



A Comparative Report on Teaching and Learning English at the Tertiary Level in China and Bangladesh

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Abstract

Globalization has been taking place due to the capital driven competitiveness among the countries. Although mainly it was supposed to be limited to the development of the countries but now the education sector has been globalized as well. In higher education, it can be seen that the developing countries are taking part in the race with developed countries to tag themselves as globalized as possible (Zajda, 2020). Due to the colonialism, English has still been considered as a common medium to be used for communication and globalization around the world. Also, English is not only considered as “Lingua Franca”, rather it has been considered as a pathway for developing in global economies by most of the countries especially Asian countries like China, Bangladesh and India. Applying the neo-liberal policy, both China and Bangladesh are blindly accepting English as their fundamental language to be exercised at all levels of educational institutions. In case of tertiary level, English has been given more emphasis so that the students are well prepared to face the outer world. Although students are also considering English as their only way to communicate with the outside world but the reality is quite contradictory to the expectation. Thus, it raises the question of conducting research. This research will compare the teaching and learning of the English language at the tertiary level in China and Bangladesh. In this comparative report between two countries, it will explore teaching strategies for a similar language in two different cultural contexts and also aim to understand the importance of English as a global language in both countries along with the student’s perception of learning English.

Keywords: Globalization, Neo-liberalism, Comparative, Education, Tertiary

Introduction

Zajda (2020, pp. 1-3) mentioned globalization as a “modern and complex” structure where the “massification of education” takes place to compete in a “technology-driven global economy.” According to him, in the process of globalization, knowledge and skills have become mere “commodities” (Zajda, 2020, p.1). Globalization can be “defined

as a new dominant ideology of economic and cultural convergence” where it can transform the “economic, social and educational pathway” (Zajda, 2020, p.3). Although globalization was supposed to become a tying knot in between countries in the field of education, rather it has been argued by Dervis (2007) that it has created a “change in world economy by making losers and winners” (mentioned in Zajda, 2020, p.3). It has been said that the inequalities between countries in the name of education has been created by globalization need to be mitigated and it should be made as a central goal for the countries (Dervis, 2007 mentioned in Zajda, 2020, p.3). Instead of working on mitigating inequalities, we rather can see the dominance of western world over the Asian countries in the name of globalization and also by the means of using English as a global language.

In this modern world, the dominance of Western societies can be visible as an outcome of creating a capitalistic society. In the name of globalization and neoliberalism, developing countries are focusing on adopting the Western culture. Nowadays English has become a tool of globalization and it impacts on educational sector greatly. In the context of two Asian developing countries, China (upper-middle-income country) and Bangladesh (lower-middle-income country), English seems to be the medium for communicating with the outside world and competing in the global economy. According to De Swaan (2001), in a global language system, “languages are connected, hierarchical and multi-tiered pattern.” Here, in global system of languages, English is now working as a centre where other language seem to be “peripheral.” While a bilingual learns another language, the speaker thinks that additional language might be of serving greater “communicative advantage”; hence, the speaker feels attracted to learn the higher level of the language, thus getting more interested towards the centre of the language than the peripherals (De Swaan, 2001 mentioned in Pan & Block, 2011, p.393).

This concept is useful for the justification of the hierarchy of a language. If we talk about English, this might be a way to have a widespread need of learning English as a global language. Apart from this, “the colonial literacy” has also been working to justify English as a global language and works as an effective tool in the capitalist market to get a job and prospective future for the developing and neo-colonized countries (Alam, 2023, pp. 3-5).

If it has been taken account into the context of China, it can be seen that English has been working as a global language for Chinese students because it serves as a tool to communicate with the outside world as an “unproblematic way” of internationalization (Pan & Block, 2011, p. 400). Similarly, in case of Bangladesh, English serves the purpose for the tool of globalization as well as English has been connected to the historical context of Bangladesh since the period of the “British Raj” ruled over Indian subcontinent (Alam, 2023, p.2). The purpose of the British-dominated education system in the subcontinent was “creating brown people with white minds.” Through the medium of the English language and inclusion of British curricula within the subcontinent, the colonial literacy has been

practiced years after years. In case of Bangladesh, we can see the propaganda to make English language popular by the fact that learning English may “open doors” for employment, also English serves as the hierarchical language (by being the colonial language); so, people feel more attracted to the central language than the peripherals (their own native language) (referring to Swaan’s theory of global language system, 2001) (Alam, 2023, p. 4).

