

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Reza Pishghadam for his willingness to bear the demand of the interview and give his care and time to share knowledge with the readers. A word of thanks also goes to Mohammad Zabetnia for his help.

Probing ELT Along a Two-way Road: An Interview with Prof. Reza Pishghadam

Masoud Mahmoodzadeh, Iran

Masoud Mahmoodzadeh is a TEFL lecturer and an EFL teacher currently working in the department of foreign languages at the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults, Mashhad. He is the author of many papers published in international journals. His areas of interest include complexity theory in SLA research, psychology of language learning, and ecological aspects of ELT.

E-mail: masoudmahmoodzadeh@yahoo.com

While surfing the net to search out databases for the successful Asian researchers in the field of ELT, one might come across the name of Reza Pishghadam, a young Full Professor of TEFL in the Department of English Language and Literature at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Iran. Having a cursory look at his contribution over the years (see his faculty page available at <http://pishghadam.profcms.um.ac.ir/>), indeed, bears out the breadth of his knowledge in the field. Over the last few years, he has particularly focused on his major research interest, namely the socio-psychological aspects of language education in which he has done some significant services to the ELT field. Following this thriving academic pursuit, five years ago Pishghadam had even the honor to be selected as the distinguished researcher of the year in humanities in Iran. In my opinion, it was a great kudos to him in that year. Added to this success is his vested interest in maintaining the status quo since then.

In his recent writings focusing on socio-psychological of foreign language education, Pishghadam, in fact, has mostly attempted to advocate an "interdisciplinary approach" to language education as a kind of broader-based logic which always ably inspires further new lines of inquiry and research. In other words, he strongly believes that no discipline is self-contained, like an island, entire of itself, but instead each discipline *per se* can benefit further through an interdisciplinary approach. For this purpose, he has always tried to look into other language-related disciplines (i.e. psychology, sociology, and philosophy) to come up with an optimal conceptualisation of the ELT field either by writing interdisciplinary-driven papers or organising national interdisciplinary conferences in Iran. In search of understanding the uncharted value of the ELT field, he has come to realise that the circle of ELT influence can be particularly expanded in EFL and/or ESL education where language teachers can play a more educational role and can in turn touch on their learners' life-rich matters. In his opinion, a more "educational slant" envisioned for the ELT climate in which its educational capacity and applicability is further recognised and empowered will certainly bear dividends.

After researching ELT within the frame of interdisciplinarity for a couple of years, in 2011 he finally came to the conclusion that perhaps the time has arrived for ELT to take a somewhat different image via his "*Applied ELT*" theory. In a real sense, then, the idea and the compelling discourse embedded in the theory directly relates to the scope of ELT field. In Pishghadam's own words, "ELT, in fact, has grown in maturity over years, establishing an independent identity for itself. It does not play second fiddle to applied linguistics any more". From this new perspective, ELT can hold an autonomous status or tendency to contribute to, rather than being contributed by other disciplines such as psychology and sociology, which grants it a more life-centered precedence.

So, I think perhaps it is time to rethink and move towards smoothing the way for a 'two-way' road, in which case the research direction from ELT to other language-related disciplines is thoroughly reciprocal in terms of educational contribution. In Pishghadam's view, much ink has been spilt in the area of ELT over the years, but even so we have only envisaged and exploited a portion of the total capacity of ELT so far, ruling out a great number of opportunities concerning the activity circle of ELT for other language-related disciplines. Another noteworthy point about this theory is related to the role of language teachers. In "*Applied ELT*", language teachers adopt a new creative and dynamic role to come to grips with possible challenges; they are thus expected to become "educational language teachers", that is, experts who not only teach the language but also try to improve other domains of knowledge in learners, which rather directly or indirectly affect "learners' idiosyncratic lives".

However, considering the significance and possible new directions of research that this new-fledged theory can bring about along with its promising pedagogical implications for ELT practitioners in the field, I decided to arrange an interview with Professor Pishghadam, and broached some matters with him and then reported the remarks in this paper. So, through the following online interview I first try to highlight somewhat the twists and turns of Pishghadam's early professional career and then with an investigative scrutiny I manage to reflect on the quintessence of his ELT beliefs particularly with reference to his above-mentioned "*Applied ELT*" theory which has been lately developed.

An interview with Reza Pishghadam

Interviewer: What really happened in your early career that initiated and motivated such growing interest in research?

Pishghadam: As a student, I really felt bad about my education in the field, because my professors generally taught me the books written by native speakers. They tried hard to mirror those textbooks in a way that they themselves were erased off the class. In fact, I could not see any Iranian voice or scientific identity in their lectures. That was very disappointing and at the same time very motivating for me to run some studies later to show that university professors can have research-based education. They can conduct their own studies, write articles, and publish books based on their ideas. I think that this is the way students place

trust in their ideas and ideals. Students like to see something novel and critical in their professors.

