

A Comparative Study Between Traditional English Teaching Methods and Communicative Language Teaching from Teachers' Perspective in Saudi Arabia

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doi: <https://doi.org/10.37745/ijellr.13/vol14n14669>

Published July 27, 2026

Citation: Emam N.W. (2026) A Comparative Study Between Traditional English Teaching Methods and Communicative Language Teaching from Teachers' Perspective in Saudi Arabia, *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 14, (1) 46-69

Abstract: *The aim of this study was to compare the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) versus the traditional English teaching method from the perspectives of school teachers in Saudi Arabia. Participants were recruited from a well-known community of teachers on Telegram, and questionnaires were distributed online. Quantitative data analysis was done using SPSS 28, and qualitative data analysis was done using thematic analysis. Only 66% of the teachers were aware of CLT and used it regularly. Thirty-two percent preferred to use CLT whereas over 70% believed in its effectiveness as a teaching method. Some participants also stated that a mix of CLT and traditional methods should be used as most students with low initial proficiency in English may not benefit from CLT activities. In conclusion, although teachers believe in the usefulness of CLT, they require more support and guidance in implementing CLT activities.*

Keywords: communicative language teaching, English as a foreign language, English language teaching, Saudi Arabia, teacher beliefs, traditional teaching methods

INTRODUCTION

The current rate and extent of spread of globalization has made it mandatory for every student to learn essential English speaking and writing skills. Traditionally, English has been taught like most other subjects where students are made to memorize and repeat words and sentences without understanding the context in which they are used. Slowly, this approach is being replaced by more interactive approaches where students can think and practice the language through activities and role-play (Gifford, 2016).

One of the primary aims of teaching English is to focus on each of the four important skills of communication, namely listening, reading, writing, and speaking. However, most of the approaches used traditionally have focused on only one or two of these skills. For instance, the grammar translation method (GTM) focuses on grammatical rules and translating sentences between the target language and the native language, thereby only focusing on reading and writing skills (Liu and Shi, 2007). In contrast, the direct approach is focused on using the language rather than the analysis of the language,

and so, it enhances mainly the speaking skill (Richards and Rodgers, 2014, p.3). The reading approach primarily teaches reading to students (Celce-Murcia and McIntosh, 1991) and the audiolingual method (ALM) is focused on listening and speaking skills (Liu and Shi, 2007, p.70). There are also other approaches such as the affective-humanistic approach, where the individual's feelings are given importance in teaching the language (Richards and Rodgers, 2014), while the comprehension-based approach focuses on listening comprehension which is thought to nurture the speaking, reading, and writing skills as well (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

The most recent and popular approach is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which focuses on interaction and communication. CLT has many advantages in teaching and learning a foreign/second language since it gives the opportunity to practice the language inside and outside the classroom (Celce-Murcia and McIntosh, 1991, p.7). Techniques used in CLT involve conversation, persuasion, negotiation, interaction, and decision-making, all of which involve meaningful communication (Thompson, 1996). It enhances learning through group work and pair work, presentations, discussions, dialogues, and role-play. The interactive communicative activities in this approach helps students practice English in real-world settings. This is a student-centred approach which focuses on communicative competence, and the teacher acts as a facilitator in helping students achieve proficiency in the language (Lee and VanPatten, 2003).

However, there are some issues that make it difficult for CLT to be implemented in classrooms or act as a barrier to students' performance. The two main issues are language curriculum design and language testing or assessment (Syarief, 2016). Lange (1990) argued that curriculum design and development has primarily been founded on the traditional analytic paradigm, wherein the entire curriculum has been pre-designed by a top-down authority. Although the nature of CLT is learner-centred in both progressions and aims, there is no opportunity for teachers and learners to get involved in the design and development of the curriculum (Syarief, 2016). Regarding language assessment, Morrow (2012) explained that the main goal of assessment is to test what students can "do" with the language instead of "how much" grammatical rules, vocabulary, and phonological resources they know about the language. The problem is that many traditional testing methods test grammar and vocabulary rather than the ability of the learners to use the language in real-world situations. Hence, language assessment for CLT needs to shift from quantitative methods to more qualitative ones (Savignon, 2003).

In Saudi Arabia, teaching English as a foreign language began in 1928, following the establishment of the Ministry of Education (MoE) in 1923 (Rahman, 2011; Liddicoat, 1997). The two main methods of teaching English in the country included the ALM and the GTM. However, during the last few years, all materials and textbooks used in Saudi Arabia have adopted the CLT approach. The MoE has worked hard to improve and develop the methods and curriculum of teaching English in the country.

Despite several years of teaching English to students in Saudi Arabia, students find it difficult to use English in their daily lives. Despite the MoEs' efforts in the field of education by officially prescribing CLT-based textbooks such as Mega-Goal, traditional English teaching methods are still implemented in several classrooms. This is because there are still some teachers who are not familiar with the concepts and principles of CLT, and therefore, are not able to fully implement it in their classes. Teachers who do not have a complete idea of CLT or do not find themselves qualified enough might

consider that the traditional method is more useful when compared with CLT for teaching English language to students. One of the flaws in the Saudi public education system is that the curriculum depends on memorization instead of critical thinking or other analytical skills, which is not beneficial for students (Elyas and Picard, 2010). Additionally, Alnofaie (2013) illustrated that the pedagogical strategies followed in Saudi schools have limited the students' abilities in class and prevented them to be free and creative in their thoughts. Thus, this research seeks to address why the transition from traditional English teaching methods to CLT-based teaching methods remains incomplete in Saudi schools and to determine if teachers' training and beliefs, and the institutional environment support teachers in implementing CLT in their classrooms.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to understand the effectiveness of using CLT for teaching and learning English compared with traditional English teaching methods from the perspective of school teachers in Saudi Arabia. A second aim of this study is to emphasize the significance of training and qualifying teachers on CLT due to its importance in achieving the goals of the Kingdom's vision in the field of education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CLT has gained popularity over the years as one of the essential and multidisciplinary methods of teaching a foreign language to students. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), CLT is not a method but an approach to learn the English Language. CLT aims to make "communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986, p.5).

