Postcolonial Directions in Education

Volume 14 Issue 1, 2025

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REVIEW

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REVIEW

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Focus and Scope

Postcolonial Directions in Education is a peer reviewed open access journal produced twice a year. It is a scholarly journal intended to foster further understanding, advancement and reshaping of the field of postcolonial education. We welcome articles that contribute to advancing the field. As indicated in the Editorial for the inaugural issue, the purview of this journal is broad enough to encompass a variety of disciplinary approaches, including but not confined to the following: sociological, anthropological, historical and social psychological approaches. The areas embraced include anti-racist education, decolonizing education, critical multiculturalism, critical racism theory, direct colonial experiences in education and their legacies for present day educational structures and practice, educational experiences reflecting the culture and 'imagination' of empire, the impact of neoliberalism/globalisation/structural adjustment programmes on education, colonial curricula and subaltern alternatives, education and liberation movements, challenging hegemonic languages, the promotion of local literacies and linguistic diversity, neo-colonial education and identity construction, colonialism and the construction of patriarchy, canon and canonicity, Indigenous knowledges, supranational bodies and their educational frameworks, north-south and east-west relations in education, the politics of representation, unlearning colonial stereotypes, internal colonialism and education, cultural hybridity and learning in postcolonial contexts, education and the politics of dislocation, biographies / autobiographies reflecting the above themes, deconstruction of colonial narratives of civilization within educational contexts. Once again, the field cannot be exhausted.

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POSTCOLONIALISM, PERSISTING COLONIAL MENTALITIES AND PERCEPTIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA AND MALTA

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Abstract

This paper examines the persistence of colonial mentalities and their influence on higher education (HE) perceptions in the two distinctive postcolonial contexts of Kenya and Malta. Adopting a quantitative approach in the spirit of epistemic disobedience and emancipation, the research employs a modified version of the pre-validated Colonial Mentality Scale to assess four dimensions, namely, Within-Group Discrimination, Physical Characteristics, Colonial Debt, and Internalised Cultural Shame and Inferiority. Attitudes toward international study and perceptions of foreign HE were also included in the study. Drawing on data from 161 participants across two institutions, the analysis revealed that colonial indebtedness tends to remain the most pronounced psychosocial legacy of British colonialism, particularly among Kenyan students. Regression analyses further showed that Colonial Debt significantly predicts greater willingness to study or work abroad and more favourable perceptions of foreign HE institutions. Meanwhile, Internalised Cultural Shame and Inferiority were low, suggesting complex, non-binary relationships with colonial pasts. Nevertheless, these

findings underscore the ongoing influence of colonial legacies in shaping educational aspirations and perceptions in former colonies across African and Mediterranean contexts.

Keywords: Postcolonial higher education, colonial mentality, Kenya, Malta, colonial debt

Introduction

In the post-colonial era, higher education (HE) systems across former colonies the world over continue to evolve in the context of imperial legacies. The persistence of entrenched Eurocentric epistemic values, along with remnants of institutional structures originally designed for colonial rule, continues to exert influence on the ambitions, identities, and global outlooks of a considerable number of HE students and academics worldwide. In this paper, we adopt an idiosyncratic conceptual and methodological position in relation to the postcolonial literature. More specifically, we adopt a quantitative and statistical approach, but aim to do so in the spirit of "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo, 2009). Otherwise stated, we follow Mitra (2025) in a bid to reclaim scientific tools for radical, justice-oriented purposes. Colonial mentality is defined in this work as a psychological internalisation of colonial values that privileges the former coloniser's culture and knowledge systems. The study accordingly aimed at measuring uptake of this construct in two HE settings in Kenya and Malta, and estimating its influence on attitudes and perceptions surrounding HE provision.

While a growing body of scholarship has documented, from various perspectives and in a range of fields, the systemic, curricular, and linguistic legacies of colonialism in Africa and the Mediterranean, comparatively little empirical work has attempted to estimate, in quantitative terms, the psychosocial dimensions of postcoloniality in HE. Moreover, patterns of international mobility, aspirations to study or work abroad, and perceptions of institutional quality remain under-explored with respect to colonial

mentality. The paper therefore aims to interrogate how these factors manifest in two distinct national contexts touched by British colonialism, and their ongoing implications for effective, locally-contextualised, equitable and empowering HE organisation and provision. Accordingly, it seeks to encourage further debate on broader themes surrounding decolonisation, epistemic justice, and global academic hierarchies.

Colonial education

Postcolonial theory posits that education, and in this case, HE more specifically, was historically employed in colonies as a strategic tool of ideological control. The British Empire ultimately designed education systems in its colonies to serve and address its imperial goals. This arguably fostered dominance, rather than empowerment, in subject populations (Ekuma, 2019; Kithinji, 2023). In British colonies, HE aimed to inculcate colonial values and reproduce Eurocentric norms, cultivating a local indigenous elite considering Europe and its values as the epistemic centre of the world. This effectively served colonial interests while marginalising the majority of local populations (Andreotti, 2011; Peters, 2017). In Kenya, the colonial education system was deeply racially stratified, prioritising vocational and technical training over critical or empowering knowledge, particularly for Africans (Otieno, 2011; Njoya, 2022). Africans were largely excluded from secondary and higher educational provision, which remained the domain of Europeans, some Indians, and a small minority of elite African families (Prah, 2018; Otieno, 2011). The result was an education system structured to reproduce subordination and limit social mobility.

While formal higher education in Kenya emerged during the 1940s and 60s, it remained inaccessible to most Kenyans until independence in 1963 (Kithinji, 2023). Yet, independence did not bring full rupture. Rather, as Sibomana (2015) argues, the newly sovereign nation inherited an HE system thoroughly shaped by colonial interests. This phenomenon was by no means unique to Kenya. In Malta, a British colony with its own prior HE legacy dating

back as far as the 16th century (Austin & Dahrendorf, 1981), similar dynamics were attempted, despite stubborn resistance from the Church and local Italian-speaking elites (Cassar, 2003). Malta's designation as an "Imperial Fortress" (Holland, 2014) essentially meant that British interests were limited to an effective local workforce to service its navy. Accordingly, educational policies were not so much of a concern so long as they did not interfere with this primary function. The shared colonial legacy between Malta and Kenya nonetheless speaks to the tendency of British educational policies to vary as a function of local geo-strategic concerns, while retaining core epistemic control. A universal feature across colonial HE was the prioritisation of Western knowledge and the marginalisation of indigenous epistemologies (Assié-Lumumba, Mazrui & Dembélé, 2013).

In Kenya, the effects of such marginalisation remain deeply embedded in contemporary educational structures, manifesting in the dominance of English, Eurocentric curricula, and the systemic neglect of indigenous knowledge systems (Murunga & Nasong'o, 2007; Shizha, 2013; Abraham, 2020). Kenyan universities tend to reflect a pedagogical disconnect between academic content and the socio-economic and cultural realities of Kenyan society (Sibomana, 2015; Lopez & Rugano, 2018). According to Wa Thiong'o (1986) and Muthwii (2004), colonial education aimed to erase indigenous beliefs and languages to uphold colonial governance (Kitoko-Nsiku, 2007). This erasure of identity arguably persists in modern curricula, resulting in the suppression of creativity and social responsiveness (Dei, 2000; Nyaga, 2017). In Malta, meanwhile, it is fair to say that colonial sentimentality and a predominantly Eurocentric worldview in HE and academia more generally have been met with minor formal criticism (Muscat-Inglott, 2023). In this sense, few academics appear likely to make overt and sustained appeals for the decolonisation of Maltese HE.

Further to Njoya (2022), who calls for a strong decolonial turn in Kenyan education on the basis that current systems remain suspended in a liminal space between anti-colonial rhetoric and genuine decolonisation, postcolonial

research aims more generally at an honest, thorough examination of the lasting, tacit attitudes and beliefs that continue to influence policy and culture in former colonies. Assié-Lumumba et al. (2013) echo this concern, arguing that, in African contexts, decades of failed reforms have continued to forfeit the needs of marginalised communities and the realities of African economies.

Mobility and perceptions of Western academia

International student mobility patterns can also be understood in terms of a broader colonial legacy in HE. Western universities remain highly appealing for Kenyan students, a trend that reaffirms Western epistemic dominance and exacerbates "brain drain" (Nganga et al, 2020; Hou & Du, 2020; Oranga, 2025), where the talent countries need to meet their own challenges is siphoned elsewhere. Similarly, a strong trend has been shown among Maltese academics to avoid pursuing postgraduate studies locally. An overwhelming majority choose to study in the UK, which essentially means that the most highly qualified Maltese, and those who arguably participate in the most important conversations about Maltese culture, politics and economy, tend to see those same local issues through the eyes of others, namely, their former colonisers (Muscat-Inglott, 2023). Despite initiatives to decolonise education in Kenya and elsewhere, the allure of various global academic rankings and Western prestige more broadly, typically, overrides these efforts subtly and insidiously (Ekuma, 2017; Gyamera & Burke, 2018).

Disconcertingly, this is occurring in a context where the same ideological imperialism that gave rise to modern colonialism has not simply ceased to exist, but rather, remains very much alive in economic form as neocolonialism. Neocolonial educational models tend to promote neoliberal ideologies prioritising economic gain and competition over collaboration and cultural integrity (Nganga & Kambutu, 2019; McGregor & Park, 2019). These models, as Gyamera and Burke (2018) argue, reinforce Western hegemonies under the guise of reform and global competitiveness, and limit space for

indigenous paradigms. Ntarangwi (2005) asserts that Kenya's education system has failed to effectively redefine itself post-independence. It has furthermore failed to foster a national identity rooted in cultural pride and self-reliance, resulting instead in the promotion of Western identity. The persistent colonial legacy in Kenya's education system, therefore, not only shapes individual perceptions of self-worth and identity but also influences structural decisions around curriculum, pedagogy, and international engagement.

This paper seeks to build on the ideas of postcolonial scholars and researchers by interrogating the foregoing dynamics, with a comparative approach juxtaposing colonial mentalities and attitudes towards HE in the cases of particular institutions in Kenya and Malta. More specifically, it aims to address the following questions. First, to what extent do measurable colonial mentalities persist in Kenyan and Maltese HE institutions? What are stakeholders' perceptions in Kenya and Malta towards pursuing HE opportunities outside their own countries? What differences in quality do Kenyan and Maltese stakeholders perceive, if any, in the provision of HE in their home countries and abroad? And finally, how do persisting colonial mentalities influence such perceptions?

Methodology

Data collection

The study was carried out via online survey using the *Google Forms* platform. A stratified sample of 161 participants, 47% (n = 75) of whom were female, and 53% (n = 86) of whom were male, was recruited using a convenience/opportunity sampling strategy across two institutions in Kenya and Malta. Namely, Kisii University is in Kisii County, Kenya, and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology is in Paola, Malta. In each instance, the researchers actively recruited both academic staff and students. The mean

age was approximately 25.14 years (*SD* = 9.06), ranging from 17 to 57. Table 1 summarises the main strata.

Table 1: *The four main sampling strata according to setting and role.*

Nationality	***Role***	***Gender***	***n***	***%***
Kenyan	Student	Female	42	.26
		Male	55	.34
	Academic Staff	Female	5	.03
		Male	6	.04
Maltese	Student	Female	21	.13
		Male	19	.12
	Academic Staff	Female	7	.04
		Male	6	.04

The study adopted a positivistic approach, conceptualising postcolonialism as a quantifiable psychometric construct using a modified version of the pre-validated Colonial Mentality Scale [CMS] (David & Okazaki, 2006; Utsey et al., 2015). The original scale presents a five-point linear scale with responses to each item with the labels (1 =) Strongly Disagree and (5 =) Strongly Agree. It measures four dimensions, namely, Within-group Discrimination (WGD), Physical Characteristics (PC), Colonial Debt (CD) and Internalised Cultural Shame and Inferiority (ICSI). WGD measures the degree to which individuals are likely to discriminate based on group, primarily those defined in terms of ethnicity, class or education level. PC measures the propensity for individuals to find the physical characteristics of their former colonisers attractive or desirable. CD refers to the extent to which formerly colonised people feel indebted, or thankful, towards their former colonisers. ICSI quantifies the degree to which individuals look down on their own culture. Wording of items in each dimension was adjusted slightly to fit the Kenyan-Maltese context. So, internal reliability testing was assessed using Cronbach's α to preserve the validity of the constructs. Three of the original 21 items were dropped

throughout this process, resulting in a final tally of 18. Table 2 presents the dimensions, all items (including those eventually eliminated), as well as all relevant internal reliability estimates.

Table 2: *The four dimensions of colonial mentality and their constituent items.*

Factor	***Item***	***Cronbach's a***
WGD	5. Certain group/s in my country are more civilized than others.	
	6. I find it amusing when my peers speak English with a very heavy local accent.	
	7. I tend to pay more attention to my peers when they speak fluent, accent-free English.	
	11. There are certain groups in my country I do not like to associate with.	
	16. I am ashamed of how certain groups in my country dress and act.	
	17. I am ashamed of my peers who cannot speak English.	.627
PC	3. I generally find a mixed-race person more attractive than a full-blooded local. *	
	9. I find people with lighter skin tones to be more attractive.	
	13. I do/would not like my children to be darker skinned.	
	14. I find a bridge rather than a flat nose more attractive.	
	20. I would prefer my skin tone to be lighter.	.735
CD	1. The British way of living is generally admirable and desirable.	

	2. The British had a civilising effect on this country.	
	4. The British updated and improved the local way of life.	
	10. Locals should feel thankful for their contact with the British.	
	12. The British did little damage to local culture. *	.752
ICSI	8. There are moments when I wish I were a member of a cultural group that is different from my own.	
	15. I feel there are a few things in my local culture to be proud of.	
	18. I am generally embarrassed by local cultural traditions in my country.	
	19. I think that locals in my culture should become more Westernised as quickly as possible.	
	21. Sometimes I feel that being part of my local culture is a curse.	.654

Note: ** Items were dropped due to low item-total correlation and negative effect on Cronbach's a.*

In addition to the modified CMS, the survey operationalised a series of items designed around the main themes from Oranga (2025) and Muscat-Inglott (2023) to fully address the main research questions. These were accompanied by the same five-point linear agreement scale. Table 3 presents the remaining constructs.

