The Investigation of the Perspectives of Iranian EFL Domain Experts on Post-method Pedagogy: A Delphi Technique

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Abstract

After the introduction of post-method pedagogy by Kumaravadivelu with its three principles of particularity, possibility and practicality, a wave of attention was directed towards this so-called 'post-method era' and its appropriacy and adequacy in satiating the demands of the language learners in this 'brand new world'. This situation has created a healthy debate among the Iranian EFL community as well. The aim of this study was to explore the perspectives of the Iranian EFL domain experts about post-method pedagogy. In so doing, the Delphi technique was adopted to reach 'expert' consensus. The participants of this study were 21 domain experts in the field of applied linguistics in Iran. The Delphi technique was a remarkably quick means of achieving a consensus on post-method pedagogy for participants. Three waves of data collection were employed in the three rounds of Delphi with the same sample. The findings of this study raised much doubt and uncertainty about both method and post method pedagogy. It was revealed that the Iranian language education has never experienced method in its actual meaning, what is known as the method has been an eclectic approach any teacher has adhered to simply based on his/her personal taste. Moreover, the findings of the Delphi technique indicated that post-method pedagogy with its three principles is not applicable in the Iranian context. Finally, the theoretical and practical implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords: post-method, particularity, possibility, practicality, EFL, Delphi technique

1. Introduction

Since the last two decades, language teaching profession has witnessed a dramatic shift of attention and orientation. One of these conceptual shifts which have received much attention is the disappearance of method (Allwright, 1991) from academic discussions and the rise of the post-method debate (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). The postmethod debate has academically put an end to method discussions and the search for the good method (Allwright, 1991; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Prabhu, 1990), although its practical counterpart, that is, methodology, is still a legitimate notion and very much alive to many teachers (Bell, 2007).

After the successive rise and fall of a series of methods and approaches in the early and mid-twentieth century, the English Language Teaching (ELT) researchers and practitioners came to realize that no single method or approach of language teaching would be the optimal framework to guarantee success in teaching a foreign language, especially as it was seen that certain learners seemed to be successful regardless of methods or techniques of teaching (Brown, 2000). Then, in this tight situation, post-method pedagogy, as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994) emerged as a response to a call for the most optimal way of teaching English that will free itself from the method-based stranglehold. The post-method pedagogy tries to explore the instructional means for real life communication in the second language (L2) classroom and to get the learners not just to develop linguistic accuracy, but to expand their fluency. From this perspective, learners are assumed to be partners in a cooperative venture, and they are persuaded to move toward the fulfillment of their fullest potential (Brown, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

As far as the history of language teaching has reported, it is clear that some approaches and methods were unlikely to be widely adopted because they were difficult to understand and use, lacked clear practical application, required special training, and necessitated major changes in teachers' practices and beliefs (Allwright, 1991). Nevertheless, the concept of method was harshly criticized in the 1990s for other reasons, and a series of limitations embedded in the notion of all-purpose methods were raised. In fact, in the 1990s, the profession witnessed a steady stream of critical thoughts on the nature and scope of method. Scholars such as Allwright (1991), Pennycook (1989), Prabhu (1990), and Stern (1992) had not only cautioned language-teaching practitioners against the uncritical acceptance of untested methods but they had also counseled them against the very concept of method itself (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

By the end of the twentieth century, mainstream language teaching no longer preserved methods as the crucial factor in elucidating success or failure in language teaching. When the notion of methods came under much criticism in the 1990s, some ELT practitioners and theoreticians began to express their dissatisfaction with the methods and approaches, hence the term post-method era was occasionally drawn upon. The early undocumented roots of post-method can be traced to what the profession has called *eclecticism.* The post-method condition questions the legitimacy of the concept of the method. Unlike the conventional methods, the new pedagogy is considered to be more flexible since it adopts macro strategies to shape micro strategies. Despite some superficial appeal which came with this so-called *flexibility* and getting rid of the limitations of method, the post-method pedagogy has been criticized from different angles (Akbari, 2008; Bell, 2003, 2007; Larson-Freeman, 2005a,b; Liu, 1995) . Akbari (2008) claims that the post-method is qualitatively not much different from method because both of them ignore or misrepresent the realities of the classroom and impose their own version of hypothetical reality. Akbari (2008) further adds:

> While method has ignored the realities of teaching and language teachers, post-method has ignored the realities of teaching and language teachers. By making too many demands of teachers, the post-method pedagogy, in practice, turned a blind eye to the social, political and cultural realities of language teaching contexts and the limits within which teachers operate. (p. 642)

