

Appropriate Methods of ELT in the Current Indo-Bangla Context

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Abstract

This paper claims that for any ELT methodology to be effective, the social context in which it is utilised must be taken into account since they represent the ideology and politics of the West, which rules the world by upholding Anglo-Saxon standards, establishing norms, and imposing its ideologies on non-Western nations. The classroom techniques and activities or tasks used in ELT methodology are primarily Western in origin and orientation; they promote the Western learning group ideals, learner autonomy, learner centeredness, group work, pair work, role play, simulation, and drama techniques – all of which are foreign to teaching-learning cultures in the periphery. However, this paper chooses to liberate ELT from methodological imperialism and promote critical, non-prescriptive, locally generated, bottom-up methods suitable for the present setting of India and Bangladesh to make ELT methods appropriate to the socio-cultural requirements of learners and teachers.

Keywords: ELT Methodology, Social Context, Methodological Imperialism, Western and Non-Western Teaching-Learning Cultures, Critical Pedagogy, Educational Equity

An Overview

In an era defined by globalisation and the relentless spread of English as a lingua franca, the field of ELT stands as an emblem of cross-cultural exchange and interaction. Once

a language tethered to its Anglo-Saxon roots, English has transcended geographical boundaries to become a global communication medium, connecting people from diverse linguistic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds (Crystal 2003). This transformation has reshaped how we communicate and profoundly impacted the methodologies employed to teach and learn English. The contemporary landscape of ELT is a tapestry woven with threads of various pedagogical approaches and practices, each originating from a distinct socio-cultural context. Yet, amidst this diversity, a dichotomy emerges. Liu says, “the “nativeness principle” (Levis 2005) affect other aspects of ELT concerning language standard, cultural orientation and teaching methodology” (2021, 99). Specifically, the prevailing ELT methodologies, often rooted in Western ideologies, have exerted a pervasive influence worldwide. While celebrated for their effectiveness in many contexts, these methodologies inherently carry the ethos and values of the cultures from which they emanated, predominantly the Western world.

However, this present study, “Appropriate Methods of ELT in the Current Indo-Bangla Context,” contends that ELT is at a crossroads, facing a formidable challenge, and that is the influence of Western ideologies and the imposition of normative standards that may not necessarily align with the socio-cultural fabric of non-Western nations. It argues that to achieve effectiveness in English language teaching, one must delve beyond the superficiality of pedagogical methods (Bull and Anstey 2018) and explore the profound influence of socio-cultural, ideological, and political dimensions. ELT, in essence, must be liberated from the shackles of “methodological imperialism.”

Methodological imperialism, wherein Western-centric ELT approaches are imposed on non-Western nations, has garnered substantial attention in the literature (Phillipson 1992; Canagarajah 2005). This phenomenon raises questions about cultural relevance and the need for context-specific methodologies. Scholars have also explored the prevalence of Western

learning group ideals, including learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, in ELT practices (Littlewood 2007; Benson 2007). While effective in some contexts, these ideals have prompted debates regarding their transferability to non-Western settings. The importance of considering cultural factors in ELT has been emphasised by researchers (Kumaravadivelu 2008; Kubota 2013). They stress the need to understand and incorporate socio-cultural nuances in language education, particularly in regions like India and Bangladesh. Critical pedagogy, as advocated by Paulo Freire, has gained prominence as an alternative to traditional ELT methods (Pennycook 1999). Critical pedagogy encourages learners to engage with language, critically challenging dominant norms and ideologies. In recent years, there has been a growing call for contextually relevant, locally generated, and bottom-up ELT methods (Canagarajah 2013; Holliday 2005). These approaches prioritise learners' and educators' unique needs, values, and socio-cultural requirements. The literature underscores the significance of adapting language education to fit the socio-cultural conditions of learners (Luke 2004; Tollefson 2000). This aligns with the paper's argument for culturally sensitive pedagogies. The impact of globalisation on language education, including the spread of English and its socio-cultural implications, has been explored (Crystal 2003; Phillipson 2008). The interplay between global and local influences in ELT is a critical consideration. Finally, scholars have discussed issues of equity and access in language education, especially concerning marginalised communities (Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Norton 2000). However, this research paper aligns with these discussions.

