

Postmethod Pedagogy and Iranian EFL Teachers' Understandings: Is a Promising Trend on the Way?

Nasser Rashidi

Professor of TEFL, Shiraz University, Iran

Nurullah Mansourzadeh

Ph.D. Candidate in TEFL, Shiraz University, Iran

Received: January 17, 2017; **Accepted:** May 10, 2017

Abstract

The profession of second language teaching has experienced fundamental fluctuations in both theory and practice. With its own proponents and opponents, the postmethod was considered as the practical and reasonable solution to the limitations of the confining concept of the method. The purpose of this qualitative study was to elicit nonnative EFL teachers' viewpoints and perceptions regarding postmethod pedagogy. In fact, the researchers were interested to know about nonnative EFL teachers' perceptions of postmethod condition regarding their own context and needs. Selected based on purposive sampling procedure, the participants of this study were 10 nonnative EFL teachers categorized into three groups based on their teaching experience. The participants took part in semi-structured interviews and they were asked a series of questions to elicit their perceptions and interpretations of postmethod. The results of the study revealed some rays of hope in some cases, though not promising in a full manner. In other words, although nonnative EFL teachers could not mention the postmethod principles explicitly, they showed a logical understanding of postmethod pedagogy tenets and its applications in their teaching practices and procedures. The results of this study can help teacher educators design more effective teacher education courses and in-service programs to enhance nonnative EFL teachers' viewpoints and perceptions regarding postmethod pedagogy and its implications in language teaching and learning processes.

Keywords: language teaching, method, nonnative EFL teachers, perceptions, postmethod pedagogy

Corresponding author: Nasser Rashidi (naser.rashidi@shirazu.ac.ir)

INTRODUCTION

According to Brown (2000), in the early and mid of twentieth century, language teaching and learning methods and approaches have undergone radical changes to satisfy the thirst of different researchers and practitioners in searching for the best replacement for the limited and limiting concept of the method. After experiencing dissatisfaction with the concept of method, these people realized that there was no single best method or approach of language teaching and learning to provide the best and comprehensive framework to bring about success in different student learning in different contexts with different needs, wants and situations. In addition, some learners appeared to be successful regardless of the method or techniques were employed in their classrooms. As a result, a revolution in stakeholders' conceptualizations was necessary to take place in the realm of EFL. Though not completely accepted and welcome, the academic discourse declared the disappearance (death) of methods and celebrated the birth of new era called postmethod. The postmethod debate tried to wipe the concept of method out of the academic argument and open new windows for innovations in the language teaching and learning processes. Though postmethod accomplished this mission theoretically well, its practical counterpart that is, methodology, what happens in classroom in practice, is still there and has not been disappeared from many classroom practitioners' discourses (Bell, 2007).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Postmethod Pedagogy

During the last two decades, the main concern of the experts in the field of education in general and language teaching in particular, has been finding solutions to the emerging problems of language teaching and learning. This trend has facilitated disappearance of method and the birth of new era called postmethod (Bell, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2006a). The crucial reason for such a change can be traced to the discourse of academic community and their interpretation and understanding of drawbacks and limitations of the concept of method. In fact, educational and language practitioners came to this conclusion that methods were no longer conducive tools for conducting different classes with different wants, needs and situations (Mackey, 1965; Prabhu, 1990; Rivers, 1991; Smith, 1970; Stern, 1985).

The trend in the process of language teaching has been called the postmethod era, because its building blocks and principles are considered a complete departure from traditional views to modernity. There have been different definitions regarding postmethod pedagogy. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006a), the postmethod era is a demanding situation that awakens us to rebuild and review the methods and approaches in the realm of language teaching as well as teacher education systems. It necessitates us to restructure the content and reshape of our classrooms, and change the traditional views regarding pedagogical and ideological orientations. It forces us to delineate new plans, redefine our teacher education programs and redesign the relationship between theory and practice.

As Kumaravadivelu (2001) puts it, the term pedagogy has been interpreted with a broad and including sense, that covers different aspects of learning and teaching features such as classroom activities and realizations, the syllabus objectives, curriculum concerns and aims and assessment procedures as well as an expanded range of background, socio-cultural and political experiences and manifestations that can be traced in different phases of education directly or indirectly. He adds that within this framework, postmethod pedagogy has three main principles: particularity, practicality, and possibility. A comprehensive discussion of salient features of each of these terms is provided below, indicating how they interweave and interact with each other.

Pedagogy of Particularity

According to Kumaravadivelu (2001), regarding the demands of post method pedagogy, localization as well as demarginalization of all stakeholders involved is very important. He adds that there must be a harmony between specific groups of participants, seeking particular objectives in a specific context with specific future horizons. According to Akbari (2008), regarding the principle of particularity, the context in which the stakeholders are operating is very important.

Khatib and Fat'hi (2012) emphasize that as far as the parameter of particularity is concerned, the crucial role of the present context with the present practitioners is highlighted, that is, what Kumaravadivelu (2006a) calls "situational understanding" (p.171). By considering the stance of this parameter as a challenging factor, L2 practitioners, policy makers, curriculum developers and syllabus designers will include all of

the regional, contextual and local factors in their activities to make the process of language teaching and learning as appropriate as possible. As Rashidi and Khajavi (2014) pointed out, the particularity parameter is the main concern of the post method teachings that highlights the role of context as crucial and demanding element toward a meaningful pedagogy.

