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## **A Move towards Postmethod Pedagogy in the Iranian EFL Context: Panacea or More Pain?**

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### **Abstract**

Kumaravadivelu's (2003) introduction and development of 'postmethod' led to the demise of methods and a dramatic change in the language teaching profession. In fact, it can be claimed that the arrival of postmethod pedagogy in language teaching might be the reason for the abandonment and replacement of method by context sensitive, pedagogic indicators, and the guiding principles of particularity, practicality and possibility. The literature concerning postmethod pedagogy has highlighted that much of the research centers on the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings, without any consideration of its realization and practical aspects in EFL contexts. So, we tried to unearth English teachers' practical constraints and barriers in applying postmethod as a new EFL pedagogy in Iran. Twenty two male and female experienced English teachers from Yazd and Shiraz, Iran, participated in this qualitative research. The researchers used a semi-structured interview as the primary source of data

collection (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010), and adopted Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method, including three steps of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to reveal practitioners' problems and constraints in putting the pedagogy into practice, in the EFL context of Iran, where all syllabi and materials are prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The researchers identified several barriers to adopting postmethod pedagogy in EFL teaching in Iran, as well as teachers' constraints when dealing with those obstacles.

**Keywords:** method; postmethod pedagogy; Iranian EFL learners; ELT practitioners; particularity; practicality

## **Introduction**

The late 1980s witnessed the beginning of an anti-method movement with the emergence of a body of literature (e.g. Bax, 2003; Pennycook, 1989; Phillipson, 1992; Prabhu, 1990) dealing with teachers and practitioners' dissatisfaction with existing methods of teaching. The concept of 'postmethod' emerged as methods and approaches, especially communicative language teaching (CLT), failed to fulfill the learners' and teachers' expectations (Huda, 2013). The main reason for this disenchantment may have been that none of them proved to be sound as they produced results which were not sensitive to different EFL/ESL contexts. The development of critical pedagogy, insightful research, and the emergence of innovative ideas in the 1980s also had an impact on questioning the nature and scope of the methods, which in turn contributed to the development of postmethod pedagogy.

During the anti-method period, a number of scholars (e.g. Allwright, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Stern, 1992) attempted to develop the concept of postmethod, suggesting guiding principles to enable teachers to enhance their own context-specific pedagogic knowledge. Stern, Kumaravadivelu, and Allwright proposed

guiding principles based on sociocultural perspectives to locate learning and teaching in socio-historical contexts. Regarding the context sensitivity of postmethod, it is necessary for language researchers to investigate the constraints, concerns and problems of its application in each EFL context and Iran is not an exception. Furthermore, it was claimed that the findings of this research could help teachers, professional practitioners, and educators to learn the restrictions of postmethod in their everyday classroom practices. In this research, we adopted Kumaravadivelu's model (2006) to investigate the appropriateness and applicability of postmethod pedagogy in an EFL context of Iran.

## **Review of Related Literature**

### ***The past 'method'***

Rodgers (2000) called the past century the "age of methods" as there was a change in language teaching methods from grammar translation methods (GTM), and direct method to alternative methods (Richards & Rodgers, 2003). The language teaching profession sought to find the single ideal method generalizable to learners, teachers and practitioners, to successfully learn and teach English as a foreign language (Brown, 2002). Tracing the history of the teaching profession reminds us of "the changing winds and shifting sands" (Marckwardt, 1972) of methods, as a succession of methods were discarded one after another, as new methods appeared on the scene.

Generally, 'method' includes a package of principles and guidelines concerning how teachers should undertake language teaching. Five decades ago, Edward Anthony (1963) defined 'method' as the second element in the hierarchy of approach, method and technique. Accordingly, method was defined as an overall plan for the systematic presentation of language on the basis of an approach.

However, there were some discrepancies between definitions., Richards and Rodgers (1986) stated that method was an umbrella

term involving approaches, designs and procedures. In Richards and Rodgers' sense (2001), it also meant a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and language learning. Indeed, method is understood to be based on a set of assumptions about a particular theory of language learning and teaching, providing guidelines concerning the role of instructional materials, the roles of learners and teachers, and their tasks, activities and procedures.

