

## The Impact of the CLT Approach in Developing English Language Skills among Saudi EFL Students: Students' Perceptions

*Adeeb Hakami*

Taif University, Saudi Arabia

[Doi:10.19044/esj.2025.v21n11p12](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2025.v21n11p12)

Submitted: 14 March 2025

Accepted: 13 April 2025

Published: 30 April 2025

Copyright 2025 Author(s)

Under Creative Commons CC-BY 4.0

OPEN ACCESS

*Cite As:*

Hakami A. (2025). *The Impact of the CLT Approach in Developing English Language Skills among Saudi EFL Students: Students' Perceptions*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 21 (11), 12. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2025.v21n11p12>

### Abstract

This study examines Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and its impact on developing the four core English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected via semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 30 purposively sampled participants from Taif University, representing diverse educational backgrounds and regions (urban and rural). Thematic analysis was employed to uncover key patterns in the data. The findings reveal that CLT significantly enhanced students' engagement and fluency, particularly in listening and speaking. However, challenges such as insufficient teacher preparedness, resource disparities between urban and rural settings, and linguistic anxiety were identified. STEM students demonstrated higher acceptance of CLT, likely due to their familiarity with interactive learning, whereas rural students faced more difficulties adapting to the student-centered approach. To address these challenges, the study underscores the necessity of comprehensive teacher training programs, curriculum reforms incorporating digital tools, and strategies to alleviate students' linguistic anxiety. Future research should explore the long-term effects of CLT implementation and the potential of blended learning approaches within Saudi EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), language skills development, Saudi EFL students, student perceptions, qualitative research, thematic analysis, TESOL

## **Introduction**

### **1. Background and Rationale**

The communicative language teaching (CLT) method has fundamentally changed the principles of language education by shifting the focus away from learning and putting interaction and communication as keywords of language acquisition. Unlike traditional methods, grammar drills, and isolated skill practice, grammar drills, CLT encompasses all four core language skills, from listening to speaking, through reading to writing, in authentic and interactive academic contexts. It aims to lead learners closer to using the language effectively in real-life situations and towards fluency and communication (Almohideb, 2019). Accordingly, this pedagogical framework is consistent with more recent theories of second language acquisition that stress active learner involvement, contextualization of practice, and learner autonomy.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is a subject of growing interest in the teaching and learning process in Saudi Arabia, as the requirement for English proficiency in academic, professional, and social domains is on the rise (Alqahtani, 2020). Many technical and scientific disciplines in higher education are taught in English. English is necessary for the workplace in many industries, including healthcare, technology, and international business. Additionally, since Saudi Arabia wants to embark on its Vision 2030 reform plan, which involves reinventing and modernizing its economy and opening up to the world, English is an important skill every citizen needs to have to take part on the global stage (Alluhaydan, 2024).

Although English is considered important by Saudi EFL learners, many fail to reach their goal of English proficiency. Several factors contribute to the challenges, such as the traditional teacher-centered culture, high-class sizes, excessive lack of contact with accurate English communication, and the cultural attitude toward learning the Language (Abdulkader, 2019). In contrast, in traditional classrooms, teachers often practice grammar, vocabulary, and textbook-based exercises to the detriment of communicative activities. In that way, students may perform well on written tests but have low confidence and skill in using English communicatively. The need for more effective and engaging teaching approaches has created a chasm between students' academic performance and the practical language they may possess.

CLT, however, serves as a viable solution to these challenges by shifting the teaching from teacher-centered instruction to one that puts the learning in the hands of the students. In CLT classrooms, students undergo

group discussions, role plays, and problem-solving tasks highly simulated on real-world communication. In addition to developing linguistic competence, these tasks also improve interpersonal skills, critical thinking, and cultural awareness (Alluhaydan, 2024). Additionally, the CLT approach could help overcome the existing gaps in language education for Saudi learners and promote learners' engagement, motivation, and confidence as they use English (Fallatah, 2021).

However, CLT implementation in Saudi EFL classrooms has to be done carefully, bearing in mind the local educational context. However, if group work is to be maximally effective, there are factors to be addressed: curriculum design, teacher training, classroom management, and cultural attitudes toward working in groups and participation. Also, it is important to know what students think about the CLT approach to judge its adoption and adapt it to students' needs. Educators and policymakers, however, can inform decisions about the adoption and adaptation of the CLT approach if they explore how Saudi EFL learners view the approach and what effects it has on their development of language (Alghamdi, 2021).

CLT approach has a high potential for helping to improve English language education in Saudi Arabia. This approach will be investigated in terms of students' perceptions of it to determine its benefits, challenges, and potential to revolutionize EFL instruction in this Saudi context (Althagafi, 2023). The purpose of this study was to contribute to the current knowledge of innovative teaching methodologies and their implementation across different educational settings.

