An Investigation into Teachers' Perception of (Postmodern) Postmethod Pedagogy

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Article Info

Article type:

Research Article

ABSTRACT

This study investigates into teachers' perceptions in order to find out whether they are thinking beyond the concept of method. Specifically speaking, the underlying goal is to diagnose whether teachers are context sensitive and are aware of the uniqueness of each specific teaching-learning context, that is, whether they are able to differentiate between the different requirements of one teaching context from another. Instead of exploring teachers' views on the term's method, postmethod, which is a dominant pattern in the literature of postmethod studies, teachers' perceptions of postmethod teaching strategies (Stern, 1992) were explored across two proficiency levels of elementary and intermediate as a kind of contextual variable. To this end, a questionnaire tapped into three teachers' perceived effectiveness of each of the two distinctive strategies of each dimension across two levels of intermediate and elementary. The statistical analysis didn't reveal any significant difference in teachers' perceptions across the two proficiency levels. This indicated that teachers didn't consider the requirements of context but rather they adhered to just one method at both levels. Therefore, these teachers were not thinking beyond the framework of the method concept and were not oriented toward postmethod pedagogy in their thoughts.

Introduction

For many years, the obsession of language teaching professions has been to find the right method. It was assumed that some breakthrough in linguistics or psycholinguistics would eventually unlock the secrets which could be incorporated into a new super-method that would solve the language teaching problems once and for all. That's why there have been successions of methods achieving recognition and fading away one after another (Brown, 2002). This period of language teaching known as the method era is directly linked to an era of 'modernism' and objectivity in the realm of science which sought to prescribe the best and universal method of teaching English for all learners around the globe assuming that a 'one-size-fits-all cookie-cutter approach' or 'a superior' method benefits all, regardless of how it is subjectively perceived by the different teachers (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009).

Gradually with the genesis of postmodernism and its endorsement of a world with no center, relativism and subjectivism viewpoints cast doubt on the deluding ideas of the best, the perfect and so the notion of expertise. Accordingly, language teaching like other fields of science was influenced by the tenets of postmodernism so that the concept of method went under attack for its positivist, progressivist, and patriarchal view of linear development. Instead, postmethod pedagogy was offered in language teaching as an alternative to the method rather than an alternative method (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009). Some of the leveled criticisms at the concept of the method are as follows:

- The transmission model of education in method-based pedagogy prevents fruitful interplay between theory and practice as well as the development of self-reflective practices (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009).
- Methods and approaches ignore a careful consideration of the context in which teaching and learning occur (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009).
- It is very difficult for teachers to practice method in ways that precisely reflect his underlying principles of the method since many of the distinctions used to contrast methods do not exist in actual practice (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009).
- Methods represent a relatively fixed combination of language teaching beliefs (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009).

Postmethod pedagogy derived from postmodernism rejects the notion of good or bad methods and the concept of the best method that can be generalized and appropriate for all contexts (Canagarajah, 1999). Instead, it treats each context as unique and one of a kind which can't be compared with other cases. In contrast to the transmission model of education in method-based pedagogy in which researchers transfer knowledge of a particular method to teachers who apply them in class, postmethod pedagogy puts the teacher at the center of the language learning and teaching process. It values teachers' beliefs, experiences, and knowledge to encourage them to be autonomous, reflective, and analytic teachers who could theorize from their practices and practice

from their theories. Indeed, rather than assigning prescribed monolith categories and procedures determined by others outside the classroom context, theory should arise from practical experience of involving in a particular teaching-learning context because it is in the analysis of data as emerging from the context that understanding develops (Canagarajah,1999).

As it is evident, apart from considering teachers as both theorizers and practitioners, postmethod pedagogy also sets a high premium on the role of context with its entire variety of elements including particular teacher, particular learner, particular institution, race, gender, and so forth. Therefore, considering the myriad factors comprising a given language classroom, the notion of finding the best method that can be appropriate for every context with its many variables is an unreachable goal.