Method in EFL involves assumptions or theories about language and learning dictating different aspects of teaching and learning practices (Huda, 2013). The concept of method was criticized on the grounds of its prescriptive nature which assumed a single unified context for language learning, and also as a vehicle of "linguistic imperialism" created by a "powerful center" targeting a "disempowered periphery" (Phillipson, 1992). A further criticism was of the distinctiveness of methods in the first stages and their indistinctiveness at later stages. With respect to the roles of the teacher and learners, all methods also assumed teacher and learners as the slaves of methods with no voice during teaching and learning activities and practices.

### ***The present 'postmethod'***

There was a never-ending enthusiasm for one method or another until Kumaravadivelu (2003) introduced the concept of the "postmethod era" implying a move beyond methods. He (2006) defined it as:

a sustainable state of affairs that compels us to restructure our view of language teaching and teacher education. It urges us to review the character and content of classroom teaching in all its pedagogical and ideological perspectives. It derives us to streamline our teacher education by refiguring the reified relationship between theory and practice. (p.170)

The concept of postmethod, in contrast to method, is based on the idea that none of the methods or approaches appear to deal convincingly with second/foreign language teaching. That is, there is no convincing benefit in adopting any individual method for any particular context of language learning. The proponents of postmethod believe that language learning and teaching are so complex and influenced by so many contextual factors that adoption of a particular method is actually absurd (Cattell, 2009).

Contrary to the nature of method which considers learners and teachers as slaves, postmethod suggests that teachers can construct their own methods and theories of practices on the basis of local contextual variables and experiences in their real teaching settings. In this regard, Kumaravadivelu (1994) makes a distinction between the concepts of postmethod and method; as the latter implies that theorizers construct “knowledge-oriented” theories of pedagogy whereas the former highlights practitioners’ construction of “classroom-oriented” theories of practices. Thus, while method has its roots in theory and knowledge centeredness, postmethod derives its guiding principles based on individuality, practicality, and localness of language learning and teaching contexts.

Kumaravadivelu (2001) defined the three parameters of postmethod as particularity, practicality, and possibility. ‘Particularity’ deals with situational understanding (Elliott, 1993). Pedagogic practices according to Kumaravadivelu (2001, p.538) are sensitive to

a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu.

It means language teaching should be sensitive to the context, which includes teachers, learners, and sociocultural factors. In fact, pedagogy should be localized in the sense that

teachers need to take into account all the linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities of language pedagogy.

Regarding ‘practicality’, Kumaravadivelu (2001) believed that there needs to be harmony between theories and practices. In other words, what teachers theorize should correspond with practices in the real context of classrooms. Theories and practices inform and re-inform one another (Zakeri, 2014). Accordingly, a theory is senseless unless it can be used in practice. This dimension of postmethod pedagogy also calls for teacher autonomy as language teachers perceive good teaching in their own ways. Teachers’ reflection and action can be another focus which is based on teachers’ insights and intuition. By drawing on prior and continuous experiences, teachers can gain fruitful insights about the practice of good teaching.

The parameter of ‘possibility’ states that language teaching and learning should correspond with sociocultural and political conditions outside the classroom. It concerns not only linguistic and cultural knowledge but also identity formation and social transformation. It should provide opportunities and challenges for learners to seek for subjectivity and self-identity. Thus, pedagogy is not summarized as transmission of information to learners, rather as the connection between linguistic needs and sociopolitical requirements.

It needs to be highlighted that Kumaravadivelu’s model (2006) also involves pedagogic indicators referring to the key participants’ roles in L2 learning and teaching. While their conceptualizations correspond with those three parameters, the roles of participants as learners and educators are of paramount importance as they influence all aspects of pedagogy from decision making, planning, to implementing the aims and activities. Based on this framework, teachers’ role is significant as they construct pedagogic theories based on their own past and present learned theories and experiences, practices, and activities in real contexts. They are also expected to have autonomy, knowledge, skills, and information about theoretical and practical aspects of language teaching and learning.

Learners in Kumaravadivelu's (2006) postmethod sense are not mere recipients of knowledge, while they are supposed to actively participate in pedagogic decision making and enhance their autonomy through learning to learn and through critical thinking. So, learners as critical thinkers need to be empowered and liberated through recognizing and challenging the sociopolitical conditions which prevent them from recognizing their humanistic potentials.

