

## The Positive and Negative Effects of Globalization on English Language Teaching and Learning

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### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss what has made English a global language and outline the (positive and negative) effects of globalization on English language teaching (ELT). Nowadays, the world is enchanted with what new information technology has made possible to the point that the world has become digitally controlled. This digital revolution has spread throughout the world and into many private homes and businesses. What we call it globalization is a result of this information technology which I consider now the basic of our daily activities. This technology has affected other sides of our life and interacted with our cultures and traditions through moving and merging some habits, customs, cultures or values of different societies into each other to create the concept of globalization. Among the things that have been affected by globalization is ELT. That is, with the rapid pace of globalization, there has been a major change in the field of ELT.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching and Learning, Globalization

### Introduction

It should be clear from the outset that defining globalization is a contested and divisive issue. For instance, Giddens (1990, p. 64) defines globalization as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa', while Armstrong (1998, p. 426) describes globalization as 'process (e.g. the expansion and internationalization of financial markets), interactive networks (e.g. global corporate management; worldwide epistemic and interpretive communities), structures (e.g. newly emerging power relationships deriving from changing global investment patterns) and discourse (e.g. new social constructions of cognition, identity and meaning built upon postmodern global conditions).' Rothenberg (2003, p. 2) defines globalization as 'the acceleration and intensification of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations.' Rothenberg's definition (2003, p. 2) includes also effects of globalization on 'human well-being (including health and personal safety), on the environment, on culture (including ideas, religion, and political system), and on economic development and prosperity of societies across the world.'

Despite their differences, the above definitions are apparently consistent with each other in stating that globalization can create a world without boundaries in which people of this world can communicate with each other, interact and share their cultures, economies and generally their lives via developments in the fields of information technologies, communications and transportations.

Block and Cameron (2002) maintain that globalization is seen by some commentators as hegemonically Western and an expansion of American imperialism. Imperialism, as defined by Galtung (1980, cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 52), is 'a type of relationship whereby one society (or collectivity in more general terms) can dominate another.' Broadly speaking, the domination that is inherent in any imperialism often comes to be associated with the language of that imperialism, as with English in the American and European imperialism. Phillipson (1992) argues that there is a strong relationship between the global spread of English and this Western imperialism. He (1992) goes on to argue that English has been supported and promoted to be used around the world specifically for political and economic purposes. This argument forms what he calls English linguistic imperialism. Phillipson (1992, p. 47) defines English linguistic imperialism as 'the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages.' Pennycook (2001, p. 61) explains this saying that 'the dominant role of English in the world today is maintained and promoted through a system both of material or institutional structures (e.g. through English maintaining its current position as the dominant language of the Internet) and of ideological positions (arguments that promote English as a superior language).' That is, being the dominant language in the era of globalization, and the mother tongue of the superpower countries, English has gained another dimension to its importance and superiority over other languages.

Globalization in the world today has been carried by several languages but English is the most dominant. There is a connection between Globalization and English. This is because, as Gray (2002) explains:

In the first place, the rise of transitional corporations does much to promote the spread of English. Typically these organizations have headquarters located in Europe, North America or Japan, and geographically dispersed (yet

flexible) centers of production, all of which are connected electronically.... This can imply business and legal documentation being produced in English, oral and written communication skills training in English for staff, possible spinoffs for the local hotel and tourist industries, and more English being taught in local schools. Secondly, the increase in the number of world organizations, many of which are themselves implicated in globalized networks, means that English continues to be in demand globally.... The third area is linked specifically to the Internet. English currently predominates on the Internet. (cited in Block and Cameron, 2002, p. 153-154).

McKay (2002) contends that the number of people using English today is vast and these numbers are growing. This growing is fueled by the advantages that English offers to those speaking it and these advantages facilitate and assist people who are familiar with the language and can readily use it. Expanding use of English around the world, according to Crystal, (2003) has reached a high status in more than seventy-five countries. This status of English in the world varies from one country to another. Kachru (1989) describes its status by using a figure of three concentric circles: 1) the Inner Circle, where English is considered to be the mother tongue of the country such as in the United Kingdom, the United states, Australia, and Canada; 2) the Outer Circle, where English comes as a second language in a multilingual country such as India, Singapore, and the Philippines; 3) the Expanding Circle, where English serves as a foreign language such as in Japan, Korea, and China. Graddol (1997) argues that the growing use of English between the citizens in the Expanding Circle countries inevitably leads to these countries joining the Outer Circle countries.

