

To What Extent does the Syllabus Allow Teachers to Go beyond Methods?

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ABSTRACT

“What is the best method to teach a foreign language?” Such queries might once come up in the minds of language teachers worldwide. While the answer to that question, if any, seems to be problematic, researchers in the area of language teaching argue that “no size fits all” (see Kumaravadivelu, 2006), implying that there is no method apt to all characteristics of language classrooms. It then triggers an issue on teachers’ dissatisfaction with the existing methods and underlies the emergence of post-method ideology. With the parameter of particularity, practicality, and possibility as well as the ten macro strategies, post-method pedagogy offers a breakthrough in language teaching. Not only does it promote teachers’ autonomy to go beyond methods, but it also mitigates marginalization, neoliberalism, and dichotomy between theorists and teaching practitioners. Despite its benefits, in such contexts as Indonesia, the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching framework is not generated under the umbrella of post-method principles. There might be a possibility for teachers, nevertheless, to go beyond methods and deploy the post-method pedagogy in their teaching. Such possibility is featured in the syllabus and thus becomes the objective of this study to critically review the extents to which the Indonesian EFL syllabus allows teachers to apply the post-method principles. By reflecting to the parameter and the framework of post-method, it can be deduced that the syllabus offers flexibility to some extent while several aspects need to be taken into account.

Keywords: *Post-method condition, post-method pedagogy, method, syllabus, English as a Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, various methods of foreign language teaching have been evolved and deployed all over the world. Each established method has attempted to offer different pathways ideal for tackling the changing teaching demands. As practitioners who directly face classroom challenges, teachers also strive to explore a range of methods to seek the one apt for varied teaching contexts. The exploration, nevertheless, seems to end up with the idea that 'no size fits all'. That is, no method fits all challenges of foreign language teaching. Novel methods regarded to have a requisite capacity to overcome the latest problems seem to be stuck with the same principles and insensitive with the diverse needs. Rivers (1991, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006b) even argued what appears to be a new

method is no more than the same existing methods presented with 'the fresh paint of new terminology that camouflages their fundamental similarity'. Little to no variant of the underlying principles is served amidst methods, as Kumaravadivelu (2006b) declared 'there is considerable overlap in their theory and practice'. The overlapping principles which are continually recycled and repackaged may then go through an endless cycle of what so-called life, death, and rebirth of methods.

With numerous classroom characteristics notwithstanding, methods appear to be too restricted to satisfactorily address every single complexity of foreign language teaching. Teachers and students intensively exposed to the diverse learning challenges, furthermore, seem to be less taken into account in designing strategies to cover their teaching and learning urgency. They are likely positioned as consumers and imposed on methods while theorists who create the methods appear to be producers. Focusing excessively on methods whereas may lead to the ignorance of classroom-governing factors, i.e. teacher cognition, learner perceptions, societal needs, cultural contexts, political exigencies, economic imperatives, and institutional constraints (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b). Instead of putting so much attention on methods, some pivotal factors should hence be taken into consideration so the goals of foreign language teaching can be met.

The prevalent dissatisfaction with the existing pedagogical strategies eventually generated an anti-method movement in late 1980 which questions the efficacy of language teaching instructions (see Nunan, 1988; Kumaravadivelu, 1999; and Safari & Rashidi, 2015). The accuracy of pedagogy deployment also seems discursive as teachers who claim to subscribe to a specific method may not practise any principles of that method. It is pragmatically described by (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b) that "even as the methodological band played on, practising teachers have been marching to a different drum". This situation is then called post-method condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) referring to the circumstance where in language teachers are no longer method oriented. Instead, they go beyond methods and exert the principles of post-method in their practice.