Interviewer: Having a quick glance at the titles of your numerous writings shows that you are an enterprising researcher, delving into a variety of subjects of inquiry in the field. How would you explain this? Is there any special philosophy behind this?

Pishghadam: Yes, you are absolutely right. I have written and published so many articles in different domains of knowledge, including psychology, sociology, philosophy, and language education. However, they are related to each other and pertinent to the EFL education. Each year I map out a research agenda, trying to fully focus on one particular topic. One possible line of explanation is to expand the territory of language education and trigger the formation of interdisciplinary scientific fields. Blurring the lines between different fields and integrating miscellaneous ways of thinking is a great trend to come up with the production of new approaches, which have never been thought of before, in response to different pedagogical issues. Besides, being able to work collaboratively with a diverse array of researchers in different fields may open my eyes to new horizons.

Interviewer: On the other hand, another quite clear point found in your publications is that you have always shared ideas with your students and/or colleagues to come up with so many co-authored works. How do you see this kind of concerted undertaking in your researching pattern?

Pishghadam: That is correct. I firmly believe in synergistic working and researching. As I already mentioned, when you have a map of research, knowing exactly what you are to achieve, you need a group of students who can help you to meet your predetermined ends. In fact, I try to think, theorise, and plan and my students are supposed to carry out the study under my close strategic leadership which expedites the deed of production. Although this practice may require more planning and administrative effort, I truly aim to train and support potential researchers who may make a difference in their own and other people's lives. To add, working cooperatively and collaboratively with my students and colleagues provides the space and time for sharing of knowledge along with different framing of real world issues.

Interviewer: Referring to your '*Applied ELT*' proposed in 2011 as a new field of inquiry, would you please tell us how you got the first insights to come up with the idea and then carried on expanding it *a priori*?

Pishghadam: Let me explicate briefly the theory for your readers before answering the question. Applied ELT holds the view that ELT is not a branch of linguistics to be called applied linguistics. It is now rich in its own theoretical foundation, ready to be applied to other fields of study. For instance, ELT classes especially in EFL contexts have the ability to teach individuals to have dialogs or practice democracy in class. You know, while I was dealing with English language teaching in my own classes, there was always a question to me: Am I supposed to be a language teacher or an educational English language teacher? All

the time, I was wondering whether I was to exclusively practice English in class. Eventually, I came to this conclusion that teachers can play a critical role not only in educating learners but also in shaping their idiosyncratic lives.

Interviewer: what is the single most important quality of 'Applied ELT', in and of itself, which makes it distinct in the field?

Pishghadam: Applied ELT is something quite unique to me. Regarding philosophy, it transcends postmodern notions in a sense that it espouses reflexivity (vertical and horizontal thinking). As you might know, postmodernism generally deals with flexibility (horizontal thinking), implying that diversity, plurality, and centrifugal ideas are lauded. With respect to sociology, it seems to be a response to neo-colonialism; it is a movement towards introducing local knowledge, empowering the non-native speakers, and giving teachers a new type of identity by assigning them a more contributory and life-changing role. Considering language education, it goes beyond post-methods era in a way that teachers are supposed to be more than reflective and critical teachers. Teachers' responsibility is to enhance language proficiency along with life qualities.

Interviewer: Could you please mention very briefly the particular areas in which "Applied ELT" has been researched and investigated in the field so far?

Pishghadam: As a matter of fact, the field of psychology has been more rapid and active in generating some noteworthy implications of ELT for enhanced investigation of learners' psychological attitudes. As far as I know, the theory has been applied to creativity, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, self-efficacy, anxiety, depression, shyness, identity formation, teacher effectiveness, and teacher burnout.

Interviewer: As the final question, do you believe "Applied ELT" can hold further promises for exciting new directions in the field? If so, please explain in what sense?

Pishghadam: Sure! Because I do believe that applied ELT is in line with the demands of the new era of globalisation. As such, the nature of language education, alongside with other fields, needs to be reconceptualised to satisfy the changing needs of individuals. From the globalisation aspect, international communication provokes social, economic, and political factors which jointly come into play, mingle with educational goals, and affect instructional materials and methods as a result. In response, a reflective role is called for on the part of the teachers, as the heart of any educational systems, to remain critical about global forces, practice localisation, and evaluate cultural appropriacy in terms of language materials in different parts of the world.

References

Pishghadam, R. (2011). Introducing Applied ELT as a new approach in second/foreign language studies. *Iranian EFL Journal*, 7(2), 8-14.

Please check the How to be a Teacher Trainer course at Pilgrims website.