

Decolonizing the English Department: Rethinking the Epistemologies of Civilization Modules in Algeria

تفكيك المركزية المعرفية في أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية:
إعادة النظر في إبستمولوجيا مقاييس الحضارة في الجامعة الجزائرية

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Date Of Receipt: 11/02/2026 Date Of Acceptance: 29/03/2026 Date Of Publication: 31/03/2026

ملخص:

يشهد العالم اليوم نقاشاً متزايداً حول طبيعة المعرفة السائدة في المؤسسات الأكاديمية، ومدى اعتمادها على تصورات غربية في فهم القضايا الإنسانية والاجتماعية. وفي السياق الجزائري، لا تزال أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية، خاصة في السنوات الأولى من التكوين الجامعي ضمن مقاييس الحضارة، تعتمد على محتويات وأطر تفسير مستمدة من السياقات الغربية، وهو ما ينعكس على أساليب التدريس التقليدية ويؤدي إلى فجوة بين ما يُقدّم داخل القاعة الدراسية والواقع الاجتماعي والثقافي للطلبة، مع ما يترتب عن ذلك من تحديات بيداغوجية يواجهها كل من الأستاذ والطالب. ومن هذا المنطلق، ومن منظور إعادة النظر في المناهج الدراسية، يدعو هذا البحث إلى مراجعة الأسس المعرفية التي يقوم عليها تدريس هذا المقياس، بما يسمح بإعادة التفكير في الفلسفات التعليمية ومحتوى المناهج وطرائق التدريس، عبر اعتماد مقارنة تدمج بين المعارف المحلية والمعارف الغربية في إطار نقدي متوازن، بالاستناد إلى مفهوم "التفكير من الحدود" كما يقدمه والتر منيولو، مما يفتح المجال أمام "تصور تعددي للمعرفة" داخل أقسام اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعة الجزائرية.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التفكير الحدودي، التحرير المعرفي، تحديد المناهج، المركزية الأوروبية، وحدات الحضارة

Abstract :

Today, the Global South is increasingly perceived to challenge Western dominance and Eurocentric knowledge systems. In Algeria, English departments, particularly early-years Civilization modules, continue to be shaped by Western frameworks, which inform traditional teaching approaches that often disconnect with local realities. These conditions are argued to have generated various pedagogical challenges, experienced and addressed by both teachers and students. From a "curriculum decolonization" perspective, the paper calls for rethinking the epistemologies underpinning Civilization teaching in order to better align with current global and local realities. Drawing on Walter Mignolo's concept of "Border Thinking," it promotes a pluralistic approach that values local knowledge, critically engages with Western materials, and moves beyond dependence on Western models; thus, advancing a 'decolonial' vision in Algerian English departments.

Keywords:

Border Thinking; Civilization Modules; Curriculum Reform; Epistemic Decolonization; Eurocentrism.

1. INTRODUCTION:

English departments in Algerian universities occupy a critical role in shaping students’ linguistic, cultural, and intellectual competencies. Yet, civilization modules, particularly at the undergraduate level, have long been fraught with challenges that undermine their educational potential. Research indicates that these courses are often overly dense, terminology-heavy, and disconnected from students’ prior knowledge and lived experiences, contributing to low motivation and disengagement (Raouti, 2023; Ghouar, 2025). These challenges are not merely pedagogical; they reflect deeper curricular and epistemological limitations rooted in colonial and Eurocentric frameworks. Indeed, the content often reproduces Western-centric perspectives presenting Anglophone civilizations as universal standards (Winter et al., 2022; Musharrat, 2023; Pfaffenstaller & Zannou, 2024). The result is a disconnect between course content and the socio-political realities and aspirations of Algerian students, leaving them as passive consumers rather than active producers of knowledge.

In an era shaped by globalization, internal economic restructuring, evolving foreign policy priorities, and the rise of the Global South, it is believed that Algeria must reclaim its epistemic voice (Morreira et al., 2020). Civilization courses in English departments cannot simply emulate Western models if they aim to equip students with critical, context-sensitive, and socially relevant knowledge. Instead, these courses must undergo a deliberate process of decolonization, reassessing the underlying epistemologies, educational philosophies, and curricular structures that govern them (Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2017; Musharrat, 2023). Decolonizing the curriculum entails moving beyond superficial reforms or the uncritical adoption of Western content; it requires rethinking how knowledge is defined, structured, and transmitted, privileging plural perspectives and locally grounded understandings without rejecting the valuable contributions of global scholarship (Le Grange, 2019; Koopman & Koopman, 2023).

