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The Cultural and Historical Elements in the Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: the Polish Perspective

Streszczenie: Artykuł postuluje konieczność i gruntowną rewizję modułu kulturoznawczo-historycznego w ramach uczenia i nauczania języka angielskiego na wszystkich poziomach edukacji w Polsce. Autor przedstawia korzyści płynące ze skoordynowanej i dobrze zarządzanej edukacji językowej, opartej na treściach kulturowych i historycznych. Podstawą badawczą artykułu są badania autora na studentach zaocznych (a jednocześnie czynnych zawodowo nauczycielach języka angielskiego) przeprowadzone w Katedrze Filologii Angielskiej Uniwersytetu Warmińsko-Mazurskiego w Olsztynie w latach 2010–2019 dotyczące obecności treści kulturowych i historycznych na lekcjach języka angielskiego. Autor stara się wyjaśnić przyczyny, dla których treściom kulturoznawczo-historycznym towarzyszy duża niechęć czy nieufność ze strony zarówno uczniów, jak i nauczycieli. Artykuł stara się unaoocnić, jak bardzo korzystne i pożądane treści kulturoznawcze i historyczne mogą się stać dla wszystkich zainteresowanych, tj. dla nauczycieli, uczniów oraz – ogólnie – dla dydaktyki języków obcych. Bazując na powyższych wnioskach i obserwacjach, ostatnia część artykułu koncentruje się na sposobach promowania wprowadzenia, stosowania i rozwoju modułu kulturoznawczo-historycznego w szkołach, wśród pedagogów oraz uczniów. Wprowadzenie treści kulturowych oraz elementów historycznych zdecydowanie podniesie poziom atrakcyjności lekcji, ich efektywność, kompetencje (zarówno językowe, pozajęzykowe, jak i ogólnorozwojowe) uczniów i nauczycieli, przyczyni się do wzrostu motywacji do nauki i pracy oraz da wymierne korzyści szkołom.

Słowa kluczowe: kultura, historia, nauczanie angielskiego, polska edukacja, nauczyciel angielskiego

Introduction

The trends in modern education emphasize the practical aspects of the teaching and learning processes¹. Simultaneously, the tendency towards providing students with broad,

¹ Jim Scrivener, *Learning Teaching: A Guidebook for Language Teachers*. Oxford: Macmillan, 2005, p. 11–25.

multi-faceted knowledge enabling them to effectively function in the 21st century realities is on the increase. The article highlights the necessity to introduce and thoroughly develop the cultural-historical module within the framework of the English language teaching and learning on all levels of education in Poland. Also, the paper attempts at evaluation of the benefits of the coordinated and efficiently administered education resting on the cultural-historical education.

The basis for the article is the author's research into the matter carried out among the extramural MA students of the Department of English at the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland, between 2010 and 2019. The author analyses why the module proves beneficial for teachers, EFL teaching as such and learners². The final part of the paper focuses on the ways to promote the introduction, application and development of the cultural-historical module in schools, among the educators and learners.

I. The cultural-historical module within the EFL

The module is the component responsible for equipping students with the understanding and knowledge concerning the culture and achievements of the Anglophone civilisations³. It is also the means of increasing the learners' awareness of the historical perspective as regards the English-speaking countries and its present implications⁴.

Such a content is usually introduced through the coursebooks⁵. Commonly, they offer *certain* reading/listening exercises related, or based on, such topics⁶. Unfortunately, attractive as the subjects appear in themselves, the Polish teachers of English do not seem to make the full use of the opportunity to engage their students in learning about the culture and history of the Anglophone world. It is a pity since the acquisition of such knowledge is of value difficult to overestimate.

² Naima Afrin, "Developing Real Life Experience through Teaching Culture in the EFL Class: Fostering the Learning through Intercultural Awareness", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*, Vol. 2, Issue 1, January. 2013, p. 72.

³ Si Thang Kiet Ho, "Addressing Culture in EFL Classrooms: The Challenge of Shifting from a Traditional to an Intercultural Stance", *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 2009, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 69

⁴ A good example of the idea behind the concept is offered in Joanna Bogusławska, Agata Mioduszevska, *Teaching English through Culture. Teaching Culture Through English: Zestawy ćwiczeń dla lektorów i nauczycieli języka angielskiego pomocne w przeprowadzaniu zajęć z tematyki kulturoznawczej*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Poltext, 2013. Cf.: Abdellah Benahnia, *The Role of Cultural Components in Shaping the L2 Learner's Identity and Intercultural Competence*, Riyadh: English Language Center, King Fahad Medical City, 2016, p. 2.

⁵ Cf.: Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, "The Cultural Content in EFL Textbooks and What Teachers Need to Do About It", *Profile*, Vol. 17, No. 2, July-December 2011, Bogotá, Colombia, p. 167–187.

⁶ Excellent examples of the ELT course books containing quite a considerable proportion of the cultural-historical contents are *Enterprise Plus*, *Upstream* and *On Screen* series (Express Publishing) or *Straightforward* and *Evolution* (Macmillan). More on the coursebooks and their cultural-historical potential: Sehbi Mimoun and Mellouk Youcef, *Investigating the Culture Component in EFL Textbooks: Case of 1st Year secondary school, Tlemcen*. Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria, Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, University of Tlemcen, 2014.

Although there are numerous reasons for the situation, two seem striking. One is the teachers' own inadequate orientation in the subject matter. Another is the Polish students' general reluctance to learn historical/cultural contents, which – typically – stems from bad experiences with the subjects such as History, Civic Education, Arts and/or Cultural Studies⁷. All too commonly, teaching such subjects is based on memorisation of large portions of facts, dates and names; hence, students do not see relevance among the bits of data. Worse still, the subjects related to culture (e.g. Cultural Studies or Arts) and politics (e.g. Civic Education) are – wrongly but commonly – regarded as of tertiary importance and bearing little relevance to the real life and the future professional perspectives.

Frequently, the above reasons constitute serious obstacles in furthering the cultural-historical module development. First, numerous students and teachers are negatively disposed to the contents they do not feel confident about. Second, the situation generates the fear of the necessity to learn “[...] even more dates and names without a clear vision of any practical application of that knowledge.”⁸ The next reason stems from the afore-mentioned lack of confidence and enthusiasm. Recurrently, the cultural-historical content is taught in an unattractive and impassionate way which lacks genuine passion on both sides⁹. Regrettably, all those make the component an “ugly duckling” of the English language courses on various levels of education in Poland.

Currently, the Polish system of education is undergoing a fundamental reform. However, the restructuring, apart from its obvious administrative aspects, does not seem to have any significant qualitative impact on the contribution and status of the cultural-historical module within the EFL teaching in the Polish state schools.