The idea to move beyond method, at the same time, seems to be an issue, in a way that it requires comprehensive pedagogical knowledge and understanding. Some thus perceive that such principle is more likely applicable for professionals, than that for novice practitioners. It is not the case, nevertheless, that post-method notion attempts to dichotomise between experienced and inexperienced teachers. Conversely, it strives to mitigate marginalization and academic gaps between theorists and teachers by spurring the later to critically conceptualise their pedagogical approach, rather than to perceive and prescriptively

exert methods as products. In a similar vein, (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b) argued that methods augment“ a clearly perceptible dichotomy between theory and practice, resulting in an unfortunate division of labour between the theorist and the teacher”. It appears that the prevalence of methods has positioned teachers in a passive, instead of a strategic role. Moving beyond methods, henceforth, may provide an alternative to bolster teachers to appraise their teaching needs, address the classroom characteristics, and opt for pedagogical principles apt for their students. It is important to note that the discursive issue of post-method ideology is not whether the teachers are experienced, rather whether such teaching instruments as syllabus offer flexibility so practitioners can move beyond methods.

Despite the discursive issue, as a teaching framework, the syllabus plays a pivotal role in ensuring the efficacy of foreign language teaching. It also reflects whether teachers may go beyond method and deploy the principles of post-method in their classrooms. On the syllabus are the parameter and the macro strategic frameworks of post-method can be framed. While the syllabus is an ideal platform to feature the post-method ideology, research on this topic seems to acquire little attention. This study, henceforth, attempts to scrutinise the extent to which the EFL syllabus designed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture offers flexibility for senior high school teachers to draw on post-method framework. The possibilities of practising post-method as a pedagogical instruction in the context of EFL teaching in Indonesia are also reflected in this study. The key theories of post-method, including its parameters as well as macro and micro strategies, will be discussed in the following literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Principles of Post-Method Pedagogy

Albeit much dissatisfaction with the existing language teaching instructions, there was no specific nomenclature referring to the anti-method movement until Kumaravadivelu called it ‘post-method condition’ defined as:

A sustainable state of affairs that compels us to restructure our view of language teaching and teacher education. It urges us to review the character and the content of classroom teaching in all its pedagogical and ideological perspectives. It derives us to streamline our teacher education by refiguring the reified relationship between theory and practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b).

It can be deduced from the definition that teaching practitioners in the post-method condition are spurred to be critical and aware of the pedagogies and ideologies of language teaching. The post-method notion also views teachers' independency and autonomy as nothing but central. Methods, by way of contrast are perceived as a marginality construction between theorists and practitioners in scholastic, linguistic, cultural, and economic dimensions (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a for more details). Teachers thus should enact desired changes in their teaching and empower students to partake in the process of decision making. That is by going beyond methods without violating institutional rules; understanding learning urgency; as well as reviewing students' perception, societal demands, and cultural contexts. In other words, post-method pedagogy encourages teachers to reflect on their practice, broaden their perspectives, and develop innovative teaching techniques tailored to the contextual classroom characteristics.

In 1992, Kumaravadivelu introduced the framework of post-method pedagogy called *macro strategies*. It is described as a range of general plans derived from the existing theoretical, empirical, and pedagogical understanding of second language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2006a). The macro strategic framework is theory-neutral and method-neutral. During its development, it has been evolved from five in 1992 to ten in 2003 which encompasses, (1) maximise learning opportunities; (2) facilitate negotiated interaction; (3) minimise perceptual mismatches; (4) activate intuitive heuristics; (5) foster language awareness; (6) contextualise linguistic input; (7) integrate language skills; (8) promote learner autonomy; (9) ensure social relevance; and (10) raise cultural consciousness (see Kumaravadivelu, 2006b for more details). Each macro strategy may have one or more sets of micro strategies that specify the essence, viz. 'language exchange', 'social interactional activities', and 'cultural understanding'. Such micro-strategies are flexible and thus can be adapted from a range of resources, as newspapers, magazines, television programs, or the internet as long as they are relevant to the EFL teaching goals.

To ensure the effective deployment of macro strategic and micro strategic frameworks, Kumaravadivelu sets three pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The parameter of particularity suggests that any language pedagogy needs to be sensitive to a particular group of teachers who teach a particular group of learners to meet a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context in a particular sociocultural milieu (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b). It clearly opposes the concept of methods that are too restricted to address numerous diverse characteristics of second language teaching. The parameter of particularity is further associated with that of practicality.

