Doing Educational Research in Asia: Contextualizing Western Methodology in Bangladesh
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Abstract
A significant question is being raised by contemporary authors about the relevance of Western methods for guiding investigation in Asian context. It is strongly argued that methods as a knowledge generating tool useful in one context (e.g., in Western) may not be well-suited to another context (e.g., in Asian), rather, "Asia as Method" (Chen, 2010), as a process of complementing west-generated methods, has strong potential to generate valid knowledge in Asian contexts. It is undeniable that the East is led by the West in knowledge production and knowledge transfer over the centuries due to their socio-economic and political supremacy. Bangladesh, which was a former colony of British Empire, tends to adopt and adapt Western ideas in Education and educational research despite having a very different socio-economic and cultural context. This paper examines the practice of applying west-originated educational research methods in Bangladesh. Data have been drawn on from our experiences of field work in Bangladesh as a part of our academic research. Two major questions have been addressed in this paper: firstly, what are the challenges we encountered doing our research, and, secondly, how have we overcome the challenges – using an adaptation process or finding a unique way rooted in local context? We reflected on our experiences and we used a descriptive method in reporting the findings. The challenges we faced include difficulties in recruiting intended participants, problems in getting survey responses, minimizing power relations (such as, between researchers and participants), participants' attempt to provide desirable or correct response to questions, and lack of effort from participants. Moreover, we found that teacher participants view research as an evaluation or inspection or judgment of their teaching performance, which may be linked to our colonial past when teaching was inspected by higher authorities. We conclude that a research approach originating from Western society does not well fit in the Asian context, but searching for a unique Asian way may not be necessary; we just need to be more contextually grounded in designing and applying west-originated methods in the Asian context. This paper may be used as a point of reference for researchers who intend to do educational research adapting Western methodology in Asian contexts.

Key words: Asia as Method; Complementing West-generated Methods; Educational Research; Bangladesh Context
Introduction

Questions are being raised by contemporary authors (e.g., Chen, 2010; Watkins, 2007, 2008) about the relevance of Western methods for guiding investigation in Asian context. It is strongly argued that methods as knowledge generating tool useful in one context (e.g., Western) may not be well suited to another context (e.g., Asian). Kee (2004) asserts that research methodology as a way of knowing is unavoidably linked with a specific culture. The failure in recognizing the value of culture in the knowledge generation process ignores culturally diverse interpretations of reality. This in turn fails to provide useful directions for moving forward.

It is an undeniable fact that the East is led by the West in knowledge production and knowledge transfer over the centuries. This supremacy is clearly visible almost in all academic discourses including educational research. Western hegemony of knowledge production and transfer influences most researchers outside Western contexts; they utilize west-originated concepts and theories to understand the educational issues in non-West contexts. In addition, researchers from the non-West contexts often employ Western methodologies to investigate educational issues in non-West contexts. Like other non-Western scholars, Asian scholars also rely heavily on these methods for generating knowledge in their own context (Papoutsaki, 2006).

The reasons for this dependency may be rooted in colonization, globalizaton, intellectual imperialism, the socio-economic and political supremacy of West, or a tendency of East policy makers to follow the West in taking their education systems up to an international standard (Nguyen, Elliott, Terlouw, & Pilot, 2009). Many scholars relate this sort of influence to neo-colonization and new imperialism of the West to the East. Some also relate it to globalization, which seems to intensify worldwide social relations (Giddens, 1990) and the consciousness of the world as a whole (Robertson, 1992). As a result, globalization, especially cultural globalization, deeply influences educational practices (Rizvi, 2004). Such Western influences on knowledge generation practices often pose challenges for researchers from non-West contexts in fully understanding the research issues associated with employing Western methodologies. The challenges are due to differences in cultural values, beliefs and norms as well as differences in orientation to research.