As Elliott (1993) claims, a meaningful pedagogy should offer a holistic interpretation of all those active elements that are helpful to the context in which we want to make decisions. Kumaravadivelu (2001) argues that, politics and pedagogy are the same regarding locality and specialty, since one cannot prescribe any of them for the entire world needs and if local demands are ignored, practitioners and agents have been marginalized from the very context of the classroom. Coleman (1996) puts it in a nutshell and says pedagogies that ignore lived experiences will ultimately prove to be “so disturbing for those affected by them so threatening to their belief systems that hostility is aroused and learning becomes impossible” (p. 11). Kumaravadivelu (2001) adds that, based on pedagogic considerations, particularity emphasizes the dialogic relationship of goals and processes.

Practitioners work for and through particularity to achieve their goals. Goals and means interact in a progressive mood to reach the stated and unstated objectives. All the practitioners are agents, that is, they are not passive and receivers of the others' ideas, they play their own roles and fulfill their own shares, although not lion ones. Particularity demands a consciousness-raising movement on the part of all practitioners to think critically and act locally. One can observe the manifestation of particularity parameter in process of action research carried out by practicing teachers, either individually or collectively, monitoring their teaching procedures, appraising the results, detecting barriers, offering suggestions and trying different ways to reach a satisfactory answer and this cycle continues. Such a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge. In other words, the appropriate place in which we can observe the unification and interrelatedness as well as needs-analysis procedure of contexts and practitioners' agency is particularity parameter.

Finally, particularity, as Becker (1986) succinctly puts it, is not the starting point. Particularity is our destination that we achieve by

rehearsing and repeating. We learn it from its very existence. We touch it when we feel it.

Pedagogy of Practicality

Practicality is the bridge that connects theory and practice to each other. In fact, the parameter of practicality is the main place in which we can see the agency of teachers. The unequal power and status between experts and teachers has been the major challenge of the concept of method. One of the challenging issues of language teaching and learning has been the mismatch between what theorists say and what teachers do in their classrooms. The main concern of the pedagogy of practicality is to compensate this drawback and make logical relationship between theory and practice (Rashidi & Khajavi, 2014).

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006b), the aim of the pedagogy of practicality is to endow both researchers and teachers equal roles and power in decision-making. It tries to resuscitate those abilities and authorities in teachers to decide based on their own context and consider local issues in their classrooms. Many theorist and experts in the field of language teaching and learning have discussed theory/practice dichotomy in detail and differentiated between professional theories and personal ones.

According to O'Hanlon (1993), professional theories are those top-down ones that prescribed by policy makers, curriculum developers and syllabus designers and are generally transmitted from centers of higher learning. Personal theories on the other hand, are teacher generated ones that emerged according to teachers' knowledge, experiences and action research findings based on employing professional theories in different contexts and locations in which they (teachers) are on the job. As Khatib and Fat'hi (2012) argue, in the framework of post method discipline, local teachers should demarginalize themselves from entrenched theories and prescriptions imposed from outside experts and play their own roles based on the context and the students' needs and wants. To be as effective as possible, teachers should investigate new channels and try new methods that will shorten the distance of success of their students and not just copy whatever other people say without realizing the very context and situation of learning and teaching.

As Kumaravadivelu (2006a) rightly puts it, the parameter of practicality highlights the importance of teachers' thinking, stance,

perception and estimation of the context. This parameter relates the practitioners' background knowledge and experiences to their present situations and paves the way for sound decisions based on the needs, wants and concerns of the learners. Separation of theory and practice has had a harmful effect and consequences because these two concepts are the two sides of the same coin that mutually interact and inform each other. So, one cannot deny the dialectical praxis existing between theory and practice (Elliott, 1991; Freeman, 1998).

According to Van Manen (1991), regarding the pedagogy of practicality, thought and action work hand in hand. These two act as a unified body in a dialogic and cyclic manner. Here, words and action speak together in a tight way and feed each other toward the same goals. The teachers who work in this domain must reflect and understand what works well and what does not and identify the problematic areas and try to alleviate them through action research, narrative stories and reflective teaching. Practicality awakens teachers and the other practitioners to decide based on their awareness and intuition and make ongoing decisions when confronting with unpredictable and unexplainable situations.

Van Manen (1977) refers to this awareness simply as maturation. In other words, teachers' understanding grows over time as they learn to overcome a range of obstacles and become well prepared, sensitive to learners' needs and expectations, and familiar with different theories of assessment as well as professional and other related factors. Kumaravadivelu (2001) emphasizes that teachers' awareness means that the teachers' responsibility is not only maximizing different learning opportunities for their pupils, but also preparing them for understanding and generalizing those opportunities from the microcosm (classroom) to the macrocosm (sociopolitical situation) outside the realities of the classroom walls. Regarding this reality, the third important element (possibility) emerges to fulfill and complete the mission of the previous parameters.

Pedagogy of Possibility

Many experts believe that the idea of pedagogy of possibility is traced back to Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. General educationists such as Simon (1988) and Giroux (1988), and TESOL practitioners such as Auerbach (1995) and Benesch (2001), argue that any pedagogy carries

the relationship between power and dominance of special group or party to keep social and power inequalities.

According to Kumaravadivelu (2001), the pedagogy of possibility helps all the language practitioners to reach the level of thinking in matters of race, social class, power, and dominance and encourages them to question the status quo and try to improve the present situation by negotiation and cooperation. In the words of Giroux (1988), the pedagogy of possibility empowers the participants to think critically and point to “the need to develop theories, forms of knowledge, and social practices that work with the experiences that people bring to the pedagogical settings” (p. 134).

According to Pennycook (1989), the concept of method is laden with an interested knowledge and it is not neutral towards different social norms, values and ideologies. Thus, postmethod is a revolution against this routine to free the practitioners from dominance and rectify those social inequalities and imbalances in the classrooms as well as in societies. According to Akbari (2008), the parameter of possibility relates language teaching and learning to socio-political affairs. Here, the practitioner's voice is heard and their roles as agents in the real world are highlighted. The students and teachers' consciousness is raised toward social problems such as inequality, racism, unequal distributions of power and human rights.

