Civic Education In Algerian Secondary School English Language Curriculum: A Neglected Dimension?

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Abstract

After the latest educational reforms, the Algerian educational policy has shifted towards incorporating civic themes in EFL teaching; hence EFL secondary school curriculum was built upon civic education (CE) notions with the aim of preparing students to be effective citizens in their society. Thus, the present paper aims at critically analyzing the status of CE in secondary school EFL curriculum. The paper first provides an overview of EFL secondary school syllabi with focus on CE topics. Second, it discusses the main obstacles that hinder the effective incorporation of CE in EFL context through classroom observation and questionnaires directed to both secondary EFL teachers and students. The gathered data show that EFL Secondary School curriculum is designed with a very solid CE perspective and clear preset civic education goals; however, its integration in secondary school classrooms is far from achieving those goals. Thus a reflection on the ways of incorporating CE within EFL secondary school education is recommended to achieve an effective implementation of CE in EFL teaching.

Key words Civic education – secondary school education – EFL teaching – EFL curriculum.

1. Introduction

Civic education, also termed "citizen education" and "democracy education", is the area of formal or informal education that is concerned with equipping students with different information and learning experiences that will prepare them to be effective citizens in their communities. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of the values, beliefs and attitudes important in students' democratic citizenship engagement (McCowan, 2009). Hence, within the impact of globalization and the developing reconfiguration of geographical and cultural boundaries in addition to the huge social, political and economic changes all over the world, the last decade has witnessed a remarkable "revival of interest" in citizenship and civic education (Turner, 1990, p. 190).

Accordingly, Algeria is among the nations that showed great interest in CE and recognized its importance in preparing Algerian youth to be democratic citizens, who are fully involved in the civic life of their society and country. This tendency towards the incorporation of CE in the Algerian teaching policy was declared by the former president Bouteflika in his address to the nation in which he admitted the lack of youth civic

engagement and urged educators to work harder on restoring the values of democratic citizenship, nationalism and civic engagement among our youth (Lakhal, 2007 cited in Benmahcene, 2014). Hence, after this national tendency towards civic education and the remarkable educational reforms along with the adoption of Competency Based Approach (CBA) in Algerian primary, middle and secondary education, the need for designing curricula that prepare students for their citizenship roles and duties has increased tremendously.

However, even though EFL classroom, due to its cross-cultural nature, is believed to be the ideal environment for the incorporation of civic education, it remained an "under-researched site for the education of citizens" (Zhu, 2013, p. V). Therefore, the present paper aims at representing a critical analysis of the status of civic education in Algerian EFL secondary school curriculum and investigating the extent to which civic notions are effectively implemented in the EFL teaching and learning process. Furthermore, since civic education and engagement in Algeria face several difficulties, the current study aims at accounting for the obstacles that hamper the effective implementation of CE in Algerian EFL secondary school teaching. Thus, in light of these objectives, the following **research questions** will be examined :

1. What is the status of CE in Algerian EFL secondary school curriculum?
2. Are civic education notions effectively implemented in EFL secondary school teaching?
3. What are the obstacles that hinder the effective incorporation of CE in secondary school EFL teaching process?

2. Literature Review
Given the fundamental role of citizenship in civic education, as articulated by Bawa (2011), a comprehensive historical investigation of civic education must necessarily delve into the historical development of citizenship concepts and practices.

2.1 The Notion of Citizenship and Its Development Through History
The notion of citizenship in not recent as it has developed though history taking a variety of forms and meanings across different societies and cultures. According to Heater (2004) the concept of citizenship sprang out in Greece during the Archaic era (776- 479 BC) and maintained as an important human social need, after that it flourished during Greek Classical era. Accordingly, during the periods of Greek and Roman civilizations, citizenship was used as a legal term to refer to the citizen's social identity. Additionally, during the Greek rule, the concept 'citizenship' underwent dynamic process of invention and definition, re-invention and re-definition (Muleya, 2005); the concept then kept evolving through history to conform to specific needs and contexts of different communities. For example, the French Revolution had completely reshaped the meaning of the term citizenship as the civil mobilization by the middle class, who claimed for their right to participate in political decisions, had a great impact on changing the criteria for considering people as citizens both in France and other countries. Therefore, since each of the Greek Civilization, the Roman Empire, the Medieval and Renaissance City and modern states had constructed its own version and meaning of the term citizenship, both citizenship and civic education are contextual since different nations and states have different objectives concerning the type of citizens they need.

