

Research Article

**Applicability of CLT and Postmethod Pedagogy in Iranian Context of ELT:  
Expert Teachers' Perspectives**

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**Abstract**

After all the methods and approaches of English Language Teaching (ELT) have been through, today in 21<sup>st</sup> century there are two current controversial ways of English language teaching named as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Postmethod pedagogy with the former labeled as being an approach belonging to method era and the latter an outcome of the belief in moving beyond the methods. This paper is concerned with the common mainstream of ELT in Iran and aimed to explore the preferred way of English language teaching in this context. After a careful review of literature regarding the present debate, the study adopted a qualitative research design including observation and semi-structured interviews. The participants of the study were five experienced English language teachers teaching at five well-known language institutes in Iran. The findings of this study help teachers' self-understanding of their teaching styles. Additionally, it helps decision makers and teachers to know the reasons behind choosing specific ways of ELT which work better in this particular context. Moreover, some practical implications are suggested to teacher education programs.

**Keywords:** *English language teaching, communicative language teaching, postmethod pedagogy, experienced language teachers.*

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## İran Bağlamında İngilizce Öğretiminde İletişimsel ve Yöntem-Sonrası Dil Öğretim Yöntemlerinin Uygulanabilirliği: Deneyimli Öğretmenlerin Bakış Açıları

### Öz

İngilizce Öğretimine (İÖ) yönelik tüm yöntemler ve yaklaşımlar ele alındıktan sonra, günümüz 21.YY'da İÖ'ne yönelik İletişimsel Dil Öğretimi (İDÖ) ve Yöntem-Sonrası Durum olmak üzere tartışmalı iki farklı güncel yöntem bulunmaktadır. Bu yöntemlerden ilki yöntem çağına ait olarak ele alınırken ikincisi yöntemlerin ötesine geçen bir inanın çıktısı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu çalışma İran'da İÖ'ndeki yaygın ana akımı incelerken, bu bağlamda İÖ'nin en tercih edilen yöntemini keşfetmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Güncel tartışmalara ilişkin alanyazın derinlemesine incelendikten sonra araştırma, gözlem ve yarı-yapılandırılmış görüşmeleri içeren nitel araştırma yöntemi ile desenlenmiştir. Araştırmanın katılımcılarını İran'da tanınmış beş farklı öğretim kurumunda görev yapmakta olan alanında deneyimli beş İngilizce öğretmeni oluşturmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın bulguları öğretmenlerin kendi öğretim stillerini anlamalarına yardımcı olacaktır. Ayrıca çalışma, sözü edilen bu özel bağlamda hangi İÖ yönteminin seçileceğine ilişkin nedenleri belirlemede karar vericilere ve öğretmenlere yol gösterecektir. Buna ek olarak çalışmada, öğretmen eğitimi programlarına yönelik bazı pratik uygulamalar önerilmektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** İngiliz dili öğretimi, iletişimsel dil öğretimi, yöntem sonrası dil öğretimi, deneyimli dil öğretmenleri.

## Introduction

The history of English language teaching and learning has been the ground for many methods and approaches while each attempting to suggest the right best method for language teaching. The suggested methods and approaches by researchers are classified by Kumaravadivelu (2006) to three categories. First, there are language-centered methods believing that learners' proficiency in second language happens by gaining mastery over predetermined presequenced linguistic features and structures. The next category named as learner-centered methods assume that learners preoccupation with both notions and functions of language leads to their communicative competence. Finally, there are learning-centered methods which aim to provide opportunities for learners to participate in interaction with the use of tasks (i.e. focus on meaning leads to communicative competence). Communicative language teaching as an offspring of learner-centered methods has gained much popularity around the world due to its emphasis on communicative competence that is the ultimate goal of language learning. The comprehensiveness of this method turned it to be considered as an approach (Richards, 2001) comprising main sets of principles (Bell, 2003) to be adopted in classrooms. However, Kumaravadivelu (1994) believes that methods driven from all aforementioned categories are not purely practiced in the classrooms since they are not outcomes of real classroom experience. He continues, "even syllabus designers and textbook producers do not strictly follow the underlying philosophy of a given method, and more importantly, even teachers who are trained in and claim to follow a particular method do not fully conform to its theoretical principles and classroom procedures" (p. 30). Regarding deficiencies of method restrictions, Kumaravadivelu (1994) proposed postmethod pedagogy to respond to the need for an optimal way of English language teaching. The emergence of postmethod pedagogy while claiming the 'death of method era' and undoubted popularity of CLT as a method have caused a controversial debate among researchers right from the advent of postmethod to the present time. In fact, postmethod advocates believe that their strategies are derived from real classroom experience while CLT has already found its way to language classrooms through the widespread use of imported commercial coursebooks for a long time (Tajeddin, 2005). In the context of Iran in which CLT –as underlying method of commercial textbooks- is utilized as the best implemented offer for