Between 1999 and 2017, the Polish educational system consisted of the compulsory primary education for the 7–12-year-old students; then they progressed to the junior secondary schools (13–16-year-olds) and completed their education in the senior secondary schools (17–19-year-olds)¹⁰. Those planning further education joined colleges and universities. The current reform of 2017 has restored the previous division

⁷ Cf.: Artur Górecki, *Uczniowie nie lubią uczyć się historii*. Access 22 November 2017, *Portal samorządowy*, <http://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/edukacja/uczniowie-nie-lubia-uczyc-sie-historii,19353.html>. Michał Pasterski, *13 błędów polskiego systemu edukacji*. Michał Pasterski: Psychologia, rozwój osobisty, edukacja. Access 22 November 2017, <http://michalpasterski.pl/2014/04/13-bledow-polskiego-systemu-edukacji/>.

⁸ A commentary of one of the survey respondents concerning her bad experience when learning cultural-historical contents as a student.

⁹ Michał Pasterski, op. cit.

¹⁰ *The System of Education in Poland in Brief*, Polish Eurydice System, December 2015, p. 6, access 14 November 2018, https://eurydice.org/pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/BRIEF_EN_FINAL2015.pdf.

into the eight-grade primary school (7–15-year-olds) and four-grade secondary school (16–19-year-olds); students can further their education in colleges or universities¹¹.

English is generally taught in the Polish state schools from the age of 7, i.e. from grade one, and continues all through the students' education, until they are 19. The state curriculum outlines the basic requirements and expectations. However, when it comes to the choice of methods, course books (form an exhaustive register of books approved by the Polish Ministry of Education) or lesson contents, the English teachers' independence is considerably bigger than that of the teachers of other subjects.

After the primary school and/or junior secondary school, students are to sit – among others – written English examinations. The level expected from an eight-grade primary school graduate is supposed to be ALTE CEFR A2/B1¹². Finishing the secondary school, students are to sit – among others – a standard state examination in English on either Ordinary level (ALTE CEFR B1+) and/or Advanced level (ALTE CEFR B2+)¹³. Sadly, after 12 years of *solely* state education, the English command among the Polish graduates is generally poor. To pass the Ordinary Level, one needs to score mere 30% of the total points¹⁴. The Advanced level does not have the passing requirement; hence, it is just a formality. All the above proves the necessity to improve the system, develop the EFL teaching techniques and strategies and – in the author's view – revise the approach to the EFL as such.

As the cultural-historical module bears incredible potential and educational value, the above state of the matters in the Polish schools should urgently be changed. Such a transformation may contribute to making learning *much* more exciting, involving and motivating. Additionally, the module offers unbelievable freedom and joy of both learning and teaching.

II. The research

The research investigated the student-teachers' pre-, during- and post-university encounters with the cultural-historical module. It also monitored their attempts, successes and challenges in the application of such contents during their lessons. The authors' survey was carried out among the first-year, MA level, extramural, in-service teacher-students attending the university between October 2010 and June 2018. The research was

¹¹ *The System of Education in Poland 2017/2018*, Polish Eurydice System, access 14 November 2018, https://eurydice.org.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Education-System-in-Poland_2017_2018_EN.pdf.

¹² *Egzamin ósmoklasisty: język angielski*, Nowa Era, access 14. November 2018, <https://www.nowaera.pl/egzaminosmoklasisty/jezykangielski>.

¹³ Egzamin, jakie możesz zdawać na określonym poziomie, access 14 November 2018, http://www.jezykiobce.net/jezykiobce_images/cms/474_tabela1.pdf.

¹⁴ *Nowa Matura z języka angielskiego*, access 14 November 2018, <http://www.angielski.e-matura.net/nowa-matura#>.

based on questionnaires. The survey investigated and analysed in the paper considers – exclusively – the 107 in-service teachers advancing their education to the Master's level as the research sample.

The questionnaire comprised of three parts:

- **Part One** aimed at collecting the general information on the teacher-students.
- **Part Two** was a diagnosis of the respondents' so-far experiences with teaching, interweaving or implementing the cultural-historical content in their work.
- **Part Three** regarded the potential future upgrades/improvements of the situation.

The survey was carried out among 107 in-service teachers, from 25 to 54. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of five questions aimed at collecting the basic data.

1.1. As regards the respondents' teaching experience, the group looked as follows:

<i>How long have you been teaching (years)?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
0–2	38/41
3–5	31/33
6–10	21/22
11–15	10/11
Total:	100/107

The majority, 38%, constituted fresh teachers with limited expertise and little professional experience. It largely corresponded with the young age of the teacher-students. Interestingly, the respondents spread quite evenly in the first two categories, i.e. 0–2 and 3–5 years of experience (correspondingly 38% and 31%).

Still, there happened teachers with significant professional experience of 6–10 years (21%). Teachers with impressive (11–15 years) professional experience constituted 10%. Such a make-up made the research sample reliable and varied at the same time.

1.2. Referring to the respondents' professional status:

<i>What is your professional status?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
<i>Stażysta</i> (trainee)	54/58
<i>Kontraktowy</i> (contract teacher)	34/36
<i>Mianowany</i> (full teacher)	12/13 (including 5 teachers teaching English <i>and</i> other subjects)
<i>Dyplomowany</i> (diploma teacher)	none
Total	100/107

Again, predictably, the teachers of the lowest professional status (trainees) made the vast majority of the group (54%). On the other pole, there could be no diploma teacher among the respondents. The status requires full professional qualifications – which the respondents were in the course of acquiring. Yet, the group contained a number of contract teachers (34%). Curiously, the research sample even contained 12% of teachers enjoying the full teacher status. Such a status stratification, proved the reliability of the sample group as well as provided interesting grounds for more general analyses.

1.3. As for the subjects taught:

<i>What subject do you teach?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
English exclusively	85/91
English and other subjects	15/16
English and Polish	4/4
English and German	3/3
English and Russian	3/3
English and Geography	4/4
English and Biology	1/2

In the age of the cross-curricular teaching approach and interdisciplinary education, the respondents had to be surveyed about the subjects they teach. Here, the vast majority were exclusive English teachers (85%).

However, the remaining 15% were teachers of interesting background and professional profiles. They mainly came from linguistic backgrounds (teachers of Polish, Russian and German – respectively 4%, 3%, 3%). The remaining ones were Geography and Biology teachers (respectively 4% and 1%).

Significantly, English was not the first choice of the teaching career in any of the cases within the 15% teachers actively teaching English and the other subjects. Hence, they had qualified in their subjects *before* they embarked on the EFL career.

1.4. The spectrum of schools the respondents were employed at:

<i>What school do you work at (full-time or bigger part of your time)?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
Pre-school (age 3–6)	4/4
Primary school (age 7–13)	42/45
Junior secondary school (age 14–16)	38/41
Senior secondary school (age 17–19)	16/17
Total	100/107

The senior secondary schools were represented by 16%, which may be explained with the fact the school finishes with standard state final examinations on Ordinary and Advanced levels (the *Matura* examination). As those determine the students' further academic career, senior secondary schools tried to select teachers already having a complete professional portfolio. Such teachers qualify to be trained as final examinations examiners and supervisors.

The pre-schools are quite underrepresented; it stems from their non-compulsory character, the age of pre-school students and the fact English became a compulsory subject within the pre-school curriculum in 2017¹⁵. The change is likely to provide more active pre-school teachers as extramural students.

