TESOL in Context
Journal of ACTA
Australian Council of TESOL Associations
ISSN 2209-0916

Developing countries don't need saving: They *may* need support

Mandana Arfa-Kaboodvand University of Eswatini, Eswatini

Abstract

This article challenges the paternalistic mindset often embedded in international development discourse, arguing that developing countries require respectful support rather than saving. Drawing on the author's personal experiences in Eswatini and other contexts, alongside scholarly insights, it explores the complex realities faced by local communities and highlights the transformative role of education in fostering sustainable development that goes beyond the saving mentality. Central to this argument is the cultivation of intercultural competence and critical thinking in both developing and developed contexts. Education can bridge cultural divides, promote empathy, and empower communities to pursue change while maintaining autonomy. The paper contends that English language teaching, beyond its linguistic goals, holds significant potential to advance these aims by facilitating dialogue, reshaping attitudes, and encouraging context-sensitive perspectives. To enable such transformative practice, educators must engage with authentic voices both inside and outside the classroom and be supported with appropriate resources and training.

Correspondence
Mandana Arfa-Kaboodvand
m_arfa@yahoo.com

Publication
Received: 8 May 2025
Revision: 19 August 2025
Accepted: 31 August 2025
Published: 15 September 2025

Copyright
©2025 TESOL in Context
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Keywords: *Developing vs developed countries; ELT; intercultural competence; local vs global education; paternalistic worldviews.*

ISMO (2024)[1], the 'funniest person in the world in the year 2014', has a story about his saving the African children:

> *My whole relationship with food has always been weird. When I was a kid, my mum always told me, "You have to eat all the food that is on your plate, because there is starvation in Africa," and then I ate all the food. And then I grew a bit older, and I started to think how have I helped the situation in Africa!!! I am now a little bit overweight. I hope they are happy. I have done my best. I am still expecting a thank you card or something. If I ever go to Africa and they look at my belly, I would say, "I did it for you."*

Introduction

A few years ago, we moved to a small country in the southern part of the African continent. We live in the capital, in a modern house with a big garden. Almost every day, groups of vervet monkeys cross our property. For the first three years, I found them delightful and was overwhelmed simply by the fact that wild animals roamed so freely near our home. I took numerous photos and videos to share with friends and family around the world, who were equally amazed. However, my local friends were less impressed and even found my fascination unusual.

The monkeys have enjoyed the fruit and vegetables in our garden, destroying many items along the way. Initially, I did not mind, perhaps because my livelihood did not depend on my vegetables and living alongside them was a unique experience. Recently, however, I learned that monkeys could carry diseases harmful to humans, and by now, these monkeys are so unafraid of us that they freely make a mess in our garden. This has shifted my perspective. I now empathise with locals whose livelihoods depend on their crops. I still find them cute, but I would prefer them to be out of my house. And now I assume that I better understand some similar perspectives, such as the case of Uganda's baboons, redtail monkeys, and chimpanzees that ate all the maize and bananas (Naughton-Treves et al., 1998).

Similarly, baby elephants are undeniably adorable. With their oversized ears and clumsy movements, they appear playful and endearing. However, adult elephants, as majestic as they are, pose significant ecological challenges. Overpopulated elephant herds in many African countries, including South Africa, Botswana, and Namibia, damage flora and fauna by destroying trees and vegetation (Blanc et al., 2007; Monadjem & Unwin, 2023). These behaviours impact not just the ecosystem but also human communities reliant on these environments (Western & Maitumo, 2004). The countries affected are looking for solutions to this major problem.

[1] Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZK7N_aGoQY

A while ago, while visiting a country with a higher level of poverty than many, I left two tablespoons of leftover rice on the ground for the birds. I was pleased with myself for having tried to feed the animals. To my surprise, the locals working nearby looked horrified. At the time, I did not understand the reason. Later, I realised that they were likely prioritising their own survival over concern for animals. Sen (1981) underscores this kind of experience, arguing that in situations of food insecurity, people's primary focus is on survival rather than peripheral concerns such as feeding wildlife.

And these are only a few scenarios that I have witnessed and probably would have judged before living in these places. And there are many more similar issues about societal values, reasons for poverty, behavioural patterns, and so on. To many outsiders, even considering some ways to control the number of elephants or not feeding hungry monkeys or birds is unacceptable and immoral. They would judge the people who do not share the same values, perhaps feel a moral obligation to voice their concern or even act in these cases to *rescue* the animals and in many other cases to *rescue* the people from what they may consider unacceptable beliefs and behaviour.