English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, postmethod pedagogy is only a familiar concept to graduate Teaching English as Foreign Language (TEFL) students who have academically studied its parameters and strategies. However, being acquainted with either does not guarantee its complete implementation and application in real classroom practice. Regarding these two current controversial ways of English language teaching -CLT and Postmethod pedagogy, this study aims to explore expert teachers' knowledge and awareness of CLT and postmethod pedagogy underlying their real practice as well as understanding the reasons behind choosing the specific way of teaching language.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Due to limitations of Grammar Translation and Audiolingual methods in providing a real-life interactive social ground for language teaching and learning, TESOL professionals suggested CLT as a solution to the problem. To carry out CLT program, classrooms need to have a number of features (Brown, 2000; Brown, 2001; Chastain, 1988; Hymes, 1972; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards & Rodgers, 2001) that are listed below.

1. Communication is the mean to achieve the goal of communicative competence.
2. CLT classes emphasize on language use rather than knowledge about language. Therefore, there's much emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy.
3. Appropriateness of language in terms of using speech acts is prioritized over structural precision. Thus, CLT classes teach forms and rules of grammar implicitly and learners discover the rules.
4. Error correction needs to be implicit and minimal, and teachers have to be tolerant to errors as they believe learners are in the process of building their communicative competence.
5. CLT classes use authentic material and CLT teachers welcome learners' spontaneous reaction and response to language lessons. With this regard, meaning is negotiated and constructed among students and between students and teachers.
6. CLT classes flourish learners' autonomy as teachers encourage learners to interact as much as possible while admitting all risks it takes. Thus, learners are active participants

and not merely passive recipients. CLT classes are quite learner-centered. The role of the learner is defined as a negotiator.

7. Group work is highly suggested due to its significant role to prepare ground for communication.
8. Teachers act as facilitators of communication and monitor of learning process who direct learners to achieve communicative competence. They assure the course of communication and interaction between all the students in the classroom with the use of a range of activities and texts. Also, the teachers are considered not only as organizers of resources but as another member of learning group.
9. CLT classes comprise suggesting main sets of principles without prescribed methodology or techniques.
10. CLT classes implement alternative assessment preferably such as self-assessment.
11. CLT teachers grow thinking skills in learners as CLT believes that use of language should develop critical and creative thinking.
12. CLT classes integrate all skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening because in reality language is not used in discrete items.
13. In CLT classes, students diversity are respected and different ways of learning are offered through learning strategies.

It should be noted that since implementation of CLT from 1990s on, its principles have continued to advance and change due to new understandings gained from its application in practice. Concepts such as language learning strategies, critical thinking and alternative assessment have been added to CLT recently (Richards, 2006) in order to meet learners' needs in communicative approach to language teaching and helping to development of strong version of CLT.

Nevertheless, the unquestioned era of methods led researchers and professionals look forward to find the best methods or to question the concept of method itself. Richards (1990) believes that methods have serious limitations. The major problem is that methods impose teacher and learners' roles, class activities and processes on both teachers and learners as he states methods are "predetermined, packaged deal for teachers that incorporate a static view of teaching" (p.

37). However, the situation is different in the real classroom context as teachers are the ones who make differences in the classroom and not the methods and the methods used in the class result from teacher-student interaction. In this way, there is a shift from prescribed methods to beyond methods. Kumaravadivelu (1994) implied the end of method era by proposing the postmethod condition which aimed to construct theories derived from real classroom practice rather than imitating theories recommended by theorists and applied linguists. The desirable condition of postmethod is 'location-specific' pedagogy and postmethod attempts to find an alternative to method and not an alternative method (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Kumaravadivelu (1994) constructed a pedagogic framework that empowers the teachers with "knowledge, skill, attitude, and autonomy". The framework constitutes ten macrostrategies offered in terms of guidelines and general plan derived from real practice in the classrooms. The macrostrategies, he asserts, are not prescribed, predetermined methods, but a set of guidelines that could be adopted to any teaching situation in a particular context. The first macrostrategy is *maximizing learning opportunities* described as a social activity asserting that teachers need to create learning opportunities and use the learning opportunities created by learners. In this way, teachers and learners are managers of learning all together cooperatively.