Methodological Imperialism: A Global Phenomenon

The term "methodological imperialism" encapsulates how Western-originated ELT methodologies and techniques are imposed upon non-Western nations. This phenomenon is not merely pedagogical; it reflects broader ideological and political currents shaping the contemporary world order. Wielding its socio-political and economic influence, the West has

positioned itself as a dominant force in setting the standards and norms by which English is taught and learned globally. In support of this argument, Holliday (2005) rightly discusses the concept of ‘appropriateness’ in ELT methodologies since Western methods may not always be suitable for non-Western contexts and stresses the importance of considering local needs and values.

India and Bangladesh, endowed with rich linguistic, cultural, and historical diversity, exemplify the unique teaching-learning cultures outside the Western paradigm. The socio-cultural tapestry of these nations is woven with myriad threads, each contributing to a distinct educational milieu. Yet, conventional ELT methodologies often disregard the richness and complexities of these contexts.

At the core of this issue lies the fundamental question of whose ideologies and values are upheld within ELT methodologies. The prevailing classroom techniques and activities, such as learner autonomy, learner-centeredness, group work, pair work, role play, simulation, drama techniques, assessment and grading, all carry the imprint of Western learning group ideals. While these approaches have demonstrated efficacy in Western contexts, their seamless transplantation into the teaching-learning cultures of the periphery is not guaranteed. For example, in Western contexts, learner autonomy and learner-centeredness are highly emphasised, encouraging students to take charge of their learning. However, in India and Bangladesh, traditional educational systems often prioritise teacher-centred instruction and rote memorisation. Students may not be accustomed to making independent learning choices, making it challenging to implement learner autonomy effectively. Secondly, Western ELT promotes collaborative learning through group work and pair work. In India and Bangladesh, cultural norms and classroom hierarchies can inhibit active participation in group discussions. Students may hesitate to express their opinions openly, fearing loss of face or authority. Thirdly, role play and simulation activities often involve students taking on

specific roles and scenarios. In some conservative cultural settings in India and Bangladesh, students may feel uncomfortable acting out roles that challenge traditional social norms or hierarchies. Such exercises and activities represent Western cultures like airports, coffee shops, theatres, etc., which may not align with local values and sensibilities. Fourthly, drama techniques can enhance language learning, but they may not resonate with the conservative educational environments in parts of India and Bangladesh. Drama activities that involve physical expression or emotive engagement may be seen as unconventional or inappropriate in specific contexts. Last, Western-influenced assessment methods, such as continuous assessment and self-assessment, and Western-standardised English proficiency tests like IELTS and TOEFL may not align with traditional examination-based systems in India and Bangladesh, where high-stakes examinations often determine a student's prospects.

Embracing Liberation in ELT Methodology: Advocating Critical, Non-Prescriptive, Locally Generated Approaches

This research paper issues a clarion call for liberation from methodological imperialism in ELT, which resonates strongly with the educational landscapes of India and Bangladesh. It argues for a shift towards critical, non-prescriptive, locally generated, and bottom-up approaches that respect and respond to the unique socio-cultural requirements and aspirations of learners and teachers in these countries. Methodological imperialism, which imposes Western-centric teaching methods, often disregards India and Bangladesh's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. This approach often results in a disconnect between the curriculum and the daily experiences of learners, making it imperative to emancipate ELT from such an ideological and methodological yoke.