1.5. As far as the location of the respondents' schools is considered, the data looks as follows:

<i>Where is your school?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
Village	11/12
Town (up to 40,000 inhabitants)	69/74
Bigger town/city (40,000–200,000 inhabitants)	19/21
Total	100/107

In the above respect, taking into consideration the realities of the area of the respondents' residence and their university location, the stratification was predictable. The vast majority of the teachers live and/or work in towns (69%). The second was a bigger town/city (19%). Only 11% were teachers working in the village environment; in that case they exclusively worked in primary schools.

Part Two was a diagnosis of the teacher-students' so-far experiences with teaching, interweaving and implementing the cultural-historical content in their work. The part consisted of seven questions.

2.1. Regarding the respondents likes/dislikes towards the contents, the statistics look as follows:

<i>Do/did you like LEARNING cultural-historical contents; why, why not?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
(Multiple answers possible)	
Yes (most common justifications):	54/58
Good experience	73/42
Interests	66/38
Possibility to understand the world better	57/53

¹⁵ *Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 30 maja 2014 r., zmieniające rozporządzenie w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz kształcenia ogólnego w poszczególnych typach szkół*, Dziennik Ustaw RP, Warszawa, dnia 18 czerwca 2014 r., poz. 803, access 14 November 2018, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20140000803/O/D20140803.pdf>

No (most common justifications):	46/49
Bad experience	65/32
Lack of interest	36/17
Little practical	23/11
Total	100/107

The above point seems of utmost importance in the questionnaire as it proves two fundamental issues. First, more teachers like/liked *learning* cultural-historical content rather than not (correspondingly 54% and 46%). Nevertheless, the difference is little, which may mean the Polish English teachers are quite evenly split over the issue. Secondly, the ultimately decisive factor why the respondents like/liked learning such contents or not was the potentially good or bad experience (respectively 73% and 65%).

Again, the quality of teaching seems to prevail over anything else, regardless the subject or its contents whatsoever. If teaching is carried out in an attractive, involving, effective and practical way, *what* the subjects/contents actually are seems of *secondary* importance.

2.2. As for the teaching the module, the data is:

<i>Do you like TEACHING cultural-historical content and why, why not?</i> (Multiple answers possible)	Respondents (%/number)
Yes (most common justifications):	44/47
Lessons become more interesting	65/31
Good for self-development	59/28
Boredom/routine escape	36/17
Language and culture = imminent whole	44/21
Good motivator	60/28
No (most common justifications):	56/60
Over-packed curriculum	80/48
Little competence	78/47
Too little time	58/34
Little practical	35/21
Too much preparation	41/25
Total	100/107

Here, the statistics are rather pessimistic. Only 44% like *teaching* the content, while 56% do not. Among the explanations supporting the culture and history application in the EFL classroom, the main points were more involving lessons, self-improvement, escaping dullness and effective motivation.

Sadly, among the sceptics, the prevailing points – predictable though – were little competence (78), workload burden and lack of time respectively (41% and 58%) and tight, inflexible curriculum (80%)¹⁶. Understandably, in a situation in which the school final examinations in English can be (and are) organized and carried out with the entire avoidance of cultural and historical contents,¹⁷ numerous teachers point out little practicality of such contents from the school/students' perspective.

2.3. Referring to the time devoted to the contents, the statistics look as follows:

<i>Do you devote any time during your lessons to the cultural-historical content in an aware, planned and systematic manner?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
(Multiple answers possible)	
Most common answers:	
On special occasions (e.g. Halloween, St. Valentine's Day)	84/90
Difficult to say	78/84
Two-three times a semester (regardless special occasions)	19/20

The rationale behind the point was to establish how much/little aware and systematic effort the respondents invest in the preparation of the cultural-historical contents. Typical answers prove the definite majority resort to such contents on occasions (84%). Commonly, such an approach is conveniently supported in coursebooks and extra materials available on big days.

Worryingly, the second most common answer was it was difficult for the respondents to establish how much time they devoted to such contents in a planned and methodical way (78%). It may suggest many of them, apart from the occasions and – theoretically, some coursebook contents – rarely spare a thought to the cultural-historical content in their teaching.

¹⁶ The above statistics seem quite universal. In other countries the proportions are similar; *cf.*: Maryam Tafaraji Yeganeha and Hossein Raeesia, "Developing Cultural Awareness in EFL Classrooms at Secondary School Level in an Iranian Educational Context", 2nd Global Conference on Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching, Linelt-2014, Dubai, – United Arab Emirates, December 11 – 13, 2014, p. 541.

¹⁷ For the Polish *Matura* final secondary school-leaving examination samples *cf.*: <https://cke.gov.pl/egzamin-maturalny/egzamin-w-nowej-formule/materialy-dodatkowe/przykladowe-arkusze/jezyk-angielski-poziom-podstawowy-i-rozszerzony/>, accessed 11 Dec. 2018.

2.4. In the respect of the respondents' inspirations:

<i>What inspires you to introduce cultural-historical content in your lessons?</i> (Multiple answers possible)	Respondents (%/number)
Most common answers:	
special occasions (e.g. Halloween, St. Valentine's Day)	88/94
coursebook suggestions	79/85
extra sources (e.g. the Internet teachers forums)	26/28
own interests	13/14

The sources of inspiration did not appear a surprise; however, the proportions did, to a certain extent at least. The big days being the most direct inspiration (88%) seems obvious. Yet, taking into consideration Poland and the Anglophone countries are not *drastically* different in this respect may prove the occasions are not too numerous. Hence, they do not provide a sound basis to rest the regular teaching on such contents.

Somehow unexpectedly, the Internet does not seem to be the main inspiration provider (26%); double surprisingly, that many of the respondents were quite young teachers, thus, well-acquainted with modern technologies.

As teaching in Poland seems quite conservative, the position of coursebook is unshaken. The fact 79% respondents trust and rely on their coursebooks in the respect of the books' cultural-historical contents may be an excellent indicator to the Poland's educational decision makers. The figure proves how big responsibility and opportunity could be created if the coursebook providers were encouraged/asked/forced/motivated to increase the proportion of the cultural-historical contents.

2.5. As for the opinion whether the time and attention devoted to cultural-historical content is enough:

<i>In your opinion, is the time and attention devoted to cultural-historical content enough and appropriate?</i> (Multiple answers possible)	Respondents (%/number)
Yes (most common answers):	32/35
ss receive enough knowledge, the rest can be found elsewhere by the students	76/81
school cannot give everything curriculum is overloaded anyway	72/77
No (most common answers):	41/44
ss would gain a lot through more cult-hist. knowledge; yet pressure on time, curriculum and examinations makes it impossible to add more	89/95

<i>No opinion (most common answers):</i>	27/29
too many factors to enumerate	83/88
Total	100/107

Here, the fact 27% have no opinion appears worrying. The most common justification that there is a combination of numerous factors for not having an opinion in the case has at least two interpretations. One, the respondents in the category did not actually think too extensively about the issue and many did not have any opinion and/or justification for that whatsoever. Two, assuming there may, indeed, be so numerous factors, the issue deserves further study.

