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Debunking Race and Gender Stereotypes in a Greek EFL Classroom Setting through Project-based Lessons Based on Historical Events

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Abstract

This classroom-based exploratory study examines how four historical-event projects were perceived by ten Greek EFL learners aged 12–14 studying at C1–C2 level. The projects used the films Suffragette, The Best of Enemies, The Trial of the Chicago 7 and Hidden Figures as entry points for researching racial and gender discrimination, discussing historical evidence and preparing presentations. After the intervention, learners completed an anonymous ten-item questionnaire containing closed and open responses. Descriptive findings indicate high satisfaction (six extremely satisfied, three very satisfied and one satisfied), strong interest (all rated interest 8–10/10) and willingness to undertake similar work (ten of ten). Five learners reported a change in their views about stereotypes, four did not and one was unsure. Qualitative comments described greater historical awareness, reflection, language practice and cooperation. The results document learners' perceptions rather than independently measured attitude or proficiency gains. The paper discusses the potential and limitations of historically grounded project-based language teaching in a small, familiar class.

Keywords: *project-based learning; EFL; historical events; gender stereotypes; racial discrimination; critical thinking*

1. Introduction

Project-based learning (PjBL) links language use with extended inquiry and the production of a meaningful outcome. Rather than treating reading, writing, listening and speaking as isolated exercises, projects require learners to locate and evaluate information, negotiate interpretations and communicate findings (Thomas, 2000; Stoller, 1997). In EFL education, these processes can create a purposeful context for integrated language practice and learner autonomy (Fried-Booth, 1986; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). Historical accounts of unequal treatment also invite learners to consider whose experiences are represented and how social assumptions are maintained or contested.

The present study investigated a classroom intervention using historical films and related inquiry tasks. It addressed three questions: (1) How did learners perceive the projects' contribution to reflection on racial and gender stereotypes? (2) How interested and engaged did learners report being, and did they consider the content appropriate for EFL? (3) Were they willing to investigate the topics further and participate in similar projects? The aim is to report learner perspectives accurately, not to claim causal evidence of changed attitudes.

2. Theoretical Framework

PjBL has been described as learning organised around complex questions and authentic products (Thomas, 2000). Barron et al. (1998) emphasise meaningful inquiry and conceptual understanding, while Stoller (1997) highlights integration of language and subject content. Projects may provide opportunities for collaboration, communication, independent research and reflection; however, such outcomes depend on task design, scaffolding and classroom conditions rather than following automatically from the label "project" (Beckett & Miller, 2006).

Within EFL, Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009) reported positive experiences with project work in a Greek primary-school context, including learner engagement and autonomy. Fried-Booth (1986) frames language tasks as emerging from the project's overall purpose. These perspectives inform the present intervention: students examined historically situated inequalities while using English to research, discuss and present their conclusions. The selection of sensitive topics also required space for different views and for respectful treatment of learners' experiences. The study did not use a validated prejudice scale; its evidence is limited to retrospective learner reports and teacher observations.

Questionnaire design and interpretation were informed by Rowley (2014) and Perry (2011), while the categorisation of open responses followed the logic of directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). These sources support the methodological choices but do not establish the validity of this

particular instrument.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants and Setting

Ten EFL students (three boys and seven girls), aged 12–14, took part in the study at the researcher's language school in Greece. They attended a C1–C2 preparation class and had Greek and Albanian family backgrounds; all were raised in Greece. They were a convenience sample and had previously experienced project-based lessons with the same teacher. This familiarity reduced the need for introductory training but also limits transferability and may have influenced favourable responses. The age range of 12–14 is confirmed by the author for this revised article.

3.2 Instructional Projects and Materials

Four projects drew on historical films, supplemented by video excerpts, readings, classroom discussion, independent inquiry and learner presentations. The thesis indicates that each project occupied no more than two lessons, with subsequent research and presentations. The available record does not include a standardised lesson-by-lesson protocol, an itemised source pack or a common assessment rubric. Accordingly, these procedures are described at the level documented in the original study.
The films were used as representations of historical events rather than as independent evidence of historical accuracy. Their narratives provided accessible starting points for examining unequal treatment, exclusion and resistance to discrimination. Learners considered women's political and professional rights, racial segregation, integration, political protest and intersecting racial and gender barriers, supported by research and discussion. In the gender-related projects, the classroom discussion concerned women's participation in public life and barriers to professional or civic equality. In the race-related projects, the central concerns included segregation, integration, racial prejudice and the relationship between historical events and contemporary examples of exclusion. These are thematic descriptions supported by the thesis, not claims that identical tasks were administered across the four films.