Having acknowledged these examples, it becomes clear that such differences in perception are not merely about animals or local practices, but about deeper worldviews shaped by culture, experience, and circumstance.

In this critical reflection, I examine paternalism in development and education through a critical lens, synthesising theory with personal observations and practical implications for English language teaching (ELT). I critique existing power dynamics, question assumptions, and recommend alternative attitudes and practices based on my own experiences as an educator in developing contexts, focusing on ELT and how it can contribute to enhancing intercultural skills. The article emphasises that educators both inside and outside the borders of developing countries need support to be able to acquire the knowledge to suspend judgment, recognise alternative value systems, and reflect critically on own assumptions to help their students do the same.

Moving beyond the "saving" mentality

A top-down look at nations, the feel-good stories of heroes who save, and the oversimplification of issues of the people and societies that are considered less privileged are in many cases leading to solutions that are disconnected from the actual needs. The idea of "saving" others and the environment can be emotionally rewarding, creating a sense of purpose or self-worth, which can overshadow the need for long-term, sustainable support strategies. Despite some humanistic intentions, this paternalistic mindset persists in some modern attitudes, framing developing nations as incapable of self-reliance and offering solutions that are not sustainable or necessarily helpful even with the best of intentions (Oloruntoba, 2020). Financial aids alone cannot save countries in need (Bauer, 1972; Easterly, 2006, 2009). At the

same time, looking at nations in crisis through foreign lenses and addressing their needs with that perspective cannot make drastic changes to the situation. For example, assuming that since a country has a parliament or presidential elections it is democratic and that votes of people count can lead to faulty assumptions about certain nations, their demands, and how they may need support. Or assuming that certain traditions are unacceptable simply because the Western world does not believe in them is mostly immature. And for the same reasons importing knowledge does not necessarily help.

ISMO's humour, introduced at the outset, reflects a genuine mindset relating to what might be called a "saviour" mentality, and, in Fraser's (2000) terms, a form of "misrecognition" that can contribute to global injustice. In educational contexts, this mentality often appears in oversimplified narratives presented in charity drives or even in textbooks. These materials may intentionally or unintentionally promote paternalistic worldviews, suggesting that the goodwill of a more affluent or powerful group of nations can solve global problems. Such perspectives overlook two critical points: first, that some perceived "problems" may in fact represent different ways of life rather than deficiencies, and second, that genuine problems often have roots in historical exploitation. Simplistic solutions usually do not help.

The role of education in producing relevant knowledge

As Sen (1999) argues in *Development as Freedom*, education should empower individuals to critically assess their problems and devise feasible solutions. This education must consider cultural and environmental contexts, as emphasised by Freire (1970), who advocates for empowering people to transform their realities through learning. Quality education is needed for all the world. Based on extensive literature review Barret et al. (2006) have put forward five components for quality education that have been referred to by various scholars: effectiveness, efficiency, equality, relevance, and sustainability. External effectiveness, which refers to "the degree to which the education system meets the needs of individuals and society as a whole" (p. 13) is one major side of effective education. Relevance is mainly concerned with "the relationship between education and development and the central question of the purposes of education" (p. 14). This side of education is what the current paper is most concerned about. It can be a reminder that *knowledge* and *information* are not the same. Despite the need for sharing information, education should be about learning how to use that information and that is what knowledge is. Samoff and Stromquist (2001) explain that "where knowledge is equated to information and understood as a static collection of what are usually called 'facts', knowledge becomes a set of discrete entities that can be labelled, categorised, stored, distributed, even bought and sold (p. 638).

Contextualising learning needs

Educational priorities differ across contexts. For example, individuals raised close to nature may regard flora and fauna primarily as resources for survival, while urban learners may view them as sources of beauty or recreation. Effective education must recognise these differences and align learning with local realities. Addressing global issues such as air pollution may be less relevant in regions where such challenges do not exist, and it could risk disengaging learners.

In less affluent nations, an overreliance on imported knowledge or external charity fosters dependency rather than development. Quality education should instead be locally grounded, equipping learners to think critically, solve problems, and use available resources effectively (Coetzee, 2023). Importantly, education should build autonomy, ensuring that communities maintain agency when engaging with external support.

