

The Role of Iranian EFL Teachers in Transition Period: Compensating Lacks and Deficiencies from Traditional Methods to Post-communicative Era

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Abstract: Scrutinizing the history of English teaching in Iranian school context, you can detect a succession of changes and many ups and downs, based on some rationales or personal preferences of some individuals. In recent years, thanks to the perceived changes in the prospects and needs of the learners and to the dissatisfaction of the society at large with the inability of the students to use English communicatively, English is now viewed mainly as a tool for communication. As a result, it has been decided to adopt a communicative-oriented language teaching as the dominant method of English instruction in Iran culminating in compiling textbook series entitled "PROSPECT". Although it is a step-forward and encouraging movement, numerous current findings and research-based achievements in the field of language teaching in general and those attributed to the so-called post method condition in particular are, for one reason or another, not paid due attention in this series and probably will be so in the future senior high school series (VISION). In this article, some of the requirements and preparations needed for the high school English teachers to compensate for the limitations and inefficiencies of adopting the "one-size-fits-all" approach to language teaching in Iranian high school context will be addressed and some guidelines in the light of recent research and expert opinions of 11 Ph.D. holders or candidates and researchers in TEFL, who have been or are high school English teachers, will be provided. Hopefully, it will shed some light for the teachers as to what preparations to make to be "reflective" teachers, act efficiently within the limitations imposed by the rules and regulations of the Ministry of Education and, considering local conditions and needs, adopt appropriate procedures and strategies to compensate for the probable lacks and deficits of the prospective textbooks.

Keywords: high school teachers, expectation, textbook, appropriate procedures and strategies

1. Introduction

Throughout its journey, English language teaching (ELT) seemed to initiate with something lacking a clear theoretical basis to constricted methodologies (one after the other, sometimes as an alternative to the previous one) based on linguistics, psychology and sociolinguistics and has ended up to the perspective of "*an alternative to method*" instead of an alternative method. Methods often had a theoretical foundation, a set of principles, often a type of syllabus, a design of how to implement the practice of teaching step by step by applying some techniques or procedures, and most often a system of testing or assessment. Methods clearly tell teachers what to teach and how to teach. They can provide, according to Liu (2004), teachers with a view of how language teaching has developed as a field. The teachers were mere consumers of what prescribed by the founder/founders of the method. They were trained as technicians, gaining the necessary skills required to follow a specific method through teacher training courses. It can be claimed that to meet the requirements of a method, we need automated teachers.

Nevertheless, Methods, though offered invaluable contribution to the realm of language teaching, are often criticized due to the fact that they are too prescriptive to meet the requirements of diverse learning and teaching situations (Kumuravadivelu, 1994, Kumuravadivelu, 2001, Kumuravadivelu, 2003, Pennycook, 1989, Prabhu, 1992, Stern, 1985). Bell (2003) argues that methods, because of their prescriptive nature and with their fixed set of classroom practices do not allow variation. Methods often do not take care of the individual differences and often adopt a "one size fits all" approach in language teaching. Do all learners have the same ability to recognize grammatical structures of the language and apply hypotheses when learning other structures? Do all learners benefit the same from applying inductive or deductive methods in teaching structure? What should we do when our class is mainly composed of reflective learners, impulsive learners or mixture of these two? Do our learners have the same L1 or do they come from different language backgrounds? These are a few questions, among numerous others, which methods take no notice of. Brown (2002) asserts that the "concept of separate methods is no longer a central issue in language teaching practice" (p. 10).

Therefore, mere reliance on a single method is neither logical nor practical. Then, in the 2000s foreign language teaching has stepped in the new world "with an intricate itinerary" (Galante, 2014 p.58). This is what

Kumaravadivelu (1994) coined, and later used by Brown (1997) and Richards and Rogers (2001) as "the post-methods era" in which three parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility, have been raised by Kumaravadivelu (2001, 2006a, b) as the parameters of post-method pedagogy.

