Meeting the new challenges in the teaching of Western civilization for EFL students

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Abstract

Globalization has affected every aspect of life, particularly higher education. New values and aspirations came to shape learners' attitudes towards education, exemplified by slender engagement in classes. Algerian EFL students are a good case in point. This urged teachers to make strenuous efforts to create convenient learning environments. Regarding the course of Western civilization, they had to equip themselves with new skills. This paper aims to explore, through the specific experience of the author, the nature of the adjustments made, pending both approaches and educational strategies. To conduct this investigation, the researcher used both a self-assessment and a student questionnaire destined for first-year students. The findings indicate the possibility of creating student-centered classes through the use of different teaching techniques such as outline composition, text analysis, discussion sequences, and summary writing. The paper demonstrates the necessity of constant updating of one's teaching approaches and strategies.

Keywords: Globalization; higher education; new skills; student-centered classes; Western civilization.

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1. Introduction

Teaching is by far an onerous process that requires constant adjustments on the part of teachers to meet the needs of learners and, most importantly, to cope with a rapidly- evolving environment (Mehdaoui, 2017). In the context of globalization, such changes were epitomized by the rise of the internet and its corollary fast communication technologies. These in turn affected the mode of teaching and learning as new needs and new objectives emerged.

1.1. Literature review

This literary review will shed light on several points that are crucial for understanding the teaching of culture and civilization. These include the importance of teaching this course, learners' preferences, and approaches to the Western civilization course.

1.1.1. Importance of teaching civilization in EFL classes

Before highlighting the objectives behind the teaching of civilization, it is interesting first to explain the concept of civilization. Lexically, the word derives from the French term 'civilizer' which by the first half of the eighteenth century was a term of jurisprudence referring to the transformation of a criminal trial into a civil one. The connotation of 'civilized statuses appeared in the year 1756 by dint of Mirabeau and Voltaire's essays: "Traité de la Population" and "Essai sur les Moeurs et sur l'Esprit des Nations," contrasting thereby civilization and barbarism.

In the Islamic culture, the connotation of the word was set along three different epochs: one in the fourteenth century, the other during the nineteenth century, and the third during the twentieth century. The first definition was provided by Ibn Khaldun (2012) who highlighted the concept in his book *The Muqaddimah the Introduction'*. He used three terms, namely 'hadara', 'Umran', and 'Ilm el Umran' (the science of civilization) (Benlahcane, 2017). For him, civilization implied both geographical and social connotations. The former referred to people living in a city (el hoddar) as contrasted to those living in a village (el badw), in other words, a sedentary way of life as opposed to nomadic. The latter alluded to the act of socialization, "the necessary character of social organization". Arguably, the largeness of the geographical area alongside social organization was to guarantee the settlement of people and their material advancement.

The second definition of civilization was set by a group of scholars such as Rifaa al Tahtawi, Mohamed Abdu, and Rachid Reda for whom the term meant 'el tamadun, that is, living in a city. In the twentieth century, the Algerian scholar Malek Bennabi (2012) secured a workable definition of the term in his books *Moushkilate el hadara 'The Problems of Civilisation'* and *Chourout el hadara 'Conditions of civilization'* where he set three parameters for peoples' development, notably man 'insane', soil 'turab', and time 'waqt'. This means that when adequate resources are carefully exploited by men, and when due consideration is given to time, the conditions of civilization are guaranteed.

Having defined the concept of civilization, let us consider its connotation in the context of foreign language teaching. It should be noted at this level that civilization in this setting is used interchangeably with culture. Generally, two approaches are relied on in the analysis of the concept of culture, viz., the anthropological, and the sociological. Anthropologists view culture as the whole way of life. Sociologists perceive culture from a different angle and consider it as everything that binds a society together. Richard Brislin (as cited in. Kramsh, 1993) conveys these ties through ideas, values, and assumptions about life, as well as the bulk of activities that are unconsciously unquestioned by people. As to the necessity of teaching culture in the language classroom, the emphasis is put on achieving intercultural communicative competence. Here, Byram and Fleming (1998) assert, "someone who has intercultural competence has knowledge of one, or preferably, more cultures and social identities, and can discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have never been prepared directly" (as cited in Facchinetti, 2011, p.242)

