

## **Iranian EFL Teachers' Willingness to Implement Postmethod Pedagogy: A Mixed Methods Study**

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### **Abstract**

As a reaction to criticisms levelled against the notion of method, postmethod pedagogy was proposed as a viable solution to compensate for the frequently reported constraints and inadequacies associated with the concept of method in applied linguistics. However, the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in language classrooms has been reported to be problematic and contentious. Given the controversial nature of postmethod pedagogy and also the particular context of Iran, the present study investigated the Iranian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy. In so doing, a mixed methods approach was employed in which first a validated postmethod questionnaire was administered to a nationally representative sample of 711 Iranian EFL teachers. Then a series of focus group discussions and individual interviews with 30 teachers were carried out in the qualitative phase of the study. The findings of quantitative data analyses revealed that the Iranian EFL teachers were not willing to implement postmethod principles in their classrooms. Furthermore, the result of the content analysis for the qualitative phase indicated that Iranian EFL teachers do not implement any particular method in the strict sense of the word. Moreover, the teachers mentioned knowledge and experience of teachers; lack of adequate teacher training program; time and financial constraints of teachers; idealistic nature of postmethod; resistance of language institutes; little support of textbook developers; and cultural tradition as the impediments to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iran. Overall, it was concluded that postmethod may not be a relevant and warranted debate to be addressed in Iran and its requirements are unlikely to be met in the status quo of Iranian EFL context.

**Keywords:** EFL teachers, postmethod pedagogy, mixed methods, language teaching

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## INTRODUCTION

Language teaching profession has witnessed radical changes and shifts of attention in language teaching and learning methods, approaches, and models during the twentieth century. Different language researchers, theoreticians, and practitioners were preoccupied with searching for the best alternative to the limited and limiting concept of method (Brown, 2000). Experiencing rise and fall of successive methods, language teachers and scholars came to realize that no method is the best method and no single, pre-determined package of techniques and principles can meet different language needs of different learners in different contexts. This situation resulted in the demise of method and the rise of postmethod debate (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). As a result, the postmethod debate quelled the obsession and the search for the best method (Allwright, 1991; Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Voices of dissent and waves of criticism against the prescriptive and colonial nature of the concept of the method gave rise to its warranted death, although the practical counterpart of the method, that is, methodology, was still a justifiable notion and very much alive to many teachers (Bell, 2007).

Within this era of confusion and skepticism, post-method pedagogy, as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994), emerged as a remedy to compensate for the philosophical and practical inadequacies of the dead method. The three parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility introduced postmethod pedagogy as a three-dimensional system (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Practicality parameter is concerned with the relationship between theory and practice by making a distinction between “professional theories and personal theories” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 540). Emphasizing teachers’ sense of autonomy, this parameter empowers teachers to construct their own theories from their everyday practice of teaching. Particularity parameter underscores a context-sensitive pedagogy in a sense that language 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 sociocultural milieu” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). Enlightened by the ideas of Paulo Freire (1970), Kumaravadivelu (2001) extends the role of language education from “linguistic functional elements that obtain inside the classroom” to “sociopolitical consciousness that participants bring with them to the classroom so that it can also function as a catalyst for a continual quest

for identity formation and social transformation” (p. 545). From possibility parameter perspective, language education is conceptualized as a political enterprise within which the students must be empowered to act as social reformists in the society.

Although postmethod pedagogy has disentangled language educators and practitioners from many of the limitations of the concept of method, postmethod pedagogy is argued to have created new limitations and has frequently been called into question (Akbari, 2008; Bell, 2003; Block, 2001; Liu, 1995). Additionally, the previous body of empirical research on the current status of postmethod in Iranian context (e.g., Karimvand, Hessamy, & Hemmati, 2014; Khatib & Fathi, 2015; Rashidi & Mansourzadeh, 2017; Safari & Rashidi, 2015) has yielded inconclusive and mixed results about the applicability and relevance of postmethod pedagogy in Iran. Moreover, most of the studies conducted in the Iranian context have been limited in scope in the sense that they have been mostly qualitative studies or have employed small sample of participants. However, the present study is a mixed methods study which examines the attitudes of a relatively big sample of Iranian EFL teachers towards postmethod pedagogy. Furthermore, it qualitatively explores the perceptions of the EFL teachers through conducting a series of focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

After repeatedly articulated dissatisfactions with the concept of method, postmethod pedagogy was introduced as an alternative to compensate for the limitations of method in applied linguistics (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). As an alternative to the inveterate notion of method, the postmethod condition not only fundamentally restructured the existing conceptualizations of language teaching and teacher training but also created a remarkable change in all pedagogical and ideological perspectives of second language instruction Kumaravadivelu (2006a). This alternative was claimed to be devoid of usually-referred-to inadequacies of method and gave more freedom to practitioners so that they could build their local and context-sensitive theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). From this perspective, since teachers have first-hand and immediate experience of their classrooms, they are the ones who know their students better and are likely to come up with better solutions to the students' problems. Postmethod teachers are viewed as

the most influential players in the classroom because of their previous experience as students, previous experience as instructors, knowledge or information on some methods acquired during their possible teacher education programs, awareness of the colleague's pedagogic actions and beliefs and also their experience as parents (Prabhu, 1990). As a result, postmethod practitioners are assigned adequate power to formulate and design their own local methods as they get engaged in teaching in their local classroom context. These local methods or body of knowledge are so valued as they are deemed viable solutions to enhance the teachers' quality of instruction. This is consistent with what is called as a movement from "science-research conceptions" toward "art-craft conception of teaching" (Arikan, 2006, p. 4) as well as a shift from top-down process to bottom-up process as teachers "theorize what they practice or practice what they theorize" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 37). Additionally, this orientation shift from method era to postmethod era marks a movement from a positivist-oriented perspective to a constructivist-oriented one and "a shift from the transmission, product-oriented theories to constructivist, process-oriented theories of learning, teaching, and teacher learning" (Crandall, 2000, pp. 34-35).