Some of the major features of CLT have been described by Thamarana (2014). Teaching language to students is definitely more a student-centric approach than a teacher-centric approach. CLT gives major importance to the use or function of the language and less importance to its structure and form. While doing so, it gives equal importance to the knowledge of grammar that is required for effective communication. Meaning is paramount while adopting CLT since it helps students grasp the concepts easily while learning a foreign/second language. It encourages fluency over accuracy in order to make the students interested in learning the language. Classrooms where CLT is implemented are designed such that there are opportunities to rehearse the language in real-life situations and prepare for real communication in a public place. Teaching is done through creative role plays, simulations, dramas, games, projects etc. that not only keep the learners engaged but provide them with opportunities to actively learn and improve. CLT is not about just one-on-one conversations, it also emphasizes reading and writing.

A study on CLT implementation in Indonesian classrooms revealed that the barriers to CLT implementation were effective execution, continuous evaluation, and accounting for diverse regional disparities and educational backgrounds (Lestari and Margana, 2024). Similarly, Iranian teachers felt that CLT could not be implemented completely because of institutional, student-related, cultural, teacher-related, and CLT-related barriers (Khodamoradi, 2024). Teachers teaching in schools located on the border of Indonesia and Malaysia stated that CLT implementation depends on the geographical

context of the students, the character of the class being taught, the competence of the teachers in implementing CLT, and institutional support (Ridwan et al., 2024).

In a study conducted by Cheng (2015), CLT was implemented among 27 first graders (21 males) from 11 different classes at a public senior high school in southern Taiwan. The study reported that students were comfortable with the use of CLT, and they were allowed to use their mother tongue when they were not confident with the foreign language. Additionally, students had become active learners in the CLT classroom and exhibited more positive attitudes towards learning English (Cheng, 2015). A study conducted at a public school in the south part of Loja, Ecuador involving six English teachers and 105 students of second, third and fourth grades of elementary school reported that CLT is indeed an effective measure to teach English (Toro et al., 2018). Questionnaires given to English teachers highlighted the strategies used by the teachers to develop communicative competence.

In a study conducted to investigate the English teachers' perception and opinions on the implementation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in English language teaching (ELT) classrooms, 26 English teachers from 16 public senior high schools in Banda Aceh found ICT quite helpful while teaching English (Muslem et al., 2018). A study on Indonesian high school teachers reported that while teachers had a sound understanding of how CLT needed to be implemented in the classroom, several of them had the misconception that the teaching of grammar was not required in CLT (Gloriez, 2022). Teachers also stated that although the instructional materials for CLT implementation were insufficient, they were able to find some useful material online (Gloriez, 2022). Bruner et al. (2015) investigated the current EFL oral communication teaching practices and the opinions of teachers regarding the same along with that of A2 students from two universities namely the Prince of Songkla University (PSU), Thailand, and the University of Novi Sad (UNS), Serbia. The reported found that oral English communication classes adopted CLT and that A2 students were reported to have been engaged in classroom tasks. It also highlighted the importance of CLT as compared with other traditional English teaching approaches. A study on 30 Chinese university students reported the effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their EFL courses in China, and the results revealed that new communicative approaches can be combined with traditional approaches to yield better understanding of the course and improve the process of teaching English (Rao, 2002). A similar study conducted in Japan by Aubrey (2011) also reported an increase in the willingness to communicate in English by students taught through the CLT approach.

A research conducted on 17 teachers teaching English in Saudi International Schools employing a questionnaire and interviews report that CLT is the predominant method of teaching English along with other approaches (Abdel-Salam, 2014). However, CLT has some disadvantages because although it is appropriate for intermediate and advanced levels of students, it is not beginner-friendly (Thamarana, 2014). In a study conducted to understand the adoption of CLT in teaching English in Saudi Arabia, administrative constraints have been observed to prevent the proper implementation of CLT (Batawi, 2000). Teachers require support from the Saudi Government as well as professional skills to implement CLT appropriately for improving the English teaching scenario in Saudi Arabia (Batawi, 2000).