The purpose behind studying British or American civilizations is essentially related to several objectives, namely the promotion of intercultural competence, or cultural empathy, the identification of the cultural traits that enabled the British and Americans to raise prominent civilizations, the consolidation of linguistic competence, and the hastening of critical thinking. Indeed, it is largely the latter that primes high in students' instruction as factual knowledge is easily available, especially with the internet. Students are called to read different kinds of documents which bring an important array of information that must be sifted and evaluated. Critical thinking ought to be embedded within a context, not in an isolated way. In other words, it should be integrated within the course as part of students' in-class engagement (Savish, 2009). Hence, the concern of the course of culture and civilization for first-year students (in the Algerian context) is oriented towards the achievement of critical solving skills which involve the use of reasoning and logical tools such as the comparison of ideas, determination of cause-effect nexus, recognition of the most momentous idea, and generalizations. The latter involves either an inductive generalization (from a set of examples to a specific idea) or an analogy (generalization from relationships among related concepts) (Lennie, 2010). No less significant is the boosting of the writing skill as students are required to undergo frequent written assignments in class. These, in turn, are meant to prepare them for writing short essays for the exams.

1.1.2. Learners' preferences

The age of globalization, which was supposedly destined to bolster development through free investment and the large-scale availability of products, resulted in uneven rates of advance. Developed countries got richer; whole developing countries sank into myriad socio-economic and political problems. Inflation and unemployment constituted the major impacts of this, decreasing thereby peoples' standards of living. This crisis cast its shadow on cultural life, essentially the attitude of learners towards education. In Algeria, for instance, higher education, which was in the past held in great esteem as the passport to a better life, is no longer conceived in the same way. New values and principles found their way among the youth, such as contempt for hard work (studies), attachment to easy-money-making expedients, passivity as a secure way to happiness, and cheating as an easy means for educational success and grade promotion. Unquestionably, these impacted the students' stand on schools and higher education. Learners developed a great disdain for traditional study modes such as dry classes. This was equally harnessed by the heavy influence of the internet and social media which are associated with different benefits such as sound, image, and movement. The internet makes it possible to get access to thousands of documents (books, articles, dictionaries) in a magical spell of the mouse that lasts barely a second.

1.1.3. Approaches in the Western civilization course

Traditionally, the model of teaching Western civilization was the teacher-engaged lecture, whereby the lecturer presented his conference (lecture) to passive learners whose chief concern was to note every piece of information. The reason behind that was the scarcity of resources on one hand, and their complexity on the other hand. It is worth mentioning here that there was no internet in those times, and the teacher's explanation was taught sufficiently overwhelming. This approach was arduously castigated because it impacted students' academic progress (Weinraub,1998) as it relied chiefly on rote memorization, a practice fervently loaded by students. In fact, with globalization and the rise of the internet, a new approach made its way, i.e., the student-engaged approach, where the instructor was to act simply as a guide. In other words, there was to be a kind of partnership between the teacher and the learners (Louahla, 2017). Subsequently, teachers were required to be proficient in digital numeracy to design courses that appealed to learners' preferences. Yet, despite this change, one should not ignore three parameters. The first is the fact that language students are not interested in factual knowledge (facts and events) in the same way as those pursuing historical studies (Cigh, 2014). The second is related to the size of the class. This means that with large-size classes it is difficult to involve all the learners and ascertain their comprehension (Hayes, 1997). The last has to do with the heterogeneous level of students, which, indeed, slows the acquisition process .