The next strategy is *facilitating negotiated interaction* meaning that in the process of interaction "learner should be actively involved in clarification, confirmation, comprehension checks, requests, repairing, reacting, and turn taking" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Also, the teacher needs to give learners the freedom and encouragement to talk, react and respond. *Minimizing perceptual mismatches*, as the next strategy, emphasizes on narrowing down the distance between teacher intentions and learners interpretation. There are ten sources of mismatch between teacher intention and learners interpretation including cognitive, communicative, linguistic, pedagogic, strategic, cultural, evaluative, procedural, instructional, and attitudinal sources. Then, there is *activating intuitive heuristics* meaning that learners need to be at exposure of great amount of fruitful data while stimulating their problem-solving insights that helps them to understand new input implicitly.

The next macro-strategy is *fostering language awareness* which suggests a combination of consciousness raising and input enhancement to promote understanding in learners rather than memorization. Then, there is *contextualizing linguistic input* through which learners benefit from integration of syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and discourse; they learn language as a whole not discrete elements in isolation. Derived from previous strategy, *integrating language skills*, as the next strategy stresses that language needs to be learned holistically through which both language ability and knowledge are fostered. Then, *promoting learner autonomy* requires students to learn to self-direct their own learning through the use of a range of strategies and by taking the responsibility for their learning.

The next strategy is *raising cultural consciousness* meaning that learners need to get the ability to interpret culturally relevant behavior. Learners' culture is as important and teacher's culture and learners' sociocultural awareness makes their learning process more manageable.

The final macro-strategy is *ensuring social relevance* highlighting the importance of learners' social and political background. Therefore, what learners are taught needs to be appropriate and corresponding to their own society since they use the knowledge in that context. At the end Kumaravadivelu (1994) states that the strategic framework should be treated "not as a fixed package of ready-made solutions but rather as an interim plan to be continually modified, expanded, and enriched by classroom teachers based on ongoing feedback".

This framework is shaped by three operating parameters named as particularity, practicality, and possibility. Pedagogy of particularity leads to "context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge" emerged from teachers' practice and raises critical awareness of local experiences; therefore, it is antithetical to the notion that there can be one set of pedagogic aims and objectives realizable through one set of pedagogic principles and procedures" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). Pedagogy of practicality encourages teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize and it highlights 'teacher-generated theory of practice'. Pedagogy of possibility is concerned with learners and teachers identity, their sociopolitical awareness and the way individuals struggle to protect their own and collective identity. Therefore, language teachers cannot separate learners' linguistic needs from their social needs. These three parameters of the

framework of postmethod pedagogy along with the aforementioned ten macrostrategies characterize primary efforts to surpass the limitations of the concept of method.

### **The debate**

Language teachers always deal with finding right method that works best in the particular context of their classroom. Believing that teaching methods help teaching quality, language teachers have always hoped for development of effective methods. Methods provide teachers with a set of principles and strategies about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and learners in the classroom, the course material, and the way material is taught (Richards, 1990). On the other hand, postmethod opened a new different window to English language teaching with its rejection of prescribed methods. It hoped for teacher and learner autonomy through providing guidelines with the use of context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). However, another instance is not taking method and postmethod as different concepts. In other words, it is the way we define methods that leads us toward its acceptance or rejection. Although postmethod was an attempt toward a search for a new method -which postmethod advocates call alternative to method, it is again a method defined in sets of principles (Bell, 2003). While comparing postmethod principles to those of Communicative Language Teaching, we come to know that postmethod macrostrategies including negotiation, interaction, integrated language skills, learner autonomy, etc. resemble highly to CLT principles. Therefore, postmethod does not put an end to method rather it raises understanding of limitations of method and tries to restrict those limitations (Bell, 2003). Akbari (2008) objects the accordance of CLT and postmethod pedagogy as he states a close look at “CLT reveals that when the term *context* is used, it is at the microlevel of who is talking to whom, where, and about what, but context in postmethod terminology includes aspects of the real sociopolitical lives of the people involved in the learning process” (p. 644); hence, CLT lacks critical pedagogy and mostly deals with philosophical and ideological aspects rather than practical aspects. In this regard, postmethod pedagogy is suffering from lack of practicality in real classroom context due to several reasons (Akbari, 2008).

In the present ELT context, the system is quite top-down and administrative that does not allow teachers' autonomy –posed by postmethod- to grow and develop. In addition, even if the system does provide the opportunity, teachers may not have the time, resources and willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy. On the other hand, requirements for postmethod pedagogy need daring teachers to implement such pedagogy that, as a result, could cost their isolation from their discourse community.