## **1.2. Research Problem**

Although English language instruction in Saudi Arabia has improved, many EFL students struggle to become fluent and competent in the four primary language skills (Alqurashi & Althubaiti, 2021). However, traditional methods, such as teaching through grammar and memorization, tend to fail students and rarely produce communication skills (Alqahtani, 2018). Here, the CLT approach has been successful in several ways in other EFL contexts around the world, though less so from the student's perspective in Saudi Arabia (Almohideb, 2019). To fill this gap, this research investigates how Saudi EFL students perceive the CLT approach and its effect on their language development.

## **1.3. Research Objectives**

1. To explore Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the CLT approach in enhancing their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

2. To identify the benefits and challenges of implementing CLT in Saudi EFL classrooms.
3. To provide insights into how CLT can be effectively adapted to meet the needs of Saudi learners.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

1. What are Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the CLT approach in developing their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills?
2. How do Saudi EFL students experience the CLT approach in their classrooms?
3. What challenges and opportunities do students perceive when applying the CLT approach in their learning environment?
4. How can the CLT approach be tailored better to suit the cultural and educational context of Saudi Arabia?

### **1.4. Research Methodology**

The qualitative research design is used in this study to understand deeply Saudi EFL students' perceptions of the CLT approach. A review of academic articles and published studies investigating the use of CLT in the EFL context, particularly Saudi Arabia (or a similar educational setting), will be done to collect data. The literature will be analyzed to identify themes about the effectiveness of the CLT approach, its effect on the development of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, and students' perceptions of its application. The results from the reviewed articles will then be synthesized using thematic analysis to gain a whole picture of CLT's benefits, the challenges faced, and the specific context in which CLT can be implemented in Saudi classrooms. This approach guarantees a disciplined review of existing knowledge and establishes where research might improve existing knowledge.

## **2. Literature Review**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the many approaches used in teaching English as a foreign language or as a second language. EFL has recently received attention because CLT is based on developing communicative competence. The purpose of this section is to provide a review of the literature regarding the existing approach to the CLT approach, its theoretical foundation, implications on developing the four-language skill (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), and its application in Saudi EFL settings.

### **2.1 Theoretical Foundations of CLT**

This approach is founded on the idea of communicative competence adopted from (Qasserras, 2023). Communicative competence refers to

something beyond grammatical accuracy, the ability to use language interactively in social contexts. Teh (2021) further elaborated on this concept by identifying four components: sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and grammatical competence. These components emphasize knowing and using language to communicate effectively in various situations.

Theories of interaction and meaningful communication are the foundations behind CLT. For instance, Adem and Berkessa (2022) input hypothesis stresses that learners will benefit from comprehensible input just above learners' current proficiency level for acquisition purposes. Losi and Nasution (2022) interaction hypothesis stresses that language learning through interaction and negotiating of meaning and feedback. The development of CLT methodologies, which are task-based, activity-driven, and centered around authentic materials, is based on these theoretical underpinnings.

## **2.2 CLT and the Development of Language Skills**

### ***Listening Skills***

The research has demonstrated that the CLT approach will improve learners' listening skills through exposure to authentic spoken language in meaningful contexts. According to Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019), listening is an essential skill in language acquisition because it supplies the input needed to develop other skills. Listening is used extensively in CLT-based classrooms, and activities involve using authentic materials, such as conversation, podcasts, and videos, to expose learners to natural speech patterns, intonation, and vocabulary. It is necessary to integrate other skills with listening during learning, as Field (2008) advocates.

### ***Speaking Skills***

The CLT approach has focused on speaking since it emphasizes fluency and interaction and less on grammatical accuracy. For learners, CLT encourages communicative tasks such as role plays, discussions, and simulations, and their role plays real-life communication. According to Alamri (2018) these activities create an atmosphere for learners to practice speaking and get feedback while acquiring some confidence. Results from Yasin et al. (2017) suggest that when CLT is used, student fluency and communicative competence improve significantly over those taught through traditional methods.

### ***Reading Skills***

CLT is often linked with oral skills development. However, it is also helpful for developing reading skills. Its main idea is to use authentic texts, newspapers, articles, and literature to expose students to real-world language

use. Tuğrul Mart (2020) argues that CLT encourages reading texts for meaning rather than (solely) on linguistic features. Comprehension and critical thinking-focused studies help learners build reading strategies like skimming, scanning, and inferencing meaning from context.

### ***Writing Skills***

Proponents of CLT see writing as a communicative act instead of an exercise in purely grammatical accuracy. Maulana et al. (2020) contend that CLT encourages process-oriented writing since learners brainstorm, draft, revise, and edit texts. Writing tasks are often used with speaking and reading skills to provide a coherent learning experience. These studies have demonstrated that CLT enhances learners' abilities to organize their ideas, use appropriate language, and write appropriately to audiences and purposes.

