



## Iranian EFL Instructors' Practical Adherence to Postmethod and Critical Pedagogy

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### Abstract

Fundamental changes and novel ideas have been brought into the field of English Language Teaching through introduction of postmethod and critical pedagogy. Postmethod as an alternative to methods aimed at fulfilling its triple principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The well-known sub-branch of postmethod, critical pedagogy, aimed at empowerment of instructors and learners, and establishment of social justice through education. Unlike theoretical aspects of these movements, practical dimensions have not received due attention, especially in eastern contexts. This qualitative investigation sought the extent EFL instructors practically adhere to the principles of these inherently western concepts in Iran, as a sample of eastern context with its own social, cultural, and academic norms. Qualitative data collection techniques were used to obtain data from the intended instructors. Qualitative data analysis laid bare the findings that postmethod and critical pedagogy are practically adopted, to a great extent, by the Iranian EFL instructors, and the pertinent principles are being put into practice enthusiastically. Powerful communication with western communities blurring cultural boundaries was deemed to be the chief reason of such strong adoption. Ironically enough, it was revealed that in general, the Iranian EFL instructors' theoretical knowledge suffered greatly concerning postmethod and critical pedagogy. In other words, although haziness of cultural boundaries has made the room for smoothed practical realization of these trends, due attention should be paid to development of theoretical knowledge in these regards in Iranian EFL teacher training courses so as to take the utmost advantages from postmethod and critical pedagogy.

**Keywords:** English language teaching, postmethod, critical pedagogy, Iranian EFL instructors, practical adherence

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## **Introduction**

The question of how to teach and learn English as a foreign or second language has preoccupied intellectuals of the field for decades. Seeking the answer to this question led to flourishing of numerous theories and methods of teaching and learning. Lots of language teaching methods developed and later were pushed aside as an alternative method was introduced, with the hope that the new method is better and could compensate for the shortcomings of the previous ones. However, after development of a collection of methods, some scholars exhausted with methods and their restrictive nature and ideological loads, started to talk of demise of methods and the need to go beyond methods towards a postmethod era so as to make teachers and learners independent, and empower them. Simultaneously, the principles of critical pedagogy lent themselves to postmethod since they were so in line with what postmethodologists yearned for as side-products of postmethod, namely changing the society, establishment of social justice through education, and development of critical thinking so as to perceive ideological intentions in education to empower the marginalized through that.

Attention to a brief history of postmethod and critical pedagogy looks reasonable here. According to Richards (1990) cited in Akbari (2008b), the roots of postmethod or going beyond method could be traced back to eclecticism, which according to Rivers (1968) is used when direct application of a method is not feasible and parts of different methods are chosen according to requirements of the context to be applied in a combined fashion. Again, Akbari (2008b) states that the first scholar who used the term postmethod was Kumaravadivelu (1994), although other well-known figures of the field such as Pennycook (1989) and Prabhu (1990) played a significant role in paving the way for introduction of the notion of postmethod. Pennycook drew attentions to ideological loads of any type of knowledge, knowledge of language teaching and methods included as well; and Prabhu talked of teacher's sense of plausibility, which is a teacher's perception of what works and what does not work (principled pragmatism) in a specific context. Continuous elaborations on these issues led to creation of what is called postmethod today.

To elaborate more on postmethod notion, reference to the three principles of postmethod introduced by Kumaravadivelu (2001) is a tactful idea so as to have a brief and useful view of what postmethod strives for:

- 1) Practicality: Instead of relying on expert-made theories, teachers should theorize based on their practices and practice what they theorize.
- 2) Particularity: Teaching and learning should be localized and context-sensitive.
- 3) Possibility: Teachers and learners should be empowered so as to be independent and also make social transformations possible via education.

Critical pedagogy, which was introduced into the field as an adverse reaction to banking system of education, is regarded as the significant counterpart of

postmethod. Akbari (2008b) regards the linkage of postmethod to critical pedagogy as one of its strengths, and Kumaravadivelu (2003) considers critical pedagogy as a postmethod perspective on ELT. The truth is whether the relationship between these two is of a superordinate or subordinate type, these notions are strongly related to each other due to the good deal of similarities they share considering their focuses on teachers' and learners' independence, empowerment of teachers and learners, establishment of social justice and transforming society through education, development of critical thinking, attention to the marginalized groups, and use of students' real life problems in teaching English language to them.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This qualitative research, employing quantification to some extent as well, aims at revisiting one of the significant dimensions of postmethod and critical pedagogy, namely EFL instructors, in Iran as an eastern platform. Speaking more precisely, the greatest focus of the present investigation, is to probe the extent to which these frameworks are practically feasible through teaching practices of Iranian EFL instructors, what the possible gaps or barriers are between theoretical and practical aspects of postmethod and critical pedagogy with an eye on social, cultural, institutional, and personal realities of teachers, and what could be done to strike the right balance between theory and practice in these regards.

