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Teachers' Perception on Postmethod Pedagogy in EFL Classes of Nepal

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ABSTRACT
Discussion on the use of method and postmethod in teaching English has become a debatable issue in Nepal. Many methods emerged as reaction to others claiming each of them as the best one but questions of their practicality and utility led to the development of postmethod pedagogy. This pedagogy empowers teachers' autonomy in the classroom and encourages them to design the best alternative way from the choices on the basis of their experience, knowledge and the context. However, the inclination to method is also on the rise. Supports claim that no practice will be method free. In this context, this study attempts to explore the teachers' perception on postmethod pedagogy in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes of Nepal. In order to achieve the designated objective, the descriptive phenomenological research design was used and 12 teachers who are teaching English at different schools in Pokhara were purposively selected. The data revealed that teachers have a positive and hopeful experience towards postmethod pedagogy and want to open quality changes in English language teaching, developing context and culture sensitive pedagogy.

KEYWORDS: Methods, postmethod pedagogy, practicality, particularity, possibility

INTRODUCTION

In this dynamic world, everything is changeable and teaching-learning methods cannot be the exception to it. Before the advent of teaching methods in practice, the teachers with some philosophical knowledge and personal experiences taught languages to their students in different contexts and times. Their efforts and practices developed the notion and need of finding the best method in language teaching. In this vein, Prabhu (1990) concedes that teaching method could be changed according to the context, so there is no single method for teaching languages everywhere. Many educators, researchers and teachers took the concept of method in teaching language which became controversial. However, Bell (2007) argues that there are a significant number of teachers who have been advocating in favor of methods as remarkable and useful aspects in

teaching as they provide major principles and guidelines for the practitioners to shape their teaching and learning in the language classroom.

Language teaching has noticed many changes in its history globally. There have been periodical and regular changes in the methodologies of teaching and learning. As Maghsoudi (2016) writes, "Many methods emerged as the reaction to the former at different periods of time to fulfill the needs of all individuals, but no method could have even gained the status of the best methods" (p. 282). There was a race of finding weaknesses of the existing method and introducing the new one basically between 1950s and 1980s with the goal of finding out the best universal method for teaching language. Hashemi (2011) has presented the historical perspectives of English language teaching methods classifying it into 'the gray period', 'the black- white period' and 'the colored period' (pp. 137-138).

HISTORY OF TEACHING

The gray period between the 14th and late 19th century is understood as pre-method era. In this period, methods did not present as clear-cut, logical bodies; instead, they were pidgin and were not distinct to each others. The art of teaching was largely dependent upon the skill and ability of the practitioners as they had to use their cognition, logics and cool experiences in the period of teaching. Citing from Howatt (2004), Hashemi (2011) states that in order to find an effective way of teaching language, techniques and procedures, more teaching time was invested. Due to this effort, the desire for searching the best and universal method for teaching English language had brought new ways of instruction, which had given birth to 'black and white period' (p. 137) by the end of 19th century.

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century is a landmark for black and white periods where teachers made choices in good or bad methods. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was developed for the foreign language teaching and dominated other methods of foreign language teaching for some time. GTM seemed to have vanished due to great criticism for having weak theoretical bases. Consequently, Direct Method (DM) was introduced as its reaction. DM was found to be distinct from GTM in terms of medium of instruction in which translation was not allowed and meaning was to be conveyed directly in the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This method received criticism as it lacked strong theoretical bases and was difficult to adopt. Celce-Murcia (1991) states that by the mid 1950s, Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) was introduced on behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics (as cited in Maghsoudi, 2016, p. 283). ALM could not develop communicative proficiency of the students and its theoretical bases that were found to be invalid and hypothetical, and led it to loss its popularity.

The period between 1970s and 1980s is remarkable for a great shift in teaching methods when the shift took place from the most traditional to new and innovative ones, like silent way, suggestopedia, total physical response and community language learning. In the historical development of methodologies, the advent of communicative language teaching in 1970s, and its descendants content based instruction, task based language teaching had turned the colored period of methods, where, following Brown (2007), developing communicative

competence has become the prime goal involving learners into various meaningful , interactive functional uses of language. However, the people in the field of language teaching profession were not satisfied. So there was a race for searching the best, ideal and universal method that could meet the need of present generation for teaching and learning foreign language. In the same context, some scholars like Allwirght, Pennycook, Kumaravadivelu, and Prabhu started criticizing the concept of method (as cited in Mashoudi, 2016) as they were weak in their use even if they had little theoretical bases. The criticism on method gave a turn in colored period which required a teacher to be speaking, reflective, dynamic and autonomous.