Each society is unique in character and it has specific knowledge needs that are culturally appropriate. Therefore, we agree with the argument that societal knowledge is crucial and an essential contributory factor for an education that is locally appropriate and globally acceptable (Ma Rhea, 2004). Research as a knowledge creation tool/process offers the direction in which a society moves for its educational innovation and development. Therefore, research needs to reflect societal or contextual knowledge (Papoutsaki, 2006). With this understanding, in this paper, we present our reflections on challenges we encountered in doing educational research in the Bangladesh context by using West-generated methodology. We are sharing our experiences because we found that there is a lack of well-documented context specific information regarding educational research.
methodology; our shared experiences may be used by future researchers as a point of reference in doing educational research adapting Western methodology in an Asian context. We also believe that this paper will complement West-dominated knowledge (specifically in relation to educational research methodology); and we see this process of complementing as being at the centre of what Kuan-Hsing Chen (2010) called “Asia as Method”. Our understanding of “Asia as method” is the theoretical frame for this paper (figure 1), which we present in the following section. We then will present an overview of the educational research context in Bangladesh discussing the challenges of using a Western research methodology in the Bangladesh context. We will end our paper with some concluding remarks.

**Asia as Method**

Within academia, many Asian scholars find an incongruous hegemony of the Western knowledge over the East. As the Western context-driven knowledge is not always appropriate for the Eastern contexts, especially for the Asian contexts, they recognize the importance of context-based knowledge instead of the inappropriate influence of the West, and consequently, they are getting more engaged in identifying more contextually suitable knowledge, and approaches to produce knowledge that are elicited from the Asian contexts. The Asian scholar Chen (2010), for example, speaks about the usefulness of the approach, “Asia as Method”, in knowledge production. This refers to the idea that Asia can be recognized as an imaginary anchoring point for producing new knowledge as well as a unique point of reference. “Asia as Method”, according to Chen (2010), can be considered as a self-reflexive movement to examine problems and issues emerging out of our experiences while we are using interventions in our various localities in Asia. Many of us have diverse intellectual and academic backgrounds. That is why we all feel that something important and worthwhile is emerging out of the intense dialogues we are undertaking among ourselves and with others. “Asia as method” helps us to think through some of these intellectual concerns, priorities and processes.

“Asia as method”, as proposed by Chen (2010), is an attempt to move forward on the trilateral challenges of decolonization, de-imperialization, and de-Cold War. Historically, imperialization, colonization, and the Cold War are very complexly related structures, which have shaped and conditioned intellectual knowledge production all over the world. Through “Asia as method”, any country or society belonging to Asia could be inspired to deal with problems (or similar problems) that are already dealt with successfully by other societies in Asia. As a result, we can overcome our unproductive anxieties and develop new paths of knowledge production in the complex structure of decolonization, deimperialization, and de-Cold War. Having said that, it is difficult to confine “Asia as method” to a single definition since it is still an emerging and unsettled issue in research. “Asia as method” is not a self-explanatory proposition. It could be, for example a theory, a methodology, or a research issue that has originated from, been used in, adopted or
modified for an Asian context. However, we often deal with challenges to apply, adopt or adapt a Western theory or methodology in Asian contexts. In applying or adopting any theory or methodology we have to be aware of the context of Asia. Asia is somewhat different from the other parts of the world, in terms of cultural practices. “Asia as method”, therefore, is a different terminology that represents research that is purely, or not so purely, adopted or modified for research in Asia. To us, it is not simply a method; it is an epistemological standpoint through which we understand what we observe in our practice in Asia.

We suggest that there are four categories of scholars who talk about knowledge production in the Asian contexts. The first group comprises with those who try to directly follow Western methodologies and thinking in knowledge production in the Asian contexts. The second group includes those who are keen to use Asian knowledge in producing knowledge in the Asian contexts. The third group is interested in transferring Asian knowledge to the West. Nguyen, et al. (2009), for example, observed that Western societies have shown some interest in learning from non-Western nations, who belong to the third group. And the fourth group consists of those scholars who like to see negotiation and/or dialogue between the West and the East in knowledge generation in the Asian contexts. The authors of this paper belong to the fourth group.