Tradition, critical thinking, and progress

While education must value cultural traditions, it should also provide tools for recognising when certain beliefs impede development. For instance, belief in witchcraft continues to shape decision-making in some African contexts, often with harmful consequences (Kakwata, 2018; Saani & Laryea, 2025). As external actors may lack the cultural understanding to address such issues, solutions must emerge from within, supported by critical and reflective education.

Quality education thus serves as the foundation for sustainable development, enabling individuals and communities to question assumptions, confront biases, and make informed decisions. As Ryan (2016) notes, meaning making is strongly shaped by nationality, social identity, and geography. By fostering critical awareness, education equips people to navigate these influences and make choices that balance local relevance with global adaptability.

Moving beyond external intervention

The assumption that external intervention alone can resolve the challenges of developing countries is misguided. Meaningful progress requires empathy, respect, and critical engagement with cultural difference rather than judgment (Appiah, 2006; Hofstede, 1984). This does not imply uncritical acceptance of every tradition; rather, it entails the capacity to evaluate practices thoughtfully, maintain respect in disagreement, and engage in dialogue. Such an approach supports sustainable, context-sensitive solutions rooted in local ownership.

The perspectives of educators and learners in the "receiving nations"

Learners may, consciously or subconsciously, prefer to remain receivers of knowledge rather than engage actively in analysing and applying information. Several factors contribute to this tendency, including long-standing educational traditions and expectations, assessment systems that reward memorisation over application, and cultural norms in which questioning information is perceived as challenging authority. Moreover, the immediate goals of many learners—including passing examinations, fulfilling visa requirements, or securing basic employment—may make critical thinking or application tasks appear less relevant in the short term. In many contexts, education has been characterised by teacher-centred practices in which teachers are regarded as unquestionable authorities, and learners' primary responsibility is to listen, memorise, and reproduce. Transitioning to a more participatory, student-centred model can therefore feel unfamiliar or even uncomfortable (Smith et al., 2018). Compounding this issue, some teachers may have limited exposure to pedagogical concepts such as learner autonomy or critical thinking or may be reluctant to relinquish control in the classroom (Kashinidi, 2020). These dynamics reinforce a cycle where learners are positioned as passive recipients of knowledge rather than active users, underscoring the need for ELT to foster pedagogies that build confidence, autonomy, and critical engagement.

There is yet another perspective to consider: educators in developing countries who, for various reasons, resist drawing on the experiences of external experts. Some may be reluctant to change, preferring to maintain traditional methods that feel familiar and culturally grounded. Others may remain sceptical of external advice, perceiving it as biased or misaligned with their local realities, regardless of the intentions behind it.

Intercultural competence and language teaching and learning

As highlighted above, in the globalised world of today, education should foster global cultural awareness. With intercultural competence, people develop the ability "to see from others' perspectives" (Deardorff, 2007, p. 68). It encompasses a range of skills, attitudes, and knowledge that enable individuals to understand, respect, and navigate cultural differences in various social, professional, and personal contexts. By cultivating intercultural competence, individuals can contribute to creating environments that are equitable, harmonious, and conducive to shared success. Intercultural competence is an ongoing process.

Since the second half of the 20th century, the role of culture and its importance have been highlighted in language teaching and learning. According to Byram (1997), intercultural communicative competence enables learners to appreciate cultural diversity while maintaining critical awareness. Meaningful understanding comes from learning about the underlying reasons behind certain ways of life, which can challenge and broaden our perspectives. As Huang (2023) puts it, "IC [intercultural competence] development does not just happen through learning about cultural knowledge and practicing related skills" (p. 3). It involves

understanding that, for example, for someone facing extreme poverty, immediate survival often takes precedence over environmental concerns. Or that the love and support extended families can provide in some communities is not necessarily interfering with the lives of younger members and can in fact be an advantage.

Modern language classes, where communication is the key to developing language skills, seem to be one of the best places to concentrate on empathy, diversity, and the role that culture can play (Barany, 2016). Both inside and outside the borders of less fortunate communities, people should study the cultures of people from different nations and communities, including immigrants to their own countries (Banks, 2008). Educating people about the cultures and lives beyond the local boundaries of (Western) countries should be revisited. Intercultural competence aims to foster empathy and understanding, not judgment, of both fortunate and less fortunate communities. People should learn to appreciate diversity and approach differences with open minds. What is considered unacceptable in one part of the world may be common practice in another—and sometimes for good reasons. They should understand the variety of cultures, contexts, needs, and priorities, and they need to be encouraged to provide support without imposing the way of life they think is better. Sharma (2019) suggests that people should learn to think interculturally. Kramsch (1993) similarly emphasises that cultural awareness in education is not about imposing values but about understanding and respecting different ways of life. Even the very process of learning a new language can encourage individuals to "think" outside the box, gaining insights into how speakers of that language perceive and interpret the world. Dreams that may be aspirational in one environment—such as home or car ownership—may hold little value in another. People's priorities differ.