Moreover, Kumaravadivelu's (2006) strategic framework for second language teaching included macro strategies and micro strategies, which present many crucial findings of second language acquisition research, including output hypotheses, input hypotheses, autonomy, and strategy training (Alemi & Daftarifard, 2010). The macro strategies which are based on authentic classroom data consist of maximizing learning opportunities, facilitating negotiated interaction, minimizing perceptual mismatches, activating self-discovery, promoting learner autonomy, fostering learner awareness, contextualizing linguistic input, integrating language skills, ensuring social relevance and raising cultural consciousness.

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), macro strategies are broad guidelines which are theory-neutral and method-neutral because they are not based on underlying assumptions of one specific theory, or on a single set of principles or procedures associated with any language method. Teachers can use them to best suit their own context-specific and needs-based micro strategies.

The researchers' focus in this research is on the parameters and indicators to justify the findings which in Kumaravadivelu's (2006) sense are referred to as fundamentals of postmethod pedagogy.

### **Status of English teaching in the EFL context of Iran**

In the EFL context of Iran, including private language institutes and state schools, English teaching is based primarily



on the application of different methods such as communicative language teaching (CLT), audio-lingual method (ALM) and grammar translation method (GTM), without any critical examination on the part of policy makers and teachers about their appropriateness and relevance in each context. The old-fashioned GTM is so dominant in state schools that it is considered as a *sine qua non* part of English classes. Passive students receive English in the form of bits and pieces of knowledge transmitted from the teacher as the sole authority in classroom, who decides on the nuts and bolts of anything (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2015; Safari & Rashidi, 2015b). Recently, a reform has occurred in the educational system of Iran which has introduced communicatively based English textbooks into state schools. Thus, English teachers who have been accustomed to teaching English based on GTM for years, are obliged to use CLT in their English classes (Safari & Rashidi, 2015a). However, as Safari and Sahragard (2015) state, many English teachers retain the same old methods based on their previous pedagogical experiences, when teaching from the new textbooks.

In the Iranian EFL context, for most English teachers, the concept of postmethod pedagogy is new and their teaching context has not allowed them to think about an alternative approach like postmethod pedagogy. CLT is often believed to be the highest goal that English teachers of state schools wish to achieve. Hence, their minds are constantly preoccupied with trivial issues such as the principles, procedures, activities and teachers' and students' roles relating to this method. Undoubtedly, the introduction of postmethod pedagogy can be a revolution which might be accompanied by a myriad of concerns, problems, and obstacles.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In spite of thorough and seemingly credible literature concerning the concept of postmethod pedagogy, much of Kumaravadivelu's writing centered on theoretical and philosophical arguments to convince readers about its use in teaching. His work highlighted the need to fill the gap in research

into practical considerations of postmethod and its integration into teaching practices. It also suggested that there was a need to learn more about teachers' feelings on postmethod in EFL contexts.

The EFL context of Iran is culturally, socially, and politically different from other contexts around the world, and there is a need for a substantial amount of research to consider the practical constraints. All syllabi and materials are prescribed by the Ministry of Education and teachers have no choice other than working with the prescribed materials. Some of these were developed some years ago and recent developments have not been considered, whilst students' needs and proficiencies tend to be disregarded. Teachers are usually considered in students' minds as 'spoon feeders' and the sole authority in classes where students have no place to voice their inner thoughts and ideologies, as it was for the teachers in their pre-service training courses and their in-service programs (Safari & Rashidi, 2015b).

To date, few studies have investigated the effect of this new approach in an Iranian EFL context. A recent study on the applicability of postmethod parameters illuminated that actual practices of postmethod pedagogy based on the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility in EFL context of Iran seems too far reaching and not practical, although not impossible (Razmjoo, Ranjbar & Hoomanfar, 2013). Therefore, we designed a research project to investigate the practical constraints and barriers of postmethod practice in an Iranian EFL context, based on recent research on its theoretical underpinnings.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative/interpretive research makes an attempt to investigate the applicability of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian EFL context with respect to Kumaravadivelu's (2006) framework of parameters and pedagogic indicators.