A common problem among Saudi students is their English communication skills. Saudi students find it difficult to convey their ideas using English. Most Arab learners cannot express themselves in

English both in academic and real-life scenarios. The root of the problem lies in the social and cultural backgrounds and the unavailability of a proper teaching method that can help learn the English language. In Rababah's study (2001), Arab learners of English produce a large number of erroneous utterances in oral performance and rely heavily on communication strategies in order to communicate. Moreover, the study reveals the unmet objectives of English departments throughout the Arab world, indicating a need for improvement. Therefore, the CLT approach can provide a solution to the problem and enhance English speaking, reading, writing and listening skills of Arab learners.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Participant Recruitment

In the present cross-sectional study, a pragmatic perspective based on John Dewey's pragmatic theory (Dewey, 2008) was adopted and quantitative as well as qualitative data were collected through an online survey analysis. The participants for the study were English teachers at Saudi high schools. A majority of the target participants were accessed via the Telegram channel known as 'BadrAlshehri Mega Goal' (https://t.me/T_Badr_English). Mega Goal is the official English textbook used in Saudi high schools and the members of this channel are English teachers. The admin of the Telegram channel was contacted, and his consent was acquired to send the survey link to the channel's members for carrying out the research study. Once his permission was obtained, information and the survey link were distributed to members of this channel. The study invite comprised of detailed information of the research study and objectives along with an informed consent form that the participants were required to sign before attempting the survey.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument was a questionnaire that was prepared and distributed to the participants as a Google form link. The questions covered topics such as the different methods used for teaching English in high schools, their effectiveness, students' progress, and their perception of the methods' usefulness in students' ability to attain communicative competence in the language (Supplementary Information). The questionnaire comprised of a total of 15 close-ended quantitative questions and one open-ended qualitative question. Out of the 15 quantitative questions, nine questions used a 5-point Likert scale, three questions were of the Yes/No type, and three questions were of the multiple-choice type. The only qualitative question was at the end of the survey allowing the participant to write down their thoughts and opinions regarding the use of CLT in the classroom. As the questionnaire was distributed as a Google form link, all responses were obtained in a Google spreadsheet.

Quantitative Data Analysis

For each individual quantitative question, the frequencies and percentages for each response was computed and tabulated. For the Likert-scale questions, the percentages for the agreement, disagreement, or neutrality of each statement were calculated. The relationship between the variables was evaluated using simple correlation by calculating the Spearman's rho correlation coefficient and conducting a sig 2-tailed analysis at a significance level of 0.01 as well as 0.05. The statistical software SPSS 28 was used for data analysis.

Qualitative Data Analysis

The responses to the single qualitative question were analysed using thematic analysis. Initially, the data were organized and classified into groups based on the overall types of responses. All responses were carefully read and understood, and then placed in the relevant category. As the analysis progressed, links were recognized, and significant components were identified in order to make the data more interpretable. Once all the participant responses were categorized, attempts were made to comprehend and explain the data with the objective of answering the research questions.

Ethical Considerations

Before the study was initiated, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant authorities and the university management board. A detailed document was prepared comprising of the aims and objectives of the study, and the purposes for which the data would be collected and used. Participants were also required to sign a non-disclosure agreement. Care was taken to ensure that all answers were anonymous and no personal information was collected during the survey. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and no financial advantage was provided to any person for their participation. Participants were also given the liberty to leave the survey at any point.

RESULTS

The study had a target of 200 responses; however, only 63 participants successfully completed the survey and so, 63 completed questionnaires were used for data analysis.

Quantitative Data Analysis

A total of 15 quantitative questions were presented to the participants in three different formats. According to the majority of the participants (n=58, 92.1%), the importance of teaching and learning English was mainly significant because it is considered to be the language of international communication (Table 1). Only 3.2% of participants (n=2) thought it could improve self-confidence and provide access to a world of entertainment (n=2).

Table 1: Importance of teaching and learning English

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
English is the Language of Business	1	1.6
English is the Language of International Communication	58	92.1
Improve self-confidence	2	3.2
Speaking English gives you Access to a World of Entertainment	2	3.2
Total	63	100.0

With respect to previous knowledge about CLT, more than half of the participants (n=42, 66.7%) had previous knowledge about CLT while about 20.6% (n=13) of the participants were unsure about it (Table 2).

Table 2: Previous knowledge about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Maybe	13	20.6
No	8	12.7
Yes	42	66.7
Total	63	100.0

Regarding sources of knowledge about CLT, the participants tended to rely on teachers' manuals and teacher training courses (n=18, 28.6%), followed by books, journals, and TESOL seminars/lectures (n=15, 23.8%) (Table 3). Participants also relied on university degree programmes (n=14, 22.2%). Some of them tended to obtain information about CLT from workshops held by teachers' association (n=7, 11.1%).

Table 3: Sources of knowledge about CLT

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Books or journals TESOL seminars/lectures	15	23.8
First time	1	1.6
I didn't	2	3.2
Never	1	1.6
Teachers' manual Teacher training course	18	28.6
University degree program	14	22.2
Workshop held by a teachers' association	7	11.1
Workshop held by the board of education	5	7.9
Total	63	100.0

The attitudes towards the belief that CLT is completely adopted in high school English classrooms is shown in Table 4. More than half of the participants (n=34, 54% agreed, n=9, 14.3% strongly agreed) showed a positive attitude regarding the adoption of CLT in high school English classrooms.

Table 4: Use of CLT in high school English classrooms

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Strongly disagree	1	1.6
Disagree	3	4.8
Neutral	16	25.4
Agree	34	54.0
Strongly agree	9	14.3
Total	63	100.0

In terms of agreement with the usefulness of the CLT approach in English classrooms, most participants (agreed: n=33, 52.4%; strongly agreed: n=17, 27%) had a positive attitude towards CLT's usefulness in class. Few participants (n=11, 17.5%) were neutral with the statement, and only two participants (3.2%) disagreed with the statement (Table 5).

Table 5: CLT Approach is very useful in class

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Disagree	2	3.2
Neutral	11	17.5
Agree	33	52.4
Strongly agree	17	27.0
Total	63	100.0

With respect to including sufficient communication activities in English textbooks that help students improve their speaking skills, about half of the participants had a positive attitude towards the statement (agreed: n=22, 34.9%; strongly agreed: n=10, 15.9%). Neutrality was observed for 28.6% (n=18) of the participants while 4.8% (n=3) strongly disagreed with the statement (Table 6).

