

Thai English Teachers' Understanding of "Postmethod Pedagogy": Case Studies of University Lecturers

Saksit Saengboon¹

¹ Graduate School of Language and Communication, National Institute of Development Administration, Thailand
Correspondence: Saksit Saengboon, School of Language and Communication, NIDA, 118 Serithai Road, Bangkok, Bangkok 10240, Thailand. Tel: 66-27-273-592. E-mail: saksit@nida.ac.th

Received: September 11, 2013 Accepted: September 25, 2013 Online Published: November 5, 2013

doi:10.5539/elt.v6n12p156 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v6n12p156>

Abstract

This qualitative case study aimed to solicit Thai EFL university lecturers' opinions concerning postmethod pedagogy. It was motivated by an interest in how local teachers construe pedagogical innovations such as postmethod pedagogy vis-à-vis their own teaching conditions. More often than not, local teachers encounter many challenges in implementing those innovations in their own teaching. Through semi-structured interviews and unique and snowball sampling, the participants ($n=6$) were asked a series of questions that delved into their English teaching experiences, especially their understanding of postmethod pedagogy. Results suggested that, although the participants did not spell out exact postmethod strategies, their response patterns pointed to a high level of understanding of the postmethod pedagogy philosophy. Moreover, limitations of the study were provided and the paper was concluded with Hayes' (2008) ecological perspective on language teaching. It is recommended that qualitative research be conducted at a wider scale in order to ascertain whether and to what extent postmethod pedagogy can be successfully implemented in the EFL context.

Keywords: postmethod pedagogy, Thai EFL university lecturers

1. Introduction

Teachers of all stripes are always in search of the most optimal teaching method. All too often, new methods are conceived by Western scholars and introduced to their Asian counterparts and teachers. While one can debate endlessly whether "Western educational research [should serve as] a basis for educational reforms in Asia" (Watkins, 2008), the notion that best teaching practice is as much coveted as elusive can hardly be contested. In fact, Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues that "...methods are based on idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts" (p. 28) and that "[a]s a predominantly top-down exercise, the conception and construction of methods have been largely guided by a one-size-fits-all, cookie-cutter approach that assumes a common clientele with common goals" (p. 28). This challenge to the traditional notion of methods brings to the fore the practical usefulness of methods in general and how teachers construe methods and apply them in their contexts in particular. While research abounds that investigates the pros and cons of existing teaching methods (e.g., Bell, 2007; Kong, 2009; Lyster & Saito, 2010), L2 vocabulary acquisition (Ammar, 2008; Tonzar & Job, 2009), the role of research in teaching effectiveness (Norris & Ortega, 2000) and the role of non-native English teachers (Mahboob, 2004), no research has focused on Thai English teachers' understanding of postmethod pedagogy – arguably a concept that will have a direct bearing on how to teach and learn a second language (L2) in the years to come. In fact, Farrell and Bennis (2013) aptly argue that "...teachers hold a complex set of beliefs about students and pedagogical practices; these beliefs have been shown to influence the instructional judgments and decisions made in the classroom" (p. 163). It is not far-fetched to assume that the same holds true for teachers' understanding of such an educational innovation as postmethod pedagogy.

Given the dearth of research on postmethod pedagogy vis-à-vis local teachers and the importance of teachers' beliefs mentioned above, the purpose of this study is to ascertain the extent to which Thai EFL university lecturers understand the construct postmethod pedagogy. This line of research is of great importance because, oftentimes, whether an innovation such as a new method will be implemented successfully depends on the level of understanding that teachers, direct stakeholders, have about it. Postmethod pedagogy stands out as an appropriate example of the re-conceptualization of best teaching practice, thereby deserving to be studied seriously. Two main research questions guided my analysis:

RQ1: What is Thai EFL university lecturers' understanding of postmethod pedagogy?

RQ2: To what extent does such understanding reflect current teaching practices of Thai EFL university lecturers?

The remaining of this paper is structured as follows. First, the researcher will discuss literature review focusing on the construct post-method pedagogy, communicative language teaching (CLT), and English teaching in Thailand. Second, the researcher will explain how data were collected and analyzed. Third, salient findings and discussion will be reported that may shed light on the level of the participants' understanding of post-method pedagogy. Finally, the researcher will draw a conclusion and discuss limitations as well as implications of the study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Postmethod Pedagogy

Postmethod pedagogy, according to Kumaravadivelu (2003), has as its main impetus the re-conceptualization of the notion and relevance of method. It emerged as a response to second language acquisition researchers' and classroom teachers' efforts in searching for fruitful and realistic ways to best manage teaching acts. For the existing teaching approaches and methods have received considerable complaints that they do not deliver what they seem to have promised. Kumaravadivelu (2003) indicated that "[n]ot anchored in any specific learning and teaching context, and caught up in the whirlwind of fashion, methods tend to wildly drift from one theoretical extreme to the other" (p. 28). The discontentment toward the inherently limited nature of methods has led to the postmethod pedagogy, an exemplar of critical language pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