Table 1. The four projects and their documented thematic focus. The inquiry purposes summarise the activities described in the thesis; they are not a verbatim lesson plan.

Project / film	Historical focus	Inquiry and language purpose
Suffragette	Women's suffrage and political rights	Research the suffrage movement; discuss equality and present findings.
The Best of Enemies	Racial segregation and school integration in the United States	Examine segregation and opposing perspectives; discuss discrimination.
The Trial of the Chicago 7	Protest, political dissent and civil rights in the United States	Investigate the historical setting and evaluate representations of dissent.
Hidden Figures	African American women in mathematics and the space programme	Investigate barriers involving race and gender; discuss achievement and exclusion.

3.3 Instrument and Analytical Procedure

After the four projects, participants completed an anonymous ten-item questionnaire in approximately ten minutes. Closed-response items addressed satisfaction, interest, willingness to investigate further, perceived attitude change and project preferences; open items invited explanations. Closed responses were tabulated descriptively in Excel. The thesis describes directed content analysis of open responses, organised into five themes: historical understanding, active thinking, stereotypes, language development and cooperation/self-confidence. The report does not document independent coders, intercoder agreement or a reproducible coding audit trail. The questionnaire is summarised in Appendix A.
The questionnaire was administered only once, after the intervention. Consequently, the item about prior knowledge is a retrospective self-rating, not a measured pre-intervention test. Likewise, a response indicating that a learner had reconsidered stereotypes is a self-report of perceived influence rather than independently verified attitudinal change. No control group or delayed follow-up assessment was reported.

4. Findings

4.1 Closed-Response Results

Table 2. Counts reconstructed from the charts in the original thesis. With ten participants, each learner represents 10 percentage points.

Question / construct	Reported responses (n = 10)
Satisfaction	6 extremely satisfied; 3 very satisfied; 1 satisfied
Interest (1–10)	2 rated 8; 3 rated 9; 5 rated 10
Willingness to research further	1 extremely likely; 3 very likely; 5 likely; 1 unlikely
Reported change in views on stereotypes	5 yes; 4 no; 1 unsure
Willingness to repeat similar projects	10 yes
Project perceived as most impactful	Suffragette 6; The Best of Enemies 1; The Trial of the Chicago 7 2; Hidden Figures 1
Perceived suitability for an EFL class	10 appropriate

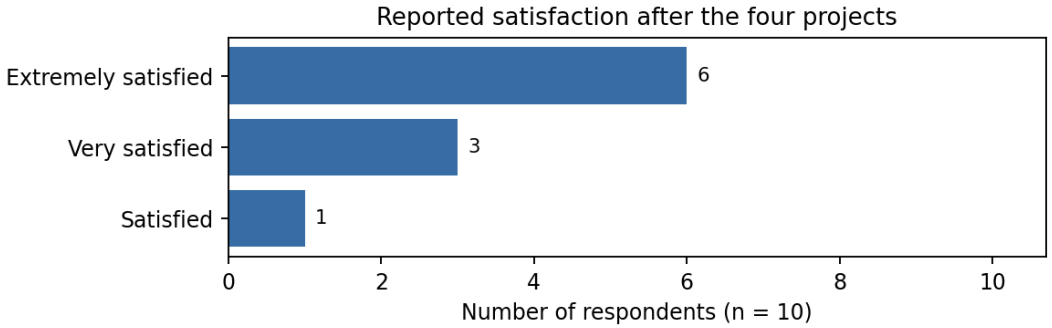


Fig. 1. *Satisfaction responses reconstructed from the original thesis chart (n = 10).*

All ten learners gave a positive satisfaction response and rated interest at the upper end of the ten-point scale. Nine of ten selected a response from “likely” to “extremely likely” for further research, while all expressed willingness to undertake similar projects. These results support a description of favourable self-reported reception in this particular class; they do not establish the effectiveness of the approach across EFL settings.
The question on perceived gains allowed multiple selections. The thesis reports category shares of 29% for group work, 21% for becoming an active thinker, 14% for conducting investigations and 14% for shifting views on important issues, alongside other categories. These percentages refer to selections across a multiple-response item, not proportions of the ten learners. Since the underlying response total is not preserved in the article, they should not be translated into participant counts.
Perceived attitude change requires special care. Five students answered “yes”, four “no” and one “not sure”. The thesis notes that some students who answered “no” already regarded themselves as non-prejudiced and nevertheless described gaining historical understanding. Accordingly, a negative response cannot automatically be interpreted as rejection of the lesson, nor can a positive response establish durable behavioural change. Another item described nine learners as finding the projects very helpful for challenging stereotypes; this is a separate self-report construct and should not be combined with the five “yes” responses.

