 5–10) that combines general education with vocational preparation, leading to skilled training or further study.

Gymnasium: The Gymnasium in Germany is an academically oriented secondary school (grades 5–12/13) that provides a rigorous general education and prepares students for university through the *Abitur* qualification.

Cornelsen: Cornelsen is a major German educational publisher that produces textbooks, digital learning tools, and teaching resources across a wide range of school subjects, including well-known series for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction.

Diesterweg: Diesterweg is part of the Westermann publishing group in Germany, with Diesterweg specializing in school textbooks—particularly for foreign language education.

Klett: Ernst Klett Verlag is one of Germany's largest educational publishing houses, best known for producing school textbooks and learning materials across subjects, including widely used English as a Foreign Language (EFL) series.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BMZ	Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, German Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development
DALYs	Disability-Adjusted Life Years
DGFF	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Fremdsprachenforschung/German Association for the Research of Foreign Languages
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
EU	European Union
FL	Foreign Language
GCE	Global Citizenship Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
HFD	High Familial Dependency
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KMK	Kultusministerkonferenz, German Conference of Ministers of Education
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex
MDI	Multidimensional Poverty Indices
MDP	Multidimensional Poverty
MPI	Global Multidimensional Poverty Index
ODA	Official Development Assistance

OECD	Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development
OPM	Official Poverty Measure
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
POC	People of Color
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SPM	Supplementary Poverty Measure
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US/USA	United States (of America)
USD	United States Dollar

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PART I

Theoretical Considerations of EFL Global
Poverty Education



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

One of the first depictions of poverty that German learners of English encounter in their school textbooks is the story of *Robin Hood*. While culturally significant and dramatically compelling, the story frames global poverty as a moral injustice to be rectified through individual virtue and simple acts of redistribution. While the good and rightful King Richard the Lionheart is away fighting in the Crusades, his greedy brother Prince John abuses his authority to exploit the poor—particularly simple, hard-working farmers in feudal England—relying on the corrupt and cruel Sheriff of Nottingham to extract excessive taxes. In response, the heroic outlaw Robin Hood emerges, recognizing the injustice and seeking to restore rightful balance. As Prince John distorts the legal system to satisfy his insatiable greed, Robin Hood is compelled to act outside the law—stealing from the rich, especially from tax coffers, and redistributing wealth to the needy and deserving poor. Though defying the highest legal authority, his actions uphold a deeper moral order until King Richard returns, restores justice, and brings peace to the land. This internationally recognized legend thus introduces poverty as a relatively straightforward moral issue for German school learners. As this study will demonstrate, such a moral framing remains largely unchallenged across the repeated representations of global poverty throughout all English textbooks used in Germany's lower secondary education.

This moralistic approach to poverty, as exemplified by the story of *Robin Hood*, is likely not unique to the German context. Rather, it appears to reflect a broader educational pattern in which poverty is moralized, personalized, and stripped of its structural complexity. As this book argues, such representations stand in tension with the aims of education for sustainable development (ESD), which call for critical engagement with poverty (among other social and environmental issues). ESD seeks to prepare students for future societal challenges and to support progress toward the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including ending poverty and reducing economic inequality (United Nations 2023). The case of German textbooks therefore serves not only to illuminate national practices, but to provide globally relevant insights into how poverty is framed in education—and what may need to change.

Poverty is a persistent and complex global issue, deeply embedded in economic, political, and social structures. It affects billions of lives, shaping access to education, healthcare, and opportunities for social mobility. Despite its far-reaching implications, global poverty is often overlooked or misrepresented in educational contexts, particularly in foreign language education. This book investigates how global poverty is framed and taught in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Germany, focusing on the roles of textbooks and teachers in shaping students' understanding of this critical issue.

The impetus for this research stems from the growing emphasis on education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCE) within language curricula. Both frameworks—promoted by international bodies such as the United Nations and UNESCO—advocate for the integration of social justice issues, including poverty, into education. These themes, alongside global poverty education, are already present within the aims of foreign language education. While traditionally associated with the acquisition of vocabulary, grammar, and communicative competence, foreign language learning also encompasses cultural and societal knowledge. In the context of EFL education, textbooks serve not only as a gateway to English speaking cultures, but also as instruments that shape students' worldviews, including their perceptions of global issues such as poverty. Given this dual role, the ways in which textbooks present poverty—whether as an abstract issue, a distant problem, or a dimension of global inequality—carry significant educational and ideological implications.

Despite the growing presence of sustainability education, most existing research and educational theory has focused on environmental concerns, with social issues like poverty receiving comparatively little attention. When poverty is addressed, it is often framed in overly simplistic and moralistic terms, typically portraying extreme poverty in distant regions while neglecting the structural causes, economic inequality, and local manifestations of poverty. Yet, even a brief review of widely used EFL textbooks in Germany reveals that poverty is a relatively common topic, present across all major school types, publishing houses, and lower secondary levels. This gap between the lack of theoretical and empirical research on global poverty education and the presence of poverty-related content in schoolbooks raises important questions: How exactly is poverty represented in EFL textbooks? Are these portrayals realistic, or do they reflect distortions indicative of particular ideological or political perspectives? What educational objectives do these representations pursue? Moreover, how do teachers perceive the topic of global poverty in their teaching? How do their views align with textbook portrayals? And how do they relate to the broader goals of ESD and GCE?

To explore these questions, this study systematically analyzes the ways in which poverty is depicted in EFL textbooks and how teachers interact with these representations in their classrooms. Employing a mixed-methods approach that combines quantitative and qualitative textbook analysis with in-depth interviews of EFL teachers in Germany, this study offers a comprehensive account of how global poverty is framed, taught, and potentially internalized by learners.

This book is structured in three main parts: theoretical considerations, empirical research, and global implications. Part one lays the conceptual groundwork for understanding the intersection of global poverty and foreign language education. Chapter 2 offers a theoretical and political foundation for global poverty education within the context of ESD, tracing the influence of international policies on national curricula. It explores the integration of sustainability education into language pedagogy and outlines the key challenges of addressing poverty in foreign language instruction. Chapter 2 also uncovers the large gap in research, as global poverty education remains consistently disregarded and, when present, small scaled and scattered across subjects and national contexts. It also shows that such research only focuses on textbook representation, and never includes teacher perspectives to indicate how textbook content translates into classroom practice and learning. Chapter 3 adopts

an interdisciplinary lens to define and contextualize poverty development, drawing on insights from sociology, history, and economics to examine how poverty is measured, framed, and addressed in policy and public discourse. This foundation supports the analysis of educational materials that follows in part two, allowing for a comparison of the ways in which textbooks depict poverty in a realistic manner, and in ways it distorts poverty across various national contexts.

The second part of the book addresses the aforementioned research gap and presents the findings of an empirical study examining representations of poverty in EFL textbooks and the perspectives of teachers tasked with delivering this content. Chapter 4 outlines the research questions, data collection, and methods of analysis, detailing both textbook selection and the structure of teacher interviews. Chapter 5 presents the results of the textbook analysis, identifying patterns in the depiction of poverty, including geographical focus, temporal framing, portrayals of affected populations, and the pedagogical treatment of poverty-related content. It shows that the representation of poverty is not particularly realistic, presenting rather a distorted view of poverty as a moral problem, consistently across the world. Chapter 6 turns to the teacher interviews, examining how educators understand and approach the topic, as well as the obstacles they face in integrating poverty into EFL teaching. Findings reveal a notable gap between textbook content and teacher practice, with many educators expressing discomfort, uncertainty, or reluctance in addressing poverty in their classroom teaching.

Part three of the book focuses on interpreting the combined findings of the study and drawing implications, not only for the German educational context, but also for the global education of global poverty. Chapter 7 synthesizes the findings of the textbook analysis and the teacher interviews, discussing their implications for foreign language education, ESD, and GCE. It critically assesses whether current textbook portrayals and classroom practices genuinely foster awareness and critical engagement with global poverty. It shows serious divergences between textbook teaching of global poverty and the aims and goals of ESD, and that teachers are not likely to correct this. Furthermore, it suggests that these divergences will have serious consequences for learner understanding of global poverty and their future engagement with the topic, as a social and political issue. Chapter 8 focuses on drawing global lessons from the German case study. It addresses typical distortions of the case study's representation and teaching of poverty, drawing on cognitive biases and

heuristics, as well as common logical fallacies, to show why the sample's global poverty teaching is not only highly problematic, but also to be expected, and likely to be found in other national contexts. The chapter concludes by making a series of suggestions for the future development of global poverty education worldwide. These suggestions are relevant for teachers (even outside of foreign language pedagogy), for researchers who would like to expand on the nascent concept of global poverty education, for material developers like textbook designers, and for policy makers, like those who develop local and national curricula. Ultimately, the suggestions call for a more systematic and research-informed approach to teaching global poverty, and framings of poverty that shift away from a purely moralistic lens.

This study contributes to the fields of EFL education, sustainability education, and textbook research in several important ways. First, it highlights the underrepresentation of poverty within ESD discourse and advocates for a more balanced inclusion of social and economic issues alongside environmental concerns. Second, it provides a detailed empirical analysis of textbook content, revealing underlying ideological framings that shape student perceptions. Third, it offers insight into the challenges and perspectives of teachers, shedding light on the practical realities of addressing poverty in the classroom. By combining textbook analysis with teacher interviews, this study delivers a holistic perspective on the dynamics of global poverty education in the EFL context. It raises critical questions about the role of foreign language teaching in promoting global awareness and civic responsibility. Ultimately, the book argues that without more nuanced, reflective, and pedagogically grounded approaches, current teaching practices risk reinforcing reductive or distorted understandings of poverty—rather than equipping students with the critical thinking and global competencies that ESD and GCE seek to foster.

Through this research, the book aims to contribute to ongoing international conversations about the role of education in addressing global inequalities, like poverty, and to encourage educators, researchers, policymakers, and textbook developers to critically reflect on how poverty is presented in (especially language) education. Only by acknowledging and addressing these limitations can the educational community move toward a more meaningful and effective approach to global poverty education.

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CHAPTER 2

Global Poverty and Foreign Language Education

Foreign language pedagogy has long opened its doors to include cultural and social issues like poverty in addition to focusing on language and communicative skill acquisition and learning. While the inclusion of such cultural and social issues makes learning the language arguably more interesting and societally relevant and leads to more culturally competent speakers of foreign languages, it also brings serious challenges for educators and the designers of educational materials. How do foreign language educators present poverty, at home and abroad, and with what learning goals exactly? Particularly if the subject of poverty is complex, both in the description of poverty, but also in determining what causes and solutions exist, then how are educators supposed to manage that complexity, especially if they are not formally educated on the topic? Considering that the topic of poverty is often associated with (controversial) political beliefs, as well as strong negative emotions, how should those involved in education present and teach poverty in a way that is *more or less* objective, multiperspective, and in a sensitive manner, without being informed by personal or socially dominant ideologies, biases or even ignorance? And—is there a such thing as a scientific approach to poverty, especially as a problem to be solved, and is that an approach that poverty education should strive for? Thus, it can be concluded that while teaching global poverty in the foreign language classroom makes educational sense, there

are substantial challenges and pitfalls that need to be considered, as even well-intentioned attempts can be counterproductive.

This chapter systematically examines the context and challenges of teaching global poverty in foreign language education while setting the backdrop for the empirical contribution of this study. The first section addresses the political and theoretical embedding of global poverty education in foreign language pedagogy. It addresses political and institutional reasons for teaching global poverty, and the subject-specific concepts, theories, and values of foreign language pedagogy that embrace it. This section is central because it explains the relevance of global poverty education and its strong match with foreign language pedagogy, both in Germany as well as in other national contexts. The second section addresses challenges of integrating global poverty education into foreign language pedagogy. While educating to reduce poverty is a laudable goal, its complexity and potential for unintended consequences should not be underestimated. The third section reviews the state of research on global poverty and foreign language teaching, focusing especially on pedagogical integration into textbooks. This section is important because it reveals the research gaps and sets the context for the contribution of this study. Moreover, it shows the large gap between theory and practice concerning global poverty education, suggesting that the two may be working toward conflicting ends. The final section provides a segue from the political and theoretical motives for teaching global poverty in foreign language education into the contribution that this study provides, namely by addressing textbooks and teachers as dominant disseminators of global poverty education.

REASONS FOR EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

Why is global poverty education already included in FL teaching in Germany (in theory and in practice), and why is it likely to remain there in the coming future? First, this section addresses global poverty education as a fundamental part of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, which have not only been adopted by the German federal government (as well as by 192 other countries around the world), but which have also been implemented in national educational goals as well as in German federal state curricula. Next, this section addresses several concepts relevant to poverty education which frequently occur in the literature on foreign language pedagogy. These concepts represent the

efforts of the international research and teaching community to implement the UN's SDGs, including global poverty education, into foreign language teaching, *on the ground* and in the classroom. This investigation into the way the topic is embedded into the field suggests that global poverty education is not simply a current trend, but rather one that will likely remain and even grow in the future. Finally, this section outlines competency modeling in Germany that provides a further framework of understanding how the topic of global poverty is perceived locally, what educational goals it is connected to, and what implications that brings.

From the UN to the Core Curricula of Germany's Federal States

There is a substantial top-down political motivation to implement poverty education in German school education. Understanding this first requires a brief look into the UN's SDGs, which, as norms, flow from the UN to the European Union, to its member states, and finally into local school curricula. The current SDGs consists of 17 goals that combine economic, social and ecological concerns, and “recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs (d)). The most obvious and relevant goal is the first *SDG*, “No poverty,” which targets both extreme poverty in developing countries but also poverty at home in Europe (in each member state, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (b)). An additional 8 SDGs deal with poverty peripherally, seeking to eliminate hunger, provide good health and well-being, provide quality education, enable gender equality, provide clean water and sanitation, provide affordable and clean energy, and allow decent work and economic growth. The goal to “reduce inequalities” targets the reduction of relative poverty, to “progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs (c)). Other SDGs, especially involving environmental issues, recognize that poverty plays a role in their achievement. These goals place poverty as a central concern.

The UN plays a decisive role in framing and driving not just global policy, but also education that addresses global issues like poverty. Formed in response to the *World Wars* of the twentieth century, the principal aims of the UN, as dictated in the *United Nations Charter*, are to protect

subsequent generations from war, to bolster respect for human rights and international law, and to support social progress and improved standards of living (Hanhimäki 2015: 1). As one of the UN's six principal organs, its *Economic and Social Council* (ECOSOC) is largely responsible for the development efforts of the UN against poverty. Poverty and economic development were viewed from the onset as crucial for global security, since the *Great Depression* of the 1930s was interpreted as a major cause of World War II (Hanhimäki 2015: 91). As UN membership expanded over time to also include countries in the developing world, the UN's interests concerning global security grew to include extreme poverty and inequalities between Global North and South (Hanhimäki 2015: 95). Multiple Earth Summits held by the ECOSOC have developed and promoted the educational interest in global issues, with the Rio 1992 summit leading to the adoption of Agenda 21 which identified education as a dominant path for achieving sustainability (Appelt and Siege 2016: 30; UNESCO). Later, the UN General Assembly advanced the Millennium Development Goals, which eventually led to the *Sustainable Development Goals* that came from the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, adopted in 2015 by the UN General Assembly (Department of Economic and Social Affairs (a)). These goals are also envisioned as educational goals by UNESCO (2024). Today, all EU member states are part of the 193 sovereign member states of the UN. Similar to the UN, the EU also has an administrative body to promote economic and social development, namely the *European Economic and Social Committee* (EESC, cf. United Nations 2024). Through the EESC, the EU has committed itself by “complying fully with and implementing the UN 2030 Agenda” (European Economic and Social Committee (a)). Like the ECOSOC, the EESC also has concrete goals to tackle poverty in Europe, with a commitment to reduce poverty by 50% by 2030 (European Economic and Social Committee (b)), and like the UN, the EU also sees education as playing a central role in abating poverty at home and abroad, in “preparing Europe’s future citizens to become aware of their responsibilities in a multicultural, inclusive society, and well-equipped so that they can contribute to a competitive European economy” (European Economic and Social Committee (c)).

Germany, as a member of both the UN and the EU, is in line to inherit and distribute these social and political norms of reducing poverty, as a value, a goal, and as a governmental and educational initiative. Many ministries of the German federal government are explicitly working in

support of the UN's *Agenda 2030*. However, in Germany, education is largely a responsibility of the individual federal states, resulting in their *Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs* having dominant influence over the content, competences, and structure of German school education—and thus over the integration of SDG goals around poverty (Bundesministerium der Justiz 2023).¹ State educational curricula in Germany do not simply adopt SDGs into their curricula, however, there are existing institutional structures that support the flow of norms and the setting of standards. Though not a part of the German federal government, the *Standing Conference of Ministers of Education* (KMK) assembles the ministers from the federal states (on a voluntary basis) to discuss important issues and make non-binding decisions. Despite the constitutional separation of the individual federal states and their educational responsibilities from the German federal government, the KMK closely cooperates with the *Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development* (BMZ), which in turn also works closely with the UN. For example, the KMK and the BMZ collaborated to publish the *Curriculum Framework: Education for Sustainable Development* in 2007, which focused on integrating issues of education for sustainable development in natural sciences (biology), geography, political education, religion and ethics, economics and vocational training subjects, and was expanded in 2015 to also include modern foreign languages, among others (Schreiber and Siege 2016). In this time, the KMK and the BMZ have hosted 11 conferences (*Fachtagungen*) to discuss various issues surrounding the education guidelines and education for sustainable development. Though non-binding, the guidelines offer a conceptual framework and examples for the integration of ESD into various school subjects in the German education system.

The purpose of the German *Curriculum Framework* was to help the individual states integrate sustainable development into the specific state curricula (cf. Müller 2017: 102; Hammer 2012: 80). An analysis of 10 current German curricula of English, secondary level 1, revealed that

¹ This federal principle is influenced greatly by the effects of national socialism in Germany, and the desire after World War II to divide up any centralized power of government, cf. Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung). It is meant as a checks and balances against the centralization of educational power.

sustainable development and related concepts are a common and frequent goal. This investigation focused on core curricula for two school forms (*Gymnasium* and *Realschule*), chosen from the north (Lower Saxony), south (Bavaria), east (Saxony), west (North Rhine-Westphalia), and center (Hesse) for maximum geographic variation. This sample, though not perfectly representative of all German school education, covers more than half of all school students in Germany (Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder 2023). The findings of this sample are also mirrored in previous claims that sustainability, as a concept and goal, has already found its way into the English curricula of Germany since the 2010s (Burwitz-Melzer et al. 2021b: 7). The results of this updated curricular analysis show that sustainable development, and/or related topics, is ubiquitous. For instance, the curricula for English for both *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* in Saxony place sustainable development in sections titled, “Goals and Responsibilities of Gymnasium/Oberschule” and “Goals and Responsibilities of the English Subject,”² and they place sustainable development and issues of globalization in topics and texts related to all grades of secondary level 1 (cf. Comenius-Institut, Landesamt für Schule und Bildung 2019a, b). Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia place sustainable development and issues of globalization only in the section covering the educational goals of English as a subject³ in the curricula for both *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* (cf. Addicks et al. 2015; Apel et al. 2015; Ministerium für Schule und Bildung des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen 2019, 2021). For the state of Hesse, sustainable development plays no explicit role, but globalization does play a role for both *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* in sections dedicated to the general contribution of the English subject to education (Hessisches Kultusministerium 2018a, b).⁴ Finally, the Bavarian curricula for *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* differ slightly. For *Realschule*, the concept of globalization plays a role in the section titled, “Contribution of modern foreign

² Original: „Ziele und Aufgaben des Gymnasiums/der Oberschule and Ziele und Aufgaben des Faches Englisch,” translated by author.

³ *Bildungsbeitrag des Faches Englisch* for Lower Saxony and *Aufgaben und Ziele des Faches* for North Rhine-Westphalia.

⁴ Original: “Kompetenzorientierung und Beitrag des Faches zur Bildung and Kompetenzbereiche and Inhaltliche Konzepte des Faches,” translated by author.

languages to overarching educational goals,”⁵ while globalization and sustainable development play a role as topics in grade 10 (LehrplanPLUS 2017). For *Gymnasium*, the situation is similar, except globalization and sustainable development are thematized in grade 9 instead (LehrplanPLUS 2022). In conclusion, issues around globalization are explicitly stated for all curricula analyzed, and sustainable development is explicitly presented in most (though not all), and in all cases in sections that present the topics as the contribution of the English subject to general education, with no obvious differences between the school forms of *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*.

As this section shows, there is strong, top-down political motivation to implement the topic of poverty into school education—for member states of the UN and especially for those of the EU. A look at the education system in Germany, from the federal government to the state curricula for English as a modern foreign language, shows that the foundation for such education is already well prepared.

Key Concepts of Poverty Education

A multitude of existing concepts in education and foreign language pedagogy readily connect to the societal and political goals of reducing poverty and economic inequality, supporting the seamless transfer of ESD norms into German school curricula as well as classrooms—suggesting a continued growth of relevance in the future. The following addresses these concepts under the umbrella of three overarching terms—global citizenship education, education for sustainable development, and global poverty education. They all share the goals of reducing human suffering, ensuring future peace and coexistence, and empowering individuals to take part in addressing global challenges. The point of this section is not to further develop these concepts or to pinpoint their exact meanings, but rather to illustrate that global poverty education is an existing part of a larger educational movement that is, at least in theory, both part and (via interdependence of issues) parcel with current social and political interests in promoting environmental, social, political, and economic stability.

⁵ Original: “Beitrag der Modernen Fremdsprachen zu den übergreifenden Bildungs- und Erziehungszielen,” translated by author.

Global (Citizenship) Education

The concept of global (citizenship) education emerged from the USA in the 1970s and 1980s (Hammer 2012: 56), though James Becker is attributed with coining the term of global education in the late 1960s (Müller 2017: 79). It did not enter the German education system, though, until after the Rio Summit of 1992, which placed a new emphasis on collective education focused on global issues that moved beyond the sovereignty of national education (Müller 2017: 79). The *Global Education Congress*, held in Maastricht in 2002, strengthened this connection, as participating countries agreed on the necessity of global education to diminish poverty, promote human rights, and support sustainable development (UNESCO Education Sector 2006: 12). Before this, global education was considered as *developmental education* in Germany, and the switch to global citizenship education was further supported by the end of the Cold War, by the growth in international exchange, and by a focus on the individual learner as the central agent of change (Müller 2017: 79).

Global education can be seen as advancing developmental education and third world pedagogy, helping individuals see themselves as participants in a global system, and teaching global topics as well as methods and skills of how to participate in a global world (Müller 2017: 73–74). It seeks to leverage competences for students to cope with ecological, economic, political, and sociocultural global issues adequately in an interactive, outcome and student-oriented environment (Müller 2017: 90). It focuses not only on providing knowledge of interconnections, but also competences to face global challenges through productive engagement (Hallet 2024: 63; Hammer 2012: 56). However, despite these clearly noble goals, global education appears to be a fuzzy concept. On the one hand, it is at times presented synonymous with many other educational concepts, like *peace education*, *international education*, *education for sustainable development*, *intercultural learning*, *political education*, *global studies* and *world studies* (Viebrock 2015: 41). Kip Cates views global education as consisting of four central components—*peace education*, *development education*, *environmental education* and *human rights education*—and views global issues as the missing piece that holds these types of education together (Hammer 2012: 58–59). Müller adds the centrality of also teaching *civics* and *democratic education* (Müller 2017: 77). On

the other hand, Lütge points out that the concept of global education, just like the concepts of culture and liquid modernity, is constantly changing, and that not all understandings of the concept associate the same meanings to it (2015b: 7). Müller also expresses uncertainty that the concept is actually novel, pointing out its imprecision despite practical implementation in EFL teaching (Müller 2017: 90).

Education for Sustainable Development

As already addressed, ESD and global education are sometimes treated synonymously. Freitag-Hild underlines the focus of ESD on *ethics* and *peace education*, noting that the concept of a world citizen is an overarching political goal to both ESD and *global citizenship education* (Freitag-Hild 2021: 70). Vogt, however, claims that the two concepts are not necessarily the same, and that ESD is often subsumed in foreign language pedagogy as a part of *global education* (Vogt 2021: 217). Also linking *global education* to *education for sustainable development*, Lütge states that both need “to explore the economic, political and social implications of sustainability by encouraging learners to reflect critically on their own areas of the world, to identify non-viable elements in their own lives as well as the tensions among conflicting aims” (Lütge 2015b: 10). Bechtel points out that ESD also has cultural aspects and is characterized by the interdependence in global perspectives and the diverging interests of actors—he also emphasizes the future-oriented aspect of ESD, “to empower students to actively design an ecologically compatible, economically efficient and a socially just environment while taking into consideration global aspects, fundamental democratic principles and cultural diversity” (Bechtel 2021: 9–10).⁶ Vogt emphasizes that ESD is strongly related to the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals (Vogt 2021: 217). However, like global education, ESD is also a fuzzy concept (Lütge 2021: 100), in part because there is no single definition of sustainable—this, in turn, is due in large part to the fact that multiple fields address and use the concept (Vogt 2021: 217). Even the UNESCO 2020 set forth two definitions of sustainable—one being on the subject of teaching

⁶ Original: “Schülerinnen und Schüler zur aktiven Gestaltung einer ökologisch verträglichen, wirtschaftlich leistungsfähigen und sozial gerechten Umwelt unter Berücksichtigung globaler Aspekte, demokratischer Grundprinzipien und kultureller Vielfalt zu befähigen,” translated by author.

content, and the other on teaching and learning so that the outcomes endure over time (Schädlich 2021: 164).

Global Poverty Education

Though it has been proven that poverty is a central topic of the UN's *Sustainable Development Goals* and for various conceptions of *education for sustainable development*, there appears to be a serious lack in concepts of global poverty education, mirroring the lack of academic and empirical research in (especially foreign language) education. As shown in Chapter 3, most existing research on poverty and education focuses on the negative correlation between the two, with terms like educational poverty referring to a lack of education that is often associated with, and leads to, monetary and other forms of poverty. Thus, *global poverty education* is a new concept and will be defined in this study as focusing on poverty as a local and a global phenomenon, interdependent with issues of economics, society, politics and the environment. Like *education for sustainable development*, *global poverty education* has a future component, understanding that present poverty in all its forms can disrupt local and even global security, peace, and sustainability. As a derivative of *global citizenship education* and *education for sustainable development*, *global poverty education* will also have to remain in some respects vague, open, and subject to ongoing development. *Global poverty education* moves beyond *development education* by also addressing poverty in developed countries, even in Germany, also connecting to the great potential for cultural learning and self-reflection, as different causes, as well as ways of enduring, conceptualizing, and solving poverty from around the world, are dealt with in educational settings. Here, reflection also includes the interrelationship of global and local, and how learners can take local action with potentially global effects. *Global poverty education* in this study is conceptualized as part of a larger education movement of *global citizenship education* and *education for sustainable development*. The plethora of related educational concepts and perspectives (like environmental, political, social, etc.) reveals its complexity, its importance, but also diverging interests. While these reflect the seeming reality of world crises in the current globalized age, they also plant a seed of concern regarding possible limitations of what can be expected from education.

In conclusion, *global poverty education* is already a meaningful part of EFL teaching in Germany, even if the concept as such is not already well-established. It is integral to the UN's *Sustainable Development Goals* that have been adopted by the German federal government and integrated into the educational curricula of the German federal states. Furthermore, it is well-established in the research literature in foreign language pedagogy via educational concepts like *global citizenship education* and *education for sustainable development*, with strong global relevance for education around the world. In addition, these concepts are firmly linked to a myriad of other significant concepts that have existed for decades in foreign language education.

Modeling ESD Competence

The top-down flow of SDG norms of reducing poverty embed themselves in an education that targets the learner's ability to act. For ESD competence, this means that school students are not only expected to learn about global poverty, but also to engage in activities that help reduce it. As will be discussed later, competency models, especially in the German context, focus on the development of abilities to use information and knowledge to successfully complete specific tasks in the real world. As such, they target inert or declarative knowledge, aiming to ensure that young people are able to use knowledge beyond classroom and testing settings. The *Curriculum Framework: Education for Sustainable Development* (Schreiber and Siege 2016), which is a collaborative effort between the German federal government and state ministries of education, takes such action-oriented modeling of competency and applies it to the UN's *Sustainable Development Goals*. This appears to create a perfect match between popular educational aims (of competency) and the UN's aims to galvanize societies into collaborative action to prevent global disasters and ensure global prosperity.

The educational interest in developing a competency model that targets the ability to act against global crises appears to come from societal changes as well as from (likely intertwined) educational politics. Klieme et al. state that the onset of the information society has created conditions that pressure education to produce outcomes (2007: 5). These conditions stem from societies' desire to become more competitive, which then in turn raises questions of educational quality (and the scientific study thereof), and Klieme et al. note that comparison studies like *PISA*, as

well as the *Bologna Process*, are educational reactions to these conditions (2007: 5). The citizens of tomorrow, according to this perspective, will need to operate in a more competitive society and will be faced with new challenges that education needs to address today.

Dominant conceptions of competence in Germany agree on the role of action, and the need to connect information to overcoming real-life situations. Klieme et al. state, “Having competence in a certain area means being able to act successfully in this area; incompetence means not being able to meet the requirements in that area” (2007: 5).⁷ While they argue that affective and motivational aspects should be excluded from such modeling, as they need to be recorded and assessed via additional means before being drawn back into relation with ability (2007: 7), Weinert sees motivational, volitional, and social willingness as a crucial part of competence that is a necessary precursor to learner action (Weinert 2014: 27–28). Despite its role in current German education, competence as a pedagogical concept is often criticized for being vague, for its understanding of “context-specific” and “real-life situations” that competences are supposed to support, and for the difficulty measuring real-life transfer in a test setting (Klieme et al. 2007: 5–8).

The *Curriculum Framework: Education for Sustainable Development* (2016) takes a similar approach to modeling competency, though like Weinert’s conceptualization, it also includes aspects of motivation and affect. Furthermore, the *Curriculum Framework* also specifically targets the reduction of poverty as a learning goal (Schreiber 2016: 99), integrating an action-oriented approach to poverty education. The model presented in the framework consists of three competency areas of *recognizing*, *assessing*, and *acting*, meant to be viewed holistically and not suggesting a consequent didactic succession (Schreiber 2016: 92). Each of these competency areas contains core competencies. For instance, the competency of *recognizing* consists of core competencies “acquisition and processing of information, recognizing diversity, analysis of global change and differentiation between levels of action,” the competency area of *assessing* consists of “change of perspectives and empathy, critical reflection and comment and evaluation of developed projects,” and

⁷ Original: “Über Kompetenz in einem bestimmten Bereich zu verfügen, bedeutet in diesem Bereich erfolgreich handeln zu können; Inkompetenz heißt, den Anforderungen in einem Bereich nicht gewachsen zu sein,” translated by author.

the competency area of *acting* consists of “solidarity and shared responsibility,” “understanding and conflict resolution,” “ability to act in times of global change,” and “participation and active involvement” (Schreiber 2016: 95). In a later chapter, the *Curriculum Framework* specifies its competency model further, providing subject-specific competencies to embed it within the context of teaching modern foreign languages. In short, the competence area of *recognizing* is defined as encompassing “What students should know about languages,” while *assessing* is defined as “What languages do with people” and *acting* encompasses “What people can do with language” (Becker et al. 2016: 160). This competency model will be discussed later, but for now it suffices to state that the ESD competency model is similar to other conceptualizations of competence, as it includes knowledge that is linked to values (via *assessing*) that are then connected to the ability to take action. The action-orientation of general competency modeling pairs up well with the SDGs, since the SDGs target the mobilization of society to help reach its goals and targets. As the *Curriculum Framework* states for the competency area of *acting*, “the focus is on motivating for the struggle with the challenges of global change and on strengthening sustainable attitudes and behaviour for the lifelong dealing with languages and cultures” (Becker et al. 2016: 160).

The ESD competency model presented in the *Curriculum Framework* suggests a strong match with educational goals of foreign language pedagogy in Germany, so much so that it is likely that other approaches to competency modeling that are thematically related to global poverty education will look similar. In fact, it shares many similarities with a model that represents, and is often accepted as, one of the dominant goals of foreign language education in Germany (Bildungsstandards, cf. KMK 2023), namely that of intercultural communicative competency by Michael Byram, with its focus on knowledge, attitudes, and skills in the pursuit of peaceful and productive communication across cultures (Byram 2021: 44, cf. also Gmainder-Pranzl 2013).

This ESD competence model presented in this section provides strong clues toward how global poverty education will be interpreted and implemented in Germany. Its focus on action-orientation in relation to global poverty and other globally relevant topics suggests an expectation that ESD prepares learners to support developmental actions, now and in the future. Not only the relationship between SDGs and competency orientation, but also the plethora of established and related educational concepts, means that ESD competency will find broad support in teaching English

as a foreign language. Finally, the connection of ESD to the UN and to the EU strongly suggests that educational curricula and teaching materials will continue to include topics like global poverty education to increasingly greater degrees. The value of these concepts for the international teaching community, and the current spread of competency throughout the educational world (cf. Evans et al. 2020: 2; Anderson-Levitt and Gardinier 2024), suggest the German example of ESD competence is an approach likely to be taken up and repeated in other national contexts around the world. However, as the next section addresses, the practical implementation of ESD may present a narrower path than that suggested by political policies or theoretical enthusiasm elsewhere.

CHALLENGES FOR EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

Even though global poverty education is—at least in theory—already a well-established part of EFL teaching, there are unresolved challenges addressed by the research literature, and these challenges can pose serious obstacles to the achievement of relevant educational goals presented thus far. First, this section will address general challenges surrounding the UN's Sustainable Development Goals—the potentially unrealistic nature of many of the goals, the need for global democratic consensus to reach them, and the potential for global unintended consequences that run counter to the goals. This investigation of societal challenges will provide background-context to understanding critical perspectives of global poverty education in general. Next, this section will address challenges that affect education in general (as opposed to the specific subject of foreign language pedagogy), specifically pertaining to the competence orientation of ESD. These challenges largely focus on the role of learner ability and action for competence development, and the complications this role creates for critical engagement with the concept of sustainability, with the role knowledge and understanding plays for sustainability learning, and with issues of learner autonomy for perspective development and for taking action. Finally, the section addresses the specific challenges of global poverty education in the EFL classroom, presenting the relevant research findings that have emerged thus far. Together, this section provides crucial contextual information that will become particularly important for interpreting the empirical findings from researching global poverty education in German EFL textbooks and in the perspectives of German EFL teachers on teaching global poverty.

Societal Challenges

The following section focuses on three societal challenges specific to global poverty education envisioned under ESD. The first challenge is that SDGs are political and not scientific goals, governed by ideals likely to remain unmet. The second challenge concerns global consent, questioning how societies define challenges, determine responsibility, and decide on solutions. Finally, the third challenge involves the centralized desire to control outcomes and maintain agency. The intention to reduce poverty is important, but so are the unintended consequences of global action.

The UN is a political organization driven by ideals that are political and not scientific. While ideals are strong motivators for positive change, they often set unattainable or unrealistic goals (Velleman 2002: 90). The following presents four reasons why the SDGs are likely idealistic and unattainable. First, the goalposts for measuring the reduction of poverty (and setting many other developmental goals) have been changed frequently, and are likely to be changed in the future. Inflation over the last thirty years has led to a threefold increase of the international poverty line, from a daily wage of \$1.25 in the 1990s to \$2.15 in 2022. Since the earned wages of the poor are not inflation protected, every increase in the poverty line risks nominally placing millions of people back into absolute poverty (World Bank 2023b; UN News 2023). Continued inflation since the last change in 2022, means that it is even more difficult to survive on the current wage of \$2.15. Another reason the UN's goals are likely unattainable concerns the validity of the poverty line, as the line targets basic survival, often in terms of food, calculated as if individuals are economically rational agents, willing to survive on very cheap, bland and monotonous diets (cf. Banerjee and Duflo 2011: 57). If the \$2.15 per day goal can ever be achieved, it is likely that a new line will be drawn to react to the harsh reality of this low, one-size-fits-all rate. In fact, an alternative and arguably more reliable way of measuring absolute poverty, the MDI (see Chapter 3), estimates the global number of extremely poor to be twice the number estimated by the UN (Alkire et al. 2019: 1; Statistics Division 2023). A third reason for doubting the SDG's attainability is that the UN has a reputation for not meeting previously set goals (Hanhimäki 2015: 5). Easterly states that "the SDGs are about as likely to result in progress as beauty pageant contestants' calls for world peace" (2015: 322)—largely due to their non-binding nature and the

“abundant escape clauses [...] disguised in respectful language” (2015: 323). In fact, the UN currently projects its own failure, with 600 million people in absolute poverty by 2030 (Statistics Division 2023). A fourth reason for likely SDG failure is unforeseeable events, like the COVID-19 pandemic, which placed an estimated 70 to 115 million people back into extreme poverty (World Bank 2022; World Bank 2023a; Ramos and Lara 2022). In fact, plagues, wars, state failures, and revolutions—which are often unforeseeable events—have thrown millions of people into extreme poverty and desperation over the course of history (cf. Scheidel 2018: 5). However, despite the idealistic and unattainable nature of the SDGs, serious progress against poverty has been made (cf. Chapter 3). The point is that by coupling itself to the SDGs, global poverty education commits itself to supporting ideals with high expectations for outcomes—ideals with no historical precedence and seemingly no scientific plan on how to reach them.

A further societal challenge concerns global consent on poverty definitions, issues of responsibility, as well as solutions. Such concerns create difficulties legitimizing the educational support and expectation of learner action (see ESD competency model) in support of reaching the SDGs. The following presents two hurdles to a democratic consensus that supports collective action against global poverty.

The first hurdle is that a sense of coherence is crucial for logical long-term planning and coalition building. But research in philosophy and psychology suggests that coherence of self is a myth supported by narratives of mastery and self-control (Bergerson et al. 2011: 15) that disguise individual responsibility from societal constraints and human relations (ibid. 2011: 78), due in part to distributed processing and the interplay of the subconscious and conscious mind (cf. Haidt 2006: 5). Individual illusions of coherence can disguise social responsibility to confront and engage with conflicting opinions and viewpoints as potentially valid and legitimate. The second hurdle for democratic collective action stems from issues of power, discourse, and politics. For Michel Foucault, discourse constitutes reality through the negotiation and critique of social and political power (cf. Foucault 1990: 11; Hallet 2008: 87). This view undermines the “natural” validity of any dominant view toward life. While undermining a sense of epistemological certainty of a single (or dominant) group may support peace, it also opens up the door to validate conflicting perspectives on reality. Mouffe supports a conflict rather than

consensus model of politics, as the latter leads to hegemonic and hierarchical structures (2005: 15), moral posturing aimed at delegitimizing opposing views (2005: 120), political disinterest and the rise of political extremism, right-wing populism, and terrorist groups (2005: 30, 69). Delegitimizing multivocality in democracy is problematic as dissent can provide checks and balances, especially against the tyranny of the majority (2005: 23). Instead, Mouffe feels political institutions should provide peaceful ways of negotiating conflict, rather than suppressing it (2005: 30). This nature of conflict is also recognized in ESD research. Schreiber calls for multiperspectivity as basic concepts like wealth, poverty, growth, and development are almost completely characterized by Eurocentrism (Appelt and Siege 2016: 41), while Geisz and Schmitt warn of a “One World” approach that homogenizes social, economic, and ecological realities (2016: 80).⁸ Ishizawa points out that describing a “good life” (*buen vivir*) as a foundation for global rules of living is nearly impossible (Appelt and Siege 2016: 27), while Kaul recognizes the inherent conflict between state sovereignty and global political cooperation (Appelt and Siege 2016: 48).⁹ In line with Mouffe, Bartosch views conflict as an inevitable component of ESD in foreign language pedagogy, and calls for the development of argument competence for ESD and democracy education (2022: 183).¹⁰ Envisioning global poverty education as ESD in support of SDGs is thus challenging, as it can cover up inherent and legitimate conflicts of perspectives.

Finally, the third challenge for a global poverty education as a branch of ESD involves the UN’s desire to eliminate (or seriously reduce) poverty, and its desire for agency toward solutions. As previously mentioned, while

⁸ Research on the global issue of human rights points out difficulties of global consensus, showing for instance willingness to adopt, but not enforce, human rights (Meyer 2004: 42), or to establish different standards out of cultural sensitivity (Frick 2019: 5). However, such inconsistencies make it difficult to envision human rights as legal rights (cf. Frick 2019: 5–6).

⁹ Some question the legitimacy of intergovernmental institutions as lacking true democratic representation, while others criticize the idea of a “global citizen” as an actual legal entity (cf. Hanson 2021: 269).

¹⁰ Global poverty would likely fall into the category of wicked problem, discussed by Bartosch as a complex problem defined by interdependencies, where solutions often create new and more complex problems (cf. 2022: 186). Solving wicked problems is not about findings *the* solution, but rather *better* solutions—but only under the awareness of costs, consequences, and the role of specific context.

the goal of reduced or zero poverty is laudable, it is possible that agency of both individuals and collective society is mitigated by ignorance. Efforts to achieve sustainable development require recursive feedback loops to allow for learning and self-correction, underlining that good intentions are only a starting point—it is the consequences of these intentions that ultimately matter.

Thomas Sowell's investigation of conflicting visions highlights concerns relatable to globalized action and consequences. According to Sowell, the UN's SDGs fit well under the concept of *unconstrained vision*, which can run the risk of overlooking trade-offs and costs of policies—for example, that the definition of global crises means that political ends justify extreme means, and that social and economic costs are irrelevant (cf. Sowell 2007: 29). A constrained view of SDGs does not reject the validity of the aims of an unconstrained vision (Sowell 2007: 254), but would rather support emergent and decentralized solutions (Sowell 2007: 37), with the understanding that complex matters are too complex for centralized rationality and power to make decisions.¹¹ The purpose of evoking this differentiation of visions is not to delegitimize either one, but to highlight the potential problems of unintended consequences inherent in centralized SDG action.¹²

Action against global crises should involve risk assessments, measured by the probability of occurrence and the impact of the outcome, and it should additionally consider that centralized collective action can multiply those risks. For instance, a collective sacrifice of economic stability for environmental stability may unintentionally buckle a system that feeds, clothes, and houses a quickly growing population that has increased from 2 billion in 1928 to over 8 billion in 2023 (cf. Ritchie et al. 2023; US Census Bureau 2023). The 2008 market crash and the recent COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted the global vulnerabilities of today's political, economic, and social systems, and provide evidence that global action against poverty requires feedback loops to learn from mistakes, should

¹¹ Friedrich Hayek expresses his doubts concerning rationally designed social policy, stating, "The rationalist whose reason is not sufficient to teach him those limitations of the power of conscious reason, and who despises all the institutions and customs which have not been consciously designed, would thus become the destroyer of the civilization built upon them" (Hayek 1964: 92).

¹² For more on the dangers of utopian (and often centrally planned) visions, see also Chirot (2020: 63) and Baumeister (2001: 169).

be cautious of centralization, and consider global risks of unintended consequences.

This section addressed societal challenges to conceptualizing global poverty education within a framework of ESD and SDGs. Valuing learner action in support of goals of eliminating global poverty and reducing economic inequality confronts teachers and learners with outcomes that are likely idealistic and unachievable, that are tied up in intense debates of consensus and legitimacy, and that potentially have serious risks for unintended consequences.

Educational Challenges

This section focuses on educational challenges of ESD, and specifically those that pertain to competency models associated with the approach. The section presents specifically criticisms of competency orientation, before addressing specific challenges of ESD. These criticisms focus on the neglect of critical reflection and on the role of knowledge, and the functionalization of learners to reach political goals. They also address ESD competency modeling that focuses on learner action.

When ESD is based on a model of competency, it inherits the problems and challenges competency models face. As previously established in this chapter, competency models are largely action-oriented, and these actions need to have relevance for solving real-life challenges. The following addresses three challenges of competencies that ESD competency models inherit. The first challenge is that competence models, with their focus on learner action, can neglect sufficient critical analysis of the problem or challenge being addressed. As Reinmann states, competence focus on solving problems suggest problem objectivity, a call to action, and a meaning of an action (2015: 18). Hartmann emphasizes a similar argument when she highlights the centrality of criticism (*Kritik*) and critical thinking (especially concerning power relations) as a foundational principle of pedagogy and education (2013: 254). The critique of competency orientation is that its focus on learner action potentially systematically teaches patterns of problem-solving that lack critical reflection as an integral and primary step in the learning process, and potentially leads to the valuing of agency over the consideration of consequences.

The second criticism claims that competence orientation warps the relationship between knowledge and learning. Reinmann notes that the criticism from the competency movement that learners have too much

knowledge and not enough ability has resulted in seeing knowledge as in conflict with ability instead of understanding that knowledge can support critical reflections on the ontological and epistemological understandings of problems and challenges, thereby informing better and more effective actions (2015: 22). Krautz presents this conflict between knowledge and action differently, stating that education (*Bildung*) was traditionally focused on content, and on selecting content that would lead to education, and that this has been largely pushed aside in the movement for competence orientation (2009: 93).

The third criticism is that competence orientation places economic above educational interests (Reinmann 2015: 20), focusing on educational investments in learners with measurable outputs that are valuable to the economic system. The economization of education (Krautz 2009: 91) can be connected to the first and second criticisms, as a lack of capacity for critical reflection, combined with lacking sufficient knowledge of a problem that is expected before action is taken, may produce workers who are more willing to unquestioningly carry out employer demands (which, at least in terms of large corporations, are heavily influencing educational institutions and policies, cf. Krautz 2009: 97). In this view, competency is about adapting to the world as it is instead of modifying it to meet our own needs (Krautz 2009: 93). Thus, the three criticisms are highly interrelated, stemming from consequences of the focus in competence orientation on learner ability to act.

Understanding criticisms levied against competency orientation are central for understanding criticism against ESD competence modeling. The first criticism concerns the lack of critical reflection on the problems and challenges that ESD addresses. Hamborg claims that ESD utilized the popular awareness of multiple crises to legitimize not just itself, but also its assumptions and approaches where the results of this legitimization process are the illusion of a consensus in sustainability education (2020: 171). By elevating sustainability as a guiding principle, ESD eludes the critical examination of sustainability efforts since they are valorized as good, correct, and without alternative (2020: 173). Hamborg suggests that learners are not supposed to question ESD and its approach to sustainability, and instead are supposed to learn how to approach the correct views and decisions (Hamborg 2017: 20–21).

The second and third criticisms concern the problematic relationship between ability and knowledge and the use of learners to meet non-educational goals. Though the extent to which learners are expected to act

directly against global challenges is left somewhat vague in ESD competency modeling of the *Curriculum Framework*, some ESD researchers claim that this is indeed the case. De Haan states that it is often presented as if ESD assesses the quality of education in its ability to teach learners to fight poverty, promote literacy, and enforce gender equality—sensible goals that overload ESD with untenable expectations greater than those we expect from experts (de Haan 2008: 25–26). Further problems with this approach to ESD are that learners are being expected to be addressed with problems they did not create (de Haan 2008: 39), and as a result they may internalize guilt and responsibility as a driving motivation (Hamborg 2020: 175). Further challenges of over-evaluating action over knowledge is the idea that our future selves may be better equipped to solve current challenges (2020: 174), that better solutions may come from changing political and economic structures rather than individual behavior (Hamborg 2017: 19), and that the “functionalization” of learners to meet the goals of ESD (de Haan 2008: 39) contradicts the ban on politically overwhelming learners (*Überwältigungsverbot*) and the need to enable learners to reach their own political perspectives, as defined by the *Beutelsbacher Consensus* (Hamborg 2020: 172; de Haan 2008: 36).¹³ Presenting young people of school age with an expectation to take action against unquestioned crises they themselves cannot solve could be viewed as politically manipulative (cf. Hamborg 2020: 177).

Against the backdrop of these criticisms, the *Curriculum Framework* places strong value on learner action, and does seek to engage learners in actions that target sustainability problems. The model specifies its competence area of acting as consisting of four core competences, though one, “solidarity and shared responsibility,” appears to be more of a value than action. The second action-oriented core competence is “understanding and conflict resolution,” which targets “overcoming socio-cultural barriers and self-interests by communicating and cooperating, and contribute to conflict-resolutions” (Schreiber 2016: 95). This competence appears to target the development of willingness to cooperate with others and establish solidarity—likely as a precursor to taking globally coordinated action. The third core competence, “ability

¹³ The *Beutelsbacher Consensus* is regarded as the standard of guidelines for teaching political issues, topics and perspectives in German schools. It is based on a minimal consensus, meaning that those involved in its drafting could agree on them, if on little else. Cf. Schneider (1999).

to act in times of global change,” appears to target more explicitly the ESD goals of addressing global challenges (Schreiber 2016: 95). The final core competence, “participation and active involvement,” explicitly involves learners in global development actions, by ensuring that “Students are able and willing, based on their autonomous decision, to pursue objectives of sustainable development” (Schreiber 2016: 95). Referencing learner autonomy may be lip-service, especially considering the concomitant omission of critical reflection of sustainability approaches. The core competence also places sustainable development as an individual responsibility (and not just in support of existing, macro-level developmental policies), stating learners should pursue action “in private, school and professional fields” as they “participate in their implementation in society and politics” (Schreiber 2016: 95).

As presented earlier in this chapter, this ESD competency model has been further defined for the teaching of modern foreign languages as a federally supported recommendation for German school education. Its subject-specific definition of *acting* as pertaining to “what people can do with language,” is further defined as “motivating for the struggle with the challenges of global change and on strengthening sustainable attitudes and behaviour” (2016: 159), but also includes supporting the learner to “use the possibility to participate in international activities to support sustainable development,” and “suggest in foreign language activities to solve environmental and social problems, and actively participate” (Becker et al. 2016: 162). However, the role of direct learner action appears attenuated, as the focus appears to be more on potential and on actual action. For instance, the core competence of “ability to act in times of global change” involves the subject-specific competencies to “realistically evaluate changes for taking communicative influence in complex processes of globalization” and “constructively discuss important future topics in a foreign language,” while the core competence of “participation and active involvement” involves the subject-specific competence to “present in a foreign language what schools, religious communities or common interest groups can and should contribute to achieve goals of sustainable development” (Becker et al. 2016: 162). Thus, the ESD competency model presented in the *Curriculum Framework* appears to treat the competence area of *acting* ambiguously—perhaps as a way of mitigating political consequences of supporting SDGs for the education of young people. In conclusion, this section presents evidence that there are serious educational challenges that stand in the way of encouraging

learners to help alleviate or solve (global) poverty. The next section will focus on the subject-specific challenges of integrating ESD into foreign language education.

Specific Challenges of Foreign Language Teaching

Research on ESD and global citizenship education has uncovered many challenges for the field of foreign language pedagogy that are highly relevant for global poverty education. Some of these challenges are inherited from societal and ESD challenges, while others are subject specific. The following section presents seven challenges that can inhibit successful global poverty education in foreign language learning contexts.

There appears to be a paradox between the educational goals of teaching (and valuing) multiple perspectives in foreign language education and the desire to unify and collaborate on global solutions to global problems. Volkmann highlights this paradox, noting that transculturalism in foreign language teaching discourse aims at ending all boundaries (and related power and hegemony), but runs the risk of covering up recurring claims of cultural difference, of representing mostly the experience of privileged and educated bourgeoisie, and of being questionably desirable if it is the result of mass culture and commodification (2015: 23). While Volkmann addresses the need for empathy, change of perspective and tolerance (2015: 28), and warns against presenting homogeneous views on global issues (ibid. 33), he also calls for a focus on commonality necessary to unite people against global challenges (ibid. 33). If universalism in its extreme form is not only incorrect but also harmful, then perhaps relativism in its extreme form is also harmful (cf. also Bartosch 2022: 180). This middle ground—a consensus against many odds—presents a serious challenge to teaching global poverty education.

A consensus, however, may only arise out of conflict—something foreign language pedagogy today tends to avoid. Koreik notes a historical shift in foreign language education from regional studies (*Landeskunde*) to cultural studies, and with this a typical avoidance of conflicting perspectives and topics in foreign language classrooms (2021: 81). Remorseful of this loss of conflict, Bechtel notes the inherent conflictual nature involved in sustainable development and its role in foreign language pedagogy, especially concerning the interrelationship between global and local, and suggests its incorporation would enrich classroom discourse (2021: 18). Further conflicts exist between, for instance, economic interests (for

instance, of growth) and environmental interests (for instance, of protection and resource management, cf. Schädlich 2021: 169; Appelt and Siegel 2016: 42). Bartosch also points to the hidden challenges of avoiding conflict for ESD, pointing to a need to teach competencies of argumentation as a central tenet (2022: 183). But how do educators find consensus, without treating all perspectives as if they are equally valid? And if they cannot (or should not) achieve this, then how can they support learner ESD competency outcomes?

In order to deal with this complexity and discursive multiperspectivity, some call for global education in foreign language classrooms to be more multi- and interdisciplinary (cf. Viebrock 2021: 210; Vogt 2021: 224)—though this interdisciplinarity brings with it its own challenges (cf. Marz 2021: 120). This call for interdisciplinarity also refers to the idea that global education is the responsibility of many school subjects (Schmelter 2021: 175). Another solution would be to bring back the idea that there are not just subjective perspectives, but perhaps also objective facts, of which the surrounding discourse can help productively guide global education. Some suggest, however, that a fact-based approach to teaching for instance culture, is currently outdated. Specifically, Koreik points out that a cultural studies approach typically is about legitimizing perspectives, making a consensus around a global problem (its causes and solutions) and agreement on the ‘facts’ around certain issues difficult (2021: 77)—this same concern is mirrored in Viebrock’s call for more scientific literacy in foreign language global citizenship education (2015: 45). She elaborates that there is a solid need for science-based teaching, and there should be a focus on students understanding issues before they are expected to act (2015: 66). Hammer even goes so far as to raise the question of whether education should focus on changing the world (i.e., through action), rather than simply helping learners to try to understand it (2012: 51).

While it is common to point out educational dangers of oversimplifying global issues (Würffel 2021: 230; Schädlich 2021: 165; Viebrock 2021: 209), attending to complexity poses a challenge for teachers as they need to remain up-to-date (Elsner 2021: 48), they have more questions than knowledge and are often uncertain on how to teach global education (Hammer 2015: 155). This problem, in turn, is exacerbated by a lack of empirical research on teaching global issues, especially in foreign language teaching contexts (Würffel 2021: 233), and by the fact that the subject of foreign language education has slowly abandoned a fact-based

approach for a more perspective based approach—one where teaching culture often fails due to learners’ lack of world knowledge, language skills and discourse competence (Koreik 2021: 81, cf. also Riemer 2021: 142). In the face of teacher uncertainty and a lack of support, statements that global education is less about teaching correct viewpoints and more about opening up a dialogue of perspectives (cf. Hammer 2012: 73), and calls for teachers and learners to become more tolerant of ambiguity (cf. Elsner 2021: 49; Surkamp 2021: 203) may fall on deaf (or covered) ears.

There is an additional classroom challenge of avoiding political partisanship, as many global issues become political issues and debates, taken up by political parties with sometimes broadly differing perspectives. Despite the (perhaps obvious) political dimension of global education for sustainable development and the need to address it in foreign language education (Würffel 2021: 228), there is a danger of focusing on one political view, like those of the *Green Party* in Germany when covering environmental issues (Lütge 2021: 101). Focusing on a party’s policies or presenting homogeneous views on certain global issues can lead to political and ideological indoctrination (cf. Hammer 2015: 165). The demands for nonpartisanship and multiperspectivity are exacerbated by the fact that even media often pose moral framings of political issues around global issues (Grimm 2015: 183), meaning that teachers must carefully select media and methods for global poverty. Research on global education in foreign language teaching also highlights the need to take learners into greater consideration. Teaching global issues can lead to learner resignation toward global problems (Viebrock 2015: 42), with feelings of being overwhelmed by Earth- and life-ending catastrophes and problems, against which learners have no, or very little, agency (cf. also Geisz and Schmitt 2016: 59). The “preaching effect” of raising global problems and promoting certain solutions (like recycling against environmental pollution) can lead to young people not taking topics and solutions seriously, or simply rejecting them despite knowledge of their importance (cf. Hammer 2012: 74). There are also serious implications for foreign language teaching that focuses on aspects that evoke negative emotions (Riemer 2021: 143), while other research points out that learners often perceive, and dislike, binary ethical approaches to issues of globalization (Hammer 2012: 54). These warnings should be strengthened by other findings that, at least in the past, there has been a lack of interest among teachers and learners concerning global issues and problems (Hammer 2012: 60).

Added to these challenges are competing classroom responsibilities in foreign language teaching. A focus on content of global education can stand in conflict with a focus on communicative skills (Volkmann 2015: 28). Some suggest that a certain language proficiency is required before learners can deal with the complexity of goals set forth for global and sustainable development education—especially for foreign languages other than English (Burwitz-Melzer 2021: 22; Schmelter 2021: 178). On top of this, teachers need to sensitize learners to cultural and linguistic diversity, but at the same time teach them to use English to solve global problems (Müller 2017: 104).

Finally, there is a general agreement on the conceptual fuzziness of approaches that deal with global issues like poverty. Viebrock presents the large number of related educational concepts (for global education, cf. Viebrock 2015: 40, and for education for sustainable development, cf. Viebrock 2021: 209), while Lütge notes that the concept of global education is constantly evolving (Lütge 2015a: 7). In part due to this fuzziness, but also in part to the constant development and complexity of issues it covers, there are frequent calls for critical engagement with these concepts (Burwitz-Melzer 2021: 22 and Viebrock 2021: 212) and even for skepticism (Volkmann 2015: 33).

In conclusion, and in line with Hammer, the question that emerges from this literature review appears not to be whether to teach global poverty in the foreign language classroom, but how to teach it effectively and appropriately (Hammer 2015: 165). This section has presented a line of arguments that suggest there are serious challenges to reaching the goals of global poverty education, and that there are strong reasons to view the goals critically and cautiously. Global poverty education that is mindful of these challenges—societal, educational, and in foreign language education—is the likely path forward to make sure it is realistic, ethical, and successful.

STATE OF RESEARCH ON EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

The previous section ended with a look into research in foreign language pedagogy on education for sustainable development and global citizenship education, with a focus on the problems and challenges that can hinder the integration of global poverty education. However, in order to put that theory of ESD to practice, it helps to know what is being done

with the topic on the ground. The following section addresses the state of research specifically on global poverty in foreign language education, with a focus on the representation of global poverty in school textbooks around the world. Overall, this section reveals a serious lack of research into the teaching of poverty in foreign language contexts (and specifically in textbooks). Therefore, this section concludes with a specific focus on the research gaps that emerge from the review of existing studies in order to position this study more concretely.

The theoretical and empirical focus on global poverty as a topic of teaching in foreign language pedagogy is rare. When poverty is present, it is often discussed in general, and in combination with other social and environmental issues as a part of ESD and global citizenship education. For example, four recent and major anthologies in Germany on the topics of ESD and GCE offering a total of 57 individual articles¹⁴ present no specific focus on poverty. Practical applications of ESD nearly always deal with environmental problems as examples of what EFL educators can do in the classroom (cf. for example Misiaszek et al. 2023: 201; Diehr 2022: 194; Genetsch 2022: 230; Alter 2015: 57; Hammer 2015: 155; Grimm 2015: 171). Poverty as a topic (among others) is often used to justify ESD,¹⁵ but the lack of research on practical applications suggests that the topic provides an air of educational and social legitimacy to the ESD concept, but that there is a general aversion to its practical application in the EFL classroom. In order to cover the breadth of the relevant research that does exist, the following addresses first the research from the international context, before turning to the German context of global poverty in foreign language teaching.

Research on textbook representation of poverty justifies itself using very similar arguments to those that will be presented later in this chapter, focusing on the centrality of textbooks for foreign language teaching as well as their influence on learning. They also generally agree that textbooks have the power to reflect worldviews and ideologies that are problematic. On the one hand, textbooks are “windows to the world” (Risager 2021: 130), viewed by teachers and learners as “repositories

¹⁴ See Lütge (Ed.) (2015), Burwitz-Melzer et al. (2021a), Surkamp (2022) and Lütge et al. (2023).

¹⁵ Cf. Hallet (2024: 63) for the use of global poverty as a justification for global (citizenship) education. Hallet also notes there that global citizenship education focuses especially on environmental problems and challenges.

of authoritative knowledge” (Herman 2007: 118) and taken factually and uncritically (McEachron 2016: 18). However, on the other hand, existing research agrees that textbooks have agendas that distort truth and present patterns, often those of existing structures of societal power and domination that legitimize the existence of poverty (Ramdhani and Maistry 2020: 17) and reinforce privilege (McEachron 2016: 17). They model society based on consensus rather than on conflict for learners to accept as true (Chisolm 2018: 226), presenting the “ideal subject” as well as idealized lives and lifestyles (Taylor-Mendes 2009: 67) that are focused on consumerism, travel, celebrities, and superficial multiculturalism (suggesting marketization and instrumentalization of language learning, cf. Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 88). A further consensus is that textbooks present and legitimize specifically neoliberal ideology (Copley 2018: 44; Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 88), focused on individualism and individual agency (McEachron 2016: 26). All this points to a “hidden curriculum” (Chisolm 2018: 226; Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 87) that textbook publishers and writers may not intend or be aware of (Ramdhani and Maistry 2020: 16), and that makes textbooks easier to sell (McEachron 2016: 17) by avoiding difficult and controversial topics (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 87). Researching the role of poverty in (foreign language) textbooks is seen as crucial also because of the central role textbooks play in the classroom to determine “the what and how of ELT” (Copley 2018: 43). These patterned framings of social and economic life in textbooks suggest that their representation is about not only teaching cultural diversity abroad but also reinforcing socioeconomic worldviews of the cultures of the textbook users at home. In this sense, most existing research on poverty in (especially foreign language) textbooks focus on implicit representation of class as a way to preserve the status quo of existing economic and social inequalities.

