

Beyond the Concept of Method: Teachers as Approaches Founders

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Abstract

Prospective teachers are crammed with a good number of teaching methods while doing their courses in colleges or universities. All these methods are theoretically valid. However, once teachers commence their journeys and get a room in practical classrooms, one can observe that no particular method is executed wholly, and in some circumstances these methods are not functioning well in one particular classroom or on a particular learner, as every classroom is unique and every learner is unique. Teachers need to develop their own theories to be practised in classrooms as most of the proposed widespread theories and methods of teaching have been developed by professionals (in labs or universities settings) who might never pay a visit to a school classroom. The present paper is in response to the current affairs caused by the pandemic, Covid-19, and urges teachers in their classrooms to adopt a holistic approach to successfully manage what is happening in their offline classrooms or online teaching. The Covid-19 (January through September 2020) was an evaluative test to many teachers and institutes. Upon the announcement of spread of this particular pandemic, almost all schools and universities in many countries were paralysed, shut their classrooms and halls and even suspended the exams. Technology as a medium of teaching should have been employed from the very beginning of Covid-19 period, but teachers and institutes were not well-prepared for such a case and many could not dare to teach using online platforms. Succeeding to deliver smooth and fruitful classes in this period of time will have a positive effect in the post-covid-19 time in which a perfect blend between classroom and online learning-teaching will be practiced with ease and maximise the outcomes among learners.

Keywords: language teaching, post-method pedagogy, up-to-date teachers

Introduction

The positive side of the various learning-teaching methods is that they assist the inexperienced teachers and learners by providing them prescriptions on how to execute their learning-teaching practices. Over the course of history, many of the teaching methods have come into vogue, and then they partially or completely disappeared. In the wake of the Covid-19, the world today is witnessing a new mode of teaching approaches in which a good number of teaching approaches are difficult to be applied. For nearly a century, we have not heard of many countries closing their schools and universities simultaneously and for the exact reason, i.e. Covid-19. The duty of the educators today is to be well-prepared and well-equipped with the necessary field knowledge and technology in order to deliver successful and fruitful classes to the learners. The finger tap and the computer mouse have replaced the chalk and marker, and the touch screens have substituted the black and white boards, and even books and notebooks. The school classrooms and university halls are no longer receiving the crowds of learners. New doors for teachers and learners have opened such as Zoom, Google (Meet, Classroom, Hangouts), Skype, Microsoft Teams, Cisco, Jitsi, Moodle, WhatsApp, to mention just a few. Failing to make use of the above-mentioned platforms will leave the educator paralysed. Hence, it is the role of the educators not only to have enough knowledge and expertise but also to employ the proper up-to-date teaching mediums such as technology to assist them in delivering knowledge to the learners. To put into a nutshell, even if being equipped with all the multifarious approaches of teaching but not coping with the recent and up-to-the-hour applications and skills, teachers may fail to deliver informed classes to the learners and that has been observed at the beginning of 2020 where many institutions and teachers could not deal with such technologies to deliver online classes to the learners.

Compared to the method eras, language teaching in the post-method era attained much freedom and independence for both teachers and learners. In the post-method era, teachers can design their own theories

and put them into practice in order to achieve the desired goals they set. However, the findings of various research reveal that there is still an influence of methods on language teaching and learning in the post-method era (Asaad 2019; Ahmed 2018; AlHarbi 2018; Algamal 2017; Al-Hammadi 2017; Al-Sohbani 2013; Brown 2007). Conventional methods that restrict language teachers to follow certain procedures and prescriptions when delivering the lessons in the classroom are still practiced. Because of the widespread discontent with the conventional concept of method, appeared what is called today the post-method condition proposed by Kumaravadivelu in 1994. From a personal and professional viewpoint, the progress of language teaching in Yemen, English language, is still far from the notions proposed in the post-method condition, especially at school level. As far as the Covid-19 period is concerned, all public and private universities and schools were shut. The most widely medium of teaching in Yemeni universities, in order to cover up the missing portions of the syllable of the second semester of the year 2020, was the most familiar application, even to the layman, WhatsApp.

English teaching in Yemen

Of all the languages in the globe, English is the most widely spoken and most common means of communication between interlocutors of different nations. In the Yemeni context, the teaching of English becomes a mandatory part of the school curriculum. English was introduced in North Yemen in 1926, at the time of Imam Yahia Monarchy, while in the South, English was introduced earlier in the 19th century by the British colonization (Al-Anisi 2016). English is spoken to a small extent in some parts of the largest cities in Yemen such as Sana'a and Aden. English is regarded as a foreign language (FL) within the Yemeni context since a language other than English, which is Arabic, is the dominant language of government

correspondences, the media, religious observance, and educational system. In Yemeni public schools, English is taught as an obligatory course from the seventh grade onwards. However, most private schools in Yemen start introducing the English course from the kindergarten stage at small doses.

