

Being a Dynamic Teacher of Second Language: Endorsing Location-Specific, Classroom Oriented Innovative Practices of Post-method Condition

Canista Arthie Hensman.

ELTC, University of Jaffna.

canista925arthie@gmail.com

Abstract - Number of methods and approaches are being introduced into the field of second language teaching. Though these various methods signify distinct perspectives of teaching, no single method proved itself to be ideal for a particular context. None of the methods can be realized in their purest form in the actual classroom primarily because they are not derived from classroom experience and experimentation. The top-down approach which is often employed in the invention of teaching methods proves futile as the practitioners are not being consulted and considered in the process of creating new methods and approaches to teaching. It is always the theorizers who are at the centre and the practitioners occupy the disempowered periphery of the power circle. This needs to be revised and a power shift might bring in desired results. Kumaravadivelu's "Beyond methods" endorses this power shifts and uplifts the position of a teacher. In a post method framework, the hands of the teacher are not tied to a particular system. Whatever she feels appropriate for a particular group of students can be adopted and utilized in the classroom. The fundamentals of Post method framework rely on paying attention to the socio psycho considerations of a given particular context and endorses location-specific, classroom oriented innovative practices. The current study is an experimental one and examines the suitability of post-method pedagogy in a Sri Lankan context. A classroom intervention was carried out to secure the necessary data. The research findings suggested that the application of post-method pedagogy is beneficial in learning English as a Second Language. The results also highlighted that the application of post-method condition enhanced learner-autonomy, student engagement and student performance.

Keywords - Beyond-method, Dynamic, innovation, post-method, practitioners.

I. INTRODUCTION

As generally perceived, the term method does not mean what teachers actually do in the classroom; rather, as per Kumaravadivelu, it refers to established methods conceptualized and constructed by experts in the field [1]. Methods are based on idealized concepts geared toward

idealized contexts. Since language learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous, no idealized method can visualize all the variables in advance in order to provide situation-specific suggestions that practicing teachers sorely need to tackle the challenges they confront every day of their professional lives. As a predominantly top-down exercise, the conception and construction of methods have been largely guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals.

Not anchored in any specific learning and teaching context, and caught up in the whirlwind of fashion, methods tend to wildly drift from one theoretical extreme to the other. These extreme swings create conditions in which certain aspects of learning and teaching get overly emphasized while certain others are utterly ignored, depending on which way the pendulum swings. Yet another crucial shortcoming of the concept of method is that it is too inadequate and too limited to satisfactorily explain the complexity of language teaching operations around the world. Concerned primarily and narrowly with classroom instructional strategies, it ignores the fact that the success or failure of classroom instruction depends to a large extent on the unstated and unstable interaction of multiple factors such as teacher cognition, learner perception, societal needs, cultural contexts, political exigencies, economic imperatives, and institutional constraints, all of which are inextricably interwoven.

On the other hand, Post-method condition refers to the qualities of the contemporary era in English language teaching in which previously well trusted methods are put under serious scrutiny and in which a body of methods and techniques collected from all previous methods and approaches are used pragmatically with a belief that such an eclectic practice leads to success. Such practices, under the post-method condition, are in constant influx, bringing continuous changes in both pre-service and in-service professional development programs.

Knowing the learner and the teaching context are very much important for a successful second language teacher. If the teacher knows the limitations of her learners and the

teaching context only, the teacher can select appropriate strategies that could facilitate his/her learners. This very idea is vividly captured by Kumaravadivelu when he speaks about the parameter of particularity he states the parameter of particularity requires that any language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be 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 socio cultural milieu [2]. As explained by Kumaravadivelu, the parameter of particularity is the ability to be sensitive to the local educational, institutional and social contexts in which L2 learning and teaching take place. Teacher has to adopt context sensitive pedagogy which could best facilitate the learner.