The *yes* answers, on the level of 32%, suggest external limitation (the already-mentioned over-packed curriculum) and trust the students can – themselves – independently find the contents if they are involved or determined enough. The latter – in the author's opinion – seems unlikely as the students may not realise *what* to search.

Even those in the *no* category (41%), wishing there were more such contents in their EFL lessons do not sound overly positive. They commonly point out limitations such as time pressure, examinations format and over-loaded curricula.

2.6. Another question concerned the value of the cultural-historical contents:

<i>Do you consider cultural-historical content worthwhile in the EFL?</i> <i>Rank its value 1–4 (1 – most valuable).</i>	Respondents (%/number)
1. Most valuable	5 /5
2. Quite valuable	62/66
3. Of supplementary value	27/29
4. Quite unimportant	6/7
Total	100/107

In the light of the data from 2.5, the findings in point 2.6 seem peculiar. They do not reflect the figures concerning proportion of time allotted to the cultural-historical content in point 2.5. Although only 32% admitted the time spent on such content teaching is enough, as many as 62% consider the cultural-historical content valuable.

Still, 27% regard such materials of purely supplementary or extra value. It suggests, the contents may add colour to the EFL teaching-learning process; nonetheless, it does constitute its fundamentals.

Curiously, similar proportions consider the cultural-historical content vital (5%) and unimportant (6%). It, suggests the issue is little controversial which may promise well for the future development of the module within the EFL teaching-learning in the Polish schools.

2.7. The respondents also commented on what hinders/discourages them from the cultural/historical content application in the classroom:

<i>What hinders/limits/discourages you (if anything) in your application of cultural-historical content in the EFL lessons?</i> (Multiple answers possible)	Respondents (%/number)
Most frequent answers:	
Little expertise and confidence	79/84
Too much preparation outside the curriculum and course books	59/63
Little practicality of the contents in the school sense	52/56

In this respect, predictably – in the light of the previous findings – the respondents did not feel self-confident and competent enough to introduce such contents in a bold manner (79%).

The teachers would also welcome materials which would not demand from them devoting too much preparation time (59%) as time – already – is a precious commodity in the Polish educational system.

Last of all, more than a half (52%) did not see a practical justification for the introduction of such contents within the current Polish educational system. It seems the respondents were afraid the broader introduction of cultural and historical contents would not translate directly into their students' exam results. Hence, neither teachers nor students would gain much if anything.

Part Three regarded the potential future upgrades/improvements of the situation.

3.1. The point concerned the potential need of extra training to upgrade the respondents' knowledge and skills as for the cultural-historical contents:

<i>Do you feel the need for extra training in learning/teaching the cultural-historical content?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
<i>Yes</i>	66/71
<i>No</i>	16/17
<i>Difficult to say / I do not know</i>	18/19
Total	100/107
<i>If so, in what forms and how frequently? (Multiple answers possible)</i>	
Most common answers:	
Workshops once a semester	40/43
Workshops once a year	35/37
Yearly regular weekend trainings once a month	23/25
It depends on the price of the tuition, its conditions, weekdays/weekends etc.	20/21

In the light of point 2.5, in which 62% respondents claimed the cultural-historical content is quite valuable, the need to have some extra training in the respect – as expressed by 66% of the teachers – sounds logical and coherent.

However, what is more involving is *how* the remaining 34% is split. Only 16% claim they do not need such preparation. Yet, 18% respondents state they are undecided whether they would welcome such an initiative in the first place. It may indicate they are either unconvinced to the *value* and/or *potential* of such contents, or they are *incapable of assessing* their own preparation to teach cultural-historical contents.

As the Polish teachers are quite pressed with time – frequently indicated in the survey – workshops once a year (35%) or once a semester (40%) should not surprise. However, since the worth and effectiveness of such a training (in)frequency appear doubtful, the additional conclusion might be the teachers would treat such practice as an extra supplement to their professional portfolio rather than an effective tool to gain and make a difference to their teaching.

Nevertheless, a substantial group of 23% declared their will to participate in a regular, extramural one-year course teaching them how to handle the contents. It sounds both more serious and realistic in the sense of the true, broad introduction of the cultural-historical contents to the Polish EFL teaching and learning.

Numerous busy teachers voiced their difficulty to declare themselves on the financial and time grounds. 23% claim they would need to have a clear offer with the prices, sources of financing, times of meetings, their number and the course content before they decide. Such an approach seems justifiable and reasonable; the Polish teachers – additionally to being time-pressed – are commonly overworked and underpaid. Likewise, the quality of some trainings offered to them – in the sense of their practicality or application in the classroom – does vary¹⁸.

3.2. The final question regarded what could encourage the respondents to introduce more such contents in their lessons:

<i>What would encourage you to introduce more cultural-historical content in your EFL lessons?</i>	Respondents (%/number)
(Multiple answers possible)	
Most common answers:	
More self-expertise and confidence	82/88
Institutional introduction of such contents to the national curriculum	78/84
Making the contents were more useful/connected to the school needs	68/73
Less preparation outside the curriculum and course books	65/70

¹⁸ A common opinion expressed on various teacher' forums. Cf.: *45minut.pl*, *Forum dla nauczycieli*, access 14 November 2018, <http://www.45minut.pl/forum/search.php?keywords=szkolenia+>. *Gazeta Forum.pl*, access 14 November 2018, <http://forum.gazeta.pl/forum/search,.html?&query=szkolenia+>.

As for the motivators, the definite majority needs more expertise and self-confidence (82%). The institutional introduction (e.g. by the Ministry of Education) of such contents to the national curriculum proves an effective extrinsic factor (78%). Obviously, the postulate to make the cultural-historical content as tightly tailored to the school and educational needs is strongly supported (68%). The fourth most common answer was to provide teachers with as many materials as possible to minimise the preparation time.

Concluding the research, the respondent group proved valid, representative and varied. **Part One** demonstrated the surveyed represented a broad range of in-service teachers in the sense of their:

- age
- professional status
- places of residence and work
- experience
- school levels

Part Two provided exhaustive data concerning the respondents' experiences, feelings and views as for the cultural-historical contents as both teachers and – previously – learners. The time allotted to the systematic teaching of such contents in their work schedule appeared insufficient. The main inspirations to teach the cultural-historical contents are special occasions and coursebook suggestions. It confirms the highly traditional, conventional and conservative character of teaching such contents in Poland¹⁹.

Another sad and concerning conclusion is not much more time can be devoted to the analysed contents. It is owing to the packed curriculum, intense exam focus of the Polish schools and the teachers' current workload. However, the majority of the respondents consider cultural-historical module as quite valuable and worthwhile.

The main limitations, or hindrance, in advancing the module the respondents see in the teachers' lack of expertise and self-confidence. Simultaneously, they postulate the matter of time-consuming lesson preparation and, generally, too little time to meet the requirements of the state curricula.

Part Three brought the conclusion the vast majority of the respondents do feel the need for self-development in the context of the cultural-historical contents. However, their opinions and suggestions as for how to upgrade their knowledge, master skills and boost professional self-confidence vary significantly. The overall conclusion here was everything regarding their decisions would depend on the offer in the respect of the mod-

¹⁹ Cf.: Si Thang Kiet Ho, op. cit., p. 73.

ule. The respondents pointed out the issues of training prices, sources of financing, intensity of the courses and places and dates of such initiatives.