On the other hand, postmethod pedagogy has been criticized in several ways by Tajeddin (2005). Postmethod is the outcome of post modernism just as other researchers believe so (Akbari, 2008; Bell, 2003) being a mixture of modernity and tradition. Post modernism itself is open to much criticism due to its inefficacy; therefore, admitting its outcome in education i.e. postmethod pedagogy is of problem. Furthermore, postmethod advocates insist on ten macrostrategies being bottom-up, however, Tajeddin says, those are quite top-down since they have not been derived from real practice of the classrooms. The psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, and linguistic foundations of postmethod condition underlie the very concept of method. Postmethod techniques, procedures and guidelines, he asserts, fall within the category of method itself. Postmethod in many aspects is similar to Communicative Language Teaching as it is clear in the macrostrategies from which five of them are tools to communicative classroom. Therefore, methods are alive not only in practice, but also in theory as CLT principles are found in postmethod strategies. Besides, while method has found its way to practicality –which is quite clear in regular coursebook development- postmethod has not been implemented in practical terms such as syllabus design, material development, and language testing, and so on. The “dynamic, pluralistic, democratic era” of method enriched ELT with many sources and resources, however, postmethod pedagogy still heavily relies on” a single set, rather than competing sets, of principles” (Tajeddin, 2005). In this way, macrostrategies of postmethod pedagogy are again fixed and prescribed since they have not changed through time.

All in all, the debate on similarities of CLT and postmethod pedagogy revealed both efficacy of limitations of CLT leading to the claim that postmethod is the effective version of CLT in the future (Savignon, 2007). CLT is an approach that could not be separated from individual

identity and social behavior. The services CLT provided to ELT could not be questioned as its footprints are found in postmethod pedagogy, as well. However, ahead of communicative language teaching in the postmethod era, there are empowered teachers –being both practitioners and theorists- who could meet the language needs of future learners. To put it all together, savignon (2007) asserts, “a holistic, interactive, and learner-oriented CLT conception of language use and language learning can be implemented in classroom teaching practices” (p. 218) if only applied linguists, practitioners, and policy makers work together to make a collaborative critique on the present situation of CLT and overcome its limitations in postmethod era.

CLT has been the interest of the most commercial coursebooks being used worldwide for the aim of English language teaching and also English language teachers are encouraged to adopt CLT in the classrooms. Iranian context of English Language Teaching (ELT) and Iranian English language teachers are no exception of this issue. The target of CLT is facilitating communicative competence development through the use of communication and interaction among students and between students and the teacher in the classroom. However, regardless of the names and definitions, every way of language teaching – including methods, approaches and postmethod- defines the ideal situation and outcome of utilizing it in terms of the competencies it facilitates learners with. The practicality of every way of language teaching is determined by teachers as the real practitioners of the classrooms. Teachers decide on the applicability and efficacy of language teaching principles and strategies. The fact that Iranian language teachers and administrators welcome CLT does not prove its implementation in the real classroom context as there are many factors involved in calling the decision for using specific way of teaching including teachers' beliefs, cognition, prior experience, context, and teacher education programs (Borg, 2003). The present study aims to explore Iranian English language teachers' preferences in using specific ways of language teaching –with regard to the a la mode CLT and postmethod pedagogy, factors involved in choosing that specific way and their reasons behind the making the very decisions.

## **Studies in Iranian context**

Teacher education programs –either held at universities under the title of TEFL or at private language institutions under the title of Teacher Training Courses- in Iran are mostly oriented on theoretical and decontextualized content. The main focus of such programs is transmission of theoretical knowledge through lectures. Student teachers are not active participants in the process of learning how to teach English language as they focus on taking notes and memorizing what teacher educators present regarding the theoretical knowledge (Naseri Karimvand, Hessamy, and Hemmati, 2014). Teacher education programs in Iran are in serious need of holding practical teaching courses in order to provide the student teachers the opportunity to put their constructed theories into practice and reinforce the ability to do so.

Considering the statues of teacher education programs in the Iranian EFL context, there are a number of recent studies that have investigated the applicability and realization of postmethod pedagogy as an alternative to methods. Using a qualitative research design and interviews, Safari and Rashidi (2015) studied the application of post method pedagogy in Iranian EFL context. They came to the conclusion that while postmethod pedagogy has provided a rich theoretical understanding, it has not been successful in finding its way to practice. The parameters of particularity and practicality may have the chance to be realized in EFL teaching with great financial investment, instruction, and provision of resources, but the parameter of possibility with its sociopolitical factors and critical thinking demands is nearly impossible to be implemented. In the same vein, Kaimvand, Hessamy, and Hemmati (2016) conducted a mixed method study to uncover Iranian EFL teachers' perception on the applicability of postmethod and the facilitative and deterrent factors in implementing it. The results indicated that parameters of particularity and practicality were considered as moderately and greatly important by teachers while parameter of possibility was considered as rarely possible or impossible in EFL teaching. Furthermore, the results of the qualitative section indicated that language institutions and supervisors have a facilitative role in encouraging teachers to use postmethod pedagogy while time constraints and lack of interest on the part of students challenge the application of postmethod. Similarly, Mardani and Moradian (2016) investigated EFL teachers' attitudes towards application of postmethod pedagogy and the difficulties and

challenges they encounter. The data analysis of this mixed method research indicated that there is a gap between teachers' understanding of postmethod and its implementation arisen from factors including teaching experience, learners' disinterest, language institutions' constraints, and current interests and schooling that influence construction of theoretical knowledge and practical teaching.