### **Significance of the Study**

In the late decades, the banking system of education has been receiving mounting criticisms from methodologists and theoreticians, who yearn for nurturing of critical thinking and radical changes in society and educational systems. Especially in the field of English language teaching, this trend has been growing rapidly and ambitiously, leading to creation and growth of concepts such as postmethod and critical pedagogy. Though theoretically very promising, practically these inherently western ideas could be challenging, especially in eastern contexts – such as Iran – with their cultural, social, and traditional barriers. It seems that it is time to think of practical and localization issues of postmethod and critical pedagogy and bring the other so-called peripheral factors with their huge impacts into play rather than rejoice repeatedly at the discovery of the relatively new concepts of postmethod and critical pedagogy. The purpose of the present investigation is to find out whether postmethod and critical pedagogy are feasible practically through Iranian EFL instructors' practices and to what extent they practically adhere to these trends.

To elaborate more, let us note that as maintained above, postmethod and critical pedagogy have been introduced into the field of ELT in recent decades, and therefore these disciplines are relatively recent modes of ELT thinking, at least in comparison with the previously introduced methods of ELT. Thus, there might be lots of underresearched areas in the field with these regards, one of which is practical realization of the relatively new and novel notions of postmethod and critical pedagogy. The practical challenges become even more highlighted when the context of realization (eastern context) is different from context of origination of language teaching methods (western context). Especially regarding Iranian context, the researchers noticed that not many investigations have been conducted studying

postmethod in Iran, and EFL instructors in these regards were perceived to be underresearched as well.

### **Research Questions**

This study pursues two research questions.

1. Are postmethod and critical pedagogy practically feasible through Iranian EFL instructors' teaching practices in the Iranian EFL contexts?
2. What is the extent of Iranian EFL instructors' practical adherence to postmethod and critical pedagogy in their teaching practices?

### **Literature Review**

In this section, a few works of research conducted by Iranian researchers and in Iranian context are reviewed so as to pave the way for further discussion of issues under investigation in the present study. The first study handpicked for presentation in this section was conducted by Khatib and Fathi (2014), the aim of which was exploration of Iranian EFL domain experts' perspectives about postmethod pedagogy. The researchers employed Delphi technique since their supposition was that Delphi technique was capable of playing a key role in quick obtainment of consensus on postmethod pedagogy for the participants who were twenty one domain experts in the field of applied linguistics in Iran. Three sets of data collection were conducted in three sets of Delphi with the same participants. The findings of the research "raised much doubt and uncertainty about both method and postmethod pedagogy" (Khatib & Fathi, 2014); i.e. methods are not realized in their appropriate and desired manners in Iranian language education, let alone postmethod. Teachers adhere to their own eclectic approaches based on their personal preferences, and methods do not receive the attention they deserve; thus and according to findings of the Delphi technique, postmethod too is not applicable in Iranian context.

The second study selected for presentation at this point is a study by Rashidi and Mansourzadeh (2017) conducted so as to investigate nonnative EFL teachers' viewpoints and perceptions concerning postmethod pedagogy with an eye on their contexts and needs. Through purposive sampling, ten nonnative teachers were selected and assigned to three groups according to their teaching experiences. Next, semi-structured interviews were utilized in order to elicit their perceptions regarding postmethod pedagogy. The findings of the study revealed that while nonnative teachers were unable to explicate the principles of postmethod pedagogy, they revealed to have an acceptable discernment of postmethod tenets and applications in their classroom practices; i.e. despite unfamiliarity with postmethod's theoretical and technical issues, the participants adhered to practical sides of postmethod pedagogy and used them in their teaching processes. The researchers of the study regard this finding as a sign of hope considering admission of postmethod into Iranian context, although the participants were only teachers (and not students or other experts in the field).

