

# A PARADIGM SHIFT AWAY FROM METHOD-WISE TEACHING TO STRATEGY-WISE TEACHING: RECONSTRUCTIVE STRATEGY VERSUS COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGY

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## Abstract

This descriptive exploratory survey is a postmethod-oriented endeavor related to the identification and adoption of the most appropriate teaching strategy, from the strategic framework proposed by Waldemar Marton, that is best suited to the Iranian educational system. In doing so, two teaching strategies, i.e., communicative strategy and reconstructive strategy were selected for examination. Specifically speaking, the underlying goal is to diagnose and analyze the characteristic features and particularities of the Iranian educational system through an exploration of the two imperative contextual factors, i.e., learner and teacher. Accordingly, the researchers probe experienced teachers' belief systems to identify the features of the two contextual factors, as well as examine the strategies at issue. The instruments utilized were four multi-purpose questionnaires. The Cronbach's alpha test of reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.78 and 0.67 for the questionnaires of learner and teacher, and 0.71 and 0.63 for the questionnaires of the strategies; thereby signifying the reliability of the survey. A sample population of 40 knowledgeable, practicing, and skilled teachers, both male and female, of the province of Khuzestan, Iran, was recruited on a voluntary basis with an average of at least ten years of teaching experience in public schools. The majority was considered both the criterion and decisive factor in regard to the type of Iranian EFL learners (careful students) and EFL teachers (with poor proficiency and stamina). Conditions included non-intensive teaching curricula and large numbers of classes. The best strategy that responds to these conditions while resulting in the successful development of second language (L2) competence was detected to be the reconstructive strategy.

**Keywords:** Postmethod pedagogy, strategic framework, contextual factors, learner variable, teacher variable, teacher education.

## *Abstracto*

*Esta encuesta descriptiva y de carácter explorador se trata de un esfuerzo orientado al post-método de la identificación y adopción de la estrategia de enseñanza más apropiada basada en la propuesta de Waldemar Marton sobre el sistema de educación iraní. A raíz de esto se eligieron dos estrategias de enseñanza para la examinación: la comunicativa y la reconstructiva. La meta que se mantiene es diagnosticar y analizar los rasgos característicos y las peculiaridades del sistema de educación en Irán a través de una exploración de dos factores contextuales e imperativos: el maestro y el estudiante. Los investigadores involucrados en este experimento pusieron en prueba sus sistemas de*

*creencias para así identificar los rasgos de los dos factores contextuales, como también examinar las estrategias principales. Los instrumentos que se utilizaron fueron cuatro cuestionarios de uso múltiple. La prueba de fiabilidad de Cronbach dio un resultado de un coeficiente de 0.78 y 0.67, en los cuestionarios de maestro y estudiante, y 0.71 y 0.63 en los cuestionarios sobre las estrategias. Una población de 40 maestros de ambos sexos con al menos 10 años de experiencia enseñando en escuelas públicas todos de la provincia de Khuzestan en Irán, fueron reclutados de manera voluntaria para llevar a cabo este experimento. La mayoría fueron considerados como el factor decisivo con relación al tipo de aprendices iraníes de EFL (estudiantes cuidadosos) y maestros de EFL (con poca competencia y resistencia). Las condiciones incluyeron un currículo de enseñanza poco intensivo y grandes números de clase. La mejor estrategia que responde a estas condiciones y al desarrollo exitoso de la competencia de un segundo idioma (L2) se detectó como la estrategia reconstructiva.*

**Palabras clave:** *Post-método de pedagogía, esquema estratégico, factores contextuales, variables de aprendices, variables de maestros, educación de maestros.*

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## **Introduction**

By the end of the twentieth century, mainstream language teaching no longer regarded method as the pivotal dynamic in accounting for success or failure in language teaching. Due to recently critical studies and profound insights in the field of the L2 education enterprise and as a result of the long-felt discontented responses to the

restricted and restricting concept of method, the profession of language teaching has initiated a movement towards a fundamental reshaping and restructuring in organizing principles for L2 teaching / learning and teacher education. Richards and Rodgers (2001) refer to the major criticisms made of approaches and methods as: “top-down criticism, the role of contextual factors, the need for curriculum development processes, the lack of research basis and the similarity of classroom practices” (p. 247). Kumaravadivelu (2003) explicitly indicates that “based on *theoretical*, *experimental*, and *experiential* knowledge, teachers and teacher educators have expressed their dissatisfaction with method in different ways” (p. 29). Explorations by professional figures in the domain of English language teaching have obviously confirmed the fact that even though methodological theorists recommend that practitioners follow a specific path, practicing teachers have been moving in different directions (Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Legutke & Thomas, 1991; Nunan, 1989). These pedagogical arguments have now made us step into the new realm of what Kumaravadivelu (1994) first coined, and was later referred to by Brown (1997) and Richards and Rodgers (2001) as the ‘Post-Method Era’.

In general, despite the fast development and advancement of the profession of L2 teaching, this enterprise is still in the process of maturing. It has gone through numerous changes. Mackey (1965) refers to this subtle point that “while sciences have advanced by approximations in which each new stage results from an improvement, not rejection, of what has gone before, language-teaching methods have followed the pendulum of fashion from one extreme to the other” (p. 138). It seems that although there is no consensus in regard to the fundamental concepts in language teaching over the last few decades (Darian, 1972; Fries, 1945; Hornby, 1950; Howatt, 1984; Kumaravadivelu, 1994; Lado,

1957, 1977; Rivers & Temerley, 1987; Strevens, 1980; Widdowson, 1978), we have witnessed a dependable body of evaluative reflections on the nature and the purview of method in the past few years (Allwright, 1993; Brown, 2001, 2002; Freeman, 1990; Pennycook, 1989; Prabhu, 1990; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Widdowson, 1990). The materialization of these innovative thoughts that reinterpret and refigure the concept of method (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2001; Richards, 1989; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Rivers, 1992; Stern, 1992) culminated in creating an atmosphere forewarning the “uncritical acceptance of untested methods” (Kumaravadivelu, 2001, p. 27).

