Using CLT Approach to Foster Fluency and Oral Communication Skills in Saudi Female English Major First-Year Students: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract:
Using English as a medium of communication has become a demanding skill to pursue better academic and occupational opportunities. EFL learners need a practical method of learning English to communicate effectively and speak more fluently. Hence, this study aims to investigate teachers' perspectives on the use of communicative language teaching to foster fluency and oral communication skills of Saudi female students majoring in English during their first year. It employs a mixed methods approach to data collection. A questionnaire of a five-point scale was used to collect data about teachers' perspectives on using communicative language teaching in EFL classes. 32 English teachers at Taif University participated in the attitudinal questionnaire. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers to have an in-depth discussion about the quantitative data and answer the research questions. The findings revealed that teachers have a positive perspective toward using CLT to improve Saudi EFL students' fluency and oral communication skills. Interviewed teachers significantly support implementing communicative activities, indicating the advantages of communicative-based classrooms. Thus, it is highly recommended to conduct an experimental study, presenting the difference between a communicative-based EFL class and a non-communicative EFL class in the Saudi context.

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Using CLT Approach to Foster Fluency and Oral Communication Skills in Saudi Female English Major First Year Students: Teachers' Perspectives

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master's Degree in TESOL
Supervised by: Prof. AbdulRahman Al-Asmari
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May 30, 2023
Dedication

My heartfelt gratitude goes to my parents and siblings, whose unwavering support and encouragement have been my guiding lights throughout this challenging yet rewarding journey of pursuing my master's degree. Your love, patience, and belief in me have given me the strength and determination to overcome obstacles and strive for excellence.

I am also deeply thankful to my esteemed professors, whose expertise, guidance, and generosity in sharing knowledge have enriched my academic experience. Your mentorship and feedback have been invaluable in shaping my understanding and contributing to the success of my thesis.

Manar Salem N. Almutairi
Abstract

Using English as a medium of communication has become a demanding skill to pursue better academic and occupational opportunities. EFL learners need a practical method of learning English to communicate effectively and speak more fluently. Hence, this study aims to investigate teachers' perspectives on the use of communicative language teaching to foster fluency and oral communication skills of Saudi female students majoring in English during their first year. It employs a mixed methods approach to data collection. A questionnaire of a five-point scale was used to collect data about teachers' perspectives on using communicative language teaching in EFL classes. 32 English teachers at Taif University participated in the attitudinal questionnaire. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers to have an in-depth discussion about the quantitative data and answer the research questions. The findings revealed that teachers have a positive perspective towards using CLT to improve Saudi EFL students' fluency and oral communication skills. Interviewed teachers significantly support implementing communicative activities, indicating the advantages of communicative-based classrooms. Thus, it is highly recommended to conduct an experimental study, presenting the difference between a communicative-based EFL class and a non-communicative EFL class in the Saudi context.

Keywords: Communicative language teaching, English language teaching, fluency, interaction, oral communication skills.
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1. Introduction

The ultimate goal of learning a language is to use it properly in communicative situations. While achieving this goal, many EFL learners have faced major issues. For instance, it is challenging to speak English fluently and communicate effectively with other English speakers. As English is not a language spoken in everyday life in the Saudi context, Saudi EFL learners need an interactive learning environment to compensate for the lack of real-life interactions. The focus of the current study will be on the productive aspect of learning a foreign language. Saudi EFL learners typically have the knowledge and rules of the language in their minds; nevertheless, they aren’t used to naturally communicating and speaking with others. Hence, the study aims to explore how effective the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach is for improving the fluency and oral communication skills of Saudi female students majoring in English during their first year. The communicative approach is a practical way of teaching in which teachers provide communicative tasks to engage students in authentic communication. According to Richard (2006), the goal of communicative language teaching is to develop students' communicative competence. Communicative competence includes a number of aspects, such as adjusting our language use to the situation and the audience and maintaining communication. In his research, Abd al-Magid (2006, p. 1) mentioned that "many countries have adopted the Communicative Approach to language teaching because it develops the competencies and abilities of ESL learners to be fluent, proficient, and accurate in the target language."

