

## Exploring Communicative Language Teaching Principles Alignment of English Textbook in Saudi Arabia Middle School

**Ahmed O. Alharbi**

School of Education, University of Glasgow  
Glasgow, United Kingdom

### Abstract

This paper aims to analysis an English language textbook used in “middle school” (high school) in Saudi Arabia in-depth, to ascertain the type of pedagogy pushed by the teacher’s book. The criteria of analysis are adapted from Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). These criteria are used to analyses the textbook in terms of how communicative it is and personalised, how authentic, how meaningful; its degree of linguistic complexity; whether it is scaffolded, accuracy or fluency oriented; and how much of all each of these categories is in the textbook activities. The methodology of this paper is qualitative and presents only one aspect, textbook analysis, of a broader case study which forms part of a Ph.D. project that explores the factors behind the failure of implementation of CLT in Saudi Arabia. The results of this analysis show that in the textbook there is a careful balance between accuracy and fluency. There are some person, alised and meaningful activities, however most of the activities lack of authenticity which limits freedom for the students in using use the target language.

*Keywords:* accuracy, authenticity, English, fluency, linguistic, meaningful, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), scaffolded, textbook, Saudi Arabia, middle school

**Cite as:** Alharbi, A. O. (2020). Exploring Communicative Language Teaching Principles Alignment of English Textbook in Saudi Arabia Middle School. *Arab World English Journal*, 11 (4) 96-109. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.7>

## Introduction

The English language has spread all over the world, leading to a rethinking of how the language should be learned. Consequently, English language learning is now widespread in Saudi Arabia, where the language plays a significant role in different fields. However, the outcomes of English language learning in Saudi schools are below those outlined by the Saudi government in 2004 when they implemented a new curriculum based on communicative language teaching (CLT). Many studies, such as those of Abdulkader (2019), Alharbi (2019), Wajid and Saleem (2016) and Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019), have explored the outcomes of these Saudi students now that the new English curriculum has been in place for more than 10 years. The results of these studies show that the outcomes are very weak. These students are experiencing difficulties writing simple sentences and communicating in basic English (Bhuiyan, 2016).

The new official CLT-based policy is supposedly student-centred and can be summarised as aiming to improve the “four skills” of English (listening, speaking, reading and writing), to increase awareness of other cultures, and to help the students learn the language for everyday use. These new ideas are said to emphasise the identity of the students, which is foundational to this new policy. This curriculum attempts to move away from the traditional curriculum based on a policy aiming at student improvement in terms of their level of language proficiency in order to ensure their access to scientific and technical fields, to transfer knowledge and to use English to spread Islam (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). These previous professional and religious aims did not emphasise language as a means of communication or for everyday use. The former curriculum was teacher-centred and it included no pair or group work in the classroom; in 2001, there was a reform of the official curriculum in general and the English curriculum in particular.

The new curriculum has implemented new strategies and techniques to enable the students to use the language more functionally in the classroom. It aims to allow the students more space to use their language and thus notes that teaching should become more student-centred. It has a new focus on helping students to communicate in everyday situations, which is a core aspect of CLT, as well as aiming to facilitate students in acquiring language skills that are suitable for them in a range of future jobs, to make the students aware of how significant English is and that English is becoming the language of the world. This new perspective runs alongside the continued aim of improving the four skills in English. There is also a new emphasis on developing respect for other cultures and other religions, as well as reinforcing Saudi students’ national identity, which is taken to be the Arabic culture and Islamic religion of Saudi Arabia (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). However, a lot of research has found that the implementation of this new curriculum has not yet been successful, despite theoretical support for the approach (Abahussain, 2016; AL-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019; Al-Nasser, 2015; Al-Seghayer, 2014; Al Asmari, 2015; Batawi, 2007)

The studies cited above provide different reasons why CLT has failed, the most common being that Saudi students and teachers reject communicative classroom teaching. The reasons that they give for this include the low language level of the students, making it difficult for them to use the target language, and the teacher tending to dominate the classroom so that the new curriculum is perceived as a threat to teacher control. Some of these studies also state that the new emphasis

does not match the assessment orientation and the focus of both the students and the teachers is still on passing exams rather than learning English as a life skill.