Generally, studies conducted in Iranian EFL context deal with the application and realization of postmethod pedagogy in the context of classroom. The difficulties, barriers, and challenges that EFL teachers encounter are the interest of the studies conducted. However, the already fixed role of CLT in EFL classrooms has been merely ignored. It was mentioned earlier in the debate section that there are similarities between strong version of CLT and postmethod pedagogy. While CLT is already being implemented in language institutions, what postmethod pedagogy has added to the classroom procedure? What strategies of either teaching ways have found their way into classrooms? Do Iranian language teachers completely conform to either of the ways of language teaching? Are there other factors involved? These are the questions aimed to be answered throughout this study.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

The participants of this qualitative study were five in-service teachers who are Ph.D. candidates in the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). This study used purposeful sampling which assists in providing relevant and enough information about the issue the researchers aim to explore. Two of the participants had 15 years of teaching experience, the other two 13 years, and the last participant had 14 years of experience in teaching English language. All of them have been teaching English at well-known schools and language institutes of Tehran - Capital of Iran. Obviously, they have had side activities such as being professional translators of specific programs or have held compact business English courses. The following table demonstrates demographic information of the participants of the study.

Table 1.  
*Participants' Demographic Information*

<b>Code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teaching experience</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Field of study</b>
<b>A</b>	Female	15 years	Ph.D. candidate	TEFL
<b>B</b>	Female	13 years	Ph.D. candidate	TEFL
<b>C</b>	Male	14 years	Ph.D. candidate	TEFL
<b>D</b>	Male	15 years	Ph.D. candidate	TEFL
<b>E</b>	Female	13 years	Ph.D. candidate	TEFL

In order to collect in-depth and reflective perceptions, this study required participation of mindful teachers who are knowledgeable about theories and experienced in practice of English language teaching. As Ph.D. candidates, the participants had well-developed awareness on and knowledge about theories and issues of English language teaching. Furthermore, they had much experience of practicing English language teaching at language institutes and schools- i.e. 13-15 years.

### **Research Design**

In order to obtain rich and in-depth data, this study adopted a qualitative research design that could deal with complexities of participants' professional teaching experiences. The experiences of participants were collected through the means of semi-structured interviews and direct observation of the ongoing procedure of their classrooms. Semi-structured interview with an open-to-talk environment helps ideas to emerge and flourish. It also maintains the direction of interview not to be diverted from the main topic of interest. The companions of this study participated in semi-structured interviews after we observed their classes, and their ways of English language teaching. The interviews were precisely transcribed later. The process of data analysis began with coding procedure. This content analysis process led to initial development of categories and codes applied to data later. The codes were then sorted and grouped to generate major themes while maintaining the interrelationships of participants' experiences and interpretations.

## **Procedure and Data Analysis**

The procedure of this study began with one by one observation of participants' classroom procedures. One session –nearly one and a half hours- of precise observation of each participants' classroom helped us in reflecting on companion teachers' preferable way of teaching. Totally, seven hours of direct observation were accomplished. During the observation sessions, we wrote memos and journals for better reflection, exploration, and further analysis of the observed ways of teaching. Observations were used as a tool ensuring us of the coordination of participants' words and acts. After the observation, we conducted individual face to face semi-structured interviews with teachers and audio-recorded the conversation. The interview questions were derived from principles of CLT and macrostrategies of postmethod pedagogy. The careful review of literature done before designing interview questions were of great value to shape and direct the questions. There were 10 questions some of which found probing questions during the course of interview. We gave the interview prompts to the participants in advance so that they could retrieve their knowledge about CLT and postmethod pedagogy and think about the probable answers to specific method-related questions. The interviews were conducted in Farsi –participants' native language, in order to get deep understanding of the situation and maintain participants' convenience. The interviews were precisely transcribed later.