Based on the parameter of particularity, the post-method pedagogy "must be sensitive to a particular group of teachers, teaching a particular group of learners pursuing a particular set of goals within a particular institutional context embedded in a particular socio cultural milieu" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 538). Practicality, relates to the relationship between theory and practice. In Kumaravadivelu's opinion the theory/practice dichotomy is harmful. He reasons on the basis of the distinction made between professional theories and personal theories by O'Hanlon (1993). Professional theories are generated by expert; and personal theories developed by teachers "by interpreting and applying professional theories in practical situations" (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 540). He complains that professional theories are often valued, while personal theories are often disregarded.

The third parameter, possibility, mainly builds upon the thoughts of critical pedagogists. It is related to relations of power and dominance. It refers to sociopolitical awareness. There are numerous variables such as race, gender, class and the like which directly or indirectly influence the classroom input and interaction. The parameter of possibility also taps language learner identity.

1.1 Foreign language teaching in Iran

Deciding on the foreign language pedagogy, in general, and on the choice of which language to teach, in specific, has often been more based on the government policy than on pure academic considerations. Foreign language teaching, in Iran, started with teaching French language in a non-governmental school established by a French priest in 1838. This caused French language to gain a social status in Iran and later affected the choice of foreign language teaching in the country (Mahboubi Ardekani, 1975).

After World War II, an atmosphere of enthusiasm toward learning English, as an established lingua franca of international communication, permeated almost the whole world. After World War II, English began to spread around the world and was taught in most countries as either the sole foreign language or as one of the foreign languages.

During the Pahlavi Dynasty (1925-1979), owing to close political, social, economic, and military affinity between Iran and the US and the idea of westernization of the country (Riazi, 1995), teaching English received an important place in Iranian educational context. Knowledge of English, as a vehicle to educational advancement, became a crucial requirement for military personnel to go to the US for additional specializations and for non-military younger generation to provide themselves with more job opportunities (Farhady, et al, 2010). However, a brief survey of English textbooks taught in formal k-12 education system of Iran shows that they were mostly and generally developed under the influence of structural and formal camps such as Reading Method and Direct Method and suffered from the lack of a national curriculum and roadmap which encompasses the overall process of formal teaching of English in Iran (Kheirabadi & Alavi Moghadam, 2014).

After the Islamic Revolution, unlike countries like Hong Kong, India, Japan, and China which see English as the key to the international world of commerce, Iran seems to be opting for more conservative policy towards foreign language education. The main reason for this is the involvement of political issue in language education decision and the fear that English presents a threat to the Persian language and Islamic culture (Khubchandani, 2008). In general, as Kheirabadi and Alavi Moghadam (2014) contend, in the political situation in which top US officials had and has spoken Iran as an enemy state and blamed Iran of being "the axis of devil" and put the strongest political and economic sanctions against this country, it seems quite rational that some Iranian officials may be disposed in a situation of not to be so eager to back teaching English willingly and strongly. However, in the national policy documents, great emphasis is attached to preserve the nation's identity on the rapid advancements of science and technology, at the same time. In line with this, many private language institutions, which existed only in the capital and few big cities before the revolution, are abundantly active these days and contribute a lot in promoting language proficiency in the students. The work of these institutes, which are monitored somehow by the Ministry of Education and/or other organizations, along with English instruction at high school contexts have brought about some changes in FLT in Iran.

However, according to Kiany, Mahdavi and Ghaffarsamr (2011), "most of the changes introduced into the Iranian foreign language education so far have been arbitrary in the sense that they were not linked to the country's other macro and micro policies and were mostly based on the personal ideas of separate individuals" (p. 462). They added that the result has been "unsystematic changes which reflect the motivation to teach and learn English and conservative attitudes about the effects of teaching English language in schools and English language institutes."

This fear, conservatism and arbitrariness are most conspicuous in the development of high school English textbooks. The Ministry of Education assumes the responsibility of textbook development and, based on

its principles and policy, does not allow the teachers to introduce the course books they themselves believe to be useful. Textbooks are the main source of input and the language practice the learners receive in the classroom. Individuals at all levels of a program, from policy makers and administrators to teachers and students, rely heavily on textbooks to achieve prescribed goals and objectives. Textbooks serve as syllabus and form the foundation for the content of lessons and the language skills the learners require.