2.2 Civic Education and the Teaching of Democratic Citizenship

Civic Education is a teaching pedagogy that aims at promoting civic engagement and supporting democratic and participatory governance. Hence, through efficient civic engagement, individuals will be empowered as agents of positive social change in their societies and the whole world as well (Jacoby, 2009). Furthermore, to achieve successful democratic citizenship engagement, the civic teaching/learning experience should include one or more of these CE principles: learning from others, self and environment to build solid perspectives on social issues, participating actively in public life, public problem solving and community service, assuming leadership and membership roles in organizations, developing empathy, ethics, values and sense of social responsibility in addition to promoting local and global social justice (ibid, 2009).

Civic Education, being a school subject, has its roots in the American educational system, and then it was gradually adopted in the United Kingdom, however; it was not incorporated in Africa until recently (Torney-Purta, 2002). The adoption of CE in African countries was due to the British influence on curriculum designing within its colonies in addition to the will of African countries to cope with the educational developments in the western countries. While Kelly (1996) argued that civic education is a typical African ideology and Africans have always transmitted CE principles to their children.

Therefore, this global tendency towards the adoption of civic education translates the urgent need for the implementation of CE values in the teaching/learning of all subjects and in EFL classrooms particularly in order to ensure an effective reinforcement of democratic citizenship, human rights and civic engagement of the country's students. In this pursuit, Dumor (1998) asserted that the CE curricula are designed mainly to achieve three major objectives:

1. To equip citizens with knowledge of the basic rules and institutional characteristics of democratic political systems in addition to different democratic rights and practices.
2. To convey a group of values, which are considered important for democratic citizenship, like political tolerance, critical thinking, and respect for the rule of law …etc.
3. To enhance responsible and informal political participation, and encourage political and service learning activities that include: voting, working in campaigns, paying taxes, lodging complaints …etc.

In the same line of argument Halstead & Pike (2008) highlighted the importance of CE for the enhancing of students' civic engagement in their communities and declared that CE has been implemented as a core subject in some western countries such as England which devoted more than 5 % of secondary school time to CE. Consequently, this is evidence of how much CE is prized and widely valued by developed communities, which leads the researcher to enquire about the benefits of this pedagogy in enhancing societies' democratic realities.

2.3 The Importance of Civic Education in Enhancing Democratic Citizenship

Since its emergence as a teaching pedagogy, civic education has been considered by many scholars an essential tool for democratic citizenship development since it plays a fundamental role in preparing young citizens to be effective agents in society affairs. Galston (2004) argued that having profound civic knowledge can enhance democratic citizenship in many ways. First, civic knowledge helps citizens comprehend and learn more about civic affairs which will make them avoid having mistrust and fear of public

life. Second, civic knowledge enhances consistency of citizens' views like the ones expressed at public opinion
surveys as the more civic knowledge citizens have the more consistent their views are. Third, civic knowledge can change citizens' opinions on certain civic issues, for example the more profound civic knowledge citizens have, the less they are to fear immigrants and their impact on the country's economy.

In the same line of argument, Cecchim (2003) considered CE as indispensable agent of democratic citizenship improvement as it helps equipping citizens with knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute positively and effectively in public life, which makes CE one of the most effective media employed by states to promote positive citizenship values in their societies. While Biesta (2011) viewed CE as vehicle for democratic enlightenment since it conveys the right knowledge of the principles of democratic living, such as the ability to distinguish fair and unfair laws and actions and the necessity to fight civic imbalance, which is necessary for the development of citizens' democracy.

3. The Study
The purpose of the current research is to investigate the status of civic education in secondary school EFL curriculum and critically analyze its implementation in the process of teaching/learning EFL in Algerian secondary schools. It also accounts for the obstacles that hinder the effective incorporation of civic education in secondary school English syllabi and provides recommendations to achieve a real and effective implementation of CE in Algerian secondary school English courses.