III. Cultural-historical module: *What's in it for English Teachers?*

To become effective, successful specialists in teaching the cultural-historical module within the framework of the English language teaching system in Poland, the teachers need to clearly understand the benefits of their engagement in – first – *themselves* learning the module contents,²⁰ techniques and methods of passing the specific knowledge to students and – second – the actual teaching the module. It must be emphasised English teachers in Poland are rarely trained in teaching the cultural and historical knowledge²¹. It comes from the fact the specific methodology of teaching and learning such contents has its roots in the cultural and historical/political /social studies²². Hence, the module appears loosely (if at all) linked to the pedagogical-linguistic-didactic profile of the language teacher training at most Polish universities²³.

For teachers interested in its exploration, the module itself has a lot to offer. The opportunity for self-education and intellectual development seems a prominent argument²⁴. In the times of busy teachers, increasing competition among schools, struggle to attract students and effect-oriented education, those features seem a must and welcome element²⁵.

Another advantage behind making effort to broaden teachers' education in the discussed sense is winning students' respect. Commonly and regrettably, language teachers at state institutions are perceived as earthbound grammarians, constantly drilling numerous vocabulary and grammatical patterns. Therefore, changing the image and convincing students their language teachers are actually *knowledgeable intellectuals* able to pass to their students much more than mere tense use rules and lexical equivalents shall appear an attractive option²⁶.

²⁰ As for the actual contents of the module, *cf.*: Hemat Purba, "The Importance of Including Culture in EFL Teaching", *Journal of English Teaching*, Vol. I, February 2011, p. 51.

²¹ *Cf.*: The syllabi of the teaching specialisation at the Polish universities and colleges. PWSZ Tarnów. Access 22 November 2017, <https://pwszta.edu.pl/instytut-humanistyczny/filologia-angielska/syllabusy/>. Uniwersytet Zielonogórski. Access 22 November, <http://www.wh.uz.zgora.pl/index.php/studia-i-studenci/programy-studiow-ects/kierunki-studiow-2014-2015/195-studia-stacjonarne-ii-stopnia/633-filologia-angielska>. Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego in Bydgoszcz. Access 22 November 2017, http://www.neofilologia.ukw.edu.pl/jednostka/instytut_neofilologii/fa.

²² See: Hemat Purba, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia and Ximena Bonilla Medina, "Addressing Culture in the EFL Classroom: A Dialogic Proposal", *Profile*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2009. ISSN 1657-0790. Bogotá, Colombia, p. 167.

²⁵ Hemat Purba, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

²⁶ José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia and Ximena Bonilla Medina, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

Moreover, the teachers' engagement in improving their subject-matter knowledge as well as methodology of teaching such issues can immensely improve the teachers' own command of the foreign language they teach. Frequently, teachers (especially from smaller towns or villages) complained they feel alienated and lack the opportunities to practise and maintain their own high level of the language. Most often, they work with the same age and level students – usually up to ALTE CEFR B1; hence, the teachers' own language command may – and often does – deteriorate²⁷.

A further gain of mastering the cultural-historical component is the fact the module provides a wealth of materials for hundreds of uniquely original, stimulating lessons²⁸. That has two most-desired effects. First, it heads off professional burnout, so dangerous currently to all professionals. Teachers constantly working with the same age and level students constitute a group highly vulnerable to the negative and dangerous phenomenon. Second, the inclusion of cultural and historical elements in the English lessons does contribute to effective breaking the negative routines. By definition, a language lesson follows certain patterns which, if slavishly cultivated, with time, turn into unattractive, dull and ineffective drills²⁹. Introduction of the new contents and methods could significantly improve the situation.

Finally, the module inspires language teachers to look for new approaches to various aspects of their work. It could help them re-define their own job. The teachers can acquire new skills and wholly innovative teaching strategies³⁰. Educationalists would become more involved in the educational process and fully comprehend the nature and responsibility of their work as well as the calibre of the effects of their efforts.

IV. Cultural-historical module: *What's in it for the EFL teaching?*

To be effectual, every human activity needs a purpose and people need to know/realise *what* the purpose is. The same applies to the introduction of the cultural-historical module in the English language learning in Poland.

The most eminent argument for the module is it teaches *critical thinking*³¹. Through working on materials concerning real events, phenomena, facts and figures students learn to make decisions, evaluate critically and apply reasoning processes vital in their every-

²⁷ A common concern continuously expressed by the author's English Department MA extramural students.

²⁸ Will Baker, "Should Culture Be an Overt Component of EFL Instruction outside of English-Speaking Countries? The Thai Context", *Asian EFL Journal*, December 2003, p. 17.

²⁹ Zoltán Dörnyei, Magdalena Kubanyiova, *Motivating Learners, Motivating Teachers: Building Vision in the Language Classroom*, Cambridge: CUP, 2013, p. 38–47.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 125–138.

³¹ Stella Cottrell, *Critical Thinking Skills: Developing Effective Analysis and Argument*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p.2.

day lives. That way, it contributes to making the language learners more aware individuals; they become people of much fuller understanding of the world around them – the overriding purpose of education³².

Another worthwhile advantage of the module's implementation is the stimulation of thought exchange through the creation of a *genuine* information gap. Students are provided with the – unique in a language class – opportunity to *talk* (and not merely to *speak* a language), exchange views, challenge and discuss *real* and *original* concepts³³. A lot of teaching and learning in language classes rests on *artificially* created materials which – good and effective as they commonly are – do not fully cater for the lessons based on discussing real rather than abstract notions³⁴. Such an approach would make language learning impressively more meaningful.

Also, the cultural-historical module provides an excellent opportunity to go beyond the course book. In the digital era, in which books as such do not appear too attractive to children and teenagers, it is becoming increasingly important to expose learners to extensive and intensive multimedia teaching stimuli. It does not mean the postulate to abandon the traditional, “old school” course books, whose value and usefulness is difficult to overestimate. However, all too often, teachers use the material in such books in a most conservative, predictable and routinous way. That leaves little room for novel, unusual, inventive, thus stimulating, contents and approaches³⁵. The cultural-historical module could effectively bridge that gap.

The current state education in Poland is – like any other aspect of teaching – heavily bureaucratised. Teachers are frequently bound with numerous limitations imposed by the presently valid curricula and syllabi³⁶. Not only is the material to teach too abundant for the allocated time, but also the teachers are expected to rigidly stick to the sequence of teaching units and their syllabi³⁷. Interestingly, few language teachers seem to actually understand how lucky and privileged they are within the system. As the language education cannot be planned similarly to the way in which mathematics, physics, geography, biology or history are, the English language syllabi are much freer as for the choice, sequence and intensity of the teaching material. Contrary to their colleagues in other subjects, English teachers can plan what, when, how and why to teach in a more liberal

³² Ibidem, p. 85–100. Tran-Hoang-Thu, *Teaching Culture in the EFL/ESL Classroom*, San Diego: Alliant International University, 2010, p. 7.

