

## **English Language Teaching in Saudi Arabian Context: How Communicatively Oriented is it?**

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**Abstract.** Although English syllabus, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (hereafter Saudi Arabia), is to some extent communicatively oriented and although students in Saudi state schools receive seven years of formal English teaching (one year in elementary school, three years in intermediate school and three years in secondary school), most of them graduate from secondary school unable to use the language for communicative purposes. This might be attributed to many reasons like language learning settings, poor teacher training, unsuitable materials, students' negative attitudes or a combination of all of the above. It is my belief that each of those reasons should be examined and dealt with separately in order to arrive at a better standard in English language teaching in Saudi Arabia. The study we propose here is going to focus on the English language teacher, who interprets and executes the curriculum, as a possible contributor to the problem.

The present study aims to explore how Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter, CLT) is understood and implemented by the teachers who teach English in Saudi boys secondary school. In order to understand the success and failure of curriculum implementation, I examine it in real contexts using classroom observation and interview with EFL teachers.

The study data shows that traditional methods of teaching such as the Grammar Translation Method and some aspects of the Audio-lingual Method are the predominant approaches practiced by the EFL teachers included in this study. It also reveals that the EFL teachers face difficulty in implementing the CLT, although documented instructional goals imply a smooth implementation of it. The EFL teachers' theoretical background is suggested as a contributing factor against the implementation of the CLT. The EFL teachers also indicate that the implementation of the CLT is not simple because of various situational constraints such as time constraint, unavailability of required and adequate teaching/learning aids, inadequate examination system, over-crowded classes and administrative tasks imposed on the EFL teachers.

### **Introduction**

The English syllabus, in Saudi Arabia, is to some extent communicatively oriented. It is organized according to the communicative functions and notions. According to the 'Syllabus Document' issued by the Ministry of Education in 1993, the English syllabus for the intermediate and secondary levels is based on the functional/notional approach. It implies the use of the communicative methodology, which encourages the students to use the language communicatively from the beginning. The designers of the syllabus intend to move the Saudi learners from a very structured approach to a cued one and open dialogue over the six years of learning the English language (Hafesth *et al.*, 1993). To

exemplify, Table 1 details the content and design of unit one of student's book from each secondary stage.

From Table 1, it is obvious that these are Functional-Notional textbooks that are based on a communicative approach to ELT. However, having materials that adopt a communicative approach to ELT does not necessarily mean that the classroom practice in Saudi Arabia is communicative.

The document issued by the English department in the Directorate of Curriculum at the Saudi Ministry of Education in 1421H. (2000) states that English education should foster students' abilities to comprehend and express basic English, as well as foster interest in foreign languages and cultures. General goals include fostering student motivation as well as developing receptive and productive language

abilities in the four skill areas (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Specific linguistic activities are further prescribed within these four skill areas. The curriculum further specifies that appropriate linguistic content should be incorporated into the activities in order for students to attain these skills. Thus, the curriculum privileges fostering communication skills as a primary goal with linguistic content such as grammar and vocabulary playing a subordinate role (Ministry of Education, 2000).

However, situated cognition views learning as a phenomenon which occurs in socially and culturally-situated contexts, rather than in abstract, idealized and decontextualized learning environments (Lave and Wenger 1991). In the field of education, this movement has offered the situated evaluation theory which its proponents recognize two forms of curriculum; one is a documented version, which prescribes idealized teaching practices across various teaching situations, and the other is a realized version,

which emerges from curriculum implementation in actual classrooms (Bruce and Rubin 1992).

The situated evaluation theory claims that various factors influence curriculum implementation. Of particular importance is the teacher, who interprets and executes the curriculum. Freeman and Richards (1996) and Woods (1996), among others, argue that the need to investigate teacher practices and beliefs derives from the notion that teachers are not transparent entities who fulfill curriculum plans and goals as prescribed by their authors, but who filter, digest and implement the curriculum depending upon their beliefs and environmental contexts.