3.1 Methodology
Since the present study is concerned with the investigation of the status of Civic Education in Algerian secondary school English curriculum through a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the secondary school English curriculum and classroom observation in addition to obtaining teachers' and students' opinions on the status of CE and the obstacles that might hinder its effective incorporation in the process of EFL secondary school teaching/ learning. Hence, the researcher has opted for the case study approach, in which the concerned secondary school students and teachers take the case of a small research sample.

In spite of the fact that this research method does not guarantee complete representativity, however; it can effectively depict, analyze and explain the uniqueness of the research population and situation.

3.2 Participants
In order to ensure the variety of ideas and inspect different points of view concerning the subject matter, the population of the current study is divided into two categories: secondary school students and secondary school teachers.

3.2.1 Students
This research concerns first, second and third year secondary school students at L'Arbi Kouider Secondary School -Lasilis- Ouargla. The researchers have chosen to deal with the three levels in order to ensure total representativity of the sample since the research deals with syllabi of the three secondary school levels. 120 students out of 350 were selected, which makes an average of 34.28% of all school students' distributed in the three levels. The sample population is constituted of 57 males and 63 females randomly selected. All

the students involved in the investigation have studied English for at least four years in middle school and they are aged between 16 and 20 years old.

3.2.2 Teachers
The teachers involved in the study were twenty teachers selected from different secondary schools in Ouargla city. All teachers, who participated in this research, are certified teachers with an experience in EFL secondary school teaching that varies between 8 to 22 years.

3.3 Data Collection Methods
So as to ensure research validity and a full representation of the situation under investigation, the researcher used multiple data collection methods. Bacha (2003) indicated that using multiple data collection instruments can add important depth to the analysis and help obtaining a realistic depiction of the situation or topic under study. Therefore, the researchers have opted for three different research instruments in conducting the present study:

3.3.1 Qualitative Analysis of the Three Secondary School Levels Syllabi
A thorough critical analysis of the syllabi of the three secondary school levels is needed to depict the status of CE in EFL secondary school curriculum. Hence, to achieve this goal, the researchers resorted to the teachers' manual and other documents provided by the Ministry of National Education in addition to the three secondary school levels English course books used by both teachers and learners.

3.3.2 Classroom Observation
The researchers used classroom observation to understand how students interact with the different CE topics introduced to them and how much interest and attention they pay to such topics. This instrument was also important to explore the main obstacles that might hinder the effective implementation of CE within secondary school classrooms.

3.3.3 Questionnaires
The third instrument selected for conducting this research is questionnaires. Hence, two questionnaires were designed; the first directed to secondary school students while the second was designed to secondary school EFL teachers. The aim behind directing the first questionnaire to students was to determine the students' English proficiency level and identify the main difficulties encountered by students in understanding as well as benefiting from the CE topics introduced to them within the English courses. Whereas, the second aimed at identifying how much importance do Algerian secondary school teachers give to CE and the main obstacles they encounter when trying to deal with CE topics in their classrooms.

3.4 Procedure
It is important to carry out a pilot study before embarking on the study in order to examine the research instruments and the data collection procedures. Seliger & Shohamy (1989) indicated that the pilot study is an essential research step that helps the researcher assess the quality of his/her instruments and therefore revise it or improve it before using it with the actual subjects of the research. Hence, the two questionnaires were piloted (with small group of 10 students and three teachers) and modifications were carried out to guarantee the efficiency of the research instruments. Furthermore, the researchers noticed in the pilot study that some teachers do not have a clear idea on Civic Education,

its principles and its objectives. Consequently, the researchers decided to provide a definition of CE at the beginning of the questionnaire directed for teachers.