In reaction to the methodological concept, Kumaravadivelu (1994) came out with the concept of postmethod based on the principle of postmodernism. Addressing the postmethod era, Clarke (1994) called for a "complete re-orientation of the profession" (p. 18). Making criticism on the concept of methods, Kumaravadivelu (2006) asserts that applying a pure form of theoretical methods in the classroom pedagogy is really a difficult job because language teaching and learning is situation specific, needs to be specific and culture specific. But the methods which are synthetically and hypothetically transferred into the classroom are far distant from real classroom contexts. Allwright (2003) concedes, "To get away from methods as the central focus to teaching"(as cited in Harmer, 2007, p. 78). He means to say that for successful teaching and learning, exploratory practice which requires negotiation and reflection is very significant. Kumaravadivelu (2006) conceptualizes particularity, possibility and practicality as three basic driving principles. This method requires a teacher to be context sensitive, innovative and autonomous as Kumaravadivelu (2006) claims.

Richards and Rogers (2001) assert that some methods are unlikely to be adopted since they are difficult to understand and use. So, an alternative method for language teaching which makes a teacher innovative needs to be adopted. Akbari (2008) concedes that old established methods are rejected while new knowledge, ideas and principles that are suitable to the contexts are incorporated in postmethod pedagogy. However, a study carried out by Canagarajah (2002) and Pishghdam (2012) have shown that some teachers are willing to welcome new method in the language teaching (as cited in Chen, 2014). Hashemi (2011) claims, "Methods will live as long as practice will and asks, how could any practice be method free?" (p. 143). Similarly, Akbari (2008) states, "Missing from post method is how teachers are prepared to perform their duties as post method practitioners because post method view heavily emphasizes teacher qualification" (p. 642). He means to say that even in methods, if teachers perform their duties as required, there is no need to introduce postmethod condition. Here, the teachers' qualification and duty determines the success of a method. In this context, it is relevant to find out the teachers' reflection towards postmethod pedagogy in EFL classes.

DEBATE ON TEACHING METHODS

Attempts have been made to improve the quality of language teaching and to find out solutions to existing problems in the sphere. Various principles and

methods have been postulated. Anthony (1963) has postulated three terms: approaches, methods and techniques (as cited in Dagkiran, 2015, p. 10). Approaches are axiomatic beliefs that deal with the nature and description of languages, their teaching and learning process. Methods are plans for orderly presentation and techniques are classroom activities. In the same context, Richards and Rogers (2001) propose that the method is a bridge which connects principally with approaches and practically with techniques. It is not unwise to claim that the development of various methods and approaches have been fluctuated and shifted over the years. In this vein, Richards and Rogers (2001) state that various methods have been developed during 1960s and the apex of such methodological shifts took place from 1950s to 1980s. Brown (2007) claims that the modern foreign language teaching was started in the 17th century in Europe with the advent of GT method. Describing the nature of GT method, Richards and Rogers (2001) engross that learners' native language is used as a medium of instruction where the prime focus is put on teaching grammar deductively and translating literary texts. This method does not pay any attention in teaching listening and speaking.

DM which came in reaction to GT method was based on naturalistic approach and teaches grammar inductively in the target language. It does not allow the learners' mother tongue in the classroom but encourages learners to learn and dream in the target language. But its popularity has not remained longer. In this arena, Brown (2007) states that DM was criticized having poor theoretical bases and was very difficult to use in the classroom context. This criticism against DM has led to the development of Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) in the mid 1950s, which was introduced basically to train the US army. It was based on the theoretical ground of behaviourist psychology and structural linguistics. Its focus was on memorization through drill. Its adoration was declined by the end of 1960s when its theoretical foundation was criticized and it failed to develop communicative competence.

The 20th century has flourished with the shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Nunan (1991) states that CLT focuses on learning to communicate through interaction where developing students experience is a pivotal element (as cited in Dagkiran, 2015, p. 15). As the successors of CLT, many other methods like multiple intelligences, learning strategies, and task based language teaching, content based instruction, etc. emerged in English language teaching and learning. The emergence of the methods was doubted and questioned in the decade of 1980s. For instance, Rivers (1991) claims that new methods did not become different from the existing one except its terminology. The new methods remain similar to the existing methods in all classroom dynamics. Brown (2000) mentions that teaching methods do not nest milepost in teaching language for longer because

- They make prediction about the possible context before it is recognized. They are quite authoritative and over generalized in their application to the practical situation.

