

## EMPOWERING STUDENTS THROUGH BRITISH STUDIES

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### **Abstract:**

This article presents a forward-looking educational framework designed to enhance student engagement in British Studies through a critical, multidisciplinary, and active approach to learning. By integrating role-playing, simulations, and leadership models, the framework expands the scope of learning and equips students to address societal challenges with well-informed perspectives. It promotes analytical rigour, enabling students to critically examine historical narratives and establish meaningful connections to pressing global issues, including migration, decolonisation, and economic transformation. The paradigm emphasises reflective practices and experiential learning, fostering intellectual agility and the development of lifelong learning competencies. Cognitive load principles are incorporated to optimise the acquisition and retention of complex material while strategically structured tasks support comprehension and facilitate long-term recall. This approach effectively bridges historical knowledge with contemporary socio-political contexts, preparing students to navigate and impact global challenges. The framework's adaptability makes it applicable across disciplines and encourages a comparative and international perspective, further enhancing its relevance. Incorporating modern technologies, such as augmented reality, provides immersive and interactive learning opportunities, deepening student engagement. Ultimately, this paradigm redefines British Studies education by equipping students with critical thinking abilities and leadership skills essential for meaningful and impactful global citizenship.

**Keywords:** British Studies, active learning, interdisciplinary analysis, critical thinking, knowledge retention, role-playing simulations, experiential learning, cognitive load, socio-political landscape.

### **Introduction**

The British Studies curriculum thoroughly examines the period from 1945 to 1990, an epoch defined by transformative political, social, and cultural upheavals. This era provides an analytical lens for assessing Britain's navigation of critical challenges such as decolonisation, globalisation, and internal diversity. Engaging deeply with pivotal texts and primary materials, the course interrogates key episodes of post-war reconstruction, societal transformation, and shifting economic paradigms. Through structured and critical engagement, students develop a sophisticated understanding of Britain's evolution during this time and its profound implications for contemporary political and social contexts.

Key policy initiatives and societal trends shaped Britain's adjustment to the volatile post-war global environment. David Kynaston's *Tales of a New Jerusalem* series, including *Family Britain: 1951 – 57* (2009) and *Modernity Britain: Opening the Box, 1957 – 59* (2013), offers an exhaustive study of cultural and social transformations, providing insights into the ways these changes forged national identity. Peter Hennessy's *Having It So Good: Britain in the Fifties* (2006) enriches this narrative by dissecting the establishment of the welfare state and the intricacies of post-war recovery, demonstrating the interplay between governance and societal adaptation.

Stuart Hall's *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) critically examines the cultural and ideological shifts of subsequent decades. It investigates the impact of post-colonial migration on Britain's national consciousness during the 1960s and 1970s. Hall's exploration of

multiculturalism and global interconnectedness reveals the renegotiation of identity amidst these transformative forces.

The political and economic challenges of the 1970s and 1980s are illuminated in Dominic Sandbrook's *State of Emergency: The Way We Were: Britain, 1970–1974* (2010), *White Heat* (2006), and *Never Had It So Good* (2005). Sandbrook's analysis delves into the Thatcher era's complex interweaving of cultural resurgence and economic strife, revealing the coexistence of public optimism with deep structural crises. Complementary analyses include Robert Skidelsky's *Keynes: The Return of the Master* (2009), which critiques Keynesian responses to economic turbulence, and Andrew Gamble's *The Free Economy and the Strong State* (1988), which contextualises the rise of neoliberalism within Britain's ideological realignment.

### **Constructivist Frameworks for Critical Thinking in British Studies**

The British Studies framework is underpinned by an integrative application of advanced educational theories meticulously designed to foster higher-order critical thinking and analytical acumen. Rooted in the empirical insights of John Hattie's *Visible Learning* (2009), which emphasises the impact of evidence-based teaching and learning practices, the framework synergistically incorporates Sweller's cognitive load theory (1988), highlighting the optimisation of cognitive resources for effective learning. Additionally, Kolb's experiential learning model (1984) contributes a dynamic dimension, prioritising the transformative process of knowledge acquisition through active engagement and reflective practice.