Practicality in post-method pedagogy refers to the relationships between theory and practice; that is, teachers need to ‘theorise what they practise’ and ‘practise what they theorise’. This parameter suggests that the theory of practice will never be impactful to the language teaching unless it emerges from teachers’ practical experience (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, see also Karimvand, Hessamy, & Hemmati, 2014). The use of hands-on experience may encourage teachers to be more critical and innovative in designing their teaching that might be varied from one context to another. In contrast to methods that position teachers like consumers, the parameter of practicality promotes autonomy to exhibit a nuance of contextual language teaching. Action-reflection may also be employed to activate this parameter, lying on teachers’ knowledge, experience, insights, and intuition. By emerging the relationship between theory and practice, teachers may have broader perspectives of any possible issues in language teaching associated with the next parameter-possibility.

The parameter of possibility views language teaching inextricable with language ideology, individual identity, and sociopolitical exigencies outside the classrooms. Instead of being secluded, language teaching needs to put social and political constraints into consideration. One relatable example is Canagarajah’s (1999, in Kumaravadivelu, 2003b) study on how Tamil learners of English in the civil war were aware of political issues and thus resisted to the Western language and cultural books perceived to subordinate their identity. With the local values, the Tamil learners reframed, reinterpreted and rewrote their American ESL textbooks. Canagarajah (1999) has also emphasised:

‘discourses may be negotiated, intimating the resilient ability of human subjects to creatively fashion a voice for themselves from amidst the deafening channels of domination’.

It seems obvious that language teaching is powerful and potential to promote identity and address contextual exigencies, rather than merely transferring linguistics knowledge. The parameter of possibility thus stimulates teachers to be aware of issues outside the classroom. In the post-method pedagogy, the three parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility are intertwined to be featured on the syllabus.

Syllabus in Post-Method Condition

Syllabus in the post-method condition is characterised by macro and micro strategic framework as well as generated from the parameter of particularity, practicality, and possibility. The syllabus promotes flexibility in a way that can be tailored to learners’ interests (Stern, 1984). Not only teachers’ authority, the construction of the syllabus also becomes students’ by sharing what they fancy learning. Teachers may present optional

learning topics in the class and have students opt for some appealing. Embracing students in the process of syllabus design can make the syllabus sensitive to the particular classroom characteristics and thus conforms to the parameter of particularity.

The post-method syllabus is classified into two, viz., teaching syllabus and learning syllabus (Kumaravadivelu, 2003a). While the former is associated with the plans the teachers bring to the class, the latter reflects a learning framework with which both teachers and learners feel convenient. The teaching syllabus can also be converted to the learning syllabus once learners' interactional activities are promoted in the classrooms. In a similar vein, Clark (1987; see also Hall 2011 cited in Kiely, 2014) proposed two strands of the syllabus, namely 'product' and 'process'. The product syllabus is elaborately constructed before the programme begins while the process syllabus is generated through on-going meaningful classroom interactions. It provides teachers and learners with a platform of decision making, alternative procedures, and flexible activities based on contextual needs (Breen, 1984). It can be deduced that the term 'teaching' and 'learning' syllabus introduced by Kumaravadivelu has the same foregrounding concept with the 'product' and 'process' syllabus proposed by Clark.

In terms of content, the syllabus in the post-method condition comprises both language skills and linguistic knowledge. The language skills (i.e. listening, speaking, reading, and writing) are featured in an integrated way as suggested in the macro-strategy of 'integrating language skills'. The macro strategy of 'facilitating negotiated interaction' may also boost the acquisition of such linguistic knowledge as syntactical, phonological, and morphological features. Grammatical rules, furthermore, are introduced inductively to students by using contextualised oral and written samples of a syntactic element (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b). Explicit description and explanation of grammar are avoided due to the needs of students' intuition empowerment as implied in the macro-strategy of 'activating intuitive heuristic'. The use of advanced technical terms is also minimised to prevent learners' confusion during the process of second language acquisition.