All the qualities mentioned above can be the merits of a textbook and I do not want to downgrade the importance of a textbook. However, some questions arise here: Is it a good job to use the same textbook for all the students with different ability level? Is it a good job to use the same textbook for the students in the ordinary high schools and those in the special high schools for gifted students known as *Sampād*? Is it reasonable to use the same textbook for the students in the deprived regions and rural areas in which there is little or no access to private language institutes and the students in the cities in which sending the children to such institutes has become an “*unwritten must*” on the part of the families?

These questions are not attended to, because of some restrictions and the reasons mentioned above, in the compilation of language textbooks in Iran, the development of different textbooks for the students with different language proficiency levels is almost unlikely. As a result, the Ministry of Education developed an English Textbook series, entitled “*PROSPECT*” for the junior high school students. Claiming to be based on CLT and aiming at enhancing the learners’ communicative ability, this textbook aspires to make up for students’ inability to attain full competence in using the English language and for their incapability to interact with confidence. Moreover, some other textbooks are being and are going to be written for the next grades of junior and senior high schools based on the same premise, i.e. CLT principles and procedures.

CLT seeks to develop “communicative competence”. Competence, according to Savignon (1972, 1997) is characterized as the *expression, interpretation, and negotiation* of meaning and looks to both psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives in SLA research to account for its development. Therefore, in the classroom context, opportunities are provided for the students for enabling them, through interaction and the introduction of authentic materials into the learning situation based on a functional view of language, to use English in a real world situation. Activities like role play, language games, information gap, pair works, expressing personal experiences and opinions, linking classroom activities to the “real world and language exchanges are among the typical activities of CLT and are favoured even today by most teachers. Yalden (1987: 61) describes the essence of CLT as the following:

“It is based on the notion of the learners as communicators, naturally endowed with the ability to learn languages. It seeks to provide learners with the target language system. It is assumed that learners will have to *prepare to use the target language (orally and in written form) in many predictable and unpredictable acts of communication* which arise both in classroom interaction and in real-world situations, whether concurrent with language training or subsequent to it.”

CLT method, it is better to say approach, though has relatively overcome some of the problems such as unidirectionality associated with the method concept, and, because of attending to learners’ communicative needs as a basis for curriculum design (Van Ek. 1975), has gained popularity throughout the world, it is criticized on the ground that communicative approach is defined and perceived differently by different people.

Even if we find a single definition for CLT which is acceptable to all and even if we can supposedly meet all the requirements of CLT in our high school language education, does it suffice? We are in the post-method era with numerous new findings. Nowadays authors and researchers in the field of TEFL are talking about critical thinking, critical pedagogy, etc. in their scholarly books and articles and urge the teacher involved in education to attend to them. Is it fair to neglect them and refuse to use the findings and insights derived from them in the teaching and learning process? On the other hand, is it feasible to include all the new findings in the field of education, in general, language education, in particular, and instructed SLA research in the *one-book-fits-all* and generally, *one size-fits-all* language teaching approach in Iranian high school context? The answer is simply “no”. Therefore, the teachers in the field of language teaching have great responsibility in compensating, if their time and resources allow, for what are absent and not paid due attention in the textbooks. This paper was developed to shed some light as to what high school English teachers are expected to do.

1.2 Purpose of the study

During the present so called post-method era, this study is an attempt to investigate how Iranian EFL teachers can prepare themselves to compensate for the deficiencies of the newly developed textbooks which are supposed to be based on CLT guidelines and how they can develop professionally despite all the problems they experience in the context. More specifically, the following research question is raised:

What are the responsibilities of EFL high school teachers in the transition period, from traditional to CLT method, to compensate for the lacks and deficiencies of text books?