CLT typically entails allowing the students to use the language in a way that helps them to communicate more meaningfully. CLT thus increases the level of authenticity when teaching the language. When the language taught is for everyday use, it is usually authentic text that is chosen as the teaching material and the students can thus become familiar with this. This choice is aligned with the theory of Hymes (1972) that the use of more appropriate, authentic texts can help to provide useful everyday language that is real and has context.

The current article presents some work from the researcher's PhD project addressing the degree to which CLT English language teaching in Saudi Arabian high schools has been successful. It engages an analysis of the textbook material to do so. The rationale of this article is to explore how one of the Saudi textbooks reflects CLT principles with a view to understanding why the new communicative curriculum has failed to achieve the intended targets in its first decade of implementation. The research question of this article is as follows:  
How does the Saudi Arabian middle school textbook reflect communicative language teaching principles?

### Literature Review

CLT is an approach to language teaching based on the theory of communicative competence that was first proposed by Hymes (1972). Hymes argued that there is a need to look at the appropriateness of the language used in a specific context; language is used according to who and what the context is and what the reason for the communicative function is. This was itself a response to Chomsky (1965), who argued that the ability to use mechanisms of language is innate and, as we are born with language, it is used regardless of the context. Chomsky called this innate ability to use language universal grammar. Hymes, however, approached the topic from a different perspective, considering language in use. He argued that it is impossible to disconnect the language from the context; instead it is necessary to consider how to speak, to whom and in what manner (Nunan, 1999).

Brown (2007) suggested that CLT should adopt communicative competence principles, but based on a broad approach rather than a specific method. Therefore, CLT may be seen as an approach with principles focusing on language learning by using meaningful communication and authentic language. The first principle of CLT is that the form is not the only focus; instead, all aspects of competencies are important. The second principle is that the learner's fluency is as important as accuracy. The third is that the language used in the CLT classroom has to be productive for the learners. Productive language means that the language is not planned, and instead the learners have the use of resources with the freedom to let them expand their language. As no language is known or predictable, but instead it depends on what emerges in the lesson, this increases the chance of communication in the target language. The fourth principle is that the language used in the CLT classroom should be meaningful: the language should be personal to the speakers and they should relate it to their everyday language use. The final principle is that the language to be used should be authentic. Authenticity in this regard means that it is:

drawn from a wide variety of contexts, including TV and radio broadcasts, conversations, discussions and meetings of all kinds, talks, and announcements [as well as] magazines, stories, printed material and instructions, hotel brochures and airport notices, bank instructions, and a wide range of written messages (Nunan, 1999, p. 80)

The principles of CLT detailed above act as a bridge between what is learned in the classroom and the language used outside the classroom. Due to the fact that the language is used in the classroom to prepare the students, they should learn a similar version of the language to the one they will need to communicate outside the classroom, rather than only learning language to pass exams. Another communicative strategy to be found in the CLT classroom is the information gap. In an information gap task, the students individually lack information, and the task they are set encourages engagement with other members of the class in order to fill this gap, thereby requiring communication (Kumaravadivelu, 2006), which encourages the students to communicate in order to meet the pedagogical aims of the lesson.

One of the most important aspects of CLT is the textbook. Saudi Arabia has a very centralised education system that is heavily based on teaching the textbook (Ministry of Education, 2002). Indeed, the textbook may be seen as the “visible heart of any English Language Teaching (ELT) programme” (Sheldon, 1988, p. 237) and it plays a significant role in teaching the language as it suggests what kind of pedagogy to employ, what content to teach and how to teach it, with a sequence to follow. It provides the techniques and the strategies to be used, as well as outlining activities. In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Education has changed not only the textbook but the entire pedagogy, and the power of the textbook is such that it can be seen as the guide in this shift. Therefore, it is very important to consider what the textbook is aiming to achieve. In this regard, analysing the textbook is useful because it exemplifies the type of pedagogy in use in the classroom.