From another angle, the stirring of students' motivation cannot be achieved with a disconnected approach in the sense that there is a focus simply on Western civilization. In this vein, Hourdakis et al. (2018) criticize an important point in the teaching of civilization, which is the study of the past of the West and an omission of the past of the world. Marino (2011) adds here that "the world's history reads as the legacy of actions taken by the West." The main hindrance to this is the 'fostering of insular feelings and the ingraining of stereotypes regarding the non-Western world (Broom, 2010). Hourdakis et al. (2018) earnestly applaud the momentum of the global approach according to which there would be an association between the West and the rest of the world. Indeed, the integration of the latter is extremely significant in creating the interconnectedness between the two, and, most importantly, the bolstering of reflective thinking. In the context of British or American civilizations, one can, for instance, link that with the Muslim and African civilizations. The merit of this is to institute cross-cultural interactions that would elucidate episodes of continuity and change (Brown, 1987). It follows, then, that the use of a global approach would confer great benefits on learners as it would steadily foster their critical thinking, and breed the development of empathy, tolerance, and mutual understanding (Bunge, 1994).

Additionally, the adoption of in-depth analysis, or what is termed the post-holing approach, is largely recommended by educators to increase the learners' involvement. The latter refers to an in-depth exploration of the content of a course by considering the "important events, periods, persons, and ideas" (Keller, 1968, p.156). To exemplify this, the civilization instructor (in the case of first-year EFL students) can, for instance, design the process of European exploration of the Americas that probes the following points: (the pre-European explorers; the reasons behind the beginning of European exploration; which nations were involved in this? How was this process? What were the effects of those explorations on the Europeans and the natives?). Kerr (2009) contends that this approach promotes students' comprehension and engagement.

Side by side with that, educators ought to endorse the adoption of the intercultural approach that considers culture as a constantly evolving social practice. Liddicoat and Scarino (2009) admit that this approach provides the arena for a multi-layered understanding of culture. This comprises (i) the teaching of a lingua culture, (ii) a comparison between the source and target cultures, and (iii) intercultural exploration (Lo Bianco et al., 1999, p. 11). In this vein, the content of the culture and civilization course should comprise a combination of both big 'C' and small 'c' cultures; similarities and differences between the source and target cultures; non-verbal communication; openness, curiosity, empathy and nonjudgmental thinking (Mehdaoui, 2017).

1.2.   Purpose of study

The purpose of this paper is to explore the new modes of teaching civilization to elucidate how the challenges in the course of culture and civilization (first-year students) were counteracted. This survey is significant in the sense that it offers concrete teaching approaches and strategies grounded in real-life contexts. To undertake that study, it is pertinent to ask the following questions:

•   What is the objective behind teaching civilization in the EFL class?

•   Which approaches and teaching strategies do teachers of culture and civilization use to engage their learners?

•   How far do those approaches and teaching strategies satisfy the needs of learners?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1.   Participants

The purpose of this paper is to provide some practical teaching practices in the course of culture and civilization that were designed as a response to the exigencies of contemporary challenges. To achieve that, the researcher used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The population of the study concerns first-year Algerian EFL students at Saida University for the current year (240 students). A

sample population of 89 students was selected for the survey purposes (those who attended the course). They were chosen according to convenience sampling as the author instructs this course to three groups numbering 120.

2.2. Data collection

To collect data, two research instruments were used: a canvassing of the instructor's actual teaching strategies, namely outline composition (word stretching), text analysis, discussion sequences, and summary writing, in addition to a semi-structured questionnaire destined for students.

3. Results

3.1. Scrutinization of the teacher's strategies in the civilization course

Before unveiling those strategies, it is important, first, to present the course of culture and civilization to first-year students. The curriculum comprises two semesters: the first is devoted to the exploration of British civilization; while the second is concerned with American civilization. The author instructed simply American civilization. The syllabus consists of the Native Americans, European explorations, early settlements, the establishment of the 13 colonies, the French and Indian war, the roots of the revolution, and American independence. Regarding the scrutinization of the author's strategies in this course, the instruction of the subject was carried out through the four approaches highlighted above, namely the student-engaged class where interest was put on a totalitarian engagement of learners, the global approach that associated Western and Muslim civilizations, the post-holing approach that paid attention to a comprehension explanation, and the intercultural communicative approach whereby learners were induced to empathize and respect the culture of the other through debate sequences. The integration of Muslim civilization was done as an online assignment (see figure.1).