After the widespread criticism of the method concept and the advent of postmethod era and the proposal of postmethod pedagogy as its direct consequence, numerous researches were undertaken in the field of language teaching. These studied postmethod pedagogy from different perspectives. Allwright (2003), Brown (2002), Kumaravadivelu (2003), and Stern (1992) were the first scholars who in their attempts to find an alternative to the method, developed guiding principles within which teachers could develop their own context-specific knowledge and techniques. Some scholars like Bell (2003), Hashemi (2011), and Shakouri (2012a) studied the postmethod theory from a different critical position and put up the argument that method and postmethod are just the same. Others, rather than offering any suggestion or argument, selected teachers as the main variable of their study and aimed to explore their beliefs or practices or both of them with respect to postmethod pedagogy. One of these studies which was the main impetus for carrying out the present research, for instance, was carried out by Bell (2007) who explored teachers' views toward the notion of method, the death of methods and, postmethod. The result of this study revealed some striking realities bearing some relation to the purpose of this study that it is worth elaborating on. Bell (2007) made use of two direct sources of data collection and two indirect sources of data which are as follows respectively: Interviews about the concept of method, discussion board postings on the topic of post-method, language learning/ teaching autobiographies, teaching journals.

The data sources indicated that most of the teachers described their teaching methodology as eclectic and used methods in connection with notions of eclecticism, teacher autonomy, and context sensitivity. Also, they considered postmethod as the same as eclecticism since it confirms their already established practice of eclecticism (Bell, 2007).

According to the above-mentioned findings, Bell (2007) concluded that "teachers have always been beyond methods … Teachers seem to be aware of both the usefulness of methods and the need to go beyond them" (Bell, 2007: 143).

Inspired by this conclusion, the present study took some steps forward in order to do a more comprehensive investigation on this issue so as to address and fill the identified gaps in Bell's study (2007). To this end, instead of exploring teachers' views on the terms like method, postmethod and getting entangled in the long discussion of what teachers are really implying by those broad terms,

two proficiency levels were selected as a kind contextual variables across which teachers' perceived effectiveness of Stern's (1992) postmethod teaching strategies (intralingual- crosslingual dimension, implicit-explicit dimension, and analytic-experiential dimension) were explored to see whether the teachers differentiate between elementary and intermediate levels so the following research question was formulated:

To what extent do teachers' perceptions of postmethod teaching strategies differ across two proficiency levels?

Design and procedure of the study

This is a survey method of study which employed a questionnaire to tap into teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of each of the two distinctive strategies of each dimension across two levels of intermediate and elementary (Appendix A). To construct the questionnaire and elicit teachers' perceived effectiveness of each strategy, Allen's et al. (1984) five categories of Colt observation scheme were employed. To explore teachers' perceived effectiveness of the explicit-implicit dimension of strategies in relation to each other across two proficiency levels of elementary and intermediate, the four categories of technique set forth by Stern (1992) were employed in constructing the questionnaire. And in order to find out about teachers' perceived effectiveness of intralingual- crosslingual strategies in relation to each other, kinds of statement were constructed.

For the analysis of the questionnaire, each item was rated on a 1-5 agree-disagree response scale, and each degree of agreement was given a numerical value from one to five. Finally, the obtained data from the two proficiency levels were compared to find out whether there were any variations in teachers' perceptions between the two levels. To this end, the percentage of perceived effectiveness of each distinct feature of an individual category related to each dimension is reported in a table. Also, the average percentage of perceived effectiveness of features of each strategy in relation to the perceived effectiveness of features of its distinct strategy along a dimension is included in this table. Then the teachers' perceived effectiveness of each dimension of strategies was compared between the two levels by providing figures.

Results of Teachers' Perceived Effectiveness of Analytic-Experiential Dimension of Strategies

As shown in Table 1, teacher 1 and teacher 2 considered analytic strategies more effective than experiential strategies at both levels, but teacher 3 treated both kinds of strategies in terms of the same effect at intermediate level. However, they all believed that analytic strategies were more effective in elementary levels than intermediate levels and experiential strategies were more effective in intermediate levels than elementary levels. This contrast is depicted more transparently in Figure 1.