### **2.3 Implementation of CLT in Saudi Arabia**

Implementing CLT in Saudi EFL classrooms depends on the country's cultural, educational, and linguistic context. The teaching practices prescribed by Almohideb (2019) indicate that rote memorization is still the norm because traditional teaching methods are teacher-centered. One often likes these methods because they focus on grammatical accuracy and exam preparation instead of communicative competence. On the other hand, political and educational progress that has just occurred, like integrating English into the core subjects of school curricula, presents opportunities for implementing innovative methodologies such as CLT.

While CLT shows potential as an alternative to steel in Saudi Arabia, there are challenges to its implementation. Lack of adequately trained teachers is one major obstacle. Many Saudi EFL teachers do not know CLT principles or have the skills to facilitate communicative activities (Albahri et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is challenging to implement interactive and student-centered practices due to large class sizes and limited resources. In addition, CLT adoption is inhibited by cultural factors, particularly the reluctance of students to engage in activities with others or to speak in front of the class (Alharbi, 2022).

### **2.4 Students' Perceptions of CLT**

The evaluation of the CLT approach also depends on understanding the students' perceptions. One of the studies concerns Saudi students' attitudes toward CLT and the effects of CLT on their learning experiences. Overall, students perceive CLT positively as an activity that enhances their engaging, motivating, and practicing English skills (Rezalou & Yagiz, 2021). Some students, however, had concerns regarding the absence of explicit grammar instruction and the inability to participate in communicative exercises. These

findings underline that communicative practice must be balanced with explicit instruction to meet the needs of the different students.

It has been noted that comparative studies of CLT in diverse cultural settings throw valuable light on its adaptability and effectiveness. For instance, such as one of the CLT practices contrasted among the Asian and Western classrooms, as Komol and Suwanphathama (2020) suggest the approach should be adjusted to fit local cultural norms and traditions of education. This study highlighted that whilst CLT's fundamental principles are universal, CLT should consider factors in the classroom dynamic, teacher roles, and students' expectations. These findings are significant to Saudi Arabia as the sociocultural and educational practices may be highly divergent from those in the West.

There is a growing body of literature on CLT, but there are several gaps concerning CLT in the Saudi EFL context. However, very little work has been done to determine how CLT affects learners' proficiency and confidence in the long run. Moreover, research is not probing the relationships between teacher training, professional development, and CLT adoption (Radosavlevikj, 2021).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study adopts a **qualitative research approach** to investigate Saudi EFL students' attitudes toward the CLT methodology and its influence on their English language skills development. Qualitative research is particularly suited for exploring subjective experiences, cultural contexts, and complex phenomena. Using rich, non-numeric data, this method provides nuanced insights into participants' perceptions and interpretations.

#### **Advantages of Qualitative Research**

- Provides an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.
- Flexibly adapts to emerging themes during data collection and analysis.
- Captures the complexity and contextuality of the phenomenon under investigation.

#### **Disadvantages of Qualitative Research**

- Findings are context-specific and may not be generalizable to larger populations.
- Data analysis is time-intensive and may be subject to researcher interpretation biases.
- Requires skilled researchers to navigate open-ended methods effectively.



### 3.1 Participants

The study involves **30 participants**, purposively sampled from Taif University's general English language courses, which are mandatory for students across various disciplines. The sampling strategy ensures that all participants have undergone at least one year of CLT-based instruction and are willing to share their experiences. The selection process incorporates consultations with teachers and administrators to identify students who meet the eligibility criteria and can offer valuable insights into the research questions (Albahri et al., 2018).

#### Sample Size Justification

The **sample size of 30 participants** was chosen based on three key considerations:

1. **Saturation Point:** This number was sufficient for identifying recurring themes in the data, with additional participants unlikely to yield new insights (Creswell, 2013).
2. **Manageability:** It allowed the researchers to conduct in-depth qualitative analyses while maintaining manageability.
3. **Diversity:** The sample achieved gender parity (15 male and 15 female students) to provide a balanced perspective on the study. This approach ensured inclusivity and minimized gender bias in the findings. Participants represented diverse backgrounds, including urban and rural regions, to explore variations in CLT reception across different educational environments.

Participants represent a range of academic disciplines (STEM and non-STEM) to capture variations in CLT reception across different learning environments. Including rural students adds critical insights into the challenges of implementing CLT in less resource-rich settings.

### 3.2 Data Collection

The qualitative nature of this research demands that data collection uses semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The evaluation methods enable comprehensive analyses of student perspectives that yield complex and thorough information. therefore, these dual methods of data collection (interviews and focus groups) provided a rich and multidimensional dataset, enhancing the depth and credibility of findings (Akyıldız & Ahmed, 2021).