Language teachers and intercultural competence

Theories relating to intercultural competence highlight that the world needs to become a better place; however, still there seem to be many grey areas when it comes to practicing them even in our classes. Language teachers are often encouraged to cultivate cultural awareness and develop intercultural competence in their classrooms. Nevertheless, to achieve that teachers should learn to have an open mind to be able to foster that open-mindedness into their classes. Teachers should be equipped with the skills to navigate cultural differences respectfully and try to help their students learn that as well. Both teachers and students need to listen to the experiences of people in other countries. Teachers need specialised training and continuous professional development to effectively teach intercultural competence. They must also have extensive experience and sensitivity to the cultural implications associated with the language being taught (Achieng, 2023). And where ready-made materials are scarce, teachers should also be supported in adapting or creating resources suited to their learners' contexts. Empowered teachers are essential for guiding learners from passive reception toward critical engagement, intercultural understanding, and independent problem-solving.

In *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society*, Kumaravadivelu (2012) outlines five interrelated global perspectives: postnational, postmodern, postcolonial, post-transmission, and

postmethod. He argues that these "must be taken together if we are serious about designing comprehensive teacher preparation programs" (p. 11). These perspectives directly challenge narrow, one-size-fits-all models of education, instead urging teachers to recognise the complexities of identity, culture, and power that shape language learning. For example, a postcolonial perspective reminds educators to question paternalistic attitudes and resist imposing external values on local contexts, while a post-transmission approach rejects the traditional "banking model" of education (Freire, 1970) in favour of dialogic and participatory learning. To translate these perspectives into practice, Kumaravadivelu introduces three parameters of language teacher education: particularity, practicality, and possibility. Particularity stresses that pedagogy must be rooted in the specific social, cultural, and political realities of learners rather than borrowed wholesale from other contexts. Practicality highlights the need for teachers to critically reflect on their own classroom practices and generate context-sensitive pedagogical knowledge. Possibility calls on teachers to envision education as a tool for empowerment, helping learners cultivate agency, critical thinking, and the capacity to challenge inequities. Taken together, these principles align closely with the call for ELT to move beyond the passive transfer of information, instead preparing teachers to nurture intercultural competence, critical engagement, and learner autonomy in ways that are both globally informed and locally grounded.

Cochran-Smith (2020, p. 50) also explains teachers need to "Learn to teach for social justice," and sometimes to do so, in addition to the knowledge and skill they gain, they need to "unlearn their own long-held and largely invisible ideas, beliefs, and practices related to race and equity" (p. 52). This applies to many other aspects of teaching. In order to promote moral education, educators need to be well-resourced, and the findings of several studies suggest that more needs to be done in this regard (Fernández & Salazar, 2019; Özışık et al., 2019). Teachers should believe in the need for intercultural competence and its value, and then they should learn how to deal with it. They should revisit their values, constantly reflect, and develop their skills and knowledge in dealing with it. They should become aware that it is a never-ending task. Teachers should be educated to firstly understand and then to teach it to their students that intercultural competence does not mean that everybody always should appreciate all cultural values of all nations. The idea is to be able to talk about them, invite others to talk about them and try to understand and learn. This is not equal to everybody agreeing with all rites and rituals.

In addition, the materials and teaching resources should help teachers to provide the required support. Coursebooks, curricula and supporting materials can make a difference in the ways teachers approach cultures and nation and help their students to talk about them. Currently, technology can be an aid to teachers, which requires that teachers learn how to take advantage of it in the best possible ways.

To sum up, as Jiang et al. (2021) put it, teachers "need to be adequately equipped – through thorough and rigorous training – before they are able to respond to their students' needs at a level which would truly allow them to develop and reach their full potential" (p. 9).