Common to these textbook investigations is a confirmation of initial research hypotheses, namely that either poverty is absent (or seriously neglected), or that its representation supports neoliberal ideology. Cates’ claim in the early 2000s that EFL textbooks ignore global issues including poverty (2002: 46, cf. also Cates 2022) appears to have been confirmed in most subsequent research, and for other foreign language contexts. Research on Spanish language textbooks for US high schools revealed poverty is rare and is treated superficially and vague, with a focus instead on the middle class (Herman 2007: 132). EFL textbooks in Brazil depict the USA as largely successful and elite, appearing to learners as if it lacks

violence and poverty (Taylor-Mendes 2009: 72). Other research finds that EFL textbooks designed for use in global contexts tend to ignore poverty and conceal class inequality (Baleghizadeh and Motahed 2010: 17; Hilliard 2014: 239). Studies have revealed similar findings on French as a foreign language (Block 2018: 116; Block and Gray 2018: 128), as well as a neglect of class in SLA literature and in literature on bilingualism and multilingualism (Block 2014: 117 and 147; Block 2015). More recently, research on textbooks for various foreign languages in Denmark (including English, German, French, and Spanish, cf. Risager 2021) and EFL textbooks in China (cf. Xiang and Yenika-Agbaw 2021: 334) reveal little depiction of poverty, focusing instead on middle to upper-middle-class life. The common thread of this research is a lack of focus on lower classes and poverty, and a greater focus on middle classes in textbooks of all foreign languages and national/regional contexts.

Some researchers note, however, that class-related issues, including poverty, were once commonly present in foreign language classrooms (for instance since the 1960s, cf. Herman 2007: 118), but that since the 1980s this has changed (Copley 2018: 52–53) to focus more recently on “identity politics” (Bori 2018: 41) and specifically race and gender (Chisolm 2018: 233; Hilliard 2014: 239). This enabled a shift away from collective experience that affects all identity groups (Copley 2018: 55), allowing for the representation of society as a homogenous group and the representation of racial discrimination as an irrational expression of racial bias (rather than systemic and structural, cf. Chisolm 2018: 228). This focal shift away from class has enabled the representation of employment as positive, enjoyable, and involving individual agency and personal satisfaction (Copley 2018: 55), as opposed to the historical textbook representation of work as burdensome and unsatisfying (Copley 2018: 48), where unemployment was also more frequently thematized (Copley 2018: 53). Now the focus is more on individuals who are unconstrained by material considerations, with individual problems and solutions, and less on social problems and social solutions (Copley 2018: 55). Jobs are often presented as “white collar” involving university degrees and world travel (Bori 2018: 108–109), or as reflecting an “entrepreneurial identity” (Bori 2018: 138). Characters are depicted as wanting or owning houses, and needing banks, credit cards, and mortgages to do so (Bori 2018: 149). This focus represents the upper-middle class (Bori 2018: 104) in “a prosperous country, without poverty, without class differences, that offers great job opportunities, possibilities to travel around the world and

[the ability to] live in comfortable houses and apartments” (Bori 2018: 114). These studies reveal not only a lack of poverty in textbooks, but also the representation of life as positive, care-free, and without financial concern.

One of the most comprehensive and recent research projects investigating poverty in EFL textbooks shares many overlaps with the interests and approaches of this study, but focuses on internationally oriented EFL textbooks by British publishers. In the 32 textbooks investigated in this study, 104 texts were found to thematize poverty (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 89), with 15% of those referring to causes, one-third to symptoms, and 80% to solutions of poverty—most of which were charity from the Global North to the Global South (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 91). The authors conclude that the only solutions are from charitable individuals or organizations (suggesting individual responsibility), with no real systemic or state solutions. Furthermore, they find that poverty is vague and general, and that people in poverty are presented as lacking agency (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 100). They further note that solutions are future-oriented, contingent and optimistic (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 98), that if governments are mentioned as solutions, they are done so “as parties to be reminded and mobilized to take action” (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 92), and that the common reference of “we” as solutions “puts the blame on those who are in no way responsible” (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 96). They also find a difference in poverty of the Global North and the Global South, noting poverty in the former is typically general and “faceless,” whereas in the latter it is often personal and specific (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 93). Though their research did find substantial representation of poverty, their conclusion appears to be consistent with that of other studies—namely that poverty is mostly not a local, Western phenomenon (allowing a more positive representation of Western societies), and that responsibility largely falls on the Western individual to help those in developing countries. The authors claim that textbook poverty presents a neoliberal story of equal opportunities that erases class in Western societies, presenting poverty in “an optimistic, light version that does not require reflection on the systemic causes of poverty and making it possible to trivialize complex, serious issues by offering simple solutions” (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 100). They also claim that this framing attributes the blame for poverty on those

in poverty, promoting individualism combined with belief in success as the sum of willingness, determination and hard work (Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 101). This matches Copley's claims that the neoliberalist representation in textbooks renders natural the focus on people being defined by consumption in pursuit of self-interests, and on social relations defined by the market (2018: 47), and Bori's claims of allowing the "capitalist class" to disseminate its view on "official knowledge" (2018: 163).

From this conclusion of a neoliberal framing of work and poverty, the existing research draws implications for both society and classrooms that use the textbooks. The societal implications are that school textbooks for foreign language education serve to support the current neoliberal structure, and that the capitalist system that supports neoliberalism is responsible for the creation of economic inequality. According to Bori, neoliberalist textbooks must present the happy life of consumerist capitalism, and therefore also hide poverty, violence, and less desirable forms of work (2018: 163). This imperative of neoliberal textbooks stems from the belief that neoliberalism creates the inequality of wealth distribution (Bori 2018: 165), and that the European Council is a neoliberal organization that presses its views and ideology into education (Bori 2018: 166). This sentiment is shared by Block, who sees the "erasure" and "denial" of social class in teaching materials as a way of avoiding the inequality that capitalism produces, and the resulting societal changes that would occur if this were recognized (2015: 10). Pogorzelska et al. also believe current poverty representation excuses the state from its responsibilities (2023: 87), and supports the status quo and its founding ideology (2023: 101). This presents a conflict of interests, as foreign language textbooks try to avoid offending some textbook consumers and harming sales via the inclusion of diverse views on poverty (Herman 2007: 134). However, Pogorzelska et al. claim that challenging this ideology "is precisely what contemporary schools need" (2023: 101). Noting a similar absence of poverty in economics textbooks, Ramdhani and Maistry call for a "balanced perspective on why poverty exists in society" (2020: 17), while McEachron, focusing on poverty in social studies textbooks, urges more specifically for a focus on parallel structures for different ethnic groups showing similarities and divergences in terms of class (2016: 28), a focus on micro-, mezzo- and macro-economic perspectives and concepts (2016: 28), and the presentation of different value positions and opposing points of view, as well as multiple economic models for governance (2016: 28), moving beyond free enterprise capitalism to include state capitalism,

state-regulated capitalism, mixed state regulated and private enterprise capitalism, private enterprise capitalism, anarchism, communism, democratic socialism, Marxian socialism, and state socialism (2016: 30). She emphasizes that this would frame healthy debate and reinforce the value of free speech (2016: 29). Indeed, if foreign language textbooks wish to include topics of poverty, especially under the ESD framework of participating in solutions, then they may need to include perspectives, information and even values that question the current structure of society, its market logic (and underlying governmental policies), and the current social and economic inequalities, even (or especially) in Western and developed countries.

The neoliberal framing of work and poverty in textbooks of foreign language education also has implications for the classrooms they are used in. One consequence is that textbooks run the risk of further alienating school students by ignoring the realities of increasing number of students affected by poverty (in the global use of textbooks, cf. Pogorzelska et al. 2023: 88), especially considering recent increases of migrants and asylum seekers in Western countries (Herman 2007: 137). This framing does not prepare students equally for the future (Chisolm 2018: 226), or help them “consider or understand the ways that wealth is unequally distributed, or why some people are poor and others are embarrassingly rich” (Bori 2018: 117). Concerning how foreign language textbooks represent other countries, they run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes (for instance of the USA, cf. Taylor-Mendes 2009: 76). By focusing on identity instead of class, textbooks prime equality based on difference, rather than commonality (i.e., their economic class, which is mutable), decreasing the chance for any change (Block 2015: 6–7). For this reason, Chisolm (similar to McEachron introduced above) calls for the increased focus on intersectionality of class, race and gender (2018: 225). Taylor-Mendes criticizes how foreign language textbooks promote activism concerning poverty, and that “instilling unrealistic expectations for change within this reality is even more inappropriate in EFL teaching and learning” (Taylor-Mendes 2009: 66). Bori believes textbook representation teaches learners how to obey the ruling ideology, and that being poor is something to be avoided at all costs (2018: 163). Based on research on economics textbooks, Ramdhani and Maistry claim that the neoliberal representation of work and poverty puts the blame of poverty on those in poverty, creating challenges for teachers who have students living in poverty (2020: 17).

The review reveals little research on poverty in foreign language textbooks of any particular region. What the review clearly shows, however, is a pattern of both research findings and interest. Across locations, across foreign languages, and across publishers (and even across different educational subjects), poverty is found to be mostly missing, replaced instead by middle-class lifestyles with middle-class occupations, homes, and hobbies. Across studies, the review revealed a pattern of interest in how textbooks present, and even push, a framework of neoliberal ideology and a strong focus on individuals with little financial concern, meanwhile lacking reflection on the political and economic structures that create and promote the economic well-being of some, and the hardships of others.

In Germany, there is also surprisingly little research on poverty in foreign language school textbooks. Two projects, however, share some similarities with the present study. Kubanek (1989) focuses on the representation of third world countries in English textbooks of Germany between 1947 and 1984. While this study does include insights on poverty, it also addresses additional factors (*ibid.*: 353–353). Kubanek begins by noting that English language textbook authors in Germany are usually not educated in third world research (*ibid.*: 349), and her findings confirm this. While she reveals a shift from a view of development politics as help that leads to self-help in the 1960s and early 70s, to a view of universalism in the late 1970s and 1980s, she also finds that controversial topics are still missing (*ibid.*: 359). She notes that textbooks present foreign cultures in a fragmented manner and overload them with content and topics. Since there is little overall content provided on third world countries, learners are asked questions they cannot properly answer (360). She thus calls for a cultural contrastive approach (one that shows the limitations of access to foreign cultures), more guidance and knowledge provided by the textbooks, reflection on their truth claims, research on the pre-knowledge of the learners concerning the third world, and an increased integration of literary texts (*ibid.*: 361).

In a study more than two decades later, Hammer (2012) addresses poverty in EFL textbooks in Germany, but it is again addressed among other topics and within the framework of globalization. Her research focuses on 27 textbooks from Klett, Cornelsen, and Diesterweg, and includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses. She concludes that poverty is an underrepresented topic missing basic background information, as well as information on fighting and containing poverty (2012: 231). She finds that only one textbook (Camden Town 5) addresses

causes of poverty, that in general there are stereotypical pictures of homelessness in metropolitan cities and poor children in Africa, as well as of slums in South Africa and India, and that the focus appears to be on the unequal distribution of wealth than on global injustices or strategies to fight poverty (2012: 231–232). She also finds that the textbook audience is often invited to become active, but that the perspectives of those who are affected by poverty are often excluded (2012: 234). Much like the conclusions made by Kubanek, Hammer finds a fragmentary representation with single perspectives that lead to a distorted view of issues of globalization (2012: 312). Furthermore, similar to the research on poverty and neoliberalism in textbooks outside of Germany, Hammer finds an overall positive representation of globalization in textbooks, and that materials tend to manipulate learners rather than support the development of individual opinions (2012: 313). Finally, Hammer concludes there is a lack of focus on interdependencies of local and foreign settings, and calls for the greater integration of narrative texts with figures that learners can identify and empathize with (2012: 315).

RESEARCH GAPS AND CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

An investigation into the literature on global poverty in foreign language school education reveals that research is spread thinly across many linguistic and national contexts, and is extremely sparse in Germany. Often, the research focuses more on socioeconomic class than on poverty, or poverty is one topic among many others (and therefore lacking analytical depth). The existing research focuses solely on analyzing textbook content and typically includes qualitative and quantitative aspects. A common finding across the research is that poverty is rarely represented in textbooks, and if present, it is treated superficially and external to the local contexts of learning.

An overview of the existing research thus provides insights into research gaps that are addressed by this study. First, there appears to be no substantial contemporary research on teaching global poverty in Germany, especially in textbooks, and relevant German research is sparse and not focused specifically on global poverty. The contribution of this research project is its focus on the most recent complete generation of EFL textbooks in Germany (2013–2019) and its sole concentration on poverty as a global issue. Like other research projects, the textbook analysis of this study includes both quantitative as well as qualitative

methods, but its sole focus on poverty—and in one national context of Germany—enables a much deeper and broader analysis. This characteristic is also strengthened by the in-depth theoretical and empirical research on poverty in general, but also as a global and local phenomenon (cf. Chapter 3). While existing research does not appear to be interdisciplinary, this project moves beyond any single perspective (like neoliberalism or globalization) to provide conceptual and empirical insights on global poverty from fields like sociology, political science, economics, and history. Finally, this project is the first to integrate textbook findings of global poverty with the perspectives and experiences of practicing EFL teachers, providing deeper insight into how textbook global poverty is interpreted by teachers and, ultimately, how global poverty is taught *on the ground* in foreign language classrooms.

ROLE OF TEXTBOOKS AND TEACHERS FOR EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

The outcomes of global poverty education will depend on many factors, including, but not limited to, teachers, learners, teaching materials, but also the social context (including the school, parents, geopolitical location), current events, and educational policy makers. Understanding how these factors influence global poverty education on the ground, and in classrooms, is crucial for understanding how poverty education can be developed and optimized, and how teachers, material designers, and policy makers can anticipate potential problems and challenges. However, while a comprehensive investigation into all factors influencing current teaching of global poverty might be desirable, it would exceed the scope of this study and its resources, and run the risk of sacrificing analytical depth for broad coverage. Instead, this study focuses on the two dominant factors: school EFL textbooks and the teachers who use them. Both factors are understood as highly influential sources and filters of content and methods, and both, also in interaction with one another, can have a substantial influence on how poverty is represented and taught, and on the resulting learner outcomes.

Textbooks

School textbooks play a central role in the (EFL) education of young people today, and textbook representation and teaching of poverty will

have a considerable impact on learners, and how they understand and work toward reducing poverty and economic inequality. The centrality of textbooks stems from many aspects—their content, their relation to educational policies, their role in classroom planning and teaching, and the value teachers, learners and the general public assign to them. The following section first addresses textbooks as the product of complex interactions, making it difficult to assign a simple and clear intentionality to their presentation of issues like poverty as a whole. Thereafter, it addresses the role of textbooks for foreign language teaching, with a focus on the German national context, and provides evidence for the centrality of textbooks in teaching, and their influence on student learning. Finally, this section addresses research on teacher and learner perceptions of textbook content, and how textbooks substantially influence political and ideological views of learners, as well as their perceptions of reality.

Textbook content is the result of different actors pursuing different interests, therefore making it nearly impossible to associate a dominant intention to textbook representation. Textbook content is typically not the result of a single author, and it often does not present one coherent view of the subject matter. Textbooks, especially in Germany, are produced by teams of authors, editors, and advisers, with different perspectives, opinions, and levels of expertise. Müller shows that textbooks in Germany are often written and designed by actors from different fields and different interests in pursuit of a common goal, though their cooperation does not have to be deliberate or based on consensus (2021: 13). His research focusing on the representation of Africa in German school textbooks, further shows that textbook authors often rely on their own opinions of political, scientific and subject-didactic issues for textbook content, though they also rely on their personal networks to other specialists (2021: 473), and that textbook editors strongly influence textbook content though they lack formal education for positions, rely on educated guesses rather than market research, and exercise a conservative influence over progressive authors to make textbook content more palatable for the general market (2021: 40–41).

Textbooks are driven by educational, but also economic concerns that sometimes compete. In Germany, textbook companies are private, need to anticipate market demands, and are aware that changes in content can hurt sales (Müller 2021: 35–36). Textbook series tend to be renewed with little changes until sales dwindle (even despite curricular changes),

their authors remain in production for long periods of time, and textbooks are slow to react to social and scientific changes (Müller 2021: 471–472). Not only is there little change over time within series, but the major publishers in Germany produce textbooks which are strikingly similar (Gehring 2017: 358).

Textbook production in Germany is also heavily influenced by federal constraints of the Conference of the Ministry of Culture (*KMK*), the state curricula (*Lehrpläne*), and official approval procedures for entry into the school market. While Müller found that some textbook experts claim that state approval procedures censor heavily, and others value the procedure in its role for quality control (2021: 62), he also found that many textbook authors are also involved in the design of *Lehrpläne* and curricula, increasing the flow of official norms into textbooks (2021: 86). For EFL textbooks in Germany, Gehring states that the pedagogical and instructional guideless of the *Ministries of Education and Cultural Affairs* are easy to meet and that usually only the first book of a series must pass inspection to then automatically authorize the whole series (2017: 357–358).

This investigation into the origin of textbook content in Germany reveals the messy nature of their production and the diffusion of responsibility concerning their overall content. Müller shows that, the more textbooks claim to be learner-centered, the more they focus on presenting *islands of knowledge* rather than coherent coverage (Müller 2021: 65).¹⁶ Textbooks today may not even attempt to present coherent messages (at least about complex social phenomena like poverty) anymore. This conclusion appears to coincide well with the complex interplay of actors in textbook production, and with difficulties of assigning clear intentionality to textbook representation.

Despite the seemingly chaotic nature of textbook production and their content, as well as the difficulties of viewing textbooks as coherent perspectives transmitted to learners, textbooks play a central role in school teaching worldwide (Fuchs and Bock 2018: 1; Hansen 2018: 370). In fact, textbooks are even viewed as a central medium to help reach SDGs (GEM Report 2016: 1), and access to textbooks and textbook quality can positively influence learner performance, especially in developing and low-income countries (cf. Smart and Jagannathan 2018). However, there are

¹⁶ Bromley, Meyer and Ramirez also show that, over time and globally, school textbooks are becoming more student-centered (2011: 14).

many factors of textbook design that can influence learning like language, representation, design, and learning methods (Behnke 2018), making it difficult to identify exactly what ultimately makes a textbook educationally effective. Furthermore, despite the often-cited centrality of textbooks in teaching, Vera notes that textbooks as a source of information in classrooms are slowly losing their dominance, largely due to access to digital, online media (Vera 2018: 106). Textbooks are central to teaching, but their impact is dependent on many other factors, such as the socio-economic background of learners, textbook design, and technological changes.

It is often assumed that textbooks play a central role on determining teaching in EFL classrooms in Germany, although there is a lack of contemporary and definitive empirical research to verify this (cf. Kurtz 2020: 198). The reasons for this centrality are multiple and convincing. Textbooks offer teachers learning content and activities, and provide them with teaching ideas for their own material development (Hansen 2018: 369; Meyer et al. 2022: 247). Through this, textbooks save teachers time and energy (Tomlinson 2017: 349). They support learners by allowing them to look ahead to upcoming content or review previous content, and can empower them to create spontaneous in-class interactions (Schmidt and Strasser 2018: 220). Textbooks support educational planners by systematizing and structuring material, standardizing learning, allowing the monitoring of quality (Meyer et al. 2022: 248) and fulfillment of curricular needs (Schmidt and Strasser 2018: 220). Textbooks are cost-effective and offer the public course-credibility (Tomlinson 2017: 349).¹⁷ Despite these reasons for their use, there are many criticisms of EFL textbooks and their use in Germany. For instance, it is generally recommended that teachers do not rely too heavily, or solely, on the textbook (Schmidt and Strasser 2018: 221), and textbooks are often criticized for being inauthentic, presenting distorted and stereotypical content, avoiding controversy, and deskilling teachers (Meyer et al. 2022: 248). Further criticisms state they are superficial, reductionist, and do not cater to learner needs and interests (Tomlinson 2017: 349). Despite these criticisms, textbooks are still a popular medium in the classroom, “As yet, the critical voices of scholars who argue against textbook dominance have not had an effect. The status that textbooks have as the most used media

¹⁷ For a more in-depth look at textbook use in general, and its research, cf. Hansen (2018).

in English lessons has not taken any damage” (Gehring 2017: 359–360). The general research consensus of EFL textbook use in Germany is that textbooks are central (and for many understandable reasons), but also problematic.

However, statements of the dominance or centrality of textbooks in EFL classrooms in Germany say little about the exact extent of their use. While the 2006 DESI study showed almost 100% of English teachers in Germany worked with textbook teaching materials (Gehring 2017: 360), most teachers create or find additional materials to complement the textbook, though strictly adhering to the textbook is also quite common (Meyer et al. 2022: 247). A study from Czech Republic found that a majority of EFL teachers rely mostly on textbooks for in-class materials and activities (Sikorová and Červenková 2014: 114). Specifically, it found that over 80% of English teachers relied primarily on the textbook in class, and that textbook reliance was influenced neither by teaching experience (in time) nor qualification level (Sikorová and Červenková 2014: 118–119). There are not only many good reasons for teachers to use textbooks in their EFL teaching, but research suggests that frequent and substantial textbook use is a common teaching practice.

EFL textbooks not only play a dominant role in classroom teaching, but many researchers claim that their content is also taken quite seriously by teachers and learners. Textbooks are often perceived by the general public to represent the general knowledge, values, and beliefs of the public. They are a form of “mass media” which are distributed to people at an early age, and their contents have influenced generations of future citizens (Lässig 2009: 1–2). Though they are subject to a complex production process, they “always contain and enshrine underlying norms and values; they transmit constructions of identity, and they generate specific patterns of perceiving the world,” “delivering the knowledge these societies deem relevant enough to pass on to the younger generation” (Fuchs and Bock 2018: 1, cf. also Lässig 2009: 2; Vera 2018: 108). According to Höhne, textbooks play an active part in reproducing social disparities by reproducing the cultural, social, and economic status quo, often in accordance to existing “powerful social elites and interest groups who collaborate with the state in the production of textbooks” (2018: 116). Furthermore, due to their highly selective nature and the fact that textbooks are subject to official approval procedures or are oriented toward state-regulated examinations, “the knowledge and

interpretations they hold appear legitimated and authorized to a particularly large extent,” and they “appear to carry an official ‘stamp’ promising ‘the truth’” (Lässig 2009: 2) whose authority is often not questioned by students (Hansen 2018: 374). Such conclusions are repeated in other research including analyses of foreign language textbooks, connecting both the perception of textbooks with their ideological framing, “textbooks represent the authorized “official” texts that often have an overt or covert agenda to promote/demote certain cultural values and ideologies” (Curdts-Christiansen et al. 2015: 4). This appearance of legitimacy is in part strengthened by the idea that the perspectives taken up in textbooks “correspond to the values shared by the majority of society, as societal acceptance of a medium is relatively high whenever it corresponds to the current patterns of thought, interpretation, and assessment and adopts their communication structures” (Lässig 2009: 3). The selection (and deselection) process concerning textbook content can present information as either relevant or dispensable, meaning textbooks ultimately participate “in the construction of social realities” providing “clues as to what is considered “worth knowing” by societies or their ruling elites, and how this knowledge should be transported” (Lässig 2009: 3). Taken to an extreme, textbooks can be viewed not just as “mirrors of societal debate” (Bock 2018: 58) that transfer not just dominant ideology as well as contesting multivocality (Christophe et al. 2018: 414; Apple 2004: 187), but also as “battlegrounds [...] never completely free of political and ideological considerations” (Lässig 2009: 4). This supports previous research that shows that ambiguity and contestation can be a stable part of textbooks’ content. Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that textbooks can be highly influenced by certain single social ideologies, influencing especially unquestioning teachers and learners.

The research on how textbook information (and underlying political and ideological implications) is perceived by teachers and learners overlaps well with perspectives from communication theory, like cultivation theory (cf. Gerbner et al. 1986) and media effects (cf. Griffin et al. 2022: 465), which suggest that media influence perceptions of reality, but also socially acceptable attitudes and behaviors in reaction to those perceptions (cf. Baumeister 2001: 274). Research in cognitive science also appears to support the claims of media influence on perception, as the availability heuristic suggests that information that is easy to remember is more likely to be believed to be true or probable (cf. Tversky and Kahnemann 1974: 1127; Kahnemann 2011: 129). Steven Pinker (2018: 51)

claims that media influences what people believe to be true via the availability heuristic, by patterned medial perspectives, repetition (across time and media outlets), and filter (usually negative filtering, which is dramatic and which appeals to a negativity bias, cf. also Tierney and Baumeister 2019). Though the effects of media influence on perspectives may appear to be small (cf. Morgan and Shanahan 1997), in aggregate—the net social effect caused by even small individual influences—the social effect may be substantial and has not yet been thoroughly investigated. Thus, textbook representation of ESD related topics, and specifically of poverty, likely influences the perceptions of the learners that use them. This claim is supported by textbook research that show that textbooks that present historical events can influence how both students and teachers remember historical events (Christophe et al. 2018: 414). Textbook representation of poverty will help inform learners' perception of the reality of poverty, as well as their belief in the reliability and in the social acceptability of that knowledge (especially in an educational context). It will help them accept the status quo of the beliefs and attitudes that underline that representation (and of the power structures that created them), and it will influence learners' ability to recall that information as they apply it to real-world settings and prepare for real-world action.

As suggested in the theory on textbook reproduction of societal ideology, it is possible (or perhaps even highly likely) that the textbooks reflect perspectives, views and attitudes of poverty held by the general society at large—especially since, for this case, the EFL textbook authors are not specifically and formally educated in the scientific field of poverty and development (and therefore are not necessarily representing the scientific discourse of the topic). If there is truth to this idea that textbooks simply reproduce ideologies and the status quo, and that their representation influences learners' perception of reality, then it could be the case that textbooks inadvertently work against the aims of ESD by not presenting poverty (and poverty development) as a scientific subject, where developmental actions and programs are also the subject of scientific research, as well as of scientific debate. Rather, textbooks could be following a different agenda, even if that agenda claims or believes to support the goals of ESD and sustainability development.

As this section has shown, school textbooks play a central role in the (EFL) education of young people today, especially in Germany. Although it is difficult to interpret them as having coherent representational patterns and intentions, there are strong reasons for teachers to use textbooks,

as most do in Germany for a substantial portion of their teaching. This section makes the case that understanding how textbooks represent and teach poverty will help educators understand learners' own views on poverty, both in the present and in the future. These views, as influenced by textbooks, can not only affect learners' abilities to successfully participate in the SDGs and ESD (and specifically of ending poverty and reducing economic inequality), but also potentially their political views (and democratic actions) as they mature into voting-age adults. If textbook representation and teaching of poverty is unrealistic or warped by biases and misconceptions—even if they stem from the prosocial dispositions of the actors involved in their production—then the (unintended) consequences could result in learners and citizens that actually inhibit progress toward the SDGs. The impact of such textbook content is reinforced by the relationship between textbooks and educational policies, by the multiple central roles textbooks play in classroom planning and teaching, by the perception teachers, learners, and the general public have of them, and by the ideological, political perspectives they inevitably present.

Teachers

Like school textbooks, teachers also play a central role in the education of young people. How teachers perceive the topic of poverty, and how they present, teach, and modify the global poverty represented in school textbooks, will also have a meaningful impact on learners and their knowledge of, attitudes toward, and abilities concerning poverty reduction. Especially in high-income countries like Germany, where teacher education is highly professionalized, teachers—and how they view and work with textbooks and their content—will have a substantial influence on learner outcomes. This subsection first presents the role of the teacher for student learning, showing the ways in which teachers impact learner outcomes. Next, it addresses the role of teacher beliefs, not just in determining content and methods, but also in influencing learners.

Education is, at least in part, dedicated to supporting the future productivity and success of learners, and teachers play a central role in achieving this. Thus, addressing the centrality of the teacher in the classroom is crucial to understanding learner performance in school, and to understanding what learners will take from their education and apply to their own lives. Much research has been performed on the role of

the teacher for learner performance. Studies show that high performance teachers in the US significantly impact student learning (Béteille and Evans 2021: 4; Rockoff 2004: 248), and some findings show increases that are stable over time and impervious to a variety of other factors, especially for lower-ability students (Aaronson et al. 2007: 95). Furthermore, several years of outstanding teaching has been found to even offset learning deficits of disadvantaged students (Béteille and Evans 2021: 5). Even in low and middle-income countries, much research finds a positive correlation between teacher quality and learner performance. Studies in Pakistan (Bau and Das 2020: 62) and Sub-Saharan Africa (Buhl-Wiggers et al. 2017: 1) find that teacher quality still plays a substantial role in student performance. In fact, studies in low- and middle-income countries provide evidence that intervention programs that target teachers result in the greatest impact on learner outcomes (Snilstveit et al. 2015: iv), despite the negative effects of lacking provision of basic working conditions on teacher performance (Evans and Yuan 2018: 1).

In the US, increasing teacher quality appears to have one of the greatest effects on improving learner performance. According to research from Béteille and Evans, the most successful interventions work through teachers (Béteille and Evans 2021: 4). Further research has found that interventions involving teachers have a greater effect on increasing learner performance than reducing class size (Rivkin et al. 2005: 417). The positive impact of teacher quality on learner success goes beyond educational success. In the US, students assigned to high value teachers in schools are more likely to attend college and earn higher salaries, and less likely to have children as teenagers (Chetty et al. 2014: 2633). These positive correlations mesh well with the common public belief that links teacher quality to student achievement (Rockoff 2004: 247).

Despite popular assumptions, teacher experience and education level are often found to have little impact on student performance (Bau and Das 2020: 62; Kane et al. 2008: 615; Rivkin et al. 2005: 417). Béteille and Evans also point out this evidence, but claim that while they are important for teacher quality, they are often simply too low in research studies to impact results (Béteille and Evans 2021: 5). Béteille and Evans also claim that a great deal of teacher success is based on their previous ability (Béteille and Evans 2021: 2), while Kane et al. find that classroom performance in the first two years is a good indicator (large and persistent) of student performance (2008: 615). However, not all researchers agree on the lack of correlation between teacher experience and teacher quality.

Rockoff points out that teachers with ten or more years of teaching experience (compared to early career teachers) increase reading test scores by 0.17 standard deviations on average (2004: 248). It appears that many factors converge to make teachers successful in positively impacting student learning.

Research provides empirical support to the generally held belief that quality teachers play a substantial role in supporting student success. And because many learners spend more time with teachers than any other adults, they also serve as substantial role models outside of the home (Béteille and Evans 2021: 2). However, this teacher role must be understood within the backdrop of its limitations, as there are more impactful factors that are often outside of the reach of educational institutions, policies and personnel. Among these are the socioeconomic background and educational aspirations of fellow learners (including peer effect), the learners' own sense of agency over his or her own life, and the learners' own socioeconomic and family backgrounds (Coleman 1966). The effects of these factors on learner success are very difficult for educators to mitigate.

If teacher quality is a factor that is substantially correlated to learner performance, and if teachers are a factor that can be influenced via education and interventions, then it makes sense to address teacher pedagogical beliefs concerning certain classroom related subjects and issues, as these beliefs can have substantial influence on how teachers teach and how they influence learners. An investigation of teacher beliefs is especially relevant here, since teacher perspectives and beliefs concerning global poverty education in the EFL classroom will be discussed in the empirical section of this book. This investigation into teacher beliefs—their types, impacts, and limitations—will help contextualize the meaning of the empirical findings (cf. Chapters 7 and 8).

Belief as a concept is difficult to define definitively and is related to several other concepts in pedagogical research (Skott 2015: 20; Borg 2001: 186). Many researchers state that a belief is something that an individual holds to be true or false (Pajares 1992: 316; Borg 2001: 187; Buehl and Beck 2015: 66; Koşar and Dolapçioğlu 2021: 221), even without proof or evidence (Gill and Hardin 2015: 232; Watt and Richardson 2015: 191). Sometimes teacher beliefs are researched under the concept of teacher knowledge. However, this inclusion allows the non-value judgment of participants, especially since many hold their beliefs to be true and therefore define beliefs as knowledge (cf. Mayer 2020: 632, where beliefs are referred to as *convictions*). Furthermore, beliefs are often related in

the literature to values and are therefore also related to actions and behaviors (Watt and Richardson 2015: 191; Borg 2001: 187). Borg states that teacher beliefs usually refer to teachers' pedagogic beliefs, or those relevant to an individual's teaching (2001: 187). Because beliefs are held to be true but are not necessarily so, they are sometimes referred to as subjective theories (cf. Groeben and Scheele 2020: 185). Research on teacher beliefs can also fall under teacher cognition, which investigates what teachers know, think and believe, and how these relate to teacher actions (Borg and Burns 2008: 457).

Investigating teacher beliefs is also relevant due to the general consensus that they can influence teaching and therefore learners' outcomes and performance. Beliefs influence teacher actions in their planning and in their teaching. Beliefs, as related to attitudes, are said to play a substantial role in the formation of intentions (Mast and Sachse 2021: 23). They are often said to serve as a "filter" that influence instructional choices, teaching practices as well as interactions with learners (Hoffman and Seidel 2015: 106). This filter, also described as a "lens," is said to come particularly into play when teachers are faced with ambiguity (Xu 2012: 1398). As subjective theories, they function to explain, predict, and guide teacher action in the classroom (Groeben and Scheele 2020: 185). In the classroom, epistemological teacher beliefs inform teaching style (in the Asian-Pacific realm, cf. Soleimani 2020: 1). For example, some teachers from schools where students have lower socioeconomic statuses tend to believe in pedagogies that provide very structured learning environments for their learners (Rubie-Davis 2015: 267). If teacher beliefs run counter to pedagogical EFL training, they can create obstacles for EFL teachers in the classroom (in the context of Mexico, cf. Garcia-Ponce and Tagg 2020: 1). Teacher beliefs are noted to be more influential on teaching (planning and practice) than actual knowledge (Xu 2012: 1397). Teaching approaches and knowledge that challenge teacher beliefs are often dismissed by teachers as wrong (Xu 2012: 1397). Some claim that teacher beliefs about effective language learning pervade classroom actions more than a particular methodology that a teacher is told to adopt or the coursebook he or she follows (Xu 2012: 1400). As a part of subjective theories, teacher beliefs are said to have a large overall effect on teacher actions (Helmke 2006: 6). Therefore, researching teacher beliefs on global poverty education can provide important insight into how global poverty, especially as presented in textbooks, will be taught in the classroom.

Research also shows that teachers' beliefs affect learners. Positive teacher beliefs lead to more positive learning environments (Gill and Hardin 2015: 240–241). Teacher beliefs can influence their relationships with learners and the degree to which they provide personal support (Rubie-Davis 2015: 269). Effective teacher beliefs are ones that meet diverse learner needs and believe all learners can learn, and their expectations of success and confidence therein lead to learners who expect success for themselves and are also more confident in that success (Xu 2012: 1399). When teachers have a stronger sense of self-efficacy, their learners often tend to also develop a strong sense of self-efficacy (Rimm and Sawyer 2004: 322), and this finding is said to be one of the most strongly related teacher characteristics for learner behavior and performance (Xu 2012: 1400). Teacher self-efficacy can also positively influence students' positive attitudes toward school as well as toward other school children (Rimm and Sawyer 2004: 322). Furthermore, teacher beliefs about learning can directly affect learners' own views on learning (Lunn et al. 2015: 327). This research supports the idea that teacher beliefs about global poverty education will not only influence how they teach the subject, but also what knowledge and competences learners acquire, and how they value the topic.

However, there are some considerable caveats for studying teacher beliefs and their influence on classroom practice and learner performance. Studies often point out incongruencies between the beliefs teachers profess and the actions and practices they bring into their classrooms (for EFL teachers in Turkey, see Koşar and Dolapçioğlu 2021: 221; and for EFL teachers in England see Graham et al. 2014: 44), though other studies do find congruencies (Ding et al. 2019: 20). However, some researchers point out that typical incongruencies may be the result of mitigating factors, including beliefs that can cancel out other beliefs or that are situational (Skott 2015: 23), or institutional constraints or lacking knowledge in how to put subjective, especially abstract, theories into practice (Mayer 2020: 634). For example, Graham et al. found that EFL teachers in their study would often value task completion over beliefs about effective teaching, and would therefore use different methods that did not align with their beliefs about effective teaching methods (Graham et al. 2014: 44). Others point out conflicts between collective beliefs and teachers' (professed) beliefs that may influence actions taken in the classroom (Tschannen-Moran et al. 2015: 306). It is therefore important to

keep in mind the complex nature of teachers' beliefs, and the limitations that research on them can provide for educational interventions.

Other researchers point to lacking evidence in the size of influence that teacher beliefs have on classroom practice (Mayer 2020: 634). Buehl and Beck point out that the weak quantitative correlations between teacher beliefs and classroom practice are due to weak data sources. They point out the incongruencies in findings and state that some research shows reciprocal but complex relationships between beliefs and practices (Buehl and Beck 2015: 70). Mayer notes another methodological problem, namely that some research only tests theories of a short reach (Mayer 2020: 633). Helmke provides evidence that some incongruencies between beliefs and practices are due to warped or biased perceptions of teachers or between what they perceive they are doing and what actually occurs in the classroom (Helmke 2006: 11). Other theories that may explain the incongruency are socially desired responses of participants, or that cognition is not always rational, but rather often serves a social function to explain oneself (and maintain positive relationships) via rationalization (cf. Haidt 2006: 9).

Many teacher beliefs are quite likely to be influenced by factors external to their education in their field. On the one hand, teachers' beliefs are influenced by their personal backgrounds (Pajares 1992: 326), which includes their life experiences in society (Gabillion 2012: 191), the cultures within which they were raised (Gabillion 2012: 192), their stereotyped understanding (Rubie-Davis 2015: 266), as well as their previous L2 learning experiences (Kissau et al. 2014: 228). On the other hand, teachers' beliefs are also informed by their teaching experiences (Borg and Burns 2008: 458), as well as the social expectations, norms, and beliefs of other teachers in schools (Tschannen-Moran et al. 2015: 301). Some suggest that teachers' beliefs are more influenced by factors external to their formal education (Borg and Burns 2008: 456), and that once these beliefs are formed, they are difficult to change (Pajares 1992: 325). Resistance to belief-change is often fueled by emotion (Gill and Hardin 2015: 241) and emotion (or affect) can influence beliefs, just as beliefs are reinforced by behaviors that can in turn also influence beliefs (Gill and Hardin 2015: 232–233).

A further mitigating factor on the influence of teacher beliefs on teacher action is the idea that beliefs exist in a relational network, and that all are competing to varying degrees for influence on teacher action at any given moment within a given context. Some beliefs can be seen

as core, while others as peripheral, with core beliefs having more influence over classroom practice (Koşar and Dolapçıoğlu 2021: 223). This points to the idea that beliefs can be held with varying degrees of certitude (Ashton 2015: 36). Furthermore, teachers can hold many different beliefs at the same time—about knowledge (Lunn et al. 2015: 323), their students, their subject matter, pedagogy and ethical dilemmas and societal issues that influence their teaching (Levin 2015: 48; Xu 2012: 1398), and about themselves (Borg 2001: 187). In addition, beliefs can be explicit or implicit, with various degrees of teacher awareness (Borg 2001: 186), they can be primary or derivative, stable or instable, and they can be held in clusters or in isolation (Buehl and Beck 2015: 66–67). Finally, beliefs are related to their use-function, as teachers implement them to filter and interpret information, frame problems or tasks, or guide immediate action (Buehl and Beck 2015: 66–67; Borg 2001: 187).

Though teacher beliefs are often presented in research as impediments to teaching and as stubborn to change, interventions have been found to provide positive impact. Some researchers highlight teacher self-reflection on beliefs as a mode to improve teaching (Gerlach 2020: 60) and this reflection can also focus on uncovering incongruencies between beliefs and action and between teachers' beliefs and dominant theories and approaches to teaching (Helmke 2006: 12). The research on teacher beliefs shows that they are highly complex and that while they do have considerable influence over what is taught, and perhaps more importantly over what is learned, their role as an influencing factor should not be exaggerated.

This chapter has addressed reasons for the integration of global education in foreign language pedagogy today, showing that, for the case of Germany, it is an issue passed down to German state curricula for the teaching of foreign languages by the United Nations, amplified by the adoption of the SDGs by the European Union and the German federal government. It also highlighted the existence of related concepts that are well-established in literature on foreign language education. This chapter then presented challenges that are necessary in understanding potential problems that can arise when teaching about global poverty. Some of these challenges concern issues of consensus, potential for conflict, the vagueness of conceptual development, and the complexity of global issues that have consequences for the identification of solutions.

Next, the chapter provided an overview of current research on global poverty education, from concepts of global citizenship education and

education for sustainable development, to empirical research on the representation of poverty in foreign language textbooks. This investigation into current research also allowed for the uncovering of research gaps to contextualize the contribution of this current study. Finally, this chapter addressed the role of textbooks and teachers as disseminators of global poverty education. It looked at the role of textbooks as a dominant classroom medium that reflect, and likely even transfer, dominant social norms and values. Addressing teachers, this chapter also presented evidence for the strong influence teachers have on learners and their performance, as well as on the role that teacher beliefs about various pedagogical subjects can have on their teaching, and ultimately also on learner performance. Whatever the theoretical and political reasons are for integrating ESD and global poverty education into foreign language pedagogy, research strongly suggests that textbooks (how they represent and teach) and teachers (their beliefs concerning the inclusion of the topic in their classrooms) will have considerable influence on whether and how the topic of poverty is taught, and whether and how the goals of global poverty education will be met. Taken together, textbooks and teachers ultimately influence what learners know about global poverty, what they understand to be the causes of it around the world, and what they believe to be acceptable and effective poverty reducing measures.

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Global Poverty as Complex Social Issue

The central framing of this chapter is that global poverty education, particularly with the intention of contributing to its reduction or eradication, is a highly complex endeavor. It demands either specialized training or well-informed, critically designed teaching materials. This is due to the complexity of the topic itself: Experts continue to debate the most effective strategies for reducing or solving poverty, especially across diverse national, cultural, and historical contexts. Given the multifaceted nature of poverty—its causes, manifestations, and potential solutions—it may be premature or even counterproductive to expect learners to take action against poverty while still in school, particularly without a solid foundation of knowledge. Encouraging action without sufficient understanding risks promoting well-intentioned but ultimately ineffective or harmful initiatives. It also risks students becoming overly reliant on the perspectives of their teachers, textbook materials, political ideologies, or media narratives, thereby undermining the educational goal of fostering autonomous, informed political decision-making.

To highlight the complexity of global poverty and the challenges this poses for supporting meaningful learner action, the chapter begins by examining how poverty is defined and measured. This includes an exploration of the major approaches used to determine who qualifies as poor, whether for political or research purposes, and a critical discussion of the limitations and implications of each. The chapter then turns to

how poverty is framed as a problem. These framings, while sometimes taken for granted, shape assumptions about the causes of poverty and the solutions deemed appropriate. Individuals may agree that poverty is a problem, yet hold vastly different underlying perspectives that can lead to miscommunication or flawed interventions if left unexamined. Following this, the chapter explores a range of factors that influence poverty, beginning with spatial and geographic dimensions, including urban–rural divides and geopolitical disparities. It then considers the temporal aspects of poverty, both historically and across individual life courses. Further sections address additional contributing and alleviating factors, emphasizing that poverty is rarely caused—or resolved—by a single element. Instead, it typically results from the interplay of multiple, context-specific factors that complicate straightforward solutions. Before addressing these complex influences and potential interventions, however, the chapter first takes a closer look at poverty as a concept and a standard of measurement, as applied in different contexts. This conceptual groundwork is essential for understanding the full complexity of global poverty and for critically engaging with efforts to address it in educational settings.

DEFINING POVERTY

What is poverty? Defining it proves conceptually challenging, as does its measurement. This difficulty arises in part from the term's common usage and resulting ambiguity in everyday speech, where perceptions of poverty may not align with established political or research criteria. Within research and policy contexts, poverty is typically categorized in two distinct ways, with significant implications for solution-seeking and resource allocation. *Absolute poverty* defines a threshold below which survival or well-being is threatened. In contrast, *relative poverty* focuses on wealth distribution within a society, identifying individuals with comparatively limited access to resources and opportunities for a satisfactory standard of living. This latter conception frames poverty as a lack of access to the wealth, resources, and opportunities necessary for societal participation and well-being. The following passages detail these two approaches, trace their historical origins, and address the inherent challenges in establishing poverty thresholds, along with common benchmarks, their sources, and their role in broader poverty discourse. They shed light on why it is difficult to define poverty, and therefore to determine how to best achieve its reduction.

Absolute Poverty

Absolute poverty, also termed extreme or abject poverty, denotes a lack of resources essential for survival, typically including food, water, medicine, clothing, and shelter (Butterwege 2019: 8; Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 22). This category encompasses a spectrum of deprivation, ranging from acute starvation to chronic malnutrition, inadequate access to safe water, limited or poor-quality healthcare, insufficient clothing for environmental conditions, and housing insecurity—from homelessness to substandard living conditions lacking basic amenities like electricity or sanitation. The threats to survival associated with absolute poverty can be immediate or prolonged, but fundamentally concern an individual's capacity to sustain life. Consequently, absolute poverty is often addressed with a greater sense of urgency than relative poverty.

The World Bank's internationally recognized benchmark for absolute poverty is currently set at \$2.15 USD per day. This line applies specifically to low-income countries, and is adjusted to \$3.65 USD for lower-middle income countries, \$6.85 USD for upper-middle income countries, and \$24.36 USD for high-income countries (Jolliffe et al. 2022: 14). This threshold is calculated using purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates, referenced to the USD, to account for variations in the cost of living across economies. Primarily due to inflation, the poverty line has been adjusted three times in the past three decades, increasing from \$1 USD in 1990 to \$1.25 USD in 2005, \$1.90 USD in 2015, and most recently to \$2.15 USD in 2022 (World Bank 2023c). Further revisions may be necessary in the near future due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical conflicts, and disruptions to production and supply chains.

While the World Bank's international poverty line offers a practical means of global measurement, it is not without limitations. This threshold is claimed to neglect geographically specific survival conditions, the varying role of the subsistence economy across regions, and individual variables—such as age, health, and gender—that influence daily cost of living (Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 22). Furthermore, the use of PPP is imperfect. Non-tradable goods, local tax rates, and tariffs introduce variability, and incomplete market adjustments mean that \$2.15 USD does not translate equally across all locations. Finally, the assumption of

economic rationality is often inaccurate, as individuals (even in extreme poverty) prioritize not only survival but also quality of life (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 9, Banerjee and Duflo 2011: 38). This underscores the disconnect between the logical assumptions underlying poverty line construction and the lived experiences of individuals.

Given these limitations, alternative methodologies have emerged. While income fails to capture indicators such as wealth and actual living conditions, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) offers a more comprehensive approach. The MPI assesses poverty across three dimensions: health (nutrition and child mortality), education (years of schooling and child school attendance), and living standards (electricity, sanitation, water access, flooring, cooking fuel, and asset ownership; Alkire et al. 2011: 4, cf. also World Bank 2018a). A 2020 report analyzing 107 developing countries identified 1.3 billion people as multidimensionally poor, representing 22% of the studied population. Extrapolating this figure to all nations threatened by absolute poverty suggests that 16.7% of the world population experiences multidimensional poverty—a considerably higher estimate than current World Bank figures (Alkire et al. 2020: 3). However, the MPI is not without its limitations. Similar to the income-based poverty measure, the MPI is also normative and susceptible to regional and cultural biases. Furthermore, the MPI's choice of indicators is inherently selective, potentially overlooking crucial dimensions of deprivation (like clean air). Importantly, the MPI focuses on measuring extreme poverty at a higher standard of living than the international poverty line of the World Bank.

This section has outlined two distinct methods for benchmarking poverty, and demonstrates the inherent difficulty in defining and quantifying absolute poverty. While the UNs SDG of eradicating absolute poverty currently relies on the international poverty line of \$2.15 USD per day, the MPI as an alternative approach offers more comprehensive assessments of deprivation. Despite its potential for greater accuracy, this alternative method remains normative and resource-intensive, hindering global scalability.

If public discourse on poverty has the potential to influence textbook content and the authors who design them (see Chapter 2), then it makes sense to look into the discourse on poverty today in Germany, as it pertains specifically to absolute poverty, and consider its relevance for also describing global discourse. Two discourse strands will be presented here. The first concerns the existence of absolute poverty in Western societies,

while the second addresses the ultimate cause of absolute poverty, the determination of which can influence proposed solutions.

Some claim that absolute poverty no longer exists in Western countries (cf. Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 9; Lepenies 2017: 7), while others point out that the estimated 200,000–800,000 homeless, drug addicts, and undocumented migrants living in absolute poverty in Germany alone proves it does (Butterwege 2019: 23). If such individuals are considered absolutely poor within Western contexts, it raises questions about addressing how to categorize (and ultimately help) those in extreme poverty who suffer from mental illnesses and substance addiction, or have chosen alternative lifestyles. The potential existence of absolute poverty within wealthy nations, and the fact that some individuals' poverty is not solely due to a lack of basic resources, also raises the question of whether similar factors contribute to absolute poverty in low-income countries. This prompts further inquiry into how to accurately determine this condition and whether differing standards for assessment are warranted.

Absolute poverty is often framed as natural, rather than as a product of societal structures (Butterwege 2019: 11–12). This perspective is likely influenced by the historical reality that absolute poverty was once a widespread condition, with large populations vulnerable to natural fluctuations. Crucially, this view is often distant from the lived realities of those experiencing absolute poverty in low-income countries today. Images of famine in Northeast Africa during the 1980s, for example, were often attributed to drought, overshadowing deeper systemic issues like the long history of extractive ruling classes—first an absolutist oligarchy, then a corrupt communist regime—that exploited their own people without establishing effective governance and the rule of law (cf. Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 234). These issues were further compounded by economic policies that disincentivized investment and surplus production (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 335). The persistent perception of absolute poverty as a result of “bad luck” or circumstance has contributed to a reliance on charitable interventions (Butterwege 2019: 28), appealing to Western empathy and a willingness to donate excess resources.

Importantly, the discourse surrounding poverty in Germany and similar high-income countries offers valuable insight into how poverty is understood and addressed globally. The challenges of defining, measuring, and identifying absolute poverty, coupled with debates about its causes and deservingness of support, are not unique to Germany. These complexities shape political and social responses. The tendency to view poverty

through a specific cultural lens, often detached from the lived experiences in low-income nations, can influence how foreign aid is conceptualized and delivered. The historical evolution of these perceptions—from blaming the individual to acknowledging systemic factors (cf. Lepe-
nies 2017: 19)—provides a crucial framework for understanding current debates and the potential for more effective and equitable solutions across the world. To conclude, the common public reaction to absolute poverty is often one of urgency, but there are complex processes, procedures as well as norms and values involved in pre-determining what survival is, how it is affected by which deprivations, and who should receive what type of support.

Relative Poverty

Unlike absolute poverty, relative poverty does not refer to specific indicators of survival, but rather to income and access to resources that are low compared to the rest of the population within any given society. While the threshold for absolute poverty indicates a level below which physical existence is threatened, the line for relative poverty represents a point under which sociocultural existence is threatened, or where those below it are marginalized and socially stigmatized (Butterwege 2019: 12–13). Relative poverty requires a reference group, and societies differ in defining where that line falls (Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 22).

The inherent difficulties in defining poverty are reflected in the challenges of measuring it, as evidenced by the multitude of methods employed. Dittmann and Goebel differentiate between direct and indirect methods. Direct methods, primarily on income, are useful as income data is widely collected across many countries for comparative study. However, even within this approach, defining poverty varies. For example, in Europe, a line is drawn at 60% of equivalent median income to identify those at risk of poverty, with 50% representing poverty, and 40% indicating severe poverty (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 9). These poverty lines are imperfect but serve as useful benchmarks and comparative figures, reflecting the significant role monetary income plays in our society (ibid.: 9). However, the European approach is not universal. The US, for instance, uses an Official Poverty Measure (OPM) and a Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM). The OPM compares pre-tax cash income to a threshold based on three times the minimum food diet costs of 1963, adjusted for family size and inflation. The SPM supplements the OPM

by considering not just food but also clothing, shelter, utilities, and regional cost variations (Institute for Research on Poverty 2023). These differing methods demonstrate that the poverty line, or threshold, is a social construct, a product of negotiation and context (Lepenies 2017: 7).

These methods all have limitations. They often assume that a lack of money is the root of the problem and that increased income is the solution (Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 23). Furthermore, resources are not solely financial (healthcare, education, local infrastructure), and possessing financial means does not guarantee effective utilization. Regional costs of living further complicate matters. Critically, this approach often ignores the role of discrimination and its impact on effective resource access. Finally, income does not necessarily reflect overall wealth or assets, which significantly impact financial security (cf. Goebel and Grabka 2018: 93). Income-based measures also struggle in developing countries with subsistence economies, where informal flows of goods and services are often untracked.

The living standards approach attempts to broaden the income approach by incorporating access to material goods that contribute to a comfortable life. Like the income approach, it assumes a negative correlation between lacking goods and social participation. However, it struggles to determine which goods are essential or more valuable than others, making measurement and comparison difficult (Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 24). This approach can incorrectly identify as poor those who intentionally choose a less materialistic lifestyle, and integrating diverse values is challenging. Indirect approaches, as an alternative, aim to include broader aspects of poverty, like the ability to self-actualize and fully engage in society without exclusion (capability and life situation approach). However, these are difficult to clearly define and measure across societies (cf. Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 29). It's unclear whether social exclusion causes poverty or results from it, as the two do not always coexist (*ibid.*: 29).

A final challenge is that all these definitions and measurement tools are largely external, and do not necessarily align with how individuals perceive their own situation. For instance, researchers disagree on measuring homelessness, as causes range from substance abuse to psychological issues to personal choice. Societies also include those who intentionally opt-out, living “off the grid” with a simpler lifestyle and greater autonomy. People in traditional tribal communities, like the Yanomami

of the Amazon or the Huli Wigmen of Papua New Guinea, may have limited income, occasional food shortages, and limited access to modern services. However, labeling them as poor is problematic. The question arises whether their circumstances warrant human rights protections and governmental intervention. These dilemmas highlight the ethical concerns of applying external standards to diverse lifestyles.

Some argue that relative poverty is not a meaningful concept (cf. Butterwege 2019: 23), and that what is measured is simply inequality. Proponents of this view argue that most people in high-income countries have access to basic necessities and are relatively wealthy compared to those in low-income countries. Conversely, others claim that relative poverty will always exist (cf. Lepenies 2017: 7), especially given income disparities and the ongoing social stigma associated with being at the lower end of the economic spectrum. This means that even if living standards improve and average incomes rise, relative poverty will persist as long as significant income inequality exists.

This debate is further complicated by the fact that the threshold for income inequality will likely increase as societies generate more wealth. In a context of limited resources, rising inequality is particularly concerning, as the benefit of one group comes at the direct cost of another. However, modern economies, especially those in developed nations, are not typically zero-sum. Wealth generation creates new resources, but its distribution is not always equitable or immediate (Pinker refers to this as the “lump fallacy,” cf. 2018: 80). Historically, rising inequality often accompanies periods of rapid economic change and wealth creation. This occurred during the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and is occurring currently as a result of the digital revolution (cf. Pinker 2018: 111).

The discourse on relative poverty, then, centers on the legitimacy of the term “poor” and the sense of unfairness associated with economic inequality. Butterwege suggests that attempts to delegitimize the label of poverty in high-income countries are a strategy by the wealthy to protect their resources and power (Butterwege 2019: 28). He also argues that the willingness to accept the existence of absolute poverty stems from its perceived resolvability through charity, avoiding systemic redistribution (ibid.: 28). However, robust economic growth allows for redistribution schemes that could affect future wealth—through taxes or social expenditures—without necessarily diminishing the wealth of the upper classes. Achieving this balance is complex.

While some argue that any discussion of poverty inevitably includes a discussion of wealth, it's crucial to also consider the discourse within the middle class. The middle class is often more vulnerable to poverty, as it is in closer proximity to poverty and experiences greater mobility into and out of it. Hanson argues that democracy relies on a robust middle class, as the wealthy do not depend on democratic processes for power (being insulated from the consequences of their decisions) and the poor often rely on elites for survival (and are prone to supporting extreme measures, cf. 2021: 25). From this perspective, the danger of inequality is not solely a concern for the poor, but also for the “hollowing out of the middle” that can lead to increased polarization. In a polarized society, each side may perceive the other as a threat to its existence, even while becoming mutually reliant on each other for survival.

The two perspectives on poverty—absolute and relative—serve different goals. Defining absolute poverty focuses on enabling survival, ensuring access to basic necessities. This is rooted in a broader discourse on harm and societal prosocial impulses to reduce suffering. Definitions of relative poverty, in contrast, focus on ensuring that the lower rungs of society do not fall too far behind the middle and upper levels. Approaches to relative poverty are less focused on immediate harm and more on fairness or social well-being. This section demonstrates that distinct types of poverty are intertwined with different public discourses and debates. Both types face challenges in definition and measurement. Informed engagement with developmental efforts and sustainable development education requires understanding these nuances. The following section will expand on these themes by examining different framings of poverty as a problem, acknowledging that despite agreement on its existence, causal relationships and proposed solutions differ significantly.

FRAMING POVERTY AS A PROBLEM

Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.—Nelson Mandela

Nelson Mandela's quote, prominently displayed on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals website (Jeffrey 2023), is rhetorically powerful but conceptually fraught. It is compelling insofar as it highlights

how poverty can result from human-made systems, as was clearly the case under apartheid in South Africa. During that era, non-white¹ populations were systematically excluded from wealth creation and subjected to exploitative policies. In this sense, poverty was inseparable from political and moral injustice, making Mandela's call for action a powerful ethical appeal. However, the quote oversimplifies the complex and multifaceted nature of poverty. Not all poverty is the product of deliberate exploitation or systemic injustice. Environmental conditions, historical trajectories, institutional capacity, and even individual behaviors play crucial roles in shaping economic outcomes. Even in South Africa, pre-colonial inequalities and extractive institutions existed before and alongside colonial rule (cf. Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 263). Poverty, then, is not always "man-made" in a moral sense, nor are solutions always external or collective. In many cases, individual agency and local conditions shape both the persistence of poverty and the pathways out of it.

Mandela's statement represents a moral framing of poverty—one that links deprivation to injustice and assumes a duty of redress. While such framings can galvanize public support and motivate political action, they risk becoming reductive when universally applied. Overreliance on moral narratives can obscure other explanatory frames, such as economic, cultural, or institutional factors. Moreover, they may lead to poorly targeted interventions if moral culpability is overemphasized at the expense of structural or behavioral dynamics. The way poverty is framed matters. It influences which causes are considered legitimate and which solutions are pursued. While moral framings like Mandela's can be powerful in contexts of historical injustice, a more nuanced and pluralistic understanding is necessary for addressing poverty across diverse settings. Recognizing poverty's multiple origins does not weaken the call to action—it strengthens it by aligning ethical motivation with practical insight.

¹ In this book, the term white is used to refer to people when it fit to how people are categorized in research and research statistics, like that from the US census. When appropriate, the more acceptable term "person of European descent" will be used.

Poverty as a Solvable Problem

Is poverty solvable? Perhaps, but if so, it hinges on how one defines and measures it. As explored in the beginning of this chapter, differing definitions lead to divergent perspectives on the nature of poverty itself. While there is a consensus that poverty is undesirable, questioning whether poverty is a solvable problem is crucial. This questioning is not new; historically, poverty was often considered an unavoidable aspect of life (Lepenies 2017: 24), a view that began to shift with the Enlightenment (ibid.: 7). Framing any issue as a “problem” implies potential for resolution, prompting critical reflection on who defines poverty, who is affected, and who is responsible for providing support—particularly when that support is external. This critical questioning is integral to the scientific discourse on poverty and should be a core component of sustainable development education, encouraging learner participation in addressing global poverty-related issues.

The United Nations’ SDGs represent a strong societal belief in the solvability of poverty. Examining how the SDGs define poverty reveals a complex picture. SDG 1, aiming to end poverty “in all its forms everywhere,” targets both absolute and relative poverty. While subgoal 1.1 specifically addresses absolute poverty, 1.2’s aim to “reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions” (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2023b), can be interpreted as encompassing relative poverty. In fact, some UN documents explicitly broaden the scope beyond absolute poverty (Osborn et al. 2015: 8), while others reaffirm its focus on extreme poverty as defined by the \$2.15 USD benchmark (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development 2023). The UN further expands the definition, recognizing poverty as more than mere lack of income:

Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision-making. (United Nations 2023b)

This broader definition acknowledges factors beyond the \$2.15 USD threshold—factors like education and social inclusion—that are more subjective and challenging to measure. This ambiguity creates space for

negotiating the effectiveness of the UN's benchmarks. Goal 10, centered on reducing inequality, further emphasizes this focus on relative poverty. Its targets prioritize income growth for the bottom 40% (Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2023b), demonstrating an underlying concern for economic disparity. A stakeholder forum scorecard ranking the SDG challenges placed inequality at rank 5 and poverty at rank 16 for developed countries (Osborn et al. 2015: 6), providing further evidence of the UN's dual focus on absolute and relative poverty.

These issues raise the fundamental question of whether poverty is a solvable problem. Regarding absolute poverty, the answer appears to be yes, with significant progress having been made in reducing extreme poverty globally. However, the \$2.15 USD threshold is somewhat arbitrary and has been adjusted historically, suggesting it may be revised again. This raises the possibility that future generations will redefine absolute poverty, potentially recategorizing millions as poor again. Furthermore, progress is contingent on the absence of major crises—wars, pandemics, rapid population growth, and environmental disasters—and sustained resource availability. Finally, the optimism surrounding absolute poverty's solvability may be based on the assumption that it has already been solved in high-income countries—a claim that is disputed. These factors dampen any unqualified optimism about completely eradicating absolute poverty.