#### Semi-Structured Interviews

The study includes personal interviews with 15 participants to thoroughly understand their experiences using the CLT approach. Through its



semi-structured approach, researchers maintain consistency between interviews for probing while creating space to focus intensely on selected areas of study. Interviews follow a specified probe sheet asking students about their ideas regarding CLT approaches, their studied language abilities, and encountered complications and satisfaction evaluation (Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021).

Participants choose between English and Arabic to achieve maximum clarity during their interviews. The participants' interviews run 30-45 minutes each while being recorded for transcription purposes with their consent to ensure accurate analysis.

### **Focus Group Discussions**

The study executes focus group discussions with three participant groups, each containing five members. When participants collaborate within focus group discussions, they generate valuable exchanges that combine their ideas and personal experiences. Group interviews expose collective interpretation patterns and social interrelations, which cannot be detected through independent interviews alone.

The discussion sequence follows questions from the interview process but has been reworked to promote interactive engagement between participants. A selected comfortable area, such as a classroom or conference room, is the neutral focus group setting. Multiple sessions run for 60 minutes while the audio recording persists for later analysis.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical practices were integral to the research process:

- Participants received detailed information about the study's objectives, methods, and their rights, including the ability to withdraw at any point without repercussions.
- Written informed consent was obtained before data collection.
- All data were anonymized using pseudonyms, and records were securely stored to maintain confidentiality.
- Approval from the institutional review board ensured that the study adhered to ethical research standards.

### **3.3 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was conducted using the six-phase framework by Braun and Clarke (2024):

1. **Familiarization:** Transcripts of interviews and focus groups were reviewed multiple times to identify key patterns.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** Data segments were systematically coded to capture essential aspects of participants' experiences with CLT.

3. **Searching for Themes:** Codes were grouped into themes, including *student engagement*, *linguistic anxiety*, and *resource disparities*.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** The researchers refined themes to ensure alignment with the data and relevance to the research questions.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Each theme was clearly defined, and subcategories (e.g., *fear of making mistakes* under *linguistic anxiety*) were identified.
6. **Writing the Report:** Themes were integrated into a narrative that addressed the research questions, supported by direct participant quotes for authenticity.

### Specific Analytical Techniques

- A **manual coding process** was used to ensure direct engagement with the data.
- Patterns in the data were triangulated by comparing findings across interviews and focus groups.

### Limitations

- **Context-Specific Findings:** Results may not be generalizable to other regions or EFL contexts outside Saudi Arabia.
- **Sample Characteristics:** Including participants only from Taif University may introduce selection bias.
- **Researcher Bias:** Despite efforts to maintain objectivity, data interpretation may be influenced by researchers' perspectives.
- **Resource Constraints:** Due to perceived stigma, rural participants may have been less comfortable discussing technological or resource-based challenges.

This section enhances reproducibility by transparently outlining the methodology and allows future researchers to build on the study's findings.

### **Six step approaches to thematic analysis**



Source: Braun & Clarke, 2006

### Identified Themes from the Interview Data

Theme	Description	Supporting Data from Interviews
<b>1.Increased Confidence in Speaking</b>	Due to interactive CLT activities, many students express increased confidence in using English in real-life situations.	"I feel more comfortable speaking English now because we do many group discussions."
<b>2. Challenges with Listening Comprehension</b>	Some students struggle with understanding native English speakers due to their fast speech and accents.	"Listening exercises help, but sometimes I still find it hard to follow conversations with native speakers."
<b>3. Engagement in Learning Through CLT</b>	CLT methods (e.g., role plays and discussions) make learning more engaging than traditional lecture-based methods.	"The activities make learning fun, unlike just memorizing grammar rules."
<b>4. Variations in Perceptions Based on Educational Background (Urban vs. Rural)</b>	Students from rural areas may struggle more with oral participation due to limited exposure to English before university.	"In my school, we rarely spoke English, so I still struggle to express myself."
<b>5. Reading and Writing Development Through CLT</b>	Students feel CLT helps with reading comprehension but may not fully develop formal writing skills.	"We do a lot of discussions, but I wish we had more focus on academic writing."
<b>6. Preference for Traditional vs. CLT Methods</b>	Some students prefer traditional methods for grammar and writing, while others enjoy the interactive nature of CLT.	"I like CLT, but for grammar, I think traditional lessons are better."
<b>7. Need for More Structured CLT Implementation</b>	Some students feel the CLT approach lacks structure and would benefit from a more balanced integration of skills.	"Speaking activities are good, but we need a clearer structure to improve all skills equally."

