



Graduate School of Education

**Curriculum Development in Saudi Arabia: Saudi Primary EFL Teachers' Perspectives of the
Challenges of Implementing CLT into the English Curriculum in State Schools**

Submitted by

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Abstract

In the context of Saudi Arabia, changes in educational policy and curricula have come to place as a result of international pressures after the 9/11 attacks. One of these changes, in the ELT field, was the adoption of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach which has been, arguably, imposed on language teachers by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Some researchers in the literature have attributed these changes to the government's attempts to shift to more globalized neoliberal education policy (Elyas & Picard, 2019) because it was in the economic interests of the state to manage the linguistic resources of the nation and tie them to economic policies and ideologies (Barnawi, 2019). As a result of those changes, the nature of teaching practices in Saudi EFL classrooms has ultimately changed (Elyas & Picard, 2012). Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore teachers' perspectives of the challenges they face while implementing CLT into the English curriculum at the primary level in state-schools in Saudi Arabia. The second aim of this study was to explore the nature of in-service training that EFL teachers receive and/or have received to cope with the CLT approach. The study also sought to explore the extent of teachers' involvement in the processes of curriculum development. This study was exploratory and interpretive in nature. The research data in this study was drawn from three main sources: a questionnaire, unstructured classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews. Consequently, the participants have been divided into two strands based on the method. The participants in the qualitative strand, classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, were 15 Saudi female EFL teachers employed in state primary schools. The participants in the questionnaire, on the other hand, were 75 mixed gender Saudi primary EFL teachers employed in state schools around the kingdom. The findings indicated that primary EFL teachers faced challenges that fall under six main aspects of the curriculum. Namely, those challenges were related to CLT as a pedagogical approach, students, syllabi, classroom processes, the learning environment in schools, as well as teachers'

limited role in the process of decision making with regards to curricular change. The findings indicated that after the implementation of CLT teachers have been placed under increasing performative pressures that have raised feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction with the profession. One of the interesting findings of the study showed that EFL teachers were dissatisfied with the quality of professional development (PD) they were getting. Some teachers described formal in-service training as “time-wasting”, “mediocre”, “disconnected from reality” and that it did not meet their training needs on how to successfully implement CLT. The findings also suggested that the Saudi educational system was significantly centralized and that teachers’ were marginalized and lacked voice and choice within the system. An overwhelming majority of EFL teachers in the sample complained that they had no say in designing the curriculum, did not play any role in the English language education planning processes and were expected to adhere to and implement whatever was handed down to them from the top. This study should, therefore, be of value to those in the realm of education wishing to resolve two fundamental questions: what could educational policy and curricular changes signify beyond the obvious pedagogical changes on the instructional level, and what effects do they have on teachers and their practice?

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
ELT	English language teaching
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
ESL	English as a second language
EFL	English as a foreign language
GDE	The General Directorate of Education
MOE	The Ministry of Education
NTP	The National Transformation Programme
SETs	Saudi English Teachers

Chapter 1

Introduction

Overview

In the Saudi public school system – regardless of the reason of the change – not following the prescribed approach would automatically reflect negatively on teachers’ appraisal and evaluation reports. I was, briefly, an English as a foreign (EFL) teacher in the public school system in Saudi Arabia, I remember my inspector criticizing me for making amendments to the nationally prescribed teaching methodology. At that time, I felt that, as a teacher, I should have been involved in the process of choosing a teaching methodology and content that are beneficial to my students. Moreover, in terms of my social background, I come from a family of two generations who worked in the teaching profession. The first generation includes my mother and a number of my older cousins who are all now retired. The second generation includes my sister and my younger cousins who are still teaching within the public schools system in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, five of my closest friends from college are EFL teachers in Saudi state schools in urban and rural parts of the country. Thus, almost all social gatherings with family and friends would involve lengthy discussions, sharing narratives about the teaching profession and teachers’ experiences, and comparisons between teaching in the past and present within the educational system. Those gatherings and my short personal experience about teachers’ feelings of powerlessness and helplessness were behind my motivation to focus this exploratory investigation on EFL teachers’ perspectives on the CLT challenges they face and on the extent of their participation in the process of curriculum change and development.

Furthermore, in 2014 I worked on a small-scale research project in order to get my M.Ed. degree from the University of New South Wales in Sydney Australia. The focus of the study

was to evaluate the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach as a learner-centred methodology into the EFL curriculum in Saudi public schools. Thus, in light of Littlejohn's (1998) three-levels-analysis model for evaluating EFL textbooks, I utilized a critical content analysis of the national EFL materials taught at the 4th grade at the primary level in Saudi state-schools. At that time, I focused on the course objectives, classroom instructional guidelines for students-teachers interactions (i.e. the curriculum at the micro level). The study concluded that the textbook designers overestimated the claim of learner-centeredness and that "traditional" teacher-centred methodologies of language teaching such as the audio lingual and grammar translation methods were still used in the curriculum. The findings of the study ignited my curiosity to investigate the issue further, as I became interested in knowing the source of the problem and why the change was not successful and ineffective especially given the fact that a huge budget was allocated to implement that curriculum (Albedaiwi, 2014). Thus, in the current study I wanted to look at the macro level of the curriculum (i.e. the process of decision making in the educational system in Saudi Arabia) while further investigating issues related to the micro level. Therefore, this study was designed to investigate Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives on CLT challenges in relation to three dimensions: classroom practice (related to teachers' role, materials and resources, syllabus content, and learning activities); socio-political (related to teachers' involvement in curriculum decision making processes); teachers' training and professional development. Each dimension would have implications for each of the distinctive curriculum levels found in Akker (2004). The first dimension covered issues related to the micro (classroom) and meso (school policies and systems) levels, the second dimension shed light on the macro level (the educational system and the educational policy), and the final dimension reflected on the nano (personal) level as related to the macro level. The differentiation between these levels of the curriculum will be

explained in the literature review chapter under conceptualizing the notion of curriculum (see section 3.1.3).

1.1 Statement of the problem

Over the last two decades the English language curriculum in the Saudi public education sector went through a number of major changes. Those, changes included changing the contents of the EFL materials and prescribed teaching methodologies (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). In 2007 the Saudi Council of Ministers granted the Ministry of Education (MOE) permission to start a project for developing the process of education in the country, which marked the introduction of the biggest project in the history of educational development in Saudi Arabia (Tayan, 2017). The project, which was called King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project or the Tatweer – which means in Arabic development or improvement – initiative, aimed to alter and improve the model of Saudi education. The initiative focused on the development of standards, curricula, and the provision of high quality teaching (Tatweer, 2008, 2012). In the ELT context new English textbooks were designed to introduce the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach to the field in the country (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019). Within the CLT approach, teachers, are supposed to promote and encourage EFL learners to be autonomous (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). However, unless teachers themselves experienced autonomy as teachers, expecting them to encourage learner-autonomy would be unrealistic (Balçıkanlı, 2010). Thus, teachers should be enabled to experience the type of instruction that they are asked to provide to their students (Gaible et al., 2005).

In the context of Saudi Arabia, claims have been made that despite the implementation of CLT, Saudi English teachers still relied on traditional teaching methods that stressed the dominant role of teachers, limited students' interactions, focused on discrete skills, and encouraged competitive rather than cooperative learning styles (Alharbi, 2021; Alqahtani, 2020). Furthermore, findings obtained in previous studies showed that Saudi English teachers faced a

number of challenges related to individual and contextual aspects (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Elyas & Picard, 2012). It has been suggested that due to inefficient pedagogical and linguistic preparation in their pre-service programmes, Saudi EFL teachers had some misconceptions about CLT and were not sufficiently confident to implement CLT in their teaching practices (Abahussain, 2016). Others suggested that Saudi EFL teachers faced constraints related to institutional and situational factors; including the quality of in-service training programmes, examination purposes and classroom structure (Alzahrani, 2017). In addition, some referred to challenges related to socio-cultural factors associated with the nature of the Saudi educational culture, such as the traditional view of education, and the status of ELT in the Saudi context that seemed to be incompatible with teaching English for communicative purposes (Al-Seghayer, 2017). Hence, there was an assumption that Saudi EFL teachers in mainstream schools were not ready and were not sufficiently trained to implement CLT in their teaching practices and that the approach was rather imposed on them by the MOE (Abahussain, 2016; Albedaiwi, 2014). Moreover, based on reports in the literature, as well as my experience, it could be safe to assume that teachers within the Saudi public educational sector were obligated to follow the prescribed national curriculum and prohibited from changing, editing or using any external textbooks or supplementary materials (Al-Sadan, 2000). Imposing curriculum change on teachers could lead to teachers' resistance, feelings of marginalization, and sabotaging efforts (Troudi & Alwan, 2010).

As a result of those relatively recent curriculum changes, this study was interested in exploring the nature of curriculum change in Saudi Arabia from Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives and its implications on their practice, lives and experiences. Thus, this study aimed to explore Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level. In addition the study aimed to explore teachers' perceptions on how those challenges were related to teachers' in-service training – which will be used interchangeably with teachers' formal

professional development throughout this thesis – and their involvement in the process of curriculum development.

1.2 Aims and objectives

This study aimed to:

1. Explore Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level.
2. Explore teachers' attitudes towards CLT.
3. Explore the extent of teachers' involvement in the process of curriculum development.
4. Explore the nature of training and support available for teachers to help them implement CLT.

1.3 The research questions

What are Saudi EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT?

What are teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level?

To what extent do teachers' in-service training opportunities support them to implement CLT effectively?

To what extent were EFL teachers involved in the process of curriculum development?

Chapter 2

The study context

Overview

The adoption of the communicative approach was a part of a set of alterations and educational reforms that took place as a result of policy debates in the early 2000s (Barnawi, 2019; Elyas, 2011, Elyas & Picard, 2010). In response to internal and external pressures from different parties during that period, the Saudi MOE has undertaken a number of educational reforms and curricular changes including the implementation of CLT in the ELT context in the country. Thus, it is important to contextualize implementing CLT into the EFL curriculum in the Saudi context by describing the history of curriculum reforms in relation to key events in the history of the Saudi Arabian educational system. In this chapter I shall provide a brief overview of the Saudi educational context that constitutes the background for this research study. The chapter will start by a brief description of the history of ELT in Saudi Arabia followed by a description of recent reforms – since the early 2000s – in the English curriculum at the public educational system in Saudi Arabia. Namely, this chapter will describe three significant periods in the history of the Saudi Arabian educational system that took place during the last two decades. I shall refer to those periods as; the “post 9/11 Era”, the “post Arab Spring Era” and the “the Saudi Vision 2030 Era”. Then, a general description will be given of the history and nature of English language teaching at the primary level in the Saudi state school system. The chapter will be concluded with a description of Saudi English teachers and the nature of their initial teaching preparation programmes and in-service training and professional development programmes.

2.1 A historical overview of ELT in Saudi Arabia

Since the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is considered a young country, formally established as a kingdom in 1932 (Mahib ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013), the country's educational system can, therefore, be described as young too. According to Mitchell and Al furaih (2017) only in 1939 schools were formally established in Saudi Arabia. Even then educational curriculums were basically cloned from Egyptian and some other Arab countries' curriculums (Elyas & Picard, 2019; Mitchell & Al furaih, 2017). However, before that, towards the end of the 19th century, there had been some kind of formal education in the region, known then as the Arabian Peninsula, mainly in the western (Al-Hejaz) and eastern (Al-Ahsa) parts (Elyas & Picard, 2019). Indeed, according to Abahussain (2016) the Ottoman State introduced the beginnings of formal education in the provinces of Hejaz and al-Ahsa, which were under Ottoman control then. At that time and until the beginning of the twentieth century, four elementary private schools existed in the whole Arabian Peninsula, most of these were in Hejaz, offering boys limited teaching of other subjects besides religious studies.

In 1937, English was first introduced to Saudi schools' curricula. Due to the shortage of qualified Saudi EFL teachers at that time, English was taught mainly by teachers from neighbouring Arab countries, namely, Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Jordan and Sudan (Zafer, 2002). However, when the Saudi Ministry of Education was established in 1953 and the government started receiving significant royalties for oil, the influx of oil revenues was invested in sending Saudi nationals abroad on scholarships to many countries including Egypt, Lebanon, the United States and Europe for teacher training (Mitchell & Al furaih, 2017). Thus, one could argue that educational reforms in Saudi Arabia started in the 1950s, when the government started to change and localize the educational system by spending from oil revenues (Elyas & Picard, 2019). Nonetheless, it was during this period the U.S. government started to take interest in the social and economic affairs of Saudi Arabia in order to protect its commercial oil interests in

the country through the Arabian-American Oil Company (ARAMCO) (Faruk, 2013). This made English language teaching more relevant to the Saudi Arabian economic and social development (Mitchell & Al furaih, 2017).

This historic background implies that in the Saudi context English might be seen as a gatekeeper to national development, prosperity and financial gain, and as a language of liberation as opposed to postcolonial contexts where English might carry memories of constraint and a painful colonial past (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). However, it is pertinent to point out here that despite encouragement from the government and industry a hostile attitude has persisted towards English teaching in some sectors of the Saudi society (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019), especially the issue of introducing the English subject at the primary level (Al-Issa, 2009).

2.2 Educational reform into the Saudi EFL curriculum

This section will give a brief description of the history of educational reforms into the English curriculum in Saudi Arabia and the circumstances that led to those reforms. However, for the purpose of making the discussion manageable, the review will be limited to the curriculum reforms that took place over the last two decades.

As mentioned above (in section 2.1), the formal education system in Saudi Arabia is relatively young – in 1939 schools were formally established in Saudi Arabia (Mahib ur Rahman1 & Alhaisoni, 2013) – and that oil revenues changed the nature of the social, economic and political life in the region. However, as a result of those rapid changes in the educational system in Saudi Arabia, there was, arguably, so little time for reflection and evaluation. The rapid societal changes of the recent past, in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region, have left education in a state of crisis (Barnawi, 2019). This is because developments have occurred simultaneously at all levels (social, cultural, political and economic) resulting in little time for

reflection, consolidation, recalibration, or adjustment which have had a serious impact on the overall planning, implementation, and management of language programmes (Syed, 2003). Hence, the sections below seek to describe social, economic and political issues that have contributed to educational reforms in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia over the past two decades.

2.2.1 The Post 9/11 Era

After the tragic events of 9/11, the educational system in Saudi Arabia has changed dramatically (Tayan, 2017). In the early 2000s, changes have been made in the whole educational system of the country to comply with increasing pressures and demands on the government at both the national and international levels. At the national level, the ministry of education and educationists realized that modifications had to be made within the educational system in order to prepare Saudi citizens to live and survive in an enormously changing society and increasingly globalized world (Elyas & Picard, 2019). Furthermore, local media and bodies in the industrial sector blamed the education sector for the economic crisis calling for urgent reforms to align education with job market needs (Barnawi, 2016). Along with those internal national pressures, the changes have also been prompted by external political pressures from the West. Based on the American government's claims that 15 out of the 19 attackers on 9/11 were Saudi nationals, reports from the Congress described the Saudi educational curricula as fostering intolerance and anti-Western views in ways that posed a danger to the stability and security of the global community (Barnawi, 2019; Karmani, 2005).

The scope of changes and modifications that took place in all aspects of life in Saudi Arabia, can be summarized in what the former Saudi ambassador to the United States, Prince Turki al Faisal, wrote in the USA Today:

“Saudi Arabia is a nation undergoing dramatic self-examination. Every aspect of Saudi Arabia's society and culture is being openly debated. We have recognized that a comprehensive, modern and open educational system - with new and revised textbooks - is fundamental to the growth and prosperity of our country. A thoughtful

revision of this system is necessary, and indeed well underway” (cited in Alfahadi, 2012, p. 16)

Thus, in response to those local and international demands the Saudi educational system underwent a series of changes and modifications ever since 2001. Those changes included; altering the content of all curricula and textbooks; increasing the amount of secular content; introducing English as a subject from the elementary level; local English teachers were sent abroad; the communicative approach was introduced – as part of the Tatweer initiative – at the instructional level (Barnawi, 2019; Elyas, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2010).

Arguably, the biggest educational development initiative in the history of curriculum change in Saudi Arabia, was King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer initiative). The initiative radically altered the Saudi education model to bring it in line with the highest international standards (Albedaiwi, 2014). Thus, in the period between 2007 and 2013 the government allocated up to US\$3.1 billion in funds in order to facilitate the changes and recommendations of the project (Al- Kinani, 2008; Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). According to Tatweer (2010) the project aimed to give teachers the opportunity to contribute to material development and implementation by redefining the role of the MOE in which it became responsible of policy-making, standards development, provision of highly qualified staff and provision of the necessary resources to all learning institutions. The project also involved the adoption of curricula from the developed world that was made compatible with the local environment of Saudi Arabia.

In terms of changes in the Saudi ELT context as part of the Tatweer initiative, the MOE founded the “Development of the English language Project” (DELP) in order to raise internal and external efficiency in the field of English language teaching in the public education sector and meet the requirements of higher education and the labour market (Albedaiwi, 2014). As a result of the work of this project, the MOE introduced English language as major subject in the

curriculum from the fourth grade at the primary level of all public schools in the country. In addition, both Tatweer and DELP encouraged designing high quality training packages and globally recognized programmes for EFL teachers and also produced advanced educational materials and interactive websites and computer programmes for determining attainment levels. At the instructional level, the Tatweer policy introduced CLT, promoted the incorporation of information technology into school curricula, and gave strong impetus to support teachers' pedagogical use of technology in their teaching including the teaching of English (Elyas & Picard, 2019). However, the Tatweer project has been criticized by both the Saudi public and scholars interested in educational reforms in the country (Elyas & Al-Ghamdi, 2018). Indeed, despite the fact that the objectives of the project were practical, there has not been much evidence of tangible improvements in the Saudi education system (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Data obtained from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2020) and the literature reviewed for this study – as will be shown in the next chapter (sections 3.1.6 and 3.5) – seem to corroborate this observation.

2.2.2 The Post Arab Spring and Vision 2030 Era

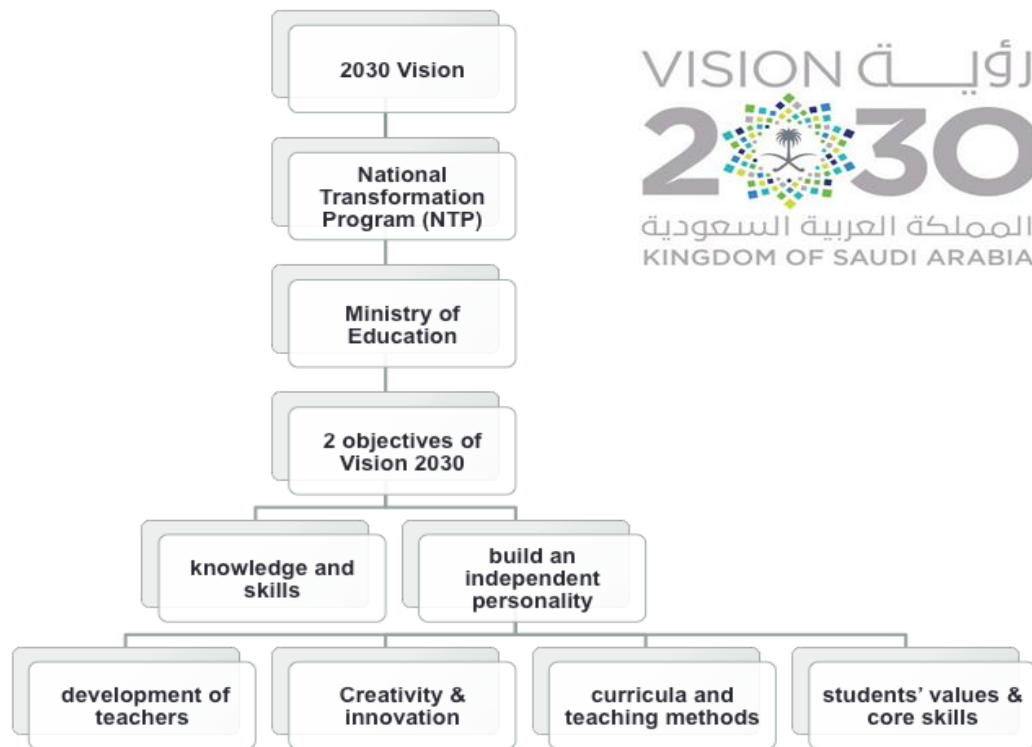
The events that started at the beginning of 2011, collectively described as the Arab Spring, showed that there were a number of conflicting views in the Middle East reflecting the complexity of how these countries were grappling with global and local discourses (Alfahadi, 2012). The events shed light on how the Arab world sees itself, as abiding by the Arab and Islamic values but also striving to share with the global world an identity that calls for social justice, democracy, transparency, tolerance and development (Eid et al., 2016). Thus, the political climate in the region in what I would like to refer to as the “Post Arab Spring Era”, fuelled the movement toward another series of changes in Saudi Arabia which, arguably, along with other factors led to the launch of the Saudi Vision 2030 (Barnawi, 2019).

Vision 2030 is a roadmap that aims to address the socioeconomic and political crisis facing Saudi Arabia (Barnawi, 2019) through calling for transparency, positive involvement of the Saudi citizens and their development (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). In order to build the institutional capacity and capabilities needed to achieve the ambitious goals of “Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030”, the National Transformation Programme (NTP) 2020 was launched across 24 government bodies operating in the economic and development sectors in its first year (Saudi Arabian Government, 2016). According to the NTP handbook the Ministry of Education will achieve two objectives of Vision 2030 (see Figure. 1). These objectives are: 1. to establish positive values and build an independent personality for Saudi citizens, and 2. to provide citizens with the knowledge and skills to meet the future needs of the labour market. Thus, the MOE will be working on eight different strategic objectives in order to achieve those two previous objectives of the 2030 Vision. Amongst the eight strategic objectives, I found that four were directly related to the arguments I am making in this study. These four objectives focus on improving: recruitment, training and development of teachers; the learning

environment to stimulate creativity and innovation; curricula and teaching methods; students' values and core skills.

Figure 1

Objectives of the ministry of education in the Saudi Vision 2030



The aims of 2030 Vision imply the tendency to transform schools into educational centres (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020) rather than merely curriculum delivery agencies (Estrela, 2001). Within this view schools and teachers are granted autonomy to develop and adapt the curriculum according to their students' needs under the guidelines and regulations set by the MOE. In other words, this view entails a view of teaching as an activity that goes beyond delivering the curriculum within the boundaries of classroom and subject area. Thus, the Vision 2030 acknowledges that there is an urgent need for educational reform. Particularly, change is required in the area of teachers' development in order to prevent the perpetuation of traditional teaching methods (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Indeed, the success of educational reform in

Saudi Arabia will depend greatly on the success of efforts to transform teaching and the teacher profession (OECD, 2020). However, according to OECD report on education in Saudi Arabia (2020), the overarching educational goals of the vision have not yet been translated into clear standards and quality schooling. The NTP has set national students' achievement goals, but it does not help schools understand how to achieve those goals and more fundamentally what the purpose of schooling should be in the context of the vision. On that account, this study would be of significance, as it aimed to shed light on fundamental issues such as decentralization, autonomy and flexibility of education particularly with regards to teachers' voice.

2.2.3 The global context of educational policy shifts

In the 21st century, neoliberal globalization has placed pressures on and brought about changes to the concept of education globally. Those changes have emerged due to demands made by international financial organizations such as the WTO, IMF and OECD (Barnawi, 2019). Thus, it is important to foreground the global context of contemporary trends related to curriculum development and educational policies. This is important because it helps in better understanding the educational reforms – discussed in the two previous sections above – that took place in Saudi Arabia that, it has been argued, have been made in response to the demands of the globalized neoliberal education policy trends (Barnawi, 2019). Educational policy adjustments and curriculum alterations in Saudi Arabia have arguably introduced globalized neoliberal frameworks to the education policy in Saudi Arabia (see Barnawi, 2019; Elyas & Picard, 2013; Eusafzai, 2017; Phan & Barnawi, 2015). Nonetheless, Saudi Arabia is not unique in perpetuating such policies in its educational system. Indeed, contemporary curriculum policies are not exclusive or internal educational issues, but subjected to the influence of trends of internationalization, neoliberal visions on administration and management, pressure groups (Akker et al., 2003), and international financial institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, and the OECD (Barnawi, 2019).

In the context of education policy shifts that have been made to conform to globalization and neoliberal frameworks, educational policies have the responsibility to align education with local, national, regional and global demands (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). A number of studies carried out in various contexts across the globe – see for example, Watkins, 2007 (in Australia); Narin & Higgins, 2007 (in New Zealand); Bocking, 2018 (in Mexico); Hursh, 2013 (in the United States) – indicated the implications of these policies and practices for education and the ways teachers make sense of neoliberal modes of governmentality in the practices of schooling (Davies & Bansel, 2007). Therefore, education has been affected by such policies within which teachers are placed under accountability and performativity pressures (Conell, 2013), their authority was undermined shifted to state curriculum and surveillance authorities (Watkins, 2007).

According to Al-Issa (2009) centralization is extremely woven into the Saudi educational system, making the MOE – which closely oversees all planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation operations – the most bureaucratic, centralized, inefficient and incapable government agency to engage in any development projects. Therefore, educational reform initiatives – such as Tatweer and Vision 2030 – within the Saudi educational system were designed to increase efficiency of education and redefine the role of the MOE and schools through the move towards a decentralized school governance. Decentralization of education has gained currency and became part of educational policies after their emergence in policy reports by agencies like UNESCO and the World Bank (Alyami & Floyd, 2019). Thus, within the discourse of globalization of education increased accountability measures are used to align educational outcomes in many countries with international benchmarks through the decentralization of education (Shields, 2013). In summary, this section aimed to situate the policy reforms in the Saudi educational system within the wider global context of educational policy trends and landscapes. Particularly, the section highlighted the implications of

globalization, neoliberal education policy agendas and globalization on education in many contexts around the world; in an attempt to understand the context of educational reform initiatives such as Tatweer and the Saudi Vision 2030.

2.3 ELT at the primary level in Saudi state-schools

Historically, English, and French, were first taught as foreign languages at the primary level back in the 1930s (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017) but then English was eliminated from the primary curriculum in 1943 (Baghdadi, 1985; Elyas, 2011). In 1970, French was officially removed from foreign language curriculums for unknown reasons (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). Nonetheless, in early 2002 English was reintroduced as a subject at the primary level in Grade 6 first, and then in grades 4 through 6 in state primary schools (Al-Seghayer, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2019). It is worth mentioning here that the issue of teaching English at the primary level has always, and still does, attracted controversy and debate among different sectors in the Saudi society (see for example Al-Issa, 2009; Al-Seghayer, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2010).

Currently, English is taught for 2 instructional periods per week (approximately for one and a half hour weekly) in public state-schools. This represents 6% of the primary level curriculum (Al-Seghayer, 2011). According to the MOE Statistical Handbook (2019) there are three types of primary state schools within the Saudi Arabian educational system: public schools; Qur'anic schools and special education schools. Interestingly, based on data collected for this study the number of English periods in Qur'anic schools is 50% less (i.e. English is taught once a week in such schools). Until the time of collecting data for this study three textbooks were nationally taught at the primary level. These were: *We Can*; *Get Ready*; *Smart Class* designed and published by McGraw Hill; Macmillan and MM Publication respectively. Background data collected from EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample implied that *Smart Class* was the most popular syllabus. However, by the beginning of the 2020-2021 academic year two of those

textbooks were eliminated and *We Can* was adopted as the only national English syllabus in all state-schools across Saudi Arabia (Alaqel, 2020).

At the instructional level CLT is meant to be the national English teaching approach, as described previously in this chapter. However, in general Saudi EFL classrooms largely feature traditional methods such as the audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods (Al-Seghayer, 2017). For example, techniques such as chorus work, use of L1 (Al-Rashidi & Phan, 2005), text translation (Kharesheh, 2012), reading and repeating passages, and providing detailed explanations about form and vocabulary (Baawi, 2006) have been reported as practices that tend to consume English teachers' time and efforts inside Saudi EFL classrooms.

2.4 Saudi EFL language teachers

There are three pathways – Arts Collages, Languages and Translation Colleges and Education Colleges – for Saudi English teachers' preparation programmes within the Saudi educational system (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Arguably, most of Saudi EFL teachers are graduates of English Language and Literature Departments in Faculties of Arts (Javid et al., 2012). However, in some universities, these departments offer only theoretical educational courses for students without any practicum training. While in other universities such as King Abdul-Aziz University the same department offers two practical courses but does not offer any theoretical educational ones (Abahussain, 2016). Al-Seghayer (2014) confirms the inconsistency in the structure of these programmes by emphasizing that because each university has its own unique programme and requirements, there is no chance for developing national standards and guidelines that govern major issues equated with the process of preparing and training English student teachers. In the second pathway, however, (i.e. English Language and Translation Departments), students are not exposed to any pedagogical knowledge nor educational courses and experience (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

Amongst the three pathways, Teacher Colleges of Education seem to be the only ones that are dedicated to preparing professionally efficient Saudi EFL teachers. However, it has been argued that their current programmes are inadequate for preparing Saudi EFL teachers (Ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013), especially with regard to linking theory to practice (Al-Malihi, 2015). Al-Seghayer (2017) also argues that those programmes are inadequate in developing prospective EFL teachers' disciplinary knowledge – like language teaching methods and second-language acquisition – pedagogical content knowledge – such as curriculum planning, assessment, reflective teaching and classroom management – and technological pedagogical knowledge – which involves the ability to effectively integrate the available technological resources into language teaching. Data from OECD (2020) report also reveals ubiquitous concern with the quality of initial teacher preparation programmes as just over 60% of Saudi teachers – in The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 – have indicated that they felt well prepared in classroom practice, which is the fifth lowest share in the world.

The same feeling of dissatisfaction can describe teachers' in-service training programmes. The literature indicates that there is widespread concern that teachers' in-service training programmes have struggled to meet demands and requirements of educational development (Al-Seghayer, 2014, 2017). The OECD (2020) report, points out that despite government efforts and goals, set in the NTP, to increase the average number of annual teachers' professional development (PD) hours, Saudi teachers engage in a very low amount of PD in comparison to international benchmarks. The report suggests that one of the contributing factors to this discrepancy, might be the fact that teachers' workload is solely based on classroom instruction time. This means that Saudi teachers do not have a mandatory number of PD hours. Al-Seghayer (2017) attributes the missing link, between the type of experiences and knowledge shared in pre as well in-service training, and those teachers need in the reality of classroom culture, to lack of collaboration in the Saudi educational system on three

significant levels: 1) lack of collaboration between teacher education programmes in local colleges and universities on a theoretical framework and unified standards for practicum programmes; 2) lack of partnership between the ELT department in the MOE, local universities and teacher training institutions to identify priorities and specific duties for teachers, school personnel and supervisors; 3) lack of collaboration with international EFL educational institutions – such as TESOL International Association – to foster discussions about how to properly organize teacher training programmes. Currently, only supervisors and school principals perform the task of identifying teachers’ PD needs through appraisal (OECD, 2020). This can be problematic considering that the results of regular appraisals might not be truly representative of teachers’ performance, capacity and training needs (Alhamad, 2018). These concerns over the accuracy of the regular appraisal system might be due to reports that most teachers and teacher supervisors perceive appraisal as an administrative task concerned with ratings rather than a means for improving teachers’ practice and professional learning, making the whole exercise meaningless (OECD, 2020).

Chapter 3

Literature Review

Overview

The focus of this study was to explore curriculum development in Saudi Arabia and teachers' perceptions of the challenges of implementing the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach at the primary level. Therefore, it is essential for the literature review to focus on conceptualizing three main constructs in the study; 1) the notions of curriculum and curriculum development; 2) teachers' role in curriculum development; 3) CLT and its implementation. Therefore, the first part of this chapter aims to define the notions of curriculum, curriculum development in the general education domain and curriculum development in the English language teaching (ELT) field in general and in the Saudi Arabian context in particular. The second part is dedicated to reviewing the literature about the centrality of teachers' role in the process of curriculum change. Then, the third part of the chapter will be focused on defining CLT, its principals, and teachers' and learners' roles within the approach. An analysis of CLT misconceptions and criticism is, also, outlined at the end of this section introducing the concept of post-method pedagogy. The fourth and final section of this chapter is dedicated to reviewing the empirical literature about CLT implementation across EFL/ESL contexts, the section is concluded with a review of CLT implementation in the Saudi Arabian context. The chapter is concluded by identifying the gap that this study is filling.

3.1 Conceptualizing the notion of curriculum

Since this study falls under the discipline of curriculum studies, it is only logical to start the literature review by conceptualizing the notions of "curriculum" and "curriculum

development”. That is to assert in what capacity the terms are used whenever I refer to either one of them throughout this thesis. At first, the discussion is focused on conceptualizing the notion of curriculum –in the general educational domain – and defining curriculum development as a complex system. The section will then be concluded by defining curriculum development in the ELT field and particularly in the Saudi Arabian context.

The term curriculum is used with a number of different meanings and definitions (Kelly, 1999). Despite the differences, however, in essence the term is often used to refer to a plan for learning (Gouëdard et al., 2020). It is the strongest representation of the goals of a particular educational system (UNESCO-IBE, 2015). Thus, the curriculum framework must encapsulate what students should know, how they should be taught and assessed, along with learning standards and accompanying materials (OECD, 2020). Given this conceptualization, a differentiation between various levels of the curriculum – when talking about curricular activities including policy-making; design and development; evaluation and implementation – can be very useful (Akker, 2004). Akker (2004) makes the distinction between the following four levels:

The macro level; includes the socio-cultural system, educational system and educational policies. It is also composed of activities outside the classroom including extracurricular and community involvement activities.

The meso level; involving schools and institutions

The micro level; related to classroom-based activities. This level comprises the specific teacher-student interactions inside the classroom.

The nano level; related to individual and personal factors

As outlined before, this study is set to explore curriculum at the macro (policy), meso (institutional), micro (classroom) and nano (personal) levels. Traditionally, curriculum has been regarded as a technical issue that best left to specialists, educationalists, textbook writers

and designers of assessment procedures (Amadio et al., 2014). Recently, however, the notion of curriculum has moved beyond the technical realm to involve issues about policy discussion on what education is needed and for what type of society, involving decision-makers, educators, interest groups as well as local and international institutions and stakeholders (UNOWG, 2014). Within this vision, curriculum is seen as an instrument for forging learning opportunities throughout life, and places it at the center of discussions on cohesion, inclusion, equity and development (UNESCO-IBE, 2015). Therefore, curriculum is understood as an educational project forming identities founded in three domains: knowledge, action and self (Barnett, Parry & Coate, 2001).

Those definitions imply that equating curriculum with syllabus, i.e. the knowledge content, is limiting and hinders any attempts for curriculum change and development, because it fails to recognize the other two domains, i.e. action and self, of the curriculum. Indeed, Kelly (1999) challenges this limited view of curriculum by asserting that any productive definition of the term should take into consideration going beyond stating the knowledge content to explaining and justifying the purpose of this content and how students' exposure to it is going to affect them and their identities. Kelly (1999) argues that this assumption about the meaning of curriculum, amongst others, underpins and encapsulates different ideologies about curriculum and education. The particular view that assumes that curriculum and syllabus are alternatives, which is of importance to this discussion, however, encapsulates the ideology that endeavours to argue that the term curriculum only signifies the content and sees education as mere transmission of knowledge. Similarly, Richards (2014) argues that curriculum is a far broader concept than syllabus. Curriculum includes what students learn (i.e. content) as well as how they learn it, how teachers help them learn it, what materials, syllabus, methods of assessment are used to support them learn it, and in what kind of facilities. Thus, Kelly (1999) argues that, if the term curriculum is to be effective and productive, it should refer to the overall rationale

for any educational programme, and that this total rationale must have priority. Therefore, within this holistic view of the curriculum the task of educational planners and teachers is to work on developing a thought-out rationale that total schemes can be built on.

Thus, for the purposes of the current study, curriculum is best defined as the philosophy, purposes, designs, changes, developments and implementation of a whole educational programme (Graves, 1996). Consequently, then, this study adopts a view of curriculum as a process characterized by continuous improvement and refinement of an educational programme with procedural principles that are capable of guiding teachers' practices throughout (Kelly, 2009). It is considered as a development process that never comes to an end, that is perpetually ongoing and evolving, where evaluation is a continuing process in the service of decision-making (Brown, 1995). This conceptualization calls for viewing curriculum as the bases of an integrated conception of education as cultural, social and economic policy, and particularly of the forms of insertion in society and the knowledge and information economy (UNESCO-IBE, 2015). As such, constructivism is the lens through which curriculum is conceptualized here, in which curriculum is viewed as an evolving, dynamic, and creative process in nature, teachers and learners as active creators of knowledge, and knowledge as a construct for social interaction with others (Levine, 2002). It is beyond the scope of this study to fully examine both teachers' and learners' roles in curriculum development. Therefore, in an upcoming section in this chapter (section 3.2), the centrality of teachers' roles in the process of curriculum development will be explored. So far this section has focused on defining the concepts of curriculum and curriculum development. The following section will briefly examine curriculum models, approaches and theories.

3.1.1 Curriculum development approaches and theories

Due to demands and challenges related to modern societies and global trends, countries have increasingly paid attention to curriculum development. This is because of the desire to equip

children with the skills, knowledge and competences they need to thrive in this century. This increasing interest in curriculum development reflects the acknowledgement that the students of today need to be appropriately prepared to deal with a more uncertain future characterized by an ever-changing environment (OCED, 2018). In addition to that it draws our attention to the complexity of the process of curriculum reform, particularly as a project that requires policymakers to walk a tightrope to balance between local and global influences in the curriculum (UNESCO-IBE, 2015). Hence, from this view curriculum development is seen as an intersection between national and international forces. It is a national project that aims to define the knowledge, skills and competencies valuable for the local society and necessary in preparing for its future (Gouëdard et al., 2020). However, at the same time, it is a project that, all too often, can be easily influenced by international trends such as globalization and international assessment regimes (Amadio et al., 2015). Thus, striking a productive balance between national and international influences can be a tricky business. This becomes especially true considering the recent attention in the literature that addresses the argument that efforts to modernize education are rarely made in order to advance education as a practice in its own right (Hogan, 2011). As front-runners of global educational policies like the IMF, WTO and World Bank further perpetuate the concept of education as a commodity to be used for human development through various strategies (Connell, 2013). In fact, it “can no longer be taken for granted that the power to set agendas for national education systems is held or exercised exclusively at a national level” (Barnawi, 2019, p. 131). The UNESCO-IBE (2015) also confirms that the curriculum involves a multiplicity of local and global political, social and educational agendas that become superimposed and often collide, and to a great extent reflect different interests.

Along with the complexity of balancing global and local influences, curriculum development calls for paying attention to other major issues such as making decisions regarding

implementation approaches. Curriculum implementation refers to the means to accomplish the desired objectives and needs to be translated into classroom practices for the new curriculum to bear fruit (Fullan, 2015). Curriculum implementation can be seen from two distinctive perspectives; top-down and bottom-up (Castro et al., 2015). Within the top-down approach, curriculum implementation is measured by the implementers', mostly teachers, compliance with the prescribed reformed curriculum (Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Thus, within this perspective of curriculum implementation teachers are marginalized and seen as mere implementers and knowledge transformers. On the other hand, in the bottom-up approach to curriculum implementation, teachers play a central role in curriculum implementation and are seen as enactors, collaborators and partners in the process. Within this perspective, teachers' agency is recognised as teachers do not solely play the role of passive executors at the final stage of the reform, but rather the role of active actors throughout the whole reform process (Gouëdard et al., 2020). Therefore, it could be concluded – based on the views reviewed here – that curriculum implementation goes beyond teachers' compliance with change and includes concepts such as inclusion, equity and teachers' empowerment and pedagogical rights. According to Harris et al. (2017) the failure of a great deal of contemporary education reform and change projects largely stems from the fact that teachers' perspectives and views are not adequately considered and that teachers are not seen as leaders within the reform process. Building on this view, one of the goals of this study is to explore the extent to which Saudi EFL teachers are involved in curriculum development and decision making. More on the role of teachers in curriculum development will be explained elsewhere in this chapter (under section 3.2).

3.1.2 Curriculum models

Cultivating curriculum development and implementation requires establishing a curriculum framework that sets parameters within which the content needs to be developed. Those

parameters reflect a range of factors related to policy and practice, such as pedagogy, teachers, class sizes and assessment procedures (UNESCO-IBE, 2017). According to the UNESCO glossary of curriculum terminology (2013), the curriculum framework is a document that sets the guidelines for the implementation process, to ensure systematic coherence in the organization and management of policies and procedures. This document, therefore, aspires to: explain the educational philosophy underlying the curriculum and approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that are fundamental to that philosophy; outline the curriculum structure, its subjects or learning areas and the rationale for the inclusion of each in the curriculum; provide guidelines to subject curricula developers, teacher trainers and textbook writers; prescribe requirements for curriculum implementation, monitoring and evaluation (UNESCO-IBE, 2011). Thus, setting the scope of the curriculum framework defines the curriculum, its models and the education vision it aspires to reach.

In the UNESCO glossary of curriculum terminology (2013) curriculum models are defined as broad theoretical frameworks used to design and organize the curriculum in light of certain criteria – such as the product model and the process model or discipline-based and learner-centred models. There is a well-referenced literature that identifies the distinction between the product model and the process model of curriculum development (O’Neill, 2010). On the one hand there is the product model – emphasises plans and intentions (Neary, 2003; UNESCO, 2013) – which is informed by Tyler’s (1949) framework whose influence can be clearly seen in curriculum development projects in the United States. This model is based on the definition of learning outcomes in the cognitive (knowledge), affective (attitudes) and psychomotor (skills) domains, and thus it is results-oriented. The framework argues that objectives should describe learners’ behaviours and identify what changes have come about in learners as a result of teaching based on those three domains. However, some have criticized the model arguing that the concept of objectives represents a limited view of knowledge and others questioning

the technical approach of the framework which seems better suited to business and industry than education (Richards, 2014). Within this model, curriculum reform follows a cascade model, in which priority goes to funding of textbooks, teaching materials and equipment due to the limited function of curriculum. From this traditional point of view, the amount of money spent on curricular reform is seen as an expression of the political will to prioritize education (Amadio et al., 2015). This model is associated with high-constraint educational contexts, where teachers are obligated to follow a prescribed syllabus where students' experiences are narrowed (Gouédard et al., 2020).

On the other hand, the second model (i.e. the process model) emphasises activities and effects (Neary, 2003; UNESCO, 2013). Gouédard et al. (2020) point out that the process model originated in the work of Stenhouse (1975). This model shifts focus from the outcome of learning to the process of learning itself. Within this model the emphasis is on students' active engagement in the learning process through independent and individualized learning, and problem solving. The model is associated with low-constraint educational contexts where teachers have autonomy, freedom and flexibility (Wette, 2010). From this point of view, curriculum reform is seen as a product of a process of dialogue, inclusivity and acknowledgement of stakeholders. This model, takes an integral view of educational systems seeking synergies between inputs, processes and outcomes (Amadio et al., 2015).

Building on the chosen curriculum model (product or process), curriculum developers can move on to choose the way the curriculum should be designed. Based on educators' assumptions about curriculums, there are different sets of curriculum types that can be identified in the literature. For instance in the generic educational domain, Grundy (1987) suggests three different perspectives informed by three different philosophies of education; the technical interest (which emphasizes the production of learning outcomes that coincide with predetermined specifications), the practical interest (emphasizes making education more

meaningful to the students), and the emancipatory interest (informed by criticality and the transformation of the teacher's consciousness). Alternatively, Lawton (1978) lists three types of curriculums based on assumptions that psychology, philosophy or sociology can help in justifying the curriculum; the child-centred view, the subject-centred view and the society-entered view. Another classification of curriculum design identifies three types of curriculum design: content-based (focused on what to be learnt and how it should be learnt); objective-based (based on the assumption that learning leads to a change in behaviour, and, therefore focuses on behavioural objectives), and competency-based (based on the development of problem-solving skills and general competencies rather than rote learning) (IBE-UNESCO, 2013). It is worth mentioning here that there is an emerging alternative view of curriculum, as countries – in the 21st century- are taking an integral view of education systems and progressively shifting interests across content-centred, competence-centred, and learner-centred curriculums (Amadeio et al., 2015). This emerging view seeks to achieve synergies between inputs, processes and outcomes. As such curriculum development is viewed as a tool for harmonizing national and educational agendas which brings a more humanistic perspective and democratization of education (Amadeio et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, there is consensus in the literature that any given curriculum seldom follows a pure model and often combines different types in its design (Gouëdard et al., 2020). Similarly, on the instructional level it is unlikely that teachers would follow only one approach to the curriculum at all times and that it is best to incorporate all three theories of curriculums into one comprehensive theory (Grundy, 1987; Lawton, 1978). This study shares this perspective, in which curriculum models and designs can be strategically chosen and that the choice can be informed by the assessment of all interests. Through this lens, what matters is that the curriculum is implemented in a manner that shows coherence and compatibility between its model, design and approach. This particular issue brings about the discussion about the

importance of coherence between the three dimensions of curriculum: the intended curriculum; the implemented curriculum; and the assessed curriculum.

3.1.3 The dimensions of the curriculum

Congruence between the three dimensions of the curriculum; the written curriculum, the taught curriculum and the tested curriculum, must be taken, comprehensively, into consideration when it comes to curriculum development and implementation (Amadeio et al., 2015). The aim of good curriculum implementation is to bring the three dimensions into congruence, in which the intended curriculum should be the same one that is implemented and assessed (Steffy & English, 1997). The intended curriculum refers to what students are expected to learn and expresses national beliefs about values, pedagogical methods and assessment aims (OECD, 2013). While the implemented curriculum refers to actual teaching and learning practices, and the tested curriculum is the knowledge and skills students actually acquire as a result of teaching as demonstrated through different means of evaluation (OECD, 2020).

It has been argued in some contexts, that incompatibility between those three dimensions would lead the reform to fail (Tehio, 2009). More importantly, some claim that any gaps identified between what is taught and what is tested, i.e. discrepancies between the intended and tested contents, would lead to dominance of what is tested in the taught curriculum (Nkosana, 2010). With regards to the Saudi context, there is evidence in the literature of a substantial gap between policies stated in government documents and the way they are implemented in the day-to-day EFL classroom delivery which means that educational reforms in Saudi Arabia are not being properly and consistently implemented (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019). Particularly, data obtained from Abahussain (2016) has indicated that assessment practices and examinations of the English language subject contradict the goals of teaching English set by the MOE. Similarly, there is evidence of lack of alignment between national examinations and the

curriculum along with contradictions between the implemented curriculum and the aims of the intended curriculum, which prevents the examination system from supporting the implementation of the curriculum (OECD, 2020).

3.1.4 Curriculum development and implementation in ELT

Along with the curriculum models and dimensions discussed above (in sections 3.1.1, 3.1.2 and 3.1.3) in the general education domain, the literature about curriculum development within the ELT field is often also concerned with trends, methodologies and language teaching and learning theories that inform foreign language curriculums (see for example Field, 2000; Richards, 2014). In the history of the development of language teaching, there have been numerous taxonomies regarding trends in language teaching in different historical periods: the grammar translation method in the 19th century, the audio-lingual and the communicative methods in the 20th century; and what is known as the post-communicative paradigm in the 21st century (Nagy, 2019).

Wedell and Grassick (2018) identified two perspectives on language teaching and education in general that strongly influenced the development of English curricula in state school education systems. The first trend brought about changes derived from ideas in Applied Linguistics in the 1970s which led to the birth of communicative language teaching (CLT). Those changes were based on the idea that language proficiency entails more competencies (particularly communicative competence) along with linguistic competence (Field, 2000; Richards, 2014) – more on CLT and its emergence will be discussed under section 3.3 in this chapter. The second perspective is related to the move away from teacher-centred, knowledge transmission view of education towards more learner-centred, interactive and constructivist conception of education (Schweisfurth, 2013). As a result of these perspectives a global demand has increased for

teaching English for communication emphasising communicative competence and developing learners' ability to communicate in English (Wedell &Grassick, 2018).

With regards to curriculum implementation within the ELT field, a number of issues – including the assumption that implementation is a linear process, lack of communication between stockholders, ineffective teachers' training and lack of proper support to name a few – have been identified as factors that have negatively affected implementation outcomes (Levin & Fullan, 2008). EFL curriculum planning in many developing and developed nations remain power coercive (a top down and hierarchical process) with implementation still viewed as a linear process (Wedell &Grassick, 2018). From this line of thinking those responsible for implementing the curriculum (EFL teachers in particular) are rarely informed, consulted about the change or involved in any planning processes (Wedell, 2013). As a result of this lack of communication between English curriculum planners (policymakers) and implementers (EFL teachers), the new curriculum would very often proceed without sufficient consideration of the existing context (local cultural and material realities). Secondly, lack of communication within curriculum development and implementation processes can lead to inconsistency between other parts of the English language system such as textbooks, examinations and teacher education. Unless coordination and alignment is manifested in materials, assessment and teachers' professional learning, reform in educational policy is unlikely to pay off for teaching and learning (Cohen & Hill, 2001). Finally, lack of communication can lead English teachers to feel confused about what to do, especially when their local context can offer little guidance on the classroom implications of the new English curriculum (Levin & Fullan, 2008). Wise change does not make the mistake of underestimating the importance of contexts in changing people's behaviour (Gladwell, 2000) because in successful transformative change, changing the context is the focus (Fullan, 2003). Lack of consideration of the whole change context can lead to a mismatch between the skills that the communicative curriculum aims to develop and

what is tested in exams or between the classroom time needed to use communicative activities and the pressure on teachers to finish the book. As a result teachers might feel helpless knowing that their teaching is not helping learners to achieve hoped-for curriculum outcomes (Wedell &Grassick, 2018). Finally, insufficient formal – one-off, off-site, lecture based, theory application approach – teachers’ training might hinder the successful implementation of the communicative curriculum, because this type of training does not help English teachers to adjust their existing familiar practice to become consistent with CLT (Richards, 2014; Tetiurka, 2018). Consequently, English teachers often receive minimal support to understand what the new curriculum aims mean for their own classroom practice (Diop, 2018). This observation might explain the argument made by Gouëdard et al. (2020) and Wedell &Grassick, (2018) indicating that despite the substantial human and financial investment made on supporting English teaching by governments, there is limited evidence that national English curriculum change initiatives – which aim to implement CLT and enable learners to develop their communication skills through shifting to a learner-centred model of instruction – have been successful. This is due to a number of issues including those discussed above in this section and others suggested by empirical CLT implementation studies across EFL and ESL contexts. A review of the empirical evidence of CLT implementation will be provided under section 3.4 below.

It can be helpful to understand curriculum development as a complex system from the complexity theory perspective (Fullan, 2003). From this perspective curriculum development and implementation are perceived as complex processes which can help us make sense of the ways in which current and future change planning and implementation projects may become better able to meet their outlined goals and more sustainable (Fullan, 2003; 2007; Szekeley & Mason, 2019). Hence, the next section will discuss the issue of understanding curriculum development as a complex system.

3.1.5 Curriculum development as a complex system

There are a number of features that characterize curriculum change in education; together these features constitute the definition of curriculum change. Curriculum change involves negotiation, multiple players, paradoxical complexity, progress that causes loss and redistribution of power, and cultural implications (Szekely & Mason, 2019; Fullan, 2003). The literature on curriculum implementation has shed light on the need for the systematic attention to this multifaceted nature of curriculum reform (Gouédard et al., 2020; Fullan, 2015) before one can expect robust changes (Akker, 2010). Therefore, what follows is a brief review of what has been said in this regard.

The literature on curriculum change has highlighted the fact that the process of curriculum change and innovation abounds with the assumption that it is a highly complex process fraught with challenges, concerns as well as expectations (Lamie, 2005; Carless, 1998; Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Levine & Nevo, 2009). Part of the reason why curriculum change is challenging and complex is that it is risky and involves uncertainty and dealing with the unknown (Bailey et al., 2001). Particularly, as Lamie (2005) emphasizes that the uneasiness of curriculum change comes from the fear that the proposed changes might fail, and this fear makes us feel threatened about our ability to perform the assigned tasks or even losing our jobs. Nonetheless, although changes are complex and difficult, planned changes in any professional environment are necessary (Bailey et al., 2001) and if done properly curriculum change, in particular, can be promising and rewarding (Castro, 2013).

However, making sense of the chaos and complexity within the system of large scale education reform calls, as Fullan (2003) argues, for using complexity theory as applied to social systems. From this perspective, Fullan (2003) argues that informed prescription may impose order on a chaotic unproductive system, but informed professional judgement requires the creative

thinking of complexity theory. Thus, Fullan (2003) asserts that it is best that educational reform is understood and seen through the lenses of the core concepts of complexity theory – such as:

Non-linearity: accepting that reforms might not unfold as intended

Unpredictability: dynamically complex interactive forces can lead to surprises along the way

Auto-catalysis: occurs when systems interact and influence each other towards new patterns, as behaviour in one system stimulates certain behaviours in another system until eventually the chain of stimulation returns to catalyse the original system

The edge of chaos: when systems avoid too little and too much order

Butterfly effects: when small numbers of key forces merge and lead to disproportionately huge effects

Morrison (2006) agrees with Fullan's (2003) description in that educational systems and practices exhibit these features of complex systems, being dynamical and emergent, sometimes unpredictable, non-linear organizations operating in unpredictable and changing external environments.

Therefore, approaching curriculum reform based on this line of thinking, is based on the premise that change (order) emerges naturally because of unpredictable interactions between intersecting entities within the educational system. This perspective also suggests a move from top-down curriculum development towards more bottom-up decision making and a rejection of centralized prescription and linear programming of teaching and learning (Morrison, 2006). Indeed, Szekely and Mason (2019) argue that from this perspective educational development is the process through which systems adapt to contextual changes in order to ensure their sustainability and survival. This means that systems incorporate inputs from their context to address their interests and needs to survive. In addition, systems co-regulate those inputs to

provide feedback that has consequences for the sustainability of other systems that represent the context in which they exist.

In the same manner, Akker (2010) suggests paying attention to a list of ten curriculum components metaphorically visualized as a spider web. The ten components – which are: rationale, aims, content, learning activities, teacher roles, materials and resources, grouping, location, time and assessment – address ten specific questions about the planning of student learning. The spider web illustrates the interconnection as well as vulnerability of those components, and complexity of the efforts to reform curriculums in a consistent, balanced and sustainable manner. Gouédard et al., 2020 argue that while all components are important for successful curricular reform, three are particularly crucial. Namely, the rationale (why students are learning?), the type of curriculum to be developed (what are they learning?), and teachers' role (how teachers are facilitating learning?) are vital components to be addressed in any reform attempt.

Therefore, curriculum change might be better seen as a complex system, where individuals and institutions within this system affect the implementation process of the change. In addition to that, change is also affected by the social and economic context in the wider environment (Szekely and Mason, 2019). This means that curriculum development emerges from interactions among the educational system's constituents – which are not always predictable – and cannot be understood through one or even many of those participant constituents in isolation (Fullan, 2003, Fenwick et al., 2011). This particular principle has manifested itself throughout the discussion of the context and background of this study, in which it has helped in understanding how curriculum reform in Saudi Arabia was imbedded within a broader web of political, social, and economic factors at both the local as well as international levels, and how those factors ultimately affected the process of curriculum change in the country.

To ensure the sustainability of curriculum change, it requires continuous training and practice, and time. Fullan (1993) asserts that development necessitates learning how to face the outcomes of change by taking advantage of the positive ones and diminishing the negative ones, which brings about the discussion of setting goals and outcomes for curriculum change.

According to Lamie (2005) change, any change, involves eight general principles. At the beginning the objectives and aims of the change need to be either explicitly or implicitly stated. However, if those promoting the change aim for it to be effective, the aims should be explicit even if they consider these aims apparent. Change is also a continuous process of problem solving, in which those implementing it should allow for and respond to feedback and modify accordingly. Nonetheless, Richards (2014) lists needs analysis and situation analysis as steps of curriculum development in language teaching that should precede setting the goals and outcomes of the curriculum. According to Richards (2014), needs analysis aims to determine (including others) what language skills learners have/need, their communicative abilities, how they use English on a daily basis, as well as the cultural, political and personal characteristics of students. Situation analysis, on the other hand, is an analysis of factors in the context, such as: socio-political matters, educational value systems, teacher experiential wisdom and learner motivation, which can potentially facilitate the change or hinder its successful implementation. Thus, bringing the results of both types of analysis into congruence can ensure consistency between the goals and outcomes of the change project.

Since curriculum change necessitates interaction between many players, negotiation and communication become a requirement (Morgan and Roberts, 2002), because each of those players is trying to construct their own understanding and place in the new system (Weston, 1979). Describing curriculum change as a system implies that it is full of complexities and challenges that need to be considered by the different players within the system. The complexity of educational change is rooted in its ambiguous nature, in which educational

institutions have to face change while they must also, at the same time, preserve continuity (Evans, 2000). Beside ambiguity, part of the complexity of educational change comes from the fact that it causes loss and uncertainty as shown at the beginning of this section. However, Richards (1998) introduces a two-way development procedure to minimize this feeling and reduce the fear of change. Richards' procedure is based on the recognition of the existence of different actors in the change process by suggesting a model for training teachers and utilizing mentors in the higher education sector. As well as minimizing fear, implementing curriculum change requires continuous training and practice (Lamie, 2005) in order to smooth the process of changing the educational culture. According to Fullan (1991) the agenda behind introducing change into educational institutions is to change the culture of these institutions. Thus, the effectiveness and sustainability of the change require an alteration in the behaviours – skills, activities and practices – and beliefs – understandings and commitments – of those who are part of the change process.