Relative poverty presents greater challenges. Conflicting definitions and shifting benchmarks complicate measurement and consensus. Crucially, support for addressing relative poverty is often less universal. While few would argue against providing basic necessities to prevent starvation, relative poverty is frequently linked to perceived individual choices and personal shortcomings. This leads to questions of societal acceptance: how much inequality are we willing to tolerate, and under what conditions? The current international standards already demonstrate a degree of tolerance, considering a country to have eradicated extreme poverty when only 3% of the population remains below the poverty line (United Nations 2023b).

The widespread acceptance of poverty as a problem has allowed the UN to establish broad, yet potentially unachievable, goals. These goals obscure debates about the very definition of poverty, the lines demarcating its existence, and the extent to which it can be reduced. It also masks the fact that poverty is, to some degree, a social construct—subject to constant change, revision, and debate, and susceptible to political manipulation. With this critical understanding of poverty's framing, it is

crucial to examine the reasons presented for why it should be addressed. The following will explore four common frames: poverty as a moral dilemma (rooted in harmful actions or processes), poverty as unnecessary suffering, poverty as a threat to social stability (leading to conflict), and poverty as a loss of human potential (resulting in lost opportunity costs and economic burden). These frames, taken alone, often oversimplify the issue and can lead to ineffective solutions.

Poverty and Moral Injustice

As previously noted, Nelson Mandela's quote frames poverty within a moralistic lens, suggesting that if poverty is created by people, it is their responsibility to solve it. While moral failures like greed, hatred, or indifference may contribute to poverty, viewing poverty *solely* through a moral framework can be limiting—and even manipulative. Stephen Karpman's model of social interactions serves as a good illustration of how moral framings can serve individual interests. This model identifies roles of victims, persecutors, and helpers, where interactions prioritize power dynamics and identity over problem-solving (cf. Karpman 2019; Berne 2010). This section explores three moralistic perspectives on poverty—fairness, harm, and tyranny—and uses Karpman's model to highlight the potential pitfalls of solely relying on moral interpretations.

Poverty can be framed as a matter of fairness, both in absolute and relative terms. The presence of disparity in resources (i.e., outcomes) can be seen as a sign of potential injustice. However, defining the concept of fairness is complex, as it can range from equality of opportunity to equality of outcome (Haidt 2012: 161). Jonathan Haidt explains that the moral foundation of fairness evolved through reciprocal relationships, complicated by the risks of cheating and unequal contributions. The emotions associated with fairness—anger, gratitude, and guilt—are relevant to understanding poverty. Karpman's model helps identify a tendency to assign blame and responsibility, as those with resources can be accused of “cheating” or taking more than deserved, while those lacking resources can be accused of “freeloading” (cf. Haidt 2012: 158). This framing often invites intervention from a “helper” motivated by guilt or righteous anger, seeking to defend the “victim” against the “persecutor.” The UN's statement, “Eradicating poverty is not a task of charity, it's an act of justice and the key to unlocking an enormous human potential” (The Global Goals 2023), exemplifies this “helper” role and invokes a sense of

violated fairness (cf. Haidt 2012: 146). The key question then becomes: What type of fairness is desired—that of opportunity or of outcome? Starman et al. argue that people prioritize economic fairness of opportunity over equality (of outcome), if they believe the system they are operating in fairly considers varying effort and merit (2017: 3). Starman et al. further observe that people often underestimate existing societal mobility and the degree of economic equality (2017: 4). They warn that pursuing fairness can be problematic, suggesting a more nuanced understanding is needed, and that efforts to level inequality might create new injustices.

Another moral framing of poverty focuses on harm. While Jonathan Haidt separates fairness and harm (2012: 109), others view fairness as a subset of harm. This convergence is reflected in Karpman’s model, where conflicts are often framed as “victim” and “perpetrator” scenarios. Schein and Gray emphasize the typically intuitive, and potentially inaccurate, identification of intentional agents causing damage to vulnerable individuals (2017: 1). To be considered immoral, harm requires intentionality, a violation of social norms, and negative emotional impact on the victim (Schein and Gray 2017: 4–6). Haidt links both care and harm to the evolutionary need to protect children, evoking emotions of compassion and the desire to help (2012: 146). These responses extend from beyond children to anything perceived as vulnerable or suffering (2012: 155).

A third moral framework positions poverty as a consequence of tyranny. Haidt’s authority/subversion foundation explains perspectives on power imbalances (2012: 197). Wealth often confers social power, creating the potential for abuse. This leads to questioning the legitimacy of wealth accumulation itself. While respecting authority is a moral intuition, the desire to subvert it, particularly if seen as unjust, is equally strong (Haidt 2012: 197). This perspective is reflected in archetypal narratives, like David and Goliath, *Robin Hood*, that portray the weak or poor as virtuous victims fighting against tyrannical abuse of authority. These narratives reinforce the framing of poverty as resulting from improper use of power and position a third party “helper” or savior to intervene.

While sometimes helpful, framing poverty solely through a moral lens is not always accurate. It overlooks the complexity of responsibility and can mask underlying factors beyond individual control. Roy Baumeister’s

concept of the “myth of pure evil” is relevant here. The tendency to categorize people as “good” or “bad” (2001: 59) can distort understanding. Victims often present themselves as “innocent” or “virtuous” (2001: 25, 89), with biased interpretations of events (2001: 43) and potentially driven by their own agendas (2001: 38–39). Perpetrators, too, often have contextual reasons for their actions, see themselves as victims, or believe their actions are justified by positive intentions (cf. 2001: 40, 48, 176). Baumeister concludes that moral lenses can hinder a causal understanding of harmful acts (2001: 20). He stresses the importance of considering *both* the victim’s and perpetrator’s perspectives to achieve a comprehensive evaluation (2001: 28–39). Ultimately, while accurately framing poverty as undesirable, applying moral frameworks can obscure the complex realities of the problem, prioritizing human causes and solutions while neglecting broader systemic factors.

Poverty, Suffering, and Well-Being

Another possible framing of poverty as a problem focuses on the moral reaction to, rather than the moral cause of poverty. Lepenies points out that throughout the history of Christianity in Europe, the status of the giver was above the status of the taker, so that to give to the poor was seen as a sacred act, a good deed that helped enable access to heaven, and less concerned with actually helping the poor (2017: 15). If one of the dominant goals of EFL global poverty education is to increase the empathy of learners toward people who are suffering from various social issues like poverty, then perhaps the goal of teaching global poverty is less about solving or alleviating poverty directly, and more about creating morally good, empathic citizens who are willing to help those in need.

It is disputable, however, that empathy is always the best and most moral response to suffering. There are many problems and limitations associated with empathy. Paul Bloom, focusing on emotional empathy, points out that empathy likely evolved for life in small groups, and specifically for parental care of substantially vulnerable human young (2016: 130). He claims, as a result, that empathy is more often poorly adapted to deal with the complexities of modern life and its problems. He provides many reasons for this claim—empathy is difficult to scale to large groups and it tends to reduce the complexity of problems (ibid.: 31), it is a poor indicator of what people are actually perceiving (ibid.: 67), and it is

sensitive to bias (in support of in-groups and for those who look aesthetically pleasing, cf. *ibid.*: 90). The emotional dimension of empathy reduces logical and rational clarity, privileging short term and immediate solutions over long-term sustainable ones (*ibid.*: 154). In addition, empathy can be used as a manipulative tool (*ibid.*: 100), something children often learn to take advantage of at an early age (Farrell and Gray 2019: 129). Highly empathic people are more likely to suffer from unhappy and imbalanced relationships (unmitigated communion), from empathic distress as they suffer from the suffering of others, and from negative health outcomes, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer (Bloom 2016: 134–135). Finally, empathy not infrequently leads to justifying retributive action against those who are perceived as causing suffering. It encourages the personification of perpetrators, their dehumanization, and the desire to make them pay with as much if not more suffering (cf. *ibid.*: 177). As Bloom states, it is not so much that empathy is bad, but rather that its negatives outweigh its positives and that there are better alternatives (*ibid.*: 241)—like rational compassion (*ibid.*: 39).

It is difficult to separate empathy from pity. As Ure points out, pity can be viewed as a “social pathology” that not only reduces the objects of pity to passive objects (2006: 68), but also assuages the pitier’s sense of lacking self-sufficiency (*ibid.*: 75). As two sides to the same coin, pity and envy both imagine social connection through shared negative emotions of suffering, but not through shared positive emotions of joy or success (*ibid.*: 76). According to Ure, while pity may enable action to alleviate another’s suffering, it also nurtures a desire for sameness, to keep others from attaining more joy and self-sufficiency. Noting that pity can be used by political and economic systems to manipulate individuals, Ure emphasizes that pity should always be preceded by love, honor, and admiration (instead of belittlement) so that alleviation from suffering can proceed to potentially better, more joyful, and self-sufficient states than our own (*ibid.*: 80–81).

These critical perspectives convincingly suggest that empathy is not necessarily a virtue, and that it does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes. Just as viewing poverty through a frame of moral injustice can lead to oversimplistic understandings of the causes of (and solutions to) poverty, sacrificing rational curiosity and systematic investigation of poverty on the altar of developing empathy as an educational goal might lead to worse, even if unintended, consequences. Taking the ethical viewpoint of consequentialism (cf. Bloom 2016: 15), helping the poor is

only as meaningful as the resulting outcomes. In line with this thought, Steven Pinker also promotes a consequentialist approach to morality, which he delineates as separate from, though overlapping with, the utilitarian approach, as “maximizing human flourishing,” not based on ideas of happiness per se, but rather as including things like “childrearing, self-expression, education, rich experience, and the creation of works of lasting value” (2018: 416). In conclusion, perhaps the desire to increase human flourishing, based less on negative emotions of suffering (or retributive justice) and more on systematic and scientific investigation of poverty programs, is a better approach to addressing the problem of poverty—even if it is less emotionally satisfying.

Framing the reduction of poverty in terms of virtue development can serve a positive purpose, especially in situations where the problem of poverty can be diagnosed as stemming from an uncaring society or individuals. However, the increase of empathy may not be a likely solution in many cases, as empathy is often illogical as applied to complex phenomenon, because it can be used to manipulate people, and because empathy can quickly turn to pity, including envy and resentment. While empathy can be a starting point for engaging with a problem, it does not necessarily translate into the analysis required to understand its complexities or the development of corrective measures. Furthermore, the emotional intensity of empathy can interfere with the executive functions—planning, organization, and monitoring progress—that are critical for goal accomplishment (Jung et al. 2014).

Poverty and Societal Instability

Beyond moral framings, poverty can be viewed through a pragmatic lens as a driver of social instability. In this perspective, poverty threatens not only those directly affected but also the cohesion and continuity of broader society. Addressing poverty, then, becomes a strategy for preserving public order, protecting political institutions, but also securing the interests of elites. Action is motivated not by ethical obligation, but by a desire to prevent unrest. Whether social disruption is perceived as justified or not is secondary; the primary concern of this lens lies in maintaining institutional stability and avoiding political upheaval.

Historically, this stability-oriented framing has played a major role in prompting anti-poverty measures. In medieval and early modern Europe, elites often responded to poverty when it posed a direct threat to their

authority. In the fourteenth century, rapid population growth, urbanization, and the rise of the merchant class coincided with recurrent crises—plague, famine, and war—that disproportionately affected the poor. These pressures contributed to revolts and labor unrest. In parts of Western Europe, such uprisings helped serfs obtain improved rights and wages, challenging the extractive constraints of feudalism (Lepenies 2017: 19; Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 96). As the limits of ecclesiastical charity became evident, states implemented more coercive and systemic approaches to managing poverty—such as workhouses and, eventually, tax-funded welfare programs (Lepenies 2017: 24). The French Revolution exemplifies also how poverty and inequality can destabilize political systems. In the late eighteenth century, the “Third Estate,” composed largely of the poor, challenged the entrenched power of the clergy and nobility, helping to usher in a new legal and institutional framework based on equality before the law (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 283). The subsequent Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars spread these ideals across Europe, illustrating how poverty-driven uprisings can catalyze widespread transformation.

In the nineteenth century, industrialization intensified the visibility of poverty. While not the root cause, it concentrated poor populations in urban centers, where conditions were often dire. In Germany, the population rose from 24 to 31 million between 1820 and 1840, while agricultural productivity remained low, food prices surged, and industrial employment lagged behind demand (Lepenies 2017: 58–59). These pressures triggered further revolts and ideological ferment, as thinkers like Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels interpreted these conditions as precursors to revolution. Fearing instability, reforms were introduced—notably, Otto von Bismarck’s social welfare legislation—which aimed to preempt unrest rather than address poverty on moral grounds (Lepenies 2017: 16). Historically, then, fear of disruption has been a powerful motivator for poverty alleviation.

This framing continues to resonate today. In the United States, the 1992 Los Angeles riots and the 2020 protests following the killing of George Floyd were driven not only by racial injustice but also by deeper socioeconomic grievances, including poverty and inequality within African American communities (Taylor 2021; Black Lives Matter 2023). The 1992 unrest caused approximately \$1.4 billion in damages, while the 2020 protests caused an estimated \$1–2 billion in insured losses (Kingston 2020). These figures exclude long-term costs such as

lost income, community disinvestment, and human suffering. Empirical research underscores this contemporary link between economic inequality and violence. In the US, income inequality and homicide rates are strongly correlated, with over half the variance in homicide rates explained by state-level inequality (Daly 2016: 24). Similar correlations exist in Canada and across 33 middle- and high-income countries, where one study found an even stronger correlation between inequality and homicide rates (Elgar and Aitken 2010: 242). Such data supports the thesis that inequality is not only a moral or economic problem but also a source of social instability.

In addition to physical unrest, inequality contributes to declining public trust in institutions. As Pinker notes, institutional trust in the US has steadily declined since the 1960s (2018: 28). Gallup polling confirms that confidence in major institutions—including government, media, business, and religious bodies—has decreased significantly since the 1970s (Gallup 2023). This decline correlates with rising inequality: studies show a strong inverse relationship between income inequality and institutional trust in rich and middle-income countries (Elgar and Aitken 2010: 243). According to Butterwege, when large segments of the population feel excluded from economic gains, they increasingly view democratic institutions as illegitimate and unfair (2019: 70). From a stability-focused perspective, poverty alleviation serves not only the marginalized but also the broader social order. Preventing extreme inequality may reduce the likelihood of riots, revolutions, and institutional erosion. Importantly, this framing does not depend on compassion or moral obligation, as it argues that mitigating poverty is a form of managing risk.

However, this approach has notable limitations. It is fundamentally reactive, often mobilizing resources only when unrest becomes imminent. Moreover, it can cast the poor as a threat to be stopped rather than as citizens entitled to dignity and rights. In extreme cases, this perspective may justify authoritarian responses, such as increased policing or militarization, as means of preserving order. Without a parallel commitment to equity or justice, such responses risk reinforcing the very inequalities they seek to contain. For these reasons, while historically effective in motivating action, the framing of poverty as a threat to social stability is ethically ambivalent. It highlights the instrumental value of poverty reduction, but may do so at the cost of empathy, long-term investment, and inclusive

democratic governance. The following subsection explores a final framing of poverty, focused on the opportunity costs of underutilized human and social potential.

Opportunity Costs of Poverty

Sociological literature frequently refers to a lack of opportunity as both a cause and effect of poverty. Discussions often frame this absence in normative terms, highlighting fairness, discrimination, and justice through the lenses of either equality of opportunity or equality of outcome (cf. Becker 2018: 357–360; Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 9). While these moral framings emphasize fairness, this section adopts a utilitarian approach by analyzing poverty through the concept of opportunity cost—defined by Buchanan (1991: 520) as “the value that is given up or sacrificed in order to secure the higher value that selection of the chosen object embodies.” In this context, poverty imposes costs not only on the individual but on society as a whole—when individuals at the lower end of the income spectrum are unable to realize their productive potential, and when societies allocate substantial resources to poverty alleviation programs that may not generate sustainable outcomes (cf. Plantinga et al. 2018).

Poverty limits not only material well-being but also agency—the power to make meaningful life choices and influence broader societal outcomes. Amartya Sen’s *capability approach* reframes poverty as a deprivation of substantive freedoms. It emphasizes that well-being should be measured not by actual achievements but by the freedoms and capacities individuals have to pursue valued goals (Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 27–28; Barlösius 2018: 38). This capability is shaped by both personal resources and societal structures, like education, healthcare, legal access, and social support systems. Poverty, then, constrains the capacity of individuals to not only improve their own lives but also to contribute to society’s collective advancement. In this light, poverty represents a societal inefficiency. This individual underutilization represents a significant societal loss, especially considering that some among the poor might otherwise contribute substantially to solving pressing global challenges. As Pinker (2018: 324) notes, rising standards of living have historically coincided with increased attention to planetary-scale issues, such as environmental conservation, global health, and technological innovation. When basic needs are met,

individuals have the freedom—and often the motivation—to invest in others and in collective well-being.

The economic and intellectual output sacrificed to systemic poverty is difficult to quantify, but trends in global development suggest the opportunity cost is considerable. Gains made by countries that have successfully reduced poverty often manifest not only in improved standards of living but also in greater civic engagement, scientific innovation, and institutional effectiveness. However, the path from poverty alleviation to productivity is not guaranteed. Critics of the capability approach argue that it assumes individuals will always act in their own rational self-interest if given freedom. Empirical research complicates this assumption. In both developed and developing countries, individuals sometimes make choices that do not lead to economic mobility. In affluent nations, people may prioritize immediate gratification—such as luxury consumption—over long-term investments like education or retirement (cf. Sowell 2019: 78; Sawhill 2003: 79; Vance 2016). In low- and lower-middle income countries, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo find that the poor often choose to spend discretionary income on more palatable food or conspicuous goods rather than nutrition or schooling (2011: 38). Children in impoverished households may resist education; parents may have difficulty enforcing school attendance or saving for the future due to social or psychological pressures, such as instability and lack of self-control (ibid.: 38, 71, 119, 194).

These findings suggest that while poverty alleviation increases potential, it does not ensure productive outcomes. Effective poverty reduction may therefore require not only resource provision but also cultural, behavioral, and institutional shifts – a long-term and often incremental process. Nonetheless, the broader point remains: As Matthew Desmond points out, every individual lifted out of poverty represents not only one fewer person dependent on external support, but one more person capable of contributing to society, less susceptible to chronic stress, and more empowered to make beneficial choices (cf. Desmond 2023: 182). In aggregate, these shifts can have compounding effects, leading to more resilient and innovative communities. However, realizing this ideal requires societal incentives that promote prosocial engagement and meaningful participation beyond subsistence.

Beyond individual productivity, poverty imposes opportunity costs on the state. Social protection systems—especially those that fail to produce sustainable exits from poverty—tie up substantial public funds that might

otherwise be allocated toward other pressing needs. A comparative analysis of 2019 OECD data illustrates this tension. In the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, social protection represents the largest category of government expenditure, surpassing even education, defense, and environmental protection. In 2019, social protection accounted for 7.6% of GDP in the US (approx. \$1.51 trillion), 14.5% in the UK (\$0.44 trillion), and 19.6% in Germany (\$0.82 trillion) (OECD [2023c](#)). To illustrate the trade-offs, if poverty were permanently resolved in these countries and social spending significantly reduced, other sectors could see dramatic increases. Education budgets, for instance, could theoretically be doubled in the US, quadrupled in the UK, and quintupled in Germany. Environmental protection could be scaled up by factors of 39, 24, and 34 respectively. This is not meant to argue against welfare spending, but to stress the importance of evaluating whether such expenditures lead to sustainable poverty alleviation or merely perpetuate dependence. If poverty is ultimately solvable, then continued large-scale welfare transfers represent misallocated resources. Conversely, if poverty is intractable under current conditions, then governments must reckon with the permanent fiscal burdens that redistribution entails—and with the consequent limitations placed on other policy goals. Thus, poverty's opportunity costs are both bottom-up (lost individual contributions) and top-down (public resources diverted from other social investments). This dual perspective highlights the far-reaching implications of poverty, not only for those who experience it directly but also for broader societal development.

This analysis of poverty through the lens of opportunity costs complements previous framings explored in this section: poverty as a solvable problem, a moral injustice, a test of virtue, or a threat to social stability. Each frame suggests different causes, implications, and corrective actions. Viewing poverty through the lens of opportunity cost emphasizes pragmatic losses—of potential, of talent, of economic and social progress—and thus invites utilitarian arguments for poverty reduction. Importantly, such framings matter for sustainable development. ESD aims to cultivate learners capable of analyzing complex societal problems and taking informed, ethical action. To that end, learners should be introduced to multiple conceptual frameworks, including moral, political, and economic lenses, to understand how different framings shape problem definition and solution strategies.

THE SETTING OF GLOBAL POVERTY

Poverty is not a static or uniform phenomenon; it shifts across time and space in ways that challenge simplistic definitions and solutions. As ESD aims to empower learners to engage with global issues like poverty, it becomes essential to equip them with a robust, historically and geographically grounded understanding. This chapter examines poverty as a dynamic and multifaceted condition, shaped by temporal, spatial, and geopolitical factors. The following section explores three interrelated dimensions. First, it traces the historical trajectory of absolute and relative poverty, highlighting the dramatic decline of extreme deprivation since the Industrial Revolution, alongside the rise of inequality and relative poverty. Second, it investigates the rural–urban divide, revealing that poverty today is disproportionately rural—both in terms of severity and prevalence. Finally, it compares poverty across countries of differing income levels using standardized metrics to demonstrate how context, measurement, and inequality affect our interpretations of poverty. These insights are not only crucial for fostering critical global citizenship, but also serve as a comparative backdrop for later analysis of how poverty is portrayed in German EFL textbooks (cf. Chapter 5). Understanding poverty across space and time lays the groundwork for developing informed, empathetic, and effective responses to one of humanity’s most persistent challenges.

Historical Perspective on Absolute and Relative Poverty

This subsection presents a brief history of absolute and relative poverty. While absolute poverty has characterized most of human existence, meaningful reductions only began with the Industrial Revolution. In contrast, relative poverty—though it likely always existed—gained prominence as industrialization produced massive wealth abundance and amplified economic inequalities.

For most of history, the vast majority of people lived in conditions that today would be classified as absolute poverty. In prehistoric times, hunter-gatherers’ access to food was constrained by nature’s rhythms. The advent of agriculture around 11,000 years ago through the Neolithic Revolution gradually improved food security, but vulnerability to droughts, floods, and nutrient-depleted soils remained. Archaeological records from Paleolithic Europe show substantial signs of widespread violence and

malnutrition, pointing to persistent scarcity (Cunliffe 2008: 84; Mithen 2003: 129). Throughout most of human history, even elites were only marginally shielded from famine and disease. Famines struck entire populations, while plagues like the Black Death in the fourteenth century decimated up to half of the populations it touched (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 100). Even medical limitations extended into the modern era. The world's richest man in 1836, Nathan Mayer Rothschild, died from an infected abscess, and Calvin Coolidge Jr., the son of the US President, died from an infected blister as late as 1924 (Pinker 2018: 62–63). Child mortality was almost 50% in 1780 Sweden and still nearly 15% in Canada in 1920, while maternal mortality in Sweden was about 1% in 1870 and in the US in 1920 (Pinker 2018: 57).

The historical prevalence of absolute poverty has sharply declined. This trend has been attributed to the scientific and Industrial Revolution, which also gave birth to the Green Revolution, as the Haber–Bosch process in the early twentieth century allowed for industrial-scale nitrogen fixation to revolutionize agriculture by significantly increasing food yields (Pinker 2018: 75). Today, less than 10% of the global population lives under the threshold of absolute poverty (Hasell et al. 2023), despite a nine-fold increase in global population since 1800. It is estimated that of the 109 billion people who have ever experienced absolute poverty, 108 billion of them lived in the past (Routley 2022).

While absolute poverty has decreased, industrialization brought about new economic structures that widened income gaps, making relative poverty more visible. The emergence of large urban centers in industrial England laid bare socioeconomic disparities and triggered the first studies on poverty and inequality (Dittmann and Goebel 2018: 22), though the concept of relative poverty took academic shape in 1960s UK (Lepenies 2017: 9). In earlier agrarian societies, wealth was typically based on extraction, as elites enriched themselves by taxing or collecting tributes from the general population. These systems did not generate wealth broadly; they redistributed scarce resources in a largely static economy. Consequently, pre-industrial societies were more equal, not because they were just, but because nearly everyone was equally poor (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 45). The Industrial Revolution, however, sparked sustained economic growth. In 1960, global GDP per capita stood at 456 USD; by 2020, it had reached 10,909 USD (World Bank 2023a). High-income countries experienced particularly dramatic increases. Germany's per capita GDP grew from 2,761 USD in 1970 to 46,208 USD in 2020. The UK's rose

from 1397 USD in 1960 to 40,284 USD, and the US from 3007 USD to 63,543 USD over the same period (World Bank 2023b). Accompanying this wealth creation was a consistent rise in social spending, with Western nations now investing 20–30% of GDP in social services compared to under 5% in 1930 (Pinker 2018: 108). Indicators of quality of life have also improved in this time, as weekly work hours and domestic chores have decreased, and the percentage of income spent on necessities has fallen from over 50% pre-1950s to under 35% by 2015 (Pinker 2018: 249–254).

Despite these gains, inequality has re-emerged as a social concern. In the US and UK, inequality, measured by the Gini index, increased during early industrialization, peaked in the mid-nineteenth century, and then declined until about 1980. Since then, inequality has risen again, though it remains below historical highs (Pinker 2018: 106). At a global level, the story is more encouraging. International inequality—the differences in income between countries—rose until 1980 as high-income countries industrialized. David Landes observed that in 1750, Western and Eastern Europe differed little in income, but by 1900 the West was almost 80% richer (1999: 194). This divergence was even more pronounced between Europe and the future “Third World.” Yet, since 1980, international inequality has declined significantly, as the economies of low- and middle-income countries grow at faster rates than wealthier ones (Pinker 2018: 104). Global inequality, which measures income differences among individuals worldwide, has also dropped since the 1980s (Pinker 2018: 105). This suggests that gains in high-income countries are no longer coming at the expense of poorer nations. Still, inequality within high-income countries is currently rising, creating continued cause for concern.

Several factors explain this renewed increase in economic inequality. One is demographic: more people live alone, while high-earning couples with no or few children combine incomes. A second is economic: the digital revolution has created highly paid jobs for the skilled while automating or outsourcing others (Pinker 2019: 111). A third is political: income growth in high-income countries has been sluggish for lower-middle classes, fueling political discontent. In the US, this group—often associated with populist movements—has seen the slowest income growth since 1980 (Pinker 2019: 112). In Germany, research shows that while the top 10% of households have seen notable income gains, the lower 40% have stagnated, concluding that the poor in Germany have not necessarily gotten poorer, but the rich have definitely gotten richer (Peichl

and Ungerer 2017: 4). Though poverty rates remain stable, the wealth gap has widened, increasing both actual and perceived polarization. Similarly, in the US, the upper-middle class grew from 13% in 1979 to 30% of the total population in 2014, while the percentage of people earning under 30,000 USD annually shrank from 24 to 20% (Pinker 2019: 114). The growing US inequality is coming in substantial part of the shift from lower- to upper-middle class, leading to a so-called ‘hollowing out’ of the middle.

In conclusion, a historical perspective on both absolute and relative poverty depict a more optimistic perspective on poverty than some would suspect. Over time, due to evolving institutions, technologies, and global cooperation, absolute poverty has massively shrunk, and if the trajectory of reduction continues, it may be all but eradicated in the coming decades. Relative poverty, though socially undesirable, appears to be largely a product of the very mechanisms that have created the massive expanse of resources and services since the Industrial Revolution. Relative poverty is also not the same as absolute poverty, as it is more reflective of economic inequality that is more extreme than a society deems desirable. While such inequality is indeed problematic, it has been at higher rates in the recent past, is largely occurring in developed countries, does not mean that the poor are getting poorer (but that the middle class is getting richer), and it does not reflect a global trend. In conclusion, a balanced historical perspective shows that absolute poverty has dramatically decreased, and global inequality is also declining. Although relative poverty is a growing concern in wealthy nations, it must be understood within the broader context of rising prosperity. Addressing poverty today requires careful reflection on which forms of poverty persist, what causes them, and how best to respond without undermining the gains made by earlier generations.

Rural and Urban Poverty

This section explores two central questions: Is poverty worse in rural or urban areas? And, proportionally, are people in rural areas at greater risk of poverty than those in urban settings? These questions may overlap or diverge. For instance, a country might have a higher number of rural poor in absolute terms while also having a higher poverty rate in urban areas—or vice versa—depending on population distribution and classification standards.

Globally, extreme poverty is concentrated in rural regions. As of 2015, the UN estimated that 79% of the world's extreme poor lived in rural areas, and the 2020 Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) placed the rural share at 84.2% (Alkire et al. 2020: 27). Both the net number and the poverty rate are higher in rural settings: 17.2% of rural populations live in extreme poverty compared to just 5.3% in urban areas (United Nations Statistics Division 2023a). This disparity is largely due to the fact that extreme poverty is primarily a developing-country phenomenon, where rural areas often lack infrastructure, services, and economic opportunities. While urban slums challenge the rural dominance of extreme poverty, particularly as they grow and offer substandard conditions, rural poverty remains more extreme and multidimensional. MPI data shows that rural populations experience more deprivations per person than their urban counterparts (Alkire et al. 2020: 27).

Country-specific data further illustrates the rural–urban divide, though such comparing is difficult for multiple reasons (McAreevey and Brown 2019: 1). In the US, the rural poverty rate is 16% compared to 12% in urban areas, but due to the larger urban population, only 24% of the total poor are rural (Kyzyma 2018: 13). In contrast, England shows both a higher rate and number of poor in urban areas—23% vs. 17%—with 87% of all poverty classified as urban (Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 2023a). South Africa offers a stark rural poverty landscape. A 2017 government report showed a rural household poverty rate of 66% compared to 29% in urban areas (Lehohla 2017). Despite a majority-urban population, 54% of the country's poor live in rural areas (population data from Index Mundi 2023, cf. also Atkinson 2014). Similar patterns exist in Australia, where rural poverty is more severe, though the urban population dominates in numbers (National Rural Health Alliance Inc. 2017: 1; World Bank 2023b). In the EU, rural areas carry the highest poverty risk (27.2%), followed by cities (22.6%) and towns/suburbs (24.3%) (Members' Research Service 2023)—these findings are similar for Germany (Keller 2018: 259). In developing regions, rural poverty dominates both in terms of net numbers and rates: rural shares of poverty range from 67% to over 88%, depending on the region (Alkire et al. 2020: 28; World Bank 2007: xiii).

These patterns highlight the need to distinguish between net numbers and proportional risk when evaluating areas of poverty. For most developed countries, urban areas have more poor people overall, but rural residents face a higher risk of being poor, and their poverty is more

extreme. In developing countries, both the majority of the poor and the worst poverty are found in rural settings. For global poverty education, this distinction is crucial. Oversimplified views—often shaped by the visibility of urban poverty—can distort understandings of root causes and effective solutions. Targeted education must address the severity of rural poverty while not overlooking the growing urban poor.

Comparing Poverty Across Countries and Regions

While poverty exists globally, locally it varies significantly in type, extent, and measurement. Understanding these differences is essential for any informed approach to addressing poverty. Cross-country comparisons are challenging due to differing definitions and measurement methods. However, OECD data provides standardized indicators that allow for a comparative analysis. This section focuses on four key metrics: (1) absolute number of people in poverty, (2) poverty rate (percentage of population below the poverty line), (3) the poverty line in purchasing power parity (PPP-adjusted USD), and (4) income inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient. The comparison includes seven countries: the USA, UK, Australia, South Africa, India, Mexico, and Germany.

The OECD defines the poverty line as 50% of a country's median household income (Sanchez [2025](#)). Poverty rates thus reflect relative, not absolute, deprivation. According to the data, South Africa and India have the highest poverty rates, followed by the USA and Mexico, with the UK, Australia, and Germany showing the lowest rates. However, in terms of total numbers, India leads by far, followed by the USA and Mexico, reflecting their large populations. However, comparing poverty rates across countries is problematic due to differing income levels. PPP-adjusted poverty lines reveal striking contrasts: the US poverty line is the highest, at \$17,500 USD, while South Africa and Mexico are under \$2500, and India is just \$1250. Thus, a person considered poor in the US may be far better off than someone above the poverty line in India or South Africa. Nevertheless, the US also exhibits significant income inequality—its Gini coefficient is higher than that of other developed countries in the sample and only surpassed by South Africa and Mexico (Gini Coefficient by Country [2025](#)). When combining all four indicators, India and South Africa consistently appear among the worst in poverty levels and inequality. Mexico ranks closely behind, followed by the USA, while the UK, Germany, and Australia perform comparatively better.

However, this ranking is shaped by methodological factors—particularly the use of relative poverty thresholds. For instance, the US appears worse off in part because it uses a considerably higher benchmark.

These findings illustrate the complexity of global poverty and the pitfalls of relying on a single metric. Decisions about which countries to highlight in global education or policy depend on whether focus is placed on poverty rates, absolute numbers, income thresholds, or inequality. Each metric tells a different story. In sum, learners engaging with global poverty—particularly through a lens of ESD—need to grasp this multidimensionality. Without such context, textbook portrayals or policy interventions risk misrepresenting both the scope and causes of poverty.

Taken together, the historical, spatial, and comparative perspectives on poverty presented in this section reveal a nuanced and evolving picture. Absolute poverty—defined by severe material deprivation—has dramatically declined over the past two centuries, thanks to technological, institutional, and medical progress. Yet, relative poverty and income inequality have gained new salience, particularly in high-income countries where wealth has grown but not been evenly distributed. Simultaneously, poverty remains geographically uneven: globally, it is most acute in rural regions and in low- and middle-income countries, although urban poverty is increasingly visible and politically salient. Importantly, how poverty is defined and measured has profound implications for education and policy. Metrics such as the poverty rate, PPP-adjusted income thresholds, and the Gini coefficient each highlight different aspects of deprivation and inequality. Consequently, learners must be equipped not only with data but with the analytical tools to interpret it critically. For ESD to be truly transformative, it must go beyond moral appeals and incorporate an understanding of poverty's historical roots, spatial patterns, and political dimensions. By fostering this multidimensional perspective, educators can help learners move from simplistic narratives of poverty to a more complex, informed, and ultimately more constructive engagement with the issue—an engagement essential to achieving the goals of sustainable development.

FACTORS INFLUENCING POVERTY

Development economist Peter Bauer famously stated, “Poverty has no causes. Wealth has causes” (Pinker 2018: 79). This perspective reframes poverty not as an anomaly needing explanation, but as the default human condition. Wealth, by contrast, is exceptional and must be actively created and maintained. Over time, wealth naturally deteriorates through use, decay, or devaluation—a process governed by entropy (Pinker 2018: 15). Building and sustaining wealth, therefore, demands coordinated effort across multiple domains. It may follow what Jared Diamond describes as the *Anna Karenina principle*: success requires the presence of numerous interdependent factors, and failure can result from the absence of any single one (1999: 157). This principle highlights why wealth is difficult to attain and maintain, while poverty is relatively easy to fall into. This section approaches poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. Its purpose is not to assign blame, but to explore the diverse and often interlinked factors that contribute to its emergence and persistence. In public discourse, poverty is frequently attributed to individuals’ choices, the actions of the wealthy, political systems, or even fate. However, such assignments of blame often oversimplify a highly complex phenomenon.

Attributing poverty to individual agents or entities reflects a broader anthropomorphic bias—the human tendency to explain complex systems in terms of personal agency (Johnson 2019: 305). It is often more psychologically satisfying to identify a singular, emotionally resonant cause than to acknowledge a diffuse network of contributing conditions. This inclination underlies the single cause fallacy, wherein people erroneously seek one root cause for outcomes that are actually multifactorial in nature (Vleet 2011: 84). While popular narratives, including mythology and folklore, often reduce human suffering to clear cause-and-effect structures—as seen in stories like *Robin Hood*—academic analyses of poverty must contend with its complexity. Factors influencing poverty are rarely deterministic, and may function as either necessary or sufficient conditions, with some being both or neither (cf. Vleet 2011 136–139). These can be proximate (e.g., job loss) or ultimate (e.g., colonial legacy or geography) (Diamond 1999: 23). Some are mutable, such as individual behavior, while others—like early childhood disadvantage or limited access to quality education—are far less so. Furthermore, some variables may correlate with poverty without causing it, and in many cases, the direction of causality remains unclear.

This section does not attempt to offer a comprehensive catalogue of all causes of poverty, nor does it claim to resolve the complexities involved. Rather, it presents a structured examination of the key domains that research identifies as significant contributors to poverty, moving from the individual level to group and societal factors. It also considers natural events and life-course transitions that shape economic vulnerability across the lifespan. Ultimately, any meaningful approach to poverty reduction must begin with the recognition that poverty is not reducible to singular causes or straightforward narratives. A robust understanding of its causal complexity is essential for developing informed, effective, and context-sensitive strategies to address it.

Individual-Level Factors of Decisions, Behavior, and Heritage

Discussing individual-level factors in relation to poverty is both appealing and problematic. On one hand, such factors imply personal agency, suggesting individuals can shape their financial trajectories through their decisions. On the other hand, emphasizing personal responsibility can lead to “victim-blaming,” where poverty is seen as the natural result of bad choices, ignoring structural influences. This subsection examines individual-level contributors to poverty, distinguishing between mutable factors (e.g., behavior and decisions) and immutable ones (e.g., birth circumstances), while also addressing the interdependence of both.

A central question in this context is whether basic “rules” of behavior can meaningfully reduce poverty risk in high-income countries. Sawhill identifies three behavioral norms strongly correlated with avoiding poverty in the US: (1) finishing high school, (2) delaying parenthood until age 21 and within marriage, and (3) maintaining full-time employment (2003: 81). US Census data shows that only 1% of those who followed all three rules were poor (Sawhill 2003: 83). An updated analysis by Sawhill and Rodrigue using 2012 data confirmed this trend: only 2.4% of those adhering to the norms were poor, accounting for just 1.5% of the total population (2018: 3). Conversely, 72% of the poor had not maintained full-time employment, 42% had children outside of marriage or before 21, and 29% had not completed high school. Although not every deviation leads to poverty, these norm violations were found to be significantly higher among the poor. While their research does not present data to show a causal linkage between these norm breaks and poverty, the authors present other studies that suggest this is the case (ibid.: 6–9).

These findings suggest that individual decisions can play a considerable role in economic outcomes, though context remains crucial.

Similar patterns are found in Germany. Education has a well-documented effect on income and employment prospects. Between 2005 and 2015, the poverty risk for individuals with low educational attainment rose from 23.1% to 31.5% (Kohlrausch 2018: 182). Although educational attainment increased during this time, poverty rates also grew (*ibid.*: 182), revealing that higher education does not always equate to better life outcomes—particularly when degrees are devalued or job markets become oversaturated (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 43). As requirements for entry-level jobs become more academic, the value of qualifications has become more relative than absolute. Moreover, education level affects not just poverty risk, but also the duration of poverty. For example, it does not significantly reduce the risk of becoming poor after job loss, but it does shorten the length of poverty spells (Ehlert 2018: 192). Education also impacts the next generation. Children of educated parents perform better in school and are more likely to pursue higher education (though some of this can be counterbalanced by parent engagement, cf. Williams 2019). In Germany, 84% of children with two highly educated parents attend Gymnasium, compared to only 31% from families without such a background (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 127). Educational attainment is highly correlated with class reproduction: only 11% of university students come from low-income families, and children from poor households generally lack digital and linguistic capital necessary for success in modern education systems (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 143). These disparities contribute to a self-perpetuating cycle of disadvantage. Yet, education is not entirely deterministic. High parental involvement, regardless of educational background, can significantly mitigate these disadvantages and foster academic success (Böhnke and Heizmann 2018: 131).

Family structure and planning also affect poverty risk. In Germany, divorce significantly increases poverty risk, especially for women with children. It takes an average of 18 years for divorced females to return to pre-divorce economic levels (Giesselmann and Vandecasteele 2018: 73). Single-parent households face elevated poverty risks—double that of the average EU household—and in Germany, 40% of single parents are poor, with 90% being female (Betzelt 2018: 170). Additionally, families with three or more children are disproportionately affected (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 42), and divorce is a common reason for female homelessness in Germany (*ibid.*: 104). These trends are reinforced by changing family

models: dual-income households have become the norm, while single-breadwinner models have declined, increasing income inequality between family types (Betzelt 2018: 170).

Employment is one of the most important factors influencing poverty. In Germany, the unemployed face the highest poverty risk—57.6% (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 42). Unemployment is influenced by factors such as education, health, age, and migration status, as well as job contract type, and low-qualified workers, older individuals, and immigrants are particularly vulnerable (Ehlert 2018: 190). The risk is compounded when the household lacks a second income. Since employment is the primary income source for most, job loss not only affects individuals but their dependents as well. Ehlert notes that since the introduction of Hartz IV, the chance of falling into poverty after losing a job rose from 18 to 25%, although the duration of poverty has slightly decreased (2018: 192). Long-term unemployment is especially damaging: 34.8% of Germany's unemployed are long-term unemployed (over one year), and many suffer from multiple disadvantages such as poor health, low education, or behavioral issues (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 68). Beyond the economic costs, unemployment has social consequences. It is linked to mental and physical health deterioration, increased substance abuse, and strained family relationships (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 70). The financial burden on the state is also significant—unemployment costs Germany 56.7 billion euros in 2013 alone (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 64). Although some unemployment is voluntary, much of it is not, underscoring the limited agency many individuals have over their economic conditions.

Health behaviors also correlate with poverty. People in lower socioeconomic classes are more likely to smoke, consume alcohol excessively, and suffer from obesity—factors that can reduce employability and increase healthcare costs (Lampert 2018: 227). Men in poverty are more prone to alcohol abuse, often as a coping mechanism for unemployment, which in turn contributes to homelessness (Lampert 2018: 227; Dittmann and Drilling 2018: 278). Poverty itself can drive unhealthy behaviors and poor life management, further complicating the causal relationships between individual actions and economic outcomes.

This raises broader ethical and policy questions: To what extent are individuals responsible for their own poverty? How much should be expected from the state in terms of support or intervention? Most research suggests a complex interplay between personal agency and structural constraints. Sawhill warns of a growing “behavioral divide” in

the US, where socioeconomic groups differ significantly in their norms around marriage, parenthood, and work (2003: 90). Wealthier individuals increasingly marry later, have fewer children, and benefit from multiple income sources—trends mirrored in Germany’s middle class. These families are more likely to support their children’s education and transfer social capital across generations, deepening inequalities. Importantly, the boundary between mutable and immutable individual factors is not always clear. For example, while children do not choose the family they are born into, the consequences of their birth context often follow them into adulthood. Learned behaviors and values, such as fatalism, lack of future orientation, or low self-efficacy, can be passed from one generation to the next (Santens 2019: 134; Cherry 2019: 118). Language acquisition is one example: children from welfare-dependent families hear significantly fewer words per hour than those from professional families (Sowell 2019: 9), potentially limiting their cognitive and linguistic development. Though the “word gap” theory has been criticized as simplistic or culturally biased, it continues to influence research and education policy (Durán 2019: 72; Saiyed and Smirnov 2019: 75). Cognitive ability, too, is a contested but relevant factor. While higher IQs are correlated with financial success (Fischbein 1980: 51), IQ can be shaped by environmental factors. Sowell notes that firstborn children typically have higher IQs than their siblings—likely due to greater parental attention (2019: 7)—while Mani et al. found that poverty itself can reduce IQ scores by up to 13 points during times of financial stress (2013: 976). Thus, cognitive performance may not be a fixed trait but one influenced by economic insecurity. Similarly, behaviors associated with poverty may be both cause and consequence, making it difficult to establish linear causality (Boyd 2019: 99).

In conclusion, while individual-level factors such as education, family planning, employment, and behavior significantly influence poverty risk, they are deeply intertwined with structural and intergenerational conditions. Personal agency exists but is often constrained by circumstances beyond one’s control. Therefore, while individual responsibility should not be ignored, blaming individuals for their poverty without acknowledging broader systemic factors is both inaccurate and unhelpful.

Group Factors of Social Vulnerabilities and Discrimination

Poverty is not only shaped by individual-level characteristics, but also by group-level factors that systematically affect certain populations. For example, international organizations such as the UN identify vulnerable groups including women and girls, children and adolescents, older persons, persons with disabilities, migrants, and LGBTI individuals (OHCHR 2023), and these groups are typically shown to be at higher risks of poverty. Additional groups, such as ethnic minorities, the chronically ill, and single parents are frequently included in European policy discussions (Henrik et al. 2020: 4; Jordan et al. 2019: 1). This section focuses on those group characteristics most relevant to the findings from the textbook analysis (cf. Chapter 5): gender (females), race/ethnicity (people of color), age (children and older persons), and family structure (single parents, large families and orphans).

Gender is a widely acknowledged axis of inequality and has been at the center of intense debate (Chamberlain et al. 2019: 7).² While gender discrimination—often institutional or cultural—persists, other contributing factors to specifically female poverty include the unpaid burden of motherhood and disruptions to career progression. Although celebrated, motherhood often results in reduced income, part-time employment, or career withdrawal, particularly in countries with limited social support. Across all countries analyzed, poverty affects females more than males. In the US, 57% of those living in poverty are females, with a gender poverty gap of 3.27%, reduced to 1.89% when controlling for variables such as family structure and employment (Glassman 2020: 7, 13). Similar disparities are observed in the UK (52% of adults in poverty are women, cf. Bennett and Daly 2014: 23), Mexico (increased gender gap at lower-income levels, cf. Ramos et al. 2020: 8), South Africa (female-headed households have a 9.6% higher poverty gap, cf. Lehohla 2017: 79), and India (54% of poor population are female, cf. Azcona et al. 2020: 6). In Germany, females face a higher poverty risk (16.2% vs. 15.2%) due in part to reduced working hours among mothers (Rühlemann et al. 2019: 6; Betzelt 2018: 166). Though some subgroups—such as unemployed or migrant men—may experience worse outcomes, these are exceptions rather than the rule (Betzelt 2018: 170–171). Pay gap

² Gender is treated here as a binary subject, as this is how available data present gender research on poverty.

analyses support the conclusion that women remain economically disadvantaged. According to OECD (2023a), the unadjusted gender wage gap among full-time employees was 17.7% in the US, 12.3% in the UK, 13.9% in Germany, and 9.6% in Mexico. Among the self-employed, gaps are even wider. Though trends show slow improvement in most countries, disparities remain significant. Adjusted analyses of gender pay gap—accounting for factors such as education and industry—reveal smaller but still persistent gaps: 4.9% in the US, 5.0% in the UK, and 6.4% in Germany (Chamberlain et al. 2019: 22). A notable portion of these gaps (35–45%) remains unexplained and may reflect discrimination or structural inequality.

While females are generally more affected by poverty, males face specific vulnerabilities. In countries like Germany, the US, and South Africa, males make up the majority of the homeless population—often 67–86%—and face higher rates of chronic illness and premature death (Dittmann and Drilling 2018: 286–287; Moses and Janosko 2018: 1–2; Kok et al. 2010: 27). In Germany, the life expectancy gap between the poorest and wealthiest men is over 10 years, compared to 8 years for women (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 80), and poor males are much more likely to suffer from chronic health diseases (Lampert 2018: 227). Regional variations also matter. In South Asia, for example, school attendance among children varies significantly by gender and country. Girls are more often out of school in countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan, while in others like Bangladesh and Bhutan, boys are more educationally disadvantaged (Alkire et al. 2019: 7–8). These examples demonstrate that gender-related poverty must be contextualized within cultural and regional specifics. In summary, while females face a greater overall risk of poverty, nuanced vulnerabilities—like those experienced by homeless men or boys out of school—require targeted policies. The narrowing gender pay gap in some countries is encouraging but far from resolved, and the role of social norms, motherhood, and discrimination remains central.

Racial and ethnic group membership can also predict poverty. Minorities or historically marginalized racial groups often face structural barriers to wealth and opportunity, although not all minorities are economically disadvantaged. For instance, Asian Americans and Indian Americans in the US often have higher median incomes than white Americans, despite political underrepresentation (Shrider et al. 2021: 5). Similarly, Chinese Malaysians enjoy relative economic power but limited political influence (Sowell 2019: 263). For the most part, though, these are exceptions

rather than the rule. In the US, poverty rates vary sharply by race: 8.2% among white non-Hispanics, 8.1% for Asians, 17% for Hispanics, and 19.5% for African Americans; however, in absolute numbers, 45% of those in poverty are white (17 million), followed by Hispanics (29%) and African Americans (22%) (based on 2020 US census data and Shrider et al. 2021: 15). A large factor here for the US, though, are also differences in single-parent homes for races, which appear to be a large influencing factor (cf. US Census Bureau 2023a: 202). However, racial biases in the US against people of color still persist, and these influence their income levels and the governmental support they receive (cf. Desmond 2023: 86). In Germany, individuals with a migration background face more than double the poverty risk of native-born Germans, and while poverty levels among migrants decline over time and across generations, they remain consistently higher, particularly among Italians and Turks (Janßen and Bohr 2018: 156). In the UK, the lowest poverty rates are found among white British (19%), while the highest are among Black (40%) and Pakistani/Bangladeshi (49%) populations (cf. Cribb et al. 2021: 32). Although most of the poor are white, people of color represent a disproportionate share of poverty (Equality and Human Rights Commission 2023). In South Africa, stark racial disparities persist: 0.8% poverty incidence among whites compared to 46.6% for Black South Africans (Lehohla 2017: 81). In Mexico, 69.5% of the poor are from indigenous groups (Sanchez 2024), and socioeconomic status correlates with skin tone in Mexico, Central and South American, as well as in the Caribbean (Zizumbo-Colunga and Martínez 2017: 3–7). In India, lower castes—“Scheduled Tribes,” “Scheduled Castes,” and “Other Backward Classes”—account for five out of six multidimensionally poor individuals (Alkire et al. 2021: 15–16). Although not all minorities are disadvantaged, being part of a historically marginalized racial or ethnic group remains a strong predictor of poverty around the globe. Discrimination, limited access to education, and intergenerational wealth disparities are key drivers.

Age is another critical factor in poverty vulnerability, especially for children and older adults. In the US, children have the highest poverty rate (16.1%), followed by working-age adults (10.4%) and seniors (9%) (Shrider et al. 2021: 16). While the elderly once had the highest rates, this changed in the 1970s due to pension reforms (Shrider et al. 2021: 17). In net terms, however, more adults than children live in poverty due to their larger share of the population. In the UK, children are also

the most vulnerable group (31% poverty rate), followed by working-age adults with children (25%), those without (17%), and finally pensioners (18%) (Francis-Devine 2021: 14–15). Despite children’s higher rate, adults there also make up the bulk of the poor population. Similar trends are seen in Germany, where 30.1% of children, 22.5% of working-age adults, and 19.2% of seniors are at risk of poverty (Destatis 2021)—with considerably more adults than children living in poverty. In South Africa, child poverty is highest (60.1%) and declines through middle age before rising again among the elderly—still here, children make up less of the poor population than adults, in terms of net numbers (Lehohla 2017: 59–60). Mexico shows similar patterns, with the highest poverty among those under 14 (34%) compared to 19% among older age groups (Inchauste 2020: 2). In India, children represent about half of all multidimensionally poor, while poverty among those 60+ stands at 8.2% (Alkire et al. 2021: 4). These findings all show that, while older adults are vulnerable, in high-income countries they are often better protected due to pensions and social welfare systems. In contrast, children consistently face higher poverty risks, emphasizing the need for age-sensitive policy interventions. However, more adults than children are poor in almost all sampled areas.

Family structure, particularly household size and composition, is closely linked to poverty. Larger households are more common in low-income countries, while high-income countries tend to have smaller, but increasingly fragmented, households (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division 2017: 1). In the US, average household size declined from 3.3 (1960) to 2.5% (2015), while single-parent households increased from 8 to 19% by 2022 (US Census Bureau 2023a). The UK and Germany show similar trends, with rising single-parent rates despite small average household sizes; in contrast, countries like Mexico (3.8), India (4.4), and South Africa (3.2) maintain larger average household sizes but also show growing trends in single parenthood (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division 2022). Larger families face higher poverty risk due to the greater cost of raising children and reduced earning potential of caregivers—typically mothers. As already discussed, in Germany, three or more children substantially increase household poverty risk. In developing contexts, however, large families may be viewed as economic strategies, ensuring support in old age or increasing the chance of a child achieving upward mobility (Banerjee and Duflo 2011: 105). Determining causality of large families for poverty is complex: do large families cause poverty, or are poor families more

likely to have more children? The answer is likely both. Nonetheless, both size and structure—especially single parenthood—are critical dimensions of household vulnerability.

Group-level vulnerabilities, whether based on gender, race, age, or family structure, significantly shape poverty outcomes across the globe. Women, though increasingly empowered, remain more likely to be poor, particularly mothers. Ethnic and racial minorities often face higher poverty rates due to historic and systemic marginalization. Children are consistently the most vulnerable age group, while the elderly fare better in high-income countries due to welfare systems. Family composition also matters, with single-parent and large households facing the greatest risks. While trends show slow improvement in some areas, structural inequalities and intersecting vulnerabilities demand targeted, context-sensitive policies to ensure equitable progress.

National Factors of Economic and Governance Policy

Poverty is deeply influenced by a country's national context—its economic and governmental institutions—which shape the conditions for wealth creation and distribution. While individuals may have agency, the opportunities and constraints they face are often determined at a structural level. This section outlines three major national-level factors that affect economic well-being: institutional fairness, economic restraints, and recessions.

The fairness and inclusivity of a country's institutions play a central role in shaping its economic outcomes. Political and economic institutions influence whether societies generate and distribute wealth equitably or entrench power among elites. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson distinguish between inclusive and extractive institutions, where the former encourages broad participation in economic activity, secure property rights, impartial legal systems, and allow individuals to pursue their talents and aspirations (2013: 73). These foster innovation, productivity, and long-term prosperity. By contrast, extractive institutions concentrate power and wealth among elites, often through coercion, limited access to markets, or political manipulation. While they may produce short-term economic growth, this growth is narrow, unstable, and often excludes large segments of the population (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 73, 335). Extractive systems tend to self-perpetuate, as those in power resist change that would challenge their dominance, even if inclusive reforms

would benefit society at large. Mexico's underdeveloped banking system in the early twentieth century is illustrative: While the US had over 27,000 banks by 1914, Mexico had only 42—two of which controlled 60% of all assets. In this example, the entrenched elite had little incentive to open the economy or empower wider segments of society (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 33–34). Even where inclusive institutions exist, they are not always extended to all. Historical examples include slavery and Jim Crow laws in the US, Apartheid in South Africa, and the colonial extractive systems in much of Africa and Asia. In such cases, economic institutions were inclusive only for a select few (Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 245). Importantly, institutional fairness is dynamic. Societies can regress, as inclusive systems become hijacked by elites, or fail to address structural inequalities inherited from the past. As Pinker argues, wealth is not finite—it is created through knowledge and cooperation (2018: 80). But when the rules of the game favor extraction over innovation, societies lose out on this wealth-creating potential. As has already been pointed out, inequality in modern societies often triggers mistrust. Wealth and power may be assumed to stem from exploitation rather than merit, particularly in societies with histories of exclusion. While this suspicion is not always justified in societies with strong inclusive institutions, it still informs political discourse and moral expectations.

Economic freedom is another crucial factor affecting national prosperity. It refers to the ability of individuals to control their labor and property, participate freely in markets, and invest without excessive government interference (The Heritage Foundation 2023). Historically, economic thinkers like Adam Smith argued that economic freedom fosters wealth creation by unleashing individual initiative (Smith 2007: 363). This has since been confirmed (Acemoglu et al. 2014). While government regulation can be necessary—to uphold law, correct market failures, or protect emerging industries (Egbo 2018: 2; Pinker 2018: 97)—over-regulation can stifle growth and protect rooted interests rather than the public good—and it may even increase inequality (Chambers and O'Reilly 2021: 64). In some cases, extreme cases of market regulation can also lead to extreme poverty (cf. Chirot 2020: 63, Pinker 2018: 90). Two metrics, those of the Index of Economic Freedom and of the Freedom House's Global Freedom Status, offer insight into the institutional and governance environments of different countries. The findings from both indexes are summarized below (The Heritage Foundation 2023; Freedom House 2023) for key countries around the world:

- United States: High economic freedom (74.8%), with strengths in property rights and business freedom, but lower scores in fiscal health. Rated “free” politically (83%) in Global Freedom Status.
- United Kingdom: Very high economic freedom (78.4%), though government spending is a weak point. Rated “free” (93%) in Global Freedom Status.
- Germany: High economic freedom (72.5%), but with weaker scores in labor freedom and tax burden. Rated “free” (94%) in Global Freedom Status.
- South Africa: Lower economic freedom (59.7%), with trade and monetary freedom as stronger areas. Still rated “free” (79%) in Global Freedom Status.
- Mexico: Mid-range economic freedom (65.5%), dragged down by weak judicial effectiveness and government integrity. Rated “partly free” (61%) in Global Freedom Status.
- India: Relatively low economic freedom (56.5%). Rated “partly free” (67%) in Global Freedom Status.

These indicators align with patterns of national wealth and poverty. Countries with higher levels of economic and political freedom tend to have stronger economies, less absolute poverty, and higher average living standards—even for the relatively poor. Economic freedom promotes entrepreneurship, encourages investment, and enhances overall productivity, while political freedom tends to support inclusive policies and public trust. Research by Nobel prize winner Daron Acemoglu states that this relationship is not just correlational, but also causal (Acemoglu et al. 2014).

Even countries with inclusive institutions and high economic freedom can experience periods of hardship. Economic recessions, financial crises, and structural shifts in technology or trade can push individuals and groups into poverty—even if temporarily. The 2008 global financial crisis demonstrated the widespread vulnerability of modern economies. In the US, it triggered the largest one-year rise in poverty since 1991 (Schierholz 2009). Countries like Ireland saw their once-booming economies collapse, while Germany responded with increased government spending and borrowing to maintain stability (Benz and Heinz 2016). South Africa, already grappling with social and economic challenges, saw a downward trend in GDP per capita starting around 2010 (Sibeko 2021). Mexico, closely tied to the US market, experienced a deep economic hit

(Congressional Research Service 2010), while India's economy suffered ongoing aftershocks through to a 2013 economic crisis (Narayan 2018). These examples show that poverty is not always the result of policy failure or institutional exclusion. Sometimes, large-scale economic disruptions—whether global or local—can cause widespread setbacks, particularly when governments lack the fiscal tools or institutional strength to cushion the impact for their populations.

The national context in which individuals live, including their country's institutions, freedoms, and economic resilience, has a profound impact on their economic prospects. Inclusive institutions tend to promote innovation, entrepreneurship, and equitable growth, while extractive ones entrench power and limit opportunity. Economic and political freedoms enable individuals to pursue prosperity, and countries with higher freedom scores tend to experience both higher national wealth and lower absolute poverty. However, these conditions are neither fixed nor immune to disruption. Institutions can regress, freedoms can erode, and global economic forces can create setbacks. In this complex interplay of structure, policy, and history, poverty is shaped not only by what individuals do, but by the systems within which they act.

Natural Causes of Poverty

Some drivers of poverty, and barriers to wealth, lie beyond individual or even collective human control. Natural factors such as disease, natural disasters, and geographical factors, often contribute to poverty, intensifying hardship and limiting opportunities for development (cf. Organization of American States 2023). This section outlines how these factors influence poverty globally.

Disease impacts poverty at both individual and national levels. The concept of the “disease burden,” often measured using Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), reflects the health challenges populations face. DALYs, calculated per 100,000 individuals, account for both fatal and non-fatal outcomes across three categories: communicable diseases (including maternal and nutritional issues), non-communicable diseases (e.g., cardiovascular disease, cancer), and injuries (all following data on DALYs taken from Roser et al. 2023). In wealthier nations, disease burdens are significantly lower and dominated by non-communicable diseases. For instance, the US records about 26,000 DALYs per 100,000 people—86% due to non-communicable diseases, with the remainder

split between injuries (9%) and communicable diseases (5%). The UK and Germany show similar patterns, both with about 20,000 DALYs per 100,000, predominantly from non-communicable causes (88–89%). In contrast, less wealthy nations face higher burdens. South Africa experiences 50,000 DALYs per 100,000, with communicable diseases accounting for 50%, non-communicable diseases 38%, and injuries 12%. India records about 38,000 DALYs per 100,000, with a mixed burden: 58% non-communicable, 31% communicable, and 11% injuries. Mexico sits in between with 28,000 DALYs, 75% of which are from non-communicable diseases. Globally, disease burdens have declined over time, especially for communicable diseases, thanks largely to medical advancements. Wealthier countries benefit from stronger health infrastructure, greater access to vaccines and treatments, and innovations that originated in the developed world—advantages closely tied to their economic status (Pinker 2018: 64). While some disparities may reflect structural inequalities, the gradual improvement in global health suggests a slow diffusion of medical knowledge and infrastructure to less-developed regions.