The present study utilized direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and memos to collect the most relevant data and to ensure the notion of triangulation leading to trustworthiness of the study. Additionally, careful review of literature while gaining a precise understanding of the controversies of the issue at hand as well as observing the present situation of English language teaching in our local context provided a rich background to this study. We began data analysis with reading, re-reading, and highlighting the interview transcriptions and memos. Through the process of open coding, we found related meaningful data in interview transcriptions, notes and memos and highlighted them with colorful markers. Then, through axial coding, we tried to group the highlighted parts together and find the points of similarity. After we found relationships among the determined groups through selective data coding, themes were emerged out of data. This process is named selective coding and looks for

connection among groups (Dornyei, 2007). The relationships of themes and codes are explained later in this paper.

## **Findings and Discussion**

In the following parts, we will report on the questions and the salient responses through the categorization of the themes emerged from the data. It should be noted that the focus of the present study was not a confirmation to the presence of a specific kind of way of teaching; however, it aimed to explore that how experienced educated teachers with awareness and knowledge of principles of CLT and guidelines of postmethod pedagogy carry out the course of their classrooms.

### **Eclecticism is Present in Theory; Principled Pragmatism Happens in Practice**

The theories developed by theorists with a top down approach in prescription of methods to be implemented in the classroom cause a big gap between theory of theorists and practice of practitioners. In this way, teachers adopt an eclectic approach toward language teaching that is a kind of resistance and survivance toward maintaining faithful to theories (Akbari, 2007). However, participants of this study claim that their way of teaching is arisen from their understanding of the way teaching leads to learning achievement. Experiences including their experiences as teachers and learners, discussions with colleagues and in some parts academic knowledge gained at universities shape the very understanding. Such approach derived from direct activity of teaching is called “principled pragmatism” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Participant A puts it this way:

*“What we do in the class is not eclecticism. Eclecticism requires being first knowledgeable about the methods and then selecting the appropriate-to-context ones. In my case, my teaching experiences tell me what way works in the class and what does not.”*

Participant teacher D with 15 years of teaching experience asserts the same issue this way:

*“In my opinion, eclecticism means having a theoretical basis behind whatever you select from methods in the classroom. But what I do is adopting a combination of my operating experiences that could be applied to most of my classes.”*

The participants of the present study believe that eclecticism requires them to have a theoretical justification behind every principle applied in the classroom. The situation is quite different for novice teachers with little professional knowledge as they randomly select techniques from different methods and use them in “unsystematic, unprincipled, and uncritical” way (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). The evidences show that whether teachers have theoretical principles behind eclecticism or they randomly combine techniques of various methods, both situations lead to restrictions in applying teachers' own teaching experience. In the following theme we discuss whether the academic knowledge gained in teacher education programs help teachers' efficiency or not.

### **Academic Studies Improve Teachers' Foundation of Theories**

Teacher education programs help student teachers to gain much knowledge about theories of language, language learning, and language teaching. The assumption is that the teacher educators transfer the knowledge and student teachers are on their own to apply the theories into practice as Day (1993) says, “students are said to be educated when they have been exposed to the scientific knowledge which the experts believe are the fundamental elements of a given profession” (p. 6). The scientific knowledge student teachers acquire during teacher education program lacks practical aspects. Language teachers need to be equipped with both knowledge of subject matter –i.e. language, and knowledge of teaching it. Participant C states the difference clearly this way:

*“The way language teachers are treated is just like the following situation: a graduate student of Physics starts teaching Physics to students at schools. Does this graduate student in this science know anything about rules and techniques of teaching a subject matter?”*

The participant teachers asserted that what they deal with in academic education at universities is abstraction and there are not enough instances to help them in practicing the knowledge. They believe teaching experiences gained before passing academic degrees help them more in practice. Participant B says her opinion as the following:

*“I should say that we, as educated language teachers, are dealing with two things: teaching language and teaching its theories of teaching and learning. Studying TEFL could end up us with being an instructor educating student teachers at universities. The truth is that what we learn in teacher preparation programs help us with the latter and it is not very helpful in becoming a language teacher.”*

However, participant teacher E with 13 years of experience believes that academic knowledge has helped her in different ways. She owes the knowledge about alternative assessments and ways of error correction to teacher education program. She asserts that postmethod assisted her to raise autonomy in her students and to have a good rapport with the students. Participant teacher B had more or less the same idea. She had clearly witnessed the differences between a teacher with academic knowledge record (such as M.A. or Ph.D. in TEFL) and a language teacher (who could have been studying other fields of study and were there busy with teaching only because of being fluent in English language). Teachers with academic knowledge are able to justify and rationalize the strategies, styles and techniques they offer to students and the learners find such teachers knowledgeable enough and trust them more.

