

## The Importance of Teaching British Civilization to Spark the Students' Creative Historical Thinking Skill

أهمية تدريس الحضارة البريطانية لتنمية مهارة التفكير الإبداعي التاريخي لدى الطلاب الجامعيين

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Received: 02/06/2021

Accepted: 18/09/2021

Published: 31/03/2022

### ABSTRACT:

The aim of this research paper was to investigate some of the effective ways to stimulate the students' creative historical thinking in EFL classrooms. A teacher of civilization adequately addresses major issues as they face a myriad of challenges and struggle both psychologically and instructionally, as to how to realistically incorporate Western past life into the students' present life and to design an environment that encourages creativity or develop a systematic approach to teaching thinking skills as part of the university curricula. There are, however, many factors that result in the difficulty to introduce history studies to EFL classrooms.

In order to achieve this objective, the observational and analytical approaches were used. The examples that this research centred around were the Houses of Parliaments, Black Death, the Tudor Dynasty and assessing contradictory quotes written by authors of history. There are many lessons that can be drawn from these lectures despite the fact that they took place in the Medieval and Renaissance Ages. This research, then, raises so many questions as to how the students critically investigate the contradictory historical data and how they benefit from the ways, policies and measures taken by leaders in history to overcome some complicated situations.

**Keywords:** Assessment, British Civilization, Contemporary Education, Creative Historical Thinking.

### الملخص:

هدفت هذه الورقة البحثية إلى استكشاف بعض الطرق الفعالة لتحفيز التفكير الإبداعي التاريخي لدى الطلاب الجامعيين للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. يواجه أستاذ الحضارة البريطانية بعض التحديات من خلال طرحه لبعض القضايا التي تخص الثقافة الغربية على الصعيدين النفسي والتعليمي فيما يتعلق بكيفية دمج الحياة الغربية الماضية بشكل واقعي في حياة الطلاب الحالية، تصميم بيئة تشجع على الإبداع و تطوير منهج لتعليم مهارات التفكير التاريخي كجزء من مناهج وبرامج الجامعة الجزائرية.

ولتحقيق هذا الهدف، تم اعتماد المنهج التحليلي والملاحظة. الأمثلة التي ركز عليها البحث كانت حول البرلمان البريطاني، الطاعون الأسود، عائلة تيودور و مقارنة اقتباسات من كتب تاريخية متناقضة بحيث تساعد الطلاب ليس فقط على التعرف على أحداث ماضية وإنما الاستفادة من تحليلها والتعمق فيها وفهم الطرق، الوسائل والسياسات المتخذة من طرف المجتمع البريطاني في عصور مضت بعد مواجهتهم لمشكلات شبيهة بمشكلات عصرية. اهتم البحث بتقييم أهمية تطوير مهارة التفكير التاريخي في المناهج والدراسات الجزائرية من خلال وضع إسقاطات على تحديات العالم المعاصر، حيث يمكن الاستفادة من الحضارات القديمة وتمكين المتعلمين من اكتساب مجموعة واسعة من المعارف التواصلية والثقافية الأساسية لتعزيز الحس الإبداعي في أذهانهم.

كلمات مفتاحية: التقييم، الحضارة البريطانية، التعليم المعاصر، التفكير التاريخي الإبداعي.

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doi: 10.34118/ssj.v16i1.1986

<http://journals.lagh-univ.dz/index.php/ssj/article/view/1986>

ISSN: 1112 - 6752

Legal Deposit Number: 66 - 2006

ISSN: 2602 - 6090

### **1- Introduction:**

Most contemporary tendencies in education underpin that educational accomplishment is mostly based on the learners' ability to communicate, share, and use information in order to solve complex problems, adapt and innovate in response to new demands and changing circumstances. Thus, new regulations and reforms are needed to introduce methods and tools that adjust the basic thinking skills and competences, in teaching Western civilization and culture in particular. The major factors imply the scanty knowledge of history, the cultural, social and national biases in addition to the inability to correlate several methods or interdisciplinary fields.

Accordingly, this research assesses the conceivable tasks that embed as well as cultivate thinking, comprehension, analysis, interpretation and decision- making by providing applicable lesson planning and pertinent objectives. Furthermore, such tasks of the civilization sessions permit the teachers to do an initial assessment to see where students fall on the Bloom's taxonomy and classify the educational goals. This taxonomy, as an educational tool, is introduced by designing a triangular diagram that represents the different ways educational attainment rises through six different steps of learning, starting from recalling facts and basic concepts to explaining ideas, to the use of information in different situations, to drawing connections among ideas, to justifying a stand or decision, to producing a new or original work. This marks the aim of contemporary educational system which aims at reshaping the personality of tolerant students: diverse citizens.