In order to develop the English curriculum, the Saudi Ministry of Education asked for help from companies in the US and Europe to design suitable English textbooks for the new curriculum. Sami Al-Shuwaikh (director of Tatweer Educational Services, tasked with the responsibility of developing the textbooks), commented on this aspect of the curriculum reform:

The textbooks design will aim to develop the four English skills, the communication skills by using different strategies and the textbooks will include 30% of the Saudi and Islamic identity and the rest will be from the global identity but content that does not conflict with the local identity (Nassir, 2013)

These textbooks are provided for free to all schools, public and private. Communicative competence is one of the main goals of these textbooks, achieved through different types of communicative activities, such as role play, group work, group discussions and problem-solving. The textbooks also use different types of “real-world” materials, such as articles from magazines and newspapers, pictures, texts, reports, advertisements and posters. Interaction is emphasised through communication and conversation based on both the audio and the written text with a view to increasing the students’ communicative abilities both inside and outside the classroom

(Abahussain, 2016; Farooq, 2015; Al Asmari, 2015; Al-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019; Wajid & Saleem).

In his study, Abahussain (2016) discussed the use of the new textbooks by teachers who had recently graduated and were now teaching English in secondary schools. He found that these teachers used the textbooks differently from the communicative approach outlined in the lesson guide given to the teacher, which was communicative. These teachers made use of the communicative activities by engaging traditional methods such as the grammar translation method (GTM). The study concluded that the textbooks lack support material that aligns with the need for authenticity and meaningfully helps the teachers to teach the lessons outlined by these textbooks. It founded that activities were outdated and there were no resources in the school for teachers and students to access the internet and thus further materials. This study, however, did not consider in any depth whether the lessons being taught aligned with the CLT principals.

Farooq (2015) studied the changes that teachers face in implementing a communicative curriculum based on these textbooks in Saudi Arabia. Farooq found that the study was evaluate the CLT in these textbooks has an impact on the students' level. He found that a lack of suitable materials and time pressure stopped the teachers from teaching CLT effectively. Farooq further noted that the level of students does not depend on the textbooks alone, but also on the teacher, their language proficiency, and how they teach. Farooq (2015) found that these teachers have a high level of CLT awareness with regard to these textbooks and a high level of how to evaluate the students' competences. However, this study did not provide a framework that could provide a deeper and clearer understanding of the teachers' awareness of CLT and whether this was aligned with CLT principles.

Al Asmari (2015) focused on the challenges that stopped the teachers from implementing the CLT methods and tasks suggested in the Saudi textbooks. He found that not only was the CLT challenging the teacher, but also the English itself was regarded as a challenge. This is because English as a foreign language is treated as a subject to study but not as a set of skills to acquire. With regard to the CLT in the textbooks, Al Asmari found that there was a lack of the necessary training to help the teacher implement these textbook tasks. He suggested that more time was needed to prepare for the communicative activities and there was a clash between the CLT and the Saudi educational system. Al Asmari (2015) further found that the educational system stopped the teachers from being able to teach these textbooks in alignment with CLT principles. He suggested that there was a lack of authenticity in the activities in these textbooks. However, this work did not consider the elements of CLT in the textbooks and what elements clashed with educational systems and how.

Al-Garni and Almuhammadi (2019) assessed the impact of CLT on teachers and students in their study. The study explored English in the textbook activities, such as role playing, problem-solving and interviewing, and the impact of this on the students' learning. They found that the teachers had difficulty preparing materials for communicative activities. However, there was no framework used to evaluate these textbooks activities

Wajid and Saleem (2016) explored how both students and teachers view CLT in Saudi textbooks. They found that the quality of the material was low, which made the communicative activities a challenge to implement. They also suggested that there was a conflict between the CLT teacher's role and the traditional Saudi role of the teacher. Even though this study involved students and teachers to note these challenges that emerged from the textbooks, the study did not discuss the lesson guides with regard to what was required and what kind of pedagogy was outlined in these lessons guides.

Finally, Almalki (2014) explored the English textbooks series in secondary schools, considering teacher perceptions of these textbooks. The study found that most of the teachers believe some parts of the new curriculum are too difficult because they are beyond the learners' level. However, this study did not provide examples of these difficult activities, but instead only based this finding on student perceptions.