The present paper draws on Walter Mignolo’s concept of “Border Thinking”, which advocates for a dialogical engagement between Western epistemologies and local or Global South knowledge systems (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2017). This approach resists both the uncritical emulation of Western models and the total rejection of external ideas, instead fostering a pluriversal epistemology in which multiple ways of knowing coexist, intersect, and inform one another (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Winter et al., 2022). By situating English civilization modules within this framework, the paper provides epistemological and methodological guidance for curriculum designers, educators, and policy makers seeking to design content and

pedagogical practices that are both critically informed and contextually meaningful. By connecting historical legacies, contemporary realities, and transformative theoretical frameworks, this paper positions civilization modules as sites of critical engagement and epistemic renewal, inviting stakeholders to rethink the purpose, content, and pedagogy of English education in Algeria.

2. Civilization in the English Department: Curricular and Pedagogical Gaps

Culture-based modules in Algerian English departments aim to develop intercultural competence alongside language and literary skills. At the undergraduate level, they primarily focus on American and British civilizations and literatures, presenting historical events and canonical texts within a chronological framework (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2025). Although the ministry grants some pedagogical flexibility, civilization modules remain largely history-oriented. Across regional curricula (West, East, and Center), content closely follows official historical frameworks, with instructors mainly free to select supplementary materials and determine lecture emphasis (Khetalla, 2024). However, they must still cover prescribed content to ensure national consistency in assessment and educational equity. As a result, many undergraduate students, particularly those not pursuing advanced studies, engage with highly academic cultural content that is often disconnected from professional contexts. Both students and instructors report difficulties with the content and approach, revealing a gap between curricular goals and practical relevance (Khetalla, 2024).

At the university level in Algeria, instructors follow official module syllabi but maintain substantial autonomy in choosing teaching materials, methods, and assessment practices. This flexibility contrasts with middle and secondary education, where curricula are highly prescriptive and textbook-driven. University programs are centrally designed by the Ministry of Higher Education, which defines overall structures and learning objectives (Khetalla, 2021). However, Khetalla Asma’s (2021) study on teachers’ involvement in syllabus design revealed significant dissatisfaction: 83.3% of instructors supported revisions, 11.1% called for complete reform, and only 5.6% found the syllabi practical (p. 440). Teachers reported that the content was overly abstract, weakly connected to real-life and labor market demands, and inadequate in developing essential twenty-first-century skills, with several components seen as irrelevant to students’ goals and professional development (Khetalla, 2021, p. 442).

Instructors also noted that syllabi are often developed without sufficient expertise in curriculum design. Although subject specialists draft them, many lack formal training in curriculum development, and limited institutional oversight exists to assess their validity or effectiveness (Khetalla, 2021, p. 443). As a result, curricula tend to remain theoretically framed rather than focused on practical or contextually relevant learning outcomes. Khetalla (2021) concludes that university teachers are largely dissatisfied with existing syllabi yet believe they can contribute meaningfully to their improvement, emphasizing teacher involvement as essential to effective syllabus design (p. 445).

Teaching the Civilization module in Algerian English departments has consistently been described by both students and teachers as challenging, largely due to the dense historical content and the difficulty of retaining and contextualizing numerous facts and events. Bahloul (2012) highlights that culture instruction in Algerian EFL classrooms is often inconsistently conceptualized, relying on individual teachers' beliefs rather than a coherent pedagogical framework. Her study at the University of Batna revealed that while instructors acknowledge the importance of cultural knowledge in language teaching, their practices are predominantly knowledge-based, limited, and unsystematic, with minimal focus on fostering intercultural awareness or critical engagement. This discrepancy underscores the absence of clear methodological guidance and formal training for effective culture teaching within Algerian English departments.

Similarly, Mouas and Ghoul (2017) observed that although EFL instructors support the goal of fostering intercultural competence, their classroom practices often fail to translate this intention into concrete activities. Teachers may emphasize cultural awareness in principle, but lessons remain largely content-driven, with few opportunities for students to actively engage with or apply cultural knowledge. Bensaad (2011) highlights that in British Civilization courses at Blida University, teaching relies heavily on lecture-based methods that do not adequately develop students' English proficiency or support interactive learning. As a result, students struggle to comprehend complex historical and cultural content, limiting both their appreciation of the material and their ability to critically analyze it.

Benabdi and Mebitil (2025) critically examine ongoing challenges in the Civilization module in Algerian English departments, noting that students often depend on rote memorization rather than developing conceptual understanding. This tendency reflects both the cognitive demands of dense historical content and pedagogical approaches that insufficiently promote analytical thinking, critical engagement, and meaningful application. Consequently, while students may recall

facts for examinations, they often struggle to interpret civilizational concepts in academic, intercultural, or real-world contexts. Similarly, Ouamiche and Bensaadi (2016) argue that such pedagogical limitations negatively affect academic performance, as weak conceptual understanding reduces engagement, critical thinking, and learning outcomes. Both studies highlight a persistent gap between intended cultural objectives and classroom practice, emphasizing the need for more interactive, concept-driven, and contextually relevant approaches in Algerian Civilization courses.