The most frequently articulated criticism made about the intrinsic limitations of method is that an evident disconnection exists between method, as conceptualized by theorists, and method as carried out by teachers in the classroom. Since “language learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are unpredictably numerous” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 28), no ideal method can address all intervening variables and factors in advance so as to prescribe to teachers how to tackle the challenges they deal with every day of their professional lives. Entangled in a pendulum-like swing, methods are inclined to move from one theoretical extreme to the other. For example, at one time grammatical exercises and tests were recommended as the best solutions to teach, at another, they were given up in support of communicative activities. At one time explicit correction of errors was regarded as appropriate and crucial; at another, it was rejected. These extreme positions in the methods era overemphasize certain dimensions of learning and teaching at the expense of other prominent facets.

The limitations of the concept of method have paved the way for the emergence of the awareness that “the term method is a label without substance” (Clarke, 1983, p.

109), that it has “diminished rather than enhanced our understanding of language teaching” (Pennycook, 1989, p. 597), and that “language teaching might be better understood and better executed if the concept of method were not to exist at all” (Jarvis, 1991, p. 295). The appreciation of this awareness must be actualized in the Iranian educational system, together with all of its relevant intervening factors. The most important point in the realization of such a crucial understanding, and thus adopting appropriate measures, will be through the analysis and scrutiny of the salient aspects of the innovative proposals of the postmethod condition. As a primarily essential endeavor, an extensive critical analysis of two important contextual factors, most often referred to by postmethod advocates as crucial variables, i.e., the learner variable as well as teacher variable, is carried out in this research.

This study conducts an exploratory-analytical survey to examine the effectiveness and appropriateness of two strategies proposed by Marton (1988) within Iranian educational system, i.e., *communicative* strategy and *reconstructive* strategy. Prior to the inquiry over the efficacy of the two strategies, a primary crucial study is also conducted to investigate the characteristics of the two contextual variables most often emphasized in the postmethod paradigm, i.e., *teacher* and *learner*. The major portion of this research project is inevitably assigned to the relatively comprehensive analysis of the contextual factors. Due to the indispensable role relationships that these two important contextual variables play within the framework of a successful postmethod paradigm, exploring the characteristics of these two factors directs us to opt for the implementation of the most appropriate strategy that is best location-sensitive, situation-specific, system-responsive and consequently most successful and realizable in the Iranian educational structure.

## Selected Literature Review

The initial stages of taking purposeful measures in the field of L2 teaching fall completely short of any theoretical ideal. The twentieth century has seen the rise and fall of a variety of methods and approaches from the Series Method (Gouin, 1880) to the Audio-Lingual Method (Fries, 1945), the Designer Methods (Brown, 2001), and later Communicative Language Teaching (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Wilkins, 1976).

During the twentieth century, and until the 1980s, two major method-wise trends can be found to come into view. In the first, theorists adapted premises from various fields of relevant disciplines including linguistics, psychology, and sociolinguistics to design a particular method. The second trend entailed the endeavors of method-developers on the basis of individual philosophies. In particular, in the late 1980s and the beginning of 1990s, educationists, professional L2 researchers and thinkers came to seriously evaluate the limitations of the concept of method, and critique its validity and acceptability. As a consequence of such critical attitudes towards the profession of language pedagogy, innovative paradigms came to light, e.g., Marton's (1988) pedagogically strategic scheme. In accord with Marton's principles, Kumaravadivelu (1994) also introduced his strategic framework in the postmethod era. In order to better track the cycles and changes that the language pedagogy profession has undergone, the researchers have divided the history of English language teaching into three separate categories, i.e., the method-wise era, the calculated-detachment-from-method era, and the postmethod era. The last era is expanded upon due to its immediate relevance to this study.

### *Postmethod Era*

By the end of the 1980s, the profession of language pedagogy had grappled with the endless cycles of life, death, and rebirth (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) through which methods proceed. The gradual emergence of critical thought called the very nature and scope of method into question. Additionally, the appearance of innovative ideas refigured our understanding of method. Since the end of 1980s, language teaching pedagogy had reached the “point of maturity” (Brown, 2001, p. 39) and a “state of heightened awareness” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 32) that it was time to divest itself of the complexity of the never-ending quest for finding the best alternative out of the maze of method. As a result of this new awareness, a marked era emerged, i.e., a “postmethod condition” (Kumaravadivelu, 1994). Among significant available proposals, there exist three important and unique ones in the realm of TESOL. They are introduced in this section.

It can be witnessed that almost all postmethod proposals invoke strategy. Brown (2001, 2002) suggests strategies-based instruction (SBI) closely combined with his particular approach. Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2002, 2003) puts forward a strategic framework, taking in macrostrategies and microstrategies. Marton (1988) also proposes a strategic framework comprising four strategies.

The three proposals being discussed here revolve around the conceptual axis of strategic framework and scheme. Brown (2001), in his book under the title of *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, devotes three chapters to his proposal. The chapters, in order, are *The Present: An Informed ‘Approach’*, *Teaching by Principles*, and *Strategies-based Instruction*. Kumaravadivelu (1994) also proposes a

strategic framework in his famous and thought-provoking article entitled *The Postmethod Condition: (E)merging Strategies for the Second/Foreign Language Teaching* published in *TESOL Quarterly*. Waldemar Marton (1988) suggests another strategic framework and options in his prominent book. The Kumaravadivelu's and Marton's strategic frameworks are touched upon in the following sections.

### ***Strategic Framework: Macrostrategies and Microstrategies***

As stated, the emergence of postmethod has been in response to the inadequacy and the rigidities of the concept of *method*. Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003) explains the postmethod condition by pointing to its three interconnected features. He asserts that the postmethod condition signifies three important characteristics. First and foremost, it signifies a search for *an alternative to method* rather than *an alternative method*. Secondly, the postmethod condition suggests *teacher autonomy*. The last, but not the least, characteristic feature of postmethod pedagogy is *principled pragmatism*. The three major characteristics of postmethod condition outlined above provide the foundation on which a pedagogic and strategic framework is constructed. To put in practical terms, such a framework is supposed to enable teachers to develop the knowledge, skill, attitude and autonomy necessary to develop for themselves a systematic, coherent and relevant alternative to method that is informed by principled pragmatism (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2003).

