



Appropriating BANA Teaching Approaches to Suit TESEP Contexts: A Case Study in a Saudi University

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. Author GMAG collected the data, wrote the literature review and revised the manuscript. Authors Hamza Alshenqeeti and Hadi Alsamdani contributed to the literature review, helped with multiple revisions and provided suggestions throughout the process. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This article briefly looks at the practice of appropriating Western teaching methodologies into the Arab world. It accounts for recent and historical attempts to do so and evaluates the success or otherwise of such practice. The paper adopts Adrian Holliday's (1994) distinction between British, Australian and North American (BANA) context and Tertiary, Secondary, and Primary English language education (TESEP) where the context of the current study fits. The paper argues that appropriating Western methodologies risks alienating the culture from which these teaching approaches come. Since one reason for learning a language is to become familiar with its culture, one may question the need for adapting its teaching methodologies by simply separating it from its cultural values in the first place. The question is that shall one protect his or her cultural identity by dismissing the cultures of other dominant languages? This is a conundrum that cannot be easily saved but one that needs looking at nonetheless. The paper looks at a widely used series of textbooks in a TESEP context and attempts to see if adapting

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teaching methodologies is attainable and practical. By comparing the stated goals of both the institute and the textbook, we can better define how local contexts can shape BANA methodologies.

Keywords: Teaching methodologies; pedagogy; ESL; BANA; TESEP.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been an ongoing debate regarding the appropriateness of teaching methods imported from the West into other non-Western cultures especially when one considers the enormous cultural, social and economic differences between the two. Hence, many researchers have stressed the need to appropriate teaching methods developed in the West in order to be more suitable for other cultures. Graddol [1] for example remarks: "... teaching methods and materials, and educational policies, need to be adapted for local contexts". This need for adaptation is essential especially in non-Western countries that have different social and moral values in one hand and in many cases less teaching resources and more challenging educational circumstances on the other hand. However, there is no denial that most teaching theories and methods come from the West and are somehow imposed into other non-Western cultures without taking their appropriateness and applicability to these contexts into account. Similarly, as Nault [2] and Asraf [3] notes, the last few decades have also experienced an increasingly wide interest in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which focuses merely on the learner (i.e. a learner-centred approach) and many educational bodies around the globe recommend its instructors to use CLT despite its possible inappropriateness and unsuccessfulness to the local educational contexts. Ironically, one of CLT's shortcomings as highlighted by Rueker et al. [4], and Bax [5] is its failure in observing the local contexts as a significant factor of teaching successfulness. This paper addresses these cultural, administrative, economic and social differences and tries to come to terms with modern Western methodologies and theories that influence different aspects of language learning/teaching in non-Western contexts including teaching methods, teacher training programmes, curricula, classroom interaction, and classroom management.

It starts with a discussion about issues related to applying Western teaching methods in non-Western countries. This will be followed by a

brief discussion of communicative language teaching as an example of Western methods but the focus will be on issues that are present in the non-Western contexts which CLT fails to address. The argument also includes a brief description to the context that we are familiar with. Optimistically, this account will reveal some 'radical' differences between teaching environments in Saudi Arabia as a TESEP representative (tertiary, secondary, and primary English language education) and those of the British, Australian and North American (BANA) where most of modern teaching methods emerged and have thereafter been exported to the rest of the world. The impact of these differences on methodology appropriateness will be discussed in the following section. Finally, we will try to explain what changes must be done order to overcome Western methodologies' shortcomings taking into account the uneasiness of the task to be achieved.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Can Communicative Language Teaching Easily Replace Structuralism?

In this paper, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been selected as a typical example of a Western teaching methodology for its numerous effects on language teaching around the world including our own context. Although Diana [6] and Beal [7] argues that CLT has become something of the past, he still admits that, until recently, its influences have been present in language teaching at least for the last two decades and are represented in many textbooks and language teaching policies around the globe up to this day.