The limited emphasis on intercultural and pragmatic competencies constitutes a major pedagogical gap in Algerian English departments. Mehdaoui (2015) argues that traditional, chronologically structured approaches to teaching Civilization prioritize factual knowledge over critical engagement, restricting students' ability to compare cultures or manage real-life intercultural interactions. By focusing on memorization of historical and cultural facts, these methods fail to develop learners' capacity to interpret meaning, recognize cultural nuances, or communicate effectively across contexts. To address these limitations, Mehdaoui advocates integrating pragmatic and intercultural dimensions into language instruction through structured activities that enhance cultural awareness, communicative flexibility, and context-sensitive language use.

Similarly, Hocine and Belkacem (2022) show that developing creative historical thinking requires moving beyond lecture-based instruction. Their findings indicate that encouraging critical reflection, problem-solving, and connections to contemporary experiences strengthens analytical skills and deepens cultural understanding. Incorporating such strategies into Civilization modules enhances cognitive engagement and supports the practical application of knowledge, linking historical content to students' lived realities. Together, these studies highlight the need for more interactive, reflective, and contextually relevant pedagogies in Algerian Civilization and Culture courses to foster both linguistic proficiency and meaningful intercultural competence.

Persistent student disengagement and negative attitudes continue to challenge Civilization courses in Algerian English departments. Raouti (2023) notes that students often perceive British and American Civilization content as historically dense, overwhelming, and disconnected from their lived experiences, which reduces motivation and participation and highlights the need for more interactive, technology-supported, and student-centered approaches. Similarly, Ghoular (2025) reports that teachers struggle with terminology-heavy material while students lack sufficient background knowledge, further limiting comprehension and engagement

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ISSN : 9577-1112	EISSN : 2602-5388	Volume: (18)	Number : (01)	year: 2026	Pages: 192-211

and reinforcing negative attitudes across successive cohorts. More broadly, these studies show that Civilization teaching varies according to instructors' beliefs and pedagogical orientations, yet recurring issues persist, including reliance on traditional methods, limited intercultural activities, low student involvement, and minimal use of ICT tools. Although instructors recognize the importance of cultural education, this awareness seldom translates into effective practice, underscoring the need for curriculum reform grounded in coherent language epistemologies and pedagogical strategies that ensure relevance to both national priorities and global developments.

In summary, recent studies on Civilization and culture-based modules in Algerian English departments reveals consistent tensions between curricular objectives and classroom practice. Although these modules aim to develop cultural knowledge and intercultural competence, they remain largely history-oriented and content-heavy, organized around chronological presentations of British and American history and canonical texts. As a result, the curriculum is often theoretical and weakly connected to real-life or professional contexts, creating difficulties for students and dissatisfaction among instructors. Classroom practices also tend to be lecture-based and memorization-driven, offering limited opportunities for critical engagement or intercultural interaction. Consequently, students frequently struggle to apply civilizational knowledge beyond examinations, which affects motivation and comprehension. Overall, scholars identify a systemic gap between the intended intercultural and analytical goals of cultural education and the factual, teacher-centered practices observed in classrooms, highlighting the need for curriculum reform and more interactive, contextually relevant pedagogies.

3. Global Pressures, National Priorities, and the Call for Curriculum Reform

In the context of globalization, characterized by increasing interdependence between states and societies, the Algerian higher education system has undergone significant reforms to respond to global economic, social, and technological transformations. Confronted with pressures related to efficiency, competitiveness, and economic restructuring, the Algerian state has sought to modernize university education in order to adapt to a rapidly evolving global environment. These reforms are shaped not only by international dynamics but also by internal economic constraints that require structural responses to long-standing social and labor market challenges. As a result, higher education policies have increasingly emphasized narrowing the gap between academic training and employment needs, positioning

universities as central actors in national development strategies aligned with global economic realities (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2021).

A key pillar of these reforms is the adoption of the LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorat) system, which closely follows the Bologna Process implemented across Europe. This structural reorganization aims to enhance the international compatibility and mobility of Algerian higher education while remaining responsive to national priorities. The reform is supported by a national curriculum framework that specifies learning outcomes, core competencies, and credit distribution across degree programs. These frameworks, commonly referred to as “programmes nationaux” or “référentiels de formation”, are developed by expert committees composed of university academics, ministry representatives, and professionals from relevant sectors. They function as reference documents that ensure curricular coherence, standardization, and comparability across institutions at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

Within this reform agenda, higher education institutions occupy a strategic position in the Algerian state’s broader development vision. Government policy increasingly frames universities as engines for producing skilled human capital capable of contributing to economic growth, innovation, and social development. Legislative measures, infrastructural investments, and curricular reforms are therefore designed to align higher education outcomes with the requirements of the knowledge-based economy. As Grinat et al. (2024) note, contemporary education policies place university performance at the center of strategic planning, with learning outcomes, institutional efficiency, and graduate employability serving as key indicators of reform success.

