

## **Introduction**

The knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and the different aspects of civilization is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, and for that reason many departments of English in Algeria incorporate the teaching of civilization and to some extent culture into the foreign language curriculum. Foreign language teaching is composed of several overlapping components, including grammatical and communicative competences, as well as a change in attitudes toward the civilization and culture of the being studied.

As far as American civilization courses are concerned, this module is taught, in our Department of English, for three years starting from the second year. The syllabus embodies the main aspects of American Civilization: the curriculum designers tried to be comprehensive in the incorporation of different aspects of the United States such as geography, history, society, religion, education, political institutions.

The United States civilization curriculum is dealt with in a systematic way. Periods are delineated in order to facilitate the implementation and understanding of the history of the United States. In the second year, learners are first exposed to the US physical environment, and the early settlements of the new world. Third year learners deal mainly with the American Civil War, Westward Expansion and Conflict. In their fourth year, learners have the opportunity to go to some details in the US modern society and its institutions.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon observed by us and confirmed by many teachers in the Department of English at Biskra University, is that most learners appreciate the American civilization courses more than the other courses, but they fail to distinguish between American civilization and American culture. Moreover, they take it for granted that what they see in the American movies, violence, vulgar language, casual clothes and strange hair-cuts is the real picture of what happens in the United States society. Learners seem to become more and

more interested in those courses as they move from one year to the next up their academic studies. They are so attracted by the *glossy* US way of life, culture, way of thinking, behaviour, mass media...etc. Unfortunately, they idealize what they see in Oscar-winning movies, gesticulating Rock music singers, and easy gaining money businessmen. It may seem paradoxical that due to the appearance of TV channels dedicated to the political analyses, breaking and updated news and different but most of the times conflicting viewpoints, learners tend to change their attitudes vis-à-vis the American foreign policy, which eventually would affect negatively their perception of American civilization courses.

Last but not least, teachers are to some extent accountable particularly when it comes to the teaching methods and materials. Moreover, they tend to use obsolete methodology and overlooking technological innovations such as CD ROMs, computers, over head projector ,...) and also to invite some American native speakers to meet their learners to talk freely about both interesting and frustrating phenomena.

Against this backdrop, we have assumed a number of hypotheses that try to encompass the underpinning assumptions behind the aforementioned contradictions.

- The US civilization courses foster a positive effect toward the United States of America.
- Learners change attitudes toward the USA throughout the three years of their curriculum.
- Mass media's contribution in the learning process has positive effects on learners' attitudes and perceptions.
- Learners taking courses in American civilization will change their attitudes toward this foreign language country and its culture as long as they move from one year to the next.

- Not only academic means lead learners to have attitudes toward the United States and its culture, other factors may also contribute.

Having this in mind, we intend to study where the problem lies in order to propose some solutions that might bring relief to both teachers and learners so that objectives of the curriculum are met.

This present research intends to answer the following questions:

- Do the objectives of American civilization syllabus square with the methods and available material and learner expectations?
- Do learners make a distinction between “Civilization” and “Culture”?
- Are learners satisfied with the way American civilization module is presented to them?
- Do learners have difficulties when exposed to the US civilization module?
- Do learners appreciate the US civilization module more than other modules?
- Do media contribute in their learning process and forming their attitudes (positive or negative)?
- What kind of effects does the American civilization have on learners?
- Do they change or keep the same attitudes throughout the three years?
- To what extent do American civilization courses develop our learners’ personal growth, perception of the world and ultimately make them aware of the intricacies of emergence, evolution and progress of a new man and a nation?
- How can we promote the teaching of American civilization courses in our department?

This research comprises three chapters in which we try to the best of our abilities to come up with insightful answers to the questions already mentioned

above. We have tried to be precise, accurate, and analytical in discussing and commenting the different chapters of this work. In the following section we shall be taking the endeavor to highlight the most salient features of the chapters. It is worth of note to say that we have devised two main parts: one theoretical (including three chapters) and field work which comprises two questionnaires and the meeting of our learners with American native speakers under the aegis of a panel of teachers.

**Chapter one** highlights the differences between the two major concepts in this work, civilization and culture. The former is seen as material achievement, while the latter is seen as complex patterns ways of behaviour. We ultimately argue that many scholars in our Department make the distinction between these two seemingly overlapping concepts. We conclude that teachers are much more interested in providing dates about facts rather than immersing learners in the Anglo-American culture.