2. Literature Review

This section is an overview of relevant studies to the research under discussion. The research aims to investigate teachers’ perspectives on the use of communicative language teaching to foster fluency and oral communication skills of Saudi female students majoring in
English during their first. It presents the theoretical background and empirical studies on the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and its effect on EFL learners' fluency and oral communication skills. Previous studies conducted on the CLT approach, interaction and communication skills in L2, and fluency are presented in the theoretical background section. The section of empirical studies includes Saudi EFL students, promoting fluency in English language classrooms, and teachers' attitudes and communicative approach implementation.

2.1 Theoretical Background

2.1.1 Communicative Language Teaching Approach

A significant number of studies have stressed the need for developing communicative competence when teaching foreign languages. Richard (2006) states that communicative competence refers to understanding a variety of texts and knowing how to use the language for various purposes, how to adjust the use of the language depending on settings and participants (formal and informal language), and how to maintain communication regardless of any obstacles the speaker may have. According to Alibekova and Urinboyeva (2020), the main goal of teaching English as a foreign language is to develop students' communicative competence. This goal can be achieved by implementing a communicative system-activity approach in which students are engaged in real-life situations. The communicative method is the most successful method of teaching a foreign language and its culture (Alibekova & Urinboyeva, 2020).

Many studies have investigated the advantages of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, stressing the great practical benefit to teachers and students. According to Savignon (2002), the interaction between teachers and students is significantly enhanced, which helps them build a harmonious relationship in the classroom. In language classes, particularly, the more approachable and interactive the teacher is, the more students are eager to
practice and use the language. However, the communicative activities should be used constantly throughout the course, or it would not provide the expected results of developed communicative competence and oral skills (Vanessa Toro, Gina Camacho-Minuche, Eliana Pinza-Tapia, & Fabian Paredes, 2019). Indeed, the constancy of applying communicative activities (i.e., pair and group-work activities, roleplays, oral discussion, information gaps, storytelling, and task-based activities) in language classes is the fundamental base on which the CLT approach is built to assimilate real-life interactions and situations. Also, the CLT approach creates a facilitating environment to produce the language through doing the communicative tasks because "students spoken language is more productive when they are engaged in a dynamic learning environment that encourages them to do their tasks" (Vanessa Toro, Gina Camacho-Minuche, Eliana Pinza-Tapia, & Fabian Paredes, 2019, p. 111).

2.1.2 Interaction and Communication skills in L2

As interacting and communicating with others is the natural way of learning a language, teacher-student interaction should be implemented in language classrooms. As such, students will have the opportunity to speak and develop their oral communication skills. Ellis (1999) defines interaction in a second language as the communication that takes place when individuals talk to each other, especially when they are interpreting meaning to avoid communication problems. Although Ellis focused on second language learning, interaction plays an important role in foreign language learning as well. Simply, interaction is "the exchange of information between the teacher and the students or among the students" (Jeyasala, 2014, p. 165). She links the use of interactive activities to the development of effective communication in English. According to Krashen (1982), learning a language involves developing not only one's language abilities but also one's communication skills. He stresses the importance of communicative input in developing the learners' communication skills and using the target language in real-life situations.
2.1.3 Fluency

The CLT approach is used to improve learners' fluency in the target language because learning a language, targeting accuracy and grammatical competence, does not enable students to communicate effectively and deliver meaningful messages (Richard, 2006). Therefore, there was a need to shift from traditional English teaching that focused on grammatical competence to CLT that encourages learners to speak the language fluently. According to Richard (2006), fluency is the natural language use that takes place when a speaker interacts meaningfully with others and keeps ongoing and understandable conversations. In his book, he practically discusses the CLT approach and explains its positive effect on improving fluency. By implementing communicative activities and strategies, students will have the opportunity to articulate their ideas constantly, which leads to building the habit of speaking English fluently.

Consistent with the concepts and notions presented in the theoretical background, empirical research with EFL and ESL learners supports that communicative teaching facilitates fluent speaking and meaningful communication in English. In the case of EFL Saudi learners, the implementation of the CLT approach and effective interaction in the teaching process are particularly useful for the development of fluency and oral communication skills in English.