Furthermore, postmethod pedagogy gives much credit to unique and particular contexts of instruction. Introduced as the particularity parameter, the situational understanding of the language teaching context must receive particular attention by not only practitioners but also policymakers and administrators (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). This particularity parameter highlights the context-sensitive nature of foreign language pedagogy. Particularity "seeks to facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 537).

As the third parameter of postmethod condition, possibility seeks to provide a more exhaustive, socio-political context for language teaching by taking social engagement and political accountability into consideration. Subscribing to this parameter, postmethod practitioner may consider language teaching and learning not as merely understanding of linguistic knowledge but as a new venue through which there is struggling between the old and new identities for both teachers and learners. As discussed by Kumaravadivelu (2001), the possibility parameter encourages the language teachers not only to discuss issues related to race, poverty, discrimination, inequality, and dominance in

their own classrooms but also to question and criticize existing socio-political situations and try to make improvements to the existing situations by raising the students' consciousness.

Concerning the postmethod pedagogy and its implementation in Iranian EFL context, a number of empirical studies have been conducted. For instance, Khatib and Fathi (2015) carried out a Delphi study to explore the perspectives of the Iranian EFL domain experts regarding post-method pedagogy. To accomplish the objective of their study, 21 Iranian domain experts in the field of applied linguistics served as the participants of this Delphi study. To reach unanimity among the participants, three rounds of data collection were utilized with the same sample. The findings of the Delphi study questioned the appropriacy of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context. The findings revealed that the Iranian ELT has never experienced method in its true sense, and the concept of method in Iran has been equal to an eclectic approach the teachers have implemented simply according to their personal taste. Moreover, the findings of the Delphi technique demonstrated that postmethod pedagogy accompanied by its three principles is not applicable in the Iranian context.

Also, Karimvand, Hessamy, and Hemmati (2014) carried out a study to examine the role of postmethod pedagogy in teacher education programs in Iranian EFL language centers. In other words, the study intended to investigate whether currently practiced Iranian teacher education fosters or hinders postmethod implementation. In so doing, 23 Iranian language teachers were interviewed regarding the logistics, content, and procedures of the teacher education programs they had participated in. The data analysis of the transcribed interviews, as guided by grounded theory, led to the emerging of three themes including no/little teacher learners' involvement in course design and implementation, dominance of a transmission model, and dominance of a linguistic and technical focus. Overall, the findings revealed that the participants maintained that there was little, if any, negotiation with them over the content, procedures, and logistics of the courses in their experienced teacher education programs. Moreover, they believed that they had been educated in a teacher-fronted and lecture-based mode with little opportunity for reflection and sharing of ideas. Finally, it was revealed that a technical, language-bound, context-reduced, and non-political approach to ELT had been mostly implemented in the courses.

Likewise, Safari and Rashidi (2015) sought to uncover English teachers' practical constraints and barriers in implementing postmethod pedagogy in Iran. In so doing, 22 male and female experienced English teachers from Yazd and Shiraz, Iran, took part in this qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews were carried out to explore practitioners' problems and impediments in putting the pedagogy into practice, in the Iranian EFL context. The findings revealed several barriers to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iran. More specifically, it was found that the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian EFL context would be very difficult. Although two principles of 'particularity' and 'practicality' may be applied with much financial investment, instruction, the provision of resources and opportunities, it would still be virtually impossible to implement 'possibility' principle.

Similarly, in a more recent qualitative study conducted by Rashidi and Mansourzadeh (2017), the nonnative EFL teachers' beliefs and perceptions concerning postmethod pedagogy were explored. In so doing, 10 nonnative EFL teachers were selected through purposive sampling and were divided into three groups based on their teaching experience. Conducting semi-structured interviews, the researchers investigated the participants' perceptions and interpretations of postmethod regarding their own context and needs. The findings of the study indicated that the Iranian teachers demonstrated an acceptable understanding of postmethod pedagogy. It was found that although the participants did not mention the principles of postmethod pedagogy explicitly, they favored most principles of postmethod pedagogy in their teaching.

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Given much controversy created by postmethod pedagogy and also the unique context of Iran, the aim of the present study was to explore the Iranian EFL teachers' willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy. To shed more light on the applicability of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context, a mixed methods design was employed. To accomplish the objectives of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent do Iranian EFL teachers show willingness to implement the principles of postmethod pedagogy?
2. Are there any significant differences among Iranian EFL teachers' willingness and conformity to the principles of postmethod pedagogy and their demographic characteristics including their gender, experience, and degree?
3. What is Iranian English teachers' perception of their method of language teaching? Do they teach based on a particular method?
4. What are the impediments to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context from the perspectives of EFL teachers?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

For the quantitative phase, a nationally representative sample of 711 Iranian EFL teachers who were teaching at different institutes, schools, and centers of higher education in different parts of the country participated in the study. For the qualitative section of this phase, purposive sampling was employed to select the participants with a set of pre-defined characteristics. The criteria set for the selection were: (a) being an EFL teacher, (b) being an MA or Ph.D. graduate/candidate in Applied Linguistics, (c) being familiar with the concept of postmethod, and (d) having experience of teaching for at least three years. Given the set criteria, thirty practicing EFL teachers in various language institutes/universities participated in the qualitative section of this phase. The participants were those English teachers who had previously completed the validated questionnaire. They were both male (n=23) and female (n=7). Their age varied from 29 to 41 with the mean of 33.2. They were either MA holder of TEFL (n=17) or Ph.D. holders/ Ph.D. candidates (n=13). Their teaching experience ranged from 5 years to 19 years with the mean of 11.6 years of teaching.