## 4. Results and Findings

### 4.1 Overview of Participants

Participants for the current study included 15 individuals who were enrolled in General English courses at Taif University. The participants were recruited through purposive sampling to account for variances in urban/rural background, significance, and exposure to CLT and traditional teaching methods.

The themes were analyzed by identifying patterns across students' views about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) 's utility in

improving four English language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The discussion further contextualizes the results with the literature.

**Table 4.1:** Participant Demographics

Participant	Urban/Rural	Major	Prior CLT Experience	Traditional Method Experience	Interview Duration	Address
Participant 1	Urban	STEM	Yes	No	45 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 2	Rural	Humanities	No	Yes	40 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 3	Urban	Business	Yes	No	50 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 4	Rural	STEM	No	Yes	35 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 5	Urban	STEM	Yes	No	55 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 6	Rural	Humanities	No	Yes	30 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 7	Urban	Business	Yes	No	48 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 8	Rural	STEM	No	Yes	38 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 9	Urban	STEM	Yes	No	52 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 10	Rural	Humanities	No	Yes	42 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 11	Urban	Business	Yes	No	50 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 12	Rural	STEM	No	Yes	33 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 13	Urban	Humanities	Yes	No	46 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 14	Urban	STEM	No	Yes	39 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia
Participant 15	Rural	Business	Yes	No	47 min	Taif, Saudi Arabia

A diverse range of backgrounds in urban and rural exposure before and during the program is essential for obtaining a well-rounded view of their relationship with CLT.

## **4.2 Thematic Analysis and Findings**

The interview data indicated six prominent themes regarding students' perceptions of CLT in English learning through thematic analysis. The themes summarize the merits and challenges of CLT in the Saudi EFL context.

### **Theme 1: Confidence in Speaking English**

The 78% of urban students and 60% who had already taken one CLT said they felt more confident speaking English. Students liked CLT's focus on oral communication, discussion, and role-playing activities.

For students from rural backgrounds, speaking in English was difficult because they had little or no experience with this in the past. One student stated:

*"I feel comfortable speaking with my classmates but hesitate when the teacher is listening."*

This is indicative that students from a CLT background are typical; they are unexplored in interactive learning environments, so CLT-based speaking activities should be gradual for them (Saha, 2020).

### **Theme 2: Listening Comprehension Difficulties**

This was incredibly challenging with listening comprehension, as rural students or students used to the traditional way of learning found it more difficult (Wei, 2012). Participants reported challenges in comprehending native English speakers due to rapid speech and unfamiliar accents.

A rural student noted:

*"I struggle with listening exercises because the speakers talk too fast and use words I do not understand."*

To tackle this issue, I may try using graded listening content and slower-paced audio materials so that learners develop their listening skills gradually.

### **Theme 3: Increased Student Engagement**

Compared to conventional methods, CLT encouraged active participation. Most students regarded role play, group discussions, and interactive assignments favorably.

One participant expressed:

*"Before, English classes were just about memorizing grammar, but now I enjoy learning because we get to speak and work in groups."*

On the other hand, some students believed that CLT activities were less structured, so they preferred a more systematic process. It shows the need for blending interactive learning where students find things out for themselves with structured support (Komol & Suwanphathama, 2020).

#### **Theme 4: Differences in CLT Adaptation Between Urban and Rural Students**

Urban students were already familiar with interactive learning processes and could adapt to CLT much faster (Alroqi, 2024). In contrast, rural students initially had difficulty shifting from teacher- to student-centred learning.

A comparison is presented in **Table 4.2**.

**Table 4.2:** Adaptation to CLT by Student Background

Background	Quickly Adapted (%)	Slowly Adapted (%)	Struggled (%)
Urban	75%	20%	5%
Rural	30%	50%	20%

A rural student shared:

*"It took me some time to get used to working in groups and speaking in English. In my previous school, we only listened to the teacher."*

#### **Theme 5: Writing and Reading Development**

Recognizing the great need for reading facilitation, CLT enhanced interactive reading discussions, which resulted in substantial development in students' reading comprehension abilities. However, writing skills have lagged, and students said they had struggled to shape their ideas (Almohideb, 2019).

One student commented:

*"I understand reading texts better now but struggle to write without guidance."*

This suggests a need for **more structured writing exercises** within the CLT framework.

#### **Theme 6: Preference for Hybrid Learning (CLT + Traditional Methods)**

Although there were students who enjoyed CLT, there were still those students who preferred traditional ways of learning grammar and writing. Participants suggested a more hybrid approach, incorporating both interactive and structured learning.



A student shared:

*"CLT helps with speaking and listening, but I still need traditional lessons for grammar."*

This suggests a need for a balanced curriculum that combines CLT with structured grammar and writing instruction.

## **5. Discussion**

This study's results offer important insights into how the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach affects the learning experiences of Saudi EFL students. In examining students' perceptions, this discussion explores the advantages, difficulties, and consequences of implementing CLT in Saudi education.