Table 6: Amount of communication activities to improve English speaking skills

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Strongly disagree	3	4.8
Disagree	10	15.9
Neutral	18	28.6
Agree	22	34.9
Strongly agree	10	15.9
Total	63	100.0

More than half of the participants (n=41, 65.1%) believed that the CLT method could be easily applied in class such as working in groups, role-play, or group discussions. On the other hand, only 7.9% (n=5) did not agree with the statement, while 27% (n=17) were neutral (Table 7).

Table 7: Application of the CLT method in the classroom

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Maybe	17	27.0
No	5	7.9
Yes	41	65.1
Total	63	100.0

For enhancing the four language skills such as reading, speaking, writing, and listening, most participants (agreed: n=34, 54%; strongly agreed: n=17, 27%) were in favour of using CLT, while very few participants did not agree with the statement (n=3, 4.85%) (Table 8).

Table 8: Improvement in the four language skills

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Disagree	3	4.8
Neutral	9	14.3
Agree	34	54.0
Strongly agree	17	27.0
Total	63	100.0

A vast majority of participants (agreed: n=32, 50.8%; strongly agreed: n=19, 30.2%) had a positive attitude towards using the CLT approach to make students more motivated in class since it comprises of communication activities such as pair work and group discussions (Table 9). No participant disagreed with the statement.

Table 9: Motivation level of students using CLT

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Neutral	12	19.0
Agree	32	50.8
Strongly agree	19	30.2
Total	63	100.0

According to the majority of participants (n=41, 65.1%), the CLT approach was more effective than traditional methods of teaching English (Table 10). On the other hand, some participants did not give any opinion regarding the statement (n=18, 28.6%).

Table 10: Effectiveness of the CLT Method

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Valid	Maybe	18	28.6
	No	4	6.3
	Yes	41	65.1
	Total	63	100.0

Participants were asked how CLT was more effective than the traditional method in making students competent in the English language. There are many reasons that might make CLT effective in class (Table 11). CLT could provide students with the chance to practice the language and interact in class (n=24, 38.1%). It could make learners become more confident in using the language in the real world (n=20, 31.7%). Also, for some participants (n=6, 9.5%), it could lead to an improvement in language skills such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Most of the participants seemed to focus on practicing the language as opposed to improving language skills.

Table 11: Reasons for effectiveness of CLT

	Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
It gives students the chance to practice the language and interact in class	24	38.1
It improves (Speaking, Listening, Writing, Reading)	6	9.5
It makes learners become more confident using the language in the real world	20	31.7
It makes students more active and involved in class	13	20.6
Total	63	100.0

The participants showed a positive attitude towards (agreed: n=18, 28.6%; strongly agreed: n=8, 12.7%) using traditional methods leading to enjoyment of the learners in the classroom (Table 12). In contrast, 30.2% of the participants disagreed with the statement.

Table 12: Enjoyment of the lesson in traditional English teaching methods

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	4.8
	Disagree	16	25.4
	Neutral	18	28.6
	Agree	18	28.6
	Strongly agree	8	12.7
	Total	63	100.0

Some participants (agreed: n=19, 30.2%, strongly agreed: n=2, 3.25) found that using traditional methods usually made students more afraid of making mistakes when compared with CLT (Table 13). However, the majority of the participants did not agree with the statement (disagreed: n=15, 23.8%; strongly disagreed: n=9, 14.35).

Table 13: Fear of making mistakes in traditional English teaching methods

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	15	23.8
	Disagree	9	14.3
	Neutral	18	28.6
	Agree	19	30.2
	Strongly agree	2	3.2
	Total	63	100.0

The preference of using traditional or CLT method in the classroom given that the materials used are based on the CLT approach is presented in Table 14. It seemed that the participants did not show a clear attitude as 33.4% agreed/strongly agreed, while 36.5% did not prefer the traditional method.

Table 14: Preference of English teaching method in the classroom

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
	Strongly disagree	5	7.9
	Disagree	18	28.6
	Neutral	19	30.2
	Agree	18	28.6
	Strongly agree	3	4.8
	Total	63	100.0

Most participants (agreed: n=31, 49.2%; strongly agreed: n=13, 20.6%) showed satisfaction with the CLT approach in teaching English (Table 15). However, a few participants were dissatisfied (6.4%) with the CLT approach.

Table 15: Satisfaction with the CLT approach in teaching English

		Frequency (n)	Percent (%)
Valid	Strongly disagree	1	1.6
	Disagree	3	4.8
	Neutral	15	23.8
	Agree	31	49.2
	Strongly agree	13	20.6
	Total	63	100.0

The relationship between the variables was analysed using the simple correlation analysis (Supplementary Information). The results show that there was a significant positive correlation between the usefulness of CLT and motivation enhancement of CLT (correlation=0.431, p-value<0.001). Also, the usefulness of CLT was positively correlated with the satisfaction of CLT in teaching English (correlation=0.397, p-value<0.001). The belief that the CLT approach increased the motivation of students in class was positively correlated with improvement in the four language skills using CLT (correlation=0.501, p-value<0.001).

In summary, based on the above results, most participants showed a positive attitude towards learning and teaching English using CLT approaches in Saudi high schools.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Responses of the participants to the single open-ended qualitative question were analysed using thematic analysis. All answers were divided into three broad themes, namely positive, negative, and mixed.