2 Methods

2.1 Participants

A purposive sample of both male and female teachers of English as a foreign language with more than 10 years experience in teaching at public high schools (schools for common students and gifted ones, SAMPAD) was selected. The data saturation point was reached when the tenth participant was interviewed. Therefore, the purposive sample size was 11 EFL teachers. They were either PhD candidates or PhD holders in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). The main reason for including such participants in the study was having not only a good command of professional theoretical knowledge but also broad range of insight and experience in teaching at high schools which makes them quite familiar with the problems all teachers usually encounter. Furthermore, the researcher was passionately striving to be informed of the latest research and development in the field of TEFL. Therefore, what is presented in this paper was derived from numerous researches in aforementioned fields. The data collected from numerous books and articles are mingled with the expert opinion of the teacher-researchers mentioned above and organized in the form of some guidelines presented for the high school language teachers.

2.2 Data collection

This study required qualitative instruments which could deeply explore the perspectives of EFL teachers about how they can get the best out of the situation they engaged in. Hence, semi-structured face to face individual interviews with open ended questions, as well as some e-mails were conducted to collect the data of the study. Semi-structured interviews helped us understand interviewees' own perspectives with the assumption that the important reality is what people perceive to be.

Moreover, open ended questions helped us develop rapport with participants, explore our research questions deeply, elicit information and generate answers which allowed a true assessment of participants' beliefs. Also, face to face interviewing made understanding participants' verbal responses via their nonverbal cues possible.

2.3 Data analysis

To avoid any misunderstandings, all interviews were conducted in English. In order to elicit teachers' in-depth perceptions, the interviewer allowed the conversation to move on smoothly in a more interactive manner. The interviews took from 45 min to 1 h and 5 min, with an average of 50 min. Each interview consisted of two main parts. In the first part, the questions addressed teachers' perceptions of the existing English text books and in the second part questions addressed the main suggestions and ideas which the participants have in order to compensate the textbooks' deficiencies and develop professionally.

Radnor's (2001) guide to qualitative data analysis was employed for analysing the data. Interviews were first transcribed and multiple copies of the transcripts were printed. The transcripts were then read for topic ordering to draw out and list topics linked to the original research questions of the study. A second meticulous reading of transcripts helped the researchers identify the explicit and implicit categories which emerged within each topic. The categories were colour coded. In case of more than one category in a topic, numeric coding was used. A third reading for content helped to identify quotes that were aligned with each category within the topics. The quotes were labelled according to the categories they represented.

2.4 Objectivity

Trustworthiness in interpretive research is extremely valuable to assess the research quality. Hence, while the subjective nature of this research is acknowledged, the researcher attempted to the best of her capability to present an accurate, complete, detailed, and bias free account of participants' views, perceptions, and feelings they were revealed to the researcher and as they were experienced by the participants.

3 Results and Discussion

In this section, individual interview data are analyzed. Findings appear thematically under the research question and are illustrated by quotations from interviewees. In order to illustrate the number of interviewees who hold similar views, we grouped individual interviewees.

Research Question:

What are the responsibilities of EFL high school teachers in the transition period, from traditional to CLT method, to compensate for the lacks and deficiencies of text books (Expectations from the teachers in the post communicative era)?

Responses to this question resulted in a variety of views which have been grouped under seven themes as shown in Table 1 below. These themes, taken from the expert opinions of eleven accomplished teachers in TEFL and recent trends in ELT are provided for Iranian current and would-be high school teachers.

Table 1: Expectations from the Teachers in the Post Communicative Era

<i>Expectations from the Teachers in Post Communicative Era</i>	N	%
Enhancing their communicative ability and speaking skills	10	90
Getting full familiarity with all the methods of second or foreign language teaching	9	81
Facing the challenge of language teaching	9	81
Teaching explicitly the language learning and communicative strategies	7	63
Adopting a post-method view of language teaching	6	54
Thinking professionally and developing professionalism in themselves	6	54
Fostering critical thinking in the students	6	54

In other words, as can be derived from the previous parts, CLT and CLT-based textbooks can provide ample opportunities for learners to use English communicatively within the classroom context in order to be able to use it in new outside-of-the-classroom contexts. However, recent developments in the field of language teaching, such as autonomous learning, demands more than that and has influenced teaching methodology and dramatically changed the roles of the language teacher and the language learner. To cope with these changes, future teachers have to be prepared both practically and academically, apart from a specialized knowledge base, obtained through academic study and practical experience. Table 1 is in fact presenting a list of items and/or activities, which are mainly the components of professional development of language teachers, that can be considered by teachers and be applied by them. (The capabilities related to general pedagogy and those academic and practical skills required for all teachers, regardless of their fields like classroom management and those skills and abilities attributed to foreign language teachers are not necessary to be mentioned here and are beyond the scope of this paper).