As mentioned earlier, Western knowledge presides over the world due to its socio-economic and political superiority, which has a long backdrop of colonization, globalization, and the Cold War. Asian researchers, like we from other non-West nations, have in the past built our knowledge by pursuing what the West suggests is important. We then apply this West-oriented approach in Asian contexts for the purpose of extracting knowledge that is situated locally. This process, however, is very challenging due to the differences in cultural and historical traditions between the West and Asia. To address these challenges the researchers who are the authors of this paper have modified our West-based approach to better suit local values and cultures. That is, we negotiate our role through making a dialogue between Western knowledge and the local reality or situation. This in fact facilitates a modified approach that is not exclusively Western or Asian but a complementary approach to each other. This is a cyclic process and follows the same path each time but it makes and adds new knowledge to the knowledge world. To our understanding, this process of making new or complementary knowledge through a negotiation or dialogue between the West and the Asia is “Asia as Method”. We consider this dialogue has a strong potential to generate valid knowledge in the Asian contexts. Thus, “Asia as method” is an epistemological stance to us through which we make sense of our world through a negotiation between Western knowledge and our experience. Figure 1 describes our understanding of our epistemological stance.
We acknowledge that every aspect of our lives including education in Asia has been influenced by colonization, globalization (Tahman, 2007; Tsui & Tollefson 2007) and the Cold War as part of the current world economy and politics. That is, the hegemony of the West over world knowledge is a consequence of colonization and globalization as well as the Cold War. In these circumstances, we believe that a dialogue between the West and the Asia is absolutely necessary. Our paper is an attempt to contribute to this process, which we hope in turn, will complement Western knowledge.

Education and Educational Research Context in Bangladesh

Bangladesh, a developing country, belongs to the South Asia region. Along with other parts of South Asia, Bangladesh was a British colony from 1757 A.D. to 1947 A.D. Although we have a great history of educational institutions (such as Nalonda University), the formal, institutionalized modern education system was introduced by the colonizer after 1854 (see Nurullah & Naik, 1951). Till now, our education system has largely followed British (and other English speaking countries) education systems in educational innovations and reforms. Educational research to produce local wisdom or locally suitable innovations has not been valued or promoted by the society. Of the little research that have been conducted in academic institutions, most is traditional in character and directed by a positivist philosophy; it is characterized by questionnaire surveys, short visits to schools, quantitative data and interpretation (Begum, Zinnah, & Alam, 2002). Most education

Figure 1. Conceptualising “Asia as method”
reform initiatives in the country have been backed by foreign aid agencies in association with the
government. The country relies on organizations like the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank
and other UN organizations for most of its aid and has to follow their recommended strategies for
doing research that is basically to accomplish their agendas. These international organizations tend
to set their own agendas, which are derived from Western expertise, knowledge and approaches.
From our experiences in working with many donor funded research projects, we see that in the
implementation of educational innovation in Bangladesh, Western consultants seem to playing the
leading roles with little or no knowledge about the cultural context of the country. Often, only
superficial, small-scale studies are conducted prior to the implementation of imported innovations.
Modifications that are made to consider the issue of “cultural fit” lack sufficiency. As a
consequence, the Bangladeshi education system enjoys few benefits from reform or innovation
endeavors. Rather, as suggested by Crossley and Vulliamy (1996), when international consultants
with limited cross-cultural experiences of the locality get involved, cultural imperialism continues to
take place in different forms.

Evidence suggests that the major attainment in the education of Bangladesh is limited to
quantitative expansion (product); however, the quality is still far from being achieved (process).
This is not surprising as Vulliamy (1990) found that major World Bank evaluation studies in non-
Western countries are heavily influenced by traditional input-output research designs, which have
been proved to be nearly always inefficient or misleading. That is, aid-assisted de-contextualized
education reform has not been performing well towards real change in Bangladesh. It is argued that
quantitative techniques can bring some benefits to the developing countries, e.g., by providing
overall information, nonetheless they cannot be sufficient for in-depth knowledge that is essential
for proper decision-making. Rather, context focused research, e.g., a qualitative/constructivist
approach can be efficient for generating valid knowledge (Vulliamy, Lewin, & Stephens, 1990) in a
developing Asian country like Bangladesh. Moreover, reliance on dialogue between researchers
and consultants from both West and non-West context (Bangladesh) and emphasis on respect for
cultural factors can contribute to real change (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1996) in education sector in
Bangladesh.