Table 3: *Items measuring willingness to study or work abroad and attitudes towards foreign HE.*

Construct	***Item***	***Cronbach's a***
Willingness to Study or Work Abroad (WSWA)	If the opportunity presented itself, I would leave home temporarily to study or work abroad.	
	If the opportunity presented itself, I would leave home permanently to study and/or work abroad.	
	I have too many commitments at home to pursue study or career opportunities abroad. *	
	The best opportunities for furthering my career are abroad.	
	There is nothing to tempt me academically or professionally to go abroad that I can't do or achieve right here at home. *	
	I would be tempted to study or work abroad for long-term financial gain.	
	I would be tempted to study or work abroad for long-term personal growth.	.737
Perceptions of Foreign HE (PFHE)	International university rankings are a good resource for helping me choose where to study or work.	
	International university rankings are a good resource for helping me choose where to study or work.	
	Having a degree from a foreign university creates more professional opportunities for me than one from my own country.	
	People in my country generally tend to respect foreign degrees more than local ones.	

I would personally feel more proud of my degree if I got it from a foreign university.	
I genuinely feel that degrees from foreign universities are of higher quality.	
Studying or working in the UK would look better on my professional profile than studying or working in Malta.	
Studying or working in the UK would look better on my professional profile than studying or working in Kenya.	.847

Note: ** Items were reversed in final scoring to correct for valence.*

In addition to the constructs above, the survey finally posed the following standalone items; "There are good scholarship opportunities in my country to help me study abroad" (Good Scholarship Opportunities [GSO]). And, "I do not trust local universities to assess me fairly" (Fair Local Assessment [FLA]).

Data analysis

The data were downloaded and organised in an open-source spreadsheet software application (*LibreOffice Calc v24.2.7.2*) and eventually imported into the open-source statistical analysis software application *JASP* (*v0.17.2.1*). The analysis consisted of two main phases. First, the descriptive statistics were examined with 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs). Inferences are made from the CIs based on the alternative hypothesis that the population mean was either greater or smaller than the central linear scale value of 3 ($H_0 = \mu = 3$). A series of Kruskal Wallis tests to explore differences in the outcome variables of interest according to the four main strata of Kenyan and Maltese Students and academic staff. The data did not meet the assumption of homogeneity of variance, rendering the use of parametric procedures like one-way ANOVA or regression analysis unreliable. Dunn post hoc analyses were carried out in

conjunction with the Kruskal Wallis test, and interpreted using a Bonferroni correction to lower the risk of Type I errors.

For the second phase of the analysis, two regression models were built to explore factors affecting WSWA and PFHE as the main dependent variables of interest. The independent variables were dummy coded with the values of 0 and 1 to denote Setting (1 = Kenya, 0 = Malta), Role (1 = Academic, 0 = Student), and Gender (1 = Female, 0 = Male). An additional variable was created to capture the interaction between Setting and Role. This would indicate the variation in the outcome due to being an academic as opposed to a student, which depended on being in Kenya as opposed to Malta. The four dimensions of colonial mentality were also included as independent variables, and were centred and standardised for ease of interpretation. In other words, coefficients in these cases indicate the change in the dependent variable for every standard deviation change in the relevant colonial mentality dimension. The regression models took the form:

$$\hat{Y} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 WGD + \beta_2 PC + \beta_3 CD + \beta_4 ICSI + \beta_5 Setting + \beta_6 Role + \beta_7 Gender + \beta_8 Setting*Role + \varepsilon$$

Throughout the regression analyses, an exploratory approach was maintained, with a special focus on the explanatory power of the independent variables by virtue of their β parameter estimates. In both instances, the null hypotheses applied to the ith β parameter were:

$$H_0 = \beta_i = 0$$

In other words, the null hypothesis states that each independent variable, such as Setting, Role or Gender, has no statistically significant effect on WSWA or PFHE, while controlling for all other variables in the model. The collinearity diagnostics revealed no concerning condition indices (< 30), suggesting acceptable levels of multicollinearity. Inspection of QQ plots and residual-vs-fitted plots supported normality and homoscedasticity

assumptions. In accordance with social science convention, the alpha level was set to .05, such that null hypotheses were rejected when $p < .05$. All CIs are reported at the 95% confidence level.

Findings

Group differences

Tables 4 and 5 show the descriptive statistics for the main outcomes of interest overall, as well as divided according to the four main strata.

Table 4: *Descriptive statistics and CIs for the main outcome variables of interest.*

Outcome	***Mean***	***SD***	***CI***
WGD	3.096	0.855	2.964, 3.228
PC	2.346	1.030	2.187, 2.505
CD	3.703	0.976	3.553, 3.854
ICSI	2.151	0.945	2.005, 2.297
WSWA	3.791	0.864	3.656, 3.925
PFHE	3.700	0.955	3.551, 3.848
GSO	2.385	1.397	2.168, 2.602
FLA	2.522*	1.351	2.311, 2.732

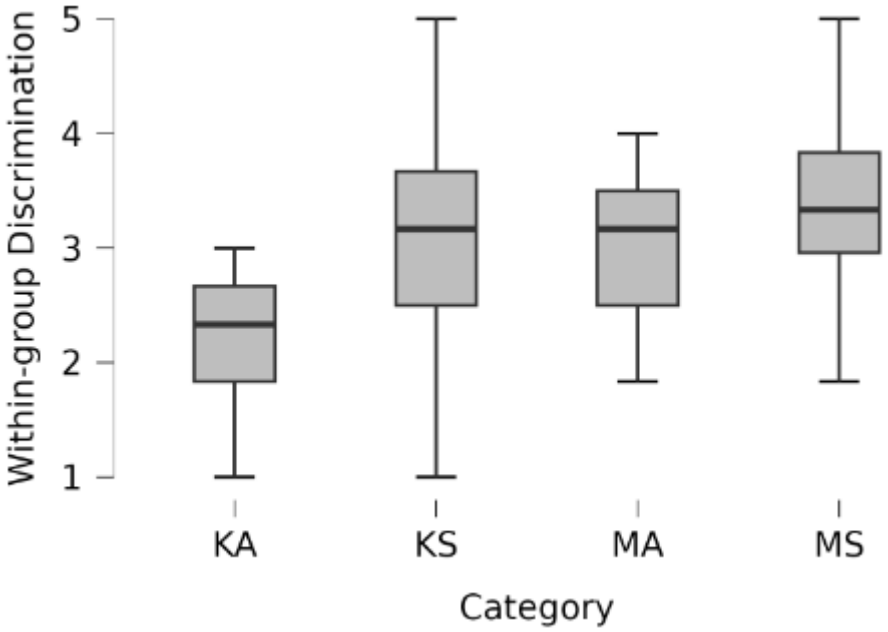
Note: ** Denotes reverse valence, whereby lower scores indicate more of the construct.*

Table 5: *Descriptive statistics and CIs across the four main strata of interest.*

Outcome	***Kenyan Students***	***Kenyan Academics***	***Maltese Students***	***Maltese Academics***
WGD	*M* = 3.112	*M* = 2.167	*M* = 3.350	*M* = 2.987
	SD = 0.908	*SD* = 0.654	*SD* = 0.627	*SD* = 0.712
PC	*M* = 2.376	*M* = 1.705	*M* = 2.481	*M* = 2.376
	SD = 1.130	*SD* = 0.773	*SD* = 0.825	*SD* = 1.130
CD	*M* = 4.039	*M* = 3.341	*M* = 3.156	*M* = 3.192
	SD = 0.941	*SD* = 1.185	*SD* = 0.713	*SD* = 0.708
ICSI	*M* = 2.309	*M* = 1.523	*M* = 2.112	*M* = 1.615
	SD = 1.055	*SD = 0.541*	*SD* = 0.709	*SD* = 0.485
WSWA	*M* = 4.029	*M* = 3.532	*M* = 3.382	*M* = 3.484
	SD = 0.782	*SD* = 0.939	*SD* = 0.863	*SD* = 0.848
PFHE	*M* = 3.952	*M* = 3.136	*M* = 3.347	*M* = 3.375
	SD = 0.960	*SD* = 1.102	*SD* = 0.731	*SD* = 0.840
GSO	*M* = 2.216	*M* = 2.000	*M* = 2.575	*M* = 3.385
	SD = 1.431	*SD* = 1.265	*SD* = 1.152	*SD* = 1.557
FLA	*M* = 2.505	*M* = 2.364	*M* = 2.625	*M* = 2.462
	SD = 1.473	*SD* = 1.362	*SD* = 1.148	*SD* = 1.050

The CIs for WGD overall indicated that the colonial legacy of discrimination within formerly colonised societies was generally mixed in the Kenyan and Maltese contexts. In other words, the evidence was not sufficient to indicate that the mean was significantly different from 3. We cannot say, therefore, that WGD generally exists as a problematic remnant of colonialism in HE across the settings studied. There was, however, a subtle difference between the four strata on this construct ($p < .001$), with Kenyan academics ($M = 2.17$, $SD = 0.65$) standing out as reflecting the lowest values, significantly less than both Kenyan students ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.91$, $p_{bonf} < .01$) and Maltese students ($M = 3.35$, $SD = 0.63$, $p_{bonf} < .001$). We suspect that increased ethnic-tribal diversity in Kenya means that within-group differences are something Kenyans with higher levels of education are more likely to be aware of.

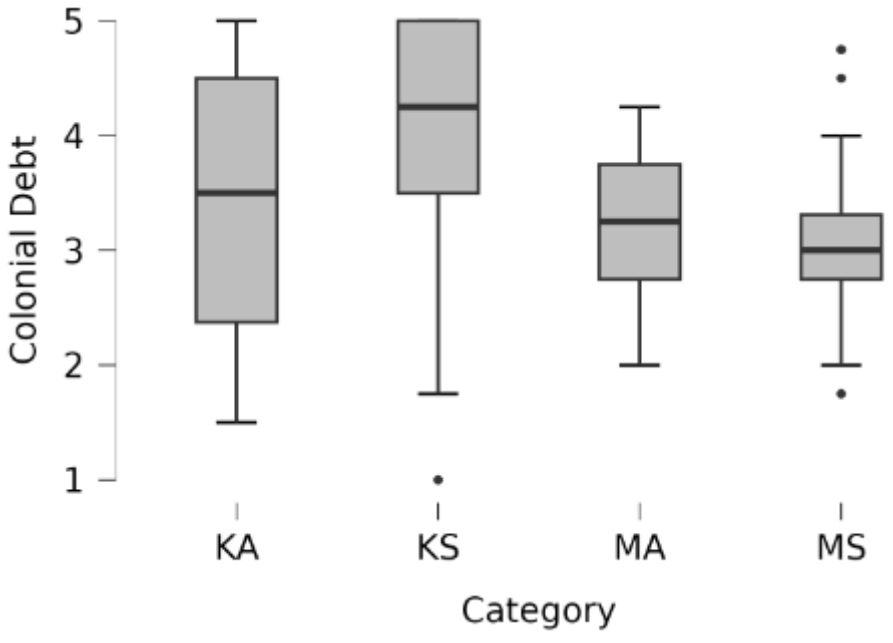
Figure 1: *Box plots for WGD across the four strata.*



PC (M = 2.35, CI = 2.19, 2.51) was relatively low, suggesting that Kenyans and Maltese do not generally exhibit preferences for the physical features of former colonisers. The difference between the four strata was not significant (p = .13), indicating homogeneous views relating to this construct. In other words, Kenyans and Maltese across the board do not appear likely (μ < 3) to find members of their own ethnic group any less attractive than those conforming more faithfully to traditional Western beauty ideals. Balogun et al. (2024) argue that African standards of beauty and sexuality remain very much in flux, with a good deal of diversity likely due to multiple traditional, religious, as well as colonial influences. Mastamet-Mason et al. (2024) report, for instance, that more curvaceous physiques remain an idealised and desirable, distinctly African, body type, in spite of the popularity of more thin-curvy body types promoted in Western cultures. Maltese beauty standards have not received notable scholarly attention in this context, although it is fair to say that many Maltese would not hesitate to identify ethnically as white Europeans, and are therefore unlikely to exhibit any significant differences from associated Western beauty norms.

CD (M = 3.70, CI = 3.55, 3.85) was relatively high overall ($\mu > 3$). This suggests that feelings of indebtedness to former colonisers continue to exist among both Kenyans and Maltese. There were also significant differences across strata ($p < .001$), with Kenyan students (M = 4.04, SD = 0.94), registering significantly more on the construct than both Maltese students (M = 3.16, SD = 0.71, $p_{bonf} < .001$) and Maltese academics (M = 3.19, SD = 0.71, $p_{bonf} < .01$). In the African context, we submit that a lack of any direct contact with the British among current university-aged Kenyans creates somewhat of a disconnect. In other words, colonial atrocities in Kenya remain, for them, increasingly abstract historical events with little connection to, or influence on, the present. For instance, it is unlikely that students are making the connection between wealth inequality in Kenya and the conditions brought about under British colonialism (Simson, 2024). The same point applies to Maltese students, who, as argued previously, are not generally exposed to dissenting, critical or postcolonial perspectives in their HE journeys. A more detailed critique of postcolonial dependency, colonial nostalgia and long-entrenched historical Eurocentrism in the context of Maltese academia is undertaken in Muscat-Inglott (2023).

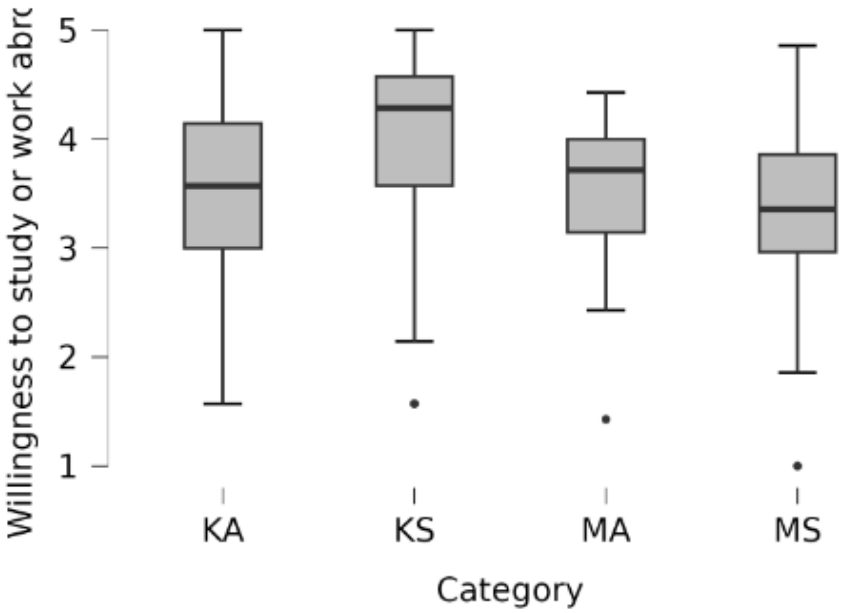
Figure 2: *Box plots for CD across the four strata.*



In spite of such gratitude to former colonisers, cultural shame and inferiority (ICSI) was relatively low overall (M = 2.15, CI = 2.01, 2.30). It was encouraging to note, in this sense, that colonial indebtedness does not preclude positive attitudes to one's own culture. The two, it would seem according to the evidence, are not mutually exclusive. In the Kenyan context, initiative aimed specifically at cultural expression and celebration (Luby et al., 2016), are likely paying dividends here. The Kruskal Wallis test furthermore indicated a significant difference among groups (p = .01). The effect size however, was likely extremely small, given that according to the Bonferroni adjusted group comparisons, no statistically significant differences can be said to have emerged.