The gap from the above studies is that nobody has undertaken a textbook analysis based on CLT principles as a framework to investigate how well the textbook aligns with the CLT principles

## Methods

This research forms part of my ongoing PhD study of the factors behind the failure of the implementation of CLT in Saudi Arabian middle schools. The research design is that of a qualitative case study, which enables the researcher to apply the required depth to explore these phenomena (Yin, 2009) using interviews with four teachers, before and after classroom observation. I also conducted two focus groups with students of two of these teachers, as well as textbook analysis – which is the only aspect of the research presented in this article.

The researcher used a set of criteria to analyse one unit of the textbook, *Lift off 6*, which is used in the third year of middle school in Saudi Arabia. The typical age of the students in this grade is 14 years old. The textbook is given to the students for free at the start of each year.

The criteria I used analyses the textbook and is adapted from the CLT approach (Brown, 2000). I assessed the activities and the textbook aims in terms of: whether or not they are communicative; meaningful; free; authentic; personalised (whether the activities relate to the students' personal experience and let them use the language personally; whether or not they are scaffolded; accuracy or fluency-oriented; and whether an information gap exists.

I choose one unit at random because all the units are typical and designed in the same way.

## Analysis

Lesson one, which is entitled "If I were the New Manager", presents fictional text in the format of a graphic novel and the lesson entails the children being asked questions related to this (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 22). The following lesson includes multiple-choice questions, which can be answered on the page, then the second exercise includes grammar correction – both in relation to reading and speaking – and the final part entails a listening exercise. Overall, this lesson can be regarded as meaningful because it creates a story/scenario; however, as this scenario seems to be created for the purpose of the lesson, it is not authentic. The lesson overall is scaffolding knowledge and building towards a larger exercise and knowledge base. It is personalised to a degree as it does

seem to be based in the country and so there is an element of locality. Later exercises also draw on the students' own personal experiences. There is a general drive towards accuracy and a high level of complexity. The final exercise offers a certain degree of freedom, while the rest have a very clear right/wrong dichotomy.

### ***Unit Three: Lesson One***

#### *Activity A: Reading*

In the teacher's book the aim of this lesson is outlined as: "to read for gist; to introduce the vocabulary of the lesson" (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 22). The sequence of this activity is to: "Look at the pictures and establish the setting (a football match). Choose two students to read the parts of the supporters. Do not help with vocabulary yet. Students use their voting cards to show their answer." This reading exercise thereby establishes background knowledge and perhaps the relevant vocabulary for the rest of the lesson. The teacher is encouraged not to correct the students as they read, but to ask for the "best" title for the exercise; this is seemingly a subjective choice, but notably the teacher's book outlines a clear answer to this. This does not seem to fulfil the communicative criteria as it limits the potential for discussion and there is limited freedom. The textbook offers the potential for freedom, while the teacher's book limits this and adds further constraints and control. However, it is personalised as it involves Saudi names.

#### *Activity B: Reading and Speaking*

The aim of this activity is: "to read for specific information". The sequence is: "In pairs, students use the cartoon to answer the questions. Monitor their corrections. Note any common problems. Choose pairs to share and discuss their answers with the class. Review any outstanding vocabulary issues or other common problems" (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 22). This activity has the potential for communicativeness as it asks the teacher to use pair work to fulfil the information gap activity. This also may be meaningful to the students as they consult a panel of images. It is personalised as the pictures show a Saudi sports team with Saudi names. It is more fluency than accuracy oriented as it asks the students to discuss in pairs and suggests that the teacher should monitor but not correct the students.

#### *Activity C: Listening and Speaking*

The aim of this activity is: "to improve pronunciation, stress and intonation; to promote fluency". The sequence is: "Say now 'listen and repeat'. Play track 12. Students repeat, following in their books. Monitor and repeat if necessary. Students repeat the dialogue in pairs. Choose pairs to demonstrate to the class" (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 23). This exercise is a pair work exercise focusing on encouraging the students to engage with the pictures. The questions are very simple, engaging a spot-the-difference style approach, and they only require focus on what is in the picture. There seems to be a sense of encouraging enjoyment in this exercise. There is no information gap and a relatively low level of complexity – the students do have to supplement words, but the structure and form of the sentence is given to them. This is controlled and there is limited space for freedom as there is quite a clear answer being sought (clearer than it was in exercise A). There seems to be a focus on accuracy rather than fluency as the sentence is fed to them, requiring only the supplementing of a word or two, and then the teacher's book is clear that they should be monitoring the answers and using the opportunity at the end of the exercise to ensure the vocabulary is correct.