From a historical perspective, CLT has been initiated and developed in the West, particularly in the UK during the early 1970s, as a response to the shortcomings of structuralism. Norton [8] and Savignon (1991) notes that the rich British linguistic tradition that included social and linguistic context in descriptions of language behaviour was an essential contributor to the

development of CLT. The main emphases of CLT were that language is not a set of structure-habits, nor a collection of phrases; it is, rather, a medium for communication, comprehension and the expression of meanings. The students in communicative classrooms are responsible for their own learning and they do most of the speaking with the teacher as the active facilitators of their learning [9].

However, in many educational contexts, including the Middle East, the shift from structuralism to CLT was not expected to be smooth and in many occasions, traditional approaches to language teaching are still prevalent. Some teachers in Saudi Arabia even sustain the old belief that a classroom in which they are dominant will guarantee pedagogical success [10,11]. The reasons for this unsuccessfulness can be also ascribed to the inappropriateness of CLT especially in its original form to cultures that are fundamentally different from that of the West [3,6,7]. CA is only efficacious if it is culturally appropriate; after all, literacy is a cultural tool and is the outcome of cultural transmission.

2.2 BANA versus TESEP Classes

Holliday [12] suggests two fundamentally different educational contexts when it comes to teaching English as a second/foreign language: BANA and TESEP. These acronyms represent British, Australian and North American, and Tertiary, Secondary and Primary, respectively. BANA language classes usually consist of a small number of students taught by well-trained, highly qualified, native English speaker teachers, whereby all of the resources are available including the latest technologies in language teaching and students come from multilingual backgrounds. BANA classes therefore represent the ideal setting for effective language learning from a Western point of view. Arguably, modern language teaching methods have developed in such perfect circumstances that are appealing for both teachers and learners which are then reflected in the quantity and quality of resources, materials and teacher-training.

TESEP on the other hand are used almost synonymously to refer to teaching practices in what is known as the expanding circle of English language teaching in countries such as Brazil and China (the dichotomy is being between it and BANA). TESEP classes have many constraints resulting from one or more of the

following factors: the local educational policies, the curriculum, the available teaching material, overcrowded classrooms, and untrained, linguistically incompetent teachers (See Table 1). Holliday [13] and Maley [14] also mentions other very influential external factors such as the weather and poverty that contribute to the widening difference between BANA and TESEP contexts. Unlike BANA contexts where language learners enjoy their learning, learning in such difficult circumstances of TESEP can cause demotivation, frustration and fatigue.

2.3 Teaching English in TESEP Contexts

Although Holliday [12] discusses three different types of methodologies to be related to the local social context (material design, classroom research and teaching English), the focus here will be on the methodology for carrying out the work of teaching English. Chapelle [15] and Kumaravadivelu [16] focus on the role played by local context which is particularity comprised in his description of postmethod pedagogy in order to discover an appropriate methodology. According to him, language pedagogy must sensitively consider the particularity of teachers, students, goals and educational contexts. Local needs, therefore, is an essential component in the process of language learning.

In order to do so and according to the above description of the local context, some interesting local issues arise to the attention that may have their impact on teaching English: a) the separation between male and female students, b) the conservative nature of the students and their unwillingness to converse easily with other cultures nor even with their classmates, and c) the fundamentally different English materials (and necessarily methods) students will experience when joining university.

3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE LOCAL EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT ON TEACHING METHODS

Many researchers have commented on the necessity of adapting the BANA methodologies to fit into the TESEP contexts. Kurek [17] for example believes that the success of instructional design is seen as the relation between the original version and its locally appropriated adaptation, hence acknowledging the significance of the local context. Likewise, Feldman [18], commenting on her South African experience, believes that professional learning

communities (PLCs) can play a significant role in teachers' pedagogical adaptation.

Holliday also suggests that knowing about a particular culture is not enough. Educators need to perceive the culture of the classroom, He argues (1994:161):

[I]t is not possible to generalise about the precise nature of a particular classroom culture, or the other cultures which influence it, or the form which this influence takes. This means that the process of learning about these things is not a matter just for theorists and university researchers—not something that teachers can get from the literature. It is something that has to be worked through in the situation in which teaching and learning have to take place.