4. The Results

After the collection of data through the different research instruments used in this study, the status of Civic Education in Algerian English secondary school curriculum was explored and then analyzed; furthermore, the obstacles that hinder the implementation of CE in English secondary school teaching/ learning were identified. Hence, the results are represented and discussed as follows:

4.1 The Status of CE in Algerian English Secondary School Curriculum

When analyzing the ministry manuals of 1SE, 2SE and 3SE's programme, one can notice hints and notions of CE; however, these notions are not explicitly mentioned or discussed. Therefore, to account for these notions, the researchers examined the objectives of English language teaching in secondary education which are represented at the beginning of all ministry programme manuals. The objectives of teaching English in secondary education are divided into four categories: 1) linguistic objectives, 2) methodological objectives, 3) cultural objectives and 4) socio-professional objectives. While the first two objectives deal only with equipping students with the needed linguistic competencies and appropriate learning strategies; the last two objectives contain some CE insights and are to a certain extent civic oriented. For example, when considering cultural objectives, they include:

- Encouraging students to explore cultural aspects of different linguistic communities which will enable them to have a profound knowledge of their own culture.

- Promoting positive attitudes towards other cultures.

- Stimulating students' curiosity and contributing to opening their spirit via exposing them to different contexts of civilization and raising their interest in the varieties of English civilizations (British, American, and African).

While socio-professional objectives emphasize:

-Promoting pedagogy of success through creating an environment in which students develop positive attitudes towards learning English.

-Fostering interdisciplinarity by incorporating themes belonging to other disciplines so as to enable students express different realities and situations using the English language.

　　　　Another important document provided by the Ministry of National Education to the English language teachers is the teacher's guide in which all the course book units, sequences and rubrics are explained and methods of their presentation are represented. Surprisingly, after the analysis of the teacher's guides of the three levels, no CE orientations or hints where found in the three books, where the most discussed objectives were　　achieving proficiency in the three competencies, namely interaction, comprehension/interpretation and production.

　　　　The third element in this analysis was English course books of the three secondary school levels. The analysis of the three course books shall be then divided into three parts:

4.1.1 First Year Course Book "At the Crossroads"

This course book comprises five units, each replete with implicit cross-cultural and CE nuances. Unit one "Getting Started", which deals with the different means of communication (traditional and modern), encourages students to make friendships with people from different countries and urges them to use the modern means of communication with caution as it illustrates the benefits and drawbacks of different means of communication. While the second unit "Our Findings Show…", which tackles the topic of media and press; raises students' awareness to issues that might be new for them such as ethics of journalism, serious papers, tabloids, etc. It also draws students' attention to the dangers of promoting false or invalid information. As for the third unit "Eureka"; it deals mainly with innovation and technology. The main civic notions that can be deduced from this unit are: raising students' awareness of the importance of science and exposing them to different scientific inventions and inventors in addition to making them think of the ways these inventions improved people's daily life. While unit four "Back to Nature", which deals with the drawbacks of technological development and its dangers on the environment, contains clear and powerful civic notions. It alerts students about the dangers of the modern industry and development on the environment and people's health; it also brings their attention to environmental phenomena such as pollution and global warming and highlights the citizens' role in fighting these phenomena.

4.1.2 Second Year Course Book "Getting Through"
Second year course book contains six units but students in scientific streams are concerned only with four units while literary and foreign languages streams deal with five units. Furthermore, some streams have units which are unique and only students in that specific stream deal with the unit such as unit eight "Business Is Business" which is devoted to students of Management and Economy stream only. Hence, in order to be specific, only the units that contain civic notions will be discussed. First, unit one "Signs of the time", which is devoted to literary streams only, tackles the topic of changing life styles and the differences that exist between life in the past and in the present. The clear civic notion in this unit is the call for preserving our ancestors' customs and traditions and accepting the differences that exist among different cultures. Second, unit two "Make Peace", which students of all streams study, is full of civic insights. It discusses notions of peace, war, rights, duties, racial discrimination …etc and it encourages students to promote a culture of peace in their societies and schools; it also makes them aware of their rights and duties and highlights the importance of respecting other people's rights. The unit also discusses the topic of racial discrimination along with civil rights movements and human rights topics as it urges students to express their right of living in a racism free society and to have equal rights and duties. Third, unit three "Waste Not, Want Not", which deals mainly with the preservation of human resources and protecting the environment, has clear civic messages. For example, it encourages students to be responsible citizens and stop wasting natural resources and damaging the environment. Finally, unit six "No Man Is an Island", that tackles the topic of charity and solidarity especially during crises, contain some civic nuances since it urges students to participate in charitable associations and help people in need, especially during natural disasters.