The first strategy concerned outline composition (also termed word-stretching or conceptual framework). Here, students were provided with a topic (for instance, the European exploration of America) and were asked to design a suitable outline that allowed a comprehensive investigation. The end product was the following points: when was this exploration? Where precisely in America (the coast or other areas?), by whom (all European nations or simply some?), what were the reasons behind this? What facilitated those adventures? How long did those explorations last? How was the reaction of the native people vis-à-vis those explorers? Was there a clash of interests between European explorers? What were the consequences of these schemes for both Europeans and Native Americans? Such questions would, then, prepare the learners and motivate them to undertake a more detailed study in terms of fostering coherence and memorization. This constituted the objective of the second strategy, the text study. At this level, learners were handed medium-length texts and were first asked to read individually to become familiar with the topic. A sample of such texts is provided in figure 2. To guarantee their full engagement, a kind of coercive instruction was given (all students were to be questioned on what they had understood).

Later, a detailed exploration of the text was initiated which engaged a collective work. Each student read a sentence and tried to explain it. If he failed, his classmates would intervene. In this process, the whole text would be explained. But to make this hard task enjoyable, the instructor tried from time to time to create a diversion that would link some ideas in the text with issues corresponding to them in contemporary life. In one sense, they were asked to compare. As an illustration, when dealing with the point of gender roles (see fig.2), the teacher asked them to expound on their points of view as to the state of those roles in contemporary life. In this way, learners would be relieved for a while from the hard task of reading and deciphering the information. This model text explanation goes hand in hand with the use of support tools, either maps, tables, or figures secured in-class or off-class on the Moodle platform to secure sound comprehension. Once the whole text had been explained, learners would be charged with writing a summary of the text to ensure better acquisition, memorization, and development of their writing skills.

For the harnessing of empathy, they were asked to simulate the position of the other and evaluate it. To provide a clear picture of this, they were required to judge rationally the hostility of the natives towards the European comers in this way: if you were in their place (natives) and you recognized that those newcomers encroached on your resources, would you retaliate to entrench your rights? Astonishingly, the students replied "yes," developing, thereby, a sense of intercultural sensitization. Indeed, those four strategies created a vivid learning atmosphere because the instructor strived to make a balance between difficult and easy tasks. Hence, the large majority of students were enthusiastically involved by volunteering for reading and asking questions. Furthermore, the techniques boosted the promotion of both reading and writing skills and ingrained cultural sensitization and respect for others. Indeed, the writing task did not reveal a good student's mastery of this skill, but one should not forget that the course of culture and civilization aims to promote critical thinking and empathy.

Figure 1

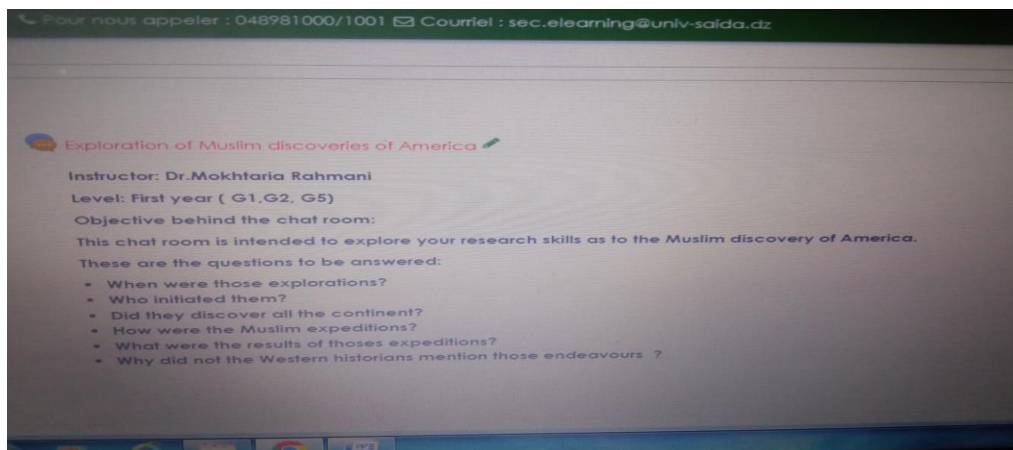*Sample of an assignment that promotes the global approach*

Figure 2

Sample of a text in the culture and civilization course

Text: Native Americans

Many different Indian peoples inhabited the Americans in the past. Those peoples displayed differences in language and lifestyle. Nowadays there are about 370 Indian tribes in USA.

