Postmodernism and English Language Teaching

Mansoor Fahim

Allame Tabatabaee University, Iran

Dr.mfahim@yahoo.com

Reza Pishghadam

Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran

rpishghadam@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims at shedding light on the concept of postmodernism, and its implications in the TESOL. Postmodern philosophy as a prevalent concept and a hot buzzword in philosophy, science, and art is believed to have influenced the TESOL theoretically in some ways. The elements of postmodernism including: constructivism, subjectivism, relativism, localism, and pragmatism are found to have been applied in the TESOL to the concept of the demise of the methods, more focus on styles, strategies, and multiple intelligences, chaos/complexity theory and critical theories. But in practice, in developing countries the TESOL still lives in the modern era.

Key terms: Modernism, Post Modernism, English Language Teaching

Introduction

Postmodernism is a concept which appears in a wide variety of disciplines or areas of study including art, music, film, literature, architecture, and technology and nowadays has burst into popular usage as term for everything from rock music to the whole cultural style and mood of recent

decades. Blackburn (1994) defined postmodernism as a reaction against a naïve confidence in objective or scientific truth. It rejects the idea of progress in utopian assumption about evolution, social improvement and efforts in education to produce reform. It denies the idea of fixed meanings, or any correspondence between language and the world, or any fixed reality or truth or fact to be the object of enquiry. The postmodernist approach considers objectivity to be a veil that hides its real nature of power; by stripping objectivity of its disguise, some postmodernists seek liberation, while others "retreat to an aesthetic, ironic, detached, and playful attitude to one's own beliefs and to the march of events" (Blackburn, 1994, p. 295).

If postmodernism is the dominant spirit of the time and has influenced many fields of study, this question may spring to mind: Has postmodernism affected the field of English language teaching both in theory and practice too? to answer this question first, we delve briefly into the concept of modernism, the movement from which postmodernism and finally we shall see whether there is any implication of this philosophy in the field both in theory and practice.

Modernism

The term "modern" derived from the Latin modo, simply means "of today" or what is current, as distinguished from earlier times. It has been used in various periods and places to distinguish contemporary from traditional ways and in principles can refer to any sphere of life and any period in history.

Generally "modernism" and "modernity" are used differently.

Modernism refers to the board aesthetic movement in visual arts, music, literature, and drama and modernity refers to a set of philosophical and ethical ideas which provide the basis of the aesthetic aspect of modernism.

Therefore, "modernity" is older than "modernism". For the sake of simplicity the authors use modernism for both terms.

There has been a long debate among scholars when exactly modernism starts and how to distinguish between what is modern and what is not modern. It seems modernism starts with the European Enlightenment which begins roughly in the middle of the 18th Century. The goal of the Enlightenment was to establish knowledge, ethics, and aesthetics based on rationality. The movement leaders were going to lead the society toward progress, out of a long period of irrationality and superstition (Cahoone, 2003).

It seems with the decadence of the Catholic Church and the end of the Aristotelian logic and with the dominance of the Baconian inductionism and the emergence of the Newtonian physics, the first foundations of modernism were laid. Before the Renaissance Europe was a theocratic society, in which God was the center of the universe and the supernatural phenomena ruled the natural phenomena and the Aristotolian deductionism was common, but when Bacon put more emphasis on the role of observation, and when Newton discovered some laws of the nature, man got proud of himself and found himself the center of the universe. Believing he could find the ultimate truth; therefore, he left no room for God or for the supernatural and reason. Rationalism and scientific method took over

as the dominant interpretation of life. As in philosophy, the modern period was started by Descartes who believed in exact and objective knowledge. He was a rationalist who believed in reason, thinking that reason can grasp truths, independent of time and place.

The picture born in the Enlightenment gave rise to a civilization which was founded on scientific knowledge of the world and rational knowledge of value, which placed the highest premium on individual human life and freedom, believing that such freedom and rationality would lead to social progress through virtuous, self-controlled work, and create a better material, political, and intellectual life for all.

