



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN SOCIAL SCIENCE  
LINGUISTICS & EDUCATION

Volume 13 Issue 7 Version 1.0 Year 2013

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)

Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

## Post-Method Pedagogy and ELT in Bangladesh

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*GJHSS-G Classification* : *FOR Code: 930299p*



*Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:*



# Post-Method Pedagogy and ELT in Bangladesh

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the -concept of post-method pedagogy is related to the dissatisfaction with the methods and approaches that have so far emerged in the foreign and second language teaching domain over the last century. This concept began to take a shape from the mid-nineties of the last century as the existing methods and approaches, specially the CLT, failed to come abreast with the hopes and expectations with respect to second/foreign language teaching. None of the existing methods and approaches proved sound and perfect, and therefore, could produce expected results irrespective of language teaching contexts. Even CLT that came into being in the 1970s with a big bang in the backdrop of the failure of the Audiolingual Method and the popularity of which spread all over the world failed to prove effective in many contexts, specially in the main stream of education of Afro-Asian countries. Soon after its introduction in these countries, people concerned with teaching English as a second or foreign language began to complain against many principles of this approach, putting the efficacy of this approach into question, which ultimately led to the emergence of the concept of post-method pedagogy.

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In Bangladesh CLT was introduced in the mid-nineties of the last century, and since then it has been being used for teaching English as a foreign language in the country. But the introduction of CLT has been the cause of deterioration of the quality of English education in the country, instead of being the cause of improvement. Therefore, the present state of ELT practices in the country necessitates a rethinking. In such a backdrop, the concept of post-method pedagogy can be properly utilized for reconstructing the paradigm of the ELT practices in the country. The present article has attempted to discuss firstly what we know about the concept of the post-method pedagogy and then how some points of this concept can be utilized for the purpose of developing an appropriate methodology for ELT in the country.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF POST-METHOD PEDAGOGY

A method is generally understood as a package of guidelines about how language teaching should be done. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 245), it refers to "a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning". It embodies some assumptions about language and language learning, and accordingly provides some guidelines about the role and nature of instructional materials, roles of learners and teachers, mode of classroom instructions, tasks and activities to be practised and so on. That is, a method on the basis of some assumptions or theories about language and learning dictates different aspects of language teaching-learning practices. Defining a method Nunan (2003, p. 5) says, "A language teaching method is a single set procedures which teachers are to follow in the classroom. Methods are usually based on a set of beliefs about the nature of language and learning".

In contrast to the idea of a method, the concept of the post-method pedagogy asserts that none of the conventional methods or approaches is complete or absolute individually for second/foreign language teaching. Therefore, there is no need for the wholesale adoption of any method for the purpose of language teaching. Rejecting the exclusive use of a method, the proponents of the post-method pedagogy argue that language teaching or learning is a complex process and is subject to various factors such as participants, contexts, time, purpose, etc. Therefore, "The notion that one method can be appropriate for every teacher and every learner in every time and every place is absurd

absurd when one considers the myriad factors that comprise a given language classroom” (Cattell 2009, p. 59). Instead of relying on any existing method, they suggest the language teachers to construct their own methods on the basis of the local contextual variables. While in case of the existing methods it was the theorizers who devised theories and developed methods based on them, in case of the post-method pedagogy it is the teachers who are to formulate their own methods or theories of practice based on local contexts and their own experiences in classroom teaching. Distinguishing the concept of post-method from that of method, Kumaravadivelu (1994, p. 29) says, while the concept of method involves theorizers constructing “knowledge-oriented” theories of pedagogy, post-method involves practitioners constructing “classroom-oriented” theories of practice. Therefore, when generalization and centredness are the criterion of a method, individuality, practicality and localness are the key points of the concept of post-method.

The term ‘post-method’ was first coined by Pennycook (1989) and then was taken up by others, including Prabhu (1990), Alright (1991), Stern (1992) and Kumaravadivelu (1994, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2006). Though the main thrust in the post-method concept is to develop a new set of strategies and procedures for language teaching, it does not advocate for complete abandonment of the existing methods. Instead, it endorses any attempt on the part of the teachers to modify and adjust an established method to the realities of their local contexts, thus recreating them as their own (Richards and Rodgers 2001, p.251). By drawing on a number of methods, teachers can develop an eclectic method harmonious with the local contextual variables. In this regard Cattell (2009, p. 59) says, “One way to overcome the limitations of the methods paradigm would be to simply allow teachers to choose from a variety of methods”.