2.2 Empirical Studies

2.2.1 Saudi EFL Students

There has always been a quest for development and useful adjustment in the Saudi context of teaching English. For instance, Nather (2014, p. iii), in her case study on the effect of an integrated program on speaking, states that "Saudi public schools aim to educate students to use English in real-life communication." She has introduced a program to enhance Saudi high school students' competence and confidence while speaking in English. Her communicative-based program yields positive results, stressing that active participation, a stimulating learning
environment, and authentic tasks improve students' confidence and linguistic competence to verbally communicate in English. Therefore, she recommends implementing communicative and interactive teaching methods in the syllabus of English courses. As the study takes into account all the linguistic and cultural aspects of the Saudi high school context, the program was designed accordingly.

2.2.2 Promoting Fluency in English Language Classrooms

Fluency is a goal for any EFL learner, yet it can be challenging to achieve. For this reason, many studies have investigated methods to improve fluency in English speaking. According to Jeyasala (2014), teachers should apply interactive ways of teaching and involve students in speaking activities to promote effective communication and fluency in English. In her exploratory study, she listed the repeat benefits of adopting interactive tasks, and one of them was that the tasks enabled them to strengthen their conversational and communication skills. Jeyasala (2014) concludes that speaking skills are enhanced as students share information and discuss it orally with their peers and teacher. This in turn boosts their fluency due to the constant speaking and interaction in the classroom.

The findings and conclusion of Jeyasala (2014) align with what Nather (2014) has found in her case study. As students in a traditional Saudi classroom learn mainly from prescribed material, they have few opportunities to speak English (Nather, 2014). After implementing the communicative-based program, she noticed that when students regularly practiced speaking aloud about engaging topics, their fluency increased.

2.2.3 Teachers' Attitudes and Communicative Approach Implementation

Teachers' attitudes are of paramount importance to the success or failure of a teaching method application. A descriptive case study conducted at six secondary schools in Zimbabwe by Abd al-Magid (2006) reveals that teachers' positive and favorable attitudes toward the
communicative approach were crucial for its successful implementation. According to Abd al-Magid (2006), teachers' attitudes are shaped by their beliefs, emotions, and actions; therefore, the connection between them was examined to find their effects on how teachers apply teaching approaches. Teachers have a strong influence when adopting a teaching approach, such as the communicative approach, because they are the ones who guide their students and decide their classroom behavior. Therefore, the study reveals that the successful adoption of the communicative approach in teachers' ESL classrooms was found to be significantly correlated with teachers' classroom behaviors and attitudes, demonstrating a dependent relationship between them.

However, because it is only one of many factors, the impact of teachers' attitudes on the communicative approach implementation is undeniable but not always definitive (Abd al-Magid, 2006). For instance, Jeyasala (2014) has noted that both students and teachers need to increase enthusiasm and enjoyment to successfully have a communicative and interactive learning environment. She stresses the influence of both teachers and students, so classrooms should be interactive to improve students' communicative competence. To this end, both studies yielded practical and significant results that help teachers when implementing teaching methods in their classrooms.

2.3 Gaps in the literature

The previous studies were mainly concerned with improving confidence in speaking English at the high school level in Saudi Arabia (Nather, 2014) and promoting communication in English at the college level in India (Jeyasala, 2014). However, none of them have investigated teachers' perspectives toward using the CLT approach to develop fluency and oral communication skills in English. Another researcher has investigated how teachers' attitudes affect the success of the communicative approach implementation in an ESL context (Abd al-
Magid, 2006). Even though the study has shown how important teachers' attitudes are to effectively applying the communicative approach, the results of the study might not apply to EFL teachers in Saudi colleges. Although many studies have discussed the communicative language teaching approach and investigated its effect on ESL students, there is still a lack of robust research in the EFL Saudi context at the university level. As such, the current study aims to fill the gap by investigating teachers' perspectives on the use of the communicative language teaching approach to foster Saudi EFL students' fluency and oral communication skills. The results of the study could have pedagogical implications for improving Saudi EFL students' fluency and oral communication skills.

2.4 Problem statement

Learning English as a foreign language has been challenging for Saudi EFL learners. A major challenge is that the way they are taught does not correspond with the interactive goal of learning English. Even though the educational system has undergone tremendous changes to implement effective teaching methods, many English courses, especially speaking courses, are delivered using non-communicative teaching methods. The traditional method of teaching leaves little room for practice and discussion, which contrasts with the students need to practice speaking and apply what they have learned effectively in real-life interactions.