The History of Postmodernism

The term "postmodernism" seems first to have been used in 1917 by the German philosopher Rudolf Pannwitz to describe the "nihilism" of twentieth century, a theme he took from Friedrich Nietzsche. It turned up again in the work of the Spanish literary critic Federico do Onis in 1934 to refer to the backlash against literary modernism. It first appeared in English in 1939, used in two ways, by Bernard Iddings Bell, signifying the recognition of the failure of secular modernism and a return to religion and by the historian Arnold Toynbee to refer to the post-World War I rise of mass society, in which the working class surpasses the capitalist class in importance. It was then utilized in literary criticism in the 1950s and 1960s, referring to the reaction against literary modernism, and in the 1970s was used in architecture. In philosophy it was used in the 1980s, to refer

primarily to French post-structuralist philosophy, and secondarily to a general reaction against modern rationalism, utopianism and fundamentalism (Cahoone, 2003).

Postmodernism philosophy originated in France during the 1960s and 1970s and was greatly influenced by phenomenology, existentialism, psychoanalysis, Marxism, and structuralism. These intellectual movements portrayed the human subject as alienated in contemporary society, estranged from his or her authentic modes of experience and being, whether the source of that estrangement was capitalism (for Marxism), the scientific naturalism (for phenomenology), excessive repressive social mores (for Freud), and bureaucratically organized social life and mass culture (for existentialism). In fact, all rejected the belief that the study of humanity could be modeled on (objectivity) or reduced to the physical science (reductionism); hence they avoided behaviorism and naturalism. Unlike hard sciences, they focus not merely facts but on the meaning of facts for human subjects. Furthermore, studies in the history and philosophy of science have cast doubt on the credibility of the science which was the mainstream Western scientific practice (Kuhn, 1962), revealing that physical reality is no less than social reality is at bottom a social and linguistic construct and the truth claims of science are inherently theory-laden and self-referential. In fact, there was a return to the true, or authentic, or free integrated human self as the center of lived experience.

In the 1960s, some French philosophers including Jean-Francis Lyotard, Jacques Derrieda and Michel Foucacult radicalized structuralism. Like structuralism, they rejected the centrality of the self, believing that it is not

the self that creates culture, it is culture that creates the self; and unlike structuralism, they rejected scientific pretentions and applied the structural-cultural analysis of human phenomena to the human sciences themselves, which are after all human cultural constructions. Hence, they are commonly named "poststructuralist". In fact, they undermine any and all positive philosophical and political positions and announce the end of rational enquiry into truth, the illusory nature of any unified self, and the impossibility of clear and unequivocal meaning.

Another important factor in the development of postmodernism was the situations after the Second World War which led to the decline of grand theories including Nazism, Fascism, and finally Marxism. Lyotard (1984) argued that modern philosophies legitimized truth-claims not on logical or empirical ground, but rather on the grounds of termed as "language games". He further argued that in our postmodern condition, these metanarratives no longer work to legitimize truth-claims. In a way, he stressed the fragmentary and plural characteristics of reality, believing that there is no universal truth and no grand theory is credible.

In the 1970s, in America changes were also taking place. Richard Rorty revived the pragmatism of Pierce, James, and Dewey. Pragmatism championed those ideas that apply practically, repudiating philosophy's reputation of being essentially idealistic and abstract. It finds troubling philosophy's insistence on truth and certainty, instead of insisting on the importance of trying different methods and ways of life and then evaluating them with regard to their consequences (Rorty, 1979).

In the field of science, all the hopes of Newtonian physics-- eternal physical laws which are objective and absolute-- were dashed with the emergence of Heisenberg's quantum mechanics and Einstein's general relativity in which the space-time manifold ceases to exist, an objective physical reality, and geometry becomes relational and contextual.

Furthermore, in the last decades of the century developments in the theory of self-regulating systems in biology and cybernetics, chaos theory and catastrophe theory have been exploited as a part new sciences with postmodern implications.