³³ Jeremy Harmer, *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman, 1991, p. 1–10.

³⁴ Cf.: Part II and Part III in Penny Ur, *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: CUP, 1996.

³⁵ Hemat Purba, op. cit., p.51–53.

³⁶ On their proper role: Tran-Hoang-Thu, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁷ Cf.: *Podstawa programowa: Historia klasy IV-VIII*. Access 22 November 2017, <https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/podstawa-programowa-historia-klasy-iv-viii.pdf>.

manner³⁸. Such a specific nature of the subject allows language teachers to fully use the freedom they truly have in the considerably restrictive Polish educational system. The cultural-historical content can successfully support virtually any aspect of language learning, on every level and at every stage.

The already-mentioned trend to look for meaningfulness in education is easy to illustrate in this respect. Applying the cultural and historical contents to the language lessons makes students realise something of fundamental nature. They notice their educators teach them *something*. It is much more than just active practising the English language through meaningless grammar/lexical drills. Especially, that some exercises are bound to lack context, imagination and appeal. Thus, students and teachers treat them as a necessary evil. In such conditions, it is difficult to expect learners would be overjoyed if asked to do a considerable number of such drills³⁹. The cultural-historical content adds *meaning* and may generate greater interest in students than vocabulary/grammar activities⁴⁰.

Yet another positive of the module is the possibility to exploit the course book materials to the full. The cultural-historical phase of a lesson may recycle the already used material, the one to be worked on in the future or the currently being used one. It all depends on the teachers' and students' creativity. Additionally, it also provides great guidance and the welcome context to the decontextualized grammatical or lexical practice.

Predictably, if carried out in a consequent and attractive manner, such culturally-historically focused classes (or their parts) would quickly and directly increase motivation to teach and learn: a classical win-win solution. The school might become – at least in the discussed respect – a place full of eager teachers and learners willing to invest their time and effort in the mutual and expressive development.

Lastly, the discussed module is perfect for the use of modern technologies in and outside the classroom. The opportunity to use multimedia, e.g. *Microsoft Power Point* presentations, projectors, smartphones or working on the *YouTube.com* materials etc. is manifold. Such an approach could reduce the students and educators' frustrations with the fact the Polish school is still behind the modern trends and combine the students' everyday functioning (studded with electronic gadgetry) with *meaningful* learning and teaching at school⁴¹. Bridging the gap would contribute to the change of students' – quite negative – perception of school. It may become perceived more as a *voluntary* rather than *compulsory* duty.

³⁸ Podstawa programowa z komentarzami Tom 3. *Języki obce w szkole podstawowej, gimnazjum i liceum*. Access 22 November 2017, https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/men_tom_3.pdf.

³⁹ Susan Halliwell, *Teaching English in the Primary Classroom*. London: Longman, 1992, p. 19–36.

⁴⁰ Alba Olaya and Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, "Exploring EFL Pre-Service Teachers' Experience with Cultural Content and Intercultural Communicative Competence at Three Colombian Universities", *PROFILE* Vol. 15, No. 2, October 2013, Bogota, Columbia, p. 50.

⁴¹ Tran-Hoang-Thu, op. cit., p. 36.

V. Cultural-historical module: *What's in it for learners?*

The learners – the crucial link in the educational system – can benefit most from the module energetic introduction in the language learning⁴². The observation which comes first is such a content could effectively break the classroom boredom. Unattractive, repetitive and drudging lessons are most frequently listed as the main reasons why students do not like, value or respect school⁴³. Bringing a sense of meaning to learning would, most certainly, make students more engaged in their language lessons. As there would constantly be something *new and stimulating* during the lessons, so much more difficult to do with mere grammar and vocabulary, the matter of monotony could be effectively handled.

Another – impossible to overestimate – point is the cultural-historical module enriches students far beyond the mere development of their language tuition⁴⁴. And it is not just about becoming somebody of encyclopaedic knowledge used to impress others. Far from that; the cultural-historical approach seems to have a number of entirely practical applications⁴⁵. Firstly, it is turning out more and more essential nowadays as becoming an effective *communicator* – on a relatively low language level – is *not the point any longer*. The growing advancement, in practically every walk of life, enforces becoming more and more of a *language expert*⁴⁶.

Presently, people do not learn languages simply for tourist purposes, to have a conversation with a hotel receptionist, ask the locals the way or order food at a restaurant. An increasing number of young people develop dreams and ambitions to study or work abroad. In either case, a high level of language competence is essential⁴⁷. It seems incomparably easier to teach students to the desired levels with materials which would not only equip them with the expected language command, but – simultaneously – provide them with the knowledge and understanding of the countries in which they plan, want or will have to spend a considerable part of their adult lives. In other words, the cultural-historical module in the language education may significantly improve their future perspectives, comfort and quality of life⁴⁸.

Such an approach has a number of supplementary benefits. Aside anything else, the cultural-historical educational background improves and broadens one's general knowledge. Hence, it contributes to better educational results, offers a fuller use of the educa-

⁴² Naima Afrin, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁴³ Aleksandra Postoła, *Strefa nauczyciela: Dlaczego polscy uczniowie nie lubią szkoły?* wyborcza.pl, 25 maja 2018, access 14 November 2018, <http://wyborcza.pl/7,157035,23434317,dlaczego-polscy-uczniowie-nie-lubia-szkoly.html?disableRedirects=true>

⁴⁴ Maryam Tafaraji Yeganeha and Hossein Raeesia, *op. cit.*, p. 535

⁴⁵ José Aldemar Álvarez Valencia and Ximena Bonilla Medina, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

⁴⁶ Jim Scrivener, *op. cit.*, p. 61–78.

⁴⁷ Hemat Purba, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁴⁸ Abdellah Benahnia, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

tional facilities and opportunities; it is also easily applicable in other subjects⁴⁹. That may involve students in their education through various projects, festivals or exhibitions. The extra advantage here would be the promotion of the pro-social behaviours, spirit of community and self-identification with the class, school etc. Analogically to the teachers, the learners would find it easier to generate better, and longer-lasting, motivation to learn⁵⁰.

Finally, teaching culture and history through the modern multimedia may make extensive use of the *smartphone technologies*. That aspect is also vital as, currently, numerous schools simply ban, reduce or ‘oppress’ the smartphone use and their educational application on the school premises rather than promote it. Such a strategy seems a lost cause since smartphones have already become an integral part of the youths’ lives. Thus, the cultural-educational module might contribute to improving the situation in a more effective and pro-educational way. Such a change would certainly be welcome by the learners; it could strengthen the positive image of school in the students’ collective awareness. It would be directly reflected in the lesson attendance, participation in classes and level of involvement.

VI. How to promote the cultural-historical module

To implement the module in the regular English language syllabus and enjoy the above analysed positive effects, the introduction needs to be undertaken in three directions. All the three subjects of education, i.e. schools, teachers and learners should – concurrently – be made aware of the potential benefits of the enterprise.

