Debunking race and gender stereotypes in a Greek EFL classroom

Project-based lessons based on historical events

Aikaterini Tsilimpari

MA in Applied Linguistics, Hellenic American University

My idea and why I chose it

Historical events gave my learners something meaningful to investigate and discuss in English.

My aim was to connect language learning with critical thinking, acceptance and empathy.

Starting point: the rationale in my MA thesis and revised conference paper.

What I wanted to investigate

Views on stereotypes	How did learners perceive the projects' influence on their thinking?
Interest and relevance	Did the topics engage learners and fit an EFL classroom?
Willingness to continue	Would learners investigate further and join similar projects?

The class and the study

10 **learners in my language school**

Aged 12–14
C1–C2 preparation class

3 boys and 7 girls
Greek and Albanian backgrounds

Exploratory classroom study. Convenience sample already familiar with PjBL.

The four project topics

Film / project	Historical focus
Suffragette	Women’s suffrage and political rights
The Best of Enemies	Racial segregation and school integration
The Trial of the Chicago 7	Protest, political dissent and civil rights
Hidden Figures	Race, gender and recognition in science

Films provided entry points for inquiry, alongside readings, videos and research.

The process of a project

01 Before

Introduce the historical topic and prepare essential vocabulary.

02 During

Explore film and texts, discuss the issues and research further.

03 After

Present findings in English and reflect on the issues discussed.

No more than two classroom lessons per project, with follow-up research and presentations.

A classroom example: Suffragette



Suffragettes

A) Warm up

1. Look at the pictures. Work in pairs to figure out what is their main topic,
2. What do you know about Suffragettes?/ Have you ever heard of the term?
3. Did you ever have to support your rights against someone or somebody?

Original worksheet from my teacher presentation, slide 8.

The original material combined:

Images and warm-up questions

Vocabulary and video comprehension

Paired research and a presentation

How I collected and analysed the data

One anonymous questionnaire after all four projects

10 questions

Closed responses and open explanations, completed in about 10 minutes.

Two forms of analysis

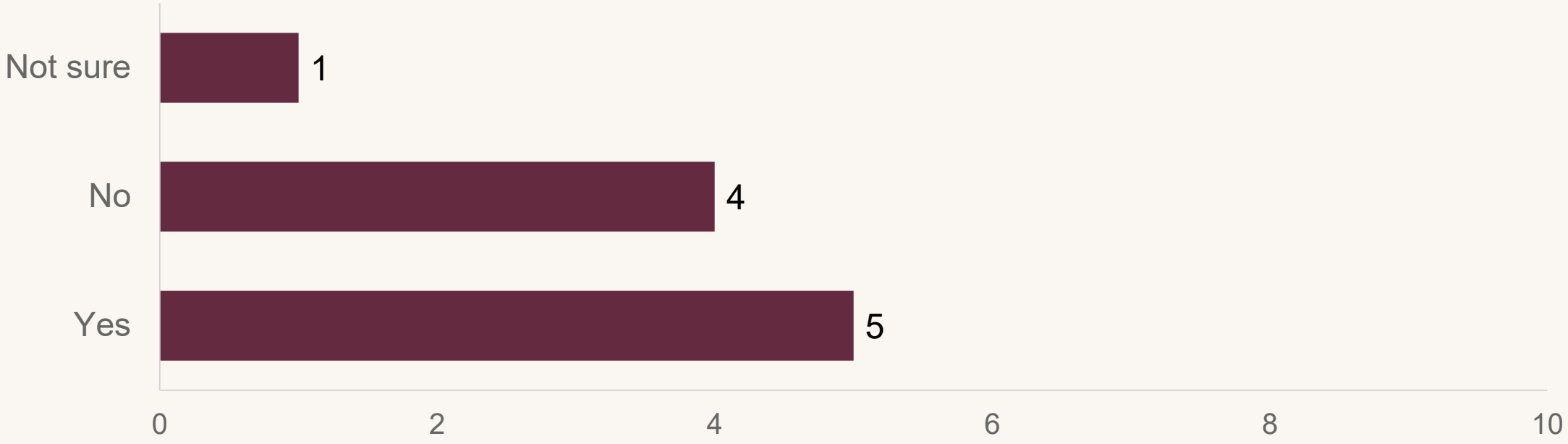
Descriptive counts in Excel and directed content analysis of open responses.

The research results

Questionnaire focus	Reported responses (n = 10)
Satisfaction	6 extremely satisfied; 3 very satisfied; 1 satisfied
Interest	All 10 rated interest between 8 and 10/10
Further investigation	1 extremely likely; 3 very likely; 5 likely; 1 unlikely
Change in views	5 yes; 4 no; 1 unsure
Similar projects in future	10 yes
Greatest reported impact	Suffragette 6; Chicago 7: 2; other two films: 1 each
Suitability for EFL	10 appropriate

Descriptive self-reports. Counts summarise Table 2 in the revised conference paper.

What changed in learners' views?



Some learners answering "no" already saw themselves as opposed to discrimination.

n = 10. Perceived change, without a pre/post attitude measure.

Five themes in the open responses

Historical understanding	Learning about events and the inequalities behind them
Active thinking	Questioning information and supporting arguments
Reflection on stereotypes	Connecting history with discrimination in everyday life
Language practice	Vocabulary, listening, speaking and presentations
Cooperation and confidence	Peer support and greater participation

Themes from learner reports and teacher observations, not independently measured gains.

The outcome of the investigation

The projects received positive feedback and opened opportunities for reflection.

Learners wanted to continue and described meaningful English practice.
Reports of changed views varied across the class.

The findings describe this classroom experience and remain exploratory.

Limitations

A small, familiar class	10 learners in one school, with an established teacher relationship.
Short-term self-report	No baseline attitude measure, control group or delayed follow-up.
Teacher–researcher role	Possible response bias and no independent verification of coding.

Next steps: broader samples, pre/post measures, learner work and follow-up.

What I take back to the classroom

A meaningful question	A historical event gives learners something worth investigating.
Support for English	Vocabulary and discussion support research and presentation.
Evidence and empathy	Historical sources and respectful dialogue support reflection.

Conclusion: encouraging engagement and reported reflection, with further research needed.

Thank you

English gives learners a voice. Historical inquiry gives them something meaningful to explore.

Questions and discussion

Aikaterini Tsilimpari