Thus, at the end of this section one could define curriculum change as a complex system where interaction between its components is the vehicle by which change occurs and unpredictability of the change process is the stimulus that promotes novelty and development (Fullan, 2003). Lamie (2005) summarises curriculum development by describing it as a part of a complex system that is paradoxical in nature, strives to improve, and seeks to accomplish constancy at the same time. The UNESCO-IBE glossary of curriculum terminology (2013) also defines curriculum development as a systematic process that values the input of stakeholders while also catering for sustainability and long-term impact. The glossary also adds that in contemporary educational practice curriculum development is best seen as a comprehensive cycle of development, implementation, evaluation and revision. Taken together these definitions indicate that curriculum development is a system that involves awareness of difficulties – such as loss and fear of change along with dealing with the attitudes and feelings

of the actors within this system – and acknowledgement of the different factors that this system is affected by – including the social and economic contexts.

3.1.6 English Curriculum development in Saudi Arabia

In the Saudi context, the literature indicates that education in Saudi Arabia continues to be in a state of crisis due to ideological conflicts between different sectors of the Saudi society, which led the government to contest traditional education systems in the name of promoting modernity, tolerance and the fight against terrorism and radicalism (Barnawi, 2019). As it is well recognized by now, the events of 9/11 have changed the world dramatically for every Saudi national (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020; Rugh, 2002). When the Saudi government responded, after the attacks, to global concerns and accusations of a deep-seated anti-American and anti-Western hostility in Saudi educational curriculums, a government official – Prince Khalid Al-Faisal, a former minister of education 2013- 2015 – went on the record, in 2004, and said that 20% of the problem might have been in school curricula. However, he noted that 80% was in the hidden curricula – unofficial values and normative patterns of behaviours, not specified in the planned curriculum, students are expected to conform to while in school (UNESCO-IBE, 2013) – and the way in which extremism was inculcated by those responsible for students in schools (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019). This indicates that the government has held teachers accountable for problems in the old curriculum, which might not be an accurate accusation, however, it shows, rather ironically, that officials are aware of the centrality of teachers' roles and beliefs in curriculum implementation. This is problematic, because, as will be explained further in the next section of this chapter, the Saudi educational system is often described as highly centralized as teachers have very limited autonomy in what they teach and do inside classrooms.

A further explanation of the roots of the critical situation of the Saudi educational system can be found in Al-Issa (2009), which argues that despite the unanimous concerns in the discourse about the inadequacy of the Saudi educational system, these discussions are rarely followed by any serious attempts to answer some of the most critical questions in this regard. The book claims that three fundamental factors determine as to why have educational reform in Saudi Arabia failed in the past: 1) the lack of a clear educational policy vision; 2) grave misgivings about the concept of change and reform in the religious culture; 3) centralization and bureaucracy at all levels of official administrative bodies. Al-Issa goes further and argues that work within national formal advisory committees – tasked with educational reform – is often scrutinized by lobbying religious activists and predominated by hidden agendas, intellectual conflicts and currents of thought that are fuelled by conspiracy theories and mistrust among members. Due to this climate of cultural crisis and limited culture of dialogue and mutual understanding, intellectual conflicts tend to prevail in most of educational reform projects (Gouedard et al., 2020). As members continue to walk a tightrope unable to reconcile their differences. As a result, those committees would usually come up with ineffective recommendations and half solutions that are futile in attaining any real educational reforms (Al-Issa, 2009). However, in light of this explosion of conflicting interests looming over the process of curriculum development, it might be best to understand curriculum as a synthesis of these visions. Within this view diversities are plunged into a process of comprehensive reform and promoting an inclusive universalism of different beliefs, affiliations and interests. This is important because it aligns with the emergent vision of curriculum as a product of social dialogue and collective construction based on a comprehensive approach to the education system (UNESCO-IBE, 2015).

Considering the scope of this study, the focus here will specifically be on changes in the EFL curriculum in Saudi public schools. The process of curriculum development and

implementation within second and foreign language teaching has gained significant attention in education systems around the world (Nagy, 2020). Indeed, second and foreign language teaching is one of the largest educational enterprises in the world, as millions of children, adults and teachers devote large amounts of time and a great deal of energies into teaching and learning languages (Richards, 2014). As outlined in the context chapter of this study, a number of socio-political pressures have had bearing on the process of English curriculum development in the Saudi Arabian context.

The significance of ELT curriculum development in Saudi Arabia is rooted in the fact that EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia is inescapably linked with economic, social and political imperatives of the Saudi state (Mullick, 2013). Therefore, ELT is likely to continue to be strongly influenced by central government policies. As a result of the significance of ELT in the Saudi educational context, a number of adjustments and alterations have been made, arguably introducing globalized neoliberal frameworks to the language education policy in Saudi Arabia (see Barnawi, 2019; Elyas & Picard, 2013; Eusafzai, 2017; Phan & Barnawi, 2015). One of the ramifications of introducing those policies into the Saudi education system, and the English education system in particular, has been the Tatweer project (Tayan, 2017) and the Vision 2030 (Barnawi, 2019). According to Tayan (2017) there is link between the aims of Tatweer and neoliberalism, in which Tatweer enforces the view of education as a market commodity and the marketization of educational policy perpetuated by Saudi Arabia's membership in international power drivers such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the World Bank. English teaching is viewed as particularly important within these policies because it underpins many of the initiatives detailed in those policies (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019).

Consequently, adjustments in the national EFL curriculum in the state public schools system included, among other things, changing the programme scope, English subject introduced to earlier grades at the primary level, the syllabus, the teaching pedagogy, teachers' practices, teaching materials, and students' testing evaluation systems (Moskovsky and Picard, 2019). However, it has been argued (see Al-Issa, 2009) that the challenges of ELT in state schools are not exclusive to issues such as number of English classes per week or whether the English subject should be introduced at the primary level. ELT challenges go beyond those micro-level constraints, as they extend to issues related to policy-makers appreciation of the importance of teaching foreign languages, curriculum planners' understanding of instructional approaches that should be used, teachers' training and PD, and the type of curriculum that better suits and reflects our contextual needs (Al-Issa, 2009).

Thus, the EFL curriculum has had its fair share of curricular changes that took place during the last two decades in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, an abundance of research has been conducted to trace those changes and tackle a wide range of EFL-related topic areas. In fact, in a comprehensive review of EFL teaching and learning literature by Saudi scholars, Moskovsky (2019) indicates that the era after 2000s have seen strong growth in EFL research. According to Moskovsky (2019) one major topic area concerns EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia, including issues of pedagogy and curriculum, teaching methodologies and teachers' pre-service and in-service training.

For instance, Alfahadi (2012) investigates how the content of the EFL curriculum has completely changed in the "post 9/11 era" in Saudi Arabia. According to Alfahadi's study, in an attempt to position the country in a competing place amongst other developed political and economic forces and to preserve local values and practices; and in response to the local and global pressures, the Saudi educational authorities have modified the cultural content of EFL textbooks for public schools. For instance, a new textbook was introduced to all levels of public

school education in 2003. Alfahadi claims that the textbook presents a noticeable presence of Western cultural values, in which it features many characters with local names and clothing but enacting Western cultural values such as a Saudi boy introducing his sister to his male friend, a practice, Alfahadi (2012) argues, that is not acceptable in the local culture in Saudi Arabia.

The modified cultural content of the EFL textbooks that Alfahadi refers to can be compared to older versions of EFL textbooks where English has been taught with reference to local Saudi cultural models. Alfahadi (2012) goes further and argues that this attention on the representation of cultural models in textbook reform is, most likely, intended to target changing the views and decision-making of those who use the materials, arguably, teachers (p. 16). He goes on to support his argument with a factor that McGrath (2006) has observed, in which it is assumed that teachers' views of textbooks influence the way they use textbooks and the way students receive these textbooks. Indeed, teachers' views and understandings of the curriculum and its content influence its nature and implementation (Mullick, 2013).

At the end of this section it can be befitting to conclude on the following note, which is a reflection on how all those changes have reflected on teachers' lives, experiences and practice. Undoubtedly, all the intertwined changes into the English curriculum, discussed above, have had remarkable effects on local EFL teachers' teaching practice, experiences (Eusafzai, 2017) and their professional development and training (Al-Seghayer, 2017; Moskovsky and Picard, 2019). For instance, Eusafzai (2017) claims that there is a conflict between the aims of Tatweer and the resources and training and support available for English teachers. Moreover, some claim that due to the implementation of those new reforms English teachers were further deprived from their autonomy (Barnawi, 2019), lost face – i.e. their social status – (Eusafzai, 2017) and experienced a shift in their identity and professionalism (Elyas & Picard, 2012).

Considering teachers' role in educational reform is important because, according to the most recent literature (see for example Allmnkrah & Evers, 2020; Barnawi, 2019), there is a need for a fundamental shift – in this regard – in the Saudi education system in order for the country to progress to a knowledge-based economy. To achieve this goal, Allmnkrah & Evers (2020) suggest that in-service as well as preservice teachers need to be trained in innovative ways and that officials need to listen to teachers in terms of what they need in order to play an active role in the attainment of the Saudi Vision 2030. These suggestions confirm recent observations indicating that the overarching educational goals of the vision have not yet been translated into clear standards and quality schooling (OECD, 2020). According to the OECD (2020) report The National Transformation Programme (NTP) has set national students' achievement goals, but it does not help school teachers understand how to achieve those goals and more fundamentally what the purpose of teaching should be in the context of the vision. This brings about the discussion of the important role that teachers can play in curriculum change. Teachers can either play a positive role in implementing change, alternatively they can play a negative one where they might resist the change and/ or sabotage it (Kelly, 1999). Hence, the second section of this chapter is designated to the discussion of the issue of the centrality of teachers' role in curriculum development.

3.2 Teachers' role in curriculum change

Given the aim of this study was making sense of curriculum development from teachers' perspectives, it was pertinent to review what roles can language teachers play in this regard. Close examination of the aforementioned notions of curriculum development and implementation (under section 3.1) confirms that they are inclusive processes, in which policymakers and teachers have equal responsibilities to connect the dots between policy and practice (Fullan, 2003). These processes are built on principles of collaboration and partnership between different actors and stakeholders. Indeed, the success and sustainability of change

depend on having the people (teachers in this case) with the problem internalize the change itself, because people can be willing to make sacrifices to implement change if they see the reason why (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Hence, scholarly discourses call for curriculum development to be democratic and collaborative, include multiple stakeholders' perspectives, and aligned to values that promote the professional, social and public good (Wilson & Slade, 2019). However, some curriculum studies in the literature have revealed that curriculum development remains an internal top-down process and that its success is measured by teachers' adherence to the prescribed curriculum (Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Thus, a more detailed review of the literature on teachers' role in curriculum development is outlined in the sections below.

The centrality of teachers' role in the curriculum needs to be asserted here not only because teachers are professionally required to understand the curriculum, but rather due to Kelly's (1999) 'make or break' role they have in curricular change. Kelly (1999) uses this expression to emphasize that any attempts to sell teachers pre-packaged programmes are deemed to fail, because "each school is unique and its curricular needs are thus largely idiosyncratic" (p. 8). Thus, only teachers are capable of deciding whether and how to use the curriculum in their contexts, and imposing the change on them may lead them to sabotage any reform attempts. This concurs with Fullan's (2015) argument about the importance of teachers in successful curriculum implementation. Fullan (2015) argues that individuals, practitioners not policymakers, are the core unit of change and if they do not have adequate skills, change will not occur. Similarly, Kisa and Correnti (2015) argue that teachers' limited knowledge – of the new curriculum – and existing beliefs and practices can hinder an effective curriculum implementation. Thus, teachers' existing beliefs is an important factor to consider before implementing change, because those beliefs can affect teachers and what they do inside their classrooms (Borg, 2011). The issue of teachers' beliefs, how those beliefs may influence their

practice and how to make inferences about those beliefs will be discussed towards the end of this section and further in the next chapter (see section 4.1.3). Thus, smart reform takes into consideration the existing capacities of teachers (Gouédard et al., 2020). This way, change achieves coherence on the top at the policy level and on the ground at the level of practice. Fullan (2003) argues, drawing on the principles of complexity theory, that to do this policymakers need to forego the temptation to impose too much order and have a little less control in exchange for the potential of more innovation and commitment on the ground. This means that policymakers need to trust teachers and their judgments by delegating some of their authority and power over the curriculum to teachers in order for the curriculum development process to be successful.

Kelly (1999), also, asserts that education cannot be a mechanical mindless activity because it largely depends on teachers and the decisions and judgements they make regarding the curriculum. At the same time, however, Kelly further argues that teachers need to understand, fully participate and accept the rationale behind the curriculum in order to reach the right decision. From a complexity theory perspective, Fullan (2003) refers to this as the seduction of “an off the shelf solution” (p. 29), in which policymakers might feel that their role is to impose clarity (solutions), where their main role is to help people discover it. In this manner change emerges as teachers discover – with support from policymakers – what works rather than comply with what is imposed by policymakers. It might be useful here to refer to Heifetz and Linsky’s (2002) distinction between technical change – that is required to solve technical problems (such as improving literacy and numeracy) by applying know-how techniques – and adaptive change – where people are required to alter their behaviour. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) suggest that the latter involves a number of problems that are not amendable to authoritative top-down procedures and cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from the top. Those are called adaptive challenges because they require adjustments from different levels

within the system and require changing the attitudes and behaviours of those in the system. This further supports Kelly's (1999) assertion that the success of any attempts of curriculum change depends largely on the level of commitment and acceptance that teachers show towards this change and that this commitment relies on teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the underlying principles on which the change is built.

In short, based on the discussion above, it can be assumed that failing to recognize the centrality of the individual teacher's role and attempting to control the curriculum from outside are recipes for failure and triviality. It seems that Kelly's (1999) arguments can be contextualized in and support the premise that skewed distribution of power – the capacity to control curriculum development and implementation processes – and the recognition of how all stakeholders (especially teachers) might potentially impact the change process and minimize the possibility of resistance. This implies that resistance can pose a significant threat to any attempts of successful implementation and that maintaining balance in power relations can determine the extent to which change can produce outcomes (Szekely & Mason, 2019). Teachers are the filters through which the curriculum passes, because their understandings of it and their enthusiasm or frustration with some of its aspects affect its nature. Consequently, those factors are responsible for any differences between the planned mandated curriculum and the one implemented in classrooms (Mullick, 2013). Thus, it can be suggested that hindering curricular reform or facilitating it, is a matter of whether teachers are heard or marginalized within the process of development.

Indeed, there is consensus in the literature on curriculum development that emphasizes the significance of teachers' input as a fundamental factor in any effort to successfully implement educational reform (Adams, 2000; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Lukacs, 2015). Furthermore, it has been reported in the literature that there is a relationship between students' success in a certain educational system and the extent of teachers' professional freedom and participation in

teaching and learning innovation within this system (Hargreaves, 2009; Levin, 2000 cited in Adin-Surkis, 2015). There is ample evidence, on the other hand, that failure of educational changes is closely related to the lack of cooperation between teachers and the educational system they work in (Flores, 2005; Fullan, 1993; Ni, 2009; Sarason, 1996). In order to highlight the ramifications of teachers' marginalization in the process of developing EFL/ESL curriculums, the section below will briefly review some of what has been done in this regard. First, I shall refer to studies focused on teachers' roles in curriculum change in TESOL in different EFL/ESL contexts. Then, I shall conclude this section with evidence from the Saudi Arabian context.

Adin-Surkis (2015) conducted a survey study – of 84 English teachers in the Jerusalem district – and in-depth interviews – with 9 English teachers in the same district – to examine EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards a newly implemented English curriculum in Israeli schools. The findings of the study indicate that the participant teachers relied on their past experiences and did not use and apply the new teaching approach due to fear and insecurity about their ability to fulfil the demands of the new curriculum. The findings from Adin-Surkis study, thus, confirm claims that when curricular change is imposed on teachers, they tend to perceive the situation as a threat to their existence and status which generates natural anxiety and defensive efforts (Fullan, 1993).

In the same manner, Sharkey (2004) has conducted a qualitative case study on an ESL context, in Millville a refugee resettlement city in the U.S., to investigate how teachers' knowledge and voice can be mediators in the process of English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) curriculum development. The participants in the study were nine elementary ESOL teachers, a school district coordinator, and a university researcher. The findings of the study indicate that teachers' awareness of their teaching contexts plays a significant role as a critical mediator in the process of curriculum development in three fundamental ways; as a vital mediator in

establishing trust and legitimacy, defining needs and concerns regarding the curriculum, and critiquing the political factors that affect the curriculum. Nevertheless, both Adin-Surkis (2015) and Sharkey (2004) recommend that educators in teacher education programmes need to work in collaboration with in-service teachers in order to help pre-service teachers understand educational policies and how they are applied in reality. Both studies call for the necessity of collaboration between teacher training programmes and curriculum change planners, in addition to the importance of teachers' pre-service as well as in-service training in order to fulfil the potential of any future curriculum changes.

In a study – involving 16 female teachers in three secondary schools in the UAE – about EFL teachers' feelings towards curriculum change, Troudi and Alwan (2010) have concluded that teachers convey tacit resistance to imposed change in the curriculum by focusing on finding faults in the new materials and resorting to use traditional teaching techniques despite the suggested changes. Moreover, the study has reported that most teachers in their sample tended to use metaphors, such as being 'at the bottom of the pyramid', 'out of the circle' and 'obedient slave[s]', which connote powerlessness, inferiority and even isolation. Similarly, Raddawi & Troudi (2018) conducted an action research study – in six secondary schools in three emirates – to examine the possibilities and obstacles present in adopting a critical approach to English language education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In their conclusion the authors have claimed that the education system in the UAE, and the region, can be characterized as what Freire (1996) referred to the Culture of Silence. Within this system teachers feel they are 'slaves' to the system, where the dominant – i.e. policy-makers – silences the oppressed – EFL teachers – through marginalizing and undermining any voice that challenges the authority of the oppressor.

Hence, any effective attempt to implement structural reform and educational innovations need to seriously take teachers' individual agency into consideration (Flores, 2005). Understanding

how teachers change, why they resist change and why they alter the ‘process of change’ in which they play a key role are crucial elements in implementing curricular change (Hargreaves, 1994). In fact, in a small-scale study on the implications of curricular changes on teachers’ sense of professionalism in an elementary school in Portugal, Flores (2005) has detailed a number of factors that contribute to teachers’ defensive behaviour towards imposed curricular change. Of these factors, Flores enlists the increasing demands placed upon teachers as political and social priorities and expectations are changed. For instance, Flores indicates that increasing demands for quality and raising the standards of education have become priorities for all governments. As a result, intensification and bureaucratization, increased forms of managerialism, and greater accountability and public scrutiny are but a few examples of the pressures that have been placed on the teaching profession. These changes in educational policies have made teachers’ work subject to public and official accountability in addition to lack of support, training and proper education which resulted in teachers facing dilemmas and, by and large, changing their perception of the notion of professionalism (Tayan, 2017). According to Flores (2005) these dilemmas can be demonstrated by teachers’ attitudes towards the tensions marked by the dichotomy between what teacher’s professionalism is and what it should be.

A considerable amount of literature has indicated that CLT principles are rarely implemented inside second language classrooms (Nunan, 1987; Kumaravadivelu, 1993; Savignon, 2007; Spada, 2007), indicating a critical discrepancy between CLT theory and teachers’ actual classroom practices. For instance, Karavas-Doukas’s (1996) has developed a Likert-type attitude scale in an effort to understand teachers’ attitudes towards the communicative approach within the context of an EFL innovation in Greek public secondary schools. The study seems to support claims in the literature on curriculum innovation and implementation suggesting that one of the causes of the discrepancy between prescribed theory and classroom practice may be

teachers' attitudes. Thus, it might be safe to assume that teachers' attitudes play a crucial part in the implementation of CLT, because teachers are not atheoretical beings. That is to say, any newly adopted approach should be in completion with well-established theories, experiences and beliefs about language teaching and learning held by teachers as a result of previous teaching approaches. Attitude change is an inevitable part of any process of pedagogical innovation (Fullan, 2003; Heifetz & Linsky, 2002), and that any discrepancy between the principles of the new approach and teachers' existent theories and beliefs will lead to their attempt to interpret the new principles in light of their own beliefs and translate innovative pedagogies to conform with their own style of teaching (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Therefore, it is important to investigate and explore teachers' perspectives and attitudes to anticipate any difficulties they might face when implementing a new approach in the classroom. Findings of such investigations would be crucial in informing decisions related to building a sufficient support system for teachers through in-service as well as pre-service training schemes. However, despite the importance of teachers' attitudes in determining the successful implementation of new curricula, it seems that decision-makers neglect the criticality of the issue when deciding to implement new teaching approaches (Nunan, 1991; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Butler, 2011). Thus, understanding Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of their own classroom practices and why they do what they do, might help in understanding the incompatibilities between their knowledge of CLT principles and their classroom practice (Kleinsasser and Savignon, 1991).

There are a relatively recent body of literature that is concerned with teachers' role in curriculum development and decision making in the Saudi Arabian educational context. For instance, Mullick (2013) has conducted a study informed by the critical paradigm as it focused on EFL teachers' oppression and lack of voice in curriculum development. The participants in this study were five, male, native speakers of English teaching in a preparatory English course

in a tertiary institution in Saudi Arabia. The study concludes that the teachers in the sample perceived that they have no opportunity to voice their opinions and when they do, they are either ignored or reprimanded. Similarly, Alnnefaie (2016) has explored the issue of EFL teachers' marginalization from a critical stance. This investigation has aimed to describe and challenge the current situation of male, Saudi, state-school EFL teachers' marginalization in the process of curriculum and centralization in the Saudi education system. Data drawn from this study show that the MOE considers teachers as mere implementers and shed light on limitations imposed on teachers, their lack of autonomy and how those limitations may affect their professional creativity. Most recently, Allmnakrah & Evers (2020) have conducted a scholarly review that aims to shed light on recent Saudi educational reforms and teachers roles in contributing to the achievement of the goals outlined in the Saudi Vision 2030. The study argues that curriculum reform in Saudi Arabia is characterized by lack of leadership roles for teachers and lack of consultation and training. The review claims that notions such as partnership and cooperation are merely marketing slogans – used in rhetoric rather than in action – within Saudi educational reform projects (such as Tatweer) to align those projects with the global trend to involve teachers in educational reform. On the ground, however, collaboration and partnership between teachers and policymakers are practically non-existent within the centralized Saudi education system.

The aforementioned studies seem to suggest that teachers lack agency, voice and choice within the Saudi educational system. Unfortunately, this indication is not surprising given arguments that have been made in the literature that the Saudi educational system is highly centralized and controlled in many aspects by the MOE (see Al-Isa, 2009; Al-Seghayer, 2017). This observation concurs with claims in the relevant literature indicating that those who might have little to no experience in the reality of what is happening inside classrooms and students' needs and abilities might be privileged with leadership roles while teachers are marginalized within

the process of curriculum development (Akker et al., 2003; Taylor & Moohr, 2018). It can also be argued that the current situation of teachers' lack of autonomy and voice within the system calls for the need to decentralize policy and decision making within the Saudi education system and the need to distribute leadership and power amongst stakeholders and to encourage collaboration (Fullan, 2003; Szekely & Mason, 2019). As doing so could affect positive change in the national language education policy leading to introducing a more adaptive learning environment with flexible EFL teaching practice (Al-Seghayer, 2017).

The issues raised by the above-mentioned studies can be conceptualized and further explained by evidence from the literature on teachers' cognition and beliefs. The empirical evidence discussed above suggest that although professional training does help in shaping teachers cognition, programmes that ignore teachers' existing beliefs may be less effective (Flores, 2005). Research has also indicated that teachers' beliefs and practices are mutually informing and relevant for curriculum and instruction (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), with contextual factors playing an important role in determining the extent of teachers' ability to implement instruction aligned with their cognitions (Borg, 2003). For example, both Borg (2013) and Pajares (1992) stress the significance of teachers' episodic memories – i.e. memories and critical events that influenced and shaped teachers' beliefs about teaching – rooted in teachers' beliefs and conceptualization of teaching.

In an examination of the definition of teachers' beliefs and synthesis of findings about the nature of beliefs, Pajares (1992) argues that the time teachers have spent in classrooms as students is a fertile ground for developing beliefs of all kinds that student-teachers bring to teacher education and teachers take into their classrooms. Therefore, teachers become unable or “subconsciously unwilling” (p.323) to change educational practices in need of reform, because they already have positive identification with antiquated ineffective teaching – due to their episodic memories – which leads to the continuity of conventional teaching practices that

function as de facto guides for teachers. Similarly, in a review of research on language teachers' cognition, Borg (2003) provides further support for this assumption. Borg's review argues that prior language learning experiences shape language teachers' cognition and instructional decisions. For instance, Borg cites a study in which a teacher has explained that their own education included formal language learning practices including memorization, reading, writing, and grammar. However, that teacher has indicated they won't completely abandon the traditional teaching approach that has worked for them as a student in the past, even though they are required to use CLT in their current teaching practice. Thus, Borg (2003) concludes that teachers' prior language learning experiences form their conceptualization of L2 teaching during teacher education and continue to be influential throughout their professional lives. The general implication that emerges here, then, is that it is fundamental to study and analyse teachers' existing beliefs about teaching before implementing any curricular changes and educational reforms. As unexplored teachers' beliefs may be responsible for the perpetuation of antiquated and ineffective teaching practices, which is not only important for teachers' educators and preservice teachers, as Pajares (1992) suggests, but also for policy makers as well. As marginalizing teachers' beliefs may lead to their resistance to changes, as has been explained throughout this section, especially when the changes challenge teachers' existing core beliefs about teaching.

The next part of this chapter will review the literature about the development of CLT, its definition and its principles. The section is concluded with a detailed analysis of misconceptions about CLT, its criticism and the emergence of post-method pedagogy as an alternative to CLT.

3.3 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

3.3.1 The development of communicative language teaching

Communicative language teaching is an approach to teaching that focuses on communication – rather than mastery of grammatical rules of the language – as the organizing principle for language teaching (Richards, 2014). On the philosophical level, CLT originates and is influenced by a desire to establish connections between semantic interpretation and pragmatic use (Candlin, 1976). One of the difficulties of conceptualizing CLT, is doing justice to its eclectic nature (Richards, 2014). As a concept, CLT is informed by a broad assembly of ideas from a broad range of some linguistic and educational sources (Field, 2000), which have together come to be considered as good language teaching practice by many teachers (Thamarana, 2015). Candlin (1976) lists the main areas of enquiry that commonly inform the study of discourse and drawn on in developing communicative syllabuses as follows: textual cohesion; language function; studies in speech act theory; sociolinguistic variation; presuppositional semantics; interaction analysis; ethnography of speaking; process analysis; and discourse analysis. Thus, CLT is best viewed as a hybrid approach with different variations derived from multidisciplinary perspectives from linguistics, psychology, philosophy, sociology and educational research (Savignon, 1991). It would be beyond the scope of this study (and my present state of knowledge) to discuss all those areas in detail. However, it is pertinent to note that listing the above-mentioned areas is useful, because it draws attention to two fundamental issues in relation to the development of CLT curriculums. On the one hand, the list makes it clear to see the complexity of making sense of interaction. It is equally clear, in addition, that syllabus designers only take some of those areas into consideration when designing communicative curriculums. Nonetheless, this diversification in the theoretical background of CLT has been considered as a deficiency rather than a strength – as I will discuss

in detail in an upcoming section of this chapter (under section 3.3 misconceptions and criticism of CLT) – by opponents of the approach.

In their book about curriculum development in language teaching, Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that, as an approach, CLT is a significant indicator of the validity of the claim that there are a number of external and internal factors interacting to shape and determine the direction of the field of language teaching in the recent history. The book argues that external factors reflect the increasing essential features of contemporary societies represented in the global growing demand for an English-proficient workforce in economic sectors and desire for the ability to gain access for educational and technical resources available to proficient English users. As a result, more pressure is placed on English language programmes to provide the skills needed “by today’s global citizens” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p.83) and on governments to establish effective language education policies and by adopting more efficient language teaching approaches and effective language teachers’ preparation programmes. Internal factors, on the other hand, are initiated from the evolving changes of the very nature of the teaching profession itself. The authors’ manifestation of these internal factors can be clearly articulated in the following quote:

“[the] language teaching profession undergoes periodic waves of renewal and paradigm shifts as it continually reinvents itself through the impact of new ideas, new educational philosophies, advances in technology, and new research paradigms, and as a response to external pressures”(p. 83).

Thus, the interaction and interrelationship between both external and internal factors affecting the ELT field have resulted in the birth of a new language teaching approach that is assumed to be capable of fulfilling and complying with the demands of those influential sources of pressure.

Jacobs and Farrell (2003) define CLT as a paradigm shift that – over the past five decades – has represented the move from positivism to post positivism which indicates the move away

from behaviourist psychology and structural linguistics to cognitive and more contextualized meaning-based views of language. This paradigm shift in language teaching involves shifting attention from: teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction; product-oriented to process-oriented instruction; students as decontextualized individuals to the social nature of learning; viewing differences as impediments to learning to viewing differences as resources to be catered to and appreciated, a part-to-whole approach to a whole-to-part orientation; and drills and rote learning to emphasis on meaning (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). Thus, in terms of internal factors, the CLT movement started in response to rejection of assumptions and practices associated with the *Situational Language Teaching* (SLT) approach (Nagy, 2019). Generally, SLT focuses on teaching a foreign language through practicing basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities and had been the most common British approach of foreign language teaching up until the 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, the rejection of its underlying theory, i.e. Audio-lingualism, led to questioning the efficiency of the approach in foreign language teaching and shifting emphasis towards another element of language – i.e. communicative competence – that had been inadequately addressed in language teaching approaches at the time. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), British applied linguists emphasized another fundamental dimension to language, besides *structure*, in which the focus is placed on the *functional and communicative* potential of language. In fact, as the authors point out, the terms *notional-functional approach* and *functional approach* are sometimes used to describe the communicative approach. Thus, one of the distinctive features of CLT is its focus on the practicality of language learning (i.e. fluency) rather than the mechanical use of language (i.e. accuracy) emphasized in grammar focused traditional approaches. CLT features and principles will be discussed in detail in an upcoming section (3.3.3 the essentials of CLT), the following section, however, will be a discussion of the definition of communicative language teaching.

3.3.2 CLT Definition

Savignon (2007) argues that viewing CLT as a strict adherence to a textbook or set of curricular materials is not likely to be true to the processes and goals of CLT. It is best, therefore, to view CLT as an approach or theory to be used in developing materials and methods appropriate to a given context of learning. Even as an approach, Richards and Rodgers (2014) suggests that CLT can be seen from two theoretical perspectives; as a theory of language and a theory of learning. Richards and Rodgers (2014) claim that “at the level of language theory, CLT has a rich, if somewhat eclectic, theoretical base” (p. 89). However, in comparison, they argue, little has been written about the theory of learning that underpins CLT. The underlying learning theory of CLT can be discerned from its practices, principles and the design of textbooks and language courses based on CLT. Generally, as an approach CLT highlights communicative competence focusing on both conveying meaning and achieving objectives (Haryani & Ainur, 2020).

As a theory of language the concept of CLT can be traced back to the early 1970s when Hymes (1971) argued that language must be considered as a social entity that is composed of grammar as well as notions and functions. Thus, in its core, CLT is composed of a theory of language as communication and as a system for expressing meaning (Karakas, 2013; Li, 1998). Brown (2014) highlights the significance of CLT by emphasizing that “[a]mong the shifting sands of L2 methodology since the late 1970s, one overall catch phrase to describe the prevailing approach to pedagogy has stuck with us: communicative language teaching (CLT)”(p.235). Brown (2014) goes further and argues that the push toward communication has been relentless in the field of second language education for over three decades. Researchers have defined and redefined the constructs of communicative competence and examined, as a result, countless language functions learners must be able to accomplish (Savignon, 2007). However, Brown (2014) points out that despite this multitude of research into the concept of CLT, it is difficult

to synthesize its definition. Brown claims that all we have is “interpretations enough to send us reeling” (2014, p.236). It is worth mentioning here, that based on this confusion and disagreement about the definition of CLT some researchers in the field called its credibility into question (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Bax, 2003; Spada, 2007; Didenko and Pichugova, 2016).

The literature about CLT often refers to two separate versions of CLT, each version reflects how different people interpret the approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Indeed, for some CLT signifies using teaching procedures that encourage language learners to work in pairs and in groups for problem-solving (Parisi, 2020). Others, on the other hand, perceive CLT as an approach for integrating functional and structural aspects of language (Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020). The distinction between how each group defines what CLT means, can be used to put Howatt’s (1984) classification of a “weak” and “strong” versions of CLT into perspective. According to Howatt (1984), while the weak version of CLT can be described as “learning to use English”, the strong version of CLT entails “using English to learn English”. According to Howatt and Smith (2014) this distinction means that teachers need to know whether students are “communicating to learn” the foreign language or just “learning to communicate” in the foreign language (p. 91). Thus, the weak version aims to provide language learners with opportunities, through activities integrated in a wider language programme, to use their English for communication purposes. This weaker version of CLT has remained more or less the standard practice and the pedagogical norm of the approach (Howatt & Smith, 2014). By contrast, in the strong version the target is not merely activating a pre-existing inert knowledge of language through communication, but rather stimulating the development of the whole language system in language learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Based on the previous discussion, it seems that, almost always, the divergence of interpretation of CLT in L2 education is as to whether CLT includes the attention to language form through direct instruction and/or feedback. Some argue that at both levels, theory and practice, there is

a dichotomy between two set of diverse meanings of CLT in L2 teaching. For example, Spada (2007) claims that within practitioners, second language teachers describe CLT as exclusively meaning-based, foreign language instructors, on the other hand, describe it as a combination of language form and function. Similarly, in terms of theory unlike their American counterparts, British applied linguists conceptualize CLT as an L2 teaching approach that incorporates form and meaning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Therefore, it might be best to define CLT based on understanding its core principles that guide and define the communicative curriculum. Hence, the section below outlines CLT principles and characteristics especially with regards to teachers' and learners' roles.

3.3.3 The essentials of CLT

The best way to define CLT and understand it as an approach, might be through understanding its core principles. Brown (2014) identifies four interconnected characteristics of CLT as a simple and direct definition. First, Brown asserts that within CLT, classroom goals are not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence. Secondly, organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable learners to accomplish the use of language for meaningful purposes. The third characteristic that distinguishes CLT from previous language teaching approaches, is that fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. In other words, priority may be given to fluency rather than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use. Finally, in a communicative classroom authenticity is key, where students use the language productively and receptively in unrehearsed contexts. Brown (2007) argues that authenticity of communication often makes it difficult for novice and non-native speaking teachers, who are not very proficient in the target language, to teach effectively as drills, rehearsed exercises, and discussions (in the first language) of grammatical rules seem much

easier. Brown (2007) notes, however, that such a drawback should not deter communicative goals in the classroom, in which technology can come to the aid of such teachers.

Brown's definition of CLT draws the attention to some major deviations from previous teaching methods such as the Audiolingual method – which is a method that dominated foreign language education in the United States in the 20th century (Howatt & Smith, 2014; Nagy, 2019) in which all instruction had to be done in the target language and visuals, realia, paralinguistic and demonstrations were used as aids to convey meanings (Vizental, 2008). Before that, Grammar-Translation – which is a German scholarship – dominated European and foreign language teaching in the 19th century (Howatt & Smith, 2014; Nagy, 2019; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) in which the focus has been on written language and sentences, deduction of grammar rules, memorization of composition and reading comprehension (Celce-Murcia, 2014; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Alternatively, CLT pays considerably less attention to presentation and discussion of grammatical rules by suggesting that grammatical structures might better be subsumed under various functional categories (Brown, 2014). This means that CLT places emphasis on the practicality of language learning, (i.e. fluency) rather than the mechanical use (i.e. accuracy) of language learning. Indeed, Chambers (1997) points out that the use of authentic language is implied in CLT as teachers attempt to build fluency. This emphasis on fluency, however, is not encouraged at the expense of clear, unambiguous, direct communication.

In a similar manner, Richards and Rodgers (2014) identify three assumptions on which the learning theory that underpins CLT is based. First, Richards and Rodgers (2014) describe CLT as a learning theory that seeks to promote language learning, through activities that involve real communication. Thus, CLT focuses on the immediate use of the target language rather than postponing communication until after the mastery of its structures. This anti-structural perspective of second language learning can also be called “learning by doing” or “experience

approach” (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 87). Second, it is based on the assumption that task-based activities promote learning. It is pertinent to point out here that some advocates of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) view it as an extension of CLT (Nagy, 2020). Others, however, argue that TBLT is part of the post-communicative trend (Rama-Agullo, 2012), while a third group claims that it has emerged as a successor for CLT within the communicative approach (Dagkiran, 2015). Nevertheless, the assumption upon which those who view the communicative approach as an umbrella term that encompasses TBLT, is that TBLT in L2 learning is based on the focus on real-life tasks from which communicative aspects of the target language use and knowledge of its structures can emerge (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This principle, also, stresses the need to draw on the wider sociocultural context of language learners, including their behaviours, beliefs and word choice. The last CLT principle that Richards and Rodgers (2014) identify is that language should be meaningful to learners. This principle relates to the most frequently cited dimension of CLT, which is its learner-centred and experience-based view of language learning. Therefore, language learners are seen as unique individuals possessing their own interests, needs and goals and language teachers are encouraged to provide learning opportunities and design methods of instruction that reflect learners’ interests.

Based on the principles discussed above, it can be discerned that CLT has a number of pedagogical principles. First, CLT solely, focuses on the communicative nature of language. Besides, the approach focuses on meaningful language tasks rather than on language structures. CLT, also, mandates the introduction of authentic materials that represent genuine situations as well as the focus on pair and small group work to maximize opportunities of meaningful negotiation. Finally, CLT demands the use of learner-centred strategies that encourage learners to play the role of communicators, contributors, and partners in the learning process (Nagy, 2019; Holliday, 1994; Howatt, 1984).

These principles indicate and necessitate new classroom dynamics implying new teachers' and learners' roles. Indeed, the transition from classroom activities that are teacher-centred and teacher-controlled – i.e. activities that demand repetition and memorization of sentences and grammatical patterns – to more learner-centred ones – i.e. ones that encourage learners to negotiate meaning and meaningful interactions such as jigsaws and role plays – requires the adoption of new classroom dynamics in terms of teacher-learner roles and relationships. Students' roles in CLT classrooms become, as Hu (2002) proposes, “those of negotiators for meaning, communicators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information” (pp. 95-96). Breen and Candlin (1980) explain that learners' role as negotiators encourages L2 learners to learn in an interdependent way as it gives them the implication that they are expected to contribute as much as they gain within their groups and classroom procedures. This means that teachers' role within CLT classrooms is no longer that of a model for correct speech, but rather the type of activities in communicative classes propose that teachers assume the role of facilitators and monitors. Candlin (1980) points out that teachers in communicative classrooms have two interrelated primary roles – facilitators of learners' communication and independent participants in the learning-teaching group – and a set of three implied secondary roles – organizers of resources, guiders of classroom procedures and activities, and researchers and learners – that enable them to contribute in terms of knowledge, abilities and learning opportunities for language learners. Larsen-Freeman (2001) adds, in addition to the previous roles, that teachers within CLT work as co-communicators and needs analysts rather than their role as authoritative figures that they used to assume within the more “traditional” language teaching approaches.

These shifts in classroom dynamics between teachers and learners indicate that teachers, within the communicative approach, are expected to give up their authoritative role as knowledge transmitters. A role that teachers as well as learners in some cultures are accustomed to view

as a primary teacher-instructional responsibility(see for example Al-khawaiteer, 2001; Alnough, 2008; Hu, 2002a, 2002b; Jin & Cortazzi , 1996).

More to the point, close examination of some of these principles, one could raise a question as to whether contextual factors – such as learners', and teachers' for that matter, low English proficiency – might have any effects on the attainment of CLT principles particularly in EFL contexts. This question raises a valid point, especially considering that most, if not all, the previous core principles of CLT have been questioned and even described as myths and misconceptions (Spada, 2007). For instance, Richards and Rodgers (2014) conclude the discussion about CLT indicating that criticism of CLT takes different forms including its inapplicability in some cultures of learning due to incompatible assumptions about the nature of teaching and learning (Ahmad & Rao, 2012; Jin & Cortazzi, 2011 in China and East Asia; Vasilopoulos, 2008 in Korea; Chowdhry, 2010 in Bangladesh).

Following the steps of Richards and Rodgers (2014), I would like to conclude the discussion here by pointing out the possibility of a mismatch between CLT principles and the learning culture and educational system in Saudi Arabia. As shown throughout this section of the chapter, the communicative curriculum is learner-centred and process-oriented. At its core, CLT focuses on the process of learning the foreign/second language through authentic communication rather than learning discrete points about language structure. However, it seems that in the Saudi educational context – as discussed in section 3.1.6 – curriculum is understood as product-oriented process where teachers are obligated to follow nationally prescribed plans and materials to achieve previously set objectives. Consequently, this implies a fundamental clash in understanding the concept of curriculum between CLT and the Saudi Arabian educational culture. This is problematic, because it indicates a discrepancy between the two from the outset which can make implementing CLT in the Saudi context challenging.

The challenges of CLT implementation in the Saudi context will be addressed in section 3.5 later in this chapter.

The following section will address those claims and some of the criticism that has been raised against CLT. Empirical evidence of the clash between some of the core underlying principles of CLT and some of the traditional cultural views of teaching and learning in some EFL/ESL contexts will also be addressed later on in this chapter (section 3.4 and 3.5 CLT implementation across EFL/ESL contexts, and further in section 3.6 about the post communicative paradigm).

3.3.4 Issues of the CLT approach

3.3.4.1 CLT misconceptions

Even though CLT has become, and still is, widely used for the design of language courses and materials, it has its critics (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The fact that CLT has meant a multitude of different things to different people had resulted in making the term problematic and vague even within the theoretical and empirical literature. Some argue that this might be as a result of enthusiasm to implement the new ideologies of CLT, when it was first introduced, even before the establishment of its theoretical background (Didenko and Pichugova, 2016). Indeed, on account of the different ways CLT has been defined, several misconceptions and “myths”, as Spada (2007) puts it, have developed about the term over the years. Consequently, some L2 educators and theorists have challenged the credibility of CLT as the ‘best method’ or language teaching approach (Bax, 2003; Didenko and Pichugova, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Spada, 2007).

In a description of the development of CLT theory, research and practice, Spada (2007) points out the fact that all the disagreement between the interpretations of the communicative approach to second language instruction has “resulted in misconceptions of CLT and how it is implemented in the L2 classroom... [and] these differences in interpretation and

implementation of CLT are sufficiently problematic to suggest that CLT has become a rather vacuous term” (p. 271). According to Spada (2007), most interpretations of CLT stress the significance of communication of messages and meaning. There is disagreement and debate, however, as to whether practices such as emphasis on language forms, the inclusion of literacy skills, first language use and vocabulary instruction are compatible with CLT principles.

A number of the misconceptions and “myths” about CLT have developed over the years and have become part of the CLT culture. Spada (2007) argues that two different reasons were behind the emergence of those misconceptions. Partly, vagueness of the term and inconsistency of its interpretations empirically and theoretically are contributing and opening the way for some of the misunderstandings of CLT principles. In fact, Savignon (2007) argues that the widespread of materials and activities labelled “communicative” has resulted in some uncertainty as to what are and are not essential features of CLT. Savignon (2007) goes further and, understandably, claims that clarifying what CLT is not strengthens a theoretically grounded representation of the term. Other misconceptions have evolved from the different ways in which teachers chose to implement CLT often due practicalities in their specific contexts. Spada (2007) discusses, with some detail, some of the most commonly held misconceptions of CLT by teachers including: CLT means an exclusive focus on meaning, CLT means learner-centred teaching, and CLT means listening and speaking practice.

One of the most widespread misinterpretations within CLT is that it is an approach that exclusively focuses on meaning with no attention to form. Some critics question CLT on the basis that it promotes fossilization – lack of grammatical development in L2 (Gao, 2020) – and argue that the promise that communicative activities would help learners develop both communicative and linguistic competence has not always happen (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Some language courses focus on the extensive use of authentic communication and developing fluency at the expense of accuracy resulting in poor command of grammar and high level of

fossilization (Zhang, 2020). Savignon (2007) confirms this in the discussion of what CLT is not, in which the paper argues that CLT does not mean the exclusion of metalinguistic awareness or knowledge of rules of syntax and discourse. Spada (2007) points out that this interpretation of CLT is actually inconsistent with the views of most applied linguists. The paper argues that “CLT was not conceptualized as an approach that was intended to exclude form but rather one that was intended to *include communication*” (Pp. 275-276). Spada argues that results of observational research in CLT classrooms as well as experimental research to address the problem indicate that exclusion and/or very little attention to form results in L2 learners’ failure to achieve high levels of language development and accuracy and that the inclusion, on the other hand, of form-focused instruction leads to development in students’ knowledge and ability to use that knowledge. Moreover, some L2 instructors and programme developers have had enough experience over the last five decades to realize that a balance is needed between form and meaning to enhance L2 learners’ language abilities. Indeed, recently it has been suggested in the literature that integrating CLT and audiolingual practices, might actually help learners in developing their communicative skills (Haryani, 2020; Vanessa et al., 2019). However, despite compelling empirical and practical evidence, Spada (2007) argues, there are some L2 practitioners who still believe that exclusive focus on meaning is the way for second/foreign language learning success.

The second most pervasive misconception about CLT is that it means learner-centred instruction. Some L2 practitioners assume that group-work is solely associated with CLT, and that CLT is not really CLT unless it involves learner-centred and/or learner-directed practice. Savignon (2007) emphasizes that CLT does not require group-work and that it has been found helpful in many contexts as a way of providing opportunities and motivations for communication amongst L2 learners. Nonetheless, the paper argues that group-work might be inappropriate in some other contexts, and thus should not be considered as an essential feature

of CLT. This observation has been corroborated, as studies in the literature have indicated challenges with group-work especially in large size classes (Rahman & Pandian, 2018) or in learning cultures that encourage competitiveness over collaboration (Abahussain, 2016). In the same manner, Spada (2007) points out that many L2 educators have misinterpreted the positive results of research studies focusing on the effects of group-work on L2 learners, and assumed, as a result, that group-work is an essential feature of CLT. For many years, instruction in CLT has been and continues to be characterized by exclusive focus on “the exchange of messages and meanings in group-work interaction” (Spada, 2007, p.278).

Nonetheless, there is evidence that emphasizes the significance of accompanying group-work with other teacher-fronted activities within the L2 classrooms (Haryani & Ainur, 2020). In this regard Spada details how the findings of an influential article (Long & Porter, 1985) about the benefits of group-work interaction in L2 classroom published in *TESOL Quarterly*, were misinterpreted to form the basis of this misconception about CLT. The Long and Porter (1985) study has revealed that adult L2 learners produced more speech and a greater variety of speech functions in group-work interaction than they did in teacher-centred interactions, and that this type of interaction did not affect the learners’ accuracy levels. However, according to Spada, the authors were careful to point out in their conclusion that group-work needs to be supported by teacher-centred interaction, and raised the issue of how to make group-work encourages L2 learners provide each other with feedback on accuracy. Despite this conclusion, some L2 educators choose to take the part about the benefits of group-work in CLT and leave out the part were the authors and others (Bruton & Samuda, 1980; Fodus, 1994; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2002 all cited in Spada, 2007) point out the importance of teacher-fronted interaction, feedback and accuracy in L2 learning.

In fact, Spada (2007) lists avoiding explicit feedback on learners’ errors along with exclusion of reading and writing skills, and avoidance of the learners’ L1 in the classroom as some of the

commonly held misconceptions of CLT that have been documented in the literature. The study claims that the myth that CLT should not include corrective feedback on learners' errors is likely due to two fallacies. First, L2 teachers were educated to believe that making errors means learning and making progress in the target language. Secondly, some research studies in the literature, which represent an extreme view that has been rejected and falsified, argue in favour of total rejection of any type of feedback on form errors. Ammar and Spada, (2006) and Lyster (2004) indicate that explicit feedback is better than implicit feedback and that L2 learners need direct signals on form errors to improve their accuracy levels and development.

In terms of attention to receptive skills, CLT does not exclusively focus on face to face oral communication. In this regard, both Savignon (2007) and Spada (2007) argue that CLT principles apply equally to reading and writing activities because both involve meaning negotiation, interpretation and expression. Moreover, the goals of CLT are exclusively dependant on learners' needs in a given context. Consequently, it is crucially important to keep in mind that theorists agreed that one of the basic principles of CLT is that linguistic skills and communicative abilities should not be treated in isolation of each other (Savignon, 1997).

On the basis of the argument that L2 learners need as much exposure to the target language, and less to their L1, as they can get to become successful L2 learners, many L2 educators have adopted what Howatt (1984) calls the monolingual principle. According to Spada (2007) this argument "is supported by considerable evidence that both quantity and quality of target language input are crucial factors in L2 learning" (p.280). However, some research studies, such as Cook (2001), call for the reconsideration of the restrictions on L1 use in L2 classrooms. In fact, according to Spada (2007) there is evidence that using L1 knowledge is actually beneficial for certain types of L2 learners, in which it has been shown that in classrooms where L1 use is not restricted there has been transfer of conceptual knowledge and skills across languages as L1 provides a form of scaffolding support as learners negotiate both form and

meaning. Nevertheless, it is crucial to note that how much L1 use should be allowed and encouraged in the L2 classroom depends on the context. For instance in some EFL contexts, where exposure to L2 is restricted to the classroom, it is more likely that maximizing target language use and minimizing L1 use would be more beneficial for successful language learning.

3.3.4.2 CLT criticism

Advocates of CLT point out that CLT is defined as a theoretical approach that adds a communicative view into language education pedagogy starting from syllabus design to classroom activities and learner-teacher interaction (Didenko & Pichugova, 2016). However, critics such as Kumaravadivelu (2006), argue that these same features that helped CLT gain its popularity actually led to the general disappointment in the approach later on. In the literature a number of internal weaknesses were identified within CLT along with other external issues that attracted criticism and led to a state of disappointment in the approach.

In a detailed examination of CLT and its influence on the post-method state, Didenko and Pichugova (2016) scrutinize some of the internal weaknesses and the criticism directed at CLT by its opponents. Didenko and Pichugova (2016) argue that the characteristics that make CLT unique can be regarded as features of its weakness. For instance, some critics argue that the theories and concepts underlying CLT have never come to agreement on some of its fundamental conceptual components like defining communicative competence by pointing out that in the literature there are three different models of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei & Thurrell, 1995). However, Didenko & Pichugova (2016) claim that it is highly doubtful whether those models have actually made CLT more manageable in terms of classroom application. Didenko and Pichugova (2016) speculate that the confusion, inconsistency and even contradictions in the understanding of its very concept are due to the fact that CLT has attempted to embrace a number of language-related disciplines

at once. Thus, this incomplete adoption of the linguistic theories underlying the approach is yet another issue that contributes to the problem, in which misgivings of those theories were intentionally omitted leading to the fragmentation and confusion of the resulting CLT models. Indeed, Widdowson (2011) argues that the principles adopted in CLT were initially contradictory and fragmented, in which upon the process of adopting from linguistic theories that were ambiguous and problematic issues were left out resulted in “a confusing mixture of misshapen models and conflicting ideas” (Didenko & Pichugova, 2016, p.3). Thus, the gap between a collection of different concepts and practices has become too wide that the approach has had to be divided into two different versions: strong and weak CLTs. What is rather ironical, is that this very fact encouraged CLT proponents to propose treating CLT as an umbrella term covering a number of other approaches including the task-based approach (Littlewood, 2014), whereas opponents used it to base the accusation that CLT has never been a revolutionary approach but rather a renamed collection of long existing teaching methods of the 19th century reform (Howatt, 1987). Indeed, Kumaravadivelu (2006) cites that several scholars have reached to this same conclusion arguing that the claim that CLT is a quite radical break from traditional approaches – supported by well-known textbooks on TESOL methods such as Richards and Rodgers (2001) – is not actually supported by evidence.

CLT has been also criticized for failing to comply with its promise to innovate the second language educational environment in the world. Most researchers base their claims and criticism on the basis that in some contexts CLT failed to promote authentic communication and that its application in those contexts turned out to be tormenting to teachers and learners alike even in the cases where the adaptation was approved and supported by governments (Didenko & Pichugova, 2016). Empirical evidence in the literature confirms the claim that due to a number of contextual reasons, CLT practices were found to be incompatible with some of socio-cultural norms in those contexts leading to difficulty and failure of the entire ELT field

within those contexts (Nunan, 1987; Kumaravadivelu, 2001). The imperial evidence of the challenges of CLT implementation in the EFL/ESL and the Saudi context will be reviewed shortly in sections 3.4 and 3.5.

Some critics have questioned the actual communicative nature on the classroom practice level rather than on the theoretical and practical nature of CLT. For instance, one of the often cited studies in the literature is Nunan (1989). The study argues that in theory it seems that CLT can be successful as a revolutionary method that “swept through language classrooms all around the world, and that very little remained of what might be called “traditional” classroom activities” (p. 136). However, the study questions the accountability of those theoretical speculations pointing out that only empirical investigations could confirm whether or not changes were actually occurring at the classroom level. Thus, Nunan (1989) has aimed to investigate CLT as it is manifested in the classroom in order to determine to what extent genuine communication is evident in CLT classes. The results of the investigation suggest that “in communicative classes, interactions may, in fact, not be very communicative at all” (p. 144). In fact, the study indicates that the “communicative classes” observed are dominated by form rather than function and by grammatical activities rather than communicative fluency ones. However, the study emphasizes that strategies can be developed to increase opportunities for genuine communication and that teachers should be the prime agents of the change that CLT called for and advocated. Other studies conducted by Legutke and Thomas (1991) and Kumaravadivelu (1993a) confirm Nunan’s (1989) findings, in which they emphasize that despite the jargons in textbooks and teachers’ manuals ladled communicative, and even teachers committed to CLT fail to create genuine communication and interaction in L2 classrooms. Nevertheless, what is more unfortunate is that three decades later the same issues are still being reported in CLT classrooms, specifically in EFL contexts including KSA (as it

will be shown in sections 3.4 and 3.5 below) which might support claims of CLT's inability to meet EFL/ESL students' needs in those contexts.

Critics argue that despite the claims that CLT classrooms reverberate with authentic communication that emulates interactions in the real world, classroom based research – following the steps of Nunan (1987) – reveal that the so-called communicative classrooms are anything but communicative, as discussed previously in this section. This critique also leads to questions about the claims of CLT acceptability and that its emergence marked a revolution in the field of second language teaching. Kumaravadivelu (2006) argues that those claims of distinctiveness are based on the activities rather than on the conceptual underpinnings of CLT. He claims that “a detailed analysis of the principles and practices of CLT would reveal that it too adheres to the same fundamental concepts of language teaching as the audiolingual method it sought to replace, namely, the linear and additive view of language learning, and the presentation-practice-production vision of language teaching”(p.63). Finally, Kumaravadivelu (2006) cites evidence from research studies conducted in different contexts, such as India, South Africa, Pakistan, South Korea, China, Japan and Thailand, that contradicts the observation that CLT principles and practices can be adapted to fit any context across the world. Kumaravadivelu (2006) states that these and other reports suggest that, in spite of the positive features mentioned earlier, CLT offers perhaps a classic case of a centre-based pedagogy that is out of sync with local linguistic, educational, social, cultural, and political exigencies”(p.64). He believes that the dominance of CLT in the ELT profession is one construct of the concept of linguistic imperialism and the dominance of Western interests in the field. This confirms Cameron's (2002) concern over the “obsession with communicative skills” (p.67 cited in Butler, 2011), in the field of second language education, as Cameron (2002) has warned that this obsession indicates an imposition of Anglo-centric ideologies on genres and styles of communication.

Criticisms of CLT take other several forms including: the fact that it reflects native-speakerism, as the method is developed to meet the needs of L2 learners in the centre which are fundamentally different than the needs of L2 learners in state-based public schools in other countries (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Others, such as Kumaravadivelu (2006, 2012), also argue that CLT does not capture the diversity of students' needs and goals – as will be discussed in section 3.6 about the emergence of post-method pedagogy and the post-communicative paradigm.

The issues addressed in this part of the literature review lead the argument to questions regarding the effectiveness of CLT on language attainment in EFL/ESL contexts. Hence, the next section aims to attend to this question, as it provides empirical evidence from the literature about CLT implementation across EFL/ESL contexts around the world.