The present study, however, aims to provide an understanding of curriculum realization through an investigation from situated evaluation perspective of the practices and beliefs of EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context implementing Communicative Language Teaching.

**Table 1. A Functional-Notional content and design of student's textbook**

*	Topics	Functions/Notions	Grammar	Skills
1st Year Unit One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let's meet the team.</li> <li>• The Man from "In Focus".</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing and describing people.</li> <li>• Saying Countries and Nationalities.</li> </ul>	Be: Short forms and Long Forms of am, is, and are.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening: Listening to an interviewer talking about himself, his job and his team.</li> <li>• Speaking: Practice saying the short forms of am, is, and are to identify countries and nationalities.</li> <li>• Reading: Reading short text about people (the man from "In Focus").</li> <li>• Writing: Practice writing sentences to describe oneself or others.</li> </ul>
2nd Year Unit One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fires.</li> <li>• Fire Fighters.</li> <li>• What should you know about fires?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying people and their jobs.</li> <li>• Identifying signs.</li> <li>• Giving Instructions.</li> </ul>	Giving Instructions using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do ..., Do not ...</li> <li>• Always ..., Never ...</li> <li>• If + present, ... future</li> <li>• If + present, ... instruction</li> <li>• Instruction + if + present</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening: Listening to a conversation (A boy is talking to a telephone operator).</li> <li>• Speaking: Asking questions and giving instructions.</li> <li>• Reading: Reading short texts (Fire Fighters, What should you know about fires?).</li> <li>• Writing: Taking notes and then writing a letter (Writing from notes).</li> </ul>
3rd Year Unit One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water (conversation in a tape).</li> <li>• Water (text).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Making a discussion about water.</li> <li>• Making a conversation practice about mathematical abilities.</li> </ul>	Asking questions using helping verbs + main verbs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening: Listening to an English man and a Saudi talking about the weather. Listening to a conversation between two boys about mathematical abilities.</li> <li>• Speaking: Discussing and talking about water.</li> <li>• Reading: Reading a text about water.</li> </ul>

Source: English Language Project (2006).

## **Methodology**

### **Data collection instruments**

This study follows the qualitative approach to the research, in which interview, observation and documentary collection are employed as techniques for collecting data. This is to ensure triangulation and validity (Creswell, 1998).

Strauss (1987), on the other hand, stresses the importance of having a variety of materials as data in qualitative research. Therefore, in addition to the interview and the observation, I managed to get copies of exam papers that covered the three secondary stages, of textbooks and of the study plans of EFL trainee teachers' programs.

### **The conduct of the study**

This study was conducted into two phases: classroom observation phase where I used observation as a technique for data collection; and EFL teachers' interview phase where I employed interview as a technique for collecting data. In this study, I will present each phase separately. My presentation is derived from the process that I followed in conducting the study.

#### **Phase One: Classroom Observations**

To set up the first step towards understanding how CLT is understood and implemented by the teachers who teach English as a foreign language in Saudi state secondary schools, I began with classroom observations. Boehm and Weinberg (1977: p. 1) write "the observation process allows us to obtain essential information for drawing inferences and making decisions". This phase was set to explore the two questions below:

1. What is the actual classroom practice of EFL teachers in Saudi boys secondary schools?
2. To what extent do the EFL teachers implement CLT in their classrooms?

### **Setting the scene**

For conducting this study, I had an option of selecting schools from the nine Directorates of Educational Supervisory in Riyadh city, the capital of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, I randomly chose nine schools, one from each directorate. This procedure was set to ensure that these schools were appropriate representatives of other boys' secondary schools in Riyadh City.