**Challenges of using Western Research Methodology in Bangladesh Context**

This section presents some of the challenges in conducting educational research in
Bangladesh. Two major questions have been addressed here: what are the challenges people
encounter doing educational research, and, secondly, how do they overcome the challenges – by
using an adaptation process or by finding a unique way rooted in local context? We, the five
educational researchers from Bangladesh, as the authors of this paper, encountered numerous
challenges in doing educational research in the Bangladesh context. We encountered different
challenges in different steps of our research. However, in this paper we focus only on the step of
data collection. Our knowledge of research methodology has developed following Western methods and approaches to educational research. However, we are well aware of the cultural context of Bangladesh where we were born and brought-up. Therefore, we were able to overcome the challenges we faced.

Data for this paper have been drawn from our experiences. To make sense of these data, we have documented our individual experiences first, and then we have identified the commonalities among them. In the next step, we reflect on these shared/common experiences and try to find out the possible reasons behind the challenges/issues. We use a descriptive method in reporting the findings below.

Getting permission for collecting data

Ethical issues are codes of professional conduct for researchers (Creswell, 2009). As a part of addressing the ethical issues in research planning and implementation process (Mertens, 1998), researchers seek a permission letter from the respective authorities who work as gatekeepers to access to the information. Given this process, we sought a general permission letter from the respective authorities in Bangladesh for our academic studies. The permission letter usually accompanied a letter for inviting the target participants to join voluntarily in each researcher’s study. However, we faced challenges in obtaining this permission letter and these are presented in the following cases.

(a) Case 1: Slow bureaucratic process and doubt about information trafficking.

One of the challenges I faced in getting permission for collecting data was the slow bureaucratic process maintained in the administrative offices in Bangladesh. For example, in following the administrative processes maintained in government offices in Bangladesh, I prepared an application letter to the head of the administrative office; the head was a gatekeeper and had the power to say “yes” or “no” to me. In the bureaucratic process, the application needs to be authorized by a director before proceeding to the head. However, I found difficulty in finding the appropriate director for the authorization as there were a number of directors in the administrative office. I was sent to many of them and found that they were not the appropriate person. After several days, fortunately, I got the appropriate director, but he had no time to listen to my need. After convincing his personal secretary, I got to talk to him. After listening to the explanations about my intended research, the director expressed his doubt about “information trafficking” as the research was being conducted with a foreign university. I explained to the officer that I was conducting this research for my academic purposes and no foreign funding was associated with my research. Whilst the purpose and associated funding of my research were clearly described in my application to get the permission letter, it did not seem to be sufficient; rather my verbal communication with the officer helped me in his authorizing my application and issuing the permission letter.

(b) Case 2: Unwillingness to issue a permission letter.

I sent all the documents including an explanatory statement of my intended research to the person who was the key to providing access to study participants at the research sites. This person said that he was too busy to read the explanatory statement and issue a permission letter. I politely tried to convince him by e-mails and later in person. Without reading any of
my documents and listening to me, this person in authority made the decision not to issue the permission letter, which put me in trouble. Finally, I was able to obtain the permission by convincing one of the friends of the key person who requested him to issue the permission letter.

According to Western research methodologies, while ethical issues are an important part of research and gaining a permission letter from the gatekeepers is one of the important ethical procedures (Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 1998, 2005), the above two cases demonstrate how this sort of procedure is far from straightforward in a non-West context where the concept of research is still at a very primary stage. It is a challenge for academic researchers to obtain this sort of permission from the relevant authority in Bangladesh. If any researcher follows the Western process for obtaining a permission letter from the key authority, it presents considerable challenges. The researcher needs to understand the cultural phenomenon and needs to apply local knowledge and culturally appropriate wisdom.

These two cases also exemplify how the slow bureaucratic process maintained in Bangladesh costs huge amount of time and labour to manage permission from the gatekeepers. Moreover, the first of the above two cases illustrates how in Bangladesh, getting access to information sources for research for researchers, particularly those studying at foreign universities, seems more challenging because of a fear of losing foreign funding. As in many other developing countries, in Bangladesh, research in the field of various social sciences including education is conducted with funds from foreign agencies. The Bangladeshi authorities are often concerned with disclosing data that they believe might dissatisfy authorities from foreign funding agencies which may, in turn, impede foreign funds.