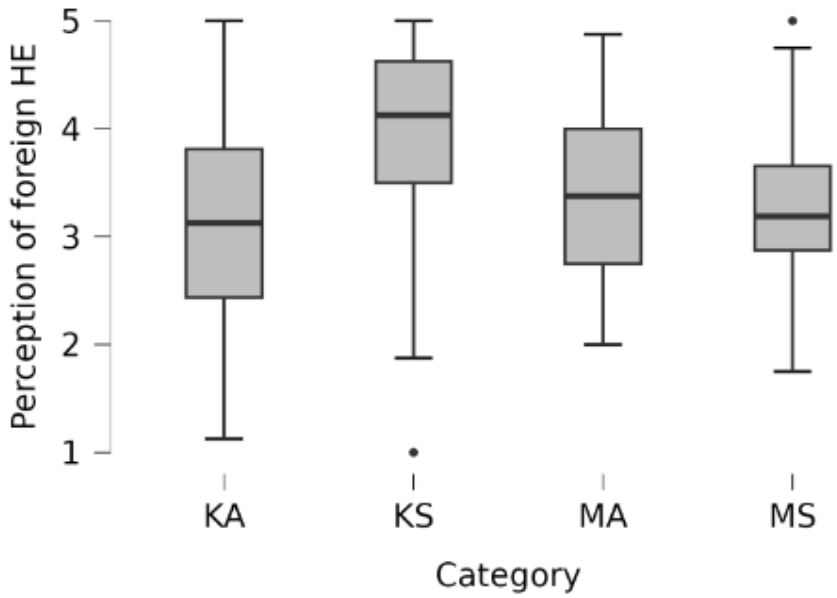
The CIs for WSWA (M = 3.79, CI = 3.656, 3.925) suggest that most individuals in HE, regardless of role or residence in Kenya or Malta, are generally willing to study or work abroad (μ > 3). There was a significant difference between groups (p < .001), with the largest effect (p_{bonf} < .001) emerging specifically between Kenyan students (M = 4.03, SD = 1.06) and Maltese students (M = 3.38, SD = 0.86). The same pattern emerged with respect to PFHE.

Figure 3: *Box plots for WSWA across the four strata.*



PFHE (M = 3.700, CI = 3.551, 3.848) values suggested a generally positive perception of foreign (as opposed to local) HE overall ($\mu > 3$), with the strongest effect ($p_{bonf} < .001$) again emerging between Kenyan students (M = 3.95, SD = 0.96) and Maltese students (M = 3.35, SD = .73).

Figure 4: *Box plots for PFHE across the four strata.*



We interpreted the values in the context of economic growth rates in Kenya, which have remained relatively slow and unstable in the decades since independence. This has likely been due to a number of factors, including long-range dependence structures (Gil-Alana & Mudida, 2018), which are difficult to disentangle from colonial legacies, namely contemporary neocolonial global economic structures. Additionally, current policies do not appear likely to result in the achievement of eradicating poverty by 2030 (Jacobsen et al., 2023). These predictions likely affect Kenyan students' enthusiasm with respect to local opportunities for study and work. However, the economic situation in Malta is drastically different, so the slightly higher propensity among Kenyan students with respect to WSWA and PFHE must be interpreted in the context of relatively high values ($\mu > 3$) across the board, in all groups surveyed. Elevated values in these variables provide some evidence for a

systematic trend that cannot be explained solely by economic difficulties, given its ubiquity across the two countries studied.

Scholarship opportunities (GSO) appeared to be generally low overall (M = 2.39, CI = 2.17, 2.60), however, a difference between groups did emerge (p = .02), with Maltese academics appearing to have the most opportunities (M = 3.39, SD = 1.56). The largest effect (p_{bonf} = .04) emerged specifically between Maltese academics and Kenyan students (M = 2.22, SD = 1.43). A lack of trust in local institutions (FLA) to assess fairly did not generally appear to be an issue overall (M = 2.52, CI = 2.31, 2.73), with no significant differences emerging between groups (p = .84).

Regression models

The first of two regression models was built to explore influences on WSWA as the main dependent variable of interest. The model significantly improved the prediction of willingness to pursue foreign HE provision and work opportunities compared to the null model (F(7, 153) = 5.62, p < .001), and explained 21% of its variance (R^2 = .21). The coefficients are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: *Regression model output for WSWA.*

Term	***b***	***SE***	***B***	***t***	***p***
(Intercept)	3.613	0.147		24.606	< .001
Gender (1)	-0.043	0.186		-0.231	.817
Nationality (1)	0.357	0.155		2.307	.022*
Role (1)	-0.043	0.186		-0.231	.817
WGD	0.076	0.081	0.088	0.947	.345
PC	-0.100	0.078	-0.115	-1.269	.206
CD	0.225	0.075	0.261	2.992	.003**
ICSI	0.092	0.083	0.106	1.109	.269

Note: ** Denotes statistical significance at the 95% confidence level, ** at the 99% level.*

Nationality (β = 0.36, p = .02) and colonial indebtedness (β = 0.23, p < .01) emerged as the strongest influential factors affecting willingness to pursue foreign HE or work opportunities. Since nationality was coded as Kenyan = 1, the results suggest a systematic trend towards increased willingness among Kenyans, regardless of role or indeed any other factors. In other words, being Kenyan, while holding all other variables constant, was the strongest predictor of WSWA. Of the four colonial mentality dimensions, indebtedness was the strongest predictor while holding all other variables constant. This suggests a statistically significant relationship between CD and WSWA across all contexts. In other words, the more one feels indebted to their former coloniser, the more they are inclined to pursue opportunities abroad.

The second regression model was built to explore influences on PFHE as the main dependent variable of interest. The model significantly improved the prediction of willingness to pursue foreign HE provision and work opportunities compared to the null model (F(7, 153) = 17.40, p < .001), and explained 44% of its variance (R^2 = .44).

Table 7: *Regression model output for PFHE.*

Term	***b***	***SE***	***B***	***t***	***p***
(Intercept)	3.587	0.136		26.417	< .001
Gender (1)	-0.056	0.118		-0.478	.633
Nationality (1)	0.206	0.143		1.438	.152
Role (1)	-0.006	0.172		-0.034	.973
WGD	0.158	0.075	0.165	2.121	.036*
PC	0.112	0.073	0.117	1.545	.124
CD	0.403	0.070	0.423	5.794	< .001***
ICSI	0.119	0.077	0.125	1.557	.122

Note: ** Denotes statistical significance at the 95% confidence level, *** at the 99.9% level.*

Tendency to discriminate within one's own culture ($\beta = 0.158$, $p = .04$), as well as colonial indebtedness ($\beta = 0.40$, $p < .001$) emerged as the strongest predictors of perceptions of foreign HE provision. No significant effects emerged from any of the other factors, including nationality and gender. This evidence provides some support for the proposition that colonial mentality reliably predicts attitudes in HE in formerly colonised countries. No differences, therefore, emerged among Kenyans and Maltese, while controlling for all other variables in the model. WGD also emerged as a significant independent predictor here, while holding all other variables constant. In other words, the more likely one is to discriminate against people in their own country, the more likely they are to also think more highly of foreign HE provision as opposed to local. This supports the idea that the colonial mentality extends beyond hierarchy merely in terms of coloniser above colonised, also to elite colonised over non-elite colonised.

Conclusion

The use of convenience and opportunity sampling, the relatively small number of academic staff, as well as the use of just one case study institution in each country, limits the generalisability of the findings. It should also be considered that the modified CMS likely oversimplifies the complex construct of colonial mentality. Therefore, contextual interpretations of the findings should be made within these boundaries. Future research might include larger, more representative samples and qualitative follow-up studies to fully explore the complex phenomena under discussion. More postcolonial research is needed to explore these constructs more broadly, particularly in the Maltese context. Nevertheless, a number of important insights directly emerge from the present study.

Evidence of colonial mentalities persists in both Kenya and Malta, with colonial indebtedness being the most pronounced persisting postcolonial phenomenon observed. Kenyan students showed the highest colonial indebtedness, as well as a greater willingness to study abroad, reflecting a

residual valorisation of British influence. Further reflection among stakeholders in HE is needed, in this sense, on the idea of misplaced gratitude in the context of colonial histories and contemporary neocolonial global economic structures. Nevertheless, internalised cultural shame and inferiority were low. And finally, based on the findings of our regression analysis, we argue that the desire for international HE is influenced by enduring ideological frameworks from colonial histories, and not just economic or structural limitations. The study ultimately calls for a deeper reckoning with epistemic dependency and colonial continuities in HE. More specifically, we support the promotion of structural reforms, in the broader spirit of decolonising HE, aimed at promoting local epistemologies and integrating these more deeply into Kenyan and Maltese HE provision alike.

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THE IMPACT OF COMPARATIVE POSTCOLONIAL INSTRUCTION ON EFL LEARNERS' PERCEPTION OF SELF AND OTHER:

THE CASE STUDY OF MASTER'S STUDENTS, ENGLISH DEPARTMENT, UNIVERSITY OF KHENCHELA.

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Abstract

This study investigates the pedagogical challenges of teaching postcolonial literature, highlighting the need to address cultural variables that may alter learners' identities, interactions with the Other, and perceptions of postcolonial texts. A mixed-methods approach was adopted to investigate the influence of intellectual imperialism on course dynamics using an experimental quantitative strategy. An observational qualitative strategy was used to assess the effectiveness of comparison in achieving intercultural understanding. A random sampling method was used to select fifty-nine students enrolled in the postcolonial theory/literature class of the Master's program (2022/2023), Department of English, University of Khenchela, Algeria. The collected data was examined through qualitative discourse analysis, and a systematic process of Python programming language coding

was utilized to yield numerical results. The findings validate intellectual imperialism, marked by media homogenization and misinformation, Eurocentrism, dominant Orientalist ideologies and portrayals, and limited self- and Other-awareness. This study aims to facilitate the teaching of culturally dense literature, resolve cultural entanglements, and enhance intercultural communicative competence among EFL learners. This approach seeks to foster critical thinking, identity-consciousness and the capacity to engage with others thoughtfully and empathetically via postcolonial narratives.

Keywords: Postcolonial literature, Intellectual imperialism, Intercultural communicative competence, Comparative instruction

Introduction

It is possible to access literature pedagogy in English as a Foreign Language didactics as a simple framework, systemized and methodized by its scholarly objectives, i.e., linguistically, culturally and aesthetically (García, 2017). That aligns with the standards of the *Guidelines for "the Certification and Preparation of Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages" (TESOL) in the United States* (Stern, 1985). This pedagogy is intended to enhance the language learner's communicative competence. However, it is questionable whether one can evaluate and design the latter uniquely by the objectives above for various reasons, considering further needs to comprehend a literary text and its cultural variations. A primary cause is the expanding global viewpoint in literary studies. Literature curriculum has transcended a purely Eurocentric or colonial paradigm. They now include literature beyond the conventional Anglo-English, Elizabethan, and Shakespearean canon. Consequently, the curriculum embodies a more varied and global literary panorama. Another significant reason is the complexity of text-context, seeing how cultures, languages, and identities are in a constant flux and interfusion and are involved in a complex permeation (Dagnino, 2013). In addition to the

literary mobility or the circulation of the literary text across cultures, as Damrosch (2003) describes.

The study of literature has been immersed in a global, active cross-cultural communication and the pedagogy of literature in the EFL classroom has undergone revisions to meet the standards of the current postmodern era. As Dagnino (2013) notes:

> *within the discourse of modern human mobility, the twentieth century has been mainly written, read, and studied through a migrant/multicultural and/or postcolonial perspective, the early twenty-first century of neo-nomadic and transnational patterns appears to be marked by a transcultural sensibility. (p.132)*

The use of literary texts in the EFL classroom necessitates students' development into proficient intercultural communicators. As a result, literature instructors must be appropriately equipped to assist learning in this cross-cultural environment. Such training equips readers to comprehend and respect various cultures (Nafisah et al., 2024). Furthermore, effective educators serve as intercultural mediators, enhancing comprehension and bridging gaps between different cultures and students' cultural backgrounds (Czura, 2016). These requisite competencies are evident in the teaching of postcolonial literature. Ahmed and Dilshad (2018) assert that literature served many purposes under the postcolonial framework. Initially, it reinforced hegemonic beliefs by embracing the culture and religion of the colonizers. Subsequently, it evolved into a platform to voice the concerns of the oppressed and marginalized. Recently, literature has been employed to advance various agendas, shape public opinion, and challenge power systems (Ahmed & Dilshad, 2018). Given the considerations mentioned above, it becomes necessary to reevaluate and revise the literature pedagogy.

Teaching postcolonial literature is a notable instance of such a mandated pedagogy change because the postcolonial text is historically accurate,

realistically grounded, and, to some extent, a political and cultural discourse. Young (2012) described it as political in its broadest sense, resisting by exposing and challenging imbalances of power and injustice. This engages learners in discovering unprecedented ideologies and cultural experiences, which might evoke unanticipated responses. The consequences of such a primary encounter are assuredly not limited to linguistic and cultural comprehension but rather consist in forging an impact on the actual perception, communication and experience of the Other. As Nayar (2008) argues, "This literature seeks to understand, negotiate, and critique a specific historical 'event' -colonial rule- while looking forward to a more just, socially egalitarian world order" (p.1). Ergo, imparting such an input certainly requires adoptive pedagogy, i.e. a pedagogy which delivers and assures proper vision and a positive relationship with new cultures.

