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Postmodern Thoughts for Language Teacher Educators

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Abstract:

After the ‘demise of method era’ and erosion of the Communicative Language Teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), postmodernism came across as the guiding force for language learners, teachers and teacher educators. With the help of Subjective, anti-scientific, constructivist, non-linear, non-generalizing, practical approach of postmodernism, language teaching profession has abandoned its long quest for the abstract, objective, linear, globally generalizable utopian methods. Postmethod approach, with its three-dimensional theoretical framework of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility* demands more power for teachers in the whole framework of language learning and teaching process. Postmodern concepts like Critical Classroom Discourse Analysis (CCDA), teacher identity, teacher autonomy, critical thinking and so on, have helped language teacher educators create awareness about the effectiveness of the true *teacher self*. Language teaching in postmodern era is more sensitive towards the issues related to teacher education. Thus, this paper intends to (a) introduce Postmodernism in the field of language teacher education (b) explain the postmodern concepts as tools to empower language teachers and (c) propose KARDS model as a well-conceived alternative conceptual outline to help language teachers address teaching problems more effectively.

Keywords: Teacher education, teacher educator, language teacher, postmodernism, postmethod.

Introduction

Teacher Education has been one of the least deliberated and overlooked practices in the field language teaching. Teachers are generally directed by the authorities to teach according to a method and are expected to adhere to it. But, as Pennycook opines, teachers ‘feel frustration at being told how to teach, sensing that there is little concordance between what the concept purports to describe and what is actually happening in their classrooms’ (Pennycook589). This practice of giving instructions to teacher on the methods, demotes teachers’ autonomy and make their role less substantial. They are made to function only as the delivery boys of global teaching methods. Although ‘many teachers in an EFL context question the usefulness of supposed methods to their own teaching contexts and resent their impositions by “experts” from abroad’ but ‘despite this dissatisfaction, the concept of Method continues to be used by many of those involved in teacher education’ (Pennycook589). This ignorant practice of abstract, objective, linear, globally generalizable and utopian methods makes teachers ineffective in their classrooms. Their whims are neglected and their creativity is killed, which makes them nothing more than human robots carrying out the commands of unknown experts.

The result of this dissatisfaction among language teachers towards the concept of dictating teaching method by the experts has been investigated and explored in the 'spirited 70s' by various linguists. (Akbari641). And the concerned studies have resulted in 'postmodernism in language teaching' and 'postmethod conditions'. On one hand, the expression 'postmodernism in language teaching' talks about how to improve language teaching profession by benefitting from the key features of postmodern philosophy. On the other hand, postmethod condition refers to the qualities of the present era in language teaching where all 'previously well trusted methods are put under serious scrutiny and in which a body of methods and techniques collected from all previous methods and approaches are used pragmatically with a belief that such an eclectic practice leads to success' (Arikan01). With this understanding 'teachers and researchers came to realize that no single research finding and no single method of language teaching would bring total success' (Arikan 01). Therefore, a comprehensive collection of ideas, techniques and strategies from significant approaches and methods need to be tied together with the thread of pragmatic outlook. There is a need for an approach which can enhance teachers' autonomy and make them more confident outside as well as inside the classroom. An approach which can provide space for teachers' creativity and respects their experience. Thus, language teaching has headed towards practices which are based on principles not methods. It does not provide static frameworks for teachers, rather broad guidelines to help them develop specific classroom strategies and techniques which are context based and address the social, political and cultural needs of the learners.

Language Teaching Based on Principles Not Methods:

It is evident from postmodernism oriented recent research in the field of language learning and teaching that issues like curricular objectives, instructional materials, classroom strategies, evaluation measures, political, historical, cultural and social experiences of language teachers and learners indirectly as well as directly affect language education. Thus, any restricted method based on static rules focusing on specific social and cultural realities can never address varied language classroom situations across the globe. B. Kumaravadivelu (2001) has visualised a three-dimensional structure based on three principles i.e. *Principle of Particularity*, *Principle of Practicality* and *Principle of Possibility*. These principles are designed to work together in harmony to empower language teachers by elevating their role in the language learning process and by redefining their role as autonomous beings.