### **2- The Rationale:**

The study reinforces the positive impression and feedback of students who showed interest in discussing debatable issues in an attempt to find conceivable solutions to the contemporary social problems that they discover after studying historical events. Moreover, the research asserts the importance of stimulating the students' creative thinking through introducing problem- solving tasks that incorporate their daily life challenges to past issues. The study recommends the need to introduce contemporary methods in teaching civilization to EFL teachers.

This poses questions and a dilemma for educators, syllabus designers and teachers, the kinds of skills and competencies that can solve such a dilemma include ways of thinking critically and creatively. For many people, the concept of creative thinking conjures the images of the famed geniuses while teaching civilization is mistakenly equated with memorizing historical events as introduced by Erikson who claimed the need to train students read, write and think like historians instead of simply giving them photocopies of "primary sources" (p.1067).

### **3- Objectives:**

The main objective of this paper was to describe what factors pedagogues may take into account in making decisions as whether to adopt new methods in teaching civilization to

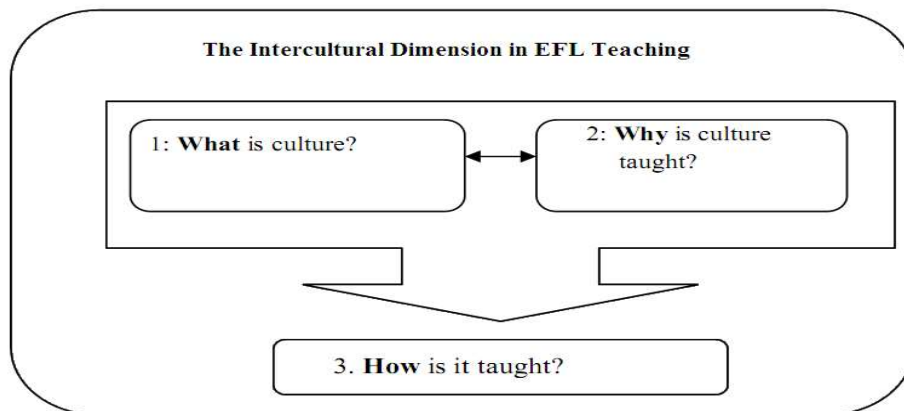
enhance creative thinking. Another aim was to assess the accessibility and acceptability to contemporary ways of sparking creative thinking. A third aim could be the illustration of some of the ways that could be beneficial to students to solve the problems of the contemporary world.

#### 4- Importance

The importance of the study lies in the fact that the results will help evaluate the quality of teaching English in EFL classrooms rendered by academic performance, attitude and skills acquired in relation to the nature of the courses of Civilization. This study may foster new ways of enhancing knowledge, skills and attitudes which the contemporary tendency of education reinforces.

In this study, the researchers set out to explore the cognitions that Algerian teachers at the university level have about the intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching. In light of the discussion in the theoretical framework of this research, the intercultural dimension can be understood as consisting of three components:

- 1-Conceptions about what culture in FLT is,
- 2- beliefs about why culture is taught, in other words, beliefs about the cultural objectives of FLT, and
- 3- teaching practices aimed at reaching those objectives. The word “belief” is used in the meaning formulated by Harvey (Qtd. in Pajares, 1992: 313), as “an individual’s representation of reality that has enough validity, truth, or credibility to guide thought and behaviour.” Hence, conceptions about culture and beliefs about the cultural objectives are seen as interacting and together influencing classroom practice. The relationship between the three components is illustrated in Figure 1 below. What, why and how are used as question words to highlight the starting point of the study within classical didactics.



**Figure 1. The Intercultural Dimension**

The Intercultural Dimension; perceived in this study as:

- 1) conceptions of culture,
- 2) cultural objectives, and

- 3) the relationship of both of these to how it is taught.

## 5- Literature Review

In recent years, there has been considerable interest in encouraging learners work independently, learn and develop their cognitive process, taking into consideration the ongoing events of modern life. A growing body of literature has introduced the necessity for integrating thinking skills to the curriculum so that the aim of teaching culture and history shifts from teaching language to teaching the skills that can be practically employed after university graduation alongside knowledge transmission. In his seminal book, *Creative Historical Thinking* (2018), Michael Douma illustrates that history should not be focused on memorizing facts, but it should help train learners to think creatively and improve their creative thinking skill. Douma reinforces that history should be considered a subject that has a positive impact on the individual's life, personality and experience; thus, it can be practised as an integrally beneficial outcome. The case studies and the examples that the author introduces indicate the importance of integrating creative tools as a practical guide to learn about the past through profoundly different perspectives and highlight the value of teaching history at the personal and communal levels.