Having mentioned the principal features of the postmethod condition, Kumaravadivelu (1994) sets forth his “research-based strategies framework” that is “not as a dogma for uncritical acceptance but as an option for critical appraisal in light of new



and expanding experience and experimentation in L2 learning and teaching” (p. 32). The proposed strategic framework consists of macrostrategies and microstrategies.

Macrostrategies are universal tactics derived from theoretical, empirical and experiential knowledge, grounded in classroom-oriented research. In fact, a macrostrategy is a general principle that can assist practitioners in generating their own situation-specific, context-sensitive, need-based microstrategies or classroom techniques. Macrostrategies are realized through microstrategies in an educational setting. Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2003) highlights that macrostrategies may be regarded as theory-neutral and method-neutral. He further asserts that theory-neutral does not mean atheoretical; but rather that the framework is not constrained by the fundamental premises of any specific established theory of language, language learning, or language teaching. In a similar way, method-neutral does not imply methodless; but rather entails a framework that is not based on any of the specific set of theoretical principles or classroom procedures typically allied with any of the particular established language teaching methods.

Kumaravadivelu’s strategic framework comprises ten macrostrategies:

- *Maximize learning opportunities*
- *Minimize perceptual mismatches*
- *Facilitate negotiated interaction*
- *Promote learner autonomy*
- *Foster language awareness*
- *Activate intuitive heuristics*
- *Contextualize linguistic input*
- *Integrate language skills*

- *Ensure social relevance*
- *Raise cultural consciousness*

Kumaravadivelu (2001) enriches the postmethod condition by proposing a three-dimensional pedagogic system, i.e., the pedagogy of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*. Having placed the postmethod condition on the foundation of the three parameters of *particularity*, *practicality* and *possibility*, Kumaravadivelu (2003) stresses that in order to propel the language teaching beyond the restricted and restricting notion of method, “we need a coherent framework that can guide us to carry out the salient features of the pedagogy in a classroom context” (p. 38), and accordingly, he presents one such a framework, a strategic framework. Another practical and possible framework is also proposed by Marton (1988), and is used as a theoretical foundation for the current research. This pedagogically framework is introduced below and two relevant strategies (encompassing macro / micro strategies), i.e., *communicative* and *reconstructive*, which are under the investigative scope of this study, are brought into focus.

### ***Marton’s strategic framework***

According to Marton (1988), “teacher training programmes should provide trainers with some form of theoretical scaffolding or general schema which will help them to plan their teaching at the beginning of their careers and to interpret their experiences in a principled and coherent way” (p. xiii). This schema is directly connected with the essential issue in language pedagogy, i.e., the question of how to make teaching so efficient that it would support only genuine and successful learning experiences.

From a technical standpoint, Marton’s strategic framework, although possessing its own macrostrategies, is consistent with postmethod pedagogy and fundamentally

parallel to its underlying concepts. It is closely connected to the strategy-wise era. With respect to the concept of the *possibility* and *practicality* of a framework, which are also highlighted by Kumaravadivelu (2001), Marton points out *possible options and strategies* (1988) and an *operationally definable strategy* (1988) leading to successful development of L2 competence as well. He also states that after having followed such a strategy-loaded framework, “on the basis of the knowledge provided by the programme and after gaining some practical experience” (p. 2), creative and enlightened teachers will be able to construct their own [ongoing and dynamic] teaching theory. This is precisely consistent with what Kumaravadivelu (2001) explicitly and frequently indicates that the parameter of *practicality* seeks to enable and inspire teachers to theorize from their practice and practice what they theorize.

The principal premise of Morton’s framework is that there are fundamentally and essentially three such options and strategies; listening to or reading texts in the target language (receptive strategy); attempting to communicate via this language (communicative strategy); reproducing, reconstructing and transforming model texts in the L2 (reconstructive strategy). These three successful language learning procedures logically lead to the idea of three basic teaching strategies, i.e., specific strategies consisting of several macrostrategies signified by the advocates of postmethod pedagogy, by which they can be promoted. Marton (1988) further claims that these three strategies can be combined with one another consecutively; the various combinations making a fourth strategy-eclectic one. By considering the parameter of *particularity* as accredited in postmethod era and due to the specific features such as age factor, time-constraints, and level of language study, the receptive and eclectic strategies appear to have been, in

one way or another unsuccessful and impractical in the Iranian educational settings. The other two significant strategies, *communicative* and *reconstructive* strategies, which appear to be more applicable and have more likelihood of being successful in the Iranian educational context (especially in public settings and classrooms, i.e., public schools) are selected and explored in the present study.

### ***Marion's definition of 'strategy'***

The terms *strategy* and *approach* are repeatedly used rather synonymously in contemporary literature on language pedagogy, in the sense of a worldwide regarded procedure, philosophy or way of teaching. Yet the principles in terms of which the particular strategies or approaches are described are not homogeneous since they refer to a variety of important parameters of the language learning / teaching process.

Although all current classifications on defining *strategy* capture some of the crucial issues and options in language pedagogy, they often fail to stress crucial factors that distinguish various possible language teaching procedures. Thus, to Maron, a language teaching strategy is defined as “a globally conceived set of pedagogical procedures imposing a [an operationally] definite learning strategy on the learner directly leading to the development of competence in the target language” (1988, p. 2). These procedures are drawn from a set of correlative, theoretical, empirical and experiential assumptions concerning the nature of language, the nature of L2 development and the functions of language teaching. Since the concept of language teaching strategy is directly associated with the concept of developing competence in L2, it is also connected with the idea of success in gaining a practical command of the target language.

Accordingly, procedures which are sometimes treated as language teaching activities but

which do not aim at the development of a competence in L2 cannot be considered as language teaching strategies.

Having defined the concept of language teaching strategy, Marton (1988) comes to the conclusion that it can be postulated, on the basis of accumulated teaching experience and L2 acquisition research, that there exist only four basic and successful strategies of language teaching, which can be labeled as the *receptive strategy*, the *communicative strategy*, the *reconstructive strategy*, and the *eclectic strategy*. As already stated, the *communicative strategy* and the *reconstructive strategy* are of the major focus of this research.