## **Participants**

To collect the qualitative data, twenty two male and female experienced English teachers from education organizations

(Branches of Ministry of Education) in Yazd and Shiraz, were invited to participate in the research (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Brief overview of teacher participants**

City	Male	Female	Educational Background	
			Male	Female
Yazd	4	9	B.A. in English Translation (2)	B.A. in English Teaching (4)
			M.A. in TEFL (1)	B.A. in English Translation (3)
			Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL (1)	M.A. Student of TEFL (1)
Shiraz	6	3	B.A. in English Translation (1)	Ph.D. Candidate of TEFL (2)
			B.A. in English Literature (3)	M.A. in TEFL (1)
			M.A. in TEFL (2)	

Thirteen English teachers taught in the education organization of Yazd and the rest were engaged in teaching English in Shiraz. The collection of data was conducted separately for participants who were selected based on purposive sampling. To protect participants' confidentiality and privacy in addition to ensuring the data accuracy, the researchers followed Christians' (2005) ethical guidelines for conducting research. Gaining participants' informed consent, and avoiding any trick or deceptive questions was considered important. Thus, in order to protect their privacy, the researchers assured participants about preserving their anonymity.

### **Context**

The current research was conducted in the Iranian EFL state schools context. Thus, the researchers selected the education organizations of Shiraz and Yazd, the capital cities of Fars and Yazd provinces respectively. The education organizations

are managed, supervised and directed by the Ministry of Education.

### ***Instrument***

The current qualitative/ interpretive research was conducted through a semi-structured interview (see Appendix) as the primary source of data collection (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010). According to Alvarez and Urla (2002), this method provides more rich and useful data which can be used for thematic analysis when the number of participants is quite small. In studies which benefit from an open framework, it is applied to obtain more appropriate information from conversational exchanges. The researchers adopted Strauss and Corbin's (1998) constant comparative method, including three steps of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding to reveal practitioners' problems and constraints in teaching practices.

Participants were free to answer the interview questions in English or Persian, as they should meticulously elaborate their perceptions and understandings of their classroom contexts. To ensure the validity of findings, the researchers adopted member checking to triangulate the obtained data, as it is applied at the end of data collection by asking participants for further accuracy and meaning (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorenson, 2010).

### ***Procedure***

The process of data collection occupied three sessions of one hour and a half for both groups of participants in Yazd and Shiraz separately. The first two sessions were devoted to instruction as one of the researchers elaborated on postmethod as a new path in the process of professional development. The researcher's aim was to help teachers reflect critically on the applicability of postmethod in the EFL context of Iran. In the third session, the researcher as a teacher trainer and educator interviewed each participant separately over a period of 20-30 minutes to gain their insights on respective issues. There were also two 'brown-bag' meetings with both groups of participants in

case they needed to further elaborate their understanding and perceptions concerning the research topic. The researcher audio-recorded all the sessions in order to precisely transcribe the data and obtain the relevant emerged themes.

### **Key Findings**

The researchers unearthed themes and concepts based on Kumaravadivelu's (2006) model of postmethod parameters and pedagogic indicators; and concepts relating to postmethod teacher, learner, and teacher educator by adopting postmethod parameters as the reference points. Below, the themes which emerged from the data analysis are discussed.

#### ***Learners' passive roles and lack of autonomy: Necessity for autonomy promotion***

Postmethod pedagogy assumes language learning is an activity which autonomous learners are required to self-direct, regulate, and take responsibility for. In fact, it is a teachers' job to help learners through this process and to promote their strategic investment (Brown, 1991). Thus, the autonomous learner in postmethod has a meaningful role in pedagogic decision making (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). In this process, learners should be equipped with a repertoire of strategies in order not only to learn to learn but also to become critical thinkers through the relationship between their own learning and ideology. In other words, learners can develop their autonomy when they are given an active and meaningful role in classroom.

Due to the system of 'banking education' to use Freire's (1985) term, and the authoritarian nature of education in the Iranian educational system, an unequal and asymmetrical relationship can be seen between teacher and learners (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2015). Freire (1985) believed that students in such systems become authority-oriented and become passive citizens who believe that education means listening to what teachers tell them to do. This passivity affects students' lives into the future,

changing them into people who accept any role that society assigns to them in their adult lives.

Drawing on the broad view of learner autonomy or 'liberation autonomy', the learner should learn to liberate himself or herself and take the sociopolitical aspects of learning into account. However, such liberation with its anti-authoritarian nature is actually in contrast to the authoritarian nature of education in Iran. As one of the teachers said:

Learners in my class are supposed to listen to me carefully in order to get the key points. I don't like to give the responsibility of any activity to learners. Because I don't want to leave the class into the chaos. Actually, I want them to obey me.