Douma's use of creative tools is fully justified, plausible, well-grounded, comprehensive and endorsed by experience. To date, this methodology has only been applied to Western learners. This research, then, is an attempt to provide a practical endeavour of Douma's contributions to the field by providing some examples of activities and students' feedback in the sessions of British Civilization in an Algerian university, aiming to help remedy the problem of fruitless history education and eliminate the unneeded fear of the course of civilization. The findings of this research seem to support the conclusions of Douma's book.

## 6- Definition of Civilization:

Defining the term 'civilization' has demonstrated to be a challenging task, and the numerous endeavors by authors from diverse fields to arrive at a single, final and inclusive definition have continued to spin out of control. This stems from the fact that it is viewed through the various approaches that arise from its very nature and aspects. The following definitions illustrate some common characteristics of the use of the term.

Etymologically, it is derived from "civil+ -ization" to mean "law which makes a criminal process civil" or from French "civilization, serving as an opposite to barbarity and a distinct word from civility" ([www. Etymologyonline.com](http://www.Etymologyonline.com)). Similarly, Ayto states that the word "civil" comes from Latin *civis* 'citizen' had two adjectival derivatives which have passed into English: *civicus*, source of civic, and *civilis*, from which, via Old French, we get civil" (p. 111). The term is also defined in both Cambridge and Webster's Dictionaries as follows:

human society with its well-developed social organizations, or the culture and way of life of a society or country at a particular period in time;

- a place that has comfortable living conditions;
- a relatively high level of cultural and technological development;
- specifically: the stage of cultural development at which writing and the keeping of written records is attained.

The four definitions reinforce that civilization is the high state of condition of individuals who produce and benefit from living and functioning together cooperatively with well-organized and well- developed living conditions.

### **7- The Distinctions between Civilization and Culture:**

The two terms are often used as synonymous or employed interchangeably in general usage. In fact, Civilization introduces a phase of cultural progress while culture refers to a way of living shared by humans and can be spread from one generation to another. In this sense, civilization indicates the development of urban settlement and culture becomes one of the complex elements or part of civilization. In addition, culture can be either tangible or intangible while civilization is something that is more tangible as it represents a high level of industry, architecture, science and government characterized by aesthetic, spiritual, intellectual and technological realization. Botz-Bornstein claims that civilization “refers more to material, technical, economic, and social facts while [culture] refers to spiritual, intellectual and artistic phenomena” (p.p. 10-11). Culture can cultivate and exist without shaping a high level of living conditions; yet, civilization can never flourish without cultural manifestation.

### **8- Civilization Studies in the Syllabus**

On the basis of the definition of civilization, one may say it is not synonymous to culture through one can learn about specific and general knowledge about manners of behaviour, skills, beliefs, values, philosophy, art, norms and attitudes which guides individuals and inclines them to function as a group.

The term culture, as used in the present research, refers to something beyond art, literature and civilization. It encompasses the system of values, beliefs and behavioural patterns or lifestyles of a society or group of people. According to (Moran, 2001:5), it refers mainly to “the ability to enter other cultures and communicate effectively and appropriately, establish and maintain relationships, and carry out tasks with people of these cultures”. The word "implicit" in this definition concerns the researchers' strong belief that foreign language teachers will do better if they go beyond background studies or what are customarily called “civilization modules” in the implementation of the English course syllabus.

### **9- Creative Historical Thinking:**

A good example of Contemporary Models for Teaching Civilization Creatively can be found in Michael Douma's book Creative Historical Thinking which asserts that the subject matter should take into account individuals' experience (Douma, 2018, p. 51). It also investigates pioneering methods to think as well as write about history. In addition, it examines, with

examples and case studies, the significance of discussing historical events from different points of view that estimate and illustrate the value of learning about history and culture.

### **10- Research Questions:**

In order to achieve the aims, this research raises the following questions:

- Is the subject matter likely to interest the students / teachers?
- How can the course of Civilization be easily exploited for language learning, purposes and cognitive skills' development?
- To what extent may teachers and learners overcome some obstacles in the course of civilization regarding creativity?