This exercise is meaningful as it draws on a story evoking lifelike events. However, it is not authentic because this is fictional text.

This is a very structured exercise that asks the students to listen to and repeat a section of audio relating to the football match theme. The focus outlined in the teacher's book is very clearly on accuracy in relation to various levels: pronunciation, stress and fluency. There seems to be a very strong focus on correctness and this is perhaps more controlled than the ideal CLT approach that requires a greater level of freedom. Again, it is meaningful but not authentic, as with the above exercises. By this stage, there is a level of scaffolding – this exercise is clearly building on and using knowledge that has been developed in the previous stages, although in itself the exercise does not involve much scaffolding. The homework activity seems to be less meaningful than the rest of the lesson and it is unlikely to engage the students' attention as it entails them learning a list of words rather than continuing with the story element of the lesson. There is a potentially high level of complexity in this exercise as the students need to understand in order to repeat with a good level of accuracy. While this exercise is supposed to be aimed at promoting fluency, in fact the focus seems to be on accuracy and getting detailed elements, such as pronunciation and intonation, correct.

#### *Activity D: Language Help*

The aim of this fourth activity is: “to introduce the second conditional with If I were (person) + I would/'d + (verb)”. The sequence of this activity is:

Read the language help information. Highlight the two examples in the cartoon (If I were the referee, I'd show a red card; If I were the manager, I'd change all of your team.). Elicit more examples from the students. Note: Teach If I were ... as a phrase. The students don't need to understand the grammar yet.

There is a high level of complexity in this exercise as this entails introducing (and working on) a very difficult grammar point for the students. There is a lower level of meaningfulness in this exercise as the teacher's book sets a model and asks the students to apply it. The teacher's book explicitly states that the students do not need to understand the grammar behind this. There is also no information gap here or any kind of search for understanding by the students. There is a lower level of scaffolding because the use of the running theme – football – seems to be more superficial, and indeed the students could move away from this with very little difficulty, and still be correct. This activity has the potential for less engagement as the teacher is asked to elicit responses from students, which may not include everyone. Added to the lack of explanation, this could lead to a lack of attention.

#### *Activity E: Reading*

The aim of this activity is: “to practice giving reasons and brief explanations for opinions”. The sequence of this activity is: “Read through the advice and then the list of reasons. Help with vocabulary. Students complete the task and vote on the answers, making corrections where needed” (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 23). There is a focus on meanings and reasons in this exercise; this seems to be a relatively low complexity activity that encourages the students to engage with the text and draws the focus back to the topic at hand after the previous exercise has perhaps drifted

away. The teacher is encouraged to develop any vocabulary that emerges out of this and there seems to be a strong element of scaffolding. This is not authentic because it is not real material, which is clearly illustrated by the fact that the grammar is a bit low level. There is no freedom in this exercise as there are a predefined set of answers and no scope for moving away from these. Nonetheless, there is potentially an element of fluency focus as this is pushing towards understanding full sentences and phrases.

#### *Activity F: Speaking*

The aim of this activity is: “to practise asking for and giving advice and giving reasons for opinions” (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 23). The sequence of this activity is: “Ask students to give advice using If I were you, I’d ... and the sentences in Exercise E. Choose two students to demonstrate using the speech bubbles. Students complete the task in pairs. Monitor for the target Structure” The activity builds on the previous two sections to create further difficulty in the sentences the students are creating. It fits with activity D but lacks the focus on understanding the grammar. Instead, the focus is on applying it and using it in context. There is potentially more freedom in this activity as the students could move away from the format given, particularly in activity E. In this sense the activity is also more personalised and it is more communicative because they are being asked to work in pairs to create this dialogue independently. There is a focus on accuracy as the teacher is instructed to monitor the structure and the language uses as the students work in pairs. There is a high level of meaningfulness in this exercise as the focus is on applying reason.