3.1 The Significant Role of the Local Context

Kim [19] and McGroarty and Galvan [20] note that culture shapes one's views of language and education in profound ways, and these views influence expectations regarding the nature of language teaching and learning in the classroom. One obvious feature that sets apart the local context from other Western (and even non-western) contexts is the fact that males and females are separated. It is well known that the community in Saudi Arabia is very conservative which, needless to say, is reflected in educational contexts. Hence, there might be some unease among adult students when they experience course books explicitly mention normal relations between men and women. From educational perspective, gender differences may have implications for L2 learners. Shehadeh [21] believes that "Gender differences may have implications for L2 learning." The argument here is that men and women are different when practicing their conversation in L2 with regard to the negotiation of meanings, interpersonal relations, amount of talk, leading the conversation ... etc which is a central component of CLT.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Anticipated Problems in Introducing Western BANA Methodology

It must be acknowledged that teachers regardless of their context or teaching material tend to look for ways to adapt to their learners'

unique requirement from the course of study. For instance, Kalogiannakis and Papadakis [22] mention that teachers are actively looking for ways to adapt to new circumstances. Furthermore, Papadakis [23] also believes that the success of pedagogical adaptation and adoption depends largely on teachers' attitudes and acceptance (in this case in the use of technology).

Kumaravadivelu's [16] proposal of postmethod pedagogy perceives teachers in relation to their local contexts as to "build and implement their own theory and practice that is responsive to the particularities of their educational contexts and receptive to the possibilities of their social cultural conditions" (2001: 548). Kumaravadivelu strongly sustains teachers' autonomy to coincide with pedagogic decision making. Fortunately, in this particular context, teachers have the opportunity to apply their own way of teaching with no real pressure from the institute's regulations which, according to Kumaravadivelu, is an advantage. Yet the textbook many teachers in Saudi universities use, including ourselves, always encourages teachers to implement a more communicative, learner-centred approach. Bax [5] comments on CLT from cultures' perspective and claims that communicative language teaching has served the language teaching profession very well for many years. However, in spite of all the good points that CLT has there is also a negative side to be considered that best describes the issue of this essay as Bax [5] says "CLT neglected one key aspect of language teaching – namely the context in which it takes place the consequences of this are serious". In other words, it could be argued that CLT does not pay much attention to the culture, the learning context, and students' needs and wishes.

On the other hand, Ruecker et al. [4] and Asraf [3] draws into attention some considerations related to specific cultures by investigating the main purpose of learning language according to the language teaching's discussion in the last few decades as to communicate appropriately in the target society. Teachers therefore can familiarize learners with what is linguistically and socio-culturally appropriate. Schuman (1976) as mentioned in Asraf [3] goes even further and claims that the degree of acculturation determines the learners' language competence and without sufficient knowledge about the foreign/second language culture, the competence will be incomplete. Adaskou et al.

[24] in favour of having the cultural aspects in language learning mention the following reasons: it can promote international understanding, deepen understanding, deepen an understanding of one's own culture, facilitate learners' visits to foreign countries and motivate learners. Nevertheless, with regard to most of the conservative societies, Asraf claims that acculturation does not necessarily guarantee acceptance among natives and there are some features not accepted by some students which are still considered signs of politeness in the West. After all, not all Muslim learners are learning English with the intention to immigrate or to merge with natives.

McKay [25] notes that as English has increasingly been recognised as an international language (EIL), the insertion of cultural component into English textbooks will conflict with the notion of an international language as it is by definition not linked to any particular culture. Many countries according to McKay [25] prefer this idea of English as an International Language and tried to exclude the English cultural component from their textbooks and as a result tried to replace it with local themes. In a study by Adaskou et al. [24], the inclusion of another culture, especially a Western culture, was not found to be motivating or beneficial. Asraf also comments on communicative approaches and claims that teaching English merely for the purposes of communication is not the most appropriate aim of teaching the language. Instead, he suggests teaching English with the aim of modern-day knowledge.