### **11- Hypotheses:**

This research, then, claims that:

- teaching Civilization creates anxiety for teachers and boredom to students when using traditional methods.
- new ways and methods should be introduced to both teachers and learners of the Civilization's module to easily exploit it for language learning purposes that aim at improving cognitive skills' development and fit the changes and the challenges of the contemporary world.
- there is a possibility of sparking creative historical thinking and translating historical and cultural events into the real life defies.

### **12- Approaches:**

In order to find answers to the research questions, the researchers conducted a questionnaire, an interview in addition to the use of Empiricist Approach based on observation. The methods used in this study will be clarified, and how they have been used in order to reach the ultimate goal. This can be described as revealing whether or not language teaching in Algerian universities today can be described as intercultural, in the sense that culture is taught with the aim of promoting intercultural understanding, tolerance and empathy; qualities which are needed in our world now more than ever.

### **13- Methodology of Research:**

#### **13-1- Location and Time of Study:**

The study was conducted in the Department of English at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat. Laghouat is a province in Algeria, 400 km (250 mi) south of the Algerian capital Algiers. The research had been carried out in the academic year since 2019-2020 until the data were fully collected.

### **13-2- Study Population:**

The sample chosen for this study was composed of 100 Third-Year students from the Department of English at Amar Telidji University of Laghouat, between the ages of 21 and 23. 60 of them are females and 40 are males divided into three groups and each group received similar tasks and activities.

### **13-3- Data Collection Techniques**

Both lectures and workshops were delivered in the sessions of Civilization. The teacher used different methods and tools in the sessions such as presentations, discussion, workshops and team work. The students discovered the thinking skills, including creative thinking skills in their second year with their teacher of Didactics. They also introduced presentations about the topic in the class.

### **13-4- Data Analysis Methods**

Based on the students' answers, discussions and assignments, the teacher took them as the subject matter of this research. In order to validate the analysis and the results of the study, the research is upheld by conducting a questionnaire that asks students about their vision of the module before and after the sessions of Civilization to see the impact of the tasks chosen on the students' vision of today's issues and their benefit from past events in history.

### **14-Questionnaire:**

The first section was framed so as to allow for statistical analysis of the students' answers and to get feedback of quantitative nature. The second section comprises a number of open-ended questions to allow for more unstructured commentary and to get feedback of qualitative nature. The third section is based on Observation/ Empiricist Approach in which the teacher asked the students to answer questions that were related to the courses of Civilization and then analyzed them.

### **15- Samples of Some Tasks:**

In these tasks, the teacher's aim is to reflect the historical events to the students' challenges and life. The questions were chosen carefully in order to link the past to the present and discuss contemporary issues.

1- The Course of UK Parliament (compared to students' representation and elections):

After finishing the course, the teacher asked the students about youth and mini-parliaments, the students' Council and the programme that they wanted to implement as well as the objectives that they wanted to realize. Such a question can encourage students to think about the opportunities they may have to be ambitious individuals in their communities.

2- The Course of Black Death (compared to Corona period):

The aim of this task is to investigate with the students the epidemics of the contemporary world and compare them to past events. The students can have the possibility to think of

possible solutions to current diseases such as Ebola and Coronavirus. When the students study how old people dealt with such a problem, they feel the responsibility towards their countries and they become fully aware that they have to react in their societies in order to save others' lives.

These are the questions:

Q1: Would it make a big difference to our country if 69 million people died in a short period of time?

Doctors

Teachers

Cleaners

Q2: Your local area introduces the concept of Quarantine, as do many others. How does Quarantine affect your life at home and at work?

Q3: In the aftermath of the plague, how do you feel? What are the consequences of everything that has happened?

Q4: What do you feel about the fact that the disease still exists today? Do you think that what we know about it historically can help us understand more about it in the present?

3- The Tudor Dynasty (How to be involved in political issues and leadership):

The main aim of this task is to benefit from the monarch's policies and reaction of the defies of their societies. Students can learn leadership traits and deduce the qualities of successful leaders.

Q1: Great leaders consistently possess core leadership traits. Based on your readings and research, who holds these aspects in the Tudor family (the monarchs)? Why?

Q2: Which leader in the contemporary era may resemble one of the Tudor kings or queens in their personalities and decision making, according to you? Justify.

### **16-The Questionnaire:**

The researchers asked 100 Third-Year students, females and males, from Ammar Telidji University of Laghouat, Algeria. The researchers also evaluated the assignments' answers of the students of one semester (3 months).

#### **16-1-The Main Questions of the Questionnaire**

- The death of half of population/ leadership traits/ individual's achievements:
- To what extent do you think these questions reflect your life and personality?
- To what extent do you think these questions stimulate your creative/critical thinking?