Positive: The majority of the participants had positive perceptions regarding the use of CLT in the classroom. They felt that it was a significant, useful and helpful method, and that using CLT improved learning of the English language thereby ensuring that the current generation would be confident English speakers. CLT was seen to ensure the participation of students in the classroom and enable them to practice the language in real-world scenarios. One teacher stated that all students and their families should take learning English seriously, so that schools may achieve their objectives of providing effective English education to all.

According to one participant, using the CLT method helps “break the ice” inside the classroom as it provides an opportunity for each student to practice their knowledge of English, and it helps shorten the time and effort given for teaching each lesson. CLT is considered a new approach that should be adopted for teaching English as it helps students get involved in learning the language and imparts life-long proficiency to them. Teachers believe that using CLT in the classroom makes it easy for students to learn the language especially because it gives enough opportunities for practice to the students and enables them to achieve self-confidence in using English. One of the advantages of CLT is that it prepares students in speaking English confidently which is very important in the international professional scenario.

As teaching through CLT is light-hearted and fun, students perceive learning English as a game which enhances their retention of the grammatical concepts. One teacher stated that using CLT is more useful to the student than using traditional methods given that the student has sufficient opportunities for practice outside the classroom. One teacher also said that using CLT made it easier to assess students through quick tests in the classrooms. According to one teacher, students are more active in CLT-based classes, develop confidence in using the language with other teachers as well, and learn to speak and write in English within a very short period of time.

Negative: Some respondents found CLT to be not very useful for teaching English in high school classrooms. However, they failed to elaborate and give reasons for their negative attitude towards CLT.

Mixed: A few respondents had mixed perceptions about the use of CLT in the classroom. One participant felt that CLT is only useful for some students depending on their level of English

knowledge; however, it is not useful for many students in Saudi Arabia due to a lot of reasons which the participant did not elaborate. Another participant also stated a similar point wherein CLT may be useful in certain regions but may not be helpful for students from other regions that have lower knowledge of English who come from lower income families. One teacher suggested that training courses about using CLT in the classroom should be prepared and distributed in order to empower teachers to make the best of this approach for teaching English. This is because teachers need to be very well-prepared in order to implement CLT in the classroom and the availability of training material will help teachers make appropriate use of CLT for teaching English.

Another teacher felt that CLT lacks a suitable curriculum and that a curriculum should be designed in order to support the use of CLT in classrooms. A few participants also felt that a mix of traditional and CLT-based approaches should be used for teaching English as this keeps students engaged in the class. One teacher stated that the CLT approach should be used in class but total dependence on this method should be avoided. One of the limitations mentioned for CLT was that despite being an effective method, it was very difficult to implement in a class with a large number of students. Another teacher stated that although CLT is very productive in the classroom, most teachers are not ready to step out of their comfort zones and expend more effort in implementing CLT in their classes.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to identify and assess the perspectives of Saudi English language teachers with regards to using CLT as opposed to traditional methods of teaching English in the classroom. Based on the findings, it was apparent that around 92% of the teachers considered English to be the language for international communication and students needed to learn the language to widen their prospects in international trade markets.

Regarding CLT, only around 66% of the teachers indicated that they had prior knowledge of the teaching method, which is low considering that most of the standard English textbooks that are taught in classrooms are designed according to the CLT method. Interestingly, around 66% of the respondents also indicated that they adopted the CLT approach in their classrooms while teaching English, and around 79% of the respondents stated that the CLT approach was very useful in teaching English to students. Around 34% of the teachers are probably not making full use of the CLT approach in their classrooms. Most of the teachers who had knowledge of CLT indicated their main sources of knowledge to be manuals and training courses, university degree programmes, books, and journal articles. Several participants in this study felt that a suitable curriculum should be designed for teaching English using the CLT approach and that sufficient training material should be available and easily accessible to the teachers so that their practical knowledge of CLT is improved. This will enable them to correctly and effectively use CLT to teach English to their students.

A study conducted by Siddiqui and Asif (2018) in a Saudi university found that although teachers considered CLT to be a useful and effective approach, lack of available training materials and lack of regulations governing the CLT practice are two main barriers to making full use of CLT in the classroom. A case study conducted by Alghanmi and Shukri (2016) found that Saudi teachers believed that English grammar should be taught implicitly rather than explicitly; however, observing them in class revealed that they taught English grammar explicitly rather than implicitly, resulting in a gap

between their beliefs and practices. Another study conducted in Iran found that although teachers considered CLT to be a useful and effective approach, they did not implement it in their classes to the full extent.

Some of the factors that were uncovered in this study that led to this gap between theory and practice were teachers' low English proficiency, nature of assessments, large number of students in the class, and discord between educational policies and teaching requirements in the classroom (Tootkaboni, 2019). A study carried out by Alghamdi (2021) in Saudi Arabia revealed that some teachers use the CLT approach in implementing oral and written activities in their classes, while others still use the traditional method of teaching English as they give more importance to learning the rules of grammar to pass the course. This implies that the nature of assessments of English language courses might need to be revisited to ensure that CLT methods can be implemented and assessed reliably in the classrooms. The necessity of learning grammar was linked to the language proficiency of students wherein students with low English proficiency could learn grammar and pass the course (Alghamdi, 2021). This opinion was shared by participants in our study who also felt that CLT is not suitable for students who have low language proficiency and cannot participate in communication activities taking place in the classroom.