### **Instrumentation**

#### ***Postmethod Scale (PMS)***

In order to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy, "Postmethod Scale" (PMS) developed and validated by Fathi and Hamidizadeh (2019) was employed. The initial draft version of PMS consisted of three components identified

after (a) undertaking a comprehensive review of the literature on postmethod pedagogy and second language (L2) teacher education, and (b) conducting interviews with domain experts and practicing language teachers. PMS was validated in two phases. In Phase 1, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted with a sample (N=255) of Iranian EFL teachers, resulting in three internally consistent factors: (a) *Teacher Sense of Social Justice*, (b) *Teacher Autonomy*, and (c) *Teacher Sense of Academic Enthusiasm*. In Phase 2, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was completed with a new sample (N=648) of practicing teachers. Strong model fit estimates in Phase 2 confirmed the factor structure of Phase 1 and resulted in a final 29-item scale. The scale is of a six-point Likert scale, ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (6). The participants of the present study were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement. The internal consistency of the scale, as measured by Cronbach's Alpha, was reported to be 0.81.

### ***Semi-structured Interview***

To seek out the participants' willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy, they were interviewed in individual face-to-face interviews with the researcher. The method of the interview selected for this study is "qualitative interviewing." This method "is based in conversation, with the emphasis on researchers asking questions and listening, and respondents answering" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, cited in Warren, 2002, p. 83). The conducted interviews were semi-structured in nature in which the interviewer began with a number of initial questions (see Appendix) while asking new questions according to the dynamics of the interview process. Each interview took about half an hour on average. The interviews were held in the language institutes where the teachers were teaching English. In order to provide the interviewees with the opportunity to express their ideas and attitudes more eloquently, the interviews were conducted in Persian.

### ***Focus Group***

Apart from the individual interview, a series of focus group discussions were run by the researcher in order to investigate the perceptions of the practicing teachers toward postmethod pedagogy. Focus group can be defined as "a way of collecting qualitative data, which involves engaging



a small number of people in an informal group discussion (or discussions, 'focused' around a particular topic or set of issues" (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 177). The participants were divided into three groups and were invited to participate in three 45-minute face-to-face focus group discussions. The focus group discussions were held in Danesh language center in Tehran, Iran. The same questions of the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix) were used as guides for focus group discussions. The focus groups were conducted in Persian and were translated, transcribed, and analyzed in English.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

For the quantitative phase, the postmethod scale (PMS) was administered to a sample of 711 Iranian EFL teachers throughout the country. Both face-to-face methods and emails were used for instrument distribution. For the qualitative phase, the interview questions for both individual interview and focus group discussions were designed in a way to make the respondents focus on both general and particular aspects of postmethod pedagogy (see Appendix). Appointments were made with the participants, and thirty one-to-one semi-structured interviews based on the open-ended questions were audio-taped. Moreover, a series of focus group discussions were held. In these successive sessions of focus group discussions, the researcher chaired each session with a set of questions drawn out of the scrutiny of the related literature of postmethod. The aforementioned questions were also validated by the experts' opinion regarding their face and content. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study prior to conducting the interviews and focus group discussions. Each session discussion was also digitally audio-recorded. The recorded data were then transcribed verbatim.

### **Data Analysis**

The present study employed an explanatory sequential design (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006) in which the quantitative data was collected first followed by qualitative data collection. The purpose was to make use of the qualitative results to further explain and interpret the findings from the quantitative phase.

Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis approaches were employed to analyze the collected data. To analyze the quantitative data,

descriptive statistics, one-sample t-test, independent-samples t-test, Pearson product-moment correlation, and one-way ANOVA were used. To analyze the qualitative data, the transcripts were thematically analyzed drawing on the tenets of content analysis proposed by Auerbach and Silverstein (2003).

To increase the trustworthiness (Merriam, 2009) of the qualitative phase, several strategies such as member checking, triangulation, and peer debriefing (Thomas, 2011) were used. As far as triangulation was concerned both semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were employed to address the research questions. Moreover, peer debriefing was carried out by discussing the study protocols and analyzing the data with an independent researcher.

## RESULTS

### *Research Question 1: Willingness to Implement Postmethod*

The purpose of the first research question was to investigate the degree of willingness of Iranian EFL teachers to implement postmethod pedagogy. In order to answer this question, a series of one-sample t-tests were carried out for the whole scale (i.e., postmethod) and for each of its sub-scales (i.e., social justice, teacher autonomy, and academic enthusiasm) (see Table 1). In fact, the purpose of a one-sample t-test was to determine whether postmethod score for the participants was different from the normed value of 101.5 for the postmethod scale. Postmethod scores were normally distributed, as revealed by Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p > .05$ ) and there were no outliers in the data, as determined by inspection of a boxplot. Mean postmethod score (94.9475) was significantly lower than the normal postmethod score of 101.5,  $t(710) = -4.708$ ,  $p = .000$ .

**Table 1:** Results of one-sample t-test and descriptive statistics for postmethod and its subscales (autonomy, social justice, and academic enthusiasm)

Measure	M	SD	n	Comparison Value	Mean Difference	t	df
Postmethod	94.94	35.75	711	101.5	-6.55	-4.70*	710
Autonomy	37.00	15.42	711	35	2.00	2.96*	710
Social justice	30.21	12.68	711	35	-4.78	-5.43*	710
Academic enthusiasm	27.22	12.01	711	31.5	-4.27	-6.13*	710

\*  $p < .05$ .