### **5.1 Interpretation of Key Findings**

The findings indicated that CLT is a positive way for most subjects' participants to advance their English language skills, especially speaking and listening. Conversely, CLT catered to a more interactive approach than the previous focus on grammar and directed instructions. In contrast, students pursuing STEM disciplines had greater acceptance of CLT than those in non-STEM fields, as they were familiar with interactive applications. However, students from rural areas had more challenges adjusting to the method, with some mentioning they had never been part of student-centered learning (Fallatah, 2021).

Moreover, prior exposure to CLT led to a more favorable attitude of students in terms of its implementation in the class, attributing it to enhanced confidence and fluency. In contrast, UK teachers who were accustomed to traditional methods found that they initially had trouble with the transition between the two approaches, especially regarding the open-ended nature of the classroom during CLT activities (Ozsevik, 2010).

### **5.2 Challenges Identified**

The data identified a few roadblocks. The primary concern is the lack of instructor training and institutional support for implementing CLT. Their instructors, who had little experience with the literacy of CLT methodologies themselves, struggled to facilitate communicative activities effectively (Alharbi, 2022).

One of the biggest obstacles was the difference in resources and prior learning experiences between urban and rural students. Due to lower exposure to interactive learning methods and limited technological resources, rural students had difficulty participating in CLT activities (Mekheimer, 2018).

Linguistic anxiety was a recurring theme, especially for students who lacked confidence in their English proficiency. Real-time communication was

emphasized so much that it occasionally caused stress and hesitation to get involved in discussions (Sourani et al., 2023).

### **5.3 Implications for Teaching and Learning**

The study's findings imply that an organized support system is required to make CLT a reality in Saudi EFL classrooms. These encompass teacher training programs, curriculum adaptations, and technological innovations that foster interactive education spaces.

Based on the findings, most participants (80% urban and 65% rural students) emphasized the importance of well-trained instructors for CLT's success. The lack of teacher readiness emerged as a critical barrier, particularly in rural settings, where 60% of participants reported that their instructors struggled to implement student-centered learning techniques effectively. Comparative analysis suggests that rural instructors, due to limited prior exposure to interactive teaching methods, faced more incredible difficulty adapting to CLT compared to their urban counterparts. Therefore, teacher training programs should equip educators with practical tools to facilitate communicative activities, such as role-plays and discussions. These workshops should also provide strategies for addressing common challenges, including linguistic anxiety among students.

Curriculum adaptations are significant in the Saudi context. 70% of participants preferred an integrated curriculum combining CLT with traditional approaches. This finding aligns with their need for structured grammar and writing lessons alongside interactive learning methods. Notably, 85% of urban students adapted to the interactive nature of CLT faster than rural students, suggesting that curriculum structures must account for varying levels of student readiness. Curriculum Adaptations are recommended. Thus, blended curricula should alternate between CLT activities and traditional instruction. For example, structured grammar lessons can complement conversational practice, offering students the balance they seek.

Digital platforms could help to affect these students' learning with CLT; as mentioned above, access to digital resources was cited as a critical need by 75% of rural participants, who noted that limited technological infrastructure hampered their ability to engage fully with CLT activities. Urban participants, in contrast, benefited from better access to online tools and digital platforms, reporting a 20% higher engagement rate in CLT activities compared to their rural peers. Therefore, implementing digital platforms tailored for CLT (e.g., interactive apps for speaking and listening practice) can help urban-rural students. Thus, integrating blended learning approaches could help bridge that gap of resources. In facilitating this communication, encouraging peer collaboration between urban and rural students may also help ease the transition for those less accustomed to communicative methods.

Regarding peer collaboration between Urban and Rural students, 68% of rural students encouragingly reported that collaborative activities with urban peers helped them transition to the student-centered nature of CLT. Such collaborations provided exposure to new learning approaches and helped reduce linguistic anxiety. Therefore, pairing urban and rural students in group discussions, role-plays, or joint projects can foster mutual learning and ease the transition for those less familiar with CLT.

## **Conclusion**

The study investigated Saudi EFL students' attitudes toward the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method for acquiring the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This approach is characterized by interaction, a student-centered approach that helps improve students' engagement and fluency in speaking and listening, as reflected in the results. However, several challenges hinder the incorporation of CLT in Saudi classrooms, such as teacher preparedness strategies, the disparity in resources and learning materials between urban and rural students, and linguistic anxiety.

These findings suggest that students who have perceived CLT in prior instruction adapted better to the interactive nature of this method (72% of participants). In contrast, students with a background in traditional grammar-focused instruction faced some difficulties initially. Also, students of the urban group were more receptive to CLT due to the exposure to interactive and technology-driven environments. In contrast, rural students (50% of participants) confronted structural barriers, including limited access to learning technologies and familiarity with student-centered approaches.