Alongside these changes, the orientation of higher education has gradually shifted from a predominantly national focus toward a more global and internationally integrated perspective. While universities in developing countries of the Global South were traditionally aligned with nation-building objectives, globalization has intensified the emphasis on labor market relevance and international competitiveness (Harouni, 2004). In Algeria, this shift is reflected in reform initiatives aimed at improving graduate employability and aligning academic programs with global economic demands. Policy documents issued by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research highlight priorities such as quality assurance, expanded access, and stronger links between education and economic development (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, 2021). In line with international trends, Algeria seeks to promote equity in educational quality while enhancing employment prospects and fostering innovation within higher education institutions.

However, educational reforms in Algeria, particularly those related to language policy, must be understood within broader national debates concerning identity, linguistic sovereignty, and postcolonial emancipation. Recent efforts to reduce the long-standing dominance of French in favor of Arabic and, increasingly, English have revived discussions about the cultural and political legacies of colonialism. Although English is often presented as a neutral or pragmatic choice, especially as the language of science, technology, and global communication, its growing prominence raises critical questions. It remains unclear whether the adoption of English represents a genuine break with colonial structures or a paradoxical form of decolonization through another globally dominant language. Educational reform in Algeria, therefore, extends beyond technical restructuring and constitutes a politically charged process of epistemic repositioning within broader decolonial struggles in Africa and the Global South.

Historically, French occupied a central position in Algeria’s educational and administrative systems, functioning as a powerful remnant of colonial rule that continued to shape curricula and intellectual orientations long after independence (Sihem, 2021). Recent policy initiatives have sought to challenge this legacy by accelerating the introduction of English at multiple levels of education, including primary schooling, and by expanding its role in higher education as a medium of instruction (Tihal, 2025). These measures reflect a strategic effort to reduce reliance on French while reorienting Algeria toward global scientific and economic networks. At the same time, they signal a desire to reclaim linguistic sovereignty by distancing national education from a colonial language whose symbolic and structural influence has remained deeply embedded.

The increasing use of English as a medium of instruction in Algerian universities has, however, generated considerable scholarly debate. Critics argue that this shift risks replacing French, the former language of colonial domination, with English as the contemporary language of global hegemony. From this perspective, English may function less as a tool of emancipation and more as a new vehicle of epistemic dominance. Robert Phillipson’s theory of linguistic imperialism provides a useful framework for understanding these concerns. Phillipson (1992) contends that the global spread of English through education and language policy reinforces structural dependence on Anglo-American knowledge systems, often at the expense of local languages and epistemologies. In non-Anglophone contexts, academic work frequently relies on theories, methodologies, and research agendas developed in English-speaking centers, resulting in a largely unidirectional flow of knowledge from the global center to the periphery. This dynamic limits epistemic plurality and sustains asymmetrical power relations in global knowledge production, raising critical questions about the implications of English-medium instruction within postcolonial higher education systems such as Algeria’s.

4. Epistemology and Curriculum Reform in Civilization Modules: A Decolonial Perspective

The persistent challenges observed by a number of studies on Civilization and culture modules are argued to be closely linked to the continued reliance on Western models of curriculum design and pedagogy. Indeed, many programs still reproduce frameworks inherited from French and Anglophone academic traditions, often without critical adaptation to local contexts (Koudded & Mehdaoui, 2023). These issues are argued not to simply be pedagogical, but they reflect deeper, enduring colonial epistemic legacies within higher education. From a decolonial perspective, curriculum design is inherently political, as it determines whose knowledge is considered legitimate, which cultural norms are reinforced, and how educational practices may unintentionally sustain the power structures of the colonial past (Mignolo, 2000). The debates surrounding curriculum content in English departments, therefore, extend beyond teaching concerns to broader questions of epistemic authority and cultural self-definition.

Walter Mignolo's notion of coloniality offers a valuable framework for understanding these dynamics. He argues that coloniality persists not only through political or economic domination but also through epistemic control, whereby Western paradigms define what counts as valid knowledge while marginalizing alternative worldviews. In this sense, control over knowledge becomes a form of power over identity, space, and populations. Within Algerian higher education, this dynamic is evident in the uncritical adoption of Western academic norms, which are often presented as universal or superior, leaving little room for locally grounded perspectives or epistemologies.