The results of one-sample *t*-test for the whole postmethod scale revealed that the Iranian EFL teachers did not show willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy principles. Moreover, in order to specifically investigate the attitudes of teachers toward each of the three sub-scales of the postmethod, three one-sample *t*-tests were also run. The results of one-sample *t*-test (see Table 1) for autonomy scores show that mean autonomy score (37.0077) was significantly higher than the normal autonomy score of 35,  $t(710) = 2.962$ ,  $p = .003$ , revealing that Iranian EFL teachers had positive attitudes toward this sub-scale.

As far as sense of social justice was concerned, the results of one-sample *t*-test (see Table 1) indicated that the mean of social justice score (30.2114) was significantly lower than the normal social justice score of 35,  $t(710) = -5.431$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating that Iranian EFL teachers were reluctant to implement this principle in the classroom.

Moreover, with regard to academic enthusiasm component of the scale, mean academic enthusiasm score (27.2242) was significantly lower than the normal autonomy score of 31.5,  $t(710) = -6.133$ ,  $p = .000$ , indicating that Iranian EFL teachers did not show a high sense of academic enthusiasm.

### ***Research Question 2: The Role of Demographic Characteristics***

The purpose of the second research question was to investigate the role of demographic characteristics including gender, professional experience, and educational degree as moderator variables. Concerning the role of gender, an independent-samples *t*-test was carried out to compare the scores obtained from the male and female groups of English teachers and to see which group held a more positive attitude toward postmethod pedagogy. Table 2 reveals the descriptive statistics and the results of the independent samples *t*-test for both males and females. As shown in Table 2, the mean for the female group is higher than that of the male group. However, the results of an independent *t*-test,  $t(710) = 0.084$ ,  $p = 0.933$ ,  $p > .05$ , demonstrated that there was no statistically significant difference between the postmethod attitudes of male and female EFL teachers in this study. Hence, it can be concluded that Iranian male and female EFL teachers do not differ from each other in their willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy.

**Table 2:** Independent samples t-test for postmethod scores in each group

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Female	408	95.03	35.94	0.08	0.93
Male	240	94.79	34.60		

As far as teaching experience was concerned, Pearson product-moment correlation was carried out. As presented in Table 3, the result reveals that there was a significant positive correlation between teachers' attitudes toward postmethod pedagogy and their years of teaching experience ( $r = 0.58$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Therefore, it might be concluded that the higher the years of teaching experience, the higher the level of willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy.

**Table 3:** Correlation between postmethod and years of teaching experience

Variables	1	2
1) Postmethod		0.58**
2) Experience	0.58**	

To investigate the role of educational degree, a one-way ANOVA was run to compare the means of the three different groups of teachers with different degrees (BA, MA, and Ph.D.) in language-related fields. The descriptive statistics including the number of participants from different educational degrees, mean, and standard deviation are all shown in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Descriptive statistics for different educational degrees

Degree	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
BA	124	85.01	38.54
MA	439	96.56	33.82
Ph.D.	60	100.38	35.44
Total	623	94.63	35.25

## EFL Teachers' Willingness to Implement Postmethod Pedagogy

The results of the one-way ANOVA (Table 5),  $F(620, 2) = 6.16$ ,  $p < .05$ , shows that there are significant differences among Iranian EFL teachers with different educational degrees as far as willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy was concerned. It should be noted that only 623 (out of 711) respondents had provided us with the information on their educational degree.

**Table 5:** One-way ANOVA results for postmethod and degree

	<b>Df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Between Groups	2	6.16	0.00
Within Groups	620		
Total	622		

In order to ascertain which degree group is significantly different from other degree groups, a Tukey test as a post hoc test was run. The results of the Tukey test are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Tukey test results for multiple comparisons of postmethod and degree

<b>(I) degree</b>	<b>(J) degree</b>	<b>Mean Difference (I-J)</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
MA	Ph.D.	-15.36*	.01
	BA	11.54*	.00
	Ph.D.	-3.82	.70
Ph.D.	BA	15.36*	.01
	MA	3.82	.70

As Table 6 indicates, there is a statistically significant difference between BA and MA teachers in their level of willingness to implement postmethod ( $p = .004$ ). MA students had more positive attitudes toward postmethod pedagogy. By the same token, there were significant differences between BA and Ph.D. EFL teachers' attitude ( $p = .015$ ). However, the difference between Ph.D. teachers and MA teachers in their attitude toward postmethod was not statistically significant ( $p = .707$ ).

### ***Research Question 3: Teachers' Perception of Their Method of Language Teaching***

During the interview and focus group discussions, the participants were asked whether they were teaching based on a particular method or under which method their method of language teaching could be subsumed. The result of the content analysis indicated that Iranian EFL teachers did not adhere to any particular method in the strict sense of the word. All the practicing teachers maintained that they were not following the principles or techniques of a particular method in their classes, rather they have acted based on either restrictions and regulations of the institutes or based on the needs of the students. For instance, Reza [MA holder of TEFL with seven years of teaching experience] said:

*I really do not teach according to any particular method, I have my own method of teaching which is a collection of knowledge and experience that I have gathered over the years..... this (knowledge) has been shaped mostly based on the restrictions and regulations of the institutes and also sometimes (based on) the needs of my students and also ....*

In addition, some teachers felt that they lacked a comprehensive and clear knowledge about any kind of method as it is scientifically defined. They also asserted that many teachers either pretend and claim to use a particular method or do not know what that method is exactly and how it is defined professionally. Mina [MA holder of TEFL with five years of teaching experience] and Pedram [Ph.D. candidate in TEFL with ten years of teaching experience], for example, mentioned:

*To tell you the truth, I am not totally familiar with the techniques and principles of even a single method.... My knowledge is so general and superficial..... so I cannot claim that I employ a particular method in my classes. (Mina)*

*I doubt that there would be a teacher or teachers to employ a method with all of its package of principles and procedures ..... even if they themselves claim that they adhere to a particular method, they either don't have the complete knowledge about that method, or they pretend ..... they usually say my method is*

*communicative approach .... nowadays it (communicative approach) is fashionable... a kind of pretention of knowledge or showing that I am up-to-date.... (Pedram)*

#### **Research Question 4: Impediments of Postmethod Implementation in Iran**

Thematic analysis of the transcripts revealed that the teachers mentioned knowledge and experience of teachers; lack of adequate teacher education program; time and financial constraints of teachers; idealistic nature of postmethod; resistance of language institutes; little support of textbook developers; and cultural tradition as the impediments to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context. These impediments for the failure of postmethod pedagogy are, to a large extent, in line with what has been mentioned in the literature as the critique of postmethod pedagogy.

