The Postmethod Condition, An Oportunity For Going Into A "New Pedagogical Era"

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Abstract

One of the current but unknown topics for new English teachers' generation is the Postmethod condition. Its correct use causes a great impact on the teaching and learning process, for this reason it has been considered as the starting point of a new era in respect to pedagogy specifically for some eastern countries. This is not a research article, but it is more oriented to reflect upon Kumaravadivelu's ideas and the current situation of the Postmethod Condition in Colombia, as well as, to invite ELT teachers to become part of a "new pedagogical era". It concludes that Postmethod is a good option to rethink about our Language Teaching practice in order to contribute to a real and authentic pedagogical epoch.

Key words: method, post-method, language teaching practice, new pedagogical era.

Resumen

Uno de los temas más actuales pero desconocidos para la nueva era de profesores de inglés es el Post Método. Su correcto uso causa un gran impacto en el campo de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera. Por esta razón, El Post Método ha sido considerado como el inicio de una nueva era pedagógica. Este artículo no es un reporte de investigación; por el contrario, está orientado a reflexionar sobre las ideas propuestas por Kumaravadivelu, la situación del Post Método en Colombia, así como, invitar a los profesores de lengua inglesa a que hagan parte de una nueva era pedagógica real y autentica.

Palabras clave: método, post método, práctica pedagógica, nueva era pedagógica.

Introduction

The rise of Globalization and the emergence of new technologies are having a great impact on language education in terms of what we teach and how we teach it. For these reasons, contemporary teachers are required to enroll in professional development programs and to be a reflective. This reflection is mainly focused on the method we use and the results we get, that is to say, the effectiveness of our practice. Generally methods contain detailed specifications such as teaching procedures, techniques as well as roles; this makes them so strict and organized. The classroom practice shows that they are designed for a mechanical application by the teacher and for a response by the students. In this sense, methods are not the conceptual basis upon which teachers act within the classroom in real life because they were not conceived as a result of classroom practices or experiences.

The facts addressed before made that authors and theorizers, like Kumaravadivelu, begin a deeper reflection about teachers' understanding of method. These authors also suggest the necessity of searching for an unconventional option that allow teachers to plan and shape the way they teach by "themselves" and not by following a range of artificial principles, which are commonly far away from their own context. This strong reflection took the traditional concept of 'method' towards a "Post Method Condition". Nevertheless, despite the fact that it was introduced by Kumaravadivelu since 1990 approximately, there are still ELT practitioners who are not familiar with The Postmethod concept or they just do not know how to apply it and the implications it has.

Bearing in mind these facts, this paper provides a reflection in respect to Kumaravadivelu's ideas, as well as, a discussion about whether the Postmethod really implies a "new pedagogical era" in our context.

THE POST-METHOD CONDITION

Regarding the Posrmethod condition, Kumaravadivelu (1994) asserts that "It refers to the qualities of the fashionable era in English Language Teaching, in which previously methods, commonly called "traditional" are put under analysis or research" (p. 29) He also argues that it "is a state of affairs that compels us to refigure the relationship between the theorizers and the practitioners of method" and "the concept of post method signifies a search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method" (p. 29)

As well as the "traditional methods" were put under analysis, Kumaravadivelu's theory has been criticized by some authors. As I mentioned before, Kumaravadivelu's (1994) argues that the Postmethod Condition is "an alternative to method." (p. 29) However, Liu (1995) claims that Postmethod cannot be considered as an alternative to methods because at the level of practice they provide clear directions about realizable procedures. From the English language teaching perspective, Harmer (2009) argues that methods give a necessary order and sequence to the techniques teachers use in any method. Based on my experience as language teacher, I can say that method is a tool that can show us how theory about language learning becomes tangible and useful in language teaching. Nevertheless, the realities within the classrooms I have guided indicate that a specific method cannot satisfy all my students' pedagogical needs.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) also makes a contrast between "method" and "methodology," introducing the first as a "construct" and the second as a "conduct" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p. 162). He states that method "is an expert's notion based on theories" (2006a, p. 162), while methodology, on the contrary", is what the teacher does in the classroom" (2006a, p. 163).

In this sense, Kumaravadivelu's definition limits the concept of method to only what goes on in the mind of the expert. Nonetheless, I consider that method could be better defined within the Postmethod as the conceptualization and actualization process carry out by practitioners. This allows me to conclude that the method is even undeniable in the Postmethod era. I strongly believe that these two concepts are highly interwoven and that each one depends from the other. Thus, Kumaravadivelu's principle about the search of an alternative to method is not the real requirement; I believe that it is better to attempt towards an alternative perspective for renewing our understanding in order to encourage ourselves to accept and recognize the nature and importance of method. In this sense, method is not dead but misunderstood. I totally agree with Bartolomé (2003) who states that method is not dead. She argues that "the informed way in which a teacher implements a method can serve to offset potentially unequal relations and discriminating structures and practices in the classroom and, in doing so, improve the quality of the instructional process for both student and teacher" (2003, p. 412).