### **Sampled subjects**

For the purpose of the present study, I conducted one term classroom observations of 18 EFL teachers out of the 40 EFL teachers included in the study. Since it would not have been feasible to observe all the EFL teachers in each of the nine schools chosen for this study (because of time constraints), I considered it better to observe two EFL teachers teaching and covering the three different secondary stages/years. The EFL teachers were observed during their normal teaching classes, which are four hours a week. Accordingly, I observed 18 teachers, two teachers for each school. Each teacher was observed for a number of class periods (lessons). Each class period lasted for 45 minutes.

### **Observation procedures**

For classroom observations, I depended on my notes and tape-recorder. The teaching sessions were recorded, with teachers' approval. All the classes attended were observed and recorded in full. During observation sessions, I preferred not to use formal systematic observation schedule, as I did not want to be constrained by predetermined categories. I was aware that "systematic observation ... leads researchers to find only what they set out to look for, in a circular and non-reflexive way; and that it tends to be preoccupied with counting isolated bits of behavior, rather than with fully understanding human agency and intentionality" (CARE, 1994: p. 111). Informal, short interviews with EFL teachers were conducted following on from the classroom observations with the aim of clarifying observed behavior.

### **Reading and reporting the observation data**

Within the limited space of this article and for the purpose of this study, I will give a description account of the common, recurring and salient features of the EFL teachers' classroom practices in the nine secondary schools under the study. This is to paint a picture of what actually happens in secondary EFL classrooms.

### **EFL Teacher's Classroom Practices**

In this section, we will try to gain insight into the congruencies and discrepancies between the idealized instructional goals (the government curriculum goals mentioned earlier) and their realization (actual classroom implementation). This is an attempt to answer the two questions cited above. The following discussion draws on the observational data collected during my visits to the nine secondary schools under study.

The classroom observations represented one stereotyped picture of the classroom where communication was extremely centered on teacher. All the EFL teachers observed were in control of the lesson from the beginning to the end. The students, on the other hand, had limited or no opportunity for practicing the language communicatively.

It was clear that the teaching atmosphere in the observed EFL classes tended to reflect the outdated traditional practice. Once the lesson had started, the teacher spent a lot of time explaining and illustrating new language items, sometimes speaking to the students, sometimes writing on the board, while the students sat and either listened, read, or copied from the board when asked to. Techniques used for instruction were: chorus work, answering questions, correction, individualizing learning. Games and role-play were rarely used. In general, teaching methods used in the observed English classes depended on the memorization of words and sentences, reading passage and repetition. Lessons were presented in a traditional way, following the Grammar Translation Method and some aspects of the Audio-lingual Method.

The dissatisfaction with the traditional Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-lingual Method has been expressed by some applied linguists and language theorists. This is mainly because the traditional Grammar Translation Method has been found to be non-productive in terms of speaking, reading, and writing and leads to learning about the language rather than learning to use the language (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). The Audio-lingual Method, on the other hand, is too mechanical and not imparting skills in communication and encourages rote learning, particularly when the teacher is untrained or accustomed to follow one particular method of teaching (Hammerly, 1985). In short, and generally speaking, these classroom observations reveal what seemed to be inappropriate practice on the part of the EFL teachers. In my opinion, this is the main cause for any low achievement.

For the English language teaching to be successful, it requires more than explaining grammatical items, translating texts, and doing form-focused exercises. The CLT approach, on which the Saudi English syllabus is based, highlights learners' communicative competence which is defined as learners' ability to efficiently express what they mean in the target language and successfully achieve communications in real-life situations. In order to do so, learners not only need to acquire the linguistic knowledge, but also the pragmatic knowledge of the target language. It is suggested that competence, both

linguistic and pragmatic, is the knowledge developed and acquired through exposure and use (Hedgcock, 2002). In other words, without sufficient exposure needed for learners to notice and acquire the language input and chances to use the knowledge, communicative competence is not likely to be promoted. CLT related to classroom practice is compatible with a learner-centered educational philosophy. It advocates content oriented meaningful activities rather than linguistic forms (Richards and Rogers, 2001; Nunan, 2005). Hence, language teachers must make great efforts to improve students' aural comprehension and oral communication along with their reading and writing skills. We cannot achieve these objectives through dull and boring manipulative drills where students are in a passive position from beginning to end. According to Dickenson (1981: p. 382), finding "techniques which will enable and encourage learners to interact in the target language in the very limiting context of the classroom" is "a major problem for language teachers". To solve this problem, students should be engaged actively in the learning process. Dickenson (1981: p. 382) writes "A promising solution to this problem is for the teacher to introduce activities such as games, role-play, and simulations into his language lessons".