In these contexts, adopting critical pedagogies allows learners to engage with English as more than just a language but a tool for critical thinking and empowerment. Encouraging learners to analyse language usage, texts, and media critically helps them better understand

language's socio-cultural and political dimensions. As Pennycook (1994) argues, critical language awareness can enable learners to recognise and challenge power structures and ideologies embedded in language. Furthermore, embracing non-prescriptive methods empowers educators to tailor their teaching to learners' needs and preferences. This flexibility aligns with Canagarajah's (1999) emphasis on respecting diverse linguistic and cultural resources, ensuring that ELT reflects India and Bangladesh's local contexts and realities. Overall, the call for liberation underscores the importance of embracing contextually relevant, culturally sensitive, and empowering approaches to ELT to redefine these countries' pedagogical landscape and offer learners a more inclusive and meaningful language education experience.

Research Objectives

This study aims to critically analyse the impact of social and cultural contexts on the effectiveness of ELT methodologies, examining their alignment with Western ideologies and Anglo-Saxon norms. It explores the repercussions of methodological imperialism in ELT, advocating for the liberation of ELT from these constraints and emphasising the importance of contextually relevant approaches. Additionally, it promotes the adoption of critical pedagogy to empower educators and learners to question existing norms and adapt methodologies to local socio-cultural contexts. The study further seeks to propose non-prescriptive, locally generated, and bottom-up ELT methods tailored to the specific needs of India and Bangladesh. Finally, it aims to provide practical strategies and recommendations for educators and policymakers to implement contextually appropriate ELT methodologies that respect and reflect the socio-cultural diversity of learners and teachers in these regions.

Methodology

This research employs a desk-based approach, primarily relying on critically analysing existing literature and archival materials. The objective is to critically examine and synthesise relevant academic literature, policy documents, and archives related to ELT methodologies, methodological imperialism, and socio-cultural contexts in India and Bangladesh. A comprehensive search of academic databases, libraries, and digital repositories has been conducted to identify peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference papers, and research reports related to ELT methodologies, cultural influences, and pedagogical practices in India and Bangladesh.

Recommendations

The critical analysis of the socio-cultural context and the impact of methodological imperialism in ELT in India and Bangladesh leads to several recommendations for educators,

policymakers, and stakeholders. The following recommendations aim to foster culturally relevant and effective ELT methodologies.

1. Contextualised Curriculum Development

Educational authorities in India and Bangladesh should collaborate with educators to develop ELT curricula that reflect local cultures, values, and needs. This includes incorporating indigenous literature, traditions, and socio-cultural content into English language materials (Kumaravadivelu 2008). In India, indigenous literature can be included in English language textbooks. For instance, works by Rabindranath Tagore, such as “Gitanjali,” are often included in the curriculum. In Bangladesh, the poetry of Kazi Nazrul Islam is a prime example of indigenous literature that can be integrated into ELT curricula. Instead of studying non-contextual Western poems like Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” which says “April is the cruellest month,” or Wordsworth’s “Daffodils”, poems and songs of indigenous writers of Tagore and Nazrul not only teach English language skills but also expose students to the rich literary heritage of India and Bangladesh.

Moreover, English language lessons in India can include content on traditional festivals like Diwali, Holi, or Pongal, allowing students to learn English while exploring their cultural practices. Similarly, In Bangladesh, cultural traditions like the celebration of Bengali New Year (Pohela Boishakh) can be integrated into ELT materials. These materials can introduce students to the significance of this festival, its customs, and related vocabulary in English, thus fostering a sense of cultural pride.

2. Teacher Training and Professional Development

Investing in comprehensive teacher training programs that focus on adapting ELT methodologies to local contexts and promoting critical pedagogical approaches is essential for India and Bangladesh. This approach aligns with Pennycook’s (1999) call to challenge Western-centric practices in language education. India is a linguistically diverse country with

numerous regional languages. Comprehensive teacher training programs can include modules that help teachers leverage this diversity. For example, a teacher in Tamil Nadu can be trained to adapt ELT materials to incorporate elements of Tamil culture and language.

Similarly, teachers in Bangladesh can be trained to integrate Bangladeshi culture into their ELT instruction. For instance, they can incorporate lessons about the history of the Bengali Language Movement or discussions about Bangladesh's Liberation War of 1971. These topics make ELT more relevant and challenge the dominance of Western historical narratives.