Interaction across frontiers yields knowledge of the world, including the involved parties' social identity (Byram, 1997). The learners' general knowledge of the world can be considered an extraneous contributing factor to the instruction, engagement and perception in the language class. However, the students 'preconceived stereotypes and generalizations, along with the educators' cultural bias, gatekeeping and condescension while presenting new cultures, are expected pedagogy impediments, hindering the proper understanding of cultural representations in class. In the context of postcolonial literature, as the instructors navigate this cultural complexity, these extraneous factors are already a part of the instruction and the postcolonial class content, that is, intellectual imperialism. In the teaching of postcolonial literature in an EFL setting, it can be observed that learners are relating their identities and culture with one of the two parties, the colonial culture or the colonized one, and amid superiority and inferiority. Young (2012) noted that the postcolonial text often disturbs our assumptions and perceptions.

The assimilation and establishment of connection with cultures outside learners' own is achieved by reflecting on their personal cultural influences,

acknowledging and addressing intellectual imperialism involving comparisons, highlighting commonalities and distinctions. Since these cultural entities are more precisely tied to history, any consideration of the postcolonial text always closely connects with historical events. As evidenced by the scholarly contributions of Boas (1940) to cultural relativism and historical particularism, comparison, a holistic and historical lens, yields a more comprehensive understanding. When implementing the theoretical framework of cognitive comparison in understanding cultures in the practical setting of an EFL classroom, all pertinent cultures related to the context are showcased in parallel to learners, that is, postcolonialism in relation to its colonialism and vice versa. Counternarratives or intertextual dialogues present the feasibility of precisely aligning the conceptual framework. The approach for instructing postcolonial texts integrates previously examined elements of postcolonial literature and its pedagogy. It is constructed in alignment with Kramsch's (1993) principles for instructing literary materials. The framework also includes considerations of external effects. This strategy necessitates adaptation and slight methodological modifications. The present experiment of this framework was conducted on master's students (specialization in language and culture) of the Department of English, University of Abbes Laghrour, Khenchela, Algeria.

The objective of this study is to examine the influence of intellectual imperialism on postcolonial literature pedagogy and its implications for EFL classrooms. Three fundamental inquiries are addressed in the investigation:

1. To what extent does intellectual imperialism influence the teaching of postcolonial narratives?
2. How does the explicit integration of this variable reorient learners' interpretive frameworks in postcolonial literature courses?
3. Can a comparative methodological approach to postcolonial texts deepen contextual understanding and foster intercultural competence, strengthening learners' self-identity and engagement with the "Other"?

The hypothesis is that learners and educators in an EFL classroom are subject to intrinsic and extrinsic cultural influences, which impact the instruction and comprehension of a culturally diverse/sensitive context in various ways. The awareness of latent imperialist misconceptions and their rectification would yield an appropriate view of the Other, and a review of one's identity, laying a solid groundwork for comprehending a postcolonial text. In the next step, it is essential to determine the proper pedagogy for the required purposes. Recognizing the cultural intricacy of the postcolonial milieu is crucial. Utilizing comparison as a methodical strategy is a conventional way of comprehending others. This strategy promotes contextual knowledge and reveals its underlying reasoning. Moreover, it fosters an intercultural bridge by cultivating relationships and enhancing intercultural communication.

Methodology

To comprehensively investigate the evidence of intellectual imperialism influencing the course dynamics and assess the efficacy of the comparison in achieving intercultural understanding, a mixed methods approach was adopted, incorporating both experimental (quantitative) and observational strategies (qualitative). The study population consisted of a random sample of fifty-nine students enrolled in the postcolonial theory/literature class of the Master's program (2022/ 2023), Department of English, University of Khenchela. The independent variable of this experimental design is the learners' intercultural communicative competence manifested in their ability to recognize and redress elements of intellectual imperialism present in the suggested postcolonial literary works. The dependent variable is the suggested instructional framework.

Prior to introducing Orientalism (Said, 1978) and Culture and Imperialism (Said, 1993), a pre-reading activity was designed to elicit learners' awareness and views on Orientalism, Orientalist paintings, and the Orient and the relationship between the Orient and the Occident. The activity consists of two

parts. The initial segment was a visual exposition of Orientalist paintings, with the following paintings having been showcased:

1. Gérôme's *The Snake Charmer* (1879)
2. Fabbi's *Bazaar Paintings* (late 19th century)
3. Dinet's *Girl at the Window* (early 20th century)
4. Osman Hamdi Bey's *Young Woman Reading the Quran* (late 19th century)
5. Osman Hamdi Bey's *Young Man Studying* (late 19th century)

The students were questioned about their knowledge of the showcased paintings and asked to share their opinions. Direct and controlled participant observation was used to gather data; students' interactions and attitudes to the classroom activity were documented, and the observer/researcher actively participated as the class lecturer.

The second phase of the experiment entailed a discussion in which the learners were asked to generate and annotate associations and impressions to a list of countries: Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, India, and Germany. The countries were selected in that order for their cultural affinity with the participants' national identity. The concept was to test the learners' knowledge of the Orient from both a familiar country (Egypt), which shares the same identity attributes with the partially unfamiliar Far East (Afghanistan and India), as well as a European country to compare perceptions and suggest a cultural critique from the Orient to the West, and eventually to detect imperial ideology and media influence. A combination of qualitative thematic analysis was used to obtain quantified qualitative data.

The collected data were examined through qualitative discourse analysis. The students' written answers consisted of either adjectives or descriptive expressions. A systematic process of Python programming language coding was utilized to yield numerical results by calculating word frequency and word

tendency by grouping words based on content into the following categories: individual profiling descriptors, ethical descriptors, historical/geographical descriptors, political descriptors, and economic descriptors. The language used by the learners was ordered into the following subsequent categories: tolerant, when the discourse does not include adjectives with tendencies to express hate and misjudgment; positive, when the discourse consists of adjectives with tendencies to describe a positive aspect; negative, when the discourse includes adjectives with tendencies to describe a negative aspect; neutral. When the discourse does not include adjectives. A statistical treatment of research data was illustrated via Excel.

The novels selected for teaching postcolonial narrative were divided into two groups. The first batch comprised Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) and Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958). Students engaged in a systematic comparative examination, emphasizing the portrayal of African identity and African persons in both works. The second batch included Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre (1847) and Jean Rhys' Wide Sargasso Sea (1966). In this scenario, students participated in a comparison activity aimed at highlighting the link between colonizer and colonized while also identifying imperial qualities in both texts. This paradigm enabled critical investigation of postcolonial topics through direct textual comparison. Direct and controlled participant observation was used to gather data; the students' post-reading comments to each book and their impressions and reactions to each comparison were documented. The activity aimed to reveal the students' intellectual imperialism, that is, their inability to recognize both imperial traits in colonial literature and the intent of postcolonial literature in correcting falsified conceptions.

Results

Assessing Student Awareness of Orientalist Representations

The initial phase of the experiment was intended to ascertain students' comprehension of the Orientalist discourse. To this end, an orientalist painting was juxtaposed with an authentic work by an Oriental artist. The objective was to evaluate students' ability to discern the disparities between these two perspectives and their susceptibility to Western-centric biases. Students' verbal responses to the presented art paintings were documented. Below is a record of the replies:

Responses to Jean Leo Gerome's *Snake Charmer*: The students indicated the occurrence of sexualization towards the young boy and articulated their uneasiness. These are the sentences they have utilized.

"Why is the boy naked?", "Why is he with old men?", "They are pedophiles!", (mentioned in six answers), "Is it an Arabic place?", "Is this picture legal?", "Arabian Nights".

Responses to Fabio Fabbi's *Bazzars Paintings*: "Beautiful woman", "Did they get out like this back then?" interspersed with laughter.

Responses to Alphonse Etienne Dinet's *Girl at the Window*: "Beautiful girl", "She has tattoos". Responses to Osman Hamdi *Bey's Young Woman Reading the Quran* and *Young Man Studying: "Islamic* painting", "Beautiful woman", "I think this is from the Abbasid Empire.", "Islamic golden age". The students could not recognize any of the showcased paintings, including the Algerian girl (*Girl at the Window*).

Investigating Perceptions of Self and Other and Intellectual Imperialism

The second phase of the experiment sought to investigate contemporary perceptions of national identity and the "Other" in the West and the East, aiming to highlight intellectual imperialism in these perceptions. The data is systematically organized in the following tables and visualized in graphs.

Table 1

Frequency Analysis of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Algeria

Individual-profiling descriptors			**Ethical descriptors**			**Historical-geographical descriptors**		
33			76			94		
Fact /Correct assumption		**Biased generalization /False assumption**	**Fact /Correct assumption**		**Biased generalization /False assumption**	**Fact /Correct assumption**		**Biased generalization /False assumption**
12		21	69		7	91		3
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
9	18	6	17	4	55	54	1	39
Political descriptors			**Economical descriptors**			**Language and tone**		
2			10			57		
Fact /Correct assumption		**Biased generalization /False assumption**	**Fact /Correct assumption**		**Biased generalization /False assumption**	**Fact /Correct assumption**		**Biased generalization /False assumption**
1		1	8		2	55		2
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
1	1	0	1	3	6	33	9	15

Note: Algeria was not mentioned in 2 students' papers

Figure 1

Distribution of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Algeria

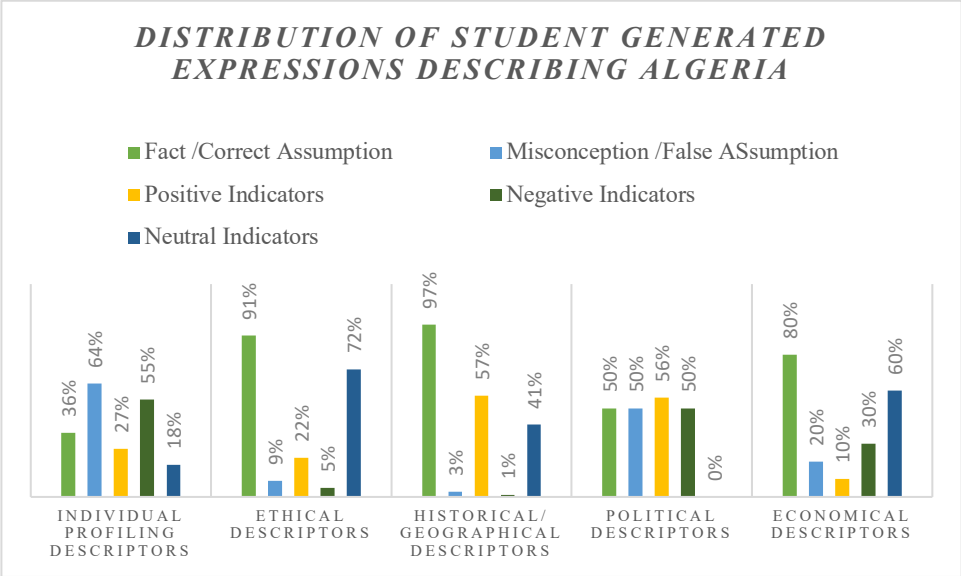


Table 2

Frequency Analysis of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Egypt

Individual-profiling descriptors			**Ethical descriptors**			**Historical-geographical descriptors**		
48			101			132		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
3	45		67	34		107	25	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
11	32	5	19	34	77	17	29	86
Political descriptors			**Economical descriptors**			**Language and tone**		
6			19			58		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
3	3		3	16		51	7	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
0	8	2	2	15	2	10	15	34

Note: Egypt was not mentioned in 1 student's paper

Figure 2

Distribution of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Egypt

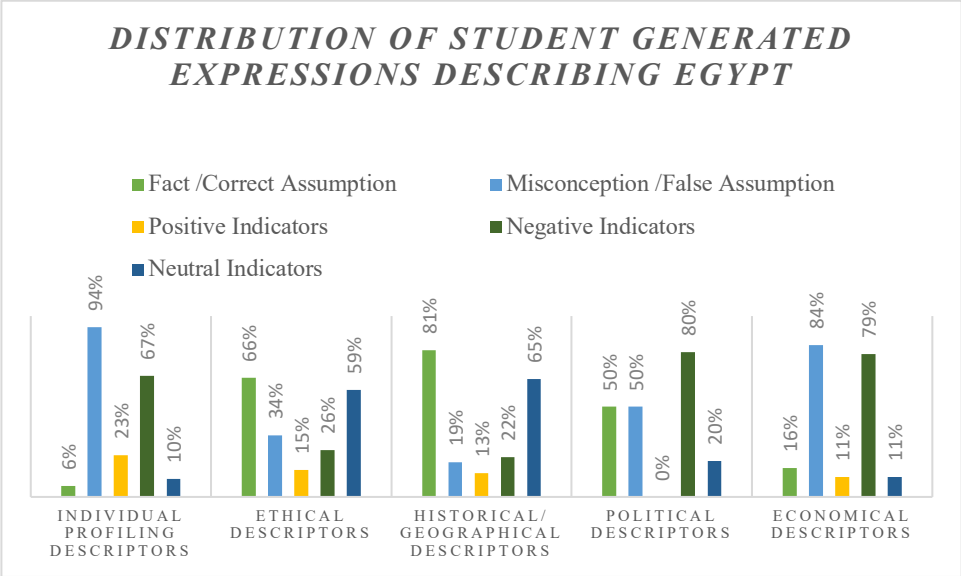


Table 3

Frequency Analysis of Student-Generated Expressions Describing India

Individual-profiling descriptors			**Ethical descriptors**			**Historical-geographical descriptors**		
33			101			58		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
9	24		57	44		40	18	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
9	17	6	6	45	50	4	19	35
Political descriptors			**Economical descriptors**			**Language and tone**		
0			32			52		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
0	0		16	16		47	5	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
0	0	0	1	30	1	1	24	27

Note: India was not mentioned in 7 students' paper

Figure 3

Distribution of Student-Generated Expressions Describing India

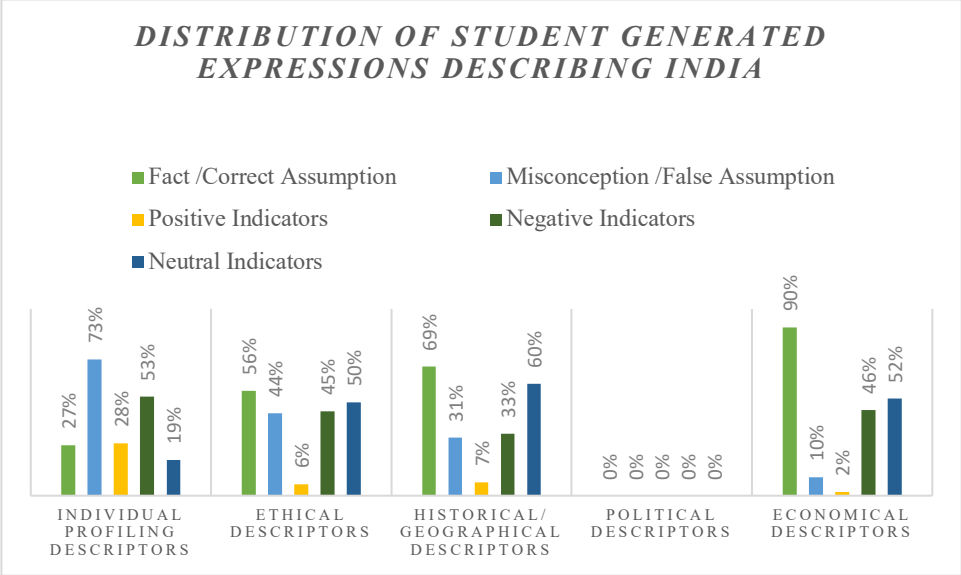


Table 4

Frequency Analysis of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Afghanistan