- Methods seem significantly different in their early stages of language teaching but the later stages the classroom activities cannot look any distinct.
- Methods were thought to be tested scientifically to catch the best, ideal and universal one, but in fact language pedagogy which is artful and intuitive cannot be tested empirically.
- Methods which are the forms of imposed knowledge have become vehicles of a linguistic imperialism to disempower periphery. (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 10)

From aforementioned ideas, we can get insights that methods have become far from the classroom use and context. They become more theoretical than considering the needs and demands of the local contexts and concerns. They got changed only on themselves but they could not change the attitude and behaviors of teachers and students being friendly to them. They could also not bring any qualitative change in language teaching. They were more imposed rather than leaving freedom and autonomy both for teachers and students. In the present world, teachers and students are seeking practical classroom based dynamics more than ideally imposed methods.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) concludes that methods are highly hypothetical and have very crumbled theoretical ground and they are untouched with the practicality. The rooted disconnection and dissatisfaction upon the method has resulted the emergence of postmethod pedagogy.

Postmethod pedagogy is based on postmodernism. The concept of postmodernism was appeared only after the World War-II in the field of art, music, film, literature and language. Dic (2016) states that postmodernism rejects the dogma, principles or practices of established modernism (as quoted in Elatti, 2016, p. 2). Postmodern era denies any fixed ideas and theories as it believes in multiple realities and subjective knowledge.

Postmodernism believes that each study or inquiry must be approached contextually. Arguing about postmodern classroom teaching, Fashim and Pishghadam (n.d.) claim that postmodern classes reject the global decision and encourage the classroom practitioners; knower and unknower to be involved in interaction to create new knowledge. Postmethod pedagogy keeps all the principles of postmodernism into classroom practices.

Postmethod pedagogy emerged to respond to the excellent way to teach English language making it free from any authoritative and imposed methodological restrictions. In this context, Kumaravadevelu (1994) explains:

> The conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to conduct knowledge oriented pedagogic theories, while the post method condition enables the practitioners to construct classroom oriented theories of practice. The conventional method authorizes theorizers to centralize pedagogic decision making, while the post method condition enables practitioners to produce local, specific and novel practices. (p. 29)

In postmethod pedagogy, teachers and learners are the core elements of classroom pedagogy where the knowledge, beliefs and experiences that the pose are respected and valued. They are taken as the builders of the content for making

teaching and learning contextual and need based. In connection with the teacher in postmethod pedagogy, Ganyaupfu (2013) writes that they are the best knower of the learners' needs, interests, backgrounds ad classroom environment, which are the guiding elements for selecting effective and efficient alternatives. Richards and Rogers (2001) engross that postmodern era, teachers are expected to be capable of developing their own suitable methods on the basis of their knowledge, experience and classroom context. Postmethod pedagogy is guided by three dimensional operating principles: particularity, practicality and possibility. Shedding light on particularity, Kumaravadivelu (2006) states, "Postmethod pedagogy 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 miller" (p. 171). To make teaching effective and suitable for all contexts, the analysis of context is unquestioned. The innovative, context specific and situational issue is particularity, which focuses on local, cultural, political, linguistic, and discipline based teaching. Similarly, the principle of particularity assures teachers' reflection on teaching.

Teachers are designers, producers and users themselves. They can generate the context sensitive theory from their given experiences, knowledge and the study of the context. They assess the situation, seek for the possible alternatives and make appropriate need based and context based decisions, which can be varying from context to context. Likewise, the principle of possibility concerns to the social, educational, economical, cultural and political experiences that a teacher brings into the classroom setting. This principle asserts that recognition of learners' socio-cultural identities is very significant for making teaching socially, culturally, and politically appropriate. In this sense, postmethod pedagogy claims that teaching technique of English for Nepali learners can be different from teaching to Chinese learners due to different socio-cultural conditions of the learners. Talking about teachers' role in classroom pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (2003) has presented 9 different roles under his macro-strategic framework where a teacher is expected to maximize learning opportunities, minimize perceptual mismatches, facilitate negotiated interaction, promote learners' autonomy, foster language awareness, activate intuitive heuristic conceptualize linguistic input, integrate language skills, ensure social relevance and raise cultural consciousness.

Similarly, Stern (1992) has presented three dimensional framework of postmethod pedagogy as intra-lingual and cross-lingual dimension, analytic-experimental dimension and explicit-implicit dimension (as cited in Dagkiran, 2015). The first dimension asserts that teacher should identify and make decision on the rate and ratio of L1 use as per the learners' needs, interests and levels as opposed to conventional methods that restrict L1 use of in teaching foreign language. Similarly, the second dimension claims that the form of language is laid on the synergy between teacher and student and their involvement on various problem solving tasks. Likewise, the third dimension asserts that language forms should be taught both explicitly and implicitly, that is, the traditional methods claim to teach language explicitly but the communicative approach claims to

teach language implicitly. Postmethod pedagogy asks teachers to teach language both explicitly and implicitly according to the context of teaching, nature of the language, levels, needs and interests of the learners.