**Chapter two**, we have tried to expose the curriculum of American civilization courses throughout the three years of our learners' academic study. The premise behind this exposition, which is otherwise brief and concise, is to help the readers to have an idea of what our learners are supposed to receive in their American civilization module. As we have noticed that this syllabus fails to include some important features of the Anglo-American civilization and culture, we have come up with some insightful additions that we argue could add to the variety and eventually motivate our learners.

**Chapter three**, we have discussed one of the major parts in this work: *incorporation of American civilization courses in the university foreign language classrooms*. We argue that the misunderstanding between the two major players of the audience (teachers and learners) is due to their different conceptions of what this module is and what is supposed to do. Moreover, we

have tried to explore to some length the context wherein the implementation of the US civilization course takes place.

**The field-work** is actually the core of this work, for we have tried through a series of questionnaires and interviews (written and taped) to confirm or disconfirm the hypothesis of the present research, and also to answer the ten questions stipulated in this introduction. We have found out that different learners have developed different attitudes towards this module and its content. Broadly speaking, they start with a very positive attitude towards American civilization and culture and eventually turn against the American foreign policy.

### **The Research Methodology and Design:**

To understand the phenomenon under study, we need first a description of the situation learners exist in (learning American Civilization courses). We have chosen the descriptive method also because the problem in itself does not need an initially suggested treatment to be tested. A possible experiment presupposes first an analysis of facts leading to the use of the experimental approach. Moreover, other methods like the historical, we deliberately avoided their use for the fact that we are dealing with the presently registered learners. We do not need an account of the history of teaching American civilization in our Department.

### **The Sample:**

#### **1- Learners:**

We have randomly selected 100 learners from the three years to represent the population of our study. Since we are not interested in selecting the population according to their marks, random sampling is seen as our best choice. Furthermore, the choice of this technique is made on the grounds that learners' characteristics are not important variables which may affect the study. We intended to see whether and to what extent the courses of American civilization have an effect on learners with no regard of their achievements. All of them are foreign language learners taking courses in American civilization, and our objective is to examine the possible effect a foreign language culture may have on them. They are in their early and mid-twenties. As our classes are co-educational, both male and female learners have been chosen to conduct this investigation. It should be noted that, despite that our learners are affiliated to the university of Biskra, they come from many parts of Algeria with a mixed ability potential to learn English.

## **2- Teachers:**

All of the eleven teachers of American civilization courses are with the Department of English at the University of Biskra. Likewise they come from different universities and some of them are even America-educated. Some are female and male teachers who have been very cooperative in answering the questions both in the unstructured interviews and thief questionnaires. Most of them are experienced teachers with years of seniority. We can also add that some of them are not full-time teachers and they are highly motivated for personal reasons. They have been randomly selected. As a matter of fact, we had to take those who came in our immediate context. We think that comparing what they said with other American civilization courses teachers in other universities would have given us insightful information about the attitudes and readiness of the teachers to implement effectively the objectives of this module.

## **Data Gathering Tools:**

The linchpin of data gathering in this research is the questionnaire and interviews with the audience (teachers and learners). Moreover, we have tried to tape one of the interviews so that a physical piece of evidence would give credit to the effort done to verify the hypotheses and try to answer the research questions.

### **1-Learners' questionnaire:**

This seventeen-item questionnaire aims at identifying in three sections the overall attitudes of our learners vis-à-vis the US civilization module and content. We have made every possible effort to make this questionnaire appealing both in format and type of questions to the learners in order to make them feel good and comfortable while answering anonymously the items.

## **2- Teachers' questionnaires:**

The teachers' questionnaire counts thirteen items. It aims at identifying the staff teaching American civilization courses and their attitudes, methodology, and way of designing courses as well as testing examination papers. Again, we have tried to make the questionnaire look as appealing as possible. We have not observed any comment that detracts the way or the types of questions included in this data gathering tool.

## **3- Interviews:**

Different types of interviews have been conducted with the premise of lending credibility to the aforementioned questionnaires. Both unstructured and structured interviews have been arranged with teachers and learners. We have also thought to include an exclusive taped interview between the learners of the English Department and a panel of teachers on the one hand and a couple of Americans on the other hand. Different questions have been addressed to them in order to clarify or comment or even denounce some practices by the American political class.