Based on Khatib and Fat'hi (2012), the parameter of possibility provides a broader context for language teaching profession and considers social aspects as well as political responsibility of language practitioners. According to this viewpoint, L2 profession is taking new roles and stances according to the needs and situations of all practitioners. Postmethod pedagogy considers L2 practice as a tool to help all the people involved to gain new identities, share new thoughts, shape new personalities and explore new people with new cultures. Thus, parameter of possibility tries to help learners accept and develop the value of critical thinking as a vehicle for expressing their inside feelings and thoughts.

To put it in other way, the purpose of L2 teaching should not be just linguistic features but it should consider social as well and political issues in all stages of language teaching and learning. Thus, all the contextual and local aspects as well as global issues should be considered simultaneously.

As Kumaravadivelu (2006a) maintains, in the postmethod era, we see a radical shift in the relations of teachers and theorizers, which encourages teachers toward autonomy and empowerment. Based on the gained insights, teachers try to be critical thinkers and train critical learners. As Weedon (1987) clearly points out, language is the place where one can shape his/her real or probable future. Our social and political orientations are formed through using language in different contexts. Thus, we can construct our world through our word and this is the beauty of any language. In fact, the parameter of possibility tries to bring language, culture, society, and identity together to make all the practitioners aware of the realities beyond the confined walls of the classroom.

The Postmethod Learner

Since the main purpose of this article is to investigate the postmethod challenges on the Iranian EFL teachers' orientations and understanding, we give a very brief discussion of postmethod learners. As Kumaravadivelu (2001) argues, the main purpose of postmethod pedagogy is to train independent and autonomous learners. Holec (1988) highlights two kinds of autonomies: academic autonomy and social autonomy. Whereas the former refers to the process of learning, the latter is dealt with the matter of interaction. We can call the first one intrapersonal and the second interpersonal.

Based on Kumaravadivelu (2001), although learning and interactional autonomies are leading factors and encourage learners to develop their full potentialities in classroom milieu, a very demanding element is absent here that is, the sense of liberation and freedom. In fact, if learning autonomy enables learners to use all the resources appropriately and effectively and academic autonomy encourages learners to work in collaboration with others, critical and reflective thinking is the final product of liberatory autonomy. Thus, liberatory autonomy goes much further than the other two aspects of learner autonomy by actively seeking to help learners recognize sociopolitical impediments to realization of their full human capabilities and by providing them with the intellectual tools necessary to overcome those impediments.

The Postmethod Teacher

Though the postmethod pedagogy has facilitated the process of language learning in several aspects, its practicality has been questioned in several ways. As Rashidi and Khajavi (2014) argue, postmethod is not free of harsh criticisms. The first one refers to the position that postmethod considers for language teachers. Nobody denies placing teachers at the higher level of decision-making processes in language teaching, but it is easier said than done. To summarize, Akbari (2005) argues that in postmethod condition, the practitioners are free to articulate their voices; use their background knowledge and their life experiences are respected and valued. Furthermore, teachers are supposed to have the power and authority to decide based on their learners' needs and context and their own reflection of different situations. According to Akbari (2008), to be actually put into practice, the postmethod pedagogy demands a well-planned and effective teacher education system as well as appropriate mechanisms for removing those challenges and barriers teachers struggling with in their professional lives. Clarke (1994) emphasizes that in the framework of postmethod, teachers play a crucial role in language classrooms and their accountability as problem pausing, critical thinkers and action researchers cannot be ignored. Regarding the practicality parameter of postmethod pedagogy, a lot of educational barriers, social challenges and execution limitations are on the teachers' way to fulfill their missions completely. Even an expert like Kumaravadivelu (2005) is aware of those obstacles and constraints that postmethod will bring about for practitioners, especially for teachers as the main decision-makers in the real situations of the classroom. He refers to two major sources of problems that must be addressed if the postmethod is going to be accepted as the dominant L2 teacher education framework: "Pedagogical barriers and ideological barriers" (pp. 215–223). Pedagogical barriers are concerned with some inveterate set of beliefs and models of teacher education, which refer to "a set of predetermined, preselected, and presequenced body of knowledge from the teacher educator to the prospective teacher" (Kumaravadivelu, 2005, p. 216), and the ideological barriers refer to the mentality of teachers and what they consider as valid and ideal knowledge.

As Akbari (2008) puts it, in postmethod pedagogy local teachers, their skills and experiences have been marginalized. Local practitioners' perceptions and knowledge are not taken seriously in all stages of

education. He adds that postmethod has not provided sound solutions to emerging problems. He argues that even though postmethod has a very strong theoretical foundation, it fails to consider the actualizations and practical aspects of classrooms and hence cannot delineate a bright future. Akbari (2008) harshly criticizes Kumaravadivelu by mentioning that the limitations of textbooks have received a superficial attention in Kumaravadivelu's claims. Akbari believes that we are not teaching in vacuum but we are in real contexts with real learners with different demands and challenges. One can detect an irony here: In the past, little attention was paid to the social relevance and reality of L2 teaching and classroom environments, but now we have an excessive preoccupation with these constructs at the risk of ignoring the constraining realities of the classroom in terms of teachers' responsibilities. As a final point, the lack of appropriate teacher education infrastructure, restricting role of textbooks, tight administrative frameworks, poor payment, the social and professional limitations of teachers, traditional forms of testing, ignoring the novice teachers in the chaos world of postmethod era, and teachers' abilities and differences are among the most important challenges that postmethod practitioners (teachers) are grappling with.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Regardless of the subject matter, searching for the most optimal and convenient method has been the old wish of many teachers. Methods such as Grammar Translation, Audio-Lingual, and Direct, have been the dominant paradigms in many parts of the globe for many years. For many decades, the common belief was that Western educational research could serve as the foundation for educational reforms in many Asian countries (Watkins, 2008). In fact, the West has acted as the model for the rest of the world. When a constructivist-oriented of postmethod replaced a positivist-oriented viewpoint of method, the rest of the world longed this new propaganda without considering the social, political, and cultural needs of this newcomer. The postmethod era was on the way and many people considered it as a cookie cutter, one size that fits all solution, to existing problems of the concept of method (Crandall, 2000). Teachers' understanding of postmethod pedagogy stands out as an appropriate example of the re-conceptualization of best teaching practices, and it deserves to be studied seriously. Since the construct of postmethod has been the dominant discourse in many EFL academic