Natural disasters—earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, droughts, and others—often cause immediate destruction and long-term poverty. While their occurrence may be random, their impacts are disproportionately severe on vulnerable populations. The World Risk Report (Aleksandrova et al. 2021) assesses both the exposure of countries to disasters and the vulnerability of their populations. It reveals that wealthier nations like the US, UK, and Germany show medium exposure levels but low overall risk, primarily due to very low vulnerability; in contrast, countries like South Africa, Mexico, and India exhibit medium risk and medium exposure, while India is marked by a high vulnerability score, indicating that its population is less resilient to disasters' effects (Aleksandrova et al. 2021). Crucially, it's not that poorer countries face more disasters, but that they are less equipped to mitigate their consequences. As Pinker notes, “a richer and more technologically advanced society can prevent natural hazards from becoming human catastrophes” (2018: 187). Over the past century, global deaths from natural disasters have declined substantially—but this progress is uneven. Poorer nations still suffer the worst consequences, including economic losses and displacement, especially as climate change increases the frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

Geographical location also significantly shapes economic outcomes. Jared Diamond famously argued that Eurasia's east–west orientation facilitated the spread of agriculture, technology, and domesticable animals—thanks to shared climates and ecosystems—unlike Africa or the Americas, where a north–south axis hampered similar diffusion (1999: 93, cf. also Diamond 2006: 248). Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, lacks domesticable animals partly due to co-evolution with aggressive wild species (Diamond 1999: 170). Marshall adds a geopolitical dimension: geography influences a nation's priorities and capacities. Russia's flat terrain, lacking defensive mountain ranges, has left it vulnerable to invasions, while China's massive size and diversity historically encouraged internal consolidation over external engagement. Africa, despite a long coastline, lacks many natural harbors, and its rivers are largely unsuitable for large-scale transport—obstacles to trade and development (Marshall 2019: 42). Thus, geographical constraints have historically shaped the development trajectories of entire regions. Wars have been fought over fertile land, river access, and strategic locations, underscoring how crucial geography has always been in determining wealth or poverty. Today, these factors continue to play a role, affecting infrastructure development, trade routes, and access to natural resources.

Natural factors such as disease, disasters, and geography have profound and often unequal impacts on poverty. While progress in health and disaster mitigation has improved outcomes globally, poorer countries remain more vulnerable due to weaker infrastructure, limited resources, and geographical disadvantages. Understanding these natural contributors is essential to addressing poverty not merely as a result of individual or policy failures, but also as a complex interplay between environment, development, and resilience.

Poverty and Life-Phases

Poverty is not always a static condition; many individuals—especially in high-income countries—experience poverty during particular life-phases. Distinguishing between *stable* (persistent) and *transitory* (temporary) poverty helps clarify these dynamics. Stable poverty lasts over extended periods and is often rooted in structural issues. In contrast, transitory poverty reflects short-term hardship during specific phases of life (Gieselmann and Vandecasteele 2018: 72). High rates of transitory poverty can signal upward mobility within a society, while high rates of stable

poverty suggest structural inequalities and limited opportunity. Giesselmann and Vandecasteele note that the longer someone remains below the poverty line, the harder it becomes to escape it (*ibid.*: 73). While Germany mainly experiences transitory poverty, stable poverty is reportedly on the rise (*ibid.*: 74). Similarly, Rank and Hirschl find that in the US, most adults between the ages of 25 and 60 will experience at least one episode of poverty (2015: 1).

Understanding poverty through a life-phase lens helps identify both persistence and vulnerability. Certain life stages—such as entering the workforce, raising children, or retiring—are linked to greater economic risk. Over a century ago, Seeborn Rowntree observed that childhood, early family formation, and old age were periods of financial strain, while mid-life and child independence often correlated with improved economic stability (1901: 137). These patterns remain relevant today. Several key factors contribute to poverty during these life-phases. Young adults often start at the lower end of the job market and may lack family or state support. Parents of young children face increased costs and potential income loss, especially when one parent leaves the workforce. Retirement brings reduced income and rising healthcare expenses—pressures worsened by longer life expectancy and costly medical care. However, career progression and cohabitation can improve economic conditions through higher wages and shared expenses. When children become financially independent, parental household costs often decline. Research also shows that critical life events can intensify poverty risk. According to Giesselmann and Vandecasteele, unemployment, migration, and divorce (especially for females with children) are particularly destabilizing in adulthood (2018: 74). In the US, Sawhill and Rodrigue identify three statistically significant factors that reduce the likelihood of poverty in adulthood: completing high school, working full-time, and delaying parenthood until after age 21 and ideally within marriage (2018: 1–2).

While earlier sections discuss structural and group-based poverty, it is important to note that for many, poverty is temporary and tied to predictable life stages. Vulnerable populations, however, are more susceptible during these periods and often experience more persistent poverty. Though stable poverty tends to draw more attention, transitory poverty is more common in high-income societies. Life-phase poverty, affecting young adults, new parents, and the elderly, is often resolved as individuals move into more stable phases. Still, critical moments like illness or job loss can turn transitory poverty into long-term hardship. Therefore,

interpreting poverty statistics requires attention to both type and timing, as policy responses may differ depending on whether poverty is enduring or temporary.

POVERTY REDUCTION MEASURES

This section explores commonly proposed solutions to poverty, while also critically examining the challenges and unintended consequences they may entail. It operates on the foundational understanding that poverty is a deeply complex phenomenon, rooted in multiple, often intersecting causes, and that any effective response must be sensitive to specific local contexts. Consequently, broad or one-size-fits-all solutions risk being ineffective or even counterproductive.

A central issue in poverty alleviation is the frequent mismatch between intentions and outcomes. Well-meaning individuals, organizations, and governments are often influenced by an *action bias*, or the tendency to favor action over inaction, even when action may not improve the situation or may inadvertently worsen it. While taking action can create a sense of agency or moral comfort, it does not guarantee progress, particularly when the complexity of the problem is underestimated. Additionally, the relationship between causes and solutions is not always linear. Addressing the root causes of poverty may sometimes be infeasible or unnecessary for certain interventions to succeed. Effective solutions can arise even when the original causes remain unaddressed, and some actions may bring improvements despite—or even because of—bypassing causal factors.

This section therefore examines a range of approaches to poverty alleviation, not as definitive answers, but as strategies with varying degrees of effectiveness, depending on context. It begins with *self-help*, or the ways individuals and communities attempt to improve their own conditions. It then considers *charity*, including private donations of time, money, or resources. Next, it explores *social transfers*, where governments redistribute wealth to support vulnerable populations, and extends this logic to *foreign aid*—international transfers from wealthier to poorer nations. Following that, the discussion turns to the *economic production of wealth*, addressing the systemic conditions under which wealth is generated and redistributed. Finally, the section examines *migration*, a complex but often highly effective strategy for individuals seeking to escape poverty, albeit one that can produce significant tension and resistance in host societies. Throughout, the section emphasizes that no single approach offers

a universal remedy. Each must be critically assessed in light of its potential benefits, limitations, and the broader socio-political and economic structures in which it operates.

Self-Help

Self-help solutions to poverty refer to actions taken by individuals or their immediate communities—such as family, friends, or faith-based networks—to improve financial well-being. While often emphasized in public discourse, it is important to acknowledge both the opportunities as well as the limitations of self-help strategies, especially given the contextual, structural, and institutional constraints that many individuals face. This section explores both individual and community-level efforts while recognizing the challenges of relying solely on this approach.

Self-help at the individual level typically involves behaviors and choices that improve long-term economic stability. These include completing basic education (e.g., high school), securing and maintaining full-time employment, postponing parenthood until later in life and preferably within marriage, and avoiding behaviors that lead to incarceration or addiction. These guidelines align with those often cited in poverty research in high-income countries (see section on contributing factors to poverty in this chapter). Additional strategies include budgeting effectively, avoiding excessive debt, and saving for retirement. However, these approaches assume access to financial education, stable employment, and a supportive environment—conditions not equally available to all. In lower-income contexts, Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo note that poor households often spend disproportionately on non-essential goods, sometimes at the expense of food security, education, or health-care (2011: 36). This phenomenon—conspicuous *consumption*—is also observed in Western nations, where maintaining social appearance can divert resources from long-term investments (cf. Desmond 2016; Vance 2016). In Western Germany, about half of those considered income-poor are not living-standard poor, indicating that many low-income individuals prioritize maintaining certain living standards over financial planning (Andreß et al. 2018: 218). Regarding retirement, Vogel and Künemund warn of increasing old-age poverty and stress the growing importance of private savings as state pension systems weaken (2018: 149). Similarly, Giesselmann and Vandecasteele highlight divorce as a significant poverty

risk, especially for females, who typically take up to 18 years to regain pre-divorce economic stability (2018: 73). Living alone in old age, without shared household costs, also increases poverty risk. Although individual choices matter, they exist within a broader context of constraints. Still, for some, avoiding poverty may involve abstaining from harmful behaviors and adhering to socially endorsed norms that foster long-term security.

Communities can also play a key role in mitigating poverty. Strong social networks, especially among family and close friends, can provide emotional and material support in times of need. Research in Germany shows that low-income groups rely more on familial and neighborly ties than wealthier classes (Böhnke and Link 2018: 254). However, poverty can weaken these networks, leading to greater social homogeneity and isolation (ibid.: 251). Conversely, communities can also reinforce negative behaviors. The “neighborhood effect” suggests that living in impoverished areas may normalize detrimental habits or reduce exposure to opportunity (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 115; Keller 2018: 265). The erosion of traditional family structures is also cited as increasing vulnerability to poverty (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 137). Ultimately, while individual and communal efforts can support economic resilience, their effectiveness depends in part on broader social and structural conditions.

Charity

Charity is a widely recognized but also widely debated strategy for addressing poverty. On one hand, charitable giving provides immediate assistance to those in need and offers donors the opportunity to choose how, when, and to whom they give—often resulting in emotional satisfaction. On the other hand, significant criticisms exist regarding its long-term effectiveness, potential unintended consequences, and issues related to transparency and misuse of funds.

One of the most persistent criticisms of charity is that good intentions do not always translate into effective outcomes. In the 1970s, UNICEF-funded wells in Bangladesh were later found to contain harmful levels of heavy metals, leading to widespread health issues (Gottesfeld 2007). Similarly, across rural Africa, an estimated 50,000 charitable water projects failed due to lack of maintenance (Kelly 2009). Such examples reveal that charity often fails when it does not account for sustainability and local capacity. Another concern is dependency. Charitable initiatives can sometimes inhibit local economic development (cf. Kohler-Gehrig 2019:

162). The shoe company TOMS, for example, faced criticism for its “buy-one-give-one” model, which arguably discouraged the growth of local footwear industries. The company ultimately abandoned this approach (Hessikiel 2021). Critics argue that such efforts alleviate symptoms of poverty, but fail to address root causes, and may even exacerbate them. For instance, programs focused on vaccination in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., by the Gates Foundation) may unintentionally increase resource pressures in already strained communities due to short-term population growth (cf. Huet and Paun 2017). Charity of European food surpluses can justify the creation of such food surpluses at the cost of contributing to food shortages in hunger-stricken areas (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 162). Other critiques include the use of pity as a promotional tool. Ure (2006) questions whether appealing to pity is a sustainable or ethical foundation for prosocial behavior, suggesting it can erode dignity and foster resentment. Emotional appeals in advertisements often exploit the imagery of suffering, raising questions about the integrity of such campaigns. Charity can also be inefficient or mismanaged. Some organizations have high administrative costs, leaving little of the donation for actual aid. For instance, executives at major charities like the American Heart Association and Feed the Children have salaries exceeding \$1 million (Paddock 2025). Bono’s ONE Foundation came under fire for allocating less than 2% of raised funds to charitable causes (Daily Mail Reporter 2010). In the US, the problem of charity fraud is significant enough that the FBI has issued official warnings, especially during natural disasters and public crises (FBI 2025).

Despite its flaws, charity remains an essential lifeline in crises such as natural disasters, famine, or pandemics—contexts where rapid relief is vital. The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) has measured global charitable behavior using three indicators: helping a stranger, donating money, and volunteering. Between 2009 and 2018, the US ranked highest, followed by countries like the UK (7th), Germany (18th), and India (82nd) (Charities Aid Foundation 2019: 7). While charity is not a panacea for poverty, when implemented thoughtfully and ethically, it can play a valuable, if limited, role in alleviating immediate human suffering.

Social Spending and the Welfare State

In many developed countries, wealth is redistributed through taxes and allocated to those in need—a process known as social spending. According

to the OECD, this includes “cash benefits, direct in-kind provision of goods and services, and tax breaks with social purposes,” targeting groups such as low-income households, the elderly, the unemployed, and the disabled (OECD 2023b). As of 2019, the OECD average for social spending stood at 20.0% of GDP. Among selected countries, Germany reported the highest rate (29.9%), followed by the UK (20.6%), the USA (18.7%), Mexico (7.5%), and India (2.5%) (OECD 2023b; Pinker 2018: 109). Pinker, in addition, notes that social spending in the USA is actually considerably higher than this data shows because Americans pay health, retirement, and disability through their employers rather than the government (2018: 109). Historically, social spending expanded significantly with the US New Deal in the 1930s and in other developed countries after WWII, and as Pinker notes, rising national wealth is typically accompanied by increased social expenditure (2018: 108–109). However, there appear to be diminishing returns beyond a certain threshold: Well-being does not increase significantly once social spending exceeds approximately 25% of GDP (Pinker 2018: 110).

Critics highlight several challenges. Social spending can foster a “moral hazard,” reducing personal initiative and fostering dependency (Pinker 2018: 110). It may weaken both individual responsibility (Hübenthal 2018: 112) and broader social solidarity (Böhnke and Link 2018: 247). Intergenerational transmission of reliance on social benefits may also occur (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 150). Some argue the welfare state was designed primarily for the middle class (Kronauer 2018: 47) and can even entrench poverty, as seen in critiques of Germany’s Hartz IV system (Ehlert 2018: 189). Females, particularly mothers who remain at home, are at greater risk of poverty due to limited contributions to social insurance (Betzelt 2018: 106). Moreover, social transfers can obscure the structural roots of poverty. In Germany, poverty is measured after transfers (Vogel and Künemund 2018: 145), masking the fact that 37.7% of the population would fall below the poverty line beforehand—a figure that has been rising (Becker 2018: 306). Across Europe, one in four lives in poverty before transfers (Fritsch and Verwiebe 2018: 82). Kohler-Gehrig stresses that poverty is not solely a lack of financial resources; its causes are more complex (2019: 166).

The welfare state relies on societal cohesion, which historically stemmed from shared hardship (Kronauer 2018: 47). If this cohesion weakens, support may erode. Kohler-Gehrig warns that the German system risks dividing society and undermining trust, and she also points to

systemic inefficiencies, noting that overlapping or contradictory programs create confusion and excessive administrative costs—up to 20% in some cases (2019: 30). In sum, while social transfers are a key instrument in addressing poverty, they are neither sufficient nor unproblematic and must be evaluated alongside broader structural reforms.

Foreign Aid

Foreign aid is a widely used approach to reduce extreme poverty, typically involving high-income countries transferring resources to low- and middle-income nations. As with other proposed solutions, its effectiveness remains contested. One formal term for foreign aid is *Official Development Assistance* (ODA), defined by the OECD as government aid specifically targeting the economic development and welfare of developing countries (OECD 2025). ODA excludes military aid and commercially driven transactions. It comprises both development-focused and humanitarian assistance; in 2016, 27% of ODA went to humanitarian efforts in fragile contexts (OECD 2025). The United Nations recommends donor countries allocate 0.7% of their gross national income (GNI) to ODA, and as of 2020, the average contribution of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) members was only 0.32%—among countries discussed in this chapter, Germany met the target (0.73%), closely followed by the UK (0.70%), while the USA allocated just 0.17% (though the USA contributed the most in net terms—\$35.5 billion) (OECD 2025). On the receiving end, countries such as India, Mexico, and South Africa benefit from ODA. India received \$2.6 billion in 2019, Mexico \$971 million, and South Africa \$536 million, yet relative to GDP, these sums are modest: India received about 0.1% of its GDP in aid, South Africa 0.14%, and Mexico only 0.07% (World Bank Group 2025). This disparity highlights the limited economic impact per recipient, given the large number of countries receiving aid from a smaller group of donors.

Economic Production of Wealth

Prior to its global dominance, Europe—particularly in the Middle Ages—was relatively underdeveloped. Its transformation into an economic powerhouse is commonly attributed to the Industrial Revolution, along with the political and social changes that both enabled and were reinforced by it. Pinker emphasizes that the gross world product remained

minimal until around 1700, then surged dramatically from the late nineteenth century onward, reaching approximately \$110 trillion (international dollars) by 2015 (2018: 81). He also cautions against interpreting this growth purely in monetary terms, as it reflects the emergence of new goods and services—many of which were previously unimaginable—and whose costs have generally declined over time due to increased accessibility (2018: 81–82). Pinker credits this explosion of wealth largely to Enlightenment values, which paved the way for both the Agricultural and Industrial Revolutions (2018: 83). He describes this transition as the “great escape” of the West from poverty, which has increasingly become a “great convergence” as other regions catch up in economic development (2018: 85). David Landes similarly attributes Europe’s rise to industrialization, while also highlighting underlying enablers such as geography, historical contingencies, and institutional arrangements. He notes that countries that adopted industrialization early and supported it through appropriate economic policies experienced the sharpest gains in real GNP per capita (Landes 1999: 232).

Acemoglu and Robinson challenge geographic and exploitative explanations of wealth disparities. Through historical analysis, they argue that nations governed by elites who prioritized personal or class power over public prosperity were generally resistant to economic development, as it threatened their dominance (2013: 343). In contrast, they propose that the foundation of sustained economic growth lies in *inclusive institutions*—those that encourage broad participation in the economy, protect private property, ensure legal equality, and support open access to markets and careers (2013: 74–75). They further assert that inclusive economic institutions are underpinned by inclusive political institutions, or systems that distribute power widely and constrain its arbitrary use (2013: 82). Where political and economic institutions are extractive, focused on maintaining elite control, economic growth may occur but is often narrow, unstable, and unsustainable (2013: 124, 152). Colonial legacies illustrate how extractive institutions imposed externally can stunt development (2013: 245). Moreover, inclusive systems can regress over time if not safeguarded. Their research also suggests a robust link between democracy and prosperity: democratization leads to long-term increases in per capita GDP by an estimated 20–25% (Acemoglu et al. 2019: 74), reinforcing the importance of institutional quality in shaping economic outcomes.

Migration

Migration has long served as a human response to resource scarcity (cf. Mithen 2003), although the rise of the modern nation-state has reframed migration as disruptive or even unnatural. Historically, migration was often accompanied by violence and displacement but also facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas, and technologies (cf. Cunliffe 2008). One of the largest modern migrations occurred from Europe to the United States, with around 30 million Europeans migrating between 1850 and 1930 (World Bank Group 2018: 135)—a movement that coincided with the displacement and decimation of Native American populations.

Today, migration is generally framed more optimistically, as individuals leave middle-income countries for wealthier destinations in pursuit of better lives. Contrary to popular belief, most migrants do not originate from the poorest nations, since migration requires considerable resources. Instead, most come from middle-income countries (World Bank Group 2018: 117). Currently, 60% of global migration is concentrated in ten destination countries, primarily in North America, Europe, and high-income nations of the Middle East and North Africa (ibid.: 6). Despite frequent references to a “migration crisis,” the share of migrants in the global population has remained steady at around 3% (ibid.: 39). There is broad evidence that migration can offer substantial net economic benefits. Migrants often experience a three- to sixfold increase in income (ibid.: 1), lifting not only themselves but also their families and communities, often through remittances. Host countries benefit as well: migrants frequently fill labor shortages, particularly in low-skilled sectors, and provide services in domestic and care work that allow native-born females in wealthier households to enter the workforce (ibid.: 215). Migrants’ children often benefit from improved education, job opportunities, and enhanced social and cultural capital (Sowell 2005: 50).

Nonetheless, migration also poses challenges, particularly for receiving societies. Concerns include pressure on jobs and wages, strain on welfare systems, effects on crime and education, and questions of national identity. Migrants tend to cluster in specific regions and sectors, causing localized disruptions, particularly among low-skilled native-born workers who may experience displacement and wage stagnation (World Bank Group 2018: 2–3, 17). Immigrants often arrive with lower bargaining power and human capital, leading to wage gaps and higher poverty rates,

although these effects typically diminish over 10–20 years (*ibid.*: 190–191). There are also political and social tensions. Large-scale or irregular migration can be perceived as a threat to national cohesion or citizenship value, and these may be exploited by populist leaders (Hanson 2021: 80). Additionally, emigration may serve as a pressure valve for autocratic or dysfunctional states, reducing the need to address internal inequalities or unrest (Hanson 2021: 84). To address these complexities, the World Bank proposes policies that enhance the benefits of migration while minimizing disruptions. These include investments in education for low-skilled native-born workers, support for internal relocation, progressive taxation on those who profit from migration, and more equitable distribution of migrants across regions (World Bank Group 2018: 19–21). Better international coordination is also needed to manage flows more effectively and fairly (*ibid.*: 35). Beyond economics and logistics, migration raises ethical and legal questions. Should wealthier countries be morally or legally obligated to accept more migrants, even against domestic opposition? Should the expectation of openness extend to middle- and low-income countries or ethno-states as their economies grow? These unresolved issues reveal the tensions between human rights, national sovereignty, and global equity.

Migration patterns are not evenly distributed. The United States remains the top destination, attracting 21% of potential migrants (World Bank Group 2018: 51), with the largest inflows from Mexico. The US–Mexico migration corridor is the world’s largest, with 11.8 million migrants as of 2010 (*ibid.*: 131). Most are low-skilled and undocumented, leading to substantial costs related to border enforcement and deportation. Approximately 10% of Mexicans live in the US, sending back large amounts of remittances each year—money that leaves the US economy but supports millions in Mexico (McAuliffe et al. 2024: 37).³ The UK also attracts significant immigration: 16% of its population is foreign-born, with top source countries including India, Poland, Pakistan, Romania, and Ireland (Cuibus 2024: 2). London is a particularly concentrated hub, with 40% of its population born abroad (*ibid.*: 2). Immigrants in the UK are generally highly educated: 41% hold university degrees, compared to 25% of the native-born population (*ibid.*: 9). Germany is the second most popular destination for prospective migrants

³ The US is the largest source of remittance payments—\$79 billion in 2022, cf. McAuliffe et al. (2024: 37).

(World Bank Group 2018: 51), hosting about 15 million immigrants and sending out roughly 5 million (McAuliffe et al. 2024: 25). It ranks among the top countries for both sending and receiving remittances (ibid.: 37). Mexico, while primarily a source of emigration, has recently become a major transit and destination country. As US immigration restrictions tighten, many migrants are forced to remain in Mexico, where public sentiment toward immigrants—particularly from Central America, China, and Haiti—is often negative (Sánchez-Montijano and Ortega 2022: 12–15). Remittances, mostly from the US, remain Mexico’s single largest income source, with 61.10 billion USD in 2022 (McAuliffe et al. 2024: 37). In Africa, South Africa receives the highest number of migrants, primarily from neighboring countries such as Zimbabwe and Mozambique (Maluleke 2023: 7, 25–27). Though migration into South Africa due to poverty is seen as a major challenge (ibid.: 89), internal migration is seen as a key strategy for addressing poverty, particularly rural–urban movement (ibid.: 7). Finally, India is the world’s leading source country for emigrants, with around 12 million people abroad—most migrate to the UAE, US, or Saudi Arabia (McAuliffe et al. 2024: 25). Despite this, only 8% of Indians express a desire to migrate (World Bank Group 2018: 51). India is also the largest global recipient of remittances—\$111 billion in 2022 (McAuliffe et al. 2024: 37).

In sum, migration is both a cause and a consequence of global inequality. While it can significantly reduce poverty and offer economic gains to both migrants and host societies, it also introduces social, economic, political, and ethical tensions. Migration often serves as a personal solution to poverty, but addressing its broader impacts requires coordinated, context-sensitive policy and serious public dialogue.

In conclusion, addressing global poverty—whether through education, policy, or action—requires acknowledging its inherent complexity and resisting oversimplified narratives. As this chapter has shown, poverty is not a singular or universally understood phenomenon but is shaped by diverse historical, cultural, spatial, and political factors. Effective teaching on this topic must therefore go beyond encouraging immediate action, instead fostering critical thinking, contextual understanding, and informed decision-making. Without such a foundation, well-meaning efforts risk being misguided or even harmful. By examining definitions, measurements, framings, contributing factors, and poverty reduction measures, this chapter has aimed to equip the reader with a nuanced understanding of poverty—one that supports not only meaningful

engagement with the issue, but also the development of autonomous, reflective, and responsible global citizens.

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PART II

EFL Global Poverty Education—A German
Case Study



CHAPTER 4

Research Methodology

Chapter 2 reviewed existing theory surrounding global poverty education, assessed the current state of research, and identified key research gaps. It concluded that international research on global poverty education is limited, particularly within the German context. Existing studies typically focus on textbooks to the exclusion of teacher perspectives, often address poverty as one issue among many (limiting investigative depth), and frequently lack a robust foundation in broader poverty research—including its global manifestations, causes, and potential solutions. Chapter 3 addressed this gap by providing a closer examination of poverty research, establishing a framework for interpreting textbook representations of poverty and teacher perspectives in light of current scholarship. This chapter begins by presenting the specific research questions guiding the empirical investigation, followed by a detailed explanation of the textbook and teacher selection process. Finally, it outlines the methodology employed for data collection and analysis.

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Chapters 2 and 3 explored the role of global poverty education within (FL) pedagogy, alongside the inherent complexities of the topic as a research subject and global phenomenon. Building on this foundation, this section outlines the interconnected research interests that will guide

the empirical phase of this study. The theoretical groundwork laid in Chapters 2 and 3 leads to two central conclusions: first, that global poverty is a core component of ESD and global citizenship education, firmly embedded within German EFL policies and curricula, with a clear emphasis on learner action in support of the Sustainable Development Goals; and second, that critical scholarship highlights challenges related to topic complexity, conceptual consensus, and learner autonomy, potentially creating tensions between ESD's aims and other educational objectives such as knowledge acquisition and avoiding undue political influence.

These observations translate into core research interests concerning how global poverty is addressed in German EFL classrooms and the degree to which current practices align with the goals of ESD, acknowledging the inherent complexities of the subject matter. Specifically, this study investigates three interconnected interests: first, the representation of poverty in German EFL textbooks, focusing on their complexity and realism; second, the intended learning goals of global poverty education, and whether they enable learners to take action; and third, the reflective potential of global poverty education, and its contribution to developing independent thought and critical decision-making skills.

It is important to note that this research operates under the premise that definitive answers to these interests are not attainable. Instead, the project aims to provide robust evidence regarding the extent to which EFL pedagogy in Germany meets the standards and ideals identified in Chapter 2. To gather this evidence, the empirical investigation will focus on two key actors within German EFL education—textbooks and teachers—both of which, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, exert significant influence on learner outcomes. The following subsections detail the specific research questions guiding the investigation of each.

Textbook Research Interests

Chapter 2 established the central role textbooks play in foreign language education, as teachers rely heavily on them for content and students perceive them as authoritative sources of information, shaping their understanding of the social world. Consequently, textbooks significantly influence not only what learners acquire but also how they view social realities. This leads to the overarching research question: *Do German EFL textbooks support the goals of ESD?*

However, this question necessitates further clarification. To effectively assess this alignment, this study addresses a further question: *Are the textbook representations of global poverty complex and realistic?* Complexity and realism are inextricably linked, as Chapter 3 highlighted the multifaceted nature of poverty—its diverse conceptions, geographic variations, historical contexts, and multiple contributing factors. A complex representation is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for realistic global poverty education. Complexity implies differentiation in variables and categories representing poverty according to factors like location, time, and demographic groups. Realism, in this context, means the textbook's portrayal of complexity aligns with research findings on poverty, prioritizing proportional representation of variables and categories. A textbook focusing solely on urban poverty, for example, without acknowledging its limitations, would be considered unrealistic and potentially misleading, even if complex in its internal differentiation.

Beyond accurate representation, this research also investigates the knowledge and skills textbooks aim to impart. This leads to the second key research question: *Do the activities associated with the presentation of poverty in German EFL textbooks support the ESD competency model as presented by the Curriculum Framework?* This question focuses on whether learners are provided with knowledge, engage in evaluation processes, and are encouraged to take action related to global poverty.

Furthermore, recognizing criticisms of ESD presented in Chapter 2, this study also asks: *Does the presentation and teaching of global poverty in German EFL textbooks support critical reflection on global poverty—both in its definition as a problem and potential solutions?* The goal of addressing this question is to assess whether textbooks promote independent thinking and avoid manipulating learners into possibly supporting specific political agendas without informed consent. Engaging students in critical reflection on sustainable development programs and policies is seen as a crucial component of effective ESD.

Finally, to address the potential for overgeneralization, the textbook study considers the influence of context: *Are the overall findings skewed by specific school contexts (like school form or publisher), or do they represent more general trends experienced by learners?* Identifying common approaches across contexts could reveal broader, implicit views or ideologies influencing global poverty education in Germany. In conclusion, gathering data in response to these questions aims to determine whether German EFL textbooks represent global poverty with complexity and

realism, engage learners in competency development that promotes action, and encourage critical reflection.

Research Interest for Teacher Interviews

Chapter 2 highlighted the significant influence teachers have on learners and their performance, as well as the substantial role teacher beliefs play in shaping their instructional practices. Consequently, investigating teachers' beliefs offers valuable insight into how they approach global poverty education and how this aligns with dominant educational theories and perspectives. The overarching research question guiding this interview study is: *What are teachers' beliefs about teaching global poverty in the EFL classroom, and how do these beliefs align with the goals of ESD?*

Similar to the textbook research, this overarching question can be subdivided into more specific questions to facilitate a focused investigation. First, the study seeks to understand whether teachers generally support the inclusion of global poverty education in their classroom teaching. This is explored through the questions: *Do teachers believe in teaching global poverty in the EFL classroom, and what are their reasons for these beliefs?* Next, the research investigates teacher beliefs concerning the core dimensions of the ESD competency model—recognizing, evaluating, and acting—to identify any variations in perspectives and values. This leads to the question: *How do teacher beliefs about teaching poverty relate to the ESD competency model, and to critical reflection on global poverty education? What are the reasons underpinning these beliefs?* These questions focus on teachers' general beliefs about global poverty education, but do not yet address their relationship with specific instructional materials. Therefore, the final primary question asks: *What role do textbooks play in teachers' beliefs about teaching global poverty?* This aims to uncover how textbooks are utilized, perceived, and potentially integrated (or not) into their instructional practices. As an additional area of interest, the study will explore potential trends differentiating the perspectives of teachers from *Gymnasium* and *Realschule*, mirroring the differentiation employed in the textbook sample. While a small sample size limits definitive conclusions, exploring these potential differences offers valuable insights.

The findings from these interviews will provide a deeper understanding of teachers' approaches to global poverty education, inform future research and development efforts to support educators in this

area, and contextualize the textbook research findings by illuminating the interaction between teachers and instructional materials concerning global poverty education.

DATA COLLECTION AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As previously stated, this study cannot provide definitive answers to the overarching research questions. Similar to refining the broad research interest into specific, testable questions, these questions must be addressed within the scope of available evidence. Therefore, while the focus is on how global poverty is taught in German EFL classrooms at the secondary level I, this study's investigation is limited to textbooks and teachers within *Gymnasium* and *Realschule* settings. Consequently, the findings will not represent all EFL textbooks or teachers in Germany, but rather offer insights from carefully selected, manageable samples. This approach balances the need for rigorous research with the practical constraints of limited resources. The size and composition of a research sample are often determined by resource availability, access to the field, and potential gatekeepers limiting that access (cf. Grum & Legutke 2022: 85–86). Various sampling strategies exist to navigate these constraints and maintain research quality. The following subsections detail the decisions regarding the sample selection, specifically concerning the chosen school levels and forms, the textbooks analyzed, and the teachers interviewed.

School Level and Forms in the German Education System

The German school system is diverse, with multiple levels and forms catering to varied student needs. Compulsory education is divided into primary (grades 1–4) and secondary I (grades 5–10). While primary school is largely uniform, secondary I offers different pathways, most notably through *Hauptschule*, *Realschule*, and *Gymnasium*. *Hauptschule* prepares students for vocational training and apprenticeships, often culminating in an internship. *Gymnasium* focuses on academic preparation for university. *Realschule* occupies a middle ground, preparing students for more skilled professions than trades, but typically not direct university entry—often leading to professional or technical training. *Gymnasium* extends to grades 12 or 13, with the final exam qualifying students for higher education. Other school forms exist, like the *Gesamtschule*, which combines pathways within one institution.

Given this complexity, this project's sampling strategy prioritized maximizing relevance with the fewest data sources, focusing on the secondary level where English language competency is generally sufficient to engage with complex topics like global poverty. Therefore, the study limits its scope to secondary 1 and specifically to *Realschule* and *Gymnasium*. Three key reasons support the focus on secondary 1: First, students at this level typically possess the language skills needed to discuss global poverty. Second, curricula explicitly address topics conducive to teaching global issues. Third, as part of compulsory education, nearly all students are exposed to this level, making the topic relevant across a broad population. Excluding secondary 2 (*Gymnasium* upper levels) was intentional, as it represents a smaller student population and findings would be less comparable to other school forms. The selection of *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* was further motivated by their combined majority enrollment. According to 2016/17 national statistics, *Gymnasium* students account for 34.2% of the secondary 1 population, and *Realschule* students represent 20.6% (Destatis 2018: 13). Together, these two school forms encompass over half of all secondary 1 students. This focused selection—secondary 1, *Realschule*, and *Gymnasium*—allows for a significant sample while representing the most popular and diverse school forms, ultimately maximizing the relevance of the research to the largest number of students. This project concentrates on textbooks and teacher perspectives as meaningful sources of data within this context.

Textbooks as Data Source

As established in Chapter 2, textbooks are central to FL education, widely used by teachers and significantly shaping learner acquisition of knowledge, perspectives, and socially legitimized practices. This project's textbook selection mirrored the school-level sampling logic: prioritize relevance and impact with the fewest sources possible.

The analysis focused on secondary 1 textbooks from three major German publishers—*Klett*, *Cornelsen*, and *Diesterweg*—for both *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* levels. These publishers were chosen based on their long-standing presence in the EFL market and reported high sales/classroom usage (Müller 2021: 57, Pandarova et al. 2019: 352, Hammer 2012: 95). One textbook line per publisher and school form was selected, resulting in a total of six lines. While publishers offer variations based on federal state curricula, these differences are often minor.

The study specifically analyzed textbook lines sold in Lower Saxony due to the researcher's local access. To maximize comparability, the most recently revised editions were chosen (at the time of data collection, 2013–2019), ensuring a consistent basis for analysis. This yielded a total of 36 textbooks (6 lines x 6 grade levels). This selection resulted in *Klett's Red Line* series for *Realschule*, and *Green Line* for *Gymnasium*. For *Cornelsen*, the study focused on *Headlight* for *Realschule* and *Access* for *Gymnasium*. Finally, for *Diesterweg*, *Camden Town* was selected for *Realschule*, and *Camden Market* for *Gymnasium*.

The primary unit of analysis was the task—typically comprising input (text/image) and associated activities. The analysis did not focus on supplemental material (grammar explanations, writing guides) as these aren't consistently integrated into classroom teaching. Only tasks containing evidence of poverty—explicit statements or implicit indicators like depictions of inadequate living conditions—were selected for further analysis. This resulted in 455 poverty tasks across the selected textbooks.

Teacher Perspectives on Poverty Education

Recognizing the substantial role teachers play in contextualizing curricula and shaping classroom learning, this study investigated teacher perspectives on teaching poverty in EFL classrooms. An interview study was chosen to allow for nuanced understanding of these perspectives, utilizing open-ended questions and follow-up cues to encourage detailed responses (Cohen et al. 2007: 351). The interviews also provided qualitative context to complement the textbook analysis' predominantly quantitative approach (Kuckartz 2014: 46–47). A semi-structured format minimized interviewer bias (Misoch 2019: 65). However, interview studies admittedly have limitations. Smaller sample sizes restrict the generalizability of findings (Denscombe 2010: 195), and the social context of interviews can influence responses, potentially leading to socially desirable answers (Misoch 2019: 231).

Eleven teachers were recruited via convenience and snowball sampling (Misoch 2019: 207). Three served as pilots to refine the interview guidelines. The final analysis focused on eight interviews: four *Realschule* and four *Gymnasium* teachers, reflecting the corresponding textbook analysis sample. This balanced selection aimed for representativeness across the secondary 1 level and facilitated comparison between school forms. The sample comprised six female and two male teachers, equally distributed

across school forms. Four teachers had migrant backgrounds, three born outside of Germany, also evenly distributed. All teachers worked in the German federal states of Lower Saxony and North Rhine-Westphalia.

The interviews followed a semi-structured guideline based on the study's research interests, focusing on beliefs and perspectives about poverty education. Sessions lasted on average 1.5 hours. Interviews were individual, starting with rapport-building and progressing from simple to complex questions. Participants were encouraged to elaborate, and given the opportunity to ask questions at the end. All interviews were voice-recorded.

Supplementary Interview with Chief Editor

In addition to the main datasets of the textbooks and teacher interviews, a short supplementary interview was conducted with the chief editor of one of the major English textbook publishers in Germany. To ensure anonymity, the name of the editor and the publishing company are not disclosed here. The purpose of this interview was not to generate a separate body of data for systematic analysis, but rather to provide contextual insight into the findings of the German case study. Specifically, the discussion that resulted from the interview focused on possible reasons that make the German case study distinctive within the global research and teaching landscape, as well as on considerations that underline its broader relevance for international research on textbook design and use concerning ESD. Selected insights from this interview are referenced in part 3 of this book, where they help to contextualize some of the major findings and their implications.

Ethics Approval

The interview studies were performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, as well as the local guidelines for ethical research on people, as set by the *German Association of Foreign Language Research* (DGFF 2019). Namely, all participants were adults and were provided with an informational letter as well as a consent form in advance of all interviews. The letter informed participants of the study aims, that anonymity would be upheld (of both their persons and their employing institutions), that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequence, that

the findings of the interviews would be published, and finally that any collected data about their person would be stored safely.

Empirical Research Design

To address the research interests outlined in the beginning of this chapter, a mixed-methods approach was employed to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research. A quantitative research design was prioritized for the initial analysis of EFL textbooks to establish a more objective and broadly applicable understanding of how global poverty is represented and taught in German classrooms. This approach aims for an etic perspective, prioritizing data-driven insights and minimizing researcher bias (cf. Schramm 2022: 52). However, recognizing the limitations of quantitative methods—specifically their potential lack of explanatory depth—a qualitative component was integrated to provide richer context and emic perspectives. Therefore, the textbook analysis utilizes a sequential explanatory design. The initial quantitative analysis of global poverty representation served as a foundation for a subsequent, focused qualitative investigation of specific themes identified as particularly relevant to the research questions (Schramm 2022: 55). In this design, the quantitative analysis is more comprehensive, with the qualitative analysis used to explain and elaborate on emergent findings.

Acknowledging that textbooks do not solely determine classroom practice—educational outcomes are shaped by the interplay between teachers, materials, and learners (cf. Chapter 2)—teacher interviews were conducted to contextualize the textbook analysis. These interviews aimed to understand teachers' beliefs and perspectives regarding global poverty education in foreign language teaching. This qualitative data collection method allows for the interpretation of how textbook content might be integrated into practice. The interviews also explore the reciprocal relationship between teacher perspectives and textbook design. To integrate these elements, a parallel/triangular design was adopted. Findings from both the textbook analysis and the teacher interviews are intended to complement each other, providing a more holistic understanding of global poverty education in German foreign language teaching (cf. Schramm 2022: 56). The following sections detail the methodology for both the textbook analysis and the teacher interviews—including coding and analytical procedures—to further clarify the research design and the relationship between the employed methods.

TEXTBOOK CODING AND ANALYSIS

The following section explains the coding and the analysis of the selected textbooks. It reviews the process of coding as well as the resulting categories, codes, and their exact meanings—so how the codes relate to specific poverty-related phenomena that appeared in the textbooks. Next, the section addresses the analysis of the coded data—both for the quantitative investigation as well as the qualitative. For the qualitative investigation, the reasons for a qualitative analysis in addition to the quantitative will be explained, as well as the sampling procedure applied there, and the procedure for the analysis.

Textbook Coding

The quantitative analysis of the textbooks enables the identification of patterns and relationships between variables, as well as comparisons with existing research on global poverty. Specifically, frequency and relational analyses allow for an examination of how poverty is portrayed and taught—whether this varies by country, demographic group, time period, or type of poverty—and how realistic these portrayals are. Where possible, findings are differentiated by school form and publisher to assess consistency and generalizability. Recurring patterns are analyzed as potential focal points or biases to understand how German EFL textbooks represent global poverty, and how these representations align with the aims of EFL teaching and global citizenship education.

The coding process for 455 selected textbook tasks involved systematically collecting categorical data (Field 2018: 837) across three areas: textbook metadata, representations of poverty, and learning goals. Metadata included school form (*Realschule* or *Gymnasium*), publisher (*Klett*, *Cornelsen*, or *Diesterweg*), and grade level (5–10). Poverty representation data covered type (e.g., indicators of poverty or extremity), setting (time/place), affected groups (e.g., age, race, gender), and causes or solutions. Representational aspects were also coded, such as the source of material (authentic vs. textbook-produced) and perspective (e.g., those in poverty, aid providers, third parties). Learning goals were categorized using the ESD competency model (*recognizing*, *assessing*, *acting*), with an additional category for grammar-focused tasks.

Poverty representation was the most category-rich section of the coding. Categories were initially derived from the literature in Chapter 3

and refined during the coding process. Some variables were binary, while others required binning due to small sample sizes. For instance, individual developing countries were grouped under “developing countries” due to infrequency. Australia, as a rare setting, was included under “developed countries,” along with references to “the West” or “Europe.” In total, 42 variables were used in coding.

The coding enabled both descriptive and co-occurrence analyses—especially regarding country and regional variations. This supported the investigation of whether textbook portrayals of poverty varied systematically by location, time, area (urban/rural), demographics, causality or solutions. Integrating metadata, representational, and learning goal data allowed for comparisons across school forms, publishers, perspectives, and ESD competence areas. Importantly, the coding table also aided in identifying the 455 tasks, as many poverty representations were implicit. This required high-inference coding of poverty type, representation, and learning goals. To ensure reliability, all tasks were reviewed and re-coded seven times. This iterative process produced consistent results, offering confidence in the intra-rater reliability of the coding (cf. Cohen et al. 2007: 271).

How textbooks presented poverty was coded. The analysis concentrates on three major dimensions: the setting of poverty (when and where it occurs), the people affected by poverty (focusing on aspects such as gender, race, age, and family structure), and the types of poverty that are depicted (based on both labeling and the presence of key indicators). Each of these dimensions was operationalized through specific categories and codes during the content analysis. The following discussion explains these variables and outlines the coding decisions that shaped the data collection and interpretation.

Understanding the setting of poverty involves exploring its geographic and temporal dimensions—specifically where and when poverty is depicted in the sampled materials. The analysis distinguished between two spatial variables: “place,” referring to the geopolitical location of poverty, and “area,” referring to the urban or rural character of the setting. In cases where textbooks identified specific countries, those were coded directly. Frequent appearances justified coding nations like the USA, the United Kingdom (including England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland), and South Africa as individual units. In instances where exact locations were absent, broader regions or economic groupings were coded—such as the Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, or South Asia. To simplify and standardize

the analysis, less commonly mentioned or ambiguous settings were grouped under the categories of “developing countries” or “developed countries.” These categories drew on definitions from sources such as the International Monetary Funds (IMF) and the United Nations (UN), with “developing countries” typically including Latin American, African, and Asian nations, and “developed countries” including nations like Australia and those within the broader Western or industrialized world. This binning of places helped to reduce complexity and ensure meaningful statistical comparisons, particularly given the smaller frequency of certain settings. The rural/urban divide was another important factor in coding the context of poverty. Tasks were categorized as “urban” if the poverty depicted occurred in cities or towns, and “rural” if it occurred in countryside settings. This information was gleaned from both textual descriptions and accompanying visual material. In cases where both rural and urban elements appeared in a single task, this was recorded but excluded from comparative frequency counts. Importantly, the analysis treated references to slums, shantytowns, or townships as urban settings—even if located on city margins—because these areas are typically defined as urban by demographic and policy organizations.

In addition to location, the textbooks were also analyzed in terms of the time period in which poverty was portrayed. Initial coding differentiated between various historical periods (e.g., early twentieth century, nineteenth century, and so on), but for analytical purposes, these were later grouped into a binary classification: “contemporary” (referring to twenty-first-century poverty) and “past” (referring to any time prior to the twenty-first century). The term “contemporary” here includes any representations that are likely still relevant to the lived experience of learners today. In contrast, “past” encompasses all examples clearly situated in earlier centuries and outside current contexts.

Beyond setting, the portrayal of individuals affected by poverty is central to understanding the textbook narrative. This portion of the analysis considers whether the textbooks offer a differentiated picture of poverty based on demographic characteristics and family structures, which can affect how learners interpret vulnerability and social inequality. The gender of those depicted as poor was recorded whenever the material allowed for such classification. If tasks depicted multiple people with different genders but no discernible focus on either, gender was marked as non-specified. The purpose of this variable was to determine whether either males or females were more prominently associated with poverty,

and to assess whether poverty was gendered in any systematic way across the materials.

Racial identity was another demographic characteristic considered, though it was coded only in specific geopolitical contexts where race is a particularly salient social factor—namely the USA, the UK, and South Africa. These locations were selected because of their histories of colonialism and racial stratification, which make race a significant factor in understanding poverty representation. Racial identity was coded as either “person of European descent” or “person of color,” depending on visual and textual cues. Where both people of European descent and people of color in poverty appeared in a single task, or where racial identification was unclear, the variable was not coded. Australia was excluded from the racial coding because of the limited number of cases (12 in total), though it is noteworthy that all of these focused on Aboriginal Australians. Age distinctions were simplified into two categories: “non-adult” and “adult.” Non-adults included children and teenagers, while adults included working-age individuals and the elderly. Old-age was originally treated separately but was eventually merged with the adult category due to the limited number of instances. Visual representations and text-based descriptions were both used to infer age. When both non-adults and adults appeared in a task, non-adults were typically coded, especially when children were the central focus. High familial dependency (HFD) captured whether individuals were depicted in family situations that are considered to heighten vulnerability to poverty. HFD was coded when textbook tasks included references to single-parent households, families with three or more dependent children, or orphaned children. HFD was coded as a binary variable—either present or not—to ensure clarity and maximize the statistical usability of the data.

In addition to identifying who is poor and where and when poverty occurs, the analysis also focused on how poverty is characterized. This involved examining both explicit labels and indicators used to signal material or social deprivation. The labels assigned to poverty within textbook texts were coded into two categories: “poor” and “very poor.” The former included general terms like “poor” or “poverty,” while the latter included more intense descriptions such as “extremely poor,” “absolute poverty,” or “no money.” Although such terms can be ambiguous and are often used imprecisely in everyday language, they nonetheless signal different intensities of deprivation and were treated as distinct

codes for the purposes of analysis. The study identified six key indicators used in textbooks to describe poverty in more nuanced ways. It measured work poverty, which included lack of employment, child labor, or exploitative working conditions (e.g., long hours, low pay). It addressed educational poverty, which captured reduced or absent access to schooling, such as quitting early or receiving lower-quality education. It also included housing poverty, which involved references to homelessness, overcrowding, inadequate shelter, or poor infrastructure (e.g., lack of electricity or running water). Food poverty reflected conditions like hunger, food insecurity, undernourishment, or famine, while health poverty distinguished between problematic health (e.g., addiction, chronic stress) and severe health issues (e.g., illness, lack of healthcare services). Both were grouped under a single binary variable. Finally, material deprivation was coded to reflect limited access to non-survival goods (e.g., clothing, belongings). Although EU criteria for material deprivation (e.g., access to meat, leisure travel) could not be applied due to missing data, related cues in the textbooks were used to code for this variable. In order to determine how severely poverty was depicted, each textbook task was also coded by the number of indicators it included. Tasks with one or two indicators were categorized as “low indicator” instances, while those with three or more were classified as “high indicator” tasks. This allowed the study to evaluate not just whether poverty was present, but whether it was presented as a complex, multidimensional, and more severe issue.

The coding framework applied in this study enables a systematic and layered analysis of how poverty is portrayed in German EFL textbooks. By examining the setting, demographics, and characteristics of poverty, this approach reveals key patterns in representation and potential biases in educational materials. These insights are particularly relevant for evaluating the degree to which these textbooks align with the principles of ESD, which call for the critical engagement of learners with global challenges such as inequality and poverty. A nuanced and accurate portrayal of poverty is essential not only for fostering global awareness, but also for empowering students to think critically and compassionately about the world they live in.

The analysis also addressed contributing factors to poverty—that is, the individuals, groups, or forces identified in textbooks as causing or exacerbating poverty. Additional variables of *place* and *time* were also applied to contextualize whether these factors were portrayed as foreign or local, and whether they occurred in the past or present. Agents were

identified using a bottom-up coding process, resulting in four main categories: people of European descent, economically powerful, society, and other. People of European descent included references to “whites” or “historical Europeans,” typically in the context of colonial or racialized poverty in present-day or the historical United Kingdom, the USA, South Africa, and Australia. Economically powerful encompassed individuals and institutions labeled as “rich,” “wealthy,” or “noble,” as well as business-related actors such as banks, corporations, industry, and credit card companies. Society was a broad and sometimes vague category, including civil society (“we,” “media,” “war,” “cultural practices,” “consumers”), government (“government,” “police”), and economic structures (“unemployment,” “low wages,” “expensive cities”). These attributions reflect societal-level forces and will be explored further in the qualitative analysis. The category of other included low-frequency subcategories related to self-induced causes (e.g., substance abuse, family decisions, parental absence) and natural causes (e.g., natural disasters, geography, disease). These were combined due to their similarly low frequencies (11 and 12 instances, respectively). Each instance of contributing factor was also coded for its associated time and place to enable later testing of relational patterns. A qualitative analysis of how these factors act upon or influence poverty will be provided in Chapter 5.

Also investigated was the variable of *poverty reduction measures*—that is, who or what is portrayed as solving or reducing poverty. Information on *place* was also collected to assess whether solutions are presented as local or foreign. Textbook data was analyzed to identify the individuals or institutions depicted as helping to reduce poverty—referred to here as *helpers*. The coding process identified four main categories of helpers: The category of charity includes teenagers, adults, the general public, and charitable organizations that rely on individual action or donations to assist those in poverty. Government refers to local or national government agencies, or the government more generally, as providers of aid or intervention. Migration describes cities, regions, or countries that offer improved living conditions, thereby requiring people in poverty to migrate in order to escape their circumstances. This solution depends on the initiative of the individual or group in poverty. Finally, self-help involves individuals or communities affected by poverty taking their own corrective action to improve their situation. In addition to identifying the *poverty reduction measure*, the presence of a measure was coded as a binary variable to enable further relationship testing. The *location* of each

solution was also recorded to examine whether places depicted as experiencing poverty are also shown to generate their own solutions or are dependent on external sources of aid.

Textbook *staging* of poverty was also analyzed including the *input source* and the *input perspective*. These categories examine how poverty is presented and whose voices are heard in the selected textbook tasks. Input source was coded into four main categories. Many poverty tasks featured texts that appeared to be created specifically for the textbook. If a text lacked source attribution and no external match could be found through online searches, it was coded as *textbook input*. When such input conveyed factual information (e.g., about Aboriginal Australians), it was labeled *textbook factual*. If the text presented fictional, often narrative-based content (e.g., a story about a Bangladeshi girl), it was coded as *textbook fictional*. Texts that were clearly sourced from outside the textbook—such as novels, films, news articles, or websites—were labeled *real input*, further divided into *real fiction* (e.g., a short story or film excerpt) and *real non-fiction* (e.g., a news article). These were typically accompanied by source references, though online verification was used when sources were missing. Tasks using real images alongside fictional narratives were still coded as *fictional*, since the text was the focal point of analysis. Finally, perspectives were coded based on direct or indirect speech and authorship. Five categories emerged: *patient* (a person experiencing poverty), *helper* (individuals or organizations offering support), *agent* (those causing or exacerbating poverty), *3rd person* (narrator or neutral observer), and *patient and helper* (both perspectives present). Agent perspectives appeared only in combination with others, and 3rd person was only coded when no other voices were present.

Also investigated were the variables of teaching poverty, or how textbooks engage learners with the topic of poverty through *activity type* and *activity focus*. Activities were analyzed in relation to the ESD competence areas: *recognizing*, *assessing*, and *acting* (cf. Chapter 2). The first category of activity type, *information-based* activities, includes tasks that ask learners to extract facts, identify characters, or access background knowledge. These tasks may involve forming opinions prior to reading, without engaging with the poverty input. They align with the *recognizing* competence area. The second category, *information processing*, includes tasks that require higher-level cognitive engagement, such as analyzing cause-effect relationships, summarizing, or reorganizing information. Creative

tasks were also included here—unless they encouraged empathy or real-world application. Though related to *recognizing*, these involve more advanced processing and therefore were distinguished from simple information gathering activities. The third category, *empathy/opinion*, corresponds to the *assessing* competence. These activities ask learners to change perspective, empathize with characters, or react emotionally to poverty. Despite being a high-inference category, these tasks show substantial potential to build emotional and ethical understanding. Also included here are tasks requiring students to form and justify opinions or evaluate situations based on the text. *Potential action* tasks, related to the *acting* competence, invite learners to consider real-world responses to poverty. While none required action beyond the classroom, they encouraged students to think about their role in addressing global issues. Only when activities explicitly reflected possible social engagement were they included here. A fifth category tracked *grammar and vocabulary* tasks. Though not part of the ESD model, they may support ESD goals by reinforcing language around poverty or implicitly framing perspectives through linguistic choices. Each textbook task typically includes an input text and multiple instructions, each coded individually. Tasks could therefore be coded across multiple activity types. Proportions and order of activities were not analyzed—only their presence. To refine analysis further, a second layer of coding examined whether activities directed attention to the *patient* (those in poverty), *helper*, *agent*, or both patient and helper. A fourth category, *other*, was used when activities lacked clear focus or referenced unrelated elements. This coding helps assess how actively activities engage learners with the core dimensions of poverty presented in the input.

Finally, this study documented contextual information about the textbooks in the sample, including the school type for which each textbook was designed, the publisher of the textbook series, and the intended grade levels. Specifically, the coding procedure recorded whether each poverty task appeared in a textbook designed for *Gymnasium* or *Realschule*, whether the textbook was published by *Klett*, *Cornelsen*, or *Diesterweg/Westermann*, and whether it was intended for grades five through ten—covering the full range of grade levels represented in the sampled German EFL textbooks.

Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

The quantitative coding of EFL textbook poverty tasks enabled a two-pronged investigation: determining the overall frequency of poverty-related aspects and examining associations between these aspects, particularly across countries, regions, and time periods. Analyzing frequencies revealed broad trends in the representation and learning of poverty, which were then compared to existing poverty research to assess realism and identify potential biases in the textbooks' focus. Specifically, the analysis aimed to determine whether textbooks accurately reflect real-world poverty trends or skew the understanding of poverty by emphasizing certain aspects while neglecting others. This was achieved through chi-square testing to identify significant associations between variables, revealing how textbook representations vary based on contextual factors. This process directly addresses the central research questions outlined in earlier in this chapter.

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS crosstab functions, following the methodology outlined by Field (2018: 852). Pearson's chi-square test was employed to assess associations between categorical variables, with Cramer's V used to quantify the strength of these associations, given the multi-category nature of many variables (Field 2018: 841). Effect sizes were interpreted using Cohen's conventions: small effect ($d \geq 0.1$), medium effect ($d \geq 0.3$), and large effect ($d \geq 0.5$) (Sedlmeier and Renkewitz 2018: 560). To ensure statistical validity, the significance of findings was determined using p-values, with a threshold of $p \leq 0.05$ indicating statistical significance (Field 2018: 73). Tasks with p-values exceeding 0.05 were considered non-significant. The "compare column proportions" function in SPSS was utilized to assess the significance of differences between categories, particularly relevant when dealing with variables featuring more than two categories (Field 2018: 855). Fischer's Exact Test was used to confirm sufficient sample size for chi-square approximation, with a cutoff of 20% for expected frequencies (Field 2018: 839).

The analysis yielded two types of conclusions. First, the frequencies provide insights into general focal points regarding poverty representation, allowing for a comparison with poverty research (Chapter 3). For example, if research indicates that most global poverty is rural, a higher frequency of urban poverty representation in textbooks would suggest

a potential bias. Second, association testing reveals whether poverty is differentiated across variables, for example like space and time.

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis to understand how global poverty is presented in textbooks. While the quantitative analysis provided a broad overview, a deeper qualitative analysis was undertaken to address two key limitations: insufficient detail regarding the causes of and solutions to poverty, and difficulty systematically applying variables to these categories. The primary goal of the qualitative analysis was to provide a richer, more contextual understanding of how poverty is framed for learners, assuming the textbooks aim to develop competency—equipping students with information to solve problems and engage with real-world issues, rather than simply imparting knowledge. The qualitative work also aimed to validate quantitative findings and enhance the reliability of variables that proved challenging to code objectively. The qualitative analysis therefore focused on two specific areas, due to their centrality to the research interest and due to the high-inference nature of their coding (cf. Cohen et al. 2011: 474). First, it focused on the contributing factors to poverty as well as on poverty reducing measures that were presented in the textbooks. The initial quantitative data lacked sufficient detail in these areas. Next, it focused on the activities, and specifically the category of assessing poverty. Due to limited quantitative coding, a qualitative assessment was used to explore how these activities support perspective-taking, encourage critical thinking, and strategically elicit responses related to poverty.

A random sampling method was used to select poverty tasks for qualitative review. Sampling rates varied between 20–30% based on the frequency of the associated codes—more common codes received a smaller sample size, while less frequent codes were sampled more extensively to ensure representative data. The qualitative analysis proceeded in the following four steps. First, tasks were analyzed to enhance understanding of the original codes within their context. Information not captured in the quantitative data was noted. Next, tasks within the same textbook were compared to identify deeper patterns and themes. This was followed by the production of summaries for each textbook, highlighting key themes related to poverty presentation (types of poverty, locations, affected populations, causes, solutions, etc.). Finally, these summaries were compared to identify overarching patterns and establish explanatory categories. This iterative process involved an expansion of data to uncover potential themes, followed by a reduction of data

to present dominant patterns and categories. Detailed explanations of specific analytical adjustments are provided within the results sections for each category. Ultimately, the qualitative analysis provides a more nuanced understanding of how poverty is portrayed in textbooks and how learners are positioned to interpret and address this complex global issue, contributing to stronger evidence regarding learners' capabilities and competency development.

TEACHER INTERVIEW CODING AND ANALYSIS

A semi-structured interview was prepared in advance and a list of interview interests and questions was provided to the participants in advance. This approach aimed to ensure transparency and allowed the teachers to structure their responses, referring back to earlier questions if needed. The interview questions began by collecting background information on participants, such as teaching experience in years, types of schools, grades, and subjects taught. Participants were then asked to briefly describe their current English class to help situate their responses in their current teaching practice.

The main section of the interview focused on participants' general beliefs and perspectives regarding global poverty in EFL teaching. This included their views on the educational goals of the topic, relevant competencies, and their own interests and strengths. These dimensions were further specified to explore beliefs and perspectives across four focal areas: the field of foreign language education, the teachers themselves, their learners, and their textbooks. Each of these was considered in light of both the educational functions of global poverty education and competency development. At the end of the interview, participants were given the opportunity to add any relevant comments or ask the interviewer questions. During the interviews, the interviewer employed active listening techniques, deviated from the interview guide when relevant topics emerged, and asked follow-up or clarification questions to reduce the need for interpretation during analysis (cf. Misoch 2019: 234).

The interview guideline also structured the subsequent analysis, as it reflected the central research interests. The aim was to gather authentic opinions and perspectives from teachers: how they currently address global poverty and how they might approach it more extensively in the future. The interview design and structure, along with the interviewer's effort to foster an open atmosphere, were intended to elicit honest and

reflective responses. Participants were reassured that they were viewed as experts in practice and that any theoretical framing or critique from the interviewer was not evaluative, but rather part of a broader inquiry into the practical feasibility of global poverty education. Although it is difficult to fully assess the influence of social desirability bias, the participants appeared willing to express their honest views.

All interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed using a simplified method (cf. Dresing et al. 2015: 27). The transcripts were then coded using *F4 Analyse* software, allowing for deeper textual analysis by “detaching the events from their transience” and enabling a “reconstruction of reality” (Flick 2010: 302–303). This facilitated the categorization and interpretation of relevant content. Coding followed a top-down approach, in which interview segments (ranging from partial to multiple sentences) were categorized by valence (whether they addressed opportunities or challenges) and by dimensions of teaching. This process enabled the organization of statements according to the educational functions of teaching about poverty, competency goals, and referents (e.g., students, teachers, or textbooks). It also allowed for distinguishing whether participants expressed support or concern regarding the topic. To enhance reliability, all transcripts were reviewed and coded four times at different intervals—a process reflecting intra-rater stability (cf. Cohen et al. 2007: 271). No changes were made during the fourth review, indicating that the coding had reached a stable state. This approach aligns with the principles of content analysis, which involves systematically reducing and interpreting texts through both pre-existing categories and emergent themes to generate or test theory (Cohen et al. 2007: 476).

Chapter 4 presented the research questions guiding the study and described the methodology used to collect data in relation to those questions. It detailed the sampling procedures, the definition of units of analysis, and the overall research design. The chapter also outlined the coding and analysis procedures for both the textbook and interview data. The following chapters present the results and discuss their implications in relation to the study’s aims and research questions.

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Global Poverty Education in German EFL Textbooks

The following chapter investigates how the sampled EFL textbooks support global poverty education, and in what ways this support overlaps (and diverges from) the principles and goals of education for sustainable development. More specifically, the data presented in this chapter will help determine how realistic the representation of global poverty is, in terms of how, where, when it exists and of whom, but also in terms of contributing factors as well as measures to reduce it. This data will also help determine whether there are patterns of representation that reflect focal points or distortions, in the case that the textbooks verge from an attempt to mirror poverty as it exists around the world. An investigation of the activities that accompany textbook input on poverty also enables an investigation of the learning goals associated with the topic, and how these relate back to the representation of poverty—as reality or as selected focal points. This chapter begins by presenting the results of a quantitative analysis, which addressed a relatively large range of aspects of poverty. These results will paint a very clear picture of how, as a whole, EFL textbooks in Germany describe and define poverty as a subject of education. The chapter will conclude by taking a closer look at select aspects that are both central to the interests of the study, and which also proved difficult to describe fully with quantitative means.

RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

The results of the quantitative textbook analysis are presented in this section. The following focuses specifically on how poverty is presented in terms of place and time, in terms of who is living in poverty, and in terms of what type of poverty is being experienced. Next, it turns to both the contributing factors to and poverty reduction measures of global poverty as presented in textbooks, and then presents findings on how poverty is staged—whether it is fictional or non-fictional, whether authentic or not, and whose perspectives are being foregrounded and whose are marginalized. It then presents findings on how global poverty is taught in terms of the competency model for ESD, and finally, it presents the findings on how global poverty, its representation and teaching vary across the sampled school form and publishers.

Presentation of Poverty

This section addresses how poverty is presented in the sampled textbooks. It investigates the setting of poverty, the people affected by poverty, and the types of poverty they face (see Chapter 4 for full list of variables). This serves as the bedrock for understanding how poverty is differentiated in textbooks across areas and people, and a comparison to research on how poverty is different around the world (see Chapter 3). The following analysis investigates both frequencies of, as well as relationships between, variables, allowing a more in-depth comparison of the textbook representation of poverty across different variables.

The testing of frequencies related to the presentation of poverty included place, area, time, individual characteristics, as well as labels and indicators of poverty (see Table 5.1). Looking first at the setting of poverty, the results show that almost all poverty tasks present geographical information of place (like a specific nation or region), and that the single place where poverty most frequently occurs is the USA, followed by the United Kingdom, and then South Africa. As a cluster of places, however, the code of developing countries was the second most frequented location of poverty. Information on the area of poverty also appears to be important in textbooks, as a majority of tasks presented information on whether poverty is rural or urban. The findings show that nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all poverty tasks that present area information occurs in urban areas.

Table 5.1 Frequencies of variables on presentation of poverty

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Percent of total poverty tasks</i>
Place	95.6% of all poverty tasks identified place
USA	29.4%
Developing Countries	24.8%—of which 6.4% other (lower-frequency countries not in regions mentioned below, plus areas only labeled as “developing”), 5.3% Sub-Saharan Africa, 4.4% Caribbean Islands, 3.2% Central & South America, 3% South Asia, 2.5% Asia
United Kingdom	23.5% (including England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland)
South Africa	14%
Developed Countries	8.3%—of which 2.8% is Australia
Area	72.7% Urban (65% of 455 poverty tasks had urban/rural information)
Time	(96% of 455 poverty tasks had temporal information)
Present	79%
Past	21%—of which, 9.9% nineteenth century, 6.8% twentieth century, 3.5% pre-nineteenth century, 0.4% vague past referencing
People	84.4% of 455 poverty tasks had at least one vulnerability
Female	54% (37% of all poverty tasks presented gender information)
POC	78% (54.7% of all poverty tasks presented racial information)
Non-Adults	86.6% (60% of all poverty tasks presented age information)
HFD	46% (52% of all poverty tasks presented familial information)
Poverty Label	56% of all poverty tasks had poverty labels
Poor	80%
Very Poor	20%
Indicators	76% of 455 poverty tasks had at least 1 indicator
Housing	44% of all poverty tasks
Work	40% of all poverty tasks
Food	27.7% of all poverty tasks
Health	26.6% of all poverty tasks
Education	23% of all poverty tasks
Material	14.1% of all poverty tasks
Deprivation	

Addressing the people of poverty, the results show that nearly half of all poverty tasks present information about race, age, and family situation, while a little over 1/3 present information on gender. While males and females are about equally represented as living in poverty, people of color as well as non-adults are an obvious focus. Nearly half of all poverty tasks with information about familial situation present either large families or orphans.

A little over half of all poverty tasks label poverty directly (as opposed to indicating it via housing, education, or employment markers), for instance by naming individuals or groups as poor or very poor. The results show that an overwhelming majority (4/5 of all poverty tasks with labels) identify poverty as just “poor” rather than “very” or “extremely” poor. More often than labels, textbooks focus on providing indications of poverty (in nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of all poverty tasks), with the most frequent being housing and work poverty, followed by food, health and education poverty. Multiple indicators were not infrequent in the textbooks, with $\frac{1}{5}$ of all poverty tasks presenting three or more different indicators.

The results of the relationship testing reveal numerous relationships between variables, showing that textbook poverty is differentiated by many variables (see Table 5.2). Moreover, $\frac{1}{3}$ of relationships were found to be medium to large. It is not only meaningful to investigate and interpret the presence of relationships, but also the absence of others across variables. Notable absences were found between area and place, area and gender, area and age, area and label, area and work, time and work, and time and education poverty.

As determined in section Chapter 3, a focus on gender and race/ethnicity is important when representing the reality of poverty. Notable lacking relationships were revealed between gender and presence of a cause, location of cause, locality of cause, temporal overlap of cause and victim, agent of cause, age, area, safety, label, work, education, housing, food, health, material deprivation, rate of multidimensional poverty (MDP), MDP severity, solution presence, location of helper, school form and publisher. Addressing people of color, no relationships were found with age, high familial dependency, being an immigrant, severe vulnerability, label, work, food, health, MDP severe, presence of a solution, school form, and publisher. The presence of certain relationships, and the lack of others, reveals a differentiated representation of global poverty in textbooks that can indicate either a realistic representation or a focus/bias—either intentional to pursue a specific educational goal or unintentional due to lacking understanding of the complexity of global poverty.

Contributing Factors to Poverty

Variables were investigated in the textbooks to determine what causes or contributing factors to poverty are presented. The following first presents

Table 5.2 Meaningful associations between variables of poverty presentation

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Place & Time	Large	USA, South Africa (SA), and developing countries are more present, United Kingdom (UK) and developed countries are more historical poverty
Race & Help Origin	Large	POCs less likely to have local solution in UK, and more likely to have local solutions in SA
Area & Race	Medium	All people of European descent in USA and contemporary UK are in urban poverty—significantly higher rates than POCs
Place & Labels	Medium	UK and USA have lower rates of highly identified poverty, while developing countries have higher rate
Place & Gender	Medium	UK and developing countries are more female than US, and SA is more female than UK and developing countries
Place & HFD	Medium	Developing countries have greater increases in high familial dependency, developed countries have greater decreases
Gender & Help Origin	Medium	Females have more foreign solutions
Gender & Help	Medium	Females are more likely to migrate
Place & Race	Medium	UK has less race focus and less POC focus, USA more likely to present race, SA more likely race info and more likely POC (all)
Race & Help	Medium	POC receive less charity and immigrate less, self-help more, and get more help from the government
Place & Age	Small	SA has a smaller rate of child poverty, while developing countries has a greater rate of child poverty
Time & Label	Small	Contemporary poverty has greater rates of being labeled very poor than past poverty
Time & Gender	Small	Female is more historical
Place & Work	Small	USA has lower rate of work poverty while developing countries have higher rate
Place & Education	Small	UK and USA have lower rates, while SA and developing countries have higher rates of education poverty
Area & Education	Small	Rural settings have greater increases in education poverty
Area & Housing	Small	Urban settings have greater increases in housing poverty
Time & Housing	Small	Contemporary settings have greater increases in housing poverty

(continued)

Table 5.2 (continued)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Area & HFD	Small	Urban areas have greater increases in high familial dependency
Gender & HFD	Small	Females are higher in HFD
Gender & Immigrant	Small	Females are more likely to be immigrants living in poverty
Gender & SV	Small	Females are more likely to have a severe vulnerability
Race & Gender	Small	Females are more likely to be POC
Race & Time	Small	POC is more contemporary poverty
Race & Crime	Small	POC poverty more likely includes crime and violence
Race & Education	Small	POC more likely to suffer from educational poverty
Race & Housing	Small	POC more likely to suffer from housing poverty
Race & MD	Small	POC more likely to suffer from material deprivation
Race & MDP	Small	POC are more likely to suffer from more than 1 MDP indicator
Area & Time	Small	Contemporary is more urban, while past of more rural

the frequencies of the variables, before investigating meaningful relationships. A closer look at related variables will show how specific categories diverge from the overall frequencies in the presence of other variables.

Table 5.3 presents the frequencies of the categories used to investigate contributing factors of poverty in the textbooks. These include the agents of contribution as well as whether these were local or foreign to the place of poverty.

Table 5.3 Frequencies of categories of contributing factors of poverty

<i>Category frequencies</i>	<i>Percent of poverty</i>
Presence of contributing factor	65% of 455 poverty tasks
Local	91% (9% foreign)
Economic Elites	37%
People of European Descent	31%
Society	25%
Other	8%

The results reveal that a considerable majority of textbook poverty tasks present evidence of a contributing factor. Of these, an overwhelming majority (over 90%) are local to the country or region of poverty. Addressing specific types of contributing factors, the results show that the largest single factor are the economic elites, followed somewhat closely by people of European descent. This group is then followed by the vaguer category of society, then by the even less frequent category of other.

Testing for meaningful relationships shows that some variables differ significantly in the presence of others (see Table 5.4). A relationship was found between the location of poverty and the presence of a cause, revealing that the USA and South Africa are more likely to have tasks that present contributing factors, while developing countries are less likely. Further testing revealed that some places are more likely to have local contributing factors. A strong relationship shows that developing countries have significantly larger rates of foreign contributing factors, and the United Kingdom, USA, and South Africa significantly higher rates of local ones. A medium relationship was also found to show that South Africa and developed countries are more likely to have people of European descent as contributing factors. A small relationship also exists to show that rural poverty is more likely than urban poverty to have a contributing factor. Finally, a small relationship revealed that only contemporary poverty has foreign causes. No relationships could be determined between the variables of area and locality, area and agent type, time and causal presence, time and agent type, place of poverty and temporal overlap, and area of poverty and temporal overlap.

The contributing factors were checked against eighteen other variables, resulting in fourteen meaningful relationships. Three relationships were found to be large, five to be medium, and six to be small (see Table 5.5).

To summarize the contributing factors of poverty, people of European descent are associated with five significant increases, concerning poverty involving people of color, poverty where those affected suffer from crime and violence, educational poverty, material deprivation and high levels of MDP. The economically powerful are associated with three increases: those in poverty being labeled as very poor, the presence of food poverty, and of severe multidimensional poverty (MDP). The causal agent of society is associated with three decreases: educational poverty, housing poverty, and severe MDP. No correlations were found with the following nine variables: area of poverty, time of poverty, gender, age,

Table 5.4 Meaningful associations between poverty variables of cause

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Place & Locality	Large	UK, USA, and SA have greater rates of local, while developing countries have higher rates of foreign contributing factors (CF)
Place & CF	Medium	Developing countries and UK have lower rates of white factors, while SA and developed countries have higher rates of white factors
Place & CF Presence	Small	USA and SA have greater rates of causal presence while developing countries have lower rates of causal presence
Area & CF Presence	Small	Rural poverty is more likely to have the presence of a contributing factor
Time & Locality	Small	All foreign contributing factors occur in contemporary poverty

familial dependencies, wage laborer and immigrant, presence of 2 or more vulnerabilities, work poverty, and health poverty.

Poverty Reduction Measures

How do textbooks present the reduction of poverty? The following looks first at the frequencies of the variable of poverty reduction, before moving to the results of co-occurrence testing. A closer look at related variables will show how specific categories of poverty reduction vary in the presence of other variables.

Table 5.6 presents the frequencies of the categories used to investigate textbook poverty reduction. It presents the frequencies of the presence of a measure to reduce poverty, as well as what measures of poverty reduction are offered. The results show that a considerable majority of poverty tasks present an action to reduce poverty—similar to the rate of the presence of a cause or contributing factor. Addressing types of reduction measures, the results of the analysis reveal that the most frequently presented measure is charity (with 44%), followed not so closely by migration (22%), then by government, and finally by self-help.

Looking for relationships between categories of poverty reduction measures and other variables reveals many differentiations (see Table 5.7). The findings show that the place of poverty is indeed differentiated by

Table 5.5 Meaningful associations between contributing factors and other variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Contributing Factor (CF) & POC Poverty	Large	POC more associated with white CFs
Race & CF	Large	POC poverty is more likely to have white people CFs
Race & CF Temporal Overlap	Medium	POC poverty is more likely to have historical CFs
CF & Housing	Medium	Housing poverty is less associated with society and more with white people CFs
CF & Material Deprivation	Medium	Material deprivation is more associated with white CFs
CF & High Levels Multidimensional Poverty (MDP)	Medium	High levels of MDP are more associated with white CFs
CF & Severe MDP	Medium	Severe MDP is more associated with economic elites, and less associated with society
CF & Food	Small	Food poverty is more associated with economically powerful
CF & Education	Small	Education poverty is more likely to have white causes and much less society causes
CF & Crime	Small	White people as CF is more associated with poverty with crime
CF & Label	Small	Economic elites contribute less to very poor label
Race & CF Presence	Small	POC is more likely to have a CF that is present
Race & Location of CF	Large	POC poverty has less CFs in UK, more causes in SA
Race & Local CF	Small	POC poverty has more local CFs

Table 5.6 Frequencies of reduction measures categories

<i>Reduction measures</i>	<i>Percent of total poverty</i>
Presence of measure	66% of 455 poverty tasks
Charity	44%
Migration	22%
Government	18%
Self-Help	16%

the type as well as by the presence of a reduction measure. A large relationship was established between the place of poverty and the presence of a reductive measure, where developing countries were found to be much more likely to have foreign measures. Concerning area of poverty, urban poverty is less likely to have a reductive measure than rural poverty, and urban poverty relies more on government assistance and less on self-help. Contemporary poverty presents greater degrees of assistance from developed countries (here including USA and the United Kingdom), and historical poverty relied more heavily on migration to reduce poverty. For the following tests, no relationships were found: place of poverty and place of measure, area of poverty and place of measure, area of poverty and time of measure, time of poverty and presence of a measure, area of poverty and geographic overlap of measure, and time of poverty and geographic overlap of measure.

The poverty reduction measures were tested with eighteen further variables of describing poverty (see Table 5.8). Eleven associations were found, eight of which are weak, two are medium, and one is strong. Six of the nine vulnerability variables showed correlations. There were no relationships between the reduction measures and poverty vulnerabilities of age, familial dependencies, and the presence of two or more vulnerabilities. There was also no relationship between the presence of a cause and the presence of a solution. These findings show substantial differentiation of solutions across different variables, suggesting that different types of global poverty are presented in the textbooks as having, or requiring, different types of solutions.

Textbook Staging of Poverty

This study also collected information on how poverty is staged, and not just on its representation. Here, staging refers to how authentic the representation of poverty is, and whose perspectives are privileged. The following first presents the frequencies of the relevant variables, before presenting the results of the relationship testing. Afterwards, a closer look at variables that are found to be related will show how specific categories of the variables diverge from the overall frequencies in the presence of other variables.

The frequencies of the variables used to investigate textbook staging of poverty include the variable of input, as textbook or real, as fiction or non-fiction, as well as the variable of input perspective, consisting of 3rd

Table 5.7 Meaningful associations between reduction measures and other variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Place of poverty & Locality of Measure	Large	United Kingdom (UK), USA, and South Africa (SA) are more associated with local, while developing countries are more associated with foreign measures
Measure Type & Place of Poverty	Medium	UK has less government, help USA has more self and less migration, SA has more government help and less charity, developed countries have more government help and more migration, developing countries have less government help and less self-help (and more charity and migration)
Presence of Measure & Place of Poverty	Small	UK is more associated, and USA less associated with the presence of a measure
Area & Presence of a Measure	Small	Urban poverty is less associated with the presence of a measure
Area of Poverty & Measure Type	Small	Urban poverty is less associated with self-help, and more associated with government measures, while rural poverty relies more on self-help and less on government
Time of Poverty & Locality of Measure	Small	Contemporary poverty is more associated with measures from developed countries, while historical poverty is more associated with measures from UK
Time of Poverty & Measure Type	Small	Past poverty relies significantly more on migration

person, patient, helper, agent and patient and helper perspective together (Table 5.9).

Concerning textbook input, most appears to have been designed by the textbook companies, and solely for their use. Less than half could be considered authentic, or created external to the textbook, i.e., not for educational purposes. An even larger proportion of textbook poverty tasks are fictional (nearly $\frac{3}{4}$), meaning they are not based on true events and people, even if they are supposed to be realistic. A further investigation

Table 5.8 Meaningful associations between reduction measures and further variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Measure & Contributing Factors	Strong	Economically powerful contributing factors are more likely to receive charity. Poverty influenced by society is more likely to lead to immigration or governmental solutions, and individuals affected by poverty caused by whites are more likely to help themselves or be helped by governments
Measure & Gender	Medium	Migration is more likely a measure for females and self-help more likely for males
Measure & Race	Medium	Whites in USA and UK are more likely to receive charity and POC in USA, UK, and SA are more likely to receive governmental help
Measure & Time of Poverty	Small	Government help is more associated with contemporary poverty, and migration with past poverty
Measure & Crime	Small	Poor areas of crime and violence are more likely to receive government help, and less likely to receive charity
Measure & Labels	Small	Very poor areas are more likely to receive government help and rely less on self-help
Measure & Housing	Small	Those with housing poverty are less likely to immigrate
Measure & Food	Small	Those with food poverty are less likely to help themselves
Measure & High MDP	Small	Those with high number of MDPs are less likely to immigrate
Measure & Severe MDP	Small	Those with severe MDPs are more likely to receive charity and less likely to help themselves

of the intersection of these codes reveals that nearly half of all poverty tasks are fictional stories designed by the textbooks, and only 16% of all poverty tasks are non-fiction and authentic. A look at input perspective reveals that nearly half presents a third-person perspective, or the voice of someone who is neither poor nor involved in the cause of or solution to poverty. The second most dominant perspective, however, is that of

Table 5.9 Frequencies of poverty staging categories

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Percent of total poverty</i>
<i>Input</i>	
Textbook	61% (49.5% textbook fiction, 11.6% textbook non-fiction)
Authentic	39% (22.6% fiction and 16.3% non-fiction)
Fiction	72.1%
Non-Fiction	27.9%
<i>Input perspective</i>	
3 rd Person	45.3%
Patient	34.7%
Helper	13%
Patient & Helper	4.8%
Agent	2.2%

the person who is experiencing poverty, followed by those who are trying to help or a mixture of the two. The least common, and perhaps mostly neglected perspective, is that of the person who is contributing to the poverty.

Relationships between variables were tested, and only a small correlation was found to exist between the type of input and the perspective that input presents (see Table 5.10). More specifically, fictional texts—by far the most dominant form—are found to more likely focus on presenting the voice of those experiencing poverty directly, and less likely to focus on simply third-person voices.

Table 5.10 Meaningful associations between poverty staging and other variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Input Fictionality & Perspective	Small	Fictional texts are more likely to focus on the patient, and less likely to focus on 3 rd person texts, than non-fiction texts

Teaching Poverty

This study addresses not only the representation of poverty and its staging, but also how poverty is taught, or what students are supposed to learn by engaging with activities that accompany poverty input. The following addresses first the frequencies of the variables, before presenting the results of the relationship testing.

Table 5.11 presents the frequencies of the variables used to investigate textbook activities that are associated with textbook poverty input. These variables include the activity type and the activity focus. Of all the competence dimensions, information-oriented activities were the most common and made up over half of all activities. Over 1/3 of all activities were oriented toward simply gathering information from the input texts that were provided, and this type made up the single most common activity. The second single most common activity is empathy and opinion, consisting of slightly more than 1/4 of all activities, followed somewhat closely by information processing. Grammar and vocabulary related activities made up 12%, and only 3% of activities referred learners to investigate or gather information relevant to the task topic and external to the textbook. Finally, only 1% of all poverty task activities encouraged the learners to engage in potential action. Activities could also engage learners with specific individuals involved in textbook poverty input. The results show that nearly 44% directed learner attention to those experiencing poverty, and 29% to aspects not relevant for the topic of poverty at all. The next most common focus is on the helper, followed by those contributing to poverty.

An investigation was carried out to determine relationships between variables of teaching poverty. The results uncovered no relationships existed between location of poverty and any of the activity types: grammar and vocabulary, information-based, information processing, empathy and opinion, and action activities.

An extra set of relationship tests were run to check for the category of empathy and opinion. This was due to the emphasis on this category in the textbooks, as well as to the fact that this variable was selected for a closer qualitative analysis. The presence of empathy and opinion tasks was checked with 27 other variables, ranging from school form and publisher, variables for causes (presence, agent type, location), poverty (setting, vulnerabilities, indicators) and helper (presence, location, type), and only one correlation appeared (see Table 5.12). A co-occurrence test

Table 5.11 Frequencies of poverty teaching categories

<i>Variable frequencies</i>	
Competence dimensions—presence	Percent of total poverty
Information Gathering	36%
Empathy & Opinion	27%
Information Processing	23%
Grammar/Vocab	12%
Potential Action	1%
Competence dimensions—net numbers	Percent of total poverty
Information Gathering—Internal	33%
Empathy & Opinion	27%
Information Processing	23%
Grammar & Vocab	12%
Information Gathering—External	3%
Potential Action	1%
<i>Activity focus</i>	
Patient	43.9%
Other	29.0%
Helper	11.3%
Contributing Agents	9.7%
Patient & Helper	6.2%

was also run for activity focus on place of poverty, and a weak relationship could be determined (see also Table 5.12).

The findings show that work poverty is less likely to have an associated activity of empathy or opinion, when compared to the other types of poverty. The findings also show that the activity focus is related to place,

Table 5.12 Meaningful associations between poverty activities and other variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Presence of Empathy/Opinion & Work Poverty	Small	Work poverty is less likely to have an activity of empathy or opinion
Activity Focus & Place	Small	South African poverty has activities with a greater focus on patient, and a decreased focus on helpers. Poverty in developing countries have activities with greater focus on helper perspectives

as South African poverty has activities that focus to a greater degree on those experiencing poverty, and that focus less on those that help against poverty. Furthermore, it was found that poverty in developing countries is more likely to have activities that focus on those who are helping against poverty.

Variations Across School Forms and Publishers

The following investigates the role that school form, publishers, and grade play in the representation and teaching of global poverty. It targets whether this teaching is similar or different across these variables.

The frequency findings reveal that *Realschule* holds a slight majority of poverty tasks (with 59%), as does the publisher, *Diesterweg/Westermann* (with 43%). It also uncovers that an overwhelming majority of poverty tasks (84%) occur in the second half of secondary level 1 (Table 5.13).

A test of relationships was performed in order to investigate the connection between the variables of school form, publishers, and grade. Two relationships could be found (Table 5.14).

The relationship between school form and publisher revealed the only difference is that Cornelsen is less likely than the other publishers to have poverty tasks in *Gymnasium* (so a greater focus in *Realschule*). Concerning grade levels, it was found that *Klett* has a significantly lower number of poverty tasks in the 10th grade, that *Cornelsen* is more likely

Table 5.13
Frequencies of school
form, publisher, and
grades of poverty tasks

<i>School forms</i>	<i>Percent of total poverty</i>
Realschule	59%
Gymnasium	41%
Publishers	Percent of total poverty
Klett	29%
Cornelsen	28%
Diesterweg/Westermann	43%
Grades	Percent of total poverty
5	2.2%
6	4.2%
7	10.1%
8	31.6%
9	19.6%
10	32.3%

Table 5.14 Meaningful associations between school context and other variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
School Form & Publisher	Small	Cornelsen poverty is less likely to occur in Gymnasium
Publisher & Grade	Small	Klett is less likely than others to have 10th grade, Cornelsen is more likely to have 5th grade, and Diesterweg less likely to have 7th and 9th grade poverty tasks

to focus on poverty in the 5th grade, and that *Diesterweg* is less likely than the other publishers to present poverty in the 7th and 9th grade.

Further relationship testing was performed to investigate the extent to which other variables could be differentiated by school form. A number of relationships were found to exist (Table 5.15).

A total of fourteen relationships were discovered, all of which were small except for three medium. For example, *Realschule* not only presents global poverty more frequently, but it is also found to have more urban poverty, to label its poverty as very poor, to present more work poverty, to show more government solutions and less migration, and to have more fictional input. The test found lacking relationships between school form and a greater number of other variables. No relationships were observable between school form and time of poverty, or poverty and gender, race, age, family dependency, being a wage laborer or immigrant, safety, rate of vulnerability, education, housing, food, health, MDP high or low or severe MDP. In addition, no relationships were determined to exist between school form and the presence of a poverty reduction measure, geographical overlap of poverty and reduction measure, time of help, presence of contributing factor, locality of the contributing factor, temporal overlap between agent and victim, input perspective, or the presence of a grammar and vocabulary exercise, of an empathy and opinion exercise, and of a potential action exercise.

In addition to school form, relationship testing was performed to investigate the extent to which other variables could be differentiated by publishers. This testing was performed to determine whether the overall findings were skewed by a publisher, or whether they could be generalized across secondary level school education, at least for the two school forms chosen. A number of relationships were found to exist (Table 5.16).

Table 5.15 Meaningful associations between school form and further variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
School Form (SF) & Place of Help	Medium	Realschule (RS) has more poverty in United Kingdom (UK), South Africa (SA), and developing countries, and less in USA
SF & Place of Cause	Medium	RS has more UK and SA, and less USA place of cause
SF & Input Source	Medium	RS has more fiction
SF & Place of Poverty	Small	RS has more poverty in SA and developing countries, and less US poverty
SF & Area	Small	RS has more urban poverty
SF & Label	Small	RS has more poverty labeled as very poor
SF & Work	Small	RS has more work poverty
SF & Material Deprivation	Small	RS has less material deprivation
SF & Grade	Small	RS has more 6th and 9th grade, less 8th grade
SF & Helper Type	Small	RS has more government solution and less migration
SF & Causal Time	Small	RS has less contemporary/more past
SF & Causal Agent	Small	RS has less economically powerful and more society causes
SF & Info Activity Presence	Small	RS has more information comprehension activities
SF & Info Processing Presence	Small	RS has less information processing activities

The results show 12 relationships between publishers and various other variables, and typically increases for *Diesterweg/Westermann*, and decreases for *Cornelsen*—though there are plenty of examples of mixed results. Further relationship testing showed that an even greater number of variables (24) fail to correlate to the variable of publishers. No correlations were found between publishers and time, gender, race, age, high family dependencies, poverty labeling, housing, food, material deprivation and rate and severity of MDP, place of poverty, place of helper, place of cause, time of cause, causal agent, presence of information comprehension activities, presence of information processing activities, presence of empathy or opinion activities, presence of potential action activities, presence of a solution, time of help, presence of a cause, locality of cause,

Table 5.16 Meaningful associations between publisher and further variables

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Strength</i>	<i>Significant changes</i>
Publishers & Area	Small	Diesterweg has more rural poverty
Publishers & Work	Small	Cornelsen has less work poverty
Publishers & Help Type	Small	Klett has more and Cornelsen less immigration
Publishers & Input Source	Small	Cornelsen has more textbook non-fiction and less textbook fiction, and Diesterweg has more textbook fiction and real fiction, and less textbook non-fiction
Publishers & immigrant	Small	Cornelsen has immigrants
Publishers & Crime	Small	Diesterweg has more crime, and Klett less
Publishers & 2 + Vulnerabilities	Small	Diesterweg has more, and Cornelsen less
Publishers & Education	Small	Cornelsen has less education poverty
Publishers & Health	Small	Klett has more, and Cornelsen less health poverty
Publishers & Solution Geo Overlap	Small	Cornelsen has greater geographic overlap of solutions, and Klett less
Publishers & Input Perspective	Small	Klett has greater input focus on patient and less on 3 rd person, Cornelsen has less on patient and more on helper
Publishers & Grammar Vocab Presence	Small	Diesterweg has greater presence of grammar/vocabulary activities

temporal overlap agent and victim. In whole, it appears that publishers share more in common concerning their representation of global poverty.

RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A qualitative investigation into the textbook representation and teaching of global poverty was performed after the quantitative analysis for several reasons. First, the analysis revealed that a quantitative method worked well for investigating some aspects of the representation and teaching of global poverty, but not for others. For instance, while it was successful at describing the representation of poverty, it was less productive in describing contributing factors, poverty measures, and activities of empathy and opinion. Though central to the research interest

and common features in the textbooks, these aspects contained lots of implicit information that was hard to code. A qualitative method proved better at providing greater interpretative power for these aspects. The next reason for the addition of the qualitative analysis is the increase in validity (see Chapter 4). As will become clear in the following, the qualitative analysis of the aforementioned areas of interest reveal a very different perspective, and a much clearer picture, to the representation and function of contributing factors, poverty measures, and activities that target the development of empathy and opinions.

Contributing Factors to Poverty

The following investigates the four factors contributing to global poverty that were coded in the quantitative analysis: *other*, *society*, *people of European descent*, and *economically powerful*. They vary not just in terms of frequency, but also of specificity of agents, causal linkages, and effects. Contributing factors are sometimes ultimate and sometimes proximate, where individuals do not actually cause, but rather exacerbate existing poverty or fail to help. The following addresses all four agent categories in the order of ascending frequency.

Other exists as a binnet category that includes previous categories deemed too small for statistical analysis, and includes personal mishaps and natural disasters—admittedly two very different contributing factors, which are often clearly identified in the textbook input as contributors to poverty. 11 of the 28 poverty tasks coded with *other* contributing factors were randomly sampled for qualitative analysis. These 11 tasks were located in eight different textbooks. The following provides a brief overview of the selected tasks and their contexts within the textbooks, and is organized according to patterns and trends that emerged from the analysis. For this category, the following will address specifically the difference between high-income and low- to middle-income countries.

High-income countries with codes of *other* contributing factors can be subdivided into historical and contemporary poverty. Historical poverty in this context focuses almost primarily on the Potato Famine in nineteenth-century Ireland. This occurs in five of the 8 textbooks that were sampled, ranging from grade seven to ten. This historical Irish poverty is associated with mass starvation and exacerbated or caused by high land-ownership of the English in Ireland, or by having a large family. It appears to be connected to contemporary strife and poor economy in Ireland.

This historical poverty frequently leads to mass migration to the US. Two of the selected textbooks present the Irish Potato Famine and the subsequent migration to the US to precede contemporary poverty of POCs in the USA—largely of Hispanics and Native Americans, which in turn have a high rate of racism from people of European descent as a contributing factor. Contemporary poverty in high-income countries with *other* contributing factors all present harmful individual choices. In one textbook, it is the thematization of Western homelessness across multiple tasks, where substance abuse and conflict with family members are listed as contributing factors. Another textbook presents cartoons of people begging on the street due to bad decisions made online, like posting criticisms about work on social media. Another textbook presents a text on a school banning slang, in part because slang use can lead to stereotypes that increase chances of unemployment and poverty. These textbooks provide few obvious contextual clues to help interpret this type of poverty further.

Middle- and low-income countries also have *other* contributing factors that are natural and personal. One textbook presents the poverty of Indonesia as being exacerbated by the 2004 tsunami, while another presents extreme poverty in Haiti as exacerbated by frequent natural disasters like hurricanes. Another textbook shows Hong Kong (arguably not a developing country) as having homelessness due to high rent prices that stem from geographic limitations to building expansion. Human-made factors of poverty occur also in Haiti in the context of *Restavek*, a practice in which those who are well-off exploit the poorest of the country. Finally, one textbook presents Hispanic poverty as being exacerbated by having a large family (8 children) or from father abandonment. Both cases connect poverty in the home country to continued poverty after immigrating to the US, and are preceded by examples of European historical poverty and migration to US. Other examples of Hispanic poverty in the same books connect Hispanic poverty in the US with discrimination by people of European descent.

In conclusion, past poverty of Ireland focuses mostly on the Irish Potato Famine leading to extreme poverty and to immigration to the US, which is often paired in the same textbooks (and precede) contemporary discrimination or racism by people of European descent toward Hispanic immigrants. Large families are occasionally mentioned as exacerbating the effects of the famine. Poverty of contemporary high-income countries consist of poor personal decisions that lead to unemployment or

homelessness. Developing countries (including South Africa) focus mostly on natural factors, though there are occasionally instances of self-causes, like the cultural practice of *Restavek* or the typical father abandonment in Central America. In the sampled textbooks, historical Irish poverty and European immigration to the US often set the backdrop for presenting contemporary Hispanic poverty that often starts in Central America but continues in the US due to contemporary discrimination by people of European descent. A further pattern is that natural factors are more present in historical Europe and in contemporary middle- to low-income countries.

Twelve of the 60 poverty tasks that were coded with *society* contributing factors were randomly selected for the qualitative analysis. These fall within seven textbooks, six of which are from *Realschule*. All selected tasks occur in high-income countries or in South Africa. This category includes contributing factors which are vaguely defined and appear to indicate general poverty that involves large groups of people or vague references to institutions. Sometimes a poor economy is connected to poverty, sometimes the government, and sometimes civil society in general.

Of the six textbooks that address a poor economy, five cases are contemporary. Three tasks occur in the United Kingdom and come from two textbooks. Two of these present families with a recently unemployed father. One presents little contextual information, simply that there are few jobs to be found, while the other states that the entire region is experiencing business closures leading to unemployment. For both tasks, the unemployment brings emotional stress for the whole family, especially the children. Another task presents poverty of a young couple who move to London and cannot afford the general high rent prices. Four tasks from three further textbooks present poor economic contexts in contemporary US (high rent cost and broad economic downturn), two leading to homelessness and two to migration within the US. Finally, one task from another textbook presents poverty in contemporary South Africa as stemming from general unemployment. There is little presentation of further reasons, within the tasks as well as within the textbooks. The exception is the unemployment in South Africa, where many tasks on South Africa's past of Apartheid, with its persistent problem of racism by people of European descent, present ample contextual evidence for interpretation. The one case of historical poverty involves Europe and general poverty that led to nineteenth-century migration.

Four selected tasks present governments as contributing factors, and three of these occur in the US, are contemporary and come from two textbooks. Two (from the same textbook) present a complex set of factors that lead to poverty of people of color. One, presenting Native American poverty, presents ineffective government policies that are exacerbated by broken families, substance abuse, and a cycle of poverty. This task and its poverty are contextualized by other tasks presenting the colonial history of the US and its negative effects on Native Americans, as well as the continued discrimination that inhibits their flourishing. Another presents US Hispanic poverty (after escaping poverty in Central America) that is exacerbated by a precarious legal status and its effects on employment in the US. Here, the US government is presented as unwilling to protect the Hispanics, but the general population is also presented as discriminating against them. The third poverty task presents poverty in contemporary New Orleans, and failed promises of the US federal government to protect especially its poor (and taken from historical context, people of color) after the 2005 Hurricane Katrina. The final task presents fictional poverty in a dystopic future, where the government is the sole provider of necessary services, at the steep cost of controlling acceptable behavior. Social transgressions lead to removal of services, followed by abject poverty.

Five tasks in four textbooks present civil society as contributors to poverty. Two tasks present poverty of people of color in the US and references to a hostile society, with the surrounding context providing clues of racism and discrimination. An additional US case presents homelessness, and a general population that is presented as not willing to help. A fourth task presents poverty in the United Kingdom that is attributed to the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland (that lead to a couple migrating to the United Kingdom, where they struggle to earn enough to live). The final task presents general poverty in a South African region, and the vague claim that the wildlife tourism industry has failed to sufficiently help local poor communities, and instead harms the poachers who come from them.

From this analysis, two types of societal poverty emerge. One stems from unexplained economic and social processes that, in high-income countries, occurs to mostly people of European descent. Here, the lack of employment and the presence of poverty traps people who are then forced to move or who become homeless. The other type appears to stem from lacking empathy—toward people from different religious or

ethnic backgrounds, or toward the homeless. This lacking empathy can manifest itself in an uncaring general society or via governments that may historically represent only one segment of society. Not uncommon are the contextual connections to discrimination toward people of color.

Twenty of the 90 tasks coded with *people of European descent* contributing factors were randomly selected for a qualitative analysis. Of all the contributing factors, this one was the easiest to identify, as its tasks typically present the most evidence and identify it with the clearest intent. This factor is often presented with historical events, and is often clearly linked to a moral harm with explicitly bad intentions that manifest themselves in harmful actions toward people (of color) who explicitly suffer emotionally (cf. Chapter 3). Even contemporary poverty that is linked to historical moral harm (in the absence of explicit contemporary moral harm) is more specified than other poverty. The contributing factor of people of European descent is structured in the following by geographic place in order to create a clearer picture of specific national contexts.

The sampled South African poverty of people of color with people of European descent as contributing factors stem from 4 textbooks across both school forms, all publishers, and grades nine and ten. All textbooks present approximately 10 tasks on the subject of South African poverty with people of European descent as contributing factors. All four textbooks explicitly link contemporary black South African poverty to past Apartheid. One textbook also links it to the original European colonization and the usurpation of land. All textbooks present the continuation of racism as linked to poverty, and all present discrimination as linked to indicators of poverty, like work, education, and housing. All textbooks explicitly link past discrimination to the privileging of white South Africans with better jobs, education, and housing. Finally, all textbooks present the people of color in South African poverty as experiencing negative affect, as the people are frequently scared, upset, and angry about their past and current situations.

Three textbooks from both school forms, grade 8 and 9, Klett and Cornelsen present tasks with Native American poverty and people of European descent as contributing factors. All three textbooks include racism and discrimination from people of European descent within two time periods—the first during initial settlement of Native lands by people of European descent, and the second in contemporary times. Two textbooks present settlers of European descent as also escaping poverty, and their US westward expansion as an attempt to improve their lives.

However, this expansion is also always presented as a violent injustice through armed conflict and forced land displacement. The third textbook also presents historical European immigration into the US as driven by poverty, but the link is more implicit here in its relation to atrocities against Native Americans. The causal link between past injustice and current Native American poverty is always implied in the selected tasks as a comparison of then and now. In all textbooks, Native Americans now live in poverty, have unequal life chances, experience negative emotions and view people of European descent as richer and discriminatory. Racism is in two cases an explicit contemporary suspicion that is evidenced by Native American characters through comparison of people of European descent as having more money and better education. Hope is also offered in all three textbooks, as examples of Native Americans being accepted into white social groups (all in schools) outside of reservations are provided, despite initial Native American fears of rejection.

Poverty tasks with people of European descent as contributors in the US also involve other people of color, sampled from *Gymnasium* and *Diesterweg*, from grades eight and ten. One example focuses on Hispanic poverty in seven tasks, where people leave poverty in their countries of origin and live in contemporary poverty in the US, performing manual labor (house cleaning and yard work) for people of European descent presented as having wealth and privilege. They are presented in the textbooks as having the lowest average income of all ethnic groups, as not being able to work legally, having hard lives in general, and as being treated poorly by Americans who want them to leave. Poor Hispanics are presented as sad, scared and vulnerable, and the associated tasks suggest the learner should feel shame, sadness, and anger over their situation and treatment. Though no explicit connection is made in the textbook, there is a focus in the beginning of the book on US as a nation of immigrants, and especially on European immigrants of the nineteenth century, and their initial poverty. The second textbook focuses on African American poverty in four tasks. Their poverty is presented as coming from historical racism and violence against them, and it exists still today in society in general and in the police, who are accused by individuals in the textbook of being racist and killing out of racism. The government is also claimed to underfund black communities, and young African American men are presented as being angry and in despair. Here it should be emphasized that these perspectives are presented in textbooks through the included texts, authentic or designed by the publishers, fictional or non-fictional.

Sampled poverty tasks from two textbooks (both school forms, two different publishers, both grade 9) present poverty of Aboriginal people in Australia. The poverty here is always placed into three temporal periods, ranging from original European settlement (involving killing, taking land and bringing diseases and alcohol), to a later governmental disenfranchisement and legalized discrimination (including forced removal of children from parents), to contemporary discrimination by people of European descent against Aboriginal people (with no specific evidence of type of discrimination provided). One textbook, however, shows the current Australian government moving toward improvements by providing the right to vote and more recently formally apologizing for past injustices.

In summary, discrimination by people of European descent against people of color has led to their poverty in the past, and the legacy of both (poverty and discrimination) are presented as still existing today. Historical racism was typically more explicit, violent, structural (legal) and described in greater detail, while present discrimination is vaguer and more social. Hispanics (who are not necessarily people of color) are a bit of an exception, as they escape poverty from their origin countries (which is almost never explained in detail) only to face poverty in the US, with the only clue to why being current ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, there are often explicit indications of a moral harm, as the poverty of people of color is intentional, the harm is against modern social norms, and the affected people experience substantial negative emotion as a result.

Out of the 118 tasks coded as having *economic elites* as contributing factors, 26 were selected for a qualitative analysis. This category refers here to the rich and noble class, powerful businesses, and Western consumers (only when related to middle- and low-income poverty).

Some tasks present poverty as coming from the rich and noble class. These come from nine textbooks from across all school forms, publishers, and grades. They typically present two causal relationships between poverty and wealth—passive and active. Most are the former, where poverty and wealth coexist, and the wealthy are aware of the poor and yet do not help. The unanswered expectation of their help is typically framed in the text by either those who are poor or by the narrating voice. This is the case for six of the nine selected textbooks. Three occur in the present and three in the past. One is the story of Ebenezer Scrooge, while another the story of the unfair treatment of first-class passengers on the Titanic before it sank. A third is of a nineteenth-century princess

who visits a poor neighborhood and later realizes it is her duty to help. For contemporary poverty, two present stories of homeless children in middle- to low-income countries (Brazil and Mexico) whose open pleas are ignored by rich people. In India, poverty and massive wealth are said to exist side-by-side, and in a fictional story within the US, street children steal from wealthy adults as the children express explicit disdain for a capitalistic system that has left them behind. The final task presents wealthy looking Europeans ignoring a young Ethiopian refugee girl in distress. Three textbooks present active rich contributors to poverty, all of which are historical. In one, a rich person in historical England unjustly takes land from poor farmers (though the unjust nature is unexplained) and in another, a greedy sheriff steals from the poor for an illegitimate king in the story of *Robin Hood*. The third presents medieval England, where a local lord unjustly takes most of the crops from a poor farming couple. These victims of poverty are presented as vulnerable (children, the elderly, female peasants, families with young children) and suffering emotionally. Five appear to involve explicit greed, as those who take have more than they need, and taking causes obvious harm to the poor. The remaining four cases appear to involve apathy or, at best, ignorance (in the case of the young British princess).

Powerful businesses are present in six textbooks across both school forms, all publishers, and most grades. Often Western, they are usually presented as faceless entities which exploit especially children in foreign countries. Here, the work is dangerous, and businesses are sometimes explicitly malicious in their exploitation. Three of the six selected textbooks present poverty in the USA, with two presenting tasks on US farms exploiting immigrant Hispanic teens (labeled as children in the textbook under the discourse of child labor), and two presenting tasks on the coexistence of the very rich and the homelessness in the US. One book even places the blame for homelessness on the super-rich and banks and corporations. The presentation of Hispanic teen exploitation comes in textbooks that present racism by people of European descent toward them and other people of color, and one in a textbook that presents poverty of past European immigrants into the US. The Hispanic teens work in dangerous outside conditions and exposure to pesticides and receive no education. One textbook presents a comic panel of Nike exploiting Asian girls in a sweatshop in a textbook that has frequent cases of pairing the high living standards of Westerners with the horrid conditions of child labor in developing countries. Another textbook presents a fictional future

dystopic Western society in which a very large and powerful company exploits children for entertainment—some of whom die. Finally, the sixth textbook presents multiple tasks of historical and dangerous exploitation of British children in factories and mines. All sampled cases present children caught in the crossfires of powerful businesses. Many children are explicitly presented as sad, scared and, for the Hispanic children, also angry. Explicit business motivation is often lacking or involves greed and profit.

Some selected tasks present Western consumers as participating in the exploitation of the poor, especially in foreign, low- and middle-income countries. The selected tasks fall in three textbooks from both school forms and only two publishers and two grades (8 and 10). All three focus on child labor in sweatshops in developing countries and the role that Western consumers play in supporting the harmful industry. One selected task presents a sweatshop that collapsed, killing many workers, including children. The blame is placed in part on the factory owners, but also on British consumers who profit from buying cheap clothing. Another task presents US high schoolers protesting child labor at a mall, where an explicit blame is placed on US consumers for supporting this industry. This task is contextualized in a textbook with many tasks on Fairtrade, which often pair images of Western luxury next to severe poverty of developing countries. The final selected task uses images and text to emphasize European and US overconsumption of chocolate that stems from an industry reliant on exploitative child labor. Here, children work with machetes which explicitly leads to loss of limb. However, here and elsewhere in the textbook, explicit blame is also placed on the cocoa industry and multinational corporations, as well as on consumers who are presented as having the power to change them. Fairtrade is thematized in relationship to poverty in all three textbooks, where the name alone suggests an unfairness and a moral wrong. The difference here is that the blame is not just placed on companies that use child labor, but also on consumers who live in much better conditions and who desire abundant and cheap products.

Most cases that involve economic elites frame poverty as a moral wrong. The rich and noble, past and present, either passively allow poverty to exist and people to suffer, or they actively extract from the poor even though they live in abundance. Businesses can also be active in their engagement as they exploit people of color, usually within Western nations directly, or they can take a more passive role as exploitation is

mediated through a system which utilizes child labor. Western consumers and markets are often presented as abundant, paired explicitly with the resource scarcity of particularly children in developing countries. Another common thread is the unequal outcomes of people of European descent and people of color, as the exploitation of Hispanic child labor in the USA is indirectly linked in textbooks to other tasks of racism by people of European descent toward Hispanics, and as the exploitation of people of color in developing countries via Western consumers who, if presented as individuals, are always presented as people of European descent.

The qualitative analysis of contributing factors adds to the quantitative findings presented earlier in this chapter. This analysis reveals that the category of *other* includes clearly identifiable causes of poverty, such as natural disasters or absent fathers in developing countries, and poor personal decisions in the contemporary West. The *society* category, drawn mainly from Western contexts, is vaguer and often links poverty to structural issues like factory closures and unemployment, without attributing clear blame—though racial bias in government responses is sometimes implied. People of European descent as contributors, particularly in settler colonies like the US, South Africa, and Australia, are depicted as direct historical causes of systemic inequality, with institutionalized racism and explicit moral wrongdoing highlighted. The economic elites—both historically (nobility) and today (corporations and consumers)—are shown as contributors through exploitation, greed, or indifference, often with vague attribution but a strong emphasis on the emotional suffering of the poor and the moral injustice of inequality. Overall, the portrayal heavily emphasizes human causes of poverty, particularly through the actions of the rich and people of European descent, but also through the other categories via the textbook context within which those contributing factors are presented.

Measures to Reduce Poverty

Closer analysis of poverty tasks coded as having measures of reducing poverty reveals an underlying questionability in nearly all cases. Reductive measures are not presented as solutions to individual or group-level poverty, but rather as alleviation to poverty. They appear to address acute issues in the moment, rather than to present long-term, sustainable responses. For each reduction measure type, a qualitative analysis is performed on a randomly selected sample. The analysis is organized

according to emergent patterns, and integrated into the context of the textbooks they are from.

Twenty-seven of the 135 poverty tasks (20%) with *charitable measures* were randomly chosen for qualitative analysis. These tasks come from 18 textbooks, ten of which are in *Realschule* and eight in *Gymnasium*. They are in all publishers but slightly more prevalent in *Cornelsen*, and they are distributed across all grades. The following addresses first the people or institutions that are helping, before looking closer at the type of help being provided. Next, those being helped via charity is presented, before addressing the contextual patterns within the textbooks.

In the qualitative analysis, the British emerge as one of the most charitable people, as 14 of the 18 sampled textbooks present people there engaged in a charitable act. In relation to other areas, US Americans are found in four textbooks to be engaged in charity, followed by individuals in five other countries, each in one textbook, and then three in the West in general with no particular discernible country. Beyond this, teens are presented as particularly engaged in charity, as they appear as explicitly named individuals and groups in 12 of the textbooks, while individual adults are presented as charitable in 10 textbooks and charity companies alone in five textbooks. Not infrequently, the adult helpers are young adults of college age. Looking at tasks, teens are by far most frequently involved in charity, often acting within school contexts and even school sponsored events.

The most common form of charity is the transfer of money, mostly via charitable organizations (in 12 textbooks) but also directly to victims of poverty (in 6 textbooks). The most frequently occurring charitable organization is Fairtrade. Volunteering is also a common form of charity, always mediated through help organizations that recruit teens and young adults. Volunteering nearly always targets poor children, consisting of soup kitchens and food pantries in the West, and of educational contexts in developing countries. Six textbooks present awareness raising efforts, which come either via charity organizations or by protests in Western countries, usually against child labor and the complicity of Western shoppers. In four textbooks, good deeds (which in frequency are the least common type) are presented, and include helping a refugee find safety, traveling back in time to help a poor person (in two textbooks), and Robin Hood returning wrongfully taken taxes from poor farmers.

Typically, children are the recipients of charitable acts, occurring in 16 of the 18 books. This often relates to child labor, but also at time to

poor families in developing countries who suffer from food or education poverty. In seven textbooks, poor people are addressed as the recipients of charity without further information, typically when referring to charitable organizations. Three textbooks address charity toward the homeless. Fourteen textbooks address charity within the West, while 11 textbooks address Western charity toward developing countries—though there are far more such tasks in the latter than in the former.

Addressing the larger context of poverty in individual textbooks helps shed light on the charitable acts presented within them. Charity directed toward child poverty—and especially child labor—are often found in textbooks with a large number of tasks that present bleak stories of child labor with no solutions or relief in sight. The same appears for the topic of homelessness—tasks that present charity toward them are contextualized in many other tasks that present it as bleak and without solution. The cases of individual charity toward the homeless are usually small money donations that seem more out of pity than out of any real hope of making a sustainable change. Charity organizations play a large role, either through their direct efforts to help the poor with money and infrastructure, but also to mediate the money transfer of Westerners as well as to organize volunteer efforts. The most commonly named charity is Fairtrade, which appears to target not only helping the poor but also in changing Western society and consumers. This occurs through their awareness raising efforts, as well as by protests by teens to support Fairtrade and show Western shoppers the harm in their shopping behaviors. Though infrequent, memorable are tasks that combine charity with divine intervention or magical events, as contemporary teens mysteriously travel back in time to help peers who are suffering from extreme poverty, or as Ebenezer Scrooge is visited by ghosts (and also time travels) to be convinced of the error of his greed, leading to a change of heart that results in charitable acts. This relates well to tasks with volunteer work, where the focus is as much on personal transformation as on helping the poor.

In conclusion, the pattern that emerges is largely British school teens providing charity, mostly money, to working children in developing countries (though local charity is not unusual). Usually, the charity is mediated through organizations, and mainly Fairtrade. However, contextual evidence suggests charity may be primarily about doing good deeds than making sustainable change to poverty, as most working children in

developing countries are presented with no solutions in the textbooks—further evidence of this is the presentation of homelessness as mostly insoluble, and charitable donations as simply alleviating their poverty and current condition. Volunteerism is much less common, but when present, it targets teens and highlights the potential transformation of the volunteer as a driving factor.

Approximately 20% of the tasks with *migration* solutions were randomly sampled, leading here to 14 tasks that came from 7 textbooks. These were roughly equally distributed across school forms, but were clustered mostly in grade 8 and mostly in *Klett* (though all publishers are represented). The patterns that emerged from the qualitative analysis revolve around historical migration, contemporary migration, and the relationships between the two.

Historical immigration always involves Europeans immigrating west, mostly in the nineteenth century (some very early twentieth). Six of the seven textbooks present this historical immigration, and five of those involve immigration into the US. These migrants are always described as leaving poverty in their homelands, which is very vaguely referenced (or just simply as joblessness or general poverty), except for cases of Irish immigration to the US due to the Potato Famine. The focus on their hardships includes the situation in Ireland and the travel to, and immigration process into, the US, but usually not afterwards.

Six of the seven textbooks involve contemporary immigration. Contemporary migration involves Central American (4 textbooks) and Caribbean (1 textbook) into the US in five textbooks. Three textbooks that focus on Hispanic immigration show both the poverty left behind in their origin countries, but also continued poverty that is difficult to escape within the US. These are quite common in these textbooks, and were also not coded as migration solutions, but as no solutions, since poverty still exists (though often not as extreme as in origin countries). Also quite common are tasks that present Hispanic immigrants, with no indication of poverty left behind, but rather a focus on poverty found in the US. These can be found in all three textbooks. In two textbooks, this includes legal forms of child labor in contemporary US farms and restaurants. Hispanic poverty is also connected in all textbooks with discrimination by the American society, always presented in the unfriendly treatment of, and hostility toward, Hispanics. The Hispanic individuals are vulnerable, being mostly women and children. All Hispanic examples involve families and a considerable focus on negative affect of the victims while in the

US. Their poverty in the US is also often the focus, and is more specified in terms of the conditions of their living (small living quarters, drug and crime ridden neighborhoods), work (dangerous, hard, and low paid jobs), and no or little education (for children). Furthermore, their poverty in the US is often framed via shame of narrating perspectives, or via the stark photographic contrast of affluent American life with the poverty of Hispanics in the US. Caribbean immigration into the US occurs in three textbooks. Two of these focus on Cuban immigrants (in two tasks total) who, through hard work, have found great success in prestigious professions in the US. The third presents immigration from Jamaica to the US for jobs, with no mention of negative experiences there. One textbook focuses on what looks to be refugees from the Middle East or North Africa, where push and pull factors are presented as reasons for immigration. The push factors are war and poverty (underspecified), while the pull factors are the open and empty spaces of the US, as well as its exorbitant wealth and luxury (all presented in word and image). Finally, one textbook presents contemporary immigration from Ireland to England due to factory closings. Here, the historical poverty of Ireland is also presented, and the focus on hardship is only on leaving family and friends behind.

There is a pattern in the sampled textbooks of presenting contemporary immigration of people of color into the US with the historical immigration of Europeans into the US—all in relation to poverty. This occurs in five of the seven textbooks investigated. This typically does not occur in the same task, but within the context of the same textbooks. Both settings share similar experiences of leaving family and friends, hard journeys and entrance, and an escape from poverty in origin countries. However, the stark differences lie in the experiences once people arrive, as historical Europeans have little indications of hardship in the US, while people of color, especially Hispanics (though there are plenty of cases for other people of color groups too), continue to deal with hardship, discrimination and poverty in the US. These hardships are specified and often numerous in the textbooks.

In summary, historical immigration is almost always from Europe into the US, as people escape vague poverty in their home countries (except when connected to the Potato Famine). Hardships surround travel to and entry into the US, but is almost never described once within the US. Contemporary immigration is almost all from Central America into the US. Hispanic immigration into the US is presented as highly problematic, as many escape extreme forms of poverty (also always vague)

but only end up in (perhaps less extreme) poverty in the US (which is often more specified with more indicators than poverty of origin), where they also frequently face discrimination by Americans and sometimes even experience child labor. Here, the focus is largely on Hispanic females and children immigrants, with a strong focus on negative affect. In the context of the same textbooks, there are also frequent tasks of Hispanic immigrants living in poverty in the US, with no mention of poverty in origin countries. Common in Hispanic poverty tasks is the pairing (in word or image) of Hispanic poverty and US wealth, and sometimes the explicit shame of Americans for the poverty and hardships of Hispanics. In stark contrast are the much more seldom tasks on the immigration of Caribbeans into the US, where poverty is left behind in origin countries and success, always presented through hard work, is found in the US without any mention of further hardships. Historic immigration into the US as a solution to vaguely described poverty seems to establish a context to interpret contemporary, mostly Hispanic immigration into the US, where a less severe but more detailed poverty exists in the destination country alongside explicit and recurring discrimination and hardship. In this light, immigration seems less about being a solution to poverty, and more about setting the context to understand the hardships of immigrants in the US.

Twenty percent of the 54 poverty tasks with *government* solutions were randomly selected for the qualitative analysis. The eleven selected task fall in 9 textbooks, seven of which are for *Realschule* and two for *Gymnasium*. They are represented in all publishers but only grades 8–10, where they are relatively equally distributed. Most national government solutions are presented as questionable, while international government organization (which is rarely depicted) appear to be exempt from critical framing.

Government solutions, framed as questionable, are most common in the US and in South Africa (four textbooks sampled for US and three for South Africa). For the US, different affected groups are presented, including Native Americans, the homeless, the poor in a specific city with a high black population, and child stars. In one textbook, the poverty and many other social ills of a specific Native American tribe are presented in relation to multiple ‘failed’ governmental programs. The possibility of a new program helping is presented (and that governmental programs have been helpful on other reservations), but also explicit doubt whether it will be successful for this particular reservation. For Native Americans, there

are no other tasks with government solutions. For the homeless, one textbook presents a program of a local city government to provide homeless with pets (and money to support them). Though the task presents mostly opinions of support, one opinion of doubt (by an animal rights group) is presented on whether the pets will help the homeless. The program is in no way presented as a solution but rather as an alleviating factor to the condition of the homeless. Most homeless tasks in the textbook have charity solutions, if any at all. For child stars, both parents and failed government protection are blamed for their problems later in life (including poverty), and the hope for future legal protection (through unspecified protective laws) is presented as a solution. Child stars with government solutions occur in two textbooks from the same publisher. In the city of New Orleans, the poor were most affected by Hurricane Katrina, and the government promises to help are presented as questionable in the text and accompanying activities. Though not specified in the task (but would have been discovered in the online research the textbook task initiates), the poor population of New Orleans is mostly African American, and the then president George W. Bush was often accused in the public media of racist intentions in withholding help despite public promises.

In South Africa, the questionability of government solutions is embedded in its history in racism. In the past, the Apartheid government did make initial changes to end the racism that it upheld politically for many years, but only after internal pressure from local, largely black activism and from external pressure from the international community. The more recent historical changes the South African government made to end Apartheid are shown in one textbook to be met with racist backlash from the people of European descent, especially concerning school re-integration. In another task, the historical changes in the government to end Apartheid is compared to the contemporary feeling from black South Africans of lacking equality. In fact, in one of these same textbooks, tasks that present contemporary government solutions to black poverty are still met with skepticism, because the government cannot legislate away remaining racism. The third textbook presents tasks of the South African government providing jobs to blacks via government programs, and another task on government improving township conditions, but only in response to community activism. Activism plays a strong role in this textbook, as the historical poverty of black South Africans is presented

as having been met with activism that led to changes to the Apartheid government.

In Australia, the government is shown in one textbook to have taken measures to improve the poverty of Aborigines and address historical wrongs by formally apologizing and returning large amounts of land to the Aborigines. However, this is also called into question, as in this task (and in others in the textbook) Aborigines are shown to still face many problems, including poverty. This, however, is contextualized in the textbook where the past government was complicit in racist agendas to disenfranchise, discriminate, usurp land, and separate and “reeducate” families. In all these examples, the past institutionalization of racism in governments can be seen as calling their contemporary legitimacy into question, either by having created historically determined inequalities or by not being able to completely end racism in its society.

Finally, two different textbooks present tasks surrounding two separate texts on fictional, dystopic, and future societies, where the government has provided solutions to past social ills, including poverty, in exchange for massive losses to personal freedoms. In one textbook, the government requires all its citizens to implant a chip that tracks them, in return for certain services. Failure to implant the chip is answered with the refusal of services, including housing, food, and medical aid. Here, the government solves poverty, but also threatens with extreme poverty in cases of non-compliance. In the other textbook, a society has also solved poverty, but institutes strict rules on “sameness” which creates a discontented and authoritarian society. These examples show clear evidence of questionable government solutions—either via failed attempts to help poverty in the past, by only providing help and no solutions, by being part of the problem, by being associated with racism (even if historical) or by not being able to end racism.

There are, however, occasions where governmental organizations are presented as helping impoverished communities and no indicators of doubt are present, but these all occur with intergovernmental organizations. The first example is the United Nations, which is presented in two textbooks (from the same publisher) as protecting the rights of children (for instance against child labor). The other textbook presents UNICEF and its large-scale effort to help children, especially to escape child labor. This same textbook also presents an info-box on the European Union, and its mission to improve living standards in poorer areas of Europe. In a third textbook (from a different publisher), the Commonwealth of

Nations is presented in its goal to engage in fighting against poverty in its member states. There are no indications of doubt within these tasks and texts that present these intergovernmental organizations, and there are no contextual precedencies in the textbooks to sow the seed of doubt.

As with the other categories, 20% of the 50 poverty tasks labeled with *self*-initiated solutions were chosen for a qualitative analysis. The 10 tasks that were randomly selected came from 7 textbooks, mostly from both school forms, across all publishers and grades. Some self-initiated measures appear to be clear and helpful, while others appear doubtful in their ability to sustainably effect change.

There are three tasks (from three textbooks) that present relatively clear examples of solutions that come from those suffering from poverty. The first task presents the history of poverty in Ireland, and the recent efforts made by the society to improve it. These efforts include ending the religious and violent conflict known as the *struggles* and joining the EU. Both changes brought businesses to Ireland, where before industries were presented as closing and businesses leaving. The second task from another textbook presents economic hardships of Shakespeare, and the actions he took to solve them. Finally, the third task presents a disabled Irish person from the early twentieth century who, despite his very poor background, was very intelligent and wrote successful books. These clear solutions all occur in Europe and are mostly historical. One presents the efforts of an entire society to improve the economic base of its country, while the other two present actions from individuals to solve their own situations of poverty.