As the key points of the concept of the post-method pedagogy Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 538) has suggested three parameters—*particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*. By the parameter of *particularity*, he argues that language teaching practices should be sensitive to “a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu” (p. 538). That is, post-method pedagogy has to be sensitive to the context where language teaching will take place, taking into consideration the teachers, the learners, and the institutional and sociocultural factors of a context. By the parameter of *practicality*, Kumaravadivelu (2001, p. 541) points out that there should be a harmony between what the teachers of a particular context will theorize and what they will practise in classroom teaching. According to him, a theory is meaningless unless it can be applied in practice. Therefore, teachers themselves should try to

derive their own theories from their language teaching practices on the basis of their understanding of the problems they face while teaching in their contexts. By his third parameter of *possibility*, he (2001, p. 543) states that second language teaching and learning should be seen not only as learners’ grasping new linguistic and cultural knowledge, but also as a tool to help them to come to grips with their own identity. That is, language education has to provide “its participants with challenges and opportunities for a continual quest for subjectivity and self-identity”, and also for connecting their linguistic needs to their social needs.

The concept of post-method pedagogy considers teachers and learners as very significant because it is they who are to play the central role in a language teaching programme. Teachers are to shoulder the responsibilities of devising their own theories from their constant practical experiences, and then of applying those theories into practice. However, to do their job properly they are expected to be knowledgeable and skillful, and should have adequate amount of information about both the theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and learning. That is, in this pedagogy they, as Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 173) has argued, need to “develop the knowledge and skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to construct their own context-sensitive theory of practice”. As to learners, they need to be not the mere recipients of knowledge, but actively take part in pedagogic decision-making to promote the idea of learner autonomy.

### III. THE PRESENT SCENERIO OF ELT IN BANGLADESH

English language teaching-learning practices in Bangladesh are still revolving round the conventional concept of a method. That is, Bangladesh like many other countries of the world is still suffering from the CLT phobia and, therefore, has not been able to come out of the method paradigm. Before the introduction of CLT, it was the Grammar-Translation Method that was traditionally followed for teaching English in the country. As with other methods, dissatisfaction was also with this method, especially for its failure to impart communicative competence to learners. Therefore, the switch over from this method to the CLT approach was made on the expectation that this change would improve the quality of English teaching and learning in the country as a whole. Thereupon, new textbooks compatible with the principles of CLT were written for the students of the primary to the higher secondary levels of education, and training on this new approach was given to the English teachers so that they could properly apply the principles of this approach to the classroom teaching. But in spite of all these efforts, the desired result is yet a far cry. Even after fourteen years of the introduction of CLT in the country the quality of English

education here has not improved at all. A number of studies/investigations done on the application of CLT for teaching English in Bangladesh report that the quality of English education has alarmingly deteriorated after the introduction of CLT. According to the report of a baseline study done by English in Action (EIA) project in 2008-09, a significant number of students even after many years of schooling have not progressed beyond initial level of competence in spoken English (p. 26). In the report, it is also mentioned that the overall competence in spoken English of the teachers, learners and community adults of the country is very frustrating (p. 14).

Neither the teachers nor the learners of Bangladesh are enthusiastic to follow the principles of CLT. In teacher training programmes, seminars, workshops, textbooks, etc., ELT teachers are advised to apply the principles of CLT in the classroom, but in actual practices there is no reflection of this instruction or advice. Islam (2011, p. 384), in a study on the practice of CLT in the country, finds that teachers here are very reluctant to promote the ideals of CLT and therefore avoid its application. The new English textbooks based on the principles of CLT contain a lot of communicative tasks and activities in the forms of pair work, group work, role-play, etc., but the learners do not practise them in classrooms. What they do in the classroom is nothing more than translating the reading-texts available in these textbooks into Bangla. In addition to this, what they care most is practising the answers to the model questions from notebooks or guidebooks to prepare themselves for examinations. The teachers on their part do not teach by following the lesson-plans of the textbooks. Instead, they are mainly seen using 'Bangla translations to explain the meaning of the text' (Haider and Chowdhury 2012) or helping the learners solve the model questions of the guidebooks. Obviously, one kind of chaotic situation is prevailing in the name of CLT in the present scenario of English language teaching and learning in the country.