communities, it is worth devoting time and effort to it in order to discover its hidden potentialities.

Regarding the significance of postmethod pedagogy and its implications on the one hand and lack of empirical studies on nonnative EFL teachers' viewpoints and beliefs on the other hand, the present study tries to highlight the extension of this discourse in the context of Iran. Considering the importance of postmethod pedagogy, two main research questions that guided this study are as:

1. What is nonnative EFL teachers' understanding of postmethod pedagogy?
2. To what extent does such understanding reflect current teaching practices of nonnative EFL teachers?

METHOD

Participants

The participants of this study were 10 Iranian EFL teachers teaching in language institutes in Dehdasht and Shiraz cities, Iran. Their mother tongue was Persian, which was the same as their students' L1. They were selected through purposive sampling (Creswell, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007). According to Dörnyei (2007), in qualitative inquiry, the aim of sampling is to find participants "who can provide rich and varied insights into the phenomenon under investigation so as to maximize what we can learn" (p. 126). Dörnyei believes that this aim is best achieved by applying purposeful/purposive sampling.

The participants of this study were selected through purposeful/purposive sampling based on two main criteria. First, they all had the experience of teaching English as a foreign language to adult learners in the setting of a language institute offering general English courses. Second, they all had passed a Foreign Language Teacher Educations courses (FLTE) in the setting of the study before starting to teach and consequently had received pre-service training in the same context. The participants were categorized into three focus groups. The criterion for grouping the participants was their teaching experience (three teachers in low group, three teachers in medium group, and four teachers in high group), which was based on their teaching level in the teaching setting (elementary, intermediate, and advance, accordingly). The participants' informed consent was obtained before starting data

collection. The three focus groups will henceforth be called High, Mid, and Low based on their teaching experience. Their age ranged between 31 and 52 with the average of 14 years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language. Since the participants were working in private institutes, they wanted to know the reason and purpose behind conducting such a research. To protect ethical issues with human participants, the researchers explained the purpose of the study to the participants and all of them were eager to cooperate with the researchers in the process of interview. Regarding research ethics, their consent was taken into account on part of the researchers. They have been mentioned by their real names in this study. For further information, Table 1 below depicts participants' demographic features:

Table 1: Participants' profiles

Participant	Age	Gender	Year of Experience	University Degree
Ali	50	M	24	MA in TEFL
Kambiz	32	M	9	MA in TEFL
Ruhullah	45	M	17	BA in TEFL
Mahsa	32	F	9	PhD candidate in linguistics
Qodrat	43	M	15	MA in TEFL
Saman	34	M	10	BA in TEFL
Hussein	52	M	25	MA in TEFL
Nazanin	29	F	7	BA in translation
Zahra	31	F	11	MA in linguistics
Mohammad	39	M	13	MA in translation

Instrumentation

The researchers employed interview as the main instrumentation for this study. They invited the participants to sit face to face and asked them the research questions in order to elicit the most related answers. Ten interviews were held with all the participants of the present study. One of the researchers was the interviewer in all interview sessions and managed the participants' comments and perspectives.

Data Collection Procedure

After selecting the participants and categorizing them into three focus groups and before holding the interview sessions, a briefing session was held for each group in order to give the participants some information about the nature of the guided interviews in the panels and to answer all their possible questions about the research project. Likewise, a short briefing was given at the beginning of every interview session to generally introduce the topics and subtopics that were going to be covered in that session. The interviews took place in institutes where the participants taught. Through semi-structured interviews, each participant was asked a series of questions that invited him/her to reflect upon his/her teaching experiences. In semi-structured interviews, according to Merriam (2009),

interview guide includes a mix of more and less structured interview questions; all questions [are] used flexibly; usually specific data [are] required from all respondents; the largest part of interview [is] guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored and [there is] no predetermined wording or order. (p. 89)

Each interview lasted 35 minutes, depending on each interviewee's time. The interviews then were recorded with the permission of the interviewees. All the interviews were recorded, and the audio recordings were organized, labeled, and transcribed. All the transcribed data were examined two times to gain a general understanding of the content and then to conduct detailed content analysis to codify the data and find the emergent themes. The content of the interviews' transcriptions of each focus group was analyzed to find the main themes in the data for each group of participants. A framework was set for finding and labeling the themes. In this framework, the postmethod pedagogy was categorized into its components/elements. In view of this framework, the themes were found and labeled based on the nature of these components. Several

themes emerged from the data in a bottom-up process through inductive data analysis (Creswell, 2009) and each theme was labeled. Then, all these labels were listed and the whole data were carefully analyzed again to verify if any new themes might emerge.