In Yemen, all the subjects at primary and secondary school levels such as Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Science, Social Studies, Islamic Studies, etc. are taught in Arabic. In some circumstances, especially in some rural schools, non-specialist teachers who have very little background in English teach the English courses. Even those specialized teachers are either two-year graduates (diploma) who did not receive enough training in teaching English or four-year graduates who graduated with insufficient practice of English. At the university level, many departments teach all subjects in Arabic except the required English courses that do not usually exceed two beginning courses in the whole four-year programme.

Glance at the method eras

Since the development of methods in the 19th century till date, researchers and practitioners in the field of language teaching and learning could agree that there is no royal/best method in language teaching; however, various methods have emerged for the facilitation of learning languages, especially L2 and FL. Larsen-Freeman (2009) listed *14 methods* that are still in use. These methods are (in alphabetical order): Audio-lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Community Language Learning, Content-based Approach, Cooperative learning, Direct Method, desuggestopedia, Grammar-Translation Method, Learning Strategy Training, Multiple Intelligences, Silent Way, Participatory Approach, Task-based Approach and Total Physical Response. Below is a description of *four* teaching methods.

1. The Grammar translation method (GTM)

Methodologies designed for teaching foreign languages started to arise in the late 19th century and the first among these methods was the classical method or GTM (Brown 2007). As cited in Brown (2007), Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979) identify the major characteristics of the GTM as classes are taught in the mother tongue with little active use of the target language. It emphasises the teaching of vocabulary in the form of lists of isolated words and it pays great attention to long, elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar. Though reading is encouraged in this method, little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. In most cases, the only drills are exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue. Grammar is taught deductively. For teachers, this might be the most relaxing method, as it requires them to master few specialised skills. Of the criticism it receives, GTM does not pay good attention to the pronunciation and it does not enhance a student's communicative ability in language. Though GTM has been criticized and rejected by many scholars, findings of several recent research, including research conducted by Yemenis, reveal that it is still dominant in classroom practices.

2. The Direct method (DM)

The DM was a modified up-to-date version of the GTM at that time, the early of 20th century. This method has been used for many years and lately it was revived to meet the requirement of using the FL to communicate, since the GTM failed to serve this requirement. As opposed to the GTM, the DM does not allow for translation (Larsen-Freeman, 2009). As its name suggests, the DM conveys the meaning in the target language with the help of demonstration (not translation) and visual aids i.e., native language is not recommended in the classroom. According to Larsen-Freeman (2009), in DM, reading in the target

language should start from early stages and this skill will be developed through practice with speaking, as language is primarily speech. To help students understand the meaning, real objects or picture should be utilised in the classroom. In this method, students are encouraged to think in the target language as early as possible. Vocabulary should be acquired through complete sentences and not in word lists. Asking and answering questions from the part of the students is favoured. Pronunciation and writing should be practiced right from the beginning of learning the language and students should be given chances to speak as much as possible. Grammar is taught inductively in DM and self-correction helps in language learning.

3. The Audio-lingual method (ALM)

The ALM has strong theoretical connection with linguistics and psychology. It was called the Army Method as this method was developed after World War II and Americans wanted to be proficient in the languages of their allies and enemies, therefore, Americans funded for developing special, intensive courses that focus on the aural-and-audio skills (Brown, 2007). As cited in Brown, Prator and Celce-Murcia (1979) sum up the characteristics of the ALM as follows:

In ALM, the new material is presented in dialog form. There is dependence on mimicry, memorization of set phrases, and overlearning. Structures are sequenced by means of contrastive analysis and taught one at a time. Structural patterns are taught using repetitive drills. There is little or no grammatical explanation: grammar is taught by inductive analogy rather than deductive explanation. Vocabulary is strictly limited and learned in context. There is much use of tapes, language labs, and visual aids. Great importance is attached to pronunciation. Very little use of the mother tongue by teachers is permitted. Successful responses are immediately reinforced. There is a great effort to get students to produce error-free utterances. There is a

tendency to manipulate language and disregard content. This method lost its popularity towards the end of the 1960s due to its much dependence on memorization as well as the learning through pattern drills.

4. Communicative language teaching (CLT)

CLT is an *eclectic* approach that benefited from the contribution of the previous methods in which teacher can provide authentic uses of the L2 in their classrooms. In CLT, the teacher moves beyond the teaching of rules, patterns, definitions and other knowledge *about* the language to that teach students how to communicate effectively. Brown (2007) sums up the characteristics of the CLT as follows:

Firstly, classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence. Structurally (grammatically) sequenced curricula were a mainstay of language teaching for centuries. CLT suggests that grammatical structure might better be subsumed under various functional categories. In CLT, we pay considerably less attention to the overt presentation and discussion of grammatical rules than we traditionally did. Secondly, language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes. Thirdly, fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use. It is important to note, however, that fluency should never be encouraged at the expense of clear, unambiguous, direct communication. Fourthly, in the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in

unrehearsed contexts. The fourth characteristic of CLT often makes it difficult for a nonnative speaking teacher who is not very proficient in the second language to teach effectively. Dialogs, drills, rehearsed exercises, and discussions (in the first language) of grammatical rules are much simpler for some non-native speaking teachers to contend with. This drawback should not deter one, however, from pursuing communicative goals in the classroom. Technology (video, television, audiotapes, the Internet, computer software) can come to the aid of such teachers. Moreover, in the last decade or so, we have seen a marked increase in English teachers' proficiency levels around the world. Finally, much more spontaneity is present in communicative classrooms: students are encouraged to deal with unrehearsed situations under the guidance, but not control, of the teacher.