### **CLT and Postmethod Pedagogy Face Barriers in our Context of ELT**

As we discussed earlier, some researchers believe that CLT and postmethod have many things in common (Bell, 2003; Savignon, 2007; Tajeddin, 2005). When the participant teachers of the study were asked the question of “To what extents is your way of teaching similar to postmethod pedagogy or CLT?”, the responses indicated the same fact as they believed both trends have things in common. For instance, the importance given to learner needs, communication, interaction, learners’ creativity, learner autonomy, waiting for learners to discover rules, teaching grammar implicitly, etc. are more or less the same in both trends. However, there are some issues with CLT, as they believe, it is designed for the ELT programs in countries which have ELT as second language (ESL) and not a foreign language (EFL). In the EFL context, language learners do not have access to target context. The emphasis on communication and interaction in CLT is only achieved in limited hours of English classes during the week. Moreover, the communication approach does not help young learners with low language proficiency. Additionally, the emphasis of CLT on using authentic material has been remained in a vague instance in terms of what authentic material is and who is in charge of developing such material. There are many situations in which the cultural issues stated in imported coursebooks designed by English language speakers abandon learners from talking or if the conversation runs, it is due to learners’ memorization ability and not a sense of closeness to the very context. In such cases, the interaction is initiated when the autonomous teacher directs the topic of discussion to the related local issues so that learners feel comfortable to keep the interaction going on.

The CLT does not lay much local flavor. The observation of participants of the study clearly indicated that when they use topics of learners’ interest, learners keep the hot discussion going on as if they are talking their native language or there are times that they give opinions in Farsi in order to impress others with their ideas. This is where ideas become more important than the language so negotiation and interaction are facilitated. To reach this stance, participant teachers devote one or two sessions of the term in getting to know the learners, their interests, favorites, and needs. Then, the classes are carried out according to the particular expectations of the learners.

On the other hand, postmethod teachers need to be very skilled and expert to implement the requirement of postmethod pedagogy (Naseri Karimvand, Hessamy, & Hemmati, 2014) as participant A mentioned:

*“Postmethod pedagogy requires very skillful teachers as to be jack of all things. Postmethod teachers do not act within restrictions of administrations, syllabus designers, and decision makers. But we are working within all these constraints.”*

The aforementioned restrictions influence the parameters of postmethod pedagogy directly. For instance, pedagogy of particularity is not practical to be considered with the existing limitations that teachers face in the course of their career. It seems really idealistic that a teacher could take into account every particular learner with particular needs in a particular context with the presence of much workload, time constraints and a full imposed syllabus to be covered. Participant teacher C believes that:

*“In our language teaching system, especially in the context of private language institutes, teachers are actors to the system and are not in charge of making decisions.”*

In the same vein, pedagogy of possibility is under question (Naseri Karimvand, Hessamy, & Hemmati, 2014, Safari & Rashidi, 2015).). The imposed syllabus and program by administrations do not open much space for teachers to develop critical thinking in students. Neither teachers themselves have been raised as critical thinkers as they were subjected to the same system. Our students are trained to be followers and not critical thinkers. Of course, participant teachers state reasons other than the mentioned one as participant A said:

*“Teachers prefer to maintain the authority in the class and do not like to be questioned by students. There is an unwritten rule for them that the stricter you hold the class, the more principled class goes on.”*

Teachers are the heart of postmethod pedagogy. They need to be autonomous, creative, and reflective (Akbari, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). Restrictions of language institutes and schools in covering the whole assigned designed syllabus within time constraints, too much workload, limited time of preparation for classes, low payments, learners' diversity as well as inefficiencies teacher training courses (TTCs) and teacher education programs tie teachers' hands in the post method pedagogy.

### **Teacher Education Programs and Teacher Training Courses Have a Vital Role**

Globalization has brought people around the world closer to each other and the medium of communication among diverse people and cultures is English language due to many reasons such as Western culture hegemony and academic imperialism (Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Loomba, 2005; Pennycook, 1998). Therefore, English language teaching has turned to be a professional career today with constant developments. In this regard, ELT as a “field of

educational specialization... requires a specialized knowledge base obtained through both academic study and practical experience, and it is a field of work where membership is based on entry requirements and standards” (Richards, 2008, p. 160). Teacher education programs and teacher training courses have been responsible for preparing student teachers for language teaching. In our context, we are dealing with two situations. A) Teacher education programs held at universities such as TEFL and, B) Teacher training courses held by private language institutes. The participant teachers asserted that there are problems with both.