Hattie's (2009) emphasis on metacognition underpins the development of reflective and analytical abilities. By encouraging learners to evaluate their cognitive processes, the framework equips them with tools to approach multifaceted historical narratives, such as the Suez Crisis of 1956 or Britain's EEC accession in 1973, with precision and intellectual rigour. These events serve as case studies for assessing shifts in foreign policy and political alignment, connecting historical decision-making to broader societal implications.

Sweller's (1988) cognitive load theory emphasises the strategic organisation of information to optimise cognitive processing and enhance learning outcomes, an integral principle of the British Studies framework. This approach is particularly evident in the analysis of complex historical and economic transformations, such as the Thatcherite reforms of the 1980s. Margaret Thatcher's economic policies, characterised by deregulation, privatisation, and a reduction in the power of trade unions, represent a highly intricate interplay of ideological, economic, and social dimensions. The framework deconstructs these reforms into manageable segments, such as their theoretical underpinnings in neoliberalism, their practical implementation through landmark policies like the privatisation of British Airways and British Telecom, and their socio-economic ramifications, including shifts in employment patterns and regional disparities. By structuring these elements logically and sequentially, the framework allows learners to engage deeply with Thatcherism's complexity, critically evaluating its legacy without cognitive overload.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning model significantly enhances the British Studies framework by emphasising the critical role of active engagement and the practical application of knowledge. This model transforms theoretical learning into dynamic, interactive experiences that deepen understanding through direct involvement. For instance, re-enacting parliamentary debates on pivotal historical events, like the 1975 EEC referendum, serves as a powerful pedagogical tool.

### **Linking Economic Policy and Political Ideology in British Studies**

This course adopts a multidisciplinary framework incorporating theoretical constructs from Esping-Andersen (1990), Middleton (2010), and Gamble (1994) to deconstruct the interplay between economic policy and political ideology in post-war Britain. By synthesising these models, students critically examine the ideological undercurrents and political mechanisms

driving transformative policy developments, such as the establishment of the welfare state and the ascendancy of neoliberalism.

Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology of welfare regimes provides a foundational lens to evaluate Britain's alignment with the liberal welfare model while considering its partial adoption of social democratic elements under Clement Attlee's post-war government. Policies, including the National Health Service Act of 1946, social housing initiatives, and education reforms exemplify this hybrid approach. Through detailed analysis of primary sources, such as legislative documents and Attlee's parliamentary addresses, students interrogate the tensions between equity-oriented policies and the imperatives of economic growth. Comparative exercises, such as juxtaposing Britain's welfare state with Sweden's archetypal social-democratic model, enable learners to critically assess trade-offs between social justice and market efficiency, enhancing theoretical comprehension and applied insights.

Middleton's (2010) analysis of consensus politics underscores the Keynesian economic foundations that underpin bipartisan cooperation in Britain's mid-20th-century governance. Students explore how Labour and Conservative administrations converged on policies prioritising full employment and economic stability, evident in the nationalisation of key industries and welfare expansion. This examination is deepened through seminar-based evaluations of policy efficacy, focusing on instruments like wage controls and public ownership. Particular attention is given to the fracturing of consensus during the economic crises of the 1970s, with discussions emphasising inflationary pressures and industrial decline as destabilising forces.

Gamble's (1994) seminal critique of The Free Economy and the Strong State frames the ideological schisms that emerged with Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal revolution. Thatcher's prioritisation of deregulation, privatisation, and market efficiency marked a decisive rupture from the Keynesian orthodoxy of preceding decades. Analytical tasks include dissecting landmark policies, such as the 1981 budget, and comparing Thatcher's rhetoric with consensus figures like Harold Macmillan, providing a nuanced understanding of Britain's ideological pivot and its governance and economic structure implications.

### **Decolonisation: A Critical Framework**

Decolonisation represents a critical juncture in British history, signalling a profound transformation from imperial dominance to a redefined global role and reshaped national identity. Key milestones such as India's independence in 1947, the Suez Crisis of 1956, and Harold Macmillan's Wind of Change speech in 1960 serve as focal points for dissecting the political, economic, and cultural dynamics of this epochal shift. John Darwin's *The End of the British Empire* (1988) and *Britain and Decolonisation* (2009) provide a geopolitical and economic lens to evaluate the structural pressures driving Britain's withdrawal from the empire. Simultaneously, Stuart Hall's *Cultural Identity and Diaspora* (1990) contextualises the enduring societal and cultural repercussions, offering a framework to interrogate the intersections of post-colonial migration, national identity, and multiculturalism.