Another strain of postmodernism refers to the radical changes of the society: the end of the last vestiges of European colonialism after the Second World War, the development of mass communications and a media culture and shrinking of the globe by internal marking, telecommunications, and intercontinental missiles which led to a significant delegitimization of authority and to a more egalitarian society. Said (1978) found that colonized people were dehumanized, stereotype, and treated not as communities of individuals but as an indistinguishable mass about whom one amasses knowledge. Baudrillard (1983) denounced hyper-reality, in which technology's reproduction of images and objects blurred the distinction between real and unreal and transformed persons into media projections. Derrida (1970) denounced the "mercantilization of knowledge" (p.51) and the contrived invisibility of the author, a presence behind the text exerting authority and influence but protected from recognition and critique unless deconstructed. For postmodernists, Habermas's (1975) "crisis of legitimation" is the recognition that every author exercises authority that

promotes an agenda, denies alternative views, and fails to guarantee its own truth. Foucault (1973, 1979) examined how power is legitimized through complex social structures and objected to discourses in which "the privileges of one subject -to tell stories or decide what the topic is- materially diminish the rights of other subjects." He showed how discourse regulates what can be said, what can be thought, and what is considered true or correct. In his opinion, discourse is the medium through which power is expressed and people and practices are governed.

Outside philosophical and scientific inquiry after the Second World War new tendencies in art, literature, music and architecture emerged which critiqued the bourgeois capitalist social order that carried the economic load of modernity. To name a few developments: dissonant and atonal music, impressionism, surrealism, and expressionism in painting, literary realism, and the stream of consciousness novel emerged which seemed to open the imagination to a subjective world of experience which was ignored by the modern society and technology.

Common Characteristics of Postmodernism

Despite the divergence among different usages of "postmodernism" one can find some commonalities centering on postmodernists. They:

- are constructivist, in their view, there are no real foundations of truth, for there is no truth, except what the group decides is truth. Postmodernism is preference and truth is a social construct to be

eliminated. Truth and persons are given value only as the group values them.

- are against absolutism, they value relativism. Knowledge is not stable and eternal as the history of science has shown us, it refers to probabilities rather than certainties, better rather than the best.

- reject theories because theories are abundant, and no theory is considered more correct than any other. They feel theory conceals, distorts, obfuscates, it is alienated, disparate, dissonant; it means to exclude order, controls rival powers.

  To them inquiry must be approached pragmatically.

- question the notion of expertise. The idea that some people (experts) know more than others (non-experts) are not espoused. They believe that interaction between the knower and non-knower is often best seen as dialog in which there is mutual influence than simple transmission of knowledge from one to other. In fact both are involved in an interactive process of knowledge creation. Dialog replaces monolog.

- reject global decisions. Since reality is culture dependent, changing over time, as cultures do, and varies from community to community, knowledge is not universal. We are cautioned to be careful with generalization, because they can be deluding. Therefore, Postmodernists are intolerant of truth and values unless they are considered local. Diversity is celebrated.

- attack notions of reason and means-end thinking. The line "I feel; therefore, I am and what I feel is good" replaces "I think; therefore,

I am." Objectivism is replaced with subjectivism and this is the society's whims which rule scientific disciplines not physical laws.

- use analytic strategy which is central to politics of postmodernism. They try to uncover the taken-for-granted relationship which has been hidden for a long time, to unnaturalize the naturalized roles in the world and each society, and to analyze a text to find out the hidden and marginalized meanings of it. To them no text is innocent, and every text betrays a fragment of power which should be surfaced.

Postmodernism and modernism in a Nutshell

No.	Modernism	Postmodernism
1.	objective	subjective
2.	rational	irrational
3.	scientific	anti-scientific
4.	global claims	local claims
5.	positivist	constructivist
6.	utopian	populist
7.	central	fragmented
8.	the best	better
9.	linear	non-linear
10.	generalizing	non-generalizing
11.	theoretical	practical
12.	abstract	concrete
13.	unification	diversity

Implications for a Postmodern TESOL

There seem to have been lots of implications of the foregoing in the TESOL (Teaching English as Second Language), but the authors outline a few of the main ones.