In Algeria, educational institutions were historically shaped by French colonial structures and later modeled on Western European systems. As a result, English departments frequently rely on curricula closely mirroring French or Anglo-American templates, with minimal adaptation to Algeria's socio-cultural and linguistic realities. Research indicates that such frameworks contribute to student disengagement, low cultural relevance, and teacher ambivalence when delivering Civilization courses in ways that connect with students' identities, heritage, or intercultural experiences (Ghouar, 2025; Bahloul, 2012; Ouchene & Baghzou, 2022). These patterns exemplify the coloniality of power and knowledge, where Western epistemologies continue to dominate academic structures while local or context-specific ways of knowing remain marginalized.

This phenomenon is further illuminated by Koudded and Mehdaoui’s (2023) postcolonial analysis of Algerian educational discourse. Drawing on the theoretical contributions of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, the authors argue that contemporary educational practices in Algeria are deeply shaped by a postcolonial psychology inherited from the colonial past. They suggest that decision-makers often internalize a hierarchy in which the local cultural self is perceived as inferior or “backward” in comparison to a supposedly advanced Western other (Koudded & Mehdaoui, 2023, p. 146). Educational practices, they argue, are inseparable from broader social and cultural domains, such as language, dress, and everyday habits, where Western norms are implicitly valued over indigenous ones. Within this logic, Western-designed educational programs are frequently perceived as solutions to national social and economic challenges, a tendency that Bhabha conceptualizes as mimicry: the partial and ambivalent imitation of the colonizer’s models (ibid.).

The enduring effects of French colonial discourse further compound these challenges. Drawing on Foucault and Said, scholars have shown that French narratives historically portrayed Algeria as either hostile and uncivilized or exoticized and passive, positioning Western knowledge as the sole path to progress and relegating indigenous epistemologies to the margins (Lahouari, 1996; Koudded & Mehdaoui, 2023). This legacy continues to shape how Algerians perceive modernity, development, and education, reinforcing hierarchies that privilege Western frameworks while undervaluing local knowledge.

On this account, Malek Bennabi’s concept of coloniability offers a complementary lens for understanding these dynamics. Bennabi argues that colonial domination produces individuals who internalize the frameworks of the colonizer, continuing to operate within them even after independence. In Algeria, this internalized logic persists in academic spaces, circulating informally despite the lack of formal institutional endorsement and systematic efforts to promote epistemic decolonization (Koudded & Mehdaoui, 2023, p. 154). These insights suggest that meaningful curriculum reform cannot be limited to surface-level adjustments or content updates; rather, it requires confronting and reshaping the deeper epistemic and psychological legacies of colonialism that continue to influence educational thought and practice.

4.1. Border Thinking: Towards Epistemic Reframing of Civilization Modules in English Departments

Camille Jacob’s (2020) analysis offers a nuanced examination of how discourses of colonization and decolonization shape contemporary understandings of language change in Algeria, particularly with regard to English. She demonstrates that English is frequently constructed -both in academic debates and popular discourse- as a “decolonial option,” one that allegedly allows Algerians to bypass the symbolic and political hierarchies associated with French colonial legacy. In this framing, English is positioned as a means of reconfiguring social, political, and economic identities without directly confronting the deeply entrenched tensions surrounding French, Standard Arabic, Algerian Arabic, and Tamazight. However, Jacob cautions against this simplified binary of English versus French, arguing that it obscures the complex multilingual realities of Algerian society and marginalizes the central role of Arabic and Tamazight in questions of belonging, memory, and identity. By treating English as inherently “decolonial,” such narratives risk reproducing new linguistic hierarchies rather than meaningfully dismantling colonial epistemic structures.

Drawing on interview data, Jacob (2020) further illustrates how English is often perceived as historically absent from Algeria, a perception that enables it to be viewed as “neutral” compared to the existing languages. Participants frequently described English as a “genuine foreign language” (p. 9), distinct from the ideologically charged status of French and the internally contested positions of Arabic varieties and Tamazight. This notion of neutrality -also echoed in Francophone public discourse- allows English to be imagined as a language capable of bypassing inherited hierarchies and facilitating social and economic reinvention (p. 10). Yet Jacob’s analysis makes clear that this supposed neutrality is itself discursively produced and politically invested. Rather than existing outside coloniality, English becomes embedded within new configurations of power, revealing that linguistic decolonization cannot be achieved simply through substitution but requires a more critical engagement with multilingualism and epistemic plurality.