VI. 1 The module’s practical introduction *in schools*

One of the strategic challenges Polish schools are contemporarily facing, regardless the level of education, is the question *how* to attract more students and increase the level of teaching-learning. Making the school decision makers (e.g. the principals) aware of the advantages the module may certainly bring the realisation how attractive such an approach might be for the schools’ portfolio. In the times of the constant struggle for students, schools are forced to mark their presence and promote their offer during various educational fairs, learning festivals and promotional actions. If presented in the right way – clearly explaining the benefits – the module would make a school’s offer more attractive.

Another matter worth consideration on the school level is the fact the training and knowledge in the culture and history of the Anglophone world may bring precisely

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Will Baker, op. cit., p. 8.

measurable results. In an obvious way, each school is, interested in having students succeeding at contests, competitions etc. Many of such events already include the cultural-historical components⁵¹. Good preparation in this respect boosts chances of the school's students to succeed. That can mean more students of such a school qualified for the higher-level stages of the contests, more finalists and laureates. Additionally, the module may contribute to students' successes in other, non-language contests, e.g. historical or geographical ones. The more finalists and laureates in as many fields as possible, the better the schools' reputation and its prestige. It seems a strong argument for parents considering the choice of school for their children.

Moreover, while working on the cultural and historical contents students experience the *genuine* information gap, they feel the need to converse and discuss matters⁵². It guarantees better and more thorough command of English, good fluency, precise vocabulary, effective language understanding, advanced writing and argumentative skills. As all the above could be proved through students' numerous school and competition successes, the parents concerned about their children's command of the English language will certainly pay attention to such schools⁵³.

All the above benefits naturally stem from the effective, motivating and open teaching. They instantly translate into the teaching success of the school. Hence, the school may soon be perceived as the cutting edge in modern, successful teaching-learning procedures. Consequently, the schools implementing the cultural-historical module may be looked up to by others, appear pioneers and originators of brand-new teaching qualities. Undoubtedly, such a label would contribute to the school's popularity, standing and more students.

VI. 2 The modules' practical introduction *among teachers*

Teachers appear the focal element of the initiative. As remarked at the beginning, numerous ELT educators in Poland either do not know much about the culture and history of the Anglophone world, or do not feel competent or willing enough to teach it. Therefore, the project has to start with providing teachers with examples, models and scenarios to create the appropriate vision of what the cultural-historical module is all about. Such ma-

⁵¹ *Zakres wiedzy i umiejętności wymaganych na poszczególnych etapach konkursu i wykaz literatury obowiązującej uczestników oraz stanowiącej pomoc dla nauczyciela*, Małopolski Konkurs Języka Angielskiego dla uczniów szkół podstawowych województwa małopolskiego w roku szkolnym 2018/2019, access 14 November 2018, <https://kuratorium.krakow.pl/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/mkja-na-str.-1.pdf>. *Regulaminy konkursów przedmiotowych*, access 14 November 2018, http://ko.poznan.pl/rodzice_uczniowie/konkursy_olimpiady_turnieje/konkursy_przedmiotowe/2018/09/regulaminy-konkursow-przedmiotowych-2/.

⁵² Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, op. cit., p.178–179.

⁵³ Abdellah Benahnia, op. cit., p. 6.

materials could demonstrate what and how to teach in the module, what options the class has, what means to use and how to manage/administer the students' efforts successfully. That would strengthen the teachers' confidence in themselves, their subject and knowledge⁵⁴.

Simultaneously with the above, there appears a need to provide extra – easily available – teacher training in both the contents and methods of teaching the cultural-historical module⁵⁵. That would equip the teachers with the necessary knowledge of the subject matter as well as how to fruitfully use it. There are numerous institutions, firms and organisations competent to provide such training. It can be carried out by the Poland's Ministry of Education, provincial educational boards or district examination boards.

Also, the training can successfully be provided through outsourcing provided by commercial companies, *e.g.* ELT course book publishers as they have extensive experience in covering such issues worldwide. Other service providers may be the professional "guilds" involved in the ELT or academic research of the cultural and historical matters, for instance the Polish Association of the American Studies, Polish Association for Standards in English, Polish Association of Canadian Studies and many others.

Other highly reliable sources of teaching materials, experts and welcome initiatives may be – and already are – the Anglophone countries' embassies and cultural institutions (*e.g.* the British Council)⁵⁶. They have significant experience in the respect and seem enormously interested and involved in the promotion of the Anglophone countries' culture, history, life and institutions⁵⁷.

On the level of the regular, standard teacher training at universities, it seems advisable to consider broader and more extensive development of the cultural-historical module for the students of the ELT specialisation at the linguistics and philological departments⁵⁸.

VI. 3 The modules' practical introduction among learners

Perhaps the most effective manner to convince learners to engage in the cultural-historical module in their language education is to demonstrate to them as many practical applications of such gained knowledge as possible – preferably outside the classroom and school as such⁵⁹. Certainly, the learners will appreciate the perspective of winning contests and improving their language command in natural ways.

⁵⁴ Zoltán Dörnyei, Magdalena Kubanyiova, *op. cit.*, p. 147–156.

⁵⁵ Will Baker, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁵⁶ *Cf.*: Maryam Tafaraji Yeganeha and Hossein Raesia, "Developing Cultural Awareness in EFL Classrooms at Secondary School Level in an Iranian Educational Context", 2nd Global Conference on Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching, Linelt-2014, Dubai, – United Arab Emirates, December 11 – 13, 2014, p. 540.

⁵⁷ The initiatives of the US Embassy in Warsaw, Poland is especially worth emphasizing in this respect.

⁵⁸ At the author's university, the cultural-historical specialization within the Department of English is becoming more and more popular among students.

⁵⁹ Jim Scrivener, *op. cit.*, p. 324–332.

Yet, even more so, they may like the fact the involvement in exchanges, international projects and establishing own connections can translate into invaluable future academic or professional advantages. Watching Anglophone films and/or listening to such music will become a fully aware and conscious activity, with the comprehension of the matters addressed by the artists. Assuredly, that brings a lot of self-confidence and satisfaction on multiple levels.

Unfortunately, the article size does not allow to analyse and exemplify the wealth of the real-life applications of the cultural-historical knowledge. To name but two instances, when the learners become aware of the gradual development of the rock'n'roll and rock music from the 1950s to 2020s, the progress of the subgenres and trends within the music, the main performers etc, they find it so easy to hear and see all the influences – musical and non-musical alike – which have shaped their current rock idols. Similarly, following the rise and decline of the British Empire, comparing and contrasting it with the other ones, the students acquire a fuller understanding how and why certain countries in history need to become hegemonies and – even more so – why the other countries need them even more in that function.

The knowledge of the Anglophone world may prove useful to the learners planning educational and professional careers in those countries. Making the learners aware of the local customs, habits, culture etc. leads to better knowledge, thus, stronger self-confidence. That may – enormously – contribute to their skill of getting around the Anglophone world⁶⁰.

Finally, teaching and learning the cultural-historical module imminently requires doing projects, research, browsing the Internet sources and contacting people and institutions in the Anglophone countries and elsewhere. That may contribute to establishing long-lasting and fruitful contacts⁶¹. Such a process might radically change/improve the future academic and professional careers of the young Poles.