3.1 Enhancing their communicative ability and speaking skills

The researcher, as the head of English language group of Isfahan educational office and the instructor of in-service teacher education, is well aware, through classroom observation and direct contact, of the communicative ability of the English teachers. Unfortunately most of the teachers, though highly competent in other areas such as structure, reading comprehension, vocabulary, etc., are not properly proficient in expressing themselves in English. Most of them are not capable of handling a class in English in more than 5 minutes. They often use a mixture of modified version of the grammar translation method and some techniques of the audio-lingual method as their instructional activities and procedures and use Persian as the language of instruction.

The question arising here is that how is it possible for a teacher who is not communicatively proficient and has difficulty expressing him/herself in English to develop such ability in his or her students? The following quotation from a female teacher exemplifies this problem:

"...All English teachers in our high school have a meeting each month in which we pose our questions and consult on the issues raised. We also let each other to attend our classes. Two weeks ago, observing one of my colleague's classes, I found that, owing to their participation in private English institutes, some of her students were much more competent in expressing themselves and communicating with others. Not having a good command of English makes the teacher embarrassed and most of the time leads her to resort to Persian" (T1).

Therefore it is incumbent on our teachers to enhance their ability in speaking and must have a working knowledge and a strong understanding of *oral language development*, of the role of the components of language and speech, specifically sounds, grammar, meaning, coherence, *communicative strategies*, and *social convention* in order to be able to cope with the future high school English classes which are going to be communicative-oriented.

3.2 Getting full familiarity with all the methods of second or foreign language teaching

Even methods as old as the GTM and the direct method can teach invaluable lessons to our teachers. Adopting communicative-oriented language teaching or performing on the basis of the post-method pedagogy does not mean withdrawing all the previous methods. Far from it; the method concept is still a powerful one. Liu (2004 p.5) argues that:

In spite of the changing status of methods and approaches in language teaching, the study of past and present teaching methods continues to form a significant component in teacher preparation programs because 1) it provides teachers with a view of how language teaching has evolved as a field; 2) teachers can adapt methods and approaches as sources of well-used practice rather than prescriptions to suit their own teaching contexts and needs; and 3) they can provide teachers (especially novice teachers) with basic teaching skills with which they can expand their own teaching repertoire (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Larsen-Freeman (2000) posits that studying language teaching methods can be very precious in teacher education in that "methods serve as a foil for reflection that can aid teachers in bringing to conscious awareness the thinking that underlies their actions. By becoming clear on where they stand, teachers can choose to teach differently from the way they were taught" (p. 9).

The following quotations from a participant exemplifies the theme:

Last month, English language teachers in our city were invited to a quarterly meeting. I was invited to give a lecture on innovations in language teaching. I addressed some issues about collaborative teaching and how teachers can involve learners in teaching. Most teachers really enjoyed this lecture and expressed that they will try some of the techniques I taught because they had found them useful (T6).

Fortunately, in Iranian university context, no matter whether students study TEFL, translation or English literature at the B.A. level, they pass a course entitled "Teaching Methodology" in which students gain a thorough familiarity with almost all the methods of language teaching. If this is not the case, there are invaluable sources available on the market or online on the web, which help them to gain full familiarity with all the methods.