The research aims to show that the dominance of English as a global language over China and Bangladesh is the highest and both of these countries are prioritizing learning English for the development of the national economies. There might be a slight cultural contextual difference between these two countries but the aspiration and expectation of acquiring English as a global language for China and Bangladesh provides similar purposes and outcomes. The research also unfolds the reality of learning English versus the expectations from this scenario.

Methodology

Alexiadou (2013, What is Education For? section, para.1) stated the importance of understanding comparative education since it is necessary to understand the value of education. According to him, education is based on two major activities “learning and teaching.” To understand education as a “phenomenon” it is also important to know the systematic approaches to education such as how education is organized, controlled, and administered by the states. The state has two systemic approaches to providing education for all and they are –“formal and informal.” Education can also be provided by non-governmental organizations as well. To achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it has become a humane right to ensure “education for all” (Alexiadou, 2013, What is Education For? section, paras. 3-4).

The educational sector varies from one country to another country. For example, in developing countries or relatively poor countries, the national level of the education system is incomplete. It is difficult for them to ensure both primary and secondary schooling for all citizens while developed countries like the United Kingdom have adopted private schooling systems for the elite class to prepare for future leadership. From the ancient period, the difference in the educational system can be visible. Hence, it emerges the question of understanding comparative education. To understand the importance of comparative education, it needs to be understood that education acts as a “social and political control mechanism” for any country. If we look into history, we can observe that educational systems from different countries have been written down as “traveler’s tales”, and this literature was borrowed by the countries and adopted into their educational systems. The countries act both as “borrowers and lenders” of educational practices to develop their educational systems (Alexiadou, 2013, The Emergence of Comparative

Education section, para.1).

Michael Sadler who has been considered the father of comparative education. According to him, when we talk about the education system, we only mean the schooling system of a country. But education does not only depend upon the schooling system, the teacher-pupil relationship, and other national frameworks; also to understand the educational system of a country one must choose to travel from the street to the house of the pupils where one can know the actual meaning, cultural and spiritual connection of the educational system to pupil's lives (Higginson, 1979, p.49 mentioned in Alexiadou, 2013, The Emergence of Comparative Education section, para.4). Another pioneer of comparative education, Issac Kandel talked about the issue of teaching strategies. He mentioned that the educational policy should take into account how literacy could change people's lives. Reading and writing skills should not only make people capable of getting definite government employment. Rather the literacy skill should support them to develop any stages of their lives. Developed countries like the US, the UK, and France should support other developing countries to teach students so they can work within their own communities (Alexiadou, 2013).

The research would like to compare the teaching and learning of the English language at the tertiary level in China and Bangladesh. In this comparative report between two countries, it will explore teaching strategies for a similar language in two different cultural contexts. The research will also aim to understand the importance of English as a global language in both countries and the student's perception of learning English. Based upon Saddler's perception of understanding comparative education, this comparative report will talk about the teaching-learning strategies for English language skills and it will also connect the cultural significance of the English language in the lives of Chinese and Bangladeshi people. Having agreed with Kandel (1942), it can be said that literacy skills should support people in developing their lives and employability. Here, the report will establish the connection between English linguistic ability and the employability of Chinese and Bangladeshi people and how it is helping them to connect with the world as English has been considered a global language since the period of 1980s.

Literature Review

Globalization and Education

In this paper, one of the main focuses is globalization and its impact on education. Here, Jackson's (2016) idea of globalization and its impact on education will reflect to show the necessity and outcomes of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh and China.