3.4 CLT implementation across EFL/ESL contexts

On the basis that educational and local cultural environments are inextricable, and teaching practices in a given educational culture are socially constructed in that environment, many researchers argue that the implementation of foreign teaching methods almost always proves to be challenging and problematic (Holliday, 1994; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996; Penneycook, 1989). CLT was born as a Western teaching approach which has been and continues to be adopted in EFL and ESL contexts around the world (Richards & Rodger, 2014). Holliday (1994) argues that CLT reflects a view of teaching and learning that reflects assumptions derived from cultures of origin – Britain, Australia and North America (which Holliday refers to as BANA contexts). Although CLT is widely used, there are many reports in the literature indicating that CLT implementation into some EFL contexts has failed (Bax, 2003; Didenko and Pichugova, 2016; Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Being one of the biggest EFL contexts around the world, the Chinese context has attracted a considerable amount of attention and research with regard to the implementation of CLT in China (Jin & Cortazzi, 2011). Findings of those research studies indicate that implementing CLT into the Chinese context has not been an easy task due to a number of constraints, including class sizes, schedules, lack of resources and equipment, and teachers' professional status, that characterize the educational culture in the country and more importantly oppose the very principles of CLT (Zhang, 2020; Fang, 2010; Hu, 2005; Yu, 2001; Sun & Cheng, 2000). Other studies in South Korea (Li, 1998), Turkey (Karakas, 2013; Ozsevik, 2010) and Syria (Alakrash, 2021) indicate that the situation is quite similar to the Chinese one in which those studies report similar constraints that contribute to the infeasibility of importing CLT into those contexts.

Kumaravadivelu (2006) cites evidence from research studies that have been conducted in a number of EFL/ESL contexts – such as India, South Africa, Pakistan, South Korea, China, Japan and Thailand – and have suggested that CLT principles and practices are just “inappropriate and unworkable” despite governmental support and endorsement (p. 63). Abahussain (2016) confirms this observation in which the study identifies a total of 16 studies that have been conducted in various non-western contexts, from the Middle East (including Saudi Arabia), South East Asia and South Asia, throughout the last three decades investigating the effectiveness of CLT implementation. The study points out that the results of the meta-analysis of those studies has indicated that CLT implementation has been unsuccessful and that participant teachers, despite their good knowledge of CLT, have failed to transform theory into practice and therefore depend on more traditional teaching practices inside their classrooms (Abahussain, 2016).

Therefore, a great deal of the research studies that have investigated CLT implementation into non-Western EFL contexts report, almost always, a very similar set of constraints and

challenges that hinder its success. Those constraints range from educational cultures, teachers' training, big classrooms, social and institutional challenges, and the nature of CLT itself. In an article about the implementation of communicative and task-based language teaching in the Asia-Pacific region, Butler (2011) identifies three types of constraints that limit effective CLT implementation: conceptual level constraints, classroom level constraints, and societal-institutional level constraints. Furthermore, Abahussain (2016) adds a fourth level of challenges focusing on teachers' pre-service and in-service training. Therefore, to make representing empirical evidence from the previous literature easier, I will categorize the challenges based on integrating both Butler's (2011) and Abahussain's (2016) classification systems.

3.4.1 Conceptual constraints

This type of constraints stems from a significant mismatch between CLT principles, especially in terms of the nature of teaching and learning practices, and the traditional views – the educational culture – in the context CLT is implemented in (Butler, 2011). Some researchers object to this cultural-value-based, oversimplified and rather stereotypical presentation of educational cultures (Chung & Huang, 2009; Ha, 2004; Savignon & Wang, 2003). Those studies indicate that the stereotypical views of Asian students as passive and less-vocal, and Asian teaching as authoritarian and teacher-centred do not always accurately characterize the educational culture in the Asian context (Butler, 2011). It is a common discourse, however, in some ESL contexts to refer to the conflict between CLT's Western instructional premises and local norms (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). For instance, some studies in the Asian context indicate that from the traditional Asian educational culture view, knowledge resides in books, and teachers are seen as possessors of knowledge and as authoritative figures (Hu, 2002, 2005), while students are seen as the recipients of this knowledge (Jin & Cortazzi, 1996, 2011). These studies suggest that traditional views of education in Asian EFL contexts seem to value a more

literacy-focused and teacher-centred teaching practices. It is clear, however, that those roles are not compatible with CLT that stresses on the importance of student-centred instruction where students are supposed to contribute as much as they gain (Breen & Candlin, 1980) and should be responsible for their own learning and the learning of those with whom they interact (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003).

In the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) context, similar issues have been reported, in which traditional views of teaching and learning were conflicted by CLT principles. For example, Al-khawaiter's (2001) findings – in the Qatari context – indicate that teachers in the sample find it challenging to translate CLT theory into practice due to cultural issues that were incompatible with some core CLT principles. Particularly, the study refers to the issue of teachers' authority inside the classroom as a challenging aspect of teaching communicatively. Similarly, Alnoh (2008) suggests that Kuwaiti EFL teachers find difficulty in applying CLT into their teaching practices because it contradicted with their beliefs about the nature of teaching.

Butler (2011), also, identifies teachers' and learners' misconceptions about the nature of CLT as another conceptual difficulty challenging its sufficient implementation in EFL contexts. This may, however, be partially because CLT itself is very open to individual interpretations. Butler (2011) points out that in the Asian context, teachers view CLT as exclusively and solely concerned with meaning and oral production of language and completely ignoring grammar instruction and accuracy, which Savignon (2005) and others have argued is not true, as shown previously in this chapter (in section 3.3.4 above). Nonetheless, results of various research studies in a wide range of EFL contexts (Ansarey, 2012 in Bangladesh; Chang, 2011 in Taiwan; Shihiba, 2011 in Libya) have revealed that misconceptions about CLT held by EFL teachers in those contexts were significant barriers to any efficient implementation of CLT.

3.4.2 Classroom-level constraints

This set of constraints refers to contextual issues at the classroom level including limited human resources, lack of sufficient materials, structural challenges (i.e. large class sizes and limited instructional hours), and classroom management issues(Butler, 2011). Findings of a number of observational studies in the Asian context (Mahmadun Nuby et al., 2020 in Bangladesh; Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2008 in Thailand) have reported that communicative activities introduced in CLT classrooms are not communicative but rather a mix between audio-lingual and form-focused activities.

In addition to the lack of sufficient materials, large classroom sizes and limited instructional hours are frequently reported as barriers to the implementation of CLT. Numerous studies have reported that EFL teachers think that CLT activities are time consuming and that they do not have sufficient time for preparation or instruction (Rahman et al., 2018a, 2018b; Roy, 2016). Studies in the Asian context, indicate that large class sizes restrict teachers' abilities to implement CLT, in which EFL teachers find it difficult to introduce communicative activities in such classrooms without risking its ramifications on classroom management (Butler, 2005; Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004). Those teachers seem to believe that such activities tend to make learners digress from the original objective of the discussion activity by excessive unrelated discussions in their first language which makes it difficult and time consuming for teachers to keep and restore order inside the classroom (Butler, 2011).

3.4.3 Societal-institutional level constraints

Constraints in this category are identified in challenges beyond the classroom level, the most significant ones being; washback from grammar-oriented examination systems, limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, and inner-institutional administrative issues. Previous studies indicate that teachers as well as learners in EFL contexts tend to believe

that CLT might not be suitable and efficient to teach in compliance with the requirements of standardized college examinations (Alnough, 2008; Al-Mohanna, 2010; Butler, 2011; Chang, 2011; Nkosana, 2010; Ozsevik, 2010; Shihiba & Embark, 2011). Those studies refer to the negative washback of such examination systems that are best described as grammar-oriented, because they intensively focus on grammar rules, reading and writing skills, and vocabulary. These findings seem to suggest that within examination systems that focus on accuracy and form rather than fluency and communication, CLT might not be the most effective method of teaching. In addition, the issue of limited time and opportunities to use English outside the classroom, has been a source of concern amongst researchers in the “expanding circle” – i.e. EFL contexts – as learners’ have very limited exposure to the target language (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2003; Rao, 2002).

3.4.4 Teacher-training level

There is no doubt that teachers’ own beliefs, perspectives, and knowledge play a significant role in either hindering or pushing forward any curricular change (Lukacs, 2015; Flores, 2005; Hiatt-Michael, 2001; Adams, 2000; Kelly, 1999) as emphasized in section 3.2 in this chapter. Thus, teachers’ pre-service and in-service training could be considered as a fourth category of CLT challenges in EFL contexts.

In the Asian context, Butler (2011) claims that many governments took a hasty decision to implement CLT without providing proper training for EFL teachers on what is and what is not CLT. As a result, Asian EFL teachers interpreted CLT “as synonymous with the natural approach or what Long and Robinson (1998) would call “instruction with a focus on meaning” (Butler, 2011, p. 41). Similarly studies in other EFL contexts refer to inadequate professional training in CLT as one of the issues hindering its proper implementation (Amin, 2017 in Iraq; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008 in Bangladesh). In terms of teachers’ pre-service training, i.e. teacher

preparation programmes, some studies have indicated that EFL teachers lack the sufficient theoretical knowledge about CLT (Shihiba & Embark, 2011) and that student teachers have very limited opportunities to apply CLT (Alnough, 2001; Alzaidi, 2011) because some teacher education programmes offer little opportunities for microteaching, observation, or even practicum courses. In terms of in-service training, on the other hand, in some EFL contexts, empirical evidence has indicated that EFL teachers have little meaningful in-service training during their careers that helps them to properly understand CLT and its implementation in their contexts (Alkwaiter, 2001; Shihiba, 2011; Chang, 2011).

3.5 Implementing CLT in the Saudi context

The existing literature on CLT in the Saudi context explores a range of issues – including CLT challenges, EFL teachers’ attitudes towards it, EFL teachers’ practices, and the communicative nature of English textbooks in Saudi Arabia. This section will review some of the studies that have investigated issues related to CLT implementation into the Saudi context in light of the same categorization system adapted in section 3.4 above.

3.5.1 Conceptual level issues

In a study aiming to explore to what extent English language teaching in Saudi Arabia is communicatively oriented, Al-Mohanna (2010) has observed and interviewed Saudi male EFL teachers in boys state secondary school classrooms. The findings of the study indicate that “traditional” methods of teaching, such as Grammar-Translation and Audio-Lingual methods, are predominantly used by the participant teachers. Moreover, Al-Mohanna (2010) along with Alsaedi (2015) indicate that EFL teachers lack the sufficient theoretical knowledge about the conceptual nature of CLT.

However, Alzaidi (2011) examines the implementation of CLT in Saudi intermediate and secondary schools. The findings of the study indicate that teachers have a good theoretical

knowledge about CLT principles and that Saudi EFL teachers in the sample have mildly favourable attitudes towards CLT. On a practical level, however, Alzaidi's (2011) findings indicate that teachers still use traditional methods to teach communicative materials. In fact, a number of other studies aiming to explore teachers' awareness about CLT show that Saudi EFL teachers possess some level of awareness about the concept of CLT and positive attitudes towards it, but still combine traditional teaching methods with communicative methods in their actual teaching practices (Alamry, 2013; Abdulkader, 2016; Alkahtani, 2015; Alanezi, 2015). Similarly, data obtained from Abahussain (2016) suggest that in addition to using traditional teaching methods, Saudi EFL teachers also have some misconceptions about CLT and its principles.

At the primary school level, Alshref (2012) has investigated – through a questionnaire involving 200 Saudi primary EFL teachers – CLT challenges in grade 6 and how can CLT be effectively implemented at the Saudi context. The study findings indicate that EFL teachers are still reliant on more “traditional” methods, despite their good understanding about the concept of CLT. However, some of the participant EFL teachers in the study have indicated adopting some of the methods that increase more communicative learning.

In the context of private international schools in Saudi Arabia, the situation is barely different. For instance, Abdel-Salam (2014) has investigated international schools EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT, through a questionnaire and interviews of 17 teachers working in international schools in Saudi Arabia. The results indicate that CLT principles might be applied in teaching practices, yet teachers' practices in terms of their roles and learners' roles do not reflect CLT principles.

3.5.2 Classroom level issues

Studies in this category show almost the same set of problems, including students' low proficiency, lack of motivation, and resistance to participation (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Alzaidi, 2011; Alshref, 2012; Abdulkader, 2013; Albedaiwi, 2014; Alkahtani, 2015; Alanezi, 2015). For instance, Al-Mohanna (2010) reports that Saudi EFL teachers' practices are restricted by the high-density textbooks with insufficient time to teach the textbook from cover to cover and the limited number of English classes. The study argues that the time allocated to English within the public schooling system is four periods per week with each lasting 45 minutes, which means that students have less than four hours of exposure to English per week. EFL teachers in Al-Mohanna's sample also report a number of CLT constraints, including: lack of adequate teaching/learning resources, inadequate examination system, and large size classes. Just like Al-Mohanna's sample, EFL teachers in Alzaidi's (2011) sample report a similar set of constraints including high density syllabus and students' low English proficiency.

Nonetheless, Alshref (2012) makes a very interesting observation in terms of the challenges at this level, in which the study findings show that – at that time – “the curriculum in English learning for primary school was found to be non-existent” (p.52). This finding is concerning, because English has been reintroduced to the 6th grade at the primary level in 2002 (as explained in the context chapter in section 2.3 of this thesis) – which means it has been taught for nearly a decade at the time of Alshref's (2012) study. Findings of the Alshref (2012) study also suggest teachers' dependence on textbooks and worksheets to deliver lessons which does not adhere to communicative means.

Albedaiwi (2014) study – involving classroom observations and interviews of 6 male EFL teachers in Saudi public schools – indicates that English textbooks in Saudi Arabia favour focusing on content and grammar teaching rather than communicative competence.

Furthermore, in a study, that has aimed to analyse the instructions given to EFL teachers in the English textbook for the fourth grade in the Saudi public elementary school level, Fallatah (2014) reaches a similar conclusion. Results of the content analysis conducted in the study – based on Littlejohn’s (1998) three-levels-analysis model for evaluating EFL textbooks – suggest that instructions outlined for teachers in the textbook are far from communicative in nature but rather mostly focus on teachers’ modelling, drills and repetitions which are compatible with traditional language teaching practices rather than CLT.

Some studies, also, indicate difficulties related to students’ lack of motivation and resistance to participation inside the classroom. In a study – involving a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with 35 Saudi EFL teachers studying at the MA and PhD levels – on teachers’ attitudes towards CLT and its challenges, Abdulkader (2016) identifies students’ lack of motivation, resistance to practice English in and outside classes, and poor communicative skills as factors hindering CLT implementation at the classroom-level. Abahussain (2016) also reports a number of factors that belong to this category including; teacher-dominated classrooms, marginalized students’ interactions, focus on discrete skills, and dominance of competitive instead of cooperative learning style.

3.5.3 Societal-institutional level issues

Al-Mohanna (2010) indicates that centralization is one of the constraints of proper CLT implementation in Saudi Arabia. The study points out that EFL teachers have complained that their limited classroom-time is consumed in performing small tasks, due to the fact that EFL teachers are required to finish the syllabus from cover to cover according to specific plans and deadlines set by the MOE. Al-Mohanna, also, reports imposing additional school-related administrative tasks on teachers as one of the societal-institutional level constraints. Teachers in Al-Mohanna (2010) believe that taking on administrative tasks consumes their time and

energy which they could have used for better and more efficient preparation for communicative activities.

Alkahtani (2015) also reports lack of support from the administration and grammar-based examinations as problems related to ineffective implementation of CLT into the Saudi context. Furthermore, EFL teachers in Alanezi (2015) indicate that they need a certain degree of autonomy in choosing more advanced amenities such as smart boards and computers in each class instead of common resource centres in order to be able to adopt CLT effectively. Albedaiwi's (2014) findings imply that the Saudi educational context is not yet ready for the implementation of CLT or even the Audio Lingual approach due to lack of appropriate resources in Saudi public schools. Abahussain (2016) also reports some socio-cultural challenges such as the traditional view of education and the general low status of English education in the country that seems at odds with teaching for communicative purposes. These issues seem to affect the private education sector as well, in which Abdel-Salam (2014) identifies the educational system and assessment procedures as some of the challenges hindering any effective use of CLT in Saudi international schools.

3.5.4 Teachers' training level issues

Alzaidi (2011) indicates that EFL teachers think that in-service training on how to effectively implement CLT into their teaching practice is inadequate. Albedaiwi (2014) also emphasizes that Saudi EFL teachers do not have any professional training to help them or encourage them to be communicative teachers. Similarly, findings of other studies in this category show that Saudi EFL teachers have disclosed two major problems in their careers; the absence of proper in-service training on how to implement CLT into the Saudi context and their own resistance to implement a new method of teaching (Alanezi, 2015; Abdulkader, 2013; Alsaedi, 2015). Abahussain (2016) investigates both pre-service and in-service teaching programmes. Data

obtained from the study suggest that EFL teachers lack the confidence to run communicative classes due to ineffective pedagogical and linguistic preparation in pre-service teaching programmes, and low quality and inefficiency of their in-service training programmes.

In light of all the CLT challenges reported in the empirical literature about its implementation in EFL/ESL contexts around the world, it might be understandable to look for an alternative method. Data from CLT implementation studies reviewed in this section suggest a need for a solution to the CLT challenges reported in those studies. Hence, the next section of the literature review outlines the emergence of post-method pedagogy as an alternative to, or arguably an extension of, communicative language teaching.

3.6 The post communicative state

As CLT criticism has been referred to previously in this chapter in section 3.3.4, this section focuses on the emergence the post communicative paradigm and post-method pedagogy which have emerged as a result of CLT criticism. Despite its great impact on the second language teaching context over the last five decades, CLT has been criticized (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) and its plausibility and appropriateness to still lead in the field of L2 education has been questioned (Nagy, 2019). Although some second language educators believe that CLT is in a state of transition (Spada, 2007), others, however, question its usefulness and call for discarding it along with the fundamental concept of method in L2 teaching (Didenko and Pichugova, 2016). In fact, this concern has been and continues to be raised in the applied linguistic and second language literature for quite some time now. Shortly after its birth some of the weaknesses and problematic issues of CLT have been scrutinized by researchers such as Swan (1985) who surprisingly, given its dominance in the scene of foreign language education at the time, described CLT as an inappropriate approach because:

“it over-generalizes valid but limited insights until they become virtually meaningless; it makes exaggerated claims for power and novelty of its doctrines; it misrepresents

the current of thoughts it has replaced; it is often characterized by serious intellectual confusion; it is choked with jargon” (p.2)

Swan’s description of the approach might now be dated, the concerns it has raised, however, still stand true. There are problems associated with CLT that studies in the literature have highlighted over the years including, its colonial and imperialistic background (Kumaravadivelu, 1994, 2006; Sreehari, 2012), it reflects native-speakerism and a Western-based top-down approach to innovation (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), its use of authentic materials that are often isolated from the cultural context in which they are used (Siddiqui, 2016), and its sensitization towards interculturality is often artificial (Nagy, 2019) to name a few. As a result of all the confusion and criticism regarding CLT, some researchers and ELT practitioners argue that, as a label for a language teaching method, CLT has lost its relevance to L2 teaching (Bax, 2003). Some researchers, however, argue that language teaching pedagogy has reached a point where the whole concept of method should be replaced by what is described as post-method pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Kumaravadivelu (1994) explains what the post-method condition entails by pointing out that:

“at the core of the post-method condition is an awareness that “as long as we are caught up in the web of method, we will continue to get entangled in an unending search for an unavailable solution, an awareness that such a search drives us to continually recycle and repackage the same old ideas and an awareness that nothing short of the cycle can salvage the situation” (p. 28).

Kumaravadivelu (2003) goes further and suggests that:

“Self-marginalization reinforces and reaffirms the negative stereotypes used in the centre to define the subaltern space. The centre, in turn, perpetuates its dominance by exploiting the practice of self-marginalization on the part of the subaltern. Thus, the process of marginalization and the practice of self-marginalization in various guises constitute the post-method predicament that any serious practitioner of a post-method pedagogy has to deal with” (p. 548).

Kumaravadivelu views the concept of method as a construct of marginality: as it establishes the native self as superior and the non-native self as inferior (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Thus, the post-method pedagogy, which he claims is an alternative to method not an alternative

method, is a construct influenced by the postcolonial movement. Therefore, in its core Kumaravadivelu's framework argues that we, as researchers in the field of second language education in ESL/EFL contexts, directly or indirectly, feed the negative stereotypes used in the centre to define us and our educational cultures if we continue to search for the "perfect method", which – Kumaravadivelu (2003) argues – is a colonial construct to begin with. Instead, Kumaravadivelu (2006) asserts that efforts can be put on training teachers to be more autonomous and to be able to pick a pedagogy that best meets their students' needs and abilities, one that is appropriate to their unique context rather than one that is 'universally' claimed to be the 'best method'. So the solution is that teachers design their own strategies based on their own knowledge of the already existing methodologies. This means that language teachers need to be trained to be knowledgeable about existing language teaching strategies and how to adapt them to meet their local contexts and their students' needs (i.e. design their own micro-strategies).

This particular view might be compatible with the concept of methodology relativism as opposed to methodology universalism. The former entails that in language teaching, and teaching in general, there is no one size fits all. The distinction between the two concepts can be found in Bax (2003) who argues that the widely accepted assumption, among practitioners interested in teaching EFL, that CLT is the best method as claims that it has cured and corrected the disadvantages of previous language teaching methodologies – such as the Grammar-Translation and Direct methods – have created what Bax (2003) describes as the "CLT attitude" (p. 279).

According to Bax (2003) practitioners with the "CLT attitude" assume that previous methodologies are traditional and backward, and deemed to be unsuccessful even if there is evidence to prove otherwise. However, Bax argues that CLT ignores an important aspect in language teaching, which is the context where the method is applied. The article goes further

and claims that the focus on teaching communication within CLT and on teaching methodologies in teacher education programmes, delivers an indirect message that all the problems in our EFL classrooms are exclusively related to and can only be cured by methods. Consequently, novice teachers and student-teachers are led to assume that as long as they arm themselves with knowledge about teaching methods, no matter the context, they will succeed in their teaching. However, Bax acknowledges that attention on teaching contexts is not a new perspective in the field of second language education. Bax's critique further support that of Prabhu (1990) who explains that the notion that there is no best method in language teaching implies three assumptions: (1) that different methods are best for different teaching contexts; (2) all methods are partially true or valid; (3) describing methods in terms of good or bad is misguided.

Bax (2003) argues that good teachers think about their specific contexts – what Prabhu (1990) refers to as teachers' sense of plausibility – in which they teach, but may be told and forced to prioritize methods instead. Furthermore, Bax points out that researchers in the field realize that context is a key factor in language learning and yet it is still neglected in which the search for the “best method” is still the centre of debate in the field. Ur (2013) also suggests that language teaching should not be primarily based on methods, but rather on teachers' understanding of their contexts enforced by principles and procedures supported by research, theory and practice. Thus, there is an increasing awareness that the search for ‘the best method’ that is universally applicable is insufficient, yet still research studies in the field suggest that the problem and its solution are in methodology rather than in analysing the learning context.

Both Bax (2003) and Ur (2013) call for a shift from CLT and the concept of method to a more context sensitive approach, which Bax (2003) calls the “context approach”. The context approach, unlike CLT and other teaching methodologies for that matter, prioritizes the context in which any teaching methodology is intended to be applied. Thus, teachers need to conduct

needs analysis, by studying students' needs, experiences and expectations, and the general educational culture, before choosing any teaching method. Only the results of that process could determine which method/methods would be best for that specific context (Bax, 2003; Ur, 2013). This means that second language teachers need to be armed with the ability to analyse the context in which they teach and conduct successful and thorough needs-analysis and choose the appropriate teaching method that can promote students' learning accordingly (Prabhu, 1990).

In conclusion, it is important to point out that despite all the criticism, CLT and the concept of method are still dominant in the field of second language education. According to Littlewood (2011) the term CLT still serves a useful function as an umbrella term to encapsulate methodological approaches designed to improve students' ability to communicate. Similarly, Didenko and Pichugova (2016) significantly conclude their article by pointing out the need to acknowledge that, despite all the criticism, CLT still dominates the field of language teaching arguing that the post-methods condition is an extension of CLT and hence should be called Post-CLT. Therefore, it might be true that CLT may have lost its leading role in the field, its position has not been claimed yet which proves its vitality and its continued major impact in the present ELT context. Furthermore, the movement to abandon the whole concept of method might be described as extreme. Instead, the focus could be given to training student teachers as well as in-service teachers to be able and confident to choose the method or methods they think will be suitable in their contexts and compatible with their students' needs and expectations.

3.7 Conclusion and Identifying the Gap

This chapter has addressed the three main constructs related to this study curriculum and curriculum development, the role of teachers' perceptions in curriculum development and CLT and the challenges of its implementation. Throughout this chapter, I have referred to research

studies that have been done in those three areas in EFL/ESL contexts in general and in the Saudi context in particular.

In the Saudi context, the area of EFL teaching – covering topics such as: pedagogy, curriculum, teaching methodologies and teachers’ in-service and pre-service training – has attracted the attention of educational researchers in the country. In a comprehensive review of the EFL-related research conducted by Saudi scholars over the past 25 years, Moskvsky and Picard (2019) assert that several studies have examined the EFL curriculum used in Saudi public institutions. The review cites a number of curriculum studies focusing on areas such as: evaluative studies of English textbooks with no clear outcomes (Al-Yousef, 2007; Madkhali, 2005; Rahman, 2011); evaluation studies with largely unfavourable findings in which Saudi English curriculums have been found inadequate and ill-suited (Alfallaj, 1998; Kharma 1998; Alhawsawi, 2013); imbalance between the objectives of Saudi educational reforms and their implementation in day-to-day classroom delivery (Faruk, 2014; Alshumaimeri, 2014; Alhamdan, 2013).

With regards to the issue of curriculum development in ELT and the extent of teachers’ involvement in the process, few of the sources reviewed in the current study linked CLT implementation to both EFL teachers’ training and their involvement in curriculum development at the primary level. For instance, Albedaiwi (2014) explores Saudi teachers’ willingness, confidence and ability to take control of their personal teaching, learning and playing the role of curricular developers. Otherwise, the majority of the studies reviewed (such as: Al-Mohanna, 2010; Alzaidi, 2011; Alshref, 2012; Abdulkader, 2013; Albedaiwi, 2014; Alkahtani, 2015; Alanezi, 2015) focus on exploring teachers’ attitudes towards and understanding of CLT and the extent to which their practices reflect their knowledge and attitudes. Alfahadi (2012) focuses on Saudi TESOL teachers’, in public schools at all levels, views towards cultural models for TESOL textbooks. Abahussain (2016) explores the

challenges of implementing CLT faced by teachers at the intermediate and secondary levels. The study involves a questionnaire and interviews with teachers, supervisors and university lectures in teacher education programmes.

Therefore, because the aim of this study is to make sense of the process of curriculum change in Saudi Arabia by investigating the extent of EFL teachers' involvement in the process with a special interest on the implementation of CLT into the Saudi ELT context. The aim is to explore teachers' perspectives on the challenges they face with the current curriculum and how those might be related to the kind of support they are getting and the extent of their involvement in decision making (or lack thereof) within the Saudi educational system. Thus, the study goes beyond exploring EFL teachers' perceptions on the recent changes to further understanding how primary EFL teachers are struggling with CLT in their day-to-day teaching practice, and whether they feel capable to implement it in light of both their involvement in the process of change and in-service training programmes. These aims are especially significant as findings might have implications related to facilitating the transition to the Saudi 2030 Vision that the government is currently working to accomplish as shown in chapter two. This is because the findings of this study can draw a vivid picture of the challenges EFL teachers face in terms of curriculum implementation, in-service training and involvement in curriculum development. Coordinating strategies in all these three factors – curriculum and instruction, professional development, and leadership development – is important to be achieved when planning and implementing efficient educational reforms (Fullan, 2003). Indeed, Allmnakrah and Evers (2020) argue that the Saudi educational system is in dire need for a shift in terms of training teachers, listening to their voices and evaluating their needs to achieve the country's aspiration to transition to a knowledge-based economy as outlined in the goals of the Vision 2030.

The following chapter will focus on the research methodology adopted in this study to answer its questions and fulfil its aims.

Chapter 4

Methodology

Overview

This chapter outlines the research methodology that underpinned this study as well as the epistemological and ontological assumptions behind it. The chapter also introduces the methods of data collection utilized to gather the data along with a description of the research participants and selection procedure. In addition, this chapter explains data analysis procedure adopted to analyse the data. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of ethical issues, and considerations of reliability, validity, credibility and trustworthiness.

4.1 The research philosophy

This study aimed to go beyond merely exploring to deeply understand how Saudi EFL teachers perceive their own experiences as EFL practitioners. This study aimed to give teachers a voice that was heard to uncover their perspectives towards the challenges they face while implementing CLT in Saudi state primary schools. Consequently, then, the interpretive philosophical paradigm underpinned this study. As this project was interested in understanding the socially constructed nature of Saudi EFL teachers' perspectives of CLT challenges, an interest that was ontologically and epistemologically compatible with the interpretive tradition. Thus, this section will highlight the philosophical, ontological and epistemological aspects that have underpinned this study with regards to the interpretive tradition.

Striving for deep understanding in the qualitative interpretive tradition requires being in contact with participants personally, spending extensive time in the targeted field of the study, and probing to obtain detailed meanings. This view of research is aligned with constructivism in which the purpose of interpretive educational research is to clarify how interpretations and

understandings are formulated, implemented and given meaning in lived situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The value of interpretive research is to help clarify theories people have that inform their experiences through broadening the practitioner's knowledge base, and to aid a deeper understanding of both actions and context (Radnor, 2002). This assumption might lead to an even more important one. That is when treating and talking to practitioners (teachers in this case) as knowledgeable – i.e. they know what they are doing, why and how they are doing it – they can render an informative account of their experiences in ways that are meaningful to them (Gioia, 2021). This, probably, begs the question of to what extent those practitioners are aware of all these things or do them out of habit, which invokes the discussion of making inferences about teachers' beliefs which will be discussed in detail later in this chapter (in section 4.1.3).

Cohen et al. (2018) argues that the interpretive perspective approaches educational research from the perspectives of the individuals acting within the educational system. Furthermore, it approaches educational research with an acknowledgment of the structural conditions of individuals and the way individuals' perspectives towards their own experiences and interpretations of their practices in situations that confront them and how they construct new actions based on those perspectives and interpretations (Cohen et al., 2018). This vision of recognition of the role individuals play within a context has been one I ascribed to – in this study – and was my theoretical approach to interpretivism. This study aspired to understand how primary EFL teachers defined the challenges of their teaching practice in a way that was unique to each of them, and how those unique definitions could be related to the agreed upon and taken for granted overall definition of the situation in the literature. In the quote below Hargreaves (1972) gives a clear account of the significance of understanding how individuals define their situations within the context they act in:

“We take the overall definition of the situation for granted because it does not have to be negotiated de novo every time. But this should not blind us to the process of progressive negotiation and modification that has taken place” (104-6).

Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore, describe and understand CLT challenges that state-schools primary EFL teachers face from their perspectives and to demonstrate how their views shaped any actions they took within that reality.

Applying this type of research requires the researcher to reflexively acknowledge their individual positionality (Dean et al., 2018), because due to its subjectivity a different researcher or the same researcher in a different time might approach the same data set differently (Brown, 2010). Social research is a complex enterprise (Morrison, 1986), it involves active interaction between personal values, theoretical views and data collection skills. Thus, I was aware that my own position and initial assumptions about teachers – as a previous teacher myself and based on my experiences with teacher family members and friends as explained in chapter one of this thesis – were all factors that influenced me, the way I approached this study and the knowledge created based on my interpretation of the data (Cohen et al., 2018). I acknowledge that the focus of this study, how I approached it, described it, explained and interpreted the data were all shaped by both my social and professional backgrounds. Those experiences influenced the way I collected the data for this study, in which the aim was to understand teachers’ perspectives of their lived experiences related to implementing a new curriculum within an educational system that I viewed as centralised and marginalizing teachers. However, I made sure to self-appraise my bias and positionality in the research process (Berger, 2015), by utilizing reflexivity and ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the data generated from this study – (these issues are thoroughly addressed under section 4.6 Research issues at the end of this chapter). I also adopted a constructivist grounded theory analytical framework – section 4.5.1 – in order to minimize and set aside any preconceived ideas and capitalize on participants’ voices by letting the data give rise to the study themes (Cohen et al., 2018). Furthermore, I

utilized data triangulation, by using different methods of data collection and data sources to confirm the findings and get richer data and deeper understanding of the situation under study (Wilson, 2014). All these steps were taken to minimize the effects of bias and subjectivity in collecting, analysing and interpreting the data.

4.1.1 Ontology

Ontology asserts the answer to the philosophical question: “What is reality?” and how we answer this question affects how we approach our research (Byrne, 2016). Within interpretive research, reality is seen as a holistic structure that is continuously changing and perceived by individuals trying to make sense of the world (Darby & Fugate, 2019). Within the research process ontological positions lead to certain epistemological positions, which in turn lead to employing certain research methodologies and methods (Grix, 2018). As such, this study relied on the ontological stance that reality is constructed by those involved in the research situation. This means that this study foregrounded teachers’ sense-making about their practice through giving voice to their own individual understandings of CLT challenges, nature of training and their involvement in decision-making. Therefore, the study represented teachers’ voices and understandings prominently in terms of the study themes that were emerged from and reflected their understandings (Gioia, 2021), and advanced evidence of different perspectives of each theme.

4.1.2 Epistemology

In a thorough analysis of the philosophy of educational research, Pring (2000) defines epistemology in educational research as “different underlying theories of explanations, of truth and of verification” (p. 45). Lewis-Beck et al. (2004) adds that epistemology in social sciences, in particular, is used for deciding how we can produce reliable social scientific knowledge. At the epistemological level, the interpretive theoretical framework in this study asserts that social

knowledge can only be created through dialogue and negotiation between researchers and participants given the simultaneous relationship between individuals and the external world (Darby & Fugate, 2019). This study has been informed by constructionism, where subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning (Al-Ababneh, 2020). In other words, this study has been grounded in the assumption that knowledge is created through minimizing the distance between the participants and myself (as a researcher) by closely interacting with them through individual interviews and observations (Creswell, 1998), this stance supports Crotty's assumption that "meaning is not discovered but constructed" (2003, p. 9).

Thus, this study also aligns with the constructivist perspective. Constructivism requires the researcher to examine the nature of the situation in question through the multiple lenses of the individuals involved to understand how they make sense of the situation, to obtain their definition of it and to focus on interactions, contexts and environments (Cohen et al., 2018). Indeed, according to Burr (2003), constructivists perceive people as constructive agents whose ways of knowing, seeing, understanding, and valuing influence what is known, seen, understood, and valued. Consequently, then, constructivists do not view the phenomenon under study, meaning or knowledge, as passively received by people but rather built by them (Troudi, 2010). In addition, constructivism points out the uniqueness of each individual's experience and focuses on the meaning-making process that takes place in that unique individual's mind (Crotty, 2003). Based on this premise, this study intended to make sense of the constructed world of teachers out there through constructing meaning in the data and findings generated from teachers' perspectives (Walt, 2020). Thus, this investigation intended to construct a meaning of how Saudi EFL teachers respond to the implementation of CLT in the curriculum in light of their context.

Since this study is partially informed by both constructionism and constructivism, it is pertinent to note here that there is a distinction between constructionism and constructivism in the

scholarly literature. Some refer to both as alternatives (for example Cohen et al., 2018), while others argue that they are different. For instance, Fruggeri (2021) emphasises that the adoption of either one underlines a difference between the socially constrained discourse and the internal cognitive discourse. Constructivists aspire to deal with the function of knowledge in the construction processes of social realities in addition to emphasising its social nature. Constructionists, on the other hand, renounce attempts to analysing cognitive processes to focus attention on the constructive function of written and spoken language (Fruggeri, 2021). Collin (2004) argues that constructivism focuses on meaning making and the constructing of the social world through individual, cognitive processes, while constructionism emphasizes that the social world is made real (constructed) through social processes and interaction. Burr (2003) on the other hand, points out that there is a twofold difference between constructivism and constructionism: the former refers to the extent of the individual's agency in controlling the construction process, and the latter focuses on the extent to which constructions are the product of structural or interactional social forces. Howell (2013) asserts that although constructivism and constructionism come from different direction, each boils down to the position that reality is determined and defined through social interaction and it is not external to human existence. Therefore, since this study aspired to understand teachers' own constructions of the reality of their practice through interacting with them in interviews and conversations pre and post classroom observation sessions, this study was informed by both stances.

In summary, the theoretical perspective on which this study was based on was interpretivism. This theoretical perspective was informed by both constructivist and constructionist epistemological stances and an ontological stance that rely on the subjective reality of an individual or individuals in a social institution (Ernest, 1994) where values and beliefs are socially constructed and shaped by those individuals.

4.1.3 Making Inferences about Language Teachers' cognition

I would like to point out that the umbrella term 'teacher cognition' is used here to encompass the constructs of teachers' perspectives, beliefs and knowledge. According to Borg (2019) the goal of teacher cognition research is understanding how what teachers' think and feel about aspects of their practice is informed by personal, professional, and sociocultural dimensions of their lives.

Despite the fact that interests in focusing on the nonobservable aspects of language teaching practices started in the mid-1990s – since then this focus shifted to theoretical debates in the field – the premise of research on teachers' cognition remains true today. Attention to the unobservable dimension of teaching is critical to understanding the process of “becoming, being, and developing as a teacher” (Borg, 2020, p.16). Research into teachers' cognition, as Fenstermacher (1979 cited in Pajares, 1992) puts it, is the single most important construct in educational research. While this statement may now be somewhat dated, however, it still stands true. Investigations that aim to explore teachers' perspectives and beliefs about education provide valuable information to all those in the sphere of education. It does not only inform decisions teacher educators make when designing their programmes as Pajares (1992) suggests, but also it is key to making informed decisions before implementing educational reform and curricular change projects at the policy-making level. In fact, as it has been argued before in the previous chapter (section 3.2), failing to acknowledge the significance of investigating teachers' perspectives may lead to the perpetuation of antiquated, ineffectual and resistant-to-change teaching practice that might sabotage efforts for educational reform. Nonetheless, although exploring teachers' perspectives and beliefs is rewarding, when clearly conceptualized, it is a taxing task, because, as Pajares (1992) states, examining beliefs and making interpretations from them is always risky for inconsistency of meaning is the order of the day. It is beyond the scope of this study to detail what has been done in the literature with

regards to the issue of defining teachers' cognition. However, since this study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives about their practice, the discussion here will focus on how to make valid inferences about teachers' cognition.

When it comes to the relationship between teachers' cognition and classroom practices, Borg (2003) argues that "teachers' cognition and classroom practice exist in symbiotic relationships" (p.91). Despite this relationship, though, Borg describes a body of work in the literature that shows that teachers' practices do not always reflect their beliefs and pedagogical principles. Borg (2003) reflects on findings from the literature that collectively show that language teachers' practices are shaped by a range of social, psychological and environmental realities of the school and classroom. These interacting, and often conflicting, contextual factors include the school environment, curriculum mandates, classroom and school layout, principals' requirements, school policies, testing systems and the availability of resources. Borg highlights that evidence in the literature indicates that how such contextual factors conflict with teachers' cognition which may, consequently, hinder language teachers' ability to adopt practices which reflect their perspectives.

Understanding teachers' perspectives requires making inferences about their underlying states, because teachers are often unable or unwilling to accurately convey what they think about their practice and perspectives cannot be measured or observed (Borg, 2012; Pajares, 1992). Therefore, in order to operationalize these assumptions, this study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions about CLT implementation through making inferences from what they said, during the interviews and their pre and post observation sessions talks, from their responses to an attitudinal survey, and from what they did, during the unstructured classroom observation sessions. Borg (2003) points out that earlier studies in the field had been criticized for relying on quantitative measurement of teachers' cognition without examination of its relationship with practice through investigating what teachers do in classrooms in order to

develop better understandings of their teaching practice. In a similar manner, Pajares (1992) highlights that surveys about teachers' perceptions must be accompanied by additional measures such as interviews and observations, if richer and more accurate inferences are to be made. It is pertinent to note that this does not mean questionnaires should not be used, as their results can help in detecting inconsistencies and areas that require attention. However, such quantifying instruments cannot encompass the wide range of contexts – because they ask teachers to respond to lists of statements that may or may not reflect their unique professional contexts – under which beliefs become attitudes that actualize intention and behaviour.

Thus, inferences about teachers' perceptions require assessment of teachers' verbal expressions, predispositions to action and practice (i.e. what teachers say, intend and do). As such, failure to examine these factors calls into question the validity of the findings and value of the study (Pajares, 1992). Thus choosing a qualitative design in investigations that aims to elicit teachers' perceptions is important for studies aiming to understand teachers' practice from their perspectives. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) put it, qualitative research empowers individuals to share their stories and make their voices heard. Drawing on data that were collected from an attitudinal scale, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, this study aimed to unmask the challenging factors that constrain what Saudi primary EFL teachers (in state schools) do inside their classrooms and may diverge their practices from communicative principles to more traditional teaching approaches. Hence, the following section will outline the research design of this study in detail.

4.2 Research design

In order to fulfil the aims and answer the research questions of this study, an exploratory research design was selected. The exploratory design was chosen, because there was a need to know more about teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing CLT and how those challenges were affected by in-service training and their leadership roles in decision making.

Since little information existed focusing on primary teachers' perspectives with this regard, the study had to be exploratory in nature (Swedberg, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify and describe CLT challenges that Saudi primary EFL teachers were facing that led to, the well reported, CLT unsatisfactory implementation in the Saudi context (Perry, 2005). The exploratory design enabled me to reveal how teachers felt, what they knew, and what their concerns, perceptions and understandings were by capturing through language the peculiarities and documenting as closely as possible 'slice-of-life' episodes (Radnor, 2001) through observations and interviews.

The adopted exploratory approach, aimed to go beyond merely understanding the participant teachers' perceptions about CLT challenges, but rather to voice their worries, concerns, initiatives and suggestions to improve their professional practice, and consequently the way the curriculum change process could take place in the Saudi educational context. From this perspective, as a researcher, I placed myself within a context of discovery rather than proof (Swedberg, 2018). Indeed, effective exploration of social phenomena, Stebbins (2001) argues, necessitates approaching the research with two special orientations: flexibility in ways of creating data and open-mindedness about where to find them. Approaching the research with those two inclinations in mind served the main aim of exploratory research, which was the production of inductively derived theoretical generalizations about the situation under study (Stebbins, 2001). The notion of theoretical generalizations here was seen from Ritchie and Lewis's (2013) position, in which qualitative data inductively developed from participants' perspectives could be assessed and used to develop and refine established theory depending on how well the data might fit within those theories.

Qualitative data predominated this exploratory study. Quantitative data, however, was used as it was possible and desirable. Therefore, this study followed an embedded design, in which a quantitative questionnaire was embedded for flexible and desirable use within the qualitative

exploratory design to triangulate data sources (Wilson, 2014) and give a clearer glimpse of where and how to look for answers for the main questions of the study (Swedberg, 2018). Thus, the problem of this study was tackled pragmatically, as the priority was to develop in-depth understanding of how the participants perceived their realities by presenting themes grounded in their perspectives in a way that gave them a sense that their voices and experiences really mattered. This perspective enabled the hybrid use of qualitative and quantitative data based on appropriateness for addressing the research questions and issues rather than mere focus on philosophical debates (Ritchie and Lewis, 2013).

4.3 Data collection

4.3.1 Participants' selection and recruitment procedure

In order to appropriately answer the research questions of the study, the data were collected from those involved in the educational context that was the focus of this study (Herrington et al., 2007). Since the study collected both qualitative and quantitative data, the sample of this study came from two different sampling strategies for each data collection method. Accordingly, the qualitative sample of this study included 15 Saudi female EFL teachers in state primary schools (see **Table 4.1** below for details about the participants and the methods they participated in and number of times they were observed). Saudi Arabia is a huge country, thus due to time and distance constraints and administrative complications, 12 of the participants – for classroom observations in particular – were from urban and rural areas in a major city in Saudi Arabia. As for the remaining three; one was from a different city in the same region and the other two were teaching in a rural governorate in a different region. The quantitative sample, on the other hand, included a total of 75 mixed gender Saudi primary state-school EFL teachers from 24 rural and urban parts across the country (see **Appendix1**). A limited number of the questionnaire respondents (20%) indicated an interest in participating in

subsequent interviews. Thus, this limited the possibility for purposive sampling to consider diversity in teachers' backgrounds. More details about the participants will be given under each method of data collection (in sections 4.4.1.4, 4.4.2.2 and 4.4.3.3).

Table 4.1

Distribution of participants on data collection methods.

Participant	Demographic information	The questionnaire	Data collection method				Semi-structured interviews
			Classroom observations	Session #	Number of times observed	Grade level	
Abrar	Urban/ public school	x	9	2	6-4	45 mins/each	x
Afrah	Urban/ Qur'anic school	x	7	1	5	45 mins/each	x
Ameenah	Urban/ public school	x	2	2	5-6	40 mins/each	-
Anwar	Urban/ public school	x	4	2	4-6	45 mins/each	-
Asma	Urban/ public school	x	-	-	-	-	x
Azhar	Urban/ public school	x	-	-	-	-	x
Faten	Rural area/ Qur'anic school	x	10	1	4	45 mins/each	x
Hebah	Urban/ Qur'anic school	x	6	2	6-5	45 mins/each	-
Hind	Urban/ public school	x	1	2	4-5	40 mins/each	x
Khlood	Other city/public school	x	-	-	-	-	x
Najwa	Urban/ public school	x	5	2	6-5	A/40 B/35 mins	x
Noha	Urban/public school (sublet building)	x	3	1	5	40 mins	-
Noor	Rural / public school	x	-	-	-	-	x
Rana	Rural / public school	x	-	-	-	-	x
Samah	Urban/ public school	x	8	2	5	45 mins/each	x

4.3.2 Gaining access

Gender segregation and its ramifications on data collection, was a key issue that has been often reported with regards to conducting research in the Saudi educational context (Alfahadi, 2012; Albedaiwi, 2014). Thus, as a female researcher, I was not allowed to enter boys' schools or observe male teachers. To overcome this and to diversify data sources I distributed the questionnaire online in order to gain access to both genders. The qualitative data (observations as well as interviews), however, was limited to female Saudi EFL teachers teaching at the primary level in state schools.

Before commencing my field work, I had to obtain permissions from the Ministry Deputy for Planning and Development at the General Directorate of Education in the region where the study took place (see **Appendix 2**). However, at the first school I visited the head-teacher informed me that the permission from the Ministry Deputy for Planning and Development was not enough and that I had to contact the director of the District Office of Education in her school district before I could start the observation sessions. There were five different district offices – the north district; the south district; the west district; the east district; and the central district – in the city where the study was conducted. Each district office was a subdivision under the supervision of the General Directorate of Education in the Region that oversaw and supervised state and private schools in each district in urban and rural areas in the city. After obtaining the necessary documents to access primary schools under the city Department of Education, I was able to visit primary schools located under three district offices of education – the south, west, and central districts – in order to gain access to 13 local primary state-schools (see **Appendices 3, 4 and 5** respectively). Only one of those was in a rural area – 66KM – outside the city under the supervision of the south District Office of Education in the city.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

As it was explained in the research design section (section 4.2), the aim of this study was to explore and describe what was really happening on the ground – i.e. inside EFL classrooms at the primary level in Saudi Arabia – and most importantly what were teachers’ perspectives on the challenges they face while implementing CLT. Thus, the data came from three different sources; an attitudinal scale, unstructured classroom-observations and individual semi-structured interviews. **Table 4.2** below maps out which methods were used to answer each of the research questions of this study. The methods are presented in the same order in which each method was conducted in the timeline (see **Figure 2** below).

Table 4.2

Research questions and methods of data collection

Research questions	Data collection methods		
	The questionnaire	Classroom observations	Semi-structured interviews
What are Saudi EFL teachers’ attitudes towards CLT?	X	X	X
What are teachers’ perspectives on the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level?	X	X	X
To what extent do teachers’ in-service training opportunities support them to implement CLT effectively?		X	X
To what extent were EFL teachers involved in the process of curriculum development?	X		X

Qualitative research has the potential to empower individuals to share their stories and hear their voices, therefore, choosing a qualitative design in this investigation that aimed to elicit

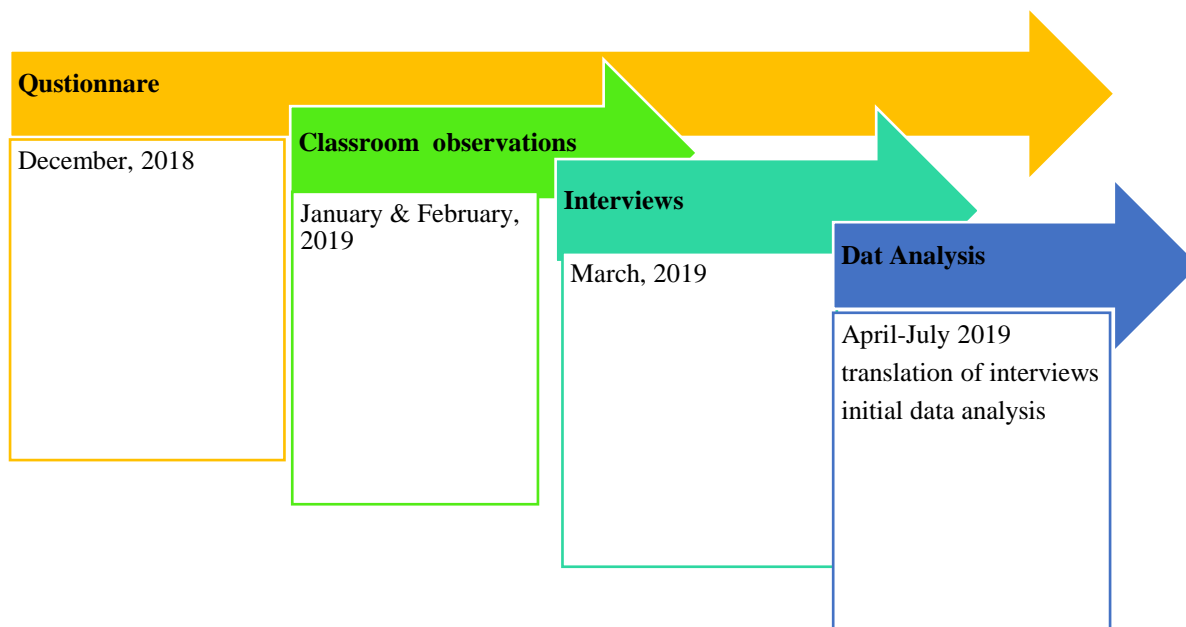
teachers' perceptions was important (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Understanding teachers' perspectives required making inferences about their underlying states, because teachers might be unable or unwilling to accurately convey their perceptions and perspectives cannot be measured or observed (Borg, 2012). Therefore, in order to operationalize these assumptions, this study aimed to understand teachers' perceptions about CLT implementation through making inferences from what they said – in their interview responses and their pre and post observation sessions talks – what they intended – from their responses to an attitudinal survey, and what they did – in classroom observations. This design was chosen in light of recommendations made in the literature about teachers' cognition (see for example Borg, 2003; Pajares, 1992) – as explained in section 4.13 above. This methodological design was suggested to make appropriate and valid inferences and gain additional insights about teachers' beliefs about their practice (Borg, 2003).

Thus, the blend of those particular methods seemed appropriate to answer the study research questions. The design helped in fulfilling the aims of the study, by extension, which were to explore CLT challenges that Saudi state primary EFL teachers faced, their perspectives towards training and leadership roles in the Saudi educational system. The utilization of this design enabled the development of a deep understanding of teachers' perspectives and their teaching experiences and practice. Moreover, the questionnaire enabled the triangulation and confirmation of the validity of the findings from a larger pool of participants. Therefore, the data-collection process went through three different phases (see **Figure 1.4**). The first phase was publishing the questionnaire and distributing the link through Twitter and WhatsApp from December 2018 until June 2019. The second phase was observing EFL teachers in state primary school classrooms. The final phase was dedicated to the primary source of data in this study which was teachers' individual interviews. The decision to collect data in that particular order paved the way to setting up the questions in the interview schedule, in which I knew what to

focus on and how to prompt each participant to talk about certain issues that came up in the questionnaire and during the observations. More details about how data collected in phases 1 and 2 informed data collected in phase 3, will be provided in section 4.4.4 later in this chapter.

Figure 2

The methodological design and timeline.



4.4.1 Piloting of the methods

In terms of the piloting phase, the questionnaire was piloted before embarking on the fieldwork stage of this study. At that stage, I was still in the UK working on the first draft of this chapter. However, because the pilot questionnaire (see **Appendix 6** for the piloted questionnaire) was administered online via Google Forms, I was able to pilot it and test it for validity and reliability. Details and results of testing for the questionnaire validity and reliability will be discussed under **section 4.61** validity and reliability. The participants in the pilot were recruited via a snowballing sampling technique, in which I first sent the link of the pilot questionnaire to my friends who were EFL teachers in state schools and asked them to share the link with their fellow primary EFL teachers in state schools. As a result, 19 primary EFL teachers participated in the pilot. More details about the subsequent changes of the questionnaire will be provided in **section 4.4.2.3** about the questionnaire design.

The pilot was employed to estimate the timing of the questionnaire and provide participants' input about the format and clarity of the statements. More importantly, the questionnaire was piloted to enhance its validity and reliability through two phases: checking construct validity and calculating its internal consistency – more details about results of the pilot study will be discussed later in this chapter under the section about research issues (section 4.6.1 validity and reliability).

With regards to the classroom observations, due to time, space and gatekeeping constraints this method was not piloted. As mentioned before, at the piloting phase of the study I was in the UK. Therefore, I did not have the time, resources or permissions – at the time – to pilot the observations in Saudi EFL classrooms.

Due to the fact that finalizing the questions in the interview schedule was informed by data collected from the questionnaire and classroom observation sessions, this method was not piloted at the piloting phase of the study. Towards the end of my fieldwork, after I finished the classroom observations, I was able to finalize the questions in the interview schedule. Due to limited time, I piloted the interviews with two participants who fitted the criteria of the participant sample of this study (i.e. Saudi primary state schools EFL teachers). The participants were recruited from the questionnaire sample – as will be explained in section 4.4.2.3. The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents if they would like to participate in an interview, 20% of the respondents indicated that they were interested in participating in the interviews and left their contact information (either email or phone number) in the form. Thus, I contacted all respondents – via email or phone – who indicated that they were interested in participating in the interviews. I sent emails and messages introducing myself and giving the reason why I was contacting them and that I had got their contact information from the form they completed at the end of the questionnaire – and for those with emails I provided my WhatsApp contact information in case they preferred to reply via this

method. Only two of those replied, both female both via WhatsApp, and provided answers to the questions sent to them. At the time, the decision to use IM interviewing had already been made, therefore the pilot interviews were conducted via WhatsApp. I followed the same procedure, detailed in **section 4.4.4.4** below, in conducting the pilot interview. At the end of the interviews I asked the participants about the clarity of the questions and whether they felt anything needed to be changed. Both participants indicated that the questions were clear and no changes were necessary.

4.4.2 The Questionnaire

Some educational researchers might argue against “the mathematization of nature” (Cohen et al., 2018), because most educational concepts cannot simply be reducible to statistical analysis. Cohen et al (2018), however, argue that the use of quantitative data in educational research is “entirely dependent on fitness of purpose” and that dismissal of numerical analysis is a matter of “mere ideology or prejudice” (p. 604). Questionnaires are a common research tools, used to enable researchers to uncover hidden information or views by generating data in order to examine views, perceptions and attitudes of participants in any given context. Another significant feature of questionnaires is that they allow the researcher to elicit background information about the participants in the chosen sample (Cohen et al, 2018). In addition, questionnaires significantly minimize researcher’s bias, because the researcher is distant from the participants and, thus, is not affecting the participants’ responses and consequently the results. Moreover, the anonymity of the participants gives them more freedom to respond without restraints (Walliman, 2005) unlike interviews or even observations where respondents may hold back or be self-conscious.

The questionnaire used in this study was semi-structured with closed items (a five-value Likert scale). This design enabled me to set the agenda without presupposing the responses (Cohen et

al., 2018) giving the participants the opportunity to respond to the statements presented to them in the way that they thought was best.

4.4.2.1 Issues of attitude scales

One of the limitations of Likert-type attitude scales is the difficulty of establishing a neutral point and its ramifications on the interpretations of respondents' scores. Although the questionnaire has been analysed descriptively, this issue is still relevant in the context of this study because the questionnaire respondents had opted the neutral point in several statements in the questionnaire (as will be seen in the next chapter of the thesis). Karavas-Doukas (1996) discusses this issue in detail. First of all, Karavas-Doukas points out that the neutral point does not necessarily mean the middle point between the two extremes of the total score of the scale. For it is possible that respondents achieve a middle of the range score due to inconsistent responses or holding strongly favourable and strongly unfavourable attitudes towards the statements in the scale. Secondly, such inconsistency in participants' responses might be interpreted as a signifier of lack of understanding or confusion. Karavas-Doukas, however, emphasizes that participant's agreement with two opposing statements does not necessarily indicate lack of understanding or inconsistent attitudes. Such discrepancy can be interpreted as an awareness, on part of the respondent, of the significant contribution that both could make in the issue under investigation. Thus, to overcome this shortcoming, Karavas-Doukas suggests utilizing subsequent interviewing with the respondents to assess the depth of their knowledge and reason behind their perception of two opposing statements as fitting.