As elaborated by Kumaravadivelu (2003) in his seminal book titled "Beyond Methods: Macrostrategies for Language Teaching," postmethod pedagogy earnestly takes into account contextual factors that come into play in second language (L2) learning. Such contextual factors are subsumed within a 10-macrostrategy framework to realize teaching goals. The ten macrostrategies, put together, are the realizations of "...a pedagogy of particularity, practicality, and possibility" (p. 37). The ten macrostrategies are as follows: 1) maximize learning opportunities; 2) minimizing perceptual mismatches; 3) facilitate negotiated interaction; 4) promote learner autonomy; 5) foster language awareness; 6) activate intuitive heuristics; 7) contextualize linguistic input; 8) integrate language skills; 9) ensure social relevance; and 10) raise cultural awareness (detailed explications of each of the ten macro-strategies is provided on page 39 of the book). In short, postmethod pedagogy aims at "self-regulated learning" (Cassidy, 2011, p. 989) because it "...include[s] issues such as morality, social justice, fairness and, perhaps most importantly, wellbeing" (Glassman, 2011, p. 161). According to Pica (2000), postmethod pedagogy is "...the outgrowth of highly linked developments in the wider field of language studies" (p. 2). This outgrowth is intended to underscore the necessity of preparing English language learners for effective and efficient use of English in various social and cultural contexts.

With its strong inclination for classroom reality and practicality, postmethod pedagogy is not immune to criticism, however. For example, Bell (2003) argued that the concepts of method and postmethod should complement each other. As he put it,

And one element in those shifting forces is the way that method and postmethod can also be seen as inevitable and necessary dialectical (emphasis mine) forces: the one imposing methodological coherence, the other deconstructing the totalizing tendency of method from the perspective of local exigencies (p. 334).

Given Bell's argument, rather than dichotomizing method and postmethod orientations, a suggestion could be made that when it comes to teaching, polarizing an issue may be a misguided attempt. To this author, postmethod pedagogy pursues teaching effectiveness through the bottom-up approach, taking into consideration classroom realities.

Although postmethod pedagogy has been around for at least a decade now, no empirical study has been conducted to ascertain whether local EFL teachers understand and implement its tenets or whether those teachers may have already incorporated the postmethod strategies without their recognition and realization that what they are doing is compatible with postmethod macro-strategies. According to Akbari et al. (2010), "...there is not any published piece of research in applied linguistics [...] to indicate that teacher reflection [which is an area affected by the postmethod pedagogy] will have any positive (or negative) effect on L2 learners' achievement or efficiency of instruction" (p. 211-212).

Notwithstanding the nonexistence of empirical research that bears direct testimony to postmethod pedagogy, communicative language teaching (CLT), which has been around for at least three decades, comes close to postmethod pedagogy because it is a set of guidelines, thereby leaving ample opportunity for teachers to implement any of its principles mentioned above in ways that will be fruitful to learners. In fact, it might be

argued that postmethod pedagogy is a refined version of CLT. Next, I review CLT principles.

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching

A quintessential example of "...a movement away from master-oriented approaches focusing on the production of accurate samples of language use, to the use of more activity-oriented approaches focusing on interactive and communicative classroom processes," (Richards, 2013, p. 6), communicative language teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1980s as a response to the shortcomings of the audiolingual method (See e.g., Breen and Candlin, 1980; Canale and Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1983). Premised on Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence, CLT focuses on appropriate use of a second language (L2). Specifically, form, function and meaning are to be properly combined so that L2 learners will be able to appreciate how language functions and, more importantly, use the language in a most suitable manner. As an approach (rather than method) of language teaching (Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT is multifaceted, entailing "a culture of collaboration" (Russell, 2012, p. 445) and pragmatics—defined as knowing what to say to whom when and how, whereby the center of education has gravitated toward L2 learners. Moreover, teaching materials must involve diverse cultures to the extent that the learners are convinced that language is learned for use rather than for memorization. Because of its focus on language use, knowledge of pragmatics is also needed. Obviously, as an exemplar of "Hymesian social cognition" (Canagajarah, 2012, p. 267), CLT creates a learning opportunity for both the learners and teachers.

Being flexible in nature, both postmethod pedagogy and CLT consider the role of L2 learners as pivotal to success in L2 acquisition, although the former wants to liberate the teacher from having to be concerned about which teaching method best facilitates learning and the latter emphasizes L2 learners' roles in developing their communicative competence.

2.3 An Overview of English Teaching in Thailand

According to Baker (2012), "English is perceived as an essential lingua franca which links Thailand culturally, intellectually and commercially with other ASEAN countries and the rest of the world" (p. 2). But before its current status as a lingua franca, and because "...Thailand has no colonial links with English and it is a foreign rather than a second language for the majority of the population" (Hayes, 2008), English in Thailand is still considered English as a foreign language (EFL) where it is taught as a school subject, implying that most Thais who study English do not use it in their daily conversations. It is no surprise that English proficiency of Thai people is relatively low. According to Doughty and Williams (1998), although EFL students may spend over 12 years studying English, the total hours of their exposure to English are approximately 1,200 hours, which is incomparable to a typical American child growing up spending approximately 8,400 hours being exposed to correct English by the time they are 4 years old. Notwithstanding this truism, low English proficiency has always been a cause for concern.