4.2 An Outline of the Adapted Activities in Accordance with the Local Context

Drawing on the above discussion, an attempt to amend and modify the methodology that result from the material will be carried out according to the local needs and expectations of the class and, to tackle this issue successfully and convincingly and with regard to earlier mentioned quote of Holliday [12], it is believed that a sort of small-scale classroom research is required here. The notion of an ethnographic research is suggested to deal with classes as cultures. The purpose of this investigation is firstly to determine if there is a problem with implementing NABA methodologies (the term suggested by Holliday, 1994 to refer to private schools and institutions in North America, Britain and Australia), and if so, to which extent and in which aspects does it affect ESL classes. Secondly, students' beliefs

and expectations, which definitely play their role regarding the successfulness of methods in ESL classes, can be explored and examined. However, there will be no detailed description of the research as this is neither the purpose of this paper nor our major concern although questionnaires will be used as data collection methods. Teachers as observers is an idea strongly recommended by Holliday [12] which enables teachers to modify their teaching methods accordingly and appropriately as different situations require.

We have noticed that students cannot readily use English to converse with each other when they put in pairs or groups in English. One possible reason in Saudi contexts suggested by Whitfield and Pollard [26]) is the "stringent constraints that discourage types of interaction normal to the modern language class." Most of the exercises from the listening/speaking textbook¹, however, require students to form pairs or groups to discuss a certain issue in English with the main purpose of communicating in an authentic situation using authentic English. As expected, these tasks were a complete failure. If students do not know each other, they will keep silent or if they are willing to say something, they will do so in Arabic. The situation was quite frustrating; this situation is almost identical to that of Holliday [12] in an Egyptian university and similar to that of Penner [27]. Students have never been in such collaborative tasks during their formal education in public school. However, one would not expect the transition from traditional approaches to CLT to be smooth and automatic for students who during their six formal years of learning English in public schools have never experienced such a thing. For Holliday, such communicative activities are of 'unease' to the students.

The department of European Languages and Literature in King Abdulaziz University's policy recommends the communicative approach which can be drawn from its description of the basic listening/speaking module:

This course is intended to give students the opportunity to practice speaking and listening skills. Although some of the activities encourage the use of specific grammatical structures, in general, the activities are intended to promote fluency and improve communication skills. Students will be

¹ *Interactions 1, 2 Listening/Speaking 4th ed. McGraw-Hill.*

Table 1. Applying a BANA methodology (CLT) in a Saudi University

Cause of constraints	Constraints	Effects	Possible Modification(s) of Methodology
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most students have a reserved nature. - Students usually do not accept the Western concept of social relations. - Teachers are viewed like the sole source of knowledge. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - They do not like to be involved in collaborative work (pair/ group work) - Exercises that contain notions that do not conform to the locally appropriate one are likely to be offensive. - Teacher-dominant classes. - Passive learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teacher can be engaged in the activity as a member. - Later on, once students get used to this new situation, teachers can act like monitors. - Knowing about other cultures does not necessarily mean copying them. However, depending on the level of students, teachers can still overcome such notions and replace them with more appropriate ones. - Teachers must clearly state that learning a new language is a very complicated task that requires, besides teachers and material, the involvement of active learners. - Teachers shall give the chance for exercises that promote autonomous learning.
Educational Policies/ Administrative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teaching English does not start in primary level. - Textbooks have little reference to the Western culture. - Not all language teachers are trained to use modern BANA methods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students are likely to start learning a foreign language after their so-called 'critical age' i.e. after 12 years old. - Positive effect: de-localised language. - Negative effect: failure to attribute certain linguistic expressions and cultural themes to the English speaking culture. Usually results in sustainable weaknesses in spoken English. - Teachers will keep using the traditional, structural approaches that they are familiar with. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not much can be done here. This is the government policy but it is under constant revision. - Teachers must identify students' weaknesses and find appropriate solutions for their condition. If they suffer incompetence in the spoken aspects of English, more training shall be provided to learners. - Most teacher-training programmes around the country are outdated.
Linguistic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Little or no real need for successful communication in English (or any other language). - Usually low competence when joining the English dept. in University. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students perceive the communicative aspect of English as artificial. No authentic use. - Interaction in the target language is either unsuccessful or very difficult and time-consuming. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Stress the fact that English has become the international language. - Placement tests and remedial pre-sessional and in-session courses.

introduced to a wide range of listening tasks developed to reflect natural language including conversations, radio and television programs, instructions, recorded messages, lectures and stories.