4.4.2.2 Operationalizing the questionnaire

To fully answer the research questions and collect rich data that would enable me to achieve the research objectives, it was important, to distribute a questionnaire amongst teachers who fit the description detailed in the sample section. The questionnaire aimed to investigate teachers' attitudes about their responsibilities as language teachers as well as their attitudes

towards students' roles within the classroom – which are two crucial tenants of the CLT approach. Therefore, the results of the questionnaire helped in painting a picture of teachers' attitudes towards the principles of CLT – especially their understandings of their roles and responsibilities inside the classroom as well as those of their learners.

The literature in the field, as discussed in the previous chapter, indicated that there was a mismatch between CLT theory and practice. Thus, results of the questionnaire helped in understanding those claims. In addition, one of the survey purposes was to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards their roles and level of involvement in the process of curriculum change. This part of the questionnaire reflected teachers' perspectives towards the assumption that their lack of involvement in the process might be linked to the ineffectiveness of CLT implementation in the Saudi context. After figuring out the purpose of the questionnaire and translating it into researchable objectives, I worked on identifying and itemizing the needed subsidiary topics that reflected those main purposes.

4.4.2.3 The questionnaire design

The questionnaire included a total of six main sections (see **Appendix 7**). Each of those included a number of subsidiary items related to the main purpose of the section. The first section was allocated to the cover letter and consent form obtained from the University of Exeter's Ethics Committee. The cover letter gave information about the researcher, aims of the study, and explained participants' confidentiality and anonymity in which no names or contact information were required to complete the questionnaire – unless the participants wished to participate in the interviews. Next, respondents were prompted to read and agree on the statements of the consent form in order to move on to the next section. The second section asked for participants' background and demographic information. This part asked participants if they were primary EFL teachers (if not the respondent would be automatically taken out of

the survey). This section also gathered demographic information such as gender, educational background, years of teaching experience, syllabus taught, and location.

The third section was designated to primary EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT which included items 8 to 28. All items in this section were adapted from Karavas-Doukas's (1996) attitudinal scale. The scale was chosen because it was widely used in studies surveyed in the literature review focusing on investigating teachers' attitudes towards the communicative approach (see for example Nejad, 2020; Lashgari et al., 2014; Rahimi & Nader, 2014). The Karavas-Doukas (1996) scale was composed based on an extensive review of the communicative approach. The original scale consisted of a total of 24 items which fell into five thematic groups: group/pair work; quality and quantity of error correction; learners' roles in the classroom; teachers' role in the classroom; the importance of grammar. After piloting the questionnaire and checking its internal consistency, only 21 items were used (see section 4.6.1 below).

The fourth section collected EFL teachers' attitudes towards the difficulties they face while teaching CLT. Items in this section were adapted from Li's (1998) study of South Korean EFL teachers' perceived difficulties in adopting CLT. Li (1998) identified four categories of factors that hindered CLT implementation in the South Korean context. These include: teachers (difficulties related to their low English proficiency, limited training and limited time to prepare communicative activities); students (challenges related to their low English proficiency; lack of motivation and resistance to participate); the educational system (obstacles related to large classes and grammar-based examination); CLT itself. Thus, because Li's (1998) categories were well reported in the literature interested in identifying factors hindering teachers' ability to implement CLT in EFL/ESL contexts (Suparmi, 2020), it was chosen to identify the challenges Saudi EFL teachers, in the sample of the questionnaire, faced while implementing CLT at the primary level. All nine items used in Li's (1998) questionnaire were used in section

four of the questionnaire. However, based on feedback from the pilot the wording of some of the items was changed (see section 4.6.1).

Section five of the questionnaire consisted of two items that reflected teachers' attitudes towards their level of involvement in the process of curriculum change and its effect on the ELT field in general. The final section of the questionnaire was allocated for those who were interested in participating in the individual interviews. I asked interested respondents to leave their contact information – email or phone number – if they would like to talk more about the topic in an individual interview with the researcher.

4.4.2.4 Questionnaire sample

The sample included Saudi primary EFL teachers teaching in state schools across Saudi Arabia. In order to ensure a higher response rate and more importantly as many diverse views as possible, a snowball sampling technique was applied. Diversification was important because it enabled me to cover as much varied contextual factors as possible – which added to the validity of the findings. The questionnaire was self-administered online (using SurveyMonkey software) to ensure socio-demographic diversity and a higher response rate. In this respect the process of snowball sampling proved to be very useful in recruiting participants for the online questionnaire.

The snowball sampling technique allowed me to distribute the questionnaire link on social networking platforms. This sampling approach has been described, as Noy (2008) puts it, as “essentially social” (p. 332). In addition, as an outsider, I anticipated having difficulty contacting the sample through formal channels, this method of sampling, however, enabled me to rely on informal networks to gain access. The technique allowed me to use participants' social networks and personal contacts in order to gain access to further participants. Thus, I first identified a group of individuals who either fit or had access to the sample that fit my

sampling criteria. Those individuals were then used as informants who forwarded the link to others who qualified for inclusion and those, in turn, identified more participants and recruited them to participate (Cohen et al., 2018). Consequently, I targeted online groups within social networking platforms mainly WhatsApp groups and Twitter accounts in Saudi Arabia – that were designated for discussing Saudi school teachers and their issues – to distribute the questionnaire. I asked a friend, who was an EFL teacher, about accounts that fit the description and she provided me with some. Then, I contacted the owners of those accounts to ask for their help by retweeting and posting the questionnaire link on their accounts. I provided my contact information within the questionnaire should the participants had any concerns that needed to be addressed. Moreover, snowball sampling helped with hesitant participants, in which some participants agreed to participate when peer group members approached them and recruited them for the study (Cohen et al, 2018).

Therefore, about a month prior to the fieldwork, I published the final questionnaire online and distributed the link on the chosen Twitter accounts and WhatsApp groups to increase the response rate and number of participants. This step was crucial and helped me to put the observations into perspective and enabled me to finalize interview questions and think about probing techniques. Based on the initial analysis of the responses, I was able to identify certain patterns in the data which helped me in finalizing the questions in the interview schedule, in probing participants during the interviews, and noticing certain issues (such as the implementation of group-work, students' numbers and their participation in group-work and classroom interactions) during the classroom observation sessions.

As a result, 397 participants initially responded to the questionnaire link. However, 75 of those completed the questionnaire – 89% of which were females and 10% males (see **Table 4.3**) – from 24 different areas around the country (see **Appendix 1**). In terms of the educational level, the majority (86.67%) of respondents were holding a BA degree, 12% with Masters and only

1% with a PhD (see **Table 4.4**). While 22.67% of the teachers had between 1 to 5 years of teaching experience and 32% had less than 10 years of teaching experience, nearly half of the sample (45.33%) had more than 10 years of teaching experience (see **Table 4.5**).

Table 4.3

Participants background information: gender (N = 75).

	Number	Percent %
Male	8	10.67
Female	67	89.33

Table 4.4

Participants background information: educational level (N = 75).

	Number	Percent %
BA level	65	86.67
Masters	9	12.00
PhD	1	1.33

Table 4.5

Participants background information: years of teaching experience (N = 75).

	Number	Percent %
Between 1-5 years	17	22.67
Between 6-10 years	24	32.00
More than 10 years	34	45.33

With regards to the syllabus that each respondent was teaching – at the time of collecting data for this study three different syllabi were taught in primary state schools in Saudi Arabia – it seemed that Smart Class was the most popular syllabus of the three. Slightly more than half of the participants were teaching Smart Class (54.67%), Get Ready was the second most popular syllabus in the sample, in which 32% of EFL teachers were teaching it. We Can was the least popular syllabus with 13% of teachers in the sample (see **Table 4.6**).

Table 4.6

Distribution of sample on which syllabus was taught (N = 75)

Item	We Can		Get Ready		Smart Class	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Which syllabus are currently teaching?	10	13.33	24	32.00	41	54.67

4.4.3 Classroom observations

The decision to use observations arose from the need to gain specific information – about the reality of what was happening inside primary EFL classrooms in the Saudi Arabian context (Richards, 2003). Classroom observations were found necessary to gain insights into the contextual challenges Saudi EFL teachers faced while implementing CLT in order to answer the research questions of this study (see **Table 4.2** in section 4.4 above). In the context of this study there was a paradox stemming from claims in the literature that Saudi EFL teachers generally had favourable attitudes toward CLT, yet findings of several research studies also reported a set of challenges and difficulties EFL teachers faced with CLT. Thus, to understand the type of CLT challenges teachers had to face and deal with on daily basis, I found it essential

to use qualitative classroom observations to capture the whole story of classroom life (Wragg, 1999).

In this study, classroom observations were used as a supplementary source of data. The purpose was to capture how EFL teachers were or were not able to implement CLT in their teaching and to gain insights about the reality of primary EFL classroom. The observational data gathered deepened my understanding of CLT challenges EFL teachers faced and informed my line of questioning later in the individual interviews. In addition, the notes collected from observation sessions were used to corroborate and validate the data obtained in the interviews (Robson, 2002). In this case, therefore, observations were used to give insights for the interviews and at the same time to corroborate data generated from teachers' interviews.

More importantly, classroom observations showed the significant role of context on teachers' practice (Wragg, 1999). Indeed, classroom observations allowed me to understand the impacts of contextual factors on teachers' ability to use CLT. One of the unique strengths of classroom observation was its ability in helping me look at what was really happening in the context rather than relying on what was reported about the situation in the questionnaire and in the interviews later on (Denscombe, 2010). Thus, observations enabled the collection of live data from a naturally occurring situation (Cohen et al., 2018).

In order to capture the significance of the context and capture any context-specific factors, I designed an observation schedule (see **Appendix 8**) adapted from Spradley's (1980) list of things to consider in observations. With regards to the decision about what type of observation to utilize in TESOL, Richards (2003) strongly insists on the importance of making an informed decision when it comes to using structured observations – i.e. the systematic use of predetermined categories – and what role it could play in the research. The researchers' desire for results and tangible outcomes could twist the research from “the search for understanding

... [to] an obsession with the meaningless accumulation of detail” (Richards, 2003, p. 144). Therefore, to comply with the exploratory nature of this study, I utilized an unstructured observation approach. The approach depended on a two-section sheet that allowed me to collect notes on two levels.

At the first level, I collected notes with regards to some of the difficulties reported in previous studies and those covered in the questionnaire – including: classroom size; resources available in the classroom; number of students in the class. At the second level, on the other hand, I wrote down notes to capture any new factors, not listed in the first section, which allowed the observation session to be open to any unanticipated critical events.

To overcome concerns with regards to the risk of inferring meaning from an event captured in only an instant of time, triangulation – of methods, time, space, or observers – was suggested in the literature (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, several actions were taken in this study to address this issue, in order to yield reliable evidence and minimize the risk of selectivity. First, this was done by triangulation of methods in which data were collected from other sources to corroborate the observational data. Secondly, most EFL teachers were observed more than once. Therefore, as shown in **Table 4.1**, in total, 17 observation sessions were conducted of ten Saudi EFL teachers in 9 primary state – public (6) and Qur’anic (3) – schools (8 of those in an urban city, 1 in a rural area), in grades 4, 5 and 6. More details about the number of observations conducted can be found in sections 4.4.3.2 and 4.4.3.3 below.

4.4.3.1 Issues of classroom observations

In addition to being time-consuming, observations can be limited by researcher bias in terms of what, how and who the observer is observing (Cohen et al., 2018). Observations had been described as inevitably selective in recording information and interpretation (Baker, 2006), which makes caution, reflexivity (Corbett-Whittier, 2013) and close consideration of the

observer's (i.e. researcher's) role within observation sessions (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011) requisites for this form of data collection.

According to Richards (2003), one of the most delicate issues of observations is researcher-participant relationship. This is because classroom observations require a certain amount of sensitivity and awareness of the effect of the researcher's own experiences and beliefs about the nature of language teaching and how to reduce their impact on the observation process. Richards (2003) asserts that "it takes creative insight of a very high order to free us from the domination of taken-for-granted perceptions" (p. 150). From this perspective it is unlikely for TESOL professionals to easily make sense of what is going on without carrying 'mental baggage' assumptions about language teaching. Furthermore, it is equally important for TESOL researchers to contemplate how their presence inside the classroom is seen. This is because our professional identity will influence how teachers perceive our presence inside their classrooms. Thus, in this study it was essential to help teachers not to see me as a supervisor or inspector who was looking to evaluate them and judge their teaching practice. One of my main priorities was to establish trust with the participant teachers by assuring them that the purpose of the observation was constructed not individualized or to evaluate their teaching abilities. It was necessary for me to minimize my intrusion by contacting teachers beforehand, not overplaying the status card, and clarifying the purpose and outcome of the observation so that the observation would "be as natural and unstaged as possible" (Wragg, 1999, p.16). I found that reassuring teachers and school principals about the purpose of my visits and scheduling my visits with them beforehand were significant steps to minimize any suspicions about the nature of my existence, as an observer, inside the observed classrooms. I even, agreed to show teachers – if they asked to – an empty copy of my observation schedule to assure them that I was observing possible contextual challenges not evaluating them personally.

4.4.3.2 Classroom-Observation participants

After obtaining the required permissions from the General Directorate of Education in the region (see **Appendix 2**) and from the relevant District Offices of Education, I started visiting primary schools located in the districts I had permissions to be in (see **Appendices 3, 4 and 5**). In total, I visited 13 state primary schools in urban and rural areas around the city. Each time I would meet the head-teacher at the school, first, and would introduce myself and give a general idea about my study showing the required permissions. Then, after the head-teachers' permission, I would sit with the EFL teacher/s – most of the schools involved in this study had only 1 EFL teacher – in the school to introduce myself and my research. At the first meeting with each teacher, I would clearly state the aim of the observation. With time, I noticed that assuring teachers that the aim of the observation was, merely, to see what difficulties they were facing inside the classroom and showing them a copy of the observation sheet if needed was reassuring for them. Taking those steps was an incentive that made teachers enthusiastic and willing to participate in the study. After the introduction, I asked teachers to sign a copy of the participant information sheet (see **Appendix 9** for the English version and **Appendix 10** for the Arabic version) and consent form (see **Appendix 11** for the English version and **Appendix 12** for the Arabic version) and handed them a copy for their reference. Then, I would take each teacher's contact information in order to set up a date and time for the observation sessions. At the same time, I asked each teacher to complete the questionnaire to familiarize themselves with the focus of the study if they had not done that already. Most teachers were cooperative, welcomed my existence inside their classes and appreciated the purpose of my research.

All teachers in the sample were Saudi female nationals teaching at girls only schools. The Saudi Ministry of Education recently allowed co-ed at state primary schools which will be 100% completed by 2030 according to Haya Al-Awwad – the former Deputy Secretary of Education

– (Sabq, 2018). At the time the data of this study were collected, most of state elementary schools – in the city – were still segregated.

I ended up observing 10 female teachers in 9 state primary schools out of the thirteen schools I visited – two teachers were not able to participate. Of those – with the exception of three teachers – I observed each teacher twice conducting a total of 17 classroom observation sessions of English lessons at the 4th, 5th and 6th grades (see **Table 4.1** in section 4.3.1 above). A total of around 13 hours of classroom time was observed, in which each observation session lasted between 35 to 45 minutes. In some schools, class duration varies between morning periods and after lunch periods. For instance, while in observation session #5A the class duration was 40 minutes, session #5B was 35 minutes. The former was in the 3rd morning period – before lunch break – while the latter, on the other hand, was in the 4th period – directly after lunch. It appeared that schools would normally reduce class time in the periods after lunch by approximately 5 minutes. In addition, some schools (such as those where observation sessions 1, 2, 3 and 5 were conducted) were sharing the building with other schools, in which one school would occupy the building in the morning to afternoon period – between 7:45 am to 12:30 pm – and the other in the period between 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm. Class duration were normally shorter in this type of schools (40 minutes or even less in classes after the lunch break).

Students were seated in rows of three to four students in most of the observed classes. However, in observation sessions 1, 7, 8 and 10, students sat in groups, in circles not in rows, mainly because either the classes took place in the *School's Recourses Centre/room* (such as sessions 1 and 10), the class was given at the *School's Arts and Craft Room* (observation session 8), or the class had a small number of students (observation session 7).

4.4.3.3 The Observation strategy

Since the aim of utilizing classroom observations was exploring the difficulties that primary EFL teachers face while implementing CLT inside classrooms, I used a non-rating schedule (see **Appendix 8**) in which I recorded written notes during the observations, as it was not my intention to evaluate teachers' behaviours inside the classroom. The observation schedule was designed to comply with the exploratory nature of the project, to capture any unanticipated critical factors, and significance of the context and to capture any context-specific challenges.

During each observation session, I recorded notes with regards to teachers' and learners' roles within classroom procedures – including notes related to who controlled interactions during the class and whether the class was teacher-centred or student-centred. In addition, I collected notes related to the nature of CLT implementation within each class and if there were any physical or contextual challenges that hindered CLT implementation. For instance, I would write notes about how the importance of grammar was stressed during the class, the nature of error correction, the use of learners' L1 (Arabic), and how group work was done and the type of activities allocated to group work. In terms of the observable challenges, I collected notes describing the space (classroom) and whether it encouraged communicative activities, how students were seated, and whether the classroom was equipped with technological resources (i.e. computers, projectors, screens and access to internet). Finally, I collected notes about the time, interruptions, and routines, in which I described how these factors affected the observed classroom procedures. For example, I collected notes about whether the session took place at morning periods – before lunch break – or afternoon periods – after lunch – and how classes during the latter tended to be shorter in time and how those factors affected teachers' ability to teach.

During the observations I opted to be a non-participant observer in which I would set in a place that was allocated to me by the teacher and start recording, written, notes on my observational-

notes folder without interfering with the lesson. This passive role was chosen to make the observation less intrusive (Spradley, 1980), in which I was present at the scene only to listen and observe (Baker, 2006). Moreover, being a non-participant observer allowed me to set back and note down what transpired in the whole class without disrupting the natural environment of the classroom (Rahman et al., 2018). However, one session (observation session 8B) was an exception, where I participated in one of the classroom activities at the teachers' request.

4.4.4 Interviews

Notwithstanding that interviewing is considered as a significant source of collecting interpretive data, it is becoming increasingly common for interpretive studies to rely mostly or even solely on interview data (Hammersley, 2013). Edwards & Holland (2013) argue that interviewing is becoming more popular in educational research, because it gives insights about individuals' experiences and practices, insights that can help in changing educational policies. In addition, Seidman (2013) claims that interviewing becomes a necessity if the aim is to figure out how teachers make meanings of their experiences. Understanding abstract social notions like "education" requires exploring how those involved in these abstractions perceive their experiences (Seidman, 2013). In circumstances where the focus is on exploring meanings of specific phenomena or perceptions of processes within a given social unit to the participants, interviewing is most appropriate (Robson, 2002).

Thus, since the aim of this study was to explore Saudi EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT challenges in their day-to-day teaching practices, individual semi-structured interviews were utilized. The aim was to understand how primary EFL teachers perceived and constructed their social and professional realities. This type of qualitative interviews did not simply aim to accumulate information from teachers but to deepen understanding of their practice and the challenges they were facing (Richards, 2003). Semi-structured interviews made an excellent

fit with the overall theoretical framework of this study and a flexible method for providing rich and illuminating data, because they opened a unique window on what lay behind teachers' observed actions and questionnaire responses (Robson, 2002).

In line with the constructivist stance adopted in this study, interviewing entailed recognizing that each participant's experience counted and showed interest in focusing on primary EFL teachers' experiences and voices (Seidman 2013). In addition, interviewing, within this study, entailed an exchange of views between me and the participants on a topic of mutual interest, which indicated the significance of "human interaction for knowledge production, and emphasized the social situatedness of the research data which was consistent with the constructionist stance of this study. Therefore, interviews were not seen as exclusively either subjective or objective, but rather intersubjective (Cohen et al., 2018).

4.4.4.1 Online interviewing via instant messaging (IM)

Initially, I planned to use face-to-face interviewing due to its advantages and ability to provide rich and in-depth stories of teachers' experiences. However, due to distance issues and participants' hesitance to have their voice recorded, conducting the semi-structured interviews online through instant messaging (IM) – via WhatsApp messenger – seemed the most appropriate alternative.

In fact, text-based online interviewing was argued to be rather empowering for the participants, in which it allowed them to take ownership of the narrative construction (James, 2016). Indeed, some of the EFL teachers answered the interview questions in unexpected ways and therefore took the conversation to new directions. This, in return, allowed me to respond to those new directions by asking further questions which allowed them to reflect upon their stories on a much deeper level which was compatible with the exploratory nature of the study. In addition, IM online interviewing allowed teachers to send documents, pictures, and video evidence of

the initiatives they led to overcome the challenges they faced while teaching English communicatively at the primary level, which supported their perspectives and helped me understand their point of views. For example, Hind sent me pictures and videos of her English Lab (i.e. resources room) to show me the room's layout, the resources and teaching/learning materials available in the room (see **Figures 3 and 4**). Another teacher, Samah, also shared pictures and videos of her students' work within her English Club Scheme initiative – the initiative will be explained in detail in the next chapter under section 5.3.1.3 (see **Figures 5 and 6** below).

Figure 3

Picture evidence of resources available in Hind's English lab.



Figure 4

Layout of Hind's English Lab and students' seating arrangement.



Online interviewing is recommended for participants with fulltime jobs, busy schedules, who are geographically distant or have concerns about their privacy (Jenner & Myers, 2019). In addition, text-based online interviewing has the added benefit of cutting across interaction barriers such as time, space, social isolation, and any social inequality or concerns of social desirability bias that could affect face-to-face interaction (Pearce et al., 2014; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Moreover, within the context of this study, asynchronous text-based online interviewing enabled participants to construct and have the space to reflect upon their experiences and stories in their own words (James, 2016).

Indeed, online interviews facilitated by instant messaging as the communication medium is argued to offer advantages in terms of interaction for both researchers as well as respondents (Hinchcliffe & Gavin, 2009; Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Clarke (2000) also argues that online communication has the potential to increase anonymity, confidence, active participation and engagement, reflection and honesty, because there are no nods, frowns, or yawns to discourage or distract participants. Moreover, in this day and age IM is faster, more conversational, and offers more archiving capabilities than other online alternatives (Flynn, 2004). Thus, due to the advantages detailed above and in respect of the participants' wishes and convenience, online interviewing via IM was employed to conduct teachers' semi-structured interviews.

4.4.4.2 Issues of IM interviewing

Although online interviewing is becoming increasingly accepted as a reliable data source, some qualitative researchers still have some concerns about rapport and data quality. However, in a study – focused on comparing between in-person and mediated interview contexts – Jenner & Myers (2019) report that interviews conducted online resulted in more sharing of personal experiences, and those online interviews did not cause reduction or excess of rapport. The absence of non-verbal signals and visual cues is, also, one of the issues of using IM online

interviewing. This issue is rooted in concerns that the written text may be interpreted at face value by both the interviewer and the interviewee (Pearce et al., 2014). However, to address these concerns, this study utilized probing through texts for confirmation of meaning and checking for mutual understanding which encouraged generating more accurate data. In fact, teachers often used metaphors and common expressions to express themselves and describe their experiences, which provided me with unique and rich quotations about their perspectives. Hinchcliffe & Gavin (2009) argue that confirmation of meaning through textual communication is more accurate compared to reliance on confirmation through visual cues that might invoke interruptions, discouragement, or even misreading of those non-verbal cues.

4.4.4.3 Interview participants

I initially contacted 20 primary EFL teachers to participate in an individual interview about the difficulties they face as English teachers. As explained in section 4.4.1, I got some of those teachers' contact information from the last part of the questionnaire where I asked teachers to leave their contact information if they wished to participate in an interview about the topic (see **Appendix 7**). The other teachers in the interviewing sample were from schools I visited for the classroom observation sessions. Thus, in total, I interviewed 11 Saudi female teachers, six of whom were from the classroom observations sample. As for the rest, they were recruited through the snowball sampling technique – two were from a rural area in the southern region, one from another city, one was teaching in an afternoon school, and the last one was from the same urban city where the data were collected but from outside the observation sample (see **Table 4.1** for details about the interview participants).

4.4.4.4 Conducting the Interviews

One of the basic principles of conducting semi-structured interviews is constructing an interview schedule that lists the predetermined questions that need to be covered during the interview. Therefore, the initial analysis of notes collected from classroom observations and

survey responses informed the final draft of the interview schedule (see **Appendix 13**). Based on the initial analysis of trends in the questionnaire data, I adapted the questions in the interview schedule to gain an in depth understanding of teachers' perspectives, particularly with regards to the extent of their involvement in curriculum development processes and decision making. Initial data from the questionnaire suggested that teachers were aware of the importance of their role in curriculum development, therefore in the interviews I wanted to explore the issue further. Similarly, I used my notes from the observation sessions in asking teachers about some of the observed activities, particularly in probing those who participated in both the interviews and classroom observations. I also used the field notes and data from the pre and post observation talks with the observed teachers in adapting the questions in the interview schedule, especially questions related to teachers' perspectives of the challenges they were facing while implementing CLT (see **Table 4.2** in section 4.4 for how each method answered the research questions of the study).

The benefit of having the schedule was to cover some the areas that were of interest to me as a researcher. Due to the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, interviewees were able to respond to and answer the questions on their own terms (Edwards & Holland, 2013). After that, the series of the rest of the questions followed from what they mentioned in their initial responses. In addition to that, the interview schedule helped in reminding the participants to cover and touch on the basic areas of interest of the study. However, that did not mean that we, the participants and me, could not pursue a certain topic that was not included in the schedule if it was relevant and beneficial to the research (Edwards & Holland, 2013).

When I talked with some teachers they stated that they were happy to answer any questions but they made it clear that they did not want their voices, their answers, recorded. That and the fact that some teachers were from outside the city and meeting them was not possible, I decided to conduct the interviews via WhatsApp. A decision that enabled me to interview teachers from

other cities, regions and saved me a considerable time and effort that would have been consumed in transcribing audio recordings. The interviews were conducted in Arabic for the teachers' convenience and to allow them to express themselves freely. Typing in a foreign language (English) might have required more effort and time from participants for checking the accuracy of their sentences (Pearce et al., 2014). Thus, all participants received the initial interview questions written in Arabic (see **Appendix 14**) and typed their responses in Arabic as well.

I first contacted, via WhatsApp Messenger, each participant teacher privately and encouraged her – especially those not from the observation sample – to respond to the questionnaire in order to familiarize herself with the focus of the study. Then I sent a PDF copy of the consent form and interview information sheet to each teacher and explaining how their responses are going to be used and archived. Before proceeding to the interview, I asked the participants if they read and understood the consent form (see **Appendix 11**). After that I started the interview by sending two introductory questions asking about the teacher's school location and type of school (morning, evening or Qur'anic school). Then, I would send a text including the set of nine questions in the interview schedule to each teacher privately (see **Appendix 14** for a sample interview). The initial questions invited teachers to share their opinions and perspectives by encouraging them to reflect on issues such as in-service training and efficiency of the curriculum.

Reports in the literature of IM interviewing indicate that if both the interviewer and interviewee are typing at the same time, participants may find it confusing for the line of questioning (Pearce et al., 2014). Therefore, after sending the questions, I gave teachers time to type in and send their answers. As each teacher started to send her written answers, I made sure that she completed her answer and stopped typing before asking any further questions. After receiving the written answer, I would read the response for each question carefully. In case I felt that the

answer was not sufficient or not clear to me, I would type in probing questions. As Fowler (2009) suggested, I used probes – such as: can you explain why? or can you clarify what did you mean by ... – for the purpose of seeking conformation or further explanation. For example, the quote below is a sample of a conversation between me and one of the participants (the italicized text represents English text the teacher used in her response):

Rajaa: you mentioned that most of the skills specified in the Noor system are incompatible with the lessons. Can you please explain further?

Teacher: for example in the old syllabus for 6th grade, if lesson one was “*What’s your name*” the skill specified in the MOE’s Noor system says “*introduce herself*” or “*answer short questions*” ...

I concluded each interview by sending a message to the participants asking if they wanted to add anything further and thanking them for participating and for their time.

4.5 Data analysis

4.5.1 The analytical framework

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, I drew upon Charmaz’s (2006) constructivist grounded theory approach as the analytical framework that guided the data analysis procedure in this study (Cohen et al., 2018). In fact, Stebbins (2011) points out that exploration and grounded theory would be usually mentioned together, because both depend on an inductive line of thinking. Thus, this framework was chosen because it aligned with the constructivist-constructionist theoretical framework that underpinned this investigation. This model of grounded theory is based on interactionist and constructivist theoretical basis, where concepts are seen as constructed through interactions, involvements, ways of looking, interpretations and meanings leading to one or more constructions of reality (Cohen et al., 2018). The approach was chosen because it involved: (1) using inductive reasoning, in which themes, categories and concepts emerged directly from the data (Abahussain, 2016); (2) perceiving the researcher as an architect of a specific understanding of the investigated phenomenon; (3) that

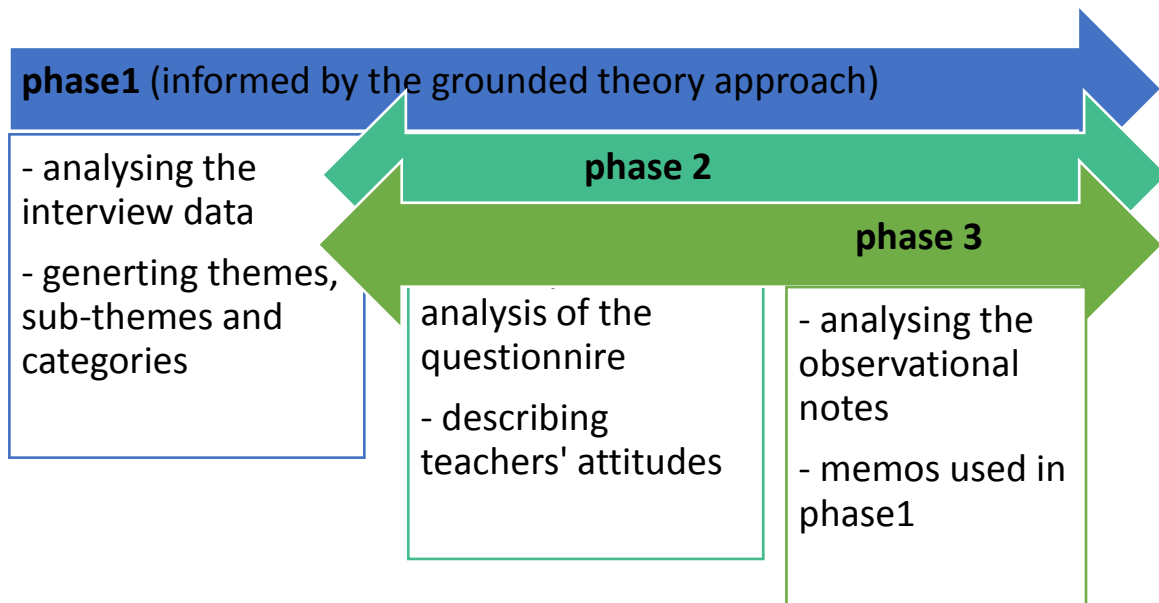
understandings would emerge through mutual interactions between the researcher and the participants (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019).

Due to the fact that the semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data in this study, the first phase of the analysis was analysing the interview data in light of the constructivist grounded theory approach. However, it is worth noting that the analytic procedure was done in an iterative manner. The analysis in phase one was informed by data emerged from the initial analysis of phases two and three. For example, during the first phase I referred to memos and notes from the observational data, and initial patterns of teachers' attitudes in the questionnaire to finalize the themes, categories and sub-categories that emerged from analysing the interviews.

The second and third phases involved analysing data from the questionnaire and observational notes. These final two phases were then added to the first phase, in which the data were integrated with the data generated from the first phase and used as supporting evidence under themes emerged from the interviewing data. Thus, the overall process of data analysis was done in light of the constructivist grounded theory approach as will be explained shortly (in section 4.5.2 below), in which interview data were analysed and used to generate the themes, the descriptive data from the questionnaire and data from observational notes were integrated to support the interview data (see **Figure 7**). Thus, the sections below represent the analysing the data in the same order of the data analysis phases shown in **Figure 7** below.

Figure 7

Phases of data analysis



4.5.2 Analysing the interviews

Qualitative data has been interestingly described as an attractive nuisance (Robson, 2002). For, Robson (2002) argues, the words collected through interviews constitute rich, full and real data that have the quality of “undeniability” in comparison with the simplified abstraction of numbers. Indeed, Richards (2003) also emphasizes the same thing, by describing the process of analysing qualitative data as imaginative, artful, flexible, and reflexive for it does not adhere to any one correct approach or set of right techniques. Nonetheless, despite the fact that there is not a single correct set of conventions for analysing qualitative data (Robson, 2002), qualitative analysis should be methodical and rigorous (Richards, 2003). Therefore, the following is a detailed description of the data analysis procedure I followed to analyse the interviewing data of this study.

At first, I archived all the interviews with EFL teachers (in a chat.TXT format files) as well as the pictures that some participants sent me of their work. Then, I moved all the files from WhatsApp to my personal cloud for safe keeping and easy access. After properly saving the files, I converted each chat (.txt) into a PDF file in order to print the chats. Then, I printed each PDF file, redacted each interviewee's name and phone number from the entire document and allocated a pseudonym to each interviewee to maintain teachers' anonymity and privacy. At the end of this stage, I started familiarizing myself with the collected data and overviewing them through reading and rereading the printed scripts.

As a result, I became thoroughly familiar with the data set which, although seemed an obvious step, was a crucial activity at the beginning of the data analysis stage (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It was after that extensive reading period, the more formal and rigorous analysis of the data started. Thus, after comprehensively reading all interview scripts, I organized the raw data by highlighting relevant interview responses (see **Appendix 15**).

At first, I conducted the initial open coding stage within the constructive grounded theory analytical approach (Cohen et al., 2018), in which each word was coded to be later classified into themes, categories or subcategories. Therefore, this level of analysing the individual semi-structured interviews involved extensive reading of the data collected from each interview text separately. At first, I did the analysis on paper using pens and highlighters (see **Appendix 15**). After that, however, I created a mind-map for each interviewee, to help me visualise the data and organize the initial coding in a systematic manner. To do this I used the mind-map tool in the NVivo software (see **Appendix 16**). This step was also helpful because by the time I finished creating a mind-map for each participant, I translated all the interview texts from Arabic into English. Doing the translation helped me read each script comprehensively, in order to translate the text in a manner that represented each teachers' responses. This step

enabled me to arrive at a description of the participant teachers' perception of their experience and practice (Radnor, 2002).

The second level of the analysis was axial coding. At this level I started a comparative analysis which involved constant comparisons across the data which led to generating the initial themes in a way that answered the research questions. At this level I started to identify links between codes and categories emerged from the open coding stage across participants. At the same time, I created a mind-map (see **Appendix 17 and Appendix 18** for a screenshot from NVivo) that integrated codes – from the previous stage – around the axes of central categories in order to visualize and examine the interrelationship and interconnectedness across codes emerged from each participant (Cohen et al., 2018).

Through both stages, memoing was used as an integral part of the analysis. In those memos, I wrote notes, ideas, thoughts, insights and personal observations about the data. To do this, I printed out the mind map created at the axial coding level and wrote down my memos on post-it sticky notes and added those to the sides of the map as ideas emerged (see **Appendix 19**). I continued to add memos, comments and ideas throughout the analysis phase of the study, linking data across all three data sources.

The final stage, involved selective coding, where core categories were identified and their relationship with other categories was made clear. At that stage, all the pieces (codes and categories) started to fit together and a recognizable picture started to emerge. For example, at that stage CLT challenges that EFL teachers face started to present themselves under themes that stemmed from factors related to CLT, teachers, students, the syllabus, classroom processes, the institutional environment, and teachers' absent voices. At this stage, I created a final mind-map categorizing themes, sub-themes and categories, along with references to individual participants (see **Appendix 20**). This step was crucially significant as it made locating quotes

easier. As soon as the themes emerged it was essential to review and re-read the initial interview scripts in order to make sure no further themes or subthemes were embedded in the responses (Radnor, 2002).

The final phase of the analysis process involved summarising and synthesising the data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) which was “where the interpretive process [took] over from the descriptive” (Radnor, 2002, p.88). Richards (2003) describes analysis as a no straightforward matter, an unfolding process of interactional exploration that begins with the first interview and enlightens the research process all the way to its final representation. At this stage, I was able to organize all the bits and pieces – data from the questionnaire, classroom observations and interviews – and I was able to see a vivid picture of primary EFL teachers’ challenges with CLT. By this stage I was able to integrate data from the questionnaire and observational notes under the themes, sub-themes and categories emerged from the interview data (see **Appendix 21**). As a result, I was able to write statements interpreting the findings within the categories. These, statements marked the end of the analysis stage and formed the basis for making sense and understanding what was going on – i.e. presenting the findings. At the end of this stage, in preparation for the interpretation, I organised the themes and categories in a table and integrated the supporting data from the questionnaire and observational notes with reflective statements (from my memos) to start interpreting the findings (see **Appendix 22**).

4.5.3 Analysing the questionnaire

Due to the exploratory nature of the study, the questionnaire data were descriptively analysed. This entailed describing EFL teachers’ agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items in terms of percentages and amounts represented in tables and diagrams (Trochim, 2006). This was done to reveal patterns in the data that helped in understanding the data and what it

conveyed (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014) which was found sufficient for the purposes of using the questionnaire as a tool in this study.

The purpose was describing primary EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT and its challenges and how those attitudes could help in understanding the data gathered from interviews and classroom observations. O'Dwyer & Bernauer (2014) argue that descriptive analysis would be sufficient for addressing the research questions in non-experimental descriptive research studies. Therefore, at this level of the analysis the aim was to describe what has been found in the data gathered without making predictions about the sample. However, those descriptions were integral in making sense and interpreting the data gathered later on in reporting and writing up the findings chapter (Cohen et al., 2018).

The package I subscribed to in SurveyMonkey provided a tool that conducted a basic descriptive analysis for the data set – distribution of the sample on attitudes towards the questionnaire items. Therefore, this level of analysis was found satisfactory for the exploratory interpretive nature of the study, the overall methodological design, purpose of using the questionnaire and for supporting evidence from the other methods of data collection. As a result of the descriptive analysis, the SurveyMonkey software generated tables describing the distribution of the sample on attitudes towards the items including number of cases and percentages (see **Appendix 23**). However, the tables – showing the results of the questionnaire – used throughout the thesis were converted to follow the guidelines of the APA style.

4.5.4 Analysing the classroom observation notes

At this phase of the analysis, I converted the handwritten notes I collected in the field into tables on the Microsoft Word software – each teachers' observation session in a separate table – in order to make managing and coding the data easier. Notes in the table were organized in light of the themes that emerged from analysing the interview data (see **Appendix 24**). After I

digitized the observational notes, I uploaded those documents into NVivo in order to code the notes of each session. I followed the grounded theory analytical framework in analysing the observational data. Hence, I started with open coding where I coded every line in the notes. At this stage I created codes for each item in the observation schedule as a category and coded my notes in every session under those main codes (see **Appendix 25**). After that, I moved to axial coding, where I identified links between the initial codes and decided that those codes could be grouped together under a certain category. At this level, certain codes started to form a pattern around the axes of certain central categories. For example, at this level a pattern was generated around the category labelled *Group-Work*. That pattern included codes about students engagement with group activities (see **Appendix 26**).

Finally, I moved to selective coding, in which I started comparing the codes across sessions to generate categories that encompassed relationships between the initial codes. For example, going back to the *Group-Work* category explained above, at this stage I compared codes generated across all observation sessions and therefore generated a category labelled students' engagement with group work. The resulting categories from this level of the analysis were then integrated with themes generated from the interviewing data (see **Appendix 27**). Therefore, data analysed at this phase of the analysis were used to support data generated from the interviewing data and as sub-themes and categories under some of the main themes that emerged.

4.6 Research Issues

This section describes how issues related to rigour and ethics were addressed in this study. Namely, this section details steps that have been taken to ensure the validity, reliability, credibility and trustworthiness of the data. This is done to reflect the researcher's interest in producing a robust piece of research (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, being aware of these issues as

a researcher who was a part of the world that I was researching, I considered these issues and kept them in mind as I went through the research process.

4.6.1 Validity and Reliability

The validation procedure of the questionnaire consisted of two phases, under which I took a number of actions in order to ensure that the instrument was valid and reliable. The first phase of the validation procedure involved ensuring the construct validity of the instrument in which the items were adapted from already established questionnaires in the field of language teaching. After that, the first draft of the questionnaire was sent to five professors – specialized in English curriculums and instructions from the College of Education at a local university in Saudi Arabia – to validate the appropriateness of the statements as ELT professionals and experts working with Saudi EFL teachers. I asked them to comment on whether:

the statements represented the principles of CLT

each item was essential for representing CLT principles

any of the content appeared biased

the directions for completing the instrument were clear and unambiguous

the format of the instrument (i.e. the layout and the response options) was appropriate for Saudi primary English teachers

the vocabulary and sentence structure were appropriate for Saudi English teachers in the primary level.

Four of the professionals replied and suggested some changes related to the wording of some statements. After some amendments based on the professors' comments and suggestions, the questionnaire was ready to the second level of the validation procedure.

The second phase of the validation procedure involved piloting the questionnaire and calculating its internal consistency. This was done to increase the validity, reliability and

practicality of the questionnaire (Cohen et al., 2018). In order to calculate the reliability coefficient, the pilot questionnaire – which originally consisted of 41 items – was sent to the 19 EFL primary school teachers resembling the specified sample of the study (see **Appendix 6**). The participants were asked to answer some questions at the end of the questionnaire about timing and clarity of the items and the instructions. Secondly, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability indicator in the SPSS software was used to determine the internal consistency of the items. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the initial questionnaire was .483 (see **Table 4.7**), the software suggested deleting some items to increase the reliability of the questionnaire. After deleting the suggested items, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .748 (see **Table 4.8**). Therefore, based on the reliability check it was decided that only 33 items of the original 41 items would constitute the final version of the scale (see **Appendix 7**).

Table 4.7

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.483	.596	41

Table 4.8

Reliability Statistics when items deleted

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.748	.769	33

4.6.2 Credibility and Trustworthiness

I was aware that as an interpretive researcher, I could not stand back from the research process. Hence, it was necessary that I engaged in a process of reflexivity and made sure to take actions to minimize any threats to the credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Moreover, I believed that effective research ought to give a faithful representation and accurate descriptions of the social phenomena under study, the data collected and the way by which they were analysed (Radnor, 2002). Thus, throughout the course of this study I strived to implement constant comparisons of the data, reviews of the categorizations, and member validation procedures to confirm the data as trustworthy evidence based on which interpretations were made (Radnor, 2002). Creswell and Creswell's (2018) approach to verifying qualitative data

suggested employing trustworthiness and authenticity in establishing the credibility of a study. The operationalisation of these terms, in this study, involved utilizing techniques such as triangulation of data sources and methods to establish the study's credibility, and thick description to ensure transferability of the findings between the researcher and participants. Triangulation of methods and data sources was used to provide corroborating evidence, in which data collected from individual semi-structured interviews, classroom-observations, and questionnaires were integrated to corroborate and shed light on interpretations and teachers' perspectives.

Researchers have the responsibility to inform the participants about the outcomes of the research in which they were involved (British Educational Research Association [BERA], 2018). Therefore, in compliance with this guideline, member checking was utilised as well as a verification procedure, which is arguably considered the most critical technique for establishing credibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The procedure involved taking a rough draft of the final themes back to the participants to judge the accuracy and credibility of interpretations (Creswell, 2014). The member check strategy in this study was done on two levels at two different stages within the investigation. First, it was embedded in the primary data collection procedure, when participants were asked to clarify what they typed in their initial interview responses, and when participants in classroom observation sessions were asked about observed incidents during the interviews. The second level, involved asking all participants in the observation and interviewing sample to check if the generated themes, sub-themes and categories accurately rendered their experiences, captured the meaning of those experiences and represented what they disclosed during the interviews, pre and post observation talks (Given, 2012). To do this, I contacted each of the participants via WhatsApp and sent them a PDF file and a picture of the final themes and categories that emerged from the data and asked them if they feel that those accurately

represent their experiences as primary EFL teachers. All the participants agreed that the themes seemed representative of the reality of their practice.

4.6.3 Reflexivity

Reflexivity was a fundamental part of establishing rigour in the study and improving its overall quality (Berger, 2015). This required me to reflect on my role as a researcher throughout the study. For instance, I had to reflect on my insider-outsider role with regards to the participants and the topic as well. For the participant, I was a stranger, an intruder, trying to peek into their classrooms particularly in classroom observations. This meant paying special attention to power relations with the participants, who might have perceived me as an expert or, worse, as an evaluator of their teaching practice due to my background and position as a Lecturer in a university (Richards, 2003). To minimize any effects of this issue, I made sure to help teachers understand that they were the experts and that the purpose of my existence was to report the challenges they face as EFL teachers implementing CLT at the primary level which was empowering and reassuring for them (Berger, 2015). On the other hand, during the observation sessions, I had to reflect on my role as an observer in light of my experience as a supervisor for practicum student-teachers. As a supervisor my job entailed observing practicum students to evaluate their behaviours. However, as a researcher my role as an observer was totally different, in which evaluating teachers' behaviours was not my purpose. Hence, to minimize falling into habit (Richards, 2003), I opted to utilize unstructured classroom observations. Furthermore, I designed the observation schedule in a way that enabled me to focus on collecting notes about challenges and incidents that affected teachers' ability to teach such as routines, contextual issues and interruptions during classes.

Moreover, I used partnering to prevent confirmation bias (Shufutinsky, 2020). To do this, I recruited a colleague of mine who was a PhD in TESOL researcher in the UK as well, to check

my translation of teachers' responses and to provide feedback regarding how they externally perceive my translations. I selected a number of quotes from the data and listed the original text in Arabic and my English translation under it and asked that colleague to read both and see if the translation captured the meaning in the original text. The colleague confirmed that the translation was very good and that it captured what has been said in the Arabic text.

4.6.4 Ethical considerations

On the ethical level, issues regarding informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were carefully considered. Therefore, since this research study followed the Ethics Policy set out by the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter, the Certificate of Ethical Research Approval required by the Graduate School of Education was completed, and the corresponding approvals and signatures were obtained (see **Appendix 28**). In addition, I obtained the approvals and permissions to access and collect data from Saudi Arabian state schools, required from the Saudi Cultural Bureau (see **Appendix 29**) and MOE (see **Appendix 30**).

Another ethical issue I considered, was my potential impact, as a researcher, on the participants and vice versa (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Minimizing any possible threats and maximizing robustness and accuracy of the analysis and interpretations of the data were believed to add to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Radnor, 2002). Therefore, to minimize threats, I clearly explained to the participants in this study the research aims and purposes, their roles, the confidentiality of the information they enclosed during observations and interviews, and their anonymity. As a result, all participant teachers were allocated pseudonyms and no specific information (such as names of urban and rural areas where the study was conducted, names of the schools) that might contribute to recognizing the participants was disclosed in this report. All possible indicators of who the participants were or the location of their schools were also

redacted from the appendices enclosed with this thesis. I also reassured them that they were never judged on what they said. In addition, I informed all the participants of their right to withdraw from the study if they wish to do so.

According to BERA (2018) ethical guidelines, participants should be treated fairly, sensitively and with dignity and freedom from prejudice in recognition of their rights. Thus, in respect to participants' concerns regarding audio-taping their voices, all the interviews were text-based conducted via IM (using WhatsApp Messenger). As a result, obtaining participants' consent form was adjusted accordingly, in which a copy of the consent form (see **Appendices 11**) and information sheet (see **Appendix 31** for the English version and **Appendix 32** for the Arabic version) – provided by the ethics committee in Exeter University – was sent as a PDF file to each teacher to read. Before each interview I made sure to ask teachers if they read and understood the consent form as an alternative to their signatures or verbal agreement to be involved.

With regards to classroom observations, there were three issues that I considered: the effect on the behaviour of the observed; possible consequences on the observer; the ethics of the observers' actions (Richards, 2003). To minimize my role and effect over the situation and increase the reliability and validity of the study at the same time, I utilized a non-participant unstructured approach to observation. Consequently, I did not participate in the classes – unless the teacher asked me to – I strived to observe classrooms as an outsider at the back of the class and took notes without being involved in the activities and classroom interactions. The other ethical issue I considered during classroom observations, was how the EFL teachers responded to my existence in their classes because this had significant impact on their actions during the process of collecting the observational data. Teachers would most likely perceive the existence of an observing researcher as superior or a spy (Richards, 2003). To overcome this, I made sure to meet with teachers first to build up rapport and gain their trust. At those meetings I

would set up a time they chose for the observation sessions, gave them a copy of the information sheet and consent form (see **Appendices 9, 10, 11 and 12**). I also explained that the purpose of the observations was to explore the challenges they faced not to evaluate or judge their teaching.

Finally, in the interest of transparency a number of steps were taken. First, the consent form clearly disclosed to the participants the possibility to reuse the data in future research studies by the researcher to address new research questions (BERA, 2018). I also aimed to be open and honest with the participants, in which I provided my contact information for participants – in all three methods of data collection – should they had any comments or concerns they wished to communicate with me. Similarly, with the classroom observations participants, I was willing to show teachers – who asked to – the items in my observation schedule in order to assure them that the purpose of the observations was to understand the challenges of implementing CLT at the classroom level. In the next chapter,

I will present the findings that emerged from the three data sets (interviews, classroom observations and the questionnaire).

Chapter 5

Findings

Overview

This chapter presents the findings yielded from the data obtained from the questionnaire, classroom observation notes, and individual semi-structured interviews of Saudi primary EFL teachers in state schools. The questionnaire data and the observational notes helped in setting up the line of questioning in the interviews in a way that encouraged interviewees to talk about their perspectives and experiences in depth. Through this process of exploration, the participants reported their perceptions on the challenges they face while teaching CLT at the primary level. The data also revealed teachers' perspectives towards numerous aspects of the curriculum.

The findings are presented in light of the themes emerged from the constructivist grounded theory analytical framework that was adopted to analyse the data collected for this study. As a result of that analytical process six main themes (see **Table 5.9**) emerged from the interview data. The emerged themes represented six main CLT challenges that Saudi primary EFL teachers have reported. Namely those challenges were related to: teachers' attitudes towards CLT itself, students, the syllabus, classroom processes, the institutional learning environment, and teachers' absent voices in decision making.

To reflect the complexity of the data, this chapter presents the findings that emerged from all three data sets integrated together. Thus, each theme will be supported by findings from interviews, observational notes, pre and post observation talks, and the questionnaire. The findings under each theme are interpreted, explained and commented on in light of previous research studies in the literature. In addition, some of the findings were linked to theory

(particularly findings about resources and the use of technology were linked to sociomateriality). The discussion of the finding will be further developed in Chapter 6.

Table 5.9

Themes emerged from semi-structured interviews

Challenging aspects of the curriculum for EFL teachers	Themes	Categories	Subcategories	
	1. Primary EFL teachers' challenges with CLT	1.1 Teachers' attitudes towards CLT		
		1.2 Teachers' ability to teach communicatively		
		1.3 Teachers' workload		
		1.4 "time-wasting and worthless" teachers' in service training and career development		
	2. Students' related challenges			
	3. Syllabus related challenges	3.1 Teachers' innovative initiatives		
3.2 Assessment related challenges				
4. Classroom process related challenges	4.1 CLT theory versus practice dilemma	4.1.1 Teachers' role		
		4.1.2 Students' role		
		4.1.3 Group work		
		4.1.4 Grammar and error correction		
	4.2 Time related challenges			
5. Institutional and learning environment related challenges	5.1 Classroom environment challenges			
	5.2 Challenges related to resources and teaching facilities			
6. teachers' absent voices and marginalization				

Note. The subcategories emerged from classroom observations and the questionnaire.

5.1 Primary EFL teachers' challenges with CLT

Four broad categories emerged under this theme. Those categories surfaced mainly in relation to teachers' perceptions of CLT, their ability to teach communicatively, their perspectives on in-service training, and their workload. The data emerged under this theme were dominant in the interview data. The questionnaire responses and observational data also highlighted some of the challenges teachers reported in the interviews and corroborated those reports.

5.1.1 Teachers' attitudes towards CLT

Since the focus of this study was to explore the challenges primary EFL teachers face while implementing the communicative approach, it was only logical to explore teachers' general attitudes towards the approach. EFL teachers, in the sample, reported mixed attitudes towards the implementation of CLT. Some teachers reported that the new curriculum (based on the communicative approach) was better than the old one, describing the new one as more engaging and interesting. Other teachers, on the other hand, thought that CLT was not suitable for students at the elementary level due to their very low English proficiency.

The difference in teachers' attitudes could be clearly seen in their responses to statements 9 and 10 in the questionnaire (see **Appendix 7**). In response to statement 10 (see **Table 5.10**), most of those surveyed (72%) indicated that their teaching practice was different before and after CLT. A possible explanation of this finding may be found in teachers' responses to statement 9 (see **Table 5.11**), in which 61% , of teachers in the survey sample, agreed that teaching English before the implementation of CLT was easier than teaching it after, indicating those teachers' negative attitudes towards the implementation of the approach. There are, however, other possible explanations for teachers' responses in statement 10, because one fourth (25%) of the sample opposed the notion that CLT made their teaching more difficult.

Table 5.10*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards implementing CLT (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
My teaching practice before and after CLT is different	2	2.67	5	6.67	14	18.67	40	53.33	14	18.67

Table 5.11*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards CLT (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teaching English before the implementation of CLT was easier than teaching it after CLT	3	4.00	16	21.33	10	13.33	40	53.33	6	8.00

The general dissatisfaction found in teachers' attitudes towards CLT, in the survey, was also echoed and explained further in teachers' responses in their individual interviews. In their accounts of their perspectives of CLT some interviewees felt that CLT was more interesting and engaging, while others considered it as incompatible with students' language abilities and learning style. Nonetheless, even those who felt CLT was good, expressed concerns about issues – such as inadequate time and number of classes per week – negatively affecting its proper implementation into their practice.

For example, one interviewee said:

The new curriculum is satisfactory. It is better than the old one, as it is more interesting and engaging for the students. (Afrah)

The same view was echoed by another participant who also said the new curriculum was fine, but indicated her concerns about time. As she put it:

The new curriculum is so wonderful ... we just need more than two classes a week so that we could achieve more desirable learning outcomes. (Samah)

Another participant said:

The new curriculum is excellent, but the teaching time of each instructional block was somehow not appropriately considered during course planning and syllabus design. (Najwa)

A few participants, on the other hand, explicitly referred to the new changes in the curriculum as unbecoming and incompatible with students' language abilities. For instance, commenting on the issue, one of the interviewees said:

The entry level of the curriculum is ill defined, it seems to aim at students of a higher level... students are still weak in the subject and the problem of their low proficiency is still not solved by adopting CLT. (Khloud)

This sense of dissatisfaction with CLT, amongst teachers in the study sample, could be attributed to teachers' awareness of the contextual barriers to its proper implementation into the EFL curriculum in the Saudi context. As some teachers indicated that CLT could be engaging and interesting, but other contextual factors, such as limited time, students' language abilities, and the teaching and learning environment, made it challenging to successfully implement the approach. These findings seemed to corroborate claims in the literature, that suggested that any discrepancy between CLT principles and teachers' attitudes would likely lead to their attempt to interpret its principles in light of their existing beliefs and translate CLT pedagogies to conform to their own style of teaching (Kisa & Correnti, 2015). It is possible, therefore, that these findings might further confirm the importance of investigating teachers' attitudes and the difficulties they face when implementing CLT. This type of exploration is critical in designing a sufficient support system that is needed in in-service development and training schemes. Neglecting teachers' perceptions in this regard could be a recipe for failure

and triviality (Fullan, 2015), because teaching is not a mechanical mindless activity, but rather a profession that largely depends on teachers' decision-making and judgement-making regarding the curriculum (Kelly, 1999).

5.1.2 Teachers' ability to teach communicatively

When teachers were asked about their views on their abilities to teach communicatively, a variety of perspectives were expressed. Teachers in the study sample reported challenges that could be categorized under two different levels; personal (such as teachers' ability to teach communicatively, English proficiency and competence) and contextual (such as the classroom environment and availability of resources). This category was generated mainly based on teachers' responses to the second question in the interview schedule (see **Appendix13**).