To redress this linguistic problem, the Ministry of Education has for the past two decades at least advocated the implementation of CLT in Thai English classrooms. Like in many other EFL situations, CLT in Thailand has been met with challenges because a large number of Thai students still cannot function effectively in English. This situation has led many teachers to rethink the role of English in Thailand in general and CLT in their teaching contexts in particular. For example, Draper (2012) examined English in a community of Northeast Thailand, utilizing the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality, and found "...very low levels of self-reported English ability and little experience or positive opinion of English generally in the community, but increased self-reported ability and experience in the younger generation" (p. 777). This finding led the researcher to "...question the compulsory English paradigm" (p. 777), although a desire was expressed for English at school.

Focusing on the CLT approach in the Thai EFL setting, McDonough (2004) conducted a study investigating the use of pair and small group activities in a local university in Thailand. Specifically, the author examined perceptions of instructors and learners toward the effectiveness of the pair and small group tasks. The major findings of the study were that the participants who participated in the activities more actively outperformed those who did not, although the participants themselves did not necessarily find such activities useful. In short, this study lent strong support to CLT as a viable teaching technique.

Also revolving around the issue of perceptions, Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006) examined Thai secondary school teachers' perceptions and implementation of the learner-centered approach, a realization of CLT principles. Through a case study, the authors found that the participants were in strong favor of CLT tenets but the stark reality of day-to-day teaching seemed to have prevented them from implementing the CLT tenets successfully, particularly the learner-centered principle. Moreover, the findings reported the lack of confidence in implementing the learner-centered technique. So the authors concluded that "...the teachers need more assistance to understanding basic concepts in CLT and more practical input in order to increase their confidence in

developing communicative activities” (p. 5).

In a similar vein, Manajitt (2008) conducted a study focusing on the conceptualization of CLT and its practice of Thai EFL schools teachers in Bangkok. Through the use of a teacher questionnaire, a student questionnaire and a semi-structured interview, it was reported that although the participants appeared to have a good understanding of CLT principles, they did not seem to practice what they preached (or were preached). The most striking finding was that “...both teachers and learners felt obliged to partly focus on developing knowledge and skills for the English entrance examinations rather than for English communication” (p. 4).

Khamkhien (2010) also pointed out that, in Thailand, CLT has been promoted actively by all stakeholders because of its promising results. However, in practice the benefits of and appropriateness of CLT seem questionable. As he put it, “... in Thailand it is deemed that CLT often fails to create sufficient opportunities for genuine interaction in the language classroom” (p. 186). Reviewing several studies concerning CLT strengths and weaknesses, the author appeared to capture the gist of the problem suggesting that “...up to now English language teaching using CLT in Thailand has not prepared Thai learners for the changing world. The idea that teachers should improve teaching competence, including testing and evaluation by promoting the communication approach needs to be revised” (p. 186).

The studies reviewed above appeared to corroborate a point raised by Lochland (2013) about “...the insensitivity of English language teaching methods to the linguistic, sociocultural, and political background of learners in English as a foreign language settings” (p. 261). Certainly, Thai EFL teachers are not alone in experiencing the implementation challenges accompanying CLT and, quite plausibly, this is a situation where there are considerable doubts about the usefulness of teaching methods/approaches, thereby leading to the proposal of postmethod pedagogy.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

The participants consisted of six Thai EFL university lecturers in six universities in Bangkok and its vicinity. They were invited to participate in the study through the unique and snowball sampling methods whereby participants are selected based on “...unique, atypical, perhaps rare attributes or occurrences of the phenomenon of interest [and] locating a few key participants who easily meet the criteria...” (Merriam, 2009, p. 78-79). The participants were known as Bok, Chai, Daam, Mon, Thana and Ying. Ying and Chai taught at two premier public universities; Mon and Bok at two private universities; Daam, at a teachers college; and Thana, at a vocational college. The average teaching years is 13.11 years with Ying having the longest years of teaching experience (30 years) and Chai, the shortest (2 years).

Table 1. Participants’ profiles

Participant	Gender	Year*	Course	Affiliation
Bok	F	13	FE**	Private university
Chai	M	2	C***	Public university
Daam	M	20	C	Teachers College
Mon	F	15	FE	Private university
Thana	F	18	FE/C	Vocational College
Ying	F	30	FE/C	Public university

Year* = the number of teaching years

FE** = Foundation English course

C*** = Content course

3.2 Data Collection

This study utilized a qualitative multiple case study interview. The interviews took place at the universities/colleges where the participants taught. Through semi-structured interviews, each of the participants was asked a series of questions that invited him/her to reflect upon his/her teaching experiences. In semi-structured interviews, according to Merriam (2009), “interview guide includes a mix of more and less

structured interview questions; all questions [are] used flexibly; usually specific data [are] required from all respondents; the largest part of interview [is] guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored and [there is] no predetermined wording or order” (p. 89). Each interview lasted between 40 to 60 minutes, depending on each interviewee’s time. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the interviewees, all of whom preferred to be referred to in the study via the aforementioned pseudonyms.

