ELT METHODOLOGY: PRAGMATIC PRACTICES IN THE CONTEXT OF TESOL

Dr. Zoheb Hazarika

Department of English, Najran University, Najran, Saudi Arabia

ABSTRACT: *This paper highlights the pragmatic practices relevant to reflective practitioners in the context of Teaching English to Students of Other Languages (TESOL). Unhindered by the plethora of theoretical methods and professional discourse dominated mostly by native speakers, the purpose of this paper is to lend 'voice' to the 'ordinary' TESOL practitioners. At first, it analyses the background of the evolving field of English Language Teaching methodology. Second, it delineates the major trends of ELT methodology in the last two decades or so. Third, it explains the significance of pragmatic practices in the TESOL classroom. After that, it explores numerous pragmatic practices facilitating the 'ordinary' TESOL practitioners. Finally, the researcher believes that the practices, if implemented dexterously, can enhance language teaching & learning, and thereby could yield the desired pedagogic outcome.*

KEYWORDS: ELT, ELT Methodology, Pragmatic Practices, TESOL

INTRODUCTION

ELT methodology is an evolving field. It has witnessed significant changes in the history of language pedagogy. From the grammar-translation method to the 'post method condition' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994b), there has been a plethora of methods and approaches. The quest for the best method has pre-occupied the minds of theorists and researchers for a significant duration of language teaching history. In the 1960's, the earliest framework delineating the constituents of method was that of Anthony (1963). He argued that the elements that constitute language teaching are approach, method and technique. He defines method as 'an overall plan for orderly presentation of language material'. Since then, throughout the history of language teaching, various methods have developed from time to time, to overcome the deficiencies of the previous method. The dissatisfaction with one method paved the way for the development of another. This discontentment led N.S. Prabhu (1990) to declare in his famous work, 'There is no best method'. This dissatisfaction was further vindicated when Stern (1983) and Allwright (1991) emphasized on unhelpfulness of the existing methods. Consequently, Allwright (1991) delivered his significant work entitled 'The Death of Method'. Brown (2002) echoes similar expressions for "recently interred methods" (p.14). The intuitive eclectic method was derived from a juxtaposition of bits and pieces of various methods. But it also had its deficiencies. As pointed out by Stern (1992, p.11), it's "too broad and too vague". In this scenario, Kumaravadivelu (2006) presented his post-method pedagogy in terms of 'pedagogic parameters' and 'pedagogic indicators'. Post-method pedagogy is crucial for the professional development of teachers as it involves teachers constructing "classroom oriented" theories of practice (Kumaravadivelu, 1994b, p.29).

MAJOR TRENDS IN ELT METHODOLOGY

N.S. Prabhu's paper, 'There is No Best Method- Why?', published in TESOL Quarterly (1990, p.161-176) negated the quest for the best method. He emphasized that "it all depends on the teaching context" (p. 162) and "There is some truth in every method" (p. 166). Since then, there have been significant developments in ELT methodology in the last two decades or so. These developments can be broadly divided into two categories – professional discourse and pragmatic practices. Professional discourse refers to major publications, seminar & conference presentations, electronic discussions etc. One of the major theoretical developments during this period is the 'post method condition'. It is the idea that prescribed methods of language teaching possesses myriad shortcomings and are not a credible basis for methodology. The second development is that of the 'appropriate methodology', the notion that the most effective kind of methodology is based on the socio-cultural norms of the teaching situation. Another major development is the renewal of 'methodism', one caused by the way that a 'communicating to learn' approach is vehemently advocated as the single best method. In this approach, learners use language to solve problems and thereby acquire knowledge of grammar and other linguistic items as a by-product of the communicative work. The 'communicating to learn' approach has been so strongly advocated in the professional discourse that Prodromou and Mishan (2008) refer to it as 'methodological correctness' (p. 193-194).

On the other hand, if we look at the pragmatic practices during the same period, an entirely different picture emerges. Although, it is difficult to generalize the classroom scenario, major classroom and classroom-oriented researches illuminates us to a significant extent. A meticulous delineation of these studies reveals that there has been very little development in the last two decades or so, as far as the practice side is concerned. Moreover, international course books and teaching materials also sheds light on these practices, as they are designed on feedback from practitioners to a great extent. Consequently, these course books and teaching materials provide us with some kind of idea of what a large number of teachers, working in diverse socio-cultural situations around the world, regard as effective methodology at the practice i.e. classroom level. If we analyze and compare the standard course books from about twenty years ago with their recent editions, we find that methodology in both editions hasn't really changed much over the years. Moreover, it is essentially a 'learning to communicate' in nature i.e. first the grammar and so is studied followed by numerous practice exercises and skills-based activities to guide the learners to gradually put it into practice. Thus, it can be concluded that there has been very little development over the last twenty years or so at the practice level unlike the theoretical level.

Significance of Pragmatic practices in the TESOL Classroom

One of the major reasons for the very little development in practices is the perennial hegemony of the 'native speakerist' concept of foreign language learning (Holliday, 2006). The professional discourse is dominated mostly by native speakers whose tendency is to advocate a notion of language teaching methodology based on the L1 experience of learning English. But this 'naturalistic' approach prevailing in an L1 situation is almost the opposite of the typical classroom-based TESOL environment. Consequently, one of the major challenges in a TESOL situation is to adopt an overall perspective on language learning and teaching which is grounded in the present realities of ELT as it is practiced in various parts of the world. The approach should be pragmatic and TESOL oriented, rather than 'native speakerist'. On the contrary, there is a comparative lack of 'voice' given to the 'ordinary' practitioner in a field increasingly dominated by top-down academic ideology (Waters, 2009 b). Therefore, the idea

should be to elicit feedback from 'ordinary' TESOL practitioners, and exclusively focus on the pragmatic practices which effectively enhance linguistic competence in the TESOL classroom.