Since its inception, the postmethod pedagogy has evoked much controversy and debate among ELT community all over the world. Sometimes, even it has been the target of much attack (Akbari, 2008; Bell, 2003; Brown, 2000). Despite the legitimacy of this healthy debate regarding postmethod pedagogy, the Iranian teacher education program still suffers from the agony of indecision and a state of uncertainty with regard to the postmethod pedagogy (Gholami & Mirzaei, 2013; Razmjoo, Ranjbar and Hoomanfard, 2013). No systematic effort has been made to uncover the realities concerning the Iranian domain expert's mentality and beliefs about postmethod pedagogy. Since the domain experts in ELT have a professional experience and understanding of the Iranian context, their perspectives regarding the postmethod has definitely much to offer to those who are engaged in the profession of language pedagogy in Iran. In order to improve

the quality of English language education in the country and respond to the Iranian English language learners' needs in today's world, the present research with the research question of " *What are the perspectives of Iranian domain experts in the field of applied linguistics on post-method pedagogy in the Iranian context*?" aims to explore the opinions of the Iranian EFL domain experts about the current state of postmethod pedagogy in Iran, the result of which will contribute to the Iranian Language Teaching.

2. Review of the Literature

In spite of the existence of much debate and controversy over the postmethod pedagogy, the number of studies dealing with the postmethod pedagogy in second language teaching is few. In other words, as far as the empirical studies are concerned, the number of studies exploring the notion of postmethod pedagogy is very limited.

One main study may be Delport (2010) in which Postmethod Pedagogy with Mozambican Secondary School teachers was explored. The participants of this study were two Mozambican secondary school teachers who expressed an interest in carrying out an exploratory research project in their context of practice. The research was carried out to investigate how teachers, who had attended an International House Language Lab (IHLL) teacher education program in 2008, were theorizing from their practice with the aim of developing a context-sensitive pedagogy. The research was a qualitative study consisting of two case studies. Each case was based on the practices of a teacher attempting to implement an exploratory research project. The exploratory projects included the following activities: the teacher teaching a lesson with a colleague observing; the teacher and observer meeting both before and after the observed lesson to discuss and analyze the lesson; and finally, the teacher inviting a group of students to discuss their perceptions of selected episodes in the lesson. The teachers employed the exploratory research projects to explore their classroom practice in order to learn more about their teaching.

Since the rise of reflective teaching in ELT can be considered as one of the consequences of the postmethod debate (Prabhu, 1990; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Kumaravadivelu, 2001; Kumaravadivelu, 2006), of particular relevance to this study is literature on practitioner research and teachers as reflective practitioners. In analyzing the data of studies dealing with reflective practitioners, it was demonstrated that although the exploratory research projects provided a frame of reference and point of departure for

postmethod pedagogy, the teachers' ability to "develop a systematic, coherent, and relevant personal theory of practice" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003b, p. 40) was limited by: the context, the surface level application of macro strategies, and a lack of foregrounding of the critical issues in the postmethod macro strategies. The study concluded with a critical reflection on the value of postmethod pedagogy for teacher education programmes offered at IHLL, as well as for the teachers' contexts of practice. The researcher offered some 'fuzzy generalizations' (Bassey, as cited in Delport, 2010) about the place of postmethod principles in teacher development courses for language teachers from a range of classroom and community contexts.

Recently, an accumulated interest in research on L2 teaching, EFL teachers, and post-method condition has been observed in the Iranian mainstream education that has culminated in researchers to concentrate on the use of communicative language teaching (CLT) based methodology and materials in the teaching and learning environment. In spite of this growing interest, no systematic, large-scale study has been carried out to investigate the current state of postmethod in Iran. A study conducted by Atai and Gheitanchian (2009) investigated any possible relationship between teachers' attitudes towards post-method pedagogy and their students' achievement. In so doing, a questionnaire was designed to uncover Iranian EFL teachers' beliefs about dominant teaching methods preceding and succeeding communicative language teaching. The participants of this study were 594 Iranian EFL teachers selected from various cities throughout the country. After the administration of the designed questionnaire to the pool of participants of this study, the gathered data were fed into statistical software and packages for the statistical analysis. The obtained results indicated that Iranian EFL teachers had disparate attitudes towards dominant methods of language teaching but no significant relationship was found between the teachers' attitudes towards post-method pedagogy and their students' achievement(Atai & Gheitanchian, 2009).