Scaffolding toward active learning of intercultural competence

In her work on moral education, Noddings (1998, 2002, 2005, 2008) highlights dialogue and genuine encounters as key to fostering mutual respect. Diller (1993) extends this into the concepts of coexploration and coenjoyment, where learners discover shared values and find enjoyment in the process of dialogue itself. Language classrooms, therefore, become spaces where intercultural communicative competence can naturally emerge (Lee, 2012). In this way, ELT directly counters paternalistic "saviour mindsets" by equipping learners to engage with global challenges through humility, respect, and recognition of mutual agency.

Certain tasks and activities such as critical incidents, project-based learning, and reflective activities in the classroom can facilitate the acquisition of intercultural competence. Short, real, or fictional accounts of cross-cultural misunderstandings, for example, invite learners to analyse situations, identify perspectives, and propose culturally sensitive responses. Such activities foster not only linguistic development but also empathy, adaptability, and perspective-taking. Student learning outcomes in these contexts can include:

- interpreting cultural behaviours without premature judgment
- articulating multiple cultural perspectives on an issue
- proposing locally appropriate solutions
- recognising personal cultural assumptions
- demonstrating greater willingness to engage in intercultural dialogue.

Embedding these practices within language learning ensures that intercultural competence is developed as an actionable skill rather than an abstract goal.

Practical empirical evidence in ELT

To help learners transition from passively receiving knowledge to actively using information, ELT teachers can begin with small, structured tasks that build confidence without overwhelming students. Research from Namibian ESL classrooms shows that while critical thinking sometimes arises incidentally, explicit lesson planning and clearly aligned objectives are essential for systematically cultivating these skills (Rittmann & Mpofu, 2024). Similarly, with proper training, peer scaffolding – where learners support and challenge each other – has been shown to enhance reading comprehension and learner autonomy in EFL settings, as demonstrated in a study among Thai students (Yawiloeng, 2021). By integrating teacher-led scaffolding with peer-driven collaboration, learners are encouraged to progressively engage with information, strengthening both analytical capacity and collaborative agency.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, I relocated to a small African country where I was offered a position teaching English for Academic Purposes (EAP) to first-year university students. This role presented unique challenges, as I had limited time to familiarise myself with the local

culture and educational practices. Before my first class, I sought clarity on classroom norms, including appropriate forms of address, materials used, and assessment systems. Despite my more than 30 years of teaching experience, it quickly became apparent that this new context required navigating a host of unfamiliar questions.

The country differed considerably from the places I had lived previously. The largest city had a population of about 90,000, and according to the World Bank, 76% of the population resided in rural areas. Life moved at a slower pace, and nature was deeply woven into daily life. Experiences common elsewhere – pollution, traffic congestion, and busy rush hours – were largely absent here. While the country had much to offer, the contrasts with my previous contexts were striking.

Cultural differences soon became evident in everyday interactions. In my home culture, requests for favours are typically subtle, and refusal carries negative connotations. Here, requests were made openly, and refusals did not appear to cause offense. Similarly, in other places where I had lived, new acquaintances – especially foreigners – were often met with curiosity. In this setting, people displayed little overt interest in who I was or why I had come. These contrasts highlighted aspects of my own culture that I had previously taken for granted and made me increasingly aware of both major and minor differences.

These differences carried into the classroom. On the first day, I expected questions about myself, my background, and my reasons for being there. Over 300 students attended the session, yet none asked questions, despite my visible status as a newcomer and the only white person on campus. Even when prompted, students remained silent. I later learned that this reluctance reflected cultural traditions regarding the teacher–student relationship, but I continued to wonder whether it was also related to ethnicity or to broader norms of interaction. While I had hoped for curiosity and engagement, students' silence often left me frustrated.

Selecting course content proved equally complex. My review of several EAP textbooks revealed topics that were either irrelevant or poorly aligned with students' lived experiences. Some local materials addressed African issues such as ghosting, depression, or modern slavery, which I did not always find appropriate for EAP purposes. Conversely, widely used international EAP textbooks featured topics such as airports, nuclear families, fast food, urbanisation, or air and noise pollution. These themes, often assumed to be "universal", resonated little with my students.

For example, coursebook sentences such as "*My parents won't let me stay out later than midnight. They're such fascists!*" or "*More people should ride bicycles into town*" bore little relevance to my students' realities. Many did not own cars or bicycles but walked. Fertile soil meant genetically modified foods were unnecessary. Access to clean water remained a more pressing concern than fast food culture. Nightlife was uncommon, as students typically supported their families after class. Seasons were not marked by snow or autumn leaves, but by a hot, rainy summer and a cold, dry winter. Textbooks did not reflect these experiences, and

visuals rarely represented local ethnicities. This disjuncture revealed that international assessment topics often overlooked the lived realities of students in such contexts.