Another study that again dealt with the relationship between postmethod and Iranian context and was handpicked for review here, was conducted by Amiri and Sahragard (2018). The researchers of the study believed that most of the studies concerning postmethod have dealt with the theoretical aspects of it and practical realization issues have mostly remained underresearched. Thus, they investigated perspectives of Iranian EFL teachers regarding applicability of postmethod pedagogy. The participants of the study were twenty one teachers, both male and female, from different parts of the country, and semi-structured interview was used as the primary means of data collection for the study. The outcome of their research illuminated that due to the following issues language teachers do not adhere to postmethod pedagogy in their classroom practices: absence of required autonomy among teachers, teachers' job security, students' passivity, absence of critical thinking skills among students, dominance of transmission model of teacher education, inefficiency of textbooks, teachers' focus on coverage and grade pressure, demanding nature of postmethod pedagogy (Amiri & Sahragard, 2018).

As the reader might have noticed, the sample studies reviewed above deal with postmethod pedagogy in Iranian context, the overall outcomes of which are disappointing regarding not only practical application of its principles, but also familiarity with theoretical dimensions of it in Iran. Since the construct of critical pedagogy as a part of postmethod is the focus of the present research as well, a few sample studies handpicked for this purpose are going to be presented in the following paragraphs.

Moving chronologically, the first study considered for review here as a research linking critical pedagogy to context of Iran, was conducted by Safari and Pourhashemi (2012). In their investigation, they explored the problems and constraints of application of critical pedagogy in Iranian educational system. The participants were twelve English language teachers, both male and female from Yazd, Iran. Journal writing, observation, and semi-structured interview were used as data collection means for the study. As the chief outcome of their study, the researchers claimed that optimal application of critical pedagogy in Iran is not feasible.

Another study conducted in these regards is by Sarani et al. (2014). Their study investigated Iranian EFL university instructors' awareness of critical pedagogy principles, and difference(s) between Iranian EFL instructors and subject instructors in terms of applying the CP principles. Convenience sampling was utilized in this study, through which fifty five EFL and subject teachers were selected from different universities. Questionnaire of critical pedagogy attitudes was used as the mean of data collection, and the results of the study approved that there is a difference in terms of attitudes towards critical pedagogy between EFL instructors and subject teachers: EFL instructors adhere to principles of critical pedagogy more than subject teachers.

Aliakbari and Amoli (2014) conducted a research in which the researchers were interested in finding out the extent of application of critical pedagogy principles by Iranian EFL instructors in Iranian English language institutes.

Viewpoints of two hundred Iranian EFL instructors were considered in this study, and a questionnaire with reference to their age, gender, educational level, and work experience was used as the mean of data collection. The findings revealed that each of the stated factors could have a specific effect on application of critical pedagogy by the EFL instructors.

And, another study that is chosen to review here, which again deals with the relationship between critical pedagogy and Iranian context, was conducted by Atai and Moradi (2016). In this investigation as well, the focus of the research was on teachers: it investigated Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions regarding basic tenet of critical pedagogy. The data for the study were gathered through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, and a hundred forty eight participants in total took part in the research. The results of the study indicated that in general, Iranian EFL teachers supported the basic tenets of critical pedagogy.

Regarding the sample studies above dealing with the relationship between critical pedagogy and Iranian context, the reader might have contemplated that critical pedagogy is potentially more promising than postmethod in Iran since in spite of some challenges, at least EFL teachers are supportive of its principles, thus we would be hopeful to its future in Iran as an eastern context. However, the researchers of the present study regard such thought a naïve supposition – why did the findings on the relationship between postmethod and Iranian context turned to be disappointing in general, while the findings on the relationship between critical pedagogy and Iranian context turned to be promising? We know that critical pedagogy could be regarded as a subcategory of postmethod or at least there are considerable similarities between their tenets; therefore, why the findings of studies in these regards are contradictory? How reliable could the findings be? Should not we think of triangulation of the studies to judge with more confidence concerning these issues? All these questions are worthy of consideration since as was noted above the topics of postmethod and critical pedagogy are somehow new in Iranian context (and even in other eastern contexts maybe) since the origins of these approaches could be traced back to western world chiefly. Thus, the number of research projects in these regards are limited in other contexts. The present study hopes to shed more light on some of the vague dimensions of these issues.