Data Analysis

Following transcribing the recorded files, the researchers reviewed the scripts several times and classified the salient features. In conducting this process, the researchers resorted to categorical indexing since the study was a grounded theory one (Dornyei, 2007). According to Dornyei (2007), "coding in qualitative research is a multi-level procedure, and grounded theory describes a logical, three level system" (p.260). In so doing, first, the researchers broke data into categories (chunks) and assigned conceptual frameworks to data sections (open coding stage). Then, interrelationships between these classifications were identified (axial coding). Finally, these relationships were explained at higher level of abstraction (selective coding) (Dornyei, 2007).

RESULTS

Research Question One

Regarding the EFL teachers' understanding and perceptions of postmethod pedagogy and its requirements, the results of interviews opened new windows of argument. The results showed that though Iranian EFL teachers have understood the rudimentary and basic tenets of postmethod pedagogy, the level of their perception and analysis of postmethod remains a debatable issue. According to the analysis of the obtained results, the main issues and maxims that were highlighted by Iranian EFL teachers are as follow: 1) Postmethod pedagogy means teaching critical thinking. 2) Teaching and learning are inseparable matters. 3) There is no best method; even CLT is not the panacea. 4) Raise the consciousness of your students. 5) Both usage and use are important. 6) Your focus should be on your learners.

Postmethod Pedagogy Means Teaching Critical Thinking

It was interesting that the first issue that the participants referred to was empowering the students with the power of thinking. They emphasized that nurturing the way of thinking is among the most serious challenges of English teachers.

Table 2: Participants' perceptions of different themes of critical thinking

Main theme: Critical thinking: It means	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
To hear students' voices	*		
To empower our students	*	*	*
To Challenge the status quo	*	*	*
To value their feelings and judgments	*	*	

As shown in Table 2, all the participants in the three focus groups argued that, to be successfully executed, the postmethod pedagogy should foster critical thinking as a powerful strategy in learning and take learners' voices and agencies into account. In addition, the participants in the High and Mid groups emphasized on empowering learners, challenging the current situation and valuing students' feelings, while the participants of Low group only referred to empowering the learners and questioning the present situation.

High Group

Researcher: What does postmethod mean to you?

Ruhullah: To hear students' voices.

Ali: To accept learners' roles.

Hussein: Change the current situation.

Qodrat: To consider learners' feelings and emotions.

Mid Group

Researcher: What does postmethod mean to you?

Mohammad: To consider students' influence in the classroom.

Zahra: To change the old traditions.

Saman: To consider humanistic dimensions of our learners.

Low Group

Researcher: What does postmethod mean to you?

Nazanin: Postmethod means moving to a new condition.

Kambiz: To train self-confident students.

Mahsa: I have no idea.

Teaching and Learning Are Inseparable Matters

As Table 3 shows, regarding teaching and learning connection, transferring paradigm, consistency of learners' objectives and teachers' plans and students' involvement, there are similarities between High and Mid groups. In the case of Low group there is an emphasis on understanding students' weaknesses and strengths.

Table 3: participants' perceptions of different themes of teaching and learning connection

Main theme: Teaching and learning connection: It means	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
To transfer rather than transmit	*	*	
To connect teachers' plans and learner objectives	*		*
To involve students in the process of learning	*	*	
To understand their students' weaknesses and strengths	*	*	*

High Group

Researcher: *How are teaching and learning defined in postmethod condition?*

Ruhullah: *We teach for learning in postmethod era.*

Ali: *A teacher should involve students' aims and objective in the process of teaching and learning.*

Hussein: *In my opinion, transferring learning skills is much more important than transmitting a body of knowledge.*

Qodrat: *We should consider students' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as well as students' weaknesses and strengths.*

Mid Group

Researcher: *How teaching and learning are defined in postmethod condition?*

Mohammad: *Students differences should be considered.*

Zahra: *We should consider our learners' roles in the process of decision-making in our classrooms.*

Saman: Our teaching and learning should be meaningful to current situation in which we are operating.

Low Group

Researcher: How teaching and learning are defined in postmethod condition?

Nazanin: Teachers' teaching should be in line with students' wants and needs.

Kambiz: We should realize our students' aims in our teaching process.

Mahsa: We should consider our students' weak and strong points.

There Is No Best Method, Even CLT Is Not the Panacea

As shown in Table 4, Regarding method problems, context-sensitivity, postmethod vagueness, and CLT challenges, only the High group had a high perception of method shortcomings. Considering method deficiencies, the Mid and Low groups did not reveal a high level of understanding.

Table 4: Participants' perceptions of different themes of method shortcomings

Main theme: No best method is there: It means	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
All methods are deficient	*	*	*
Context determines the applicability of method	*	*	
Even postmethod has no clear cut framework	*		
CLT cannot solve all dilemmas	*		

High Group

Researcher: What is your idea about method myth?

Ruhullah: Methods have many inherent problems.

Ali: It depends on the context of teaching.

Hussein: Even CLT has its own shortcomings.

Qodrat: Even postmethod has not a clear definition.

Mid Group

Researcher: What is your idea about method myth?

Mohammad: Regarding the concept method, there are many unanswered questions at least for me.

Zahra: There is no one size that fits all.

Saman: We should consider the needs of our situation then employ the appropriate method.

Low Group

Researcher: What is your idea about method myth?

Nazanin: methods cannot solve our problems.

Kambiz: Methods are not sensitive to our students' differences and each method has its own shortcomings.

Mahsa: I believe that there is no best method. Eclecticism is a right choice.

Raise the Consciousness of Your Students

As Table 5 shows, considering incidental learning and teaching learning strategies, both the High and Mid groups had similar opinions. In the case of valuing students' interpretations and meaning focused teaching, the High group showed a logical understanding. Regarding the above-mentioned items, the Low group did not provide any logical comment.

Table 5: Participants' perceptions of different themes of awareness raising procedures

Main theme: Raise the consciousness of your students: It means	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
To pay attention to incidental learning	*	*	
To consider students' interpretations	*		
To focus on meaning –based learning	*		
To teach learning strategies rather than teaching methods	*	*	

High Group

Researcher: How do you define learning in postmethod?