#### *Activity G: Pronunciation*

The aim of this activity is: “to differentiate between different sounds in English (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 23). The sequence of this activity is outlined as: “Play track 13. Students listen and tick the sound they hear. Monitor. Check answers as a class.” There is thus a strong element of meaninglessness in this activity as the sounds are being lifted out of context. The exercise requires the students to listen to a sentence and then select a correct pronunciation from a list of options. This is very controlled and provides a very clear right/wrong dichotomy. The teacher’s book simply instructs the teacher to “monitor”. There is no freedom in this activity, it is not particularly complex and the focus is on accuracy with a detailed attention to creating the correct sounds. This drifts away from scaffolding as there has been little emphasis on this aspect in the class so far. There is also a lack of authenticity to this this is text created for the textbook. This activity is thus very de-personalised.

#### *Activity H Listening*

The final two activities are not mentioned in the teacher’s book, which is presumably an error, but could also be construed as offering the teachers greater freedom. The teacher’s book does suggest a variation on activity F, supplementing a new phrase, but again it does not explain the reasoning for this grammar use. There is little information on activity H in the teacher’s book, so it is to draw conclusions on this, but it would presumably be a similar format to the activities discussed above.

Aims: “Repeat Exercise F, using Why don’t you and You’d better as revision”

#### Activity I WRITING

Aims: “Workbook pages 100 and 101 Final activity” (*Lift off 6*, 2016, p. 23)

The sequence of this activity is: “Students write a short list of possible problems. Working in pairs or small groups, they take turns reading a problem. Their partner has to give advice using If I were you, I’d...” There is a strong focus on meaningfulness in this activity, as the students are encouraged to create and write advice for one another based on a set of problems outlined – notably only the last of the four relates to football, which has been the subject discussed throughout the lesson. There is a far greater level of freedom to create and develop ideas here, as well as some scaffolding on some of the topics that have been discussed above – still without explanation of the grammar points though. As this is a writing task, the students are presumably working on their own in this. There is no information gap, but a relatively high level of complexity. This is very personalised as the students are given the freedom to develop their own ideas. The lack of advice in the teacher’s book – whether on purpose or by mistake – also contributes to this as it means there is no clear idea of what is expected and there is no right or wrong answer outlined.

Table 1. *Summary of key results*

| Activity | Activity requirement  | Aim of the activity   | Elements  |
|----------|---|---|---|
| <b>A</b> | “tick the best title for the cartoon”                       | “to read for gist; to introduce the vocabulary of the lesson”                       | Limited freedom, communicative, fluency orientated and personalised   |
| <b>B</b> | “correct the sentences”                                     | “to read for specific information.”   | Communicative, information gap, personalised and fluency orientated   |
| <b>C</b> | “repeat the story in the cartoon”                           | “to improve pronunciation, stress and intonation; to promote fluency”               | Low level of complexity, controlled, scaffolded, limited freedom, accuracy orientated and meaningful, but not authentic |
| <b>D</b> | “read and remember”   | “to introduce the second conditional with If I were (person) + I would/’d + (verb)” | High level of complexity, less meaningful, no information gap and not scaffolded  |
| <b>E</b> | “write the letter of the reason next to the correct advice” | “to practise giving reasons and brief explanations for opinions.”                   | Meaningful, low level of complexity, not authentic, accuracy over fluency and no freedom                                |
| <b>F</b> | “give advice or suggestions to the new manager”             | to practise asking for and giving advice and giving reasons for opinions.”          | Meaningful, scaffolded, more freedom, accuracy orientated and personalised  |
| <b>G</b> | “listen and tick (X) the correct sound”                     | “to differentiate between different sounds in English.”                             | Meaningful, accuracy orientated, very controlled, no freedom, low level of  |

|   |                         |   |   |
|---|-------------------------|---|---|
|   |                         |   | complexity, not scaffolded, not authentic and not personalised  |
| H | “now listen and repeat” | “repeat Exercise F, using Why don’t you and You’d better as revision” | Meaningful and personalised. No freedom, no information gap, no freedom and with a high level of complexity; no scaffolding |