Table 1. Percentage of teachers' perceived effectiveness of analytic-experiential strategies in elementary and intermediate levels

Perceived effectiveness of analytic – Experiential categories features		Teachers of & levels	Elementary levels			Intermediate levels		
			T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T3
Participant organization	An	Whole class activity & Individuals work	80%	80%	40%	80%	40%	40%
	Ex	Group work	20%	20%	60%	20%	60%	60%
Content	An	Focus on language	60%	60%	40%	60%	40%	60%
	Ex	Other topics	40%	40%	60%	40%	60%	40%
Content controls by class	An	Teacher	40%	80%	60%	40%	40%	60%
	Ex	Teacher-student &Student	60%	20%	40%	60%	60%	40%
Information gap	An	Giving predictable information	100%	80%	60%	80%	80%	40%
	Ex	Giving unpredictable information	0%	20%	40%	20%	20%	60%
	An	Request pseudo information	80%	80%	60%	40%	80%	40%
	Ex	Request genuine information	20%	20%	40%	60%	20%	60%
Reaction to code or message	An	Reaction to code	40%	100%	80%	40%	40%	60%
	Ex	Reaction to message	60%	0%	20%	60%	60%	40%
Analytic strategy by teacher in elementary & intermediate levels			66.66%	80%	56.66%	56.66%	53.33%	50%
Experiential strategy by teacher in elementary & intermediate levels			33.34%	20%	43.34%	43.34%	46.67%	50%
Total analytic strategy in elementary & intermediate levels			67.77%			53.33%		
Total experiential strategy in elementary & intermediate levels			32.23%			46.67%		

Notes: An: analytic; Ex : experiential; T: teacher

Figure 1: Comparison of percentage of teachers' perceived effectiveness of analytic-experiential strategies between elementary and intermediate levels

■ Elementary levels ■ Intermediate levels
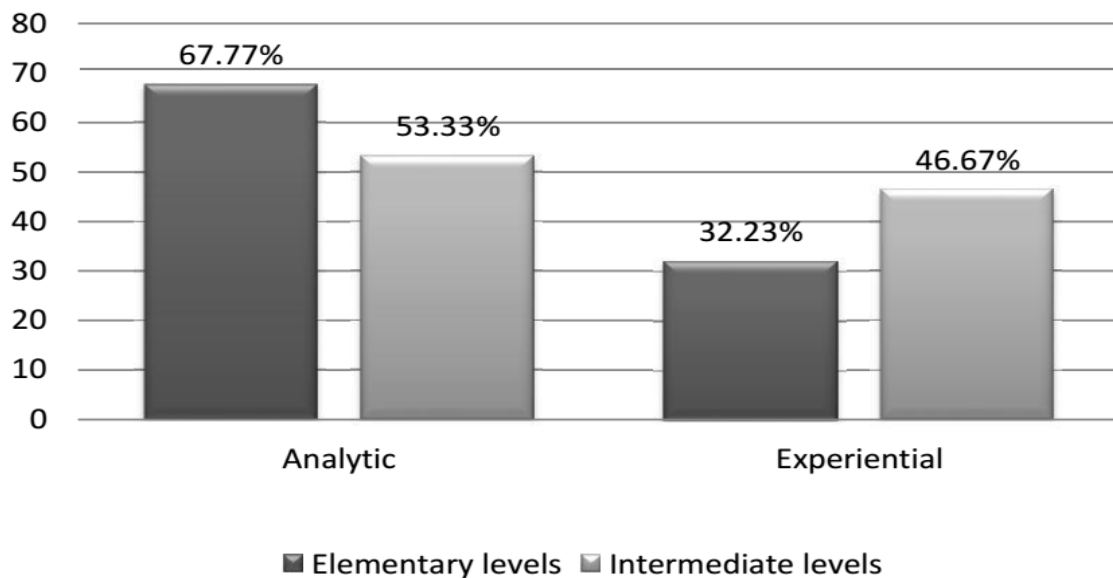
As it is evident in Figure 1, Teachers perceived analytic strategy as more effective at the elementary level than at the intermediate level. However, they perceived experiential strategy as more effective at the intermediate level than at the elementary level.

Results of Teachers' Perceived Effectiveness of Explicit-Implicit Strategies

Table 2 depicts the proportion of individual teachers' perceived effectiveness of each explicit technique to each implicit technique at the elementary and intermediate levels. It reports on each teacher's perceived effectiveness of explicit strategy in proportion to implicit strategy in two proficiency levels. Also, it shows the total ratio of perceived effectiveness of the explicit strategy to implicit strategy at elementary and intermediate levels.