3.3 Data Analysis

After transcribing the tapes, the researcher read and reread the scripts to ascertain salient themes. In so doing, the researcher used “categorical indexing” (Mason, 2002, p. 150) whereby “...the researcher applies a uniform set of indexing categories systematically and consistently to the data. These could take the form of serial indexing categories, inserted as subheadings at the relevant points” (Mason, 2002, p. 150-151). Specifically, the researcher applied a three-pronged approach to analyzing the data: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Merriam, 2009, P. 200). The open coding involved tagging any unit of data deemed relevant to the study; the axial coding was done in which categories were related to each other and the selective coding through which the researcher developed a core category.

4. Findings

The analysis of data revealed several key themes that reflect the participants’ understanding of successful L2 teaching, although the extent to which such understanding necessarily indicated that they understood the postmethod pedagogy principles and maxims remains debatable. Those themes, reported below, are 1) postmethod pedagogy means teaching from the ground up; 2) teaching is inspiring; 3) there is no magic-bullet method; 4) it takes two to tango; and 5) grammar rules and use go in tandem.

4.1 Postmethod Pedagogy Means Teaching from the Ground Up

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was concerned with postmethod pedagogy and its components. When asked whether they had heard of the term postmethod pedagogy, the participants were hesitant at first and then asked me to clarify it a bit. After my clarification of the term, they thought that the term was perhaps an extension of CLT and that it did not prescribe any teaching steps as did earlier teaching methods such as grammar translation and audiolingualism.

For example, Bok said, “I’m not familiar with the term [postmethod pedagogy] but I guess it means something like you give your students lots of opportunity to explore the English language and its use” Chai further argued that, “postmethod pedagogy should refer to no reliance on any single teaching method but the teacher should be flexible in using a mixture of teaching techniques that helps students improve their English.” Daam, who was somewhat reluctant to answer the question at first, said, “Certainly, I haven’t heard of the term before until you mentioned it, but I guess it must be something about liberating teachers from using just one teaching method and allowing them and their students to figure out ways and means to do English...I don’t know whether this is the right answer or not.” Mon, who put it in a tongue-in-cheek manner, quipped that, “maybe it means no method...right? But if that were to be the case, then it would be useless. We need something to hold on to when teaching students. So my guess is that those who advocate postmethod pedagogy simply want to help local teachers feel that they should think for themselves what teaching techniques would be most appropriate for their students.” Thana, who felt a bit uncomfortable answering the question, put it in a very careful manner saying, “I don’t know what to say judging from the name postmethod, but I guess it’s another term introduced to us by some gurus. And it should help local teachers make their own decisions about how to teach. That seems risky to a large extent because once you don’t have clear steps to follow, you’ll go in disarray. But I don’t know...postmethod should go beyond just any method to use. It seems fair perhaps.” Finally, Ying, who has also supervised Ph.D. dissertations and consequently may have extensively read academic papers dealing with English teaching, philosophized about postmethod pedagogy that, “I think it’s a term that must have been influenced by the “critical” movement in linguistics and applied linguistics. If that’s the case, then it suggests that what we have now is not functional and misguided and we should forget about a fixed method. What we should do now is to consider local factors involved such as the kinds of students we have, the syllabus and the objectives. In a way, postmethod pedagogy may be about a set of practical strategies and goes beyond any fixed way of teaching.”

The participants’ responses above indicate that they viewed postmethod pedagogy as a break away from the traditional method of teaching, although they could not spell out exact strategies involved. This is understandable because when I asked them the question I had to make sure not to make them feel they were being tested. Once I got the impression that they thought about postmethod pedagogy as a flexible way of teaching, I stopped pressing further lest they were to think I was questioning their knowledge.

4.2 Teaching Is Inspiring

The six participants were in agreement that teaching an L2 means inspiring the learners to do their very best. Certainly, the participants differed in techniques they had employed in encouraging their students. For example, Ying pointed out that,

The most important thing for a teacher is to inspire students. This could be done with your genuine interest in them. You must make them feel that you really want them to succeed in their learning efforts. Students differ from one another. It's their differences that you need to cope with. Inspiring them is easier said than done, but you can't avoid it. Otherwise, you will serve merely as a dispensing machine giving out knowledge when touched.

Ying's genuine interest in them as a source of inspiration concurs with the remaining participants. Bok, for example, pointed out that "sometimes you'll need to talk with them about other stuffs besides English and school subjects," whereas Chai preached on the value of English knowledge for their future studies and careers. According to him, students appeared to expect him to be like their father or big brother, willing to help them out. This is the expectation that Chai was willing to meet, though. He said, "students seemed to want to be taken care of...it's not just about the subject matter. Some wanted to talk to me about various other things that would help them feel at ease with university life."