Individual-profiling descriptors			**Ethical descriptors**			**Historical-geographical descriptors**		
56			65			50		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
5	51		27	38		23	27	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
4	47	5	3	48	14	5	28	24
Political descriptors			**Economical descriptors**			**Language and tone**		
64			20			56		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
64	0		10	10		32	24	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
0	64	0	0	20	0	1	43	12

Note: Afghanistan was not mentioned in 3 students' paper

Figure 4

Distribution of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Afghanistan

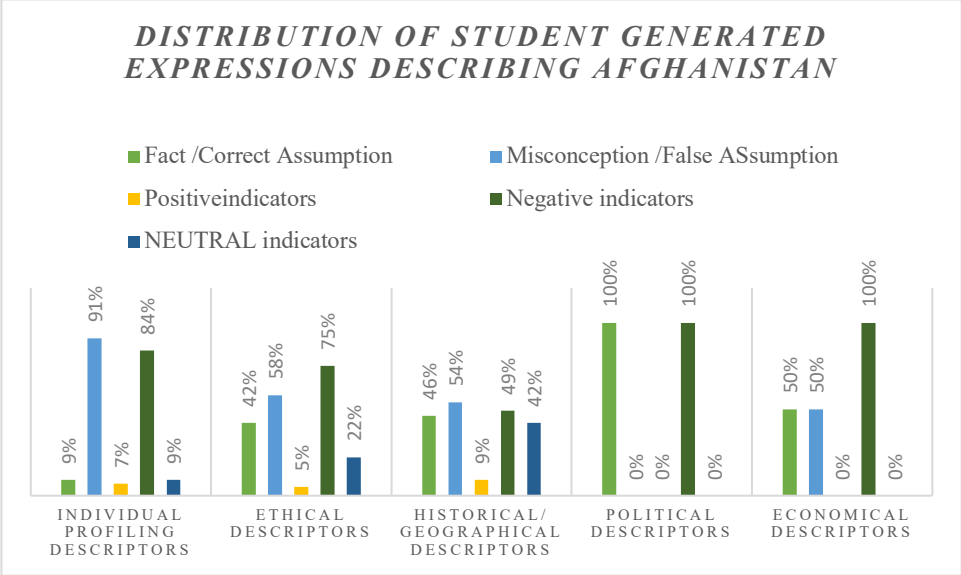


Table 5

Frequency Analysis of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Germany

Individual-profiling descriptors			**Ethical descriptors**			**Historical-geographical descriptors**		
38			25			35		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
10	28		10	15		35	0	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
2	3	8	14	2	9	14	5	16
Political descriptors			**Economical descriptors**			**Language and tone**		
18			33			57		
Fact /Correct assumption	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**		**Fact /Correct assumption**	**Biased generalization /False assumption**	
16	2		31	2		57	0	
Positive	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Neutral**
13	1	7	22	0	11	43	2	12

Note: Germany was not mentioned in 2 students' paper

Figure 5

Distribution of Student-Generated Expressions Describing Germany

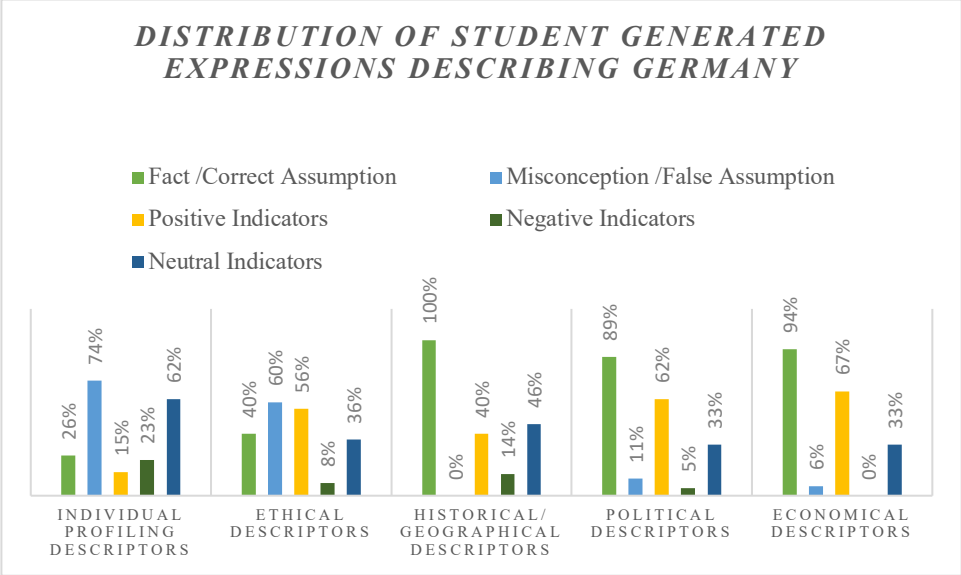
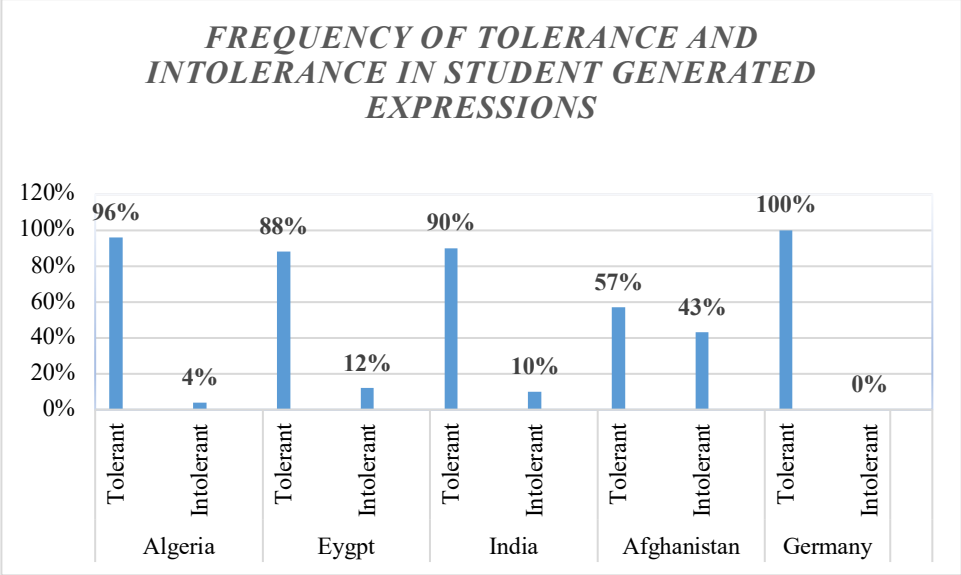


Figure 6

Distribution of Tolerance and Intolerance in Student-Generated Expressions



Addressing Misconceptions through Comparison

The final stage of the experiment involved the application of comparative analysis. The students' verbal responses included the following remarks: after reading both *Heart of Darkness* and *Things Fall Apart* and while engaged in a comparative analysis, one student asserted, "Conrad had so much hate for Africa", while another replied, "But he went there?" Students mentioned that they had studied the novel before. Another student pointed to Conrad's dehumanizing descriptions of Africans and said "The title itself is racist". When asked about their opinion about Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, one student responded, "It was sad, I don't understand why Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna, he suffered from mental illness". At the same time, another followed up with "He had to". Other students commented on how Igbo culture was well described in the book, some female students mentioned that Okonkwo was a polygamist and violent towards women and described the novel as "Not good at all", admitting that they hadn't finished reading the book. Later, a few students mentioned the white man, saying, "They tried to, kind of forced them into their lifestyle and religion and Okonkwo didn't obey", "By the end it all fell apart sadly", "Colonialism happened just like in any other place in Africa, just like us". When comparing the two novels, only one student mentioned, "Conrad said they were savage, animal-like, but Achebe described a society, there were troubles, but it was a community". Following that remark was a teacher-led lesson of comparison initiated to explain the African identity in both novels.

Feedback from students' reading of Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea included the following observations: the prevailing narrative among students was that of romance, no comment alluding to either colonial aspect or the lady in the attic. A number of students mentioned that they had previously watched the film adaptation. The classroom exhibited a heightened level of excitement to express their opinions after reading Wide Sargasso Sea; they implied astonishment at the writer's shaping of the story, describing it as "amazing, brilliant, nice revenge for her people". They also

expressed compassion for Antoinette Cosway and criticized her white husband for being arrogant. In contrast to their impressions of the other novels, the students mentioned power dynamics, racial supremacy and colonialism in the case of Wide Sargasso Sea. After that, the lesson and comparison of the two novels were carried out with a noticeably heightened engagement in class.

Discussion

The literary text extends beyond delivering linguistic and cultural input in the foreign language classroom; it introduces cross-cultural dialogue affecting the perception and intercommunication with the Other. Any contextualized language instruction is a cultural representation to learners which can result in either a positive perception and effective dialogue with the Other or a complete communication collapse, misunderstanding and possible perplexities on the level of personal and collective identity. These elements are profoundly elucidated in colonial and postcolonial literature, which is mainly viewed as a cultural friction arena. The postcolonial text is generally opaque and controversial, but it continues to offer new perspectives on its understanding and the pedagogy of teaching postcolonial literature. This study expands on earlier studies on teaching postcolonial texts. Many of these research are covered in Abdul-Jabbar (2015). The study investigates how external factors, such as intellectual imperialism, shape pupils' cultural conceptions of the Other. It also investigates how these elements affect students' cultural relationships.

In the EFL classroom in Algeria, the Eurocentric bias was discernible. The students are Muslim from North Africa. Individuals who navigate the complex interplay of colonial legacies and postcolonial resistance via multiple identity disputes marked by institutional marginalization, cultural reclamation, and strategic adaptation. Historical disparities, discriminatory prejudices. The students' answers highlighted a significantly ambivalent relationship between responses to Afghanistan and Germany. A marked inverse of the high and low

rates correlation between the two (figure 7) helps correlate the findings with the West versus Orient perceptions being illustrated in the two opposite extremes of the results:

Germany: The lowest rate of negative indicators of individual profiling descriptors (23%).

Afghanistan: The highest rate of negative indicators of individual profiling descriptors (84%).

Germany: The highest rate of positive indicators of ethical descriptors (56%)

Afghanistan: The highest rate of negative indicators of ethical descriptors (75%).

Germany: The highest rate of correct assumptions about historical/geographical descriptors (100%) and the lowest rate of false assumptions about historical/geographical descriptors (0%).

Afghanistan: The lowest rate of correct assumptions about historical/geographical descriptors (46%) and the highest rate of false assumptions about historical/geographical descriptors (54%).

Germany: The highest rate of positive indicators of political descriptors (62%).

Afghanistan: The lowest rate of negative indicators of political descriptors (0%).

Germany: The highest rate of tolerance in Student Generated Expressions (100%).

Afghanistan: The lowest rate of tolerance in Student Generated Expressions (57%).

Such depictions are examples of intercultural imperialism, demonstrating the dominance of Western information sources (Galtung, 1971; Said, 1993; Schiller, 1969). Negative depictions of Afghan citizens are frequently based on long-held preconceptions. Political media coverage reinforces these prejudices, creating a false view of Afghans. As a result, Afghans are typically seen through the prism of Islamic extremism and backwardness. The responses to Orientalist representations as in to Jean Leo Gerome's *Snake Charmer* are similar to the Afghan descriptions along the lines of "pedophiles" and "rapists", which aligns with Said's arguments regarding how Orientalist representations reinforced harmful stereotypes at the service of colonial interests (Said, 1978) that can be reflected to the Afghan-American geopolitical relationship and media depictions of Afghanistan.

Figure 7

Comparative Table of the Highest and the Lowest Rates in Student-Generated Expressions

		Fact/ Correct assumptions	**Misconceptions/ False assumptions**	**Positive Indicators**	**Negative Indicators**	**Neutral Indicators**
Individual profiling descriptors	Highest response rate	**Algeria 36%**	**Afghanistan 91%**	India 28%	**Afghanistan 84%**	Germany 62%
	Lowest response rate	Egypt 06%	**Algeria 64%**	**Afghanistan 07%**	Germany 23%	Afghanistan 9%
Ethical Descriptors	Highest response rate	**Algeria 91%**	Germany 60%	**Germany 56%**	**Afghanistan 75%**	**Algeria 72%**
	Lowest response rate	Germany 40%	**Algeria 09%**	India 06%	**Algeria 05%**	Afghanistan 22%
Historical/ geographical descriptors	Highest response rate	**Germany 100%**	**Afghanistan 54%**	**Algeria 57%**	**Afghanistan 49%**	Egypt 65%
	Lowest response rate	**Afghanistan 46%**	**Germany 00%**	**Afghanistan 09%**	**Algeria 01%**	Algeria 41%

Political descriptors	Highest response rate	Afghanistan 100%	Alg/Egy 50%	**Germany 62%**	**Afghanistan 100%**	Germany 33%
	Lowest response rate	India 00%	India 00%	**Afghanistan 00%**	India 0 0%	Afghanistan 00%
Economical descriptors	Highest response rate	Germany 94%	Egypt 84%	**Germany 6%**	**Afghanistan 100%**	Algeria 60%
	Lowest response rate	Egypt 16%	India 10%	**Afghanistan 00%**	**Germany 00%**	Afghanistan 00%

Another indicator of intellectual imperialism is media homogenization, Western cultures exert a high influence, which might lead to the erosion of other "minor" cultures. The data reveals that Egypt has the lowest rate of correct assumptions about individual profiling descriptors (6%), despite being a neighboring country with high cultural similarities, and it can be safely asserted that the students' answers stemmed from media consumption, which is also illustrated in India's individual profiling descriptors. India has the highest rate of positive indicators, with 28%, mainly due to the Bollywoodization of the Indian appearance. At the same time, it has the lowest rate of positive indicators of ethical descriptors (06%), which is also related to social media exposure. As for students' responses about Algeria, they were to be anticipated since it is their native country, and their knowledge of the culture explains the highest rate of correct assumptions and the lowest rates of false assumptions in both individual profiling descriptors and ethical descriptors. However, it is also noteworthy that responses lacked political and economic descriptors, even though it is their native country, politics and economy were mainly visible regarding Germany and Afghanistan.