4.1.3 Third Year Course Book "New Prospects"
The course book of third year comprises six units. When compared with first and second year course books, "New Prospects" apparently contains less CE notions, as they can be noticed in only two units of this book. First, unit two "Ill-Gotten Gains Never Prosper", which tackles the topic of ethics in business, contains clear civic notions such as making the students aware of the importance of ethics in the business world through the

illustration of ethical and unethical practices; it also urges students to be active agents in the society and participate in the fight against corruption. Second, unit four "Safety First", in which the topic of food safety is discussed, yield many civic topics like drawing students' attention to the importance of consuming healthy food and the dangers of GMFs and junk food. It also tackles important issues that citizens suffer from such as obesity, health issues and the negative effect of food advertisements on people's health.

4.1.4 Teachers' Views about the Civic Notions in English Course Books of Algerian Secondary Schools

According to 71 % of secondary school teachers, who participated in the study, civic education notions are present in almost all secondary school English lessons while only 29 % of them think that there exist some CE topics in the secondary school English curriculum but they are not sufficient.
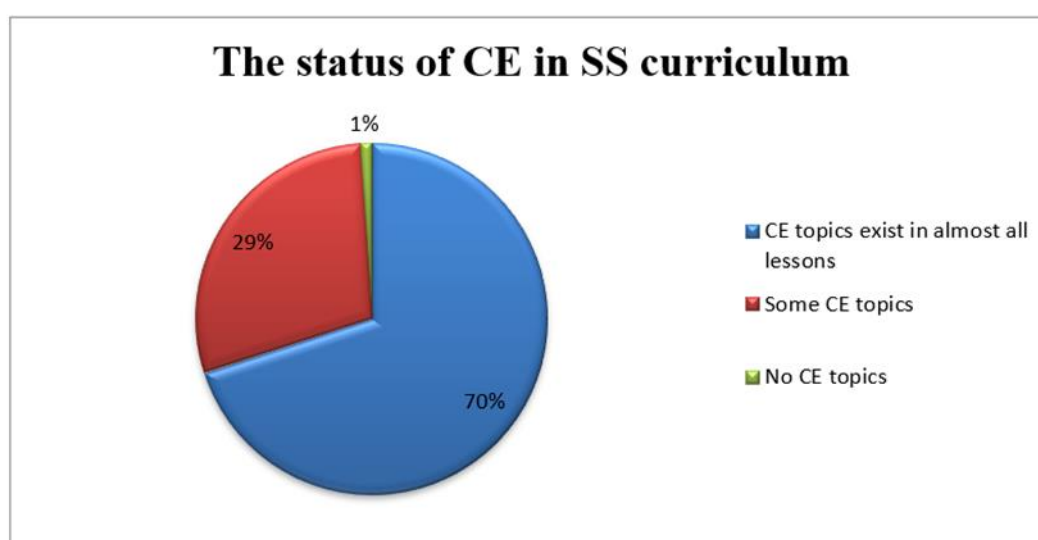

Figure 1. The status of CE in SS English curriculum according to SS teachers.

The analysis of secondary school English language syllabi, textbooks, and teacher's guides reveals a significant potential for civic education. The curriculum is replete with civic concepts that, if effectively harnessed, can contribute to the development of informed, engaged, and responsible citizens. However, a formalized civic education strategy or the explicit integration of civic education principles is currently lacking. To fully realize the civic potential of the English language curriculum, a more deliberate and structured approach is necessary