I think that what happens to me and probably to the majority of language teachers is that there is a lack of compatibility between the method or methods we adopt and the specific characteristics of the context in which it or they are applied.

Kumaravadivelu (2001) argues that the Postmethod Condition has two current dimensions: 1. Effective Teaching, in which applied linguists should theorize and teachers should practice those theories. In this regard, Effective Teaching follows top – down processes where teachers' ideas, contributions, experiences and context particularities are not taking into consideration. 2. Reflective Teaching, on the contrary, considers that theorizing should not be only an applied linguists' task, but it can has a mediation responsibility upon the teachers' shoulders. So, reflective teaching assumes bottom – up processes where teachers' contributions and insights are validated taking a relevant position into theoretical constrains.

The characteristics and dimensions mentioned previously lead the Postmethod to come up with strong grounds to construct what kumaravadivelu called "A Strategic framework for FL/L2 teaching". This framework comprises ten macrostrategies. This author defines them as "general plans derived from theoretical, empirical and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 learning/teaching. A macrostrategy is a broad guideline, based on which teachers can generate their own situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques." (p. 32) This means that macrostrategies need the microstrategies in order to be applied in the classroom. The ten macrostrategies stated by Kumaravadivelu (2001) are:

Maximize learning opportunities: this macrostrategy is about teaching as a process of creating and utilizing learning opportunities, a process in which teachers find a balance between their role as managers of teaching and their role as mediators of learning.

Facilitate negotiated interaction: This macrostrategy is about ensuring meaningful learner-learner, learner-teacher classroom interaction in which learners are entitled and encouraged to initiate a topic and talk, not just react and respond.

Minimize perceptual mismatches: This macrostrategy is about recognizing potential miss-matches between teacher's intention and learner's interpretation, and what to do about them.

Activate intuitive heuristics: This macrostrategy is about providing rich contextual data so that learners can infer and internalize the underlying rules governing grammatical usage and communicative use; it also has to do with helping them in the process of grammar construction.

Foster language awareness: This macrostrategy is about creating general as well as critical language awareness; besides, it deals with drawing learners' attention to the formal and functional properties of the language.

Contextualize linguistic input: This macrostrategy is about how language usage and use are shaped by linguistic, social and cultural contexts.

Integrate language skills: This macrostrategy is about holistic integration of language skills traditionally separated and sequenced as listening, speaking, reading, and writing; moreover, it is about understanding the role of language across the curriculum.

Promote learner autonomy: This macrostrategy is about helping learners learn to learn, and learn to deliberate; about it also has to do with equipping them with the necessary means to self-direct and self-monitor their own learning.

Raise cultural consciousness: This macrostrategy emphasizes the need to treat learners as cultural informants so that they are encouraged to engage in a process of classroom participation that puts a premium on their power/knowledge and on their subjectivity and identity.

Ensure social relevance: This macrostrategy is about the need for teachers to be sensitive to the societal, political, economic and educational environment in which learning and teaching take place.

Liu (1995) believes that Kumaravadivelu should use the word "principle" instead of "macro-strategy" because "macro-strategies" should not and cannot replace methods" (p. 175) I think that this macro-strategic framework does not pretend to replace methods. From the language teaching point of view, this framework presents a solution to cover all the students needs that methods cannot. Since I become aware about it, I started to include some of this macrostrategies into my pedagogical practice.

For instance, I used to show different fairytales videos. In order to facilitate negotiated interaction, learner answer in small groups some questions like: What is the fairytale about? What is the main idea? Which grammatical tense predominate into the story? Does it leave a specific message? Why or why not? among others. I consider that the integrating skills macrostrategy is very important, so, I usually ask my students to complete the following steps in a writing lesson: first, read a text and discuss it during class in small groups; second, plan and write an opinion paragraph based on the text; third, share the paragraph with classmates and finally I ask for written and oral feedback.

Lately I have realized that it is possible to use different macrostrastegies during one activity. Few days ago, I worked about "The National Condom day". Before giving the text to my students, I said that I would show them a picture, but first they would try to guess what the picture was about by using vocabulary related to it such as: safe sex, pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, condoms, popular, HIV/AIDS, etc. After that, I showed the picture in order to confront students' beliefs. Then, I asked them to develop a reading activity based on a fill-in-the-gap listening activity. Finally, they analyzed and judged the text information about this topic. Thus, within this activity I used different macrostrategies: I gave clear instructions to minimize perceptual mismatches; students made predictions about the picture by using the related vocabulary to promote learner autonomy and facilitate negotiated interaction, also they used critical thinking to analyze and state their position about the topic to raise cultural consciousness and finally, they had to read, write, listen and speak to integrate language skills.

