

Received : 09/04/2018

Published : 30/06/2018

## Civilisation In An Efl Class: A Study Of Goal Achievement

**Nacéra Djouimai<sup>1\*</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> University of Algiers 2, Algeria

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the present state of civilisation (history) teaching in the English department, through an analysis of the proposed syllabus. Teaching history and studying historical texts involve a mastery of reading and understanding the historical 'jargon'; as well as having a sound cultural background that would enable learners to appreciate facts and political and economic concepts. The findings of this paper may yield further insights for implementing teaching strategies in a non-English speaking country like Algeria, whose educational systems are wavering between modern and traditional practices. Hence, a careful analysis of the learners needs must be carried on as there is limited use of communicative language teaching methodology which brings to the foreground their abilities. As well, students' attitudes and goals may be different from that designed by the educational authorities. Hence, teaching history can be problematic if the final goals are not clearly defined and distinguished.

The world has become interlinked in a multitude of ways. Indeed, nowadays, no one can proceed to a narrow specialisation as it is impossible to study anything in isolation from the host of interlinked subjects. Hence, the need to adapt and develop interdisciplinary approaches in the high education syllabi. This paper considers the teaching of civilisation as presented in the English curriculum; and how beneficial would it be for both students and teachers if it is coupled with literature within a fully integrated framework. Also, it is not a definite statement on interdisciplinarity, but is meant to generate thought and discussion. I hope it will help both students and faculty to develop this integrative approach and evaluate its place. The choice of this presentation stems from my personal experience as a teacher of this course. Thus, it is a personal attempt to probe into the immense complexities of the teaching/learning process. As such it is heavily influenced by my own opinions; therefore, one and all are welcome to disagree on any view point put forward. The term civilisation is complex in itself as it operates on a multidisciplinary model to the point that it can be synonymous of interdisciplinarity. In fact, it encompasses a wide range of disciplines and areas of researches such as: history, politics, economics, arts and culture and literature, to name but a few. However, for the sake of conciseness and due to time limitation, I have opted for selectiveness in outlining the interdisciplinary areas to be covered in this paper.

To begin with, I deemed it necessary to present a brief definition of interdisciplinarity –which the audience has surely been introduced to – nonetheless, sometimes repetitions may not be superfluous. Among the various definitions of this approach, I have selected the following:

“Interdisciplinarity has been variously defined in this century: as a methodology, a concept, a process, a way of thinking, a philosophy, and a reflexive ideology. It has been linked with attempts to expose the dangers of fragmentation, to re-establish old connections, to explore emerging relations, and to create new subjects adequate to handle our practical and conceptual needs... Interdisciplinarity is a means of solving problems and answering questions that cannot be satisfactorily addressed using single methods or approaches” (Klein, 1996)

This definition is a further assertion that we live in a complex environment, and that we constantly draw on and integrate diverse information from our education and experience to make decisions, understand phenomena and generally make sense of this world. This informal and at the same unconscious process itself represents a sort of interdisciplinary analysis. Transposed to academic discipline it involves drawing on specialized knowledge, concepts and theories, and to integrate them to create deeper understanding; if not a new knowledge possibly in terms of solutions to problems or ways of thinking about problems.

Despite its potential, the teaching of civilisation raises the question whether it is not peripheral considering the different language –based subjects; witness the students’ poor performance in this area. Indeed, there is a gap between language study and the historical ‘jargon’. For the learners as a whole, language study involves the communicative approach which is the students’ target to language learning. Considering civilisation and literature, some of them may question their usefulness within the curriculum. Their importance can only be meaningful once the ultimate goals are clearly defined by the educational authorities.

The EFL program is generally designed to assist students in acquiring the English proficiency they need in the four skills namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking. More specifically, the British civilisation course is mainly conceived to introduce them to British history using a chronological approach. This inevitably invokes an incursion into the politics, economy and culture of this nation. Linguistically speaking it exposes them to a specific vocabulary whereby language skills and a metalanguage are necessary to produce well structured essays. Additionally, they are presented with a host of facts and events which they have to analyse using all the techniques of humanities, to raise questions and probe for appropriate answers. Studying history is like travelling backward in time, where we can appreciate and measure the heavy cost paid by past generations for the achievements of the present. Theoretically this may seem perfect, but practically one wonders if our students are well equipped to undertake such a journey as it demands the mastering of multidisciplinary skills.

At the pedagogical level, the teacher must seek to build situations in which the students are forced to reflect, thus ensuring that learning will not end the minute they are off campus. S/he must allow the learners explore the text before intervening. This reflection will help them construct new schemes in relation to the theories and concepts involved by the subject. Here

the teacher operates a switch from a teacher-centred methodology towards a learner-centred pedagogy that will bring out the student's idiosyncratic interpretations of the different texts he is exposed to. Also drawing parallels with their own history and culture may incite them to feel involved and may be curious to find common grounds; or on the contrary be able to assess and explain the differences with other cultures. So using an interdisciplinary methodology to study a historical event is proving to be an essential intellectual process to find unity and synthesis between the different disciplines, as it is a positive incentive for learners to undertake individual initiatives. Hence, civilisation and literature which are taught as autonomous units in the English curriculum could be rendered independent as the symbiosis between them has become unavoidable. Indeed, the two modules are more rewarding for the student and teacher when taught within an integrated framework. The traditional monodisciplinary method has proved its pedagogical limit as it focuses on only one subject at a time. Additionally, any literary text is considered as the reflection of society hence the importance to integrate the two subject matters to form a coherent entity.