Postmodernism seems to have influenced the TESOL from the 1990s when for the first time the concept of method was put into question. For many centuries, the ELT profession was preoccupied with the quest for the elusive 'best' teaching method (Kelly, 1969; McArthur, 1983) in the sense of a 'predetermined packaged deal' of static attitudes, theories, methods, techniques (Strevens, 1977) generalizable across widely varying audiences, that would successfully teach students a foreign language in the classroom.

More specifically, the period from the 1950s to the1980s, and most particularly the "spirit seventies" (Brown, 2002), has been referred to as 'The Age of Methods,' or the era of so-called 'innovative designer' or 'brand-name' methods, as "the changing winds and shifting sands" (Marckwardt, 1972). After the genesis of Direct method in the 1920s which generally marks the beginning of this "method era" (Richard and Rodgers, 2001) up to the end of the 1980s lots of such methods flourished, to name a few, audio-lingual, silent-way, suggestopedia, total-physical response and languished after a while. This epoch was directly linked to an era of 'modernism' and objectivity in the realm of science and also in language teaching, for all them:

- sought to find the best method of teaching English, that is, the method that yields the best results or learning outcomes in a given period of time;

- had universal claims, trying to prescribe their procedures for all learners around the globe assuming that a 'cookie-cutter approach' or a 'superior' method benefits all, regardless of how it is subjectively perceived by the different teachers involved;

- were scientific, based on theories from other disciplines including linguistics, psychology, and sociology; and

- were teacher-proof, guru-based, and, therefore, magnifying the role of experts.

According to Brown (2002), method in this sense can be viewed as a generalized, prescribed set of classroom specifications for accomplishing linguistic objectives, or a set of theoretically unified classroom techniques thought to be generalized across a wide variety of contexts and audiences.

But in 1989, the concept of method went under serious attack for its "positivist, progressivist, and patriarchal" view of the linear development of the TESOL practices (Pennycook, 1989). Pennycook (1989), Long (1989, 2003), Prabhu (1990), Stern (1991), Richards (1990, 2003), and Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2003a) are amongst the first persuasive critics who call the conceptual coherence and validity of method into question and lament over our 'century-old obsession' or prolonged preoccupation with the unproductive and misguided quest for the best method that would be the final answer. Pennycook (1994) relates the role of teaching theory to more general concerns about the production of "interested knowledge"

that, despite its being apparently scientific, rational, and technical, still functions in the interest of the dominant class and the politics of language teaching.

Therefore, method is a "prescriptive concept" that "reflects a particular view of the world" (Pennycook,1989, pp.589-590), plays an important role in maintaining "inequalities" between or among (male and female) academics, student, teachers, and theorists in differential positions of power and various levels, and it "has diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching" (Pennycook,1989, p. 597).

What is then needed (for us as teachers), according to Pennycook, is to view critically all the standard orthodoxoies of TESOL, investigate the interests served by such orthodoxies, conceptualize or view ourselves as "transformative intellectual" or as "professionals who are able and willing to reflect upon the ideological principles that inform (our) practice, either see practice and theory as informing each other, or, better still, do away with this, distinction all together, connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, work together to share ideas and exercise power over the conditions of our labor, and embody in (our teaching) a vision of a better and more human life.

In another vein of argument, Long (1989), developing an "anti-methods" view of language teaching methodology, contends that methods do not matter because they do not exist. Also Prabhu (1990) was equally persuasive in his argument that "there is no best method" and that the concept of method results in the "overroutinization of teaching" and a

"mechanical teaching" with no sense of understanding or identification by the teacher that will turn out to be the main impediment to success.

Perhaps, then, there is a factor more basic than the choice between methods, namely teachers' "subjective understanding" of the teaching acts they do, referred to as a "pedagogic intuition" or "a sense of plausibility" about teaching, which may arise from different sources of experience and is active, alive, operational, and not frozen or routinized but open to change in the process of the ongoing acts of teaching as well as through the interaction between different such sense. Likewise, Nunan (1991) argues:

> It has been realized that there never was and probably never be a method for all, and the focus in recent years has been on the development of classroom tasks and activities which are consonant with what we know about SLA, and which are also in keeping with the dynamics of the classroom itself (p.172).

