Exploring the Post-Method Pedagogy for Language Classrooms

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Abstract

This research paper introduces new perspectives on the development of educators by examining the role of traditional teaching approaches and post-method pedagogy. Post-method pedagogy emerges as a promising alternative to address the limitations associated with conventional teaching methods. It incorporates Stern's Three-dimensional framework and Kumaravadivelu's Macro-strategic framework, both derived from a blend of theoretical, empirical, and experiential knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 185). These frameworks offer educators essential guiding principles to underpin their teaching practices, fostering awareness and justifiability.

Post-method pedagogy plays a pivotal role in nurturing teacher growth as it encourages educators to formulate classroom-centered theories of practice (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). It places value on teachers' capacities by highlighting their roles as educators, parents/caretakers, and students (Prabhu, 1990) – roles often underestimated when implementing conventional teaching methods. Armed with knowledge of these methods, as well as their personal experiences and the provided frameworks, educators can develop their own teaching approaches, assuming roles as evaluators, observers, critical thinkers, theorists, and practitioners. Consequently, they become valuable resources for both prospective teachers and their peers, contributing to their professional development."

1. Introduction

Efforts to address challenges in the realm of English Language Teaching have been a recurring theme throughout its history. This field has remained dynamic and in a state of continuous evolution. This evolution has primarily been driven by the adoption of fresh teaching approaches and methodologies, which have surfaced to cater to the evolving needs of learners in different time periods. Essentially, the historical quest for solutions in English Language Teaching has been focused on discovering new methods that could offer universal applicability across diverse contexts (Mahdavi-zafarghandi, n.d.). Traditionally, the effectiveness of English language instruction was often perceived as contingent on the accurate implementation of a specific method's prescribed principles and techniques (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In contemporary times, educators who are adept at effectively employing the Communicative Language Teaching Method are regarded as successful instructors, while those favouring the Grammar Translation Method are sometimes viewed as outdated and less successful. Furthermore, prospective teachers who

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receive training based on these methodologies, especially communicative ones, often encounter a stark disconnect between theory and the practical realities of the classroom. This dissonance prompts critical questioning of the extent to which method utilization and the pursuit of the ultimate teaching approach have truly been successful endeavours. Over the past two decades, studies conducted within the classroom environment have revealed that teachers have encountered challenges when attempting to effectively implement prescribed teaching methods in real-world teaching scenarios (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). However, it's important to note that these difficulties in method implementation do not necessarily equate to an inability to achieve desired learning outcomes.

To elaborate further, the research findings suggest that teachers who profess to adhere to a specific teaching method often fail to put its fundamental principles and procedures into practice. Conversely, those who claim to employ various methods frequently adopt similar classroom techniques, and vice versa. Additionally, teachers are observed developing and utilizing their own instructional activities that are not aligned with any specific method (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a).

This situation has led us into what is commonly referred to as the "post-method era," prompting a need to re-evaluate the relationship between the creators of teaching methodologies and those who implement them. As articulated by Kumaravadivelu (1994), the post-method condition entails a shift in perspective:

> *An awareness that as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas and an awareness that nothing short of breaking the cycle can salvage the situation. (p. 28)*

In essence, there is no need to create another teaching method; instead, there is a need for post-method pedagogy, which differs from a traditional method. I contend that post-method pedagogy doesn't signal the elimination of methods but rather signifies an acknowledgment of the limitations inherent in the concept of a method and a desire to surpass these limitations. Consequently, post-method pedagogy contributes fresh insights to the development of educators by exploring the role of conventional teaching methods alongside the post-method approach. Within this context, this paper delves into the constraints associated with traditional methods and how post-method pedagogy addresses these limitations. It does so by examining two post-method frameworks: Stern's Three-dimensional framework and Kumaravadivelu's Macro-strategic

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framework, both of which draw from a blend of theoretical, empirical, and experiential knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 185). Lastly, the paper presents a lesson plan for evaluation within the framework of these two post-method approaches.

2. Limitations of Methods

The text underscores the importance of distinguishing between the concept of a teaching method and the idea of post-method pedagogy. A method is defined as a specific set of theoretical principles and classroom procedures designed for teachers to follow, primarily derived from academic disciplines (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). In contrast, post-method pedagogy involves teachers themselves developing classroom procedures and principles based on their prior knowledge, practical experiences, or specific strategies. In simpler terms, a method is theory-driven, while post-method is practice-driven (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29). Post-method arises as a response to the limitations of traditional teaching methods, emphasizing that creating yet another method does not effectively address these limitations.