The EFL teachers and students situated performance in the classroom observed reflected a different picture from the curriculum goals and objectives stated by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education. In overall actual classroom teaching, grammar instruction was central, and far more foregrounded than CLT. The language of instruction and class management was Arabic (students' mother tongue). EFL teachers spent most of the class time involve in teacher-fronted grammar explanations, chorus reading, and vocabulary presentations. Students, attended to teachers' explanations, learned to translate at the word and sentence level, to read the textbook aloud in choral reading, to copy vocabulary items in their notebooks, and to engage in sentence manipulation exercises. CLT activities, in which meanings are negotiated in English, seemed to play a much smaller role. Overall, in the observed class periods, if any time at all was spent on CLT, it was a maximum of 5 minutes out of 45. CLT was mainly implemented through some activities such as information-gap, question and answer role-plays. In most of these activities, teachers initially presented the target grammar features. Furthermore, students did the role-plays reading from their textbooks. The communicative activities were designed so that students comprehend and produce target grammatical

items correctly, usually at the sentence level, through oral interaction tasks. These activities mostly resembled audio-lingual practices. However, with this linear mode of traditional face to face interaction, EFL learners generally have limited time and chance to practice and use the target language in traditional classrooms (Campbell, 2004).

### **Phase Two: EFL Teachers' Interviews**

Although the main focus of the present study was on the understanding of how far CLT is implemented by EFL teachers in Saudi boys secondary schools through identifying the structure of classroom practice, yet that could not be treated as a matter of technique and in isolation. There was a necessity to step outside the language classroom to see the broader context which shapes the classroom practice and to a great extent influences it. As a consequence, the study has focused on interviews with EFL teachers. This phase was set to explore the following questions that emerged upon the completion of the classroom observation phase:

1. What is the theoretical background of the EFL teachers and how communicatively oriented is it?
2. How do the EFL teachers define CLT?
3. What factors might be behind the EFL teachers' situated practices and their failure of implementing CLT as the Saudi EFL Curriculum prescribes?

### **Participants of this phase**

The target population of this phase is a group of male teachers who teach English as a foreign language in the nine secondary schools under the study. It is assumed that EFL teachers are in a good position to make reasonable, valid judgments concerning the issue we discuss in the present study. This is justified because they are the actual actors of the current TEFL courses and they are in a better position than anyone else to diagnose the issue tackled by this study. Those EFL teachers vary in their country of origin: Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Palestine, and Jordan. They all have a Bachelor degree in English.

### **Interview procedures**

Interview, in qualitative research, is viewed as "the third leg of the observation-interview-documentation triptych and probably is the most significant of the three, judging by the sheer volume of data generated by this method and the degree to which it is preferred in determining eventual research

and evaluation judgment" (Sanger, 1996: p. 60). The interviews that I employed in this study were of a semi and an unstructured nature. I had not prepared any structured outline for my interviews. Although I felt that these interviews I was about to conduct were unstructured in the sense that I did not have a prepared set of questions to be asked in a systematic or a chronological order, I had an idea of what I wanted to ask about. During the interviews, I tried to leave room as much as possible for the participants themselves to direct the conversations and raise their own issues as that showed their willingness to talk and explore issues deeply. Maybe this is what Bogdan and Biklen (1992: p. 97) refer to as "good interviews", because the interviewees are at ease and talk freely about their points of view. The interview between me and the interviewees was closer to an informal conversational interview than a formal interview. In other words, I tended to direct the interviews as the questions arose spontaneously. This engaged the interviewees in unthreatening discussion in which they felt the flow of a natural conversation.