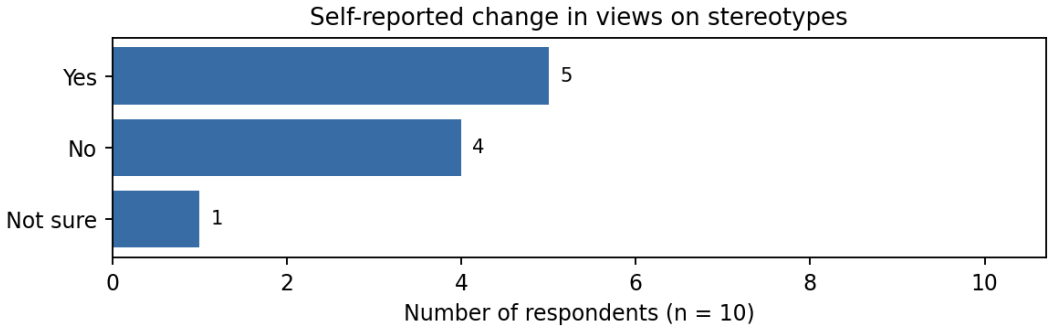


Fig. 2. *Self-reported change in views (n = 10); this is not a pre/post attitude measure.*

4.2 Open-Response Themes and Classroom Observations

Historical understanding. The thesis describes learners becoming familiar with women's suffrage, the Ku Klux Klan and integration, and connecting these historical subjects to contemporary discrimination. These are researcher-reported summaries, not verbatim learner quotations or independently scored history-test outcomes; individual questionnaires were unavailable for verification.

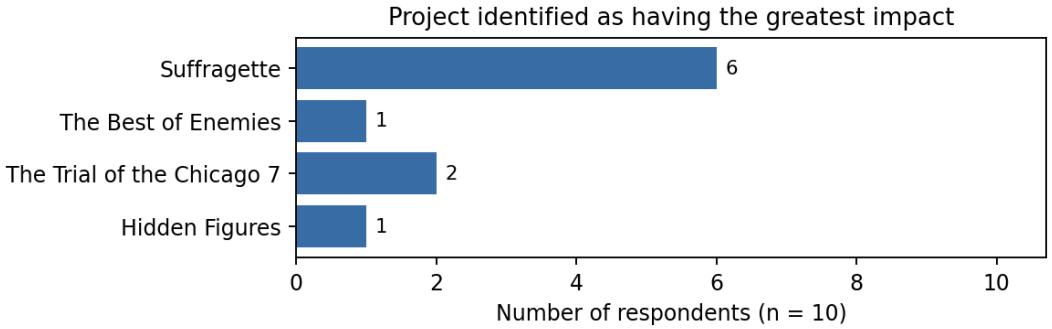


Fig. 3. *Preferred project by perceived impact, as reported in the thesis (n = 10).*

Active thinking and stereotypes. Learners reportedly examined sources, questioned information and discussed discriminatory incidents in school and society. The thesis also describes connections to personal experiences and contemporary misinformation. These examples illustrate the interpretive themes, but cannot establish measured changes in critical-thinking ability or durable attitudes.

Language and cooperation. Learners reported new vocabulary, listening and speaking practice, and opportunities to prepare presentations. The teacher observed peer explanations and contributions from previously quieter learners. These are self-reports and classroom observations, not independently rated language-proficiency gains.

5. Discussion

The favourable satisfaction and interest responses are consistent with the motivational possibilities attributed to meaningful, collaborative project work (Beckett & Miller, 2006; Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). Learners' accounts of research and presentations similarly reflect the integration of language and content described by Stoller (1997). The findings extend these pedagogical discussions by illustrating how a small advanced EFL class engaged with historically grounded questions of inequality.

A further distinction is needed between engagement with a sensitive topic and evidence of durable changes in discriminatory beliefs. Learners may find the historical narratives compelling and develop vocabulary for discussing inequality without necessarily changing a pre-existing belief. In the present data, the four respondents who reported no change cannot automatically be interpreted as resistant to the teaching: the thesis records that some already considered themselves opposed to discrimination. Conversely, the five affirmative responses cannot establish how long any reported shift persisted.