This analytical framework prioritises the interrogation of narratives surrounding Britain's declining global influence. For instance, a close examination of Macmillan's Wind of Change speech elucidates how rhetorical devices such as metaphor and repetition functioned to navigate decolonisation's political complexities. Comparative analysis of speeches by figures such as Enoch Powell enables a multifaceted exploration of the ideological tensions between nationalist aspirations and imperial legacies. These case studies highlight the interplay of moral, economic, and social dimensions, fostering a sophisticated understanding of how decolonisation shaped British and global narratives.

The pedagogical structure is informed by Biggs' (1999) constructive alignment model and Bloom's taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001), ensuring a systematic progression through cognitive stages. The initial emphasis on acquiring foundational historical knowledge transitions into advanced analytical tasks, such as critiquing the diplomatic balancing acts reflected in Britain's

post-war foreign policy. Culminating activities involve applied synthesis, where students draft policy recommendations or prepare speeches addressing contemporary issues rooted in post-colonial legacies, such as immigration and globalisation.

Visual methodologies, including concept mapping, support cognitive integration by elucidating connections between decolonisation, rhetorical strategies, and Britain's reconfigured global role. Situated repetition of themes ensures reinforcement of critical concepts, while peer-led presentations foster collaborative learning and refine analytical acumen.

### **Exploring Britain's Complex Relationship with Europe**

Britain's evolving engagement with Europe offers a fertile domain for examining pivotal historical events, ideological divergences, and policy dynamics. The study spans Britain's initial hesitance towards European integration and the fractures within its political consensus.

Britain's reticence to participate in early European integration initiatives highlights ideological tensions around sovereignty and international alignment. Hugo Young's *This Blessed Plot* (1998) comprehensively critiques Britain's exceptionalism, framed by its Commonwealth priorities and transatlantic alliances. Analysing Winston Churchill's 1946 Zurich speech alongside Harold Macmillan's 1961 address on the European Economic Community (EEC) membership exposes the evolving rhetoric of engagement, underscoring contrasting views on collaboration and national identity. These insights, juxtaposed with Robert Schuman's declaration advocating European unity, allow students to critically assess Britain's ideological dichotomy. Timelines of key events, such as the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the Treaty of Rome (1957), contextualise these narratives while role-playing exercises simulate the geopolitical deliberations driving Britain's strategic choices.

The French vetoes of Britain's EEC membership in 1961 and 1967 exemplify the diplomatic complexities of regional integration. Piers Ludlow's *Dealing with Britain* (1997) offers a granular account of these negotiations, revealing how sovereignty concerns and transatlantic dependencies shaped Charles de Gaulle's objections. Detailed analyses of Macmillan's speeches and de Gaulle's public justifications illuminate ideological divergences, while comparative case studies of Britain's and other EEC members' priorities enable a broader understanding of regional politics.

Britain's accession to the EEC in 1973 and the subsequent 1975 referendum represent watershed moments in public opinion and policy framing. Saunders (2018) deconstructs campaign narratives, revealing how pro- and anti-EEC factions leveraged themes of economic prosperity, national autonomy, and geopolitical significance. Comparative analyses of campaign materials, including speeches and advertisements, facilitate a critical evaluation of public persuasion tactics. Simulated debates allow students to re-enact these campaigns, fostering an understanding of the interplay between political rhetoric, media influence, and voter behaviour.

Margaret Thatcher's Bruges Speech in 1988 signals a turning point, embedding Euroskepticism into British political discourse. Anthony Forster's *Euroskepticism in Contemporary British Politics* (2002) provides a theoretical lens for examining Thatcher's opposition to European centralisation, contrasting her position with earlier pro-European stances. Analysing Thatcher's rhetoric against consensus-era figures like Harold Macmillan elucidates the ideological shifts redefining Britain's European stance. These analyses are augmented by evaluations of Thatcher's policy impacts, including deregulation and sovereignty assertions, within the broader European context.