This teacher presumes a passive role for learners who blindly obey what teachers in authority want them to do. Due to this passive role, marginality, and presence of an authority figure in the classroom, learners do not have any opportunity for autonomy, self-discovery, or liberation.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) believed that learner autonomy in its narrow sense refers to the learners' development of their capacity to learn. In other words, as Holec (1981) put it, learning to learn involves developing learners' ability to take charge of their own learning, and assume responsibility for developing learning objectives, defining contents and progression, selecting methods and techniques, monitoring the process of learning, and evaluating what has been learned. In Kumaravadivelu's words (2006), learning to learn means utilizing appropriate strategies to achieve desired learning objectives.

A review of the literature shows learners' use of different strategies including cognitive, social, affective, and metacognitive in their own learning. It is understood that learners should gain a knowledge of strategies, know how to plan, regulate, and monitor their own learning. Further, learning and using appropriate strategies can facilitate the process of learning to learn. However,

it is also important for teachers to keep in mind that their job in this process is to identify learners' strategies, help them to know their strengths and weaknesses, reveal the successful learners' strategies, encourage other students to incorporate them in their learning, explicitly instruct the most appropriate strategies, and convince them to extend the use of strategies to any learning opportunities out of classroom.

It also should be noted that teachers can help learners learn to learn through use of a repertoire of appropriate strategies if and only if they have been taught how to learn current strategies, and their use in learning opportunities, and also if teachers are well-acquainted with principles of this process. Thus, the culture of learning to learn should be integrated in schools to help learners to maximize their learning potentials. One teacher mentioned something which is worth quoting.

How can my students learn to learn while I myself have no idea about it? During my life, no one has taught me how to learn. I have learned how to learn intuitively and unconsciously. Actually, teaching learning to learn and strategies are not my job. My duty is just to teach the lesson, check my students' homework, evaluate them, and manage the classroom activities.

She believed that learning to learn strategies are separate from language classrooms and schools and that students should experience it for themselves without conscious instruction. In other words, learning to learn as a lifelong strategy is not integrated into learners' lives and school culture. We are advised to develop postmethod learners who want to learn, and we, as language teachers should integrate postmethod culture into our classroom activities and through the negotiation of its significance and impact on learners' lifelong learning.

### ***Critical thinking as a missing component in our educational system***

In Burbules and Burk's (1999) sense, critical thinking has a general humanizing impact on the social lives of different groups of people and classes. Hence, there is a need for all people to become critical thinkers. The advocates of critical thinking believe if learners are helped to become critical thinkers, they can be liberated to see the world as it is and act upon social inequalities and injustices in the surrounding community. Therefore, one of the responsibilities of education is to assist learners to be liberated through the opportunities it provides for them to think critically in all situations. As Burbules and Burk (1999) highlight, a critical person is empowered to seek justice and emancipation. Critical thinking changes the person into an adroit critical thinker who not only recognizes the sociopolitical injustices and inequalities but also assigns them new characters not to accept any taken-for-granted knowledge and assumptions.

According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), the broad view of learner autonomy or liberation autonomy treats learning as a means of attaining the goal which is learning to liberate. It means liberation autonomy empowers learners to become critical thinkers. So the postmethod teacher as the agent of change should indeed be in charge of creating an instructional space to enhance critical thinking among learners and socially transform them into critical thinkers. Learners as critical thinkers can challenge the *status quo* through critically considering and acting upon the socioeconomic and political injustices in the society which are undemocratic and oppressive.

With respect to the EFL context of Iran, it should be noted that criticizing and the culture of critique, as Safari and Pourhashemi (2015) claim, is not well developed among learners and in educational settings, so most people prefer to avoid it. The avoidance of any criticism might be due to the dominance of a silencing culture that assumes any critique to count as unruly and unmanageable behavior which needs to be reprimanded. This can be challenging for the postmethod teacher who wants the



postmethod learner to become a critical thinker in the Iranian EFL context. One of the participants in this project said:

I don't like my students to be critical thinkers. If so, I cannot manage them at all because they want to challenge everything and find the deficiencies of my teaching. I hate to be challenged. In my opinion, teachers shouldn't allow learners to interfere in such affairs.