Mon, Daam and Thana, however, appeared to resort to other techniques to inspire their students. For example, Mon said,

Private university students are not the same as those in public ones because many of them seemed to have low self-esteem, believing that they couldn't study English or any other subject for that matter. The way I usually use to inspire them is to make them realize that they can't change the past but they can make the present and future better. I focused on real action not just talk.

Daam, a caring and willing teacher, believed that the most vital role of teaching is inspiring students. Having 20 years of teaching experience at a teachers college, he came to realize that teaching students with low English proficiency was the most daunting and challenging. He confided in me that he had a love-hate relationship with his English teaching career. He said,

You see...when you prepared your lessons well but your students didn't cooperate. What were you to do then? It would be much easier just to ignore those students and simply taught what you had prepared for, but then again I thought to myself that if I were to do this, I would need to do it well, if not perfectly well. So my first task was to inspire or convince them that they had what it took to become successful in learning English. By success, I didn't mean the ability to improve their English overnight. Success, to me, was first to make them want to learn and, second, to get them to continue learning. I think I could do that by openly talking to them that if they didn't move, nothing good would come out of this. I repeated this often enough so that some of them were beginning to be willing to learn English.

As far as Thana is concerned, her inspiring strategies were to make them feel they could do it, they could study English. What she did was to give them a rather easy quiz so that they would have no fear about English and that they would feel in control of their own learning. She said,

I intentionally prepared an English quiz, items of which were somewhat easy for all students, but not too easy not to be challenging enough. I heard about the comprehensible input at $i + 1$ thing and I thought it wouldn't hurt to try it with my quiz. So what I did may be input at $i - 1$. Interestingly enough, most students began to realize that they too could understand and get good marks on English

4.3 There Is No Magic-Bullet Method

The six participants were unanimous that any teaching method is not a magic bullet because method alone is as good as it gets. It should also be noted that the number of years of teaching experiences does not result in different quality answers. For example, answers to the interview questions from Chai, who has the minimum years of teaching experience, concurred with Ying with the maximum years of teaching that method is but one of the key factors to make L2 learning a success. In this regard, Chai said, "I think the question whether there is a magic method is somewhat naive. If there were such a magic thing, I wouldn't need to be worried about how to teach students." Along the same line, Ying philosophized about teaching that "method is both very important and very unimportant. This may sound too extreme and arrogant, but trust me if the teacher loves what he/she does, method--magic or otherwise--is secondary in importance. So, instead of searching for a magic method, we should look at our own conditions." The points raised by Chai and Ying above were corroborated by Bok, Daam, Mon and Thana--all agreeing that method should be flexible and adjusted based on local conditions. Specifically, Bok suggested that "a working method should be one that is embedded in each teaching situation," and Daam

indicated that “I’ve heard about various teaching methods and no single one seems to work in all teaching situations.” This is a point Mon and Thana emphasized, saying respectively that “it is useless to find a magic method for a very simple reason that teaching episodes differ from one another; therefore, a single best method runs counter to our commonsense knowledge, I guess... [and] that the idea of magic method is somewhat impractical because students differ from one another and consequently teachers will need to vary their teaching methods anyway.”

4.4 *It Takes Two to Tango*

Inasmuch as we discuss collaboration in language learning (Russell, 2012), the participants realized that all the teaching endeavors would not be successful unless there is cooperation from learners. For example, Bok said, “all teaching plans won’t work if students don’t want to learn.” Chai reiterated the point, saying, “teaching is like dancing. You’ll need to have a good companion. It takes two to tango...you see.” Daam also pointed out that, “although a teacher’s qualifications are important, students’ cooperation is even more important.” On this point, Mon further argued that, “one of the challenges in dealing with my students was how to get them involved in the learning process. Some students held blase attitudes toward the English class. They didn’t seem eager to put more efforts. It’s not that they were unable to learn.” Moreover, Thana referred to her own teaching situations and lamented that “...not enough was done on the part of the students. They couldn’t care less. But then again sometimes you’ve students who are so dedicated and willing to take risks and learn new things. So that’s very helpful, making my class a joy to teach.” Equally interesting is Ying’s ideas about the importance of learners’ cooperation. She said, “the communicative approach seemed very helpful in getting learners to cooperate, but then again they would need time devoted to explicit grammar teaching because they said grammar got tested in the TOEIC test as well.” The participants’ call above for close collaboration and cooperation from the learners appears to go beyond the interaction between the teacher and learner. Rather, it requires a better understanding in and knowledge of “situated understandings of learners” (Mercer, 2011, p. 57).