Table 2 indicates that all three teachers regarded explicit strategy as more effective than implicit strategy at both levels. While teachers 2 and 3 believed that explicit strategy had the same effect on both levels, for teacher 1 explicit strategy was more effective at the intermediate level than at elementary levels. While teachers 2 and 3 believed that implicit strategy had the same effect on both levels, in teacher 1's viewpoint implicit strategy was more effective at the elementary level rather than at intermediate levels. Figure 4.4 demonstrates this interaction between proficiency levels and teachers' perceptions of explicit-implicit strategies.

Table 2: Percentage of teachers' percieved efffectiveness of ecplicit-implicit strategies in elementary and intermedaite levels

Perceived effectiveness of explicit – implicit techniques / Teachers & levels		Elementary levels			Intermediate levels		
		T1	T2	T3	T1	T2	T
Metacognitive techniques	Ex	80%	100%	80%	80%	100%	80%
Implicit Audiolingual technique	Im	20%	0%	20%	20%	0%	20%
Cognitive technique	Ex	40%	80%	80%	80%	80%	80%
Experiential technique	Im	60%	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
Explicit strategy by teacher in elementary & intermediate levels		60%	90%	80%	80%	90%	80%
Implicit strategy by teacher in elementary & intermediate levels		40%	10%	20%	20%	10%	20%
Total explicit strategy in elementary & intermediate levels		76.66%			83.33%		
Total implicit strategy in elementary & intermediate levels		23.33%			16.66%		

Notes: Ex: explicit; Im: implicit; T: teacher

Figure 2: Comparison of percentage of teachers' perceived effectiveness of explicit-implicit strategies between elementary and intermediate levels
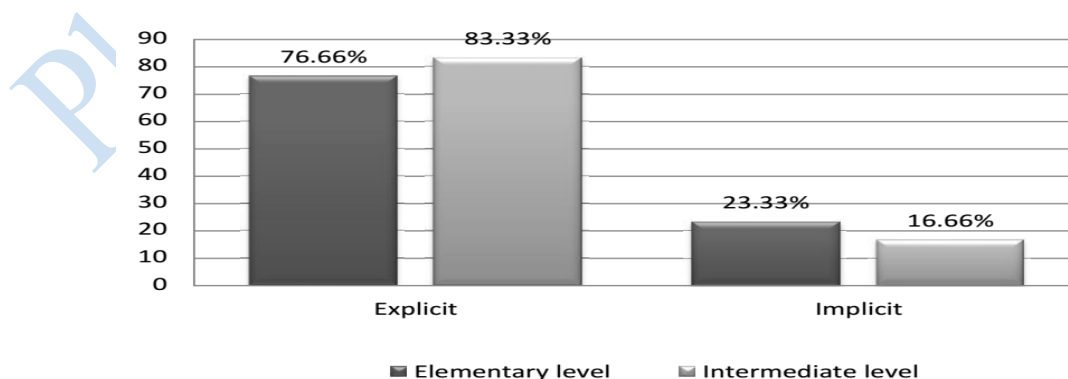
As it is seen, Teachers perceived explicit strategy as more effective at the intermediate level than at the elementary level. However, they perceived implicit strategy as more effective at the elementary level than at the intermediate level.

Results of Teachers' Perceived Effectiveness of Intralingual-Crosslingual Strategies

Since all three teachers agreed on the issue that only the English language should be employed at both levels and they disagreed on the usage of the native language along with the English language at either level, no comparison was possible.

The Variance Analysis of Teachers' Perceptions across Two Proficiency Levels

To explore the statistical significance of the correspondence between teachers' perceptions of postmethod teaching strategies and proficiency levels, the univariate analysis of variance was employed through Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) software. The variance analysis didn't result in a significance between teachers' perception and proficiency levels (df=1, $p> 0.05$).