The 1992 European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) crisis, or Black Wednesday, encapsulates the intersection of economic instability and political fallout. David Marsh's *The Bundesbank: The Bank that Rules Europe* (1993) examines the fiscal pressures driving Britain's ERM withdrawal, contextualising it within European monetary policies. Role-playing decision-making during this crisis deepens understanding of policy constraints while mapping the

connections between economic destabilisation and domestic Euroscepticism, providing a comprehensive view of its long-term implications.

### **Learning Leadership Through Britain's Post-War Foreign Affairs**

Britain's post-World War II foreign affairs present a compelling lens through which to examine the complexities of leadership, diplomacy, and strategic decision-making in an evolving global order. Key events, including the Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis (1951–1953), the Suez Crisis (1956), the Vietnam War (1955–1975), and the Falklands War (1982), underscore the challenges faced by Britain as it navigated declining imperial influence and shifting geopolitical dynamics. These historical moments provide fertile ground for applying advanced leadership models such as Meta-Leadership (Marcus et al., 2006), which emphasises cross-sector collaboration in addressing multifaceted challenges; Strategic Non-Engagement (Sanders, 2011), which evaluates the balance between active participation and diplomatic restraint, and transformational leadership (Bass, Bass, 2008), which explores the use of crises to rebuild national confidence and stability. Integrating these frameworks into pedagogical practices, such as role-play simulations, crisis negotiations, and scenario analysis, fosters a multifaceted learning environment. This approach develops students' analytical and collaborative skills.

The Anglo-Iranian Oil Crisis offers a rich context for learning about leadership by examining the interplay of strategy, diplomacy, and decision-making. Using frameworks such as Meta-Leadership (Marcus et al., 2006), one can analyse Britain's reliance on US intervention, demonstrating the necessity of cross-national collaboration when unilateral efforts fail. Strategic decision-making can be explored by evaluating the actions of Clement Attlee and Winston Churchill, including their use of financial sanctions and covert operations, and assessing whether these approaches reflected adaptability or overreliance on imperial strategies. Crisis management lessons emerge from Britain's handling of Mossadegh's nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, highlighting how leaders balanced escalating tensions, domestic pressures, and external alliances to achieve strategic goals. Through transformational leadership, one can examine how the restoration of the Shah's power was framed to preserve Britain's influence and whether it marked a turning point in its global role.

The political leadership framework (Bryman, 1992) offers a valuable lens for analysing Prime Minister Anthony Eden's leadership during the Suez Crisis, highlighting his inability to align national policies with shifting post-war geopolitical realities. This framework underscores the importance of adapting strategies to evolving global power dynamics, which Eden misjudged by pursuing a military intervention that lacked international support. Students engage with this model by critically analysing Eden's decisions and examining how his leadership failed to navigate the crisis's interconnected military, political, and economic considerations. Complementing this theoretical exploration, crisis simulations allow students to role-play as Eden's cabinet, UN representatives, or Egyptian officials.

Contrastingly, the Strategic Non-Engagement model (Sanders, 2011) provides a framework for evaluating Prime Minister Harold Wilson's leadership during the Vietnam War. Wilson's decision to resist US pressure to deploy troops while maintaining diplomatic support reflected a cautious balancing of alliance obligations, domestic priorities, and limited resources. This approach, shaped by the lessons of the Suez Crisis, prioritised strategic restraint over direct involvement. Students analyse Wilson's leadership by comparing Britain's non-alignment strategy with other Cold War approaches, exploring the trade-offs between maintaining alliances and preserving national autonomy. Policy debates, in which students assume roles as British officials, US diplomats, or military advisors, encourage critical thinking by challenging participants to evaluate the broader implications of non-engagement on Britain's international influence and alliance stability.