During interview sessions, Arabic (the interviewees' native language) was used as the medium of communication. My rationale to conduct the interviews in Arabic was to encourage teachers to express themselves naturally, and to help them avoid the feeling of uneasiness they might encounter if they had to express themselves in English.

The main technique which I relied on in capturing the moments of the interviews was a small size tape recorder. I sought the EFL teachers' permissions to tape record the interviews explaining to them that the information given would be for the purposes of the research. All the tape recordings were named and dated to facilitate subsequent organization and analysis of the data.

### **Getting familiar with the interview data**

First of all, the recorded tapes were reviewed and were transcribed in full. Upon the completion of transcribing and revising the interview data, I read the transcripts a number of times to familiarize myself with the content of each interview: the expression is "staying close to the data" (Radnor, 2002: p. 70). When examining the transcribed interviews, I found out that most of the EFL teachers believed in the importance of CLT but they felt the need to primarily conduct teacher-fronted non-communicative activities. I also found out that the EFL teachers had a shared view on several crucial issues which could directly or indirectly influence their classroom teaching practices and stand against implementing CLT as the Saudi EFL Curriculum prescribes. This

helped me to develop a "thematic framework" from the interviews (Lynch, 1996: p. 139). These themes will be the focus of the forthcoming sections.

### EFL Teachers' Inadequate Theoretical Background

Based on the truth that teachers are the ones who execute and implement the curriculum, this study investigates whether English language teachers in Saudi Arabian context have a communicative orientation to language teaching that coincides with the present materials or have a different background that guides their practices.

The preparation of English language teachers in Saudi Arabia involves a four-year program in either teaching English, English language and translation or English literature introduced in the departments of English in teachers colleges, in colleges of languages and translation, or in colleges of arts in the various

universities in Saudi Arabia. The four-year English teacher program offered in the departments of English in teachers colleges prepares trainees to teach English in Saudi state schools, while the program offered in departments of English in the other colleges prepares trainees as specialists in English language, although the Saudi education system allows graduates from the latter program to teach English in state schools if they wish. The difference between the programs offered by the teachers colleges and those provided by the other colleges is that teachers colleges prepare trainees specially to be teachers of English and emphasize the educational aspects of their preparation, whereas the programs at the colleges of languages and translation and the colleges of arts prepare trainees to be specialists in English translation or in English literature, and not necessarily to be English teachers. Typically, the program offered in teachers colleges looks like this (Table 2).

Table 2. Modules taken by EFL trainee teachers in a typical teacher training program

<b>College:</b>	<b>Teachers College</b>	<b>Department:</b>	<b>Department of English</b>
<b>Major:</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Degree granted:</b>	<b>Bachelor Degree in English</b>
<b>Duration of the study:</b>	<b>4 years (8 semesters)</b>		

#### First Level

First Level			Second Level		
Course Code	Course Title	Course Hours	Course Code	Course Title	Course Hours
131 Eng	Writing (1)	4	151 Eng	Dictionaries	2
101 Eng	Listening (1)	3	142 Eng	Grammar (2)	2
141 Eng	Grammar (1)	4	132 Eng	Writing (2)	4
111 Eng	Speaking (1)	4	123 Eng	Vocabulary (2)	2
121 Eng	Vocabulary (1)	3	110 B Eng	Speaking (2)	3
122 Eng	Reading (1)	4	102 Eng	Listening (2)	3

#### Third Level

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours
214 Eng	Debate & Discussion (1)	2
243 Eng	Grammar (3)	2
111 Qur	Quranic Recitation	3
105 Arab	Arabic Calligraphy	1
102 Edu	Fundamentals of Islamic Education	2
172 His	History of KSA	2
203 Eng	Listening (3)	2
213 Eng	Speaking (3)	3
122A Eng	Reading (3)	4
133 Eng	Writing (3)	4