As endorsed by modern approaches like Communicative Language Teaching and others, emphasize is given to learner autonomy. Learner-centred classroom are highly appreciated. Still in contexts like Sri Lanka the learners cannot be left by themselves. Being spoon fed from their early childhood, the Sri Lankan learners expect the teacher to explain things for them. Gradually only this habit can be changed. As implied by Kubota western culture is often characterized by western educators as promoting individualism, self-expression, critical and analytic thinking, and extending knowledge [3]. Asian culture, by contrast, values collectivism, harmony, indirection, memorization and conserving knowledge. It is easier for a western learner to adopt learner autonomy and learner centeredness, as their cultural values are designed in such a way. But it is not the case for our learners. As Van Manen claims, the teachers' sense making plays a pivotal role here in choosing location specific, classroom oriented innovative practices in the classroom based on the psycho social considerations [4].

Thus, as Kumaravadivelu insists it is the responsibility of the teacher to construct situation-specific and need-based classroom techniques which best suit and are comprehensible to the learner.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Though various methods have been applied from time to time to improve the proficiency level of the learners in English, no desired or significant results could be achieved. And this leads to question the suitability and effectiveness of different types of methods applied so far in the field of teaching English as a second language and makes it necessary for the quest of a different venture to optimize the outcome of teaching and learning process. And at this juncture the researcher felt it is the right time to introduce "post-method paradigm" which is

known as a mixture of methods pertaining to the particular teaching and learning context to test its applicability. As no method so far proved itself to be effective in Sri Lankan context, the present study is significant as it seeks to find out a way through for the current problem – what method to follow. To explain the same in Kumaravadivelu's words - Recent explorations in teaching English as a second language pedagogy signal a shift away from the conventional concept of method toward a post-method condition that can potentially refigure the relationship between theorizers and teachers by empowering teachers with knowledge, skill, and autonomy [5]. So empowered, teachers could devise for themselves a systematic, coherent, and relevant alternative to method, one informed by principled pragmatism.

III. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to analyze effective ways of teaching methods and to find out the appropriateness of "post-method framework" of Kumaravadivelu to the prevailing conditions of University of Jaffna and to prescribe them fruitfully.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Before analyzing what 'beyond method' is, it would be helpful to define what 'method' is. According to Nunan a language teaching method is a single set of procedures which teachers are to follow in the classroom [6]. Methods are usually based on a set of beliefs about the nature of language and learning. The demise of method is consistent with the widely held view that we are now in a 'post-method' era. Thus, as long ago as 1983, Stern declared that several developments indicate a shift in language pedagogy away from the single method concept as the main approach to language teaching [7]. One such development was the failure, on the part of researchers, to find any significant advantage in one method over another. As Richards noted, studies of the effectiveness of specific methods have had a hard time demonstrating that the method itself, rather than other factors, such as the teacher's enthusiasm, or the novelty of the new method, was the crucial variable [8]. Moreover, recognition of the huge range of variables that impact on second language learning fuelled a general disenchantment with the notion of a 'quick fix', or what, in the social sciences, is sometimes called the 'technical-rational approach', i.e. the notion that social change and improvement can be effected through the strict application of scientific method. This had very much been the mind-set that impelled the spread of audiolingualism, founded as it was on (now largely discredited) research into animal behaviour. The last decades of the last century, however, witnessed a

challenge to ‘scientism’ in the social sciences, a challenge associated with the advent of postmodernism, and its rejection of the idea of universalist, objective knowledge. Accordingly, Pennycook argued that methods are never ‘disinterested’, but serve the dominant power structures in society, leading to a de-skilling of the role of teachers, and greater institutional control over classroom practice [9].

At around the same time, Kumaravadivelu identified what he called the post-method condition, a result of the widespread dissatisfaction with the conventional concept of method. Rather than subscribe to a single set of procedures, post-method teachers adapt their approach in accordance with local, contextual factors, while at the same time being guided by a number of macro strategies. Two such macro strategies are to maximise learning opportunities and promote learner autonomy. In a much-cited paper in 1990, Prabhu argued that there is no one method, but that individual teachers fashion an approach that accords uniquely with their ‘sense of plausibility’ [10].

V. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The design of the research is experimental and in order to carry out the research two groups of undergraduate students from the Second year Social sciences, with the same level of proficiency were selected. The informants of this research are the Social Science Undergraduates reading in their Second year in the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna. The students were selected from the department of Planning. Almost all the informants are of same age, namely, 22-23 years of age. Nearly all the students come from similar language and cultural background. The exposure to the target language (TL) is considerably less when comparing to the students from south as most of the students are affected by the ethnic conflict.