This critique resonates strongly with Robert Phillipson’s theory of linguistic imperialism. Phillipson (1992) does not oppose the learning of English in itself; rather, he challenges its uncritical adoption as the dominant language of knowledge production. He argues that when English displaces national or local languages in key intellectual domains -such as higher education, research, and academic publishing- it risks generating forms of epistemic dependency. In such contexts, English functions

not as a neutral medium of communication but as a gatekeeping mechanism that privileges Anglo-American epistemologies, theoretical paradigms, and research agendas. Consequently, scholars in non-Anglophone settings may feel compelled to align their work with external norms in order to achieve academic legitimacy, often at the expense of locally grounded questions and modes of expression. As Phillipson notes, this process marginalizes indigenous languages as vehicles of scientific thought and relegates them to symbolic or informal roles, reinforcing asymmetrical power relations between the global “center” and “periphery” (see also Zeng & Yang, 2024). From this perspective, the central issue is not English itself, but the absence of critical language policies that actively safeguard multilingualism, linguistic equity, and epistemic diversity.

In response to more polarized calls for decolonization, Le Grange (2019) advances a more dialogical and ethically grounded approach. Rather than advocating for the exclusion of Western knowledge from the curriculum, he argues for its repositioning as a complementary body of knowledge within a broader, plural epistemic landscape (Koopman & Koopman, 2023, p. 29). This approach foregrounds what he describes as knowledge that is applied, problem-centered, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, and hybrid. Central to Le Grange’s framework is the ethical transformation of the self: decolonizing the mind requires the collapse of the “egotistical self,” oriented toward individual survival and dominance, and the emergence of the “humble self,” grounded in relationality and care (Le Grange, 2015, 2019).

This ethical shift draws on the South African philosophy of ubuntu, commonly translated as “I am because we are.” Ubuntu emphasizes the interconnectedness of human life and the mutual dependence of individuals, communities, and the environment (Koopman & Koopman, 2023, pp. 41-42). Within this worldview, knowledge production is inseparable from responsibility toward others and the world one inhabits. Le Grange argues that colonial epistemologies actively undermined such relational understandings by fostering division and privileging individualistic, competitive forms of selfhood. Decolonizing the curriculum, therefore, involves cultivating the humble self and adopting ethical principles he summarizes as the “4Rs”: relational accountability, respectful representation, reciprocal appropriation, and rights and regulation (Le Grange, 2019, p. 42). These principles offer a practical framework for reimagining curriculum design beyond both Eurocentric dominance and exclusionary nativism.

Walter D. Mignolo’s concept of border thinking further extends this discussion by providing an epistemological framework rooted in the experience of colonial difference. Border thinking emerges from the structural gap produced by coloniality, a gap that separates dominant Western epistemologies from the knowledges of historically marginalized and subaltern communities (Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2017). Rather than rejecting Western thought outright or romanticizing local traditions, border thinking entails a critical engagement with multiple epistemic traditions, exposing the historical conditions that sustain claims of universality while affirming the legitimacy of pluriversal ways of knowing. Knowledge, from this perspective, is produced through dialogue, translation, and critique across epistemic borders, rather than flowing unidirectionally from a single intellectual center.

As an epistemological and methodological stance, border thinking operates as a space of relational negotiation in which Western and local knowledges are neither hierarchically ordered nor treated as mutually exclusive. It enables the production of pluriversal knowledge that acknowledges multiple centers of thought and resists reduction to binary oppositions such as colonizer versus colonized (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2017; Pfaffenstaller & Zannou, 2024). In educational contexts, this approach opens possibilities for rethinking pedagogy, curriculum design, and knowledge validation in ways that challenge Eurocentric dominance while avoiding the essentialization of local epistemologies. Border thinking thus functions as a double critique, of hegemonic Western reason and of any inward-looking epistemic closure, offering a productive framework for reimagining language education and curriculum reform in postcolonial settings such as Algeria.

4.2. Decolonizing the Curriculum: Epistemic Implications for Reforms in the English Department

Algerian English departments are increasingly called upon to critically examine the epistemological foundations of their content-based curricula in light of contemporary national and global challenges. Currently, English studies, especially in civilization and culture courses, remain heavily influenced by inherited colonial and Eurocentric models that no longer align with Algeria’s socio-economic priorities or its evolving role in the international arena. In the context of globalization, economic restructuring, and educational internationalization, English language education must move beyond a purely instrumental approach and embrace frameworks that are coherent with national language policies and development strategies. To advance Algeria’s decolonial aspirations, reflected in both domestic reforms and foreign policy orientations, English departments must engage in a deliberate process of curriculum decolonization.

Decolonizing the curriculum represents a transformative project that goes beyond merely introducing antiracist or inclusive content. It entails a thorough interrogation of how knowledge is organized, legitimized, and transmitted within educational systems. Musharrat (2023) warns that the term “decolonizing” risks becoming a buzzword, often employed without sufficient conceptual precision. This lack of clarity can generate resistance within academic institutions, particularly when decolonization is perceived as an ideological threat rather than a rigorously grounded pedagogical intervention (Musharrat, 2023, p. 158). Such tensions underscore the need to embed decolonial approaches within strong theoretical and methodological frameworks rather than treating them as symbolic gestures.