At the personal level, a number of issues were identified with regards to teachers' knowledge about CLT, having the necessary professional CLT teaching skills, and coping mechanisms they have adopted to deal with CLT. When asked about their perspectives on Saudi EFL teachers' capability to implement CLT into their practice, teachers had conflicting views in this regard. For example one interviewee said:

English teachers are totally capable to teach with the communicative approach and enjoying it with their students. (Abrar)

While another interviewee, when asked the same question, argued:

EFL teachers are insufficiently capable to adopt CLT. (Azhar)

These rather contradictory teachers' perspectives on their ability to teach communicatively might be due to the limited amount of training teachers had on how to integrate CLT into their teaching practice. Evidence of this inference can be clearly seen in Samah's comment when she talked about this matter. When I asked her if she was familiar with CLT before it was implemented into the English curriculum, she said:

Frankly, no I was not familiar with the concept [of CLT] ... we did not know anything about it. When they first changed the curriculum we had to go through a training course. Before that we were lost. We did not know how to teach the subject. We were lucky that the trainer in our district was really good. She taught us how to teach the new syllabus down to how much time we were supposed to spend on each activity.

Along with insufficient preparation and in-service training, these findings could indicate inefficiency in initial teacher preparation (ITP) programmes. As some teachers', like Samah, indication that they did not know what CLT was – before its implementation – was indicative of the fact that ITP programmes were offering outdated content that was disconnected from reality and from educational reforms that have taken place in the last two decades. This remark can corroborate concerns about those programmes reported in the OECD (2020) report about education in Saudi Arabia, which raised concerns about the quality of instruction in ITP and the extent of their ability to offer quality training for student teachers.

Other teachers also raised concerns about training in their responses about their ability to teach communicatively. For example, an interviewee said:

EFL teachers need more training on how to be CLT teachers. (Hind)

Another interviewee discussed the issue further and suggested:

If EFL teachers followed the instructions in the Teacher's Manual Book and familiarized themselves with the general goals of teaching English in the primary level, dealing with CLT should become easier. (Samah)

However, this suggestion might be problematic for two reasons. First, the goals of foreign/second language teaching in the Saudi Arabian educational system have been questioned and described as unclear due to the lack of a clear language policy (see Al-Essa, 2009; Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Elyas & Badawood, 2016; Tayan, 2017). Secondly, an analysis of the contents of the Teacher's Manual Book for the fourth grade – for the *Smart Class* syllabus – revealed that the instructions given to teachers in the book did not encourage communicative activities, but rather traditional teacher-controlled ones (Fallatah, 2014). This observation, was also corroborated by data obtained from Alharbi (2020), who analysed a

communicative textbook at the middle school level in Saudi state schools. The study concluded that most of the activities were very teacher-controlled and provided limited opportunities for students to communicate freely in the target language.

Based on the teachers' comments above, it seemed that teachers were unfamiliar with CLT before it was implemented, and that they were in dire need for training in how to implement it. These findings indicated that the support and training teachers' have got was not enough, because teachers in the sample reported that they were still struggling with the approach after more than a decade of its implementation into the curriculum.

In fact, when asked about the difficulties they face while teaching CLT, over half (56%) of EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample (see **Table 5.12**) agreed that teachers' knowledge about using the CLT methodology in EFL classrooms was one of the difficulties of implementing the approach. What was curious about the responses to this statement was the fact that 30% (see **Table 5.12**) of EFL teachers in the sample opted for a neutral response. It might be difficult to determine why participants opted for the neutral response, for it could be due to a number of reasons including; masking nonresponse, lack of opinion or interest in the matter or unfamiliarity with the process of expressing opinions in such matters. More findings about teachers' knowledge of the principles of the communicative approach will be discussed under the theme focused on challenges related to classroom processes (section 5.4).

Table 5.12

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards teachers' knowledge about CLT (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers knowledge about using the CLT methodology in EFL classrooms	3	4.00	7	9.33	23	30.67	38	50.67	4	5.33

Teachers' low English proficiency (as well as students' low proficiency for this matter) was yet another possible factor that could explain why EFL teachers still find CLT difficult to implement. This assumption was based on teachers' responses to statements 30 and 31 in the questionnaire (see **Appendix 7**). Almost two-thirds of EFL teachers who participated in the survey reported their own low English proficiency (65%) as well as their weakness in strategic and sociolinguistic competences (60%) as obstacles in the face of successful CLT implementation. Interestingly, however, around 20% –which was more than those who disagreed with both statements – of the participants chose the neutral option (neither agree nor disagree) as a response for both statements (see **Table 5.13** and **Table 5.14**).

Survey participants could opt for neutral responses due to a number of different reasons including (but not limited to); masking ignorance about the matter, lack of opinion, or the tendency to opt the mid-point of the scale (Cohen et al., 2018; Blasius & Thiessen, 2001). This might suggest that the participants thought that proficiency did not make any difference with regards to implementing CLT or they simply did not have an opinion on the matter. This rather intriguing result could be due to a number of other reasons, hence, these inferences should be taken with caution.

Table 5.13*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards challenges hindering CLT (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers' low English proficiency	2	2.67	6	8.00	18	24.00	42	56.00	7	9.33

Table 5.14*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards challenges hindering CLT (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers' weakness in strategic and sociolinguistic competences	4	5.33	6	8.00	20	26.67	36	48.00	9	12.00

At the contextual level, some interviewees suggested that some context-related aspects – such as classroom environment and large students' numbers – made it difficult to properly implement CLT at the primary level. These contextual challenges will be outlined later in this chapter (in section 5.5 under institutional and learning environment related challenges).

5.1.3 Teachers' workload

One of the recurrent issues reported in the interviews, was a sense amongst interviewees that they were overloaded with teaching as well as administrative responsibilities that consumed their time and energy. Time and energy they could have used, as they claimed, in preparing communicative activities or joining proper professional development training. Teachers in the survey sample, also, reported concerns about their workload. While the majority of those surveyed (80%) thought teachers should supplement the textbook with other materials and

activities (see **Table 5.15**), a little less than those (around 75%) also reported that teachers having limited time to prepare communicative materials as one of the obstacles of successful CLT implementation (see **Table 5.16**).

Table 5.15

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards using materials to supplement textbooks (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks to meet the individual differences among students	5	6.67	3	4.00	7	9.33	40	53.33	20	26.67

Table 5.16

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards ability to prepare communicative activities (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers' having limited time to prepare communicative materials	2	2.67	9	12.00	8	10.67	41	54.67	15	20.00

A variety of perspectives were expressed by EFL teachers in the interviewing sample regarding teachers' workload. Some teachers complained that they were forced to teach other subjects (such as Islamic Studies, Arabic, Art, and PE) in addition to English. Because English is taught

only two times a week and sometimes once a week, EFL teachers have to compensate for their mandated (24 hours/ week) teaching hours per week. Thus, teachers indicated being forced to do this by teaching other subjects, or taking, mandatory, stand-in (supply) teaching assignments in other schools in addition to taking on administrative responsibilities in the school. Almost all teachers (8 teachers) in the classroom-observation sample mentioned that they were teaching two or more subjects beside English at the time. For instance, after her observation session, I asked Noha about the issue and she complained:

I had to accept teaching Islamic Studies, otherwise my supervisor would have sent me on a stand-in supply teaching assignment in another school to cover for teachers who are on sick leave ... then I would be splitting my time between two different schools... For me, it is better to stay in my school and teach three different subjects than teaching English in two different schools.

This indicated that teachers were pressured into teaching other subjects and doing administrative work or threatened of being assigned for stand-in assignment in other schools. This could imply teachers' lack of voice and choice in the decision making procedures, indicating a top-down managerial approach in the Saudi education system. The issue of teachers' marginalization is addressed in detail later in this chapter (under section 5.6).

In addition to teaching other subjects, teachers also reported taking administrative responsibilities, such as chairing the extra-curricular or the quality and accreditation committees in the school. Some participants, especially in schools in rural areas, reported that they had to teach English for more than one level, other subjects as well as doing administrative work. This was evident in the case of Faten, who was an English teacher in a Qur'anic school complex – where primary, intermediate and secondary levels share the same school building – in a rural village outside the city. When I asked her about the challenges she was facing – after her observation session – Faten was especially passionate about the issue of workload, about which she complained:

I currently teach six different English curriculums [three grades in the primary level plus the three grades at the intermediate level], I also teach Arts and other subjects ... I am the students' councillor of the school and supervisor of the schools Resource Centre.

Based on the previous findings, it seems that EFL teachers have to assume the role of 'jack of all trades, master of none', in which all the time and energy they consume in doing what they were not supposed to do, could be invested in doing meaningful and relevant professional training and career development courses. In fact, teachers did report that they were in desperate need for all the time and efforts to be better prepared to improve the quality of their teaching by joining relevant in-service training and professional development courses. For example, Azhar (an EFL teacher in an evening primary school) suggested:

One of the solutions is to reduce primary EFL teachers' workload so that we could focus on our own teaching practice and work creatively.

Interestingly, however, a few participants referred to in-service training as a contributor to the pressure on their workload, describing it as an extra burden. This will be explained further in section 5.1.4 below.

Other interviewees felt that the current assessment procedures especially for under achievers were adding extra pressure on their workload. This issue will be addressed in detail in the third theme of this study designated for syllabus related challenges (section 5.3.1 in particular).

A small number of teachers, also, reported constant changes in policies as another burden that added extra work over their already overloaded schedules. Talking about this issue, Asmaa (who has been an EFL teacher for about ten years) said:

I seriously started thinking about early retirement. Because of the constant policy changes which created an atmosphere of instability for me as a teacher. It is like the General Directorate of Education comes up, literally every moment, with a brand new intervention in the middle of the term. And it is annoying and not fair for teachers because we do not have the time to cope with and implement all these changes.

Similarly, other teachers complained about the pressure of being obligated to meet all requirements made by their supervisors which was challenging because it restricted their autonomy and made their jobs confusing sometimes.

A small number of participants expressed frustration towards the discrepancy between the recommendations they get from their supervisors (either during in-service training or in meetings) and the requirements they had to meet for their annual appraisals. For instance, in observation session #5, I noticed that students were very engaged with the teacher. Thus, after the session we talked about activities and students' engagement in them. During her talk, however, Najwa indicated:

In one of the in-service training courses the trainer [who is usually a supervisor from the General Directorate of Education] recommended that we focus on communicating knowledge in a way that is simple and engaging for the students regardless to the quantity of the tasks they end up doing. However, when my supervisor came to observe me she insisted that all tasks in the textbook should be done during class and that those activities should be supplemented by extra teacher-prepared activities and worksheets

While others, on the other hand, reflected on how the articulated nature of the syllabus restricted their autonomy and limited their chances of pursuing in-service training opportunities. These particular challenges were clearly observed during classroom observations. Given that I conducted all observations over the same period of time (sometimes observing two teachers in two different schools on the same day), I noticed that everywhere I went teachers of the same grade were teaching the exact same page or part of the lesson in every school. Similarly, I noticed, in all observation sessions, that teachers had to rush activities and tasks in order to cover a certain number of pages in the textbook specified in the syllabus distribution plan.

Thus, in observation session #9, I asked the teacher about the issue and she explained that by the beginning of each semester supervisors – from General Directorate of Education – would send each EFL teacher a very articulated syllabus distribution plan, in which lessons are

assigned to specific dates on the calendar so that all teachers would be teaching the same lesson on the same day nationwide. She also explained that if the teacher missed a day either for in-service training or for personal reasons, then she would be obligated to find the time to catch up with the syllabus distribution plan.

These findings were significant in at least two major respects. First, the findings indicated teachers' lack of voice and choice in a top-down managerial approach to education within the Saudi educational system. Second, the present findings could be seen as significant indicators of the negative effects of the neoliberalist approach to education that the Saudi government opted for in education, where accountability, performativity and constant teacher evaluation have been prioritized in order to improve school performance in an international scale (Tayan, 2017). Under such performance pressures teachers might be forced to spend more time and attention trying to teach perfect lessons – to fulfil the requirements of performance measures – rather on improving students' (particularly struggling ones who might need remediation) learning (Powell & Parkes, 2020).

An indication of this, can be seen in the shift in teachers' behaviour and tendency to deliver perfect lessons to impress supervisors. For instance, when I contacted one of the teachers before her observation session, she asked me what type of lesson – regular quality class or supervisor quality class – I was interested to observe. At first, I thought that her response was strange. However, after further reflection, I realised that as a result of performativity and accountability pressures, teachers were forced to change their teaching plans and behaviours to comply with those demands. These findings could further corroborate those obtained in previous studies that indicated that the adoption of neoliberal accountability frameworks had affected English teachers in Saudi Arabia restricting their autonomy and affecting their professional identity and understanding of the teaching profession (Eusafzai, 2017; Tayan, 2017). These factors in addition to lack of support, training and proper education resulted in increasing demands and

pressures placed upon EFL teachers and the teaching profession in general. Thus, these findings seemed to be consistent with other research studies which found that accountability pressures placed on teachers resulted in intensification and bureaucratization, increased forms of managerialism, and greater accountability and public scrutiny (Flores, 2005; Holloway & Brass, 2018).

5.1.4 “time-wasting and worthless” teachers’ in service training

With regards to this category, teachers raised concerns about the content quality of in-service training, trainers’ competency as well as timing and availability of teachers’ training opportunities. Whilst teachers mentioned a number of challenges under this theme, the majority expressed the desire for more relevant quality training that addressed their needs and reflected the reality of what they were experiencing inside classrooms on a daily basis.

When participants were asked to what extent their in-service training and career development courses were satisfactory, adequate and relevant to their teaching needs, only a minority of the respondents reported their satisfaction with the training they were receiving. Only three teachers reported favourable attitudes towards formal in-service training and career development seminars. For example, Samah, explicitly described formal training courses as:

“Wonderful. Every EFL teacher needs it ... it is very relevant to our needs”

The other two participants described these training courses as “relatively good”.

In the conversation below, the interviewee raised the issue of localized training, in which school staff (teachers as well as head teachers) offer training in topics of interest for teachers:

Hind: I offered two workshops about Active Learning strategies for teachers. I train in my school.

Rajaa: how does it work? Do you volunteer? Or do you need permission from your supervisor?

Hind: the head teacher recommended me for it, and I did. Sometimes the supervisor chooses... the supervisor selected me and she invited teachers to my school so that I can offer them a workshop ... they [the MOE] are now encouraging localizing in-service training in schools, so now there is peer-training in every school ... this improves the school's ranking. Therefore, head teachers are eager to enforce localized training, sometimes they offer seminars themselves.

Rajaa: what happens when the school's ranking improves? What does it mean for you and the students in the school?

Hind: the school scores higher in the ranking system. And many parents register their kids in our school based on the quality of teachers and our commitment to use Active Learning strategies because it makes students eager to learn and cultivates their higher-order thinking skills.

Although the idea of localizing in-service training might seem a positive step in the right direction, its potential benefit should be interpreted with caution. It could be argued that if not carefully planned, this type of training might not be sufficient for EFL teachers as normally this type of training can more likely be general for teachers of all subjects rather than subject-specific. In fact, the teacher in the above quote indicated that although she trained her colleagues in active learning strategies twice, she also trained in health and safety for three years. In addition, as Hind indicated head-teachers could encourage this type of training just to score higher in the ranking system, for competitive purposes, regardless to the quality and relevance of the training to teachers' actual needs.

Nonetheless, the majority of the teachers, including Hind, in the sample of this study painted a rather gloomy picture of how they perceived formal in-service seminars and career-development training courses. Those reports indicated that teachers lost faith in this type of training relying on more self-directed learning. The comment below can illustrate the level of teachers' mistrust in the worth of official in-service training:

"The same professional development courses are repeated every year, we need new programmes. Even those ones can sometimes be impractical and difficult to apply at the primary level ... I now learn and look for information online, I train myself in Google. I do not rely on formal in-service training." (Hind)

During a post-observation conversation (in observation session # 6), the teacher reported a similar attitude and lack of confidence in formal training, as she said:

“I have more confidence in private informal professional development courses because they are better and more useful than those held at the District Educational Office or the General Directorate of Education.”

One of the interviewees complained about the competency of some trainers in formal training seminars. As she put it:

“We [teachers] find them [professional development courses] useless due to incompetent trainers who are not specialists in the field, this is why these courses are not compatible with our teaching needs.” (Faten)

Some teachers complained that attending in-service training was seen as an extra burden for teachers rather than an opportunity for professional development. For instance, one interviewee was particularly critical of the quality of such courses. She said:

“time-wasting and worthless, and on top of that it is an extra burden on the teacher, because it messes up her schedule and the syllabus distribution plan because you see I would have to miss a day in school in order to attend the training course and then I have to find the time to make up for that missing lesson ... I would tell you if in-service training is compatible with my needs, if we had adequately qualified trainers in the first place” (Khloud)

Other respondents were particularly critical of the discrepancy between what trainers in formal training seminars suggested they should do and the reality of their practice inside classrooms.

For example one teacher argued:

“Professional development programmes are generally good. However, most of these programmes are impractical only theoretical and idealistic talk and some trainers seem to be living in La-La Land, they never tried to actually apply what they are recommending and asking us to do in the field. Also, the duration of the courses is always off, either too short or oversimplified” (Azhar)

The findings in this category were significant, not only because they showed teachers’ negative perspectives towards and lack of faith in structured in-service training and formal professional development, but also because they indicated teachers’ sense of agency and intrinsic motivation to learn and take the initiative to improve their own teaching practice. This awareness of their

agency and inclination to seek some forms of self-directed professional development and learning was one of the most interesting findings of this study. These findings were also in agreement with findings of previous studies in this area linking CLT challenges with the quality of teachers' in-service training and professional development. Studies conducted in a number of EFL contexts reported that governments took a hasty decision to implement CLT without providing proper training for EFL teachers (Butler, 2011), and that EFL teachers had little meaningful and efficient in-service training – that helped them understand CLT and its implementation – during their careers (Abahussain, 2016; Alzaidi, 2011; Chang, 2011; Shihiba, 2011).

5.2 Students' related challenges

Teachers in the sample reported a number of student related challenges. Namely, EFL teachers referred to: students' learning needs, perceptions of English as a subject, background, learning style, and lack of contact with English outside classrooms, as some of the challenges of teaching English communicatively at the primary level. Findings from the questionnaire and classroom observations corroborated some of those issues as well.

The majority of primary EFL teachers in the study sample – in both the interviews and the questionnaire – reported students' low English proficiency as an issue that made implementing CLT a challenging task. In a number of cases, the interviewees reported students' low proficiency as yet another challenge they had to deal with while implementing CLT. For example, one interviewee said:

Students are still very weak in English, CLT has not improved their low proficiency.
(Khloud)

This finding was corroborated by questionnaire responses, as can be seen in **Table 5.17**, around 75% of teachers in the questionnaire thought that students' low English proficiency was one of the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level in Saudi Arabia.

Table 5.17

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards difficulties hindering CLT (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students' low English proficiency	2	2.67	4	5.33	13	17.33	46	61.33	10	13.33

These findings were consistent with data from classroom-observation sessions as well, which showed that students relied on rote learning, memorizing and copying the teacher's sampled models, and imitating forms from the textbook. More about this will be discussed in section 5.4.1 under classroom process related challenges. However, for the purpose of corroborating the point made here, some observations from classroom observation sessions might need to be presented. During most sessions, it was clear that students lacked the ability to independently communicate in English. For instance, in observation session 3B (an English lesson for the 6th grade), students were very dependent on teacher's modelling, explanation and sometimes translation before they could do a task or answer a question. For instance at the beginning of the lesson the teacher tried to warm up the class by asking students what they did during the weekend, no one was willing to attempt sharing their activities at first, until the teacher sampled the expected response by saying:

"I went to the mall in [named a city] on Saturday".

After that some students started to raise their hands and shared places they visited in the weekend following the same form the teacher used combined with names of places they were studying in the unit they covered that week:

Student 1: I went to the mall on Saturday

Student 2: I went to the park

Student3: I went to the ... Mosque

This finding might broadly support those of Najjar (2013) who reported that despite teachers' positive attitudes towards CLT, students' low English competence and lack of opportunities for interactive communicative use of English, limited CLT effective implementation. The study further suggested that low-proficiency passive learners might need more than CLT as it might need to be supplemented by more traditional methods to improve their English learning.

One of the things that some teachers mentioned, that could explain students' low proficiency, was students' lack of contact with English outside the classroom. These findings were not surprising especially given the fact that students were still in the primary level and more importantly in all public tertiary level state-schools in Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language. However, in this time of the technological revolution students could have more access to English either via video games or other content available on online platforms such as YouTube and streaming services. This finding matched claims in Moskovsky & Picard (2019) who reported that many Saudi students lack motivation to learn English as they still encounter it rarely in their daily lives. Implications of this could be related to challenges teachers reported in this study related to lack of proper resources and equipment, particularly, students' as well as teachers' lack of access to the internet while in school, which will be discussed later in this chapter (in section 5.5.2).

When asked about the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level, one interviewee commented:

Limited number of classes and lack of opportunities for the student to practice the language outside the class and therefore she easily forgets what she learns inside the classroom. (Samah)

In fact, based on classroom-observation data, students' contact with English inside the classroom was insufficient either. For it was noted in the majority of classroom observation sessions that even during the limited time students had inside classrooms, they spent that time

passively listening – as knowledge receivers – to teachers’ explanation rather than using the language in communication or negotiation (as will be explained further in section 5.4.1). Those surveyed confirmed this inference, in which nearly 70% agreed that students’ passive learning style and reliance on teachers to ‘spoon-feed’ them as one of the challenges of implementing CLT into their practice (see **Table 5.18**).

Table 5.18

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards difficulties hindering CLT (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Students’ passive style of learning and dependence on the teacher	2	2.67	6	8.00	15	20.00	38	50.67	14	18.67

In their accounts of students’ related challenges during the interviews, EFL teachers referred to other student related obstacles such as; students’ perception of English, different individual abilities, and socio-economical background (parents’ educational levels and/or their income). A number of those interviewed, indicated that those three issues combined, including others, were obstacles hindering any successful implementation of CLT at the primary level. For example, one interviewee stated that:

We have to use CLT with students who do not know how to study English, their parents do not teach them which makes English a difficult subject because they do not memorize and practice at home so English as a subject becomes incomprehensible for them. (Asmaa)

And another, when asked about the challenges of being a primary EFL teacher, commented:

The challenges are lack of parents’ involvement in their kids’ education, the students come from financially disadvantaged backgrounds with no access to the internet ... and students’ belief in the idea that English is a difficult subject. (Abrar)

In her pre-observation talk (observation session 8), Samah (who was a teacher with Abrar in the same school) argued that students' background negatively affected students' learning progress – the school was located in one of the underprivileged areas in the south-western district of the city, an area heavily populated by disadvantaged communities including (but not limited to) Burmese refugees and resident-permit holders and/or violators from non-Arabic speaking African countries – in her school. As she put it:

The biggest difficulty we face is that our students mainly come from disadvantaged backgrounds which means they come from foreigner non-Arabic speaking communities and this negatively affects their learning progress.

Both teachers (and the school principle when I talked to her) later – during a post-observation conversation – explained that the majority of students in the school came from low income families and were struggling with learning in Arabic which made learning English even harder. These findings suggested that students' socioeconomic conditions restricted their opportunities to take advantage of some of the resources they should have access to – such as the online supplementary materials provided with each textbook – in order to improve their learning experience. These findings confirmed data obtained from Nayeem et al. (2020), in which poor socioeconomic conditions were listed as one of the major challenges to implementing CLT in Bangladesh. The consequences of these issues on the proper implementation of CLT will be discussed further, later in section 5.5 of this chapter. The findings here were particularly interesting, and may be unexpected, because students' poor socioeconomic conditions are not often reported with regards to the Saudi Arabian educational context.

EFL teachers in the interviewing sample gave a number of recommendations, when they were asked what they would suggest should be done to deal with these student related challenges. The majority of interviewees proposed that English should be gradually introduced to students from grade 1, in which the entry and exit levels are sequenced from basic literacy skills to the more complex language components. Responses to this question included:

“I recommend teaching English from the first grade” (Najwa)

“We need to start by teaching students basic English literacy skills, including learning the alphabets, listening to, repeating and memorizing the most common words, then gradually introducing simple sentences... this should be the English curriculum for the first six years [the primary level], after that students can start learning grammar in the next three years [the intermediate level]”. (Asmaa)

Others even suggested giving students private tutoring lessons at a nominal charge. Other teachers – especially those teaching in rural areas and remote regions in the country – have even suggested teaching English for parents in underprivileged and rural communities. For instance, two of the respondents in the interviewing sample – both were teaching in a rural areas – made the following suggestions:

“Encouraging both students and their families to learn English and providing tutoring lessons” (Noor)

“Raising students’ and their parents’ awareness of the importance of learning English” (Rana)

Teachers’ recommendations under this category indicated their awareness of the importance of increasing students’ contact with the target language in and outside the classroom in order to enhance the implementation of the communicative approach into the curriculum.

The findings in this regard were grouped around a number of issues such as resources, time and the impact of students’ background on their learning progress. A possible explanation for this might be that teachers were aware of the importance of giving students equal opportunities when it came to accessing all available resources. These findings may also indicate teachers’ awareness of the importance of adequate teaching resources in order to efficiently implement CLT.

Before moving on to the next theme, it might be useful to adopt a theoretical lens through which these interesting findings can be understood. These findings might have implications on the socio-materiality of education which can offer a theoretical explanation of how teaching and learning practices might be affected by material elements such as resources and

technologies. Within this theory, the material element can be seen as an actor – in and of itself full of agency – within education which is seen as a complex system (Fenwick et al., 2011). Based on this view, the material (resources) and the social (teaching and learning) are intertwined (Johri, 2011) in forming educational practice (Sørensen, 2009). Thus, the findings here corroborated Sørensen’s (2009) idea that when materials are removed – on the basis of a simplified understanding of technology as an instrument for educational aims – from educational practice, consequently teachers are often unnerved by the chaos and loose ends formed by the disruption of the relations within which materials were connected to educational practice. This simplified understanding hides the quality and contribution of materials and the ways they act in educational processes (Fenwick et al., 2011). Resources, in the context of this study, for example exert power, because, as teachers reported, they enacted certain pedagogical activities and limited students’ abilities to learn effectively and benefit fully from the curriculum. This can also corroborate findings of previous studies that suggested technology could have a fundamental role to play in implementing CLT in EFL contexts, as it can come to the aid of teachers with low English proficiency in teaching communicatively (Brown, 2007).

5.3 Syllabus related challenges

Concerns about the instructional materials – including print as well as non-print materials – were widespread in the data. There was a sense of dissatisfaction with the design of the syllabus amongst EFL teachers in the sample, in which the majority of teachers expressed concerns about the syllabus mainly in relation to time, content, structure and appropriateness to students’ learning needs, abilities and proficiency levels.

The overwhelming majority of teachers in the study sample used words such as: “heavy”, “articulated”, “long”, “demanding”, and “knowledge-packed”, to describe the syllabus. It is worth noting here, that at the time of collecting data for this study, three different national syllabi were taught in Saudi public state schools across all grades and levels. According to

Abdullah Albadry – a member of the Centre of English Language (CEL initiative) under the MOE Centre of Qualitative Initiatives set to oversee developing ELT in Saudi Arabia – the MOE has been piloting three textbooks – Smart Class, We Can and Get Ready designed by three different publishers – in each tertiary level of state schools (TESOL Arabia, 2019). In the sample of this study the majority of those surveyed (250 participants initially responded to this question in the questionnaire) in addition to teachers in the interview and classroom observation samples reported using the Smart Class syllabus (see **Table 5.19**).

Table 5.19

Distribution of sample on which syllabus was taught (N = 250)

Item	We Can		Get Ready		Smart Class	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Which syllabus are currently teaching?	40	16.00	86	34.40	124	49.60

In terms of time, a number of interviewees argued that there was inconsistency between the input of each lesson – the number of teaching points in the lesson – and time. Limited time was another widespread issue in the data, and will be discussed in detail later in section 5.4.2. For the purpose of illustrating teachers’ perspectives about the issue of time with regards to the syllabus, the excerpt below was included here as an example. The teacher here – who was an EFL teacher in a Qur’anic primary school, which meant lesser number of English classes per week for grades 4 and 5 – commented:

“One of the difficulties in the primary level is that the syllabus is too long and it is supposed to be covered in a very limited number of classes per week” (Afrah)

These findings were hardly surprising, given the fact that Saudi students at the state-schools elementary level only receive a total of 60 hours of English instructions per year (Al-Seghayer,

2017). This meant that students had very limited exposure to the English language and consequently limited opportunities to use it for communicative purposes. These findings were consistent with those reported in earlier studies. For instance, the findings in Mahammad and Pandey (2020) revealed students' need for a sufficient number of contact hours in order to get ample exposure to the language and improve their communicative competence.

Some interviewees even expressed concerns about the compatibility of the syllabus content with students' proficiency levels and language ability. Those respondents, thought that the syllabus content should be sequenced in which it would start with basic literacy, social and communication skills for the 4th grade and then gradually introduce more complex skills such as grammar. Commenting on this issue an interviewee said:

The students' workbook is packed with exercises and the problem is that students are still very weak I think the solution is sequencing the syllabus and changing the nature of tasks in the textbook by including games, role playing and singing with other scaffolding exercises" (Khlood)

When I asked the teachers what could be done to solve this particular issue, many echoed Khlood's view. Therefore, the majority of teachers recommended sequencing the instructional blocks in the syllabus, in which it starts with teaching letters and numbers, songs about greetings, personal identification and social language at the entry level (for 4th graders), and gradually introducing the more complex language skills (language form and grammar). Others, recommended reducing the number of lessons and the amount of information included in the textbooks. For example, one teacher suggested:

"Reducing the density of the knowledge content of the curriculum, because the syllabus is packed with a tremendous amount of trivial information and words that are unpractical and do not reflect the real world or students' practical life" (Rana)

This finding was consistent with that of Al-Qahtani (2016) who concluded that English textbooks in Saudi Arabia contained many lessons, long lists of vocabulary items and instructional materials that teachers struggled to go through within limited class times. These

findings might indicate inconsistency in planning the curriculum at two different levels. On the one hand, the findings suggested lack of coordination between the content of the syllabus and the time allocated for teaching the syllabus. On the other hand, the findings also indicated a mismatch between the general aims of the curriculum, i.e. teaching communicatively, and the way the curriculum was implemented in terms of the time allocated to teaching English as a foreign language in state schools.

In addition to inconsistency in planning the curriculum, several other factors could explain these findings. Firstly, the articulated nature of the syllabus could push teachers to rely more on textbooks, which might be inconsistent with CLT principles. Unlike other more traditional language teaching methodologies, CLT – in the context of foreign language teaching – was described in terms of calling for the “gradual move beyond course books as sole or even principal determiners of the language syllabus and towards the use of authentic texts and other personalised inputs selected by teachers and pupils themselves” (Field, 2000). This finding was consistent with those of Rahmatuzzman (2018) who indicated that one of the key difficulties of implementing CLT was teachers’ formal teaching that seemed to have more contextual attachment to completing the syllabus rather than teaching to support communication. This reliance on textbooks and pressure on teachers to strictly do what the textbook instructed them to do, could lead to ineffective language teaching and learning. Accordingly, teachers would not have the time to use communicative activities and learners would not have the opportunity to develop their communicative competence. As a result, the communicative goals of the curriculum would not be attained. The findings here, might also be seen from the lens of sociomateriality, in which they suggested that textbooks had power and agency in forcing teachers to adhere to the textbooks (Fenwick et al., 2011) even when they were clearly struggling with time.

Teachers' awareness about this issue was also reflected in the questionnaire, in which approximately 80% of those surveyed thought that textbooks must be supplemented by other materials (see **Table 5.20** below), and 60% of the participants agreed that the lack of authentic teaching materials was one of the obstacles of adopting CLT (see **Table 5.21**).

Table 5.20

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards accommodating students' differences (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks to meet the individual differences among students	5	6.67	3	4.00	7	9.33	40	53.33	20	26.67

Table 5.21

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards difficulties hindering CLT (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Lack of authentic teaching materials	4	5.33	11	14.67	15	20.00	41	54.67	4	5.33

Secondly, the findings may indicate teachers' awareness of the importance of introducing functions and general notions as important constituents of any communicative EFL syllabus in addition to grammar and vocabulary. As the findings indicated that some EFL teachers in the sample acknowledged that the focus of teaching within CLT should be shifted from teaching knowledge about English to the ability to use it in a meaningful way. Unfortunately, the

findings here suggested that this was not possible with the currently taught syllabus – which teachers described as packed with irrelevant information – that focused on knowledge about grammar and vocabulary rather than on maximizing students’ opportunities to actually use the target language for meaningful purposes. These findings agreed with those of other studies, in which EFL resources in Saudi Arabia were described as inauthentic, decontextualized from the language and not meaningful (Al-Attar, 2014). This was another indicator of incompatibility between practice and the sole characteristics of CLT, within which language would be normally acquired and used in social interactions with attention on giving learners opportunities to use the target language creatively to complete tasks rather than on correctness of language structure (Field, 2000).

Hence, to overcome some of the syllabus related challenges, three EFL teachers in the sample took the initiative and developed extracurricular activities in order to help students improve their language abilities either to introduce English for 3rd graders or as a scaffolding strategy for 4th, 5th and 6th graders. A more detailed description of those initiatives is discussed in the following section.

5.3.1 Teachers’ innovative initiatives

This category demonstrated three innovative scaffolding strategies – designed by three EFL teachers – used as solutions to some of the syllabus related challenges. All three initiatives were teacher organized, in which these teachers took the initiative to improve their students’ English learning experiences. Two of these initiatives focused on introducing English to 3rd graders – a year earlier than the national curriculum – in order to prepare them for studying English in the 4th grade. The third one, on the other hand, was a scaffolding extracurricular scheme initiated to encourage collaboration between overachievers and underachievers using a peer learning approach. These initiatives, indicated teachers’ sense of agency in improving

their students' learning and their perceptions of the age and time assumption as will be explained at the end of this section.

5.3.1.1 The Early Contact Scheme:

Hind – the only English teacher in her school – used a self-directed learning strategy in order to improve the English abilities of her students. By the end of each academic year she would send 3rd graders, and their parents, a copy of the interactive programme – an electronic copy of the textbook provided by the MOE – of the 4th grade English syllabus and links to YouTube educational videos for students and their parents to self-train themselves during the summer vacation (which used to be three months for the primary level). According to Hind, she shared her strategy with other EFL teachers in a workshop she led. As a result, her strategy was adopted by the District Office of Education in her school district and was circulated as a recommendation for other EFL teachers in the school district to adopt in their own schools.

When asked about the outcomes of her initiative, Hind said:

The strategy is very helpful particularly in teaching reading, because students' numbers are very big and monitoring all of them during class is difficult, it also helps students overcome their fear of English as a new subject and so they come to class ready and confident.

5.3.1.2 The three-steps English learning scheme for the 3rd grade:

Asmaa started the scheme at a school in an underprivileged area of the city populated by foreign workers and illegal immigrants, where parents were most likely illiterate non-Arabic speakers. The scheme focused on introducing English for students in the 3rd grade – a year before the national curriculum – in three sequential steps. The first two steps targeted 3rd graders. In the first step, she would teach kids basic literacy skills, such as letters and numbers, and classroom commands. She mentioned that the aim was to help students practice those skills at home helping their parents learn those basic language skills at the same time. As she put it:

“Students practiced what they had learnt in school by teaching their parents at home, thus they learn the language faster”

In the second step, students were trained to develop their listening and basic communication skills, such as self-identification and simple social language skills. At this stage students were exposed to basic vocabulary. As she explained:

“Just like toddlers when they first learn to talk, they listen and repeat and that’s how they learn”

According to the teacher, by the time students reached step three (4th to 6th grades) they were supposed to be ready to learn reading, writing and grammatical rules. After planning the scheme and getting permissions from the school administration, Asmaa started applying the scheme in the first term, but faced difficulties in finding the time to teach the students. Unfortunately, she moved to another school and did not finish the programme. Nonetheless, it can be argued that this initiative supported classroom implications of the principle of focusing on meaning in CLT. In this initiative the teacher showed awareness of the shift toward emphasising meaning in CLT, where using the language in authentic tasks (learning classroom commands and communication skills) and fluency were prioritized over language usage and accuracy alone (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003).

5.3.1.3 The English club scheme:

Samah established this club at her school to enhance her students’ reading skills by using phonetics. More specifically, the club aimed to teach students reading consonants and vowels (short and long), encourage students to read short stories (from an App called Star Fall), memorize phonic-songs (from an App called Jolly Phonics), teach them how to use a word dictionary, and create simple mind-maps. Samah utilized some of the principles of task-based learning, in which students enhanced their proficiency through spelling, reading, drawing, colouring, and singing. She overcame the time obstacle by taking advantage of recess periods – there were four recess periods (an hour each) per week at the primary level – allocated for

extracurricular (physical, social and cognitive) activities. In the following quote, the teacher explained the specific details of the club membership mechanism:

“Every five weeks, I form a new group with students of mixed-levels of achievement. Each group has 24 to 25 students and we work together during the recess period. During the period I utilize peer-learning strategies in which I ask the high-achievers of the group to teach and help their peers finish tasks”

The teacher’s role within the club was to assess the high achievers based on how much they helped their peers in completing any given tasks. As a reward for members of the club, at the end of each cycle, the teacher displayed students’ work on an achievement board – located in one of the school corridors – for the whole school to see (see **Figures 8, 9 and 10**). This initiative might be underpinned by the assumption that the communicative approach can help learners adopt the role of negotiation between themselves, their learning process and the object of learning. Within CLT, this can be done both privately and publicly within groups in the classroom context (i.e. this role is adopted on a personal as well as interpersonal level) (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Thus, it could be argued that this initiative – through utilizing task-based activities and peer-learning – allowed learners to adopt the dual role of being potential teachers for their peers, and informants for the teacher concerning their own learning progress (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003).

Figure 8

Sample of students' works in the English Club Initiative



Figure 9

Display of students' achievements in the English Club initiative



Figure 10

Sample of students' works in the English Club Initiative



All in all, these three initiatives showed teachers' sense of agency and desire to improve students' learning experiences despite all the CLT challenges they have reported throughout this study. These findings were consistent with the voluminous literature indicating consistent correlations between age of initial exposure to L2 and level of proficiency in that language (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019). These findings might also further support the assumptions about age and time factors in foreign language learning suggested by Field (2000). The two complementary – rather than exclusive – assumptions were based on a critical issue in foreign language education at the primary level. The age factor assumption suggested that the younger students started learning a foreign language, the higher linguistic attainment, in that language, they would achieve later. The time factor assumption, on the other hand, proposed that the more time students spent learning a foreign language, the higher standards they would achieve by the time they take public examinations. Field (2000) claimed that even though there was not

any conclusive evidence supporting both assumptions, some evidence indicated that they would make valuable contribution to children's overall development.

In the Saudi context, Abdan (1991, cited in Moskovsky & Picard, 2019) found that Saudi private school students have outperformed their public school counterparts in English proficiency. Abdan has solely attributed the private school students' superior achievement to their longer exposure to English. Notably, by the beginning of the 2020/2021 academic school year English was introduced from the first grade at the primary level in Saudi public schools. The evidence suggested that early introduction of foreign language would cultivate young learners' communication skills and inspire them to want to communicate in a foreign language and acquire confidence in language learning which would eventually make foreign language teaching – later in adolescence – easier. EFL teachers, who designed those initiatives, argued that students' overall language skills and confidence had improved as a result of those initiatives (as discussed above). Therefore, it could be argued that those initiatives, at heart, supported the age and time assumptions and hence would make adopting the communicative approach easier for both students and teachers. However, it might be important to point out here that early introduction of a foreign language does not guarantee, in and of itself, successful language learning, as linguistic stimuli and systematic exposure to the language are indispensable for children's language and cognitive development (Alexiou & Matthaoudaki, 2013). According to Field (2000) there was not any conclusive empirical evidence to support the age and time assumptions. Add this to the fact that introducing English to young learners at the primary level – particularly in state schools – has been a controversial issue in the Saudi society especially considering its potential effect on their first language acquisition (Al-Isaa, 2009).

5.3.2 Assessment related challenges (monitoring students' progress)

About two thirds (68%) of those surveyed thought that the grammar-based examination system was one of the obstacles of implementing CLT into their teaching practice (see **Table 5.22**).

Table 5.22

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards challenges hindering CLT (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Grammar-based examinations	3	4.00	11	14.67	10	13.33	38	50.67	13	17.33

In addition, several reports within the interviewing and classroom observations data, had shown some teachers' concerns regarding assessment. Some teachers questioned whether the assessment procedures in the primary level attained the learning objectives in the syllabus. While others expressed concerns about the effects of issues like time and teachers' workload on assessment.

One interviewee compared between the assessment criteria in the old curriculum and the new communicative curriculum which she described as vague and ambiguous. As she put it:

“The assessment criteria in Noor [Educational Management] System for the new curriculum are too vague, they lack clarity and specificity. The skills are too general and not specified to each lesson... They assess language production and communicative skills. For example, in one of the criteria I am supposed to evaluate students' ability to answer short questions. It does not specify what kind of questions are students supposed to answer, so if I was not that devoted to my job, I would ask students any simple question and move on. While the assessment criteria in the old curriculum – in the system - it would be clear and would tell me that students are supposed to answer questions about introducing themselves” (Khloud)

The data indicated that teachers were struggling to find a way to assess language performance, because they used to assess grammatical knowledge. A possible explanation for this might be related to the fact that assessment in CLT has always been an issue (Lynch, 1996) as will be

explained further later in this section. Two other likely factors could explain these findings. Firstly, it might be possible that teachers' struggle with assessment was due to lack or insufficient in-service training in how to properly evaluate students' progress within the CLT approach. Secondly, these findings might indicate that some teachers might prefer following instructions and ready-made assessment tasks rather than taking the initiative and building their own. Data obtained from the OECD (2020) report confirmed this, in which it listed teachers' weak assessment literacy and teachers' training agencies' lack of capacity to provide adequate training in this area as challenges of classroom assessment in the Saudi Arabian educational system.

The same teacher also felt that the current assessment criteria encouraged students to adopt a dependent style of learning. Commenting about this, she said:

“Our students heavily rely on teachers highlighting important parts that are specified in the assessment criteria, thus they only have to focus on and memorize those parts instead of studying everything. From my experience students continue to depend on this learning style even at the secondary level

Other reports in the data, showed teachers' concerns about assessment in terms of the limited time and number of English classes per week. Particularly, teachers during pre and post classroom observation talks reported that they were struggling to find the time to apply treatment plans – teachers were required to make or implement a treatment plan for students who failed assessment –for weak students. For example, during a post-observation talk – in observation session# 9 – Abrar complained:

“Formative in-progress evaluation is putting extra pressure on us [teachers], because we are required to chase after weak students who failed the initial assessment until they achieve the minimum requirement for passing. What is worse, is that some parents do not really care and they do not help their kids study English, because they know that their kids will pass regardless of their actual progress level”

After observation session# 6, Hebah also complained:

“I have to literally chase after those who failed in the initial assessment. I sometimes have to go and pull out students from their classes and bring them to my desk in the staff room, because it is the only opportunity I get to set with each student individually and tick the boxes in the treatment plan which had to go in the students’ record in the system [Noor] as evidence for the supervisor”

Based on these findings, it could conceivably be suggested that this type of formative in-progress evaluation was not working and pushing teachers to pass all students from the first attempt, including the failing ones, in order to avoid complains. These issues could provide some explanation as to why EFL teachers tend to use more traditional teaching practices, because they could be less time consuming and easier to prepare, deliver and assess.

This combination of findings could provide some support for the conceptual premise that testing within the communicative approach had been a complicated issue. The findings in this category might help in better understanding the issue of test feasibility that might affect EFL teachers’ ability to implement CLT in the Saudi context. Arguably, administering and scoring communicative assessments – especially for younger learners – might require a considerable amount of time and effort that – based on teachers’ reports introduced so far in this chapter – EFL teachers did not have. In addition, designing assessment tasks in CLT can be challenging due to the multifarious dimensions of real-life communication (Shohamy, 1995 cited in Marrow, 2018), therefore teachers may find it easier to reduce students’ language performance to a number of easily recognized criteria (such as grammatical correctness) and consequently violating CLT principles inadvertently (Marrow, 2018). These explanations, along with the other two possible explanations mentioned above – i.e. insufficient training in communicative testing and teachers’ tendency to follow readymade testing items instead of designing their own tests – might help in understanding why teachers thought that assessment procedures rendered implementing CLT at the primary level a challenging task.

5.4 Classroom process related challenges

This theme came up in the discussion of teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the CLT into their practice. Thus, two different categories emerged. The first one, surfaced in relation to the dilemma of the gap between CLT theory and actual classroom practice. The other one, emerged from teachers' perspectives on how the limited number of English classes per week hindered any attempts of appropriate CLT implementation.

5.4.1 CLT theory versus practice dilemma

This category emerged from teachers' responses to the first question in the interview schedule (see **Appendix 13**) and corroborated by primary EFL teachers' responses to statements (8-10, 29-31, 34) in the questionnaire (see **Appendix 7**). Further evidence of this category was also found in the classroom observation sessions.

Since the aim of this study was to explore the challenges primary EFL teachers face while implementing the communicative approach, it was only logical to explore teachers' awareness of its theoretical nature and its practice-related principles. Therefore, statements related to CLT principles were included in order to explore teachers' awareness of CLT and what did teaching communicatively mean for them. Those questions reflected teachers' perspectives towards their role as teachers, students' role, and the importance of group-work, grammar, error correction, and use of L1 – Arabic– inside the classroom. This led to an in-depth understanding of what teachers thought of and knew about CLT, and pointed to some misconceptions they might have about CLT. Those factors helped in understanding and explaining their observed teaching practices inside classrooms.

The data gathered from the participants indicated that some teachers were aware, at least theoretically as will be discussed shortly, to a certain degree of CLT principles. Some teachers, on the other hand, reported that they were unfamiliar with CLT before it was first introduced

to the English curriculum. This was particularly evident in the case of some EFL teachers, when I was recruiting possible participants for this study. For example, one of the teachers asked me what I meant by CLT, when I gave a brief description of the approach she seemed to have recognized what I was talking about. This incident indicated that despite the fact that the CLT was the instructional method they were teaching, some teachers had insufficient or limited knowledge about it. In the interviews, as well, some teachers reported that when CLT was introduced to the curriculum they did not know how to deal with it, and that they had to go through some type of in-service training to learn about the approach. For example, when I asked Samah if she was familiar with CLT before it was implemented, she said:

“Frankly, no I was not familiar with the approach... We were lost. We did not know how to teach with the communicative approach”

This finding corroborated the observations made by Al-Seghayer (2017), who indicated that Saudi EFL teachers did not receive guidelines on how to integrate CLT into their classroom practice or training in how to translate CLT principles into practice and how to address context-specific challenges that might arise during the teaching process.

On the practical level, however, the data told a different story. For a number of reasons, the data gathered from classroom observations and some items in the questionnaire revealed a discrepancy between what teachers knew about CLT and the way they taught inside the classroom. This mismatch between theoretical knowledge and actual practice was apparent in teachers’ responses to opposing statements that indicated what teachers thought about CLT and what they were actually doing inside the classroom. It is worth noting here, that contradictory responses were not seen as indicators of misunderstanding, but rather as a signal of teachers’ awareness of their own context and how CLT was really applied inside the classroom. The findings under this category confirmed what was mentioned in the literature, in which teachers – who attempted to implement CLT into various EFL/ESL contexts – failed to successfully

transform their good knowledge about CLT theory into practice and were forced to depend on traditional pedagogy due to conceptual as well as contextual reasons (Abahussain, 2016; Al Asmari, 2015).

Hence, to present the data supporting these findings, teachers' awareness of CLT principles were broken down into four sub-categories. The sections below present the data that emerged under each of those four categories.

5.4.1.1 Teachers' role

The data collected from the sample of this study showed that primary EFL teachers' roles were limited to three dominant roles; knowledge transmitters, lecturers, and authoritative figures. The fact that teachers' perspectives and practices were limited to those three roles, implied a lack of or limited awareness of the nature of CLT and its principles in terms of teachers' role. The teachers in the sample attributed the discrepancy – between their practice and CLT principles – to training (as discussed in section 5.1.4), the nature of the classroom environment (which will be discussed in section 5.5.1 later in this chapter), and students' language abilities (as discussed in section 5.2). Even though the data suggested teachers' awareness of their role in facilitating students' learning, it also indicated that this awareness was not reflected in their actual practice or at least it was dominated by the other roles that gave them more control over the classroom. Despite the fact that there was an exceptional minority of the observed teachers who showed some level of eagerness to adopt the role of facilitators, they mixed that with lots of control over all kinds of classroom interactions.

The data gathered from teachers' responses in the questionnaire, revealed that while 40% of EFL teachers did not think that teachers' ultimate job was to transfer knowledge to students (see **Table 5.23**), 44% agreed with the statement. The split between teachers' attitudes was seen as an indication that teachers were theoretically aware that their job description extends

beyond knowledge transfer. However, it seemed that this awareness was not reflected in the teachers' actual practice inside the classroom, in which nearly 63% of EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample (see **Table 5.24**) agreed that teacher's role in the language classroom was to explain and give examples.

Table 5.23

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards teachers' role (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teachers' most important role is to teach students what the teacher knows	5	6.67	25	33.33	12	16.00	20	26.67	13	17.33

Table 5.24

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards teachers' role (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to explain and give examples	1	1.33	12	16.00	15	20.00	31	41.33	16	21.33

This particular perspective of limiting teachers' role to explaining and giving examples corresponded with the practices observed in the classroom observations sample. In, almost, all the observed classrooms, teachers controlled all activities and interactions inside the classroom; explaining, modelling, drilling, and helping students memorize forms.

Interviewing data, as well, revealed teachers' awareness of their role as CLT teachers. For instance, the conversation below illustrated what this particular teacher thought were necessary skills that a CLT teacher must have:

Rajaa: you mentioned that CLT implementation depends on teacher's CLT skills. In your opinion, what are the necessary skills that a teacher should have to teach CLT?

Najwa: 1- the ability to engage the students; 2- delivering information in a smooth and interesting way; 3- taking individual differences between students into consideration

Najwa's response indicated her understanding of the nature of her role inside the classroom as the responsible party for looking for ways of transmitting knowledge to students, which confirmed teachers' responses in the questionnaire and the observational notes. This understanding was also reflected in her actual practice in observation session# 5, in which students seemed very engaged with her compared to students' level of engagement in other observation sessions. However, she still dominated classroom interactions by explaining, modelling and transmitting information. This finding might further support the idea that knowledge transmission largely characterized teaching and learning in Saudi EFL classrooms (Al-Rabai, 2016). Data obtained from the OECD (2020) report also indicated that despite recent efforts to modernize teaching, classroom practices in the Saudi context remained very traditional, where pedagogy was characterized by teacher-led lectures.

The last dominant role that emerged from the data, was teachers' role as authoritative figures in the classroom. Teachers in the sample expressed the belief that they had control over everything that went on inside the classroom. The research data revealed that teachers, in the study sample, believed in the type of authority that assigned all control over classroom interactions – student-student as well as student-teacher – and time to the teacher. According to 56% of teachers in the questionnaire sample, because learners came with little or no

knowledge of English they were incapable to decide what activities were useful for them (see **Table 5.25**).

Table 5.25

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards learners' role (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Since learners come to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of English, they are unable to suggest what activities are useful for them	6	8.00	16	21.33	11	14.67	30	40.00	12	16.00

Around 46% of the respondents agreed that training learners to take responsibility of their own learning was useless because Saudi learners were not used to this learning style (see **Table 5.26**). Moreover, well over half of those surveyed (77%) thought that group work could never replace teachers' explanation (see **Table 5.27**). Those numbers indicated that teachers still believed in the role of the teacher as a figure of authority and control inside the classroom. A view that was not compatible with the teacher's, and learners', role within the CLT approach.

Table 5.26*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards learners' role (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is pointless because learners are not used to this approach of learning	7	9.33	21	28.00	12	16.00	27	36.00	8	10.67

Table 5.27*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Small group work may be useful to change the routine, but it can never replace teacher's explanation	3	4.00	6	8.00	8	10.67	42	56.00	16	21.33

These findings appeared to be in harmony with data gathered from the classroom observation sessions. In a number of incidents, I observed teachers spending valuable teaching time in disciplining and keeping students quiet inside the classroom. For example, during two different observations (observation session# 4B (a class in 6th grade) and observation session# 1A&B) both teachers interrupted the flow of their lessons more than once to discipline students and keep them quiet. This perspective of teacher's role in the classroom seemed to be consistent with more traditional teaching styles which might suggest that teachers were teaching in the style they have been taught with as learners. This finding was significant, as it might have

implications on students' ability to think critically, ask questions and argue to communicate their thoughts. To create a student-centred class, students should feel that the classroom is a safe environment where teachers cannot just tell students what to do and what not to do in an authoritative manner. Indeed, it was revealed that communicative classes – where both rules and open communication and honest emotional exchange were established – showed the highest academic achievement (Iwai, 2018).

However, one could not but stop and wonder about the significance of the responses of about one third of the questionnaire sample, in which 29% - in statement 18 – and the 37% - in statement 19 – who disagreed with both statements (see **Tables 5.25 and 5.26**). Those responses, even though less dominant, confirmed the assumption that some teachers did acknowledge the importance of other less teacher-controlled teaching styles. Therefore, it might be worth mentioning at this point, that although the data indicated that teachers' most dominant roles were as knowledge transmitters, lecturers, and authoritative figures, there was some evidence, of teachers' positive attitudes towards their role as facilitators of students' learning.

Evidence of this role could be clearly seen in teachers' responses to statement number 26 in the questionnaire, in which 77% (3% disagreed and 16% were neutral) of the respondents believed that group work activities were important in giving learners opportunities to build cooperative relationships and encourage genuine interactions among them (see **Table 5.28**). In addition, of the 75 primary EFL teachers who completed the questionnaire, 80% agreed that a teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials in order to meet the individual differences among students (see **Table 5.29**). This evidence indicated teachers 'acknowledgement of their role, as facilitators of learning, in providing students with supplementary materials that create opportunities for interaction and communication in the target language.

Table 5.28*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Group work activities are important in giving opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in encouraging genuine interaction between students	3	4.00	2	2.67	12	16.00	40	53.33	18	24.00

Table 5.29*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards accommodating students' differences (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks to meet the individual differences among students	5	6.67	3	4.00	7	9.33	40	53.33	20	26.67

Classroom observation data suggested that some teachers used a mixture of those three traditional roles along with the role of facilitators, which was significant because it indicated that teachers adopted new roles – along with their traditional roles – that fit CLT. I noticed during some of the classroom observation sessions (observation sessions #1A & B and session #8A) that although both teachers were attempting to adopt the role of facilitators – by using learning strategies and activities that gave students the opportunity to take responsibility of

their own learning – the activities and classroom interactions were still controlled by and dependent on the teacher. For instance, in observation session #1A (5th grade), the teacher utilized an Active Learning strategy, where students were supposed to actively participate in the learning process, rather than the traditional lecturing style (where students would passively listen to the teacher). Nevertheless, the teacher still controlled every aspect in the classroom processes and students' role was limited to repetition, memorization and imitations of the teacher's and textbook forms. Interestingly, when I asked the teacher, in her interview, about Active Learning strategies, she mentioned that not every teacher was allowed to utilize Active Learning unless she was certified to do so by her supervisor. This implied that teachers' limited autonomy and strict adherence to rules handed down to them from supervisors, might discourage them from implementing the intended curriculum and consequently, might incentivise them to revert to traditional instructional pedagogies. This confirmed data from previous studies, which indicated that Saudi EFL teachers' lack of autonomy and adherence to imposed teaching practices and inspection policies limited their creative and innovative abilities (Alnefaie, 2016; Mullick, 2013; Shah et al., 2013).

The teacher also indicated that she trained other teachers on how to implement the strategy into their teaching practice. This might also support the point being made here, that teachers were aware of more student-active strategies theoretically, but for contextual reasons and the nature of the educational culture they struggled to transform that knowledge into practice. Perhaps, due to all the pressures teachers were under in terms of obligations to cover materials in a limited time, administrative responsibilities, heavy workload, and large class sizes led teachers to revert to traditional teaching styles.

This type of teaching practice was also reflected in some teachers' responses in the individual interviews. For example, one of the interviewees explained her understanding of a successful CLT teacher in which she said:

“A successful teacher should be wittingly in control of her class ... [she should be] dedicated to delivering information to students and correcting their errors

Then she shared her equation of a successful CLT teacher:

In short, [the teacher should be] strong, with a lovable and kind personality + honesty and veracity + being knowledgeable + good planning + continuous professional development by reading and learning new things = a successful CLT teacher” (Kholoud)

In general, these findings indicated that teachers were still influenced by traditional methods which might inhibit CLT implementation. This might be consistent with those of Rashid et al. (2017), who reported a contradiction between the intended curriculum (CLT) and the implemented curriculum where the teaching-learning process was a matter of knowledge transmission. Nonetheless, these findings also implied teachers’ awareness of their responsibility and willingness to seek professional development in how to improve their students’ learning experiences.

