

Plausible Eclecticism: A Joint Venture of Methods and Post-Method Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This is a state-of-the-art article proposing the use of plausible eclecticism as alternative to methods of teachings. The idea of plausible eclecticism is to gain valuable contribution of various methods of teaching, while minimizing the drawbacks issues of each teaching method. The plausible eclecticism was triggered by the notions of post-method pedagogy, proposed by Kumaravadivelu. Post-method has raised awareness of the limitation of methods and gives more attention to teachers' autonomy to pragmatically theorize what they practice using the sense of plausibility. The proposed notions have gained debates. The debates on post-method notions should be positively responded through idea sharing. This article is written to share thoughts on the debates.

Keywords: *Plausible Eclecticism, Post-method, Teaching Method, Debate.*

1. INTRODUCTION

English Language Teaching (ELT) has been undergoing transitions and developments in term of method. Various methods have been proposed, each has their own valuable contribution to better understanding in ELT instructional design. Despite its valuable contributions, any method has drawbacks, indicating that the complex pedagogical issue still cannot be solved by a single method [1]–[7]. This awareness brings ELT to its development of a period, termed by Kumaravadivelu, of post-method condition, “a state of events that forces us to refigure the interaction between method theorists and practitioners” [6].

Post-method signifies 3 notions, alternative to methods, teachers' autonomy, and principle pragmatism, which are both appealing and challenging. In this article, I am going to review the notions of post-method, debates on the notions, and finally put forward a proposal of plausible eclecticism of methods based on the notions.

2. POST-METHOD NOTIONS

Post-method lays its basis on the dissatisfaction of the existing methods, conventional methods in Kumaravadivelu terms. Post-methodologists view conventional method as a unified collection of theoretical principles conceptualized by theorist and a standardized set of classroom practices that prescribed to teachers in classroom [1], [6]–[8]. Kumaravadivelu [4], [6], [9], [10] employs this idealised definition to state that none of the existed methods are applicable in their purist form in real classroom, since they are artificially transplanted through experimentation and as such, unable to reflect classroom reality. The similar notions of the methods and limitation of each method implicate that there is no theory of learning superior to other and there is no single teaching method which can solve all learning and teaching problems [6], [9]. Similarly, Bhatia [2] states, the complex and dynamic language discourse are still unable to be undermined by any generic study. It is a warn of the danger of notion of one-size-fits-all in methods [1], [7], [8].

As a first and foremost notion, Kumaravadivelu claims that post-method is a substitute for the methods, which is method neutral, unlike conventional methods,

that it is not restricted to a specific number of theoretical principles or a specific set of classroom techniques linked to a specific method. He, then, proposes 10 macrostrategies as strategic framework to alternative to methods. The ten macrostrategies includes: 1) enhance opportunities for learning, 2) assist in negotiating interactions, 3) reduce perceptual discrepancies, 4) stimulate intuitive heuristics 5) promote language awareness, 6) contextualize linguistic input, 7) integrate language abilities, 8) encourage learner autonomy, 9) increase cultural sensitivity, and 10) ascertain social relevance. The framework is an open-ended, a descriptive not a prescriptive scheme, and that it is not a theorist's construct (contrived and prescribed by theorists to be implemented in classrooms) but a practitioner's construct (theory constructed by teachers from practices in classrooms) [6]. This leads to the second notion of post-method, teachers' autonomy.

Post-method is a bottom-up movement of empowering practitioners to develop classroom-based practice theories [6]. Under the principle of pragmatism, it believes that teachers have the autonomy to construct theories based on their practices and practice their theories [5]–[7], [9], [11]. It is an appealing idea since it gives pre-eminence for teachers to be autonomous in reflecting, recreating, and reinventing strategies or theories based on their practices, not dictated by any common method. Teachers' sense of plausibility, the third notions of post-method, should then be empowered.