Another breakthrough in the post-method syllabus is embodied in the macro strategy of 'fostering language awareness'. It relates to the needs of nurturing students' tolerance, empathy, and curiosity of numerous linguistic varieties within the same language. Having language awareness may help students eliminate self-satisfaction about their levels of proficiency that language is not static but dynamic. In terms of the significance of language awareness, Hawkins (1984, cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003b) emphasised that:

‘we are seeking to light fires of curiosity about the central human characteristic of language which will blaze throughout our pupils’ lives. While combating linguistic complacency, we are seeking to arm our pupils against fear of the unknown which breeds prejudice and antagonism.’

Hawkins’ notion of language awareness implies that foreign language teaching should take students’ linguistic fear into account. Instead of having insecurity, students need to understand that being linguistically different is welcomed and that variations even within the same language are indisputable. Students hence should be aware of the dynamic language change, discursive linguistic issues, and all possibilities which may impact language learning as entailed in the parameter of possibility.

In addition to language awareness, the syllabus in the post-method conditional so promotes teaching evaluation to unveil any opportunities and challenges in foreign language teaching. Kumaravadivelu (2003b) suggests that evaluation may accommodate teachers with an understanding of ‘the educational, institutional, and sociocultural forces which directly or indirectly shape the character and the content of classroom discourse’. His notion implies that teaching reflection is likely to disclose any constraints outside the classroom which can influence the language teaching ideology. Such evaluation also benefits teachers that it allows them to see from different perspectives, fathom their strengths and weaknesses, and elaborate their professionalism. It is in line with the notion of teachers’ lifelong learning as Zeichner and Liston (1996 cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2003b) have emphasised that ‘learning to teach does not end with obtaining a diploma or a degree in teacher education but is an ongoing process throughout one’s teaching career’. Syllabus in the post-method condition indeed plays an overarching role to systematically frame and conceptualise the idea of ‘going beyond method’. These principles, therefore, will be used to see the extent to which post-method ideology is featured in the Indonesian EFL syllabus.

Features of the Indonesian EFL Syllabus

EFL is one of the compulsory subjects for Indonesian students in either state or private schools. The EFL syllabus, arranged by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, is generated from the national curriculum called ‘Kurikulum 2013’. In senior high school levels, English is taught for 90 minutes per section with an approximate total of 32 sections in one year. As stated beforehand, this paper focuses on the syllabus of senior high school students in year two who have been being exposed to English at least for four years. The students are henceforth expected to have adequate background knowledge of English.

As implied in the syllabus description, EFL teaching in Indonesia aims at developing students' ability to use English effectively in a written and spoken form in any different contexts (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017). The syllabus which is genre-based does not employ texts as the primary concern of language learning, but rather as a tool to reflect on real-life language use. It is expected that students who have background knowledge of English can comprehend factual, conceptual, and procedural understanding through speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The syllabus is, furthermore, designed to integrate such life lessons and moral values as honesty, religious faith, tolerance, responsibility, and politeness.

The arrangement of the syllabus entails three key aspects of basic competence, teaching materials, and learning activities. While basic competence refers to the description of each competency that needs to be acquired during the process of language teaching, teaching materials encompass social functions, generic structures, language features, as well as topics. The last aspect of the syllabus is learning activities associated with a range of alternatives that can be deployed in language classrooms. The design of the EFL syllabus tends to be concise to provide teachers with simplicity and opportunity to elaborate and adjust the syllabus with the classroom characteristics (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017).

There are nine topics covered in the year two senior high school syllabus, two of which are about suggestion and analytical exposition as shown in the table below.