#### IV. USING THE CONCEPT OF THE POST-METHOD PEDAGOGY FOR ELT IN BANGLADESH

The above picture of the present circumstances of ELT in Bangladesh asserts that the country badly needs to reconstruct the existing teaching-learning practices for ELT. To make the present practices effective, there is no alternative to making them compatible with the contextual realities of the country and thus developing a method or pedagogy of the country's own. In this respect, the concept of the three parameters of the post-method pedagogy—*particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*—as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2001) may come to a great help. The methodology or pedagogy to be developed particularly

for Bangladesh can be based on the key ideas of this concept, that is, on *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*. However, at the same time, it is essential to be cautious about some other points of this concept as they are not applicable in the context of Bangladesh. In other words, only the points which are practical, and hence, applicable in Bangladeshi context can be utilized.

##### a) *Using the Parameter of Particularity*

As it has been mentioned earlier, the concept of *particularity* argues for making language teaching practices context-sensitive so that they do not conflict with the local variables. Every context has its own peculiarities, and therefore, needs to be considered separately while constructing pedagogy for that context otherwise language teaching will not be effective and practical. As to Bangladesh, it can be said that she has her own contextual peculiarities, which are different from those of many other countries of the world. The need for English language, the cultural profiles of the teachers and the learners, the skills of the teachers in the target language, the situational strengths and weaknesses, etc., of Bangladesh are different in nature and quality from those of many other countries. Obviously, the methodology to be developed for ELT in Bangladesh has to be corresponding to these peculiarities as per the concept of *particularity*.

CLT has failed to work in the context of Bangladesh mainly because the parameter of *particularity* has been ignored. The teaching-learning practices which CLT embodies match with the cultural and situational realities of its origin countries, the countries which Holliday (1994) has referred to as BANA countries (Britain, Australia and North America), but mismatch with those of Bangladesh. That is why, the teachers and learners of the country do not feel any cultural affinity with the teaching-learning practices assigned by CLT. The roles it assigns to teachers and learners, the learning items it suggests, the types of tasks and activities it advocates, the skills it prioritizes, the patterns of interactions it recommends, the procedures it claims, etc., do not properly match with the beliefs, the styles, the preferences, the experiences and the values of the teachers and learners of this country which are deeply rooted in its culture.

Due to their cultural orientation in family, educational institutes and wider society, the learners of Bangladesh like to depend on teachers for their learning rather than pursuing autonomous and discovery-oriented learning or pursuing the strategies of peer-correction and peer-learning as suggested by CLT. To learn grammatical rules explicitly, they like to get them explained by their teachers. On the part of the teachers, they like to control the classroom activities to have an authority over learners, instead of merely monitoring or facilitating those activities as suggested by the ideology

of CLT. Teachers here are like guardians and “asking too many questions to and entering into a debate or argument with the teachers is a sign of disrespect and teachers hardly appreciate it” (Islam 2000).

The same cultural orientation inculcates in the beliefs of the teachers and learners that knowledge is ‘a monolithic entity’ which needs to be transmitted to learners by teachers, that learning is something to be pursued in a systematic way and to be memorized, that a textbook is an embodiment of knowledge and is, therefore, sacred and so on. About the beliefs of the people of Bangladesh, Rahman (1999) says, “knowledge is seen as monolithic entity, a finite, inflexible ‘object’, to be accepted whole and to be memorized and regurgitated.” Therefore, the reluctance of the teachers and learners of Bangladesh to follow the instructions of the present English textbooks should be sought in their cultural profiles. Besides, the situational variables such as class-size, duration of class, infrastructural realities, availabilities of teaching-learning aids, efficiency of teachers, etc. do not support the principles of CLT.