Minimizing power relations

Doing educational research involving human subjects (e.g., teachers, learners etc.) is not a clearly defined process, rather it is full of complexity and obstacles. As a consequence, often researchers need to be flexible in their research approach. Power relations are a part of complexity that often the researchers have to negotiate. It is well documented in the literature (e.g., Creswell, 2009; Mertens, 2005) how a researcher needs to negotiate the power relations at different stages of a research process, right from gaining access to setting through data collection to report writing or publishing.

In this particular study, we consider two cases, as presented below, to describe how we dealt with power relation at different phases of our data collection.

(c) Case 3: Recruiting and interviewing participants

I had a challenge to minimize power relations while collecting data. Being from a faculty in a well-known university, I was able to convince teachers to participate in my research. The problem was, some of them agreed to participate in the study because they did not want to disappoint me although they were not really committed from their heart. What I had to do is,
I recruited more participants than I needed, then I continued with the actual committed participants. I had to build rapport with teachers and students before conducting interviews. I was seen as a stranger to them (especially in the rural areas) at first because of my position in the society. Even teachers were nervous in talking about the ‘right’ things; particularly when I talked about the values they promoted in the classroom. I took two simple strategies; first, I used the fact that I was born and brought up in a remote and rural area and my father was a teacher too. Second, I had to start with very simple everyday matters with teachers and students before going deeper into the relevant discussions.

(d) Case 4: Gaining access to research setting.

At the district level, the district education officer (DEO) was the first gatekeeper for my study who had the authority to control my access to the research site I had chosen. Before gaining access to the research setting, I had to discuss my role with the DEO based on a prior negotiation, first, as a university academic and an ex-national consultant and then as a PhD researcher (being enrolled in a foreign university). On the first day of our meeting, the gatekeeper welcomed me formally due to my previous roles and due to social and cultural norms. On the next morning, after completing the official procedure, the officer offered me a lift to the very first school. I accepted the offer happily, as I was entirely new and not familiar with travelling options. We were three persons in the car including the driver (say, Mr. X). On the way to the school, one sentence from our conversation caught my attention which was, “...we will take you to a school which is not far from the guest house and also a good school; you can see some teachers are doing well after training”. Instantly, I realized two “noble” purposes of the authority. One was to save me from the discomfort of travelling in a rural area, a gesture of respect to my positional and perhaps gender role. Another was to demonstrate to me how the ‘particular school’ was a good school or in other words, particular teachers were good teachers, because I was considered as a representative of a specific project (my previous position). They imagined that the school would receive the blessings of a good report by me.

At the end of the day, I started to build rapport with the gatekeeper from a very informal level to re-negotiate my role in gaining better access to valid data. My focus was to make them clear about the purpose of my presence, whether my work would have any negative impact upon them and on the intended participants of the study. In this process, I tried to minimize my previous roles and establish a researcher’s role that was entirely non-harmful to them. It took the first two-three days to build up a trustworthy relationship. By the end of the first round visit, the gatekeeper welcomed me cordially as a researcher.

In this context, the researcher’s positional/previous role shaped the gatekeeper’s as well as participants’ function; the researcher had to play down her/his role for the purpose of getting valid data. In turn, the gatekeeper had to re-negotiate his/her role by giving up his/her ‘hidden’ objectives. This illustrates a long cultural tradition in which power relations or a bureaucratic hierarchy matter. Hague (1997) for example, argues that, in non-Western developing countries, bureaucracy is the state’s dominating feature that symbolizes the continuation of colonial legacy. The minimization of power-dependent relations was crucial for us to generate justifiable knowledge. Simply dependence on explanatory statements and maintaining an objective role (by the researcher), to avoid possible bias was not successful in this context. The researcher had to value the local context and use viable strategies.
Recruiting intended participants

Most of us have encountered challenges in recruiting intended participants especially in the case of purposive sampling. Here we present one of our experiences related to this challenge.

(e) Case 5: A Tendency to show the desirable picture.