Most self-initiated measures against poverty are highly questionable in terms of their effectiveness. Here there are two major reasons why self-solutions come across as questionable: some are morally questionable, while others are contingent. Two tasks from two separate textbooks present morally questionable self-solutions. In the first task, a contemporary British mother sees herself as forced by her dire economic situation (she can barely house and feed herself and her son) to send her son to live with his father in South Africa. Though this may be an effective strategy, it appears to be a morally questionable solution—especially if generalized. In the context of the story, however, it is a solution that the mother feels forced to make. This morally questionable solution (mediated by circumstance) is illustrated again in the second task from another textbook, in which eighteenth or nineteenth-century English farmers (the exact time-frame is unclear) feel forced to engage in pepper smuggling, due to both

the (as stated in the text) unfair laws of the English government and due to a local greedy rich person who takes land from farmers. Though the smuggling is illegal and comes with serious possible consequences, the smugglers are successful and get to sell their smuggled goods for lots of money at the local market. Though it is presented as a self-initiated solution that is perhaps legitimized by the unfairness of both the government and the local elites, the fact that those who are poor have to engage in illegal activity to improve their situation makes it morally questionable, especially if this were seen to legitimize illegal activity today by those in poverty.

Other self-initiated measures are questionable because they are highly contingent. Some are contingent on the future, as for instance in the case of a contemporary young boy from Somalia in the US who sees getting a good education as a key to his future rise out of poverty. Other tasks are not only future-oriented but are also accompanied by serious hurdles that raise greater doubt that the solutions will come to fruition. They are contingent not just on the future, but on whether outside hurdles can be overcome. For instance, one textbook presents a young farm girl in Ghana who has to work hard on the farm, survive on little food, and often cannot attend school. She hopes to get a good education, move to a city, and one day become a nurse, but she also states that she will likely have to quit school in the next few years to stay home, help on the farm, and raise her siblings. The many contemporary child labor tasks that occur in developing countries in this textbook all have no solutions, making this young girl's hopes seem less likely to come true. This same textbook also presents a contemporary Native American boy who hopes to improve his current poverty by working hard in school, but here again, some doubt is sowed in the text, as he mentions how much prejudice he has to face from society outside the reservation. Here too, the scarcity of Native American poverty tasks with solutions may seem to lessen the boy's chances of success. This is also reflected in several other tasks that present Native American tribes "trying" to improve their poverty by maintaining their traditions and attracting tourists. Their efforts are presented as hopes and attempts, not as successes. This is related to another contingency, specifically the idea that third parties are necessary for the success of self-initiated actions. One textbook presents many tasks on South African poverty, where black South Africans are able to improve their situation via protests and political engagement, both in the past and the present.

In the past, however, the change was contingent on the government willingness to make changes, and in the present, the change is contingent on government solutions which are only offered after considerable protest.

In conclusion, the pattern that emerges from this qualitative analysis of measures against poverty is the questionability of their effectiveness—they are almost never clear solutions, but rather actions that alleviate poverty, nearly always indicating the persistence of poverty even after implementation. The most frequent measure, charity, usually involves money transfers from Western countries to developing countries, and are heavily framed by Western complicity as consumers are wealthy yet want cheap goods, and support harmful industries and often Western, multinational companies that utilize child labor. Volunteering in developing countries is not uncommon, and helping there is concomitant with experiencing personal transformation while gaining work and life skills. Immigration, or the chance one country, typically the USA, offers non-US citizens to escape poverty, is usually tainted by continued poverty once immigrants arrive, which is in part due to discrimination by the dominant society against immigrants who are also people of color. Most government solutions are also partial at best, and trust in them is seriously tainted by histories of racism codified in governmental legal systems, and by contemporary inability to eradicate the residual racism of people of European descent and of the wealthier portions of the societies. Other perspectives view governmental solutions (in works of fiction) as potentially authoritarian, where “the cure is worse than the disease.” The exception is intergovernmental organizations, which are presented uncritically as helping fight against poverty. Self-induced solutions are also mostly alleviating and nearly always questionable, except for historical examples. All contemporary ones are contingent not just on the future, but on historically corrupt third parties, on serious hurdles yet to be overcome, or on finding morally questionable solutions driven by necessity.

Teaching Poverty Assessment

The qualitative analysis of poverty task activities focuses on the category of assessment (here empathy and opinion) for two major reasons. First, there is ample evidence that the representation of poverty in textbook inputs prime learners for empathizing with people of poverty and for developing opinions about poverty, and not for taking any solution-oriented measures (i.e., acting). In the textbooks, there is a focus not on where poverty is

the worst and most frequent, but on where it is the most visible and where both the infrastructure and resources for working against poverty exist—urban and contemporary poverty in high-income countries like the USA, UK, developed countries and South Africa. If poverty is visible and present, and means exist to help, why does it still exist? Specifically, there is a focus on children—the most helpless segment of the population—and on historically marginalized people (people of color), who are presented with greater associations with other vulnerabilities, more types (or indicators) of poverty, and to higher degrees of severity. The causes of poverty are largely related to groups of people—the rich and people of European descent—and these people act out of morally reprehensible intentions (lacking care or racism) and cause negative emotions of the affected people (fear, hurt, or anger). Sometimes the textbook learners themselves are made complicit through their belonging to a market society that is abundant and exploits children and workers in developing countries. Solutions presented in the textbook poverty tasks are largely questionable in their efficacy, as they are often focused on immediate need, they are small scale, and plenty of evidence exists of counteracting influences (often people). Most of the input is created by the textbook authors and fictional, and when a particular perspective is present, it is overwhelmingly that of those living in poverty. This evidence can be interpreted as priming learners with an emotional perspective on poverty—that it is not only sad but also morally wrong. The second reason for a qualitative focus is that there does not appear to be an obvious learning goal associated with global poverty, based on the quantitative analysis of the activities, other than developing opinions and empathy toward people living in poverty. Empathy and opinion activities are a dominant category, action-oriented activities are basically absent, and information-based activities, as the qualitative analysis also reveals, also prime learners to empathize and express supportive opinions against poverty.

Of the 50 sampled assessment activities, 34 were categorized as targeting the evocation of empathy. By far the most common activity type that was categorized as evoking empathy were role play, which could be further broken down into direct role play and creative role play. Direct role play is the less common of the two with four sampled activities, and refers to activities whose corresponding input consist of dramatized texts with dialogue between characters. In such activities, learners were asked to read and act out specific scenes, like for instance in the story of *Robin Hood* or in *Ellis Island*, the story of several young adults migrating from

Ireland to the US in the early twentieth century. These role-play activities have the potential for evoking learner empathy toward characters involved in textbook settings of poverty, though perhaps this potential alone is weak. More obvious are creative role-play activities, where learners are supposed to imagine they are a character presented in a poverty task (input) and then engage in an activity that was not actually presented in the text or story. In the sampled activities, 16 were creative role play. For instance, creative role play activities might ask learners to imagine they are a young girl living in extreme poverty in Bangladesh and write a letter to her mother (who is working in Saudi Arabia sending remittances home), or ask learners to imagine they are a young teen in nineteenth-century London and write a dialogue with the princess who wants to secretly explore poor parts of the city. Instead of focusing directly on information like actions and dialogue directly in texts that thematize poverty, learners here are asked to pretend they are a character and then either extend the story or interact with other characters.

Related to role play, but arguably less obvious, are activities labeled as “exploring mind,” where learners are asked to investigate, think about, and state what characters presented in poverty tasks are thinking (including their intentions) and/or feeling. Such activities evoke information not provided in the task, meaning that learners are supposed to make inferences based on information about characters provided in the textbooks. Such activities are particularly common in response to photographic input, like for instance when a picture of a young Pakistan boy working in a sweatshop is presented, and learners are asked to interpret the context of the situation, the look of the boy, his facial expression, etc., in order to make inferences about his inner world concerning his thoughts and emotional state. Of the sampled assessment activities, four were labeled as “explore mind.”

Slightly less common were activities labeled as “direct contact,” where learners were to imagine that they meet certain characters in a poverty task and could engage in some manner with that character. For instance, learners could be asked to interview characters based on what they would like to know more about. In another example, learners were asked what gift they would offer a young homeless boy in Brazil who is described as having to eat out of the garbage and who is ignored by people in the city who obviously have the means to help him.

The final empathy category describes characterization activities where learners are supposed to gather information from poverty tasks about

specific characters. These activities, of which three were sampled, are arguably information gathering tasks, except for the fact that they all explicitly ask learners to gather information about the emotional states of the characters. It could be assumed that such activities serve the function of turning characters into people, allowing for the representation of their suffering to be felt by the learner via mirror neurons. In conclusion, empathy activities were the most common assessment activities. They present a range of activity types with varying potential for evoking empathy. While empathy is difficult to force upon individuals, there are other strategies used by textbooks to contextualize empathy tasks and ensure not only empathic responses but also the directionality of the empathy. Before this is addressed, two subcategories of assessment and their similarities and differences to empathy activities are investigated.

Common, though less frequent, were activities categorized as evoking opinion. Three of the ten sampled activities that were labeled as opinion also have potential for evoking empathy. Two ask learners to make decisions that characters in poverty tasks are faced with. For one, the learner is asked explicitly to give advice to the characters on what they should do—which could involve aspects of perspective change in order to provide characters with advice fitted for their needs and situation—while for another the learners are asked what neighborhood they would move to based on a story of a family looking to move and a map presenting different neighborhoods of a city—including information on poverty. Here, it is unclear to which extent the learner is supposed to give advice to the family, since it could also be interpreted that the learner should answer as if they were placed with the question of moving there. The third opinion activity with empathy potential presents learners with paired values that relate to values of a character in a poverty task. The learners are asked to choose values in the pairs that are more important. Implied, however, is a compare and contrast function of the learner to the character—with the assumption that finding similarities in values would allow for a greater empathic connection to that character. Six opinion activities are to debate an issue, like whether or not to support beggars or to debate the role of parents in protecting child stars from future problems (like drug use and poverty) in the US, or agree/disagree with statements, like whether they agree with the message of a cartoon on homelessness or whether slang should be banned from schools because it is associated with poverty. One activity involves learners in writing a review about a film on

poverty, in which learners are also supposed to give the film a rating and recommendation.

Finally, six sampled assessment activities were put into the subcategory of reactions. This category also has a potential for evoking empathy, though many examples are less obvious than those that fell within the empathy subcategory. Such activities ask learners to respond to poverty input, most frequently by asking them what they found interesting or surprising. While these activities could be evoking a simple opinion, they could also evoke empathy when the activities present vulnerable people in poverty. For instance, one asks learners what they find interesting about a non-fictional character in Ireland who managed to escape poverty despite being disabled, while another asks learners what they find interesting about Aborigines in Australia after learning, among other things, about past discrimination and violence against them, and about their current poverty. Most, however, ask learners what they like about a story, for instance one story that offers little positive aspects of a young African girl's refugee story as she travels to start a new life in London, or another activity that asks learners what they like about a story involving a young boy of European descent helping a black girl during school desegregation at the end of South African Apartheid. For the first, there is perhaps little to "like" about the contents of the story, and for the second, the only obvious aspect to "like" is the fact that one boy was helpful when all the other interactions of the young black girl with people of European descent are negative.

As shown so far, a majority of sampled assessment activities serve as strong cues to initiate processes of empathizing in the learners. This analysis, however, also investigated the context of the activities and found further evidence to support the role of empathy learning in textbook poverty tasks, that supports both activities labeled as empathy, but also those labeled opinion and reaction. These are presented below as strategies of evoking empathy as well as strategies of directing empathy toward victims of poverty.

This study identifies three major strategies textbook poverty tasks implement to further support direct empathy of learners to people living in poverty. The first is the focus on feelings and emotions, which could occur both in the sampled assessment activities as well as in the series of activities in which the sampled activity falls. For instance, 1/3 of all 34 sampled empathy activities ask learners in the activity to focus on the feelings of the character. For instance, role plays may ask learners to

emphasize emotional states of characters as they read a dialogue, creative role play may ask learners to write about the character's feelings in a letter to that character's family member, or an explore mind activity might ask learners to think about how a poor character feels (and why) based on a picture. As another example, one activity on child poverty in Mexico asks learners how they would feel if they lived like one of these children. This finding shows that a considerable portion of empathy activities not only ask learners to participate in various types of perspective change, but also focus their attention on the emotional states of characters in poverty. Activities labeled empathy are not the only ones to do this, however, as it also occurs in one of the six reaction activities. To underline the difference between empathy activities and opinion activities, not one of the opinion activities has this explicit focus on the feelings and emotional state of the characters.

However, the focus on feelings could also occur in previous activities within a set accompanying the task, serving to prime the learners to focus on emotion during the assessment activity or to accentuate that focus when engaging with the assessment activity. For instance, 1/3 of all empathy activities had associated activities that also focused on character feelings or emotional states, and only about half of these corresponded to empathy activities that also focused on feelings—meaning half supported, while the other half primed the focus on emotion. Such contextual priming was less frequent for opinion activities, as it occurred in only one case, and never occurred for reaction activities. However, this focus on feelings of characters living in poverty both in assessment activities and in associated activities underlines a general focus of textbooks in developing not just empathy in learners, but specifically emotional empathy.

In reference to the second strategy of supporting and directing empathy, evidence was collected on whether assessment tasks were supported with previous information gathering and processing activities. This looks at the extent to which assessment is a reaction to poverty input, or whether learners are supposed to critically engage with texts and its information before empathizing with characters or drawing conclusions. For empathy activities, 1/3 were not preceded by any previous activities, meaning learners were given empathy activities without first expecting them to engage with the content of the texts in any way. Also surprising is that 3/5 (or six out of ten) opinion activities were also not supported, meaning that learners are asked their opinions about content

before engaging with the content in a meaningful way. For reaction activities, four out of six activities were unsupported, but this can be attributed to their function of gathering first reactions to a text, presumed as a way to relate the learner to the content and motivate before further engagement. Not uncommon, though, are assessment activities that both focus on feelings of characters in poverty and are also unsupported, meaning that emotional empathy is a prerequisite for further engagement with the text, or that emotional empathy is expected as a result of the initial engagement with the input. Either way, assessment activities not unfrequently occur without any previous engagement with the text, like with information gathering and processing activities that would perhaps help learners engage more deeply—or perhaps critically—with the characters, the story, or its staging narrative within the textbook poverty tasks.

The third strategy for priming empathy is the presentation of moral harm in the input, as well as in related textbook context. As explained in Chapter 3, moral harm can be explained by the presence of a vulnerable person (the patient), who expresses negative affect, with a human agent who intentionally acts upon their vulnerability. Some moral harm is implied, which occurs when there is a vulnerable patient with negative affect (anger, fear, sadness, worry, etc.), and a privileged or powerful group, but direct action or intent is missing. This occurs, for instance, in tasks where extreme wealth is paired with extreme poverty, or when privileged people of European descent are paired with vulnerable people of color, with the suggestion that unequal outcomes are unfair and that those with privilege and power are, at the very least, not helping. Moral harm can thus be seen, not in harmful actions, but in neglect and in the lack of care.

Moral framing can highlight and socially contextualize moral harm, for instance when there is the presence of a helper who either supports the patients or stops the agent from further harm. Help can occur via volunteering or charity, but it can also occur via intervention, for instance when Robin Hood stops the sheriff from taking from the poor. Further moral framing can come from third party individuals or groups who witness, but also morally evaluate or comment on the harm, and it can also come from focusing or emphasizing virtues of the patients and the vices—but also power, status, or privilege—of the agents. Typical virtues of the poor in textbooks are family members who care and take responsibility for each other, who work hard, try to get a good education, or explicitly support ideals of justice and fairness, even at the cost of their own interests. Power,

status, and privilege of agents can be institutional (government, police) or it can be wealth or access to resources like health care and education. Common vices come through expressing greed or disdain (or even hate) for others or for the poor, following self-interests at the costs of others, or ignoring the obvious presence of inequality and suffering. The point here is that if textbooks prime learners for empathy and socially acceptable opinions toward poverty by moral framing in the input, then they will also less likely engage learners critically with the content—the characters, the stories, and the causes and effects of poverty in the activities. In other words, they are less likely to be self-directed in their empathy, and less likely to draw their own opinions. Instead, they will look for socially desired responses that reflect the dominant narrative of the textbooks.

The analysis shows that assessment activities often follow input texts with extensive moral framing. For instance, empathy activities are associated with input showing clear moral harm in $1/3$ of all cases, and implied moral harm in another $1/3$. Furthermore, about $1/2$ of all these inputs are supported by a moral framing, meaning helpers or witnesses are present to recognize moral harm, and the moral virtue of the poor and the vice or privilege of agents (or implied agents) are emphasized. This means that for the majority of empathy tasks, learners are primed for a specific moral stance on those in poverty before they are given cues in activities to empathize with them. The results are even stronger for the subcategory of reaction, even though it has a substantially smaller sample size of six. For this category, $1/2$ present a clear moral harm while the other $1/2$ present an implied moral harm, meaning all activities are associated with at least an implied moral harm. Furthermore, one of these activities is also associated with an input that has an additional moral framing. For the ten opinion activities that were sampled, only two presented moral harm while three presented implied moral harm, totaling $1/2$ of activities being associated with at least implied moral harm. Furthermore, four opinion activities also had moral framing, suggesting that substantial priming for empathy occurs even for opinion activities.

A final missing link, however, is the fact that poverty tasks do not occur in a vacuum in textbooks, but rather within series of other poverty tasks addressing similar poverty topics, themes and settings. For instance, a poverty task taking place in contemporary South Africa or on homelessness in the US may not present evidence of moral harm within that task, but it may be preceded by multiple poverty tasks that do. Thus, poverty tasks on specific topics and settings of poverty can be seen as a

part of a kaleidoscope, where taken together, a greater, more coherent image of poverty for that context can be drawn. For empathy activities, $\frac{1}{2}$ have moral harm, and an additional $\frac{1}{5}$ have implied moral harm, and $\frac{1}{2}$ provide further moral framing, all in contextually related poverty tasks. For opinion activities, six (or $\frac{3}{5}$) provide moral harm while two ($\frac{1}{5}$) provide further moral framing, and for reaction, three (or $\frac{1}{2}$) provide additional relevant moral harm and four (or $\frac{2}{3}$) provide additional moral framing.

CONCLUSION

This section provided a comprehensive qualitative analysis of how global poverty is represented and taught in EFL textbooks. It builds upon previous quantitative findings to explore aspects that are more implicit and nuanced—such as contributing factors, poverty measures, and activities designed to foster empathy or opinion formation. The analysis of contributing factors focused on four categories: *other*, *society*, *people of European descent*, and *economic elites*. *Other* includes natural disasters or personal failings and differs between contexts (e.g., personal choices in the West vs. natural disasters in the Global South). *Society* often reflects vague structural causes like unemployment or a hostile civil environment. *People of European descent* are presented as historical and ongoing contributors to systemic inequality, especially in settler-colonial nations like the US, South Africa, and Australia. *Economic elites*, including corporations and consumers, are frequently depicted as exploitative or apathetic, often reinforcing global inequities. When examining measures to alleviate poverty, the analysis finds that most are framed as alleviations rather than long-term solutions. *Charity*, often by British teens via organizations like Fairtrade, is the most common measure but is portrayed as emotionally driven rather than structurally effective. *Migration* is shown to provide limited relief, especially for Hispanic migrants to the US, who often continue to experience poverty and discrimination. *Governmental solutions* are typically portrayed as ineffective or suspect, especially national efforts tainted by histories of racism, while *international bodies* like the UN are depicted more positively. *Self-initiated solutions* are mostly framed as morally questionable or heavily contingent on external factors. Finally, assessment activities, particularly those promoting *empathy and opinion formation*, were addressed more closely. The dominant strategy

in textbooks is to evoke emotional responses through role play, character exploration, and moral framing. Learners are often primed to adopt empathetic stances toward vulnerable populations, especially children and people of color. However, these activities are rarely preceded by critical engagement or information gathering, leading to a more emotionally driven, rather than critically analytical, understanding of poverty. Moreover, moral harm is frequently implied or explicit in the presentation of poverty.

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EFL Teacher Perspectives on Global Poverty Education

While textbooks play a significant role in classroom teaching, and therefore also for student outcomes, so do the teachers who use them. As shown in Chapter 2, teacher pedagogical beliefs have a strong influence on teacher actions, like planning, teaching, structuring interactions with learners, and determining teaching styles, methods, and learning environments. Teacher pedagogical beliefs in turn influence relationships to students, students' belief in their own success, the attitudes they take toward learning, as well as the knowledge and competences they acquire. Thus, it can be stated that knowing what teachers believe about global poverty education is extremely central for understanding the influence that the representation and teaching of global poverty in textbooks will have on learners. As laid out in greater detail in Chapter 4, teachers were interviewed in order to find out more about their pedagogical beliefs about teaching global poverty in the EFL classroom, and how these beliefs align with the goals of global poverty education. More specifically, the interviews targeted teacher support of the topic in general, and for the different dimensions of competency specifically, as well as the reasons they give for their support (or lack thereof). Finally, the interviews aimed at also determining how teachers view the representation and teaching of global poverty in their EFL textbooks. The findings to these questions are not only relevant for understanding in general how global poverty education is currently being taught in EFL teaching in Germany, and how

Table 6.1 Quantitative focus of teacher beliefs on poverty education

<i>Aspect of teaching</i>	<i>Comment amount</i>	<i>Percent %</i>
<i>Evaluation</i>	146	49
<i>General</i>	100	33
<i>Acting</i>	28	9
<i>Recognizing</i>	27	9
Total	301	

it could potentially be improved, but also how the findings of the text-book analysis may influence both classroom teaching as well as learner outcomes.

Thus, the structure of the research questions guides the structure of the presentation of findings in this chapter. First, the findings on teacher beliefs about the general topic of global poverty as a subject of EFL teaching will be presented, before moving on to the results of teacher beliefs concerning poverty, knowledge, attitudes (including critical thinking), and action. For each of these topics, specific focus will be paid to what teachers believe about themselves, about the institutional/systemic context of their teaching, and about their learners in their classrooms. This will then set the background to investigate what teachers believe about their textbooks, as related to each dimension of global poverty education.

Based on the findings from the interviews, three aspects become glaringly obvious. First is that, though the interview was not designed to focus disproportionately on any particular dimension of global poverty education, teachers reacted stronger to certain topics by responding in greater detail. Table 6.1 shows that teachers spent nearly half the interview speaking about the dimension of evaluation, and then about 1/3 of the interview stating and explaining beliefs about the topic of poverty in general. Relatively little time was spent by the teachers on the dimensions of acting and recognizing. A second salient feature of the interview is the overall negative valence teachers exhibited toward the topic (cf. table 6.2). Overall, nearly 2/3 of all interview data was recorded as presenting challenges and problems of teaching global poverty education. As a general topic of for the EFL classroom, teachers are overwhelmingly negative, and they also focus overwhelmingly on problems related to the dimension of action. However, they express the dimension of evaluation more ambivalently, and speak of information acquisition more positively.

Table 6.2 Valence of teacher perspectives by dimension

	<i>Against (Overall 64%)</i>	<i>For (Overall 36%)</i>
General	87	13
Information	30	70
Evaluation	51	49
Action	82	18

Table 6.3 Valence of teacher perspectives by object of focus

	<i>Reasons against (64%)</i>	<i>Reasons for (36%)</i>	<i>Total/%</i>
System	88	22	110/35
Textbooks	46	14	60/19
Learners	63	15	78/25
Teachers	0	62	62/20
Total	197	113	310

The final salient feature of the interview findings is that teachers suggest very different reasons for their valenced beliefs in global poverty education. Table 6.3 shows that teachers reference different aspects of education (and at differing amounts) when discussing the topic, and that these have slightly different rates of valence. It also shows that teachers have quite positive self-beliefs, meaning here that they value the topic of global poverty education (true across all dimensions) and are able to generate ideas of pedagogical integration, but it also shows that teachers identify many institutional reasons as challenges, they feel their learners present substantial hurdles, and feel overall unprepared by their textbooks to teach the topic. It also shows that, once positive teacher self-beliefs are set aside, teachers have an even greater negative view of global poverty education, with nearly 80% of their discussions focusing on problems and challenges.

The findings point to a significant and troubling issue. As demonstrated in the analysis that follows, teachers exhibit limited support for—and minimal confidence in—the effectiveness of global poverty education within the context of EFL instruction, at least in its current form. A central difficulty in interpreting these attitudes lies in the challenge of identifying precise underlying causes. The data suggest the presence of

a generalized aversion to the topic, one that appears to be applied indiscriminately across various dimensions and thematic areas, with the notable exception of teacher self-beliefs. This pervasive aversion further complicates efforts to ascertain teachers' perceptions of the textbooks they employ and their pedagogical approaches to global poverty. Either way, it appears likely that the overarching negativity exerts a substantial influence on how teachers view and teach global poverty, and provides clues to how they will frame and supplement (or not) the topic when it appears in the textbooks during lessons. The remainder of this chapter will present a more nuanced account of the interview data, highlighting key patterns and presenting the differentiated ways in which teachers engage with specific dimensions and topics related to global poverty.

ON THE TOPIC OF GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

Teachers expressed strong beliefs on the topic of poverty, and they spent considerable time during the interview to express their views. One third of all the interviews were coded as relevant for the general topic of poverty, and of this topic, nearly all (about 90% of coded comments in this category) were negative. In fact, nearly all positive comments—as is the case for all other interview categories—were directed toward teachers valuing the topic of global poverty education. However, a strong majority of the rest of the interviews were dedicated to teachers naming and explaining obstacles that stand in the way of its implementation.

Teacher Self-Beliefs

Five of the interviewed teachers expressed that they value global poverty education and can think of methods for integrating it into their teaching. Two teachers focused specifically on expressing value for the topic. A teacher from *Realschule* expressed her belief that teaching a foreign language (and cultures) includes focusing not just on positive aspects of places around the world, but also on their problems and injustices. She explains, “I feel responsible as a teacher to tell them about poverty in other countries and talk about whatever happens in Russia or China. [...] Not just poverty, but this might be, yes, social issues or the injustice, for example, in other countries' systems.” For this teacher, poverty is part and parcel of a greater set of “social issues” and “injustice” in certain

countries around the world, and she feels this is a part of her responsibility as a teacher to include in global poverty education. Another teacher (from *Gymnasium*) also views poverty as a social issue, and believes it is a valuable topic to highlight social inequalities, also in the classroom. As the interview took part during the Corona pandemic, the teacher believes poverty is a relevant topic to discuss the long-term social implications of certain policies that restrict social contact. He states, “If you talk about global poverty, maybe you don’t only talk about financial poverty, but also social poverty, because this is something we have developed a lot in the last two years.” Giving an example within a school context, he continues, “I mean, this is kind of poverty. I would say we, everybody of us is dealing with, especially in school.” This teacher values poverty as a topic of social injustice, and interprets it as one that holds the potential to reflect (and educate about) social inequalities—in schools and in the classroom. According to this teacher, the lack of such reflection in education leads to social and educational policies (within the context of the pandemic) that “destroys learning” and “gives them anxiety” in a period of their development in which they “should be socializing.” Of the eight teachers interviewed, two supported the educational value of global poverty education. These two teachers view poverty as a social problem and include it as a responsibility of teaching culture and social inequality.

Three teachers also express beliefs concerning their ability to educate about global poverty, largely by sharing ideas and tips on how to teach it. One teacher from *Gymnasium* relates a teaching experience on the topic of migrant labor in California in which she invited someone from a non-profit organization to speak during an online conference call. The teacher saw value in “making it personal” (through her own connection to the speaker) and by providing “not just something out of the book.” Another teacher (from *Realschule*) also believes in making the topic of poverty “personal” by introducing characters that the learners can relate to. She stated, “You need a personal perspective. That means you need a boy from Mumbai, or you need a girl from Joburg. Something like that.” A final teacher (also from *Realschule*) expressed the idea that the meaning of poverty should be investigated and discussed in class as a meaningful activity. He then suggested addressing the question as it applies to different geographic locations, stating, “You could have a topic, what is poverty? And then you could, even in English teaching at the higher levels, you could go into what is poverty here and what is poverty say in India or South Africa or anywhere in Africa, you know.” He suggested

such an investigation could precede any further work on poverty in the classroom. These comments show that five of the interviewed teachers express beliefs, either in valuing global poverty education, or in their ability to teach or introduce the topic in the EFL teaching. These self-beliefs stand in contrast to the overwhelming majority of comments from teachers that focus on serious challenges that stand in the way of global poverty education.

Systemic Challenges

While some teachers believe that global poverty education is a part of their institutionally determined educational responsibilities, most express overwhelming beliefs that institutional challenges prohibit inclusion in their teaching. For example, two teachers express beliefs that teaching English as a foreign language should include global poverty education. One teacher, from *Gymnasium*, notes that “our job as English teachers is not only to teach grammar [...] but that we actually teach content. And that’s not only teaching kids what it’s like to live in London.” She later clarifies that teaching English also has a political dimension, stating, “It’s a whole lot more, we can teach a lot of politics in the English classroom.” For her, the inclusion of political issues makes room for global poverty education. Another teacher (from *Realschule*) believes that focusing on English spoken around the world enables the inclusion of thematizing poverty in those countries. She states that through this, learners “should get a view of poverty in other countries, like for maybe India.” But beyond these sparse statements that highlight institutional support of global poverty education, most teachers spend considerable time focusing on systemic challenges.

Three teachers from *Realschule* expressed substantial beliefs that the topic of global poverty is too complex for the English language proficiency of their learners. One teacher stated, “I think it’s a bit of a language problem. And a lot of our children, they don’t like learning their vocabulary. So, they have too few words. I think they can’t discuss these problems.” Another teacher agreed by stating that the topic can be introduced once the learners have improved their proficiency substantially. She stated, “when you got a good basic idea of English, then you can start if you like, thinking about the world and what’s wrong with it.” Due to the complexity of the topic, the teacher believes it should be covered in the students’ native language, “Then you do that in the pupils’ own

language, and you can do far more. You know, because you're thinking in German and translating into English. And pupils do that, they have to do that. They can't think bilingually." This teacher also believes the topic is too complex for the language proficiency of many language teachers, "It has been my experience that most of the English teachers can't speak fluent English. And so, this leads to uncertainty." A third teacher also believes her students' English proficiency is too low, and that the topic of global poverty is too complex for her English classroom. She stated, "I wouldn't like to do that in English courses in my classes," and explained, "My students don't want to speak English. [...] And some of them, they can't speak English." *Realschule* teachers express nearly unanimous belief that the topic of global poverty is too complex for the English language proficiency of their learners.

All teachers interviewed expressed belief that the topic of global poverty education is more appropriate for older or more advanced learners, preferably in secondary level 2, where learners have not only greater English language proficiency, but also more world knowledge to contribute. One teacher stated, "I think this would be more suitable for children or the students in the higher levels of school and not at the lower levels, because they haven't got the political background [...] After the tenth class, then they have a good basis of knowledge. Before that, I think it would be very difficult." Another teacher made a similar statement, claiming, "once they grow up and once they get older [...] in year 10 or 13. Some of them are also very economically interested [...] But this, I would say is the minority of them because it is quite complex." Another teacher implied that learning about global poverty requires a level of maturity not present in secondary level one, stating, "I think you can't discuss so many things on a higher level, because they are still very young." Another teacher saw an issue in the early phases of puberty, and viewed an opportunity in the latter half of this phase for introducing topics like global poverty. He stated, "when you're in the Sek 2, you have this short amount of time where you have a dream or where you have something you really want to do. And if you can catch this point and do something important with that, you can change a lot for those people." One teacher sees potential of teaching the topic as of grade 9, but only after certain language and task-based skills have been developed, while another teacher believes grade 11 offers "a lot of freedom to do projects." All teachers believe that the topic of global poverty is more appropriate

for secondary level 2, when learners have not only greater English proficiency, but also world knowledge, greater maturity, and curricular space for more open-ended project work.

Six teachers noted that global poverty education is not (an explicit) part of the educational curriculum for teaching English as a foreign language, and identify this as a challenge. One teacher stated, "So, I feel like the whole subject is not huge in the English curriculum [...] So, we don't really have that many deep discussions about these things." Another teacher also noted its absence, stating "As far as I'm aware in secondary 1, for poverty, it is not included in any school curricula." A third teacher noted its absence in her teaching and in her textbooks, stating, "Well it's a topic that I personally haven't been involved at in my teaching," while a fourth teacher believes the topic is not a part of typical English teaching, stating, "I don't think that it's really a topic for English." Another teacher realized during the interview that poverty is thematized, but just not explicitly. He explained, "I'm sorry, I just have to, it's-, I have to roll it back a little bit in my head. We have our takes on poverty, but they were embedded in a broader context of immigration, in a broader context of racism in this case. So, it wasn't really that discussed as the topic of poverty in this way." A final teacher explained that a challenge to integrating global poverty education into English teaching is its (assumed) absence in the official curriculum, "You also got a problem in Germany, by the way, of the fact that the whole curriculum is set out, what you teach, and more or less how you teach it. You know, we have to do the *Kerncurriculum* (core curriculum), you know?"

Three of the four teachers interviewed from *Realschule* expressed a belief that the topic of global poverty is appropriate for *Gymnasium* and not *Realschule*. One teacher believes that this is due to the family backgrounds of those in *Realschule*, claiming, "I think it's the upbringing, the family background a bit. I think, yes, they don't read anymore. They don't read a lot. And their parents, they don't show them either." This leads the pupils to not take their education "as serious as it should be [...] It's really bad, and it's frustrating." A second teacher expressed her belief that *Gymnasium* is more appropriate for the topic, stating, "The level of scholastic achievement is, of course, not as high as is in *Gymnasium*. You can discuss something with a child from the *Gymnasium*, discuss, because they're like a sponge, they'll suck up knowledge, but children at *Realschule*, they won't." A third teacher believes that *Gymnasium* students not only have the required language proficiency,

but can also handle the required style of teaching that is more appropriate for global poverty education: “I had a comprehensive school, a class full of secondary pupils. But the way they were taught from the fifth class on, they were able to do that. [...] And that is something my pupils now are not able to do.” The interviews with these three *Realschule* teachers revealed a common belief that teaching poverty is better suited for *Gymnasium*, as the learners there are more capable and interested, and since the teaching style is more suitable for the complexity of the topic.

Two teachers expressed uncertainty over how to evaluate outcomes of global poverty education. One teacher from *Gymnasium* explained that she would need to know how the topic should be tested before she could teach it, and that she was uncertain how to combine testing the topic with the typical focus on language. She concluded, “So, designing a class test on the topic of poverty is going to be, could be too difficult. That’s what I think.” The second teacher (from *Realschule*) also expressed the belief that traditional evaluation may create difficulties. She stated, “I don’t know if the test folks could change to that topic. And if they are changed, I would like to have a project and not a normal unit on it. Because the units are always built up like it’s listening, then it’s reading, and then it’s writing. And then you’ve got creative tasks. And to work on this kind of topic, you need a different way to step into it.” These two teachers see challenges to teaching global poverty, and felt they need more institutional or systemic support before they could integrate the topic into their teaching.

Three teachers believe that, in general, the topic of global poverty could be too sensitive for school, especially since it holds the potential to reflect poverty and inequality in Germany and in the classroom. One teacher from *Gymnasium* believes that discussing poverty in the classroom can disrupt social harmony among the students. Speaking in general, he presented the avoidance of controversial topics like poverty as a social strategy to maintain relationships, stating, “We are so afraid about being left by people that we give them what they want.” Another teacher (from *Realschule*) explained that the topic of poverty is associated with feelings of shame in the West, and that it brings with it a culture of avoidance and embarrassment. He states that no one “wants to see it” and “nobody likes being criticized”—this is presented as a reason for focusing only on poverty in other geographical regions. A third teacher (also from *Realschule*) expressed a similar belief while pointing out the correlation between race (and discrimination) and poverty, “But Germans don’t like

to focus on racism, they like to focus on multiculturalism.” As seen in other topics that arose during the interviews, some teachers believe that poverty is a sensitive topic—one that is often avoided in society and that can bring with it shame and embarrassment in the classroom.

One teacher from *Gymnasium* believes she has not received proper training in teaching topics related to global poverty, and that she had to learn how to do this on her own and over time. She stated, “If somebody asked me if I was going to be teaching history or like civil rights movements [...] or teaching politics, I was like, oh, no, I couldn’t do that.” Instead, these topics were “something I kind of jumped in.” This statement underlines that most teachers lack formal training in teaching global poverty, and that many have to learn “on the job” how to integrate such topics into their classroom teaching.

Learners

Teachers only see challenges of the topic of global poverty learning for their learners. The five teachers (only one of which is from *Gymnasium*) to relate the topic to their learners believe their learners are not interested and that the topic is too sensitive for them.

Four teachers (all from *Realschule*) believe their learners are not interested in the topic of global poverty—though this disinterest is most commonly attributed to a general lack of interest in school and in learning English. While discussing the relevance of the topic of poverty for the lives of her learners, one teacher stated, “The only thing that I wish my students would do differently is to take their studies a bit more serious.” Another teacher commented on the difference between herself when she was a school student and the learners she has now, claiming that learners now are not that interested in learning about other cultures. She explained, “I think I can’t compare myself to these children nowadays, because I was really interested in different cultures. And I think the children at my school, they just don’t really care. They don’t have really something they are really interested in. They have, like nothing.” She attributed this in part to online media, “They have YouTube, and they think they know it all.” A third *Realschule* teacher stated that most of his learners “don’t want to learn English” and that “They learn English because they have to and not because it is interesting.” This lacking interest is also related to negative stereotypes of foreign countries, “And take a topic like the USA, in the tenth class, USA. Don’t want to go

there, you get shot... you know?" He concluded, "It's a topic which they're not-, they can't associate with it." The final teacher makes a similar argument against the topic of poverty in school. She explained that her students in her other subject do not like the topic, stating, "That's a topic in my geography class, and they hate it [...] We do that in our geography classes, they don't like it." All teachers from *Realschule* (plus one from *Gymnasium*) believe that their students are not interested in the topic of global poverty, and present this as a serious challenge for its pedagogical integration.

Four teachers (three of which are from *Realschule*) expressed beliefs that the topic of poverty is too sensitive for the learners in their classes, largely because poverty and inequality is something many learners experience themselves. One teacher from *Gymnasium* explained that the poorer students in his class want to keep their economic status a secret from the others. He stated, "I don't think that anybody would come to me and say, can you please don't tell us to get out our tablets. I don't have a tablet because we can't afford it. Nobody would do that. Nobody would come to anybody and tell them I can't afford this or that." He claimed these are "sensitive talks" that "we have to talk about in school," and that these discussions require clarification afterwards and "a safe room" for learners to feel comfortable and free from judgment. A *Realschule* teacher related more explicitly the role of poverty in her classroom, stating that there is "a lot of migration going on in the last six years when it comes to Germany," including families "fleeing from war and conflict" and migrating within Europe for better employment. She warned, "it's a very sensitive topic, and you have to be careful when talking about this." A second *Realschule* teacher shared a similar experience, stating, "The subject poverty, I think you've got another problem, that in any class, you've got children who have parents who have enough money, can buy anything they want and also parents who are living on the breadline." He explained that discussing global poverty may highlight socioeconomic differences between the learners in the class, "You walk a tight rope if you like, not to bring up subjects which would be—what's the word? Sensitive to one group in the class. Poverty is one of them." He then criticized what he sees to be the dominant societal strategy of ignoring the problem—"You know, one thing that Germans are very good at, is avoiding issues. Get rid of them. They're not there. Yeah. You know, that's not just in politics but it is in general." He also believes parents would pressure teachers to avoid the topic of poverty, "because that's embarrassing."

A third *Realschule* teacher pointed out that teachers she knows avoid the topic of poverty (for instance in geography) because of inequality in the classroom. She explained, “I know that we don’t like poverty topics because our children, they’ve got poverty at home. [...] I’m at a very multicultural school, and they have emigrated, or their parents have emigrated or even they had to move from war.” This leads this teacher—and her colleagues—to avoid the topic altogether. She stated, “I think that teachers more and more are not interested in teaching those hard subjects [...] So, they-, I avoid them. I just didn’t do them actually, even if I have to in geography. We did Australia instead of *arme Länder*, *reiche Länder* (poor countries, rich countries) because it was nicer.” This teacher also believes that school education should avoid creating spaces of conflict by bringing external conflicts into the classroom, “School must be a place where they should be more or less without this kind of problem. It should be a safer place [...] We have more social workers at the moment than anything else.” For half the interviewed teachers (and predominantly *Realschule* teachers), the topic of global poverty is problematic because it reflects poverty among some of the students, and highlights the socioeconomic differences that potentially divide them.

EFL Textbooks

This overwhelmingly negative perspective on global poverty as an educational topic in EFL teaching sets the backdrop to understand teacher beliefs concerning global poverty in their EFL textbooks. Perhaps not surprisingly, teachers maintained this overwhelmingly negative perspective when addressing their textbooks. However, before addressing their criticisms, it is important to note that teachers did express some positive beliefs concerning their textbooks and how they present global poverty in general. Three teachers recognized that global poverty is a topic presented in their EFL textbooks. Two teachers (one from *Gymnasium* and one from *Realschule*) identify that poverty is typically presented in Africa, Asia, and India. The teacher from *Gymnasium* also notes historical poverty (“the Great Famine”) but also poverty in “big cities” and with “African Americans and Hispanics” in the US. The teacher from *Realschule* focused on South Africa and “townships,” especially “as of grade nine or ten.” The third teacher (also from *Gymnasium*) noted that “global matters and making a difference” began to appear in “new books” as of “year nine and ten.” She noted that before, “I wasn’t personally

involved in the topic, the topic hadn't really touched me personally." However, the five other interviewed teachers believe the topic of global poverty was completely missing from their EFL textbooks, or that it was extremely implicit and hidden.

Most of the interviewed teachers did not realize—or believe—that global poverty was present in their textbooks, at least prior to the interview. One teacher from *Gymnasium* stated, "So, you focus on poverty, and I don't feel like I see a lot of that in textbooks. [...] I don't feel like it's really in the book." Instead, she explained that textbooks focus on "Britain," the "USA" and "Australia," mostly "rich countries." Another teacher from *Gymnasium* explained at the beginning of the interview that she was concerned about being interviewed on a topic that was not in her EFL textbook. She explained, "when you contacted me, I thought, oh, global poverty, when do we have that? We don't teach that. And even my colleagues said, oh, yeah, in year 11 it's big. It's like, oh, great. I haven't taught year 11 for 15 years." When questioned about poverty in EFL textbooks, a teacher from *Realschule* responded, "I don't think that they focus on poverty at all." Another *Realschule* teachers made a similar statement, "I can't remember any topic on poverty in the textbooks that I am teaching. It's practical. The focus is on reading, writing and speaking." A final teacher from *Realschule* also did not originally recognize the topic of poverty in her EFL textbook, and only realized as she looked through her book during the interview.

Half of the interviewed teachers realized during the interviews that poverty is thematized in their EFL textbooks, but also claimed that the topic is not central, often implicit, and presented with other more salient topics. Once realizing the topic is present in her textbooks, one teacher from *Gymnasium* stated, "But this topic of poverty, to me it's been kind of a hidden topic in others, as well." Rather, she noted that poverty "is only like a by-product of the other topics, racism, discrimination," also naming "the environment, or yeah, globalization," appearing "when you talk about plastics, then you see these kids in China who are digging through piles of plastic recycling and ruining their health." She concluded, "So it's not directly addressed as a topic itself, it's just part of a topic." Another teacher from *Realschule* also initially claimed poverty is not present in the textbook, but then modified after further reflection, "I think it's more about like social issues, or that they have like, when they introduced, like, families, it's about like, patch work, which I said before, or a single parent. And also, like, they are always colored people and

Indian people like, this is something they have to include, I think.” For her, poverty may be mentioned, but it is not a focus, but a by-product of presenting different types of people. Another *Realschule* teacher also only recognized the topic after reexamining his textbook, but deemphasizes its role as a part of discussing race and racism in the USA. He stated, “I mean, the problems of the Afro-Americans in the USA is also a poverty problem.” The final *Realschule* teacher also looked in her book and found an example. She also expressed her belief that the topic is only related to certain countries like India and South Africa. She explained, “I just looked up, it was grade 8, I taught India. And I think that’s the only unit in those course books that cope with poverty. And the others like South African, their law, historical problems. And it’s only in there when like Slumdog Millionaire comes up.”

Three teachers commented that textbooks focus too much on middle-class life, and not on poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* pointed out that the textbooks focus on “teeny, tiny bits of social inequalities,” and present “working class” individuals who “live in a village now, and there’s a really nice community in the village” where “the neighbors offer help.” She noted that when inequality is present, it is usually associated with children with “an immigration background in the UK, like usually Pakistan or India. Usually they are not very rich, they often live in a flat as opposed to a house.” A teacher from *Realschule* also saw a similar focus in her textbooks, stating that they take “too much of a middle-class perspective on poverty.” This results in the representation of poverty as being “too stereotypical when it comes to this topic,” and she wished instead “for more believable material that feels real,” from “people who have truly experienced poverty and who can talk about their own experiences.” A final teacher, also from *Realschule*, expressed her belief that textbooks typically focus on places around the world as tourist destinations, pointing to a typical middle-class perspective of world-representation. She explained, “This is very typical for German people. They go on holiday, to maybe London or Birmingham, Manchester or whatever, or Commonwealth or New York City, California and Florida.” She then proposed that this approach excludes the opportunity to focus on global poverty, “It’s not about the other big regions that are left and maybe that they have poverty, for example. People living in the countryside or in the country. No, this is not shown, only like the touristic hotspots.” These three teachers expressed their beliefs that textbooks target middle-class lives that either excludes or skews perspectives on poverty.

Two teachers criticized what they view as an incoherent presentation of global poverty in textbooks, which can lead to a serious backgrounding of the topic. One teacher from *Gymnasium* believes that the way EFL textbooks treat social topics diminishes the value of the topics, leading to a foregrounding of skill-based over topic-based learning. He stated, "Textbooks are teaching different skills independently of the topic [...]. There is no coherence in it." He explained further, "And this is the problem because we are people of media. We are more used to coherent and to connected stories than to-, Now we will do a reading part about Louisiana. On the next page, we will do the simple past because we need it. And after that, we talk about alligators on the sticks in the Mississippi, whatever area." This incoherence in the treatment of topics leads to a devaluation of the topic, as he stated the general response to this, "Who the heck cares!?" Another teacher, also from *Gymnasium*, noted what seems to her to be the random insertion of poverty in textbook activities, and explained this leads to teachers and learners to not focus on the topic as a learning goal. While looking through a textbook she brought with her, she found an activity that presents global poverty and explained, "I mean, that's global poverty, that's the topic, but it doesn't come out as that topic. The topic for me was refugees, it's a story about refugees. Why do people travel? And then that's how it was presented, why do people travel? It was, traveling was the topic." The teacher then identified this implicit thematization of poverty as a problem, as "selling a story as something nice, like traveling, reasons for traveling, when you really want to talk about poverty." She then concluded, "The biggest mistake is not identifying or not even listing it as an objective. When they list the objectives of what they're supposed to learn in this chapter, you will learn it." These two teachers recognized that global poverty is present in their EFL textbooks, but complained of a lacking coherence, and that this leads to teachers and learners to either ignore or completely overlook its presence and learning value.

In Sum

As this section illustrates, teachers expressed strong beliefs on the topic of poverty, and they spent considerable time during the interview to express their views. Overall, this section presents compelling evidence that teachers are, at the very least, seriously uncertain about teaching global poverty in the EFL classroom, and that this uncertainty translates into

a general disposition against the topic as a whole. While some teachers expressed that they value the topic of global poverty and can name methods of its pedagogical integration, they found mostly numerous reasons for avoiding it. They identified many systemic reasons for avoiding it, naming considerable language barriers, that it is more appropriate for older learners, or not for students in *Realschule*, that the topic is not in their curriculum, that they do not know how to grade this learning, that they are not trained to teach it or that it is too sensitive for society at large. They also believe that the topic is too sensitive for their learners because some of their learners have experiences with poverty, and that their learners are not interested in the topic. Finally, teachers named lots of problems with the EFL textbooks that they use. Many teachers do not think their textbooks thematize poverty, while others had difficulty recognizing its presence, and believe that it is not explicitly presented. Some teachers felt that textbooks are instead focused on representing middle-class life, tending to avoid the topic of poverty—with the few exceptions of presenting “stereotypical” stories of poverty in developing countries. Finally, some teachers feel that textbooks present poverty incoherently, in a manner that devalues its importance as a learning goal.

ON GLOBAL POVERTY COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT

On Knowing About Poverty

It is crucial that a global poverty education targeting poverty reduction is based on correct and sufficient information, especially that which reflects the reality of poverty in its various contexts. Correct and sufficient information is central for effective problem-solving, as it enables informed decision-making, minimizes risks, and increases the likelihood of success. In addition, accurate information ensures that actions are based on reality rather than skewed by assumptions or biases, which reduces errors and unintended consequences. Furthermore, having sufficient information allows for a comprehensive understanding of the problem, its root causes, and potential solutions, which can in turn inform well-planned and targeted interventions. As previously established, teachers reacted more positively to the value and role of information for poverty education than for any other dimension, but they also spent little time discussing and explaining that role. A total of 27 comments across the eight interviews focused on information, and 19 of those had a positive valence.

Teacher Self-Beliefs

Teachers value the role that learning information plays for poverty education, and they recognize its value for other important learning processes. However, they recognize that the required knowledge is highly complex and difficult, for both teachers and learners. Several teachers expressed a strong value for the role that information plays in learning about global poverty. One teacher from *Realschule* emphasized the role of information for learning, stating, “I think it’s very important, [...] knowledge of different types of poverty and who’s vulnerable to being poor, where and potential causes and solutions.” Other teachers expressed confidence in teaching learners facts about poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* explained that her knowledge of English gives her “direct access to those texts” and has enabled her “to grasp the text and also deal with these texts in school.” This gave her confidence that she can “provide them with knowledge, and make them find and analyze causes.”

All teachers from *Gymnasium* recognized the role that knowledge plays for independent thinking, but also for informing independent attitudes and beliefs, and self-directed action. One teacher emphasized that information protects learners from manipulation, “Education does not help to manipulate. It is to give you profound knowledge from which you can make your own judgments afterwards.” Another teacher emphasized the educational need to provide “knowledge from somebody who thought about it longer, and who thought about it in different ways with more experience,” also noting that such education should not target “the right way of thinking,” but rather a “starting point” to “develop their own ideas.” A third teacher stated that knowledge is a prerequisite for the other dimensions of competence, stating, “This is the basis, knowledge. And based on the knowledge, learners can form their own beliefs, and think about how to tackle the problem.” She also noted how time-intensive this is, “I would start with a big chunk of knowledge, because it’s the basis for everything that follows.” The fourth teacher expressed a similar belief, stating, “I would say providing knowledge would be the first thing you need to focus on” and explained, “From this knowledge, you can reflect on your attitudes and beliefs, and can also take action.” A final statement emphasized this centrality of information teaching, concluding, “I think the most of the time should be put in giving them knowledge.” These teachers all recognized the centrality

of information, for independent thinking and action, and the need to support learner independence through the teaching of information.

However, while multiple teachers noted that learners are interested in, and able to, learn information about global poverty, they also noted that the complexity of required knowledge is overwhelming. One teacher from *Gymnasium* stated that learners in secondary level 1 are often overwhelmed by topics for which there is no single correct response or solution, "This is something really difficult to get across, to just spread knowledge, but don't want to have one correct answer." Three teachers noted that their learners lack background knowledge that would support teaching the topic of global poverty. One teacher from *Realschule* stated, "I have to admit that in this knowledge department, knowing a lot about what goes on outside of [this city] and outside of Germany, that they are simply lacking a lot of knowledge. They don't know these things." She also pointed out that learners often have incorrect knowledge of the rest of the world, "Sometimes they may have absolute differing points of view when it comes to how the situation actually is in countries that we are talking about." Another teacher from *Realschule* agreed that learners lack a necessary background knowledge, especially for political aspects of poverty, stating, "I understand that it's quite difficult for young learners. Because they don't know about the political system or the government yet."

Teachers also admitted to difficulties treating the topic of global poverty, as related to lacking information on the topic, and due to its complexity. One teacher from *Realschule* stated, "I think that not every colleague, not even I have got the knowledge of talking on those subjects in English.... I just think about if I could explain the circle of economics of poverty in English to a tenth class." Another teacher from *Realschule* presented a similar concern, "if I had to plan and teach a unit on poverty, or if I had to be informed on that topic, I would have to do a lot of reading when it comes to the other countries. And also, to understand the complex systems of economy." Another teacher recognized the central role of information for teaching global poverty, but also noted that informing herself sufficiently "would be the hardest." A teacher from *Gymnasium* commented, "I think the most difficult would be to understand the causes and effects of poverty." This comment suggests that knowing that poverty exists around the world, and how people may suffer from it, is one thing, but understanding the causes and solutions may be a completely other, and more complex, issue. In sum, the interviews

revealed that teachers appear to value the role of information for poverty education, but recognize that having sufficient and correct information—especially for the formation of attitudes and perspectives on potential actions—is overwhelming.

This pattern of teacher perspectives on information sets the backdrop for their views on EFL textbooks information about global poverty. The analysis reveals differing views from teachers, but also that they have little to say on the matter. This is likely due to the fact that many of the teachers did not even recognize that the topic of global poverty was a part of their textbooks. One teacher from *Realschule* complained that textbook representation of global poverty is “really, really dry,” while another from *Gymnasium* noted that the textbooks present information that is “very easily outdated.” However, other teachers focused on positive aspects of the textbook delivery of information on poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* stated, “I feel like a good chunk of what the textbooks contain is knowledge based,” while another teacher agreed, “I think some textbooks show why there is more poverty in some countries than in other countries,” also providing “some statistics” that “can also help to understand poverty.” A teacher from *Realschule* stated that textbooks “are pretty good, as good as they can be when it comes to informing,” adding later her appreciation of the historical photographs that “get good information about how was it back then” and that “feel historically real.”

On Evaluating Poverty

The ability to evaluate information concerning global poverty is a central part of global poverty education. On the one hand, this ability is crucial for cognitive development and critical thinking skills of learners. It supports critical engagement with potentially biased or skewed representations of poverty, it can help challenge overly simplistic views on causes and solutions to poverty, it can enable autonomous decision-making and development of self-directed opinions and attitudes, and it can facilitate the critical reflection of proposed sustainability solutions and political policies. On the other hand, the ability to evaluate information concerning global poverty is also crucial for the fostering of social competences. It expands the ability to appropriately empathize with those in poverty, it helps focus learners on the suffering of others, and it can build sustainable attitudes of solidarity with people living in global poverty.

All interviewed teachers recognized the centrality of this skill set, as nearly half of all coded responses of the entire set of interviews thematized challenges and opportunities of learners evaluating global poverty. Though the overall responses of teachers to global poverty education were negative, there was a considerably stronger valence for teaching the assessment of global poverty than there was for other dimensions. However, a closer look at the responses reveals a complex overall view of the issue, and presents compelling evidence that—according to teacher beliefs—the challenges far outweigh the opportunities. Specifically, the analysis shows that teachers value empathy and reflection on global poverty, but believe that global poverty evaluation is too complex for the EFL subject, that it is very challenging for their learners, and that textbooks largely fail to support teachers.

Teachers Support Empathy and Reflection

Teachers expressed much support for the values of particularly empathy and reflection as goals of global poverty education, and often present reasons for their value and for their ability to support it in the EFL classroom. All teachers interviewed unequivocally expressed support for the value of empathy in relation to the topic of poverty education. On the one hand, all teachers noted that they know how to teach empathy, some even providing practical evidence to teach empathy, like “nice role plays,” “reading literature and analyzing characters,” use of various types of “media,” presenting “people from their own peer group they can identify with,” like “if you show them a picture of a poor child” or “authentic material” presenting people in poverty, in combination with “a real photograph.” In addition, half of the interviewed teachers noted that they are able to teach empathy because they themselves are empathic people. Reasons provided for this ability include not caring “about something like poverty or about money, about status,” having developed empathy “through teaching these topics,” coming from a family with a “not really well-situated background,” and viewing teaching as a “social job” with an interest in “teaching my learners that you should support weaker people in every way.”

Four teachers explained their views of the value of empathy for motivating learners to engage with the topic and to show solidarity with those living in poverty. Two of these teachers noted that empathy for those in poverty should even precede any information learning about the topic.

One teacher stated, “people only learn when they have empathy for something. It’s not the interest that comes first, it’s empathy and then you get them interested.” Another teacher shared a similar belief, stating, “I think knowledge is not the first thing you need in school. What we are doing is teaching empathy [...] Because when you don’t believe, you can’t take action.” Two teachers believe that empathy is important for supporting social solidarity. One teacher explained, “Empathy towards those in poverty, I think, it’s probably the most important to allow children to see where poverty comes from, and to say, that’s not good.” Another shared a similar belief in empathy leading to solidarity and support, “I think it’s really important to show students that very often there are valid reasons for ending up in poverty, and we have to be realistic about that and say, it could happen to anybody, it could happen to me as well.” For this teacher, empathy leads to an understanding of one’s own vulnerability to poverty.

Closely related to (particularly emotional) empathy is the ability to view poverty from multiple perspectives, and especially of those living in poverty. Four teachers explained that they are able to teach multiperspectivity, largely due to personal reasons. Two noted their international experiences as reasons, with one stating, “I do think that multiperspectivity is a strong suit. Because I feel like I’ve experienced several cultures, I’ve been to the UK, and I’ve been to the US, and I’ve also been to China, where things work very differently.” Another teacher referred to her migration background, explaining, “multiperspectivity, that is also what I’m good at because of the fact that I’ve lived in other, different countries.” Two other teachers stated other personal reasons for their ability to support learner multiperspectivity, with one teacher stating that this skill is enabled by a cognitive condition (self-described as lacking empathy as a child) that has made it difficult to relate to others socially, which led him to learn to look at issues from multiple perspectives to gain a better understanding, and with another teacher relating to the diversity of her own personal social network.

Many interviewed teachers value the role of global poverty to initiate learner reflection on economic privileges and problems of living in Germany. One common theme that emerged in the interview of four teachers is the teacher belief that poverty education should help learners develop a gratefulness for the opportunities they have living in Germany—especially in order to motivate them to value their school education and view it as a chance to secure a good financial future. Two teachers believe

they are able to support this attitude due to their international background. One teacher stated, "I would say I'm very good at developing gratefulness for German economic, social and political system," explaining further, "Coming from India, I know what is really good here. Also, from the female perspective, I think it is very good to live in a democratic country, where women are not as much discriminated as in other countries. And women have a say." Another teacher shared a similar belief, "I know as an American, developing gratefulness for German economic, social, and political systems, that's one thing that I noticed right away." She explained further, "when I started teaching English as a foreign language 36 years ago, I wanted to make Germans aware of how good they have it here. The health system, the social system." She also explained the learners' reactions, "And they were just kind of like, well, yeah, that's normal." Her response was emphasized in the interview, "And I go, no, it's not normal, it's normal here. And I think that's one thing that I'm good at because I know what it's like." Two teachers (from *Realschule*) emphasized a desire for poverty education to motivate learners to make the most of their educational opportunities in Germany. One teacher said, "I think our students should be aware that they are privileged in growing up in Germany when compared to other countries [...] We tell them time and again how grateful they should be to live and grow up in the country which offers them the opportunity to go to school." She explained further, relating the role of global poverty for increasing this gratefulness, "you don't have to be rich to go to school here, and you don't have to travel for three hours each day just to arrive at your school building. But you just take a bus and maybe you sit on the bus for one hour. You don't have to walk." Another teacher expressed a similar belief. Referring to her students, she said, "they always complain about our school system or our school and our rules, but I always tell them it can be worse." She continued, "For example, in Japan or in some Asian countries, the children have to clean, I mean, really clean the classrooms."

Another common theme is that teaching global poverty can lead to reflection of local poverty and economic challenges in Germany. Two teachers from *Gymnasium* value learner reflection on poverty in Germany, and believe they know how to support it in the classroom. One teacher noted that the value of this reflection on local poverty is to "change wrong beliefs that they have," often those "that they heard at home or among their folks or their peer group." She highlighted that teaching global poverty can become personal for learners when it is linked to local

poverty, and that for local poverty, learners are also informed by incorrect information or problematic beliefs. Another teacher from *Gymnasium* believes that global poverty education allows a reflection on the poverty experiences of recent migrants and asylum seekers in Germany. He stated, “Reflecting on the poverty and inequality, we do that often in school [...] because of the everlasting topic of immigrants, immigration, and in politics and in history.”

Two teachers from *Realschule* expressed their valuing of global poverty education leading to reflection on local poverty, due explicitly to the poverty experiences of those in their own classrooms. The first teacher believes that global poverty education can relativize German poverty, and limit the conspicuous consumption of “the latest set of phone or clothes, nice clothes, popular brands, whatever” that some in the classroom buy because they “just don’t want to show or to tell that they are poor, or that they can’t afford it.” Knowing that “a poor child in India is much poorer than a poor child in Germany” could enable them to feel less pressure to engage in conspicuous consumption—thus having more resources for better investments. Another teacher saw a value in global education as an opportunity to teach financial literacy (“more about what they really need out in life and may not yet know about”), which she sees her students requiring since “my student group are generally [...] from poor families or ill-educated families whose parents are often unemployed, or they work in this sector that is not being well paid.” For her, global poverty education would provide the backdrop for “finding strategies” to avoid poverty, and her “focal point in teaching about poverty” would be to develop a “strategy to keep you from being poor and from becoming poor [...] And hopefully not fall into the unemployed category, for example, after you leave school.” Seeing the relationship between global poverty education and poverty in Germany, this teacher emphasized the need for learners to not “flunk out of high school” and to “come to school to learn something and to stick with that throughout all their years” so her students can “end up being well paid and escape poverty.”

The teachers provide substantial evidence of strong beliefs in support of empathy and reflection as goals of global poverty education, and they claim they are able to support these aims in the classroom. Teachers name largely personal reasons for their abilities, like their social networks, their international or migration backgrounds, or their own economic backgrounds growing up. However, though all teachers support and value the evaluation of global poverty, they overwhelmingly express reasons

why it is problematic, difficult, or even nearly impossible to teach in their classrooms.