## **Method**

### **Design of the Study**

The present investigation is dominantly a qualitative nonexperimental study, and it could be claimed that it is a combination of four qualitative research types: the phenomenological research, the ethnographic research, the case study research, and the narrative research. Providing a definition of each of these research types and a brief explanation on how these definitions relate to the present study context might serve as an efficient clarification on design of this study. In their book, *Research Methods in Applied Settings*, Gliner et al. (2017) define these research approaches as follows:

- **The phenomenological qualitative approach** is a qualitative research approach which helps researchers understand the meaning participants place onto events, phenomena, activities, etc.
- **The ethnographic qualitative approach** is a qualitative research approach which describes a group of individuals who share the same culture.
- **The case study qualitative approach** is a qualitative research approach in which the goal is to develop a deep understanding of a case or cases.
- **The narrative qualitative approach** is a qualitative research approach which explores the life of an individual; the goal is to identify and report stories from the participant(s).

This research is to some extent a phenomenological investigation since it aims at delving into the participants' perceptions of the concepts under scrutiny, i.e. postmethod and critical pedagogy. To some extent it is also an ethnographic study since it aims at describing the participants as samples of a community who share the same culture, i.e. Iranian English language instructors within Iranian context. The present research could also be regarded as case study to some extent due to its efforts in developing deep understandings about some of the participants' thoughts and ideas through in-depth interview with them. Finally, the participants picked out for in-depth interview provided some types of personal narratives; therefore, it might be justifiable to claim that the present investigation is also narrative to some extent.

### **Participants**

The participants of this investigation were 30 English language instructors, all of whom were picked out through three nonprobability sampling techniques: convenience sampling, purposeful sampling, and snowball sampling. These nonprobability sampling techniques were in-line with qualitative research paradigm of the present study. Regarding the first round of data collection, which included questionnaire submission on the part of the researchers via WhatsApp messenger, the participants were picked out through convenience sampling as the first step of nonprobability sampling. As the second step of nonprobability sampling for this investigation, purposeful sampling was conducted – out of the accessible populations, instructors were chosen who were professional enough to fit into the context of a research project dealing with postmethod and critical pedagogy. As the final step of nonprobability sampling, snowball sampling was regarded, and participants who had agreed to take part in data collection process were asked to submit the questionnaires to any other colleague they assumed to fit into the context of this investigation.

Now let us touch upon the criteria regarded for selection of these instructors, and review the characteristics of those who actually took part in data collection for this research. Gender of the participants was not an important criterion for this study, and the participants included both ladies and gentlemen. The instructors were supposed to be graduated in English language, teach adult language learners at the time of data collection and have at least 2 full years of language teaching experience

to adult language learners. The participants were mostly in their thirties. The least experienced instructor had 2 full years and the most experienced instructor had 13 full years of experience in teaching English language to adults.

It should be noted that for the second round of data collection (in-depth interview) purposeful sampling was utilized again. However, this time the sampling process was conducted within these 30 participants, and 5 participants were picked out for in-depth interview. The criteria for selection of these instructors were firstly their comments provided in the questionnaires, and secondly their teaching experiences.

### **Instruments**

The instruments utilized in this research were a questionnaire and a set of interview questions. These instruments were employed for data collection processes. For the first round of data collection, i.e. questionnaire submission to participants, a questionnaire was written which contained thirteen partially open-ended questions – questions with Likert scale items to choose and an extra space for each question for participants' comments. Here, the reader might wonder what could be the justification(s) for utilization of Likert scale questionnaire format for a research like this with high inclination towards qualitative paradigm, and the researchers' answer would be that for the sake of clear and to-the-point operationalization of the participants' preferences, such format was assumed to be appropriate. However, to make up for use of such quantitative means of data collection, as was maintained, a space was provided for each of the items (besides in-depth interview after data collection through the questionnaires) encouraging the participants to share their comments verbally, which is in-line with qualitative research paradigm. Considering number of questions in the questionnaire (13 questions) and the frameworks according to which these questions were written, it should be noted that two frameworks were regarded for this purpose one of which contained ten items and the other three items. The first framework is by Kumaravadivelu (2003) called *Macrostrategic Framework* with the following principles:

- 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 second framework is by Stern (1992) with these items:

- The intra-lingual and cross-lingual dimension
- The analytic-experiential dimension
- The explicit-implicit dimension

The questionnaire and the interview questions were prepared according to the items of the above-mentioned frameworks as the principles. As the subprinciples, there was also an eye on items introduced for critical pedagogical teaching in Iran by Akbari (2008a):

- Base your teaching on students' local culture.
- Regard learners' L1 as a resource to be utilized.
- Include more of students' real-life concerns.
- Make your learners aware of issues faced by marginalized groups.