Ruhullah: To raise our students' awareness.

Ali: *We should move towards incidental and implicit teaching. I mean learning is more important than teaching.*

Hussein: *Meaning-based teaching is a good solution.*

Qodrat: *Students' understandings are important.*

Mid Group

Researcher: *How do you define learning in postmethod?*

Mohammad: *Teach inductively.*

Zahra: *Our focus should be on learning rather than teaching.*

Saman: *Learning activities should be our main concerns.*

Low Group

Researcher: *How do you define learning in postmethod?*

Nazanin: *To help our students.*

Kambiz: *To teach in the best manner.*

Mahsa: *I cannot answer such a difficult question.*

Both Usage and Use Are Important

The term grammar has been interpreted in different ways, often causing confusion in the realm of language teaching. These misconceptions lie mostly in the view that grammar is regularly seen just as a set of arbitrary rules about fixed structures in teaching different rules of language such as verb paradigms and rules about linguistic forms. Grammar is unmistakably much more than this (Crivos & Luchini, 2012). Table 6 summarizes the participants' perceptions of different themes of usage and use saliency.

Table 6: Participants' perceptions of different themes of usage and use saliency

Main theme: Both usage and use are important: It means	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
Context is a determining factor	*	*	
Usage in the service of use is emphasized	*	*	*
Grammar is important even in postmethod and CLT	*		*
Fluency and accuracy are complementary	*	*	

As Table 6 shows, both the High and Mid groups were in agreement that factors such as context, combination of use and usage, importance of grammar in new era and the complementary roles of accuracy and fluency were significant. The Low groups mentioned the importance of use and usage relationship as well as fluency and accuracy complementary roles.

High Group

Researcher: How should we teach language in postmethod?

Ruhullah: Both fluency and accuracy are important.

Ali: Communication as well as structures should be emphasized.

Hussein: Our context is a determining factor.

Qodrat: We should not ignore grammar at the expense of fluency.

Mid Group

Researcher: How should we teach language in postmethod?

Mohammad: Yes, grammar and communication go hand in hand.

Zahra: Both CLT and postmethod value grammar presentation at the service of effective communication.

Saman: We have both use and usage in every piece of teaching.

Low Group

Researcher: How should we teach language in postmethod?

Nazanin: Grammar must be taught in context not in isolation.

Kambiz: We treat language differently in postmethod condition.

Mahsa: I agree with my friends.

Your Focus Should Be on Your Learners

Since postmethod values learners largely, most of the participants agreed that we should invest on our pupils as far as we can.

Table 7: Participants' perceptions of different themes of learner-centeredness

Main theme: Your focus should be on your learners : It means	High Group	Mid Group	Low Group
Take a humanistic approach	*	*	*

Learners' needs, wants and situations are important	*	*	*
Real and authentic roles be given to learners	*	*	*
Develop community -based learning	*	*	*

As Table 7 shows, regarding learner-focused orientations, there was complete agreement among all the three groups. It means that all the participants had a high perception of humanistic approaches in the course of language teaching and learning. All of them emphasized learners' needs, community –based nature of the classroom, students' agency and humanistic approaches towards learning and teaching procedures.

High Group

Researcher: *What is the stance of learners in postmethod?*

Ruhullah: *Learners are valued in postmethod.*

Ali: *We are dealing with humans not passive containers.*

Hussein: *Teachers should follow humanistic perspective in their teaching.*

Qodrat: *Students should exert their agencies in the very context of the classroom.*

Mid Group

Researcher: *What is the stance of learners in postmethod?*

Mohammad: *We should focus on students' demands.*

Zahra: *I consider my students a community with the same destination.*

Saman: *Students are the main determining factors in the process of teaching and learning.*

Low Group

Researcher: *What is the stance of learners in postmethod?*

Nazanin: *Learners are very important in postmethod era.*

Kambiz: *We should teach according to our learners' humanistic dimensions.*

Mahsa: *Since Learners are humans, we should treat them with respect.*

Research Question Two

To answer this question, the best strategy could have been observation reports from the participants' classes. Due to lack of time and accessibility to classes, the participants' answers have been used as the main criteria. Generally, most participants believed that to teach a language successfully and appropriately, form, meaning and function should be integrated. They affirmed that the students should be empowered to act autonomously in the classroom. Since the Iranian Ministry of Education has tried to implement the CLT as the mainstream method in the curriculum of English books (Prospect and Vision Series), most of the participants have received this change with open arms. They described CLT as the prelude to postmethod pedagogy. They also, accepted that compared to CLT, postmethod is more demanding and politically oriented. Finally, the researchers concluded that regarding language learning in general and grammar presentation in particular, the viewpoints of all the participants have undergone dramatic changes in the previous years.

DISCUSSION

Concerning the six significant features raised by the participants, the findings discussed above clearly demonstrate an acceptable understanding of postmethod on the part of Iranian EFL teachers.