Table 1 – EFL Syllabus Extract for Senior High School Students in Year Two*

Basic Competence	Teaching Materials	Learning Activities
<p>Students are able to:</p> <p>Apply social function, generic structures, and language features of written and spoken interactional texts which involve offering, asking and giving suggestion according to the context.</p> <p>Compose written and spoken interactional texts which involve offering, asking and giving suggestion accordingly.</p>	<p>1. Social Function</p> <p>To maintain interpersonal relationships with teachers, friends, and others.</p> <p>2. Generic Structures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening - Responding (including spontaneous response) <p>3. Language Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gambits for offering, asking and giving suggestions by using modals (<i>should, can</i>). - Singular and plural nouns with and without determiners (<i>a, the, this, my</i>). - Pronunciation, stressing, spelling, punctuation, and writing. <p>4. Topics</p> <p>Situations about asking and giving suggestions which entail some moral values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers read some short texts about asking and giving suggestions with correct utterances and stresses, while students listen to, read, and practice what the teachers have explained. - Students ask for new information. - Students apply appropriate modals to sentences. - Teachers give students some situations to compose suggestions and offers and have them perform in the class. - Students observe school conditions and make suggestions to develop the condition. - Students and teachers evaluate the process and the result of language teaching and learning.

<p>Students are able to:</p> <p>Differentiate social function, generic structures, and language features of analytical exposition text in written and spoken form by asking and giving information on actual issues according to the context.</p> <p>Understand the contextual meaning of analytical exposition text in a written and spoken form.</p> <p>Compose analytical exposition text in written and spoken form with actual issues accordingly.</p>	<p>1. Social Function</p> <p>To ask and give an opinion with an analytical argument.</p> <p>2. Generic Structures</p> <p>It may involve opinions, analytical arguments, and conclusions.</p> <p>3. Language Features</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Related gambits (e.g. <i>I believe ...</i>, <i>I think ...</i>) - Adjunct (e.g. <i>first, second, third</i>) - Conjunction (e.g. <i>therefore, consequently, based on the arguments</i>) - Singular and plural nouns with and without determiners (e.g. <i>a, the, this, my</i>) - Pronunciation, stressing, spelling, punctuation, and writing. <p>4. Topics</p> <p>Actual issues which entail some moral values.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students read two analytical texts with different actual issues. - Students analyse the exposition texts, discuss them with their peers, and apply the analysis to the other texts. - Students analyse some sentences from three different texts which have been mixed randomly. Then, they collaborate with their peers to arrange those random sentences into three analytical texts accordingly. - Students read the texts in front of their peers with appropriate pronunciations and word stresses. - Students compose exposition text and provide their opinions on their schools, villages, or cities. - Students and teachers evaluate the process and the result of language teaching and learning.
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*The syllabus had been translated from Indonesian to English.

the topics in the rest of the syllabus are opinion, invitation, asking and giving information, letters, cause and effect, explanation text, and songs. All topics are taught in two semesters (one year) with at least two formative assessments in each semester. In the next section, the methodology employed in this critical review is discussed.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to critically appraise the existing EFL syllabus developed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture from the perspective of post-method ideology. The steps that have been undertaken entail (1) reviewing the key theories of post-method

principles, (2) drawing on the parameter of particularity, practicality, and possibility as well as the ten macro strategic frameworks to appraise the syllabus, (3) deducing the extent to which the syllabus allows teachers to go beyond method in their ELT practice, and (4) offering some suggestion on the areas of improvement. The critical appraisal of the syllabus is discussed in the following section.

DISCUSSION

Not generated under the umbrella of post-method pedagogy albeit, practising the pedagogical principle of post-method in the context of Indonesian EFL teaching seems unlikely impossible. The macro strategies, as well as the parameter of particularity, practicality, and possibility, can still be embedded in the syllabus to characterise the language teaching to some extent. Firstly, the succinct design of the syllabus implies that teachers may explore and develop the teaching framework. The designers of the syllabus also seem to have fostered teachers' authority to construct more detail features based on the learning needs and classroom characteristics. It corresponds to Yalden's (1984) notion that the cooperation of teachers and syllabus designers "can achieve a degree of fit between the needs and aims of the learners".

The design notwithstanding, the aspects of the syllabus which only encompass basic competence, teaching materials, and learning activities indicate that teachers may arrange and theorise other aspects as language assessment. It implies that the syllabus conforms to the parameter of practicality that teachers are allowed to theorise what they practice, and practice what they theorise. Also relevant is the parameter of particularity that teachers may tailor their teaching to the contextual needs.