The Falklands War (1982) provides a valuable case study for understanding restorative leadership and crisis management within national and international affairs. Prime Minister

Margaret Thatcher's decisive response to Argentina's invasion exemplifies the principles of restorative leadership in national crises. The model by Bass and Bass (2008) emphasises how leaders can leverage crises to restore national confidence, consolidate political stability, and enhance international standing. Thatcher's strategic decisions during the conflict, encompassing military operations, diplomatic negotiations, and public relations efforts, highlight how effective leadership can simultaneously address immediate threats and reinforce long-term domestic and global positions. To learn about this form of leadership, students analyse Thatcher's actions through the lens of the framework, exploring how military success secured the Falkland Islands and bolstered Britain's global reputation and Thatcher's domestic authority. A strategy simulation task situates students in Thatcher's War Cabinet, requiring them to deliberate on military strategy, diplomatic efforts, and media management.

### **Evaluating Learning in British Studies: A Multifaceted Approach**

Assessment in British studies goes beyond conventional testing by incorporating various evidence-based assessment methods supporting formative and summative learning. This approach is based on the principles of assessment for learning (Black, Wiliam, 1998). It prioritises student engagement in the assessment process to deepen understanding, promote critical thinking and improve the practical application of knowledge. Key strategies include reflective writing, portfolio-based assessment, and peer assessment.

As informed by Schön's (1983) Reflective Practitioner model, reflective writing assignments serve as a crucial pedagogical tool for linking experiential learning with theoretical frameworks. These assignments require students to critically analyse their participation in active learning exercises, such as role-play activities on the Suez Crisis. By encouraging reflection on personal involvement, these tasks foster self-awareness and enable students to synthesise historical events with theoretical insights.

Portfolios provide a comprehensive view of student development by integrating diverse academic tasks such as essays on Britain's welfare state, analyses of debates on the Suez Crisis, and creative projects like timelines of decolonisation events. Anchored in Biggs' (1999) Constructive Alignment model, portfolios ensure alignment between assessment tasks and learning objectives, allowing students to showcase their critical thinking, analytical skills, and practical knowledge. For example, students might evaluate Thatcher's economic policies or trace the evolution of British foreign policy through curated portfolio entries. By granting students autonomy in choosing their focus areas, portfolios foster more profound engagement, enhance long-term knowledge retention, and encourage reflective practice.

As conceptualised by Nicol and Macfarlane-Dick (2006), peer assessment fosters collaborative learning and critical engagement by encouraging students to evaluate and provide constructive feedback on each other's work. For example, students might assess policy briefs analysing Britain's entry into the EEC or multimedia presentations on decolonisation, offering critiques that highlight strengths and suggest areas for improvement. Moreover, peer assessment cultivates a sense of accountability and mutual respect as students recognise the importance of their contributions to their peers' learning.

Final assessments feature innovative tasks that require students to synthesise complex historical and theoretical ideas into accessible, visually compelling formats, underpinned by Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning. For example, students might design an infographic mapping the process of decolonisation, incorporating milestones such as India's independence in 1947, the Suez Crisis in 1956, and the Wind of Change speech in 1960, alongside their political and cultural ramifications. Alternatively, they may create a multimedia presentation analysing Britain's shifting role within the European Union, comparing the optimistic rhetoric surrounding the 1973 EEC entry with the ideological tensions after 1990.

## Conclusion

The British Studies learning framework transcends traditional academic paradigms by integrating critical thinking, interdisciplinary inquiry, and experiential methodologies to provide a robust and dynamic learning environment. In the future, its implications will extend beyond the classroom and offer fertile ground for developing strategies in history and social studies education. Future iterations of this framework could incorporate new technologies, such as augmented reality simulations, to deepen engagement and provide personalised feedback, enhancing the synthesis of historical knowledge with modern analytical tools. In addition, the framework's emphasis on active participation and leadership modelling has significant potential to equip students with the skills needed to address global challenges. By exploring the connections between historical case studies and contemporary issues such as climate change and migration, the curriculum could evolve into a prototype for interdisciplinary learning. Such an approach enriches understanding of British history and prepares them to navigate and influence the socio-political landscape of the future with informed empathy and intellectual versatility.

Finally, the adaptability of this framework opens up possibilities for cross-cultural and international collaboration, particularly in regions with shared colonial heritages or intertwined economic histories. Future adaptations could explore comparative studies of post-war transformations in Britain and other countries, thereby promoting a global perspective on historical narratives and policy-making. By developing intellectual curiosity and fostering a commitment to lifelong learning, the framework positions itself as a cornerstone for educating critical and globally minded future leaders.

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