At the same time, my students' world was rich with other realities – delicious avocados and bananas, breathtaking scenery, iconic wildlife, and remarkable creativity in art produced with limited resources. These differences made teaching both challenging and rewarding, creating opportunities for mutual learning but also highlighting uncertainty about content choices. Should I focus on global perspectives or prioritise local issues? Their reluctance to voice opinions compounded this dilemma, leaving me unsure whether to follow colleagues' established practices or expand beyond them.

Ultimately, I concluded that the available materials were often irrelevant or unhelpful. International assessment topics bore little connection to the lives of many of my students, and without living in the country myself, I would not have recognised these nuances. Local teachers, in many cases, may be better placed to address such gaps, though this does not absolve them from the responsibility of selecting content thoughtfully and critically. In my classes, I eventually opted for themes such as time management, gender roles, culture, youth empowerment, health and well-being, and the environment – topics that struck a balance between global relevance and local resonance.

Sampedro and Hillyard (2004), in their book *Global Issues*, argue for the integration of global themes into English language lessons in ways that stimulate critical and creative thinking. Crucially, they emphasise that activity selection must take into account the geographical, social, educational, and political context of the learners. And once again for this to occur, teachers require appropriate training and ongoing professional development. They need to be reminded that students must learn without being judged, that not all global issues carry equal significance for all learners, and that transmitting information is only one part of education. Equally important is equipping students with the ability to retrieve, evaluate, and apply knowledge effectively.

Sample ELT activities

To address the gap between global themes and students' lived experiences, the following activities are samples of what can be done to stimulate critical reflection while remaining relevant to the learners' immediate contexts. Here are some examples of the topics that are relevant to the context of Eswatini where I am working:

- Should taking advantage of solar energy be a priority in your country and should investments be made for that? Instead of focusing on global concerns such as urban air pollution, which is an issue largely absent in this country, students could explore the potential of solar energy. The global relevance of renewable energy and then shifting to whether solar panels should be a national priority would be a suitable discussion and reading point. Students then weigh advantages and disadvantages, and more

importantly, consider if such technology aligns with their country's immediate needs and resources or resources had better be allocated in other areas to satisfy the immediate or long-term needs of the country.

- How can water be managed and conserved? Given that access to clean water remains a pressing issue, students might examine how seasonal rainfall is managed. For instance, during the rainy season, large amounts of water are often lost. A task could involve brainstorming practical strategies for capturing and conserving rainwater, followed by a comparison with international examples of water management.
- Can your country be a touristic attraction? Why or why not? If your answer is yes, then how? Tourism provides another contextually relevant theme. Students first learn about attractions that draw visitors to other countries, then reflect on their own country's unique cultural and natural assets. The activity could culminate in reflecting about their countries assets without neglecting the attractions of other countries.

These types of activities not only encourage students to connect global issues with local realities but also develop higher-order skills such as evaluation, problem-solving, and contextualised communication skills, which are central to EAP. These are among the examples that demonstrate how critically analysing the information received can contribute to better learning.

More or less, the same topics can be assigned to the classes of more affluent communities. And if the resources are well-selected and the teacher is well-trained, the discussions could lead the students to learn that in some contexts solar energy may not the priority or tourism can take many forms and each country/region can offer something unique that is worth learning about and possibly visiting.

Conclusion

The overarching message is clear: no country in the world needs to be *saved*; what they need is *support*. In an interconnected world, the challenges faced by one nation inevitably affect others. At the same time, development is not a matter of imitation or "rescue". In many cases, people may lack exposure to alternative lifestyles or the resources to pursue what they already know they want. While good intentions and urgent interventions can play a role, the prevailing *attitude* requires transformation. Paternalistic assumptions emphasising that the less privileged are ignorant, incapable, or in need of saving, must give way to a recognition that every community possesses valuable skills, knowledge, and life experiences. What the world needs is not heroes who impose solutions, but knowledgeable individuals who care, listen, and collaborate.