Finally, it might be noted out to satisfy the requirements of validity and reliability, opinions of three experts in the field were considered after preparation of the preliminary version of the questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire was piloted with five participants prior to the final revision. The utilized questionnaire is available in the appendix section of the present research report. Furthermore, the pieces of advice provided by the three experts in the field mentioned above were regarded before the final preparation of the interview questions, most of which were drawn from the questionnaire items for more in-depth investigation of the intended issues.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

For the present research, two rounds of data collection were conducted. The first round included submission of the questionnaires to the participants of the study. The second round of data collection was conducted through interviewing some of the participants so as to extract the proper answer(s) to the research question(s).

Due to the Covid-19 conditions, the questionnaires were submitted to the participants through WhatsApp messenger. The questionnaires were in PDF format, and the participants were supposed to submit their answers by typing them in the chat space, or taking photos of their answer sheets, or scanning their answer sheets and submitting them in PDF format. The received answers were saved and categorized by the researchers, and the numbers of options chosen for each of the questions were counted manually. Since this study falls under the qualitative research paradigm, a type of descriptive statistics, i.e. percentage calculation, was supposed to be appropriate for reporting the frequency of the chosen options. Thus, the percentages were calculated to report the results more efficiently, offer a more tangible view of the findings, and for the sake of easier comparison of the obtained results.

Also, comments provided by the participants were scrutinized by the researchers, thematically analyzed, and notes were taken. Then, five participants were handpicked for in-depth interview. Selection of the interviewees was based on the extra comments they had provided in their questionnaires and also their teaching backgrounds. Interviews were also carried out through WhatsApp messenger due to the Covid-19 conditions. The files were saved, investigated, and thematically analyzed, and notes were taken.

### Results

In the above sections, it was noted that two frameworks were regarded for writing the questionnaire items. The first framework was by Kumaravadivelu (2003) called Macrostrategic Framework embracing ten items, and the second framework was by Stern (1992) holding three items. The following Table represents distributions of the results obtained from the instructors through the questionnaire. In the Table, questions 1 to 10 respectively refer to the questionnaire items written according to Kumaravadivelu's Macrostrategic Framework, and questions 11 to 13 respectively refer to the questionnaire items written according to Stern's framework.

**Table 1**

*Distribution of the Instructors' Questionnaire Results*

	SA	A	U	D	SD
Q 1	90	10	0	0	0
Q 2	60	26.6	0	13.3	0
Q 3	90	10	0	0	0
Q 4	36.6	50	13.3	0	0
Q 5	36.6	50	6.6	6.6	0
Q 6	66.6	20	6.6	6.6	0
Q 7	80	20	0	0	0
Q 8	43.3	50	6.6	0	0
Q 9	43.3	43.3	13.3	0	0
Q 10	73.3	13.3	13.3	0	0
Q 11	30	50	6.6	13.3	0
Q 12	60	33.3	0	6.6	0
Q 13	20	60	6.6	13.3	0

\*All numbers are in percentages.

\*Q = Question, A = Agree, D = Disagree, U = Undecided, S = Strongly

In the first place, let us have a general interpretation of the results according to what the Table above demonstrates. An overall glimpse at Table 1 reveals the fact that distribution of the results is not dispersed; i.e. perhaps a continuum could be imagined in these regards at one end of which no one has chosen the “strongly disagree” option, and at the other end most of the participants have chosen the “strongly agree” option. Such density at one end of the continuum (“strongly agree” and “agree” options) and such sharp inclination in the results are meaningful, especially with consideration of the point that the questionnaire submitted to the instructors was written in a way that the more positive the options chosen, the more in-line with principles of postmethod the participants’ ideas would be. Thus, it could be safe to claim that generally speaking, these instructors – as samples of Iranian EFL instructors – are for postmethod and critical pedagogy, and have positive perceptions towards these notions according to the patterns the outcomes lay bare in these regards.