4.5 *Grammar Rules and Use Go in Tandem*

The participants, regardless of their teaching years, thought that rules of grammar, especially discourse grammar (rather than prescriptive grammar) where forms, functions and meanings are properly combined should be emphasized. This mixture of grammar is an example of “situated understandings” mentioned above, for it does not isolate grammar rules from the context of use. Just as situated understanding of learners is important, situated understanding of grammar is equally desirable. This practice is what Lochland (2013) dubs “a situated pedagogy.” For example, Bok praised the role of grammar in L2 learning as follows:

Grammar, if taught and learned properly, serves as a solid foundation for building other skills. Without grammar, you end up learning practically nothing, especially concerning academic English. I realize that there’s a hype in the teaching sphere fuelled by the marketing gimmick that there’s no need to learn grammar if you want to speak English fluently. Well...I’ve seen people who are fluent but rarely accurate and I don’t think that should be the goal of L2 learning for everyone. At the same time, you don’t want to just learn grammar in isolation. That’s useless. In fact, grammar rules and use must be combined for effective use of English.

Further, Chai also remarked that, “even if I belong to the new generation of Thai EFL teachers, I firmly believed that grammar in context is of utmost importance.” He went on to suggest that, “based on what I teach at the university, grammar must be emphasized because students are required to do language analysis at the morphological and syntactic levels, for example.” When pressed further about whether grammar should be implicitly or explicitly taught, he quipped

You know what...grammar is unavoidable. If you need to know it well, it doesn’t hurt to teach and learn it explicitly. I don’t understand why most people seem to abhor grammar. Some even said that explicit grammar teaching would prevent students from being able to speak English. That’s ridiculous. Speaking ability has more to do with whether you have enough opportunity to speak the language in authentic situations. It has nothing to do with explicit grammar teaching...really.

Regarding English grammar rules and use, Daam reminisced about his own experience of learning English that

I think my English teachers years ago could teach us well, even if they used the grammar-translation method, but they used English throughout. I don’t know whether that would be frowned upon by teaching gurus nowadays. But it worked for me. Grammar must be taught, but the manner in which it is taught counts. Basically, the teacher must have an excellent command of English to teach well. Most Thai students could not speak English because they don’t have enough opportunity or don’t seek opportunity to speak, not because of grammar teaching.

Mon, Thana and Ying expressed their opinions in a similar manner. For example, Mon, when asked about whether teaching grammar rules was necessary for her students, did not hesitate to share with me that

You must realize that I taught foundation English courses for all these years, and I'm very certain that most, if not, all of my students definitely needed lots of grammar rules. They came to me, unarmed with even the basic knowledge of grammar rules such as the use of the verbs to be and to do. You only need to ask them to realize that they didn't seem to learn anything at all.

Thana, once asked about the role of grammar, gave me some insights as follows:

We need to put grammar in perspective. That is, we need to first ask what grammar means to us. Then, we'll have to ask about the goal of teaching. To teach or not to teach grammar should not be a debate anymore because it has to be taught. I doubted that when people say they don't like grammar...maybe what they are saying is they don't like the way they are taught grammar, not the grammar itself. One more thing is we must not perpetuate this stereotype that Thai people are fun by their nature. That's not always true. Getting serious doesn't mean it has to be bad. You see...because grammar has for so long been associated with something unduly stressful. That's not fair.

Ying, who has been teaching students with both high and low proficiency, reflected upon her own teaching as follows:

At my university, we've been experimenting with all sorts of techniques. It's like pendulum swinging you see...at one time it's all about grammar; at another time grammar is a no-no. Personally, we'll have to do grammar but do it in an integrated manner. You show them what grammar is needed and you encourage them to reason along why such grammar gets used here and there. It's simple and straight forward like that.

The aforementioned ideas all boil down to the fact that the grammar issue must not be dichotomized. The participants, in fact, seemed puzzled by the question whether grammar should be taught; they all concurred that it has to be taught in context. Singling out any particular grammar points in isolation will be a disservice to students.

5. Discussion

The findings reported above concerning the four salient themes from the interviews can be cast in the light of the two main research questions as follows:

RQ1: What is Thai EFL university lecturers' understanding of postmethod pedagogy?

Although the participants did not explicitly mention the term postmethod pedagogy in the interview, a close scrutiny of their utterances suggests that they all adhere to most of the postmethod pedagogy macrostrategies such as maximizing learning opportunities, promote learner autonomy, foster language awareness, contextualize linguistic input and integrate language skills. This implies that the participants may have already practiced the postmethod pedagogy strategies in their teaching, especially considering the fact that they all were familiar with CLT, which is a precedent of postmethod pedagogy. The participants, however, did not appear to talk about postmethod pedagogy at length because, during the interviews, I asked the following questions: "Have you heard of the term postmethod pedagogy? Do you think postmethod pedagogy will be the order of the day?" Much to my surprise, all the participants' answers touched on most of the postmethod pedagogy strategies mentioned above. They did not, however, spell out exact postmethod pedagogy strategies, and they were not to blame because, as I mentioned earlier in this paper, I did not press for their exact answers for a simple and yet ethical reason that my interview questions must not make them feel they were being detected for a lack of postmethod pedagogy knowledge.