Within this context, language teaching has a unique responsibility. Language classrooms are not only spaces for linguistic development but also for fostering intercultural understanding and critical engagement. Language teachers can help learners from diverse communities move

beyond passively receiving knowledge toward actively analysing and using information, equipping them to navigate global issues through the lens of their own realities. To do so, however, teachers require support: appropriate training, adequate resources, and materials that are both locally relevant and globally informed. This aligns with calls to "decolonise ELT materials", not merely treating textbooks as content to deliver, but as "springboards" for relational, context-sensitive learning that validates learners' lived experiences (Kim, 2023).

Curriculum developers should ensure that syllabi reflect local priorities alongside international perspectives, balancing the global with the particular. Coursebook writers need to avoid one-size-fits-all content, instead providing adaptable materials that acknowledge diverse cultural, social, and environmental realities. Policymakers must invest in teacher training, professional development, and the creation of resources that empower educators to facilitate critical, reflective, and transformative learning. And most importantly, for practitioners, this means designing lessons that encourage learners to reflect on their lived experiences while engaging with global themes in context-sensitive ways. To be able to do these, language teachers need support, training, and relevant resources.

In sum, the role of ELT and TESOL in today's world is not to "save" but to *support*: to create conditions where learners are empowered to think critically, draw on their own cultural and experiential knowledge, and engage meaningfully with both local and global challenges. Future research should explore how context-sensitive approaches to materials design, teacher education, and assessment can better align with the lived realities of learners in diverse educational settings.

While transformative change at the macro level may seem distant, education has the power to improve lives through each class, each teacher, and each student.

References

Achieng, S. A. (2023). Intercultural competence in foreign language teaching and learning. *17th International Conference for Language, Individual & Society*, *17*, 19–26.

Appiah, K. A. (2006). *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a world of strangers*. W. W. Norton & Company.

Banks, J. A. (2008). *An introduction to multicultural educ*ation (4th edition). Pearson.

Barany, L. K. (2016). Language awareness, intercultural awareness and communicative language teaching: Towards language education. *International Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies*, *2*(4).

Barrett, A. M., Lowe, J., Nikel, J., Ukpo, E., & Chawla-Duggan, R. (2006). *The concept of quality in education: A review of the 'international' literature on the concept of quality in education* (EdQual Working Paper No. 3). https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/en/publications/the-concept-of-quality-in-education-a-review-of-the-international

Bauer, P. T. (1972). *Dissent on development*. Harvard University Press.

Blanc, J. J., Barnes, R. F. W., Craig, G. C., Dublin, H. T., Thouless, C. R., Douglas-Hamilton, I., & Hart, J. A. (2007). *African elephant status report 2007*. IUCN/SSC African Elephant Specialist Group. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279528823_African_Elephant_Status_Report_2007

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Multilingual Matters.

Cochran-Smith, M. (2020). Teacher education for justice and equity: 40 years of advocacy. *Action in teacher education*, *42*(1), 49–59.

Coetzee, D. (2023). *Education as a conduit: Connecting individual potential to societal needs*. ResearchGate. https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10104.42248

Deardorff, D. K. (2011). Assessing intercultural competence. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, *2011*(149), 65.

Diller, Ann. (1993). Pluralisms for education: An ethics of care perspective. In H. A. Alexander (Ed.), *Philosophy of education* (pp. 22–29). Philosophy of Education Society.

Easterly, W. (2006). *The white man's burden: Why the West's efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good*. Penguin Press.

Easterly, W. (2009). Can the West save Africa?. *Journal of Economic Literature*, *47*, 373–447.

Fernández Agüero, M., & Garrote Salazar, M. (2019). "It's not my intercultural competence, it's me": The intercultural identity of prospective foreign language teachers. *Educa*r, *55*(1), 159–182.

Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New left review*, *3*, 107.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury Academic.

Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Sage.

Huang, L. (2023). Developing intercultural competence through a cultural metacognition-featured instructional design in English as a foreign language classrooms. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *14*, 1126141. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1126141

ISMO. (2024). *Starving in Africa* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZK7N_aGoQY

Jiang, Q., Soon, S., & Li, Y. (2021). Enhancing teachers' intercultural competence with online technology as cognitive tools: A literature review. *English Language Teaching*, *14*(3), 1–11.

Kakwata, F. (2018). Witchcraft and poverty in Africa: A pastoral perspective. *Black Theology*, *16*(1), 22–37.