Lifestyles varied greatly. The Indians were either Mesolithic or Neolithic. Most shared the same mode of organisation, that is to say societies dominated by clans that were epitomised by a number of similarities:

- The right to elect and depose its chiefs
- The obligation not to marry in the gens
- Mutual rights of inheritance of the property of the deceased members
- Reciprocal obligations of help, defense, and redress of injuries
- The right to bestow names on its members
- The right to adopt strangers

3.2. Canvassing students' questionnaire

Concerning the students' questionnaire, it comprised six-item questions that were handed over to students at the end of the class. During that session, the attendees were as follows: 27 students in group 1, 33 students in group 2, and 29 students in group 5, which means a total of 89 students. The questions comprise both closed and open-ended questions. Instructions were made to clarify what they were required to do. Regarding question item one (on a four-point Likert scale (strongly like…dislike) indicate your degree of preference for the actual strategies for the teaching of culture and civilization, 67 of the students (75,28 %) selected the option "like," 12 (13,48 %) stated "strongly like", and 10 students (11,23%) favored the option "dislike" (see table 1).

Table 1

Students' degree of preference for the actual strategies in the culture/civilization course

Strongly like	like dislike	dislike
12 (13,48 %)	67 (75,28 %)	10 (11,23%)

Concerning question item two (justify why), they provided the following responses: the course provided a clear understanding of how and why things happened; the teaching sessions offered a great deal of debate and simulation roles, the module was highly work-demanding and energy-consuming as the previous course was related to written expression,

Concerning question item three (which strategy do you like the most?), 37 participants (41,57%) opted both for outline composition and debate sequence, 9 students (10,11 %) favored text analysis, and 6 informants selected summary writing (see table 2).

Table 2

Students' preferences in terms of teaching strategies

Outline composition	text-analysis	debate sequence	summary writing
37 (41,57 %)	09 (10,11 %)	37 (41,57)	06 (6,74 %)

Regarding the fourth question: how do you consider the benefits that you would incur from the culture/civilization course? (possibility of choosing more than one answer), the students' answers were as follows: 14 (15,73%) answers for the consolidation of deep reading, promotion of debate, and simulation of roles, 63 (70,78%) responses for options a, b, e, and f, that is (exploration of concepts, promotion of debate, simulation of roles, and buildup and chrysalis of intercultural competence, and 25 (28,08%) replies for answers c and d, that is (development of critical reading, and development of the writing skill (see table 3).

Table 3

Students' views as to the benefits of the culture/civilization course

Options	Number of students	Percentage
e. Consolidation of deep reading b. promotion of debate c. simulation of roles	14	15,73%
a. exploration of concepts	63	70,78%

b. promotion of debate
e. simulation of roles
f. buildup, and chrysalis of intercultural
 competence
_____
c. development of critical reading   25   28,08%
d. development of the writing skill
_____

Table 4
Aspects of culture/civilization that should be tackled

Options	Number of students	Percentage
customs and traditions	72	80, 89 %
religion and values	11	19, 10%
history and geography	06	06, 74 %

In consideration of question item five (according to you, which aspects of culture/civilization should be tackled in the first year? 72 students (80, 89 %) said customs and traditions. Eleven students (19, 10%) opted for religion and values, while six students (06, 74 %) mentioned history and geography (see table 4). As to the fifth question (what are the actual challenges of the course?) The majority of the students (87, 64 %) stated the fact of being overwhelmed by a heavy amount of factual information inhibited the process of memorization during the exams, and 12 students mentioned a schedule. As to the last question (how do you think this course could be boosted?), six students proposed supplementing the course with videos, five students recommended students' presentations, one student proposed two-teacher alternative teaching, and the rest abstained from answering.