1) Principle of Particularity:

This principle focuses on the particularities of and in the language learning and teaching. According to Kumaravadivelu (2001), language teaching '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' (538). This principle opposes the notion that 'there can be one set of pedagogic aims and objectives realizable through one set of pedagogic principles and procedures' (Kumaravadivelu538). It emphasizes that language teachers cannot ignore (and they should not ignore) learners' social, ethnic, cultural and political realities. Overlooking these realities may create a continuing frustration in the learners which may result in

partial or complete demotivation of learners. It may also affect their attitude towards target language. As a result, environment of the language classroom may become a barrier in learning of a language. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers that they recognise learners' identity and formulate strategies accordingly.

2) Principle of Practicality:

This principle talks about the relationship between language teaching practices and its guiding theories. Educationists say that theories and practices need to be mutually informed to be more effective. They have provided a distinction between personal theories and professional theories. They define professional theories as 'those that are generated by experts and are generally transmitted from centres of higher learning' whereas personal theories are defined as 'those that teachers develop by interpreting and applying professional theories in practical situations while they are on the job' (O'Hanlon (1993) as cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2001). But when it comes to the implementation of these theories, 'in reality the expert-generated professional theories are often valued whereas the teacher-generated personal theories are often ignored' (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Therefore, principle of practicality emphasises to resolve this issues by enabling and encouraging teachers 'to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize' (Kumaravadivelu 541).

3) Principle of Possibility:

This principle talks about the unspoken and sometimes unheard dynamics of the language classroom which work as outside agents, having potential to make teaching and learning process effective, ineffective and/or even ignored. Kumaravadivelu (2001) states:

The experiences participants bring to the pedagogical setting are shaped not just by the learning/teaching episodes they have encountered in the past but also by the broader social, economic, and political environment in which they have grown up. These experiences have the potential to alter pedagogic practices in ways unintended and unexpected by policy planners, curriculum designers, or textbook producers. (543)

Thus, in turn, pedagogical practices have potential to influence the social and cultural identities of the learners by adding linguistic awareness to their existing experiences. In this way, language teaching profession may also cater the social needs of its participants.

The above mentioned three broad principles outline the underlying ideas of postmodern pedagogy for language teachers. These principles make language teaching appropriate, needs based and context sensitive.

Language Teachers in Postmodern Era:

Unlike earlier approaches, postmodernism believes in decentralization of power in the field of language teaching. Therefore, teachers' empowerment is one of the most

important aspects of postmodern language teaching. Unless teachers are given more skills and power to exercise those skills, classroom strategies and techniques will continue to be dictated by experts who are usually unaware of the reality of classroom teaching. Experts simply provide prescriptions generally on assumed situations without considering specific problems. Thus, KARDS is an exemplary model of language teaching, which can help teachers enhance their understanding of language teaching and enable them conceptualize context sensitive and situation specific classroom practices. The model is proposed and conceptualised by B. Kumaravadivelu in *Language Teacher Education for a Global Society* (2012). It is a comprehensive model that deals with the issues and challenges of teacher education along with learners and teachers support in language classrooms of postmodern era. It also addresses the need of a complete, inclusive and coherent framework for preparing language teachers in the age of fast growing cultural, educational and economic globalization. According to Kumaravadivelu, language teacher education needs radical restructurings because available models of teacher education do not address and do not have ability to face and solve global challenges. He opines:

this contention is premised upon five interconnected propositions that are as simple as they are straightforward: (a) any meaningful, context-sensitive pedagogic knowledge can emerge only from the classroom; (b) it is the practicing teacher who is well placed to produce and apply that knowledge; (c) current approaches to language teacher education are mostly aimed at preparing teachers to become consumers, not producers, of pedagogic knowledge; (d) the fast evolving global society with its incessant and increased flow of peoples, goods and ideas across the world is placing huge responsibilities on the shoulders of student teachers, practicing teachers and teacher educators; and therefore (e) we need to re-view and re-vision language teacher education if we are serious about helping language teaching professionals become strategic thinkers, exploratory researchers and transformative intellectuals. .