Razmjoo, Ranjbar and Hoomanfard (2013) conducted a study to investigate the familiarity of Iranian EFL teachers and learners with postmethod and its realization by means of a questionnaire and an interview. The participants of this study were 254 male and female teachers of English in the English language institutes all over Shiraz, Iran. The findings of the study raised uncertainties about the feasibility, possibility or practicality of a fully post-method based teaching

pedagogy and queried its emergence into Iranian context. The study proved that there is a long distance to the actual realization of post-method principles, especially its possibility and practicality parameters. The findings also revealed that Iran's language educational system is mainly based on eclectic method.

In another study, Gholami and Mirzaei (2013) investigated the Iranian EFL teachers' understanding of English language teaching in post-method era, they particularly focused on the difficulties and hindrances Iranian EFL teachers face in the implementation of postmethod pedagogy. In their study, 162 language teachers took part in a survey and answered three open-ended questions. The findings of the survey revealed that EFL teachers in Iran, though aware of the achievements of post-method era, face many impediments and barriers in implementing teaching based on its criteria. The results of their study suggested that Iranian teachers are rather pessimistic about the realization of postmethod pedagogy if the obstacles are not removed. In the studies mentioned above, the participants were all practicing teachers and none of them had sought the perspectives and unanimity of domain experts on postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian language education.

3. Methodology

The design of the present study was a survey which is a non-experimental design (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1990). The method used in this survey is a Delphi technique which is gaining recognition and popularity in particular fields. The Delphi technique has been defined as a multi-staged survey which attempts ultimately to achieve consensus on an important issue (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; McKenna, 1994). The original advocates of the Delphi Technique, Dalkey and Helmer (1963) defined the technique as "a method used to obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts by a series of intensive questionnaires interspersed with controlled feedback" (p. 458). Although this method is used mostly in nursing (McKenna, 1994) and sociology (Landeta, 2006), it has gained momentum in education as well (Cohen et al., 2007). This technique differs from other group decision-making processes in four ways. It utilizes (a) anonymity; (b) iteration and controlled feedback; (c) statistical group response, and (d) expert input. (Cohen et al., 2007; Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011).The overall strength of this technique lies in its ability to provide a systematic and structured approach to collating data in relation to

the question under investigation. (Keeney, et al., 2011).The type of Delphi utilized in this study was Classical Delphi which uses an open first round to facilitate idea generation to elicit opinion and gain consensus. This type uses three or more postal rounds and can be administered by email (Keeney, et al., 2011; Landeta, 2006). Concerning the suitability of Delphi for the investigation of the phenomenon under investigation, Linstone and Turoff (1975) identified situations when the research problem does not lend itself to precise analytical techniques but can benefit from subjective judgments, when the population is geographically and professionally diverse and when logistical reasons (such as time and cost) would make frequent meetings unfeasible. Others maintain that the Delphi is suitable for areas where there is a lack of empirical data (Farrell& Scherer, 1983) or when instant decisions are not required (Beech, 1999; 2001).

3.1 Initial considerations

Prior to embarking on the Delphi study, the researchers made a series of initial decisions concerning the Delphi design, the level of consensus and the number of rounds. Firstly, since little research has been conducted in this area previously, the classical Delphi design was considered to be the most appropriate design to be adopted. Round 1 for a classical design, initiates with an open-ended set of questions which allows participants complete freedom in their answers, which reduces the risk of overlooking a facet of the question under examination (Couper, as cited in Keeney, Hasson, & McKenna, 2011). Then the obtained opinions or judgments are stored by the researchers and distilled into categories that form the basis of the second-round questionnaire. This is distributed to the participants and, based on how other domain experts have responded, they are invited to retain or alter their original opinion or judgment. This iterative process continues for subsequent rounds until consensus is reached (Keeney, et al., 2011).

Since Delphi literature suggests that participants can become fatigued after three rounds (Walker & Selfe, 1996), which undermines consensus obtained, this study employed a three-stage Delphi. And finally, prior to the initiation of the study the threshold for consensus was determined at 75%. A review of the literature indicated no standard threshold for consensus and the selection of 75%was not based on any theoretical or methodological standards; instead, it was established on the fact that it was deemed a stronger and more conservative cut off point for measuring the level of consensus on postmethod pedagogy.