### ***Communicative strategy***

This strategy is materialized as attempted communication in the target language. The nature of this process is best understood as to consider it fundamentally similar to the process of first language acquisition (Marton, 1988). In order for communicative strategy of language teaching to be actualized, the procedure is to replicate the natural acquisitional process in the classroom in a deliberate and intentional attempt.

The L2 learner at the outset of pursuing this manner of language acquisition / learning attempts not only to understand messages articulated by other speakers but also to generate his / her own utterances in the target language expressing his own meanings, feelings and ideas. The skeleton of this strategy is grounded on the crucial assumption that the L2 learner should be meaningfully exposed to the target language because without a certain amount of meaningful input there cannot be any acquisition at all. In doing so, it seeks to provide some necessary data for the learners to make their own hypotheses about the language.

Marton (1988) assumes two characteristics for communicative strategy of language teaching. The first feature is that learners pursuing this strategy, most often, at least in the beginning stages, produce highly inaccurate or grammatically ill-formed utterances. These utterances are not taken as a sign of poor and unsuccessful learning rather it is considered as an interim phase in the developing spectrum of learner's hypothesizing about the L2. The other attribute is that the L2 learner, by following this strategy, is almost constantly forced, especially in the beginning stage, to use communication strategies.

It should be noted that the concept of the communicative strategy of language teaching is not equivalent to the concept of the communicative approach. The communicative strategy of teaching, as proposed by Marton, is a generically conceived teaching procedure which is supposed to activate a specific, psycholinguistically definable strategy of language acquisition. On the other hand, the communicative approach is a more wide-ranging concept because it covers not only a definite teaching strategy but also a certain cluster of objectives, particular kind of syllabuses and curriculums, a variety of methodological principles and specific teaching techniques.

### ***Reconstructive strategy***

This teaching strategy prompts a distinctive strategy of language learning encompassing a very controlled and gradual development of competence in the target language through the learners' prolonged participation in reconstructive tasks. Reconstructive strategy is depicted as "skill learning, totally compatible with psychological schema of information processing" (Marton, 1988, p. 57). The essential component and integral part of the reconstructive strategy is that activities are always on

the basis of a text, spoken or written, in the target language. The source text provides the learner with the linguistic resources in the form of syntactic structures, lexical items, collocations, phrases, etc. considered necessary for the successful and correct performance of a productive task assigned by the teacher. All types of texts, irrespective of their functions, can serve as the main and source text. An important point to be highlighted is that the task selected has to be connected with the main text, thus, for example, it may involve re-narrating the text, summarizing it, retelling it from a different viewpoint, adopting it to the learner's ideas, thoughts, feelings and experiences, etc.

The underlying principle of such a strategy lies in the fact that on executing the reconstructive activities, the learner has to produce only well-formed sentences and should not employ any communication strategies. In order to pave the ground for successful implementation of this principle, the learners are given all the linguistic items necessary for the successful accomplishment of the task. Another important imperative to follow is that learners, while listening to or reading the source texts, must not only understand them but also pay attention to all the formal features of the target language and attempt to remember them. In this way, a successful realization of a reconstructive activity involves remembering both the surface components and fundamental propositions of the main text.

### ***Concluding remarks***

In regard to the dissatisfaction with the concept of method, it is clear that some approaches and methods are unlikely to be widely adopted. The reason for this is that they are difficult to understand and use, lack practical application, require special training, and necessitate changes in teachers' practices and beliefs (Richards & Rodgers,

2001, p. 247). The Iranian educational system poses no exception. Taking a critical look at existing classroom procedures and activities (including available textbooks), one can unquestionably keep track of ill-utilized and somehow non-labeled method(s) and approach(es) in a typical classroom. With regard to the format of available textbooks and existing teaching methods and approaches, one can clearly witness that a combination of grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods in large measure plus some communicative-loaded tasks prevail in the typical Iranian classroom. Razmjoo (2007) evaluates and compares the degree of fulfillment of communicative language teaching principles of high-school and private school textbooks, and draws several important conclusions. He asserts that on the basis of the results and findings of the study “CLT principles are not utilized in the Iranian high school textbooks” (Razmjoo, 2007, p. 12). He further emphasizes that high school textbooks, which are “are reading and grammar based” (p. 11) do not fit EFL communicative teaching and therefore do not meet language learners’ communicative needs.

Generally speaking, typical Iranian EFL learners are concerned with the following expectations. First and foremost, passing the final exam is considered as an urgent and primary need. Second, preparedness for the university entrance exams is deemed important. Thirdly, there is communication via the English language, which is often ignored, set aside and most often not actualized. The investigators in this study have attempted to use the strategy-wise paradigm to justifiably adopt the most practical macrostrategy, based on Marton’s strategic framework, so as to remove, or at least highly decrease, the existing weaknesses and deficiencies in Iranian educational contexts. Apart from the first two expectations which, there is particular attempt to heighten and intensify



a presence and emergence of the last expectation, i.e., communication via the target language, in a way to suggest psycholinguistically and pedagogically enriched macrostrategies and microstrategies leading to the successful development of L2 competence. In doing so, the researchers intended to appraise the superiority and efficiency of one of the aforementioned (macro) strategies as being best fitted to the current educational context. In particular, the degree of successfulness, practicality and possibility of the techniques suggested by two (macro) strategies is examined.

### **Methodology**

One of the major aims of this descriptive exploratory research is an attempt to have recourse to the experienced teachers' belief system to identify the features of two contextual factors. The information obtained from these two contextual factors guides us to be inclined to safely select an appropriate strategy best fitting to the Iranian educational context and situation. In order to enrich and corroborate the results of the investigation, the possibility and practicality of the two strategies in question, i.e., communicative and reconstructive strategies, are also surveyed.

### ***Research Questions***

The following research questions are put forward:

1. What are the characteristics of an Iranian typical learner in reference to the significant notions such as fragility, inhibition, defensiveness, error-tolerance, risk-taking, and extroversion / introversion?

2. Based on the first question, is an Iranian typical student a *careful* type or an *adventurous* type of learner (Marton, 1988)?
3. What are the characteristics of an Iranian typical teacher in terms of essential notions of *proficiency* and *stamina* (Marton, 1988)?
4. Which strategy (*communicative* or *reconstructive*) best suits the Iranian educational system?