Further, Richards and Rodgers (2001) recite a number of major criticisms that have recently been leveled against "the notion of all-purpose methods" or the "post-method era." First the "top-down" criticism indicates how method typically "marginalized role" of understanding and then correctly applying its principles. Likewise, learners are regime of exercises and activities. Other criticism might be summed up as:

- methods and approaches ignore a careful consideration of the context in which teaching and learning occur,
- choice of teaching method cannot be determined in isolation form curriculum development processes and other planning and implementation practices,

- "guru-led methods" are full of claims and assertions about second language learning, few of which are based on a research foundation, and

- it is very difficult for teachers to use approaches and method in ways that precisely reflect he underlying principles of the method since they find many of the distinctions used to contrast method do not exist in actual practice (i.e., similarity of classroom practices of methods), especially at a later stage.

Most important, Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003a) exploring the nature of the traditional, top-down, modernist, and transmission-oriented methods of teaching that view learners as passive recipients of the teacher's methodology and defining the concept of method as a construct of "marginality" in the sense that it "valorizes everything associated with the colonial Self and marginalizes everything associated with the subaltern Other" (2003a, p.541) invites practitioners of all persuasions in the field to find a systematic, coherent, and relevant *alternative to method* rather than *alternative method* or to find an alternative way of designing effective teaching strategies as well as creating efficient and reflective teaching professionals. In most of his recent works, he argues that any meaningful process of decolonization of ELT method requires a fundamental shift from the concept of method to the concept of postmethod, a swing of the pendulum. This entails a greater awareness of issues such as teacher beliefs, teacher reasoning, and teacher cognition, and a transform of disempowered periphery or merely classroom consumers into strategic teachers, strategic researchers, or technicians in the classroom, reclaiming their teacher

autonomy that empowers teachers to theorize from their own practice and practice what they have theorized,. This bottom-up 'pedagogic mediation' is the essence of what he, following Widdiowson (1990), calls "principled pragmatism," a key element of postmethod pedagogy that is sensitive to language teachers' local needs, wants, and situations. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), (i) Stern's (1992) *three-dimensional framework,* (ii) Allwright's (2003) *exploratory* stand out amongst several plans that have been proposed for transcending the limitations of the concept of method and for constructing a postmethod, pedagogy even though the first two do not invoke the *label* postmethod.

It could therefore be argued that no conceptualization of TESOL as a postmethod language pedagogy is possible without being willing to entertain the ethos of postmodernism. All attempts motivated by such trends:

- downplay the role of experts outside the field;
- disbelieve in grand theories and supermethods, embracing only local and situation-based decision;
- are subjective, giving more power to the teachers as reflective, strategic researchers always involved in classroom-oriented action research;
- seek to dispute the theory/practice dichotomy;
- celebrate the diversity of the individual learners, rejecting one-size-fits-all philosophy;
- are pragmatic, using every theory which is suitable in the classroom; and

- empower classroom participants to critically reflect upon the social and historical conditions that give rise to social inequalities and to question the status quo that keeps them subjugated or marginalized.

Furthermore, learners-centered constructivism rather than teacher-centered instructivism is another major constituent of postmodernism.

While instructionism is basically dependent upon the hidden assumption that knowledge can be transferred intact from the mind of the teacher to the mind of the learner (Cahoone, 2003), constructivists believe that learning is an active process of knowledge and understanding construction whereby learners build up or construct a series of approximations to the target concepts through becoming involved in active and social interaction and collaboration with the surrounding as well as others, matching new versus given information and establishing meaningful connections as well as through trial and error, hypothesis testing and creative representations of input. Constructivist theories, therefore, call for a subtle shift in perspective for the person who stands in front of the classroom: From someone who 'teaches' to somebody who 'facilitates' learning; from teaching by imposition to teaching by negotiation (McGroarty, 1998).