In terms of topics which are limited -only nine topics for 32 sections (two semesters), the syllabus seems to encourage teachers to exert their creativity and provide meaningful learning. It at least serves two alternatives for teachers; first, embracing those nine topics in deeper discussions or, second, providing other fascinating topics and having students opt some. While the former can offer more details, the latter may promote learners' autonomy to decide what they fancy learning as embedded in the macro strategy of 'promoting learner autonomy'. About this issue, Nunan (1988, see also Kumaravadivelu, 2012) posits that 'learners should have a say in what they should be learning and how they should learn it, and it reflects the notion that education should be concerned with the development of autonomy in the learner'. Promoting learners' autonomy can also avoid misperception

between teachers and students since both may agree on what should be taught in the classroom. This element seems to correspond to the macro strategy of ‘minimising perceptual mismatches’. Besides, the fact that Indonesia has numerous diversities of culture, customs, ethnicity, race, and religion, makes such practice inevitably overarching. It also confirms that the parameter of possibility can be generated.

Explicitly stated on the Indonesian EFL syllabus, evaluation of the learning process is required once the classroom activities have been completed. It seems to correspond to the macro strategy of ‘monitoring teaching acts’ that both teachers and students should reflect the process of language teaching. Such practice can be impactful to understand what works well in the classrooms, analyse areas of improvement, and construct alternatives to cope with challenges. Finally, it can be deduced that to some extents the principles of post-method pedagogy are adaptable to the content and the design of the Indonesian EFL syllabus. The next section will cover the conclusion of this study. Some recommendations to develop syllabus in the post-method condition are also offered.

CONCLUSION

The post-method condition lies in the bottom-up, local, contextual, and teacher-based paradigm. Its emergence appears to be a breakthrough in foreign language teaching. Not only does the post-method movement critically oppose method-oriented teaching, it also proposes a pedagogical alternative by promoting ten macro strategic frameworks as a guide for teaching practitioners to go beyond methods. The parameter of particularity, practicality, and possibility can further characterise the language classrooms. Its foregrounding principles might also be featured in the syllabus to help teachers deploy a post-method-pedagogy-based language teaching.

In the Indonesian EFL syllabus, there seem to be some possibilities for teachers to go beyond methods. The flexibility of the syllabus implicates that teachers may exert their autonomy to develop a teaching framework tailored to the contexts. The simplified design and the succinct content determine that practitioners are allowed to provide more aspects and more topics of language teaching. Students’ involvement is also promoted, allowing them to have a say on what they fancy learning. In addition to teachers’ autonomy and students’ involvement, some other macro strategies (e.g. facilitating negotiated interaction, minimising perceptual mismatches, and integrating language skills) are also manifested implicitly in the Indonesian EFL syllabus. It reveals, albeit not generated under the umbrella

of post method pedagogy, the syllabus used for teaching senior high school students in the context of Indonesian ELT offers flexibility and thus featuring the elements of post-method pedagogy is unlikely impossible.

While some post-method principles are embedded in the Indonesian EFL syllabus, several features seem to have little to no attention. One of them is vis a vis the macro strategy of ‘fostering language awareness’ which can help students eliminate linguistic complacency. (Kumaravadivelu, 2006b) posits that activating language awareness can sensitise learners to aspects of linguistic knowledge which is unnoticed and unlearn. It may also develop students’ tolerance of numerous language varieties due to cultural diversities. It is, henceforth, fundamental to instantiate students’ awareness of linguistic varieties in language teaching.

As cultures and languages are inextricable, it seems pivotal to put the macro strategy of ‘raising cultural consciousness’ into more consideration. Stern (1992 in Kumaravadivelu, 2006) posits that understanding the cultures of the target language can provide students with the knowledge of the country, the differences in the way of life, the contribution of the target culture in the world civilisation, as well as values and attitudes in the target language communities. It can also assist learners on the interpretation of cultural differences between the target and the local cultures and behave in a culturally appropriate way to avoid misunderstanding. The cultural consciousness may further promote empathy, respect, and awareness of any discrepancy in society and thus fundamental to be embedded in the EFL syllabus.

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