The cultural phenomena of Bangladesh assert that the teachers here have to remain at the centre of the classroom, control all the classroom activities and also take the responsibilities of the learners for their learning, especially at the primary and secondary levels of education. It is the teachers who need to introduce the required interactions in the classroom and to ensure the learners’ practice of using English. Commenting on the appropriate classroom practices in Bangladesh, Shahidullah (1999) says that individual works under teachers’ control will prove more useful here than group and pair works. Besides, he suggests that interactions with texts, free discussions in whole class sessions, seminars, tutorial discussions, etc., can also be utilized more meaningfully and effectively in the country. Therefore, while determining the features of the teaching-learning practices for ELT in Bangladesh all these points of distinctness of the culture and situation of Bangladesh have to be taken into account.

#### b) *Using the Parameter of Practicality*

The parameter of *practicality* according to the concept of post-method pedagogy claims that any theory to be chosen for any pedagogy must have the quality to be applied into practice (Kumaravadivalu 2001). That is, the appropriate pedagogy for a particular language teaching context will be the one that will be based on such a theory or theories as can be translated into reality. CLT in Bangladesh is lacking this essential quality of *practicality*, and it can unmistakably be understood if the learning theory underlying this approach is analyzed in relation to the context of the country.

The learning theory of CLT advocates that any language can be learnt best through communication as

it is done in case of a child’s learning its mother language. In other words, the process of second or foreign language learning should be similar to the way a child acquires its mother tongue. Krashen (1982) has termed this process of language learning as *natural approach* in which there is no need to learn explicit grammar. While involved in communication in the target language, learners can pick up the elements of the language implicitly without being conscious of the grammatical rules. But the success of this natural approach to language learning mainly depends on learners’ opportunity for getting exposure to the target language both inside and outside the classroom. If learners in this approach do not get exposure to the target language in the way a child gets it to its mother language, this approach does not prove effective. It is found that learners’ exposure to the target language is generally ensured in an environment where the target language is widely/extensively used as a medium of daily communications and where the target language is used as a medium of instructions in the classroom. Generally, the society where the target language is used as a second language or a first language can provide learners with such an ideal environment.

But the context of Bangladesh is quite different from such an ideal environment since English is treated here as a foreign language and seldom used for daily communications in the society. Bangladesh being a monolingual country, English is not required to be used as a link language for daily communications in the way it is used in many countries like India where people of different language communities live together. Besides, its status being a foreign language, its official use is restricted. Therefore, the learners here do not get any exposure to English outside the classrooms. In the classrooms too, they do not get any remarkable exposure to it as the medium of instructions in the country is not English. English is spoken here only in English classes and that too is not done properly since teachers here at the lower levels of education are not skilled enough to speak it competently and continuously in the classroom. In a study on some secondary schools of Bangladesh Haider and Chowdhury (2012) found that a very small portion of the English language teachers here can use English thoroughly in the classroom. In such an environment, the theories of CLT appear to be absurd since they are not applicable.

Therefore, there is no denying that the theory of CLT which underpins the present teaching-learning practices in Bangladesh should be given up, and in its place the theory which is applicable in her context has to be adopted. Therefore, in a context like Bangladesh, the main approach to learning English should not be through communication, but through learning its system. English as a language is a system consisted of so many rules and structures, and what is practical and logical for the learners of the country is to learn these rules and

structures in their attempt to learn it. According to McDonough and Shaw (1993, p. 35), a more grammar-oriented syllabus is to be preferred in a context where English is a foreign language and where learners have very little scope for exposure to it. However, to cope with their communicative needs in English in practical life, the learners of Bangladesh also need to get involved in the practice of communication in it. Therefore, considering both the points- to learn English as a system as well as to learn how to communicate in it- the trend of English language learning in the country has to be 'learning to communicate', instead of 'communicating to learn.' The 'learning to communicate'-approach attempts to help learners master the knowledge of the system of English, on the one hand, and the ability to use it for practical communication purposes, on the other hand. Waters (2012), through an investigation into the trends in methods, has found that though at the theoretical level 'communicating to learn' approach still persists in the ELT domain, at the practice level 'learning to communicate' approach is growing stronger day by day. To identify the cause of this gap between theorizing and actual practice, he refers to an argument of Ur (2011) which she has made in one of her article with respect to the teaching of grammar. In the article Ur (ibid, p. 518 cited in Waters 2012) argues that the actual practice of second language teaching not only involves SLA theories but also many other practical things including learners' socio-cultural background, and that these practical features often exercise more influence on classroom teaching than the SLA theories. After a classroom-based research conducted over the last 15 years, Lightbown and Spada (2006, p. 176 cited in Waters 2012) comment that the form-focused instruction and corrective feedback within the context of communicative and content-based programmes will be more effective than the programmes limited to a virtually exclusive emphasis on comprehension, fluency or accuracy alone.