I intended to capture different understandings/constructs of science values from teachers and students of various backgrounds such as experienced/less experienced teachers, male and female teachers, urban/rural teachers and students, classrooms from high achieving schools/low achieving schools etc. One suitable method to get these variations of participants is maximum variation sampling technique, in which a variety of cases are intentionally selected (Flick, 2002; Patton, 1990; Wellington, 2000). To select participant from various backgrounds, I first chose schools from rural and urban areas, high and low performing schools, then I wanted to select teachers and students with varied background and experiences. When I attempted to select an experienced teacher from an urban school, the head teacher insisted that I select someone whom he thought to be a good teacher. He was so assertive that I had to select a less experienced teacher nominated by him. I experienced the same issue in the second school. To overcome this situation, I decided to contact and talk to the teachers first, and then received permission from the head teachers. In this way I was able to overcome the problem – I was able to recruit participants with varied backgrounds and experiences.

I have faced similar challenges when recruiting the students for Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The class teacher wanted good performing students to participate, whereas I wanted to recruit students of different abilities and performance. Then I compromised with my plan; I recruited half of the required students nominated by the class teachers and then selected half of the required students according to my initial plan to collect richer data. The same challenge was also experienced by another researcher and the same strategy was implemented by him as well.

From the above experiences, it is apparent that gatekeepers at the schools (i.e. head teachers and teachers) wanted to nominate participants for research. The only explanation for their behaviour is that they wanted to show the outside world (to researchers and others) that they are doing their job efficiently. Although we informed them that we will not mention their name or the institution’s name, they were worried that their weaknesses would be exposed if we select bad performing teachers and students and, they might get into trouble with parents and/or higher authorities. Their concerns/worries lead us to two historical and socio-cultural aspects. First, head teachers and teachers see research as an evaluation of their performances and they do not have a clear idea of academic research. Second, gate keepers’ worries about their performances might be rooted with our historical practices; performances of teachers and schools have been evaluated by school inspectors (now academic supervisors) since the British colonial period.

Using survey questionnaires

Many of us confronted some challenges while administering survey questionnaires in the Bangladeshi context. Here we present two of our cases.

(f) Case 6: Informing participants the terminologies used in the questionnaire.

I planned to use a questionnaire to get an overview of implemented school science curriculum in Bangladesh from a scientific literacy perspective. Because of the time-saving
and economical benefit of mailed questionnaires (Creswell, 2008, 2009), initially, I planned to mail the questionnaires to the respondents. However, I reflected on how my conceptions of scientific literacy shaped by Western literature might be different from those of the teacher respondents in Bangladesh. Moreover, it was unlikely that they would be familiar with the term “scientific literacy”. On the basis of these reflections, I changed my plan from using mailed questionnaire to arranging several workshops for in-service teachers. The workshops were designed in two phases. In the first phase, I presented a worldwide scenario of school science curriculum from a scientific literacy perspective and discussed their experiences of science curriculum with teachers from this perspective. In this manner, they were introduced to the terminology. In the second phase, teachers were invited to complete the questionnaire.

(g) Case 7: Presenting the questionnaire according to the participants' background.

I used a Likert-type questionnaire with the purpose of determining secondary students’ attitudes towards science. This study was also conducted in Bangladesh. In this quantitative study I felt that the students might have problem with the concept and the questions regarding attitudes towards science as the questionnaire I prepared was based on Western literature. As a first step, I translated the questionnaire into the participants’ language (Bengali). In the data collection stage, I gave the questionnaires to the participants and read out and explained each question. I asked the participants to respond to each question after my explanation of each question. After the participants had returned all the questionnaires, I talked to each of the participants to determine their opinion on the strategy I had followed. They provided positive feedback and they also said that this strategy helped them considerably in understanding the questions and in answering them.

Although the questionnaires in both the cases above clearly stated that teachers'/students’ own perspectives would be valued and that there were no right or wrong answers, both of the researchers noticed that the participants still seemed to want to search for the “right”/”desirable”/”positively valued” answers. One explanation for this phenomenon might be, as is the case in many Asian countries, the examination-driven education system of Bangladesh, where “right” or “wrong” answers are valued. In order to respond to this issue, both researchers started by discussing with the participants their intentions in using the questionnaire and their expectations of them as participants.