3.3 Facing the challenge of language teaching

Language teaching is, according to Richards (2015) a challenge and subject to constant changes. Facing this challenge requires interest, creativity and enthusiasm; keeping up with new changes entails thinking professionally and responds to *new movements and trends* in language teaching

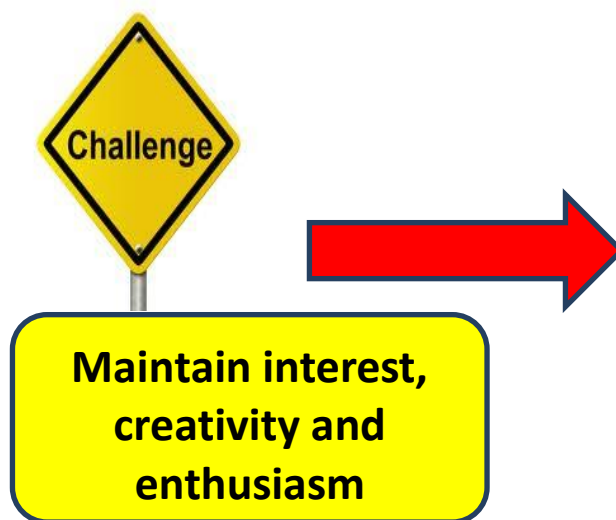


Figure3.1: teachers' responsibility in the face of challenges (source: Jack C. Richards, 2015)

One of the participants argues:

"When we are unenthusiastic in class and unmotivated students realize and this feeling is understood by us. So I think developing professionally is the best way to keep ourselves enthusiastic and motivated in our jobs" (T10).

Hence, according to the following interviewees, teachers need to find ways to refresh their teaching energies so that they can teach more effectively when they return to their classroom;

"I am sure that to be able to stay in teaching carrier for a long time, it's necessary to change because you won't enjoy it otherwise, neither will you survive" (T 7).

"I think it's a pleasure to have a chance to learn rather than teach, because you're always transmitting information to students and sometimes you might need to receive information" (T8).

3.4 Thinking post-methodically in the era of communicative-oriented ELT

In recent years, the teachers and the students as well as the Ministry of Education have been heavily criticized for the inability of the students to express themselves in English after an enormous number of hours spending in English classes in the junior and senior high schools. This criticism, which resulted from the dissatisfaction of the society at large with the inability of the students to use English communicatively, along with the perceived changes in the prospects and needs of the learners, has caused English to be viewed mainly as a tool for communication. As a result, it has been decided to adopt a communicative-oriented language teaching as the dominant method of English instruction in Iran culminating in compiling textbook series entitled "PROSPECT". Whether we like it or not, language teachers have to teach this series and use them as the main source of the input in class, and although it is a step-forward and encouraging movement, the recent trends in language education, especially what are suggested by the post-method condition are not attended deservedly. As a matter of fact, the post method condition provides teachers with many invaluable insight and guidelines that cannot be ignored by teachers. They can use them regarding the conditions of their students, as the post-method itself demands them.

Unlike method-based pedagogy, which ignores, as Freeman (1991) puts it, the prior knowledge and experiences of teachers as students, the post-method pedagogy attaches great importance for such knowledge. However, the most important characteristic of the post method teacher, according to Kumuravadevelu, (2006 b) is teacher autonomy. Considering the teacher autonomy as the heart of the post-method pedagogy, he believes that such pedagogy "recognizes the teachers' prior knowledge as well as their potential to know not only to teach but also how to act autonomously within academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks" (p.178).

Teacher autonomy encourages a reflective approach to teaching and gets teachers to analyze and evaluate their teaching and how to initiate change in language classroom and monitor the result of such changes (Wallace, 1991).

Therefore, such a kind of understanding seems to entail the key role teachers play in the post method pedagogy. As one of the interviewees argued:

"I think the teacher is a researcher and a theorizer. He makes theory on the basis of the practice and on the basis of the experience he gains throughout his teaching career and practices his theory" (T10).

This is a welcome circle which helps the teacher to act upon reflection and to modify his teaching accordingly.