2.5 The significance of the study

The study aims to contribute to educational reform in the teaching methodology in Saudi EFL classes. Lacking the ability to speak and communicate in English has become a subject of increasing concern for EFL teachers and learners, and it will negatively affect learners' academic and occupational opportunities. As a result, there has been a need to shift from traditional teaching to communicative-based classrooms.
2.6 Research questions

This research is guided by the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of Saudi female EFL teachers towards the use of CLT for Saudi female students majoring in English during their first year?

2. What are the reasons that hinder Saudi female English major students from being fluent in speaking English?

3. Does practicing English through communicative tasks in EFL classes develop students' oral communication skills? If yes, how?

4. What are the challenges of implementing the CLT approach that English teachers might face?

3. Methodology

The study employs a descriptive design as it describes how the communicative approach can be effective for Saudi students at Taif University. It also describes the strategies that would boost students' smooth speech and oral communication in English. It employs a mixed methods approach because the researcher seeks reliable final results.

3.1 Participants

The participants are Saudi female EFL teachers in English language major at Taif University. They voluntarily participated in the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. A written consent form was given to the teachers before conducting the semi-structured interviews.
3.2 Data collection instruments

A questionnaire of a five-point scale and 16 statements was given to the participants (see Table 1) in the appendices. Teachers' responses will help understand their perspectives on using communicative language teaching in EFL classes. The questionnaire was designed by Mohammed Al-Magid (2006) in his research paper, "The Effect of Teachers’ Attitudes on the Effective Implementation of the Communicative Approach in ESL Classes. It was developed to suit the aim of the current study, so some changes have been made to the original questionnaire.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers to gain qualitative data and have an in-depth discussion about the obtained quantitative data. Interviews give the participants the chance to elaborate more and share their observations about using CLT, showing all the possible answers, remarks, and suggestions related to the approach under discussion. Interview questions were written by the researcher (see the appendices).

3.3 Procedure

The attitudinal questionnaire was adapted from Mohammed Al-Magid's study (2006), which investigated the effect of teachers' attitudes on the implementation of the communicative approach in ESL classrooms. It was developed to suit the aim of the current study and distributed on April 27, 2023. All participants agreed to be involved in the study, and they were informed about the topic and the purpose of the study. The data obtained from the questionnaire was collected and analyzed on May 4, 2023. For the semi-structured interviews, the researcher contacted a number of English teachers to schedule a meeting time. Two of them agreed to participate in the study and signed a written consent form. They were interviewed via Zoom meetings on May 8 and 11, 2023. The interviews took from 10 to 20 minutes, and they were recorded.
3.4 Data analysis

English teachers who participated in the questionnaire answered each statement according to the 5-point Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree. A Likert scale is a scale of 5 or 7 points used to survey people's perspectives, preferences, and opinions about a certain issue or topic. The data collected from the questionnaire were quantitatively analyzed using SPSS (i.e., a software for data analysis). The program presented the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation of the questionnaire results. In addition, it was used to create the frequency tables, illustrating the percentage of participants under each category of the 5-point scale. For the semi-structured interviews, data were collected and qualitatively analyzed. Thematic analysis was used to classify the responses and observations of the two interviewed teachers into themes.

3.5 Ethical considerations

All teachers participated after giving their consent to be involved in the study.

4. Results

In this section, results from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews are reported. The perspectives of Saudi female English teachers towards using communicative language teaching with English major first year students are identified. In addition, this section presents some obstacles to fluent speaking, suggestions to promote fluency, communicative tasks and verbal communication, and the challenges of implementing CLT. Hence, teachers' responses in the semi-structured interviews are displayed and discussed in detail.

4.1 Teachers’ perspectives towards using CLT

The first research question of the study investigates teachers' perspectives on the use of communicative language teaching to foster fluency and oral communication skills of Saudi
female students majoring in English during their first year. Therefore, a questionnaire of a five-Likert scale was distributed to English teachers. Afterward, a descriptive statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS. Based on 16 statements, Table 1 below demonstrates the degree of agreement and disagreement of 32 English teachers about using CLT.