Concerning the conducted interviews, the first issue asked about from the instructors was atmosphere of their classes. This item was regarded due to its fundamental role in realization of many of postmethodological and also critical pedagogical principles. What kind of atmosphere do they practice and control in their language classes was elicited from five handpicked EFL instructors. Their reason(s) for consideration of such atmosphere, and also the extent of friendliness between them and their language learners were also asked from these participants. All the five participants were unanimous that a friendly class facilitates language learning through reduction of learning anxiety, increasing learners’ motivation for learning, making them feel confident, and thus, encouraging them to participate in class activities. Due to these reasons they all said to try to conduct a friendly class and maintain a warm relationship with their learners. However, they maintained that two points should be kept in mind:

- The personality type of the instructor affects the degree and the manner such friendly atmosphere is preserved in the class.
- Such warm and friendly relationship between the instructors and their learners should be practiced within a framework of respect and discipline, otherwise the class might turn into an ineffectual fun-and-game state of affairs wasting time, energy, and budget. Therefore, maintaining a delicate balance in these regards is of paramount importance.

The second issue concerning which the instructors’ ideas were elicited was their learners’ reaction(s) to utilization of their L1 (mostly Turkish in the case of those learners) or the official language (Farsi) in English language learning classes. The overall response of these interviewees was that learners confirm use of any languages other than English which facilitate learning English language; especially in the early stages of learning English or whenever they encounter a problematic part that could not be resolved but through the use of a language they already know (e.g. Farsi or Turkish). However, they do not like to have this trend as the common norm of the class. The learners do not like their instructors over-use a language other

than English in the class, especially as their level ascends. After all, they attend an English class to learn and use English as the primary language of the class.

These interviewees brought up another interesting point to the researchers' attention: when English language instructors over-use a language other than English in their classes (Farsi or Turkish for example), apart from depriving their students from learning and using English properly, they threaten the face-validity of their classes and even themselves. Because their learners might take such over-use of another language as a sign of their teacher's incompetency (their teacher uses another language, because s / he is not competent enough in English). This in turn, raises other problems such as distrust in the instructor, demotivation for learning English, etc. Therefore, here as well a fine balance should be maintained in the use of L1 in English classes.

The next issue investigated through the interview dealt with language learners' reaction(s) towards inclusion of their real-life challenges and every-day concerns into their language learning activities. The instructors maintained that their learners have totally positive reactions towards incorporation of such topics into their flow of class activities and even home assignments. These interviewees mentioned that some topics in language learning materials (especially materials produced by native experts and in English-speaking countries) seem alien to their learners in Iran. The learners do not show much interest in them since they have no more to say about them. Thus, they replace these alien topics with real-life social and personal issues that Iranian learners struggle with in their social or personal lives. By so doing, the instructors asserted, their learners' participation in class activities reflects a considerable growth, and the quality of their assignments improves as well. This is because they are in the context they are talking or writing about (there is a great deal of authenticity); they have many things to say in these regards. One of the interviewees mentioned the problem-solution mode as the most fruitful type of activity for such conduction of language classes. She said she outlines a problem (taken from real-life issues), and then asks her students to offer solutions for the mentioned problem. Such activities are very controversial and fruitful regarding not only the enhancement of language proficiency, but also the enhancement of reasoning skills and critical thinking.

Development of cultural competence and the manner in which it is conducted in their English language classes, were the next issues questioned from the interviewees. Also, their learners' reaction(s) to such practice was elicited from these instructors. All these participants maintained that even though they are interested in culture teaching in their language classes, they do not find the chance to do so due to the limitations of time and their lesson plan. However, there are opportunities provided through the textbooks, learners' questions, or initiated by the instructors themselves that could be used for the enhancement of cultural awareness in their language learners. These instructors maintained that they try to facilitate such enhancement of cultural competence through explanations on target culture issues, or through comparisons and contrasts between the target culture and the home culture. Besides development of cultural awareness, it is important to notify

the learners about respect for and acceptance of all the cultures – target and home cultures included as well.

Regarding their learners' reactions towards learning the culture associated with English language, these instructors asserted that their learners show a great interest in the target culture. Especially, technological facilities, social media, and the learners' desire to communicate with other people from other communities have all multiplied their fascination with cultural aspects of English language. The interesting point is that language learners do not show much interest in ancient culture associated with English (e.g. cultural issues that trace back to 200 or 300 years ago). Such enthusiasm is alive only for contemporary culture of English communities.

Then, issues concerning the textbooks and language learning materials that these instructors use in their classes were investigated via interview – what materials they use to teach English, their satisfaction with such materials, the positive or the negative points of these materials, and whose choice they are. The interviewees mentioned two series as the textbooks chosen by the language learning institutes they were teaching at: *American English File* and *New Headway*. They said to have a high level of general satisfaction with these series. The books are comprehensive, they contain interesting topics to cover, and they are authentic. The only shortcoming of these books is the way they present grammar – they do not have much to say about grammatical points, and the points mentioned are so truncated and inadequate. To compensate for such inadequacy, the instructors maintained that they consider some supplementary grammar books for their learners. On the other hand and considering their private classes, the instructors said to have total freedom in material selection; thus, they choose the materials based on their availability, their learners' levels, needs, and interests. The materials for the private classes are handpicked by the instructors themselves; therefore, they are absolutely satisfied with them, and see no considerable shortcoming in such handpicked materials.