4.2 The Implementation of Civic Education in Algerian Secondary Schools

Despite the fact that secondary school English curriculum is rich in CE topics, these topics are not effectively implemented in the teaching/ learning process. This was confirmed by the results of the teachers' questionnaire which show that the majority of teachers (82 %) think that CE notions exist but they are not implemented effectively in the SS English curriculum and students rarely benefit from them.
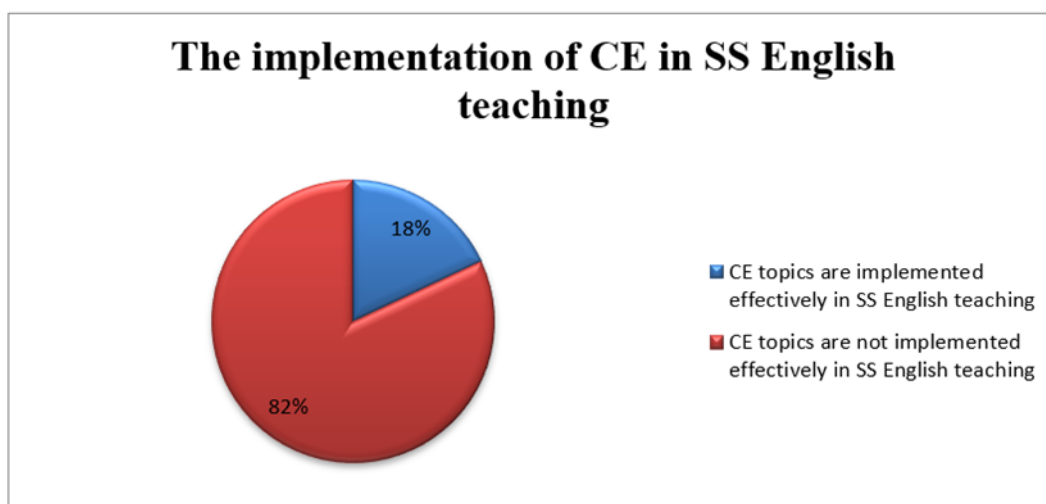
Figure 2. The implementation of CE in SS English teaching according to teachers.

Accordingly, in another question directed to SS English teachers to investigate to which extent they are willing to implement CE topics appropriately in their classes and the importance they give to introducing CE notions to their students; only few teachers (02 %) declared that they give much attention to presenting and highlighting CE notions when teaching lessons or texts that contain CE notions. Furthermore, 08 % of informants stated that they give much attention to making students interact and discuss about the targeted CE notions while the vast majority of informants (80 %) said that they give the priority to achieving the lesson's educational goals.

In this pursuit, students, when asked about their teachers' preferences in reading sessions, 62 % of informants declared that their teachers focus on obtaining correct answers about the comprehension questions, while only 8 % of them thought that their teachers give more importance to discussing the text ideas with them.
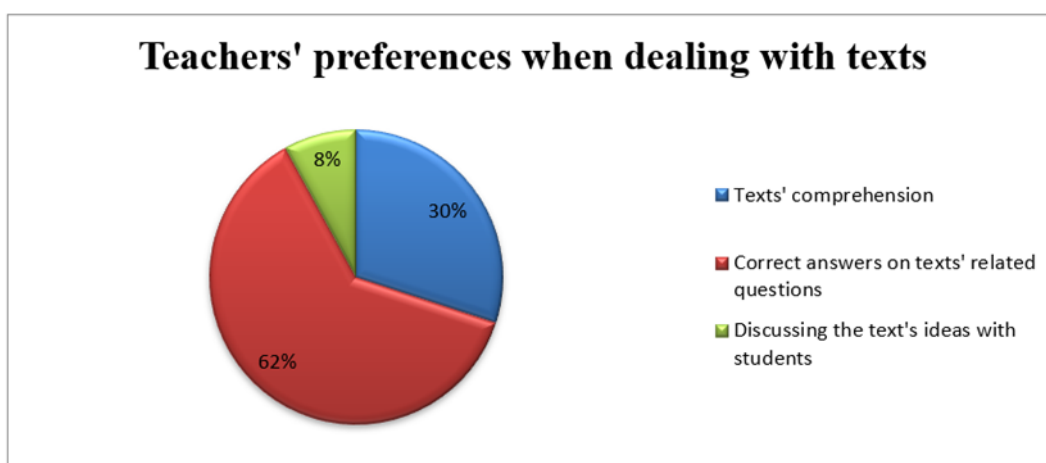

Figure 3. Teachers' preferences when dealing with texts according to students.