In practice, understanding the concept of imperialism for instance, might necessitate drawing on economy to weigh the cost and benefits, and on sociology to understand public perception and response to the phenomenon. In dealing with British imperialism the students need to identify the reasons of this ideology and to link it to the industrial revolution to have a full picture of the economic, political and social motivations that sustained it. Similarly, understanding the 'Laissez-Faire' theory entails the learners to have a general knowledge in economy to understand the basic principle of "supply and demand", and how this affects prices; as well as to assess its contribution to the welfare of the British society. This elaborated theory ascertained that the natural order of things was best designed to produce the most beneficent results for men. In other words, this meant that the government should not impede by regulations any man's enterprise aimed at promoting both his welfare and that of the society in which he lived. This policy of extreme individualism in economic matters coupled with social Darwinism summarizes the whole nineteenth century political philosophy and helps understand British hegemony as it offers a wide scope of interpretations.

Likewise, literary works contributed as well to explain if not justify imperialism. In this instance, to understand a literary text the learners need to be equipped with some psychoanalysis insight to interpret works, to tie an author's life and beliefs to his work and expand on how they interact and overlap. Kipling, for example, tried to 'soften' British occupation of overseas territory, describing imperialism as 'the white man's burden'. The implication of this view was that the empire existed not for the benefit of Britain, but in order that primitive peoples, incapable of self-government, needed British guidance to become civilized. Does not this paternalistic view ring a bell as to what is happening nowadays in Arab and African countries? Once again western interference is justified and presented as necessary to implement democracy. Amazing how history does effectively repeat itself!!

The variety of disciplines involved in studying historical issues, demonstrate the necessity to adopt an integrative approach in research and education that will redefine disciplinary boundaries; and wholly challenge the monodisciplinary structure. Civilisation and literature which share common epistemology render the synthesis and analysis of socio economic,

political and cultural problems more appealing. At all these levels of understanding, the teacher's intervention is mandatory to facilitate comprehension as sometimes s/he has to opt for a compromise level for the course to be accessible to the majority. It has been noticed that pro active students learn more things in a better way, than those who passively wait to be taught. The overall aim of the course is to develop a historical awareness and curiosity that should enable the learners to communicate more effectively. There are a handful of objectives to be attained when dealing with history, including and I enumerate:

- 1: to familiarize students with basic historical,  
economic, political and cultural concepts.
- 2: to teach a foreign language via content-based  
instructional methods.
- 3: to offer stimuli for exploring other cultures, to  
better assess their own
- 4: to improve their general and specific English  
(use of a metalanguage).
- 5: to broaden their cultural horizon.

However, all these objectives can be successfully achieved if students' expectations are effectively dealt with. In fact, the important thing is not that they memorize dates and specific facts of a historical topic, but to learn skills that might help them to understand similar situations in the real word. The students who are majoring in English aspire to master the different aspects of the language so as to be competitive.

As teachers in higher education, we expect excellence from our students which is really aiming high. However, we have become so involved with our subject discipline that we sometimes forget the basic fact that the major proportion of graduates –as statistics indicate– do not remain within the confines of their academic degree. This is true mainly concerning the humanities; as doctors, research scientists, physicians and so on, are able to use the knowledge acquired directly in their new professional activity. On the other hand, universities have become nowadays institutions that are professionally oriented. Students seek university degrees because they wish to get training for a professional career, and a well paid occupation that will assure them a secure position within the society. To meet the ultimate goals of students, the EFL program should adapt itself to the new exigencies within the framework of globalisation.

In a non-English speaking country like Algeria whose educational systems are wavering between modern and traditional practices, priorities should be clearly defined in relation to teaching foreign languages. New strategies must be developed in a way to find a footbridge between theory and practice. As well, it is advisable to develop an adequate pedagogy which

enables the learners to be independent so as to develop critical thinking and improving their potential for language use. This will be of a valuable help in their future enterprises.

## References

1. Hillier, H,(2004), *Analysing Real Texts: Researches Studies in Modern English Language*. London: Basingstoke, Palgrave McMillan.
2. Hoey, M,(2001), *Textual Interaction: An Introduction to Written Discourse Analysis*. London, Routledge.
3. Klein, J.T, (1996), *Crossing Boundaries: Knowledge, Disciplinarity, and Interdisciplinarity*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press.
4. Klein, J.T,(1990), *Interdisciplinarity, History Theory, and Practice*. USA: Wayne State University Press.
5. Sinclair, J.M, (2004), *Trust the Text: Language, Corpus, and Discourse*. London: Routledge.