Based on the viewpoints mentioned, though the participants did not talk about the principles of postmethod pedagogy explicitly, a close interpretation of what has been mentioned shows that they support the tenets of postmethod pedagogy such encouraging learners' autonomy, increasing learning opportunities, raising language awareness, contextualizing linguistic aspects, and integrating different language skills simultaneously. Regarding the participants' interpretations, we can infer that postmethod pedagogy is shifting from "a banking pedagogy to an empowering pedagogy" (Ko, 2013, p. 91). Their responses emphasized the fact that mere linguistic input is not enough and humanistic aspects should be taken into account. Since Iranian EFL teachers have achieved a good command of CLT tenet in recent years, we can see the impact of this approach on their perception of postmethod pedagogy. Generally, the level of participants' understanding of postmethod pedagogy was acceptable and promising. Although the participants did not explicitly refer to all the principles and strategies of

postmethod pedagogy, a close look at the main themes discussed above clearly shows that most of the participants are somehow aware of the requirements of postmethod. If we consider these issues: 1) Postmethod pedagogy means teaching critical thinking. 2) Teaching and learning are inseparable matters. 3) There is no best method; even CLT is not the panacea. 4) Raise the consciousness of your students. 5) Both usage and use are important. 6) Your Focus should be on Your Learners. We come to this conclusion that our participants have generally understood postmethod less or more. It is natural that participants lacked a full understanding of post method because they have not been trained based on postmethod principles.

As to the second question, we provide some clear reasons of Iranian EFL teachers' understanding of postmethod pedagogy and provide some challenges of EFL teachers toward successful implementation of postmethod pedagogy. The participants' answers in research question one show that they believe in integration of different linguistic skills as well as agency of learners. They emphasized that good teachers value their students, involve them in learning activities and inspire them to be critical thinkers. They highlighted this fact that there is no best method and we should not be in the search of magic bullet. A thorough understanding of social, political and personal status of students was considered a necessary factor in the words of all the participants. An interesting issue was that many participants thought postmethod pedagogy as continuation of CLT in targeting of humanistic and use-based orientations of language learning. Last but not least, this study opened new windows of hope because the Iranian EFL teachers have a logical understanding what is happening around the globe in the realm of language teaching and learning. Now, we turn to some challenges of postmethod pedagogy that may impede EFL teachers' full understanding.

Though the postmethod pedagogy has facilitated the process of language learning in several aspects, its practicality has been questioned in several ways. As Rashidi and Khajavi (2014) argue, postmethod is not free of harsh criticisms. The first one refers to the position that postmethod considers for language teachers. Nobody denies placing teachers at the higher level of decision-making processes in language teaching, but it is easier said than done. As we know, change is painful and it will be very demanding for language teachers to easily give up their old habits and start a new movement. Additionally, every new change needs its requirements. If postmethod claims to involve teachers

in the very process of decision-making, then a number of factors such as linguistic knowledge, cultural issues, socio-political status of the discourse community, and students' needs, wants and situations must be considered beforehand. Many experts believe that teachers, as one of the most influential factors, have been ignored in postmethod. To summarize, Akbari (2005) argues that in postmethod condition, the practitioners are free to articulate their voices; their background knowledge and life experiences are respected and valued. Furthermore, teachers are supposed to have the power and authority to decide based on their learners' needs and context and their own reflection of different situations. According to Akbari (2008), to be actually put into practice, the postmethod pedagogy demands a well-planned and effective teacher education requirements as well as appropriate mechanisms for removing those challenges and barriers teachers face in their professional lives. Clarke (1994) emphasizes that in the framework of postmethod, teachers play a crucial role in language classrooms and their accountability as problem posing, critical thinkers, and action researchers cannot be ignored. Regarding the practicality parameter of postmethod pedagogy, a lot of educational barriers, social challenges and execution limitations are on the teachers' way to fulfill their missions completely. Even an expert like Kumaravadivelu (2005) is aware of those obstacles and constraints that postmethod will bring about for practitioners, especially for teachers as the main decision-makers in the real situations of the classroom. He refers to two major sources of problems that must be addressed if the postmethod is going to be accepted as the dominant L2 teacher education framework: "Pedagogical barriers and ideological barriers" (pp. 215-223). Pedagogical barriers are concerned with some inveterate set of beliefs and models of teacher education, which refer to "a set of predetermined, preselected, and presequenced body of knowledge from the teacher educator to the prospective teacher" (Kumaravadivelu, 2005, p. 216), and the ideological barriers refer to the mentality of teachers and what they consider as valid and ideal knowledge.

As Akbari (2008) puts it, in postmethod pedagogy local teachers, their skills and experiences have been marginalized. Local practitioners are not taken seriously in all stages of education. He adds that postmethod has not provided sound solutions to emerging problems. Even though postmethod has a very strong theoretical foundation, it fails to consider the actualizations and practical aspects of classrooms and hence cannot delineate a bright future. Akbari (2008) harshly criticizes

Kumaravadivelu by mentioning that the limitations of textbooks have received a superficial attention in Kumaravadivelu's claims. Akbari believes that we are not teaching in vacuum but we are in real contexts with real learners with different demands and challenges. One can detect an irony here: In the past, little attention was paid to the social relevance and reality of L2 teaching and classroom environments, but now we have an excessive preoccupation with these constructs at the risk of ignoring the constraining realities of the classroom in terms of teachers' responsibilities. As the final point, the lack of appropriate teacher education infrastructure, restricting role of textbooks, tight administrative frameworks, poor payment, ignoring the social and professional limitations teachers, evaluations in the forms of tests, ignoring the novice teachers in the chaos world of postmethod era, and teachers' abilities and differences are among the most important challenges that postmethod practitioners (teachers) are grappling with.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the obtained results, Iranian English teachers may need to reshape and rethink whatever in their minds. The researchers believe that there is an urgent need to cultivate the seeds of change in all related areas if we want to exploit the advantages of postmethod. The main challenge that impedes the implementation of postmethod in Iran is lack of infrastructure. By infrastructure, we mean both hardware and software. The main issue refers to teacher education system as a leading and crucial factor in developing postmethod pedagogy. There should be a sense of cooperation between university professors and English teachers at lower levels. Curriculum development, teacher education and testing procedures must go hand in hand if we seek favorable outcomes of the postmethod in the future.