(Kumaravadivelu, 2012)

Above discussed explorations provide solid premise for this 'state-of-the-art model' for 'developing prospective and practising teachers into strategic thinkers, exploratory researchers, and transformative teachers' (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). The model is based on five successive modules: Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing and Seeing (KARDS). It aims at helping teacher educator provide sufficient input to teachers so that they can understand:

- How to build a viable professional, personal and procedural knowledge base,
- How to analyze learner needs, motivation and autonomy,
- How to recognize their own identities, beliefs and values,
- How to teach, theorise and dialogize,
- How to see their own teaching acts from learner, teacher and observer perspectives.

(Kumaravadivelu, 2012)

KARDS Model:

KARDS is an acronym which stands for Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing, Doing and Seeing. Each dynamic verb has specific demands from participants of language learning and teaching.

Knowing:

This refers to three different knowledge, that is, professional knowledge, procedural knowledge and personal knowledge. These knowledges work together in the language teaching practices and teachers are supposed to possess and/or be aware about them to be effective language teachers. *Professional knowledge* refers to the knowledge of the language, knowledge of language teaching and language of language learning. *Procedural knowledge* is about the planning and execution of professional knowledge in the classroom. It includes managing classroom and creating and maintaining positive learning environment in the classroom. *Personal knowledge* refers to teachers' awareness about their personality, for instance, in what type of situations they work better, what are their personality traits, their strengths and weaknesses as teachers etc.

Analyzing:

It is based on the understanding that teachers cannot carry out their duties effectively unless they are able to *analyze* learners' needs, learners' motivation and learners' autonomy. And in order to be able to analyze these aspects, teachers must develop a comprehensive understanding of learners' social, political and cultural background. It will not only help them to select or develop appropriate materials, but also help them to use them effectively.

Recognizing:

This refers to the idea that teachers need to understand themselves as much as they need to understand learners and their needs. In this module they are expected to enhance awareness about their *teacher self* and recognize their own *identity, beliefs and values*. A comprehensive understanding of these elements is needed to make teachers more instrumental and active in carrying out their responsibilities. Teachers' identity, beliefs and values cannot be neglected because these are the underlying social constructs which determines the ability as well as willingness of teachers to teach in a particular classroom setting. Teacher is more likely to be effective if these social constructs work in harmony with other classroom dynamics. On the other hand, if these constructs do not work according to expectations teaching may not produce desired results.

Doing:

This module is based on the broad action range which is expected from postmodern language teachers. It consists of *teaching, theorising and dialogizing*. Unlike previous modules which talked more about doer, this module focuses more on doing. According to the above mentioned three elements *teaching* does not refer to the traditional ways of classroom instruction, rather it focuses on maximizing learning opportunities and also on mentoring personal transformation of the students. Second element of this module i.e. *theorising* intends to empower teachers by redefining their role as teacher theorists. Teachers

are thought to be best placed to produce theoretical as well as practical knowledge about classroom. *Dialogizing*, the third element of the module, is not an action to be carried out by language teachers, rather a tool to be used to conduct research and collect data for theorising and teaching.

Seeing:

This module works as a thread and connects all previously mentioned modules, that is, Knowing, Analyzing, Recognizing and Doing. It has an important role in the language teaching process and if given required attention, it leads to teachers' professional development. But its role is often neglected. It is based on three elements i.e. *learner perspective, teacher perspective and observer perspective*.

These elements instruct teachers to acknowledge what different participants in the teaching- learning process have to offer in terms of feedback on their teaching and other classroom practices. Learner, teacher and observer examine, analyze and evaluate classroom events from different perspectives. And if they work in collaboration, as the module intends, their comments, criticism and appreciation can bring a well-informed change in the classroom instruction to make it more effective and learning oriented.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an introductory discussion on the implications of postmodernism in the field of language teacher education. It has also explained postmodern concepts as tools to empower language teachers and proposed KARDS modular model as a well-conceived alternative conceptual outline to help language teachers address teaching problems more effectively.

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