Post-method era and nature of teachers beyond the concept of method

After much criticism and, in some cases, a rejection for some methods, appeared what is called post-method or beyond-method era. From the 1970s onwards, the post-method condition received great attention in the literature. According to Scholl (2017), the first proposal for the post-method pedagogy in the 20th century comes from Stern (1983; 1992), in which he suggests that teachers can adjust the three sets of continua, which he conceptualised, to serve the pedagogic settings. Stern's first strategic continua is cross-lingual and intra-lingual in which the former is about the comparison of translation between mother and foreign tongues and the latter is about the direct association between FL and objects, contexts and situations. The second continua is analytic and experimental. The analytic focuses on accuracy and language form; language is practiced via pseudo-communication and the experimental focuses on fluency and meaning; language is practiced via unrestricted, genuine communication. The

third continua is implicit and explicit, in which the former indicates that language is acquired automatically via an intuitive, incidental process and the latter indicates that language is learned consciously via a deliberate, intellectual process.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) commented on the previous methods stating that "The term methods, as currently used in the literature on L2 and FL teaching, does not refer to what teachers actually do in the classroom; rather, it refers to established methods conceptualized and constructed by experts in the field". He comments on the post-method saying that it signifies three inter-related attributes in which the first is meant to search for an alternative to method rather than an alternative method, that is, bottom-up rather than top-down processes. The second attribute signifies teacher autonomy in which teachers should have the ability to know how to develop a critical approach in order to self-observe, self-analyze, and self-evaluate their own teaching practice with a view to effecting desired changes. The third attribute is principled pragmatism, which focuses on how classroom learning can be shaped and reshaped by teachers because of self-observation, self-analysis, and self-evaluation. Kumaravadivelu (2003) visualizes the post-method in three-dimensional system, particularity, practicality and possibility. The dimension *particularity* requires that any language pedagogy, to be relevant, must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular sociocultural milieu. The parameter of *practicality* entails a teacher-generated theory of practice in which teachers practice what they set as theories and theorise what they practice. The parameter of *possibility* seeks to tap the 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.

Kumaravadivelu (2003) lists *ten macrostrategies* in which each macrostrategy is elaborated in an independent chapter. These macrostrategies are:

- maximize learning opportunities
- minimize perceptual mismatches
- facilitate negotiated interaction
- promote learner autonomy
- foster language awareness
- activate intuitive heuristics
- contextualize linguistic input
- integrate language skills
- ensure social relevance
- raise cultural consciousness.

The macrostrategies developed by Kumaravadivelu are of good help for novice and experienced teachers to develop a systematic, coherent, and personal theory of practice. Through his book, he tries to stimulate the critical thought processes of the educators in ESL/EFL settings to self-reflective action that is based on the situational understanding of their own learning and teaching environment. He also tries to motivate educators to go beyond the concept of method and consider the challenges and opportunities.

As there is no single method that fits all teaching environments, this is an urgent call for educators in the field to self-observe and self-analyse their own successful and innovative teaching procedures and adopt them as their own teaching methods. They can keep altering their teaching approaches as per the requirement of their classes and learners. Teachers, especially at school level, should not await for professors at universities or theorist from very far environments to develop and pass them such theories, procedures and techniques on how to deliver their classes. However, up-to-date educator should be in the form of a researcher who looks into the matter and tries to find out

plausible solutions. In fact, we need to observe and read more research on possible learning-teaching approaches and techniques from school teachers than those researches generated by higher studies institutes in which many of them are purely developed for getting promotions or fulfilling a requirement to get a degree.

To have effective and professional teachers, they should act in their classrooms as trainers, facilitators, guides, mentors, leaders, etc. who convert the learner from passive to active and critical thinker. Educator should be more democratic, dynamic, autonomous, collaborative and keep observing the latest in the field and give it a try to test its validity and applicability. The teachers who have succeeded so far to teach through online will entertain extra advantages in the post-covid-19 period in which they can run their physical classrooms and supplement their students with extracurricular activities via online mediums, as well.

Conclusion

Of the various approaches in language teaching, several researchers report that concentration on competence over performance and the heavy dependence on the conventional methods are still the practice in many institutes, including Yemen, though we are today in the era beyond the concept of method. To the researcher, the teacher who is beyond the concept of method and up-to-date is the one who dealt with the covid-19 teaching period successfully and efficiently. This proves that s/he is keeping up with latest in the field of teaching means and being literate in technology, which is the only solution till date to keep in touch and deliver classes to the learners (during Covid-19 pandemic in 2020). From the defibrations raised above, and from the recommendation of using technology as a medium in online and offline learning-teaching process, one could conclude that technology

should be invested as a tool to overcome the low-quality education today and in the days to come.

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