### ***Participants***

A sample population of 40 knowledgeable and skilled teachers was recruited on a voluntary basis with an average of at least ten years of teaching experience in public schools (approximately one-third of the sample had over twenty years' teaching experience). The selected teachers were both male and female teachers of the province of Khuzestan. The participants in this survey were the full-time teaching staff of the Ministry of Education. They all had teaching experience in public guidance and high schools (mostly in high school and pre-university).

### ***Instruments***

The survey instruments utilized in this study were two multi-purpose instruments developed by the researchers. Each instrument encompasses two sub-categories embedded in one questionnaire. The first two embedded categories (which are referred to as the first questionnaire) were designed to examine the contextual variables, i.e., the learner and teacher variables (Appendix 1). The second questionnaire, i.e., the communicative and reconstructive strategies questionnaire) was developed for

examination of the practicality and successfulness of these two strategies so as to complement the findings of the first questionnaire (Appendices 2 & 3).

In order to gather quantitative data out of the questionnaires, a type of psychometric response scale was utilized. Accordingly, each item was assigned a polytomous value and assessed on a four-point Likert scale. The Likert scale employed in this investigation is in a forced choice method in which the middle option of 'neither agree nor disagree or neutral response' is not available. This provides more focused information and assists in interpreting and analyzing the responses more safely and precisely. Respondents are required to indicate the degree of their agreement on a four-point-Likert-type scale by placing a tick in the appropriate column; from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree) for the first questionnaire and from 1 (unsuccessful) to (very successful) for the second questionnaire.

Alpha option (Cronbach's Alpha) provides an effective tool for measuring the internal consistency which is a numerical coefficient of reliability. Schommer (1993) points out that the reasonable internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) can range from 0.63 to 0.85. Calculated by the Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS for windows, version 15.0), the Cronbach's alpha test of reliability yielded a coefficient of 0.78 for the questionnaire of the learner variable (extremely reliable), 0.67 for the questionnaire of the teacher variable (reasonably reliable), 0.71 for the questionnaire of the communicative strategy (highly reliable) and 0.63 for the questionnaire of the reconstructive strategy (reasonably reliable); indicating that the survey was reliable.

### *Materials and Data Collection Procedures*

The components of the instruments of the research, the first questionnaire consists of two main categories, fourteen questions in total. The first part includes ten questions as related to the *learner variable*. The other four concern the *teacher variable*. The items are formulated and constructed on the basis of the specialized materials and in reference to applied resources (Brown, 2001, 2002; Busch, 1982; Ellis, 2008; Ely, 1986a, 1986b; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Guiora, 1972; Heyde, 1979; Marton, 1988; Stern, 1991; Strong, 1983, 1984, among others). The respondents were required to rate their agreement to each statement. The initial part of the first questionnaire deals with the assessment of the notions related to learners' characteristics and personality factors such as language ego (fragility, defensiveness, and inhibition), risk-taking, error-tolerance and concepts of extroversion / introversion. It should be noted that though each learner's characteristic feature is mentioned in a separate statement, all these personality factors are interrelated and interdependent.

The second questionnaire concerns the evaluation of the degree of possibility, practicality and successfulness of two strategies pertinent to the topic under discussion, i.e., communicative strategy and reconstructive strategy. The items are, in fact, the particular teaching techniques or teaching microstrategies unique to each single strategy, extracted from Marton's book. Considering the basic assumptions such as the Iranian educational system, a typical Iranian teacher's stamina and proficiency and also a typical Iranian learner, the participants were required to rate the extent of possibility, successfulness and practicality of each mentioned technique on a four-point scale ranging from 1 (unsuccessful) to 4 (very successful). Once the two questionnaires were

completed, each item was analyzed separately. For further analysis, item responses were summed to create a score for a group of items.

### **Data Analysis**

From a technical standpoint, due to the fact that this study is a descriptive exploratory survey in nature, the most convenient and effective means for analyzing the data is to draw on descriptive statistics. In this way, the obtained data was interpreted and analyzed with the aid of descriptive statistical procedures.

In the first questionnaire, the percentages and frequencies of the initial ten questions are computed to reveal the personality features of the majority of Iranian EFL learners and consequently to identify the particular character in accordance with Marton's (1988) classifications, i.e., *careful* type or *adventurous* type of learners. The researchers have attempted to present an extended definition of these two types of character.

The percentages and frequencies of the other four questions (11-14) are also calculated to verify the characteristics of the majority of Iranian EFL teachers. The first two questions assess the teachers' proficiency and the other two evaluate the characteristics of teachers' stamina in terms of *time* and *energy* utilized for teaching purposes.

The second questionnaire is statistically treated like the first questionnaire in terms of the calculation and analysis of data. It should be remembered that the initial part of the second questionnaire is supposed to assess techniques of communicative strategy and the subsequent section deals with evaluating the techniques of reconstructive strategy.

A crucial point concerning the calculation of obtained data is that, as it is customary, scales are collapsed for ease of reporting (Peacock, 1999; Tercanlioglu, 2005; Tumposky, 1991). As a result, values representing percentages are actually collapsed scores for *Agree* (strongly agree and agree) and *Disagree* (strongly disagree and disagree) for the first questionnaire and also *Successful* (successful and relative successfulness) and *Unsuccessful* (little successfulness and unsuccessful) for the second questionnaire.

## **Results and Discussion**

The present exploratory survey is intended to test one of the most important proposed strategy-wise frame-work in the domain of postmethod pedagogy. Among available considerable proposals, this study lays stress on Marton's strategic framework. Contextual factors play crucial parts in getting a postmethod program successfully actualized. The central features such as being context-sensitive and location-specific demand a focal attention to *particularity* parameter in this paradigm. As a result, first and foremost, this investigation attempts to depict the particularity of two imperative contextual factors, i.e., teacher and learner. The learner variable is studied on the basis of personality factors, as it is the criterion for Marton to place a learner in one of his proposed dichotomous category, *careful* or *adventurous* types of learner. The teacher variable is also examined in terms of two parameters, i.e., *proficiency* and *stamina*. Having explored the learner variable and teacher variable, the researchers conduct a cross-study as well to evaluate the possibility, practicality and successfulness of two strategies, *communicative* strategy and *reconstructive* strategy, within Iranian educational system. The detailed discussion will be presented in the subsequent parts.