Jackson (2016) has stated in the research that globalization is a new trend for this 21st century. It is a process that relates to the political, social, and cultural mixing of ideas

and policies between countries. Jackson talked about the cultural framing of globalization where he mentioned that globalization takes place through the exchange of cultural rules between communities at the regional level and then at the international level between countries. Also, he mentioned that political-economic framing like globalization is also the effect of colonialism, post-colonialism, and capitalized economy. Between countries, the exchange of ideas and policies happen also due to the progression of technology. Jackson mentioned the impact of globalization on education. Globalization and education are interconnected with each other from a historical angle. Since the colonial period, the colonial rulers have established elite educational projects in colonized countries like India, Africa, and East Asia as a means of social control. This “global empire maintenance” is creating a collision between the local culture and the globalized culture (2016, p.8). This could be the negative impact of globalization and education but Jackson talked about the benefits of globalization on education as well. He stated that the positive impact of globalization on education depends upon “one’s position, perspectives, values and priorities” (2016, p.1). Setting aside the challenges of globalization, it can positively impact education through the internationalization of curricula, policies, and educational projects across the world. Through the process of globalization, educators can interact with each other’s ideas to bring changes in the educational system rather than reacting to the negative impact of globalization (Jackson, 2016).

“Neoliberalism and Language Education”

Neoliberalism is closely associated with the concept of the “free market ethos or laissez-faire” and global economic competition between the states. Under the philosophy of neoliberalism, personal failure seems to be highlighted instead of finding the lack in the discipline of social and economic structures. The implication of neoliberalism on education is turning schools and universities into human capital-making institutions. The impact of neoliberalism on language education is providing “competence-based education” where students will compete with each other to show outstanding performance and utilize the knowledge for economic development. And this process is predominantly connected to the concept of “individualism” (Xiang and Yuan, 2018, pp. 104-105). In this research, it aims to show English as a policy of neoliberalism in Chinese and Bangladeshi student’s lives where they provide importance on learning English for their professional and individual growth which can later contribute to gain economic benefits.

Bourdieu's Forms of Capital

The research would be related to the importance of English language for Bangladeshi and Chinese people by applying French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s

approaches to the forms of capital. According to Bourdieu, capital can be divided into four categories- economic, social, cultural, and symbolic. Cultural capital refers to the “individual’s knowledge, skills and education.” It also refers to “linguistic proficiency, cultural competence, artwork, literature and recognition of cultural competence through academic qualification.” Economic capital means the assets of an individual in the society. Social capital refers to the assets one individual gains through social ties. It also relates to “social stratification, educational attainment and labor market outcomes.” Symbolic capital refers to the “individual’s prestige, honor, and recognition” and this capital can be converted to other forms and the individual uses this capital to maintain “social position and reproduce social hierarchies” (Bourdieu, 2002 mentioned in Alam, 2023, pp.4-5).

Discussion

Teaching and Learning English Language in China

Historical context. Xiong and Yuan (2018, p.104) mentioned the four stages of developing an English language curriculum in China. The first stage (1949-1966) saw the decline of the Soviet Union’s influence on textbooks. The second stage (1966-1976) witnessed the cultural revolution where the textbooks were turned into tools for social struggle. The third stage (1976-1992) witnessed the death of Chairman Mao and his successors became more open towards the international market and economy. As a result, the ELT (English language teaching) materials soon become the tool for competition rather than embracing the materials and the language. The fourth stage (1992-present) has seen the rapid marketization of English textbooks and the materials are more “individualized, apolitical and value free.” From 1978 onwards, China is embracing English as a global language and boasting over 200 million English learners at school and 13 million at the University level (Taylor, 2002).

English serves as a global language and capital. In China, English is considered as the global language to open doors for individuals to take part in the international job market and economy. A study conducted by Pan and Block (2011, p. 395) shows that almost 74.1% of teachers and 72.7% of students believe that “English is more global and international” than any other language in the world. Both the students and teachers believe that English has a hierarchical position within the linguistic framework. Learning English seems to be more prestigious to students than learning Chinese. Here, English learning seems to be the cultural and symbolic capital for the students as per Bourdieu’s theory on forms of capital discussed above (Pan and Block, 2011). In the case of teaching English in China, importance has been placed upon “communicative competence” and “communicative language teaching (CLT)” and the test method. English has been considered as a “subject” rather than a “study.” In Chinese culture, the traditional examination systems seem to be prioritized although the traditional method of testing

students has been removed from the 20th century; the attitude towards the examining students remains active till now. Hence, in China, the importance of English tests from the basic to tertiary level of education remains prioritized, and more emphasis is given to passing the test for English rather than communicating in English and further developing English language skills (Pan and Block, 2011, p.399).