The results obtained corroborate the existence of intellectual imperialism, identified by: media homogenization and misinformation, Eurocentrism, persistent, powerful Orientalist ideology and representations, and, ultimately, limited knowledge of the self and the Other. Within the framework of the postcolonial course, the rectification of misconceptions was planned to draw

students' attention to the imperial power, prompting them to reconsider and question their reactions and attitudes towards the Other. The comparison was deemed effective as it showcased the comprehensive view of both sides (the West versus East and the colonized versus the colonized). Consequently, it is believed that the students' awareness will enhance their critical thinking skills and, hence, their intercultural communication skills, as well.

Conclusion

In the context of the pedagogy of literature in broad terms and the pedagogy of postcolonial literature in particular, it must be acknowledged that some extraneous factors are present and warrant consideration of its cultural impact on learners' identity in the EFL classroom, their relationship with the Other, and the proper understanding of the text. Learners will reasonably face interpretive challenges upon navigating unfamiliar cultures and dense literary connotations. To ensure a clearer grasp of the postcolonial text, the educator needs to foster self-awareness, cultural awareness and critical awareness. When learners are keenly aware of their identity and connections to others, their open-mindedness and tolerance will show both in class and outside. The aforementioned suggestions, i.e. the consideration of intellectual imperialism in the teaching of the postcolonial narrative and the comparative postcolonial instruction, aim to ameliorate the pedagogy of such culturally saturated literary texts, to unravel cultural entanglement. This study has demonstrated that EFL learners bring pre-established intellectual notions and cultural perceptions about others that sometimes necessitate corrections and should not be underestimated. Employing the methodology of comparison attempts to facilitate the understanding of the postcolonial context by deconstructing both colonial and postcolonial texts and presenting their cultural context, motivation and objective. Ultimately, the goal is to cultivate interculturally competent learners who are conscious of their identity and possess knowledge, tolerance and empathy towards the Other.

This postcolonial pedagogy paradigm may be modified for various EFL situations by promoting critical analysis of colonial and postcolonial literature, enhancing intercultural awareness, and enabling students to challenge prevailing narratives. Transferable ideas encompass comparative literary analysis and the function of educators as intercultural mediators. The objective is encouraging learners to recover and validate their indigenous cultures, languages, and histories. This negotiation entails interrogating prevailing narratives, opposing stereotypes, and establishing links to one's background, contesting the intellectual hierarchies established by colonial legacies and promoting intercultural comprehension.

Challenges may emerge, including institutional opposition to curriculum modification, insufficient teacher training in postcolonial theory, and the potential for cosmetic incorporation of various literature without addressing underlying power inequalities. Effective adaptation necessitates awareness of local history and continuous support for educators.

Acknowledgements

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‘DE-LEARNING, TO LEARN AGAIN’: TOWARDS A CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL PEDAGOGY IN MALTA

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Abstract

This research is a qualitative inquiry into the history and current characteristics of environmental education in Malta. As a former British colony, Malta’s curriculum, including environmental education, was heavily influenced by the British standardized curriculum until the 1990s. Existing literature suggests that this may have functioned to de-center generational place-based knowledge and highlight the environmental knowledge and ideologies of a colonizing group. However, there is a gap in the literature that recognizes environmental education as a contested field in Malta and other post-colonial regions. In this research, I use semi-structured interviews to explore educators’ experience with environmental teaching in the formal education system in Malta. As indicated in the results, participants identified several challenges to environmental education in Malta, including limitations of the formal education system, structural factors influencing teacher agency and environmental attitudes, and perceived nature disconnectedness. I interpret these results through a lens of critical pedagogy and post-colonial theory, suggesting that influences of colonialism might still be reflected in present-day environmental education, through a lasting impact of colonial curricula and a sense of disconnection with natural spaces. I suggest that there is reason to reconsider environmental education as a ‘neutral’ field in Malta, and that a critically-informed environmental pedagogy has the

potential to become a site of critique, resistance, and action. I conclude with ideas for what this pedagogy might look like, built on insights from critical pedagogy, post-colonial theory, and the experiences of educators who participated in this research.

Keywords: Postcolonial, environmental education, educational reform, pedagogy, social justice

Introduction

In many contexts, education sets the direction for how knowledge, histories, and memories are inherited and learned. In post-colonial theory, it is widely accepted that education often perpetuates the knowledge systems and dominant ideologies of colonizing powers. Further, colonialism can suppress generational, place-based knowledge and disrupt the connection between people and their environment.

However, the connection between colonial education and environmental understanding or ideology remains underexplored. Specifically, it is not yet well established how colonialism—and the imposition of external environmental curricula—may have influenced the development of environmental education and shaped dominant environmental worldviews.

Malta has a long history of colonization, ending with political independence from the British empire in 1964. During the British period, Malta adopted much of the legislation, administration and education systems from the United Kingdom. In the early post-colonial era, environmental education was taught using British textbooks, with material irrelevant to the Maltese islands. In my research, I look at how this history of foreign environmental curricula may have influenced current environmental education and ideology in Malta. Founded in a framework of post-colonial theory and critical pedagogy, I begin my research with a 'discourse of critique' to build a theoretical understanding of environmental education in Malta, and view the socio-historical relations

of power that might shape this. Then, I go forward with a 'discourse of possibility,' to explore how this critical environmental pedagogy can become a site of critique, resistance, and action.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How do educators experience environmental education in Malta?
2. In what ways, if any, are the influences of colonialism reflected in current environmental education in Malta?
3. How could a critically-informed approach to environmental education have the potential to bring learners to feel connected to natural space, and empowered to take action in environmental protection and regeneration in Malta?

Theoretical framework: critical pedagogy & post-colonial theory

I draw on critical pedagogy as a framework for understanding the role of education in social change. Critical pedagogy recognizes that education is not neutral, but is embedded in and reflects power relations in society. It brings learners to critically view the world, to challenge existing assumptions and power structures, and ultimately to take action in transforming these structures (Giroux, 1997). Critical pedagogy is relevant in the discussion of environmental education in Malta because of its two-tiered approach to social change. The first component of critical pedagogy is using critique as a lens to ask how power has shaped institutions on all levels of society, and to name and understand this through a critical discourse. The second component is to imagine alternate realities through a discourse of possibility (Giroux, 1997). A critical environmental pedagogy, therefore, requires developing a historical consciousness regarding the relationship between power and place, and an understanding of the role of education in this process.

Many scholars in post-colonial theory view curricula created under colonial rule as tools in cultural assimilation. These curricula may devalue local and ancestral knowledge systems, bringing people to adopt the culture and epistemologies of colonizing groups (Mafela, 2014). Often, this results in some degree of cultural erasure, loss of ancestral place-based knowledge, or the absence of native language in schools (Morris, 2016). Given the complex and heterogeneous nature of colonial education systems, Mafela (2014) advocates for an analytical approach that is context and discipline-specific. Within post-colonial theory, it is widely accepted that history teaching is a contested field, especially in regions with colonial histories. Environmental education, however, has not been widely recognized as such. In the following section, I show how these are connected—how colonial policies impact education, and how colonial environmental education shapes how people come to learn about and relate to natural space.

While acknowledging the power of education in society, it is important to remember that the relationship between colonialism and schooling is non-deterministic. Homi Bhaba reminds us to think beyond a binary 'colonizer' and 'colonized,' and see the complexities within these identities (Bhabha, 1994 as cited in Hill, 2005, p. 143). Seeing education as a contested terrain is important not only for an analysis that acknowledges these complex realities, but also to recognize counter-hegemonic agency and imagine new ways of learning.

Literature review

The environmental impacts of colonialism

For the first time, the 2022 report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change recognized colonialism as a factor in climate change. Regions more vulnerable to climate-related disasters often have complex histories that make strategies for vulnerability reduction more difficult. This includes long-term economic dependencies on another nation, or colonially established governance structures (IPCC, 2022, p. 1197).

Colonialism and imperial expansion are predicated on natural resource exploitation, and the often violent dispossession of people from place. Extractivism, deforestation and environmental degradation are all common realities of colonialism across diverse geographies (Dias, 2020).

In many regions, colonial powers sought to erase ancestral place-based knowledge about land stewardship and sustainability practices. Post-colonial literature in North America, Australia, and New Zealand describes 'attachment disruption' – that colonial domination forcibly disconnected people from land, land-based culture, and traditional ways of living (Dupuis-Rossi, 2021). Significant environmental knowledge and connection were lost by systemically detaching people from the land and the political agency of this land (Light, 2020).

Recognizing the systemic roots of climate change vulnerability and environmental issues is an essential component of environmental education. It must critically engage with structures of power, such as colonial histories, and their lasting impact on environmental outcomes and ideologies. This forms a necessary foundation for a critical, action-oriented environmental pedagogy.

British educational influence in curriculum development

Situated between Sicily and the North African coast, the three Maltese islands (Malta, Gozo and Comino) have a combined landmass of 316 square kilometers. Due in part to its strategic position in the Mediterranean with natural sea ports, Malta has a long history of colonization. Over 2,000 years, Malta has been colonized by the Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans and Arab groups; the Angevin and Aragonese empires; the Knights of St. John; and became a British protectorate in 1800. Following the British colonial era, Malta adopted the British administration system, legislation and education. It gained independence in 1964, became a republic in 1974, saw the withdrawal of foreign military presence in1979, and joined the EU in 2004.

As a former British colony, Malta's state school system is heavily influenced by the British education model (Chircop, 2017; Mifsud, 2012; Pace, 2009). Until 1992, Malta used the British-based General Certificate of Education, in which content 'in relation to the local Maltese environment was practically non-existent' (Pace, 1997, p. 74). In addition to this, an 'overwhelming reliance on the United Kingdom for educational models, textbooks and expertise' continued into the late 1990s (Sultana, 1999, p. 5).

After Malta's first National Minimum Curriculum was introduced in 1990, content and examinations became more relevant to the Maltese environment, marking a shift toward decentralization (Borg et al., 1995). However, an analysis of curricula at that time found that environmental content was repetitive, fragmented, and did not cover environmental issues most relevant to the Maltese islands (Pace, 1997, p. 75). Mifsud (2012) highlights the issue of transferability: educational practices that are effective in one context may not work in another. Malta's use of British curricula, developed for a vastly different geography and history, meant that students may not have learned about local ecosystems and context-specific environmental practices in school.

Pace (2009) writes that the long history of colonialism in Malta, along with influences from the Catholic church 'fostered a steady alienation from concerns about the environment and a narrow anthropocentric view of the value of land' (p. 1). Under British colonial rule, the concept of 'environment' appears to have shifted – from a broader understanding of the landscape to a focus on the individual home. Responsibility for the surrounding environment was largely seen as the domain of those in power at that time (Pace, 2009, p. 1). It is possible that this historical framing of environmental awareness may still influence prevailing attitudes toward land and sustainability today.

Early environmental education and pedagogical tensions

Environmental education in Malta formally began in the 1960s with the development of two NGOs: the Society for the Study and Conservation of Nature, and the Maltese Ornithological Society. Today, NGOs still play an important role in environmental education in Malta. The NGO Nature Trust Malta partners with the Maltese government to deliver EkoSkola, the Maltese chapter of an international program that seeks to promote sustainable development and environmental awareness in the classroom and broader community. Active since 2002, EkoSkola encourages student involvement in the planning and implementation of environmental initiatives in schools (Mifsud, 2012, p. 56).

In 1999, Environmental Studies was introduced in the curriculum as an examinable subject. Research by Mifsud (2012) and Pace (2009) suggests this created problems for environmental teaching, as the focus on exam performance led to curricula and teaching methods that prioritize memorization over holistic learning and skill development. This may also reflect a dominant education ideology that values test preparation over experiential approaches such as outdoor or inquiry-based learning. Examination-oriented pedagogy has also been identified as a major barrier to humanistic, learner-centered environmental education (Pace, 2000).

The National Curriculum Framework was introduced in 2011, and proposed the current Learning Outcomes Framework concept, which emphasizes skills-based, cross-curricular learning. Core subjects like mathematics, Maltese, and social studies are explicitly taught, while five cross-curricular themes – including Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) – are meant to be integrated across all subjects. Although specific learning outcomes are outlined, the content and emphasis of cross-curricular subjects is up to the discretion of the individual teacher. Currently, environmental education in Malta is included through the ESD Learning

Outcome Framework. While this is designed to add flexibility and innovation to ESD, it may also risk marginalizing the subject, particularly in a system still shaped by exam-oriented priorities.

Research shows that an examination-oriented pedagogy in Maltese schools limits the impact of environmental education, emphasizing rote learning over critical, reflective, and experiential approaches (Pace, 2009). While history teaching is often recognized as a contested field, particularly in regions with colonial histories, environmental education is rarely designed with the same critical lens. Despite this, existing literature indicates that it could be, given the colonial influences on its development and lasting legacies in cultural value systems and environmental ideologies. Further, prior to the inclusion of ESD in the National Curriculum Framework in 2011, teachers could teach about the environment and sustainability, but were not required to. This meant that the presence of environmental education in classrooms often depended on individual teachers' interest, confidence, and concern about the subject.

In conclusion, existing research suggests that the Maltese education system is heavily shaped by its colonial legacy, particularly through its adoption of British educational content. However, there has been no discipline-specific analysis of how colonialism has shaped environmental education in Malta, nor the transformative potential of alternative critical pedagogies in fostering environmental connection, engagement and action. Considering the connection between colonialism and climate change vulnerability, and education's role in either reproducing or challenging dominant ideologies, this suggests a significant gap in literature to explore.

Methodology

This study is grounded in critical theory, which shapes how I approach the research questions and make meaning from the findings. While analyzing topics of education, environment and colonialism, I use this critical lens to

ask where power might be reflected in these structures; critical theory supports an analysis of historical relations of power, and the social institutions and structures that work to either challenge or uphold its current distribution (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Ultimately, critical theory is concerned with 'the demystification of power and the development of alternative frameworks' (Gill 2012, p. 24).