Analyzing the theory about macroestrategies from real classroom experiences makes them clearer, understandable, achievable and easier to put in practice. These macroestrategies have been the result of answering some questions related to my own experience and perspectives as English teacher; those inquiries have helped me to start thinking about my assumptions, constraints and approaches related to language learning. For instance, I wonder about aspects such as: what is my "personality" as a teacher? and how are these personal characteristics reflected in my classes? which of the traditional methods or drills do I employ the most? what are my learners' aims regarding their English development? and how could I find the aims out? In which ways do the school rules and

requirements influence what happens in my classroom in terms of time and resources? Am I reflecting about my teaching practices? Why? which of the ten macroestrategies do I agree and disagree with? Why? Which activities could I apply to take advantage of some macroestrategies?

I consider that reflecting upon aspects as the ones addressed before can also be done by many ELT teachers who are interested in starting to apply these macrostrategies; this process of reflection needs to be done taking into account the students' pedagogical needs and socio-cultural conditions. Based on the experience shared before, I can say that the macroestrategies that I employed in my teaching practice highly improved the quality of the classes.

A NEW "P EDAGOGY ERA": THE POST METHOD IN COLOMBIA.

Since the Ministry of Education imposes the Common European Framework in Colombia as an innovative and motivating guideline for teaching languages, the lack of competent and trained teachers became more evident. Colombian Ministry insists on the implementation of bilingualism but it does not have the tools to do it. The aim of becoming bilingual in 2019 has obliged the ELT community to desperately look for a methodology that fits in its context and that, at the same time, achieves the goal in respect to bilingualism. My experience along ten years allows me to state that this need of change made the ELT community, especially some new era teachers, become interested in the Postmethod Condition. It is understood as an alternative to find strategies to teach in a better and a more effective way, which takes into consideration the learner´ views in preparing and teaching language, techniques, strategies, activities, processes, materials, among others. This attempt is completely valid but, taking a look at our local reality, the results do not reflect it. Probably it is because some teachers did not know about the Postmethod and followed different kinds of "traditional" methods; some others knew, conceived and applied the Postmethod Condition in a completely different way. Bearing in mind the facts addressed before, I consider that the Postmethod is neither well known nor understood by ELT; besides, it is not creating, at least up to now, a "new pedagogy era" in Colombia.

However, as a teacher who is beginning in the Postmethod theory, I dare to say that this "new era" can become true if ELT teachers attempt to formulate their own methods of teaching based on their classroom situations and on other approaches or methods they consider relevant. The idea is that these new methods reflect the teachers' beliefs, values, and experiences. In fact, the teachers add, revise or adjust the methods and approaches based on their own real classroom, students and contextual factors.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This article is an attempt to reflect on some Postmethod principles and their implications in our country. After this reflection I can draw the following conclusions.

1. Some advantages of methods are that they are easy to implement, they are based on reliable principles and different researches, a number of them work for some learners. Some disadvantages are that they create a barrier between researchers and teachers; they do not allow variation and ignore local particularities. For these reasons I think that there is not a perfect method; as teachers gain experiences, they will understand or conceive a particular method in a different way.

2. The Postmethod is not a method itself; it is the linking of diverse solutions to language teaching difficulties. These solutions are not static but dynamic because teachers and their learners can take advantage of them as better as possible.

3. Teachers who are really interested in becoming Postmethod teachers should hold some principles which are important for them such as trustisting their intuition, relying on their experience, never stop learning, taking into account the input of specialists, but being their own guide and looking objectively at their own teaching practice and do not be afraid of change. They must feel encouraged to formulate their own methods of teaching based on their classroom situations; Nevertheless, they may be based on other approaches or methods. To do this possible, I am convinced that the ELTcommunity needs training about this condition in order to assure the results expected by applying it. Thus, teachers could avoid an unsystematic mixture of methods, in other words, they do not confuse a Post Method use desire with a bad conceived eclecticism.

However, most of the ELT teachers look like they have not separated themselves from the fear and resistance to change in the way they think and teach. It does not allow them to be updated and motivated for changing. I consider that the policies of the Ministry of education have influenced teachers' behavior because there is no a coherence between these polices and the real situation within the ELT classrooms, and also because the government and employers are not providing conditions to support and reward teachers' training and development, they just have in mind the necessity of changing but it is not promoted. For this reason teachers' engagement is very weak.

3. I think that the Postmethod Condition is a good option for teaching. It is also an instrument to contribute in the process of linguistic decolonization, as well as the vehicle to "colonize" our context and culture perspectives.

Finally, I would like to invite teachers to reflect upon all the aspects presented in this article in order for them to choose the best way of teaching in their specific contexts. In this way they can start making a difference and begin to be a part of that difficult but not impossible chance. From my point of view, I have started to identify what I need to learn, how to link teacher and students' learning, how to apply them and increase performance assessment as an effective tool to control and direct my professional learning. It is important to bear in mind that the real change depends on us, on our capacity and capability to transform and to develop our profession in the best way possible by doing an everyday effort to promote and foster a really "new pedagogy era"

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NOTE: This article has not been submitted to any other publication and it has not been published elsewhere.