3.2 Participants

The crucial point in Delphi is that the Delphi does not always use a random sample which is representative of the target population; rather, it employs *experts*. This means that each respondent is an expert in the area in which the researcher is interested. An expert has been defined as a group of *informed individuals* (McKenna, as cited in Keeney, et al., 2011) and as *specialists* in their field (Goodman, as cited in Keeney, et al., 2011) or someone who has knowledge about a specific subject (Davidson, Merritt-Gray, Buchanan, & Noel,1997; Lemmer, 1998; Green et al., 1999 all cited in Keeney, et al., 2011). Due to the undeniable importance of the so-called *experts* in Delphi, much care was exercised in selecting the participants of this study. Twenty one domain experts participated in this study. For the inclusion criteria of the domain experts in the Delphi, some qualifications were taken into account: postgraduate education in Applied Linguistics, number of publications in English teacher education in general and postmethod in particular, years of experience in language teaching, and particular interest in postmethod and also willingness to participate in the study. All the participants were either PhD holders or PhD candidates in TEFL from different geographical areas in Iran. The overwhelming majority of the domain experts were the university professors; they were both males (n=18) and females (n=3) and were engaged in teaching various university courses, including teaching methodology, applied linguistics and language testing. All of the participants also had the experience of teaching English courses to students at various proficiency levels and had attended pre-service or in-service teacher education courses before. Their age ranged from 27 to 51 with an average teaching experience of 15.2 in total. The reason for the inclusion of various groups of individuals in the Delphi was the fact that heterogeneity is one important criterion in Delphi studies. For the Delphi technique, a heterogeneous sample is used to ensure that the entire spectrum of opinion is determined (Moore, 1987).The other important issue which was seriously considered was the response rate of the Delphi questionnaires. The Delphi technique might encounter problems due to a decline in response rate because, in order to achieve consensus, it is important that those panel members who have agreed to participate stay involved until the process is completed (Buck, Gross, Hakim, & Weinblatt, 1993). To enhance the response rate, periodic phone calls were made to the participants of this study.

3.3 Data collection

As discussed above, the Delphi technique employs a number of rounds in which questionnaires are sent out and are used until consensus is reached (Beretta, 1996; Yousuf, 2007). In each round, a summary of the results of the previous round is included and rated by the panel members. A Delphi technique with three iterative rounds was employed in the present study. The purpose of the initial iteration was to identify the broad issues relating to the three questions about the postmethod. Upon the scrutiny of the related literature and the consultation with three experienced researchers in postmethod area, three general questions were drawn out to investigate the overall attitudes of the domain experts regarding postmethod pedagogy. Round 1 of the classical Delphi starts with an open-ended set of questions, thus allowing panel members freedom in their responses (Keeney, et al., 2011) Responses to the first questionnaire were collated and a second, more formalized, questionnaire was developed from these initial responses.

The domain experts were asked in this second questionnaire to express their level of agreement to each of the issues raised in the first round. These ratings were collated, and the highest-rated responses were then fed back to the panel via a third questionnaire which asked respondents to indicate their level of agreement with the panel ratings. At each round, the questionnaires were emailed to the participants along with the explanation about the aims and principles of this technique. The entire process took four months.

3.4 Questionnaires

Questionnaire 1

The questionnaire used in the first round of the study consisted of three open-ended questions relating to postmethod pedagogy. These questions were designed after the perusing of the related literature and consultation with experienced researchers as mentioned before. In fact, the face and content validity of the each of the questionnaires in three rounds were checked with three experts. The questions of the first round were as follows:

Question one: Do you believe in the demise of the method in Iranian English language education? Do English teachers still act based on the principles of the methods?

Question two: What is your attitude towards the implementation of the principles of postmethod pedagogy in the Iranian context? (In your response please include the answers to the following questions" a. Are the principles of postmethod pedagogy employed by Iranian EFL teachers in language

classrooms? b. Do you agree or disagree with the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iranian foreign language education? Why?")

Question three: Do you think that the implementation of postmethod pedagogy principles is impeded by any obstacle(s)? If so, what are they?

Questionnaire 2

The questionnaire used in the second iteration included 15 statements divided into three themes (current state of method(s) in Iran, attitudes towards implementation of post-method in Iran, the obstacles to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iran), based on the responses to the three questions of the first round. The panel members were asked to rate each statement on a 4-point scale scored as follows: 1) strongly disagree; 2) disagree; 3) agree, and 4) strongly agree