The psychological dispositions of the teachers and learners of Bangladesh also correspond to the demand of the practical situation of the country with respect to English language teaching and learning. In an empirical study, Huda (2004, p. 123, 126 ) finds that the learners in Bangladesh prefer to learn English by learning its grammatical rules in the one hand, and also believe in the requirement of getting involved in the practice of using it for communicative purposes. The teachers too like to teach grammatical rules and believe in the necessity of engaging their learners in the practice of using English. Therefore, the learning theory for ELT in the country has to accommodate both these aspects of language teaching. Any attempt to teach English only through communication, without teaching its grammatical rules or system will prove futile.

#### c) *Using the Parameter of Possibility*

Like the parameters of *particularity* and *practicality*, the parameter of *possibility* is also very much important for ELT in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is an independent country with her own population, history, culture, language, literature, geography, vision and so on. But at the same time she is a member of the United Nations and many other international organizations. That is, she has different kinds of needs for using English both at national and international levels. Obviously, ELT in the country has to provide the learners with the opportunities for recreating their identities both from local and global perspectives as per the concept of *possibility*. To put it in other words, the ELT methodology that has to be developed for this context must promote learners' opportunities to explore their new identities based on their relationships with both localness and globalness. On the one hand, the methodology should enable the learners to know how to promote their own culture, literature, history, language, etc. at the international arena with the help of their new linguistic capability; on the other hand, it should also enable them to be conscious of the cultures, life-styles and perspectives of the people of other countries and thereby rebuild their own identities with this new consciousness. Obviously, with these views in end, the English textbooks of the country have to include remarkable amount of literary texts, along with other kinds of texts, embedded both in the local and foreign cultures, with priority to the local cultures. Commenting on the usefulness of local literary texts over native speaker ones, Alam (2007, p. 381) says, "Such texts allow students to engage with material issuing from the world around them and help learners develop their confidence in their ability to use the language and to write back through it." But the present English textbooks of the country at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels include neither local nor foreign literary texts. With some exceptions, they include only non-literary texts, and the quantity of these texts too is not sufficient for requirements, especially for reading purposes. The necessity of extensive reading texts cannot be undermined for learning a language. According to Alam (2007, p. 383), "Students should always read more rather than less if they are going to learn a language."

#### d) *Looking Critically at Some Points of the Concept of Post-Method Pedagogy*

Though many of the points of the concept of the post-method pedagogy are applicable to ELT in the context of Bangladesh, some other points of it are not practical, and therefore, not appropriate for this context. It is seen that in this concept an enormous volume of responsibilities has been imposed on the shoulders of teachers, asking them "to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize" (Kumaravadivelu 1999).

To do their job properly, they need to “understand and identify problems, analyze and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives, and then choose the best available alternative that is then subjected to further critical evaluation” (Kumaravadivelu 2006, p. 173). That is, every individual teacher needs to devise his/her pedagogical principles and then develop his/her own materials for teaching purposes. To put it in other words, he or she has to determine his/her own repertoire of the most effective strategies and techniques for classroom teaching through the exercise of his/her autonomy and individuality in his/her job. But to do all these activities or to carry out all these responsibilities on the part of the teachers of this country is neither practical nor possible due to various kinds of contextual as well as their personal limitations.