Table 1 below illustrates the descriptive statistical analysis of teachers' perspectives towards using CLT, according to the 5-point Likert scale: 1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree. The perspective of the teachers' is based on the mean value of each statement. Accordingly, a mean value of more than 3 reflects a positive point of view. A mean value of 3 reflects a neutral point of view, and it reflects a negative point of view if it is less than 3. Hence, it is observed from the table that the participants present a positive perspective towards using CLT to develop students' fluency and oral communication skills with mean and SD values (Mean = 3.58; SD = .35).

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis for teachers' perspectives towards using CLT to foster fluency and oral communication skills in Saudi female English major first year students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>The Statements</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pair and group-work activities help to provide opportunities for developing genuine interaction among learners.</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pair and group-work activities waste the teacher's and learners' time.</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>English is learnt most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for teaching forms of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling) in isolation from contexts of English.</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>English is learnt most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something, such as greeting, requesting, apologizing, etc.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Focusing on selected English forms helps to raise the level of learners' communicative competence in using English correctly and appropriately.</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Teaching English forms (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling) as separate statements can develop learners' fluency.</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To prepare learners to communicate fluently, topics have to be realistic and related to learners' real-life situations.</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Learners can use English fluently if the taught forms are contrived (i.e., not related to learners' real-life situations).</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>In applying the communicative approach, the teacher dominates all the activities and is the only speaker throughout the lesson.</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>In applying the communicative approach, the teacher is the manager, guide, and facilitator of the learning process in the classrooms.</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Texts provided for English learners should be well-organized and logical (coherent) so that the audience will understand them and discuss the topics effectively.</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>.71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statement 1 has the highest level of agreement among the other statements (Mean=4.38). While the statements 2 and 8 equally have the lowest level of agreement (Mean=2.47). Nevertheless, the mean score for teachers' perspectives towards using CLT shows that the 32 English teachers support using communicative activities in EFL classes to promote more speaking time and constant communication using English. Consequently, fluency and oral communication skills will be positively affected. The mean values of the majority of the statements illustrate that teachers' perspectives are positive and supportive.

In regards to the frequency of teachers' responses in the questionnaire, frequency tables were produced using SPSS software for the highest and lowest mean values of the statements, and they were designed using Microsoft Word. They show the precise percentage of each category on the 5-point scale.

4.1.1 Statements with a high level of agreement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Scale Description</th>
<th>value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>46.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Pair and group-work activities
Table 1 indicates that participants showed a high level of agreement on the effect of pair and group-work activities on encouraging genuine and authentic interaction between students. 46.9% of participants strongly agreed, and with the same percentage, 46.9% of them agreed that "pair and group-work activities help to provide opportunities for developing genuine interaction among learners." Therefore, a total of 93.8% of participants are in favor of using pair and group activities to promote more interaction in English.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Scale Description</th>
<th>value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is observed from Table 2 that none of the participants selected the categories (Disagree and Strongly Disagree) with the statement "English is learnt most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something, such as greeting, requesting, apologizing, etc." Meanwhile, 40.6% of participants strongly agreed, and half of them agreed that using English to request, apologize, or do something meaningful helps to effectively learn the language.

Table 4

Topics have to be realistic and related to learners' real-life situations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Scale Description</th>
<th>value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In statement 7, 37.5% of participants agreed and 50% strongly agreed that topics have to be realistic and related to learners' real-life situations to prepare learners to communicate fluently. By the same percentage, 6.3% of participants were neutral, and 6.3% disagreed with the statement.

**Table 5**

Students' self-confidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Scale Description</th>
<th>value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Statement 15 is intended to find out the effect of the communicative approach on students' self-confidence when speaking in English. Table 4 shows that 56.3% of participants agreed and 28.1% strongly agreed that "implementing the communicative approach in EFL classes boosts students' self-confidence when speaking in English." Only 15.6% of participants were neutral.

**4.1.2 Statements with a high level of disagreement**

**Table 6**

Teacher's and students' time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Scale Description</th>
<th>value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In statement 2, 20 participants disagreed that pair and group-work activities waste the teacher's and learners' time. Six of them agreed with the statement, and the other six participants were neutral.

**Table 7**

*Topics are not related to learners' real-life situations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likert-Scale Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from the table that the highest percentage, 34.4%, shows disagreement because taught forms and topics should be related to learners' real life., and 21.9% strongly disagreed. Six participants were neutral. While 25% of participants agreed, none of them strongly agreed with the statement.