4. Discussion

The results mentioned above suggest clearly that when the culture/civilization course is taught through the four approaches (student-oriented approach, global approach, holistic approach, and intercultural approach), then large chances of creating a vivid learning environment are guaranteed. The "like" attitude of the majority of the students attests to this situation. The "strongly like" standpoint of some students might be interpreted by extra pedagogical factors such as their cognition or socio-cultural background. On one hand, a student who is deeply motivated by a course, whose approach is learner-centered, indicates that this learner possesses relatively advanced knowledge in comparison with his classmates. On the other hand, his sound involvement can be linked with a profound study-supporting home environment. Arguably, the large positive attitude of learners towards the course denotes conspicuously the success of the instructor's teaching strategies in stirring their motivation. There is a category of students who were not satisfied with the subject of culture and civilization ("the dislike" attitude). This can be understood regarding the exigencies and anxiety of close reading and writing activities (Suárez, Mosquera Feijóo, Chiyón & Alberti, 2021).

Students' large bents for outline composition and debate sequence reveal their appeal for enjoyment and easy cognition-building techniques. The conceptual framework creates a research paradigm where one concept leads to the other, resembling a game that procures great satisfaction; whereas the debate sequence enables learners to communicate and express their ideas. Ostensibly, the diversification of teaching techniques accounts highly for instituting the learners' engagement. Hence, the association of outline composition, close reading, questioning, debate, and recapitulative writing do promote learners' enthusiasm and hastens the construction and consolidation of their reading, speaking, and writing skills. Furthermore, when learners are encouraged to think critically and advance their rational points of view as to specific points (such as showing their standpoints as to the Indians' social organization, and lifestyle), this would glaringly develop their reflective thinking and intercultural competence (Amirian, Ghaniabadi, Heydarnejad & Abbasi, 2022). The beliefs of students as to the benefits they would gain from the civilization course vary largely. The great majority identify them as the exploration of concepts, promotion of debate, simulation of roles, and the buildup and chrysalis of

intercultural competence. This discloses the fact that some activities generate more enthusiasm and involvement than others, as is the case, for instance, with critical reading and writing.

Concerning content, learners favor largely customs and traditions rather than history and geography because the latter might be Very stressful given the amount of information (dates, events, and people). Cultural topics do appeal to students because they are instructive and entertaining (Obloberdiyevna & Odilkhonovna, 2022). Yet, it is extremely momentous to operate a well-regulated study-engagement process since one cannot concentrate beyond forty-five minutes. Science and experience do confirm this verity; therefore, a course should proceed alongside a rise and fall in the tone of learners' course commitment. Moreover, to maintain the learners' positive standpoint towards the Western civilization course, exams should depart from memorization given the load of factual information. Other assessment forms should be developed.

5. Conclusion

In a nutshell, the course of Western civilization is markedly significant in the language classroom as it seeks the achievement of several objectives, namely critical thinking, intercultural competence, and the consolidation of linguistic competence. Yet, the realization of these goals is in a commensurate relationship with learners' preferences. In the age of globalization and its corollaries, learners are largely disdainful of traditional modes of instruction that are teacher-oriented, harnessing memorization at the expense of skill construction and consolidation.

Likewise, successful teaching of Western civilization ought to cope with the new challenges (new values, aspirations, and norms) and chart judicious approaches and strategies that engage learners. In the case of culture and civilization for first-year students, instructors should make an association of different approaches, viz., the student-oriented approach, the global approach, the holistic approach, and the intercultural approach. These approaches require the diversification of teaching strategies to attain sound academic achievements. These teaching practices involve the use of outline composition or conceptual framework, "active" text analysis, discussion sequences, and summary writing.

Active text analysis should comprise a set of engaging activities, stress-breaking, cognition-constructing, and skill-building. Examples of such activities may include piecemeal questioning (one sentence per sentence), comparison of cultural traits between the target culture, the source culture, or other world cultures, use of support tools such as maps and figures, and simulation of roles. In respect to content, it should not be centered simply on facts and events (history and geography), but it must consider a variety of substances, in other words 'big C' culture and 'small c' culture. Indeed, in many ways, this teaching practice is thriving. It promotes reading, critical thinking, and writing skills. It also contributes to the breeding of empathy for strikingly disparate cultures.

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