3. Promotion of Critical Pedagogy

Promoting critical pedagogy principles in ELT classrooms, as Paulo Freire advocates, can have a transformative impact on education in India and Bangladesh. This approach empowers learners to engage critically with language and societal norms, fostering a deeper understanding of socio-cultural dynamics, as Pennycook (1999) suggested. In ELT classrooms in India, teachers can encourage students to deconstruct texts critically. For instance, when studying a literary work, students can analyse how language conveys power dynamics, cultural values, and social hierarchies. By critically examining the text, students can understand how language influences and reflects societal norms (Freire 1970).

On the other hand, teachers can promote media literacy in ELT classrooms in Bangladesh. Students can critically analyse English-language media, such as newspapers, television, or online content, to identify biases, stereotypes, and the impact of media on societal norms and values. This empowers students to be informed and critical information consumers (Freire, 1970).

4. Inclusive Materials and Resources

Developing and disseminating inclusive ELT materials and resources that challenge stereotypes and promote intercultural understanding is crucial for creating a more equitable

and effective learning environment. These materials should challenge stereotypes and encourage intercultural understanding (Kubota 2013). ELT materials can provide multilingual glossaries or annotations to assist learners in understanding English terms in the context of their native language. This approach makes learning more accessible to students who may not have English as their first language and encourages the retention of cultural and linguistic diversity (Kumar, 2016).

5. Support for Local Content Creation

Supporting local content creation for ELT materials that incorporate indigenous stories, contexts, and perspectives is a valuable strategy to promote ownership and relevance in education. The Indian government, in collaboration with educational institutions and NGOs, can organise annual workshops on curriculum development and grant opportunities for teachers to create region-specific ELT materials. For instance, a teacher from Kerala could develop English learning materials that incorporate elements of Kerala's culture and history. Furthermore, the government or educational institutions can establish a national digital platform where educators can upload and share their locally generated ELT materials. These resources can be categorised by region, language, or topic, making it easy for other teachers to find and use them. Again, a collaboration between a Bangladeshi English teacher and a local author could result in ELT materials that incorporate Bangladeshi folk tales, historical events, or cultural practices, making English learning more engaging and culturally meaningful. Also, ELT educators in Bangladesh can organise community-based projects where students interview elders and collect stories, legends, and local knowledge. These materials can then be used to create ELT resources that connect language learning with the community's cultural heritage.

6. Flexible Assessment Methods

Reevaluating assessment practices in education, especially in the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), is essential to ensure that they align with context-specific learning goals and promote a deeper understanding of language and skills. Emphasising formative assessment methods that allow for diverse expressions of knowledge and skills can lead to more effective and equitable assessment practices (Benson 2007). In a formative assessment, students can be asked to create bilingual posters or presentations explaining a topic in English and their native language. This assesses their language skills and validates their linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Assessments can be designed to reflect the socio-cultural context of different regions in India. For instance, in India, students could be assessed on their ability to write an essay in English about the cultural significance of the Ganesh Chaturthi festival. In Bangladesh, the assessment might focus on the importance of Ramadan.

7. Research and Publication

Encouraging ongoing research and evaluation of ELT practices within local contexts is crucial for improving the quality and relevance of language education in India and Bangladesh. Collaborations between academia, educators, and policymakers can help assess ELT methodologies' effectiveness and cultural appropriateness (Canagarajah 2005). Researchers from any university in India and Bangladesh can collaborate with local schools to study the impact of incorporating regional literature into ELT materials. They collect data on students' language proficiency, engagement, and cultural awareness before and after the intervention. Besides, the Ministry of Education of these countries can conduct annual surveys where English teachers can anonymously share their experiences, challenges, and recommendations regarding ELT practices. This input helps policymakers make informed decisions. Furthermore, ELT should be freed from 'publication imperialism' because local publishers should value materials like Oxford University Press.