### Discussion

Brown (2000) noted that the first principle of CLT is that form is not the only focus. While some of the activities discussed above do prioritise form, fitting with what can be considered the old system of teaching, there is potential for exercises A and B to be interpreted in a more communicative way. This aspect could be reduced or enhanced in the hands of the teacher. The textbook suggests the use of some communicative aspects, as mentioned above, but it is very controlling and activities in which students use the language more freely are very limited. Interestingly, the handing of the activities in the two texts also sometimes shows conflict between the students’ textbook and the teacher’s book, as in activity A, when the teacher’s book limits the student’s use of the language, but the textbook is asking the students to use their language. Teachers may also face problems when the time for teaching content is limited. This reduces the freedom of the teacher, as they are pushed to complete what is advised by the teacher’s book, and limits their freedom in terms of how to use the material. Many of these activities concentrate on improving pronunciation, which tends to increase its importance, and the teacher’s book advises minimising the mistakes relating to tone and stress.

However, in the production of language, CLT is not only focused on accuracy but also fluency as the use of the language to communicate is important, as the name suggests. As Brown (2000) stated, the focus on accuracy should not decrease the focus on fluency. Nunan (1999) added that emphasising accuracy can limit the meaning and stop the flow of communication among the students. Some of the above activities are indeed promoting accuracy over fluency, but some encourage fluency as well. One of the biggest challenges in using this textbook is that teachers are asked to finish the textbook within limited time. This ultimately does not allow them to introduce their contribution to the lesson and it pushes them to stay with the textbook guidance only, ignoring the potential for teacher freedom. This high degree of control in turn pushes the teacher to control the students. Therefore, whilst there is indeed an element of authenticity throughout this textbook, this type of control may affect the teacher’s ability to teach communicatively.

The principles of CLT provide a path for the students and assist them in achieving more compared to what they have learnt in the class. However, this may conflict with the centrality of Saudi education as CLT encourages production not prediction. Also, some of the activities in the curriculum are still not student-focused. For a CLT approach, as noted in the literature review section, the concepts of meaningfulness, authenticity and information gap are key. Students are encouraged to learn in a way that is meaningful to them, that is applicable to the real world and that encourages them to seek out information as they would in real life. In the textbook analysis

above, there is some sense that these principles are at the forefront, but often the approach falls back onto the old style. The previous curriculum was mainly about learning the language to pass the exam, rather than acquiring skills for the use of the language.

A change in the entire teaching process and style is essential if the radical changes involved in CLT are to be applied (Abahussain, 2016). The previous curriculum was teacher-centred, it did not include practicing the English language and it was focused on traditional methods, such as the teacher being the main route to learning. One of the most important aspects of improving communication is using the language meaningfully, drawing on language that can be used in everyday life. The previous curriculum lacked activities that use pair and group work and information gap activities. Typically, the students could complete each activity without communication and they were not allowed to use the language freely. Consequently, the change to the new curriculum is radical. Notions of correctness may limit the confidence of the students in using the new language as the textbook asks, however, because neither the teacher nor the students are familiar with the language.

Based on the above, it is clear that the textbook still uses a high level of control, which in itself does not fit with the CLT approach to language teaching. The move from the traditional curriculum, in which the teacher is at the centre, to CLT, which centres the student, is therefore only slowly filtering into the education system.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored one aspect of my PhD project related to CLT implementation in schools in Saudi Arabia. This entailed exploring the textbook based on CLT principles. I have used these principles as criteria to judge the material in the textbook: whether it is communicative, meaningful, authentic and personalised; whether there is scaffolding; whether the activities are accuracy or fluency oriented; and what degree of complexity they exhibit. Most of the activities discussed above are communicative to some degree as there are many opportunities provided for pair work and group discussions and many have an information gap that encourages the students to discuss together to complete the task. The various activities that are personalised and meaningful use examples from Saudi Arabia that the students are familiar with and that are meaningful to them. Most of the activities have a low level of complexity. There is a careful balance between accuracy and fluency as some tend to be more accuracy orientated while others more fluency orientated; and the scaffolding is shown by the activities using sequencing. Most of the activities are very controlled and provide limited opportunities for the students to use their language freely.