Several issues that were uncovered in the current study and reiterated in the literature include insufficient training of teachers to implement CLT in the classroom and low expertise of students in being able to understand and participate in communication activities that are a part of the CLT approach. When students lack the basic knowledge of grammar and sentence structure, it becomes difficult to implement CLT activities with them. Additionally, English teachers in Saudi Arabia are not trained well enough to implement CLT for students with low proficiency in the language. Hence, due to these challenges, teachers in Saudi Arabia are unable to use CLT to enhance the communicative competence of their students. Furthermore, lack of a structured curriculum and training materials available for teachers to use the CLT approach also acts as a barrier in English classes. According to the findings of our study, a considerable proportion of teachers have low knowledge about CLT and its effectiveness, and this makes them reluctant in shifting from the traditional approaches of teaching English in their classes.

According to this study, the preferred English teaching method was CLT for around 32% of the teachers whereas around 36% of the teachers did not prefer using CLT, and the remaining participants were neutral about the teaching approach. Despite this, around 70% of the respondents were satisfied with the benefits of using CLT in the classroom whereas only around 6% of the teachers were dissatisfied with using CLT. This indicates that although CLT is perceived to be a useful and effective strategy in teaching English, most teachers may not be fully aware of the techniques in implementing the CLT activities in the classroom which could act as a hindrance in making the best use of this approach.

Findings of our study showed a clear gap between the teachers' beliefs and practices in the classroom. Although a large proportion of teachers feel that the CLT approach is useful and effective for teaching English, a considerably smaller number of teachers actually implement the specific activities of CLT such as group work, pair work, discussions, negotiations, and role-play in their classes. This may indicate that although teachers are convinced that CLT is an effective English teaching approach, they

may not know how to implement it or may not be confident enough to work with the students in their classes.

A study conducted on Japanese teachers living in Australia found that teachers felt that they had to spend a lot of time in preparing the materials and encouraging students to practice communicating with their peers in a foreign language. As a result, most teachers found it easier to adopt traditional methods of teaching the language which gave minimal opportunities to the students for practice (Littlewood, 2013). This is in contrast to the core principle of CLT which is student-oriented and intends to provide ample opportunities to students for practicing the language. Another study conducted in a Kuwaiti university found that while teachers used some of the activities of CLT in their classrooms, they did not implement it completely as the end-semester assessments were based on traditional approaches which aimed to identify students' knowledge of grammar rather than fluency in the language (Wu and Alrabah, 2014). This implies that students' assessment requirements also need to be altered in accordance with the objectives of CLT so that teachers do not feel pressured to prepare students for examinations and can instead focus on imparting communicative competence to them.

Alwazir and Shukri (2017) have reported that although CLT activities impart good speaking skills to students, this is not true for writing which requires a high degree of knowledge and accuracy with respect to grammar. In contrast, a majority of teachers in our study felt that CLT improved all four language skills in students, whereas only 50% of the participants believed that CLT could improve students' English-speaking skills. One reason for this discord could be due to the lack of knowledge and experience in involving students in CLT activities effectively in the classroom, which eventually leads to low satisfaction levels with the approach. In one study, in order to improve both fluency and accuracy of students in English, teachers made use of grammar exercises as well as role-plays and discussions to enable students to become proficient in both written as well as spoken English (Scott, 2012). This approach has been indicated by participants in our study as well where it was suggested that a mix of traditional and CLT-based activities should be adopted in the classroom for best results. This would enable students to acquire basic knowledge of the English language and practice this knowledge while participating in CLT activities.

Siddiqui and Asif (2018) suggest that accuracy and fluency should be considered to be present at two ends of a continuum. Beginners learning the English language may start with learning forms and functions of English grammar along with principles of sentence structure. Once they reach the intermediate stage, they may start working on fluency by taking part in discussions and role-plays, while still practicing English grammar. As they progress through the continuum and develop confidence in the rules of English grammar, they can participate more in communication-based activities to develop fluency in the language. In this way, students with even a low level of proficiency in the English language in the beginning can acquire a strong command over the language by the end of the course.

According to the findings of our study, the majority of the teachers were convinced of the positive effect of CLT on students' performance; for example, around 81% of the teachers thought that activities such as pair work and group discussions kept students engaged and motivated in class. Around 38% of the teachers believed that CLT was more effective than the traditional methods of teaching English because it encouraged the students to interact in class and practice the language.

Interestingly, around 40% of the teachers said that students enjoyed English classes more when the traditional methods were applied. Furthermore, around 33% of the teachers stated that students learning with the traditional methods were more afraid of making mistakes whereas around 38% of the teachers disagreed with this idea.

From our study, it is apparent that a lot of participants believed in the benefits of CLT in enhancing the students' English proficiency. On the other hand, as high as 40% of teachers also believed that students enjoyed the traditional approach to teaching as opposed to the CLT method. This could be because the Saudi education system is based more on memorization rather than practice, and so, it is easier for students to memorize sentences and texts in English rather than attempting to practice the language in group discussions and role-plays (Siddiqui and Asif, 2018). Despite this, several participants have indicated that CLT activities such as pair work and role-plays greatly enhanced students' fluency in the language, increased their confidence in using the language, and encouraged them to use the language even outside the classroom with other teachers.