As Akbari (2008) argues, postmethod must move towards practicality and involve all practitioners in the process of decision-making. The main responsibility of policy makers is to redefine teacher education programs and design new frameworks for teachers' participation and voice. It necessitates that a bottom up and flexible system be designed to grant all practitioners, especially teachers, the autonomy and authority in theory and practice. We should be concerned about what is really taking place in our classrooms, consider all assumptions, and employ the best strategies to overcome the barriers.

According to Khatib and Fat'hi (2012), though the concept of method was superficial and limited all the practitioners in several aspects, in practice, postmethod has nothing to offer for solving current problems. The main concern of postmethod is for novice and inexperienced teachers. Many EFL teachers have not the necessary competency and confidence to act freely and easily in the postmethod framework.

This problem refers to even a serious challenge, that is the teacher education system, which is not up-to-date to train knowledgeable and daring teachers to be able to make the best decisions in the critical moments. As to the limitations of this study, the process of this interview took into account the viewpoints of only 10 participants. Furthermore, neither classroom observations nor videotaping teaching episodes have been included in this study. Therefore, this study cannot be the very essence of what actually happens in the Iranian EFL teachers' classrooms. The procedure of data analysis as well as the discussion that ensued, reflect a limited range of the participants' scenarios only, thereby making it a demanding issue to generalize the findings to the whole context of EFL teachers in Iran.

Bio-data

Nasser Rashidi is a professor of TEFL at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. He has published articles and presented in conferences both nationally and internationally. His areas of interest include socio-cultural theory of learning and teaching, critical pedagogy, and critical discourse analysis.

Nurullah Mansourzadeh is a Ph.D. student of TEFL at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran. He has been involved in teaching English for more than fifteen years. He has published articles both nationally and internationally. His areas of interest are culture, vocabulary and postmethod pedagogy.

References

- Akbari, R. (2005). Recent developments in foreign language teaching. *ROSHD FLT*, 20(76), 25-32.
- Akbari, R. (2008). Post-method discourse and practice. *TESOL Quarterly*, 42(4), 641-652.

- Auerbach, E. (1995). The politics of the ESL classroom: Issues of power in pedagogical choices. In J. Tollefson (Ed.), *Power and inequality in language education* (pp. 9-33). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Becker, A. (1986). Language in particular: A lecture. In D. Tannen (Ed.), *Linguistics in context: Connecting observation and understanding* (pp. 17-35). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- Bell, D. (2003). Method and postmethod: Are they really incompatible? *TESOL Quarterly*, 37(2), 325-336.
- Bell, D. (2007). Do teachers think that methods are dead? *ELT Journal*, 61(2), 135-143.
- Benesch, S. (2001). *Critical English for academic purposes: Theory, politics, and practice*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Clarke, M. A. (1994). The dysfunctions of the theory/practice discourse. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(1), 10-27.
- Coleman, H. (1996). Autonomy and ideology in the English language classroom. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom* (pp. 1-16). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crandall, J. A. (2000). Language teacher education. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 20, 34-55.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Crivos, M. B. & Luchini, P. L. (2012). A pedagogical proposal for teaching grammar using consciousness-raising tasks. *The Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 4(3), 141-153.
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Elliott, J. (1991). *Action research for educational change*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Elliott, J. (1993). *Reconstructing teacher education: Teacher development*. London: Falmer Press.
- Freeman, D. (1998). *Understanding teacher research*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Schooling and the struggle for public life: Critical pedagogy in the modern age*. Minneapolis, NC: University of Minnesota Press.
- Holec, H. (1988). *Autonomy and self-directed learning: Present fields of application*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Khatib, M. & Fat'hi, J. (2012). Postmethod pedagogy and ELT teachers. *Journal of Academic and Applied Studies*, 2(2), 22-29.
- Ko, M. Y. (2013). A case study of an EFL teacher's critical literacy teaching in a reading class in Taiwan. *Language Teaching Research*, 17(1), 91-108.

- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2001). Toward a postmethod pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35(4), 537-560.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2005). *Understanding language teaching: From method to post-method*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006a). *Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006b). TESOL methods: Changing tracks, challenging trends. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 59-81.
- Mackey, W.F. (1965). *Language teaching analysis*. New York: Longman.
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- O'Hanlon, C. (1993). The importance of an articulated personal theory of professional development. In J. Elliott (Ed.), *Reconstructing teacher education: Teacher development* (pp. 243-255). London: Falmer Press.
- Pennycook, A. (1989). The concept of method, interested knowledge, and the politics of language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(4), 589-618.
- Prabhu, N. S. (1990). There is no best method- Why? *TESOL Quarterly*, 24(2), 161-176.
- Rashidi, N. & Khajavi, Y. (2014). The post method era: Opportunities and challenges. *Humanizing Language Teaching*, 16(3). Retrieved from <http://www.hltmag.co.uk/jun14/sart08.htm>
- Rivers, W.(1991). *Teaching foreign language skills*. 2nd Edn., New York: University of Chicago Press.
- Simon, R. (1988). For a pedagogy of possibility. *Critical Pedagogy Networker*, 1(1), 1-4.
- Smith, W. F. (1970). Language learning laboratory. *Britannica Review of Foreign Language Education*, 2(1), 191-237.
- Stern, H. H. (1985). [Review of the book *Methods that work*, by J. W. Oller & P. A. Richard-Amato]. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 7(4), 249-251.
- Van Manen, M. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 6(3), 205-228.
- Van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Watkins, D. (2008). Western educational research: A basis for educational reforms in Asia? In O. S. Tan, D. M. McInerney, A. D. Liem, & A. Tan (Eds.), *What the west can learn from the east: Asian perspectives on the psychology of learning and motivation* (pp. 59-76). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.
- Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. London: Blackwell.