Evaluating Global Poverty Is Too Complex for EFL Subject

Despite strong teacher support for the values of empathy and reflection, teachers expressed serious concerns that they have not been properly prepared in their teacher education to support particularly empathy and reflection in relation to global poverty education. On the one hand, five of the interviewed teachers recognized that they have been equipped with some relevant skills, like intercultural communicative competence, change in perspective, empathy, and positive attitudes toward others who are different. One teacher (from *Gymnasium*) focused on “ICC,” “multiperspectivity” and “attitudes and beliefs” of the learners, stating that they are part of the German core curriculum (*Kerncurriculum*) and its goal to create “informed citizens who have their own opinion.” Another teacher from *Realschule* sees the evaluation of global poverty as a central part of the “common goal of *Bildung* (education)” and “one of the true functions of the school system.” Other teachers noted they have been educated to teach “differences that different cultures offer and the different perspectives,” while another teacher from *Gymnasium* believes she has been prepared to teach empathy for global poverty, especially by accessing texts in English. A fourth teacher (from *Realschule*) notes that “developing empathy, I generally would say is a strength of our subject of teaching English,” especially as a goal of teaching literature that was covered in her teacher education. A fifth teacher highlighted that he understood teacher education to mostly support empathy in order to prepare for immigrants coming into Germany, “When you’re studying, you are mostly grasping at the topic of immigrants and how they’re feeling and how we as a native community have to adapt to political changes, but also help them.” Many teachers interviewed seemed to support the educational value of global poverty evaluation, and note some relevant concepts and skills provided by the EFL subject.

However, and on the other hand, teachers also expressed strong beliefs that teaching aspects of evaluating global poverty is too complex and that they are not sufficiently supported by school institutions or by their training. One teacher from *Realschule* stated that she was not prepared to teach multiple perspectives on global poverty, “I have to be quite honest and admit that I feel that my education at university did not really

prepare me for teaching this content.” Another teacher (from *Gymnasium*) made a similar claim about empathy, stating, “And empathy is not something that is so much taught at university, I wouldn’t say.” Discussing the similarity between empathy and multiperspectivity, and the need to “be careful at all times” when teaching about global poverty, a teacher from *Gymnasium* stated, “But I don’t think that you learn that in the university.”

Five teachers expressed their belief that teaching evaluation of global poverty is difficult because they do not receive support through other school subjects. One teacher stated her belief that her school ignores the topic because the assumption that a degree from *Gymnasium* will automatically lead to a financially comfortable life, “I don’t think that we do that at all, because people who are in the *Gymnasium* [...], they say, okay, I’m in the best school form, I will find something.” Another *Gymnasium* teacher echoed this sentiment, stating, “Sometimes I think that’s a topic that should be taught at school. Because I don’t think a lot of them learn it at home.” Another teacher, this one from *Realschule*, made a similar claim, stating, “Yeah, that of course *should* be done in schools, you know [...] Nobody does that.”

Other teachers support global poverty evaluation, but in other subjects than EFL. For instance, one teacher from *Realschule* claimed that teaching multiperspectivity on poverty “is something that I feel is far better taught in a different subject that we also have at my school. So, we teach economy classes, and I know that they talk about topics like taxes and contracts and things like that. This is something that is really hard to do in English lessons.” One teacher believes developing empathy for global poverty is better suited for subjects taught in the native language, “Empathy with people in poverty covers a whole load of subjects, not just in English [...] It’s far easier to bring a topic like poverty into those subjects than in English, where they’re learning English first.” Three teachers also applied this logic to supporting reflection on poverty in Germany. One teacher from *Realschule* stated, “Reflecting on poverty and inequality in Germany, I think you do that in maybe ethics or social studies or religious education a bit more than in English.” A teacher from *Gymnasium* claimed that teaching multiperspectivity and empathy are better suited for secondary level two, largely due to limited time and the perceived need to cover other more basic language skills, “You don’t have the time to get so deep into the topic to talk about causes, effects in

lower classes. If the class is still starting with the overall language, in this case, like reading skills, speaking skills, mediation skills.”

Two teachers noted that the lack of reflection on poverty in schools have societal origins. They stated that a common criticism of societal and economic systems in Germany makes it difficult for learners to reflect on positive aspects of living in Germany when confronted with global poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* stated, “It is getting more difficult to do that in these times because people are not supporting our systems today.” A teacher from *Realschule* with a migration background presents a similar belief, claiming, “Nobody in Germany is grateful for their social and political system. They would not say, I am grateful, because it’s taken for granted. You look at the political or social system in Germany as an outsider, and you think, hey, that’s good!”

Other teachers believe that teaching the evaluation of poverty is simply too complex. One teacher from *Gymnasium* believes that “you can only achieve multiperspectivity by either being from another country and living somewhere else, or going to another country and meeting other people.” A teacher from *Realschule* simply stated that developing multiple perspectives on poverty topics is “a very complicated matter” that “we definitely fall short on,” due in part to the lacking reflection tasks and opportunities “to think along the lines of empathy and try to change your perspective to that of a different person.” A teacher from *Gymnasium* drew a connection between multiperspectivity on global poverty and political education, stating, “I wonder if they get taught that in politics. That’s something that would probably not get emphasized in my lessons [...] It seems too political for me.” This aversion is due to the idea that “they need to be encouraged to think objectively about the subject.” A teacher from *Gymnasium* pointed out that teaching empathy requires more time than is usually provided. Instead of learners processing highly emotional depictions of global poverty, they tend to “build up a mental resistance” because “we do this over and over again in education.”

While many teachers value the evaluation of poverty as a core part of global poverty education, and while they see opportunities in teaching cultural competence, multiperspectivity, reflection and empathy, they appear to believe the topic of global poverty is too complex for them, as they feel they are not properly educated to teach the topic, and/or do not receive enough support from other school subjects.

Challenges for Learners

While the interviewed teachers believe that their learners are in general interested in engaging in evaluative processes of global poverty education, they overwhelmingly focused on problems and challenges their students face. Five teachers focused on learners' willingness and ability to relate with people who are suffering from global poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* claimed that learners are interested in seeing other perspectives, "especially if it's very different from their own experiences here in Germany." This is particularly true if learners can relate to other children their own age, and that "empathy is something they are good at." Another teacher (from *Realschule*) made a similar claim, noting, "I think they can, like, relate to other children their age" because "that's always interesting to them, when you show different children, and they talk about their everyday life and where they live." Another *Realschule* teacher also believes the learners are able to relate to people living in poverty, in part "because a lot of them have firsthand experiences on not being that affluent and maybe having to deal with poverty." She continued that this enables these students to be "really generous people." A fourth teacher (from *Gymnasium*) also believes her students are able to empathize with global poverty "Because I feel like a lot of my children are just really nice children [...] And they like empathizing with other people like that." Another *Gymnasium* teacher believes her students are in empathic phases of their lives, "the children in this age, they don't care about that you are poor and they want to help more because they are more socialized. They're more like, [...] I'm upset about poverty, so everybody else should be upset." She also believes their ability to empathize helps them develop opinions about global poverty, "Once they have actually started thinking about something, they like taking a side or arguing about something. It's something that they like." However, despite the expressions of these positive beliefs of learner ability to assess global poverty, most teachers spent considerable time and effort presenting challenges their learners face. During the course of the interviews, four types of challenges emerged.

Half of the interviewed teachers expressed the belief that teaching learners skills of assessing global poverty is very difficult due to their lacking background knowledge and experiences concerning the topic. One teacher from *Gymnasium* explained his belief that his students have a hard time empathizing with people in global poverty because they live in an area with, and have mostly family from, higher income

backgrounds. Because of this, “People aren’t talking about money and people aren’t talking about their incomes.” He drew a link between this lack of economic social discourse and experience, and the development of empathy for poverty, stating, “Empathy is pretty difficult to develop because nobody’s talking about it. Nobody wants to talk about it.” He expressed the belief that it is very difficult to empathize with a phenomenon one has never personally experienced, drawing a connection between experiencing poverty and experiencing trauma from war, “Imagine you fought in war and lost your arm. [...] You can’t comprehend this situation. It’s not possible.” A *Realschule* teacher expresses a similar belief. She stated her students “struggle with changing perspectives” and “with empathy” concerning poverty because “they do not know it out of firsthand experiences,” and because “Their families are complete, they are living in Germany, they have supermarkets nearby, they do not have to go hungry.” She explained the educational consequences, stating, “It’s really hard to teach that” and that her students “have a really hard time imagining what it would be like, to really empathize because they simply do not know what it feels like.” A third teacher, also from *Realschule*, made a comparison to a toothache—“It’s like, if I’ve got a toothache, you can’t understand that. You can sympathize or empathize even, but you can’t understand it because you can’t feel that. You know?” He continued, “That’s the same with poverty. If you’ve got enough money, okay, you know?” A fourth teacher, this time from *Gymnasium*, also believes learners are substantially limited in their ability to empathize with global poverty due to their own family socioeconomic backgrounds, “From their family background, some of them cannot think that there are differences in other countries because they have not traveled or because they don’t have family members from somewhere else.”

Two teachers focused on behavioral problems that often prohibit empathy in school, especially directed at people in global poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* pointed to the onset of puberty, which changes “younger children from kindergarten to the fifth, sixth grade,” described as very willing to empathize with others and to help those with less resources, to those “in the upper grades,” described as being more interested in their social status and interested in being “seen as being cool.” This group, which is also interested in conspicuous consumption and clothes and digital items which are relatively expensive, places pressure on each other, saying “Oh, you can’t afford that. Then you are not cool enough for me.” The learners develop a desire “to connect with the

cool people” because “they don’t want to be left alone from them.” He concluded, “So, when puberty is really kicking in, then you aren’t really able to do that anymore. [...] To be a teenager is a different time, man.” One *Realschule* teacher believes her learners do not show respect and dignity toward each other—something she also sees reflected in society at large. When asked about the role of empathy for global poverty education, the teacher responded, “I think the learners have kind of lost that skill and empathy in many ways. [...] Yes. And the whole society, I think, a lot of people.” She too points to social (and economic) differences of learners in the classroom, stating, “It’s getting much harder in these times I think. [...] We do have a lot of trouble concerning like, clothing, and people are like bullied because of their backgrounds.” She explains further, “they always they have such an ego. And it’s always me, me. [...] Everyone wants to be first.” Noting a perceived lack of respect “for their teachers nor for others,” she noted that this loss of respect “changed about ten years ago.” The teacher also links this perceived loss of respect to a lacking gratefulness for the privileges and opportunities they have. She stated, “I think a lot don’t understand that they should be grateful for the German economic and social and political system,” and then relates a story of students criticizing the German chancellor at the time, and saying in class that “we wouldn’t care if the Russians would come and all that.”

Three teachers also pointed out that learners can tend to evaluate topics like global poverty before they have sufficient information to properly inform their own opinions. One *Gymnasium* teacher described this problem of her students, stating “They think they just have to know things. Not every learner might be aware that they actually have to reflect things and form their own attitudes and beliefs.” She also feels that, for her students, “reflection is sometimes not very easy” because “it is a skill that has to be learned. I mean, it’s not innate to question things and reflect.” Another *Gymnasium* teacher also emphasized problems concerning learner empathy. He noted that his students can empathize with people living in poverty, but that “developing an empathy towards people in poverty doesn’t mean that you have to understand it.” He explained that student empathy for poverty is often something they do not “think through.” This teacher drew the conclusion that empathy is not something that can be taught in school, “this is nothing you can really teach.” This conclusion suggests that evaluations and attitudes of solidarity can be separate goals from understanding poverty, and that empathizing may actually inhibit a desire to learn more about the

complexity of the problem. A third teacher, also from *Gymnasium*, also noted a learner habit of judging poverty based on insufficient information. She said, "Sometimes they make too early judgments. There they think something like, this person is poor, because he did not or she did not go to school or comes from a bad family background." Calling these evaluations "prejudices," she explained, "In order to overcome prejudices, you need to have more knowledge and you need to be in an environment that gives you a chance to develop a multiperspective attitude." Thus, it appears while assessments and evaluations of poverty may be the goal, teachers note that learners can be quick to empathize or even judge people in poverty before they have gathered sufficient information to make informed decisions.

Two teachers emphasize that assessing poverty, particularly by reflecting on its existence in Germany, is taboo in schools. One *Gymnasium* teacher explained that developing empathy for poverty in Germany is difficult because poverty in Germany is "too hot of a topic," and that "teachers don't talk about that here in no way," but also "this is a topic no German person want to talk about." A part of the problem is that education from a *Gymnasium* is also viewed as the solution, "when you are in the school form of the *Gymnasium*, you don't think about that much, because, you know, you can do something with it afterwards," while another part of the problem is that "you can improve yourself in knowledge, you can improve yourself in physique, you can improve yourself in any skill, but you can't improve as a teenager in financials, because you can't work, you can't say no, I'm not poor anymore." A *Realschule* teacher also noted that poverty in Germany, and poverty of her own students, is controversial, is "very private" and "there's a lot of shame associated with that." She also noted that the presence of refugees in her school and her classroom adds a further dimension of complexity, stating, "There's this new group of students who knows poverty very well. [...] For them these topics of poverty and war and conflict are much more sensitive and you have to treat it so very lightly, because it's connected to a personal trauma for them." Here, the teacher also expressed uncertainty in how to handle such situations, "I am highly ignorant of all these problems, luckily enough, but at the same time, I would like to be better equipped with strategies, how to deal with these children and how to help them."

Why Textbooks Fail

The overwhelming negative teacher perspectives of particularly evaluating global poverty sets the backdrop for the teacher beliefs about, and perspectives on, the way that textbooks support poverty education and skills of assessment. As was the case for other aspects of this dimension of global poverty education, teachers expressed overwhelmingly negative views toward textbooks. However, two teachers (from *Gymnasium*) noted that their EFL textbooks target primarily the development of empathy as well as multiperspectivity. One teacher stated, "I think multiperspectivity and empathy are the main aspects that can be found in textbooks. Because that's something that seems to be a huge focus." Another teacher claimed, "I think textbooks are focused on showing or developing multi perspective by providing material from different countries." Both teachers believe that the relatability of textbook characters support the development of empathy, particularly by presenting "nice characters" who "work together" and have life-problems that "resonate" with the learners. Furthermore, the textbooks "show children that are the same age as the learners" in "stories" that learners are interested in. One teacher noted that fictional stories are better for developing empathy, "maybe more than if you have nonfiction texts about the country and the situation of poverty there." However, despite these comments of support, most teachers focus on substantial problems of textbooks, and how they teach the evaluation of global poverty. More specifically, the teachers believe that the textbooks present skewed perspectives, that students frequently respond negatively to textbook attempts to evoke empathy, and that textbooks try to use learner empathy for global poverty to motivate their engagement with language-focused activities.

Two teachers believe that textbooks present a very limited set of perspectives around global poverty. One teacher from *Gymnasium* claims that textbooks present a "one sided or a single perspective, and they leave out that there are also other ideas around that subject." She presented her assumption that this lacking perspective stems from a superficial treatment of the topic, "I guess they have not analyzed too much material, that's what I think." The teacher provides an example, noting that textbook stories on global poverty are always unidirectional, "One example would be, you find plenty of rags to riches stories. But they hardly ever show the other way around. That can also happen." A *Realschule* teacher believes there are not enough 'rags to riches' stories of poverty, and

desires “a more realistic portrayal of the situation of people who are poor,” or “examples of people who come from a very poor background, but actually had success.” For her, an improved perspectivity on global poverty includes “more material and more scientific cases of ups and downs for example [...] So, that would be lovely.” Both teachers criticize a lacking diversity in the perspectives of global poverty in textbooks, which in turn can be seen as limiting learners’ ability to critically evaluate poverty as a real-world phenomenon.

Four teachers recognize problematic textbook attempts to evoke empathy for global poverty. Three teachers believe that textbooks fail to effectively evoke empathy, largely due to the fictional nature of poverty representation. One teacher related this to the fictionality of global poverty representation, “students are in general, very aware of textbooks not being real material,” and that characters in poverty “may not even be real.” She explained the consequences of this fictionality, stating, “This makes a huge difference.” Responding to textbook activities that ask students to communicate with fictional characters in poverty, the teacher stated, “I would ask myself, so why am I writing to a letter to a person who doesn’t exist and who I will never hear back from.” Instead, the teacher called for “focusing on firsthand experiences on, and on things that really happened,” and that this will be more “motivating” for students. Another teacher (from *Gymnasium*) related her frustration with her students as they fail or refuse to empathize with a fictional character living in poverty. While she praised the book for doing “a really good job of saying, how do you think she felt?” she was disappointed that her students “kept making fun of her name, I remember.” While the textbook “tasks were trying to get the kids to identify with how she was feeling,” the students “didn’t really care.” In the attempt to evoke learner empathy, the teacher “really had to rub their noses in it,” but in response, “nobody looked at anybody, everybody looked at the floor.” Another teacher pointed out that the representation of global poverty in textbooks is too emotionally charged for learners. One teacher from *Realschule* complained of “stereotypical” characters who are “completely hopeless,” leaving her to call for “a middle ground.” Poverty is typically of “third world countries,” where “it’s mostly a matter of they were born that way and now they’re struggling against that.” She noted that this is “not the only way how you can become poor.”

Three teachers noted that textbooks utilize empathy to motivate learners to complete language learning activities. One *Gymnasium* teacher

explained how textbooks interlace stories of poverty in seemingly random topics and contexts, expecting learners to then empathize with them. She explained the perceived effect of this, stating, “Empathize with this person, then we’re going to do this thing. And then, oh, now I want you to empathize with this person or get into this person.” Another *Gymnasium* teacher expressed his negative view of such implementation, stating that textbooks “are giving you the same emotional nonsense to get you involved in the topic.” Expanding on the issue, he explained, “This is unbelievable. I don’t understand how people can sit in the university and think, *Oh that’s a good idea, we can do this. Why not? This is great for vocabulary.* It isn’t.” He also believes that “some examples are too emotional” and that textbook activities that target empathy “can backfire a lot.” His explanation is that textbooks “don’t prepare you to go in and they don’t prepare you to go out” so “you don’t have this distance to the part you were just like, you were pushed in. You have to feel, you have to see the emotions, but nobody is getting you out of that. It just is still in your head. It’s still bothering you.” Describing what sounds like empathic distress, the teacher continued, “They will give you something which catches your attention, but it leaves you empty, with no answer, with the feeling of being angry, unhappy.” He expressed a strong distaste for such instrumentalization of empathy, stating, “This isn’t education in my view, this is just propagandism in a way.” A third teacher (from *Realschule*) also criticized the lacking preparation of empathy activities, suggesting empathy is not really the ultimate learning goal. Referring to textbook activities that require students to write letters to people living in global poverty, she explained how these activities often fail to sufficiently evoke empathy in learners, “Write a diary entry from this person’s point of view and imagine you are living in this country and they have so many question marks in their eyes. And they say, okay, where do I even start?” She explained a lacking context in textbooks, stating, “This is something that would have to be very well prepared by giving more scaffolding, by giving a lot of information beforehand.”

Despite the centrality of evaluation for global poverty education, and despite the importance associated to this dimension by teachers, teachers expressed overwhelming belief that developing this skill in their EFL classrooms is highly problematic. They noted that, as teachers, they were not prepared in their teacher education to develop skills of evaluating poverty, nor do they receive the necessary support from other school subjects. This is in part also due to the sheer complexity of the topic

of global poverty. Teachers also noted overwhelming challenges for their learners, ranging from the limited background knowledge the students have of the topic to behavioral problems that are particular to teenagers, but also including the tendency many learners have in empathizing and forming opinions before they properly inform themselves, and including that evaluating global poverty becomes taboo when it leads to reflection on poverty in Germany. Finally, the analysis of the interview revealed that teachers believe they cannot rely on their textbooks to support the development of skills of evaluating global poverty. According to them, textbooks present only limited perspectives on poverty, students realize those are largely fictional and they do not take empathy activities seriously, and textbooks appear to largely instrumentalize learner empathy to motivate them to complete activities that simply target language learning and use. What these findings show is that EFL global poverty education, especially as initiated by textbook activities that thematize global poverty, fails to foster critical thinking skills necessary for dealing with the complex topic of global poverty and poverty development as a social and political goal, and it fails to foster necessary social competences that allow for empathy for and solidarity toward those living in global poverty—as well as in poverty in Germany.

On Acting Against Poverty

Competence modeling places great educational value on learner ability to put knowledge into practice, and in a way that can transfer to influence and improve learners' lives. For one, declarative knowledge that is completely divorced from procedural knowledge is typically not deep and often forgotten. In addition, finding real-life applications of school knowledge and learning helps ensure educational relevance and value, instead of becoming too self-serving. For the ESD competency model (cf. Chapter 2), the purpose of global poverty education is to enable learners to participate in reducing global poverty, in support of the UN's SDGs. This combination of competency modeling with UN goals makes it central that students are able to learn about global poverty in order to be able to engage in some sort of action against it. This educational and political logic stand in stark contrast to the teacher beliefs about teaching learners to act against global poverty. The analysis of the interviews shows that, while some teachers value learner action, they all find substantial challenges, ranging from institutional constraints to learner interest. In

addition, teachers feel their textbooks do not support them, and provide doubts that even future changes to textbooks could address this problem. Not only did teachers focus overwhelmingly on challenges and problems of this dimension, they also had little to say about the topic.

Like for the other competence dimensions, several teachers expressed belief that they value and are able to support learner action against global poverty. One *Gymnasium* teacher emphasized her openness to student solutions to poverty, stating “I’m very tolerant to their solutions and telling them to make their own solutions.” However, she also supports their critical thinking, explaining, “I also ask them, do you think that will work what you have come up with? Or how do you say? Is that practicable? [...] So, they have to reflect on their own ideas.” Another *Gymnasium* teacher expressed her value of student solutions to poverty as she retells of an in-class activity on the topic that led her students to avoid buying products made from child labor. Speaking of her student, she stated, “She got really into it, like, I’m not buying this anymore. And this is how you can tell, and please don’t buy these products anymore. And they, they got really, really into it.” The teacher also explained the language learning benefit to the presentations via another anecdote. The teacher explained, “I remember there was this one girl who said, Frau X, when are we going to start having English lessons again? I was like, well, I don’t know if we want to because, for me, this is perfect. We come in here, and for 90 minutes, somebody presents a topic and then we talk about it, get all emotional about it, decide what we’re going to do about it and we speak English the whole time.” A final teacher, this time from *Realschule*, explained that she values student action against global poverty because she supports helping others, “I would very much love my students to do something against poverty within their neighborhoods or families, for example. And even if it’s just tutoring other people and help them to be better at school.” Despite these positive views on student action, all teachers expressed multiple negative beliefs against such action, suggesting hurdles that they, in sum, likely see as insurmountable.

Six teachers named systemic challenges to teaching action, ranging from not having enough time, to being more appropriate for a different school form and identifying systemic hurdles that serve as impediments. Four teachers believe that teaching learners to take action in response to global poverty requires too much time. One *Gymnasium* teacher believes such action would need to also take place in “their free time” and that “the structure of their school schedule does not give them

enough freedom and free time to engage in projects.” Another *Gymnasium* teacher believes she could have engaged the learners in action against global poverty “had the school year been longer.” A *Realschule* teacher believes teaching students to take action would take too long due to the amount of time necessary to investigate various causes, stating, “Enabling solutions to poverty, I think we fall short on that, because we do not have the time to really look at all the other problems that cause poverty, except for being born into poverty.” The fourth teacher, also from *Realschule*, explained her belief that teaching action would compete with the (to her) more important “grammar, and grammar exercises,” noting that perhaps there would be time for action in the “project week.”

Two teachers believe that teaching action against global poverty is for specific types of classes. One *Gymnasium* teacher told the story of one class she believes could have taken on this task, but also noted they were “the cream of the crop from the whole year, put into one class” and that “they were all afraid that they were going to get bad oral grades because they always had something to say.” A *Realschule* teacher believes that taking action is more appropriate for older learners, and that hers are “too young to go into action.” She also believes that action is not for *Realschule* students, “That’s the type of *Realschule* student, you give them tasks and they do it, but they don’t go fully on.”

Finally, two *Gymnasium* teachers view further systemic or institutional hurdles to teaching learners to take action against global poverty. One teacher felt action education is more appropriate for other school subjects, stating “I don’t think this is for the English classes.” He also felt this is not appropriate for schools, due to his belief that “There is just one solution to poverty. And as long as we are living in a capitalistic system, and as long as we want to have our shirts for two euros and be at peace, we won’t cure poverty in any way.” Another teacher believes teaching action against poverty to be inappropriate in a school setting due to liability of unintended consequences. She then relates a story of an in-class charity project that “totally backfired,” and her class “was asked not to do that, to help in a different way.” In conclusion, six of the eight interviewed teachers identified systemic or institutional reasons for avoiding teaching learners to take action against global poverty.

Five teachers named reasons that taking action against global poverty is particularly challenging for their learners. One *Gymnasium* teacher believes that the topic is too complex for learners, especially since they should make their own decisions and not be unduly influenced by their

teachers. She stated, "It's difficult, because it requires a lot of thought and a lot of complex logic, complex thoughts, finding solutions." In addition, "we can only try and guide them to think independently, but it's difficult." The other four teachers all agreed that their learners are not interested in taking action. One *Realschule* teacher believes lacking student interest is fueled in part by the complexity of the topic, asking the interviewer, "Have you got a solution?" He also adds, "And they're not interested anyways." One *Gymnasium* teacher stated, "Some just don't know why they should do that," while the remaining two noted difficulties in motivating students to take action. One *Gymnasium* teacher explained, "Talking about it is easy, but as soon as it comes to take action, nobody really wants to engage in a certain way. That is difficult, especially since they have their free time activities." The teacher also believes the discrepancy between knowing what they should do and actually taking action leads to "a bad conscience" because "they know the right answer, or they know what's right, and they know what's wrong, they just don't act on it." A majority of teachers share the belief that taking action against global poverty is challenging for learners, in part because it is complex and must come from the learners, and in part because, according to the teachers, learners do not have enough interest, especially to act outside of the confines of the classroom.

These teacher beliefs about learners taking action against global poverty set the backdrop to their views on their EFL textbooks. While several teachers value taking action, they primarily expressed doubts, naming institutional and systemic challenges, and stated that it is too complex for learners who have low interest anyways. Four of the interviewed teachers (two from *Gymnasium* and two from *Realschule*) expressed negative beliefs concerning their EFL textbooks' ability to support action. Three teachers believe that project work is a more suitable method for supporting learner action, and explicitly state that textbooks are incompatible with this method. One *Gymnasium* teacher stated that textbooks "do not focus so much on project work on global poverty," explaining that such project work could investigate specific cases, and "What are the reasons that make these countries poor? Why are more some countries poorer than other countries? What can we do?" The teacher believes that textbooks will not integrate such project work, in large part due to the need to grade learners, and uncertainties in how to grade such work, "No, I think the textbooks designed this material in a way that can be used for a class test. [...] How are you going to

test students on if they have learned about poverty in a special country or whatever?” She then deferred the topic to another subject altogether, “Maybe that would be something that you can learn more in subjects like geography, maybe there.” A *Realschule* teacher also saw project work as a viable alternative, stating, “But I would prefer not having a textbook and doing more project work, and all that. Because this is much more interesting, or that can prepare them for the real world, they can do more things with it.” However, the teacher suggested this is an unlikely alternative due to a perceived expectation to cover all the textbook content before adding additional materials and activities. The fourth teacher, also from *Realschule*, believes that textbooks do not offer solutions to global poverty (“I’ve never come across this”), but saw an opportunity for “project work” that addresses “What could we do to relieve the stress on people who are poor, even here in your neighborhood, in our own country, can you think of anything to do?” A final teacher expressed the belief that textbooks are unsuccessful in initiating and supporting learner action against global poverty. He stated that textbooks target more immediate actions, but not changing behaviors. He notes, “Most of the time, you are trained to do something if you see it right then. And I think most of the books are built on this. You have, in front of your eyes, to do something. And later on, we have something different, do it now. It’s nothing which is embedded in the mind that much.”

Despite the theoretical centrality of global education enabling learners to take action against global poverty, as a goal of both competency orientation as well as the UN’s SDGs, the teacher beliefs that were investigated suggest serious challenges that will completely stand in the way of achieving this in the classroom. In total, and in relation to other competency dimensions, teachers have relatively little to say about teaching learner action, and when they do, they focus predominantly on challenges and problems. They find institutional and systemic reasons for not teaching the dimension, they claim it is too complex for learners and that they are not interested in taking action, and they feel that textbooks neither support action, nor are they able to offer the types of methods they feel would support this dimension of global poverty education.

In conclusion, the teacher interviews reveal a strong negative view toward the inclusion of global poverty education within the context of teaching English as a foreign language. Although teachers frequently acknowledged the value of the topic across its various dimensions, their responses were predominantly framed in terms of the challenges and

obstacles for integrating the topic into their teaching practices. An analysis of the depth and focus of teachers' explanations reveals a consistent emphasis on articulating why the topic is broadly perceived as problematic. However, a more favorable perspective emerged in relation to the evaluative dimension, particularly concerning the role of empathy, which many teachers regarded positively. While informational aspects were also seen as relatively unproblematic, they were discussed in less detail. In contrast, the action-oriented dimension was largely neglected, with teachers offering minimal commentary and few positive assessments. These overarching patterns will be explored in greater depth in the following chapter, particularly in relation to the findings from the textbook analysis.

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PART III

Conclusions for EFL Global Poverty
Education



Implications of the German Case Study

The German educational context was chosen to investigate global poverty education because it is both unique and enlightening. It is unique because of the German federal government's strong commitment to reach the SDG goals of eliminating poverty and reducing economic inequality, and the successful transfer of that commitment into educational policy as well as educational materials—like school textbooks. It is also unique because of the strong ‘bottom-up’ push to integrate ESD topics into education and educational materials. As explained by a chief editor of a major publisher of English language textbooks in Germany during a personal interview, this bottom-up integration can be explained for two reasons. The first reason is that the authors and editors of the German EFL textbooks have a “very intrinsic motivation to integrate these themes,” or “a considerable interest to set societally progressive accents and also to make sure that topics like democracy education, or in this case also further societal developments relating to environmental or social topics, are anchored.”¹ This is not limited to the textbook authors, as also “most, or actually all those working in the editorial staff find this topic to be

¹ Original: “eine sehr intrinsische Motivation haben, diese Themen auch aufzugreifen,” and “haben auch ein großes Interesse, gesellschaftlich progressive Akzente zu setzen und auch dafür zu sorgen, dass sowas wie Demokratiebildung oder in dem Falle auch gesellschaftliche Weiterentwicklung, was Umweltschutz oder soziale Themen angeht, dass das verankert wird.”

important. So for this reason, I think, this is very much a bottom-up movement.”² The chief editor also expressed his own personal conviction in support of ESD, and places it as a general societal interest, “So I hold it to be a very important topic, as an absolutely central topic of the future, and many other people feel the same way.”³ According to this interview, textbook authors and editors are more than willing to meet the requirements set by the national and state curricula, suggesting that German textbooks might have even integrated ESD topics without curricular (and top-down) support. The second reason for the bottom-up support of ESD in textbooks, as expressed in the interview, is the speculation that the election of Germany’s Green Party into several government coalitions of the past decades has increased support for ESD, and that “the entire environmental movement has become completely mainstream since the 70s.”⁴ This societal—resulting also in governmental—impact is also represented by an academic milieu in which “these social-democratic, green positions are much more frequently represented than in the societal average.”⁵

The combination of the top-down governmental support of SDGs and the curricular integration of ESD with its more bottom-up integration into textbooks by textbook authors and editors, complemented by a society which appears to be particularly interested in environmental and social issues as indicated by the voting habits of many people and the political parties they elect into power, all suggest that this German case study presents a unique opportunity to research ESD and specifically global poverty education. And because previous research has noted a general lack of global poverty in foreign language school textbooks of other national settings outside of Germany (though present in Germany for decades), the research on this unique case study can provide enlightening insights for national and cultural educational contexts that are

² Original: “auch in der Redaktion arbeiten hauptsächlich oder eigentlich nur Leute, denen diese Themen wichtig sind. Also von daher ist es, glaube ich, sehr stark auch eine Bewegung von unten.”

³ Original: “Also ich halte es für ein sehr wichtiges Thema, für ein absolut zentrales Zukunftsthema und viele andere Menschen halten das auch.”

⁴ Original: “diese ganze ökologische Bewegung seit den 70er Jahren ja mittlerweile auch totaler Mainstream geworden ist.”

⁵ Original: “in dem Bildungsmilieu diese sozialdemokratisch grünen Positionen sehr viel häufiger anzutreten sind als in dem gesellschaftlichen Durchschnitt.”

interested in increasing their efforts to integrate ESD and teach global poverty education.

The unique and enlightening potential of this case study, in combination with the study's selection of the specific EFL subject, additionally enables an in-depth and critical investigation of global poverty education in a context in which it is relatively well-established, and with this enables a close comparison to the goals and aims of ESD recently developed in theory and policy—more so than a more global survey of textbooks, or a broader range of subject textbooks, would have allowed. Furthermore, this investigation and comparison generates findings of the even less researched global poverty education in practice, allowing for not only the development of best practice tips for a more effective integration of ESD into school teaching, but also the uncovering of serious challenges that the theory and policy of ESD still need to address globally.

This study was thus interested in determining in what ways German EFL classrooms teach global poverty, and the extent to which this meets the goals of ESD. It also was interested in determining the extent to which it reflects the challenges—in theory—of the topic and goal achievement. Specifically, by investigating how global poverty is taught in textbooks and how it is perceived and integrated by teachers, the study was interested in how textbooks and teachers dealt with complexity and realism of poverty, with ESD competency development, and with critical reflection of ESD and global poverty. Here, special focus was placed on the textbooks as a central teaching medium, then on teachers' perspectives and their implications for textbook content.

Key Findings

- Textbook representation of poverty is not particularly realistic, pursuing instead a largely relative view of poverty that is framed as moral harm requiring empathic responses. This grossly reduces the complexity of global poverty, especially its contributing factors and measures of reduction, promoting stereotypes and a sense of helplessness, while inhibiting learners' individual, social, and political options in response to the real problem of global poverty.
- Textbooks prime learners to empathize with people living in poverty, then focus learners disproportionately in their associated activities on actively empathizing with them. They thereby seriously neglect an in-depth understanding of poverty (unless it is information relevant for empathizing), as they also neglect preparing learners to take

any type of meaningful action against poverty—unless that action is empathy.

- Textbooks do not engage learners in critical thinking on global poverty in its complexity, sources and means to alleviate, and they do not support critical reflection on global poverty in its local manifestations. Learners are never put into a position to question poverty representation, never meaningfully presented with German poverty, nor ever encouraged to think about local poverty in any of the activities.
- The general findings of global poverty in textbooks are true across school forms and publishers. This means that these key findings are substantially representative for secondary EFL education in Germany. Notable variations are that *Realschule* has more frequent and slightly more extreme global poverty, and *Diesterweg* focuses more on poverty than the other two publishers.
- Teachers are often unaware of global poverty in their textbooks and view it overwhelmingly critically—except for teaching empathy. They are concerned about its complexity, its potentially political nature, and conflicts and discomfort it can bring for their students. They are highly critical of teaching action as well as critical reflection, which is especially true for the teachers in *Realschule*.

These findings have serious implications for global poverty education, in Germany as well as globally. They suggest that it matters how global poverty is presented and taught in textbook materials, and that a superficial or simplistic integration will not suffice—or may even create unintended, negative consequences. They raise the question of whether empathy is indeed an appropriate (singular) reaction to poverty to teach students, and what the consequences of an unreflective engagement with poverty framed repeatedly as moral harm may have for students' understanding of global poverty and economic development in the real world. They also show the necessity of investigating global poverty education in practice, and not just in theory, policy and educational materials. Teachers often serve as the interface between these and the classroom, and substantially amplify, modify, weaken or reject content, values and goals to fit the specific needs and contexts of their learners. Their views and beliefs indeed influence the global poverty education of textbooks, often in meaningful, patterned, and adverse ways.

ANALYSIS OF EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION IN TEXTBOOKS

The Complexity and Realism of Textbook Poverty

One of the primary goals of investigating the German sample of textbooks was to determine whether the representation of poverty was complex and realistic (see Chap. 4), working under the premise that such representation will support the developmental goals of the SDGs as a part of ESD. As Chapter 3 established, poverty is indeed a highly complex phenomenon, consisting of many ways of defining poverty, of framing it as a problem, of understanding the various and multiple factors that can lead to and exacerbate it, etc. The research presented in Chapter 3 made it clear that developmental (and political) policies aiming at reducing poverty and increasing economic equality is a monumental task that requires the efforts of not just policy makers, but also the scientific community, NGOs, the business sector and civic society—as a way of dealing with the complex factors that constitute poverty in various places around the world. The analysis of the textbooks reveals certain patterns of representing poverty that seriously flatten the complexity of poverty, and that warp any realism of the particularities of poverty in various places and regions of the world, suggesting they will contribute little, if not even possibly hamper, global efforts to reduce poverty.

The following addresses how the existence of poverty is presented in the textbooks, and how the patterns of representation compare to the research on poverty around the world. Specifically, it addresses the setting of poverty, the people living in poverty, as well as the types of poverty, and it concludes that many aspects of poverty representation are not realistic. Furthermore, the patterns that emerge from these individual dimensions show a recurring focus on poverty in developed countries (including the United Kingdom and the USA), in urban areas and in the contemporary period. These are the places where poverty is the often the most described and differentiated.

The analysis of the setting of poverty in the sampled textbooks reveals problematic representation of poverty across place, area, and time. It shows all three variables are important, that two are differentiated, and none are particularly realistic. Almost all poverty tasks provide information of place (96%), making it a central factor in textbooks. Here, notable patterns emerge that diverge from the complex reality of global poverty.

First, nearly all poverty falls into three nations—the USA, the United Kingdom, and South Africa (67%). Of these three, the USA is presented with the most poverty (29%), followed by the United Kingdom (24%) and then South Africa (14%). Second, most poverty occurs in developed countries (61%). Finally, there is a predominant focus on English speaking countries (74%). Thus, it can be concluded that there is a focus on poverty in a few clear locations, on US poverty, on poverty in developing countries, and on poverty in English speaking countries. As shown in Chapter 3, this textbook focus on specific places does not mirror the reality of poverty around the globe. The predominance of poverty in developed countries indicates a focus on relative over absolute poverty, which entails a neglect of the worst and most common forms of poverty. The focus on US poverty in textbooks, as a single location, emphasizes the focus on relative poverty, by placing it in one of the wealthiest and most powerful countries in the world, with an especially high poverty line compared to all other countries. However, it is true that the USA has a poverty rate that is high compared to most developed countries. Furthermore, the overwhelming focus on poverty in English speaking countries may follow a logic for textbooks designed to teach English as a foreign language, but also hides the fact that English speaking countries are on average considerably wealthier—and have less rate and amount of poverty—than countries with other languages (Li et al. 2022, McCormick 2013). In light of this comparison, it can be concluded that the sampled textbooks have a complex yet unrealistic focus on poverty in areas of the world that are economically more powerful, and with relative rather than absolute poverty.

The area of poverty—whether urban or rural—was also an important feature of textbook global poverty as it was present in 65% of all poverty tasks. Yet again, a clear focus on urban poverty (73% of tasks with area information) could be determined, and a closer look at area and place revealed an undifferentiated focus. Comparing this to the reality of poverty around the world proves textbook representation to be largely problematic. In all areas of the world surveyed for this research, poverty is more severe and has higher rates in rural than in urban areas (except for in the United Kingdom). Developing countries also have higher net numbers of people living in poverty (79%), while developed countries have lower net numbers in rural areas (largely because of their highly urban infrastructure). This focus on urban poverty, undifferentiated around the world, hides the fact that poverty around the world is

more severe and has higher rates in rural areas, but that net numbers matter depending on development level of the country.

Time is also an important feature of the textbook representation of poverty, present in 96% of all tasks, but here too, a problematic pattern emerges. The results reveal an overwhelming focus on contemporary poverty (79% of tasks that indicate time). This view on poverty can be interpreted as unrealistic, since most poverty (at least absolute) has been in steep decline since the emergence and spread of industrialization, and more people have lived in absolute poverty in the past than those living in any form of contemporary poverty today. The investigation also revealed a somewhat differentiated temporal representation of poverty by place (with a strong significant effect), and specifically that all places focus overwhelmingly on contemporary poverty except in the United Kingdom. If a focus on relative rather than absolute poverty is taken into consideration, then relative poverty can indeed be seen as a more recent phenomenon (also stemming from the Industrial Revolution); however, rates of relative poverty have been higher in the past—though in some countries today it is rising close to historical highs. Either way, textbooks not only unrealistically focus on contemporary poverty overall, but they also appear to make a peculiar exception for the United Kingdom.

All three variables of poverty setting were found to be important in textbook representation, but also unrealistic. All patterns point to a focus on poverty in the face of, or despite, development and the current global abundance of resources. Poverty is mostly presented in wealthier areas of the world (USA, developing countries, places where English is spoken), in urban regions where resources, infrastructure and the collective social awareness of poverty exist, and in contemporary times with the means to eliminate poverty and reduce economic inequality.

The results of the textbook analysis of the people presented as living in poverty reveals problematic, unrealistic patterns. It appears to be important for textbooks to present specific information about who is living in poverty, and to focus on groups who are vulnerable that is only partially supported by global poverty research.

Gender appears to play a lesser role in textbook representation of poverty, as specific information was only available in about 1/3 of all tasks (or 37%). Moreover, no overall focus could be determined, as 54% of those task present females in poverty. This representation appears largely realistic, as research shows a slight predominance of female to male

poverty around the world (between 52% and 60% for countries investigated in this study, but only 51% for absolute poverty, cf. Chapter 3). However, disaggregating gender by place in textbook poverty reveals peculiar patterns, and specifically that there is a significantly higher rate of female poverty (medium effect size) in the United Kingdom (72% female), in developing countries (60% female) and in South Africa (95% female). The binned analytical category of developed countries is about the average (54%), and the USA reverses the trend by presenting 75% of its poverty affecting males. Research on gender and poverty in specific places around the world indeed shows that proportions of female to male poverty do indeed vary. In reality, the United Kingdom's poverty is 52% female, South Africa's is 60% female, and the USA's poverty is about 57% female. This comparison shows that the textbook differentiation of gendered poverty around the world is very problematic, with an unrealistic focus on female poverty in the United Kingdom, South Africa and other developing countries, and an unrealistic focus on male poverty in the USA.

In all but the analytical category of developing countries, race played a role in presenting poverty in textbooks (present in 55% of all poverty tasks there). In these locations, those tasks with racial information focused on people of color in 78% of the tasks. In the tasks that fell within the category of developing countries (so excluding South Africa), no racial or ethnic differences within those countries (so no minority groups) were ever presented. Disaggregating by place reveals a significant difference (with a medium effect), as the United Kingdom is even less likely to present racial information, and then significantly less likely to present the poverty of people of color. The US, in contrast, is more likely to present racial information, and also more likely than average to present the poverty of people of color. South Africa presented racial information in nearly all cases (90%), and all of them affected people of color. The analytical category of developed countries presented the expected rate of poverty of people of color, and focused on the poverty of people of color twice as often as that of people of European origin. The research on race and poverty in these areas indeed shows that being a person of color is associated with higher risks of poverty, but it appears to value poverty rate over net poverty numbers in determining the extent of racial focus. For instance, the USA and the United Kingdom do have alarmingly higher rates of poverty for people of color compared to people of European descent, but due to demographic breakdown, both places have

a considerably large population of people of European descent living in poverty (45% of US poverty is labeled as white). Thus, textbook representation of poverty in the US appears to mirror poverty rate, while textbook representation of poverty in the United Kingdom appears to mirror net numbers in determining representational proportionality. The overwhelming focus on the poverty of people of color in South African textbook poverty is realistic, however, both in terms of rate and net numbers.

Thus, what emerges is a textbook focus on the poverty of people of color, completely realistic for South Africa, and only partially realistic for the USA and the United Kingdom (and there, with different inferred reasonings for determining focus). What also emerges is a complete lack of ethnic or racial variation of class and poverty in developing countries (outside of South Africa), standing in contrast to the focus on race in Western and in developing countries. Research on the reality of these countries shows there are stark economic differences between racial and ethnic groups, sometimes even greater than those found in developing countries. The textbook analysis also reveals that people of color are much more likely to be presented as having other vulnerabilities, their poverty is more likely to be described in further detail, and are more likely to be presented with a clear cause.

The variable of age plays a significant role in the textbook representation of poverty, as more than half (69%) of all poverty tasks present age-related information of those in poverty. Moreover, a closer analysis shows a clear textbook focus on child poverty (87% of task with age information). However, the focus on child poverty is dependent on place (small effect), with a significantly higher focus on child poverty in developing countries (excluding South Africa). Comparing textbook focus on child poverty, differentiated by place, to research on poverty reveals a partial realism. According to research findings presented in Chapter 3, children around the world are at a considerably higher rate of poverty compared to other age groups. However, due to the fact that people 18 years or younger make up less than half the population (and in Western countries, considerably less than half), there are in reality more adults living in poverty than people 18 years or younger. In some places, like the USA and the United Kingdom, there are 2–3 times as many adults as people under 18 years living in poverty. For developing countries, research and estimates place about as many adults as people under 18 in poverty. While addressing the increased rate of poverty for young people would

justify the textbook focus on young people living in poverty, addressing net numbers would suggest that textbooks should focus on the opposite for Western countries, and on equal numbers for developing countries (including South Africa). Therefore, it can be concluded that the textbook representation of poverty and age, and its considerable focus on poverty of young people, is only partially realistic.

All three variables of the people of poverty were found to play an important role in textbook representation, but also to be partially unrealistic. For gender, there is an exaggeration of the rate of female poverty (and an obvious outlier of a focus on US male poverty), and for race and age there is a prevalence to focus on people of color and minors, which can only be justified under a logic of higher poverty rates in reality, though not always of higher net poverty numbers. This can lead to the conclusion that textbooks have an exaggerated focus on the poverty of vulnerable people—people of color in South Africa and developed countries, females (except in USA), and children.

In terms of the types of poverty presented, a closer analysis of the textbooks reveals the emergence of unrealistic patterns that continue a focus on poverty in developing countries, in urban areas and in contemporary times. This includes how textbooks label, as well as how they indicate poverty, in relation to variables of setting, like place, area, and time.

Labeling poverty plays an important role in the representation of poverty, as textbooks provide labels of poverty in 56% of all poverty tasks. Here, there is a focus on labeling poverty as simply *poor* (80% of all poverty labeling), as opposed to *very poor*. The focus on this label is differentiated by place, as the category of developing countries is labeled significantly more frequently as *very poor* (39.7% of all labels there), and the USA and the United Kingdom as significantly less *very poor* than the overall average. Textbooks also differentiate by time, labeling contemporary poverty significantly more frequently as very poor, but they do not differentiate by area. Comparing these findings to research on poverty reveals a very problematic use of labels as differentiated across space and time. The overwhelming use of *poor* over *very poor* labels suggests a focus on relative over absolute poverty, or perhaps rather a loose use of the term *poor* in its application to various settings. The use of *very poor* to more often describe developing countries, and less so to describe poverty in the USA and the United Kingdom, makes sense, though it does not make sense that South Africa and developed countries were not labeled significantly different in textbooks. As Chapter 3 shows, historical poverty

was worse in extremity and rate than contemporary poverty is, and so the significant increase in the use of *very poor* label to describe contemporary poverty in the sampled textbooks seems highly unrealistic. The fact that the textbooks do not differentiate their labeling according to area also does not make sense, as research findings would set the expectation that rural poverty would be depicted as more severe than urban poverty in textbooks.

In most cases, textbook poverty tasks indicate the type of poverty present in their tasks (76%). In addition, textbook analysis revealed a relatively large range of poverty indicators, including housing (44%), work (40%), food (28%), health (27%), and educational (23%) poverty, as well as indicators of material deprivation (14%). This measure of frequency shows a predominant focus on housing and work poverty, but also a considerate and nearly equal focus on food, health, and educational poverty. Of these six indicators, only two were significantly differentiated across place in the textbooks, as the USA had significantly less work indicators, and developing countries significantly more. For the other indicator, the USA and the United Kingdom had significantly less educational poverty indicators, and South Africa and *developing countries* significantly more. Furthermore, only two indicators were differentiated across area, as rural poverty was shown to have significant increases in educational poverty, and decreases in housing poverty. Only one indicator was differentiated across time, as housing poverty was shown to be significantly more common in contemporary poverty.

Overall, poverty indicators appear to play an important role in the textbook representation of poverty, with a broad range of indicators being used, but relatively little differentiation across place, area and time. Comparing these findings to research on poverty around the world reveals a problematic textbook representation. While research suggests that textbook poverty in South Africa and *developing countries* should have more indicators of poverty in textbooks, and USA and the United Kingdom less, one would also expect a significant increase in *all* indicators and not just some. In addition, research unanimously suggests that rural poverty is more extreme (except in the United Kingdom) than urban poverty, suggesting that textbooks should also present this reality—which they do not, even incorrectly showing housing poverty to be significantly more prevalent in urban settings. Finally, research suggests that all indicators of poverty should be higher in the past than they are contemporarily, though textbooks show the opposite. In conclusion, poverty

indicators play a crucial role in textbook representation. While many different indicators are present, there is a predominant focus on work and housing indicators, and most of the indicators are undifferentiated across place, area, and time—and when they are, those differentiations are often counter-realistic.

The interpretation of the findings of poverty types in the sampled textbooks further suggest a focus on relative poverty—a poverty that indicates a sense of societal unfairness. Contemporary poverty is shown to be worse than historical poverty, both in labels applied and in the presence of poverty indicators. And again, textbooks fail to show that rural poverty is more severe—in terms of labels there are no differences, and urban poverty is indicated more often than rural. Finally, while textbooks employ many different indicators to describe poverty, most are not significantly differentiated by place, area, or time, though South Africa and developing countries are more likely to be labeled very poor than the United Kingdom and the US. Again, the type poverty is often described in greater detail in places where it should exist less—at least according to research. This makes sense if the textbooks focus more on relative poverty than on absolute poverty.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the textbooks reveal a simplistic and moralistic focus on contributing factors of poverty. Specifically, textbooks predominantly focus on human contribution, namely wealthy populations and people of European descent, who are driven by greed or discriminatory beliefs and practices to harm largely people of color or people living in developing countries. While textbooks correctly identify these as contributing factors, their exclusion and backgrounding of other contributing factors make their representation of this aspect of poverty problematic, and only partially realistic.

The textbook analysis revealed that a majority of the poverty tasks provided some evidence of a contributing factor of poverty (65% of all poverty tasks), that these can be differentiated by local and foreign factors, and that the factors themselves can be differentiated into different types. Specifically, the findings show a focus on local causes or factors (91% of the cases), and that these are differentiated by place. A strong relationship was found to show a significantly higher rate of local causes in the United Kingdom, USA and South Africa, while developing countries were found to have significantly higher rates of foreign causes (where 49% of contributing factors are foreign). Further findings show that the USA and South Africa have significantly higher, and developing countries

significantly lower, rates of presenting contributing factors. Moreover, a closer inspection determined that rural poverty is significantly more likely to have a cause than urban poverty, and that all foreign causes occur in contemporary poverty. The quantitative research also revealed patterns concerning the specific factors that contribute to poverty. Those who are *wealthy* and those who are *of European descent* are the most common (37% and 31% respectively), while the category of *society* follows closely with 25%. The smallest category of *other* occurred in only 8% of the poverty tasks. The textbook analysis revealed that the proportion of these causes are also significantly differentiated by place, as the United Kingdom had significantly lower rates, and South Africa and *developed countries* (as an analytical category) had significantly higher rates of causes from people of European descent. Furthermore, especially people of European descent as contributing factors are clearly identified and elaborately specified in the textbooks, compared to other factors. Overall, contributing factors to poverty are frequently presented in textbook tasks, and they tend to focus on local causes (except in the category of *developing countries*), on rural poverty, and on people of European descent or rich as causes, with some significant variations according to place.

The qualitative findings of contributing factors shed much light on the meaning of the quantitative findings. A closer look revealed that the two most dominant causes, wealthy and people of European descent, are presented within what appears to be a moral framework. For causes stemming from people of European descent, textbooks clearly identify agents that affect people of color in poverty, there is considerable explanation of the poverty's historical origins, which is often violent and institutionalized, it is often driven by clearly defined racist intention, the agents are presented as the benefactors of an unequal power dynamic (through various economic and/or educational privileges), the poverty of people of color is then described in greater detail than is typical for other types of poverty in textbooks, and there is a greater focus on the negative emotions of people of color who are affected by poverty. There are some similarities between people of European descent as causes and wealthy ones, as there also appears to be a morally questionable intention behind the rich and powerful as contributing factors. Here, the rich and wealthy are presented as actively harming the poor (by taking from them by force) in the past (almost always in the United Kingdom), while in the present, the image is a bit more complex. Those in the West with economic power are often linked to poverty in developing countries, either via

Western corporations that exploit, often children, out of a desire for profit, or by Western consumers who are often presented as living in excess. For poverty within Western countries, there is a common pairing of the very rich with the very poor—often homeless, and usually through images rather than text. For wealthy contributing factors, like was the case for people of European descent as causes, there is a frequent focus on the vulnerability and the emotional suffering of those in poverty. The relatively large causal category of society is often vaguely identified, unintentional, and proximate (for instance, the causes of wars or the closures of businesses or the downturns of economies are never explained). The smaller category of other consists of two patterns—in the past for all places, and for contemporary *developing countries*, the cause of poverty is typically some sort of natural disaster, plague, or famine. For poverty in contemporary Western and developed countries, the cause is typically bad personal decisions.

What can be concluded from the quantitative and qualitative investigation of causes is a focus on poverty as being caused (or exacerbated) by morally reprehensible behavior. Here, there is a relatively clear power imbalance of one powerful group acting against a much less powerful group, the harm is often intentional and breaks with social norms (described as greed or racial discrimination), and those who are affected and in poverty are presented in the textbooks with clear and explicit suffering. This occurs in Western and developing countries, between the wealthy and the poor in general, and between people of European descent and people of color specifically, but it also occurs between Western/developed countries and developing countries (excluding South Africa), as the rich and wealthy in the West exploit developing countries (and often their children), while presented as consuming in excess.

Comparing these findings with research on poverty suggests that the textbook presentation of causes of poverty are partially realistic. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are many factors that can and often do influence the poverty of any particular individual or group, but this textbook analysis reveals a typical focus on single contributing factors, which tend to be moralistic in nature. This focus is indeed true, as greed and discrimination can and often do play a role in the existence of poverty around the world, but textbooks appear to place a very strong and (arguably) overly simplistic focus on these contributing factors, suggesting that poverty is predominantly a moral problem, artificial (caused by humans), and external (without any responsibility of the person living in poverty).

While Chapter 3 shows that the poverty of people of color in developed countries is indeed often exacerbated by discrimination, it is not the only factor, and individual choices and decisions (as well as cultural influence) can also play a considerable role. Concerning the textbook focus on the wealthy and their involvement in contributing (or causing) poverty, Chapter 3 also shows that most economies in Western, developed countries, are no longer purely extractive, and that wealth is no longer typically transferred but created. Furthermore, it shows that many developing countries are currently gaining wealth (and access to resources and technology) and economic development at faster rates than developed countries. Thus, poverty research suggests that the sampled textbooks focus on real contributing factors of poverty, but that these are also considerably filtered, simplified, and exaggerated. In this sense, the causes of poverty in the textbooks are only partially realistic.

The quantitative and qualitative analysis of the textbooks reveal a complex yet problematic representation of poverty reduction measures. Textbooks focus largely on individual actions against poverty, mostly reducing the role and effectiveness of local governments and institutions. Measures against poverty do not appear to be offered as solutions, but appear rather to frame the need for action against poverty, and to evoke empathy as an appropriate response.

The textbook analysis of poverty reduction measures reveals a textbook focus on presenting actions against poverty (66% of all poverty tasks). Four inductive categories of types of measures emerged, and significant differences in their presence were found to exist across locations, area, and time. By far the most common measure is charity (44%), followed by migration (22%) then governmental support (18%), and finally self-help (16%). Places in textbooks are shown to have significantly unique profiles of poverty measures. The USA is significantly less likely to have a poverty measure present, almost all measures are local, and people in poverty rely more on themselves and less on the government. The United Kingdom is more likely to have a measure present, but like the US, almost all are local and it also relies less on government. South Africa also has almost all local measures, but it relies significantly more on government and less on charity. Developing countries have a more unique profile, relying significantly greater (almost all) on foreign measures, less on government and self-help, and more on charity and migration. Finally, urban poverty is significantly less likely than rural poverty for a measure to be present, and historical poverty is more likely to include migration. The most common

measure, charity, is also more likely when there are wealthy contributing factors present, and are significantly less likely to go toward people of color than to people of European descent in Western nations and in South Africa.

As was the case for contributing factors of poverty, the qualitative findings on the investigation of poverty reduction measures shed a brighter light on the meaning of these quantitative findings. The conclusion from the qualitative analysis of solutions showed that nearly all measures are presented in textbooks as questionable in terms of their effectiveness, or are at least provided only as alleviations to poverty rather than ultimate, long-term solutions (especially since poverty is nearly always presented as persisting even after help was provided). Charity, the most frequently presented solution, often consists in textbooks of Western monetary transfers to developing countries,⁶ and appear to be framed by Western complicity and guilt in the poverty there. Volunteering and raising awareness are also commonplace, and also often focus on the poverty and exploitation of children. It likely serves as a model for the students who use these textbooks, as the charity is usually done by teenagers and is directed toward particularly children, and the focus of volunteering is more on personal transformation of the giver than on the alleviation of suffering of the receiver.

Immigration, often into the USA from developing countries, is another relatively frequent solution that is questionable—as a contemporary phenomenon—because of the continued poverty and the racial discrimination immigrants are presented as experiencing once they arrive. This stands in stark contrast to the historical European immigration to the USA, which is typically shown as successful in economic terms. There is a particular focus on contemporary Hispanic immigration into the USA, where immigrants are sometimes presented as escaping vaguely defined poverty in their home countries, but nearly always to persistently experience heavily described poverty (with clear discriminatory factors) in the USA. This depiction of Hispanic migration into the US is almost always preceded by historical European immigration into the US—this framing seems to suggest the evocation of empathy for contemporary Hispanic migration, rather than the presentation of migration as a solution.

⁶ This finding is similar to research on textbooks of other subjects in Germany, cf. Awet 2018: 245.

Government solutions in textbooks are also presented as questionable, as those sources of solutions are usually only being petitioned by citizens, and trust in those very governments appears to be eroded by their histories, as presented in the textbooks, of legally codified racism, and by the contemporary inability of governments to eradicate continued and residual discrimination by people of European descent. This representation of questionable governmental help stands in stark contrast to the (in the textbooks) unquestioned representation of the help of intergovernmental organizations, like the EU and UN.

Finally, the least common category of self-help was found to be almost always questionable—at least for contemporary poverty. Such contemporary self-help is also made questionable by the coexistence of historically corrupt governments, on serious hurdles yet to be overcome, on morally questionable solutions driven by necessity, and on the contingent nature of the self-help which has yet to bring about the desired results (meaning self-help is always toward future-oriented goals). It is also made questionable by the fact that it is more likely to be presented for people of color, who are still recipients of discrimination and bias. In conclusion, it appears that, at least for contemporary poverty, self-driven help (either by individual actions or via immigration) is highly problematic and largely ineffective, help from governments is presented as a responsibility to be provided (and to be viewed with suspicion), and help from charity is about empathy and perhaps even about addressing complicity of Westerners, rather than about providing ultimate solutions.

Comparing the quantitative with the qualitative findings of the textbook analysis shows that textbooks frequently provide poverty reduction measures in their poverty tasks, with a focus on individual-level solutions—charity, migration and self-help (82% of all poverty tasks with measures). However, the measures appear to only alleviate poverty at most, and are almost never ultimate solutions. Furthermore, migration, self-help and government measures are presented as problematic. Contemporary migration away from poverty leads to more poverty and to discrimination, self-help is contingent on the future and often presented with reasons why it will not be effective, and government solutions (except intragovernmental) are also future-oriented and problematic—either historically complicit in the creation of poverty or helpless to change the situation. Finally, different places are presented in textbooks as having unique profiles of measures, notable cases being that the USA is less likely to have a solution, and these are more likely to be self-help, that

developing countries have mostly foreign solutions, and that governments are more likely solutions in South Africa, and less likely in the USA, in the United Kingdom and in developing countries.

Comparing these findings with research on poverty suggests that the textbook presentation of solutions of poverty are neither particularly realistic, nor optimistic. First of all, consistent contemporary solutions in textbooks are rare, and most actions against poverty aim to alleviate, not reverse, poverty. This appears to run counter to the longer-term economic progress, experienced first by Europe and the United States, and currently being experienced by many countries around the world (and being experienced globally as a whole). Finally, it suggests that charity, and charitable individual action is one of the only measures to alleviate poverty, and that more should be expected from governments—where intragovernmental organizations appear to be the most promising. The lacking faith in local and national governments appears to neglect the role (and rise) of the welfare state, which has done much to reduce poverty in nations around the world, while the textbook focus on charity appears to ignore their questionable efficacy and serious problems of mismanagement and corruption. This focus may be more about performing good acts, rather than about reaching good outcomes. The devaluation of individual agency of poverty deemphasizes the role that individual decisions can play in entering and staying in poverty, and that those in poverty require external help, and the focus on migration as a solution (often from more extreme forms of poverty) is often overshadowed in textbooks by continued poverty that is exacerbated by serious discrimination—always in the USA. These findings lead to the conclusion that poverty reduction measures presented in the sampled textbooks are complex, but they are not particularly realistic. Rather than focusing on actual poverty reduction measures—or addressing the complexity of existing measures (in all their successes and failures)—textbooks appear to be focusing on raising awareness of poverty, and increasing a desire to help and care for those in poverty. In order to achieve this, there is a noticeable undercurrent of Western complicity and guilt in the existence of the very poverty being presented and addressed.