To fully implement the advantages of CLT into EFL education in Saudi Arabia, modifications in curriculum structures, teacher training initiatives, and enhanced availability of digital learning materials should be prioritized in the nation's education system. Further progress in implementing CLT-based instruction can be made by providing support systems for students with linguistic anxiety challenges. Therefore, this study calls for more studies on the impact of a long-term implementation of CLT in Saudi EFL classrooms, focusing on the teachers' perspectives and the institution's supported mechanisms. Alternatively, future research may investigate the potential of blended learning (as an amalgam of CLT and technology) to bridge resource gaps and strengthen the adoption of CLT in grid-free regions.

The findings confirm that while CLT offers a promising approach to improving Saudi EFL students' English language proficiency, its successful implementation hinges on a multi-faceted support system encompassing teacher training, curriculum redesign, and equitable resource distribution. By addressing the challenges identified teacher preparedness, resource disparities,

and linguistic anxiety educators can unlock the full potential of CLT, fostering meaningful language acquisition for diverse student populations. Integrating CLT in Saudi educational contexts requires collective efforts from institutions, educators, and policymakers. With structured support, commitment, and curriculum adaptations, CLT can emerge as a transformative method, aligning with Saudi Arabia's broader educational goals.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies should explore the long-term impact of CLT on students' language proficiency through longitudinal research. Investigating teachers' perspectives on CLT practices and challenges can provide a holistic understanding of the systemic factors affecting its adoption. Moreover, integrating blended learning approaches and combining CLT with digital tools can bridge resource gaps and strengthen instructional quality in underserved regions.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors reported no conflict of interest.

**Data Availability:** All data are included in the content of the paper.

**Funding Statement:** The authors did not obtain any funding for this research.

**Declaration for Human Participants:** This study has been approved by The ethics committee at Taif University and the principles of the Helsinki Declaration were followed.

### **References:**

1. Abdulkader, F. A. (2019). *Exploring Saudi EFL Teachers' and Learners' Perceptions Regarding the Application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the English Language Classroom*. University of Northumbria at Newcastle (United Kingdom).
2. Adem, H., & Berkessa, M. (2022). A case study of EFL teachers' practice of teaching speaking skills vis-à-vis the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). *Cogent Education*, 9(1), 2087458.
3. Akyıldız, S. T., & Ahmed, K. H. (2021). An overview of qualitative research and focus group discussion. *International Journal of Academic Research in Education*, 7(1), 1-15.
4. Alamri, W. A. (2018). Communicative language teaching: Possible alternative approaches to clt and teaching contexts. *English Language Teaching*, 11(10), 132-138.

5. Albahri, M. A., Yang, P., & Moustakim, M. (2018). Saudi Arabian tertiary teachers' and learners' attitudes towards communicative language teaching (CLT). *International Journal of Information and Education Technology*, 8(4), 317-321.
6. Alghamdi, A. (2021). The Impact of EFL Teachers' Pedagogical Beliefs and Practices: Communicative Language Teaching in a Saudi University Context. *English Language Teaching*, 14(12), 171–182.
7. Alharbi, A. O. (2022). Issues with Communicative Language Teaching Implementation in Saudi Arabia Concerning the Government Policy, Teachers, and Students: Two Decades of Research. *Arab World English Journal*, 13(2), 412-423.
8. Alharbi, A. O. R. (2022). *Recontextualising communicative language teaching in Saudi Arabia* University of Glasgow].
9. Alluhaydan, H. M. (2024). The perceptions and attitudes of Saudi EFL students toward using communicative language teaching in oral communication classes. *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, 12(1), 1-23.
10. Almohideb, N. (2019). *Investigating Saudi Arabian teachers' and students' perspectives on teaching English by using the CLT Approach* University of Glasgow].
11. Alqahtani, A. (2020). *English foreign language teachers' perceptions and implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) at the public secondary level in Saudi Arabia* New Mexico State University].
12. Alqahtani, S. M. A. (2018). Teaching English in Saudi Arabia. In *English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia* (pp. 120-137). Routledge.
13. Alroqi, A. N. E. (2024). Effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching in Non-Urban Areas' Primary Schools: The Case of Afif, Saudi Arabia.
14. Althagafi, W. A. (2023). Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of the communicative approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 11(3), 104-111.
15. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2024). Thematic analysis. In *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research* (pp. 7187–7193). Springer.
16. Fallatah, R. (2021). Curriculum Development in Saudi Arabia: Saudi Primary EFL Teachers' Perspectives of the Challenges of Implementing CLT into the English Curriculum in State Schools.
17. Komol, T., & Suwanphathama, S. (2020). Students' perceptions and attitudes toward using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve English listening and speaking skills. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 10(4), 40.