##### **Knowledge and Experience of Teachers**

Lack of knowledge and experience of teachers appeared to be one of the main areas of concern for the interviewed teachers. They considered inadequate knowledge and little experience as a hindrance to the materialization of postmethod pedagogy in Iran. For example, Maryam [ Ph.D. holder in TEFL with nine years of teaching experience] pointed out: *“I think postmethod requires that the teachers be knowledgeable and experienced enough. Novice teachers with little knowledge are not able to make spontaneous decisions in the classroom..... that principled pragmatism should be based on knowledge and experience.”*

##### **Lack of Adequate Teacher Education Program**

The teachers also believed that one requirement of the realization of postmethod pedagogy principles is the existence of a supportive teacher education program. For example, Ali stated: *“...imagine that there is no method or framework to follow, how can a teacher be trained to teach? ..... there should be solid TTC programs to support teachers.... a language classroom without a method or pre-planned order of what to be done will be formidable for teachers..... TTC classes should prepare teachers for such (postmethod) classes.”*

### ***Time and Financial Constraints of Teachers***

The interviewed teacher believed that language teaching is not a well-paid job in Iran. Moreover, the teachers pointed out that since they usually have many classes at the same semester in order to have a survival income, they do not have enough time to reflect upon the particularities of their own teaching context. For instance, Reza said: *“Postmethod requires that the teacher teaches in a particular way because his learners are particular....the context is particular.... How do we expect a poor teacher with low income to think about his particular learners.... Teachers, due to low income, have lots of students and classes at the same semester.... They have not enough time to have reflection about their learners or to refine their context-sensitive methodology.”*

### ***Idealistic Nature of Postmethod***

The interviewed teachers also believed that postmethod pedagogy is too ideal to be applied in the Iranian language education context. In other words, postmethod has neglected the realities of the classrooms and is replete with theoretical abstractions which are not translatable into the practical applications of the world of the classroom. Bahram, for example, mentioned: *“To the best of my knowledge, Postmethod, as introduced by Kumar is too ideal to be implemented. Its principles are so general, and it lacks so many details..... if we had a free and democratic society..... it would be ok to act based on postmethod. .... (postmethod) is somehow vague, it cannot be translated into action in the world of the classroom.”* However, several teachers also believed that even if the principles could be translated into practice, the notion of postmethod itself is alien to Iranian English teachers. Reza, for instance, added: *“.... How many teachers have heard about postmethod, and if they have heard the term how many teachers have understood its tenets?... or are aware of its theoretical underpinning? ...Do they really care about sociopolitical issues?”*

### ***Resistance of Language Institutes***

Another issue pointed out by the participants as the impediment to implementations of postmethod was reluctance and resistance of language institutes to postmethod pedagogy principles. Mina stated:



*“Postmethod gives teachers much freedom; therefore, language schools and institutes are unwilling to give that amount of authority and freedom to teachers... they may be right because they think that postmethod brings about chaos.... A system or institute should have its own order and organization... If I am the manager, I will do so... won't allow much freedom at the expense of creating confusion....”*

### ***Little Support of Textbook Developers***

Although language teaching profession has undergone a dramatic shift, textbook developers have not tuned themselves to this shift of orientation. This discrepancy was pointed out by the practicing teachers when interviewed. For instance, Mahsa said: *“If the teachers are expected to teach based on postmethod, what is the role of textbooks and materials? I have not seen much change in books over the last 20 years. .... the textbooks should be more supportive and fill the gaps for teachers.... the textbook developers are more responsible in postmethod era not to leave the teachers alone.”*

### ***Cultural Traditions***

The final obstacle mentioned by the participants of the study was the constraints imposed by our cultural traditions that are cherished in the Iranian educational context. Postmethod pedagogy introduces some iconoclastic tenets which may be incongruous with or run counter to our educational traditions in Iranian culture. For instance, Elaheh pointed out: *“Culturally and traditionally, postmethod is peculiar to teachers and even to learners and their parents. They are not accustomed to being taught in this way.... students and their parents should get to the point not to be scared if two teachers in one school practice differently.... we also teach according to the way we have been instructed ages ago as students.”*

## **DISCUSSION**

The current study was set to investigate the Iranian EFL teachers' willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy in their classrooms. In the quantitative phase of the study, each of the three sub-scales of postmethod scale (i.e., social justice, teacher autonomy, and academic enthusiasm) was examined to answer the first research question. Concerning teacher autonomy, it was found that Iranian EFL teachers

held positive attitudes toward this sub-scale. In other words, it can be argued that Iranian EFL teachers showed willingness to be autonomous in their classes. This can be justified due to the fact that Iranian English teachers may be under some pressure and are constrained by the rigid frameworks of the institutes. They may not be given enough autonomy in their classes, and their creativity may be stifled by the institutes most often. Concerning the significance of sense of autonomy in postmethod pedagogy, it is worth noting that postmethod teachers should be reflective as they think about their own teaching, assess the results, identify problems, find remedies, and try new procedures to refine their practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b). This is the process in which teachers have inclination to disconnect themselves from a top-down process and connect themselves with a bottom-up process as teachers “theorize what they practice or practice what they theorize” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a, p. 37). Postmethod pedagogy acknowledges teachers’ ability in knowing “not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula and textbooks” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p. 178). Furthermore, Postmethod pedagogy includes two principles of practicality and particularity, both of which emphasize the autonomy of teachers. Practicality values the teachers’ theories derived from their own practice. The realization of this principle requires that the teachers be assigned sufficient autonomy and freedom. With regard to particularity, a postmethod practitioner does not stick to a pre-determined method of language teaching rather he or she teaches particularly based on the particular needs of the particular groups of learners in a particular context. Again, this principle requires that the teacher remain autonomous.