### ***Contextual Factors: Learner Variable and Teacher Variable***

Correct recognition of the particularities of the contextual factors is frequently referred to as the decisive factor of success of a strategy-wise plan in the postmethod literature. Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003, 2006) suggests the parameter of *particularity* to expand upon the specificity of a context in which a teaching program is supposed to be conducted. Richards (1990) refers to the situational needs or the context of teaching and Brown (2002) introduces the concept of *diagnosis* in his principled approach to elaborate on the significance of context. Specifically speaking, Marton (1988) maintains that effectiveness of his proposed strategies is just subject to the personality of learner and the teaching context. In this way, it seems sensible to identify the personality of an Iranian typical learner and then the variable of teacher to have a better understanding of the existing teaching context in our country.

#### ***Learner Variable***

Marton (1988) introduces two basic types of learner, the *careful* type and *adventurous* type of learner. The most important point to be noted is that he demonstrates these learners from a general perspective and discusses them in terms of dichotomous contrasting pairs. He tends to refer to an adventurous type of learner within the scope of affective domain by resorting to notions such as relatively permeable language ego, risk-taking, extroversion, sociable, large emphatic capacity and certainly not very ethnocentric. On the other hand, the careful type is characterized by traits and tendencies opposite to the adventurous type.

It should be noted that Marton represents these two types of learner from a general standpoint and in a broad sense. He does not elaborate upon the issue of personality factor, and specifically affective domain, in a planned and systematic manner. For this reason, from a research-based viewpoint, and exactly due to the immediate relevance of the present study, the researchers find it highly urgent to go through these traits in a more systematic way to better capture the facets of affective domain. In this way, based on close examination and study of specialized and applied resources (Brown, 2001, 2002; Busch, 1982; Ellis, 2008, Ely, 1986a, 1986b; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Guiora, 1972; Heyde, 1979; Marton, 1988; Strong, 1983, 1984; Stern, 1991; among others), the investigators expand and enrich the notions of *adventurous* and *careful* types of learner so as to better judge upon the relative identification of the character of learners.

The personality traits examined in this study are as follows (See appendix 1 for the initial part of the first questionnaire – learner variable):

- Language ego involvement / permeability (its important facets are sense of *fragility*, sense of *inhibition* and sense of *defensiveness* while learning a new language) – Questions 1, 2 and 3.
- Risk-taking – Question 4
- Error-tolerance – Questions 5 and 6
- Self-confidence – Question 7
- Extroversion / Introversion – Questions 8, 9 and 10.



Table 4.1: The summarized results of the beliefs in personality traits of the majority of Iranian EFL learners

Personality Traits		Predominantly careful	Predominantly adventurous
Language ego involvement (permeability)	Sense of Fragility	82.5	17.5
	Sense of Inhibition	90	10
	Sense of Defensiveness	70	30
	Mean	80.83	19.17
Risk-taking		72.5	27.5
Error-tolerance			
	Sense of fear and hesitation (Aspect A)	82.5	17.5
	Apprehension of being humiliated and ridiculed (Aspect B)	77.5	22.5
	Mean	80	20
Self-confidence		80	20
Extroversion/Introversion			
	Individual work	50	50
	Non-argumentative position	70	30
	Difficulty in expressing thoughts	77.5	22.5
	Mean	65.83	34.17
<b>Total Sum &amp; Mean</b>		Sum = 379.16 Mean = 75.83	Sum = 120.84 Mean = 24.16

- Note: Values represent percentages.

From a holistic point of view, over 75 % (a high percent) of teachers implied that the Iranian EFL learners have characteristic features of a careful type of learner and as result are classified in this personality category (Table 4.1).

### ***Teacher Variable***

This variable is attached by great importance in the postmethod pedagogy because it plays a vital role in a successfully actualized post-method program. Proposing the postmethod pedagogy, Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003) extends the implications of this paradigm even to the field of teacher education. Postmethod teachers should be autonomous, in a sense that they should possess a sensible extent of competence and confidence to construct and implement their own theory of practice that is sensitive, specific and responsive to the particularities of their educational context. Kumaravadivelu (2001) refers to ‘teacher autonomy’ as defining the heart of postmethod pedagogy.

Identifying the characteristics of an Iranian typical learner is one of the most crucial particularities the teacher should be aware of and acquainted with. On the other hand, a postmethod proposal should be cognizant of the characteristics of the teachers available in the educational settings. Generally speaking, Marton (1988) explores the characteristics of the teachers from two important interrelated viewpoints. The first element refers to teacher proficiency, that is, whether a teacher is high-proficient or not. The second one is about teacher’s stamina. The notion of stamina can be better understood through two interconnected concepts of *time* and *energy* a teacher employs for teaching purposes. In other words, first, the amount of time teachers allot in advance to study enough necessary sources, techniques and strategies to utilize in the classroom and get themselves prepared beforehand. Second, the amounts of energy teachers spend in the classroom to patiently follow up the actual matter of teaching in general and correct the students in particular.

Four questions were developed to survey the characteristic features of the majority of Iranian EFL teachers (See appendix 1 for the second part of the first questionnaire – teacher variable). Since the concept of proficiency is subtle and important, the researchers designed two questions to study this attribute. As a result, questions ten and eleven were devoted to this concept and their total scales were taken as indicator of teacher’s proficiency. The two last questions (thirteen and fourteen) surveyed the feature of stamina with the aid of its integral notions which were time and energy. The teachers’ responses to these four questions are in fact reflective assertions of what they figure out as real and true within the educational setting in reference to the abilities of teachers. Besides, they are actually invisible confessions teachers make, possessing clear and important signals for teacher education programs and policies in our country.

Table 4.2: The summarized results of the beliefs in attributes of the majority of Iranian EFL teachers

<b>Attributes</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Low</b>
<b>Proficiency</b>		
Proficiency in general	17.5	82.5
Proficiency in particular/practice	32.5	67.5
Mean	<b>25</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Stamina</b>		
Time	27.5	72.5
Energy	42.5	57.5
Mean	<b>35</b>	<b>65</b>

\* Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the whole number and thus add up to 100.