From this teacher's view point, critical thinking means students grasp any opportunities to investigate teachers' faults. Critical thinking in this sense refers to an impolite behavior which connotes a negative feeling that the teacher would not allow within the boundaries of the classroom.

### ***Postmethod pedagogy as an unfamiliar concept in EFL education***

To efficiently apply the guiding principles of postmethod pedagogy in teaching practice, teachers are required to enhance their awareness and knowledge regarding its basic theoretical tenets, principles, skills, and practical considerations. Postmethod pedagogy as a new approach has recently found its way into educational contexts around the world. However, in an EFL context like Iran, only EFL students at M.A. or Ph.D. levels are familiar with this pedagogy while most Iranian teachers hold B.A. degrees and have had no chance of learning about teaching methodologies. The application of this method demands a fully proficient knowledge by English language teachers. One teacher referred to this crucial point in this way.

The approach you are talking about is not something I knew before. We did not study or learn anything about this new method but just got familiar with some methods like ALM, CLL, and CLT and so on.

One of participants who was teaching training courses highlighted that:

I got my B.A. in English translation some years back when there was no free access to the academic articles, books, or research databases in our undergraduate studies. University instructors also had no interest in motivating us to read more and look for recent updates in the field as they themselves had no such a chance. I got my M.A. in TEFL from one of top Iranian universities in 2010 (ten years after my B.A. graduation and 9 years of teaching experience in Ministry of Education) and now I feel more acquainted with necessary tools concerning teaching methodologies.

Thus, with respect to this important issue that Iranian EFL teachers are not familiar with the new insights and understandings emerging in the postmethod era, it is imperative that teacher education programs take serious action towards the development of pre- and in-service programs in which English teachers are educated concerning such issues (Safari & Rashidi, 2015b).

### ***Preoccupation with the methods***

One of the participants said:

Which method do you prefer in your classes?  
Explain about the best one, I want to use it in my classroom. Is it GTM, ALM, CLT, or an eclectic method?

This quote shows how Iranian EFL teachers' minds are preoccupied with the concept of method, its prescriptive nature,

and package including theories of language learning and teaching, fixed set of principles, procedures, and unchanging roles of teacher and learners in the classroom. In other words, the knowledge of methods and applying such fixed prescribed knowledge means the teacher is able to address all demands and constraints of teaching and learning without taking the contextual and sociocultural factors into account.

In fact, it is hard for most of them to believe they can be autonomous in the process of professional teaching and that they can rely on their own knowledge, experience and skills to reflect on their own pedagogic practices and activities to construct their own theories and act on them. One teacher commented:

To make theory is not my job, it should be done by a theorist with a great amount of knowledge. I'm not at the level of theorizing, how can I theorize with this superficial knowledge? What do I want to show?

He believed that only theorists are capable of theorizing. Thus, in order to develop professional EFL teachers, the educational system should attempt to remove these unfortunate illusions from teachers' minds. They should be considered as theorists who can develop a reflective approach to analyze and evaluate their own teaching actions, bring about change in their classrooms, and monitor the impacts of these changes (Wallace, 1991).

### **Most teachers' lack of skills, knowledge, and autonomy**

The postmethod teacher is a professional practitioner and an autonomous instructor, whose skills, knowledge and autonomy allow her or him to reflect on pedagogic practices, construct teaching theories, put the theories into practice, and develop inquiry through daily activities. Kumaravadivelu (2006, p.173) argued there is a need for teachers to "develop the knowledge and skill, attitude, and autonomy necessary to conduct their own

context-sensitive theory of practice”. In this regard, Min (2013) emphasised that to be professionally effective, teachers; are required to maximize learning opportunities for learners by means of their language competence and teaching efficiency. Therefore, highly professional and qualified teachers can facilitate learning interaction and enhance learner autonomy. So, postmethod pedagogy confirms that teachers are required to dynamically promote not only their professional and linguistic competence but also their teaching skills.