From the aforementioned discussion, we come to know that teachers need to analyze the contexts, events, activities of teaching process and learners' background, needs and interest. Then, they have to make free and fair interpretation of them, which makes them more autonomous and confident to make effective and appropriate decision in teaching a foreign language.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON POSTMETHOD PEDAGOGY

This study has explored teachers' reflection on the postmethod pedagogy in English language teaching classes of Nepal as a phenomenological study. The results are echoes of the teachers' voices and their perspectives. Before analyzing and interpreting the data, the recorded interview from twelve different teachers was coded and was triangulated to the written responses. Then, they were categorized into different perspectives. Finally, I entered into phenomenological reduction by delineating the data into four perspectives.

Teachers' predilection on methodological shift

The process of English language teaching has undergone many changes from past to present. Different methods came one after another at different periods to catch the needs and demands of all individuals but none of them could accomplish their goals and satisfy the learners. So, dissatisfactions and criticisms on their ground have led to postmethod pedagogy. All the respondents were familiar with such paradigm shift in teaching methods of English language. Sharing the experience, participant 1 conceded:

> *In the context of Nepal, teaching started with Gurukul dictated method where Gurus were all in all. Gradually, changes occurred due to western influence and many more methods were introduced. When I was a student I was taught English in GT method. Now I am a teacher who wants to teach English with no method. But I am forced to teach English communicatively. I find no change in quality with the change in methods even communicative teaching method does not consider practical utility and local concern*.

In the same vein, participant 11 added:

> *Methods do not do anything suitable to context and need. They are only prescribed without considering teachers, students and the country. But postmethod pedagogy has some potentialities to address these issues. It permits us to adopt any method or approach to our EFL contexts, needs, learners, goals and resources. Teaching in this condition is pleasant to us and motivating to the learners. So we want to shift from method to postmethod condition.*

Both the accounts reveal what Chen (2014) writes, "Quality problems and unsatisfactory learning outcome push the teachers and pedagogical researcher to research new method/way of teaching." The teachers seemed more hopeful and positive to postmethod pedagogy which focuses on the needs of both teachers and

learners. They believed that each method claims better than the others but none of them proves optimal quality. They seemed very happy working in postmethod condition to maintain quality education. Their happiness and hope of quality education reveals Arikan's (2008) words, "The postmethod condition refers to the qualities of the contemporary era in language teaching."

One size fits to all leads to fail

Teaching is a continuous process that incorporates bringing out desirable changes in the behaviours of learners through the use of an appropriate method. Methods which do not take account of personal variations and contextual differences and try to fit everywhere leads the language teaching and learning process to failure. Most of the respondents responded that methods from GT to communicative were too prescriptive and were developed and implemented without any empirical research in our contexts. Teachers mean to express that prescribed methods are the barriers of effective teaching and imparting quality education. Sharing the experiences of teaching, participant 10 expressed:

> *The methods which have been designed in western monolingual community for teaching native speakers have remained failed in our context and culture even if they claim themselves as universal ideal methods*.

In the same vein, next participant expressed the impact of prescribed method as:

> *Methods are being imposed on us, in our education without identifying their effectiveness in our multilingual and multicultural contexts. As a result of which, we could not teach language effectively and give quality manpower even if huge amount of budget has been spent in this field.*

Both the accounts resemble Bharadwaj and Pal's (2011) words, "Teaching methods work effectively mainly if they suit learners' needs and contexts" (as cited in Ganyaupfu, 2013). All teachers expressed that due to universal claim of methods and their implementation without any research in our contexts and cultures, they have been lagging behind in imparting quality language teaching. The authoritative and imposed teaching system has made teaching unqualitative and produced unskilled manpower in the country. The methods in the words of Kumaravadivelu (2006) have, "little theoretical validity and even less practical utility" (p. 179). All the teachers argued that methods only equipped them with their theoretical framework but could not teach them to fit the knowledge in teaching English in their own context. For them, methods have remained irrelevant in the context of Nepal.

The teachers not only criticized methods and their loopholes but they praised the context sensitive nature of postmethod pedagogy. Indicating and praising the basic principles of postmethod pedagogy as particularity, possibility and practicality, participant 7 claimed:

> *The nature of language teaching needs to be context, society and culture specific which postmethod pedagogy encompasses. Similarly, it has incorporated locally produced theories and methods which suit to our culture, can be landmark for fostering quality education.*

This account shows the utility of postmethod pedagogy to meet the needs and demands of the contemporary society. The teachers' views show that to impart quality language teaching, teaching language forms must be designed and developed through interaction between teachers and learners in the classroom cultures.