Discussion & Conclusion

Teachers didn't make a distinction with regard to three dimensions of Stern's postmethod teaching strategies (intralingual- crosslingual dimension, implicit-explicit dimension, and analytic-experiential dimension), across two proficiency levels, rather, they treated them as the same in both proficiency levels. In contrast to what was found in Bell's (2007) study, the finding of the present study confirmed that teachers didn't take the contextual variables into consideration and were not context sensitive. Rather teachers just favored a certain method and preferred the same style of teaching in both proficiency levels, in other words, they didn't go beyond methods. The finding implies that teachers didn't have any postmethod orientation in their perceptions considering the fact that in this study teachers' perceptions were explored across the contextual factor of proficiency level.

Running through literature in the field, it seems that a revolution had swept into the language classrooms. However, whether or not such changes occur in the classroom is a matter of empirical investigation rather than theoretical speculation (Nunan, 1987). The result testified that postmodern ethos and its emergence as postmethod in language teaching has just been in the theoretical and academic level of knowledge. The development of theories like beyond methods, focus on styles and strategies, multiple intelligences, chaos/complexity theory, and critical theory, all bear witness to the aforementioned claims that postmodern and postmethod speculations have swept into the language teaching profession (Fahim & Pishgadam, 2009). But in reality, it has no manifestations in the teachers' perceptions. Indeed, it is the modern ethos that in the form of method-based education has permeated into the actual teaching-learning context as the most dominant reality for a long time. In this ethos, there is no room for autonomic and critical thinking and all sections of the centralized education should conform to a perceived status quo and towards the enforcement of codes of behavior and discipline.

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Appendix A

In the following, the selected categories of modified COLT observation scheme as well as the categories of techniques for explicit- implicit strategies offered by Stern (1992), both of which were employed for constructing the questionnaire are offered.

Modified Colt Observation Scheme

The COLT scheme consists of two parts. Part A describes classroom instruction in terms of the types of activities that take place. Part B analyzes the communicative features of verbal exchanges between teachers and students or among students themselves as they occur within each activity (Flyman-Mattsson, 1999).

Part A: Classroom Events

I. Participant Organization
    a. Whole Class

- Teacher to student or class, and vice versa, (i.e. one central activity led by the teacher is going on; the teacher interacts with the whole class and/or with individual students).
- Student to student, or student(s) to class, (i.e. students talk to each other, either as part of the lesson or as informal socializing; one central activity led by a student may be going on, e. g., a group of students acts out a skit with the rest of the class as the audience).
- Choral work by students, (i.e. the whole class or group participate in the choral work, repeating a model provided by the textbook or teacher).

b. Group work

- All groups work on the same task.
- Groups work on different tasks.

c. Individual seat work, (i.e. students work on their own, all on the same task or on different tasks).

II. Content: This parameter describes the subject matter of the activities, that is, what the teacher and the students are talking, reading, or writing about or what they are listening to.

a) **Explicit focus on language**, (i.e. it includes form, function, discourse, and sociolinguistics).
b) **Other topics**, (i.e. it refers to the subject matter of classroom discourse apart from an explicit focus on language including routine and stereotyped exchange in class, topics which are beyond the classroom such as personal matters, movies, holidays, family affairs, etc. and topics of broad range like world events, public issues, abstract ideas and etc.
c) **Topic control**, (it refers to the selection of topics which might be by the teacher or the student).

Part B: Communicative Features

I. Information gap: This feature refers to the extent, to which the information requested and/or exchanged is unpredictable, i.e., not known in advance.

a. Requesting information

- Pseudo, (i.e. it indicates that the speaker already possesses the information requested).
- Genuine, (i.e. it indicates that the information requested is not known in advance).

b. Giving information

- Relatively predictable, (i.e. it indicates that the message is easily anticipated in that there is a very limited range of information that can be given. In the case of responses, only one answer is possible semantically, although there may be different correct grammatical realizations).
- Relatively unpredictable, (i.e. it indicates that the message is not easily anticipated in that a wide range of information can be given. If a number of responses are possible, each can provide different information).

II. Reaction to code or message: This feature refers to a correction or other explicit statement which draws attention to the linguistic form of an utterance.