Pragmatic Practices for the TESOL Classroom

Edge (2001) emphasizes that "the thinking teacher is no longer perceived as someone who applies theories, but someone who theorize practice" (p.6). Therefore, it was the objective of this paper to devise classroom-oriented pragmatic practices. The idea is to promote practical, reflective and self-exploratory practices relevant to the TESOL classroom.

Psychological Conditioning of the Learners

In language learning, psychological conditioning of learners is crucially important, especially in a TESOL situation. The foreign / second language learning anxieties needs to be minimized to provide a conducive and fearless environment for language learning. Making the learners comfortable and creating a good rapport between teacher-student should be one of the top priorities of the teachers. Measures should be taken to respect the dignity of the learners. Teachers should be warm and supportive providing learners with non-critical understanding. The learning environment should be as stress-free and relaxed as possible. Learning should be fun so that students look forward to it. TESOL is a unique situation which demands a significant amount of psychological conditioning, and thereby should not be confined strictly to linguistics and pedagogy.

Understanding the Kinds of Problems Learners' Face

To solve the learners' problems, a thorough and meticulous understanding of their problems is a must. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers make an assessment of the kinds of problems that students face in understanding two core areas – concepts and instructions. Like a medical practitioner, appropriate diagnosis by an ELT practitioner of the kinds of problems learners' face, will allow a better understanding for teachers. Accordingly, ELT practitioners can devise their own strategies, methods and practices to solve the problems of the learners.

Being Sensitive to Learners' Time Duration

It is crucial to understand that each learner in an individual with specific needs and capacity. Therefore, it is imperative to be sensitive to learners' time duration for comprehension, reaction, learning, and various activities conducted in the classroom. They should be allowed to make adjustments in time allocation according to their capacity and needs.

Consistent Use of Language Teaching Aids

Consistent use of audio-visual language teaching aids helps to sustain the interests of the learners. It enhances the efficacy of classroom teaching by making it more interesting and motivating for the learners.

Motivational Strategies in the Teaching-Learning Process

Motivation is the stimulus by which teachers accomplish their task of imparting knowledge and skills to their students effectively (Hazarika, 2016). This stimulus is pertinent to all pragmatic practices applied by practitioners in the TESOL classroom. It is therefore advisable for teachers to devise their own framework for motivational strategies vis-à-vis the context and level of their learners.

Building on the Familiar

Another effective practice in the TESOL classroom is building on familiar content. Proficient language learning can emerge if teachers indulge in the practice of building on what is already familiar to their students.

Better Involvement of Learners by Interaction

Currently, ELT methodologies are focused on the importance of giving learners opportunities to communicate (Ellis, 2008). Consequently, teachers should be aware of the interaction time in the three standard parameters – teacher/whole class, teacher/ individuals, and learner/ learners. Teachers should ensure active involvement and interaction of learners thereby maximizing their learning opportunities.

Reflection and Motivation of Practitioners

Perennial reflection on the part of TESOL practitioners motivates them in the process of thinking and making preparations for the class in advance. It also facilitates practitioners to choose teaching materials and practices suitable to the level and context of the learners.

Promoting Learner Autonomy

One of the most effective practices in the TESOL classroom is providing freedom to learners to choose the topic of their learning or activity. This facilitates to create and sustain interests and motivation among learners.

Integration of Teaching Resources and Language Skills

Innovative practices like language games, group discussions, role plays, pair work etc. integrates various language skills. Now, if learners can be encouraged to search for information about their relevant topic / activity in various sources like the internet, library, YouTube, newspapers, journals and so on, it would integrate teaching resources with the language skills.

Teachers' Positive Attitude and Flexibility

Practitioners in a TESOL context need to understand the crucial impact of positive attitude towards their learners. Flexibility in attitude and action would minimize the foreign language learning anxieties of students and eradicate the fear psychosis, and thereby would facilitate better language learning among students.

Responsive to Learners' Difficulties

Teachers should be responsive and sensitive to the students in their learning process, especially in a TESOL context. Consequently, teaching practices and activities should be designed and planned keeping in mind the learners' difficulties.

Peer Evaluation and Exchange of Ideas

Peer Observation is a learning tool that provides access to a complete range of processes and experiences that can lead towards the professional growth of both the observed and the observer. It helps in exchange of ideas thereby promoting collaborative work. Discussion among colleagues and seeking advice from senior colleagues facilitates the process of self-

evaluation. Consequently, it can immensely enhance language teaching methods and practices of teachers, yielding maximum pedagogic outcome in the context of TESOL.

CONCLUSION

Unhindered by the plethora of methods and professional discourse, the reflective practitioner should be able to consummately apply pragmatic practices relevant and effective in the context of TESOL. The purpose of this paper was to lend 'voice' to the 'ordinary' practitioner and thereby to facilitate them with pragmatic practices relevant to the TESOL classroom. It is the conviction of the researcher that the pragmatic practices discussed in the present paper, if implemented in its proper perspective, can yield much better pedagogic outcome in the context of TESOL.

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