The preference for Suffragette (six of ten respondents) identifies the project that students perceived as most impactful, not necessarily the most effective in language acquisition or stereotype reduction. It is possible that the narrative, familiarity of the issue or presentation format influenced preference, but the available dataset does not isolate those factors. The remaining projects should therefore be interpreted as complementary historical entry points rather than ranked interventions with demonstrated differential effectiveness.

6. Pedagogical Implications and Limitations

Teachers wishing to adapt this model could select an age-appropriate historical question, use film excerpts alongside corroborating historical sources, assign focused research roles, provide language support for discussion and presentation, and facilitate respectful reflection on competing interpretations. Historical accuracy and student wellbeing matter particularly when projects concern discrimination. The present report offers an illustrative framework, not a validated package of teaching materials.

A practical sequence for future implementation could include a brief diagnostic discussion, explicit vocabulary preparation, comparison of a film excerpt with a historical source, small-group inquiry, presentation of

evidence, and an individual reflection on how claims were evaluated. This is a pedagogical recommendation derived from the study's themes, not a reconstruction of every activity actually carried out. Teachers should provide a structured way to disagree respectfully and avoid requiring students to disclose personal experiences of discrimination.

For a stronger replication, researchers could collect anonymous baseline and post-project responses using comparable prompts, preserve de-identified excerpts of learner writing, record the exact materials and duration of each project, and analyse a sample of open responses with a second coder. A delayed follow-up would help distinguish immediate enthusiasm from sustained reflection. Such procedures would address the main evidential limitations of the current exploratory study.

The study is limited by its small convenience sample, single institutional setting, short intervention (no more than two lessons per project), participants' prior familiarity with PjBL, retrospective self-reporting, the teacher-researcher's dual role and incomplete documentation of qualitative coding. Anonymous questionnaires may reduce, but cannot eliminate, social-desirability effects. No pre/post validated attitude measure, comparison group or delayed follow-up was used. The original documentation does not establish whether institutional ethics review, parental consent or learner assent was formally recorded; these matters require author verification before submission. No verbatim learner quotations are supplied because the individual response sheets were unavailable.

Future studies could document the exact teaching materials, preserve de-identified learner responses, compare baseline and post-project measures, use independent coding and include delayed follow-up. The confirmed participant age range for this publication version is 12–14 years.

7. Conclusion

In this ten-learner EFL class, four projects centred on historical representations of racial and gender inequality were received positively and prompted reported interest in further inquiry. Participants described opportunities to learn historical content, practise English and consider discrimination critically. These findings are promising as a classroom account but remain preliminary. The contribution is a carefully delimited example of historically oriented project work, rather than proof of causal changes in stereotypes or language proficiency.

Research transparency: This article reports a small exploratory classroom study using the descriptive results and thematic summaries documented in the author's MA thesis. The original individual questionnaire responses were not available for independent reanalysis.

Appendix A. Questionnaire administered after the four projects

The following reproduces the substantive wording and response options of the ten-item instrument in the original MA thesis (pp. 44–46), with compact formatting.

1. How do you feel about Project-based lessons? Extremely satisfied / Very satisfied / Satisfied / Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied / Dissatisfied / Extremely dissatisfied

2. What did you like about working on those projects? Select all that apply. Working in groups; learning to investigate a topic; creating a successful presentation; presenting to an audience; acquiring knowledge about historical events; shifting views on race/gender stereotypes; becoming an active thinker; other.

3. From 1 to 10, how much did you know about these historical events before taking part? 1 = not informed; 10 = very informed.

4. From 1 to 10, how engaged were you about the topics discussed? 1 = not interested; 10 = very interested.

5. How likely are you to conduct further research on those topics? Extremely likely / Very likely / Likely / Unlikely / Very unlikely / Extremely unlikely.

6. Do you feel that your ideas on race and gender stereotypes have changed? Yes / No / Not sure.

7. Would you like to work on similar projects in the future? Yes / No / Not sure.

8. Which topic created the biggest impact on you, and why? Open response.

9. How much did the lessons assist you in reconsidering stereotypes and becoming an active thinker? Open response.

10. Are these projects and topics appropriate for a foreign-language classroom? Why? Yes / No, with explanation.



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