3.5 Teaching explicitly the language learning strategies

Some investigations have shown that whereas experienced language learners can attend to language learning problems in a systematic way and select appropriate strategies to perform a language task, novice learners may be less efficient at selecting and using strategies to task (O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). Other investigations emphasize that both novice and experienced learners need to be instructed "how" to use strategies efficiently so that they can improve language learning and performance. (Wenden, 1987; Cohen 1987; O'Malley and Chamot, 1995). The following interviewee elaborates:

"I think it's a pleasure for students to get familiar with some strategies for example in reading comprehension to help them grasp the meaning of the text much more easily and appropriately. It can even enhance the students' motivation to take an active role in classroom participation" (T3)

O'Malley and Chamot (1995), found two approaches to instruct strategies: *Uninformed* (embedded approach) and *direct approach*. According to them, in uninformed approach, students are not informed about the purpose, value and even the name of the specific learning strategy, rather, they work through materials and activities designed to elicit the use of certain strategies. In the direct approach, however, learners and students are made aware of the purpose, value and rationale for strategy use (ibid). The specific strategy being used is identified and opportunities will systematically be provided for the learners for practice and self-valuation (Oxford, 1990; Wenden, 1987). Wenden (1987) argues that through direct approach to strategy instruction learners become more reactive as they enhance their awareness, practice, use and monitoring of strategies while they are using them during language learning process. As a result Iranian high school teachers can, every now and then, and as the opportunity arises, embark on strategy instruction that makes both the teacher and students aware of the learning styles and strategies. The result of this awareness is the familiarity of the students with their own preferred styles and becoming more responsible for their own learning.

3.6 Developing critical thinking in students

The responsibility of all teachers, in general, and language teachers, in particular, is not limited to teach some subjects or a language. Teachers have enormous amount of responsibilities: they are responsible to develop motivation, to enhance self-concept and self-esteem, to reduce debilitating anxiety and to develop

critical thinking in their students, to name but a few. Scriven and Paul (1996) define critical thinking as 'the intellectually disciplined process of actively and skilfully conceptualizing, applying, analyzing, synthesizing, and/or evaluating information gathered from, or generated by observation, experience, reflection, reasoning, or communication, as a guide to belief and action'. Critical thinking is necessary to be developed in the students to deal with the complexities of modern world which is still getting more and more complex. Turouskaya and Turouskaya (2001) state that thinking is the extraordinary process we use all the time to make sense of our lives and of the world we live in. Successful thinking makes it possible for us to solve the problems we are constantly confronted with, to make intelligent decisions, and to achieve the goals that give our lives purpose and fulfillment. Thus, it is an activity that is crucial for acquiring quality education, for successful development, which, in its turn, would promote living in a meaningful way.

Becoming an educated thinker will help the students achieve their career goals. In this rapidly evolving world, it is impossible to precisely predict a student's career or the skills and knowledge that this or that particular career will require. However, if we teach our students the skills of critical thinking, it will enable them to adapt to the demands of their career, whatever those might be.

Developing critical thinking in students in language classes would help the learners to learn the language better and fosters communication. A bulk of recent research shows that critical thinking techniques are teachable and that they enhance reading comprehension and other language skills and components in the learners. Therefore, such techniques must be considered in designing and improving language curriculum.

Üstünlüoğlu (2004) states that applying critical thinking in the language classroom, via specific activities, questions or tasks, enables and encourages learners to speculate, criticize, and form conclusions about knowledge they already have as well as information they will acquire in the future. This is also evident from the quotation of one of the interviewees below;

"Language Function section is not attended by most of the teachers while it is a good point to exercise problem solving and create a situation in which the learners can link their own experiences with the issues raised in that context. This activity enables the learners to apply the knowledge they had and seek new information to evaluate the problem and look for the best way to solve it" (T4).

3.7 Thinking professionally and developing professionalism in themselves (teachers)

Teacher development is not only the concern of student teachers or those teachers who are new to the profession. Experienced teachers also need to gain confidence in their teaching skills and develop their teaching ability especially when they meet new challenges which seem to threaten their long-standing values and beliefs about learning and teaching. What is teacher development?