First of all, teacher education programs at universities work within transmission model framework (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). It means teacher educators deliver the theories of language, language learning and language teaching that have been put together by researchers in a package. Such model does not prepare teachers with needed practical classroom skills and techniques. Participant teacher C said that:

*“The models we have in our teacher education are imported models. They are bounded with theories and are not matched with our culture. We need to design localized models that tell teachers the way they should treat Iranian learners: adults or teenagers, and male or females.”*

There is a need to add local flavor to teacher education programs and moving beyond devotion of the whole courses to theories stated in imported academic books and giving teachers a voice to criticize and challenge the current situation of ELT and come up with new ideas and innovations that work best in our local context. Then, those personal theories could be challenged and reformed until it is ready to be implemented in the class of a reflective teacher (Akbari, 2007). Besides, practical courses are really missing in teacher education programs as participant E stated:

*“During the whole course of our graduate program (M.A. and Ph.D.), we did not have any courses for practical teaching or observing other classrooms and reflecting on them.”*

It seems that the apprentice-expert model (Day, 1993) that once had been so popular in the past, needs to be implemented in teacher education programs extensively due to student teachers’ needs and expectations. Apprenticeships and being assistant to expert teachers help a great deal to teachers in shaping their personality as teachers.

Second, the problems with teacher training courses held by language institutes have caused many problems for teachers with academic knowledge. Again such courses are devoted to language learning and teaching theories but in a much more concise form like 10 to 15 sessions. The participant teachers assured that such short programs could not deal with complexities of language teaching in any way. Usually, private language institutes ask their graduate learners to participate in the teacher training courses and start teaching English language in the very institute. The problems arisen here are related to such teachers’ lack of pedagogic knowledge like classroom management skills, content pedagogic knowledge –i.e. the field specific

knowledge of how to represent the knowledge of language to students so that their understanding is assured, and supporting knowledge such as knowledge of other fields helping language teaching like psychology, research method, etc. (Day, 1993; Richards, 2008). However, the way TTC courses are carried out mislead student teachers to think that having general knowledge of English is enough for language teachers and pedagogic and pedagogic content knowledge are not issues of concern.

### **Implications and conclusion**

The present study aimed to explore the way expert teachers with specialized knowledge of principles of CLT and guidelines of postmethod pedagogy -as two trendy ways of language teaching, carry out the course of their classrooms. The data analysis indicated that teachers do not conform to a single way of teaching and that the factors involved in choosing an appropriate way of teaching includes teachers' own prior and present experience, intuition, beliefs, cognition, discussions with colleagues, and learners' reactions and reflections. However, the academic knowledge could act only as an approval to the already implemented practice, but it is weak in making changes to their present practice; it may only add ideas to their own prior experience and knowledge. Teachers prefer to have "principled pragmatism" (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) rather than eclecticism. English language teachers face practical, cultural, and contextual constraints and barriers in applying either CLT or postmethod pedagogy.

Teacher education programs are in charge of helping teachers to deal with barriers and to device them with much freedom, autonomy and authority to question the present ELT program. In this way, teachers come up with new ideas and personal theories arisen from their own practice and experience because teachers prefer to use the methods and ways of teaching that help them with options while dealing with specific teaching contexts (Bell, 2007). As the evidences of data indicate, there is a need for conducting a comprehensive localized analysis of teachers' beliefs and cognition that could operate as a framework for Iranian English language teachers. Metaphorically, in the past, building a house could have been done simply by masons, but today's world developments require civil engineers and architects to take the responsibility of building apartments. Language teaching is no exception to that instance. While English language teaching is developing as a profession, we need to go forward and progress with that. Teachers with general English and content knowledge could be called as car drivers and teachers with academic and pedagogic knowledge of TEFL are like car mechanics. Today's condition of ELT requires language teachers to be both car drivers and mechanics. The results of this study offer implications to both teachers and teacher educators.

- a. English language teachers need to explore and revisit their beliefs, cognitions, and assumptions about language teaching and learning with the help of academic knowledge of TEFL, discussions with colleagues, students' reflection and their own reflection on their teaching. At the same time they need to keep their content knowledge updated.

- b. Local flavor cannot be eliminated from ELT programs in indigenous culture. For instance, participants of this study could not comment on CLT because its universal principles do not work in our local context. On the other hand, when it came to postmethod which has local color, the participants had too much to say.
- c. Teacher training courses and teacher education programs need to add courses related to practical teaching and observation of professional teachers' classroom. For instance, teacher educators could ask student teachers to observe 10 sessions of various teachers' classes, report on the way classes were conducted and manipulated and provide their own reflection of how and why the observations have shaped or reshaped their beliefs, cognitions, and experiences.
- d. Teacher education programs should really fill up the missing part of apprenticeships. This helps teachers to find and fix the initial ways of teaching rather than trying a trial and error approach toward teaching in real classroom context to see what works and what does not. Being teacher assistants help student teachers a lot in pedagogic knowledge such as classroom management techniques and strategies.

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