In a study conducted by Pan and Block (2011, p. 400), where they interviewed a university lecturer in China and the interviewee talked about the importance of “College English Test (CET) Band 4.” CET 4 seems to be the marker of teaching English as all university students are entitled to appear in this exam in the second year of their studies and passing the exam seems crucial for a student rather attaining the communication skills of English language. The teachers remain puzzled over the materials to select for teaching English as a language or helping them to pass the exam. The teachers also commented that Chinese students are better at English Grammar and written tests for evaluating English learning skills than speaking English, since the exam does not have a section for spoken English tests (Pan & Block, 2011, p.400). Another study conducted by Liu (2010) talked about Chinese university-level students’ prioritization over “tangible knowledge such as grammar and vocabulary rather than intangible skills such as listening and speaking.” Chinese students tend to do better while memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules instead of practicing English language communicative skills and that is the opposite of Western pedagogy. Liu (2010, p. 92) also mentioned about “face-saving strategy” of Chinese students where they tend to be embarrassed in speaking English publicly and also pay much attention to correcting grammar and vocabulary rules back in their minds. This tendency makes the students slower in case of conducting communication in English.

In the case of the Chinese educational curriculum, English has been prioritized among other Western languages where it is believed that through the learning of English, it can compete with the outer world and utilize the “human capital.” The view of learning English should be associated with “moral education, patriotism, collectivism, and bilingualism.” Rather the purpose has solely become “monolingualism” and “individualism” by providing priority to learning English. Since, learning English language seems to be the only key to being involved in an “imagined Western community” where they can assimilate with the native speakers (Xiong and Yuan, 2018, pp. 104-105). The students’ dreams and purposes do not meet the real scenarios here. Despite their efforts to prioritize English over their own mother tongue Chinese, the strategies of teaching and learning English are not fulfilling the expectations of the students. Although prioritizing English for competing in the world economy has been adopted as a tool, the students’ learning strategies are still insufficient to fulfil the motive (Pan and Block, 2011).

Teaching and Learning English Language in Bangladesh

Historical context. English is considered as a global language all over the world. A similar belief is going on for Bangladeshi people as well. Bangladeshi people also firmly believe that learning English can provide them with a good position in the outer world by securing them a better job. English has been considered not only as a global language but also a colonial language for Bangladesh. The urgency of learning English for Bangladeshi people is deeply rooted in the history of 200 years of the colonial period. Bangladesh was part of the Indian subcontinent which has been ruled by the British colony for 200 years and in 1947 the colonial period ended. Although the period ended and the British people left the Indian subcontinent but the English language remains there as an additional language. After 1947, Bangladesh was part of Pakistan to be called East Pakistan and in 1971 it gained independence from Pakistan and declared as an independent country named Bangladesh. During the Pakistani regime, article 214 of Pakistan's constitution of 1956 declared English as the official language of Bangladesh for 20 years. In 1972, after independence, it was declared that only Bangla would be the state language of Bangladesh. Although the Constitution for the People's Republic of Bangladesh accepted Bangla as a state language in 1972 but English language never lost its domination over this country (Rahman, et al., 2019, pp. 2-6).

English as “Cultural and Symbolic capital.” In the context of Bangladesh, the English language seems to act as both cultural and symbolic capital (referred to Bourdieu's forms of capital). Here, due to the post-colonial effect, people think of speaking English as part of social prestige apart from using English for better job opportunities and employability to compete in the global economy (Alam, 2023, pp. 2-5). In Bangladeshi educational curricula, English has been adopted as one of the compulsory subjects at both primary and secondary school levels. Nowadays there are several English medium schools where the medium of instruction is solely English and the elite class considers it as a symbol of showing prestige to send their kids to those schools. In the case of tertiary-level education in Bangladesh, all private universities choose to provide lectures in English, and in some certain programs run by public universities, lectures are given in Bangla, but teachers and students are dependent on English references and book materials. In Bangladesh, for private universities, medical colleges, engineering, and technological institutions, the medium of instruction for students is only English. The students need to be highly proficient in the English language to complete graduation and get better jobs after graduation. Despite studying English as a compulsory subject for twelve years at both primary and secondary schools, students are not efficient enough to proceed the tertiary education at universities in English. Hence, the universities in Bangladesh run English courses termed as “English Foundation courses” so students can further proceed with their studies in English (Rukanuddin, 2014, p. 81).