5.4.1.2 Students’ role

The fact that teachers still led teacher-controlled instructional practices – as outlined in the previous section – implied that students’ roles were limited as a result. The dominant learners’ role as observed and indicated in the data was as passive receivers of knowledge who were completely dependent on teachers’ help, explanation and translation.

With no exception, in all 17 observation sessions, students’ role inside the classroom was very limited, in which it seemed that they expected to and were expected to repeat after their teachers or copy teachers’ suggested forms. For example, it was commonly noticed, across the observed classrooms – in lower and higher grade levels – for teachers to sample reading new vocabularies, a sentence, or a short reading passage first before the students could try to read or attempt to make any kind of independent language production. Based on the data emerged from classroom observations, students rarely discussed, negotiated or made any independent language production with their teachers or with each other. On the contrary, they almost always

waited for instructions, to follow the teacher's model or the textbook. Thus, learners' role was limited to repetition drills and imitations of modelled forms. This indicated that rote learning was the most common learning style adopted by students, in which they solely relied on memorizing and copying the teacher's sampled models and imitating forms in the textbook. These observations were consistent with findings of Al-Rashidi and Phan (2015), who identified heavy reliance on rote learning and memorization as the primary learning strategy adopted by Saudi EFL learners. This type of learning might inhibit CLT implementation. Within rote learning students would remain passive which could limit their creativity, critical thinking and ability to use the L2 for communicative purposes. Parroting of arbitrary and verbatim information would not lead to understanding (Al-Seghayer, 2017) or active engagement required in a student-centred instructional method such as CLT.

Students' limited role was found compatible with teachers' attitudes towards statements related to students' role in the questionnaire. More than half (56%) of EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample (see **Table 5.30**) thought that students were incapable of taking responsibility of their own learning and nearly half of the questionnaire sample (46%) thought that training learners to take responsibility of their learning was pointless because Saudi learners were not used to this style of learning (see **Table 5.31**).

Table 5.30*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards learners' role (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Since learners come to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of English, they are unable to suggest what activities are useful for them	6	8.00	16	21.33	11	14.67	30	40.00	12	16.00

Table 5.31*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards learners' role (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is pointless because learners are not used to this approach of learning	7	9.33	21	28.00	12	16.00	27	36.00	8	10.67

Based on these findings, it could be argued that teachers' attitudes towards students' learning style and language abilities were barriers to any successful implementation of CLT. As teachers' responses indicated that they thought that students were incapable of taking responsibility of their own learning, an attitude that was inconsistent with the principles of students' roles in a communicative classroom. Within CLT students should play the role of contributors of knowledge and information (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003) and should be expected to contribute to classroom procedures as much as they gain (Richards and Rodgers, 2014).

However, around one third of the questionnaire sample did not agree with those statements (see **Tables 5.30 and 5.31**), which indicated two significant interrelated issues. First, although not commonly reflected in their observed teaching practice, EFL teachers – as discussed in the previous section – were aware that their role extended beyond transmitting knowledge to learners. Secondly, EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample were aware that their students’ role was not merely to repeat modelled forms, and to depend on teachers to passively “spoon-feed” them knowledge.

This was echoed in the teaching practices of some EFL teachers in the observation sample. Those teachers indicated some level of awareness that students’ should be more actively engaged inside the classroom by implementing more active learning strategies (such as Learning Stations (which is a way to supply students with multiple ways and mediums to learn and understand concepts), Kagan (which is an instructional strategy designed to promote cooperation and communication in the classroom, boost students' confidence and retain their interest in classroom interaction), cooperative learning, games, songs and role playing).

In observation sessions 8A&B (both in the 5th grade) the teacher was able to actively retain students’ engagement in the learning process by adopting the learning stations and Kagan active learning strategies. Within those strategies students spent half of the class-time working on tasks cooperatively either on worksheets, teacher’s iPad, or their textbooks. Despite the fact that the data showed that the teacher still controlled most of classroom interactions, it showed, however, that she was successful in making the students more actively engaged in the class. Thus, by utilizing active learning strategies students in her class seemed more engaged with the lesson than students observed in other classes who spent most of the time passively listening to the teacher’s explanation.

For instance, in observation sessions 8A, I noticed the difference in students' engagement with the lesson. Unlike all the other classrooms, students in that session seemed actively engaged and enjoyed working on tasks. To do this the teacher used a strategy called Learning Stations in which the class was divided into five stations. Each group of students in the class had to work collaboratively to finish the tasks assigned to each learning station. Hence, each group of students rotated around the five stations spending approximately five minutes in each. The activity lasted for a total of twenty minutes, during which the teacher was responsible for setting the timer for students in each station and intervening to help students work on each activity and giving instructions if needed.

Similarly in observation sessions #1A (in the 5th grade) and B (in the 4th grade), the teacher also used cooperative and active learning strategies to help students be more engaged in the class. However, in session 1B, students were noticeably less active in the class and repeating drills. When asked about this friction – between students' roles in 5th and 4th grades – during her interview, the teacher explained:

“In order to implement Active Learning I have to follow certain criteria specified on the Active Learning Sheet provided by my supervisor, teachers are encouraged to use Active Learning with all levels, however, it is difficult to implement with students in the 4th grade, because students are still beginners, it is their first time learning English as a subject and so it is difficult to apply all the items on the sheet. I gradually train them on Active Learning activities so that by the end of the school year they can easily do it in the 5th grade” (Hind)

Thus, as the data indicated, students' low English proficiency, their limited contact with English outside the classroom, along with teachers' negative attitudes towards students' learning and language abilities were factors that made it difficult for them to play any active role rather than repeating forms and depending on teachers' modelling.

A possible explanation for students' reliance on rote learning and drilling might be due to teachers' adoption of traditional instructional methods as explained before in this chapter. This was consistent with data obtained from Al-Rabai (2014) who pointed out that Saudi EFL

teachers' dominance over classroom interactions led students to be passive receptors, memorizers and reproducers of knowledge. Another possible explanation for these findings might be that this learning style could be rooted in the Saudi traditions and culture of learning. Further support of this can be found in Abukhattala (2013) who indicated that kids in the Saudi culture would be rewarded for exhibiting memorization skills especially when memorizing parts of the Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, families often feel proud when kids show a stronger faculty for memory (Al-Seghayer, 2017). These traditional views of learning – inherited from traditional schooling systems like *Kuttab*s – within the Saudi culture perpetuated the dominance of rote learning and drills over understanding and critical thinking (Allmnakhrah, 2013).

5.4.1.3 Group work

As detailed in the previous sections, the data collected from EFL teachers in the sample of this study indicated their awareness of some of the featured CLT principles. Nonetheless, the data showed that on the practical level, it seemed that EFL teachers had difficulties in translating that awareness into practice. Thus, EFL teachers' perceptions and practices in terms of group-work were equally conflicted, in which their responses to statements focused on group-work showed a level of understanding of its importance within the CLT approach. At the same time, however, their responses and observed behaviour showed that group-work was inadequately used inside classrooms. Three different challenges related to group work emerged from the data; limited use of group-work, students' engagement with group work, and the effect of the classroom environment on group work.

Although all teachers in the observation sample used group-work in classroom activities, the way group-work was utilised raised an important question about EFL teachers' understanding of its significance in communicative language teaching. In all the classes I observed – most of which had rather large numbers of students – students were seated in groups of six mostly in rows of three in each. However, what was interesting and noticeable was the way teachers

employed group-work, executed group activities and how students engaged with those group activities.

In terms of theory, the majority of teachers in the questionnaire sample (as shown in **Tables 5.32, 5.33, 5.34**) showed a rather positive attitude towards group-work. Of those surveyed, 77% agreed that group work was important in encouraging genuine interaction and cooperative relationships among students, 80% thought that it enabled students to take control over their learning, and 78% confirmed that it was important to make group-work part of the classroom activities.

Table 5.32

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Group work activities are important in giving opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in encouraging genuine interaction between students	3	4.00	2	2.67	12	16.00	40	53.33	18	24.00

Table 5.33*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and have some control over their own learning	2	2.67	4	5.33	9	12.00	44	58.67	16	21.33

Table 5.34*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
It is important that group work becomes part of the classroom activities	1	1.33	6	8.00	9	12.00	38	50.67	21	28.00

In all observation sessions, it was a common practice for teachers to set students in groups, which only confirmed the assumption that teachers approved of the use group-work in classroom activities. For example in observation session #5A & B, students were seated in groups – with 7 students in each – and because of the large number of the students and limited space the groups were seated in rows. Whenever, the teacher asked students to work in groups those in the front row had to turn around to face the other members of their group setting behind them. It seemed that students were, perhaps, already assigned to groups from the beginning of the term. Because students in each row already knew where to turn and started working on the task at hand. This indicated that it was a common practice for teachers to ask students to work in groups, and was confirmed by data from all other observation sessions. This was a rather

encouraging finding, because it suggested that teachers have established group work as part of their teaching pedagogy and that students were already encultured into it. However, when asked, during her interview, about the challenges of implementing CLT into her teaching practice, the same teacher reported group-work as the first challenge she was facing:

“May be managing the class especially during group-work” (Najwa)

This rather short comment indicated the complexity of the issue of using group-work inside EFL classrooms. This rather sceptical perspective towards group work might be explained by teachers’ desire to avoid risking the ramifications of group activities on classroom management. The literature indicates that EFL teachers seemed to believe that this type of communicative activities might encourage learners to digress from the objective of the task at hand by excessive unrelated discussions in L1 which would eventually make it difficult for the teacher to restore order in the classroom (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Aziz et al., 2018; Butler, 2011).

It might be worth noting at this point, that it was difficult to simply think of those issues as independent of each other, because the more I examined the data the more I realised how much they were intricately interconnected. As the data analysis phase came to an end, I could see that EFL teachers’ perceptions about group-work – as well as their role and their students’ role inside the classroom - dictated the way they employed group activities during English lessons which in its part significantly affected the way their students acted and perceived working in groups. Therefore, below is a discussion of reasons that might explain the complexity of the matter.

Despite the fact that group-work was a common practice across the observation sample along with teachers’ positive perception of its importance in the questionnaire sample, the way teachers employed group-work raised the following critical questions; in what capacity did teachers use group work inside the classroom? More importantly what were their perspectives

towards implementing group work into their pedagogy? EFL teachers' responses to actual practice related statements as well as their observed teaching practice showed that their use of group-work was very limited and rather insufficient. As shown in **Table 5.35**, nearly half (48%) of EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample showed a level of awareness of the important role of group-work in communicative classes, in which they did not think that group-work made monitoring students' performance difficult. The other half (44%), however, did agree that group-work made monitoring students' performance difficult. Furthermore, a rather significant portion of teachers in the questionnaire sample (77%) agreed that the role of group-work was to change the routine, but it could never replace teachers' explanation (see **Table 5.36**).

Table 5.35

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Group work activities have little use because it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using the Arabic language	5	6.67	31	41.33	6	8.00	24	32.00	9	12.00

Table 5.36*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards group work (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Small group work may be useful to change the routine, but it can never replace teacher's explanation	3	4.00	6	8.00	8	10.67	42	56.00	16	21.33

Those numbers were significant in revealing teachers' perspectives towards implementing group-work into their practice. These perspectives were also reflected on what was observed in teachers' actual teaching practices. While it was a common practice across the observation sample for teachers to use group activities, it was common practice for them to limit its use for working on imitation activities on the textbook or teacher-prepared worksheets. In other words, group-work did not allow cooperative relationships to emerge between students. Nor it encouraged them to make genuine communication in the target language. This finding was to be expected, especially if students' proficiency levels in such an early stage were taken into consideration. However, it should be asserted that within communicative classes a cooperative, rather than an individualistic, approach of learning should be encouraged. Within the principles of CLT, if learners were to take responsibility of their own learning, they should be encouraged to be comfortable with listening to and communicating with their peers in the group or class rather than the teacher as a model. These findings could be explained by two possibilities. First, it seemed possible that teachers did understand the role of group-work in the communicative approach but limited its use due to all the constraints they reported throughout this study. The other possibility was that teachers used group work in a way that corresponded with their own

perceptions which were influenced by their contexts and their views towards students' learning and language abilities (as previously illustrated in section 5.4.1.2 above).

Interestingly, the observational data indicated that in most of the times students ignored teacher's instructions to work with members of their group. Rather it seemed that they preferred to work individually while sitting in a group. This was evident in observation session# 2 A&B, in which every time the teacher instructed students to work with members of their group on a task in the textbook or a worksheet, those tasks often required lower order thinking skills such as memorizing and remembering. However, I noticed that students often worked individually within the group, in which they seemed concerned with finishing as fast as they could to impress the teacher and to have the opportunity to go and write the answer on the board rather than finishing the task with their assigned group members.

Thus, the data indicated that students only sat in groups rather than worked in groups. The data also suggested that teachers employed group-work for rather very simplistic purposes that required students to engage low order thinking skills rather than high order thinking skills. Those tasks were often form-focused activities that required students to repeat, recognize, rewrite, practice, and use the information the teacher presented. Tasks that depended on remembering knowledge, demonstrating understanding, and sometimes applying knowledge.

Taken together these findings suggested that there might be an association between teachers' attitudes towards group-work and their students' behaviours during group activities. As explained above students often tended to work individually despite teachers' instructions to work cooperatively. It might be difficult to explain students' lack of engagement and unwillingness to learn cooperatively. However, this attitude could be related to the way EFL teachers employed group-work, in which it was limited to tasks that required low order thinking skills. Such tasks did not provide an opportunity for students to communicate – using higher

order thinking skills – to discuss, compose or analyse to produce knowledge. Thus, it could be argued that if teachers used group-work for communicative activities that required students to use high order thinking skills (such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation), students would be inclined to work cooperatively to successfully finish such challenging tasks. Another possible explanation, might be the nature of the Saudi educational culture that depends on knowledge transmission and create a competitive rather than a cooperative atmosphere of learning that encourages students to work individually in order to attain personal achievements.

Looking back at the example of observation session 8A, explained in section 5.4.1.2 above, that incident indicated that when EFL teachers employed group-work using the appropriate teaching/learning strategy, students' engagement with collaborative group-work could improve. It is worth noting here, however, that tasks within the learning stations were not learner-directed and did not give students enough opportunities to communicate. The teacher was in control of all interactions, and the tasks were still form-focused. In fact, most of the time students discussed answers in Arabic or relied on higher achievers to finish the activity as fast as possible because the teacher rewarded the group that finished before time by granting students in the group extra points. Nonetheless, students' engagement with group-work within such active learning activities was noticeably better than students in other classes in the observation sample.

The last factor that seemed to have an impact on the quality of group-work, was the classroom environment. In response to the first question in the interview schedule, most of the interviewees reported students' numbers, classroom sizes and lack of English labs as challenges they had to deal with while implementing CLT. Talking about this issue one teacher commented:

The large numbers of students, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of a language lab or a special room for the subject [English] and its teaching aids. (Azhar)

These issues were consistent with the observational data which indicated that most of the observed classrooms were overcrowded leaving no space for proper group work. For example, in observation session 6A & B where both classrooms were relatively small considering the number of students (36 students) in each. The big number of students left no space for proper group-work in which students sat in rows of threes and had to turn around – they did not have the space to turn their chairs – in order to face the other half of their group who were sitting in the row behind. The issue of classroom size made implementing CLT challenging because it seemed to have made it difficult for teachers to implement communicative activities inside the crowded classrooms due to concerns about losing control and classroom management issues. In fact, one teacher (observation session 3A & B) talked about the issue saying that she has been criticised by her supervisor because students made too much “noise” during group work tasks. The teacher reported her frustration about that because, according to her, she was simply following the advice teachers were given in in-service training. Thus, this inconsistency between theory – in the advice given to EFL teachers in training seminars – and their actual classroom practice, added to the other challenges teachers reported in this study, made adopting CLT a difficult task. The issue of classroom environment will be discussed further in section 5.1 under institutional and learning environment related challenges.

5.4.1.4 Grammar and error correction

This category included factors related to; the role of grammar in assessing language performance, misconceptions about the role of language form in CLT, the role of form in communication, and teachers’ awareness of the significance of meaning in communication. The data suggested that EFL teachers in the sample of the study were theoretically aware that meaning had significant role in second language learning. At the same time, however, the data were somewhat counterintuitive. Data from classroom observations indicated that EFL teachers in the sample were still teaching in the shadows of the Grammar-Translation method,

where form and language structure were prioritized over the communication of meaning. In order to make the findings in this regard more meaningful the roles of both grammar and error correction were found closely connected and therefore were integrated under the same category.

As can be seen in **Table 5.37**, slightly more than half (57%) of EFL teachers in the sample of the questionnaire thought that effective communication in the target language required EFL teachers to focus their feedback on students' ability to communicate meaning correctly rather than on correctness of form. However, what stood out in the figure, that 20% of the sample opposed to the notion that meaning could be as significant as structure. On the contrary, in terms of teachers' responses to practice-related statements, their responses seemed to be reversed. Nearly half (48%) of EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample (see **Table 5.38**) thought that language performance could only be judged by grammatical correctness, a hardly insignificant proportion (27%) disagreed with the same statement.

Table 5.37

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards error correction (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teachers' feedback must be focused on meaning rather than form	2	2.67	13	17.33	17	22.67	34	45.33	9	12.00

Table 5.38

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards grammar (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged	7	9.33	31	17.33	19	25.33	29	38.67	7	9.33

Taken together these findings provided important insights into two significant factors. First, EFL teachers thought that language structure should be prioritized and focused on to produce successful communicators. For example, in response to statement 13 in the questionnaire (see **Table 5.39**), 61% of the surveyed teachers agreed that by mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker. Secondly, it seemed that a significant number of those surveyed (72%) thought that teaching grammar should be prioritized due to the fact that at the end students would be assessed based on their knowledge of grammatical rules (see **Table 5.40**).

Table 5.39

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards grammar (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker	2	2.67	15	20.00	12	16.00	35	46.67	11	14.67

Table 5.40

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards grammar (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Concentrating on teaching grammar rules is essential because students will be tested on their knowledge of grammatical rules in the final exams	6	8.00	9	12.00	6	8.00	39	52.00	15	20.00

This particular attitude towards the association between focusing on teaching grammar and assessment as an intertwined element of language teaching, was corroborated with data gathered from the classroom observations. This was certainly true in the case of observation session 9A, when the teacher urged her students to mark a section designated for grammar rules in the textbook as very important. Then, she stressed that the students should memorize those rules by heart for their upcoming exam:

“Girls! Memorize these rules as your own names, because they will come in the exam!”

Together these findings seemed consistent with teachers’ responses to statement 12 in the survey, in which more than half (60%) of the respondents agreed with the statement (see **Table 5.41**). These findings reflected the misconception that the communicative approach might produce fluent but inaccurate learners due to its lack of focus on form and language structure.

Table 5.41*Distribution of sample on attitudes towards CLT (N = 75).*

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners	1	1.33	11	14.67	18	24.00	43	57.33	2	2.67

Although a significant proportion of those surveyed (57%) indicated that for students to be successful communicators, teachers' feedback should focus on meaning rather than form (see **Table 5.37 above**), the data showed that in practice when teachers did correct students' mistakes, they were more likely to focus on form-related errors.

Interestingly, the observational data showed that there was not much error correction going on inside the classroom. Even when EFL teachers did correct errors those corrections were strictly form-related. Classroom observational data also indicated that EFL teachers in the sample adopted the recasting style – teacher repeated learners' faulty production in a correct way – of error-correction, which was found to be one of the least effective correction styles (Brandl, 2008). It might be difficult to explain this particular finding, as it might not be applicable to all EFL teachers. Nonetheless, a possible explanation might be that due to the lack of –student-student and student-teacher – communication in the target language and the fact that students most of the time merely repeated whatever the teachers said or worked on simple comprehension tasks, students did not have the opportunity to make much errors that required feedback from teachers.

In addition, this particular finding might partly be explained by examining EFL teachers' response to statement 22 in the questionnaire. While nearly 40% of those survey challenged the notion that much error-correction was wasteful of valuable class-time, slightly more than half (52%) showed awareness that errors were normal parts of learning (see **Table 5.42**). In a similar manner, when asked about correcting grammatical errors, 38% of those surveyed indicated that teachers should not correct all grammatical errors students made and slightly less than half (49%) thought they should (see **Table 5.43**).

Table 5.42

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards error correction (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Because errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time	10	13.33	19	25.33	7	9.33	35	46.67	4	5.33

Table 5.43

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards error correction (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make	5	6.67	24	32.00	9	12.00	21	28.00	16	21.33

The findings under this category broadly support evidence from other studies in this area. Previous evidence has suggested that most EFL teachers are unaware of types of corrective feedback or understand when and how corrective feedback should be provided (Al-Seghayer, 2017). Consistent with the findings of this study, as well, the literature also indicates that EFL teachers' corrective feedback tends to be limited to explicit correction of phonological errors, grammar and vocabulary, or to what can be described as "surface structure" features of students' output (Moskovsky, 2019).

A myriad of factors might help in explaining these findings. One possible explanation could be teachers' adoption of traditional pedagogical approaches. For instance, data obtained from Al-Seghayer (2017) indicated that the presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach of teaching grammar was widely adopted by Saudi EFL teachers. As a result of adopting such a form-focused approach, grammatical correctness and spoon-feeding were prioritized over exploration and discovery (Al-Balawi, 2014; Assalahi, 2013). However, the findings could indicate teachers' awareness of the learning style that their learners were used to, in which students might prefer, and used to, teachers to explain in a deductive approach. This was consistent with data obtained from Mallia (2015) which indicated Arab learners' overall preference of grammar instruction practices based on deductive approaches. These findings were significant because they indicated the inconsistency between some CLT principles, such as the inductive approach to learning, and the learning cultures in some EFL contexts including the Saudi Arabian context.

Based on these findings, it could be conceivably suggested that behind teachers' assertion to correct grammar-related errors was their desire to make their students ready for exams that habitually tested students' knowledge of grammatical rules. This type of exams washback effect would have direct implications on the micro and macro levels of the curriculum. Consequently teachers might have to give a great deal of attention to exams, especially given

their vital role in the Saudi educational culture, in which students, their parents, schools and even employers (in the future) would make decisions based on assessment results. This finding was reflected in teachers' actual teaching practice like the incident, mentioned earlier, with the teacher in observation session 9A, in which she stressed the importance of memorizing grammar rules by heart in order to pass the exam – which would be grammar based – as indicated in the teacher's remark. In fact, as discussed in section 5.3.2 above, the majority (68%) of EFL teachers in the questionnaire sample reported grammar-based examinations as one of the difficulties they face while teaching CLT (see **Table 5.22** in section 5.3.2).

Another possible explanation for this finding might be related to teachers' awareness that their evaluation would be informed by – if not based on – their students' performance in assessment. For instance, during a pre-observation talk in observation session# 8, the teacher complained that students' performance during classes was better than their performance in assessment which, she argued, negatively affected her evaluation by her inspectors from the General Directorate of Education. This finding was consistent with data obtained from the OECD (2020) report, which indicated that supervisor ratings evaluated teachers based on students' achievement and consequently did not accurately reflect the teaching and learning that was occurring within schools.

The findings reported here, also, indicated contradictions between the general aims of the curriculum and the assessment criteria. The study findings showed that assessment focused on testing students' linguistic competence (particularly grammatical skills), which was incompatible with the ultimate goal of teaching EFL communicatively, i.e. to improve students' communicative competence. This implied that after the implementation of CLT into the EFL curriculum, testing systems were not updated to accommodate communicative purposes. It has been argued that in a situation like this teachers and learners would more likely to pay attention to what is tested rather than on what is not (Abahaussain, 2016; Nkosana, 2010).

As outlined in the literature review chapter (section 3.1.3), there are three generic dimensions of the curriculum that direct teachers' practice; the written curriculum, the taught curriculum and the tested curriculum. It has been argued that a successfully implemented curriculum would bring all three contents into congruence, otherwise an unsystematic sequence of relations may appear (Akker, 2004; Gouedard et al., 2020; UNESCO-IBE, 2015). In the case of incompatibility amongst those contents the tested curriculum would have a greater impact on the taught curriculum, whereas the written curriculum would have a limited effect on what is taught (Steffy & English 1997). This assumption was consistent with the findings in this study, in which it was indicated that the use of CLT was limited to the written curriculum, whereas the tested curriculum still focused on grammatical knowledge. Thus, teachers had to focus on teaching grammar in order to help their students pass examinations successfully which also would have reflected positively on teachers' appraisal and evaluation. These findings were also consistent with challenges of the implemented and assessed curriculum identified in the OECD (2020) report about education in Saudi Arabia, in which it indicated that first, teachers' appraisal structures discouraged teachers from implementing the intended curriculum. Second, the report suggested that not all assessment activities were aligned through educational policy. Finally, data from the report showed that examinations were not aligned with the curriculum which prevented the examination system from supporting the implemented curriculum. All in all, the findings reported here might further support the argument that failing to adapt assessment procedures to test communicative skills, implementing communicative classroom pedagogy would not be achieved even when CLT is recommended in the teaching syllabus (Nkosana, 2010).

5.4.2 Time related challenges

The most recurrent issue reported in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that the number of hours allocated for the English subject was insufficient. The overwhelming majority

of interviewees emphasised that time was the most pressing challenge they had to deal with while teaching English communicatively at the primary level. Mainly they all expressed concerns about the number of English classes per week and the mismatch between the skills and outcomes they were expected to attain and the time they had to accomplish those goals. In the primary level English is taught two times a week in the 4th, 5th and 6th grades in public state-schools. However, in Qur'anic state-schools English is taught only once a week in the 4th and 5th grades and twice a week in grade 6.

A number of the participants explicitly indicated that English as a subject was not given enough teaching time, saying that two classes a week was insufficient for a proper implementation of the new English curriculum. Some were particularly critical of the number of classes allocated for English compared with the goals and outcomes primary EFL teachers were expected to accomplish. For instance, one interviewee remarked:

“The challenge is in the number of classes and the long and very articulated syllabus, so we really need more classes per week” (Hind)

When I asked the same teacher, how she thought this issue could be resolved, she proposed:

“The density of the subject should be reduced and the number of classes need to be increased, because two classes a week is not enough! If I have four classes a week instead, I would be able to teach the four skills – reading, speaking, listening and writing – with better quality in which I could focus on one skill in each class of the week”

In addition some participants pointed out the inconsistency between contents of each lesson and the teaching time allocated. For example, one interviewee said:

“The new curriculum is good, but the challenge is that time has clearly not been taken into consideration. We need English to be taught from the first grade, and we need more classes both in number and duration” (Najwa)

Concerns over the inconsistency between lesson content and class duration were also reflected in classroom observational data. For instance, in observation session 9A – a lesson in the 6th grade – the teaching items (input points) of the lesson involved presenting new vocabulary,

introducing a grammar rule, a listening activity and a reading passage. While student were busy writing down the lesson on their notebooks at the end of the lesson, the teacher came and complained about this issue as it was putting a lot of pressure on her. She said:

“Sometimes I would take extra classes from Islamic studies [which she also taught for the same classes in addition to English] in this way I take advantage of the time allocated to Islamic studies to finish some of the long lessons so that I would not fall behind the time frame specified in the syllabus distribution plan for each lesson ”

This was a rather significant finding, as it indicated the amount of continuous time-related stress teachers were under to cover the syllabus. These findings were in line with those of previous studies, who have suggested that limited classroom time allotted to English severely limited the effective implementation of CLT in the Saudi context (Alhamad, 2018; Alzahrani, 2017; Farooq, 2015; Najjar, 2013). These findings may be explained by the fact that teachers were required to finish the syllabus from cover to cover according to the plans and deadlines specified in the national syllabus distribution plan. As a result of teachers’ strict adherence to cover the syllabus, teachers might become unable to offer individualised teaching, substantive feedback to learners, effective language instruction and communicative activities. Accordingly, learners could miss the opportunity to learn the language effectively and communicatively, which might hinder CLT implementation and attaining the goals of the intended curriculum.

The issue of short classroom duration could possibly be considered as a by-product of a much deeper issue related to a shortage in government owned school buildings. Many schools, at the time of collecting data for this study, had to share the same building with another school respectively. Almost all primary schools, I visited for the classroom observations, were sharing the buildings with other schools, in which the original school would commence in the morning from 7 am to 12:30 in the afternoon and the other school would start from 1 pm to 5 pm. As a result, the duration of all classes had to be shortened by 10 minutes, thus each class was 35 minutes (sometimes 30 minutes especially classes at the second half of the school day) instead

of 45. That meant that learners, in those schools, were having even less than 60 hours of per year (60 minutes per week instead of the 90 minutes per week allocated for English teaching in the Saudi curriculum). This challenge was considered significant, because, arguably, studying a foreign language for 95 hours per year for six years would not lead to functional language learning (Archibald et al., 2006). The data of this study indicated that actual teaching time was even less than 60 minutes per week. However, these findings should be used with caution, because the issue of school buildings might be exclusive to the context of the city where data of this study were collected.

Overall, the ramifications of this particular issue were explicitly clear in all observation sessions in affected schools, in which teachers had to rush through activities and deal with other classroom routines and interruptions on top of that. Classroom routines, such as checking for homework, absentees, and writing down the date, were common across the observation sample. Interestingly, it seemed, in many cases, that school administrators avoid interrupting teachers while being observed by someone, because in other observation sessions when school administrators noticed that I was observing a classroom they would immediately refrain from interrupting and apologize to the teacher and leave. Which could mean that it was a standard practice within school settings that interruptions would be minimized if teachers were being observed by an outsider. However, in some cases they would interrupt the lesson to check for absentees (which was a standard procedure especially in the first three periods in the school day), make announcements to the class, or call out certain students which took around five minutes of the class time. Observation sessions 2 A and B – during the second and third periods in a school-building shared between two primary schools – would be a good illustration of this issue, in which 10 to 15 minutes of class-time were gone due to routines and interruptions. For instance, at the beginning of the class the teacher had to check for homework and absentees, ask students to dictate her the date as she wrote it down on the board, make a quick revision of

the previous lesson, and stating and writing down the goals of the lesson – this was a common routine across all participants in the classroom observation sample – on the board. This set of classroom routines would take about 10 minutes of the time. As the teacher started to warm up into the lesson procedures, someone knocked on the door and interrupted the lesson – a member of the schools administrative team was checking for absentees – this took about 5 minutes as she asked each group to name absent members in the group. As a result, the teacher ended up having approximately 30 minutes or less of teaching time and feeling pressured to rush all procedures to cover the assigned part – in the national syllabus distribution plan – of the lesson for that day.

In some cases, it seemed that observed teachers spent time – either at the beginning of the class or at the end - to reinforce civic-educational goals as part of their teaching routine. For example, in observation session 6A, the teacher discussed the goals of the 2030 Vision of Saudi Arabia with students and associated those goals with the goals of the lesson she was teaching. Similarly, in observation session 3, the teacher joined students in a prayer for the safe return for Saudi soldiers fighting in Yemen. Although this teacher was observed only once, it seemed that students knew exactly what to say and do in that prayer, which indicated that the prayer was most likely a part of classroom routine (or an occasional one at the least). However, these observations should be taken with caution, as it is possible that teachers added those civic reinforcement elements just because they were observed. As it seemed, from talking to some teachers in the sample, that teachers would add such elements to please their supervisors during their observational visits.

Nonetheless, when I asked teachers how the issue of limited time could be resolved, responses to the question included:

“The challenge is that the number of English classes is very limited compared with the desired skills and required outcomes. In my opinion, the solution is to increase

the number of English classes per week, because in this day and age English is not less important than math and as important as Arabic and if it is not properly put into practice it will be forgotten” (Azhar)

Another interviewee indicated that limited time negatively affected teachers’ ability to adequately monitor students’ progress:

“The solution to overcome the challenges we face is to increase the number of English classes per week with reducing the density of the syllabus so that the teacher is able to adequately monitor students’ progress” (Afrah)

Other teachers suggested taking advantage of the recess periods as explained in teachers’ innovative initiatives illustrated in section 5.3.1 above.

These findings were rather concerning, because they indicate two important factors. Firstly, the findings suggested that teachers’ practices were restricted by trying to finish teaching the high-density textbooks in an insufficient amount of time (in 1 hour or less per week). This meant that teachers did not have enough time for proper preparation or instruction of communicative activities. These implications were consistent with numerous reports in the literature – focused on implementing CLT in EFL contexts – where teachers thought that CLT activities were time consuming and that they did not have sufficient time for preparation or instruction (see Butler, 2011; Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004). Secondly, the findings could further support studies in previous literature that associated the issue of limited time and students’ opportunities to use the target language communicatively. Those studies indicated that insufficient class time meant that students had very limited exposure to English which deemed developing their communicative competence unsuccessful especially given that their opportunities to use the language outside the classroom might be very limited too (Butler, 2011; Carless, 2003; Rao, 2002).

5.5 Institutional and learning environment related challenges

This theme emerged from teachers’ reports of challenges focusing on administrative support provided to teachers, the type of available resources and communication networks, and the

nature of classroom environment that would serve students' educational needs. Thus, two different categories related to the institutional and classroom environments have emerged.

5.5.1 Classroom environment challenges

Two discrete issues emerged under this aspect of the curriculum. First, concerns were expressed about the large numbers of students in classrooms and its effect on teachers' ability to manage the classroom and monitor students' progress. The second reported problem was related to the physical nature of classrooms and its effect on the teaching and learning processes.

A number of interview participants raised concerns about the issue of students' numbers inside classrooms. Some interviewees reported that large student numbers was negatively affecting their ability to properly implement CLT, especially classroom practices that required close individual monitoring such as reading skills. Other teachers were concerned about the effect of students' numbers on group work. The issue of class-size and its effects on the quality of group work was previously addressed in section 5.4.1.3 above.

This issue was also confirmed in the majority of the observed classrooms. For instance, in observation session 6A and 6B (which was in a Qur'anic school in the city) there were rather large student numbers – 32 in session 6A and 35 in session 6B and the total number of students in the school was 400 – relative to the rather small-sized classrooms. Nevertheless, this issue was not unique to participants in the qualitative sample. When survey respondents were asked to what extent they thought that the issue of large classes was one of the challenges of implementing CLT, 78% agreed with the statement (see **Table 5.44**).

Table 5.44

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards challenges hindering CLT (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Large classes	3	4.00	6	8.00	7	9.33	28	37.33	31	41.33

The only two exceptions under this category were observation session# 7 (with 16 students in the class) and observation session# 10 (with 12 students in the class), both were in Qur’anic schools one located in the city and the other in a rural area outside the city. Due to the fact that this type of schools is specialized to those wishing to memorize the Holy Qur’an and that students receive financial incentives from the MOE, students’ numbers in this type of schools are normally smaller than public schools.

EFL teachers were not the only ones concerned with the issue of over population in schools. For example, before observation session# 3, during my pre-observation talk with the teacher at the schools’ principle office, the principle joined in the discussion commenting on this challenge:

Some schools in the city are very huge ... seriously, you feel that you are in the Titanic not a school! I used to work in a primary school with 900 kids enrolled in the school!

This was consistent with the data from the classroom observations where the majority of schools visited can be classified – according to the school’ principle’s description – as “*Titanics*”. See **Appendix 33** for total student numbers in each of the schools visited for the classroom observation sessions.

It is worth noting here that one of the significant factors related to this challenge, was the issue of subleased school buildings, where the situation might be even worse. In this type of residential buildings – subleased by the MOE to solve the problem of large student numbers as

opposed to existing number of public school sites – the location was not initially designed to accommodate schools. Thus, the rooms were normally much smaller than those in government-owned buildings. For instance, in observation session# 3 – the only school in the sample located in a subleased building (see **Appendix 33**) – although there were 23 students in the class (which was a smaller number than many other classrooms I visited), the room was very crowded and the teacher could barely move around the class to monitor students’ work during tasks. Furthermore, students could not move from their places either, which made it difficult for them to conveniently finish group work tasks. Moreover, in such buildings factors, such as ventilation were not properly considered as opposed to government owned school buildings. For example in the case of this school, the building was recently painted, as result it smelled like fresh paint. Therefore, the paint fumes made the classroom atmosphere suffocating and because there was only one window in the room (that was shut and barricaded) the room was inadequately ventilated.

These findings indicated that crowded classes could be one of the biggest challenges teachers had to deal with while implementing CLT into their practice. Besides, it was indicated that small crowded classrooms were inadequate for the adoption of CLT which ideally would require pupil-pupil group communication and interaction. As indicated above due to limited space students had to sit in rows and teachers standing in the front by the blackboard (i.e. in a lecture style). Thus, it can be argued that these settings hindered CLT implementation, because it meant fewer opportunities for students’ individual differences and needs to be accommodated (i.e. fewer equal opportunities for practice and individual feedback). Consequently, these challenges meant limited students’ participation, which would be incompatible with one of the core principles of the communicative approach. These findings could substantiate the association, suggested in previous research in the literature, between crowded classrooms and the difficulty to implement CLT properly and effectively (Al-Mohanna, 2010; Butler, 2011).

5.5.2 Challenges related to resources and teaching facilities

The overwhelming majority of interviewees were particularly critical of the limited resources they had and the lack of proper up-to-date educational technology equipment. In all cases, both in the interviewing and classroom observation samples, EFL teachers remarked that it was essential to have an English lab in each school in order to teach English communicatively.

Teachers brought up the idea of an English lab in discussions about both challenges and solutions. When asked about what they would suggest should be changed to solve the challenges they were facing, the overwhelming majority of interviewees thought that an English lab was an essential requirement for appropriate CLT implementation. For example, one interviewee explicitly said:

From my point of view – and I taught English in all levels - quite frankly all our [EFL teachers] troubles come down to two core problems limited time and the discouraging environment in our classrooms that does not help appropriate CLT implementation. In my opinion this can only be solved with assigning an English learning lab equipped with all the resources we need to properly teach the four language skills”. (Khlood)

Another interviewee suggested:

“Assigning a special room for English teaching equipped with all technical resources and communication networks, because unlike any other subject the perquisites of quality language teaching require the use of both resource materials (such as books, magazines and flashcards) and technological equipments”. (Afrah)

Teachers in the classroom-observation sample alluded to the notion of an English lab and the magnitude of its effect on their teaching practice. Based on data generated from classroom observations, teachers expressed their frustration about the lack of proper facilities and from the discouraging classroom environment. In almost all observation sessions, teachers had a portable wheeled-storage unit (to keep their lap tops, projectors, speakers, and other teaching aids) that they had to move around the school to each of their classes (see **Figure 11**).

Figure 11

Teacher's portable storage unit



Note. Picture taken from the classroom in observation session 9

This was certainly true in the case of observation sessions# 6 A and B, in which the teacher expressed her concern about how the unavailability of an English lab affected her. As soon as the teacher finished session A, she asked a student to help her push her portable unit (see **Figure 11**) to the next classroom. We sat together in the classroom where session B was going to take place, waiting for students to finish their lunch break. During that time we had a conversation about the teacher's concerns about the challenges she was facing, in which she said:

“I need a special resources room just for the English subject, in order to keep my teaching aids, flashcards, materials and games. You know, printing coloured flashcards is costing me a lot of money. And sometimes because I have to push or ask my students to help me push my storage unit around the school, things such as flashcards get lost. Worse than that sometimes learning games, I specifically ordered from the U.S., fall down and get broken. I would save a lot of money and valuable aids, if I only have a room to keep these things in and students come to me instead of me going to their classes with my portable unit.”

Similarly, when asked what she would have suggested to be done in this regard, another interviewee commented:

“I would suggest equipping every school with labs designated to English language just like those designated for teaching science” (Rana)

Interestingly, however, there was only one exception in the data under this category. In the rare case of observation session 1A and B, the teacher actually had a designated room for English learning. More specifically, the teacher took advantage of the fact that she was the superintendent of the school resource centre, and used it as a permanent English learning resource centre. When I asked her about it during her interview she said:

“I give all my lessons in this room. Students come to me there at their English periods. I am lucky that the head teacher is really interested in the quality of English teaching in the school and so she agreed that I teach all my classes in the school resources centre and store all my teaching aids there” (Hind)

This particular finding, indicated that sometimes teachers were given special privileges if they were seen as entrepreneurial employees who could attract good advertisement for the school and boost its rating in the system. Arguably, this system is exactly parallel to the corporate system in the private sector in which schools are redefined as firms – competing with each other in a market – that need entrepreneurial employees who are able to attract funding and market their product through advertising and so on (Connell, 2013).

Nevertheless, based on the data gathered from classroom observations, while some classrooms were equipped with a PC unit, a projector, and/or a smart board, and others even had flat screens (such as the classrooms in observation sessions 7 and 10), other classrooms were not equipped with any technological equipment (such as classrooms in observation sessions 6 and 3). In all cases, however, teachers seemed to prefer to use their own iPads, lap tops, and projectors to teach. Teachers’ abandonment of classroom equipment could have been due to a number of different reasons. On the one hand, it could indicate lack of training in how to effectively use the available equipment and how to disseminate those resources in their daily teaching practice.

On the other hand, it could be a sign of insufficient maintenance for the equipment. This finding can corroborate those of Al-Seghayer (2014) who suggested that the resources provided to EFL teachers were of low quality or in poor conditions.

Nonetheless, concerns were also expressed about teachers' as well as students' lack of access to the internet in schools. Free access to Wi-Fi in states schools was restricted to administrative staff, thus teachers were not given the right to access the school's Wi-Fi, not even for teaching purposes. Talking about this issue one interviewee said:

“The challenge for me as a teacher is the lack of internet access” (Afrah)

This particular issue also came up in discussions about students' backgrounds especially in underprivileged parts of the city and rural areas. Talking about this, one of the interviewees said:

“One of the problems is students' inability to access the audio content individually, as it is stated on the cover of the textbook. Because not every student has access to the internet at home, so they could not use the barcodes in their textbooks to access the audio” (Azhar)

The same issue came up during my pre and post observation talks with teachers, as they alluded to the notion of students' inability to access the internet due to financial reasons especially in schools located in disadvantaged communities of the city or in rural areas. This was evident in the case of observation session# 10, which was at a school located in a rural village outside the city. Despite the fact that the session was in the resource centre in the school, which was equipped with two flat screens that the teacher connected to her lap-top. After the session ended, I stayed to chat with the teacher in the same room. When I asked her about the challenges of teaching EFL in the primary level particularly in rural areas, the teacher expressed her concerns about the issue, in which she said:

“Because we [teachers] could not access the school's Wi-Fi, we are forced to bring our own private portable Wi-Fi devices. However, the internet service is so bad here. So when we complained about the problem to the service provider in the area they

said that the villagers themselves demanded that cell towers near the village should be removed”

The teacher also complained that the MOE did not send the newly updated version of the interactive programme – which is an electronic version of the textbook – to EFL teachers.

The data indicated that teachers were aware of the importance of the internet for teaching in the 21st century, however, it seemed that decision makers did not reach the same level of awareness. Teachers in the sample indicated that access to all facilities available within the school including the internet should not be restricted, because this meant their inability to use part of the curriculum and its materials. This could be seen as an indication of the gap between decision makers in the top and teachers’ real needs and concerns on the ground.

Teachers’ unanimous interest in providing more up-to-date resources for EFL instruction should not be surprising especially in view of the ever-increasing roles that digital media play in every aspect of professional and social domains. Overall, research evidence have taken a favourable stance towards the pedagogical use of information and communication technology (ICT) in Saudi EFL classrooms and its potential benefits for learners’ engagement, autonomy and improving their oral skills (Toro et al., 2019). In accordance with the present findings, previous studies have identified; limited access to suitable equipment and the Internet, teachers’ lack of sufficient theoretical and methodological grounding in the implementation of digital technology, and that EFL teachers were not adequately trained for ICT as obstacles to proper use of digital technologies in EFL instruction (Al-Maini, 2013; Picard, 2019). This also accords with the recommendation that EFL teachers were in urgent need for pre- and in-service training in the pedagogical application of digital technology in order to boost their confidence in allocating more class time to ICT related activities (Almukhallafi, 2014). The findings here could reflect teachers’ awareness that ICT has the capacity to improve learners’ autonomy and

self-efficiency due to the availability a broad range of ICT-based learning resources on the Internet which learners, even young ones, can use to support their learning.

Moreover, the lack of sufficient teaching/learning aids could explain teachers' reliance on textbooks, which is inconsistent with one of the core principles of the communicative approach. Despite the fact that the findings indicated the availability of some teaching/learning aids, teachers reported students' inability to access the digital content of the curriculum as challenging. Teachers viewed this as a challenge of implementing CLT, possibly, because even when aids were available they were either out-of-date or in poor conditions. This might be challenging because the purposes of utilizing teaching/learning aids within CLT include: (a) promoting conversations within groups; (b) providing cultural backgrounds; (c) reinforcing learning; and (d) providing students with the opportunity to listen to correct pronunciation, and grammatical and sentence structure (Al-Mohanna, 2010). However, the findings of this study indicated that those purposes were not fulfilled because students, especially young ones, did not have the opportunity to access this content in school or (in some cases) at home.

Once again, it might be helpful to invoke sociomateriality here and the semiotic relationship between social and material elements in education. As briefly explained before, material elements in education (including facilities and resources) are usually dismissed or treated as background (Fenwick et al., 2011). However, from a sociomaterialistic point view, these material assemblages can play a role in creating the reality of the educational phenomenon and stabilizing ways of producing centres of power (Fenwick & Doyle, 2018). Within this view of education learning emerges through relations between teachers and learners from one end and materials in the classroom environment at the other end (Fenwick et al., 2011). Therefore, the findings related to facilities and resources can be situated in and viewed with a sociomaterialistic lens. The findings indicated that from EFL teachers' perspectives it was not possible to separate effective CLT implementation from technological resources and up-to-date

facilities. Teachers' perspectives in this regard can be seen as an indication that the existence of facilities and resources (or lack thereof) was creating particular effects on the implementation of the communicative approach. The findings implied that both elements – the social (teaching communicatively) and material (resources) – were entangled and indeterminately connected, and that if one was taken out it would not be effective standing alone. Thus, those perspectives implied that in understanding CLT implementation, teaching practice (i.e. the social element) and the availability of resources and facilities (i.e. the material elements) could not be seen as disparate elements of teaching and learning practices.

5.6 Teachers' absent voices and marginalization

This theme was generated from teachers' responses (in the interviews and the questionnaire) with regards to their perspectives of their role in the process of decision making (or lack thereof). The data gathered in this regard indicated that teachers played a very minimal role in the process of curricular change or perhaps no role at all.

The last part of the questionnaire was designated to explore teachers' perspectives of the extent of their involvement in the process of curriculum change (see **Appendix 7**). Closer inspection of **Tables 5.45 and 5.46** below, can show that by far the majority of teachers in the questionnaire sample (86%) agreed that consulting them before implementing any change into the curriculum was important (**Table 5.45**). Similarly, 88% of EFL teachers in the sample showed positive attitudes towards statement 39 (**Table 5.46**), stating that the consideration of their opinions and experiences could facilitate ELT improvement. Those findings indicated teachers' awareness of the centrality of their role in curriculum development and were corroborated by reports from teachers in the interviewing and classroom observation samples.

Table 5.45

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards their involvement in curriculum development (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Taking teachers' opinions and experiences before making any changes in the curriculum is important	2	2.67	2	2.67	6	8.00	27	36.00	38	50.67

Table 5.46

Distribution of sample on attitudes towards their involvement in curriculum development (N = 75).

Item	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Taking teachers' opinions and experiences before making any changes in the curriculum will improve the outcomes of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.	1	1.33	2	2.67	6	8.00	32	42.67	34	45.33

In the interviews, some teachers indicated that they were not involved in the process of planning and implementing curriculum change. Other interviewees were more critical and reported that they found it annoying when the MOE made policy changes implementing new interventions and obligated them to accept and implement those changes without consulting them first. For example, one interviewee questioned the top-down system of policy making:

“I seriously started thinking about early retirement because of the constant policy changes ... created an atmosphere of instability for me as a teacher... And it is annoying and not fair for teachers because we do not have the time to cope with all these changes” (Asmaa)

This was one of the most interesting findings of the study, as it indicated that teachers were thinking of early retirement and leaving the profession due to pressures and their marginalization within the educational system. This feeling was mirrored in some teachers’ responses, as they implied their unfamiliarity with the process of curriculum development. For instance, when asked about their perspectives of the current process of curriculum development, some teachers replied:

The procedure might be good, however, it tends to be sort of erratic, inconsistent and impractical as it does not consider the practical life” (Rana)

I do not know what the procedure for changing the curriculum is. If you mean the syllabus from the primary to the secondary level, it is good but irrelevant to some students. (Asmaa)

These responses clearly indicated teachers’ unfamiliarity with the process of curriculum development, which implied the centralization of the Saudi educational system where teachers might be seen as mere implementers rather than collaborators in the curriculum. Despite their marginalization, teachers indicated their awareness – as shown in their responses in the questionnaire (see **Tables 5.45 and 5.46** above) of the centrality of their role in the process of curriculum development. This awareness was also evident in the interviewing data. For instance, one interviewee commented:

“Teachers are supposed to be consulted about curriculum change, simply because it is them who are going to execute those changes and this actually might solve some of the problems we now have with the current curriculum ” (Khloud)

This finding indicated teachers’ absent voices and their marginalization within the Saudi educational system, despite their intimate knowledge of Saudi EFL learners, their abilities, learning styles and needs. These findings were found consistent with those of Al-Hamdan (2014) who suggested that EFL teachers had greater knowledge about Saudi learners and their

needs – due to their direct interaction with learners and understanding of them – than textbook designers, officials and experts at the macro level.

When asked if they were familiar with CLT before it was implemented into the English curriculum, teachers' comments gave an indication of the procedure adopted by the MOE when the decision to adopt the approach was made. As indicated earlier in this chapter (in sections 5.1.1, 5.1.2, 5.1.4 and 5.4.1), it seemed that teachers' were not consulted before implementing CLT. For example, one teacher said:

Frankly, I did not have a clue what CLT was. Nobody consulted us before the change not even a survey. At first, there was 5 different piloted textbooks and then our feedback was taken by the end of the year, therefore the number was reduced to 3. (Samah)

As indicated by the comment above, teachers were minimally engaged in the process of curriculum change (after the fact). Based on this response, teachers were asked to give their feedback about the five different syllabi that were piloted when CLT was introduced. Teachers gave their feedback on those as a process of elimination to reduce the number of syllabi taught in state schools. Therefore, it could be argued that this involvement was insignificant. This could be corroborated by observations made in the OECD (2020) report, which indicated that channels for collecting teachers' feedback during the curriculum development and review processes appeared very limited. Data obtained from Al-Seghayer (2015) also indicated that even when prompted to submit their feedback about textbook materials, many Saudi EFL teachers did not take advantage of that option due to their lack of knowledge about the process of curriculum development, planning, design and evaluation.

In order to describe teachers' involvement in decision making as meaningful, their perspectives need to be taken into consideration before implementing the new curriculum not after. To be described as such, teachers' engagement in curriculum reform would require their involvement in curriculum reform processes from designing the curriculum to rolling it out

(OECD, 2020). This is because (as Khloud's response – quoted above – has indicated) teachers' attitudes can have direct ramifications on the outcomes of the curriculum implementation process and, therefore, their positive attitudes are necessary requisites for its successful change (OECD, 2020).

Teachers in the sample of this study suggested that they were the only ones capable of knowing what needed to be reformed, how and what would have been beneficial and compatible with students' learning needs and abilities (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). This was confirmed by most teachers' – in the classroom observation sample – attitudes when I first approached them to participate in the study. A number of teachers mentioned that they were particularly delighted and expressed appreciation that someone actually showed interest in listening to what they had to say about the challenges they were facing and to come into their classrooms to observe those challenges on the ground. Those teachers also welcomed the opportunity to share their perspectives and to cooperate with a researcher who was willing to listen to them, understand and communicate what they had to deal with on a daily basis. For instance, some teachers remarked their true desire and hope that the findings of this study would make their way to MOE officials, in the hope that decision makers would become aware of how much EFL teachers have been struggling and know the extent of the challenges teachers were forced to cope with.

These findings were significant in many respects, in which they might further explain earlier findings (reported in section 5.4) that indicated that teachers resorted to using traditional methods in their instruction rather than CLT. Teachers' resistance to curricular change might be understood as a reaction to imposed curricular changes. It has been argued in the literature that when curricular change was imposed on teachers they tended to perceive it as a threat which generated feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, inferiority, isolation, and defensive efforts (Fullan, 1993; Troudi & Alwan, 2010). These findings might also support the association

between the success of pedagogical innovation and taking teachers' perspectives into consideration ahead of implementing pedagogical changes (Ketelaar et al., 2012; Mikser et al., 2016; Pierce et al., 2003). These findings may also further explain Kelly's (1999) teachers' make and break role in curricular change that suggested that the success of curriculum change depended largely on teachers' acceptance and commitment to the change. Furthermore, these findings implied that policy makers failed to recognize the centrality of teachers' leadership roles in decision-making and indicated that teachers' marginalization could render CLT implementation in the Saudi EFL context a challenging task. Finally, the findings indicated an incompatibility between the current curriculum and CLT principles, in which it might be difficult for teachers to teach their students to be autonomous when teachers themselves do not have the professional freedom and autonomy in the educational system within which they belong.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the main issues that have arisen from the findings of this study.

Chapter 6

Discussion

Overview

Some of the findings that have arisen from this study, indicated that the obstacles EFL teachers faced while implementing CLT were complicated and multi-layered on so many levels including; the highly centralized nature of the Saudi education system, marginalization of teachers' voice, and insufficient teacher in-service training programmes. This indicated that CLT challenges were not merely related to instruction, syllabus, pedagogy and practice. Therefore, this chapter discusses the main issues that have emerged from the findings while addressing the research questions of this study, which were:

What are EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT?

What are teachers' perspectives on the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level?

To what extent do teachers' in-service training opportunities support them to implement CLT effectively?

To what extent were EFL teachers involved in the process of curriculum development?

In addition, this chapter addresses some new bigger questions that have emerged from the key findings. Based on challenges related to teachers' attitudes towards CLT, their workload, their in-service training and their involvement in decision making, the following two questions have emerged: what could educational policy and curricular changes signify beyond the obvious pedagogical changes on the instructional level? What effects do they have on teachers and their practice? This type of questions is urgently in need of answers for those of us who work in the sphere of education. Addressing such questions leads to a deep understanding of what teachers

do in light of what they think. Both factors are crucial when considering educational reforms, because beneath teachers' behaviours there are perceptions and attitudes, constructs that influence what they do. In an interview with Birello (2012), Borg stresses the role played by understanding of teachers' perceptions in the successful implementation of educational reform. Borg argues that upon the analysis of large scale educational reforms – which never seemed to have the desired impact although a lot of time and money were invested in trying to get teachers to change, very often with minimal results – it became clear that one of the reasons for this is that those reforms were targeting behaviours without taking into consideration perceptions and beliefs. This becomes particularly true when we take into consideration that education policy and the teaching profession often seem to be at the whim of those who have no experience with the profession at any level, in which teachers feel disconnected from their teaching interests or recurring problems of practice due to this top-down political climate (Taylor and Moohr, 2018). Therefore, in this chapter the discussion of the key findings is taken into a deeper level, in which it will argue that obstacles Saudi EFL teachers have reported were not exclusive to the perceptible challenges they face with the curriculum. Rather some of the key findings have indicated that some challenges might go beyond that into issues with equity, politics and teachers' pedagogical rights that can play a role in hindering teachers' growth and making them feel overwhelmed and unsupported. Such a discussion can be important in the Saudi context and might add to the body of literature concerned with the effects of curricular development and education policy change on teaching practice.

Before proceeding to the next section, it is important to revisit the conceptual framework and how it was helpful in guiding me throughout this study. The conceptual framework chosen to inform this investigation, i.e. key factors and concepts covered in the literature review such as teachers' roles in curriculum development, CLT challenges in EFL/ESL contexts and post-method pedagogy as an alternative to method, helped in situating the study within the context

of previous research. The conceptual framework was also helpful in setting the research questions, designing methods of data collection and utilizing the research design (Leshem & Trafford, 2007). It guided the process of analysing and meaningfully interpreting the findings that emerged in light of the body of research studies that already existed in the literature and showed that those findings were conceptually coherent (Berman, 2013).

With regards to interpreting the findings, the conceptual framework was useful in understanding teachers' experiences with CLT. That is, it allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of how and why EFL teachers were struggling with implementing CLT in Saudi state schools. In light of the framework, I was able to understand those challenges and give a vivid picture of CLT implementation at the primary level, the nature of in-service training EFL teachers get, and the extent of teachers' involvement in the process of curriculum development. Thus, it enabled me to get some insights into how all these factors hindered the successful implementation of CLT in the Saudi Arabian context. Comparing the findings against others in the literature made me aware that contextual challenges and logistic limitations (such as lack of time, lack of resources, large class sizes, teachers and learners low proficiency and exam-oriented education culture) were, although not less important, just the tip of the iceberg. Those comparisons helped me look deeper at other challenges related to policy and the nature of educational system that negatively affected EFL teachers' practice and thus hindered the effective CLT implementation.

To insure consistency with the conceptual framework, the discussion here addresses conceptual constraints, classroom-level constraints, and societal-institutional level constraints respectively. Challenges related to the educational policy and the education system will be analysed throughout the following sections in this chapter. The next section, however, is dedicated to addressing the contextual challenges of implementing CLT.