5. **Discussion**

The results gained from the attitudinal questionnaire demonstrate teachers' positive perspectives towards using CLT and stress that they are aware of the major aspects of the CLT approach and the factors that influence fluency and oral communication skills.

5.1 **Analysis of quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire**

5.1.1 **Genuine interaction and working in pairs and groups**

As most of the participants agreed on the benefit of applying pair and group-work activities to promote genuine interaction, it shows that interaction requires at least two people in order to happen. The level of agreement proves the effectiveness of collaborative activities in EFL
classes. When students are given suitable activities and enough time to communicate with each other in English, they can articulate their ideas more often than in individual activities.

5.1.2 Using English in real-life situations

EFL students should sense a purpose for learning English in order to apply what they have learned in their life. Once the learnt materials and expressions can be directly applied in real-life interactions, students' English will improve significantly. For instance, learning English through a situation in which the learner can use the language effectively will help him be more fluent when communicating with others without hesitation or long pauses. Contrarily, when English is learnt separately from contexts where it can be used, students will not be able to connect the grammar, vocabulary, and expressions together and naturally use them in proper contexts.

5.1.3 Promoting fluency through relevant topics

Students participate and show engagement in topics that are related to their life as they can relate to their own experiences. They eagerly share their points of view on realistic and relevant topics and ideas, showing a smoother and natural flow of speech. On the contrary, if the topics are contrived, students will not be interested in participating. In statement 8, a total of 56.3% of participants disagreed that "Learners can use English fluently if the taught forms are contrived (i.e., not related to learners' real-life situations." Therefore, topics and vocabulary should be realistic and related to students' real-life situations.

5.1.4 Enhancing students' self-confidence

As statements 14 and 15 are about self-confidence and speaking anxiety, teacher 2 expressed her point of view towards integrating constant communicative tasks and their effect on boosting students' confidence and minimizing fear and anxiety of speaking in English. She stated that "With individual tasks, usually one or two students are actively participating, but the
rest of the class is reluctant and not willing to participate." Hence, collaborative tasks create a sense of solidarity between students as they can correct each other's mistakes. Communicative tasks help them to discuss their answers and express their thoughts comfortably with their classmates rather than only with the teacher.

5.1.5 Integrating communicative tasks and class time

Time has always been a challenging factor for teachers. In the semi-structured interview, Teacher 2 expressed the difficulty of managing time when applying communicative tasks, saying, "Two hours are not always enough to do interactive tasks with almost 50 students in each class." So, teachers should manage a reasonable time for each task so they can deliver the lesson and give students time to practice speaking.

5.2 Teachers’ responses in the semi-structured interviews

The results obtained from the questionnaire suggest that English language teachers support applying communicative activities in EFL classes; hence, two English teachers were interviewed. They shared their points of view on teaching EFL learners and delivering communicative-based EFL classes. Interview questions were formulated based on the research questions and the results of the questionnaire as follows:

1. What are the reasons that hinder Saudi female English major students from being fluent in speaking English during their first year?

2. What suggestions would you give to a colleague of yours who faces such a problem with her students?

3. Does practicing English through communicative tasks in EFL classes develop students' oral communication skills? If yes, how?
4. What are the challenges of implementing CLT that English teachers might face?

Teachers' responses to the interview questions were coded into themes: some obstacles to fluent speaking, suggestions to promote fluency, communicative tasks and verbal communication, and challenges of implementing CLT.

5.2.1 Some obstacles to fluent speaking

Answering the first question, both teachers shared their opinions about the obstacles to fluent speaking in English. One of the obstacles is "lack of vocabulary". Teacher 1 commented on that saying, "Students might not have sufficient vocabulary to communicate properly. The lack of vocabulary might limit them from expressing their own thoughts and feelings". Although they have a good level of English proficiency, they might lack the expressive and advanced vocabulary needed for delivering their messages. As a result, they choose to speak a little or keep silent.

Also, they have agreed on "the fear of making mistakes" as a real obstacle, and it has a huge impact on students' confidence to speak, which logically leads to hesitant and awkward speech. Both teachers share the same point of view about students' being terrified of making mistakes, which causes less oral communication or even complete silence during classes.