In these two cases whilst the researchers had a perception that a clear statement of purpose in the questionnaire would be enough for notifying participants about their roles, their physical presence allowed them to identify the respondents’ tendency to want to provide a desirable answer rather than expressing their own views. The researchers’ verbal communication with the participants seemed sufficient to overcome this challenge.

While Western methodologies seem to suggest that a clear statement of purpose in questionnaires is enough to elicit a voluntary response from intended participants and mailed questionnaires have much benefit in saving money and time, the researchers found some uncertainties in obtaining valid data through these processes. As a result, the method of collecting data responded to the challenges with which the researchers were confronted.
Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed the different challenges in collecting data in academic research in the context of Bangladesh when following a Western research approach. The challenges we faced included difficulties in getting permission letters from key authorities, recruiting intended participants, using survey questionnaires and minimizing power relations (such as, between researchers and participants).

We argue that the scenarios presented in this paper are mostly related to our inherited culture due to colonization and the influence of contemporary international politics. Bangladesh was a colony of the British Empire for nearly two hundred years. The centuries-long colonization process has played a central role in moulding the culture that is reflected in everyday deeds in the society. As we indicated in the above section, the challenges we faced were mainly because of two possible reasons: (a) participants’ and gatekeepers’ limited conceptions about research, and (b) fear of information transfer. Participants and gatekeepers (e.g., directors, head teachers) involved in our studies see research as an evaluation of their performances because they do not have a clear idea about the purpose of research; their experience has generally been limited to the studies designed to evaluate the success or failure of projects implemented by government and funded by donor agencies. Their incomplete knowledge about the background of research then leads to fear of failure and punishment. This is arguably a legacy of our colonial past. As in the British colonial period teachers and school performances were monitored by school inspectors visiting the schools, teachers’ mind setup is strongly influenced by this experience of being evaluated and consequently they become fear of being evaluated by researcher when they respond to researchers’ request to participate in their research.

In our studies we also faced challenges because gatekeepers such as the Director General of the Ministry of Education did not trust us as they assumed us to be working for the West. They feared that important information might be trafficked to the West, which in turn would be used against our national interest. Again we argue that their distrust of the West was developed through our colonial past when the British East India Company came to the Indian sub-continent to do business but later on started political activities, captured the political power and ruled the Indian sub-continent for nearly 200 years. This fear of being ruled or deceived by others consequently generated distrust of the West.

From the above discussion, we see that Bangladesh’s colonial past and present global politics after colonization continue to shape our mindset about research. Nonetheless, the authors of this paper take the position that whether we like it or not we cannot avoid the domination of the West in knowledge production and transfer because of its socio-economic and political supremacy and also because of the fact that Western knowledge and methodology have been established thorough a vigorous research process. Moreover, knowledge is not fixed; it cannot be located in a
particular domain and controlled by any single actor; rather it is emergent and embedded in socio-cultural processes (Styhre, 2003). At this stage, generating culturally grounded knowledge and research methodology in Asian contexts would be more significant to understand the socio-cultural processes in Asia according to Chen (2010). As it would take more time, money and effort to originate culturally grounded knowledge and methodology and we cannot avoid the influence of Western knowledge and methodology, we would like to instigate a dialogue between the West and the East to adapt Western research methodology to be more culturally appropriate in non-West local contexts in general and Asia in particular.

In conclusion, we urge that it is time to increase the number of meeting points for Asian scholars, especially in Asia, which is what Chen (2010) encourages Asian scholars to do. Thus, in line with Chen (2010), “Asia as Method” may become a common platform for scholars to think about Asia. “Asia as method” is obviously not a slogan but a practice, which begins with multiplying the sources of our research-readings to include the knowledge produced in Asia. “Asia as method” is local but also has the quality of being trans-border, regional, and even intercontinental. Finally, we firmly agree with Chen’s (2010) assertion that one Asian society may benefit from another Asian society’s experience of dealing with similar issues. We hope that our experience of applying West-originated research methods in Bangladesh context will act as a guide or point of reference to researchers in other Asian contexts.
References