The analysis of how textbooks stage poverty, specifically examining what types of input are used to present poverty, and what perspectives are fore- and backgrounded, provides crucial insights toward explaining how global poverty in the textbooks match the goals of ESD. The results of the analysis reveal problematic trends—namely that textbook poverty

is inauthentic and fictional, privileging certain perspectives while silencing others.

The findings show several reasons why textbooks heavily filter the representation of poverty. First, a majority (61%) of all the input that presents poverty in the textbooks appears to be constructed by the textbook authors themselves, leaving only 39% that could be considered authentic, real-world material. This also means that not only do the textbook authors select and filter all information on poverty included in the textbooks, but that they also write a majority of those texts themselves, giving them even more influence over what information and perspectives on poverty are included. This is not the only filter—a strong majority (72.1%) of all textbook input on poverty is fictional, meaning that they are narratives with no actual claim to reality, even if they are intended to be realistic. As such, readers are either led to believe they are real stories (thus lending the stories a false authenticity), or learners are expected to engage in a playful suspension of disbelief and, for educational purposes, disentangle on their own the fictional elements of the stories from the realities of poverty that they present. However, the textbooks sampled never thematize this fictionality, and learners are left to their own devices to determine the truth-value of these fictional stories. Thus, an overwhelming amount of information on poverty in the sampled EFL textbooks is filtered—it is inauthentic, written by textbook authors, and fictional—and thereby particularly prone to distortion.

The consequences of this type of filtering become clear through the analysis of the perspectives that the poverty input foregrounds, as well as of those that it backgrounds or even excludes. The analysis of perspectives revealed that textbook poverty texts focus first on giving voice to those living in poverty, then to those who are helping, including texts that have both voices. A look at the numbers shows that textbooks are 24 times more likely to present the voices of those in poverty or those helping them compared to any individuals or groups associated with contributing to the poverty. In fact, the voice of a person in poverty and/or the voice of someone helping is even more common in texts than texts with only a third-person voice or perspective. While providing perspectives of those in poverty gives voice to historically marginalized groups, an exclusion of the perspectives of people who may be involved in contributing to the poverty suggests that the overall framing of poverty—particularly its causes—is beyond question for the students. An additional foregrounding of those who are trying to help adds an additional support to this claim,

as it validates the idea that the person in poverty requires help, while at the same time modeling that the person in poverty should be helped. The person helping is not questioning the cause or contributing factor of the poverty, framing for the learner that this is also not necessary. This particular constellation of perspectives strongly suggests a moral framing of poverty. As one expert on moral framing states, focusing on a victim's perspective is "essential for a moral evaluation" but "ruinous for a causal understanding." (Baumeister 2001: 20) In addition, the overwhelming focus in textbooks on fictional texts is also problematic, due to the power of fiction to distort reality, our conceptions of right and wrong, and understandings of causations and solutions (cf. Baumeister 2001: 18).

An analysis of how poverty is staged in the sampled textbooks reveals the significant control these materials exert over its representation, often resulting in a non-authentic and potentially unrealistic portrayal. This control extends to the framing of perspectives on poverty, with a tendency to focus on the experiences of those affected—even when presented through the lens of helpers. Consequently, textbooks not only filter the information included, but also shape its narrative through authorial choices, such as the use of fictional accounts that avoid direct engagement with the complexities of poverty. This focus on victim and helper perspectives can limit critical examination of the systemic causes of poverty.

A central aim of this case study was to assess the extent to which German EFL textbooks address global poverty in ways that align with the goals of ESD. A key focus was whether these textbooks portray global poverty as a complex and realistic phenomenon. This analysis helps evaluate whether the representations reflect the multifaceted nature of poverty as it exists globally, and whether they equip learners to understand and engage with it as a real-world issue. The findings can reveal whether the textbooks foster critical, informed perspectives, address only selective aspects of poverty, or risk distorting young people's understanding in ways that may lead to unintended educational or social consequences.

The analysis of textbook representation found that textbooks tend to portray poverty in urban, developed, English speaking contexts, despite global abundance, often ignoring more severe rural poverty. Representations emphasize contemporary poverty and focus on vulnerable groups—women, children, and people of color—sometimes in exaggerated or oversimplified ways. The emphasis tends to be on relative poverty, framed as societal unfairness. Furthermore, poverty is primarily depicted

as caused by morally reprehensible behavior, such as greed and discrimination, usually committed by powerful groups against weaker ones. This includes Western exploitation of developing countries and racial injustices in developed nations. In addition, textbooks mostly present individual-level solutions—charity, migration, and self-help—which aim to alleviate rather than eliminate poverty. These measures are often portrayed as ineffective or problematic. Larger scale government action is shown as limited or complicit, except in the case of intragovernmental organizations. The role of the welfare state and economic development is underrepresented. Overall, solutions are neither realistic nor optimistic, emphasizing guilt and awareness over practical effectiveness. Finally, textbooks exert tight narrative control over poverty depiction, often through fictional or filtered accounts that prioritize emotional engagement over analytical depth. The frequent use of victim and helper perspectives restricts critical engagement with systemic causes and reduces opportunities for deeper understanding.

In all, textbooks appear to present a narrow, emotionally driven, and morally framed representation of global poverty that emphasizes awareness and empathy over analytical understanding or realistic solutions. While they highlight important issues—such as inequality, discrimination, and power imbalances—they do so through simplified and selective portrayals that often lack nuance and ignore key structural, economic, and historical complexities. The focus on relative poverty, urban settings, and vulnerable populations contributes to a skewed view that may unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or overlook broader contexts, such as rural poverty, systemic factors, or the role of local agency. The causes of poverty are often depicted in moral terms, attributing it to exploitation and injustice, which, while partially accurate, omits a broader range of contributing factors like policy, governance, individual decisions, and economic development dynamics. Poverty reduction strategies are framed as limited, problematic, or ineffectual, with a strong reliance on charity and external aid, while governmental roles, structural reforms, and long-term development successes are underrepresented. This can foster a sense of helplessness or guilt, particularly in Western learners, rather than equipping them with a realistic understanding of how poverty can be addressed through informed action. Ultimately, textbooks appear more concerned with raising moral awareness than with providing students a critical, complex, and balanced understanding of global poverty. While this can foster empathy, it risks undermining the educational goals of empowerment, critical thinking, and global citizenship central to ESD.

ESD Competence Orientation of Textbooks

Another central goal of investigating the German sample of textbooks is to determine whether the activities associated with textbook poverty input support competency development, especially as laid out in the *Curriculum Framework*. The competency model presented therein focused on the three areas of recognizing, assessing, and acting (cf. Chap. 3). Of particular relevance to this study is the emphasis on enabling learner action in support of ESD and the SDGs—specifically, to help reduce poverty both locally and globally. The quantitative and qualitative analysis of activities present convincing evidence that the textbook sample does not support the ability to make informed decisions (and take informed action) concerning issues surrounding poverty, or even to think critically about the topic, but rather target an empathic response from learners—one that is heavily primed by many contextual factors.

The results of the textbook analysis of learner activities associated with poverty tasks reveal a dominant focus (59% of all activities) on information-based activities. Looking more closely at the type of information activity, the analysis further shows that of all activities, 36% are focused on gathering information, while a smaller amount of 23% of all activities are focused on learners processing information. Differentiating between information gathering activities that refer directly to textbook input and those that encourage learners to look for information external to the textbook (e.g., online) reveals that most information gathering activities focus learners on textbook information (33% textbook to 3% external information gathering tasks). The analysis also reveals that textbooks place a considerable focus on empathy and opinion activities (27% of all associated activities). While these are about half as frequent as information-based activities, they are still more frequent than information processing activities. A considerable number of activities (12%) do not fit neatly with the ESD competency model, as they focus learners on developing skills and knowledge related specifically to grammar and vocabulary; however, this does not mean that such activities do not play a substantial and qualitative role in contributing to ESD competence development, as shown in the qualitative analysis of empathy and opinion activities (more on this below). Finally, the least common activity category is action, as only 1% of all poverty task-related activities fell in this category. Here it is important to note that none of the activities actually encouraged or required the learners to take any action related to

changing or improving the conditions of poverty, but rather encouraged the learners to only consider possible actions.

The analysis not only addressed the types of activities and their relationship to the ESD competence areas, but it also investigated whose perspectives on poverty learners were explicitly encouraged to address. Here, the findings show a predominant focus on those living in poverty with nearly 44% of all activities. The second most common focus was *other* (29%), which refers to perspectives not related to poverty at all, followed by those helping (with 11.3%), then those contributing to poverty (9.7%), and finally on both those helping and those living in poverty (6.2%). This means that nearly 62% of all activities focus learners directly on a view of poverty that is biased toward the people living in poverty, versus a much smaller 10% that focus learner attention to perspectives from the contributing factors. This indicates that textbook activities focus on reinforcing their representation of people living in poverty (and on those who wish to help), rather than critically reflecting on contributing factors of poverty. Further analysis revealed that poverty in developing countries were more likely to have activities that focus students on the perspectives of those who are trying to help (who are typically from the West).

The findings from the qualitative investigation of activities provide additional insight and context to the quantitative results. As explained in Chapter 4, the qualitative analysis focused on assessment activities—particularly those targeting empathy and opinion—due to their proportional significance, the notable absence of action-oriented competence areas, and because the quantitative analysis suggested that poverty is framed as a moral wrong deserving empathic response. The qualitative findings support this impression, further indicating that empathy is a dominant learning goal in the sampled textbooks' treatment of poverty. The analysis revealed that most assessment activities explicitly target empathy, and that a considerable portion of opinion and personal reaction tasks also evoke empathic responses. Moreover, many information-based activities, as well as grammar and vocabulary exercises, centered learners' attention on people in poverty and their negative emotions, effectively priming them for empathy even before encountering explicit assessment tasks. These activities not only fostered empathy but also framed suffering in moral terms—thus justifying empathic responses from learners. This suggests that a significant portion of non-assessment activities still functionally support assessment goals, particularly empathy. The investigation also found that approximately half of the sampled assessment tasks

were not preceded by any supportive activities, highlighting the primacy effect—learners are expected to respond empathetically without prior critical engagement. Finally, the input accompanying assessment tasks, as well as the surrounding contextual activities, frequently presented strong cases of moral harm and injustice, further shaping learners' responses toward empathy. Ultimately, the analysis concludes not only that empathy is a key intended learning outcome, but also that learners are directed to empathize in very specific ways—primarily with those living in poverty. This framing suggests that empathic responses are not entirely self-directed, but rather coerced or socially expected. As a result, learners may express empathy more as a performative gesture to satisfy teachers and peers than as a genuine outcome of critical engagement with the material. In this way, empathy risks becoming a reflexive, socially desirable response, rather than the result of thoughtful analysis, reflection, and personal conviction.

How do the sampled textbooks teach poverty, and what are the goals of learning about poverty that emerge from analyzing associated activities? Moreover, do they align with a competence orientation, one that may fit the model put forth by the *Curriculum Framework*? The analysis shows textbooks appear to prioritize empathy as a learning goal over objective information about poverty, and definitely over any ability to take action. Several findings support this conclusion. First, there are virtually no activities that promote learner action, whether real or hypothetical. Second, assessment activities—most of which aim to evoke empathy—outnumber information processing tasks, suggesting that textbook content is not intended to be critically examined but rather to elicit immediate emotional responses. Next, many information-based and language-focused activities prime learners to empathize with those in poverty, indicating that these tasks may function as implicit empathy exercises, even if not quantitatively categorized as such in this study. Finally, when learner attention is directed toward specific actors involved in poverty, it is most often focused on those in poverty and their helpers, reinforcing a narrow perspective that emphasizes suffering and assistance over systemic understanding or agency. Taken together, these patterns suggest that textbooks fall short of promoting action competence in line with ESD goals. Instead, they foster a largely emotional, empathetic stance that may hinder the development of deeper critical engagement or practical problem-solving skills.

Textbook ESD Critical Thinking

The previous passages have strongly suggested that textbook input and activities present poverty in a way that does not support critical reflection. Namely, they present specific and non-realistic depictions of poverty which are heavily controlled by the textbook designers and that are narratively framed to present poverty that is caused or exacerbated by moral harm by more powerful groups that affects largely vulnerable people who explicitly suffer. Poverty reduction measures are largely ineffective and small scale, and often are about caring through charitable acts. The associated learning activities do not focus learners on processing textual information, but rather on the poverty as represented in the texts, and engage them largely in empathic responses to the situation of poverty. Chapter 2 has outlined why critical thinking is essential to ESD—not only as a foundation for democratic citizenship and a safeguard against (particularly unjust) power imbalances, but also as a means of fostering deeper, more comprehensive understanding of complex problems before proposing and implementing solutions. The following will continue building on these findings by investigating how textbooks present German poverty as a part of the global phenomenon of poverty, in the input (stories, information and images) as well as in the activities they provide.

Unfortunately, textbooks provide very little data to analyze in reference to this research interest. According to the analysis, there are only three poverty tasks in all the sampled books (out of 455 tasks) that thematize poverty directly in Germany, one per each publishing company. All three thematize historical poverty in Germany—two from the nineteenth century and one from mid-twentieth century. All three are also presented in the context of migration to the United States. German poverty in the nineteenth century is presented in very vague terms with no apparent cause, while the German poverty of the mid-twentieth century is presented as resulting from the devastation directly after World War 2. These tasks also fall in a series of tasks that thematize immigration into the US in general, and the focus is on the US as a nation of immigrants, and not on historical poverty of Europe or Germany. Five further poverty tasks present poverty in Europe (without a specifically defined place therein). These are distributed across all publishers and both school forms. Four of these five poverty tasks thematized historical European poverty in the context of immigration into the US, and like those for

Germany, were also found embedded in a series of tasks on the US as a nation of immigrants. These all covered European poverty from the late nineteenth century into the early twentieth (pre-World War I period). In conclusion, textbooks only represent German poverty as historical poverty (and that very seldomly), suggesting to learners that global poverty is a phenomenon that occurs everywhere but in Germany.

Perhaps the lacking representation of German poverty would not be so problematic if the representation of global poverty was used in the associated activities as an opportunity for learners to reflect on local poverty in Germany. However, an analysis of the activities revealed that this opportunity for reflection never occurred explicitly—though two perhaps implicitly. One activity stems from a task on current ethnic and cultural diversity in the US and its historical and contemporary origins in migration. After presenting a person who comes to the USA to leave poverty in Mexico, an associated activity asks learners to survey members of their own class on migration experiences. However, the assumption is likely that those with migration experiences in the German classroom have escaped poverty, and have not necessarily also found it in Germany. The second activity comes from a task on contemporary homelessness in Britain, asking learners whether people should give money to the homeless, and to respond in a short presentation. Though there is no explicit referencing to poverty in Germany, it seems likely that learners will reference their own experiences with local homelessness and begging, as this is not an uncommon occurrence in many cities in Germany.

To conclude, the analysis suggests that German EFL textbooks do not foster critical reflection on poverty. The textbooks tend to present poverty and its causes in a largely unquestioned, one-dimensional manner, without encouraging learners to critically examine these representations. Furthermore, there is a conspicuous absence of any engagement with local poverty—whether in contemporary continental Europe or specifically within Germany. This omission extends to both the content and the associated learning activities, which overwhelmingly focus on poverty as a distant, foreign phenomenon. The implications of these findings are significant: by externalizing poverty, textbooks risk reinforcing the misconception that it is a problem confined to areas outside of Germany or to marginalized communities abroad, thereby diminishing learners' awareness of and responsibility for social issues in their own context. This not only undermines the goals of ESD, which emphasize local relevance

and action, but also limits students' capacity to develop informed and critical perspectives on poverty as a global and local issue.

Contextual Skewings

Because these results are based on an analysis of the full set of sampled textbooks, it is essential to assess whether the findings are broadly representative or disproportionately influenced by a particular school form or publisher. The following section addresses this question, identifying some notable differences between school types and publishers. However, the overall patterns point to a largely consistent and uniform approach to teaching poverty across the sample.

The analysis of the role that the school form plays in the representation and teaching of global poverty reveals a slight majority of all poverty tasks (59%) can be found in schoolbooks for *Realschule*. The search for further relationships between school form and poverty revealed fourteen significant relationships (3 medium, the rest small). Specifically, it revealed that textbooks for *Realschule* have slightly more extreme poverty by labeling significantly more frequently as very poor and by focusing significantly more frequently on South Africa and developing countries. Textbooks for *Realschule* also have a significantly increased focus on work poverty, a decreased focus on migration as a solution, and an increased focus on government solutions, and a decreased focus on wealthy causes. However, testing for further relationships found a considerable larger number of factors that are not significantly differentiated by school form, like time of poverty, gender, race, age, education, housing, food, and health. *Realschule* textbooks do stage textbooks slightly differently by focusing significantly more on fictional poverty, and they differentiate poverty-related activities by including significantly more information gathering activities and significantly less information processing activities. Therefore, the analysis supports the conclusion that there are significant differences in the way *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* textbooks represent and teach poverty; however, these differences are typically small, and they appear to share more similarities than differences. The differences that do exist show poverty in *Realschule* textbooks is slightly more common and slightly more extreme.

The analysis of the role that the different publishers play for the presentation and teaching of poverty reveals some significant differences. For the presentation of poverty, nine significant variations were determined. They

reveal not only that *Diesterweg* has the highest frequency of poverty tasks, but that they present more extreme poverty. It has significantly higher rates of rural poverty, poverty associated with crime and violence, and number of associated vulnerabilities. Furthermore, *Diesterweg* textbooks have significantly higher rates of presenting fictional poverty. However, *Klett* is also associated with significant increases, as their textbooks tend to show increased rates of immigration as solutions, of health poverty, of foreign poverty solutions and an input focus on those living in poverty. The clearest pattern, however, is that the publisher of *Cornelsen* is consistently associated with significantly decreased rates of the presence of factors (seven of the nine addressed here). In textbooks from *Cornelsen*, there is significantly less work, educational and health poverty, there are less numbers of associated indicators of poverty as well as vulnerabilities of those in poverty, and immigration is less likely to be a solution. The only significant increase in *Cornelsen* is that solutions are more likely to be local than for the other publishers. For the remaining examined factors (like, for instance, for time of poverty, gender, race, age, poverty labeling, housing, food, materials deprivation, etc.), no significant differences in the presentation of poverty were found. For the staging of poverty, *Cornelsen* was also found to have significantly less rates of fictional poverty, and *Diesterweg* increased rates. For the teaching of poverty, no significant differences for publishers could be found, except that *Diesterweg* had higher rates of language-focused activities.

In conclusion, for most of the variables examined, school type and publisher do not show significant differences in how they represent and teach poverty. However, some noteworthy distinctions do emerge. *Realschule* textbooks depict poverty slightly more frequently, and the poverty presented tends to be more extreme in nature. Among publishers, *Diesterweg* stands out for including the highest number of poverty-related tasks and for portraying more severe forms of poverty, whereas *Cornelsen* features the fewest tasks and the least extreme representations. In terms of *poverty staging*, *Diesterweg* relies significantly more on fictionalized accounts, while *Cornelsen* uses them far less. When it comes to the pedagogical approach to teaching poverty, however, all publishers appear largely similar. These findings suggest that while there is general consistency across school forms and publishers, subtle differences—especially in the frequency, severity, and fictional framing of poverty—may influence how learners perceive and learn about global poverty.

ANALYSIS OF TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

As shown in Chapter 6, teachers expressed mostly negative views toward the topic of global poverty in EFL teaching, spending considerable time during the interview to express their views. The results showed that teachers are, at the very least, seriously uncertain about teaching global poverty in the EFL classroom, and that this uncertainty translates into a general disposition against the topic as a whole. While some teachers express that they value the topic of global poverty and can think of ways of teaching it, they find numerous reasons for not integrating it in their classroom teaching. Against this backdrop, the following passages address teachers' views on global poverty education as they relate to the complexity of poverty, and on ESD competence development, including critical thinking and reflection. Finally, potential skewings that occur in teacher responses will be addressed. For each of these aspects, the findings of the teacher interviews will be compared to the findings of the textbook analysis. The conclusion that emerges is not optimistic—the deficiencies of textbook poverty education determined by the analysis will either be exacerbated or ignored by the teachers. Either way, the potentials of the EFL classroom for global poverty education appear to be lost.

On Poverty Complexity

The interpretation of poverty education in the sampled textbooks revealed that poverty is often represented in complex ways, but that there are serious deficiencies concerning the realism of their depictions and the learning goals their associated activities pursue. Moreover, the complexity of textbook poverty pursues various perspectives on poverty that provide clues toward a moralistic framing of poverty (and its management). The results of the teacher interviews strongly suggest that teachers will neither compensate for this framing with additional perspectives and information on poverty, nor will they confidently teach textbook poverty as a reflection of real-world global poverty, with an aim to understand and address it.

Half of the teachers interviewed did not recognize that global poverty was even a part of their textbooks (at least not at the beginning of the interviews), while others believe the topic was too implicit, unfocused, and incoherent (lacking an overarching narrative or perspective). While

some teachers believe that textbooks do teach information about poverty, they express concern that the information is quickly outdated and uninteresting, and that poverty in Germany is completely ignored. Some also believe they support empathy and the development of multiple perspectives, but most teachers point out that their students also recognize the fictionality of textbook content, the lacking empathy learners have for their fictional characters, and that textbooks instrumentalize empathy to motivate learners to complete language activities. Furthermore, they note that this fictionality creates a skewed, unscientific and unrelatable representation of poverty with an excessive focus on negative emotions. They do not prepare students for or debrief them after empathy activities, and students can experience empathic distress because of this. Finally, all teachers expressed that textbooks do not support student ability to take action against poverty. Four teachers noted specifically that textbooks do not offer solutions, that actions that are there are reactive and not sustainable, they only focus on what can be tested, and that they should involve more project work.

Beyond explicit discussions of textbooks, teachers presented the complexity of global poverty as serious challenges to poverty education, both in terms of their own preparation to teach the topic, and in terms of their students' ability to properly handle what to them appeared to be a highly controversial topic. Many teachers noted that they were not, according to their own perspectives, sufficiently prepared in their university education to teach global poverty, and they also stated that this did not appear to be expected of them according to the state curriculum. Some teachers believe they could educate themselves on their own, but that this would not be adequate enough to prepare learners to take action against poverty. Many teachers also felt that global poverty is too complex for their learners, that they did not already have the appropriate background knowledge, or sometimes even had false information from questionable online sources, and that this especially created challenges for poverty evaluation and corrective action.

The comparison of these findings suggests that teachers who do not recognize poverty in their textbooks will reinforce textbook poverty teaching by not challenging its depiction and not compensating with additional input. Those who do recognize it, as the interviews show, react by skipping such activities, moving through them quickly, or deemphasizing the global poverty aspects of the content. None of the teachers expressed much faith in their textbooks to teach global poverty, indicating that this

responsibility would need to fall onto their own shoulders. However, teachers express serious concern over their own lacking knowledge of, and preparation in teaching, the subject of global poverty, especially considering the context of evaluating and acting against poverty—and its political implications. The result of this combination of textbook representation and teacher perspectives is likely that textbook education of global poverty will remain the only source of global poverty education in the classroom, and that teachers are unprepared, or unwilling, to challenge or compensate for their textbooks.

ESD Competence

As the interpretation of textbook teaching of global poverty uncovered, the goal of teaching global poverty appears to be the increase of student empathy toward people living in poverty—or, as teachers suggested in the interviews, to utilize student empathy for people suffering in poverty to motivate them to learn and use the language. This finding overlaps very well with the findings from the teacher interviews. Though teachers had largely positive views on the value of teaching poverty education (and overwhelmingly negative ones on teaching action against poverty), they also vigorously focused on the role and value of empathy, more than twice as often as both other ESD competency dimensions combined. Teachers view empathy as overlapping well with current goals of EFL teaching, with ICC and with teaching literature. It also seems from the interviews that increasing empathy is a major educational goal, and one that fulfills functions inside the classroom by producing a positive and productive learning atmosphere, and by reducing the potential for unnecessary conflict among students (especially between those of difference, like gender, socioeconomic, or ethnic). Teachers provide substantial evidence of strong beliefs in support of empathy as goals of global poverty education, and they claim they are able to support these aims in the classroom. Teachers name largely personal reasons for their abilities, like their social networks, their international or migration backgrounds, or their own economic backgrounds growing up. However, though all teachers support and value the evaluation of global poverty, they overwhelmingly express reasons why it is problematic, difficult or even nearly impossible to teach poverty evaluation in their classrooms, largely due to the complexity of the subject, and the challenges this creates for their students.

These findings stand in stark contrast to the goals of poverty education within the context of ESD. While textbooks present information on poverty, students are largely not required to process that information in any meaningful way, and instead are usually required to integrate it into empathic responses. Teachers value information on poverty, but have little to add other than that information on poverty is important and needs to be complex. In addition, textbooks present problematic poverty reduction measures, and almost never engage learners in acting to reduce poverty (even as potential actions). Teachers had little to say about this area of ESD competency, and when they did, they always saw it as problematic and something to avoid. Poverty evaluation, and specifically empathy, appear to remain as major learning goals of both textbooks and teachers. Textbooks prime learners to see global poverty through an empathic lens, and often engage them in activities of empathy, and teachers responded most frequently (and in net terms most positively) to empathy as a goal of poverty education. This suggests that textbook poverty education likely overlaps with teacher beliefs and values on poverty education, and that teachers will not critically challenge this aspect of textbook poverty representation—despite the teachers’ many criticisms of their textbooks and the many challenges they identify in teaching empathy. Thus, it seems likely that teachers will simply reinforce textbook focus on developing empathy for people living in global poverty. If poverty can be viewed as largely existing from human moral failures, then it is possible that empathy can be viewed as a necessary solution (or measure). In this case, student empathy for people living in poverty could be viewed as learner action against poverty, which could translate into political support of governmental and intragovernmental policies to reduce global poverty—thus turning passive empathy into active and meaningful change. However, judging poverty education within the lens of the EFL classroom, this would result from an unchallenged, unreflected, unrealistic and oversimplified framing of global poverty in textbooks.

Critical Thinking and Reflection

Critical thinking and reflection are imperative for ESD, as they support individualized, learner-centered education, and the ability of learners to construct an understanding of poverty in the world, assign meaning to those constructions, and relate themselves and their own personal lives

and experiences to them. Critical reflection also serves social and political functions of ESD, as it allows for learner (in this context, those in Germany) to not just learn about global poverty as it occurs in other contexts around the world, but also to better understand local poverty in both its general and specific aspects. Furthermore, it allows for a fuller understanding of global poverty as a systemic challenge, rather than one that simply can be explained in the peculiarities of various places around the world. Critical thinking and reflection also support critical engagement with information, and the way that individuals, institutions and media sources frame the manifestation of (including contributing factors and reduction measures) poverty around the world.

The analysis has already shown that the textbook narrative of global poverty is largely one-sided and unchallenged in textbooks, relying on consistently one-sided, partisan, and unrealistic perspectives and representations of poverty. Furthermore, the associated activities never encourage learners to challenge this narrative, leaving the depictions completely unquestioned. Moreover, textbooks almost never provide opportunities for social and political critical reflection, as German poverty is presented only a few times in the textbooks, always as historical, and learners are never explicitly encouraged to reflect on global poverty in relation to local, German poverty in the activities.

This lack of textbook-supported critical reflection corresponds to the many and overwhelming challenges that teachers present, suggesting the critical reflection described above is ultimately undesirable and to be avoided. As the interview analysis revealed, teachers do recognize the value of critical reflection for global poverty education, increasing gratefulness for privileges of living in Germany, helping learners better understand their role in creating and helping fight global poverty, and supporting their development of empathy (especially for local poverty, and including people in Germany with migrant backgrounds and refugee status). Teachers also recognize that reflection is central for students to develop their own attitudes and beliefs, which are a core part of ESD competence advancement. However, despite this recognition, all teachers also recognized that critical reflection is problematic. They all expressed concern that the topic has the potential to create conflict in the classroom. They noted that reflection made the topic “too sensitive,” and associated with “shame” for those with poverty experiences, and that drawing connections would put a spotlight on student poverty and lead

to social exclusion. Teachers reported that reflecting on poverty highlights socioeconomic differences among students, who are particularly sensitive during puberty as students become acutely aware of and competitive regarding social status and material possessions. *Realschule* teachers are particularly aware of this sensitivity due to increased rates of learners with migrant backgrounds and refugees, who may have traumatic experiences with poverty. The teachers believe the classroom should provide a “safe space” where negative emotions and topics are minimized. For these reasons, teachers are wary of the topic of poverty, and especially of critical reflection on it, and are uncertain how to teach it and express a desire to avoid the topic altogether (and that parents wish this as well). Therefore, focusing on poverty in foreign places affecting other, preferably fictional, people, feels more appropriate to them.

Most teachers believe that the topic is also culturally sensitive, making it harder to integrate reflection into the classroom. They claim that the topic is associated with shame in Germany, and therefore is to be avoided. Reflecting on poverty uncovers these uncomfortable emotions, and the fact that poverty also exists locally. Poverty is treated as a “taboo” in Germany by both teachers and society, and teachers require special training to handle such reflection. Half the teachers concur that in order to reflect on poverty in their classrooms, they would require the support of their schools, but that their schools do not offer this and seem to also not want to. Finally, several teachers express extreme caution, as they feel that particularly reflection on poverty in Germany would lead to political conclusions, that teachers could run the risk of manipulating students’ opinions and perspectives, and that any reflection would need to help students form their own attitudes and beliefs. For these reasons, many teachers feel that such reflection is better suited for other subjects, like ethics, social or religious studies, and that focusing on poverty abroad is less problematic.

Finally, half of the teachers expressed negative beliefs concerning EFL textbooks’ ability to evoke and support learner reflection. One teacher noted that textbooks support unreflective empathy that is superficial and ineffective, while two noted that lacking reflection instrumentalizes poverty for language learning (one teacher refers to it as “propaganda”). Another teacher believes that the fictional characters of poverty make poverty less relatable, and support less reflection, while another teacher believes reflective activities would help students better process empathic distress caused by textbook input and activities.

The analysis of textbooks, coupled with teacher interviews, reveals a significant gap in critical engagement with global poverty within the framework of ESD in German EFL classrooms. Current poverty education practices fall short of meeting the complex demands of this topic, resulting in a largely unexamined and unquestioned transfer of information from textbooks to students. This reliance on textbooks perpetuates the issues identified in the materials: the unrealistic, skewed, and often highly moralized depictions of global poverty are reinforced, rather than challenged, through classroom interactions. Consequently, learners may internalize these problematic representations, developing an incomplete and potentially biased understanding of global interconnectedness and the systemic causes of poverty. This has implications for their ability to engage in meaningful action or advocate for social justice.

Contextual Skewing

The quantitative textbook analysis concluded that poverty was consistently more frequently presented for *Realschule*, and that its poverty was more extreme, with a greater focus on poverty in developing countries (including in South Africa). Furthermore, it presents a slightly different poverty profile, with significantly more work poverty (usually child labor) and government solutions, and significantly less migration solutions and wealthy causes. Finally, that poverty is more often fictional, and the associated activities focus to a greater degree on gathering, and less on processing, information. This finding is interesting, considering that students of *Realschule* are typically more prone to poverty—or at least to anxiety of experiencing it, than students from *Gymnasium*. Evidence of this is that students from *Realschule* come from considerably lower socioeconomic backgrounds, are much less likely to attend university, have less career opportunities, and typically end up in a considerably smaller salary range after graduating (Kohler-Gehrig 2019: 123). This means that students who are more familiar with, or in danger of, experiencing poverty in Germany are most confronted with it in their EFL textbooks.

However, despite the increased rates of textbook poverty and extremity, and despite the specific profile that appears to match the economic background and futures of *Realschule* students, teachers from *Realschule* are more critical of global poverty education in their EFL classrooms, and less likely to include those activities in their teaching.

As emphasized by all *Realschule* teachers, there are students in their classrooms with experiences of poverty, or from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and some with migration backgrounds from developing countries. These teachers are especially aware that any poverty in the textbooks reflect implicitly on the backgrounds of these students, making it—from the perspectives of the teachers—an uncomfortable situation that is rife for shame, conflict, and complex political discussions. These teachers are more likely to skip textbook poverty, or treat it cursorily, avoiding explicit reflection and any discussion of local poverty. These teachers also wish to focus on the value of the students' school education, in hopes that their students graduate with good grades to ensure they eventually achieve their best employment options in the future. A part of this is indeed learning to appreciate the options they have in Germany, especially compare to those available in other national contexts. These findings suggest that poverty education in *Realschule* textbooks serve a modified function to motivate students of that particular school form to learn—possibly not just the English language, but to graduate and value their future employment opportunities. This fits with the desires of their teachers, and stands in stark contrast with ESD goals of learning about global poverty to critically reflect on local systems and structures of poverty, or to engage in actions (also political) to reduce poverty around the world—unless poverty reduction is envisioned as the learners helping themselves through the opportunities provided to them through their education.

In conclusion, the analysis of the textbook representation of global poverty and of teacher perspectives on the topic reveal many problems that suggest a serious misalignment between global poverty education in practice in Germany, with the global goals of ESD. However, the findings of the German case study do align well with the existing research on representations of poverty and class in educational materials, including foreign language textbooks internationally and within Germany. While German EFL textbooks demonstrate a comparatively substantial inclusion of poverty as a topic of study—a distinction noted in contrast to many other national contexts—a persistent focus on middle-class experiences suggests an ongoing prioritization of neoliberal ideologies of work and a corresponding erasure of class-based inequalities. The presentation of class, when present, typically positions it as geographically distant and attributes its causes to the moral failings of those in power.

Although the textbook sample analyzed here reveals a marked increase in the representation of poverty over recent decades, mirroring findings by Kubanek (1989) and Hammer (2012), the depiction remains largely superficial and lacks critical depth. Specifically, representations tend toward stereotypical portrayals of homelessness in the Global North and slum conditions in the Global South, presented in a fragmented and decontextualized manner. Furthermore, in comparison to Pogorzelska et al.'s (2023) recent investigation of foreign language textbooks designed for a global market, the German sample shares similar trends: an emphasis on individual moral causes of poverty, an overrepresentation of charitable responses, limited attention to systemic or state-level solutions, and a relative absence of agency afforded to those experiencing poverty. The focus on personal narratives of poverty in the Global South also echoes Pogorzelska et al.'s findings. However, a key divergence lies in the German sample's comparatively greater attention to poverty in total, and specifically within the Global North. These findings conclude that poverty in German EFL education does not directly pursue the ESD goals of reducing poverty, but rather aims at increasing learner empathy toward people living in poverty. The next chapter will discuss the implications of this approach to global poverty education, and suggest potentially negative consequences if pursued internationally.

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CHAPTER 8

EFL Global Poverty Education: German Lessons for a Global Context

The following chapter draws broader lessons from the German case study and explores their relevance in a global context. It begins by examining the specific framing of global poverty identified in the research and considers the potentially harmful implications if such portrayals were to be replicated across other national and cultural settings. The chapter then analyzes the moral framing of poverty prevalent in the textbooks, highlighting how this approach—while appearing specific to the context of Germany—may in fact reflect a wider, global trend in educational materials and educational thinking. It then continues by outlining compelling reasons why this framing is not only limited in its educational value but may also reinforce problematic assumptions and hinder meaningful engagement. Finally, it offers evidence-based recommendations for the future development of global poverty education, grounded in the findings of this study and oriented toward more critical, balanced, and constructive approaches.

FRAMING GLOBAL POVERTY IN GERMAN EFL EDUCATION

To what extent do these findings from the German case study reflect a general approach to envisioning sustainable development, one that exists in many places around the world, perhaps even globally? If this case study is in the least bit representative (and a comparison of the findings to the

sparse international research suggests this is likely), then what could be the consequences of scaling this approach to global poverty education to the rest of the world?

This study began with the premise that poverty is a complex phenomenon—even a problem that can be solved—that requires complex efforts to reduce it, and to ultimately reach the SDGs of ending poverty and reducing (economic) inequality. Chapter 3 provided evidence that not only is poverty highly complex as a global phenomenon, but that it is also highly complex in its conceptualization and measurement. It suggested that, while much has been done on the global stage to reduce absolute poverty, it is likely that the way that even absolute poverty is defined is highly problematic, and that once any international goals to eliminate it have been reached, there will likely be further revisions to the definition that in the end create new poverty. The same goes for relative poverty, which measures more than anything the distribution of wealth within a society, rather than any objective existence of a poverty. Whatever relative poverty is, it is also a feeling, a perception, that may never be eradicated, unless massive and persistent redistribution of wealth occurs. And though the past is often a poor predictor of the future, such massive redistribution has never before occurred quickly—at least peacefully.

This case study revealed that German secondary EFL textbooks hide many apparent truths about the reality of poverty. For instance, they do not show that absolute poverty has been on the decline since the Industrial Revolution, and that unlike ever before, greater proportion of the global population live well outside of absolute poverty than in the existence of humanity. As Pinker convincingly shows, even developing countries, in the Global South, are experiencing levels of progress and increase of well-being never seen before, with tendencies rising (Pinker 2018: 104). Furthermore, they do not show that for most of the world, poverty is rural—both in net numbers of the population, as well as in rate and in severity. Cities are places people move to escape poverty, as they have the resources and infrastructure poorer people need. Even in most places that are mostly urban, poverty is more severe in rural areas. Cities, however, is where poverty can be concentrated, and most visible to the public eye. As places around the world become more urban, more people will have access to the resources and infrastructure they need to survive and thrive. Textbooks also do not show that most poverty, and most extreme poverty, is not in developed countries. The US, a large focus of textbook poverty, does have serious issues with poverty and economic

inequality, but it still has a higher GDP than all other countries in the world—it is not a poor country. Textbook poverty also does not focus on individual factors of both contributing and reducing one's own poverty (which is more relevant for developed countries), just as they do not focus on government programs (and the role of social transfer) for substantially reducing poverty, nor on economic policies (which are also often governmental policies) for promoting inclusive, non-extractive growth.

Instead, textbooks focus largely on contemporary, urban, and relative poverty in a few developed countries. They highlight the vulnerabilities of certain groups of people and focus on moral harm of greed and discrimination as contributing factors—perhaps even as ultimate causes—of poverty. This foregrounding of contributing factors set the stage for the response to poverty, which is overwhelmingly various forms of charity. To achieve this framing, textbooks focus on presenting poverty in a way that evokes empathy from the reader, then engaging students in activities that reinforce these empathic responses. This means that the textbooks choose one particular framing of poverty—one based on moral injustice—among many others. For instance, textbooks do not frame poverty reduction as a desire to reduce suffering and increase well-being, out of interests to increase social stability, or in order to avoid lost opportunity costs from people in poverty who cannot participate fully in society—and the economy.

The focus on the moral problem of poverty appears to suggest that the solution is also moral. *Is empathy the answer?* If people care more about people living in poverty, will the caring automatically lead to decreases in poverty? The starting premise that poverty is a highly complex phenomenon that requires complex solutions would suggest that more caring and empathy is not necessarily the solution. As discussed in Chapter 3, empathy is a focalizer that can impede rational thinking about ultimate good, it is prone to bias, and it can lead to retributive action. A textbook reliance on emotions to present poverty and drive poverty learning can serve to motivate, but also gets in the way of higher order thinking necessary to understand poverty—unless it is indeed a simple problem. Furthermore, empathy can be utilized to manipulate others, both in everyday social actions as well as for political purposes. As suggested by many teachers during the interviews, there is a general sentiment that textbooks ultimately use empathy to motivate students to learn and use the foreign language of English. If this is the case,

then learners may just be learning how to perform empathy, rather than actually develop it.

What this framing leaves out, however, is critical reflection—both of how poverty around the world is presented, understood, and addressed, as well as of how global poverty enables reflection on local poverty in Germany. Such a reflection makes textbook poverty a local political issue that teachers—and perhaps even textbooks—prefer to avoid. This makes it arguably more difficult for students to understand poverty as a global issue that exists globally, and that there are similar structures to it that exist worldwide. Criticizing the existence of poverty in other countries can and should enable critical perspectives on the existence of poverty in one's own country and region. A moral framing of global poverty would also imply a moralistic understanding of local poverty—and therefore a critique of one's own society, political and economic included. This opportunity is missing in the textbooks, possibly due to the social and political conflicts it could create locally.

Finally, teachers play a complex role in transferring textbook poverty into classroom learning. Many teachers do not see textbook poverty, as much of it is implicit in the input, and hidden in chapters and topics that do not openly address global poverty. Furthermore, teachers appear to agree and support the textbook focus on empathy for poverty, and often lack education and training to have a more complex understanding to teach global poverty on their own—or to critically challenge textbook poverty content. At best, their overall critical perspectives of textbooks and textbook teaching of poverty may cause them to minimize the textbooks' impact, by occasionally modifying or leaving out content that appears controversial or uncomfortable, or by not personally supporting or expanding on poverty content with their own explicit beliefs and perspectives.

POTENTIAL TYPICAL DISTORTIONS OF FRAMING POVERTY AS A MORAL PROBLEM

This section suggests that the German case study provides important insights for global poverty education (and ESD) around the world. This national context was chosen specifically because a focus on one national context, and one particular subject, allowed for an in-depth investigation of the subject matter, but also because of Germany's strong commitment to support the UN's SDGs, and its strong educational commitment to

support ESD. Finally, it was also chosen due to the existence of global poverty in EFL textbooks, and the serious dearth of the topic in school textbooks around the world, and especially in foreign language education. The conclusion of the interpretation of this case study firmly suggests that EFL education in Germany views poverty via a moral lens, and therefore envisions global poverty education as teaching learners about moral causes of poverty, and moralizing the need for (often individual) action to reduce it. While this is not a false view of poverty and sustainable development per se, it does appear to be a stark distortion of it, which hides some serious and problematic consequences. This section will thus suggest that the results of this case study can be explained as a rather typical approach to viewing poverty as well as poverty education and reduction, one that is likely to reoccur in other national contexts around the world. Moreover, this section will provide specific reasons why this approach ultimately stands in the way of sustainable development, diminishing the positive impacts that global poverty education targets.

The following therefore addresses different typical cognitive biases that appear to be present in the textbook narrative of global poverty. It presents this narrative as particularly appealing to the way the mind tends to think expediently. First, the narrative represents a good (and catchy) story, one that emphasizes negative emotions and that frames poverty through a moralistic lens that also anthropomorphizes social and economic phenomena, and that it quenches a desire to simplify complex problems due to an aversion to processing large amounts of information and thinking in terms of uncertainty (and therefore, of probability). Finally, it is shown that this narrative is particularly fitting for the subject of foreign language pedagogy (as an international field of teaching and research), with its focus on individual communication, social relationships, and peaceful intercultural understanding.

Good Story Bias

Framing poverty as a contemporary problem that has human moral causes, that also require human moral solutions, makes for a very appealing narrative. Such a narrative is likely more morally satisfying than approaching poverty and its reduction as ambiguous and complex. This suggests that the textbook narrative of poverty—perhaps also as a reflection of a more global narrative on poverty—is more attractive, and therefore more socially influential, than the empirical reality of poverty

would suggest. As Stephens-Davidowitz points out, people tend to believe misleading popular narratives that are extreme, and the pattern of these stories (in popular media, in manifold forms and repeated over time), makes them feel more real, natural, and true (2022: 148). Drawing on Harari, he posits that humans have a “good story bias,” driven by a “feelings-centered worldview of the humanists,” that needs to be replaced by a “Dataist revolution” (2022: 18), or one where big data can provide better answers to human problems by bypassing the biases and problematic tendencies humans have in reasoning and decision-making.

However, while a good story is particularly effective at transplanting information to the masses across space and time, it can also be highly problematic if that story is misleading or not true. Such good stories become anchored in the public consciousness, viewed as reality, and thus serve as a filter bias (Stanovich 2021: 89) affecting the processing of further poverty information (and narratives). The research on poverty and its complexity in Chapter 3 suggests that the textbook representation of poverty fits the description of such a good story. Perhaps such a good story is to be expected—even if it is problematic—from popular media or sensationalist reporting, but it seems highly inappropriate for an educational context, especially one that explicitly aims at engaging learners in helping reach SDGs. The following addresses select cognitive heuristics and biases which can help explain why this textbook narrative on poverty makes for such an appealing story—one that may extend beyond the national boundaries of Germany—and which can also provide more specific clues as to why this narrative can be particularly problematic.

Negativity Bias

The textbook narrative of poverty is largely negative, though it could have just as well framed the story (or history) of poverty in terms of successes and progress the world has made toward reducing absolute poverty, and steadily increasing the well-being of humanity around the globe (cf. Pinker 2018). Such an approach would focus on what has worked, and on what is working, in an attempt to continue, spread, and maximize those efforts. However, such a positive framing of poverty (or the reduction thereof over time, within a lens of progress) may be viewed as an ineffective way to raise awareness for a problem and to justify mobilizing resources in response to it. If people believe poverty is reducing under the current system, then why change anything about the system?

Focusing on poverty as a problem, or even exaggerating its existence, may be a way to continue to thematize it socially and politically as a serious problem, and to maintain social and political support to mobilize resources against it. After all, progress is not a guarantee for any society (Pinker 2018: 333; Diamond 2006: 1; Acemoglu and Robinson 2013: 152).

Psychology has noted a tendency in general human thinking to over-value negative over positive information, and to also interpret the world through a lens of problems and threats rather than through one of successes and possibilities. This is not only apparent at the level of individual cognition, but also at the social level of gossip (that it typically focuses on negative rather than positive aspects of a person) as well as at the level of national news (where ‘if it bleeds, it leads’). This negativity bias appears to serve a survival function, as evolutionary costs of not reacting to a false-negative threat is usually higher than those of reacting to false-positives (cf. Haselton et al. 2016: 980). This means that reacting to a threat that does not really exist often carries little risk, compared to not reacting to ones that are really there. Much evidence suggests that this is how the human mind has evolved in general. This bias translates not only into a disposition to see events in the world via a lens of negative emotions, but also to process negative events automatically, subconsciously, and with greater potential for memory storage and recall, than would be the case for positive events (cf. Tierney and Baumeister 2019: 70; Haidt 2006: 29). This cognitive bias also tends to exhibit itself in a magnitude gap, where harm is perceived as considerably worse (or more threatening) than it actually objectively is (Baumeister 2001: 18).

This negativity bias suggests that a good story about poverty would need to present poverty by focusing only on negative aspects, as good stories have a strong tendency to focus on “struggle and stress and mortal woe” (Gottschall 2012: 49). Such an approach might make the story of poverty more memorable, believable and pervasive, also raising awareness and justifying corrective action. However, such a framing will also distort the reality of poverty, at least in its historical trajectory. The sampled textbooks appear to do this by presenting poverty as a more present and more extreme in contemporary than in historical times. It also does this by pointing out that poverty still exists, and indeed is even more prevalent, where it should not be—in developed countries today, and in particular in the USA. If learners believe that poverty is getting worse, they may be willing to pay more attention to it as a problem that requires attention,

or they may react with apathy, or perhaps in support of extreme beliefs and policies. Moreover, they may even uproot policies and practices that have been working in the pursuit of more extreme measures to alleviate or reduce poverty. A good story often has a negative, threat-based view of events or phenomena. The narrative of poverty in the textbooks fit this description, suggesting that its good story is not likely limited to only the German context.

Moral Interpretation Bias

The textbooks in the German case study chose to present poverty largely through a moral lens, though it could have chosen a number of other lenses that would have also justified social, political and educational action to reduce and/or end it. This choice of moral framing also focused on certain moral contributing factors, and certain moral reduction measures, instead of focusing of the many and multiple factors that often are involved in poverty in the real world. Despite this reduction of complexity, and this focus on a single perspective on poverty, *a moral interpretation of poverty makes sense*. As Jonathan Haidt points out, humans are highly social beings with a strong need to interpret the intentions of other people (2012: 219), and morality appears to be a universal (and even to some extent innate, though with lots of cultural and individual variation) system that enables the unbelievably complex social cooperation by mediating individual and social needs (2012: 31).

Moreover, there appears to be an affinity between stories and morality. As Jonathan Gottschall points out, stories not only overwhelmingly present morally complex situations, but they tend to reinforce moral stances (often poetic justice, cf. Gottschall 2012: 134). This sentiment is strengthened by Haidt's portrayal of moral intuition and rationalizing, as a type of narrative cognition, that occurs after the fact to then socially justify the exhibited intuitive response (Haidt 2012: 32). This connects well to approaches that look at narratives and narrative thinking as a way to understand people and read their intentions (cf. Grabes 2008: 136; Herman 2013: 32), underlining that narratives and narrative thinking help individuals read intentions and determine whether people are morally trustworthy for reciprocal cooperation.

However, this moral interpretation bias is particularly prone to a series of problems. Like many biases, it presents a tendency to be

overused and overextended to situations and contexts that are inappropriate. Fundamental attribution error points out that people tend to interpret other peoples' actions as indicative of their moral character, as opposed to as largely dependent on the specific contextual factors of those actions (Baumeister 2001: 322; Grabes 2008: 131; Stanovich 2021: 134). However, the human propensity to read moral intention extends beyond interpreting other humans—or even other living beings. People also have a general tendency to see humanity in inappropriate places, even in inanimate objects (think face pareidolia) or to interpret living intention in events that do not even involve living beings (Gottschall 2012: 105; Hutson 2012: 163). This means that people also have a tendency, through narrative thinking, to interpret non-human events through a lens of human events, through human intention, and through moral consideration (cf. Chapter 3 for anthropomorphic bias).

The textbook story of poverty appears to fit this mold. It has an overwhelming focus on fictional stories of poverty, and a strong moral framing based on vulnerable and suffering people, as well as on people who are intentionally causing harm against societal norms, and on people who react to poverty largely via a care response. This reduces a highly complex issue that is also contributed to by natural factors (even if still not acceptable, and if nonetheless worthy of serious social action) to one with human moral causes and human moral solutions. This approach to framing poverty can have undesirable consequences, as an over-exaggeration of single causes (and ignoring multiple others, cf. Chapter 3 for single cause fallacy) can seriously limit the success of mobilizing resources against poverty. It can also make students vulnerable to political agendas that can prey on the empathy of students toward people in poverty, it can reduce students' ability to think critically about poverty reducing political policies, and it can ill-prepare students for extreme political arguments that offer countering perspectives on poverty, poverty reduction, and social responsibility. Finally, such a moral framing can lead some people to justify punitive retribution against those agents seen as causing poverty, and preying on the weak (cf. Baumeister 2001: 96).

Poor Probabilistic Thinking Bias

Human cognition did not evolve over the millennia to deal with the complexity of the modern world. On the one hand, narrative thinking

as a dominant mode of cognition (cf. Bruner 1986: 11) has worked relatively well throughout much of our cultural development, but other, and perhaps more scientific modes of interpreting the world, and appropriate action within it, are becoming increasingly more relevant (Bruner 1986: 13; Donald 1991: 269; Herman 2013: 79). However, and on the other hand, it also appears that most individuals are rather poor at engaging in a more scientific way of understanding and dealing with the world, as indicated by the mind's difficulties handling large amounts of information and thinking in terms of probability.

Poor probabilistic thinking refers here to the tendency of individuals to make a slew of errors, especially when dealing with large amounts of (and complex) information. These are also likely connected to a quick-thinking bias (cf. Haidt 2006: 15; Tierney and Baumeister 2019: 70; Kahneman 2011; Haselton et al. 2016: 970), or to the idea that individuals tend to reduce complexity quickly in order to prepare for quick action in ways that are not always fitting with our (more recently evolved) modern, ultrasocial lifestyles. Here the work of especially Tversky and Kahneman on biases of representativeness and of availability of information used in predicting likelihoods of specific outcomes was groundbreaking in pointing out how poorly the human mind thinks statistically and with big data (Tversky and Kahneman 1974: 1124, 1127, respectively). Problems processing representativeness concerns in part an innate inability to deal with large numbers, and how easily misled our minds are to be influenced by other information (that help us jump to conclusions that do not require thinking about large numbers, cf. Kahneman 2011). Problems dealing with availability entail the fact that individuals are more likely to exaggerate likelihood of occurrence of a phenomenon depending on how likely a phenomenon is to think of or recall. This makes thinking very prone to the negativity bias as well as to wishful thinking. These examples highlight the role of strong emotions (fear and hope) at anchoring experiences into memory, and linking it for easy recall. These also tend to distort individuals' sense of probability or likelihood, disrupting the processing of more objective, statistical evidence. The mind, in terms of receiving, processing, and remembering information, is anything but objective, and this appears to, at least in part, influence its inability to deal well with large amounts of information necessary to understand complex problems.

The implications of this poor probabilistic thinking bias are that individuals seem to be often drawn toward good stories (i.e., those that are unique, extreme, negative, anthropocentric and morally satisfying), while

they show aversion toward more objective and complex explanations of the world that do not provide easy explanations and simple solutions.

Subject-Specific Bias

Abraham Maslow once famously stated, “I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail” (Maslow 1966: 15). Drawing from this statement, it seems possible that foreign language pedagogy—as a single subject addressing the complex topic of ESD—tends to apply specific views and values concerning education to any particular lifeworld topic brought within its purview. It therefore seems also plausible that foreign language pedagogy, with its historically academic focus on language, communication, and people, leading ultimately toward interests in supporting interpersonal and intercultural understanding, will not naturally focus on ESD issues, including global poverty, with a broad lens that includes multiple scientific and academic fields. Rather, it will be specifically focused on ideas like the social negotiation of meaning of individual learners, with an interest to connect to their lifeworlds in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them (cf. Hallet 2024: 13).

A personal interview with a chief editor of a major German publishing company of English language textbooks provides further evidence of this—backing up what has emerged from the case study findings. In the interview, the editor expressed the belief that some ESD topics are easier to integrate into English subject textbooks than others, “The topic of social equality, equality of opportunities and such, are a bit easier to integrate, because I believe it is easier to more directly grip the students, whom we must always keep in mind.”¹ This belief also matches well with the editor’s belief that “this lifeworld relevance is an extremely important point to us,” and that the textbooks try to “offer very many opportunities for learners to bring in their own perspectives, and to be able to develop their own perspectives.”² He recognizes that this likely influences how

¹ Original: “Das Thema soziale Gleichheit, Chancengerechtigkeit und so, das ist ein bisschen leichter zu verankern, weil ich glaube, dass das die Schüler und Schülerinnen, über die wir auch immer nachdenken, unmittelbarer sozusagen packt.“

² Original: “also dieser Lebensweltbezug ist für uns ja sozusagen ein extrem wichtiger Punkt,“ and “sehr viele Anlässe geben, dass sie ihre eigenen Perspektiven einbringen können, und dass sie eigene Perspektiven entwickeln können.“

topics are integrated into the textbooks, “That does influence, I believe, that the topics [of ESD] undergo a different anchoring through this.”³ This lifeworld interest of foreign language pedagogy, and its consequence of influencing what and how ESD topics are presented, is then linked by the editor to what is arguably the most dominant approach to teaching in this field, the communicative method, and the multitude of social learning techniques it involves, like “structured group work, think-pair-share, or fishbowl or double circle, that had a very large influence on the diversity of classroom methods.”⁴ In this interview, the chief editor admits that the subject of foreign language pedagogy (and not simply the German context) has a substantial influence in what, and how, ESD topics like global poverty are integrated into the textbooks.

Ultimately, the interview results indicate that German EFL textbooks tend to approach ESD topics, such as global poverty, primarily from a subject-specific perspective. In doing so, they neglect other dimensions that would be necessary to support education’s broader contribution to the SDGs and to present a more balanced account of the issues addressed. Given the communicative and social orientation of the field, practitioners and material designers are likely to frame global poverty in social terms—emphasizing social or moral causes and proposing socially oriented solutions, such as fostering empathy. It thus appears that the *good story* of poverty, presented in the previous passages, is also one that fits particularly well with the specific subject of foreign language pedagogy, meaning that this story is not only likely to reappear in many national contexts and societal discourses, but also in other national educational contexts that adopt the communicative approach to foreign language teaching.

The findings of the German case study suggest that EFL education is based on such a good story of poverty. Its story is not wrong, insofar as it presents prosocial values (against greed and discrimination, in support of caring for others) that can support aims to reduce poverty and economic inequality worldwide. However, as this section shows, it grossly distorts a

³ Original: “Das hat, glaube ich, schon auch einen Effekt darauf, dass die Themen dadurch eine andere Verankerung finden.“

⁴ Original: “Es gibt sehr viele Methoden der strukturierten Gruppenarbeit, Think-Pair-Share oder Fishbowl oder Double Circle, die haben einen sehr großen Einfluss gehabt auf die methodische Unterrichtsvielfalt.“

larger-scale understanding of global poverty, bringing with it many unintended negative consequences if not balanced out by other perspectives. Moreover, it arguably limits a more scientific and systematic approach to understanding and tackling the problem of poverty, thus making it difficult for an integration into other subject-specific discourses, and ultimately undermining the aims of ESD. This section has suggested that the particular story of poverty presented by the textbooks *makes sense*, but also that it is *not necessarily a sensical approach* to global poverty education as a whole. The cognitive biases presented herein have proposed that this story is likely to exist in many other societies and even education systems. If this is true, then this case study offers particularly relevant implications for the future global increase and spread of global poverty education.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF EFL GLOBAL POVERTY EDUCATION

The findings of this case study carry significant implications for ESD and global poverty education, extending beyond the German context in which the research was conducted. Based on the key conclusions drawn, the following section outlines a set of concrete recommendations for the future development of ESD and the teaching of global poverty. These suggestions aim to inform more effective, balanced, and critically engaging approaches to sustainability education on both national and international levels.

1. Accurately represent the complexity of contemporary social issues. Textbook authors, educators, and curriculum designers should move beyond superficial or symbolic treatment of complex topics like poverty. Materials should reflect the nuanced, interconnected nature of such issues, avoiding reductive or emotionally manipulative portrayals. Each school subject offers unique conceptual tools and approaches, so interdisciplinary collaboration is essential. A well-rounded education on social issues like global poverty must draw on expert knowledge as well as on the complementary strengths of multiple subjects.

2. Diversify the framing of poverty beyond moral narratives. While moral framings (e.g., injustice, exploitation) are valuable for cultivating empathy and ethical awareness, they should not dominate the discourse. Overreliance on moral narratives risks simplifying complex socioeconomic realities and may unintentionally promote guilt, shame, or anger rather than curiosity and understanding. Alternative framings—economic, political, historical, or systemic—should be incorporated to provide learners with a fuller picture and reduce the risk of bias or emotional fatigue. These framings can also extend beyond moralistic perspectives to explain why reducing poverty makes sense, like those of reducing suffering and increasing well-being, increasing social stability, and minimizing opportunity costs to communities and societies.
3. Promote critical thinking as a core educational goal. Critical thinking must be central to ESD. This includes cultivating the ability to:
 - evaluate ideas impartially and with detachment,
 - consider multiple perspectives and switch between them,
 - decontextualize issues to identify underlying patterns,
 - maintain healthy skepticism toward dominant narratives, and
 - recognize and examine one’s own assumptions and biases.

In addition, critical thinking should involve explicit engagement with both local and global contexts. Students should be encouraged to analyze poverty within their own society and to question overly simplistic narratives of “us vs. them” and “good vs. bad.” Teachers must also emphasize that criticizing aspects of a belief system does not equate to rejecting the entire system, nor does criticism imply endorsement of an opposing view—especially relevant for polarized discourses.

4. Reframe the concept of “taking action” in competency-based education. The competency area of action should perhaps step away from encouraging students to take direct or corrective measures—particularly when these are inherently political or easily politicized. Instead, learners should be introduced to a broader spectrum of possible actions:
 - Informational (e.g., awareness campaigns, reflective writing)
 - Dialogical (e.g., structured discussions, stakeholder analysis)

- Analytical (e.g., research projects, data interpretation)
- Supportive (e.g., local volunteering, community collaboration)

Educators should make it clear that legitimate disagreement exists—even among experts—regarding how to define social problems, what factors contribute to them, and which interventions are effective. Action competence, then, involves equipping learners to navigate this uncertainty, evaluate options critically, make informed, context-sensitive choices, and remain watchful of potential unintended consequences of their actions.

5. Integrate systems thinking into ESD and poverty education. Systems thinking should be explicitly taught as a critical tool for understanding sustainability and poverty. This approach helps students to:

- recognize interdependence among social, economic, and environmental factors, as well as among different agents and interest groups within society,
- understand feedback loops, spillover effects, and unintended consequences,
- evaluate the long-term outcomes of interventions, not just short-term intentions, and
- acknowledgements that well-intentioned actions can have mixed or delayed effects.

Encouraging learners to think in terms of systems builds a more realistic and adaptive mindset, which is crucial for addressing the complex and evolving challenges of sustainable development.

6. Provide teachers with expert-designed, pedagogically sound materials. Teachers cannot and should not be expected to navigate the complexity of global issues—such as poverty and sustainable development—on their own. These topics are interdisciplinary, politically sensitive, and often emotionally charged. To teach them effectively, educators need high-quality, evidence-based materials that are both accurate and age-appropriate. This requires collaboration between subject-matter experts, curriculum developers, and educational psychologists to design content that balances factual depth, pedagogical clarity, and ethical responsibility. Supporting teachers

with well-crafted resources not only reduces their workload and anxiety but also ensures more consistent, informed, and effective instruction across diverse classroom settings. Without such support, the goals of ESD risk becoming aspirational rather than achievable.

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