Conclusions

In summary, the cultural-historical module within the framework of the Polish EFL teaching is understood as the component responsible for providing students with the comprehension and data regarding the Anglophone world's past and present. The module's elements are commonly present in the coursebooks; yet, the Polish teachers of English seem to either underrate or neglect the contents' potential.

Quite commonly, the reason is the bad experience on the part of both teachers and students. They perceive cultural-historical content as abstract, boring and impractical

⁶⁰ Alba Olaya and Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 51. Cf.: Hemat Purba, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

⁶¹ Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

memorisation drills. Therefore, if the module is taught/learnt at all, it is all too often done in an unattractive, conventional way – lacking passion and confidence.

The above was established through the survey carried by the author (2010–18) among 107 extramural English Philology MA students (in-service teachers). Part One of the survey collected the basic data to create the appropriate research profile of the group. Part Two was a diagnosis of the past and present experiences of the teacher-students as regards both learning and teaching the cultural-historical contents. Part Three was aimed at receiving potential suggestions expectations or upgrades to improve the current situation.

The overall conclusion from the research is the cultural-historical module within the Polish EFL teaching is urgently needed. Its implementation and consequential expansion on all the educational levels in the Polish schools would have three main beneficiaries:

- English teachers
- EFL teaching as such
- Learners

The module's implementation appears highly beneficial for teachers. Once they realised the benefits and learnt the contents and techniques of teaching the module, the teachers would appreciate the great opportunity for self-development – a necessary requirement in the modern school environment⁶². Additionally, the module would straightforwardly win the learners' respect. Students could perceive their educators as knowledgeable individuals rather than impractical and dull grammarians. Moreover, the module's application is a splendid chance for the teachers to upgrade, improve and/or maintain their own level of the L2 command. The wealth of involving, genuinely curious lessons would immensely contribute to eradicating the unwelcome lesson routines. Finally, the introduction of the module, in a longer perspective, may provide teachers with a novel understanding of their roles, effectively heading off the danger of professional burn-out.

Along with the positives for teachers there are numerous rewards of the module's implementation for the EFL in Poland as such. First, working on cultural-historical materials involves assessment and analysis. Thus, it fosters critical thinking skills and independent learning in both teachers and learners. As real, original materials are used, they stimulate thoughts exchange and create the genuine information gap⁶³. Additionally, it is a great opportunity to reach beyond the coursebook in a truly meaningful way. Doing research and making projects requires the use of modern technologies and the Internet as purposeful tools rather than gadgets or toys

As the Polish educational system is heavily bureaucratised, teachers do not enjoy much freedom in the choice of the contents and sequence of the material they teach. With

⁶² Alba Olaya and Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁶³ *Ibidem*, p. 52.

the English teaching the situation is unique and more liberal. The module – if properly applied – offers incredible freedom and flexibility. Also, the module could contribute to the proper understanding why and what for the L2 is taught/learned at school. As a language is always a tool or a skill, it always needs to be taught and learned meaningfully, thus, the module suits the need perfectly⁶⁴.

Lastly, the module offers a chance to use the coursebook material to the full – recycling both forms and contents on specific demand of the class, teachers, school, etc. Needless to say, the meaningful contents, taught in an attractive and effective way, with the conviction the learned material is meaningful and hands-on, strengthens the learning and teaching motivation and takes it to another level.

The module has a lot to offer the learners. First and foremost, cultural-historical contents effectively reduce boredom – the all-too-common killer of any learning process. Studying such materials would make the learners – with time – not mere communicators in L2 but *genuine* L2 experts who use the language appropriately in its proper cultural-historical contexts⁶⁵. It is certainly vital in effective, advanced communication⁶⁶.

Such an approach to the module would make it possible for the students to capitalise on the knowledge gained that way in all the other subjects. It would make the learners frequently participate in various projects, festivals, etc. It would promote pro-social behaviours and foster the community spirit.

Finally, the intensive and extensive work on cultural-historical materials can make a perfect use of the students' smartphones. The devices – being a constant nightmare for the school authorities worldwide – could turn into a 'positively indispensable' and useful teaching aid.

In the light of the above observations, the module's implementation should be promoted in three main directions: in schools, among teachers and learners. The school decisionmakers on all levels need to be convinced and made aware how much the module could improve the teaching standards and in how many respects. The module would make the offer of a given school more attractive, which – in the times of increasing educational competition is a harsh reality – would certainly provide the school with more well-motivated students.

Consequently, successful students – participating and winning all sorts of contests and competitions – would lay foundations for the school's prestige and good reputation. Additionally, the rapid improvement of the students L2 command would certainly be noticed by the parents/sponsors of education. That would directly translate into the school's promotion and status, bringing the school the label of a pioneer.

⁶⁴ Cf.: Sehibi Mimoun and Mellouk Youcef, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Alba Olaya and Luis Fernando Gómez Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁶⁶ Hemat Purba, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

To promote the module among the Polish teachers of English – not overly confident and expert in the field – the step needs to be well-planned and prepared. First, teachers need to be demonstrated what the appropriate standards of teaching the module are. They need to be prepared to maintain the proper level of both the content and teaching it. Appropriately prepared lesson scenarios, models and assistance would – in the longer perspective – strengthen the teachers’ self-assurance and expertise.

Simultaneously, the well-planned, practice-oriented in-service teacher training is a must. It can/should be offered by as many – competent in the field – bodies as possible, Poland’s Ministry of Education, professional guilds, teachers’ associations, university departments etc. Also, on the level of college/university teacher preparation, the module’s application should be systematically broadened. The teachers-to-be need to leave the university with the knowledge and skills to effectively pass the content to their students.

As for the promotion of the module among the students, it will defend itself perfectly once they notice and understand how practical such a knowledge may be and how to use it effectively in all aspects of their lives. That would turn into significantly richer understanding of the students’ lives and motivate further on. Such an approach would offer new, broad and promising opportunities of studying, professional careers and fuller personal life.

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The Cultural and Historical Elements in the Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: the Polish Perspective

Summary: The article calls for a thorough revision of the cultural and historical content of English language curricula at all levels of the Polish educational system. The benefits of coordinated and well-managed language education based on cultural and historical content are outlined. The article is based on the author's research into part-time university students who are English language teachers, as well as the cultural and historical background knowledge imparted during English classes. The study was conducted at the Department of English Studies of the University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn in 2010–2019. The article expounds the reasons behind students' and teachers' reluctance towards incorporating cultural and historical content into English language curricula. The benefits stemming from cultural and historical background knowledge for teachers, students and foreign language teaching in general are discussed. Based on these observations, the last part of the article explores the most effective methods for promoting, introducing, implementing and developing teaching modules that incorporate cultural and historical knowledge. Culture and history-related content would undoubtedly increase the attractiveness and efficacy of language programs, promote competence development (linguistic, extra-linguistic, and general) among students and teachers, increase motivation in the learning and teaching process, and deliver tangible benefits for schools.

Keywords: culture, history, English teaching, Polish education, English teacher