The participants' answers also imply that postmethod pedagogy is shifting from "a banking pedagogy to an empowering pedagogy" (Ko, 2013, p. 91). Their answers emphasized the importance of going beyond linguistic input and incorporate a humanistic stance toward English teaching. In this light, the familiar CLT practices seem to be included within the postmethod pedagogy tenets. The role of English teachers, it appears, is supposed to be "transformative educators" (Albers and Frederick, 2013, p. 233), who manage to imbue learners with an understanding that "... English can be transformed from an object of general significance imposed by society into an object of personal significance" (Tin, 2013, p. 143). In short, the participants had a rather high level of understanding of the term postmethod pedagogy. The fact that they did not tease out each of the ten macrostrategies mentioned above does not mean they did not understand, but that they were being interviewed rather than tested for their knowledge. Their understanding of postmethod pedagogy was induced from their answers.

RQ2: To what extent does such understanding reflect current teaching practices of Thai EFL university lecturers?

The participants' answers to RQ 1 suggest that, when it comes to effective English language teaching, they believed that integrating form, function and meaning of linguistic input is of utmost importance. Further, one of the major roles of a good teacher is to inspire their students. In addition, students play a key role in making teaching a success; they need to be willing to learn and put efforts. Also, the participants cautioned that the search for the best teaching method is futile because there is no magic bullet. That is, incremental development should be emphasized. Equally important is the participants' strong inclination for form-focused teaching; that is, grammar has to be there to begin with. This is in line with Lin's (2013) findings that, "...EFL teachers demonstrate an eminent form-focused inclination in their beliefs and professional knowledge..." (p. 55).

Further, the response patterns clearly suggested that the participants thought postmethod pedagogy aligns with and at the same time extends CLT principles. Even though postmethod pedagogy has a more pronounced political or radical dimension as compared to CLT, it shares much in common with CLT. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants' understanding rightly reflects the trend of English teaching that grammar rules must be embedded in a context of real use. It is most likely that the teaching scenario will not be subject to a pendulum swing as much as a flowing river or river of no return. While the number of participants in this study does not allow for any generalization, suffice it to say that the participants' answers may ring true to many Thai EFL teachers out there.

6. Limitations

This interview study dealt with only six participants. In addition, there were neither classroom observations nor videotaping teaching episodes. Therefore, what actually transpired in their respective classrooms was not verified in this study. The data analysis and discussion that ensued were confined to the participants' scenarios only, thereby making it impractical to generalize the findings to Thai EFL university lecturers at large.

7. Conclusion

This qualitative multiple case interview study revealed that the participants had a sufficient level of understanding of postmethod pedagogy. Their answers stressed the importance of teaching with passion and care. This point in itself transcends the restrictions that usually accompany any teaching methods because it reflects "... an ecological perspective on language teaching [which] encompasses knowledge of teachers as socially-situated beings, in a mutually interactive relationship with their contexts" (Hayes, 2008, p. 472). Their inclinations for practical and realistic ways of teaching lend strong support to the tenets of postmethod pedagogy, especially the ten macrostrategies discussed above. Furthermore, it appears that their differing years of teaching experience, affiliations and gender do not make their answers entirely different from one another. Good teaching is good teaching, no matter what gender, years of teaching and affiliation. Good teaching always focuses on learners and the learning process rather than teachers.

Throughout the interviews the researcher had with the participants, the researcher was in awe by the enormity of their eagerness and sincerity in teaching English to their students. They made him feel that they were engaged in not just a career, but in the kind of nurturing that will stand the test of time. They simply loved what they did. Based on the results of this study, postmethod pedagogy is teaching that aims to improve not only learners' linguistic well-being but, more importantly, their sense of empowerment.

8. Implications of the Study

In view of the findings reported, English language teaching (ELT) professionals may need to rethink the roles of various teaching approaches and methods currently in vogue. One of the practical strategies will be to explore "the development of 'interest' in learning English as a Foreign/Second language" (Tin, 2013). This is because if we are to implement postmethod pedagogy strategies, a good starting point cannot be the teaching method but an exploration of Thai EFL learners' interest in learning English and teachers' understanding of existing teaching methods and approaches.

Moreover, teachers colleges and postgraduate programs offering an advanced degree in English language teaching should seriously consider whether postmethod pedagogy principles and strategies would post any challenges in terms of curriculum design, language testing and teacher development.

References

- Akbari, R., Behzadpoor, F., & Dadvand, B. (2010). Development of English language teaching reflection inventory. *System, 38*, 211-227. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2010.03.003>
- Albers, P., & Frederick, T. (2013). "We teach who we are": A study of two Latino transformative educators.