The data collected from teachers and students through the questionnaire suggests that CE occupies a subordinate position within EFL secondary school teaching. Teachers' limited emphasis on CE is mirrored in students' perceptions, who prioritize accurate responses to text-related questions over deeper comprehension and discussion of ideas.

Consequently, CE concepts are often neglected. This necessitates a thorough examination of the factors impeding the effective integration of CE into English language teaching and learning in Algerian secondary schools.

4.3 The Obstacles that Hinder the Effective Implementation of CE in SS EFL Teaching Process

As for the main obstacles that prevent the effective implementation of CE in SS English teaching, they are listed as follows:

4.3.1 Students' Low Proficiency Level

One of the major obstacles that hamper the appropriate and effective incorporation of CE in Algerian secondary school teaching is students' low language proficiency level. Students when asked about their level of proficiency of English language 65 % of informants declared that they have beginner's level while 21 % of students had an intermediate level and only 14 % of them had an advanced level.
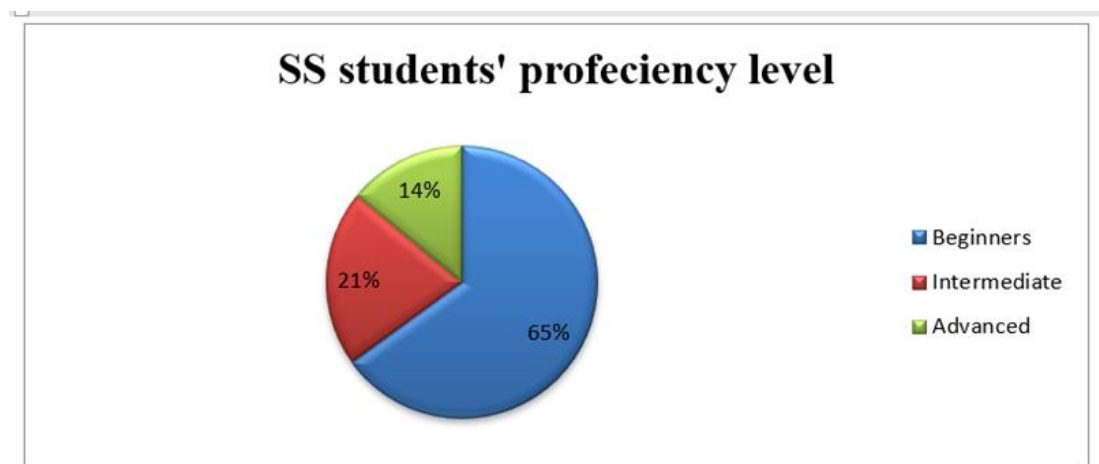

Figure .4 Secondary school students' English proficiency level

This poor level in language command, which is not supposed to be in the case of SS student as they studied English for four years in middle school, will affect their texts' and lessons' understanding. The questionnaire results confirm this hypothesis as the majority of students (67 %) stated that they understand only some vocabulary of the texts in their course books while (26 %) of participants declared that the understood less than half of the texts' vocabulary.

Accordingly, the low level of English proficiency among students severely limits teachers' ability to engage them in meaningful discussions about civic issues. Instead of fostering critical thinking and analysis, teachers are forced to focus on basic language skills, thereby neglecting the essential role of English in promoting civic awareness.

4.3.2 Students' Lack of Interest in English

Another factor that might interfere with the incorporation of CE in SS teaching is students' lack of interest in learning English. 56 % of students who underwent the study declared that they are not motivated to learn English. Therefore, teachers, even if they have the intention to deal with civic topics and raise students' enthusiasm towards discussing them, they will find themselves blocked with students demotivation towards learning the language.