Three-fourths of the teachers believed that the majority of Iranian EFL teachers have low proficiency in English language. The findings of this part, place the teacher in the category that Marton tends to call 'teacher with poor proficiency'. As one of the most important implications of this study, existence of teachers with low proficiency or in other words educating and training teachers with poor proficiency definitely do not seem to be an index of a successful educational program. This fact should be taken into account that there is in fact weaknesses and shortcoming in the teacher education and training program in Iran. These limitations, weak points and inadequacies should be diagnosed and removed as soon as possible. Without doubt, the Achilles' heel of an educational system is to rely on the teachers with poor and low proficiency. The diagnosis of the deficiencies and inefficiencies of the educational system, and specifically the teachers as leading figures, is a must in a remedial and constructive plan. 65 percents of respondents believed that the majority of Iranian EFL teachers have poor stamina. It is another challenging issue that needs to be considered carefully in a teacher education program. In sum, the majority of respondents confirmed the fact that most of the Iranian EFL teachers seem to be with low proficiency and poor stamina (Table 4.2).

### **Several Contextual Factors**

The two above examined contextual factors demanded such a kind of thorough analysis and exploration. This is so much due to the complex and multi-faceted nature of these factors. The other relevant contextual dynamics are the intensity of teaching, size of

classes, and level of language study. On the basis of a general observation of a typical classroom, it is not hard to capture appropriate information regarding these factors.

Specifically speaking, Marton (1988, p. 22) considers a program as an intensive teaching course in which from twenty to over thirty hours per week are assigned to classroom instruction. Since in the Iranian educational system the language teaching program has been designed for a long-term period, it is evident that the existing curriculum has been developed to seek a non-intensive teaching course. As for the size of the classes, it seems that we, with about over twenty students in a typical classroom, have large classes. The level of language manipulated for teaching, and accordingly corresponding to the level of language utilized for language learning, seems to range from beginning to optimistically (upper-) intermediate.

**Table 4.3: Learner and contextual factors marked with respect to favoring the choice of the communicative & reconstructive strategies and also in Iranian educational system**

Factors	communicative strategy	reconstructive strategy	Iranian educational setting
<b>A. Learner factors</b>			
1. Personality/affective variables (a). the careful type (b). the adventurous type	- +	+ 0	+ -
2. Age (a). children (b). adults	$\left. \begin{matrix} + \\ + \\ - \end{matrix} \right\}$ (depending on personality type)	+ +	+ +
3. Aptitude (a). high-aptitude learners (b). low-aptitude learners	+ 0	+ +	+ +
<b>B. Contextual factors</b>			
1. Intensity of teaching (a). intensive teaching (b). non-intensive teaching	+ -	+ +	- +
2. Size of class (a). small classes (b). large classes	$\left. \begin{matrix} + \\ - \\ + \end{matrix} \right\}$ (depending on whether group work is used)	+ +	- +
3. Level of language study (a). beginning learners (b). intermediate and advanced learners	+ +	+ +	+ +
4. Teacher characteristics (a). teacher with poor proficiency (b). teacher with poor stamina	- 0	+ +	+ +

In the above table, the plus sign marks a given factor as positively recommended, i.e., as distinctly favoring the choice of that strategy; the minus sign marks it negatively as being counter-indication concerning the implementation of that strategy; and zero marks the factor as neutral.

By comparing the proposed outline of the identified features of relevant variables in the Iranian educational system with the characteristics of the two sketches of both communicative and reconstructive strategies, the reconstructive strategy appears to best suit Iranian educational system (Table 4.2). Taking the factors of language aptitude, age and level of language study as being generally equal in both strategies, the crucial roles of learner, teacher, intensity of teaching and size of classes come to shape the focus of a critical study. The factors of the intensity of teaching and size of classes are among the principles determined and developed by the responsible authorities in the ministry of education and offered within a nation-wide curriculum. Those who devise policies for the profession of language teaching in the country generally establish the limits and specifications of these factors beforehand. Thanks to the long-run teaching program, continuously from guidance school to the end of pre-university, and average number of students attending a class, it is so much obvious that Iranian educational system seeks to pursue a non-intensive teaching with a large class in terms of the number of students. That is why the researchers found it crucial and vital to go through the other factors, i.e., teacher and learner variables to be reasonably identified so that they can safely judge upon the appropriateness of one of the strategies to be utilized. As a result, in regards to the couple influential and vital contextual factors, that is, teacher and learner, the adoption of the reconstructive strategy (or even would-be proposed strategies sharing common characteristics with the reconstructive strategy) is in fact a strategic and technical step in the process of decision-and-policy making toward developing a programmatic and speculative plan for teaching English language in the country. The diagnosis of the characteristics of the majority of Iranian EFL learners and most of the

Iranian EFL teachers reveals the fact that a communicative strategy in particular (and communicative approach in general) does not seem to be a successful program in the country on the basis of the current conditions.

**Table 4.4: Frequencies and cumulative percent on the success of each technique (communicative/reconstructive strategy)**

Items (Techniques)	Communicative Strategy		Reconstructive Strategy	
	S	U	S	U
1	25	75	47.5	52.5
2	7.5	92.5	57.5	42.5
3	10	90	60	40
4	7.5	92.5	77.5	22.5
5	10	90	90	10
6	27.5	72.5	75	25
7	75	25	55	45
8	65	35	70	30
9	32.5	67.5	62.5	37.5
10	60	40	72.5	27.5
<b>Total sum &amp; Mean</b>	Sum = 320 Mean = 32.0	Sum = 680 Mean = 68.0	Sum = 667.5 Mean = 66.75	Sum = 332.5 Mean = 33.25

Note: Values represent percentages. Percentages have been rounded to the whole number and thus add up to 100. S=collapsed scores for relative successfulness and successful; U=collapsed scores for little successfulness and unsuccessful.

On the basis of the total score, 68 % of the respondents pointed out the fact that, at least with regard to the present condition, the specific techniques of communicative strategy won't be practical, possible and successful in the Iranian educational setting. On the other hand, 66.75 % of the respondents believed that the above mentioned techniques of reconstructive strategy will be practical, possible and successful in the Iranian educational setting (Table 4.4).