The final issue of the interview with the five selected instructors dealt with the extent to which they feel to have freedom in their classes as language teachers, and the extent to which they are satisfied with this issue. Considering their private classes, they mentioned to have absolute satisfaction in these regards, since they have control over every aspect of the class, e.g. number of students, topics to be covered, books and materials, financial issues, etc. They can tune everything according to their learners' wants or needs. The principle of “independent teacher” in postmethod is literally realized in such cases. Moreover and considering their typical classes at the institutes, they mentioned to have freedom and control over the class in general, but not as much as their private classes. However, they are generally satisfied with the conditions in the institutes as well; i.e. it is natural to have a framework for such academic places within which everyone should operate. It facilitates order and discipline, and might increase face-validity of the language learning conditions.

According to the obtained data from the participants, Iranian English language instructors have a great extent of acknowledgment for the postmethodological principles and thus, critical pedagogy as well. They do their best to practice these

approaches to the maximum level feasible in spite of the shortcomings they might face regarding contents of their textbooks or the conditions of their classes.

As was confirmed by the interview data, even if these practitioners do not get the chances to use the postmethodological principles, they try to create the chances themselves, and make up for the drawbacks in such cases. The interesting point is that many of the language instructors do not have very detailed or deep theoretical information in these regards. However, as they see such principles work in classes other than their own, and lead to more fruitful learning or teaching experiences, they try to imitate them and are for such techniques (it might be a matter of following the more effective trends when they compare their own classes with the other more successful ones). Ironically and contrary to the focus of the present research, it seems that in our English language learning contexts, the instructors are good at practical realization of these trends; however, the majority's theoretical knowledge in these regards suffers. This shortcoming is recommended to be dealt with seriously in teacher training courses of our country.

### **Discussion**

Prior to conduction of this study, the researchers' assumption was that trends such as postmethod and critical pedagogy are mysterious concepts for many English language instructors and in Iran. Actually, this investigation was considered to problematize postmethod and also critical pedagogy in our country, particularly regarding their practical aspects. However, the findings of this qualitative study, turned to be a surprise for the researchers since not only these approaches are very welcomed in Iranian context, but also they are being practiced at a large scale in many English language learning communities.

Based on what was maintained above, we might conclude that the gaps between theory and practice in realization of postmethod and critical pedagogy in the case of Iranian EFL instructors are very marginal, and even in some cases there are no gaps in these regards. The researchers' supposition based on the obtained data is that the reason for such insignificant gap (besides the mechanisms mentioned above) is enhancement of communicational channels – especially the Internet and social media – making feasible a more efficient connection with other communities, English-speaking communities included as well. Such easy communication with target language communities in turn, paves the way for acquisition of more information about them and changes in social and cultural ways of thinking and acting (e.g. the form of relationship between teachers and students). These modifications, affect the way Iranian EFL instructors think and act in their language classes (whether consciously or unconsciously), and this, in turn, makes them very receptive to target language norms – norms of classroom atmosphere included as well. With regard of postmethod and also critical pedagogy as inherently western notions, such high level of receptivity on the part of the EFL instructors and smoothens realization of these notions. The only gap that might arise in practical realization of postmethod and critical pedagogy, might be in cases of some very rigid institutions with very restrictive operational frameworks for the language instructors. In such cases teachers' freedom of action might be threatened, which

prevents fulfillment of the postmethodological concept of “independent teacher”. This in turn could affect realization of other principles of postmethod due to the key role the language teachers play in these regards.