The expanding use of English around the world is due to a variety of reasons. Crystal (2003) maintains that this increase can primarily be attributed to the British colonization era of the seventeenth century. He goes on to maintain that this increase in use is related to the industrial revolution headed by Britain during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition, he argues that the role played by the United States of America as an economic and military power is the major reason for this increased use of the language since the last epoch of the nineteenth century. Graddol (1997) points out that this spread will continue to the 21st century.

The dominance of the English speaking countries in various fields gives English an even higher status, and helps it to be predominant over other living languages. Crystal (2003) states that English now is the dominant language of international relations, security and travel, media, education, and communications. McKay (2002) asserts that this widespread use of English in these areas makes it 'imperative' for any country wishing to become part of the global community. This is easily observable from the increasing numbers of people in the world today who want to learn English so as to benefit from the opportunities that speaking English can provide.

As the wide spread of English around the world has resulted in an increasing number of speakers of English, it has also led to a growing demand for teaching English. Pennycook (1994) maintains that there is a mutual relationship between the spread of English and the spread of ELT. English is now the language most widely taught as a foreign language in over 100 countries (Crystal, 2003).

ELT takes place in a wide range of contexts in many countries around the world. Because globalization has a big impact on political affairs, which play an important role in the world, financial affairs, global economy and technological industry, which contributes fundamentally to communication and media, conditions and circumstances underlying ELT are also changed by globalization (Block and Cameron, 2002). Some of these changes, as observed by Block and Cameron (2002), are economic and technological. The question arises here is whether globalization has positive or negative effects on the broad field of ELT in terms, for example, of profession, practices, teachers, students, coursebooks, methodologies, and so on. However, the following section will provide some of these effects.

### **The Effects of Globalization on ELT**

This section focuses on some of the effects of globalization on ELT. It discusses, respectively, the positive and negative effects.

#### ***Positive Effects of Globalization on ELT***

In this era of global English market, as stated by Pennycook (1994), ELT is considered to be a kind of service industry. This means that English language is seen as a commodity, and teaching it is a service provided for people. This commodification, according to Block and Cameron (2002), affects people's motivations and choice of language to be learned in that they may prefer English over other languages because it is associated with better jobs, higher positions and promotions. In support of this, Heller (2002, cited in Block and Cameron, 2002, p. 71) observes that 'many entry-level service jobs in tourism, travel, leisure and hospitality demand foreign language competence.' In Saudi Arabia, for example, job applicants who can write and speak English are much more likely to obtain positions in private sector business or government. Furthermore, Block and Cameron (2002) confirm that multinational companies and transnational corporations, which are connected electronically, train their staff in written and oral English communication skills. This great demand for learning English needs more teachers to teach it in, for example, schools, training centres, academic institutions and so on. This can imply that there are many career opportunities for English language teachers. Block and Cameron (2002, p. 156) also confirm that 'as demand for English grows, more providers of ELT service appear and competition becomes fiercer.' Within this massive service industry, moreover, it is important to consider some organizations such as TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages), TESL (Teaching of English as Second Language), TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language), the British Council and English foreign/second language examination market such as IELTS (The International English Language Testing System), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign language) and so on. Such organizations and agencies, Phillipson (1992) asserts, contribute to promote ELT and create a new marketplace in the global economic forces. Pennycook (1994, p. 158) observes that 'now English is a global commodity to be bought and sold on the world market.'

Phillipson (1992, p. 48) states 'ELT seems to be marketable worldwide. There is a demand for material products and resources (books, jobs for English teachers, space on timetables).' Globalization provides a variety of subject matter in the new language material, to present different cultures and habits from various societies worldwide. Block and Cameron (2002) remark that the coursebooks of ELT, which are bought and sold globally, are carriers of cultural messages. Similarly, Pennycook (1994) confirms that the export of English carries with it cultural messages. This may attract English language teachers and learners to know something

about the world around them. Besides, globalization helps in sending many qualified native speakers around the world to teach English and this can help somehow in acquiring and knowing something about the culture of native speakers of English. Pennycook (1994) maintains that teaching practices can be seen as cultural practices.