"Teacher development is the professional growth a teacher achieves as a result of gaining increased experience and examining his or her teaching systematically" (Glatthorn, 1995, p. 41). In comparing teacher training with teacher development Freeman (1982, pp 21-22) states that training deals with building specific teaching skills: how to sequence a lesson or how to teach a dialogue, for instance. Development, on the other hand, focuses on the individual teacher – on the process of reflection, examination, and change which can lead to doing a better job and to personal growth and professional growth. These two concepts assume different views of teaching and the teacher. Training assumes that teaching is a finite skill, one which can be acquired and mastered. The teacher then learns to teach in the same way s/he learned to tie shoes or to ride a bicycle. Development assumes that teaching is a constantly evolving process of growth and change. It is an expansion of skills and understanding, one in which the teacher is responsible for the process in much the same way students are for learning a language.

This perspective is, according to Villegas-Reimer (2003), new, and, for years the only professional development was "in-service training" usually consists of theoretical, practical and a mixture of the two or short-term courses and workshops which helped teachers to gain specific information on some aspect of their work. In the past few years, however, teacher development is considered *"a long-term process that includes regular opportunities and experiences planned systematically to promote growth and development in the profession (ibid p.12)*. This shift has been so dramatic that many have referred to it as a 'new image' of teacher learning, a 'new model' of teacher education, a 'revolution' in education, and even a 'new paradigm' of professional development (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 2001; Walling and Lewis, 2000). The following quotations exemplify this point:

"For me professional development means continuous learning. I believe one always needs to learn" (T2).

"When you stop learning how you do except to be a teacher? I don't think you ever do. You never stop learning how to be a teacher and you can tell the ones who do" (T10).

More specifically, professional development was viewed as a kind of learning which aims at adding value to a teacher's professionalism in the form of enhanced practice and capabilities. Quotations from the following interviewees illustrate their understanding of professional development:

"In my opinion professional development is anything which empowers me to teach better than I could do it in the past and I can do at present" (T5).

"I believe that professional development is learning how to teach more effectively by pursuing best practice as shown by successful practitioners" (T1).

Does professional development have an impact on teachers? Does it have an impact on student learning?

Villegas-Reimer (2003) answers the first question by saying "Successful professional-development experiences have a noticeable impact on teachers' work, both in and out of the classroom, especially considering that a significant number of teachers throughout the world are under-prepared for their profession" (p.19). Borko and Putnam (1995) offer evidence to support the fact that professional development plays an important role in changing teachers' teaching methods, and that these changes have a positive impact on students' learning.

All in all, teachers involved in ELT, particularly those who are teaching in high school contexts are expected to think professionally and involve themselves in the teacher development process. It is not possible to include many aspects of teacher development such as models and types of teacher professional development in this paper. However, since it is a relatively new concept in field of teaching and it is probable that some of high school English teachers are not familiar with this concept. This article can motivate them to seek more information about it and step in the world of teacher development.

4 Conclusion

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has decided, aligned with the national documents, to change the old system of language education and to choose CLT, which is a popular method of language teaching across the world, as the dominant language teaching approach. A book series entitled PROSPECT has been compiled for the students of junior high schools and still another series is going to be compiled for the students in senior high schools. This is good news for the students and their families, especially those who have no access, for one reason or another, to outside-of- the-school private language institutes. This book series can satisfy a portion of the population of the students, but they may look very simple for some students and they will lose their motivation to attend in the language classes or take these classes seriously. Moreover, considerable resources, both human and monetary, are currently being deployed across the country to respond to the need for language teaching that is appropriate for the communicative needs of learners. If they are supported by the following guidelines and are attended by the language teachers, the results are likely to be immense. English teachers can be more effective by

1. enhancing their communicative ability and speaking skills
2. adopting a post-method view of language teaching
3. getting full familiarity with all the methods of second or foreign language teaching
4. facing the challenge of language teaching
5. teaching explicitly the language learning and communicative strategies
6. fostering critical thinking in the students
7. thinking professionally and developing professionalism in themselves

Hopefully, this paper will have some implications for the current and would-be high school teachers in that to be up-to-date and compensate for the lacks and defects, which are an inherent feature of most textbooks, by keeping up with latest trends in FLT and ELT by being reflective, by doing action research and so on and so forth.

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