According to University Test of English Language (UTEL) benchmark set by University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka for the undergraduates in the country, their proficiency level ranges from level three to level four. One group serves the purpose of control group to whom traditional methods were utilized and the other group serves the purpose of experimental group to whom several macro strategies as prescribed by Kumaravadivelu in his post-method framework were employed. The experimental group was taught by the researcher and the control group students were handled by a research assistant who has equal proficiency level and the same qualification of the researcher. For the experimental group more flexible hybrid approaches were employed such as maximizing learning opportunities, facilitate negotiated

interaction, promote learner autonomy and ensure social relevance. Further, learners were given more freedom and psycho, socio considerations of the teaching and learning environment were also taken into consideration. Location specific and learner friendly ventures were administered for the experimental group. Pre and post tests were conducted to check the proficiency and performance level of the learners at the beginning and at the end of the research. The comparison turned to be the findings of the research.

Classroom observation, informal interviews and discussions with the learners are also utilized as research tools to gather data to carry out the research.

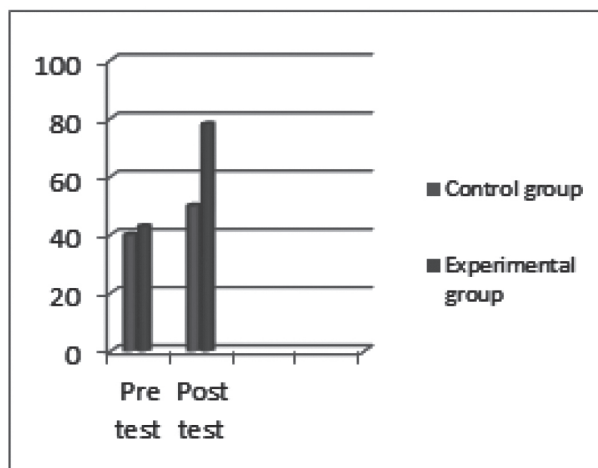
VI. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focuses on Second Year Social Science Undergraduates (seventy in numbers) studying in the Faculty of Arts, University of Jaffna. As this is the first attempt to apply post-method approaches in teaching English as a Second Language, a limited number of micro strategies were employed in the research. The research was carried out only for twenty hours owing to some practical implications.

VII. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The experimental study was conducted for three months and at the end of the time period a post test was conducted for both the experimental and control groups. The grades were analyzed and the following results were obtained as presented in the graph below:

Figure 1
Student Performance



As the graph indicates the score obtained by control and experimental groups in the pretest are almost same. And this fact brings to light that the proficiency level of the learners in control and experimental groups is almost same. Still, a significant difference could be found out between the results

of pre and posttests of experimental group, whereas the difference between the pre and posttests of experimental group is not significant. The improvement which could be noticed in the experimental group is dramatic and it is crystal clear that the new venture which was administered – that is the post-method approach was the reason behind the scene. The post-method approaches which train learners to be autonomous and self-regulated ultimately optimized student engagement and improved student performance.

VIII. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The post-method condition can also reshape the character and content of L2 teaching, teacher education, and classroom research. In practical terms, it motivates a search for an open-ended, coherent framework based on current theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical insights that will enable teachers to theorize from practice and practice what they theorize. This paper explored one such framework based on which teachers can design varied and situation-specific micro strategies or classroom techniques to effect desired learning outcomes. The paper maintains that the framework can be used to transform classroom practitioners into strategic teachers as well as strategic researchers.

Post-method approaches are more learner-centered and hold great promise for ESL students. Although the challenge to modify existing methods of teaching and learning and to develop new approaches is not an easy one, the benefits for both teachers and students are great. The ideas and models presented here are intended to be adaptable, practical, and realistic for teachers who are dedicated to creating meaningful

and effective learning experiences for ESL students. And the present study strongly recommends post method pedagogy to traditional methods of teaching if desirable outcomes are to be gained as post-method pedagogy not only encourage and optimize student performance, they also create autonomous self-regulated learners who could manage and monitor their own learning in long run.

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