T 1: "They are afraid of making mistakes; they think that they might be judged or mocked by their peers or even by their teacher."

According to Teacher 2, she said, "I like students who make mistakes because it is an indication that they want to speak and share their own ideas and feelings," so she focuses on encouraging them to speak rather than focusing on the mistakes they might make. Teachers should always provide an environment where students feel safe enough to speak and learn, boosting their confidence to speak despite possible mistakes.
T 2: "It is known that language is all about connection, not perfection. During the first year, we want our students to deliver meaning and communicate with each other rather than prevent mistakes from occurring in their speech."

5.2.2 Suggestions to promote fluency

The constant exposure to the language through communicative activities will help students boost their vocabulary. They create an authentic situation that students are most likely to encounter in real life; therefore, they will be able to speak smoothly and naturally. The reason is that students already have the expressions set in their minds for the situations they have practiced English in. Teacher 1 mentioned that the meaningful and authentic language provided by communicative activities gives students an opportunity to practice speaking English.

Both teachers stressed that students must be relaxed in order to be able to speak for a longer time and express further ideas rather than short sentences or direct answers to questions during the lesson. Teacher 1 provided the following suggestions to promote fluency:

T 1: "Be sure to create a safe learning environment. It is okay to make mistakes because they help us learn and improve. Give them positive feedback to encourage them to speak more and participate. You can provide them with delayed corrective feedback at the end of the class to avoid interruption and embracement while they speak."

In addition, the importance of not pressuring students to speak was highlighted in both interviews. Teachers must avoid threatening their students with losing marks if they don’t speak; instead, they should provide motivating activities.
### 5.2.3 Communicative tasks and verbal communication

Communicative tasks provide students with realistic and meaningful contexts in which language can be used properly. Authentic language use is enhanced through interactive tasks, and Teacher 1 supported this idea, stating that "communicative activities are crucial when it comes to improving speaking skills. They motivate students to communicate and provide them with meaningful and authentic language to practice speaking." She also said that CLT can be used with all levels because teachers can modify the activities to suit their students' levels and improve their oral communication skills at the same time. Such activities provide them with tips on how to keep conversations going and how to modify their language based on the interlocutors and context of speaking.

However, it should be taken into consideration that there are other factors, such as the class size. As Teacher 2 confirmed the effectiveness of communicative tasks to improve students' oral communication, she mentioned that "communicative tasks can develop oral communication skills, but they are most effective with classes of a small number of students; otherwise, these tasks can consume a lot of time with a large number of students."

One of the tasks that was recommended by Teacher 2 was story telling; it helps students neglect their fear and anxiety of speaking. They tend to focus on the story they are sharing with the class and their classmates' reactions and comments. After that, interesting discussions arise among the students, which smoothly improve their oral communication skills. They start to learn how to listen attentively, how to interact with the speaker, and how to check their understanding of the story through spontaneous communication and interaction with each other.
5.2.4 Challenges of Implementing CLT

The teachers identified the common challenges of implementing CLT in EFL classes based on their experience and observation. The challenges they mentioned are:

- Students' enthusiasm:

  T1: "Students might not be as enthusiastic as teachers when it comes to communicative activities. So, the lack of motivation can negatively affect teachers and lead them to steer away from this approach."

- Large number of students:

  It is difficult to implement an intensive communicative activity in a class where there are more than 30 students. It will be hard for the teacher to manage the classroom and the time of the class as well. Therefore, it is more effective with a reasonable number of students where they can all engage and interact in the communicative tasks.

- Speaking anxiety:

  Dealing with highly anxious students is not an easy job for English teachers, as they should pay more attention and make an effort to create a safe and motivating learning environment. Anxious students can struggle more with applying CLT; therefore, teachers should consider their students' personalities and needs when implementing any teaching approach.