Questionnaire 3

The third questionnaire illustrated the results of the ratings from round 2 to respondents, in tabular form expressed as group mean scores for each of the rated statements. Panel members were asked to rate their level of agreement with these obtained results.
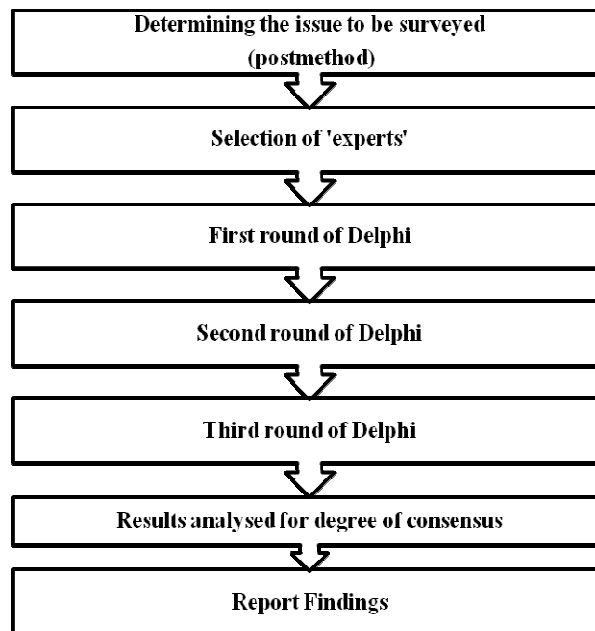

Figure 1. Representation of Three Round Delphi Technique Employed.

3.5 Data analysis

The first questionnaire which was an open-ended questionnaire elicited the perceptions of Iranian EFL domain experts regarding the notion of postmethod pedagogy. The panel of domain experts generated their own comments in response to the first wave of questions. The verbatim replies to the first questionnaire were thematically analyzed through content analysis (Mayring, 2000), by sorting, categorizing, and searching for common threads. In order to condense the data for Round 2 in Delphi, content analysis to identify major themes may be sufficient (Eggers & Jones, 1998; Powell, 2003). This requires similar items to be combined or collapsed with decisions to be made on items occurring infrequently on whether they should be included or omitted. In fact, the statements generated by the expert panels were grouped into similar areas. A total of 212 segments were extracted from the participants' responses to the three open-ended questions. Then, it was revealed that the three questions could be categorized into three themes. On the basis of their underlying themes, these 212 segments were then grouped into a number of micro categories which were subsequently clustered into 15 macro categories or statements.

During the content analysis and data coding procedure, two independent researchers were invited to comment on the themes identified. Then, areas of dispute were resolved through discussion, and necessary modifications were made to the description of the themes, a move to enhance the reliability of data analysis.

The purpose of the second round of this Delphi survey was to seek consensus by asking the panel members to rate each statement on a 4-point scale.

The data from round two were analyzed using SPSS Windows v.21. A group mean score was calculated for each of the items (statements) comprising the 3 themes derived from the three questions (see Table. 1).

Table 1. Results from the Delphi round 2, including the overall ratings (mean and standard deviation) for each response of the three themes

Themes	Statements	Mean (SD)
	1. Methods are still practiced in Iran and Iranian EFL teachers still act based on the principles of the methods.	1.66 (0.85)
	2. In Iranian context, the method has never been a healthy living entity to die and an English teacher, in Iran, teaches based on a repertoire of	3.47 (0.81)

a) Current state of method(s) in Iran	techniques he has at his disposal.	
	3. In Iran, some institutes have imposed (and still may impose) the principles of particular methods on their teachers.	2.04 (0.49)
	4. In the context of Iran few (if any) institute has ever endeavored to fully stick to principles of a particular method in a true sense of the word.	3.33 (0.65)
b) Attitudes towards implementation of post-method in Iran	5. Implementation of the principles of postmethod is advisable and promising in Iranian context	1.66 (0.65)
	6. Postmethod with its three principles is too idealistic to be practiced in the Iranian context	3.42 (0.59)
	7. Postmethod requires certain social, political, cultural, educational and economic pre-requisites of which Iranian TEFL community is not ready and thus cannot have postmethod as its viewpoint (or philosophy) in education.	3.42 (0.59)
	8. Postmethod might be another western fashionable trend within ELT which might serve the interest of particular group of individuals.	1.66 (0.65)
	9. Postmethod ,as introduced by Kumaravadivelu, lacks so many details to be implemented.	3.09 (0.83)
c) The obstacles to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iran	10. Postmethod teachers must be competent and confident and motivated enough and this requires a supporting teacher education program which is lacking in Iran	3.52 (0.60)
	11. Policy-makers, stakeholders and gate keepers are reluctant to bestow the power on teachers.	3.42 (0.59)
	12. Students and their parents are reluctant to give up traditional approaches.	2.52 (0.87)
	13. Postmethod has a tone of critical pedagogy whose implementation requires a free, democratic society.	3.47 (0.60)
	14. Administrators, textbook designers, and material developers are not tuned with the basics of postmethod principles.	3.28 (0.78)
	15. The teachers are constrained by their occupational and financial constraints	3.42 (0.59)