### **Implications**

Limited teaching time and a high dependency on textbooks are the major issues that could be addressed by removing the less important content from the textbooks. The rather controlling teacher's book guidance may constrain the aims of CLT. Changing the pedagogy of Saudi Arabia requires a broader approach than simply changing the textbooks, as communication in English, by definition, cannot be done by reading textbooks. Teaching English using CLT may necessitate giving teachers more space to increase the opportunities for the students to use the language more meaningfully. Finally, it is recommended that Saudi Arabia continue the process of updating its

CLT-based policy in order to promote its quality. This cannot be done without improving teacher education; therefore, there is a need to focus on this aspect.

### Limitations

This paper does not present how the textbook is used in the setting in actual practice, which is why the PhD project incorporates classroom observations and both teacher individual interviews, before and after observation, and a student focus groups. This limitation prevents a clearer picture being formed of how CLT is implemented.

### Recommendations

Future research should consider how well the language policy is reflected in the textbook and what can motivate the students to practice in everyday life contexts using English as a foreign language. Further research could also consider what kind of modifications to the textbook would improve the engagement of the students and the teachers

### About the Author:

Ahmed O. Alharbi graduated from the University of Ha'il, Saudi Arabia in English language teaching. Alharbi has a master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). He is currently in his final year as a PhD candidate in communicative language teaching at the University of Glasgow  
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5446-0710>

### References

- Abahussain, M. O. (2016). *Implementing Communicative Language Teaching Method in Saudi Arabia: Challenges Faced by Formative Year Teachers in State Schools*. (PhD), University of Stirling, UK.
- Abdulkader, F. (2019). *Exploring Saudi EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions regarding the application of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the English language classroom*. Northumbria University,
- AL-Garni, S. A., & Almuhammadi, A. H. J. E. L. T. (2019). The Effect of Using Communicative Language Teaching Activities on EFL Students' Speaking Skills at the University of Jeddah. *English Language Teaching*, 12(6), 72-86.
- Al-Nasser, A. S. (2015). Problems of English language acquisition in Saudi Arabia: An exploratory-cum-remedial study. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 5(8), 1612-1619.
- Al-Seghayer, K. (2014). The four most common constraints affecting English teaching in Saudi Arabia. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 4(5), 17-24.
- Al Asmari, A. A. (2015). Communicative Language Teaching in EFL University Context: Challenges for Teachers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(5), 976-984.
- Alharbi, A. (2019). IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND THE CHALLENGES THIS FACES IN THE PEDAGOGIC CULTURE OF SAUDI ARABIAN SCHOOLS.

- Almalki, M. M. (2014). *Teacher perception of a New English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum in Saudi Arabia*. (Master of Science in Education A Master's Project), State University of New York at Fredonia, Fredonia, New York.
- Batawi, G. H. (2007). *Exploring the use of CLT in Saudi Arabia*. (Master), American University of Sharjah, Sharjah.
- Bhuiyan, A. A. M. (2016). Motivation of Saudi Arabia Tertiary Level Students. *JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES*, 70-84.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (Vol. 4): Longman New York.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*. United States of America MIT Press.
- Elyas, T., & Badawood, O. (2016). *English language educational policy in Saudi Arabia post 21st century: enacted curriculum, identity, and modernisation: a critical discourse analysis approach*. Paper presented at the FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education.
- Farooq, M. (2015). Creating a Communicative Language Teaching Environment for Improving Students' Communicative Competence at EFL/EAP University Level. *International Education Studies*, 8(4), 179-191.
- Hymes, D. (1972). On communicative competence. *sociolinguistics*, 269293, 269-293.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding Language Teaching: From Method to Postmethod*: Taylor & Francis.
- Lift off 6*. (2016). UK: Macmillan Education.
- Mangaleswaran, S., & Aziz, A. A. (2019). The Impact of the Implementation of CLT On Students' Speaking Skills. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 9(4), 75-82.
- Ministry of Education. (2002). *Policy of English*,. Riyadh: Almadina Almonawara
- Nassir, Y. (2013, 2013-11-11). Sayidaty. *International companies develop the curricula of "English" in Saudi Arabia*. Retrieved from
- Nunan, D. (1999). *Second Language Teaching & Learning*: Heinle & Heinle.
- Wajid, M. A., & Saleem, M. (2016). Conflict in communicative language teaching theory and practice: a study in Saudi Arabian context. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 12(1), 47-59.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Vol. 5). London: SAGE Publications.