Categories of technique for explicit teaching strategy by Stern (1992)

- Metacognitive techniques: It refers to advising learners during instruction which consists of hints about what to do, what not to do, how to memorize, how to note vocabulary, etc in order to learn efficiently.
- Cognitive technique: It consists of examples, explanation, mnemonic devices, rule discovery, and explicit practicing.
- Categories of technique for implicit teaching strategy by Stern (1992)
- Implicit Audiolingual technique: It consists of repetition, imitation of sounds and sentences, memorization of dialogue, pattern practice, choral practice, and narratives.
- Experiential teaching technique: It refers to shifting the learners' attention away from language and engaging them in topics, tasks and activities.

Appendix B

Questionnaire

The purpose of the present questionnaire is to glean information on your opinion as a teacher about the effectiveness of employing three teaching strategies, namely intralingual- crosslingual strategies, implicit-explicit strategies, and analytic-experiential strategies across two proficiency levels of elementary and intermediate. Please take notice that this is not an evaluation of your teaching. There are no right or wrong answers and all your opinions will be kept confidential.

Part A

Please answer the following questions about yourself;
1. Name:

2. Academic qualification (please tick and complete)
   - a bachelor's degree in …………..
   - a master's degree in……………..
   - a doctorate degree in…………...

3. Number of years of English teaching experience:

Part B

Please report your idea about each of the following statements by circling the most appropriate icon on the given scale.

1. Using the native language along with the English language is more effective in elementary classes than using the only English language.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

2. Drawing learners' attention to language explicitly by explaining the grammar, offering examples and getting them to discover rules is more effective in elementary classes than taking their attention of language and engaging them in doing tasks, activities and discussion of topics.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

3. Correcting students' grammatical mistakes is more effective in elementary classes than correcting their semantic mistakes.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

4. Advising learners' on what to do or what not to do, how to memorize, and how to respond to error correction is more effective in elementary classes than getting them to repeat, to imitate, to memorize, to do pattern practice, just these sorts of unconscious activities.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

5. Engaging learners in whole class activity in which either teachers interact with the whole class or one student talks to a student or to the whole class is more effective in elementary classes than engaging them in group work activity in which students work cooperatively in group.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

6. Engaging learners in whole class activity in which either teacher interacts with the whole class or one student talks to a student or to the whole class is more effective in intermediate classes than engaging them in group work activity in which students work cooperatively in group.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

7. Drawing learners' attention to language explicitly by explaining the grammar, offering

Examples and getting them to discover rules is more effective in intermediate classes than taking their attention of the language and engaging them in doing tasks, activities, and discussion of topics.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

8. Drawing students' attention to language is more effective in elementary classes than drawing their attention to meaning in every discussion and activity of class.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

9. Offering predictable information (the message is easily anticipated in that there is a very limited range of information that can be given) is more effective in elementary classes than offering unpredictable information (the message is not easily anticipated in that a wide range of information can be given).
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

10. Asking Pseudo questions (the speaker already possesses the information requested) is more effective in elementary classes than asking genius questions (the information requested is not known in advance).
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

11. Advising learners on what to do or what not to do, how to memorize and how to respond to error correction is more effective in intermediate classes than getting them to repeat, to imitate, to memorize, to do pattern practice, just these sorts of unconscious activities.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

12. Selection of the topics for class discussion by the teacher is more effective in intermediate classes than the selection of the topics by students or by both teacher and students.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

13. Correcting students' grammatical mistakes is more effective in intermediate classes than correcting their semantic mistakes.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

14. Asking Pseudo questions (the speaker already possesses the information requested) is more effective in intermediate classes than asking genius questions (the information requested is not known in advance).
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

15. Offering predictable information (the message is easily anticipated in that there is a very limited range of information that can be given) is more effective in intermediate classes than offering unpredictable information (the message is not easily anticipated in that a wide range of information can be given).
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

16. Selection of the topics for class discussion by the teacher is more effective in elementary classes than the selection of the topics by students or by both teacher and students.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

17. Using the native language along with the English language is more effective in intermediate classes than using only English language.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree

18. Drawing students' attention to language in every discussion and activity of class is more effective in intermediate classes than drawing their attention to meaning in every discussion and activity of the class.
a. strongly agree   b. agree   c. uncertain   d. disagree e. strongly disagree