The third notion of post-method is principled pragmatism which focuses on how teacher and managed learning as the result of practical appraisal/intuition, a sense of plausibility. This subjective conceptualization may arise from practitioners' undergoes as learners and teachers, as well as through professional development and peer sharing. Kumaravadivelu [6] emphasizes on the fact that teachers' feeling of plausibility is unrelated to any concept of method, and thus concern is not with the quality of the methods but with whether they are contextually beneficial in enhancing learning [1]–[7].

All the notions proposed by the post-methodologist seem appealing in the sense that it raises the awareness of the limitation of methods and gives more attention to teachers' autonomy to pragmatically

theorize what they practice using the sense of plausibility. Yet, as any other theory, the notions have raised debates among theorists and methodologists.

3. DEBATES ON THE POST-METHOD'S NOTION

Post-methodologists' (e.g., Brown, Kumaravadivelu) have so many times stated that methods are dead and that post-method is an alternative to method. These statements are not favourable among methodologists. Post-method is not a substitute for method, but rather an additional technique in and of itself. [8]. Bell [1] argued that post-method is simply a synthesis of several CLT approaches and a further signal of the need to find a better method. The post-method situation does not have to entail the end of methods, but rather an acceptance of their limitations and the necessity of overcoming them through pragmatic and contextual issues. The inability of the procedures to be implemented in their purest form does not negate their value. The fact that none of the strategies work in every setting or with every student does not indicate they are ineffective. [1], [8]. The problem is not in the methods, it is on how teachers use methods [1], [7], [8].

The fact that not all teachers are experienced teachers raises another debate on the notion of post-method. Akbari [12] and Barrot [13] underline that teachers in the post-method condition are lacking skills and expertise in taking the role of a social reformer and cultural critic and in developing their own post-method framework. If methods ignored learning and language realities, post-method has ignored the teaching and language teacher realities [12]. Barrot [13] found that inexperienced teachers were struggling in employing various methods contextually, due to lack of technical knowledge integration. Their sense of plausibility in combining methods to make effective and practical teaching is inadequate. This statement is in line with Liu [8] that to empower teachers to be able to have a sense of plausibility in revising and modifying teaching, they need to know various existing methods with the unique procedures and techniques. This raises an assumption that teachers with lack of principles and procedures in applying a method or some methods would have a minimum

sense of plausibility. This assumption needs objective confirmation through studies.

4. PLAUSIBLE ECLECTICISM

‘There is no best method’ should not be seen as the declining of method nor that method is dead. Eventhough it has limitation of being prescriptive and lack of contextuality, method is not dead. Findings have proven that method is still a valid and very much alive for many teachers [1], [8], [12], suggesting that methods is still needed by teachers.

Even under debate, most ELT experts agree in one thing, that there is no one-size-fits-all in methods. Believing in merely a single method in developing ELT instruction has no use since ELT practitioners should be flexible in choosing and combining effective and efficient methods of developing instruction. Then, would that be possible to develop an instruction by making use of those underlying principles contribute by those theories and methods, without being limited to the prescriptive tenet of a certain theory or method, and combine them with the practical/tacit knowledge which is based on the practical sense of plausibility; a joint venture between methods and post-method pedagogy?

A better way in examining the debates is having an understanding that methods and post-method pedagogy as a joint venture in making better ELT. Exploration is needed [6], [8], a statement that both party agree. Professional efforts are required to engage and enhance teachers' diverse senses of plausibility. [6], [7]. Having an autonomy of post-method pedagogy, teachers, with their sense of plausibility, should develop a new understanding on how to make the best of the available methods based on certain contexts to enhance learning. The best method should be seen as teachers' sense of plausibility in operating existed methods to promote learning, a plausible eclecticism. The eclecticism should not be merely ‘a grab of bag of classroom practices’, the first definition of method mentioned by Bell [1]. The plausible eclecticism needs to be coherent, “occurs as a result of instructors articulating and discussing one another's pedagogic perceptions, as a result of professional reading or writing, or in other, more or less formal, ways.” [7]. Let us take the following example in making a plausible eclecticism.