Globalization contributes effectively in developing materials of English language teaching and learning through sharing and getting benefits and experiments from a lot of specialists, experts and methodologists all over the world. In support of this, Gray (2002, cited in Block and Cameron, 2002, p. 156) asserts that some European countries export materials and offer their own ELT programmes to the rest of the world. Pennycook (1994) argues that ELT practices, beliefs, techniques, approaches, methodologies and materials that emanate from the West represent very particular understandings of language, communication, learning, education and so on. This could be seen through the application of computer networks in ELT that can help language learners access multimedia materials.

Globalization supports and strengthens communication between millions who have completely different cultures. One form of this global communication trend is ELT. For example, the use of the Internet technology (for example, online learning) to learn English can encourage communication between teachers and learners who are in different places. Warschauer and Kern (2000) maintain that nowadays language learners can communicate with their teachers, fellow classmates, and native speakers by electronic mail. In addition, Block and Cameron (2002) point out that computer mediated communication (communication over a network) helps learners understand both language use and intercultural exchanges.

Being a global service industry, as suggested by Pennycook (1994), ELT provides this service for a range of specialized areas through the field of ESP (English for Specific or Special Purposes). For example, in Saudi Arabia English seems to be the only instruction medium in some schools such as medicine, engineering and computer science. Some courses such as EST (English for Science and Technology) and EMP (English for Medical Purposes) are taught in these schools. Clearly, this expands the role of ELT to supply several academic disciplines.

Global technology offers new teaching equipment which can help teachers in ELT such as overhead projectors, laboratories transparencies and so on. In addition, teachers can use the Internet to benefit from the unlimited teaching websites that provide them with the newest researches and articles in the broad field of ELT.

The above discussion of the positive effects of globalization on ELT implies that ELT is considered to be a great business. Indeed, ELT plays a key role in providing better jobs for some people. It also expands communications, interactions and integration of people either in the local or global contexts. Currently, it has both local and global position that implies its importance for many corporations, companies, and other specialized fields. In this era of technology upheaval, it has become much more modern, advanced and developed.

### ***Negative Effects of Globalization on ELT***

It could be argued that although some global ELT approaches or methodologies can be effective and useful in some ELT classrooms, they can be inappropriate for particular ELT classrooms in which they may be used. Pennycook (1994, p. 159) affirms that 'the export of applied linguistic theory and of Western-trained language teachers constantly promotes inappropriate teaching approaches to diverse settings.' Both the process and content of ELT can include some values, traditions, and social habits that may not socially and culturally correspond with particular

environments. This is because, as argued by Ellis (1990, cited in Pennycook, 1994, p. 177), 'Western-produced textbooks remain ethnocentric and give little consideration to the sociocultural context in which they may be used.' For example, some ELT coursebooks, which are published in the West, may be inappropriate for Muslim teachers and students because these coursebooks may introduce things which are prohibited in Islam such as having sex outside marriage or drinking alcohol.

With regard to the technological changes (for example, networked-based language teaching) produced by globalization, Warschauer and Kern (2000) argue that these changes affect ELT and learning in general and the improvement of some learning skills. One of the examples, they give, is the reading skill. They (2000) go on to argue that there is a shift in reading practices especially among young people who grew up with computers. That is to say, in some cases the screen is replacing the page. Different psycholinguistic processes may be required to decode information from a screen rather than from a page, especially when this is done at the click of a mouse, and the increase use of electronic dictionaries. This can imply that some regarding skills such as skimming, scanning, and guessing words from a context may be weakened and not enhanced.

Globalization may cause some laziness and dependence on others. Some teachers of English may not be able to become productive and creative in improving their ELT methodologies, but they may be dependent on others who can supply them with new materials and methods. Besides, they may be not well-trained to use the new teaching equipment in their ELT classrooms. This may create an atmosphere of frustration and complexity for them and their students. The fact is that, as observed by Warschauer and Kern (2000, p. 1), 'if language teaching has become more exciting, it has also become considerably more complex.'

It is clear from the above discussion that globalization generates the issue of the cultural appropriacy of some global ELT approaches and materials for particular ELT contexts.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has presented some recent definitions of globalization, and described how it is linked to English language and ELT. Indeed, globalization is a process that implies radical changes in our life. It has increasingly promoted the spread of both English language and ELT. It is argued that there is a reciprocal relationship between English and ELT. Clearly, while they promote each other, their current global position implies their importance to many global and local aspects.

It has been the purpose of this paper to argue that globalization has seriously influenced the field of ELT all over the world. It strikingly contributes to the improvement of ELT. However, global ELT may introduce some particular forms of culture that are not suitable for a particular ELT context.

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