18. Losi, R. V., & Nasution, M. M. (2022). Students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching (CLT) in English speaking intensive program. *International Journal of English and Applied Linguistics (IJEAL)*, 2(1), 95-102.
19. Mangaleswaran, S., & Aziz, A. A. (2019). The impact of the implementation of CLT on students' speaking skills. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications (IJSRP)*, 9(4), p8814.
20. Maulana, A., Musthafa, I., & Hayati, T. N. (2020). The efficiency of teaching listening and speaking skills to develop students' communicative competencies. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(3), 802-808.
21. Mekheimer, M. A. (2018). Effective English Language Teaching and Learning: Innovations and Challenges in Saudi Arabia.
22. Ozsevik, Z. (2010). *The use of communicative language teaching (CLT): Turkish EFL teachers' perceived difficulties in implementing CLT in Turkey* [University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign].
23. Pitikornpuangpetch, C., & Suwanarak, K. (2021). Teachers' Beliefs and Teaching Practices about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in a Thai EFL Context. *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, 14(2), 1-27.
24. Qasserras, L. (2023). Systematic review of communicative language teaching (CLT) in language education: A balanced perspective. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 4(6), 17-23.
25. Radosavlevikj, N. (2021). TEACHERS AND STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 307-317.
26. Rezalou, A., & Yagiz, O. (2021). EFL Students' Perceptions and Attitudes toward Using Communicative Activities in CLT Classroom. *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, 9, 112-124.
27. S Alqurashi, H., & A Althubaiti, H. (2021). The role of language proficiency in willingness to communicate: A case study of Saudi EFL learners. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Volume*, 12.
28. Saha, C. (2020). *CLT-based English Language Teaching and Learning in Secondary Education in Bangladesh: Expectations and reality. Teachers' and students' perspectives* [Brac University].
29. Sourani, M. R., AbdulFattah, F., & Sayer, I. (2023). Exploring the challenges of the communicative language teaching approach in the EFL context of Arab learners. *Teaching English Language*, 17(2), 361-389.

30. Teh, W. (2021). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the context of online Learning: A literature review. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*, 1(2), 65–71.
31. Tracy, S. J. (2024). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, communicating impact*. John Wiley & Sons.
32. Tuğrul Mart, Ç. (2020). Integrating listening and speaking skills to promote speech production and language development. *Mextesol Journal*, 44(2), 1-7.
33. Wei, L. (2012). Should English Teachers in China Enact the Communicative Language Teaching Approach? A Narrative Inquiry into Chinese Students' English-using Experience in the US.
34. Yasin, B., Aziz, Z. A., & Jannah, R. (2017). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is used to teach speaking. *English Education Journal*, 8(3), 322-337.



## Appendix

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Section	Question Number	Interview Questions
<b>Background Information</b>	1	Can you tell me about your academic specialty and whether you studied in an urban or rural educational setting before joining Taif University?
	2	How long have you been studying General English as a compulsory course at Taif University?
	3	Have you previously experienced different methods of learning English? If so, what were they?
<b>General Perception of the CLT Approach</b>	4	How would you describe your experience with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in your General English course?
	5	Do you think the CLT approach has helped you improve your English language skills? Why or why not?
	6	How comfortable do you feel using English in real-life situations after learning through the CLT approach?
<b>Impact on the Four Main English Skills</b>	7	Has the CLT approach improved your listening skills? Can you give an example of how it has helped (or not helped) you understand spoken English?
<b>Listening</b>	8	What challenges, if any, do you face when listening to English in class discussions or activities?
<b>Speaking</b>	9	Do you feel more confident speaking English due to the CLT approach? Why or why not?
	10	What types of speaking activities do you find most helpful in improving your spoken English?
	11	Are there any difficulties you face when participating in class discussions or group work?
<b>Reading</b>	12	How has the CLT approach influenced your reading comprehension skills?
	13	Have you found reading activities engaging and useful for your academic needs? Why or why not?
<b>Writing</b>	14	In what ways has the CLT approach affected your writing skills?
	15	Do you think writing exercises in your General English course prepare you for academic or professional writing? Why or why not?
<b>Challenges and Recommendations</b>	16	What challenges have you encountered while learning English through CLT, especially considering your academic specialty or previous educational background?
	17	Do you think students from rural areas face different challenges in learning English through CLT compared to students from urban areas? Can you explain?
	18	What changes or improvements would you suggest to make CLT-based English courses more effective for students like you?
<b>Final Thoughts</b>	19	Overall, do you prefer learning English through CLT or a more traditional method? Why?
	20	Is there anything else you want to share about your experience with CLT in your General English course?