This research is a qualitative inquiry, using semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. I ask open-ended questions about educators' experiences both learning and teaching about the environment, and any challenges, opportunities, and successes they've encountered.

Participants were identified through purposive sampling, informed by background research. As highlighted in the literature review, factors such as teachers' agency, environmental ideology, and level of environmental training can influence the environmental education students receive (Mifsud, 2012; Pace, 2000). For this reason, I chose to recruit both teachers within the Maltese formal education system and educators working in Maltese environmental NGOs, including EkoSkola teachers.

I also recognize the importance of understanding the historical development of environmental education in Malta, as well as the broader education system. Therefore, I decided to recruit one or more subject-matter experts in education, history, and/or environmental education. My goal in selecting this non-homogeneous sample was to build a holistic understanding of environmental education in Malta today.

To recruit participants, I reached out to the directors of three environmental NGOs in Malta and nine state schools. I asked if they would be interested in participating in the research, and sent a recruitment letter for distribution in their organizations if so. One NGO responded, and two schools (one declined, the other agreed to share the letter with teachers). For EkoSkola educators, I

obtained permission from the program coordinator and contacted teachers individually via email. Three responded, and I conducted interviews with two. Due to a limited initial response, I used snowball sampling to identify additional participants, contacting people suggested by early interviewees. I also drew on my personal network and suggestions from my research supervisor, contacting individuals who met the sampling criteria.

The following seven participants took part in interviews for this research. Due Malta's small size and interconnected communities, I include only general information about participants to protect anonymity.

Description of Participant	**Pseudonym in Results Section**
Environmental educator in a Maltese environmental NGO, with previous experience teaching at a state school	NGO Educator
State school teacher, also involved in non-formal environmental education projects in Malta	Teacher 1
Teacher at independent school in Malta	Teacher 2
Previous learning support assistant in a Maltese church school	Learning Support
Subject matter expert: an individual with experience developing environmental education / ESD curricula in Malta	Subject Matter Expert
EkoSkola Educator	EkoSkola 1
EkoSkola Educator	EkoSkola 2

Figure 1: Participant Descriptions

Data analysis

I conducted a thematic analysis to make sense of the data through multiple stages of coding. During preliminary coding, I highlighted emerging themes, focussing on describing what was being said rather than interpreting it. (Creswell, 2011, p. 247). While continuing interviews, my questions, notes and comments sparked new curiosities that informed subsequent conversations. In the next stage, I developed a code list and re-analyzed all completed transcripts to apply it consistently. I then started to look for patterns and connections between the existing codes, grouping similar codes together under larger themes. Eventually, I organized data into five overarching themes, outlined below:

Results

Theme 1: Limiting factors in the formal education system

Participants felt that the education system is, at present, not designed to deliver environmental education in a meaningful, impactful way. This is due in part to a content-heavy curriculum and examination-oriented pedagogy. All seven participants spoke about the curriculum being full of material teachers must cover. Educators described feeling intense pressure to teach everything in the syllabus, but there is too much material to cover and insufficient time. Many participants noted that the pedagogy in the formal education system places heavy emphasis on memorizing information for an exam. One teacher described their state school environment as '*rigid*,' saying that the school administration offers little support for teachers in deciding and enacting how they want to teach. The subject matter expert emphasized that environmental education must go beyond incorporating environmental topics into the curriculum; rather, it requires infrastructure that supports a fundamentally different pedagogy.

> *Environmental education is not just learning information about the environment, but it needs a radical change in the methodology and the pedagogy used. Because it has to change mindsets, not just information* (Subject Matter Expert)

Theme 2: Nature (dis)connection, development and urbanization

While several participants described a strong personal connection to nature, they felt this was not widely shared across the broader public. Three participants said they remember a greater connection to the environment and natural spaces in previous generations, compared with the present. Several participants linked this shift to broader societal changes, such as the move from rural to urban living. Many felt that increasing urban, commercial and residential development contributes to this disconnect – given Malta's small land mass, many houses, schools and workplaces do not have access to surrounding natural areas. Many participants expressed feelings of grief and anger at the growing pace of development.

> *I think we passed through a phase where we focussed a lot on economic growth. Maybe we thought that our island is sort of infinite, and that we could build everywhere and that we could do everything.… So we lost public beaches, we lost space, we lost fields, we lost agricultural land, certain apartments do not get sunlight because they're so high rise.* (EkoSkola 1)

Theme 3: Social and historical factors influencing present-day environmental ideologies

The subject matter expert reflected on how Malta's colonial history may continue to influence present-day environmental attitudes. They suggested that, during times of British colonialism, public space was viewed as

belonging to the British monarchy, and this has contributed to a sense of detachment or lack of ownership over local land and the environment.

A related issue is how the environment was taught in schools. When I asked participants how they learned about the environment, three people talked about learning from British environmental textbooks. One teacher noted that all the examples were British and remembered learning about rivers and glaciers in the UK. Two other participants felt that this focus on a foreign context left them with limited knowledge of the Maltese environment, such as the role of native species in local ecosystems.

> *So it's not just the notion that you don't own your environment. But even the things that you know about the environment are not correct.* (Subject Matter Expert)

One EkoSkola educator described a moment when, after learning about British geography, plants and animals in school, they realized in adulthood that what they had been taught in school was irrelevant to the Mediterranean context.

> *Because you learned, but you had to de-learn, to learn again. You know? Because you find that this was not useful for me […] what they taught me, it was not good for Malta.* (EkoSkola 1)

Theme 4: The role and importance of teachers

All participants emphasized the pivotal role that teachers play in determining the kind of environmental education that students experience. One educator said that the impact of the EkoSkola program and level of student engagement is very dependent on the attitudes of the linked teacher at the participating school. They also noted that teachers who feel a strong personal connection to the environment are more likely to dedicate time to the ESD cross-curricular subject than those who feel less connected to nature.

Several participants also expressed that teachers often feel unprepared to integrate the ESD Learning Outcome Framework into their classes, due to a lack of training and support. Related to this, they talked about curriculum changes occurring rapidly and without teacher input, leading to additional stress and a sense of disempowerment.

Theme 5: Meaningful environmental education

Participants felt that environmental education should go beyond the cognitive and scientific content to include emotions, values and personal experiences. They emphasized that environmental education should cultivate a sense of empowerment and agency in students. A recurring sub-theme was the value of outdoor education as a means of enhancing student engagement and connection with nature. Participants talked about examples of experiential outdoor learning, such as foraging, wildlife observation, and ecological science experiments.

Discussion

The formal education system: experiences of a transmissive pedagogy?

While talking about their experiences in the education system, both as students and teachers, participants described learning environments characterized by memorization and exam preparation. Participants collectively agreed that these characteristics of the formal education system pose challenges for environmental education. One possible interpretation of this theme is that current environmental education may align with a transmissive pedagogical model.

A transmissive pedagogy reflects what Giroux (1997) calls the positivist mode of rationality. This way of teaching is not concerned with developing historical consciousness, and separates the 'fact' from its social and historical context.

As a result, complex problems are treated in isolation, leaving social, political and economic structures unexamined. As Giroux (1997) argues, 'divorced from history, these structures appear to have acquired their present character naturally, rather than having been constructed by historically specific interests' (p. 13). Consequently, social problems tend to be approached with technocratic, rather than political solutions.

Regarding environmental education, this might reflect an underlying ideology that assumes increased environmental knowledge and awareness will automatically lead to pro-environmental action. This assumption has been challenged in previous research (Pace, 2000). A significant risk of this pedagogical approach is depoliticizing topics in (environmental) education.

The role and experiences of teachers

As shown in the results section, many participants felt teachers have limited agency within the state school system. This concern connects with Theme 1, *Limiting Factors in the Formal Education System*, as participants described how the pressure to cover required material and prepare students for exams often restricts their ability to make autonomous teaching decisions.

Feeling constrained by the curriculum and the formal education system also limits the environmental education teachers can offer. Several participants expressed a desire to engage in outdoor education and experiential learning, such as unstructured play and nature exploration. However, the pressure to cover all required material in the syllabus restricts their ability to use creative and innovative approaches to environmental education.

Existing research shows that teacher agency is linked and influenced by structural factors within the education system. Education systems characterized by rigorous standardized testing are shown to reduce teacher agency, as does societal pressure which makes teachers responsible for student achievement. Further, the level of teacher self-directedness depends

on the extent to which teachers feel they have to adhere to the prescribed curriculum. Teacher agency, therefore, is largely dependent on the cultural, historical, and institutional context of the education system (Erss, 2018, p. 252).

Participants emphasized that teachers' environmental attitudes and ideologies influence their commitment to ESD learning outcomes. This suggests that students' experiences of environmental education are shaped by factors at both an individual and institutional level.

At the individual level, a teacher's environmental knowledge, preparation, and values all impact their approach. At an institutional level, environmental education is affected by the teacher-administration relationship, the extent of teacher involvement in curriculum development, and systemic limitations within the formal education system.

Colonialism, environmental ideology and nature (dis)connection

Related to Theme 2: *Nature (Dis)connection*, many participants expressed grief and frustration at the extent of development on the Maltese islands. They linked nature disconnection to increased urban development and the shift from an agriculture-based lifestyle to urban living. Drawing on broader understandings of colonization, development and relationships to place, this disconnection may also reflect a lasting impact of colonialism in Malta.

In regions of settler-colonialism, existing research shows how colonization functioned to dispossess people from the land and natural environment, food and sustainability systems, and traditional ways of living (Dennis & Robin, 2020; Hansen, 2018; Wildcat, et al., 2014). Research in the United States shows how some social studies curricula convey a 'settler colonial land ethic,' which Calderon (2014) argues must be critically examined and made explicit (p. 24). While historical contexts differ, existing research highlights the power of curricula and teaching to shape specific understandings of place.

In the Maltese context, research by Pace (2009, p. 1) suggests that the long history of colonialism in Malta has fostered an alienation from land, and narrowed a concept of environmental responsibility and ownership to the area immediately surrounding individual homes. In the 1970s and 80s, there was a period of increased development in Malta. According to Cauchi (2014, p. 26) this process was underpinned by 'efforts to shift the national economy towards a sustained program of industrialization;' this sought to generate economic growth and therefore reduce political and economic dependency on Britain during the early post-colonial period. This suggests that the movement away from an agricultural-based lifestyle and increased development of the Maltese islands may have been associated with colonialism.

Foreign textbooks and materials

As described in the results, many participants recalled learning about the British environment in school: plants, animals, and ecosystems irrelevant to Maltese ecology. The importance of place-based, context-specific education likely influenced how students learned about, understood, and valued the environment. Critical pedagogy has long examined the relationship between schooling, ideology and texts. Giroux (1997, p. 74) described ideology as a set of representations concretized in behaviour, discourse, lived experiences, and texts. Critical theorists such as Marx and Gramsci argue that any analysis of ideology must also include an analysis of power. In this context, this could mean asking how British environmental textbooks might have functioned to construct and/or reproduce an 'official knowledge' about the environment.
Here, official knowledge refers to 'the mechanism whereby knowledge rooted in certain cultures and traditions is considered superior to others and established as legitimate knowledge' (Mayo, 2022, p. 2277). According to Freire, official knowledge comes about after cultural invasion, in which one group invades the cultural context of another and imposes its view of the world. Freire also argued that cultural invasion is closely tied to transmissive pedagogy, where the knowledge of dominant groups is positioned as superior or 'official' and transmitted through schooling. In the Maltese context, past

environmental education may have conveyed an 'official knowledge' rooted in a foreign environment, rather than fostering a connection to the local ecology. This can also be understood as a form of epistemic violence (Spivak, 2010), which marginalizes local and generational place-based knowledge.

Although British environmental textbooks are no longer used in schools, their influence may persist. As discussed, participants emphasized that teachers' environmental attitudes and values significantly impact the environmental education that students receive. If many educators were taught about the environment using foreign materials, this may have shaped their environmental ideologies. Giroux (1997) views teachers as both products and producers of history, who are guided by the paradigms and socialization that they learned. This raises the question of whether there may be an unconscious continuation of environmental ideologies rooted in foreign curricula.

Of course, this is only one interpretation based on themes that emerged from interviews. Advancing a non-reductionist analysis, it's important to recognize that small island states do not often have the resources to develop education materials locally (Baldacchino, 2019). The use of British environmental textbooks likely reflects economy-of-scale realities, rather than attempts to create or secure a knowledge hegemony. Additionally, this analysis does not account for other ways of learning about the environment, through family, community values, or personal experiences in nature. While acknowledging these complexities, however, I think it's important to critically examine the use of foreign education materials, and ask: Who were these books written for, and for what purpose? What ideologies, cultures, and perspectives do they reflect? Whose history and language are being taught? Although this study does not answer these questions, its findings support a rationale for looking at history and present-day education in this way.

'De-learning, to learn again'

As outlined in the results, one EkoSkola educator described a process of having to 'de-learn' aspects of the environmental education they had learned in school to re-learn content relevant to the Maltese environment – an experience I interpret as transformative learning. According to Mezirow (1997, p. 7) transformative learning is sparked by a process of critical reflection on the assumptions that form the basis of our beliefs and understandings of the world. After this moment of realization, the EkoSkola educator talked about starting to critically question other environmental and sustainability-related topics, such as where food comes from when it could be grown in Malta. To me, this affirms the power of critical, transformative education in bringing about social change.

Towards a critical environmental pedagogy: recommendations and further research

Until this point, I have used a 'discourse of critique' to build an understanding of the 'interplay between historical consciousness, critical thinking and emancipatory behaviour' (Giroux, 1997, p. 26). Now, I will go forward with a 'discourse of possibility' to explore what this critical environmental pedagogy might look like in practice.

Recognizing teachers as transformative intellectuals

Critical pedagogy advances a view of teachers as transformative intellectuals, deserving of deep respect and support in their (environmental) education practice. Giroux (1997) describes transformative educators as 'bearers of dangerous memory,' who engage with how knowledge and ideology have been shaped and contested throughout history (p. 105). As such, educators can use both a language of critique and language of possibility, elevating forms of knowledge that have been historically marginalized.

Recognizing teachers as transformative intellectuals also requires creating conditions that foster teacher agency. In environmental education, this could involve giving greater curricular autonomy to support innovative and experiential learning – the value of which has been emphasized in previous sections. At the individual level, supporting a critical environmental pedagogy could mean providing space and opportunities for teachers to reflect on their own environmental relationships, knowledge, and ideologies.