8. Policy Reform

Advocating for policy reforms that recognise the importance of culturally sensitive ELT methodologies is essential to ensure that education aligns with India's and Bangladesh's cultural contexts and needs. Policy documents should promote contextually relevant and critical approaches to ELT, as Phillipson (2008) emphasised. The Ministry of Education in India and Bangladesh can issue guidelines that mandate the inclusion of regional literature and cultural elements in ELT materials. These guidelines can provide specific recommendations and criteria for evaluating the cultural relevance of textbooks. The governments of both countries can fund initiatives that provide in-service training for English teachers on integrating local culture into their teaching. These programs can include workshops, seminars, and online courses. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India can play a significant role in addressing the issue of methodological imperialism in ELT. NEP 2020's emphasis on promoting multilingualism, curriculum design flexibility, and critical thinking development aligns with this paper's call for ELT methodologies to be contextually relevant and culturally sensitive. By encouraging the use of regional languages, providing autonomy to educators, and nurturing critical thinking skills, NEP 2020 supports the creation of non-prescriptive, locally generated ELT methods that cater to learners' and teachers' unique socio-cultural requirements, thus helping liberate ELT from perceived methodological imperialism.

9. Teacher Autonomy

Empowering teachers with the autonomy to adapt and innovate in their classrooms is essential for creating meaningful and culturally relevant learning experiences in India and Bangladesh (Benson 2007). Teachers should be provided with flexibility in the curriculum. They can make adjustments based on their students' specific needs and interests. For example, suppose teachers observe that their students are particularly interested in local folk

tales. In that case, they should be able to incorporate related topics and materials into their English language lessons.

Moreover, teachers can be encouraged to initiate and lead projects that align with their student's interests and community needs. For instance, teachers can organise language-focused community events or engage students in community service activities that require English communication skills. These projects enhance language proficiency and provide a cultural exchange and understanding platform. Also, peer learning communities should be established where teachers can share best practices, innovative teaching methods, and culturally relevant materials. These communities can provide a supportive environment for teachers to learn from one another and adapt successful strategies to their classrooms. Lastly, teachers should feel empowered to voice their opinions and suggestions to improve the relevance and effectiveness of ELT practices in their specific contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper underscores the importance of considering the socio-cultural context when designing and implementing ELT methodologies. It illuminates the pervasive influence of Western ideologies and standards, driven by the dominance of the West on the global stage. The classroom techniques commonly employed in ELT, rooted in Western pedagogical traditions, have often overlooked the rich and diverse cultural contexts of non-Western nations like India and Bangladesh. Even at the time when the Government of India is celebrating 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav', an initiative to commemorate 75 years of independence and the glorious history of its people, culture and achievements, it is deplorable that India is still not cut away from the shackles of British English education system pioneered by Lord Macaulay on his famous Minute on the Indian Education in 1835. The same is the case for Bangladesh, where we have freedom from geographical boundaries but no academic freedom.

However, this research also offers a path forward—a call to liberate ELT from methodological imperialism. By advocating for critical, non-prescriptive, locally generated, and bottom-up methods, this paper seeks to align ELT practices with the unique socio-cultural requirements of learners and teachers in India and Bangladesh. It is an invitation to reimagine ELT as a dynamic and contextually responsive endeavour that values cultural diversity, empowers educators, and fosters genuine communication and understanding. Collaboration among educators, policymakers, researchers, and communities will be pivotal. Embracing critical pedagogy, promoting cultural inclusivity, and encouraging teacher autonomy will pave the way for a compelling ELT landscape that reflects the rich tapestry of cultures and identities that comprise the global community. Ultimately, the liberation of ELT from methodological imperialism is not merely an academic pursuit but a transformative journey from ‘academic slavery’ toward more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and learner-centric language education. It is an affirmation that the power of language transcends borders and ideologies, and it is our responsibility to ensure that its teaching and learning honour the diversity and complexity of our world.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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