With regard to social justice subscale, it was found that Iranian EFL teachers were unwilling to implement this principle in the classroom. Rooted in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006a), this notion of teachers' sense of social justice is especially salient for postmethod language teachers. The low tendency of Iranian EFL teachers toward the sense of social justice in Iranian classroom settings may be attributed to some underlying characteristics of Iranian language education system, such as limited time of English classes, low payment and heavy workload of teachers, little freedom to talk about controversial and political issues, teachers’ inadequate knowledge of socio-political issues. Furthermore, Iranian teachers may

not be willing to question some issues which have been culturally regarded as holy or axiomatic. "Teachers sometimes feel obliged to bypass some topics because they are deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of a community and questioning them will amount to sacrilege and blasphemy" (Akbari, 2008, p. 646).

Similarly, regarding academic enthusiasm, it was revealed that Iranian EFL teachers did not demonstrate a high sense of academic enthusiasm. In other words, EFL teachers did not show willingness to enhance their academic knowledge of teaching, for instance, through participating in workshops or conferences related to language teaching and learning issues or reading books and articles related to effective language teaching to improve their classroom performance. It should be mentioned that for many teachers, teaching is a job, not a career (Johnston, 1997), and they are often reluctant to participate in any professional development that would task them with extra responsibilities. As far as the Iranian context is concerned, it should be noted that Iranian English teachers are not well-paid; they, therefore, have heavy workloads in order to have a survival subsistence. This makes them too busy to have time or motivation to build up their academic knowledge. Overall, concerning the three sub-scales of postmethod pedagogy, the findings of the present study revealed that Iranian EFL teachers were not willing to implement postmethod pedagogy in their own classes. These findings are consistent with those of Karimvand et al. (2014), Khatib and Fathi (2015), and Safari and Rashidi (2015). However, these findings are at variance with those of Rashidi and Mansourzadeh (2017) who argued that nonnative EFL teachers in Iran held positive attitudes towards most principles of postmethod pedagogy in their teaching.

As for the second research question, the role of demographic characteristics including gender, experience, and educational degree was taken into consideration. Regarding the role of gender, it was revealed that there was not a significant difference between Iranian male and female EFL teachers with regard to their willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy. Such results are verifying the introduction of gender-unbiased educational systems or gender-neutral nature of pedagogy in postmethod era. It may be argued that postmethod pedagogy, which is rooted in postmodernism, may be at variance with traditional and patriarchal educational systems, favoring one gender over another. Postmethod pedagogy does not presuppose any priorities or

advantages for any of the genders. Within the accumulated literature of postmethod (e.g., Brown, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2003b, 2006a; Richards, 2003), no reference has been made to the preference of one gender over the other and it is inferred that male and female teachers are regarded as the equal agents of postmethod era.

With regard to teaching experience, it was found that there was a significant positive correlation between teachers' attitudes toward postmethod pedagogy and their years of teaching experience. Such results also confirm Akbari's claim that only teachers who are at the third stage of Fuller's (1970, cited in Akbari, 2007) three stages of teacher development will have the capability of but not necessarily the willingness to act in line with postmethod pedagogy. In fact, teaching experience endows the teachers with the required competence and confidence to generate their own theories of practice based on their self-evaluation and self-analysis of classroom activities. Drawing on their principled pragmatism, experienced teachers are more likely to make more appropriate, instantaneous decisions.

Concerning the role of educational degree, it was found that there is a positive relationship between educational degree and willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy. Given that one key variable distinguishing these groups is the degree of exposure to specialized English-related programs (or lack thereof) during their academic education, such a discrepancy in the participants' willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy can be interpreted as a likely effect of such ELT-related programs. In fact, the number and type of English-related university courses that practicing teachers have gone through might have raised their awareness to a wide range of theoretical issues related to the three components of teacher sense of social justice, teacher sense of autonomy, and teacher sense of academic enthusiasm, indirectly contributing to willingness to implement postmethod pedagogy (Clark & Hollingsworth, 2002). For instance, the courses that teachers with various English-related degrees have passed on (i.e., teaching methodology, language testing, linguistics, and applied linguistics) might have made them more sensitive to and conscious about various ELT-related theories in ELT. Such findings may justify the fact that educational degree or more exposure to up-to-date ELT literature and TESOL courses offered in universities in MA and Ph.D. programs or in-service educational workshops have been, to some extent, successful in

helping teachers to relate theoretical abstractions to practical applications of the world of the classroom.

As for the third research question addressing the teachers' perception of their method of language teaching, it was revealed that Iranian EFL teachers did not follow any particular method in the strict sense of the word. This finding verifies that of Khatib and Fathi (2015) in which the domain experts believed that Iranian ELT has never experienced method as scientifically defined, and the notion of method in Iran has been defined and interpreted very intuitively and subjectively by practitioners. It can be argued that ELT practitioners have not been successful in putting method into practice in a real classroom situation, and contrary to their own claims, the kinds of activities teachers are employing in the classroom may not be compatible to the exact definition of any method. What Iranian teachers claim that they are following in their classrooms is not method as "prescription for practice" (Bell, 2003) rather it is method as "smorgasbord of ideas" (Bell, 2003) which is a generic term which demonstrates a grab bag of classroom practices or what Akbari (2008) refers to as methodology.