Teaching and Learning Strategy of English at the Tertiary Level

Although in Bangladesh, English has been taught as one of the compulsory subjects but the teaching strategy of English and student's outcomes in learning English are unsatisfactory. Mamun, Sultana & Saleheen (2011) conducted a research study on teaching and learning English at the tertiary level and in their research, they showed that after 12 years of learning English in schools, students entering universities do not even score Band 3 on English-speaking tests where the target speaking test score should be band 6 or 7. In their study, Mamun et al. (2011, pp. 93-94) talked about the lack of teaching strategies for the English language at the university level. They talked about the two methods applied in teaching English at universities and they are the "communicative approach" and the "grammar-translation method." In the "communicative approach," a student develops communicative skills through responsive behavior to learn the definite language, and in the "grammar-translation method", the learner learns the language structure and grammar through translation. The main barrier to teaching and learning English is that the teachers are much more comfortable with the "grammar-translation method" than practicing the "communicative approach" in the classroom.

Similar to Chinese students, Bangladeshi students are more focused on performing better in exams than implying knowledge in real life. They emphasize memorizing grammar rules rather than learning the strategies to communicate in English. Also, Bangladeshi students feel shy and uncomfortable speaking English in public places such as outside the classroom context like Chinese students (Mamun et al., 2011). Mamun et al. (2011, p.99) interviewed teachers and students from both public and private universities in Bangladesh and they found that the teachers are more concentrated on giving lessons on reading, writing, and grammar rules rather than practicing English speaking lessons within the classroom. And the students also are not comfortable speaking English with their peers and outside the classroom. The researchers noticed that problems like "large classes, ineffective syllabi, time limitations (the teachers remain in a hurry to finish the syllabus), traditional exam system and lack of trained teachers" are responsible for unsatisfactory learning outcomes of English among university students in Bangladesh.

Apart from the colonial connection, English is necessary for the economic development of Bangladesh. The economy of Bangladesh is "heavily foreign-aid" and for economic development, it requires good communication between Bangladesh and other developed countries like Great Britain, the USA, Canada, Japan, France, Australia etc. The media of communication between Bangladesh and these countries is English. Again, the garment sector of Bangladesh is dependent upon foreign buyers and English is the only tool here to maintain economic activities. Learning English seems to serve as a tool for globalization and neoliberal policy for Bangladeshi students. Still, the students are not showing promising outcomes in learning English. Bangladeshi students want to learn

English only for the sake of economic growth and better job opportunities (Rukanuddin, 2014, p.82).

While Chinese students aim to learn English for both economic growth and to assimilate into Western culture (Xiong & Yuan, 2018), Bangladeshi students aim to learn English to succeed in their professional lives instead of assimilating with the culture and the native speakers of English (Rukanuddin, 2014). The aims might vary in this sector but the outcomes for both Chinese and Bangladeshi students are similar.

Conclusion and Future Study

Jackson (2016, p.10) has suggested that the impact of globalization on education can increase the chances of “achieving diversity” and “enhancing global employability.” In the case of globalization of English language, similarly benefits the Bangladeshi and Chinese people. The report shows similar results for both countries where English has predominance over two countries and the people are embracing it for the betterment of their lives. The research also shows that both Bangladeshi and Chinese people have a similar belief that learning English can become their gateway to being part of the Western world. Although the motivation seems quite high among Bangladeshi and Chinese people to acquire English language skills, still the purpose remains unfulfilled due to the unsatisfactory results in communicating English. To overcome this problem, both these countries should adopt teaching and learning strategies that will create assimilation and hybridity between local and international cultures. For example, the teachers and students from Bangladesh and China should be more focused and trained on Western pedagogy besides their national pedagogy to develop English language skills. Thus, only the dream for globalizing of the English language will turn into reality for Bangladesh and China.

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