In Bangladesh the ELT teachers at the primary and secondary levels of education, as it has been mentioned earlier, are not equally competent and qualified, and therefore, unable to develop their own teaching materials or to develop their own sets of strategies and techniques through constant research. Making a comment on the ability of language teachers all over the world, Khatib and Fat'hi (2012) say, “Not every single teacher is competent and confident enough to be autonomous and draw upon his/her ‘sense of plausibility’.” The ELT teachers in Bangladesh have their own limitations in terms of their time, energy, opportunity, resources, quality to shoulder the enormous responsibilities assigned to them by the concept of post-method pedagogy. They have high workload as well as financial and occupational constraints, and are too busy to devote adequate time and energy to make their experiments on teaching practices in the fashion of, as Kumaravadivalu (2001, p. 539) suggests, ‘trying them

In addition to the qualificational and personal constraints of the teachers, there are also various kinds of contextual constraints in Bangladesh, which create impediments in the way of teachers’ developing the pedagogy of their own. The teachers here need to operate within the tight administrative and financial frameworks at their educational institutes. They have to teach in accordance with the prescribed syllabuses, textbooks and time schedule, and enjoy little freedom to go beyond these restrictions. The syllabuses and the textbooks they are required to follow provide them with the specific work-plans and guidelines regarding what to teach, how to teach and also how long to teach in the classroom. They have no space at their educational institutes to avoid these work-plans and guidelines, and therefore, cannot pursue their own autonomous plans. They have also obligation to prepare students for examinations, which intensely compels them to act up to the demand of the question-papers. Besides, the lack of teaching-learning aids, lack of library resources, shortage of teachers, large class-size, financial crisis and other situational realities of Bangladesh pose

problems for them to act freely to construct their own method or pedagogy.

The massive roles that teachers need to play in the post-method pedagogy are impractical not only for the teachers of Bangladesh, but also for the average teachers of any context. A teacher’s empowerment and autonomy have been emphasized in this concept, but in practice “the teacher is not given much elbowroom to perform freely and to make his or her decision” (Khatib and Fat'hi 2012). Expressing the similar views, Akbari (2008) says that the post-method pedagogy has neglected the social as well as the professional limitations which teachers confront in their day-to-day negotiation of their identities and practice.

To comment on the appropriateness of the post-method pedagogy in the context of Bangladesh, it can be said that though the parameters of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility* of the post-method pedagogy sound good and hence can be utilized for ELT practices in the country, it is not the teachers of the country, especially those at the primary and secondary levels, who are the right persons to ‘theorize from their practice’ or to ‘be engaged in constant research’ as Kumaravadivelu (2001) has suggested. Rather it is better to assign this load to the researchers or ELT experts or some selective and qualified teachers of higher education who are capable of doing meaningful research. While doing this research, they need to go deep into the socio-cultural features and also the situational realities of this country. They need to investigate into the beliefs, experiences, expectations and preferences of the teachers and the learners of this country because all these issues are deeply rooted into the culture of this country. Besides, they also need to seek the views and opinions of other concerned stakeholders to base the teaching-learning practices on the practical, effective and pragmatic principles and norms.

On the part of the teachers what they are required to do is to co-operate the researchers and share with them their experience, preferences and beliefs about language teaching and learning so that those can be taken into account properly. In other words, teacher’s role in the context of Bangladesh will be that of a mediator. Widdowson (1990, p. 22) expresses a similar view when he says, “it is teachers who have to act as mediators between theory and practice, between the domain of disciplinary research and pedagogy.”

As to the idea of learner autonomy, as advocated by the concept of post-method pedagogy, it creates a complete mismatch with the cultural profiles of the learners of Bangladesh. In an empirical study on the teaching-learning culture of Bangladesh, Shahidullah (1997, p. 124, 185 & 200) finds that the learners of Bangladesh want to learn under the guidance of their teachers. The teachers too believe that learners learn

best when they learn under their control. Therefore, learner-autonomy or learner-centredness, though forwarded by the concept of post-method pedagogy, has to be avoided in the context of the country.

## V. CONCLUSION

The introduction of CLT as an approach to English language teaching in Bangladesh has failed to produce any positive result. The main cause of this failure should be searched in the mismatch between the principles of CLT and the contextual realities of the country. The context of Bangladesh has its own peculiarities in terms of cultural and situational variables, which claims a specific kind of teaching-learning practices for ELT in the country. Therefore, it is essential to reconstruct the ELT teaching methodology of the country with a view to making it effective, taking the local contextual features into account. In this regard, there is much scope to utilize the concept of the post-method pedagogy, the concept which has emerged in the backdrop of the failure of all the established methods and approaches. However, at the same time it should be kept in mind that the wholesale application of this concept will not bring any fruitful result as some of its suggestions are not applicable in the context of the country.

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