To determine those statements on which the respondents had a remarkable level of agreement, a group mean of 3 was selected as the arbitrary cut-off point. In order to make decision about the specification of the cut-off point

in Delphi, the judgment should be based on the emerged data of that particular study (Keeney, et al., 2011; Powell, 2003; Williams &Webb, 1994). In fact, this procedure is quite common in Delphi studies; many Delphi studies employ arbitrary levels, state such figures *post hoc* (Williams &Webb, 1994) at the data-analysis stage or rarely provide a definition of what constitutes consensus (Clayton, 1997; Eggers & Jones, 1998; Keeney, et al., 2011; Powell, 2003). Although this cut-off point was arbitrary, a mean of 3 included issues ranked as most agreed upon items by the panel. Consequently, a statistical consensus was defined to the effect that any response item with a score greater than or equal to 3 would be included in the next round. The mean response score for each statement was calculated, to provide an indication of the level of agreement amongst the panel members.

And finally, in round 3, the third questionnaire presented the results of the ratings from round 2 to respondents, in tabular form expressed as group mean scores for each of the rated statements. The domain experts were asked to rate their level of agreement with these attained results.

4. Results and Discussion

After the administration of the second questionnaire in round 2, the mean score for each statement was computed. Then the mean score of 3 was considered as the consensus criterion. Using this criterion, a number of statements whose mean scores were below 3 were omitted in the third questionnaire in round 3.Among the fifteen statements for the three main themes, five statements were not significantly agreed upon by the panel, thus they were not included in the third questionnaire.

Concerning the first theme as the *current state of method(s) in Iran,* the results of the Delphi technique indicated that among the extracted four statements, two items failed to attain the desired level of agreement. However, the overwhelming majority of the Iranian domain experts maintained that *in the Iranian context, the method has never been a healthy living entity to die and an English teacher, in Iran, teaches based on a repertoire of techniques he has at his disposal.* The scrutiny of the data of the first round which were the panel's responses to the open-ended questions revealed that the panel believed that postmethod may be an alien notion to Iranian context because the notion of method has never existed in its true sense of the word. From their opinion there has never been a strict sticking by language teachers to a specific method. For example, the following

extract from one of the participating expert's responses indicates that method has not been an issue to Iranian EFL teachers:

> I believe Iranian EFL teachers have never been that passionately obsessed with methods to begin with. Teaching methodology has to a great extent been an eclectic implementation of more practical aspects of methods…. It seems to me that there has never been a rigorous adherence by language teachers to any specific method… (expert G)

One of the other experts maintained that the two terms of *method* and *methodology* have been conflated by the members of the Iranian ELT community:

> Method as the theoretical framework with pre-packed details has never existed in Iran… what we have had in our context is the methodology which refers to what teachers do in their classes as a matter of their intuitive practical knowledge and experience ….. most often the distinction between the two terms has become blurred by ELT community members in Iran. (expert J)

Therefore, it can be argued that in an earnest attempt "to tend to the tomatoes," teachers have tried to develop a sense of what works in the classroom and what doesn't, based on their intuitive ability and experiential knowledge (Kumaravadivelu , 2006).

The other item of this category which was endorsed by the panel was that *In the context of Iran few (if any) institute has ever endeavored to fully stick to principles of a particular method in a true sense of the word.* Though it may be said that particular institutes stick to particular methods, the result of this study indicated that the panel members believed that even institutes rarely adhere to all the principles and techniques advocated by the particular methods. For instance, the following excerpt from one of the experts suggests that institutes do no stick to the principles of the methods; they just pretend that they are applying fashionable methods:

> Institutes claim to act more or less based on a method which is fashionable in a period while violating many of its principles at the same time. (expert F)

Among the five statements of the first theme, statement number 1 with the mean score of 1.66 and statement number 2 with the mean score of 2.04 were not unanimously certified by the panel. Statement number 1 stated that "*Methods are still practiced in Iran and Iranian EFL teachers still act based on the principles of the methods*" .The majority of panel believed that a method as a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) has not existed and does not exist in Iran rather Iranian teachers draw upon a kind of self-initiated eclectic approach (Bell, 2007, Marton, 1988, Stern, 1992). In fact, they believed that Iranian teachers have their own methodology which is based on a repertoire of techniques they are familiar with , they have been grown with, or they have gained as a matter of experience. The following excerpt indicates the type of the mentioned *repertoire*:

> This repertoire based on which the teacher decides and acts is made up of his readings, his education, his history as a language learner, his political, social and religious ideologies to mention a few. (expert B)

Also in the statement number 3, it was stated that " *In Iran, some institutes have imposed (and still may impose) the principles of particular methods on their teachers*". This assertion was not significantly accepted by the panel because in their responses to the open-ended questions in the first round, most of them maintained that institutes have distorted the concept of methods and these distorted methods have been imposed upon the institutes. In other words, language institutes pretend to follow the procedures of a particular method which is fashionable at that period of time, but the method has been distorted as far as its methodology and procedures are concerned:

> Language institutes do not impose the principles and techniques of any particular method rather they have their own methodology or framework …. or even if it is said that they[institutes] conform to a particular method, that method has been drastically distorted. (expert A)

As far as the second theme is concerned, *the domain experts' attitudes towards implementation of post-method in Iran*, statements number 5 and 8 whose mean scores were 1.66, were not welcomed by the panel. This indicates that firstly, the implementation of the principles of postmethod is

not regarded advisable and promising in Iranian context by the panel. And secondly, although few members of the panel claimed that *Postmethod might be another western fashionable trend within ELT which might serve the interest of particular group of individuals*, this skepticism was not certified collectively by the panel. The rest of the items in this category whose mean scores were higher than 3 were certified by the panel. These statements indicated that from the perspectives of the members of the panel, *postmethod is too idealistic to be practiced in the Iranian context.* Their statements upon the analysis of the data in the first round emphasized the fact that the panel members believed that postmethod puts much burden upon the shoulders of the teachers and though its principles seem to be appealing in the first place, they cannot be translated into action in the Iranian context:

> It [postmethod] is alluring to the teachers in the first place,.. however, it is too idealistic to serve the time/financial constraints of the four walls of Iranian English language classes…. with its three Ps, it will be too burdensome for the practicing teachers…(expert P)

In other words, in spite of all the theoretical benefits put forth for the postmethod, when it comes to practice it fails to take the actual practice of language teaching into account (Akbari, 2008; Khatib & Fat'hi, 2012).Moreover, in the panel's opinion, *postmethod requires certain social, political, cultural, educational and economic pre-requisites of which Iranian TEFL community is not ready and thus cannot have postmethod as its viewpoint (or philosophy) in education.* This is in line with what Akbari (2008) argues that "By making too many demands of teachers, the postmethod pedagogy has, in practice, turned a blind eye to the social, political, and cultural realities of language teaching contexts and the limits within which teachers operate" (p. 642). Furthermore, the last statement of this category indicates that *postmethod ,as introduced by Kumaravadivelu, lacks so many details to be implemented.* As has been repeatedly argued (Akbar, 2008; Khatib & Fat'hi, 2012; Liu, 1995), Kumaravadivelu failed to offer any viable, systematic solution as to how the barriers of postmethod can be overcome and what mechanisms must be put in place to create the desirable context for teacher autonomy and growth based on a postmethod pedagogy. In other words, in spite of its emancipatory rhetoric, postmethod

is more concerned with the philosophy and philosophical discussions of teaching rather than the actual practice of teaching itself (Akbari, 2008).

With regard to *the obstacles to the implementation of postmethod pedagogy in Iran* as the third theme**,** all the statements except for statement 12 met the set criterion and were averred by the panel. Statement 12 whose mean score was 2.52 revealed that the panel did not believe that *students and their parents are reluctant to give up traditional approaches*. Again the scrutiny of the first draft of the data of the open-ended questionnaire implies that the domain experts revealed that if the social, political, cultural, educational and economic impediments are resolved, the students and their parents may not have much resistance towards the new approaches of language pedagogy. From the perspectives of the domain experts, if there are individuals who oppose to postmethod pedagogy implementation, they will be stakeholders or policy makers rather than the parents or students:

> … even if the prerequisite infrastructure in teacher education for the realization of postmethod exists, admittedly, there will be resistance in the community against postmethod and that resistance will be mostly from the part of stakeholders or policy makers…(expert L)

The remainder of the statements of this category which attained high level of agreement highlighted the facts that the major impediments of the implementation of the postmethod pedagogy are *that postmethod teachers must be competent and confident and motivated enough and this requires a supporting teacher education program which is lacking in Iran*. This implies that the realization of a postmethod pedagogy requires the existence of an appropriate teacher education infrastructure (Akbari, 2008). The experts predominantly believed that a postmethod teacher should be supported by a supportive teacher education program which does not exist in our Iranian context at the moment:

> … during the method era, a method was not only a framework for teaching the language but it also served as a model to train language teachers…..but even if we imagine that postmethod is a legitimate topic to be addressed in Iranian context, there will be a lack of framework by which we will be able to train a postmethod teacher. (expert P)

Statement 11 in which it is stated that *Policy-makers, stakeholders and gate keepers are reluctant to bestow the power to teachers* is in line with what Akbari (2008) points out as "through a process of marginalization and self-marginalization, teachers' practical knowledge does not find the space and the scope to be regarded as visible, and consequently, fails to become part of the accepted knowledge of the discourse community" (p. 645). Another item which was unanimously agreed upon was the fact that *Postmethod has a tone of critical pedagogy whose implementation requires a free, democratic society*. This problem of preoccupation with sociopolitical issues has been partially alluded to by others as well (Bell, 2003, 2007; Larson-Freeman, 2005a,b; Liu, 1995). The other practical hindrance was the fact that *Administrators, textbook designers, and material developers are not tuned with the basics of postmethod principles.* As Khatib and Fat'hi (2012) point out "the textbook limitation has been significantly neglected in Kumaravadivelu's writings. The textbooks accompanied by the stringent methodologies may hinder the teacher's actions in the classroom" (p. 26). In addition, the institutes and administrative organizations may be potentially another stumbling block for a postmethod teacher. Therefore, what Kumaravadivelu has in mind is an ideal classroom environment which does not exist in reality (Khatib & Fat'hi, 2012). And finally, the last obstacle proposed by the domain experts for this category was the statement that *the teachers are constrained by their occupational and financial constraints,* this limitation has been supported by others as well (Akbari, 2008; Gholami &Mirzaei, 2013; Khatib & Fat'hi, 2012). Due to financial and occupational constraints, some teachers are too busy to devote adequate time and energy to have reflection or draw upon their own "sense of plausibility" to overcome the language classroom problems in an era which there is not any method anymore (Khatib & Fat'hi, 2012).

And finally the obtained results of the ratings from round 2 were unanimously certified by the panel in round 3 of the Delphi. Table 2 shows the ratings of overall agreement with the outcome of this survey as assessed by the panel members which was 94% agreed/slightly agreed with the outcome; this overall level of agreement is far beyond the threshold level for consensus which was selected at 75%.

Table 2. Results from round 3 of the Delphi survey showing overall level of agreement with outcome for domain experts

Domain experts	
Agree/slightly agree	94 %
Neutral	Only 1 individual
Slightly disagree	
+	

5. Conclusion

 This study tried to explore the perspectives of Iranian domain experts in Applied Linguistics on post-method pedagogy. The findings of this study raised much doubt and uncertainty about both method and post method. It was revealed that the Iranian language education has never experienced method in its actual meaning, what it is known as the method has been an eclectic approach any teacher has adhered to simply based on his/her personal taste. Moreover, the findings of the Delphi technique indicated that postmethod pedagogy with its all principles is not applicable in the Iranian context. From this angle, this study verifies the findings of other similar studies (e.g., Gholami & Mirzaei, 2013; Razmjoo et al., 2013) that the healthy existence of post-method as proposed based on the principles of particularity, practicality, and possibility seems to be too idealistic and far – reaching. Though, this study focused upon the Iranian context, similar results may be found in many other parts of the world especially those in Middle East which are ,to much extent, similar to Iran when it comes to, economic, cultural and sociopolitical factors. The findings obtained from this study may be conducive to teacher education program, policy makers, language planners, textbook developers and a multitude of other academicians engaged in language teaching profession. From the theoretical perspective, the obtained results will add to the existing repertoire of knowledge of the Iranian teacher education program; it may encourage the Iranian ELT researchers to give a second thought about the appropriacy and suitability of postmethod debate in the Iranian context. This is what is championed in post-colonialism (Pennycook, 2001). In education, more specifically in ELT, when we talk about post-colonialism, we are talking about taking charge of the responsibility to plan for language teaching, to determine the methodology of language teaching, and to determine the content of language teaching. Therefore, the results of the present study may reveal that postmethod may be an alien discourse to our cultural tradition

and cultural continuity. And from a practical point of view, it may give rise to serious measures to be taken by the authorities and stakeholders to go for modifications and reformations to the Iranian status quo of language educational system. However, much care should be taken in generalizing the findings of this study because it is of utmost importance to remember that achieving consensus on a certain issue does not mean that the correct answer has been found. It means that consensus has been reached among a panel of participants. Also, since not all postmethod experts in Iran participated in this study, further investigation of the issue with a larger sample size seems warranted.

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