A study from Barron et al. [14], for example, has shown that, methods blending, Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning, with the emphasize of connecting knowledge to the contexts of its application, could be combined. The Problem-Based Learning was used as a scaffold for Projects-Based Learning, in which the problems were introduced at the beginning and then proceeded to projects. The Problem-Based section was not ended with conclusion but rather with a challenge for a futher project. Some advantages in pairing Problem and Project Based Learning were also suggested. The students, with the simulated problem at the beginning, would establish a shared level of knowledge and ability that would prepare them to carry out the project. Following problem with project enables the students to develop flexible levels of skills and understanding based on their learning pace. Similar studies on pairing methods in instructional design to enhance learning are then encouraged.

One character features of Post-method is principled pragmatism which promotes the use of harmonious ideas and sources to yield the best results of learning [6]. It overcomes the limitation of any given method by carefully combining it with other analogous methods. Post-method is considered beneficial for the teacher autonomy feature which enabling teacher practically developed method based on the experience and tacit knowledge.

I, as an ESP teacher and a reseacher, has tried to develop my sense of plausibility thorough professional discussion, reading, and writing. From the discussion and reading. As far as I am aware, practitioners of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) concur on one point. Each ESP course should be founded on a needs analysis [15]–[17]. The needs can be in the form of the necessities of target place, the resources of teaching-learning establishment, and most importantly the learners' preferences. Under the belief of post-method, that there is no single method could solve all learning problems, a coherent eclecticism has come out. The idea is to combine Task-Based Learning (TBL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) in an ESP instruction for hotelier students. These three methods (i.e.: TBA, PBL, PjBL) are considered to be able to prepare students for real world situations, in which they are required to apply knowledge, complete meaningful tasks, and solve

problems. The tasks, which is important in TBL, can be developed from the results of target needs analysis. The learning needs (learners' preferences and learning situation) could be used as the basis in developing problems and projects. Specification of tasks, problems, and projects are also possible to be implemented.

Adjoining the advantages and limitations of the methods, the reason of combining those three methods is because the notions of those methods are coherent with the current belief of post-method. All these methods are similar in the followings [18]–[21]: 1) Needs based. All methods suggest that ESP instruction must be based on needs analysis, target requirements and learner's preferences; 2) Practical orientation. Attain higher level of specialized language skills in an effective and efficient way; 3) Contextual and authentic. Materials should be based on real contexts of language use and tasks. There is more than merely lexico grammatical issue that need to be considered; 4) Student-centered. These notions are in line with the ten macro-strategies notions in post-method.

As it can be observed, I am not comparing the methods nor grabbing the methods without any particular coherent contemplation. Thoughtful professional efforts are involved, through metasynthesis¹ of articles reading. The purpose of plausible eclecticism is not to know which method serve better, but on how the methods combination works on a certain context. What intended in the example of plausible eclecticism i have just delivered should not be considered as a prescriptive procedures of teaching ESP. It should be seen as an option on how to conduct plausible eclecticism. There might be, and it will be, several other plausible eclecticism by other classroom practitioners that need to be observed, analysed, discussed, and adopted for the purpose of enriching the sense of plausibility. The main purpose is to have a better understanding in collaborative effort of making a joint venture between methods and teachers' sense of plausibility and to make the notions of post-method to be more applicable.

¹ A term used by Au (2007) referring to "synthesizing the results of qualitative studies to gain a better understanding of the general nature of a give phenomenon".

5. CONCLUSION

The notions of post-method are appreciated and, at the same time, debated. The idea that there is no single method that could solve all ELT problems is universally agreed. Yet, the statement of the futility of methods has raised opponents' comments. The limitation of methods should be seen as a challenge to make betterment, not as simply that methods are dead. In reality, theories and principles of methods are in fact still needed by classrooms teachers. The problem, then, is not on the methods, but on how teachers apply methods. Given such autonomy to use sense of plausibility, teacher may combine the their sense of plausibility with theories and principles of methods, a plausible eclecticism of methods, a collaborative effort of making a joint venture between methods and teachers' sense of plausibility.

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