#### **16-2- Feedback 1**

"Overall, the task has taught me how to use different techniques in the research process as well as to be open- minded when it comes to controversial facts especially when it is related to the historical background of an important figure. I have also learned to interpret events and stories according to my personal knowledge and not to be a passive learner."



### **16-3- Feedback2**

“Until the time of answering these questions, I feel a strong attachment to the university topics when my eyes fall upon such topics. The 3 questions above did reflect both my life and personality to some extent. I remember last time discussing with a friend of mine about what if “the half of the population is gone”, I found myself discussing it from a movie-based perspective until I shifted to discuss the question from what I have been dealing with in Civilization and how more than two thirds of the English population went apart. We had multi-vision discussion which ended up looking for historical content on the Net to see even what historians said.”

### **16-4- Analysis**

The feedback indicates the importance of selecting questions that may enhance the creativity of the students and involve them in problem- solving situations from their real lives, and thus reinforcing the objectives of contemporary tendencies and approaches of education as well as pedagogy.

### **17- Results and Discussions:**

This paper sheds light on the significance of teaching British Civilization to university students and investigates the negative or undecided attitudes towards the sessions of British Civilization. Eventually, this seems to be a common problem in teaching modules related to civilization and culture. It turns out to be even more problematic because the learners are studying a Western culture which is different from their own. Eventually, there are growing appeals for finding new ways, methods and tools to motivate both EFL teachers and students and to help them get involved in the field. This is now a mature tendency which is now being spun out into educational applications and it has been widely adopted in the new educational reforms, discussing the outcomes of a wealth of well-understood methods. A challenging problem which arises in this domain is the shift from learning the language and culture to developing the cognitive skills. In fact, designing tasks that aim at improving the thinking skills has been widely considered to be a good way to employ historical events to interpret contemporary issues and find new ways to solve today's problem and avoid the repetition of mistakes committed in the past. This appears as a more straightforward concern compared to the questions raised about grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation.

As described above, one of the main overall objectives of the evaluative study of the assignments and the answers of the students is to investigate the learners' attitudes towards the course of British Civilization and its impact outside the university. In this study, 100 Third-Year students were asked about the reflection of the questions and tasks of Civilization on their lives and personalities. After dealing with the new activities that relate past events to present and future challenges, the students reinforced the positive impact of sessions and explained their ability to understand contemporary issues by relating them to past events in the British Civilization. This indicates that the students' negative attitude and the undecided attitude towards Civilization usually result from the fact the sessions make the students passive as they

do not benefit from the activities in their daily life; the students, in this case, consider the sessions a source of information about ancient civilizations that are unnecessary to their personal lives. Accordingly, the students who participated as a sample of this research used to think that the sessions of Civilization were not of great help as the subject matter was difficult in terms of language and contradictory historical events. They also used to think that they had to memorize names, places and dates for examinations and tests. Possible explanations to the students' positive feedback after the sessions is that they could realize that British Civilization can provide them with multidisciplinary knowledge and enable them to analyse tasks from different perspectives or compare their culture to a Western culture.

In addition, the assignments submitted by the students showed the interest of students to discover the British Civilization, bring history to life and learn from the past. Indeed, studying culture and historical events can raise questions on the value of someone's identity to shape the way of thinking and manifest responsible behaviour in order not to repeat others' mistakes. The module can illustrate the changes and the development that may occur in any society in order to draw up future prospects and legacy for future generations who follow.

### **18- Conclusion:**

In conclusion, enhancing students creative thinking in EFL classroom context will be more interesting and effective by teaching Civilization as the media to show students how to creatively respond to a case and practise some creative thinking activities through reading and analyzing historical and cultural events. It is also believed that it would perform good practice on creative thinking concept since the conclusion learned by analyzing texts can be applied in the students' daily life. There is, then, a need to teach Civilization critically and creatively and not only relying on the ability to answer some sort of questions provided by teacher in class but also the ability to make judgment upon the statement brought in a class or the ability to make decision. The next method is to adapt techniques by experts such as exercises, programs, or material.

### **19-Recommendations:**

International conference for teachers of universities, pedagogues and syllabus designers on integrating tasks that stimulate creative historical thinking;

Collaboration between teachers of civilization and the teachers of psychology to benefit from the power of cognitive development in education;

Introducing critical and creative thinking to teachers and students;

The tasks of the module of Civilization should indicate questions to get students to engage in reflection on their lives in a way that lays foundation for further creative reflection, after they have learnt to use the elements, the standards and the discipline itself;

Incorporating concepts from the discipline into the students' thinking.

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