A place-based pedagogy: centering local knowledge

Meaningful, place-based environmental education offers a powerful potential for re-centering local and generational local systems in Malta, while becoming a site for decolonial and counter-hegemonic resistance. As argued by Tuck et al. (2014), the concept of 'land' carries deep relationships, histories and ways of learning, teaching and knowing (p. 8). In the Maltese context, where colonial legacies may continue to shape environmental education and ideologies, a critical environmental pedagogy would invite learners to meaningfully connect with the environment through place-based pedagogy, and move forward with a decolonial epistemic perspective (Mignolo, 2011).

Gruenwald's (2003) concept of a *critical pedagogy of place* blends traditions of critical pedagogy and place-based education, with the aim of examining how political and economic decisions impact the places we inhabit (p. 3). This involves 'reinhabitation:' the process of unlearning dominant narratives and re-engaging with more socially just and sustainable ways of living. Participants spoke a lot about environmental education including an outdoor learning element, which could be another powerful means of reinhabitation. An example of this could be learning local sustainable farming practices, or exploring food sovereignty through growing and harvesting local foods. Existing literature highlights place-based outdoor learning as a way of fostering meaningful connections with land, and centering local and generational land knowledge. This is particularly emphasized in regions with colonial histories (Tuck et al., 2014).

Another powerful form of reinhabitation is language. Maltese place names carry information about water, vegetation, directions and landscape, often lost in English translations (Ciantar, 2010). Further, environmental concepts expressed in Maltese may offer culturally specific understandings that have been sidelined through English-language textbooks and instruction. A critical environmental pedagogy with the use of Maltese language can be a powerful tool to affirm learners' connection to place.

Although some traditional environmental practices may not be relevant or feasible today, integrating ancestral knowledge can enrich present-day environmental teaching. The framework of *Two-Eyed Seeing* (McKeon, 2012) integrates multiple knowledge systems, by learning to see the strengths of native ancestral knowledge with one eye, and the strengths of Western knowledge with the other eye. And then, most importantly, learning to see from both perspectives at the same time (McKeon, 2012, p. 136). Two-Eyed Seeing has been used in many disciplines in settler-colonial contexts of North America. It is also used in environmental pedagogy, because it is about seeing beyond binary to accept the interconnectedness between people and the natural world (McKeon, 2012). In Malta, this may take the form of bridging traditional ecological practices with modern science education, opening up pluralist, transformative approaches to sustainability.

Ways forward: enacting a critical environmental pedagogy

To move toward a critical environmental pedagogy in Malta, transformation is needed at both the pedagogical and institutional levels.

At the classroom level, dialogue is central in critical pedagogy and meaningful environmental education. It creates space for students to engage with complex and urgent issues, including climate change, environmental justice, and colonial legacies. As stated by Wink (2011) 'dialogue is change-agent chatter … it is a framework for learning and teaching that turns passive learning into engagement and inquiry' (p. 65). Dialogue can start to cultivate a historical

consciousness, critically examining the social and political structures that contribute to present day realities. It allows for learning that is not only intellectual, but embodied and relational. Many educators in this study emphasized the importance of involving emotions and personal experience in environmental teaching.

Importantly, dialogue can also politicize environmental discussions. Critical pedagogy does not aim to be neutral; it seeks to examine and challenge social structures and sedimented systems of power (Giroux, 1997). In the context of environmental education, dialogue can surface about how land use, access, and knowledge have been shaped by colonialism, development, and economic policy. This kind of inquiry invites students to see the environment not as a static backdrop, but as a deeply contested and political space.

There is already precedent for this kind of work. In peace education, for example, educators have used dialogical approaches to critically examine History as a field shaped by perspective, power, and ideology (McCully, 2012). I believe a similar paradigm shift is possible, and needed, in environmental education. We can begin with questions like: What materials, pictures, and stories shaped how we think about the environment in Malta? How did you learn about the environment, and what is your relationship to it now? Dialogue can help learners develop a historical consciousness that links past and present land practices, challenges assumptions, and builds a deeper sense of connection and responsibility.

A critical environmental pedagogy may also require a re-orientation of the teacher's role, from *transmitter* of knowledge to *facilitator* of inquiry and learning. This means creating space for student experiences and emotional responses to be a part of the learning process – this is echoed by many educators on this study, who emphasized the importance of involving emotions and personal experience in environmental teaching.

At the institutional level, systemic support is required to make these pedagogical shifts sustainable. Teachers in this study spoke about a tension between their pedagogical values and goals, and the constraints of a rigid curriculum. This points to a need for structural transformation in how environmental education is understood and supported across the formal education system.

Policy Recommendations:

1. **Fund professional development in critical, place-based, and land-based pedagogies.**
   Provide ongoing support for teachers specifically in environmental education, including training in dialogic methods and reflective practice.
2. **Support educator autonomy through flexible curriculum design.**
   Encourage schools to adapt curricula based on local ecological contexts, student interests, and community relevance.
3. **Establish national guidelines for outdoor and experiential education.**
   Affirm the importance of land-based learning and incorporate outdoor education as a core component of environmental education at all levels.
4. **Revise assessment approaches for environmental learning.**
   Move away from rigorous standardized testing and instead prioritize meaningful self-reflection and critical thinking in student assessment.
5. **Integrate local and generational ecological knowledge into curriculum materials.**
   Review textbooks and classroom resources to ensure they center local and context-specific ecological material.

Future research could explore how principles of critical pedagogy can be embedded in national curricula and what forms of professional development most effectively support teachers' critical reflection.

Conclusion

Returning to the research questions, participants collectively identified several characteristics of the current state of environmental education in Malta. First, regarding how educators experience environmental education in Malta, participants noted that the formal education system presents structural limitations that hinder meaningful environmental learning. These include a content-heavy curriculum, and examination-oriented pedagogy; this has also been identified in previous studies (Mifsud, 2012). In practice, this aligns with a transmissive model of education, which, according to the principles of critical pedagogy, functions to reproduce dominant (environmental) ideologies. This dynamic, influenced by historic legacies of colonial education models, risks depoliticizing environmental and climate issues, and reducing complex sociopolitical problems to technical solutions. Environmental education is also shaped by teachers on multiple levels. Systemically, they experience reduced pedagogical agency due to the rigid structure of the state school system, which may limit innovative or non-traditional approaches. Individually, teachers' environmental attitudes and ideologies have a significant influence on how they teach about the environment, often more than the curriculum itself.

Participants also described a widespread disconnection between people and the natural environment, also found in previous studies (Pace, 2009; Restall et al., 2021). Drawing from post-colonial theory and the results of this research, I suggest that nature disconnection may be partly rooted in Malta's colonial history. The use of foreign environmental textbooks may have positioned British-based environmental materials as 'official knowledge' marginalizing local ecological knowledge and leaving students disconnected from their own landscapes. As one educator described, this required a process

of 'de-learning' what they were taught in school in order to teach in ways more relevant to Malta's environment. In response to research question two, influences of colonialism are reflected in current environmental education through a long-term reliance on foreign curricula and materials, the marginalization of local ecological knowledge, and the lingering effects of a system that historically positioned colonial perspectives as authoritative, shaping both what is taught about the environment and how it is understood. In response to the third research question, this research suggests that a critical environmental pedagogy has the potential to meaningfully connect learners with natural space, to see themselves as agents of change, and empower action in environmental protection and regeneration. This approach might start by recognizing environmental education in Malta as a contested discipline, shaped by colonial influence. This pedagogy can center generational and place-based knowledge that has been dismissed or subjugated, and support the process of learning, 'de-learning,' and learning again. As one participant said, it is an education that '*gets you to explore, investigate, research, get curious. To aim to live in a better world.'*

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Book Review

Peter Mayo, *Culture, Power and Education: Representation, Interpretation, Contestation*, ISBN 978-1-0328-9847-6, 2025, London and New York: Routledge, 186 pages.

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One could argue that another sociological study that asserts that education and the arts are inherently political is unnecessary. Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's classic *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (1977), originally published in French in 1970, convincingly demonstrated how social hierarchies and dominant cultural values are perpetuated by 'pedagogic actions' through a process of symbolic violence that reinforces existing power structures. Bourdieu and Passeron also showed how children from specific social origins lagged behind at school due to various perceived 'deficiencies', including linguistic capital, which serves as a tool for communication yet also determines the students' ability to make sense of logical and aesthetic structures throughout compulsory schooling and beyond.

On the other hand, one could also argue that both theory and research need to be revised or revisited on a regular basis, and that political and educational agendas and realities pass through previously inconceivable shifts from time to time. Nowhere, perhaps, is this latter possibility more in evidence than in the current swing that education is experiencing in the US. At the time of writing this review, President Donald Trump issued an order to dismantle the

Department of Education and dismiss almost half its workforce. One reason for this order is the perceived left-leaning 'wokeness' and identity politics that supposedly characterises public education. Along with a parallel turnaround on Diversity, equity and inclusion programmes that were previously supported by multiple campuses and companies following the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, this attack on the Department of Education is seen by many conservatives as a return to sanity and reinstatement of 'parental rights'.

In the current political climate, a book like Peter Mayo's *Culture, Power and Education: Representation, Interpretation, Contestation* (2025) hence comes across as a relevant and even visionary volume, having been written before the recent developments in the US. It is significant that one of the few references to the current US President in Mayo's book refers to Henry Giroux's description of 'Trumpism' as a "pandemic" (p. 60) that, like a nightmare, resurfaces periodically in a revitalised fascist age of post-truth. Mayo's book uses a Gramscian lens to argue that hegemonic social relationships are embedded in the everyday structures of society, from popular culture to schools and museums. While this spotlight on the value of a heightened awareness of the power dynamics that pervade contemporary life and education owes more to Gramsci and Freire's notion of praxis (or to Socrates' notion of the 'unexamined life') than the present push to shut down the Department of Education in the US, the book bears testimony to an ongoing encroachment on democratic life that is ignored at one's own peril.

The book's sub-title, referring to representation, interpretation and contestation, is arguably a good starting-point for readers to appreciate what the author seeks to do with this collection of chapters, many originally published as slightly different essays in other contexts. The issue of representation, popularised in academic circles by cultural theorists like Stuart Hall, demarcates a relationship between culture and the meanings we attach to cultural phenomena, almost always mediated via the use of language (or, to return to Bourdieu, 'linguistic capital'). In artistic circles,

disputes about representation, especially national representation, have been rampant in discussions about national pavilions in global events like the Venice Biennale, which was created as a late-nineteenth century platform for nation states to show off whatever they considered to be 'representative' of their countries. Such wrangling over cultures, art and their meanings confirms that the three words in Mayo's sub-title are actually interlinked and impossible to disentangle. While power may seek to fix meanings through specific systems of *representation* like language, language itself offers alternative routes that make possible multiple other *interpretations* (an example would be Hall's notion of 'decoding') and simultaneously generate various forms of *contestation*. Mayo's book is in itself a powerful exercise in 'decoding', as it relentlessly uses language to resist established forces that merely transmit and 'define' specific narratives and conventions.

The book's rigorous analysis of Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony in the first chapter illustrates how dominant ideologies are maintained not only through repressive systems within formal education but also through various cultural institutions and economic conditions. Readers can join the dots between questions about coercion and consent in the chapter on Gramsci and the more Christian-inspired pedagogies of Don Lorenzo Milani, who strove for "a critical reading of the world as manifest in its day-to-day reality" (p. 37). Or between Freire's radically transformative praxis and the need for people "to unlearn their privilege and to counter gender and racial oppression" (p. 82) in the chapter on bell hooks, intimately written in the second person. Or between Mayo's discussion of Giroux's analysis of authoritarianism and the 'hegemonic apparatuses' of institutionalised education in the chapter on Critical Pedagogy. Indeed, readers are constantly assisted in navigating the meticulous scholarly discussion and multiple geographic contexts referenced throughout the book by the author's numerous comparisons between the book's key thinkers in virtually every chapter.

The chapters that deal more directly with the arts, museums and popular culture examine the role of museums and fine art as spaces and objects that,

in the author's view, tend to encourage conventional pedagogies, focusing on "things of beauty" rather than "the tragic and violent histories that lurk beneath them" (p. 104). In the book, these conventional (apolitical) approaches to education (and curation) are paralleled by similar narratives reproducing existing (and largely hidden or disguised) power structures in works of art and architecture, such as the Cathedral of Seville, collections of silver artefacts in various museums, or the Orientalizing tendencies of Delacroix, Gauguin and other painters. The author makes frequent references to ecclesiastical contexts such as St. John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta and the undeclared stories of slavery and suffering that might have contributed to the bringing of gold and silver to Valletta's shores.

This insistence on a careful scrutiny of the political and historical culpability of art (or patronage) and the selectivity of museum collections is undoubtedly a vital component in a critical investigation of cultural representations. Mayo's concluding reference to Paul Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" (p. 145) in the Epilogue could be interpreted as the book's central rallying cry, seeking out buried histories in educational practices, the arts and cultural institutions. From the perspective of art criticism or art practice, however, the book also possibly illustrates, unwittingly, the limitations of such an approach. While Mayo concedes that museums can become sites of resistance (rather than sites of cultural reproduction in Bourdieu's sense), the hope he strives for beyond monolithic interpretations lies in explicit questions that can be raised by the museums themselves, by critical pedagogues or other persons who care to contest official narratives. Bar some examples of popular culture discussed in Chapter 9 and a handful of artists like Basquiat referenced in Chapter 5, art always seems to be at risk of functioning mainly as a Eurocentric or hegemonic tool in the service of oppressive or imperialising forces. The absence of a real engagement with art from the perspective of art itself and its ability to resist forms of oppression as well as historical art practices through intuitive or deliberate forms of aesthetic dissonance risks turning the political argument in Mayo's book into a reductionist appraisal of what is really at stake in the aesthetic domain. Putting it differently, in Mayo's

book, liberation can be achieved through praxis or a sociological analysis of things and ideas but seems to be less feasible in the field of art practice itself.

The theoretical depth of Peter Mayo's book is commendable. It easily engages with Gramscian theory and significantly contributes to studies on Giroux's output over the years. Its discussions on education, culture, and power are not only a scholarly resource but constitute something like a call to action. In uncertain times like these, this call is more urgent than ever. It is imperative to oppose conservative voices that explain struggles for social justice simply as forms of radical indoctrination, and Mayo's illuminating book does that and more by engaging critically with the cultural forces that shape our contemporary world. Along with the voices of artists subversively transforming the way we see that world, the many authors brought together so eloquently in this collection of essays present a compelling case for refusing to accept that education and culture are apolitical. The book is essential for anyone interested in how power extends into the classroom and beyond—into museums, churches, and public discourse.

References

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