Evidence regarding the positive effect of CLT on students' performance in learning the English language is abundant. For instance, a study conducted by Kishindo (2011) in Malawi found that students learning English using the CLT approach showed better command over the language as compared with their counterparts learning English using the traditional method. However, the study suggested that assessment tests for the English language were based on the traditional teaching method and did not consider CLT activities. Another study conducted by Molen and Green (2011) in a British university showed that students learning English using the communicative approach developed proficiency in the language earlier than students learning English using the traditional method. Furthermore, students learning English using CLT activities eventually outperformed the other group learning through traditional activities. Nwali (2014) attempted to find out the motivation level of students learning with the CLT and traditional methods, and according to the findings, students under the CLT approach were more motivated and performed better as compared to the other group.

With regards to English writing skills, a study conducted by Okonkwo (2014) found that students learning English using the CLT approach performed better in English essay writing than students learning English using the traditional method. Similarly, a study conducted by Fahim and Hashtroodi (2012) to test Iranian students on their skills in writing an argumentative essay found that students using the CLT method performed exceptionally better than students using the traditional method of learning English. Another study conducted by Uzoma and Ibrahim (2018) found that students using the CLT approach outperformed students using the traditional method of learning English in narrative essay writing and informal letter writing with regards to content and organization.

This shows that there is a body of evidence available that confirms the positive effects of learning English using the CLT approach on students in terms of the four language skills, motivation, performance, and communicative competence. In our study too, 81% of the participants agreed that CLT is useful for fostering all the four language skills in students. However, several participants were reluctant in using CLT for all activities in their English teaching classes and some of them preferred to implement a mix of CLT and traditional classes in their activities. Some participants stated that students enjoyed traditional classes more than CLT-based classes, while a few of them felt that students with low language proficiency initially do not benefit from CLT-based activities. Some of the

recommendations for overcoming these issues included developing a standard curriculum for students based on the CLT approach, altering the assessments to reflect learning using the CLT approach rather than the traditional methods, and preparing training material and resources for teachers to empower them to implement CLT in their classrooms.

One of the main strengths of this study is that it focuses on high school classrooms rather than university classrooms which have been investigated in prior studies in Saudi Arabia (Alghamdi, 2021; Siddiqui and Asif, 2018). This is important because most language-related habits form at this stage. A second strength is that the Telegram platform was used for participant recruitment, which provided a broader reach among the relevant candidates.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by presenting a contemporary and localized analysis of the disconnect between the adoption of CLT-based teaching materials and the reality of implementation of CLT in Saudi classrooms. While many studies on CLT have been published globally, this research specifically addresses the gap in beliefs and practice in Saudi high school classrooms, where teachers believe in the effectiveness of CLT but are unable to implement it to the maximum extent because of institutional and student-related barriers. The findings also reveal that the mode of assessment is an important barrier to CLT implementation, because despite the use of CLT in classrooms, the final structure of assessment still includes questions based on the traditional English teaching methods. Therefore, there needs to be a systemic alignment between design of the curriculum, teacher training, and assessment methods to facilitate the smooth implementation of CLT in Saudi classrooms.

The findings of this study have several important implications for teaching English language in Saudi high schools. This study revealed a gap between the positive perceptions of teachers towards CLT and their actual implementation of CLT in their classrooms. Hence, continuous professional development programmes should be conducted to improve teachers' understanding of CLT strategies, activities, and methods for adapting the lessons to suit students' proficiency levels. Educational authorities and curriculum developers should design structured teaching resources for implementing CLT in the classrooms, providing practical guidance to the teachers on conducting activities such as group discussions, role-plays, presentations, and collaborative tasks. Providing a clear lesson plan, examples of activities, and assessment guidelines to the teachers may enable them to gradually and smoothly shift from traditional English teaching approaches to CLT.

Additionally, assessment systems should be modified to align with the objectives of CLT. Traditional assessments mostly focus on grammar and vocabulary, which are not explicitly covered in CLT. Thus, assessments should incorporate measures of communicative competence, including students' ability to express ideas, participate in conversations, and use English effectively in real-life situations. Finally, the findings of this study contribute to a growing body of literature on teachers' beliefs and practices about CLT implementation in high school classrooms. This study also provides the institutional and contextual factors that govern classroom practices.

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to understand the extent to which English language teachers used the CLT approach in their classrooms as opposed to the traditional method, and students' performance and motivation levels from the teachers' perspective. It went beyond general observation on CLT to reveal that in Saudi schools, the curriculum for CLT exists; however, there is a lack of practical guidance and proper assessment methods. Quantitative data was provided revealing that while 81% of the teachers believed in the usefulness of CLT, 40% of the teachers felt that students preferred the traditional English teaching methods, highlighting a deep-rooted cultural preference for memorization. Based on the findings of this study, awareness, information, and training need to be provided to English language teachers in Saudi Arabia regarding the specific objectives and activities of CLT so that students may receive the benefit of this approach. A comprehensive course needs to be designed for teachers where the activities of CLT are explicitly described and guidance is provided regarding how to implement these activities in the classroom. Specific instructions and how-to need to be provided so that teachers can guide students in the activities and enable them to make the best use of the sessions. Furthermore, according to the participants in our study, a structured curriculum of the English language course is missing which makes it difficult to implement the CLT approach in the classes. Therefore, the Ministry of Education needs to work on this so that teachers may receive insights from the curriculum and plan out the best way to implement CLT in their classes. Finally, in order for CLT to be successful, the assessment tests need to be altered to reflect the objectives of CLT and students should be judged on their communicative competence rather than on grammar and sentence formation alone.