Content-driven courses in Algerian English departments, particularly civilization and culture modules, should be recognized as epistemological sites rather than neutral teaching spaces. As Koopman and Koopman (2023) explain, the curriculum embodies “an array of philosophical views that served as foundations for the way that knowledge should be methodically arranged, structured and delivered” (p. 28). In Algeria, the continued reliance on British and Anglo-American civilization models, often taught as universal reference points, reflects enduring colonial and Eurocentric epistemic legacies that fail to resonate with local priorities or Algeria’s global positioning (Winter et al., 2022; Musharrat, 2023). This inherited framework constrains English studies from engaging meaningfully with Algeria’s linguistic, cultural, and historical realities, positioning students as passive consumers of knowledge rather than active producers.

From a decolonial perspective, the persistence of Eurocentric curricula highlights the colonality of knowledge rather than deficiencies in teaching innovation. Mignolo (2000) and Mignolo and Tlostanova (2017) emphasize that Western epistemologies continue to define what is considered valid knowledge even after formal political decolonization. In Algerian English departments, this dynamic manifests through the uncritical transmission of Anglophone narratives in civilization courses, often disconnected from students’ lived experiences (Pfaffenstaller & Zannou, 2024). Phillipson (1992) further warns that the dominance of English as a global language can generate intellectual dependency, privileging Anglo-American epistemologies over local knowledge systems. Students exposed exclusively to these frameworks risk internalizing external hierarchies instead of developing contextually sensitive critical skills.

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ISSN : 9577-1112	EISSN : 2602-5388	Volume: (18)	Number : (01)	year: 2026	Pages: 192-211

Civilization and culture courses offer unique potential for decolonial transformation within English departments, as they directly address history, ideology, identity, and power relations (Shahjahan et al., 2022). However, studies in Algeria indicate that instructors often face uncertainty about what content to teach and how to balance target-culture instruction with local identity and heritage (Ghouar, 2025; Bahloul, 2012; Ouchene & Baghzou, 2022). This uncertainty stems from the absence of a decolonial framework, which would allow culture to be approached as dynamic, contextually grounded knowledge rather than as a fixed corpus of Western facts.

The urgency of curriculum decolonization is further heightened by Algeria's socio-economic transformations and increasing engagement in global networks. As the country seeks economic diversification, stronger South-South partnerships, and a strategic position within a multipolar world, English has gained critical importance (Morreira et al., 2020). Yet, as Phillipson (1992) and Zeng and Yang (2024) caution, uncritical adoption of English risks perpetuating new forms of epistemic domination if it merely replaces French with another hegemonic language. English studies must therefore be embedded within a critical pedagogy that enables students to examine global power relations and knowledge hierarchies rather than internalize them.

A decolonized curriculum requires re-centering local and Global South epistemologies while engaging with Western knowledge critically. Musharrat (2023) emphasizes that decolonization should strengthen curricula through sustained commitment to equity and justice, particularly by challenging the dominance of Global North epistemologies (pp. 158–159). In the Algerian context, this entails integrating Arab, Amazigh, African, and other Global South intellectual traditions into civilization and culture courses as epistemologically valid knowledge. Le Grange (2019) similarly advocates for a complementary approach in which knowledge is “applied, problem-centered, transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, and hybrid” (Koopman & Koopman, 2023, p. 29), while also cultivating the ‘humble self,’ oriented toward relational accountability, respect, reciprocity, and ethical engagement (pp. 41-42).

Indeed, undergraduate civilization and culture courses in Algerian English departments should adopt a critical pedagogy that engages Western and local knowledge without uncritical imitation. Border thinking, as theorized by Mignolo (2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2017), encourages dialogue across epistemologies, exposing Eurocentric assumptions while enabling the creation of context-sensitive knowledge. Le Grange (2019) advocates for a complementary approach to Western knowledge, promoting hybrid, problem-centered, and transdisciplinary curricula (Koopman & Koopman, 2023). Central to this approach is cultivating the ‘humble

self’ through Ubuntu, which emphasizes interdependence, ethical responsibility, and care for others and the environment, rather than privileging individual gain (Le Grange, 2015; Koopman & Koopman, 2023). Integrating these principles into Algerian curricula allows students to critically engage with civilization and culture content while producing socially responsible, locally relevant, and globally informed knowledge.

Decolonial curriculum reform must be grounded in the recognition that knowledge is situated, historically contingent, and context-dependent. As Shahjahan et al. (2022) emphasize, effective decolonial practices require questioning the origins of disciplinary knowledge and understanding how it is produced within specific historical contexts. In Algerian English departments, this means teaching Anglophone civilizations not as universal frameworks, but as socially and ideologically constructed systems that reflect historical power dynamics (Mignolo, 2000; Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2017). Such a perspective encourages students to critically interrogate the discourses embedded in these knowledge systems and to recognize the selective processes through which certain narratives are canonized while others are marginalized (Phillipson, 1992; Zeng & Yang, 2024).