Due to the fact that the gaps between theory and practice in realization of postmethod and critical pedagogy in Iran are marginal, no considerable solutions are required in these regards. The only thing to point out here (referring back to the only gap maintained above concerning more freedom of action for the language instructors in some strict institutions) is to regard more freedom of action for the language instructors in institutions that are rigid in some cases. Fortunately, it seems that the number of such institutions is not substantial compared to the more flexible ones. However, to guarantee realization of trends such as postmethod and critical pedagogy (if we are for them), we should make sure that all the institutions provide the appropriate context for realization of such trends. Of course, it should be noted out that sometimes such strict operational frameworks might be needed for inexperienced instructors. However, after they become experienced enough to cope with class management issues, it would be reasonable to allow them to have more freedom of action if we yearn for postmethodological language learning classes. By so doing, the postmethodological concept of “independent teacher” comes true, which paves the way for realization of many other aspects of postmethod and also critical pedagogy, even though further research is required to corroborate the findings of the present research.

### **Conclusion**

As was confirmed by the findings of the present investigation, Iranian English language instructors receive postmethod and critical pedagogy with open arms, adhere to the pertinent principles, and enjoy practicing these trends. Such enjoyment is to the extent that even when there are some barriers in practicing the principles and techniques of these trends, the practitioners maneuver in ways that create the opportunities to stick to the frameworks to the furthest extent possible despite their truncated theoretical knowledge. The issue of truncated theoretical knowledge on postmethod and critical pedagogy is strongly recommended to be noticed by EFL teacher training courses in Iran so as to obtain more fruitful outcomes in these regards. The enthusiast researchers in the field are encouraged to conduct more postmethodological and critical pedagogical studies in Iranian contexts so as to shed more light on the dim dimensions of these underresearched trends in our country.

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## Appendices

The questionnaire submitted to the instructors is brought here. The reader might be reminded that these thirteen questionnaire items were written based on the postmethodological frameworks (with an eye on critical pedagogical principles) mentioned above. Due to limitations of space, the interview questions (which were similar to the following items, but more in-depth) are not brought here. It should be noted out that five options of “strongly agree”, “agree”, “undecided”, “disagree”, and “strongly disagree” followed each of the questions below, besides the statement “Please provide your comment(s) or your justification(s) for your choice.” The participants were supposed to choose an option, and then provide their comments or justifications in the blank spaces provided for this purpose. Once more, due to limitations of space, the mentioned parts are not brought after each of the questions below. The interested reader might email the corresponding author to have the full version of the questionnaire and also the interview questions.

### Appendix

#### Questionnaire Submitted to the Instructors

**Question 1:** To maximize language learning opportunities, it is a good idea to include a wise portion of side-issues in the process of language learning as the lesson unfolds. (Examples of “side-issues”: students’ real life concerns related to the lesson, explanations on practical use of a new word or expression, free discussions related to the lesson, etc.)

**Question 2:** A justifiable occasional use of learners’ L1 could serve as an efficient vehicle to minimize probable misunderstandings in the process of language learning (for example, use of L1 in explaining the meaning of abstract vocabularies or difficult grammatical rules).

**Question 3:** Providing the chance and encouraging the learners to initiate a topic or react to a topic initiated by other learners or the teacher would lead to a more fruitful language learning experience. (The topic of discussion could be related to their real-life concerns, or their ideas on an issue.)

**Question 4:** Making language learners autonomous by teaching them learning strategies or how to self-check is a good way to make sure that language learning proceeds efficiently.

**Question 5:** Due attention should be paid to formal (grammatical) aspects of learners’ language knowledge since accuracy is no less important than fluency.

**Question 6:** Language learners learn about grammatical rules of English language through “self-discovery” better than through direct presentation of grammar; for example, providing examples for them to infer the grammatical rule is more effective than teaching them the rules directly.

**Question 7:** Contextualization of linguistic input (use of language in authentic contexts) ensures better understanding and learning of English language.

**Question 8:** The four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be regarded, presented, and learned as a whole and in an integrated fashion.

**Question 9:** Deriving topics of language learning from learners' real-life social and personal issues uplifts learners' interests in language learning since by so doing, they realize what they study in the classroom has practical value due to its relevance to their real lives. This also leads to better language learning outcomes in general.

**Question 10:** Cultural knowledge should receive due attention besides the four language skills mentioned above. To this end, language learners can use comparisons and contrasts between their own culture and L2 culture.

**Question 11:** Total banishment of L1 in English language classes is not a wise idea. L1 could be used more frequently at initial stages of language learning, and as learners advance such use of L1 would be limited.

**Question 12:** Grammatical aspects and communicative aspect of a language are complementary to each other. Thus, both should receive due attention simultaneously to ensure reasonable language learning outcomes.

**Question 13:** Instructors need not present everything explicitly, they can leave some aspects of language to be acquired automatically by learners through subconscious processes.

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