Future Research

Future research should further explore the implementation and effectiveness of CLT in Saudi Arabia by including a wider range of participants from different educational settings and regions. Since this study focused mainly on teachers' perspectives, future studies could examine students' experiences and their actual improvement in language skills after exposure to CLT-based activities. Classroom observations and interviews with teachers may also provide deeper insights into the challenges faced during CLT implementation and the factors that influence teachers' ability to apply this approach effectively. In addition, longitudinal and experimental studies comparing traditional, CLT, and blended teaching approaches would help determine which methods are most beneficial for students with different levels of English proficiency. Future research could also investigate the influence of curriculum structure, assessment methods, class size, and teacher training programmes on the successful adoption of CLT in Saudi English classrooms. Such investigations would provide valuable evidence for developing more effective policies and teaching strategies to enhance English language learning outcomes.

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Supplementary Information

Questionnaire

1- Why do you think teaching and learning English is important and helpful?

1. a) English is the Language of International Communication
2. b) English is the Language of Business
3. c) Speaking English gives you Access to a World of Entertainment
4. d) Improve self-confidence
5. e) Others

2- Have you heard about communicative language teaching (CLT) before?

a) Yes b) No

If the answer is 'yes', please continuing. If the answer is 'no', please skip to Q10'

3- Where did you learn about communicative language teaching (CLT)?

1. a) Books or journals TESOL seminars/lectures
2. b) Teachers' manual Teacher training course
3. c) Workshop held by the board of education
4. d) University degree program
5. e) Workshop held by a teachers' association
6. f) Others ...

4- Do you believe that CLT is completely adopted in high school English classrooms?

5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5- Do you think that CLT approach is very useful in class?

5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

6- Do you think that the English textbook contains enough communication activities that help students improve their speaking skills?

5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

7- Can you apply the CLT method easily in class such as working in group, role-play, or group discussion?

a) Yes b) No

If 'No', why? (.....)

8- Do you think that CLT is the method that improves the four language skills such as reading, speaking, writing and listening?

5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

9- Do you believe that CLT approach makes students more motivated in class since it has communication activities such as pair work, discussion group?

5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

10- Do you think that CLT approach is more effective than traditional method?

a. Yes

b.

No

Why? (.....)

11- What are the reasons that make CLT effective in class?

1. It gives students the chance to practice the language and interact in class
2. It makes students more active and involved in class
3. It improves (Speaking, Listening, Writing, Reading)
4. It makes learners become more confident using the language in the real world

12- When using traditional method, do you find the learners enjoy the lesson?5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree**13- When using traditional method, students are usually afraid of making mistakes compared to CLT?**5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree**14- Do you prefer traditional method in class although that the materials used is based on CLT approach?**5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree**15- Are you satisfied with the CLT approach in teaching English?**5 ☐ 4 ☐ 3 ☐ 2 ☐ 1 ☐ Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree**16- What is your opinion as a teacher of English language in adopting CLT as a long-term teaching method in Saudi Arabia? (open question)**

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Table S1: Statistical analysis of quantitative results

	Do you think that the English textbook contains enough communication activities that help students improve their speaking skills?	Do you think that the English method that improves the four language skills such as reading, speaking, writing and listening skills?	Do you think that CLT approach is very useful in class?	Do you believe that CLT approach makes students more motivated in class since it has communication activities such as pair work, discussion	When using traditional method, do you find the learners enjoy the lesson?	When using traditional method, are students usually afraid of making mistakes compared to CLT?	Do you prefer traditional method in class although that the material used is based on CLT approach?	Are you satisfied with the CLT approach in teaching English?
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			on group?							
Spearman's rho	Do you think that CLT approach is very useful in class?	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.147	.490**	.431**	-.009	-.212	.023	.397**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.249	.000	.000	.943	.096	.859	.001
		N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
	Do you think that the English textbook contains enough communication activities that help students improve their speaking skills?	Correlation Coefficient	.147	1.000	.408**	.259*	.200	-.120	.186	.227
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.249	.	.001	.041	.116	.351	.145	.074
		N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
	Do you think that CLT is the method that improves the four language skills such as reading, speaking, writing and listening?	Correlation Coefficient	.490**	.408**	1.000	.501**	-.154	-.118	-.092	.434**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.	.000	.230	.356	.473	.000
		N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
	Do you believe that CLT approach makes students more motivated in class since it has communication activities such as pair work,	Correlation Coefficient	.431**	.259*	.501**	1.000	.064	-.108	-.098	.421**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.041	.000	.	.616	.400	.445	.001
		N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63

discussion group?									
When using traditional method, do you find the learners enjoy the lesson?	Correlation Coefficient	-.009	.200	-.154	.064	1.000	-.398**	.337**	-.287*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.943	.116	.230	.616	.	.001	.007	.023
	N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
When using traditional method, students are usually afraid of making mistakes compared to CLT?	Correlation Coefficient	-.212	-.120	-.118	-.108	-.398**	1.000	-.077	-.110
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.096	.351	.356	.400	.001	.	.548	.389
	N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
Do you prefer traditional method in class although that the materials used is based on CLT approach?	Correlation Coefficient	.023	.186	-.092	-.098	.337**	-.077	1.000	-.227
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.859	.145	.473	.445	.007	.548	.	.074
	N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63
Are you satisfied with the CLT approach in teaching English?	Correlation Coefficient	.397**	.227	.434**	.421**	-.287*	-.110	-.227	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.074	.000	.001	.023	.389	.074	.
	N	63	63	63	63	63	63	63	63

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).