In fact, teachers can better create an instructional space for learners to attain lifelong learning, enhance their cultural understandings, and experience their thinking styles and strategies if they are well-equipped with pertinent knowledge and skills. Thus, a teacher who is not professionally competent and has not developed autonomy and the required skills is not able to become a postmethod teacher who can pave the way for learners to obtain autonomy. A teacher referred to this reality as:

This new approach is something I can never ever apply in my classroom because it needs skills and experiences I lack.

His colleague said:

I don't think this approach can be applicable in our context because most teachers including me are not proficient and knowledgeable enough to be able to use it.

Based on these teachers' perspectives, most Iranian EFL teachers lack a proficient knowledge and competency. This deficiency, according to Safari and Rashidi (2015a & b), can be due to the prevalence of 'banking education' in our EFL context, leading to the lack of teachers' competency and skills. Remembering that postmethod teachers should possess skills and competencies, the proponents of postmethod pedagogy suggest

these as appropriate ways for teacher improvement. Akbari (2008, p. 642) claimed that what is “missing from postmethod discussions is how teachers would be prepared to perform their duties as postmethod practitioners because the postmethod view heavily emphasizes teacher qualifications”.

### ***Misconceptions about inquiry and research***

Postmethod teachers are required to pursue their self-discovery, self-development, and autonomy in order to become professional practitioners. Kumaravadivelu (2006) believed that in so doing, teachers perform teacher research which includes the parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. This kind of research is initiated, motivated and implemented by their aspiration to self-explore and self-improve. In fact, teacher research as a goal-oriented activity is not separated from realities of language classroom but is integrated into all day-to-day activities and practices. However, due to the dominance of psychometric statistics in the social sciences, it is believed that doing teacher research requires a highly sophisticated knowledge of statistics, ability in controlling variables, analyzing numerical data, and also researchers’ investment of a great deal of time and energy. This misconception is indeed prevalent in Iranian EFL contexts, as one of the teachers mentioned:

I have no time to do research, it is a demanding task which requires a great amount of information about statistics, and it is something which is done through numbers and their analysis. Actually, I think few teachers wish to do so in order to improve their professional knowledge.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) also stated that, contrary to common misconception, teacher inquiry does not necessarily include deeply sophisticated, statistically laden, and variable-controlled experimental researches. Allwright (1993) believed that

teachers can do action research by developing and making use of investigative capabilities based on the practice of exploration, the teacher research cycle (Freeman, 1998), and critical discourse. With respect to the EFL context of Iran, it is suggested that pre-service and in-service teacher education programs should provide teachers with the appropriate knowledge enabling them to conduct teacher research for self-exploration and self-improvement.

### ***Teachers' preference for a socio-politically neutral stance***

Giroux (1988, p.174) considered a transformative intellectual as one who exercises forms of intellectual and pedagogical practice that attempt to insert teaching and learning directly into the political sphere by arguing that schooling represents both a struggle for meaning and a struggle over power relations.

Accordingly, teachers as transformative intellectuals are required to create opportunities for learners in the classroom to bring about social changes. This cannot be achieved unless they link the classroom activities to the sociopolitical conditions outside the four-walled language classrooms.

Teachers using the postmethod approach can widen their vision through embracing aspects of possibility (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Teachers cannot be satisfied with their pedagogic obligations without considering their sociopolitical obligations. In other words, teachers cannot stay socio-politically naïve. This view assumes that if teachers are divorced from sociopolitical contexts, their knowledge changes into 'parochial knowledge'. With respect to the 'possibility' parameter of postmethod, a teacher should grasp any chance to bring sense into learners' lives through making relevance between the pedagogic activities and the sociopolitical realities in real world.

Regarding the application of this parameter in the educational context of Iran, one of the participants stated:

There is no connection between teaching and politics. I have enough economic problems and have no time for political challenges. Why should I make myself so concerned and overwhelmed?

In this participant's words, education and politics are seen separately. The teachers should take a politically neutral stance in order to not jeopardize their personal lives. In other words, teachers think they should behave cautiously towards the politically challenging issues in order not to become disadvantaged in their jobs (Safari & Pourhashemi, 2015). Another participant stated :

Oh, politics and teaching...I think to be involved in my routinized activities done automatically is better than to engage in such issues and get into trouble.

She believed teaching is summarized in terms of possessing routinized knowledge or in Kumaravadivelu's words (2006), naïve knowledge without taking the sociopolitical realities into account.