Teacher autonomy in class leads quality changes in teaching

Teachers who are the agents of transforming knowledge have been assigned different roles at different periods of teaching methods. All the informants responded that the method era kept teachers as agent of implementing methodologically prescribed knowledge without any influence of their own ideas and cognition. They did not enjoy their freedom and experiences, so they could not bring quality change in language teaching. Sharing an experience, participant 5 capitulated:

> *Before the advent of the concept postmethod in our classes, teachers were totally enslaved of methods. We did not have any rights and freedom to seek alternatives if we thought the particular method could not work. We were compelled to dictate them hiding our experiences, knowledge and context. So we could not impart quality in our teaching. But now the inception of the concept of postmethod pedagogy has given a bit freedom to us in the classroom dynamics.*

This account reveals that teachers were not happy with methods that were prescribed for teaching English in the Nepali context. They wanted their autonomy in the classes. The advent of postmethod pedagogy has kept the teacher's role in the centre. Teachers are considered not only the participants and facilitators but also self-reflected who construct their theory themselves and methods from the experiences and knowledge, reading the contexts and needs.

Teachers seemed very happy in their changing roles. They shared that they were capable of producing materials and introducing appropriate alternatives of teaching suitable for their students' needs, interests and contexts. They found their responsibility increased for noticing and judging owns teaching, detecting problems, getting possible alternatives for solving it and making appropriate decision. Their expression revealed what Kumaravadivelu (2006) claims, "Teachers' autonomy is the core of post method pedagogy." Expressing the role of teachers in past method era, participant 8 averred:

> *We have become risk takers in the classroom teaching where we think and act. We use our knowledge, experience and the context before we make any decision. We do what has practical utility; we are not dictated by any guiding principles. I thank postmethod pedagogy developers.*

In the same vein, next participant added:

> *We are very sensitive towards cultural, political, economic and educational environment around here. We understand all of them detect problems and find out suitable solutions. The most interesting thing that happens to us is that to deal with same/similar problems, we do have different alternatives and choices.*

These teachers' accounts reveal what Kumaravadivelu (2006) writes, "A teacher keeps his eyes, ears and mind open in the classroom to see what works and what does it, with what group(s) of learners, for what reasons" (p. 550). Teachers were happy to work in their own context generated method rather than dictated. They were very positive and optimistic to impart quality language teaching through their role assigned in the postmethod era.

Teachers know classroom better than experts

Classroom is supposed to be a miniature form of society where all cultural, racial, linguistic, economic, and religious diversities are reflected. Getting any universal method to meet and address such diverse contexts is complicated and impossible. Methods have been shifted from one to another but could not meet such challenges and could not make teachers satisfy. Sharing experience of classroom dynamics, a participant explains:

> *We, teachers and students know and understand to each other, we can share our feelings, needs, interests to each other. But any expert designed method can understand us and our contexts only hypothetically. So, if we want to bring change in language teaching we need to promote teachers' expertise and autonomy as they really know the students' backgrounds and adopt appropriate alternative to impart quality language teaching and make them a competitive manpower.*

In the same context, participant 9 added that they knew which classroom activities fit to their students in their culture and context but no expert or specialist knows.

Teachers' voices resemble Akbari's (2008) claim that postmethod pedagogy assigns "voice to practitioners and respects the type of knowledge they possess." To bring quality change in teaching language, the responsibility of classroom pedagogy needs to be assigned to the teacher because a teacher knows classroom problems, cultures, contexts and dynamics better than any others from outside.

CONCLUSION

The advent of postmethod pedagogy in schools in Nepal has created positive attitude in teachers. The school teachers agreed that postmethod pedagogy and its implementation could promote quality English language teaching. The responses of the teachers reveal that no method is original, universal and the best. Each teacher is capable of conceptualizing and constructing the theories or methods suitable to the local conditions, needs, demands and backgrounds of the learners from their given knowledge, experiences and free-fair judgment of the pedagogical contexts.

EFL teachers in Nepal seem to open quality changes in teaching English language as they are aware of socio-political, cultural, economic and educational issues in teaching contexts and can construct context and culture sensitive pedagogies. Teachers are seeking their autonomy in the education system of Nepal with the hope of producing more qualitative and competitive manpower, which can compete with the challenges in the world. This study reveals that the

teachers wish to go for anti-method practice rather than being imposed by any methodological practices.

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