It might be concluded that those who claim that method is still alive in Iran, have not paid attention to the distinctions between different meanings of the method or they have considered method as a description of what teachers do in classrooms, ignoring the pre-determined, prescriptive principles and techniques of any particular method that existed in the "century-old obsession" (Stern, 1985, p. 251) period. According to Bell (2003), theoreticians more than practitioners have been obsessed with methods, and the obsession has become stronger even after the so-called demise of methods. He believes that while theoreticians have been obsessed with methods and searching for the best one, many practitioners have been engaged in taking whatever practical solutions are or might be available.

And finally, with regard to the fourth research question, the qualitative data analysis revealed some factors as the impediments to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context. Likewise, the previous, relevant studies (e.g., Karimvand et al., 2014; Khatib & Fathi, 2015; Safari & Rashidi, 2015) have made reference to constraints and impediments to postmethod implementation in Iranian EFL context.

*Lack of knowledge and experience* of teachers appeared to be one of the obstacles as revealed by the qualitative data analysis in the present study. One key principle in postmethod, practicality parameter outlines the relationship between teaching and the theory of teaching and is closely related to what Prabhu (1990) called the *sense of plausibility*. The realization of this parameter according to which a teacher is able to theorize is, undoubtedly, contingent upon the knowledge and experience of the teacher. What has been taken for granted in postmethod pedagogy is that many teachers are capable or interested in teaching based on postmethod principles with all its social, cognitive, political, and cultural requirements. Nonetheless, the majority of teachers may not possess the required expertise or competence to teach according to postmethod pedagogy principles in the real world of the classroom. As the second obstacle, *lack of adequate teacher education program* may refer to the inappropriateness of Iranian language teacher education program in supporting postmethod practitioners. Teacher education programs would need a dramatic shift in attention and scope to be in line with the new paradigm (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a). As far as teacher education program in Iran is concerned, teacher preparation programs may fail to present practical, successful and coherent models and approaches to the postmethod teachers. Teacher education program should be designated a more responsible role in postmethod pedagogy. Kumaravadivelu presented the use of a reflective model of teaching complemented by observer comments and students' feedback (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b) as an appropriate teacher education model during postmethod era. However, this reflective model of teaching only provides a comprehensive solution to the teacher training problem, a solution which fails to solve teachers' real problems in the immediate context of the classroom (Akbari, 2007).

*Time and financial constraints of teachers* served as another impediment to postmethod implementation. Particularity is considered as the one key element of postmethod pedagogy by Kumaravadivelu, maintaining that every pedagogy informed by postmethod era "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" (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a, p. 538). This requirement of postmethod needs much reflection and also creativity on the part of the teacher. It is justifiable that inadequate time and financial problems of teachers can impede teachers' reflection and preoccupation with their

main instructional concerns. Additionally, *idealistic nature of postmethod*, revealed as another obstacle, highlights the fact that practicing postmethod principles may not be a realistic practice. This is inconsistent with the existing literature on postmethod (e.g., Akbari, 2007). Another obstacle appeared to be *resistance of language institutes*. One major promising characteristics of postmethod pedagogy is deemed as a teacher–empowering breakthrough by which instruction is no longer divided between theorizers and practitioners (Larsen-Freeman, 2005). During method era, teachers were just the users and appliers of the theoretical body of knowledge provided by out-of-context and armchair linguists and professionals, but postmethod teachers are allowed to have their own practice-based theories (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b). This requirement necessitates the ideal classroom environment where teachers can exercise their free will in the classroom. In fact, top-down administrative systems are not flexible enough to be persuaded to grant teachers such autonomy which it is needed to implement postmethod principles. This is related to what Kumaravadivelu (2005) refers to as *ideological barrier*.

The qualitative data analysis also yielded *little support of textbook developers* as another obstacle for postmethod implementation. It may be argued that even if teachers extricate themselves from the limitations of method and do not openly conform to a particular method, they are highly dependent on the textbooks as their work plan or guidepost. Because of their busy schedule and heavy workload, teachers usually don't have much time for reflection and preparation. Therefore, they usually operate within the framework laid down by the textbooks. As a result, it may be argued that although teachers are no longer under the control of method, they are still constrained by their textbooks. The methodology and the content are now determined by the coursebooks which fail to help postmethod practitioners and do not meet the requirements of postmethod condition. Moreover, as Akbari (2008) puts it “almost all of these textbooks are sanitized and neutralized to make sure they do not lose their market potential, and in this process, most of the topics of interest for a critical or postmethod pedagogy are removed” (p. 647).

As the final impediment, *cultural traditions* referred to the cultural incompatibility of Iranian educational context with postmethod principles. More specifically, it can be argued that parents and students expect the teachers to teach as they or their peers themselves have been