- TESOL Journal*, 4(2), 233-260. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesj.56>
- Ammar, A. (2008). Prompts and recasts: Differential effects on second language morphosyntax. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(2), 183-210. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168807086287>
- Baker, W. (2012). English as a lingua franca in Thailand: Characterizations and implications. In Baird, R., Kitazawa, M., Lee, H. Y., & Wang, Y. (Eds.), *Englishes in Practice: Working Papers of the Center for Global Englishes* (pp. 18-27). University of Southampton.
- Bell, D. (2003). Method and postmethod: Are they really so incompatible? *TESOL Quarterly*, 37, 325-336. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588507>
- Bell, D. (2007). Do teachers think that methods are dead? *ELT Journal*, 61(2), 135-143. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccm006>
- Breen, M., & Candlin, C. (1980). The essentials of a communicative curriculum in languageteaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 89-112. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/1.2.89>
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1, 1-47. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1>
- Cassidy, S. (2011). Self-regulated learning in higher education: Identifying key component processes. *Studies in Higher Education*, 36, 989-1000. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2010.503269>
- Draper, J. (2012). Reconsidering compulsory English in developing countries in Asia: English in a community of Northeast Thailand. *TESOL Quarterly*, 46, 777-811.
- Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (1998). *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Farrell, S. T., & Bennis, K. (2013). Reflecting on ESL teacher beliefs and classroom practices: A case study. *RELC Journal*, 44(2), 163-176. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688213488463>
- Ganagarajah, S. (2012). Teacher development in a global profession: An autoethnography. *TESOL Quarterly*, 46, 258-279. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesq.18>
- Glassman, M. (2011). Is education ripe for a paradigm shift? The case for the Capability Approach. *Education as Change*, 15, 161-174. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/16823206.2011.563241>
- Hayes, D. (2008). Becoming a teacher of English in Thailand. *Language Teaching Research*, 12(4), 471-494. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168808097160>
- Hymes, D. (1972). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In J. Gumperz, & D. Hymes (Eds.), *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston.
- Khamkhien, A. (2010). Teaching English speaking and English speaking tests in the Thai context: A reflection from a Thai perspective. *English Language Teaching*, 3, 184-190.
- Ko, M. Y. (2013). A case study of an EFL teacher's critical literacy teaching in a reading class in Taiwan. *Language Teaching Research*, 17(1), 91-108. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1362168812457537>
- Kong, S. (2009). Content-based instruction: What can we learn from content-trained teachers' and language-trained teachers' pedagogies? *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66(2), 233-267. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.66.2.233>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2003). Critical language pedagogy: A postmethod perspective on English language teaching. *World Englishes*, 22(4), 539-550. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2003.00317.x>
- Lin, Z. (2013). Language teachers' attitudes, beliefs, professional knowledge, and views on professional development: An exploratory study at a preschool TEFL setting. *TESOL Journal*, 4(1), 55-82. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesj.52>
- Lochland, P. (2013). Moving beyond communicative language teaching: A situated pedagogy for Japanese EFL classrooms. *TESOL Journal*, 4(2), 261-273. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesj.57>
- Lyster, R., & Saito, K. (2010). Oral feedback in classroom SLA: A meta-analysis. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 32(2), 265-302. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0272263109990520>
- Manajitt, P. (2008). The communicative language teaching (CLT) conceptualization and CLT practice of Thai EFL school teachers in Bangkok. Unpublished M.A. thesis. Mahidol University.
- Mahboob, A. (2004). Native or nonnative: What do students enrolled in an intensive English program think? In L.

- D. Kamhi-Stein (Ed.), *Learning and Teaching from Experience: Perspectives on nonnative English-speaking professionals* (pp. 121-147). Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.
- McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 32(2), 207-224. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2004.01.003>
- Mason, J. (2002). *Qualitative researching* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mercer, S. (2011). The beliefs of two expert EFL learners. *Language Learning Journal*, 39, 57-74. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2010.521571>
- Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Nonkukhetkhong, K., Baldauf, R., & Moni, K. (2006). Learner-centeredness in teaching English as a foreign language. Paper presented at 26 Thai TESOL International Conference, Chiang Mai, Thailand.
- Norris, J., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50(3), 417-528. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/0023-8333.00136>
- Pica, T. (2000). Tradition and transition in English language teaching methodology. *System*, 28, 1-18. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X\(99\)00057-3](http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0346-251X(99)00057-3)
- Richards, J. (2013). Curriculum approaches in language teaching: Forward, central, and backward design. *RELC Journal*, 44(1), 5-33. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688212473293>
- Russell, F. (2012). A culture of collaboration: Meeting the instructional needs of adolescent English language learners. *TESOL Journal*, 3(3), 445-468. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/tesj.24>
- Savignon, S. J. (1983). *Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice. Texts and Contexts in Second Language Learning*. Reading, Massachusetts at all: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.
- Tin, T. (2013). Exploring the development of 'interest' in learning English as a foreign/second language. *RELC Journal*, 44(2), 129-146. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0033688213488388>
- Tonzar, C., Lotto, L., & Job, R. (2009). L2 vocabulary acquisition in children: Effects of learning method and cognate status. *Language Learning*, 59(3), 623-546. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9922.2009.00519.x>
- Watkins, D. (2008). Western educational research: A basis for educational reforms in Asia? In O. S. T., D. M. McNerney, A. D. Liem, & A. Tan (Eds.), *What the west can learn from the east: Asian perspectives on the psychology of learning and motivation* (pp. 59-76). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).