McGraw Hill (the publisher of Interactions/ Mosaic series which is used in listening/speaking courses) seem to be aware of the fact that the textbooks are going to be taught in more traditional contexts and gives the following recommendations for instructors:

- Use gestures as much as possible.
- Ask students to explain to one another.
- Use the blackboard to illustrate ideas that may be difficult to explain.
- Demonstrate what you are saying as you are saying it.

Unlike the department's course description, we found these suggestions more helpful and easier to apply apart from the one that requires students to explain to one another where they usually do seem to be very co-operative even when they form groups possibly because they are timid to participate or because they cannot perceive the use of such activities. In order to overcome this situation, we tried to be a member of a group while the rest of students watch, we then start to help the conversation going on which students now feel more willing to participate. Subsequently, I try to speak as little as possible and act out like an observer. Then I will form the groups according to the level of students where a combination of competent students and less competent ones are set together and each member of the group has his chances to speak to the rest of the group. We then act like an observer trying to observe them from outside and make sure that they are engaged in the activity and using English as possible.

The study included 36 newly registered students in the English Section of the European Languages and Literature Department in King Abdulaziz University undertaking courses in English language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). The students are largely used to the idea that teacher is the one in authority and tended to be largely negative participants in the learning process. We would make the best use of this authority when appropriate to both help students communicate with me using English only and prevent L1 use in class as possible. Students usually are unwilling to speak English with their classmates but they

will do so with their teacher when they are asked to. We also managed to divide the group into two sections each was out of ten in which one will attend the lesson and the other will be given an ordinary listening task to complete (e.g. filling in the missing words). The attending group will then be asked to listen to a normal conversation and they are expected to practice it. After that, instructors will ask students individually to discuss what they have practiced already. Students tried their best to communicate in English and, subsequently, perceive the importance of successful communication.

Most students are aware that the Western culture is fundamentally different from theirs. Nevertheless, some might find uneasiness in the exposure to the Western culture especially when they are obliged to know more about it via their educational materials. Asraf [3] recommends local English teachers not to encourage students to assimilate into English/ Western culture. Muslim learners according to him "accept only the universally beneficial, and reject the cultural specific elements of the borrowed concepts, ideas, and institutions." If we take Asraf's proposition for granted, which many multinational teachers in the context of the study would definitely do, then a lengthy preach must precede every class that contains plain exposure to the Western lifestyle or possibly contains materials that do not conform to the culturally accepted conventions. This scenario of course is likely take place but, in real life situations, does not seem very practical. In this situation, however, most students are grown-ups and such themes can be introduced to them without really affecting their morals, beliefs and values. The Western culture can be introduced as another culture which does not in any way mean that they are going to imitate. Ideas that can be considered offensive such as liberal social relations and liberalism are banned anyway by the educational authorities and we have to skip tasks that involve such notions.

5. CONCLUSION

Consequently, adjusting methodology to local context's needs is a very important topic that worth more investigating. A local teacher, however, once equipped with sufficient competence, can identify distinctive features of a specific classroom culture better than an expatriate and it is worthy to train new language teachers to become able to carry out such a task. The cultural dimension of language learning is a

sensitive issue especially, as many researchers argue when dealing with Islamic conservative communities. Furthermore, the argumentation continues regarding whether Western approach conceiving language as communication is really what learning a language is all about. Three possible aspects of Saudi learners that may contribute a distinct educational context have been mentioned and taken into consideration when modifying teaching methodology. Once necessary modifications are done, teachers can get the best out of Western methodology without compromises. This as well will be very fortunate for the students and policy makers. We also acknowledge the fact that language and cultural are inseparable. Attempts to adjust BANA methodologies to fit TESEP contexts can be necessary but total elimination of the BANA culture is unreasonable.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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