### ***Traditional nature of teacher education programs in Iran***

According to Pennycook (2004), mainstream approaches to teacher education are devoid of social or political dimensions that locate English language teaching within social, cultural, economic, and political environments. In other words, as Kumaravadivelu (2006) puts it, most teacher education models are based on a transmission model, with a set of prescribed and presequenced knowledge and information transmitted from teacher educator to the prospective teachers. Actually, based on this top-down approach, teacher educators offer prospective teachers the best way to teach, model the appropriate behaviors for them, and then evaluate them on the basis of their mastery of discrete pedagogic behaviors.

The postmethod educator would provide conditions for student teachers to acquire authority and autonomy to reflect and shape their own experiences. In other words, teacher education programs should have a focus on dialogically shaping and constructing the knowledge of teachers. Dialogic interaction should be an indispensable component of the program in which all participants have authority and autonomy to express their voices and identities (Bakhtin, 1981). Teacher educators should also expose student teachers to the pedagogy of possibility by a focus on power, politics, ideas and ideologies that shape and inform L2 education. With respect to the teacher education programs in Iran, one of the participants said:

I have participated in both pre-service and in-service classes for teachers. In all the classes, one instructor came and taught some theories and points about teaching and learning. All of us were required to note them down carefully. There was no discussion, nor did the instructor ask us to express our ideas. Most of the time, if there was any discussion; it was based on the debate on the correct usage of the grammatical points and whether to use them in American or in British forms. But these points were also forgotten after sometime.

Her quotation indicates that the nature of teacher education programs is based on a transmission model through which student-teachers are given a body of outdated knowledge and information that cannot be applied usefully in their real lives. Dialogue as an opportunity for teachers to express their voices, identities and subjectivities is not a characteristic of these programs.



## Conclusion

The authors adopted Kumaravadivelu's (2006) model to shed light on the application of postmethod pedagogy as well as its associated problems, concerns and constraints in an Iranian EFL context. A clear picture of relevant themes and concepts was obtained from twenty-two experienced teachers from education organizations. The research found that the application of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian EFL context would not be a simple job. While in the case of 'particularity' and 'practicality' as two components of Kumaravadivelu's (2006) tripartite framework, it might be possible to introduce this pedagogy through a great amount of financial investment, instruction, the provision of resources and opportunities, it would still be near impossible based on possibility 'principle'. The difficulty with this parameter is related to the sociopolitical factors and critical thinking dimensions which have not been considered in our education and culture.

Thus, although postmethod pedagogy could provide teachers with a rich amount of theoretical understanding, it has been incapable of bringing about change to the practical realities of language teaching. Akbari (2008) believed that despite the emancipatory role of postmethod, it is more concerned with philosophy and philosophical teaching without any consideration of actual practice in each EFL teaching context. The results of the current research are consistent with Akbari's view that in practice teachers might face unpredictable barriers, requiring appropriate action based on teachers' and practitioners' knowledge and expertise. Thus, practitioners should take all the consequences and constraints meticulously into account before putting this approach into practice.

Hopefully, the findings of this research can appropriately help teachers predict ups and downs of application of postmethod in their own teaching syllabi. In the meantime, this research may act as a *pharos* in the ocean, to provide teachers, instructors, curriculum developers and future researchers with insightful directions and understanding into the realization of postmethod in

the EFL context of Iran. It should also be noted that as each context has its own socially, culturally, and politically situated ideologies, further research might be conducted based on some of these issues.

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## **Appendix**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Do you think postmethod pedagogy can have any room in the EFL context of Iran? If your answer is yes or no, please explain more.
2. What types of problems, constraints, or obstacles do you predict on the way of its realization in our context?
3. Do you think there should be some basic changes in the current pedagogy which is dominant in the educational system? What are those changes?
4. Can the three parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility be realized in the context of Iran? Please elaborate.
5. Which one(s) do you think is/are impossible? Please give me the reasons.
6. Regarding the issue of pedagogic indicators or the roles played by different participants such as educators, teachers, and students, what do you think about the current roles of Iranian stakeholders?
7. What changes or transformations do the need in order the postmethod pedagogy be materialized in our context?
8. Would you yourself as a teacher prefer this pedagogy to apply in your classroom?
9. What are your suggestions, pedagogical hints, or advice to those who want to apply this pedagogy?