Considering the obtained results out of the second questionnaire, not only do the results complement the findings of the first questionnaire but also warrant the prospective use of reconstructive teaching framework as an appropriate strategy. The results indicate that over 66 % of practicing teachers found the reconstructive techniques possible, practical and successful to be implemented in the classroom with regards to the current condition of the Iranian educational setting, considering all intervening variables (teacher, learner and whole educational system). On the other hand, just 32 % of the teachers stated that communicative teaching techniques are appropriate, practical and successful in the educational system. A high percent of agreement with the practicality and successfulness of reconstructive techniques and tasks is the other side of the coin of this investigation that guarantees the success of this teaching program.

### **Conclusion**

The core function of this study was a postmethod-oriented endeavor to determine the most appropriate teaching strategy out of the strategic framework proposed by Marton (1988), best suiting Iranian educational system. In doing so, two teaching strategies, i.e., communicative strategy and reconstructive strategy were selected to be investigated. The pedagogically ultimate purpose of both strategies is maintained to be similar. They both set up a process through which L2 competence is supposed to successfully develop. The superiority of any of them over another is entirely subject to the particularities of the context. The particularity of the context is interconnected with the parameters of possibility and practicality as well. To put another way, in case the contextual factors are most consistent with the particularities of a particular teaching/learning program and

proposal, the program will successfully be possible and practical to get well actualized and accordingly develop the learner's L2 competence.

Specifically speaking, in parallel with the core function of the study, the underlying objective this study sought to accomplish was to diagnose and analyze the characteristic features and particularities of the Iranian educational system through fairly comprehensive exploration of two imperative contextual factors, that is, learner and teacher. This critical diagnosis of the distinctive features of the existing teaching/learning context is precisely and hypothetically consistent with the parameter of *particularity* in the postmethod paradigm. The possibility and practicality of an educational scheme will be in fact dependent upon the appraisal and identification of the particularities. As a result, the focal and main line of this exploratory-analytical research was assigned to the quest for assessment and detection of the particularities (characteristic features of contextual elements).

Bearing in mind that, on the basis of dependable theoretical, experimental, and experiential knowledge, Marton had already specified conditions and factors required for adoption and implementation of a particular strategy, this investigation adopted a procedure to identify the context-specific and local-sensitive conditions and factors existing in Iranian educational system. The results and findings indicated that reconstructive strategy mostly interconnects with the current particularities of the educational context. For example, the majority of Iranian learners were found to be classified as careful-type learner. Besides, most of the teachers were found to have low proficiency and poor stamina. The reconstructive strategy seems to be the best strategy that can be initiated and proceed gradually and successfully in a way it compensates the

weaknesses of most practicing teachers and be in harmony with the general psychological make-up of the majority of the students.

In closing, primarily in line with the postmethod paradigm seeking to propose and adopt a practical and possible approach on the basis of the realities and particularities of the teaching and learning context, and secondly based on the idea that now it is high time to appreciate the postmethod condition, the researchers intended to carry out a research to work out a postmethod scheme so as to judge upon the selection and adoption of a teaching strategy in a comparative analysis of two strategies proposed by Marton. Moving along a postmethod course to reach a logical and practical conclusion in order to prefer employment of one strategy, the researchers knowingly intended to take a calculated and research-oriented measure to theoretically keep pace with the sharp and heightened awareness currently prevailing in the profession of language teaching pedagogy, that is, postmethod condition, and also make an in-depth and detailed analysis of the teaching/learning context in the Iranian educational setting so as to capture invaluable information for the success of English language teaching/learning program in the country. This theoretically heightened awareness concerning postmethod condition as introduced briefly in the section of literature review as well as tailoring precisely the facets of this paradigm in practice as actualized through the body of this research are in fact a must to be grasped by policy makers and authorities in the domain of Iranian educational system and by the practicing teachers as well. Considering the majority as the criterion and decisive factor, with respect to the type of learners (careful students) and teachers (with poor proficiency and stamina), a non-intensive teaching curriculum and large amount of classes, the best strategy that can correspond with all these conditions

and yet result in the successful development of L2 competence was detected to be reconstructive strategy.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

One of the most significant implications of this research lies in the analysis of more areas of the teaching and learning context. In order for a teaching / learning scheme to be successful, dimensions of particularity, possibility and practicality of the educational system must be explored. First, researchers play a crucial part in the actualization of a practical postmethod program by conducting pedagogically in-depth investigation of the available context to scrutinize the central components and relevant aspects of the educational setting. Studies as such establish the theoretical and curricular scaffolding of a teaching / learning program via which postmethod teachers and postmethod learners know evidently their duties and responsibilities. Second, practicing teachers play a significant role in the successful manifestation of the postmethod pedagogy. Specifically speaking, a teacher has to do action research (mini-research) to attain required information concerning the characteristics of the learners (at least students of the context in which he/she teaches), weaknesses and shortcomings of the available syllabuses, short-term and long-term educational objectives, educational macro/micro-policies and all relevant minor and major effective factors. In this way, teachers must reflect upon issues in the social, cultural and political context in which teaching/learning occurs. Teachers' ideas and information developed from critical observation, experimental mini-research, experiential knowledge, rational evaluation and analysis of

the pertinent intervening factors in the education should be scanned, rescanned and tested through the practice of the teaching.

Teachers and learners are vital contextual variables in an educational setting that have not been yet meticulously and appropriately investigated with respect to the particular context in which they practice. This study attempted to step onto this ignored filed of study and explore and analyze Iranian typical teachers and learners in a systematic manner. This exploratory investigation in fact tried to open a new horizon in this regard so as to let the particularities of these contextual factors be better discovered and grasped. This pointed and intelligent awareness of the context aids teachers and learners know their weaknesses and deficiencies so that they can take planned actions and devise remedial sketches to guarantee their success in the profession of language pedagogy. On the other hand, policy-makers and authorities in the educational profession can take best advantage of solid theoretical and research-based findings out of critical studies of the teaching/learning contexts as such to consciously develop a practical curriculum in proportion to the particularities of the educational setting.

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