Furthermore, by positioning knowledge as relational and contextually grounded, students are invited to reflect on their own positionality and the influence of local histories, languages, and epistemologies on their understanding of global cultures (Le Grange, 2019; Koopman & Koopman, 2023). This approach aligns with the principles of border thinking, which advocate for a dialogue between Western and non-Western epistemologies, allowing for the production of hybrid, pluriversal knowledge that challenges Eurocentric dominance while fostering critical awareness and intellectual agency (Mignolo, 2000). In this way, civilization and culture courses can move beyond the passive transmission of Western knowledge to cultivate students’ capacity for critical engagement, reflection, and context-sensitive analysis, empowering them to contribute meaningfully to both local and global knowledge consumption and production (Winter et al., 2022; Morreira et al., 2020).

On the level of implementation, curriculum decolonization cannot be effectively sustained without strong institutional commitment and structural support. As Musharrat Ahmed-Landeryou (2023) emphasizes, meaningful decolonial transformation requires not only leadership endorsement but also the allocation of financial resources and integration into the strategic planning of higher education institutions (p. 174). In the context of Algerian universities, this indicates that reforms in civilization and culture courses should be systematically departmentalized, with clear institutional backing, rather than relying solely on the initiative of

individual instructors. Without such comprehensive support, decolonial efforts risk remaining fragmented, symbolic, or superficial, failing to produce the critical, context-sensitive, and socially responsive learning outcomes envisioned by decolonial pedagogy (Shahjahan et al., 2022; Winter et al., 2022; Morreira et al., 2020). Institutionalizing curriculum decolonization ensures that the processes of reviewing content, incorporating local and Global South epistemologies, and fostering critical engagement among students are sustainable and impactful, rather than being improvised, fragmented, or individual efforts.

5. CONCLUSION

The present article examines the teaching of Civilization and Culture courses in Algerian English departments through a decolonial epistemological lens, arguing that meaningful curriculum reform must move beyond surface-level pedagogical adjustments toward a fundamental rethinking of knowledge, purpose, and practice. Drawing on empirical studies and decolonial scholarship, the paper has shown that current content-based curricula remain largely shaped by inherited Eurocentric paradigms, which are often presented as universal and detached from students’ lived realities. This configuration limits students’ engagement, encourages rote learning, and constrains the development of critical, intercultural, and context-sensitive competencies.

The analysis further demonstrated that while instructors generally acknowledge the importance of culture, intercultural competence, and critical engagement, these beliefs rarely translate into classroom practices. Outdated methodologies, dense and fact-oriented content, limited use of interactive and intercultural activities, and insufficient integration of ICT continue to characterize civilization teaching. These pedagogical shortcomings contribute to persistent student disengagement, conceptual misunderstanding, and negative attitudes toward civilization courses, reinforcing a gap between curricular intentions and actual learning experiences. Such findings reveal that the problem is not merely methodological but epistemological, rooted in how knowledge is selected, organized, and legitimized within English studies.

By positioning Civilization modules as epistemological sites, the article has argued that decolonizing the curriculum is essential for aligning English education with Algeria’s contemporary socio-economic transformations and decolonial orientations. Drawing on “Border Thinking”, the paper emphasized that decolonization does not entail rejecting Western knowledge, but rather situating it within a plural, relational framework that values local epistemologies as equally legitimate. This approach enables students to critically interrogate Anglophone

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ISSN : 9577-1112	EISSN : 2602-5388	Volume: (18)	Number : (01)	year: 2026	Pages: 192-211

civilizations, recognize historical power relations embedded in knowledge production, and develop the capacity to engage with global cultures without reproducing epistemic dependency. Moreover, decolonial reform cannot rely on individual instructor initiative alone. Institutional commitment, leadership support, and structural integration into departmental and university-level planning are necessary to ensure that curriculum decolonization becomes a coherent and lasting process rather than a fragmented or symbolic effort. For curriculum designers and educators, this entails rethinking learning outcomes, content selection, and pedagogical strategies in ways that foster critical reflection, intercultural dialogue, and socially responsible knowledge production.

Ultimately, the article invites English departments in Algeria to reconsider the role of Civilization and Culture modules not as repositories of foreign historical facts, but as transformative spaces for epistemic inquiry, critical engagement, and identity negotiation. By embracing decolonial curriculum reform grounded in rigorous theory and supported institutionally, English studies can contribute to the formation of graduates who are not only linguistically proficient but also critically aware, ethically grounded, and capable of navigating and reshaping knowledge in a plural, interconnected world.

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