Kashindi, R. M. (2020). Learner's autonomy: A critical study and research paradigm for ELT curriculum development in Democratic Republic of the Congo higher education. *European Journal of English Language Teaching*, *5*(4).

Kim, M. (2023). Decolonizing ELT materials: A sociomaterial orientation. *ELT Journal*, *77*(3), 316-326.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and culture in language teaching*. Oxford University Press.

Kumaravadivelu, B. (2012). *Language teacher education for a global society: A modular model for knowing, analyzing, recognizing, doing, and seeing*. Routledge.

Lee, L. (2012). Engaging study abroad students in intercultural learning through blogging and ethnographic interviews. *Foreign Language Annals*, *45*(1), 7–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2012.01164.x

Monadjem, A., & Unwin, M. (2023). *African ark: Mammals, landscape and the ecology of a continent*. NYU Press.

Naughton-Treves, L., Treves, A., Chapman, C., & Wrangham, R. (1998). Temporal patterns of crop raiding by primates: Linking food availability in croplands and adjacent forests. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, *35*(4), 596–606.

Noddings, N. (1998). *Philosophy of education*. Routledge.

Noddings, N. (2002). *Educating moral people: A caring alternative to character education*. Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2005). *Caring in education*. Teachers College Press.

Noddings, N. (2008). Caring and moral education. In L. Nucci & T. Krettenauer (Eds.), *Handbook of moral and character education* (pp. 161–174). Routledge.

Oloruntoba, S. O. (2020). The politics of paternalism and implications of global governance on Africa: A critique of the sustainable development goals. In S. O. Oloruntoba (Ed.), *Pan Africanism, regional integration and development in Africa* (pp. 165–179). Palgrave Macmillan.

Özışık, B. Z., Yeşilyurt, S., & Demiröz, H. (2019). Developing intercultural awareness in language teaching: Insights from EFL lecturers in Turkey. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *15*(4), 1436–1458.

Rittmann, H., & Mpofu, N. (2024). Exploring teachers' self-reported practices for fostering critical thinking skills in ESL multilingual high school settings. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, *10*, 101156.

Ryan, S. (2016). Hidden biases of cultural schema. In *The Asian Conference on Cultural Studies 2016 Official Conference Proceedings* (pp. 173-182). The International Academic Forum (IAFOR). https://papers.iafor.org/wp-content/uploads/conference-proceedings/ACCS/ACCS2016_proceedings.pdf

Saani, A. J., & Laryea, J. E. (2025). Sociology of education: Perception of witchcraft and its related social consequences on learners' schooling. *Canadian Journal of Educational and Social Studies*, *5*(2), 258–274.

Samoff, J., & Stromquist, N. P. (2001). Managing knowledge and storing wisdom? New forms of foreign aid? *Development and Change*, *32*(4), 631–656.

Sampedro, R., & Hillyard, S. (2004). *Global issues*. Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (1981). *Poverty and famines: An essay on entitlement and deprivation*. Oxford University Press.

Sen, A. (2015). *Development as freedom (1999)*. In J. T. Roberts, A. B. Hite, & N. Chorev (Eds.), *The globalization and development reader: Perspectives on development and global change* (pp. 525–548). Wiley Blackwell.

Sharma, R. R. (2019). Cultural intelligence and institutional success: The mediating role of relationship quality. *Journal of International Management*, *25*, 100665. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2019.01.002

Smith, R., Kuchah, K., & Lamb, M. (2018). Learner autonomy in developing countries. In A. Chik, N. Aoki & R. Smith (Eds.), *Autonomy in language learning and teaching: New research agendas* (pp. 7-27). Palgrave Macmillan UK.

The World Bank. (n.d.). *Rural population. World Bank Data*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?locations=SZ-IR

Western, D., & Maitumo, D. (2004). Woodland degradation by elephants in Amboseli National Park, Kenya. *Journal of Tropical Ecology*, *20*(5), 591–604.

Yawiloeng, R. (2021). Peer scaffolding during EFL reading activities: A sociocultural perspective. *English Language Teaching*, *14*(12). https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v14n12p44

Mandana Arfa-Kaboodvand holds a PhD in TESOL from the University of Exeter, UK. With nearly 37 years of experience as an educator and university lecturer, she has taught in Iran, Uzbekistan, and Eswatini. Her research interests include language teacher education, language teaching and culture, social justice, English for Academic Purposes (EAP), and material development. She is an active contributor to international conferences and has an extensive publication record.