4.3 Discussion of findings

The findings of this study align with the findings of Nather (2014), in which the communicative approach can positively affect students' fluency, confidence, and oral communication skills when they speak English. Also, Jeyasala (2014) has concluded that both enthusiasm and enjoyment should be taken into consideration in order to successfully have a communicative and interactive learning environment.
4.4 Practical Implications

These findings should be taken into account when designing or planning speaking courses and lessons. In addition, they contribute to a clearer understanding of how EFL teachers perceive the implementation of a practical teaching approach such as CLT.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of findings

Teachers' perspectives were positive, as they showed agreement on the benefit of using CLT to help their students be fluent and good communicators in English. They emphasized that some obstacles make it difficult for students to speak fluently with natural language use. Lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes were identified as the most common obstacles to fluent speaking. To promote fluency, they suggested more exposure to the language through real-life situations, encouraging students to speak more and deliver meaningful messages. Creating a safe learning environment is key to minimizing students' fear of making mistakes. Motivation and words of encouragement are also crucial and highly recommended.

In regards to students' oral communication skills, teachers' responses in the semi-structured interviews support that their communication in English will be significantly enhanced when communicative tasks (i.e., pair and group-work activities, role-plays, oral discussion, information gaps, storytelling, and task-based activities) are implemented. To illustrate, they start to learn how to listen attentively, how to interact with other speakers, and how to check their understanding of others' messages through spontaneous communication and interaction with each other. They learn how to modify their language according to the speaker and the situation.
As implementing a teaching approach is not an easy task with no challenges, English teachers shared some of the challenges. Students' enthusiasm can be a struggle for teachers because they need students to actively engage in communicative tasks. They shed light on the number of students in each class as it affects the success of using CLT. If the number of students is large, communicative tasks will not be easy to monitor and control. Finally, they mentioned speaking-anxiety, explaining that highly anxious students might be negatively affected by the communicative-based classes. Therefore, teachers in the interviews recommended that teachers should create a safe and motivating learning environment to minimize the pressure on anxious students.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The study involved a small sample size of 32 participants. Therefore, it could be conducted on a larger number of teachers working in different educational contexts. Nonetheless, 32 English teachers can clearly show their perspectives and the effectiveness of using CLT at Taif University. It would be ideal to make extensive observations of classes where the CLT approach is implemented; however, the study is conducted in a short time frame.

5.3 Further research directions

Further research is needed to conduct an experimental study displaying the difference between a communicative-based EFL class and a non-communicative EFL class in the Saudi context. It is expected that it will lead to more practical findings, presenting the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of using CLT. Pedagogical implementations from experiments would significantly contribute to the development of the EFL teaching paradigm as a whole.
References


Nather, E. (2014). *An integrated program to promote the confidence of Saudi public school students in speaking English*. University of Canberra.


### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The statements</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pair and group-work activities help to provide opportunities for developing genuine interaction among learners.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pair and group-work activities waste the teacher's and learners' time.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English is learnt most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for teaching forms of the language (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling) in isolation from contexts of English.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. English is learnt most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something, such as greeting, requesting, apologizing, etc.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Focusing on selected English forms helps to raise the level of learners' communicative competence in using English correctly and appropriately.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Teaching English forms (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and spelling) as separate statements can develop learners' fluency.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. To prepare learners to communicate fluently, topics have to be realistic and related to learners' real-life situations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Learners can use English fluently if the taught forms are contrived (i.e. not related to learners' real-life situations).</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. In applying the communicative approach, the teacher dominates all the activities and is the only speaker throughout the lesson.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. In applying the communicative approach, the teacher is the manager, guide, and facilitator of the learning process in the classrooms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Texts provided for English learners should be well-organized and logical (coherent) so that the audience will understand them and discuss the topics effectively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Effective English learning necessitates teaching varieties and registers of English (formal and informal) that are appropriate to a variety of situations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. English can be taught successfully by focusing only on the formal register or variety. One variety is suitable for mastering English for all situations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Constant communicative activities help reduce students' speaking anxiety.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Implementing the communicative approach in EFL classes boosts students' self-confidence when speaking in English.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Students' willingness to communicate determines the success of interactive activities.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B. Interview Questions:

1. What are the reasons that hinder Saudi Female English Major Students from being fluent in speaking English during their first year?

2. What suggestions would you give to a colleague of yours who face such a problem with her students?

3. Does practicing English through communicative tasks (Pair and group-work activities, oral discussions, storytelling, role plays, opinion sharing, information gaps) in EFL classes develop students' oral communication skills? If yes, how?

4. What are the challenges of implementing CLT that English teachers might face?

Appendix C. Consent Form