Many endeavors have been made to outline the features of TESOL methodology on constructivist lines such as Wolff (1994, 1997, cited in Reinfried, 2000) and Wendt (1996a, 1998, cited in Reinfried, 2000). More notably, Wolff places "constructivist" FLT in opposition to the traditional forms of "instructivism" in language pedagogy. He hence defines instructivism as directed by a pedagogical-psychological concept, according

to which learners are considered as "reactive beings" either accepting or rejecting the material offered by the teacher. Constructivists, he holds, postulate that learning is a process which is highly subjective, autonomous, and active, and can be achieved by dint of process-action-oriented methodology including cooperative learning, active, and interactive forms of work as well as teaching by projects. It is evident that the principles of methodology and procedure discussed above reflect the general consensus of TESOL theorists in the '90s as well. However, bringing the various principles, procedures, and strategies under the one roof of 'constructivist TESOL' reflects a form of novelty which offers coherence and a superstructure for the various concepts of learning and teaching involved in the field (Reinfried, 2000). McGroarty (1998) argues that the most productive future directions theory building and research in applied linguistics derive from the extent to which the field's practitioners take insights from constructivist scholarly approaches.

Incidentally, the proposal of the diversity of intelligences propounded by Howard Gardner (1983) led Reid (1987), Oxford (1990), O'Malley and Chamot (1990) to attach more importance to styles and strategies of learners and teachers in the classroom, or what Rodgers (2000) calls Multi-intelligencia or Strategopedia. Teachers were expected to be familiar with different styles and strategies of the learners, trying to cater for them.

Besides, it was found that people in different cultures have different styles and strategies of learning a language (Oxford, 1990). Therefore, it was suggested that diversity of learners in each class and country be taken into account.

Postmodernism and English Language Teaching

Larsen-Freeman in 1997, tried to apply chaos/complexity theory of physics to the TESOL. She first argues that chaos/complexity is the science of process rather than state, of becoming rather than being. She then points to many striking similarities between the new science of chaos/complexity and second language acquisition and goes on to draw a number of chaos/complexity parallels in the language class. Her persuasive argument is concluded with the fact that languages go through periods of chaos and order as do other living systems, and their creative growth occurs at the border between these two (Larsen-Freeman, 1997). According to her, like all open systems, second language learning is a complex system in which learning is open, complex, non-linear, dynamic, emergent, evolving and changing, self-organizing, feed-back sensitive, adaptive, and unpredictable.

Van Lier (1996) also viewed the classroom as a complex system in which events occur in non-linear fashion and multitude of forces interact in complex, self-organizing ways, creating changes and patterns that are part predictable and part unpredictable. Also Larsen-Freeman (2002) argues that a chaos/complexity perspective substantiates a social participation view of SLA besides the psychological acquisitionist perspective and encourages us to think (of dichotomous pairs) in relational terms.

Another welcome though undue element of postmodernism in the TESOL profession during '90s is the emergence of critical theories in the field (Pennycook, 1994, 1999; Kumaravadivelu, 1999, 2006).

Kumaravadivelu (2006) contends that this critical turn-- i.e., "from systemic discovery to critical discourse--" is about "connecting the word with the world," "recognizing language as ideology, not just as system,"

"recognizing that language learning and teaching is more than learning and teaching language," and "creating the cultural forms and interested knowledge that five meaning to the lived experiences of teachers and learners" (p.70). Critical theorists have focused on issues of class, race, or gender in which relations of power and inequality are often at their most obvious in terms of both social and structural inequality and cultural, political, or ideological frameworks that support such inequality (Pennycook, 1994). The contexts in which the TESOL occurs are interwoven with these concerns, and the aim of the 'transormative' Tesolers should be to raise awareness regarding the power relations which are hidden in the classroom, and try to transform the status quo and to eradicate social injustice. In fact, English teachers should be aware of the political dimension in ELT and mistrust underlying ideologies that construct the global nature of English as neutral. They should critically evaluate the implications of their practice in the production and reproduction of social inequalities (Pennycook, 1994). Various facets of this critical turn including critical approaches to TESOL (Pennycook, 1999), gender and language education (Davis and Skilton-Sylvester, 2004), testing techniques (Shohamy, 2001) discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995), and critical classroom discourse analysis (Kumaravadivelu, 1999) have been explored from critical pedagogic perspectives. In fact, the amount of attention paid to this area has been so considerable that a new subfield called *critical applied linguistics* (Pennycook, 2001) has been advanced to cater to this felt need.