6.1 Pedagogical challenges

Two of the initial objectives of this investigation were to explore and understand teachers' attitudes towards CLT and their perspectives on CLT challenges. Thus, the findings discussed in this section provided answers with regards to the first two research questions in this study which sought out to explore EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT and perceptions of the challenges of implementing CLT at the primary level.

In terms of conceptual constraints, comparisons of the findings with those of other studies could confirm incompatibility between CLT core principles and traditional educational views in EFL contexts (Alkahtani, 2015; Alanezi, 2015; Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2014; Mahmudun Nuby et al., 2020; Omari, 2019). The findings indicated that although EFL classrooms were supposed to be classified as communicative, they were still teacher-centred, where teachers still controlled every aspect of classroom interactions. This was found particularly to be inconsistent with the CLT approach, in which attention should be shifted from teachers to students and learning/learner-centred instruction.

With regards to classroom-level constraints, the present findings could add to data obtained from previous studies in the literature which showed that lack of appropriate resources, limited time, teachers' heavy workload were all factors that hindered proper CLT implementation (Abdulkader, 2013; Albedaiwi, 2014; Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004). The findings in this study indicated that tasks carried out inside classrooms relied, heavily, on drills, rote learning, and improper use of group-work – i.e. tasks assigned to group activities usually required students to use low order thinking skills.

Implications of the findings under this category were significant in at least two major respects. First, this study could add to the idea that constraints on the conceptual, classroom, societal-institutional and teacher training levels are major factors inhibiting successful CLT

implementation. The insights gained from this thesis might add to the growing body of literature that reached to a similar conclusion. For instance, the challenges related to conceptual and classroom levels agreed with previous studies that found that CLT application in some EFL/ESL contexts turned out to be tormenting to teachers and learners alike even in the cases where the adaptation was approved, supported and funded by governments (Didenko & Pichugova, 2016; Spada, 2007).

Secondly, all the challenges reported in this thesis – and confirmed by findings from previous studies (see Albedaiwi, 2014; Alkahtani, 2015; Alanezi, 2015; Abahussain, 2016; Alzahrani, 2017 – might further imply that perhaps CLT might not be ‘the best method’ – i.e. the unquestioning acceptance of CLT as the best second/foreign language teaching method (see Bax, 2003; Fadilah, 2018) – of teaching English in Saudi Arabia (Alamri, 2018). Therefore, it might be time to consider other pedagogical choices that could be more flexible and appropriate to the needs, capabilities and abilities of Saudi EFL teachers and learners. Saudi EFL teachers’ reports extended our understanding of how they wished to be given the autonomy to adjust their pedagogical choices to implement what might fit learners’ individual needs, abilities and capabilities and the resources available in their specific contexts. The findings indicated that teachers thought that Saudi learners were used to a learning style that might be inconsistent with student roles within CLT. Those findings could be confirmed by previous studies, that suggest that Saudi learners were used to rote learning and memorization (Al-Haisoni, 2012; Al-Juaid, 2015) and that Arab learners preferred instruction practices based on deductive rather than inductive approaches (Mallia, 2015).

Therefore, it might be beneficial to consider the implementation of some of the contemporary ELT approaches in the post-method era. For example, Kumaravadivelu’s post-method pedagogy could be considered. In fact, Ahmad (2014) attempted to cast light on how Kumaravadivelu’s framework could improve the practical reality of ELT in the Saudi context.

Ahmad (2014) argued that post method pedagogy might have the potential for successful adoption in the Saudi context because it could strike a balance between being principled and adaptable. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), the approach maintains identifiable and measurable goals in its flexible macro-strategy guidelines, while realistically recognizing specific contextual aspects related to teachers' and learners' characteristics and values in its micro-strategies. Moreover, data obtained from Seidi (2019) revealed that the adoption of post-method pedagogy was negatively correlated with teachers' burnout, because this approach adopted a bottom up and flexible educational system where teachers would have autonomy and authority over their practice.

In acknowledgement that CLT's position has not been claimed yet and continued major impact in the present ELT context, its vitality could not be overlooked (Brown, 2014; Didenko & Pichugova, 2016; Nagy, 2019). Therefore, instead of going to the extreme and calling for the abandonment of the concept of method, a more practical solution could be reached. The focus, instead, could be on training EFL teachers to be able and confident to choose the method or methods they think could be suitable in their contexts and compatible with their students' needs and expectations. In-service teachers can be given the autonomy and support they would need to make informed judgements about what method/methods to use rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all national instructional approach that may or may not work. From this perspective, the focus would be shifted from the idea of choosing the best method to choosing the most appropriate method. Thus, this era might be best described as the post-communicative period, which might reflect the tendency to correct CLT deficiencies and apply its several good techniques and strategies (Nagy, 2019). More recently, studies started to emerge in line with this recommendation. For instance, Haryani and Ainur (2020) investigated – in Indonesia – the merits of the collaboration between CLT and traditional methods, such as the audiolingual approach and community language learning. The study concluded that the collaboration

between CLT and other methods has the potential to be used as an alternative strategy in English teaching and learning. Further research could be conducted to determine the effectiveness of such strategy in other EFL contexts.

6.2 Contextual challenges: effects of changes in education policy

The discussion in this section, addresses the second research question of the study – about teachers’ perspectives of the challenges of implementing CLT – at the level of educational policies. Some of the interesting findings of this study implied that teachers’ teaching practice and the nature of the teaching profession have been affected by some of the recent socio-political changes that took place in Saudi Arabia in the last two decades. Thus, this section aims to situate some of the issues that emerged from the findings within those policy changes to gain a deeper understanding of curriculum development in the Saudi context.

Many teachers around the world have been feeling severely compromised in their ability to offer quality teaching to their students as they battled the negative effects of performativity and accountability on their professional practice (Appel, 2020). For example, as a result of neoliberal education policy agendas, a push towards a strongly tiered system of employment has emerged, the capstone of which has been performance pay for an elite of teachers (Connell, 2013). According to Connell this system exactly paralleled the corporate system in the private sector, in which schools were redefined as firms – competing with each other in a market – that needed entrepreneurial employees who might attract funding and market their product through advertising and so on. Implications of this system was manifested in the findings in this study, where those teachers who were seen as entrepreneurial teachers who could help the school compete with other schools and score higher in the local-schools rating system, were given special privileges such as a special ELT resources room. Other indications of this system can be found in the newly placed teachers’ tiered-system, in which – in compliance with the National Transformation Programme (NTP) and the 2030 Vision of Saudi Arabia – teachers’

positions were ranked into a five-tiered system; teacher assistant, teacher, practitioner, advanced, and expert (the Ministry of Civil Services, 2019). The system called Teachers Standards and Professional Pathways, has been developed by the Education and Training Evaluation Commission (ETEC) since 2015 and considered the first professional teacher standards in Saudi Arabia (OECD, 2020).

Furthermore, because changes in education policies would rarely stop at the classroom door, the implications of such policies have been manifested in relationships between teachers and their students, reflected in intensified testing systems (Connell, 2013). Intensive testing has put teachers under tremendous pressure to narrow the curriculum to the knowledge and skills that could be tested and drilling the performance that students needed to produce during tests. As a result of this high-stakes testing regime schools had to compete with each other to have best scores and teachers to be assessed by their students' performance. The findings of this study showed that EFL teachers were struggling with assessment procedures, as many in the sample reported assessment as a source of the increasing pressures put on their workload and made their practice frustrating and confusing. Moreover, the findings indicated that the grammar – based testing system in the Saudi education system had greatly affected how and what teachers would do inside classrooms. Thus, this study might confirm the conclusion made by Moore and Clarke (2016) who indicated that teachers felt caught in the dilemma between making a difference in their students' lives and the necessity of preparing them for success in assessment which demand a degree of failure.

Comprehensive evaluation was yet another indicator – of the ramifications of the recent changes in education policy agendas on teachers – that was manifested in the findings of this study. Teachers in the sample complained that the education system created tensions, contradictions, and dissatisfaction to the point that some of them indicated seriously considering early retirement. These findings might provide insights for the argument that

despite claims that neoliberal policy might have the potential to free public schools from heavy-handed state control and bureaucracy, schools – under this policy – were being confined more firmly into a system of remote control operated by testing systems, certification, audit and surveillance mechanisms (Connell, 2013). This environment had led to an inevitable de-professionalization of teachers, because it undermined their capacity to make decisions and judgements in the interests of their students and contradictions between short-term results and long-term effects (Connell, 2013). Thus, this study might provide further confirmation that performativity measures in education have undermined and shifted authority away from teachers to state curriculum and surveillance authorities. As a result of these demands teachers might feel that they should abandon their beliefs about effective teaching practice and instead conform to new school norms that meet these measures (Gray & Seiki, 2020). More evidence of the challenges of teachers' workload in relation to performativity and accountability measures is outlined in the following section.

6.3 Challenges with teachers' workload, accountability and performativity measures

This section also addresses the question about the challenges of implementing CLT in the Saudi context. This investigation indicated teachers' job dissatisfaction and feelings of increasing pressures. Therefore, it might contribute to a growing body of evidence that drew attention to the effects of accountability and performativity measures, particularly in relation to workload, on teachers and their practice (Appel, 2020), teachers' self-efficacy (Vieluf et al., 2013), feelings of burning out (Skaalvik, 2010), and job satisfaction and retention rates (Perryman & Calvert, 2020). These effects were manifested in this study, in which some teachers have complained that the current education system created tensions, contradictions, and dissatisfaction to the point that some of them seriously considered early retirement. These findings might add to those of Alhamad (2018) who suggested that there might be a high

potential for teacher attrition in Saudi Arabia, as teachers reported that the most likely incentives for them to leave the profession were overwhelming workload and lack of support. The link between teachers' workload and teachers' retention and attrition rates was a longstanding challenge in the teacher workforce internationally. For example, data obtained from Perryman & Calvert (2020) showed that, even teachers who had reported initial motivation to entering the teaching profession had either left or were planning to leave in the future. The study suggested that workload, target driven culture, governments' initiatives and lack of support were, respectively, the most frequently cited reasons that dulled their enthusiasm.

The issues that have arisen under this category – challenges related to comprehensive evaluation and teachers' appraisal in particular – could further support those discussed in section 6.2 above. The findings implied that supervisors would test students, observe classrooms and look at documents that teachers would create about students' progress in order to collect data about teachers' performance. However, the OECD (2020) report indicated that teachers in Saudi Arabia thought that these ratings were far from fair and did not accurately reflect the amount of work they were doing on a daily basis. The report suggested that multiple reasons might explain teachers' mistrust in supervisors' ratings of their performance: 1) supervisors, although usually former teachers, are not sufficiently trained as their job is limited to using ready-made templates and guidelines; 2) the evaluation process focuses on a limited range of teachers' practices and based on students' performance rather than on their learning; 3) the grids used are inflexible and compliance driven. This study – along with the aforementioned data obtained from the OECD (2020) report – can provide confirmation for the findings of Al. Rwqee (2012) who indicated that after supervisions were completed and schools received their copies of the final report, the supervisors' job would be considered done and their relationship with the school ended there. This might be attributed to the fact that

supervisors, and Directorates of Education for that matter, were not required to provide support for quality improvement or even to recommend solutions and remedial plans in response to the common issues and challenges encountered by the observed teachers and schools (OECD, 2020).

Teachers in the sample of this study mentioned feeling stressed and frustrated that evaluation was focused on monitoring their students' performance in exams, their compliance with the nationally unified syllabus distribution plans and how much they progressed through the curriculum rather than on their professional growth or their students' learning and development. As a result of this system, this thesis implied that EFL teachers were forced to focus on what was tested, i.e. grammatical knowledge, in order to improve students' performance in exams and not on their ability to use English communicatively.

Powell and Parkes (2020) argued that this type of performativity measures, could change what it meant to be a teacher where predictability was valued over creativity and spontaneity and could lead teachers to experience a 'values schizophrenia', "where commitment, judgement and authenticity within practice might be sacrificed for impression and performance" (p. 137). This alteration of teachers' conception of their practice was evident in the findings, in which teachers indicated that they would alter their practice to adhere to such measures and impress inspectors. Similarly, Appel (2020) identified three negative effects of performance culture; lack of autonomy, stifled creativity and breach of trust as compromising factors on teachers' knowledge, autonomy and responsibility.

6.4 Challenges with teacher in-service training and professional growth

This category provides answers with respect to the third research question of the study that sought to find out the kind of training and support offered to EFL teachers to help them deal

with CLT. This investigation suggested a gap between the merits of teacher training programmes and teachers' views about what high quality teacher training should involve.

The findings reported here indicated that teachers were particularly critical of the competency of trainers and the quality of formal in-service training they were offered, which could explain teachers' disinclination to participate in formal PD. This study might support evidence from Oudah and Altalhab (2018) who reported that Saudi EFL teachers thought that they were not well qualified due to being trained by unqualified and/or non-professional trainers who used to lecture them about theory without communication or practice. The findings might also support Althobaiti's (2017) study into Saudi EFL teachers' training which found that teachers were in dire need for training in areas such as classroom management, how to effectively incorporate technology and how to properly teach language basic skills, describing the current standards of training as embarrassing. In accordance with the present investigation, EFL teachers in Alhamad (2018) rated trainers as the least effective source of assistance claiming that formal training courses were ineffective because such courses were often merely theoretical and did not meet their needs. A possible explanation for the abovementioned reasons of teachers' mistrust in formal training, might be the fact that most training supervisors were former teachers who received very little preparation on how to deliver training and develop other teachers (OECD,2020).

The empirical findings in this study provided insights into the role of teachers' voice and agency in training. The study indicated that EFL teachers turned to private informal PD as a way of self-directed learning in order to improve their teaching practice and ultimately their students' learning. This level of awareness could be seen as an indicator of their sense of agency and ownership over their professional growth. The insights gained here might confirm those of Oudah and Altalhab (2018) who also reported that most of the participant teachers in their study stated that they optionally attended informal professional training programmes, which

indicated that they had the internal motivation to attend PD sessions in order to improve their teaching skills, language level and ability to better help students enhance their learning. This study might also add to those of Alzahrani (2017) who indicated that the majority of EFL teachers in the study sample reported their genuine interest in developing their practice and knowledge base to improve their teaching and their students' learning experience and thus improve the educational outcomes to be in line with the objectives of the Saudi Vision 2030.

Thus, the present study could suggest teachers' awareness of the importance of good quality training to advance their professional growth. The teachers also indicated their frustration with the fact that their workload was a great obstacle that consumed so much time and energy they could have used to seek meaningful PD and training.

6.5 Centralization and teachers' marginalization

The last research question in this study sought to determine the extent of Saudi EFL teachers' involvement in decision making, particularly with regards to the process of curriculum development. One of the most interesting findings of this study, indicated a fundamental inconsistency between the broad government's objectives of introducing CLT into the national curriculum and its implementation at the instructional level. The present exploratory study indicated that EFL classes – although supposed to be communicative – were teacher-centred and that teachers focused on explaining grammar instead of giving students opportunities to develop their communicative competence.

The study implied a substantial gap between policies stated in government documents and the way they were implemented in the day-to-day classroom delivery. Thus, the findings in this study could contribute to the argument that educational reforms in Saudi Arabia were not being properly and consistently implemented (Moskovsky & Picard, 2019). This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of why CLT implementation has failed in the Saudi

context. The findings implied that what teachers use in classrooms was a combination of more traditional teaching approaches even though CLT was the nationally prescribed pedagogical approach. This was found to be consistent with data obtained in previous studies – such as Hu, 2002 in China; Lee, 2014 in South Korea; Mahmudun Nuby et al., 2020 in Bangladesh; Prapaisit de Segovia & Hardison, 2009 in Thailand – who confirmed that although CLT was recognized and desired by governments, in those contexts, to foster students' communicative competence, EFL teachers did not maintain a CLT-oriented teaching practice, in which teachers were still influenced by traditional language teaching methods. This investigation suggested an association between failing to adopt CLT and the centralized top-down nature of the Saudi education system. This was important because it might add to the premise that a curriculum implemented using top-down approach would be deemed as inefficient (Fullan, 2007) and that teaching and learning objectives would not be attained (Rahman et al., 2018) due to teachers' lack of authority and meagre involvement in the change process (Wedell & Grassick, 2018). Evidence of teachers' compliance with whatever handed down to them was manifested in the findings of this study, where some teachers' indicated their preference to follow assessment criteria from the MOE rather than making their own. These findings implied that within a centralized system, teachers might think that conforming to imposed plans was their only option especially in light of the very limited leadership roles and authoritative voice they had within the system (Albedaiwi, 2014; Al Beiz, 2002). The centralization in the educational system could discourage teachers from making any effort to develop their own teaching materials or choose teaching techniques that might actually work. Furthermore, with time teachers may perceive engagement in a task such as curriculum development as beyond their capabilities and responsibilities (Al-Seghayer, 2017).

The insights gained from this study suggested that teachers had very limited (if any) involvement in the process of curriculum and policy change. Teachers' limited involvement in

any meaningful decision making processes had manifested itself in many ways throughout this study. Based on teachers' discourses about the challenges of implementing CLT, it was indicated that CLT had been imposed on Saudi EFL teachers. The participants reported that they did not know what CLT was or how to implement it when it was first introduced. It had been long argued, in the literature, that Saudi EFL teachers had very limited autonomy, teach within very strict boundaries, and were expected to adhere to guidance given to them from the top (Al-Seghayer, 2017). The issue of teachers' compliance could be situated within the more general issue of power relations in the macro socio-political context in Saudi Arabia. In a conservative society, such as the Saudi Arabian society, obedience to authority is highly emphasized and entangled with some religious beliefs that would encourage civilians to obey those in authority (Mullick, 2013). Within such a context those in the bottom of the hierarchical system would be expected to adhere to rules and follow instructions coming from the top. As a result of teachers' marginalization and limited leadership roles, they might feel disconnected, powerless, insignificant and ineligible to change any aspect of the curriculum.

In addition the findings indicated teachers' lack of choice within the Saudi educational system, where teachers reported that they might face punitive actions if they did not adhere to organizational norms (such as teaching other subjects than English). These findings might further support those of Alnefaie (2016) who concluded that EFL teachers were marginalized in decision-making in general and in curriculum development in particular, in which teachers were seen as mere implementers and tools to convey MOE agendas which led to feelings of frustration, dissatisfaction and limited freedom.

The findings also indicated teachers' reluctance to express their opinions regarding certain issues. For instance, in many statements in the questionnaire a considerable portion of teachers in the sample chose the neutral options, which might be attributed to teachers' limited experience in expressing their opinions with regards to what they do or know. Other indicators

included teachers' enthusiasm to talk about the challenges they face from their own perspectives. Many teachers indicated their gratitude that this study focused on their perspectives and voices in determining the obstacles they had to overcome on a daily basis, which, according to them, they were unable to do with their supervisors who were more interested in ticking boxes than listening to what teachers had to say about their needs and concerns. These findings could confirm those of Al-Qahtani (2016) who concluded that even when the MOE encouraged teachers to share their opinions about the materials they teach – mostly textbooks – they chose not to communicate their thoughts and concerns because they believed that their opinions would not be taken seriously. This indicated teachers' mistrust in the system as well as their belief that they could not communicate their opinions or recommendations with MOE officials who were above them in the hierarchical structure.

Teachers' involvement in decision making could give them a sense of ownership and power over their practice, a voice and a sense of agency in the process of curriculum change and implementation. Teachers in the sample indicated that they should be given the power to choose what pedagogical approach could suit their students and how the chosen method would be incorporated into their classroom practice. Giving teachers the responsibility of choosing relevant content, developing syllabi and selecting the most appropriate evaluation approach and student assessment procedure, might cultivate a sense of teachers' ownership of curriculum initiatives and thus making them key agents for changing and improving the curriculum. These observations match those observed in Mullick (2013) that suggested that within an atmosphere charged with feelings of mistrust, underappreciation, marginalization, and miscommunication between the top and bottom of the educational system, education would never be able to move forward. Because such a climate might make teachers feel powerless and restrained, might inhibit their creative abilities and their abilities to use their faculties.

Although the findings indicated that some EFL teachers did not have confidence in their ability to implement CLT, however the findings suggested that teachers were unhappy that the MOE would issue changes without consulting them. These findings implied that (some) EFL teachers thought that they were capable to have the authority to “speak” as partners in curriculum reform. Those teachers indicated that they were the only ones capable of determining what was beneficial and compatible with students’ learning needs and abilities. These findings could be used to highlight the idea that teachers’ involvement in their school conditions, facilities, classrooms, their students’ needs, abilities and socio economic conditions, might be what delimit their production, implementation and ownership of curricular reforms.

This thesis has provided evidence that teachers were already using their sphere of authority and their intimate knowledge of their local contexts to make sense of the reality of their contexts and moving beyond materials – in which some have taken the initiative to establish their own extracurricular activities – to apply reforms and programmes that would meet their students’ needs and suit the resources available in their learning environments. Clearly, teachers were already appropriating the reform to suit their context of implementation, whether it be in the form of initiatives that enhanced CLT implementation or sabotaging the reform by resorting to other traditional methods.

Thus, this study might have a number of practical implications. These implications might be relevant to the way large-scale curriculum reform in Saudi Arabia could to be made. The present findings implied that unless policy-makers acknowledge the complexity of curriculum reform and the importance of partnerships in the process, successful educational reform might not be attained. Collaborative relationships – between teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, teachers’ educators, professional associations, teachers PD providers, and parents – might be key conditions for successful curricular reform. Policy makers might take into consideration that at the heart of collaboration and partnership would be the integration of top-

down and bottom-up strategies of reform in education. This integration would reflect the complexity of the process as it might require the reconciliation of the range of interests – some of them potentially conflicting – that stakeholders could bring to the process (Kirk and Macdonald, 2001).

All in all, this chapter addressed issues that have arisen from the most interesting findings of this study and situated those within the wider educational, social and socio-political context in Saudi Arabia. The discussion here referred to some of the effects of curriculum change on teachers and their practice. The next chapter discusses the implications of the findings and make recommendations that can help enhance the current ELT situation in Saudi Arabia. Limitations of the study and a reflection on the journey of this investigation will be referred to at the end of the chapter as well.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to draw together a summary of this study, the significance of its findings and its limitations. In addition, this chapter provides some of the implications of the findings with regard to policy, practice and future research. The chapter is concluded by a reflective account on my PhD journey and how the findings of this study will affect my future as a teacher educator.

7.1 Summary of the study and its findings

In the context of Saudi Arabia, changes in educational policy and curriculums have come to place as a result of international pressures after the 9/11 attacks. One of these changes was the adoption of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach which has been imposed on language teachers. Some researchers in the literature attributed these changes to the government's attempts to shift to a more globalized neoliberal education policy (Elyas & Picard, 2019) in order to manage the linguistic resources of the nation and tie them to economic policies (Barnawi, 2019). As a result of those changes, regardless to their reason, the nature of teaching practice in Saudi EFL classrooms has been ultimately changed. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' perspectives of CLT challenges at the primary level in state-schools in Saudi Arabia. The second aim was to explore the nature of in-service training that EFL teachers receive and/or have received to cope with CLT. The study also sought to explore the extent of teachers' involvement in the processes of curriculum development. This investigation was exploratory and interpretive in nature. The data in this study were drawn from three main sources: a questionnaire, unstructured classroom observations, and semi-

structured interviews. Due to the fact that the study utilized an embedded design with regards to methods of data collection, the participants were divided into two groups. The findings were reported under six main themes that emerged from the interviewing data. The challenges teachers reported were, namely, related to CLT as a pedagogical approach, students, the syllabus, classroom processes, the learning environment in schools, and teachers' marginalization in the process of decision making. Although the findings reflected the perspectives of EFL teachers in the sample, however, they might indicate a more generalised problem at the macro level in terms of the lack of communication between policy makers and teachers at the level of curriculum development and implementation.

The findings indicated that after CLT was implemented, teachers were placed under increasing performative pressures that raised feelings of insecurity and dissatisfaction with the teaching profession. One of the interesting findings of the study suggested that EFL teachers were dissatisfied with the quality of professional development they were getting. Formal in-service training was described as "time-wasting", "mediocre", "disconnected from reality", indicating that it did not meet teachers' training needs on how to implement CLT. The findings also showed that ineffective administrative practices were a major challenge that hindered CLT implementation in the Saudi context. The findings suggested that the Saudi educational system was highly centralized and that teachers were marginalized and had no voice and choice within the system.

The findings of the study painted a vivid picture of the reality of EFL teachers' challenges with CLT and experiences with curriculum change. The overall ELT atmosphere sounded sombre which was rather concerning and disappointing. However, it might be important – particularly at this critical stage where the country is in the midst of rapid social and socio-political changes and development – to picture the reality of what was happening on the ground from the perspectives of those, teachers, who were living and affected by this reality so that effective

changes can take place. This type of disclosure might be particularly important considering the state's recent desire to improve national educational outcomes. As the ELT field in the country might have a prominent place in the country's development due to the important role English language education can play with regards to economic prosperity and attaining the country's desire to shift to a knowledge economy. Thus, implications of the findings of this study can be significant for policy makers and MOE officials, as it might offer guidance on where and how to start any future educational reforms and curriculum developments.

7.2 Contribution

7.2.1 Curriculum development as a complex system

The findings of this study might have a number of implications related to the complexity of curriculum development processes. Taken together, the findings implied that decentralization and inclusion could be key factors in the emergence of effective curriculum development and implementation. The emergence of effective development might require focusing on the relations that could produce effective reform (i.e. from the perspectives of complexity theory and sociomateriality). Understanding curriculum development from this perspective would call for viewing reform as an emergence where the end result would be more than the sum of its parts and therefore not predictable from the ground from which it emerged (Fenwick et al., 2011). Indeed, Fullan (2003) suggested that the process of educational change should be understood as uncontrollable and unpredictable, as such an understanding would allow using key complexity concepts to design and guide more powerful educational systems. Thus, approaching curriculum development and implementation from this view would call for inclusivity and equity in leadership roles, where all stakeholders, including teachers, would collaborate in order to implement deeper and sustainable educational reform. The findings of

this study indicated that failure to acknowledge the importance of those factors could only lead to inefficient and ineffective implementation of curriculum changes.

Interestingly, this study suggested that material elements had agency and power in the process of curriculum development and implementation. For example, some findings implied that textbooks, teaching/learning resources and materials had an impact and influenced effective curriculum implementation. Therefore, it might be useful to view curriculum implementation through the lens of sociomateriality and actor-network theory. Through this lens implementation might be understood as continuous and recursive interactions, produced through relations amongst action and interaction, material elements, social elements and structural dynamics. Within this view, teaching and learning can be seen as a joint exercise of relational strategies performed by both inanimate (such as textbooks, materials, technology) and animate beings (i.e. teachers and learners) in the classroom. The importance of understanding curriculum development as a complex system might arise from the fact that it could show that its emergence would only be enabled within educational systems characterized by diversity, decentralization, redundancy, open constraints and feedback (Johnson, 2001).

In fact, it has been suggested that complexity theory (Fenwick, & Dahlgren, 2015) and actor-network theory (Fenwick et al., 2011) were socio-material approaches to educational research. Although actor-network theory and complexity theory might be derived from different theoretical roots, Fenwick et al. (2011) argued that there was a good link between them as they bear some important resemblances. The book argued that both theories can explore the webs of entangled human/non-human actions that give rise to educational systems. In addition both can trace interactions among material as well as social parts of the educational system. Finally, both can acknowledge that knowledge and learning emerge together as a result of action and interaction between both the material and social elements within the system. Therefore, as sociomaterial approaches, both can invite those in the sphere of education to consider the

material aspects of education (technologies, materials, resources) that might exert power and might be entangled with what would appear to be human intention, engagement and change by focusing on how agency can be distributed across people, technology and things (Landri, 2015).

According to Fenwick, & Dahlgren (2015) in recent years emphasis has been placed on recognizing the ways in which material actors would move in practice and learning, and how they would relate to social actors in complex systems. As a result, a rich body of literature has arisen on how sociomaterializing processes could configure educational actors, showing possibilities for alternative ways to understand curriculum and different ways to approach pedagogical interventions (Fenwick et al., 2011). This type of research can also help in highlighting how sociomaterial approaches to education might enrich our understanding of the enactment of education policies (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick & Landri, 2012). Thus, from this perspective educational researchers could ask how different elements in the curriculum would act on one another to affect its implementation, and how these different interactions would produce different outcomes. Moreover, acknowledging that curricular change can be uncertain and unpredictable (Fullan, 2003), as the system continuously adapts and changes pattern affecting practice (Fenwick, & Dahlgren, 2015), can raise some fundamental questions for educators. For example, educational researchers could ask questions such as: how would the teaching practice be interconnected with and affected by the testing system within a certain educational system? How might educational reform dominated by pre-packaged and imported curricula inhibit its successful implementation? How could centralized educational systems affect attempts of educational reform projects?

As outlined throughout this section, viewing curriculum development as a complex system might require educational systems to be inclusive, equitable and democratic. Hence, the next

section will discuss integrating these concepts in the Saudi educational system and their relation to teachers' pedagogical rights.

7.2.2 Teachers' pedagogical rights

One of the interesting outcomes of exploring teachers' perspectives of CLT challenges was that it led to the emergence of some important issues that have clearly influenced teachers' practice, lives and experiences of curricular change. The exploratory interpretivist design adopted in this study allowed for the emergence of some fundamental issues such as performativity, accountability, teachers' voice and pedagogical rights, and effects of neoliberal education policies on teachers and their practice.

Although teachers have not directly mentioned, in their responses, concepts such as neoliberal education policy and their pedagogical rights, it seemed hard to look past the effects of those issues on them. The neoliberal discourse was evident in their accounts about their experiences and the reality of the challenges of their professional practice. One of the implications of navigating the issue of teachers' marginalization was that it opened up the discussion about concepts such as inclusivity, equity, democracy and social justice in education.

Unfortunately, the current marketized climate and the inescapable globalized neoliberal education policies have put teachers and their practice under enormous pressure (Enright et al., 2018). Within the neoliberal accountability framework, language teaching, in particular, has become increasingly focused on the mastery of linguistic forms that can be measured by language tests, which has significant implications on teachers and their practice (Barnawi, 2019). Barnawi (2019) argued that at the instructional level, sets of standards and objective teaching models such as CLT were imposed on language teachers, because it was in the economic interests of the state to tie local linguistic resources to economic policies and ideologies. This can be added to claims, in the recent scholarly literature, of a link between

CLT as a pedagogical approach imposed on language teachers – despite its widely reported challenges across EFL contexts – and the neoliberal framework and post-colonial pedagogical imposition (see Angelo, 2020; Barnawi, 2019; Liu, 2020).

The issue of integrating moral constituents such as equity, democracy and social justice in education was described as controversial within the Saudi society (Alharbi & Alshammari, 2020). Within such a conservative society (Mullick, 2013) the state would control who speaks, who is heard and who is addressed within curriculums and curriculum planning, development and implementation processes (Barnawi, 2019). However, it seemed that the new direction of the state – in the Saudi Vision 2030 – might be to make such processes more inclusive in acknowledgement of the important role citizens could play in advancing development and the transition to knowledge economy (Allmnakrah & Evers, 2020). Thus, in line with this direction, it might be important that issues related to teachers' pedagogical rights and autonomy within the educational system would be addressed both in theory and practice. It was beyond the scope of this study to provide an exhaustive argument about the positioning of human rights and democracy and how such concepts might be manifested in the Saudi educational system. Nevertheless, more reflection might be needed in addressing the following two questions in this regard: 1) are the current stakeholders interested in opening up discussions in the discourse of human rights and social justice in education?; 2) How can these concepts be manifested in education if they are addressed at all?

7.3 Implications and local recommendations

One of the strengths of this study is that it represents an in-depth understanding of Saudi primary EFL teachers' perspectives of three key factors (instructional pedagogy (CLT), the centrality of teachers in the process of curriculum development, and the role of teachers' in-service training in curriculum development) in the process of curriculum development in language teaching. The insights gained from this study can be of assistance to practitioners,

policy-makers and the ELT field on three levels; policy, practice, and the local context. It might be helpful to point out that the implications of the study would be best understood as factors in a recursive process, in which aspiration for informed educational policies, might require policy-makers to start to talk and work with teachers, i.e. as partners and collaborators, which could lead to a better practice that in its turn would lead to the development of an accurate strategy for enhancing both policy and practice.

7.3.1 Implications on the policy level

This study can contribute to the understanding of the centrality of teachers' perceptions in the process of curriculum development. It might also help in providing a deeper understanding of how teachers' marginalization could hinder the successful implementation of CLT in particular and curricular change in general. The findings indicated that such practices within the educational system might lead teachers to feel disconnected from their practice and recurring problems of practice (Tylor & Moohr, 2018) which consequently might inhibit their creative capabilities and their abilities to prepare proper communicative materials and design efficient activities.

Additionally, this study may be of interest to policy-makers as it sheds light on the reality of teachers' day-to-day experiences inside primary EFL classrooms. This is important because it might give policy-makers deeper insights into the reality of our EFL classrooms and the real challenges primary EFL teachers face while dealing with curriculum change. In this way policy-makers would be able to make more informed decisions and offer tailored solutions for teachers and consequently enhancing students' learning experiences and ELT outcomes in the Saudi context. For instance, a concept such as post-communicative pedagogy can be considered as an alternative to CLT. As explained in the previous chapter, within this approach CLT would

not be replaced but rather balanced with the use of other methods (Nagy, 2020). As a result teachers would have the ability to make the most of the methods they are familiar with.

Furthermore, from a sociomaterial perspective this study suggests that it might be better to understand curriculum development from the lenses of complexity theory and actor-network theory. Thus, based on this line of thinking the study might add to the understanding that top-down educational reforms might inhibit their successful implementation. Similarly, the study might also shed light on the potential of applying sociomateriality to understand the effects of centralized educational systems on attempts of educational reform.

7.3.2 Implications on the level of practice

This study might be relevant to both teachers' in-service training providers and practitioners in teacher education programmes. This study identified a number of limitations of the current formal training available for EFL teachers, in which teachers described it as ineffective and time-wasting. Therefore, this study provides important insights into how can teachers' needs for quality PD that is in-practice, impactful and sustained be catered for.

The findings also indicated the importance of teachers' agency with regards to improving their own practice. Thus, the insights gained from this investigation might encourage teachers to take the initiative to take charge of their own professional learning and continuous development rather than relying on what is offered through formal channels.

The insights gained from this study might be of assistance to teacher educators in preservice programmes, as the findings indicated that those programmes were lacking. This thesis suggests that teacher educators might need to offer more relevant up-to-date content for student teachers. Thus, this study might help in giving insights with regards to reforming the current formal in-service training and providing insightful guidance for designers of teacher education programmes.

The study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the relationship between policy and practice in curriculum development and implementation. Therefore, it might help policy makers in understanding that successful implementation would require consistency and alignment between policy and training – which might require teachers’ meaningful involvement in both – to improve practice.

7.3.3 Local recommendations

This study suggests several courses of actions in terms of policy, practice and theory:

1. The MOE might need to acknowledge teachers’ role as collaborators and partners in the process of curriculum development, in order for effective educational reform to be attained. Failure to do this might lead to teachers’ resistance efforts and sabotaging any development attempts. Furthermore alienating teachers might push them to leave the profession early and therefore negatively affecting students learning processes and educational outcomes in general.
2. Maintaining teachers’ voice and sense of ownership over the pedagogical discourse might call for involving teachers in a number of capacities within the curriculum reform process: as producers of new syllabuses and curriculum guides, syllabus-writers, members of advisory committees to syllabus-writers, and as participants in trials of newly implemented syllabi and curriculum materials. To do this the MOE might need to start providing training for teachers in curriculum planning, design, development, implementation and evaluation. Teachers might also need leadership training in order to play their role in advisory committees effectively and their role as agents of change in Saudi educational reform vis-à-vis the Saudi Vision 2030.
3. Greater efforts might be needed to ensure that teachers’ PD agencies could provide teachers with tools they can use to offer flexible, individualised and differentiated learning experiences to their students. This might be particularly important with the transition to online learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4. A key priority might therefore be given to planning for the long term reform of English education in Saudi Arabia. This would imply the need for a national ELT centre to set unified guidelines for English language teaching in Saudi Arabia, so that all preparation programmes for perspective teachers as well as in-service training courses for existing ones would focus on achieving the same results. This would ensure effective English language teaching and learning outcomes. Consequently, ELT and English learning outcomes could be aligned with educational reform goals set by Tatweer and the NTP to fulfil the objectives of the Saudi Vision 2030.

5. Another important practical recommendation would be restructuring English teacher preparation programmes within Saudi universities to produce more effective and capable English teachers. These programmes might need to offer student teachers more up-to-date content that would reflect the most recent teaching approaches and pressing educational and pedagogical issues in the field. These programmes might need to train student teachers to conduct research – such as action-research – as a tool of improving their own teaching practice. This way future teachers would be able to apply evidence-based solutions for the challenges they might face, which would reflect on the overall educational outcomes of English language education throughout the country.

6. Teachers might need to empower themselves by establishing unions in order to voice their concerns and convey their demands and rights. Social media platforms would be a good outlet (to play the role of a direct link between teachers and policy makers) and a tool teachers could use to their benefit in initiating dialogue and voicing their concerns to officials in the MOE. Throughout my journey of this study, I observed that some teachers have already started their steps in this direction. For example, I joined groups on social media platforms, such as the Know Your Right channel on Telegram, which aims for advocating teachers' rights and educating teachers about their rights. Furthermore, it might be beneficial for educational

researchers to investigate the effects of social media platforms on enhancing teachers' advocacy, voice and agency.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

This study recommends further research into CLT challenges from a wider pool of participants in order to paint a clearer picture of the reality of its implementation into the Saudi context. It might be also recommended to investigate school students' and parents perspectives on the challenges of learning within the communicative approach. This is important because some findings has indicated a mismatch between CLT and Saudi students' preferred learning style.

In addition, this thesis recommends investigating the potential of adopting alternative methods and teachers' perspectives and abilities to take the responsibility of choosing the method/methods that could meet their students' needs and suit their specific contexts.

In a talk about power, policy and the reality of curriculum and teaching, Michael Apple pointed out that teachers' narratives of struggle need to be legitimated as science, thus part of our task as educational researchers is to continue the epistemological battle that says real life experiences – through documenting the reality of what is happening on the ground – must be brought in when planning and implementing teachers' policies and educational reforms (CEPS Ljubljana, 2016). Therefore, it is recommended that educational researchers in the Saudi context continue the work to legitimise teachers' challenges and experiences with the educational system through turning those experiences and perspectives into science via conducting and disseminating research. This can be done by conducting and communicating research that aim to convey teachers' voice through academic publication and conference presentations.

7.5 Limitations

The main limitation of this study was the relatively small sample size. While around 400 EFL teachers initially responded to the questionnaire link, only 75 completed the questionnaire. This was considered a limitation because a larger number of participants would have allowed a wider range of EFL teachers' perspectives and attitudes towards CLT and consequently broader range of outcomes. The final section of the questionnaire asked respondents if they would like to participate in an interview, 20% of the respondents indicated that they were interested in participating in the interviews. Therefore, because only a small number of the questionnaire respondents indicated an interest in participating in subsequent interviews, it was difficult to consider diversity in teachers' backgrounds and the potential for purposive sampling of teachers. Thus, the sample size in the qualitative strand of the study was limited too, in which it involved 15 Saudi female EFL teachers which meant low representativeness. A bigger number of participants might have been better and might have meant more diversity in the sample. However, given that the aim of this study was seeking meaning and teachers' perspectives rather than quantifying them, the current sample was satisfactory for fulfilling the aims of this study. Furthermore, low representativeness in the qualitative strand was dealt with by diversifying data sources and triangulating the methods used to collect the data.

In addition, the interpretive nature of the study made it more susceptible to subjectivity and researcher bias that could have influenced the data gathered. I dealt with this limitation by taking a number of steps to minimize my influence on data collection and analysis. Reflexivity was used as a tool to reflect on my own role and positionality (Finlay, 2002) – as explained in the Methodology chapter in section 4.6.3. In terms of data analysis, I adopted a constructivist grounded theory analytical framework to let the data speak for themselves (Cohen et al., 2018) and to let themes emerge from the data (see section 4.5.1). It was important for me to position myself within a reflexive framework to make transparent how I rendered the reality of the

phenomena under investigation and how I positioned myself in it (Davis, 2020). As such, I made sure to disclose my own personal experience and background in the introduction chapter and to make my positionality transparent – later in the methodology chapter – and how it could have influenced data collection and analysis processes. Tools such as member checking was utilized to deal with the ethical ramifications of this limitation (see section 4.6 in Chapter 4).

The Saudi education system segregates between males and females at least within the state-schools level. Consequently, the scope of this study was also limited in terms of gender diversification. This was a limitation, as it affected the data collected from the semi-structured interviews and unstructured classroom observations. Moreover, this issue affected the possibility to illustrate any differences between CLT challenges that EFL teachers face across genders with regards to all the factors that emerged for the data.

Throughout the course of collecting data for this study, I faced a number of limitations at two levels; formal and informal. The formal level involved challenges in acquiring permissions from the MOE and some of its agencies. At the beginning of the fieldwork, I obtained the required approval from the General Directorate of Education, when I visited the first school, however, the head teacher advised that I had to obtain further permissions from the District Office of Education in the school district. This kind of bureaucracy added an additional time-consuming level of procedures to my fieldwork which meant visiting three out of the five District Offices of Education in the city before accessing any schools in those districts.

The informal level of limitations was teacher-related. At this level I encountered a few challenges with regards to teachers' unfamiliarity with the notion of collaboration with a researcher. For example, some teachers were reluctant to undertake audio-recorded interviews; others were sceptical to let me into their classrooms at first and thought that I was there to evaluate their teaching and asked to look at my observation sheets. The difficulties at this level

might confirm previous ones reported in the literature, in which it was argued that the educational environment in Saudi Arabia is not fully prepared to positively engage in research studies and that teachers were not used to engaging with researchers (Albahiri, 2010; Alzaydi, 2010), as they sometimes seem to be reluctant to trust researchers enough to participate in interviews or classroom observations (Al-Fahadi, 2012).

7.6 Reflections on my PhD journey

The way this thesis was designed and its interpretative nature, required me to be reflexive on my role throughout the study. Thus, at this point towards the end of this journey, I would like to reflect on the overall process of conducting this study. This is a reflection on what this journey meant to me and how is it going to inform my future endeavours. At the academic level, this journey was thought-provoking and affirming. I started his research with some naivety thinking that it would be a long, and may be daunting, but linear process. However, as I immersed myself in interpretative research, I realised it was rather an iterative one, as I had to return time after time to maintain epistemological and methodological congruence throughout data collection, data analysis and interpretation. Finding the golden thread, one that sew a coherent persuasive argument, in the study was a fundamental learning curve. Connecting the dots between the study's aims, the literature review, conceptual framework, methodology, analytical framework and the findings to answer the initial questions of this study was challenging at certain stages, but insightful as I learnt through that process how knowledge can be generated.

At the knowledge level, conducting this piece of research has not just provided me with a great opportunity to discover key issues related to challenges EFL teachers face with CLT. It has equipped me with an expanded breadth of knowledge in relation to education policies and reforms and how those might affect teachers at the bottom of the chain of command. Conducting this research also helped me ask more refined questions of the data generated and

helped in situating the findings in theories. More importantly, conducting this study has changed some of my assumptions about teaching English in EFL contexts, such as the Saudi context, CLT and the concept of method itself. When I embarked on this project I used to constantly think if CLT might not be the right method what other method would be? Is it fair for students to not teach them with the best method there is and using the best materials money can get to help them learn better? As I progressed in the research process, however, and after reviewing the literature, I started to realise that the problem was thinking that there is a best method for teaching English at all and that a method can be described as good when it attains the outcomes it aimed to and when it helps in showing coherence between policy and practice. I now understand that the issue of implementing a curriculum and choosing a ‘good’ method – that can be compatible with the context and with students’ needs and abilities – is more complex than importing what is assumed to be the best method and spending money on buying readymade materials from internationally renowned publishing companies.

Moreover, on the personal and professional levels, conducting this research made me aware of my own role and responsibility as a teacher educator. Reflecting on the findings, made me realize my responsibility to use my position in advocating teachers’ rights and encouraging teachers to approach their profession from a critical stance in order to improve their reality and professionalism. I became aware that part of this responsibility relied on me taking every opportunity to disseminate and communicate my research either through publishing or presenting at conferences. Thus, during my PhD journey I made sure to develop my skills at both the academic and professional levels. I presented at a BERA ECR symposium, two international conferences and two PGR ones in and outside the UK. Furthermore, I am planning to publish parts of this study.

Professionally, I became aware of the importance of providing good quality teacher pre-service as well as in-service training programmes. Based on this realization, I recently acquired a

TESOL Training for Trainers and The Leadership Management Certificate Programme qualifications from the TESOL International Association in order to upskill myself with regards to providing quality teacher training. As a part of my training, I designed a training programme for EFL teachers. The programme was an action-research project that compiled teacher-led action research projects that trainee teachers are supposed to conduct inside their classrooms to address some of the challenges they face. The aim of the plan was to train teachers to be researchers and to apply evidence-based interventions at the same time. I intend to see this training programme through and actually do it when I go back to my institution in Saudi Arabia.

In conclusion, this doctoral journey was a challenge that, thus far, has been worthwhile, rewarding and informative. Now that this journey has come to its end, I feel it developed my theoretical and practical knowledge about the complexity of curriculum development and implementation. Therefore, my future direction in terms of research will be exploring the sociomateriality of curriculum development and finding new ways of conceptualizing and understanding curriculum from a new lens. As I came to realise that from this perspective, curriculum development can be understood as a network of human and non-human assemblages as an alternative perspective for understanding curriculum development based on the three (macro, meso and micro) dimensions utilized in the present study. This way of thinking can be helpful in understanding how different concepts – i.e. elements such as teachers, students, materials, tests, pedagogy and textbooks – within education can function. Understanding these things as effects of heterogeneous relations rather than as foundational objects within the system, can help us understand how forms of connection or disconnection among them might influence the outcomes of the system they are part of. Thus, what I want to focus on in the future is looking into the idea that curriculum development does not only involve the relationship between teaching – through method – and learning – from textbooks –

as human activities, but it is about the network of humans (i.e. teachers, learners, policy makers and other stakeholders) and things (i.e. materials, resources, and context) through which the curriculum is translated and implemented.

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Appendices

Appendix 2: Permission from the Ministry Deputy for Planning and Development
at the General Directorate of Education

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التربية والتعليم
إدارة العامة للتربية والتعليم بمنطقة
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

وزارة التربية والتعليم
Ministry of Education

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٥١٢٩١٤٤٧
المشرف على

سعادة المحقق الثقافي بسفارة المملكة العربية السعودية في المملكة المتحدة
ووفقه الله
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته وبعد:

إشارة إلى الطلب المقدم من الطالبة المبتعثة لمرحلة الدكتوراه / رجاء محمود احمد فلاته
سجل مدني رقم [REDACTED] في جامعة إكسبر (EXETER UN) بالمملكة المتحدة
وحيث أبدت الباحثة رغبتها بتطبيق دراستها المعنونة بـ (عملية تطوير المناهج في المملكة العربية
السعودية من وجهة نظر المعلمين في تطبيق منهج تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بالطريقة التواصلية في
المرحلة الابتدائية) على مدارس وطلاب وطالبات مدينة [REDACTED]
عليه فلا مانع لدينا من استقبالها وتطبيق أدوات بحثها في مدارسنا وعلى طلابنا
وطالباتنا وتزويدها بالبيانات اللازمة والمعينة لها ، بعد إحضار أدوات بحثها للجهة المختصة
بإدارتنا لاستكمال الإجراءات اللازمة لفحص وتدقيق الدراسة ، ولطلبها إعطيت هذا المشهد
دون أدنى مسؤولية على الإدارة ، و تقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري .

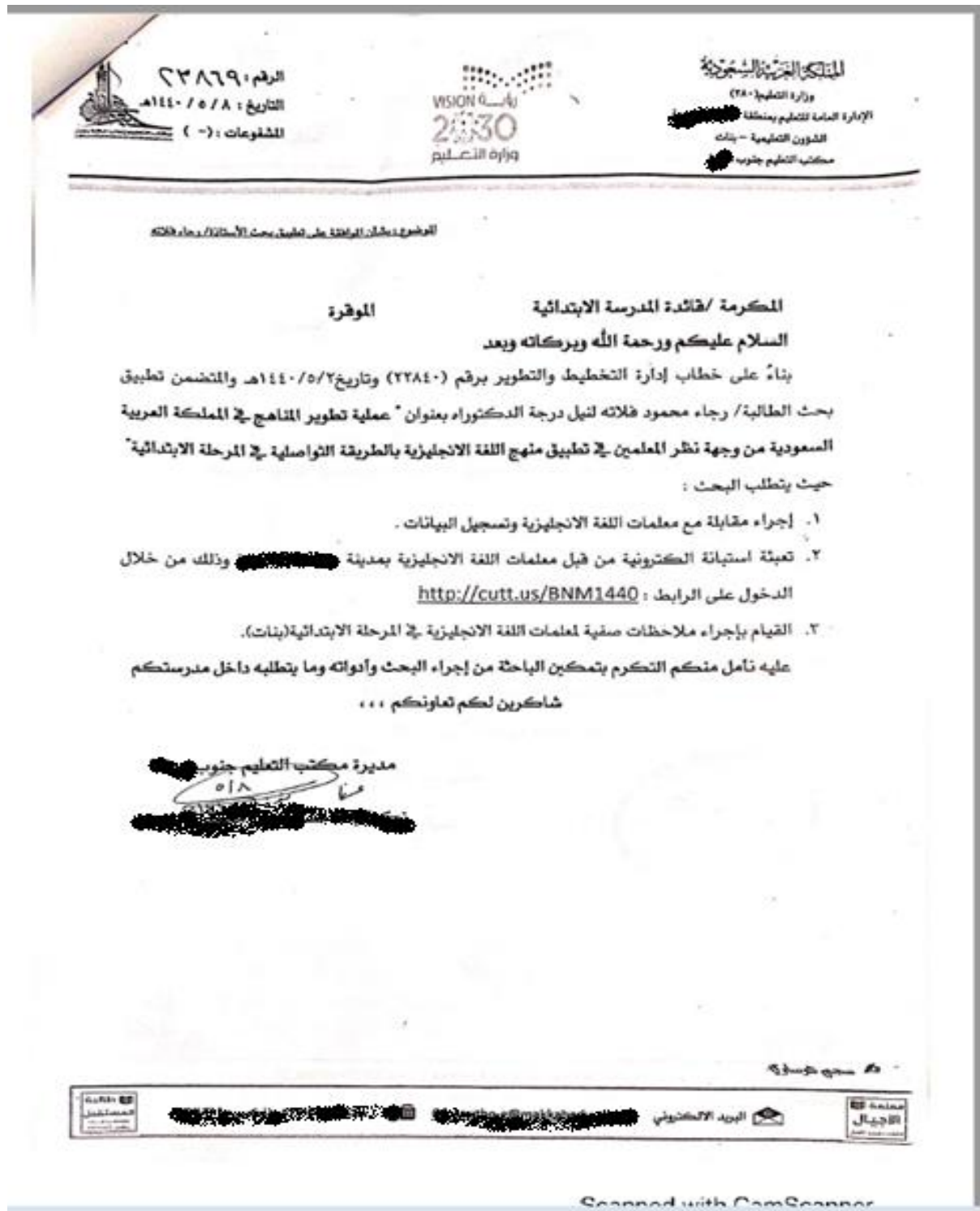
والله يحفظكم ويرعاكم، ، ،

مدير عام التعليم بمنطقة
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix 3: Permission from the Office of Education at the Southern District



Appendix 5: Permission from the Office of Education at the Central District

وزارة التعليم
Ministry of Education

المملكة العربية السعودية
وزارة التعليم
الإدارة العامة للتعليم بمنطقة
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

تعميم لجميع مكاتب التعليم وإدارة التدريب والابتعاث
وجميع المدارس الابتدائية (بين / بنات)

المكرم (ة) مدير(ة) التدريب و الابتعاث
المكرم (ة) مدير(ة) مكتب التعليم بـ /
المكرم (ة) قائد(ة) مدرسة /
المعلم عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ...ويعد:
فتقوم الطالبة / رجاء محمود أحمد فلاتة والمبتعثة إلى جامعة ((أكسير)) بالمملكة المتحدة
بإجراء بحث لنيل درجة الدكتوراه بعنوان:
(عملية تطوير المشاهج في المنصة العربية السعودية من وجهة نظر المعلمين في تطبيق منهج
اللغة الانجليزية بالطريقة التواصلية في المرحلة الابتدائية)
وحيث إن البحث يتطلب :
1 / إجراء مقابلة مع مشرفي/ مشرفات ومعلمي / معلمات اللغة الانجليزية و تسجيل البيانات .
2 / تعبئة استبانة الكترونية من قبل معلمي/ معلمات اللغة الانجليزية بمدينة [REDACTED]
و ذلك من خلال الدخول على الرابط : <http://cutt.us/BNM1440>
3/ القيام بإجراء ملاحظات صفية لمعلمات اللغة الانجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية (بنات).
عليه أمل بعد الاطلاع التكرم بتمكين الباحثة من إجراء البحث وأدواته وما يتطلبه داخل
إدارتكم / مدرستكم وحث الزملاء/الزميلات على التعاون معها (أو من ينوب عنها) شاكرين
لكم تكريم تعاونكم خدمة للبحث العلمي، و تقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري .

مدير إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

م.ع. شويخ العتيبي

تحت إشراف اللجنة
رئيسة اللجنة
مديرة مكتب لوسط [REDACTED]

Scanned with CamScanner

Appendix 6: The piloted questionnaire

Dear participant,

My name is Rajaa Fallatah, and I am currently a PhD student in University of Exeter, this questionnaire will be used a part of my doctoral thesis to explore curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level. The answers you provide will be used as research data and will be analysed for the purpose of the research understudy. I would, therefore, be very grateful if you would take the time and trouble to complete the questionnaire enclosed, which should take no longer than 15 minutes to undertake.

In order to ensure complete anonymity, personal identification is not required, however, it is important that the responses you provide are your own and not the shared views of other colleagues. Please take time to consider the information carefully and to discuss it with family or friends if you wish, or to ask the researcher any questions. I would like to emphasise that participation is entirely voluntary and that I am more than happy to answer any queries at the email address: rf357@exeter.ac.uk

Many thanks,

Rajaa Fallatah

Questions;

1. Do the statements represent the principles of CLT?
2. Is each item essential for representing CLT principles?
3. Are any items irrelevant to measuring teachers' attitudes towards CLT?
4. Does the content appear biased?
5. Are the directions for completing the instrument clear and unambiguous?
6. Is the format of the instrument (i.e. the layout and the response options) appropriate for Saudi English teachers in the primary level?
7. Are the vocabulary and sentence structure appropriate for Saudi English teachers in the primary level?

What is CLT?

Currently, the English curriculum in Saudi Arabia is based on CLT. So, before you start the questionnaire here is a brief definition of communicative language teaching (CLT).

CLT Definition

Communicative language teaching (CLT), or the communicative approach, is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of language learning. In CLT, the goal of language education is the ability to communicate in the target language (English). In contrast to previous views in which grammatical competence was commonly given top priority. CLT also focuses on the teacher being a facilitator, rather than an instructor. Furthermore, the approach does not use a textbook series to teach English, but rather works on developing oral/verbal skills prior to reading and writing.

Within CLT, language learners learn and practice the target language through the interaction with one another and the teacher using authentic materials (those written in the target language for purposes other than language learning).

section.1: Background information

- Gender (male / female)
- Educational background; (BA level / Masters / PhD)
- Years of teaching experience (between 1-5yrs / between 6-10yrs / more than 10yrs)
- Location (in which region/city you are currently teaching?)

Section.2: Teachers' attitudes towards communicative language teaching

please read the following statements and indicate if you; 1. strongly disagree, 2. disagree, 3. neutral (neither agree nor disagree), 4. agree, 5. strongly agree with them by choosing only ONE of the five options given.

Theme	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
introductory statements	1. Teaching English as a foreign language in the elementary level is important.					

	2. Teaching English before the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) was easier than teaching it after CLT.					
	3. My teaching practice before and after CLT is different.					