Examining the definition of a method reveals that it tends to marginalize teachers, pushing them to merely follow prescribed principles without room for personal judgment or unique teaching approaches. Similarly, learners often become passive recipients compelled to conform to the method's procedures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 247).

While methods are considered foundational in language education, covering everything from curriculum design to materials preparation, they fall short in explaining the complexity of language teaching. Their application can seem overly complex, and their principles can be exaggerated (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). Additionally, methods often prioritize cognitive aspects while neglecting broader institutional, political, contextual, and social factors that teachers encounter (Clarke, 1994). Consequently, methods are often designed for idealized scenarios, making them unrealistic.

Teachers recognize that methods are sometimes imposed upon them in an artificial manner, possibly because method developers often lack direct experience as language educators. This perception can undervalue teachers' expertise and experience (Clarke, 1994).

Pedagogical approaches centered on specific methods often overlook the valuable knowledge and experience teachers already possess from their own language learning experiences. In these approaches, teacher educators act as intermediaries, presenting methods as ready-made knowledge, leaving little room for critical thinking (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, pp. 216-217). This top-down approach inhibits teachers from taking control of their professional development and may lack a strong research basis, as cautioned by Allwright (1991), who advises against uncritically adopting untested methods (as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 161). Similarly, Brown (2002) argues that methods often lack empirical support, relying heavily on intuition and artistry (p. 10).

3. Macro-Strategy

A macro-strategy serves as a general plan or a broad guideline that teachers can use as a foundation for their context-specific lessons. These macro-strategies are put into action through micro-strategies. Furthermore, both current and aspiring teachers require a framework that empowers them to cultivate the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and independence needed to formulate a systematic, coherent, and pertinent personal teaching philosophy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 40). The paper proceeds to elucidate each principle within this framework.

A. Maximize learning opportunities

This principle underscores the idea that teaching involves the active creation and utilization of learning opportunities. For instance, when a student inquires about the meaning of a specific word, the teacher refrains from immediately providing an answer but instead encourages other students to volunteer their responses. To illustrate, in a lesson focused on deserts, if a student confuses the term with "dessert," the teacher seizes the moment to explain the distinction between the two words right then and there (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). The rationale behind this approach is that if one student is confused, it's likely that others may have similar confusion. Additionally, fostering connections within the school community, such as grouping students and sending them to student service centers to gather information, as well as establishing links with the local and global community, such as encouraging students to read target-language newspapers or listen to radio broadcasts, are other methods for creating learning opportunities (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). As the teacher closely monitors how the lesson is progressing, they make necessary adjustments to generate additional

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learning opportunities.

B. Minimize perceptual mismatches

This principle involves recognizing discrepancies in perception between what the teacher intends and how the learners interpret things, or vice versa. In certain classroom activities, there can be differing interpretations from each participant. In simpler terms, students may sometimes grasp concepts or information that differ from what the teacher had planned or emphasized. For instance, in Activity 1, there is a possibility that perceptual mismatches may arise if the selected words, initially believed to be unfamiliar to the students and intended to have their meanings inferred from the context, are actually already known to them. Consequently, the teacher would be unable to assess the students' capacity to deduce meanings from the text or achieve the objective of expanding their vocabulary.

C. Facilitate negotiated interaction

This principle promotes providing learners with opportunities to initiate conversations and actively participate by responding and reacting. In essence, it encourages learners to feel comfortable contributing to the discussion topic and reengaging in the conversation by asking questions.

D. Promote learner autonomy

This principle underscores the significance of guiding students in acquiring the skill of self-directed learning. For instance, in her "lexical competence" course, the researcher, who also serves as the lecturer, provides her students with a weekly article from which they are tasked with identifying unfamiliar vocabulary words. Subsequently, she instructs them to write reflective pieces detailing the strategies they employ for learning and retaining these selected new vocabulary terms. By the conclusion of the course, it became evident that the students had developed their own strategies that proved effective not only for recognizing their individual learning preferences and techniques but also for successfully acquiring new vocabulary.