taught in the past. This is addressed by (Kumaravadivelu, 2005) as *pedagogical barriers* which pertain to inveterate models of teacher education that are dependent on a transmission view of knowledge and considers foreign language teacher education as the process of transferring “a set of predetermined, preselected, and pre-sequenced body of knowledge from the teacher educator to the prospective teacher” (Kumaravadivelu, 2005, p. 216). This has also been referred to as *apprenticeship of observation* (Lortie, 1975). The apprenticeship of observation describes the situation in which prospective teachers take part in their training courses having devoted many of hours as schoolchildren to observing and evaluating their own previous teachers (Borg, 2003, 2011). Admittedly, as long as teachers continue to teach in the way they have been taught, the past will be perpetuated into the future if they do not constantly refine their knowledge, educational beliefs, teaching techniques and methodologies. In other words, even if, student teachers become familiar with and gain a positive attitude toward postmethod principles in in-service courses, they may still stick to method through which they have been instructed during their school days or method they have observed during their practical classes.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of the analyses of the quantitative data revealed that the teachers were not willing to implement postmethod pedagogy in the classroom. More specifically, concerning the social justice and academic enthusiasm factors, Iranian EFL teachers were reluctant to adhere to these principles in their own classes. However, as far as teacher autonomy is concerned, Iranian EFL teachers showed moderate willingness to be autonomous in their own classes. In fact, it can be argued that the implementation of postmethod based on its three emerged factors of *teacher autonomy*, *teacher sense of social justice*, and *teacher sense of academic enthusiasm* (and especially the last two factors) in the Iranian context is not welcome by the practicing Iranian EFL teachers. Furthermore, the result of the content analysis for the interview and focus group discussions indicated that first, Iranian English teachers don't comply with any particular method with its package of principles and techniques and second, the teachers mentioned *knowledge and experience of teachers*; *lack of adequate teacher training program*; *time and financial constraints of teachers*; *idealistic nature of postmethod*;



*resistance of language institutes; little support of textbook developers; and cultural tradition* as the impediments to the implementations of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context.

The findings of this study may have some theoretical and practical implications. From the theoretical perspective, the findings of the present study shed more light on the applicability of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context and enhance the body of literature on postmethod pedagogy. The analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that complete implementation of postmethod in Iran might be impossible or futile. The reasons for this claim lie in the fact that first of all, method might have never been strictly either prescribed or adhered to in Iran and what is known as the method has been an eclectic approach any teacher has pursued simply based on his intuition or what has been known as the fashionable method of the day. In fact, postmethod was a reaction against the dissatisfaction with the constraints of the methods. The findings of this study, however, indicated that the notion of method as “a single set of theoretical principles derived from feeder disciplines and a single set of classroom procedures directed at classroom teachers” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, p. 29) has never existed in Iranian language education. In other words, the often-mentioned restrictions and burdens methods created for teachers have not been experienced by the Iranian ELT teachers. Iranian English teachers are neither familiar nor compliant with method in the strict sense of the word. They employ their intuitive *methodology* rather than the *method* in the classroom.

The second reason for the skepticism concerning the suitability of the postmethod debate to Iranian context may be justified by the postmodernism which is the philosophical basis for the emergence of postmethod itself. From this perspective, human beings shape reality based on their needs, desires, and cultures. And since the needs and cultures of individuals in various societies are different, the created reality may vary from society to society and even from individual to individual. Moreover, because the needs and cultures of people may change over time, nature of reality is time-dependent (Beck, 1993). Subscribing to postmodernism and postcolonialism, we may question the appropriacy and legitimacy of the postmethod debate to Iranian context. Postmethod may be an alien discourse to the Iranian cultural tradition and cultural continuity and may not be a viable solution to the problems of ELT teachers in the local, cultural, social and educational context of Iran. Modernism and its tenets are still dominant in Iran (Pishghadam &

Mirzaee, 2008), Iranian language education system has been dominated by ideas of modernism, and we have witnessed little vestige of postmodernism in all levels of education in this country.

From a practical point of view, the findings obtained from this study may be conducive to teacher education program, policy makers, language planners, textbook developers and a multitude of other academicians engaged in language teaching profession. The findings of the present study may give rise to serious measures to be taken by the authorities, policy-makers, and stakeholders to go for modifications and reformations to the Iranian status quo language educational system. As far as teacher education program is concerned, the postmethod debate is of paramount importance. It is argued that during the method era, the methods were not only the frameworks for teaching the language but they were also models and points of reference for teacher training. Then with the demise of the method and with the emergence of this so-called postmethod pedagogy, the teachers were left alone. The method no longer existed to be referred to as the framework for teacher education. This issue created a crisis in teacher education program. Then, scholars in applied linguistics borrowed the concept of reflective teaching from the mainstream education (Akbari, 2007). Reflection was claimed to be able to compensate for the crisis (in teacher education) created by postmethod. All this healthy debate emanated from the acceptance of both the demise of the method and the emergence of postmethod. If it is revealed that in Iranian context has not experienced the method era in a strict sense of the word and postmethod is irrelevant to Iranian context, it seems to be logical that Iranian ELT community should not go for reflective teaching and other teacher education models which presuppose both the demise of the method and the legitimacy of postmethod.

Overall, if we want to adopt a more positive and optimistic perspective towards postmethod and its applicability in Iranian EFL classes, some radical changes must be made. To begin with, postmethod advocates and theoreticians must pay more attention to the local and highly specific contexts of EFL classes in Iran. Therefore, postmethod will be more practical if it is inspired not only by postmodern tenets but also by taking into account the voices of the practitioners and their first-hand experiences of the classroom. In addition, other changes should be made in different dimensions of ELT profession including the policies enacted for teacher education programs, required practicums for pre-service teachers, work plans for methodologists and material developers,

and guidelines for test developers. Moreover, more freedom should be assigned to ELT practitioners to be able to act based on the postmethod pedagogy principles, a situation which requires much support and approval of our academic discourse community (Akbari, 2008).

### **Bio-data**

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## Appendix

### Interview Questions

1. Do you teach English based on a particular method in your own classes? Which method are you pursuing in your classes?
2. What is your attitude towards the implementation of the principles of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context?
3. Do Iranian EFL teachers act based on the principles of postmethod pedagogy?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iranian foreign language education? Why?
5. Do you think that the implementation of postmethod pedagogy principles is constrained by any obstacle(s)? If so, what are they?