Theme	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
Place and importance of grammar	4. Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged (negative statement)					
	5. Grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.					
	6. Knowledge of the rules of a language does not guarantee ability to use the language.					
	7. The communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate					

	learners. (negative statement)					
	8. By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker. (negative statement)					
	9. Concentrating on teaching grammar rules is essential since students will be tested on their knowledge of grammatical rules in the final exams (negative statement)					
The role of the teacher in the classroom	10. Reducing teachers' amount of talk and control over the classroom is important in communicative classrooms.					
	11. Teaching is the profession of Prophets. So teachers' most important role is to transmit their knowledge to their students. (negative statement)					
	12. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to transmit knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and giving					

	examples. (negative statement)					
	13. Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using the Arabic language. (negative statement)					
The role and contribution of learners in the learning process	14. It is impossible in a large class of students to organize your teaching to suit the needs of all students.					
	15. Since learners come to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of English, they are unable to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for them. (negative statement)					
	16. Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is useless since learners are not used to this approach of learning. (negative statement)					
	17. The learner-centred approach to language teaching encourages learners					

	to take responsibility of their own learning and allows them to develop their capabilities.					
	18. Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than forced on them.					
	19. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the students.					
The quality and quantity of error correction	20. Most students learn English effectively when it is used to do something else and taught indirectly.					
	21. The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make. (negative statement)					
	22. Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.					
	23. For students to become effective communicators in the					

	foreign language, the teachers' feedback must be focused on the relevance and not the grammatical correctness of their answers.					
Group/pair work	24. Small group work may be useful to change the routine, but it can never replace teacher's explanation. (negative statement)					
	25. Group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of important teaching time. (negative statement)					
	26. Group work activities are important in giving opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge and in encouraging genuine interaction between students.					
	27. Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and have some control over their own learning. So it is important that group work becomes part of the classroom activities.					

section.3: Challenges of implementing CLT in Saudi Arabia

The following are some of the difficulties that other teachers of English as a foreign language faced in adopting CLT. In your opinion do you think they might be difficulties that you faced or facing now while teaching English?

Theme	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
	28. Teachers knowledge about CLT methodologies and how to be communicative teachers in EFL classrooms					
Adapted from Li (1998)	29. Teachers' low English proficiency					
	30. Teachers' weakness in strategic* and sociolinguistic* competence *Strategic Competence: is the ability to use strategies to start or end communication with others in English. *Sociolinguistic competence: understanding the context of the communication and using the appropriate language in it.					
	31. Teachers' having little time to prepare					

	communicative materials					
	32.Students' low English proficiency					
	33.Students' passive style of learning and dependence on the teacher					
	34.Lack of authentic teaching materials					
	35.Grammar-based examinations					
	36.Large classes					
	37. The difference between teaching English as a foreign language and as a second language.					

section.4: Teachers' perspectives towards the current practices of curriculum change

Theme	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
	38. My inability to choose a teaching method and materials that I find helpful for my students is affecting the effectiveness of my teaching.					

	39. The Ministry of Education considers teachers' opinions and teaching experiences when planning to change the curriculum.					
	40. Taking teachers' opinions and experiences before making any changes in the curriculum is important.					
	41. Taking teachers' opinions and experiences before making any changes in the curriculum will improve the outcomes of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.					

Appendix 7: The questionnaire

Part one: Consent Form

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet for the above project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.
3. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Exeter, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research. I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.
4. I understand that taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities
5. I understand that taking part involves anonymised interview transcripts to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities
6. I understand that taking part involves anonymised audio recordings to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities
7. I agree to take part in the above project.

Part two: Biographical data

- Gender (male / female) ¹
- Educational background; (BA level / Masters / PhD)
- Years of teaching experience (between 1-5yrs / between 6-10yrs / more than 10yrs) ⁵
- Location (in which region/city are currently teaching?)
- What level are you currently teaching? (primary / intermediate / secondary)

Part three: introductory statements

#		Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
1.	introducer	Teaching English as a foreign language in					

	y state	the elementary level is important.					
2.	ments	Teaching English before the implementation of CLT was better than teaching it after CLT.					
3.		My teaching practice before and after CLT is different.					

Part four: Theoretical knowledge of CLT and SETs practices inside their classrooms

#	Them e	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
Adapted from Karavas-Doukas (1996) Investigating teachers' attitudes to the communicative approach							
4.	Place and impor tance of gram	Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged					
5.	mar	The communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners.					
6.		By mastering the rules of grammar, students					

		become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker.					
7.		Concentrating on teaching grammar rules is essential because students will be tested on their knowledge of grammatical rules in the final exams					
8.	The role of the teacher	Teachers' most important role is to teach students what the teacher knows					
9.	er in the classroom	The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to explain and give examples.					
10		Group work activities have little use because it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students'					

		performance and prevent them from using the Arabic language					
11		Since learners come to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of English, they are unable to suggest what activities are useful for them					
12		Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is pointless because learners are not used to this approach of learning					
13		The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks to meet the individual					

		differences among students					
14	The quality and quantity of	The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make.					
15	ty of error correction	Because errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.					
16		For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teachers' feedback must be focused on meaning rather than form					
17	Group/pair work	Small group work may be useful to change the routine, but it can never replace teacher's explanation					

18		Group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of important teaching time.					
19		Group work activities are important in giving opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in encouraging genuine interaction among students.					
20		Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some measure of control over their own learning.					

Part five: The following are some of the difficulties that other EFL teachers had in adopting CLT. Do you think they might be difficulties for you in adopting CLT in Saudi Arabia?

#	Theme	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
21		Teachers knowledge about CLT methodology in EFL classrooms					
22	Adapted	Teachers' low English proficiency					
23	from Li (1998)	Teachers' weakness in strategic* and sociolinguistic* competences. * Strategic Competence: is the ability to use strategies to start or end communication with others in English. * Sociolinguistic competence: understanding the context of the communication and					

		using the appropriate language in it					
24		Teachers' having limited time to prepare communicative materials					
25		Students' low English proficiency					
26		Students' passive style of learning and dependence on the teacher					
27		Lack of authentic teaching materials					
28		Grammar-based examinations					
29		Large classes					

Part six: teachers' perspectives towards the current practices of curriculum change

#	Theme	Statements	Strongly agree 5	Agree 4	Uncertain 3	Disagree 2	Strongly disagree 1
30		Taking teachers' opinions and experiences before					

		making any changes in the curriculum is important.					
31		Taking teachers' opinions and experiences before making any changes in the curriculum will improve the outcomes of English language teaching in Saudi Arabia.					

Part seven:

Would you like to talk about implementing CLT further?

If YES. Please leave your contact information below (email OR phone number)

Appendix 8: The observation schedule

Classroom observation sheet

Participant:	Serial number:	
Date:	Time:	Period:
School type: morning / evening	Class:	Grade:

Theme	Notes	Descriptive notes	memos	Post-observation reflection
The role of the teacher (relationships and interactions)				
The role of the learner (relationships and interactions)				
The importance of grammar				
The quality/quantity of error correction				
Pair/group work				
Use of the first language (Arabic)				
Other practices				
Does the space encourage or discourage communicative activities?				
classroom organized in (rows/ groups)				
Resources available in the classroom?				

resource-centre at the school (accessibility – availability – equipment)				
effect of time of the class morning period / after lunch break / *near home-time (last period) on mood				
Interruptions				
Routines				
Other unanticipated incidents				

Appendix 9: observation participants' information sheet (English version)



Participant Information Sheet (observations)

Title of Project: curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level

Researcher name: Rajaa Fallatah

Invitation and brief summary:

Dear participant,

My name is Rajaa Fallatah, and I am currently a PhD student in University of Exeter, this observation will be used a part of my doctoral thesis to explore curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level. The notes collected will be used as research data and will be analysed for the purpose of the research understudy. I would therefore be very grateful if you would take the time and trouble to allow me observe your classroom.

Please take time to consider the information carefully and to discuss it with family or friends if you wish, or to ask the researcher questions. I would like to emphasise that participation is entirely voluntary and that I am more than happy to answer any queries at the email address:

rf357@exeter.ac.uk

Many thanks,

Rajaa Fallatah

Purpose of the research:

The aim of the study is to investigate how the current top-down curriculum change policy may be affecting Saudi EFL teachers and exploring the possibility that it is negatively affecting the outcomes of English language education in the public school system.

Why have I been approached?

In order to appropriately answer the research questions of the study, the data will be collected from those involved in the educational context that is the focus of the study (Herrington et al., 2007). Accordingly, the sample of this study will be Saudi EFL teachers in Saudi public primary schools. To ensure the diversification of the study sample, the participants will be both male and female teachers. In addition to gender diversity, geographical variety is equally important.

What would taking part involve?

The data collected will help me explore and understand the process of curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level. In order to ensure complete anonymity personal identification is not required, however, it is important that the responses you provide are your own and not the shared views of other colleagues

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Research does deliver wider benefits to society and some indirect benefits might be foreseeable for participants. Thus, I hope that the results of this study help in raising awareness about the important role that teachers can play in the process of curriculum change.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not believe that taking part in the research has any foreseeable risks to participants

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You can stop taking part at any time without having to give a reason. So you can ask to withdraw from the study at any time and your data can be destroyed.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection

Taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses, interviews transcripts, and audio recording to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities. Participants' data processed for any purpose or purposes will not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes.

Will I receive any payment for taking part?

Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

What will happen to the results of this study?

Taking part involves anonymised audio recordings to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, conferences and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities. Information on the outcomes of the project will be made available to participants at the end of the project on websites such as, but not exclusively, the Saudi digital library (SDL).

Who is organising and funding this study?

Not applicable.

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Reference Number...),

Further information and contact details

For further information and/or to take part please contact me at rf357@exeter.ac.uk .

If you are not happy with any aspect of the project and wish to complain please contact the department Ethics Officer or Ethics Committee Chair.

Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager

g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 726621

Thank you for your interest in this project

Rajaa Fallatah

Appendix 10: observation participants' information sheet (Arabic version)

<p>ورقة معلومات المشاركين (الملاحظة)</p> <p>(معلمي و معلمات اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية / الشرفيين التربويين / أعضاء لجنة تطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية / أساتذة برامج تدريب المعلمين والعلمين / أساتذة برامج إعداد المعلمين والعلمين)</p> <p>عنوان المشروع : فهم عملية تطوير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية: وجهات المدرسين نحو تطبيق منهج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية التوافقية على المستوى الابتدائي</p> <p>اسم الباحث: رجاء فلاتة</p> <p>دعوة و موجز: عزيزي المشارك ،</p> <p>اسمي رجاء فلاتة ، وأنا حالياً طالبة دكتوراه في جامعة إكستر ، سيتم استخدام هذه البيانات كجزء من أطروحة الدكتوراه الخاصة بي لاستكشاف تغيير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية. وجهات نظر المعلمين نحو تطبيق تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية التوافقية النهج في المرحلة الابتدائية. سيتم استخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها من الملاحظة كبيانات بحث وسيتم تحليلها لغرض البحث. لذلك سيكون من متعة للغاية إذا سمحتم لي بملاحظة تدريسك داخل أحد الفصول الدراسية.</p> <p>لضمان عدم الكشف عن الهوية بشكل كامل ، لا يلزم تحديد هويتك الشخصية لأن هويتك ستكون مجهولة المصدر بحيث لا يمكن التعرف عليك. يرجى أخذ الوقت الكافي للنظر في المعلومات بعناية ومناقشتها مع العائلة أو الأصدقاء إذا كنت ترغب في ذلك ، أو طرح أسئلة الباحث. أود التأكيد على أن المشاركة طوعية تماماً وأنتي أكثر من سعيدة للإجابة على أي استفسارات على عنوان البريد الإلكتروني: f357@exeter.ac.uk</p> <p>شكراً لمشاركتك وإسهامك رجاء فلاتة</p> <p>الغرض من البحث: الهدف من الدراسة هو التحقيق في كيفية تأثير عملية تغيير المناهج على مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية واستكشاف إمكانية تأثيرها السلمي على نتائج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في النظام المدرسي العام.</p> <p>لماذا تم الاتصال بي؟ من أجل الإجابة بشكل مناسب على أسئلة البحث في الدراسة ، سيتم جمع البيانات من المشاركين في السياق التعليمي الذي هو محور الدراسة (Herrington et al. , 2007). وبناءً على ذلك ، ستكون عينة الدراسة هذه من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية الحكومية السعودية.</p> <p>ما الذي نتعلم به؟ سيتم ملاحظة المشاركين أثناء التدريس داخل الفصول الدراسية. سيكون المشاركون فقط مدرسات اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية ، وذلك لأنني لا أسمح لي بدخول مدارس الأولاد وبالتالي تتعذر عملية مراقبة المعلمين المذكور داخل صفوفهم. سيقتصر تركيز عملية المراقبة على المعلمين وممارستهم داخل الفصل الدراسي ولن يتم أخذ أي معلومات من الطلاب. سناقشني البيانات التي سيتم جمعها في استكشاف وفهم عملية تغيير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية: وجهات نظر المعلمين نحو تطبيق منهج تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية التوافقية في المرحلة الابتدائية. من أجل ضمان عدم الكشف عن الهوية بشكل كامل ، لا يلزم تحديد الهوية الشخصية ، ومع ذلك ، من المهم أن تكون الردود</p>	<p>التي تقدمها هي الخاصة بك وليس الآراء المشتركة للزملاء الآخرين. سيتم استخدام الملاحظات كمصدر إضافي للبيانات ، حيث سيتم ملاحظة المعلمين أثناء التدريس لمعرفة كيف يستخدمون CLT في تدريسهم وإعطائي روي حول الأسئلة المتعلقة ونقاط النقاش التي قد تكون مفيدة للمقالات المنظمة. من ناحية أخرى ، يمكن استخدام الملاحظات في المرحلة الاستكشافية لمعرفة ما يجري في الواقع ، في هذه الحالة ، ذلك ، يمكن استخدامها لتوليد وإعطاء روي للأساليب اللاحقة لجميع البيانات مثل المقالات. من أجل تقليل دوري وتأثيره على الوضع وزيادة موثوقية وصحة الدراسة في نفس الوقت ، سأستخدم منهج الملاحظة الرسمية بحيث سيكون غير مشاركة في ممارسات التدريس أثناء عملية الملاحظة وبجارية أخرى ، لا أودي المشاركة في الفصول الدراسية التي سأراقبها بل سأكون محايدة و "جزء غير ملحوظ" (ص 313). سيتم عملية المراقبة على شكل مقياس تقييم سيختلف مقياس التقييم من عدد من الجارات المستندة إلى الآليات المنقطة بممارسات الفصل الدراسي CLT ، مثل أهمية التواعد ، ودور المعلم ، وأنوار المعلمين ، وكيفية جودة تصحيحات الأخطاء. يتراوح مقياس التصنيف بين خمس فئات مختلفة (غير مستخدمة - بالكاد مستخدمة - مستخدمة جزئياً - مستعملة - مستعملة بشكل جيد)</p> <p>ما هي فوائد ممثلة من المشاركة؟ إن مشاركتك في هذا البحث تطوعية تماماً ، ومن شأنها إعادة المجتمع السعودي وعملية البحث العلمي بشكل عام ، و الإفادة في عملية تطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة بشكل خاص.</p> <p>ما هي المخاطر المحتملة للمشاركة؟ لا يعتقد أن المشاركة في البحث أي مخاطر يمكن التنبؤ بها على المشاركين</p> <p>ماذا سيحدث إذا لم أرغب في الاستمرار في الدراسة؟ مشاركتك طوعية و لك كامل الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إيذاء أي سبب وبدون أي تأثير على حقوقك القانونية .</p> <p>كما يمكنك حذف جميع البيانات التي جُمعت منك أو إذا كانت طوعية جميع البيانات تعني أنه قد تم جمع كمية معينة من البيانات حتى النغمة التي تمت عملية الاستحباب فيهل ولا يمكن تعديدها فتأكد بأنها ستكون مجهولة المصدر تماماً دون أي إشارة أو ارتباط بالمشاركين الفرديين</p> <p>كيف سيتم الحفاظ على سرية معلوماتي؟ تعالج جامعة إكستر البيانات الشخصية لأغراض إجراء البحوث في الصلحة العامة . منسعي الجامعة إلى أن تكون ثقافة بشأن معالجتها لبياناتك الشخصية ، ويجب أن تقدم ورقة المعلومات هذه شرحاً واضحاً لذلك . إذا كان لديك أي استفسار حول معالجة الجامعة من البيانات الشخصية التي لا يمكن حلها من قبل فريق البحث، ويمكن الحصول على مزيد من المعلومات من منسوبي حماية البيانات الجامعة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk أو عند www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection</p> <p>الأجزاء ذات الصلة من البيانات التي تم جمعها خلال الدراسة، يمكن أن ينظر إليها أعضاء فريق أفراد من جامعة إكستر ، حيث تكون متصلة بمشاركته في هذا البحث. وبناءً عليه أعطيت الإذن ل هؤلاء الأفراد للوصول إلى سجلاتك. كما أن المشاركة تنطوي على إخفاء الهوية في كلاً من: (الردود على الاستبيان) / تفرغ نصوص المقالات/ التسجيلات الصوتية) لاستخدامها في الأغراض البحثية مثل تضمين المعلومات في أرفيف لمدة تصل إلى ٥ سنوات لاستخدام في أي مشاريع بحثية مستقبلية والتقارير المنشورة في منشور أكاديمي ... موقع المشروع ... منشورات إعلامية ... مؤتمرات .. مواد تعليمية أو تدريبية لاستخدامها في أنشطة الجامعة ... أنشطة المشاركة العامة. و في حال تضمنت الضرورة سيتم الاحتفاظ الآمن ببيانات الاتصال بك ، بحيث قد تستخدم من قبل الباحث للاتصال بك بشأن مشاريع الأبحاث المستقبلية.</p> <p>هل سألتقي أي مدفوعات للمشاركة؟ إن مشاركتك في هذا البحث تطوعية تماماً ، ومن شأنها إعادة المجتمع السعودي وعملية البحث العلمي بشكل عام ، و الإفادة في عملية تطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة بشكل خاص.</p>
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Appendix 11: participants' consent form (English version)



Participant Identification Number:

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level

Researcher name: Rajaa Fallatah

1. I confirm that I have read the information sheet dated..... (version no.....) for the above project. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without my legal rights being affected.

3. I understand that relevant sections of the data collected during the study, may be looked at by individuals from the University of Exeter, where it is relevant to my taking part in this research.

I give permission for these individuals to have access to my records.

4. I understand that taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities

5. I understand that taking part involves anonymised interview transcripts to be used for the

purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities

6. I understand that taking part involves anonymised audio recordings to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities

7. I agree to take part in the above project.

Name of Participant	Date	Signature
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Name of researcher	Date	Signature
--------------------	------	-----------

When completed: 1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher/project file

Appendix 12: participants' consent form (Arabic version)

نموذج الموافقة المستنيرة على المشاركة في بحث علمي
عنوان المشروع: فهم عملية تغيير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية: وجهات المدرسين نحو تطبيق منهج تعليم اللغة
الإنجليزية التواصلي على المستوى الابتدائي
اسم الباحث: رجاء فلاتة

١. أؤكد أنني قد قرأت ورقة المعلومات مؤرخة (النسخة رقم) الخاصة بالمشاركة في البحث أعلاه وقد أتيت لي الفرصة للنظر في المعلومات، وطرح الأسئلة والحصول على معلومات المشروع و كانت هذه الاجابه مرضية.
٢. أفهم أن مشاركتي تطوعية وأنني حر في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء أي سبب ودون أي تأثير على حقوقي القانونية .
٣. أنا أفهم أن الأجزاء ذات الصلة من البيانات التي تم جمعها خلال الدراسة، يمكن أن ينظر إليها أعضاء فريق أفراد من جامعة إكستر، بحيث تكون متصلة بمشاركتي في هذا البحث. وبناءً عليه أعطي إذن ل هؤلاء الأفراد للوصول إلى سجلاتي.
٤. أنا أفهم أن المشاركة تنطوي على إخفاء الهوية في الردود على الاستبيان لاستخدامها في الأغراض البحثية مثل تضمين المعلومات في أرشيف لمدة تصل إلى ٥ سنوات للاستخدام في أي مشاريع بحثية مستقبلية و التقارير المنشورة في منشور أكاديمي ... موقع المشروع ... منشورات إعلامية ... مؤتمرات .. مواد تعليمية أو تدريبية لاستخدامها في أنشطة الجامعة ... أنشطة المشاركة العامة
٥. أنا أفهم أن المشاركة تنطوي على إخفاء الهوية في تقرير نصوص المقابلات لاستخدامها في الأغراض البحثية مثل تضمين المعلومات في أرشيف لمدة تصل إلى ٥ سنوات للاستخدام في أي مشاريع بحثية مستقبلية و التقارير المنشورة في منشور أكاديمي ... موقع المشروع ... منشورات إعلامية ... مؤتمرات .. مواد تعليمية أو تدريبية لاستخدامها في أنشطة الجامعة ... أنشطة المشاركة العامة
٦. أنا أفهم أن المشاركة تنطوي على إخفاء الهوية في التسجيلات الصوتية لاستخدامها في الأغراض البحثية مثل تضمين المعلومات في أرشيف لمدة تصل إلى ٥ سنوات للاستخدام في أي مشاريع بحثية مستقبلية و التقارير المنشورة في منشور أكاديمي ... موقع المشروع ... منشورات إعلامية ... مؤتمرات .. مواد تعليمية أو تدريبية لاستخدامها في أنشطة الجامعة ... أنشطة المشاركة العامة
٧. أوافق على الاحتفاظ الآمن ببيانات الاتصال بي وتستخدم من قبل الباحث للاتصال بي بشأن مشاريع الأبحاث المستقبلية.

أوافق على المشاركة في المشروع البحثي المذكور أعلاه .

_____	_____	_____
التوقيع	تاريخ	اسم المشترك
_____	_____	_____
التوقيع	تاريخ	اسم الباحث أخذ الموافقة

عند الانتهاء: نسخة واحدة للمشاركة ؛ 1 نسخة للباحث / ملف المشروع

Appendix 13: The interview schedule

1. Please state the type of your school.
2. Please state where in Saudi Arabia are you currently teaching.
3. From your opinion to what extent Saudi English teachers were ready to implement CLT into their classroom?
4. What are the difficulties they face while teaching with CLT?
5. From your point of view how can you overcome the difficulties you mentioned?
6. What do you think about the quality of formal in-service training and development programmes?
7. Based on your experience to what extent are formal professional development programmes are helping and supporting EFL teachers to implement CLT effectively?
8. What is your opinion of the current process of curriculum change?
9. From your point of view how can the problem of insufficient English learning outcomes be solved?

Appendix 14: A sample interview (via WhatsApp)

argusexpo.com/argusexpo-201...

https://t.me/ammw999/status/1099384401790672896?s=12

[10/03/2019, 8:01:06 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته

كيف الحال؟

[10/03/2019, 8:01:06 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: فضلاً لا أمراً أرجو منك الإجابة على بعض الأسئلة حتى أتمكن من رسم صورة

واضحة وصحيحة باذن الله للصعوبات التي تواجهك كمعلم/ة لغة إنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية

[10/03/2019, 8:01:06 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: ممكن ترسلني الإجابات عبر الواتس أو على البريد الإلكتروني

علماً بأنه لن يتم الإشارة إلى الاسم أو الهوية في الدراسة كما هو موضح في ورقة معلومات المشاركين و نموذج الموافقة المستنيرة

شاكراً و مقدرة لك حسن تعاونك

البريد:

rf-357@outlook.com

[10/03/2019, 8:01:06 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: * الرجاء تحديد نوع المدرسة (صباحي - مسائي - تحفيظ قرآن كريم)

* الرجاء تحديد المدينة *

* ما مدى جاهزية معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية للتدريس بطريقة التعليم التواصلي في المرحلة الابتدائية

* ما هي الصعوبات التي تواجه معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية

* من وجهة نظرك كيف يمكن التغلب على الصعوبات التي تواجهك إن وجدت

* ما وجهة نظر المعلمة في برامج التطوير و التدريب المهني التي تطرحها إدارة التعليم

* ما مدى ملائمة البرامج التدريبية لاحتياجات المعلمة الفعلية و متطلبات تدريس المنهج المقرر من الواقع التدريسي

* ما وجهة نظر معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية في الآلية المتبعة لتطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية

* من وجهة نظرك كيف يمكن حل مشكلة عدم كفاية مخرجات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في التعليم العام في المملكة

[16/03/2019, 4:19:24 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: السلام عليكم

[16/03/2019, 4:19:33 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: مساء الخير حبيبتني

[16/03/2019, 4:19:39 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: كيف الحال؟

[16/03/2019, 4:20:06 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: الله يسعدك يا قمر أحتاج منك مساعدة لو تكرمت

[16/03/2019, 4:21:13 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: فضلاً لا أمراً تجاوبي إجابات واقية على الأسئلة من واقع خبرتك كمعلمة

[16/03/2019, 4:22:02 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: عشان أنقل صورة تعكس واقع الصعوبات التي تواجهكم من وجهة نظركم ..

Appendix 15: A sample of initial coding of the interview data

Dep on * ...
 Difficulties
 Classroom management
 Facilities
 Trs. Training

13 m

ما هي الصعوبات التي تواجه معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية؟
 * يفتقد على المنظمة وجاهتها
 * يفتقد على المنظمة وجاهتها في المرحلة الابتدائية

من وجهة نظرك كيف يمكن التغلب على الصعوبات التي تواجهك إن وجدت؟
 توزيع المهام على الطالبات وذلك بوضع قانات لكل مجموعة
 ما وجهة نظر المعلمة في برامج التطوير و التدريب المهني التي تطرحها إدارة التعليم ...
 ما مدى ملائمة البرامج التدريبية لاحتياجات المعلمة التعليمية و متطلبات تدريس المنهج المقرر من الواقع التدريسي
 ما وجهة نظر معلمة اللغة الإنجليزية في الآلية المتبعة لتطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية
 كتبها نوعا ما
 من وجهة نظرك كيف يمكن حل مشكلة عدم كفاية مخرجات تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في التعليم العام في المملكة
 يمكن توضيحها فصحك ...
 اقتصد ان المعلمة يعتمد عليها وعلى مهارات التعليم التواصل التي عندها
 Communicative
 طلب باصطفاك ايضها مهارات التعليم التواصل
 التي المفروض تتوفر عند المعلمة و في البيئة الصفية؟ و هل هي متوافرة عندها؟
 teaching
 [15/03/2019, 11:02:52 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: SET: ...
 [15/03/2019, 11:04:40 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: SET: ...
 [16/03/2019, 3:59:22 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: SET: ...
 [16/03/2019, 3:59:51 PM] Rajaa Fallatah: SET: ...
 [16/03/2019, 8:28:53 PM] SET: ...
 [16/03/2019, 8:30:53 PM] SET: ...
 التوظيف و لفت الانتباه ١ -
 Defined info - Commun

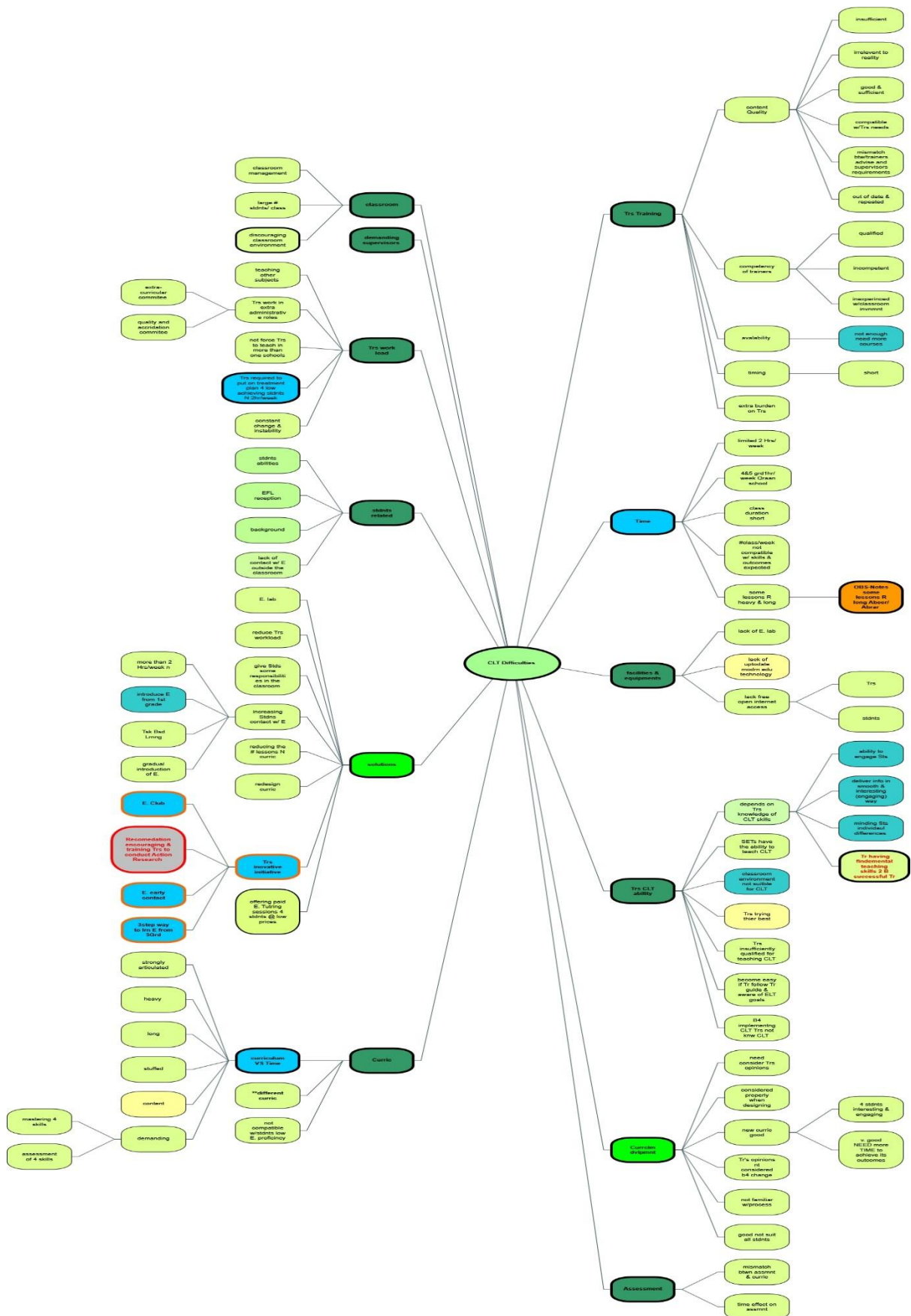
5 m

طبيب براك اليتيم الصفة تساعد؟ عدد الطالبات التجهيزات وغيرها
 هل التدريب المهني من الوزارة ...
 او حتى يعطيك خطوات كيف تعلموا المهارات دي
 real
 5
 mismatch
 btw/train
 & supervisor's
 requirements

30

0000063-STICKER-2019-03-16-21-42-18.webp

Appendix 17: mind map created at the axial coding level



Appendix 18: screenshot from NVivo of the axial coding level

The screenshot displays the NVivo software interface at the axial coding level. The top menu bar includes 'File', 'Home', 'Import', 'Create', 'Explore', 'Share', and 'Mind Map'. Below the menu is a toolbar with icons for zooming, layout, size, format, and insert. The left-hand navigation pane is titled 'Maps' and shows a list of nodes under various categories like 'Files', 'Data', 'Codes', 'Cases', 'Notes', 'Search', 'Maps', and 'Output'. The central workspace shows a complex network of nodes and relationships, with a central node labeled 'CLT' and several other nodes connected to it. The nodes are color-coded and connected by lines, representing the axial coding structure.

Appendix 21: Themes emerged at the selective coding level

Theme I: Difficulties Saudi Primary English state-schools teachers face teaching CLT

Category 1 Teachers' related difficulties

1. Teachers' CLT ability and knowledge
2. Teachers' workload
 - Teaching other subjects
 - Working in administrative roles in school
 - Teaching in more than one school
 - Designing treatment plans for low-achievement students
3. Demanding supervisors

Category 2 Students' related difficulties

1. Different individual abilities
2. Perception of English (as a difficult subject)
3. Background (parents and low income)
4. Lack of contact with English outside the classroom

Category 3 Time related difficulties

1. English is taught for only 2 hours/ week
 - Even less in Qur'anic schools (only 1 Hour/week for 4th and 5th grades)
2. Class duration is short (cut back from 45 to 30-35 mins in most schools because two schools share the same building sequentially)

Category 4 Curriculum related difficulties

1. Curriculum versus time issues
 - Very articulated
 - Long
 - Heavy
 - Stuffed with information
2. Assessment
 - Effect of time on assessment
 - Mismatch between assessment and curriculum

Category 5 classroom related difficulties

1. Classroom management issues
2. Large student numbers per class
3. Discouraging classroom environment

Category 6 Facilities and equipment related difficulties

1. Lack of English learning room (lab)
2. Lack of up-to-date education technology
3. Lack of free internet access in school (for both teachers and students)

Theme II: Teachers' in-service training

Category 1: content quality

1. Appropriateness to teachers' needs (relevance to supervisors' requirements and teachers' day-to-day needs)
2. Relevance to actual classroom environment (relevance to what really happens on the ground)

Category 2: Competency of trainers

Category 3: Timing and availability

Theme III: Teachers' solutions to overcome the difficulties they face

Category 1: suggestions

1. English lab
2. Reducing teachers' workload
3. Increasing students' contact with English
 - Increasing number of classes per week
 - Introducing English from earlier grades
 - Implementing Task Based Learning
 - Gradual introduction of English at the primary level

Category 2: Teachers' initiatives

1. Initiative1; School English Club (integrating Task-Based Language learning)
2. Initiative2; English Early Contact initiative (familiarizing students [self-learning] with the content of the English curriculum beforehand during summer holidays)
3. Initiative3; The 3-Steps plan to teach English to 3rd graders initiative

Theme IV: Teachers' marginalization and lack of involvement in curriculum development

Category 1: Attitudes towards the new English curriculum

1. The new curriculum (based on CLT) is good
2. The new curriculum (based on CLT) is not suitable

Category 2: Attitudes towards teachers' role in the process of curriculum change

1. Familiarity with the process
2. Consideration of teachers' opinions and experiences
3. Role in the evaluation process of the new curriculum

Appendix 22: integrating data from all data sources

Theme	Categories	Subcategories	Data source/s	Notes
I. Difficulties Saudi Primary English state-schools teachers face teaching CLT	1. Teachers' related difficulties			
		1.1.1 Teachers' ability to teach CLT (teachers' role, learners' role, and group work)	Interviews Observations Questionnaire (Qs8-10, Qs29-31, Q34)	<p>Q34 from observations classes still 100% teacher-controlled students heavily rely on teachers to spoon-feed them (70% agreed)</p> <p>* compare with Qs 15,16,18,19</p>
		1.1.2 Teachers' knowledge about CLT (teachers' role, learners' role, and group work)	Questionnaire (Qs 12, - 28,) Interviews Observations	<p>Q9-10; Trs' negative attitudes towards CLT (teaching practice before CLT was easier)</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers' roles <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lecturer ○ Knowledge transmitter ○ Authoritative figure (Q18,19,24) ○ Collaborator (in less frequency) 	<p>Observations</p> <p>Questionnaire (Qs 15, 16, 21, *20)</p>	<p>Q15: teachers' ultimate job is to transfer knowledge to students 40% disagreed, 44% agreed</p> <p># Teachers' attitudes split between agreement and disagreement which indicates that most teachers are (theoretically) aware that their job description extends beyond knowledge transfer.</p>	


Appendix 23: tables generated by the SurveyMonkey software

Microsoft PowerPoint interface showing a slide titled "Q8: Teaching English as a foreign language in the elementary level is important." The slide displays survey results for 75 respondents and 17 skipped responses.

Q8: Teaching English as a foreign language in the elementary level is important.

Answered: 75 Skipped: 17

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	8.00%	6
Disagree	1.33%	1
neither agree nor disagree	1.33%	1
Agree	26.67%	20
Strongly agree	62.67%	47
TOTAL		75

Powered by  SurveyMonkey

Click to add notes

Slide 18 of 82 English (United Kingdom)

Appendix 24: sample of table for notes collected from classroom observation

Observation of Teachers (observed 2 times – 4/5 grades)
State-school-building

Themes	Categories	Observational notes	Notes
Theme I: Difficulties Saudi Primary English state- schools teachers face teaching CLT	Teachers' related difficulties		
	communicative nature of the classroom environment <i>implies teachers' awareness of CLT</i>		
	• Teachers' role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation • facilitation of group work • help students memorize forms • Depend on drilling and modelling • Authoritative figure 	•
	• Learners' role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repetition – imitation of textbook forms • Stdnts seated in groups of 6 • Cooperative learning implemented • 	•
	• Group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-controlled group work • Restricted to working on textbook tasks and/or teacher prepared worksheets • No communication or discussion (language production outside the assigned task) • Students seated in groups of 6 (row) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 4 grade less group work because <u>TL</u> opted not to use Active Learning strategy (gradually trains <u>stdnts</u> throughout the year to use <u>Actv-ling</u> in 5th

sessions

Appendix 25: open coding level of the classroom observation sessions

The screenshot displays the NVivo 12 Plus software interface. The main workspace shows the following coding results:

Node Name	Files	References
3.TRs solutions	0	0
initiatives	28	39
4.TRs & currc change	0	0
1.TRs & CLT challenges	1	1
TR related	0	0
CLT awareness	0	0
errors	0	0
grammar	3	3
exam-oriented	1	1
group-work	8	18
stdnt-engagem	6	7
limited-use	7	9
classroom-envir	7	8
1st lang	8	12
TRs role	9	11
stdnt role	9	11
teaching materials	2	3
supervisor	5	5
work-load	8	9
stdnts related	0	0
background	1	1
abilities	3	6
curriculum	0	0
classroom	1	1
environment	7	13
stdnts#	10	12
facilities	3	3
time	10	26
2.TRs m-svc trng	2	2

Node: group-work

<Files(Ahrah-obs-notes analysis) - \$1 reference coded (4.55% Coverage)>

Reference 1 - 4.55% Coverage

- Students set in groups (round)
- Work individually most of the time

Node: group-work

<Files(Ameerah-obs-notes analysis) - \$1 reference coded (9.47% Coverage)>

Reference 1 - 9.47% Coverage

- Group work
- Divided into 6 different groups (in rows) b/c no space for proper group arrangement
- Group work restricted to finishing exercises and playing games
- Some students work/read individually within the group

Node: 1st

<Files(Aanwar-obs-notes analysis) - \$2 references coded (4.33% Coverage)>

Reference 1 - 3.19% Coverage

- 1st Student set in groups of 6 rows
- Group work (individual groups - the class as a whole)

Appendix 26: axial coding level of the classroom observation data

observational-themes-and-categories.nv - NVivo 12 Plus

File Home Import Create Explore Share

Clipboard Paste Copy Merge Properties Open Memo Link Create As Code Create As Cases Query Visualize Code Auto Code Range Code Uncode Case Classification File Undock Navigation View List View Find Detail View Sort By

Quick Access Files Memos Nodes

Data Files Hind-photos&vids Samah-photos&vids twitter thread File Classifications Externals

Codes Nodes Sentiment Relationships Relationship Types

Cases Notes Search Maps Maps

Output

Name	Files	References
3.TRs solutions	0	0
4.TRs & currc change	0	0
1.TRs & QLT challenges	1	1
TR related	0	0
CLT awareness	0	0
errors	0	0
grammar	3	3
group-work	8	18
stdnt-engagemnt	6	7
limited-use	7	9
classroom-environ	7	8
1st lang	8	12
TRs role	9	11
stdnt role	9	11
teaching materials	2	3
supervisor	5	5
work-load	8	9
stnts related	0	0
curriculum	0	0
classroom	1	1
facilities	3	3
time	10	26
2.TRs n-svc trng	2	2

group-work

- 4-6 stdnts in group
- Tr asks stdnts to work as group BUT they work individually
- Group-work k = Stdnts setting in a group of 6
- Most of the time Stdnts work individually
- Up to Trs to find strategies that encourage Group-work

Reference 4 - 5.93% Coverage

4-6 stdnts in group

- Tr asks stdnts to work as group BUT they work individually
- Group-work k = Stdnts setting in a group of 6
- Most of the time Stdnts work individually
- Up to Trs to find strategies that encourage Group-work

Nodes Code At Enter node name (CTRL+Q)

RF 37 Items

Appendix 27: selective coding level of the classroom observation data

Clipboard		Font		Paragraph		Styles		Editing	
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group-work <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limited use/misunderstanding 		Observations	not communicative	<p>Q26: 77% agreed group work encourages genuine interaction between students</p>	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students lack of engagement ○ Effect Classroom environment 		Questionnaire (Qs 17, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28)	<p>Q27: 80% agreed group work allows students to have control over their learning</p> <p># from observations group-work is misunderstood by most teachers & not properly used restricted to students working on tasks (students either work individually within the group or rely on high-achievers)</p> <p># even when Tr makes better use of group-work activities and work was still highly controlled by Tr. (Tr. ...)</p> <p># utilizing some teaching strategies – active learning and games – seems to boost the use of group work and make it more engaging for students compared with the limited use of finishing classroom activities (Tr. ...)</p>				

Appendix 28: certificate of ethical approval from the Graduate School of Education at the University of Exeter



GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus
Heavitree Road
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Making Sense of Curriculum Change in Saudi Arabia: Teachers' Perspectives Towards the Implementation of the Communicative English Language Teaching Approach at the Elementary Level

Researcher(s) name: Rajaa Mahmood Fallatah

Supervisor(s): Dr. Salah Troudi

This project has been approved for the period

From: 03/07/2018

To: 31/12/2020

Ethics Committee approval reference: D/17/18/55

Signature:  Date: 03 July 2018
(Professor Dongbo Zhang, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix 29: Statement from the Saudi Cultural Bureau in the UK

ROYAL EMBASSY OF SAUDI ARABIA CULTURAL BUREAU LONDON		مملكة العربية السعودية المحقة الثقافية لندن
التاريخ 2018/08/03 م.		
إفادة		
رقم الملف: UMU820		
<p>تفيد المحقة الثقافية بسفارة المملكة العربية السعودية لدى المملكة المتحدة بأن الطالبة/ رجاء بنت محمود أحمد فلاته (سجل مدني رقم ██████████) والبعثة من قبل جامعة أم القرى لدراسة الدكتوراه في تخصص TESOL بجامعة Exeter قد التحقت بالبعثة بتاريخ 17-11-1437 هـ الموافق 2016/08/20 م ومن المتوقع أن تنتهي بعثتها بتاريخ 29-12-1441 هـ الموافق 2020/08/19 م.</p> <p>وقد أعطيت لها هذه الإفادة بناءً على طلبها لتقديمها إلى من يهمه الأمر دون أدنى مسؤولية على المحقة.</p>		
وتقبلوا تحياتي،،		
<p>المحق الثقلي بسفارة المملكة العربية السعودية لدى المملكة المتحدة</p> <p>د. عبدالعزيز بن علي المقوشي</p>		
المرفقات:	الموافق:	التاريخ:
630 Chiswick High Road, London W4 5RY Tel: +44 (0) 20 3249 7000 Fax: +44 (0) 20 3249 7001 E-mail: sacbuk@uksacb.org www.uksacb.org		

Appendix 30: Permission from the General Directorate of Education in the region

الجمهورية العربية السورية
وزارة التعليم
الإدارة العامة للتعليم بمنطقة
إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

وزارة التعليم
Ministry of Education

التاريخ: 22/6/2019
الرقم: 1440/100-02
الصفحة: 1 من 1

الرجوع / الوثيقة على تطبيق باندورا 2018

تعميم لجميع مكاتب التعليم وإدارة التدريب والابتعاث
وجميع المدارس الابتدائية (بين / بنات)

المكرم(ة) مدير(ة) التدريب والابتعاث
المكرم(ة) مدير(ة) مكتب التعليم بـ /
المكرم(ة) قائد(ة) مدرسة /
السلام عليكم ورحمة الله وبركاته ... وبعد:

فتقوم الطالبة / رجاء محمود أحمد فلاتة والمبتعثة إلى جامعة ((ألكسير)) بالمملكة المتحدة
بإجراء بحث لنيل درجة الدكتوراه بعنوان:
(عملية تطوير الناجح في المملكة العربية السعودية من وجهة نظر المعلمين في تطبيق منتج
اللغة الانجليزية بالطريقة التوافقية في المرحلة الابتدائية)

وحيث إن البحث يتطلب :

١ / إجراء مقابلة مع مشرف(ة) / مشرفات ومعلمي / معلمات اللغة الانجليزية و تسجيل البيانات .
٢ / تعبئة استبانة الكترونية من قبل معلمي / معلمات اللغة الانجليزية بمدينة [REDACTED]
و ذلك من خلال الدخول على الرابط: <http://cutt.us/BNM1440>

٣ / القيام بإجراء ملاحظات صفية لمعلمات اللغة الانجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية (بنات).

عليه أمل بعد الاطلاع التكرم بتمكين الباحثة من إجراء البحث وأدواته وما يتطلبه داخل
إدارتكم / مدرستكم وحث الزملاء / الزميلات على التعاون معها (أو من ينوب عنها) شاكركم
لكم كريم تعاونكم خدمة للبحث العلمي، و تقبلوا تحياتي وتقديري .

مدير إدارة التخطيط والتطوير

Scanned with CamScanner

Appendix 31: interview participants information sheet (English)



Participant Information Sheet (interviews)

Title of Project: curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level

Researcher name: Rajaa Fallatah

Invitation and brief summary:

Dear participant,

My name is Rajaa Fallatah, and I am currently a PhD student in University of Exeter, this interview will be used a part of my doctoral thesis to explore curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level. The data collected will be used as research data and will be analysed for the purpose of the research understudy. I would therefore be very grateful if you would take the time and trouble to participate in an individual interview with the researcher.

Please take time to consider the information carefully and to discuss it with family or friends if you wish, or to ask the researcher questions. I would like to emphasise that participation is entirely voluntary and that I am more than happy to answer any queries at the email address:

rf357@ exeter.ac.uk

Many thanks,

Rajaa Fallatah

Purpose of the research:

The aim of the study is to investigate how the current top-down curriculum change policy may be affecting Saudi EFL teachers and exploring the possibility that it is negatively affecting the outcomes of English language education in the public school system.

Why have I been approached?

In order to appropriately answer the research questions of the study, the data will be collected from those involved in the educational context that is the focus of the study (Herrington et al., 2007). Accordingly, the sample of this study will be Saudi EFL teachers in Saudi public primary schools. To ensure the diversification of the study sample, the participants will be both male and female teachers. In addition to gender diversity, geographical variety is equally important.

What would taking part involve?

The data collected will help me explore and understand the process of curriculum change in Saudi Arabia: teachers' perspectives towards the implementation of the communicative English language teaching approach at the elementary level. In order to ensure complete anonymity personal identification is not required, however, it is important that the responses you provide are your own and not the shared views of other colleagues

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Research does deliver wider benefits to society and some indirect benefits might be foreseeable for participants. Thus, I hope that the results of this study help in raising awareness about the important role that teachers can play in the process of curriculum change.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

I do not believe that taking part in the research has any foreseeable risks to participants

What will happen if I don't want to carry on with the study?

You can stop taking part at any time without having to give a reason. So you can ask to withdraw from the study at any time and your data can be destroyed.

How will my information be kept confidential?

The University of Exeter processes personal data for the purposes of carrying out research in the public interest. The University will endeavour to be transparent about its processing of your personal data and this information sheet should provide a clear explanation of this. If you do have any queries about the University's processing of your personal data that cannot be resolved by the research team, further information may be obtained from the University's Data Protection Officer by emailing dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk or at www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection

Taking part involves anonymised questionnaire responses, interviews transcripts, and audio recording to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities. Participants' data processed for any purpose or purposes will not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes.

Will I receive any payment for taking part?

Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

What will happen to the results of this study?

Taking part involves anonymised audio recordings to be used for the purposes of inclusion in an archive for a period of up to 5 years, shared with other researchers for use in future research projects, reports published in an academic publication, conferences and teaching or training materials for use in University activities...public engagement activities. Information on the outcomes of the project will be made available to participants at the end of the project on websites such as, but not exclusively, the Saudi digital library (SDL).

Who is organising and funding this study?

Not applicable.

Who has reviewed this study?

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Exeter (Reference Number...),

Further information and contact details

For further information and/or to take part please contact me at rf357@exeter.ac.uk .

If you are not happy with any aspect of the project and wish to complain please contact the department Ethics Officer or Ethics Committee Chair.

Gail Seymour, Research Ethics and Governance Manager

g.m.seymour@exeter.ac.uk, 01392 726621

Thank you for your interest in this project

Rajaa Fallatah

Appendix 32: interview participants information sheet (Arabic)

<p>ورقة معلومات المشاركين (المقابلات)</p> <p>(معلمي ومعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الابتدائية/المدرسين التربويين/ أعضاء لجنة تطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية/ أساتذة برامج تدريب المعلمات والمعلمين/ أساتذة برامج إعداد المعلمات والمعلمين)</p> <p>عنوان المشروع : فهم عملية تطوير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية: وجهات المدرسين نحو تطبيق مناهج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية التواصلية على المستوى الابتدائي</p> <p>اسم الباحث: رجاء فلاة</p> <p>دعوة و موجه : عزيزي المشارك ،</p> <p>اسمي رجاء فلاة ، وأنا حاليا طالبة بكثورة في جامعة إكستر ، سيتم استخدام المعلومات التي سيتم الحصول عليها من المقابلة كجزء من أطروحة الدكتوراه الخاصة بي لاستكشاف عملية تطوير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية: وجهات نظر المعلمين نحو تطبيق نهج تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية التواصلية على المستوى الابتدائي. سيتم استخدام الإجابات التي تقدمها كبيانات بحث وسيتم تحليلها من أجل الوصول إلى إجابة على أسئلة الدراسة. ولذلك ، ستكون متقنا للغاية إذا استغرقت الوقت والجهد للرد على مقيلة مع الباحث والتي ينبغي ألا تستغرق أكثر من 5 دقائق. من أجل ضمان عدم الكشف عن الهوية بشكل كامل ، لا يلزم ذكر اسمك أو أي بيانات شخصية تدل على هويتك ، ومع ذلك ، من المهم أن تكون الردود التي تقدمها تدل على أرائك الخاصة بك وليس آراء الزملاء الآخرين. يرجى أخذ الوقت الكافي للنظر في المطومات بخداية ومناقشتها مع العائلة أو الأصدقاء إذا كنت ترغب في ذلك ، أو طرح أسئلة عن البحث. أود التأكيد على أن المشاركة تطوعية تمامًا وأنتي أسعد بتواصلك وللإجابة على أي استفسارات أرجو مراسلتني على عنوان البريد الإلكتروني: rf357@exeter.ac.uk</p> <p>شكرا لمشاركته و اهتمامه رجاء فلاة</p> <p>الغرض من البحث: الهدف من الدراسة هو التحقيق في كيفية تأثير عملية تغيير المناهج على مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية واستكشاف إمكانية تأثيرها السلبى على نتائج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية في النظام المدرسي العام.</p> <p>لماذا تم الاتصال بي؟ من أجل الإجابة بشكل مناسب على أسئلة البحث في الدراسة ، سيتم جمع البيانات من المشاركين في السياق التعليمي الذي هو محور الدراسة (Herrington et al. , 2007). وبناءً على ذلك ، ستكون عينة الدراسة هذه من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية العامة السعودية ، والمعلمين الذين يعملون مع مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية مثل المدرسين والمدربين أثناء الخدمة ، والمحاضرين الجامعيين الذين يدرسون في برامج تعليم المعلمين. لضمان تنوع عينة الدراسة ، سيكون المشاركون من المعلمين والمعلمات. بالإضافة إلى التنوع بين الجنسين ، التنوع الجغرافي مهم بنفس القدر.</p> <p>ما الذي تشارك به؟ سيتطلب من المشاركين تقديم المعلومات الأساسية (الغة العبرية وسنوات الخبرة ومستوى التعليم ومدينة المقيمين) والردود على الأسئلة الهيكلية التي تطرحها المقابلة وأي مناقشات أخرى قد تنشأ أثناء المقابلة. ستساعدني البيانات</p>	<p>التي تم جمعها في استكشاف وفهم عملية تغيير المناهج في المملكة العربية السعودية: وجهات نظر المعلمين نحو تطبيق مناهج تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية التواصلية في المرحلة الابتدائية. من أجل ضمان عدم الكشف عن الهوية بشكل كامل ، لا يلزم تحديد الهوية الشخصية ، ومع ذلك ، من المهم أن تكون الردود التي تقدمها هي الخاصة بك وليس الأراء المشتركة للزملاء الآخرين.</p> <p>ستسمح المقابلات بالتعرف على تحصيل المعلمين للواقع وفهمهم لمفهوم التعلم التواصلى وترى تجربتهم الخاصة في التدريس. سيتم إعداد أسئلة المقابلة للمعلمين قبل المقابلة لتمكينهم من التفكير بعمق في تجاربهم الخاصة والاستعداد للمقابلة. ستساعد الأسئلة على توفير فهم أكثر تفصيلاً للردود على الاستطلاع بالإضافة إلى ذلك ، ستقوم المقابلات باستكشاف وجهات نظر المعلمين حول مسألة إدراجهم أو عدم إدراجهم في عملية تطوير المناهج الدراسية وتقييمهم الخاص للتدريب والدعم أثناء الخدمة التي يحصلون عليها حالياً.</p> <p>و على نفس المنوال ، سيتم إجراء المقابلات مع المشاركين التثويين - المدرسين والمسؤولين عن تدريبهم في وزارة التربية والتعليم وأسئلة الجامعات في برامج تعلم المعلمين. ستجرى جميع المقابلات باللغة العربية من أجل إعطاء المشاركين فرصة للتعبير عن آرائهم والتعبير عنها بحرية. بمجرد الانتهاء من جميع المقابلات ونظماً ، ستقوم بترجمة البيانات إلى اللغة الإنجليزية</p> <p>ما هي فوائد متوقعة من المشاركة؟ إن مشاركتك في هذا البحث تطوعية تماماً ، ومن شأنها إغادة المجتمع السعودي وعملية البحث العلمي بشكل عام ، وإغادة في عملية تطوير مناهج اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة بشكل خاص.</p> <p>ما هي المساوئ والمخاطر المحتملة للمشاركة؟ لا يعتقد أن للمشاركة في البحث أي مخاطر يمكن التنبؤ بها على المشاركين</p> <p>ماذا سيحدث إذا لم أذهب في الاستمرار في الدراسة؟ مشاركته تطوعية و لك كامل الحرية في الانسحاب في أي وقت دون إبداء أي سبب ودون أي تذكير على حقوقك القانونية.</p> <p>كما يمكنك حذف جميع البيانات التي جُمعت منك أو إذا كانت طريقة جمع البيانات تعني أنه قد تم جمع كمية معينة من البيانات حتى النقطة التي تمت عملية الانسحاب فيقبل ولا يمكن تدميرها فتأكد بانها ستكون مجهولة المصدر تماماً دون أي إشارة أو ارتباط بالمشاركين الفرديين</p> <p>كيف سيتم الحفاظ على سرية معلوماتي؟ تعالج جامعة إكستر البيانات الشخصية لأغراض إجراء البحوث في المصلحة العامة . ستسعى الجامعة إلى أن تكون شفافة بشأن معالجة بياناتك الشخصية ، ويجب أن تقدم ورقة المعلومات هذه ترضاً ووضاً لذلك . إذا كان لديك أي استفسار حول معالجة الجامعة من البيانات الشخصية التي لا يمكن حلها من قبل فريق البحث ، ويمكن الحصول على مزيد من المعلومات من ضابط حماية البيانات الجامعة عن طريق البريد الإلكتروني dataprotection@exeter.ac.uk أو عند www.exeter.ac.uk/dataprotection</p> <p>الأجزاء ذات الصلة من البيانات التي تم جمعها خلال الدراسة يمكن أن ينظر إليها أعضاء فريق أفراد من جامعة إكستر. حيث تكون متصلة بمشاركته في هذا البحث. وبناءً عليه أعطيت الإذن ل هؤلاء الأفراد للوصول إلى سجلته. كما أن المشاركة تطوي على إخفاء الهوية في كلاً من: (الردود على الاستبيان/ تفرغ نصوص المقابلات/ التسجيلات الصوتية) لاستخدامها في الأبحاث البحثية مثل تصنيف المعلومات في أربيف لمدة تصل إلى 5 سنوات للاستخدام في أي مشاريع بحثية مستقبلية والتقارير المنشورة في منشور أكاديمي ... موقع المشروع ... منشورات إعلامية ... مؤتمرات .. مواد تعليمية أو تدريبية لاستخدامها في أنشطة الجامعة ... أنشطة المشاركة العامة. وفي حال اقتضت الضرورة سيتم الاحتفاظ بالبيانات الآمن ببيانات الاتصال بك ، بحيث قد تستخدم من قبل الباحث لاتصال بك بشأن مشاريع الأبحاث المستقبلية.</p> <p>هل سألتقى أي مدفوعات للمشاركة؟</p>
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Appendix 33: total student numbers in the schools visited for classroom observations

(Data obtained from the Statistical Manual of The General Directorate of Education – in the region where the study was conducted – 2019)

Schools	Total number of students
1 (Qur'anic school-rural)	159
2 (Qur'anic school)	191
3 (Qur'anic school)	400
4 public school	567
5 public school	318 (subleased building)
6 public school	754
7 public school	559
8 public school	813
9 public school	699
10 public school	895
11 public school	500
12 public school	343
13 public school	523