Postmodernism, Education, and TESOL in Non-Western Countries

Although the trends discussed do far are undoubtedly true of intellectual movements within academic circles in the western world, the extent to which they have actually permeated the thinking of those responsible for planning mass education for any subject in the world is so far, minimal.

For example, Iran (the country in which the authors live) has been dominated by ideas of modernism and we witness no vestige of postmodernism in all levels of education in this country. The country has a conservative, centralized educational system: all decisions are taken by the authorities in charge in the government, and schools and teachers are there just to conform to the expected rules and regulations; in fact, there is no room for them to make their voice heard. Educational institutions are considered to be the mere conveyers or performers of the governments' central policies.

In this kind of education, a one-size-fits-all policy is predominant; individual differences are not taken into account; and all people are tarred with same brush. For example one math book is taught for all second graders in all parts of the country, cities, small towns or villages. The policy is to unify all students from all walks of life (unification and global decisions).

The system of education in the country is reminiscent of Freire's "banking" concept of education in which students are viewed as "empty accounts" to be filled by teachers (Freire, 1970); students are there just to

47

memorize and regurgitate their teacher and books' opinions. There is no room for students to display their abilities and develop their creativity (positivism). Teachers are mere conveyers' of the authorities; they are not allowed to air their own views. The educational system encourages them to find the best method for teaching English; their teaching methodology is directly influenced by the national high-stakes tests that are administered at the end of each year, before entry to university, and before being employed by any organization; so, they have to 'teach to the test' that in most cases entails negative washback.

In general, it is probably fair to say that in schools there is s tendency towards making students conform to a perceived status quo, and towards the enforcement of codes of behavior and discipline.

As noted above, another important feature of modernity in this system of education is holding high-stakes tests which are quite common in Iran.

These tests can determine the future life of the students; to be allowed to continue their higher education at university, all students have to take a high-stakes matriculation test at the end of high school. The test is a competition test, based on which not all candidates are given opportunities to pursue their education.

As mentioned earlier, postmodern ethos and principles have emerged out of practices in the west, and since most TESOL takes place outside the Euro-American-Australian intellectual mainstream, one question springs to mind: Do postmodern notions in TESOL have actually had any substantial influence on TESOL practices in most part of the world? The answer is unfortunately disappointing; it seems that TESOL like any other subject is

48

no exception and has not been practically affected in practice by postmodern ideas.

Considering Iran, we witness that due to the centralized educational system teachers are not autonomous to take decisions or do any type of classroom-oriented action research, and, in most cases, they are not even familiar with the ABCs of reflective teaching. In fact, the search for the elusive best method is common on the form of 'a mad scramble,' as Brown (2002, p.17) puts it, in both schools and English language institutes.

Teachers at school are preoccupied with preparing for the high-stakes test which is held at the end of secondary school. The test in English module is held in a multiple-choice format and the focus is basically on grammar, vocabulary and reading. Other skills such as speaking, listening, and writing are not catered to in both teaching and testing. ELT teachers all the time try to put a premium on these skills tested in the exam and disregard the other skills which are very important. The book used for teaching English is uniform for all students around the country, and teachers have no right to select the materials which they think are apt for their students. Each year, various training seminars are held to find the best method for teaching English, for instance, to high school students.

Conclusion

Regarding the proposed question, we have witnessed that the TESOL in theory like other fields and disciplines has been affected by the theories of the postmodernists and the field in no exception; beyond methods, focus on

styles and strategies, multiple intelligences, chaos/complexity theory, and critical theory, all are witnesses to the aforementioned claims that the TESOL is also in the period of postmodernism. But in practice, TESOL in most developing countries in which it is practiced is still in the modern era.

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