4.3.3 Students' Lack of Interest in the Civic Topics

Even if secondary school students exhibit a desire to learn English, their focus remains largely on the acquisition of grammatical rules and vocabulary, with limited attention paid to the underlying meaning and ideas conveyed through the language. This is corroborated by the questionnaire results presented below :
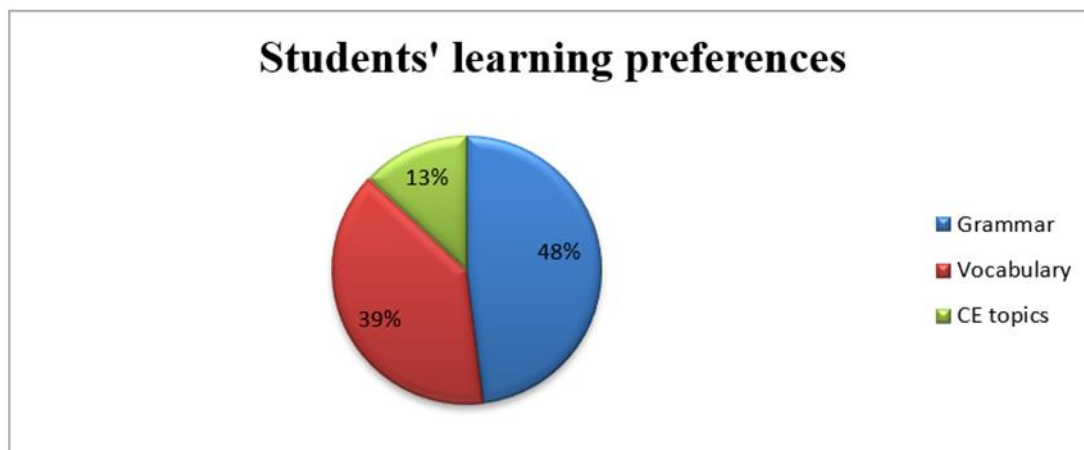

Figure 5. Secondary school students' learning preferences.

When asked about the points they consider most when reading texts, the majority of students (67 %) said that they focus on answering text related questions while (29 %) of them indicated that they focused on the points that help them understand the grammar rules and only (4 %) of informants declared that they were interested in the topic and main ideas of the text. In addition to that, the vast majority of participants said that they read texts only when they are asked by their teachers and only 9 % of them said that they read the educative texts provided in their course books.

4.3.4 The Ambiguity and Complexity of Some CE Notions

Some civic notions in secondary school course books are ambiguous and other times very complex, which make it difficult for SS teenage students to comprehend them. Teachers, when asked about the reasons that make them give little attention to CE, 28 % of them said that it is due to the complexity of these notions whereas 10 % of teachers related that to the ambiguity of these notions.

4.3.5 Teachers' Lack of Interest in Discussing CE Notions with Their Students

Another important factor that restrains the effective implementation of CE in SS teaching is teachers' indifference about the presentation of these topics in their lessons. Accordingly, teachers were asked about the points they give much attention when teaching lessons or texts that contain civic notions; surprisingly, the majority of participants (80 %) answered that they gave much attention to achieving the lessons' educational goals while only (08 %) of participants said that they gave importance to making students interact and discuss the targeted CE notions and (02 %) of informants declared that they were interested in presenting and highlighting the CE notions. In another question about how much attention they give to civic notions, 28 % of teachers declared that they find civic notions non important.

4.3.6 Time Constraints

One of the primary factors hindering the effective integration of CE into secondary school teaching is the scarcity of instructional time. Teachers, confronted with demanding syllabi and limited class hours, are compelled to prioritize the teaching of fundamental language skills, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, over more complex and time-consuming CE concepts. This is further evidenced by the fact that 30% of teachers cited time constraints as the primary reason for their limited focus on civic notions.

5. Conclusion

The present research sought to examine the actual status of civic education within the Algerian EFL secondary school curriculum and to explore the factors impeding its effective implementation in the classroom. While the curriculum implicitly incorporates CE notions, their explicit teaching and learning remain a significant challenge. Future research should prioritize the development and implementation of evidence-based strategies to overcome these obstacles, including teacher professional development programs, curriculum reform, and the integration of authentic materials. By addressing these issues, we can foster the development of civically engaged and responsible citizens, equipped with the knowledge and skills to participate meaningfully in society.

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