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E. Foster language awareness

This principle underscores the importance of directing learners' attention toward the structural aspects of the second language (L2) to facilitate learning. The researcher's personal experience serves as an example: during her high school English courses, her teacher would mark certain sentences with an "E" label, indicating expression issues. However, the teacher never provided guidance on how to correct these errors. Consequently, the researcher had to identify and rectify them on her own, which proved to be a time-consuming process and led to the repetition of similar mistakes. If the teacher had actively drawn her attention to language structures and helped enhance her awareness of language usage, she could have progressed more quickly. Activity 3 offers examples of how teachers can guide students' attention to language forms and their functions. In essence, the teacher allows students to learn about or increase their awareness of the structure and purpose of imperatives and adjectives. Additionally, students' understanding of language formality is also improved through explicit focus on the use of the term "coz."

F. Activate intuitive heuristics

This principle underscores the significance of offering learners substantial textual material and permitting them to deduce the governing rules through self-exploration. To illustrate, the poem featured in Activity 4 can serve as a tool to assist learners in examining the structure and purpose of "will" as a marker for future tense. In the lesson plan, given that students already have a grasp of future tense, they utilize the poem to deepen their understanding of how this tense is applied. The teacher directs their attention to the tense employed in the poem and the significance it imparts to the text.

G. Contextualize linguistic input

This principle entails combining various aspects of language, including syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). For instance, a poem serves as a distinct type of text and a vehicle for delivering linguistic information within a context. Students can be provided with the opportunity to concentrate not only on the language forms but also on the meanings and broader discourse aspects.

H. Integrate language skills

Kumaravadivelu (2003a) contends that while certain textbooks may present reading and writing as a single unit and listening and speaking as another, this approach appears impractical because learners naturally integrate multiple language skills rather than rigidly separating them. For instance, learners often listen attentively to the teacher and simultaneously take notes, effectively combining listening and writing skills. Consequently, it becomes essential for teachers to structure lessons in a manner that allows learners to engage with language across all language skill areas.

I. Raise cultural consciousness

This principle underscores the importance of fostering awareness and empathy toward the culture associated with the second language (L2). It achieves this by enabling students to draw comparisons between their own culture and the culture of the target language, thereby encouraging the development of a thoughtful cultural understanding. The discussion question permits students to make comparisons regarding the significance attributed to pets in both English and Turkish cultures.

J. Ensure social relevance

This principle underscores the importance of teachers being attuned to the social, political, economic, and educational context in which second language (L2) learning occurs. Kumaravadivelu (2003a) suggests that utilizing the learners' native language (L1) as a valuable resource allows the teacher to establish a connection between the home language and the target language, thereby ensuring social relevance. Additionally, the use of teaching materials that are socially relevant is crucial. These materials should not only reflect English culture but also draw from the learners' own life experiences and culture. For instance, in an activity the focus is on the learners' social environment by seeking to elicit their knowledge of hamsters, which is influenced by how hamsters are perceived in their society or their personal interests. Through this activity, the teacher aims to bridge the gap between the topic and the learners' real-life experiences, societal influences, and background knowledge shaped by the social, political, and economic environment. By doing so, the teacher can encourage learners to comfortably express themselves using their native language and establish connections between the two languages, which may reveal different perspectives on the topic.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, considering the limitations inherent in the concept of teaching methods and how post-method pedagogy addresses these limitations, it can be affirmed that post-method is not simply another teaching method; instead, it has emerged as an alternative to traditional methods. As a novel approach in the field of English language teaching, post-method pedagogy encourages educators to view language teaching and learning from a fresh perspective. It empowers them to recognize their own potential as practitioners. Post-method pedagogy does not signify the abandonment of established methods, which still provide valuable insights. Rather, it calls upon educators to comprehend the constraints of traditional methods while acknowledging their own capabilities as significant resources in method development. Educators should draw from their experiences and knowledge, sharing them with others. This dual role as both researcher and practitioner enables them to transition from idealism to practicality.

In this endeavour, educators should be capable of justifying their method construction by referencing the macro-strategic and three-dimensional frameworks, which offer broad and adaptable guidelines. These frameworks provide principles that can be applied and customized in any educational context, guiding both seasoned and novice teachers toward professional growth in both research and practice.

To summarize, the emphasis should not solely be on how methods work for teachers but on how teachers actively engage in constructing and implementing methods (Arikan, 2006, p. 7). It underscores the importance of how educators transcend existing methods by utilizing the guidance of these frameworks.

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