#### Fourth Level

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours
204 Eng	Listening (4)	2
253 Eng	Language & Culture (1)	2
234 Eng	Advanced Writing	4
122B Eng	Advanced Reading	4
103 Edu	Educational Research	2
202 Edu	Education System in Kingdom	2
215 Eng	Debate & Discussion (2)	4
252 Eng	Introduction to Linguistics	3

Table 2. Continued

**Fifth Level**

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours
355 Eng	Applied Linguistics	3
354 Eng	Language and Culture (2)	2
344 Eng	Syntax & Morphology	2
371 Eng	An Introduction to Literature	3
361 Eng	Text-linguistics and Translation	3
356 Eng	Phonetics and Phonology	2
100 Aid	Instructional Technology	1
332 Curr	General Teaching Methods	2
104 Isl	Islamic Culture	2
211 Edu	Developmental Psychology	2

**Sixth Level**

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours
372 Eng	Literary Forms	2
101 Comp	Introduction to Computer	3
381 Eng	Approaches in Language Teaching	2
382 Eng	Teaching English in Saudi Arabia	2
102 Arab	Arabic Composition	2
111 Edu	Educational Psychology	3
357 Eng	Second Language Acquisition	2
311 Edu	Student Guidance & Counseling	2
358 Eng	Semantics	2
362 Eng	Applications in Translation	2

**Seventh Level**

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours
200 Aid	Educational Aids Production	1
201 Edu	Educational Evaluation	2
335 Curr	Post-primary Curricula	2
483 Eng	Psycholinguistics	3
484 Eng	Basics of Linguistic Research	2
303 Edu	School Administration	2
485 Eng	Language Tests	3
486 Curr	Methods of English Teaching	3
487 Eng	Computer-assisted Language Learning	2

**Eighth Level**

Course Code	Course Title	Credit Hours
499 Curr	Teaching Practicum	8

Source: <http://www.tcr.edu.sa> (2007)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Language skill courses
<input type="checkbox"/>	General knowledge courses
<input type="checkbox"/>	College requirements
<input type="checkbox"/>	Education related courses
<input type="checkbox"/>	Courses that directly deal with teaching methodology

If we examine the above table, we clearly see that trainee teachers only have four modules that directly deal with teaching methodology. These are General Teaching Methods, Approaches in Language Teaching, Methods of English Teaching and Teaching Practicum. These modules represent about 9% of the total program. The rest of the program

ranges from courses that teach the English language to the trainee teacher to totally irrelevant courses that could be substituted with more useful courses that prepare the teacher for his/her future job.

Most of the EFL teachers, included in this study, reported that they did not have the opportunity to see the English syllabus during their study at university. Some

teachers pointed out that they had a chance to teach the syllabus as trainees in the last term of university study. They said that they were given a Teacher's Guide and were asked to follow its instructions in their teaching of the syllabus. Some other teachers indicated that they were not trained to be teachers of English because they graduated from different English departments such as literature or translation. The Ministry of Education then employed them as teachers of English without pre-service training courses.

To check the current theoretical background of the EFL teachers and try to see how communicatively oriented it is the EFL teachers, included in this study, were asked a number of questions about language teaching. Below are the questions being asked to the EFL teachers (Table 3).

The questions above represent three different schools of thought in language teaching. These are the Grammar Translation Method, the Audio-lingual Method and the Communicative Language Teaching. These approaches are chosen for the following reasons:

- The Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method are the predominant approaches practiced by the EFL teachers included in this study.
- Traditional approaches to language teaching like the Grammar Translation Method were the ones in fashion in Saudi Arabia before Communicative Language Teaching. There has been anecdotal evidence that the Grammar Translation

Method still has its roots deep in the practice of language teaching in Saudi Arabia. It is true that young teachers in Saudi Arabia are no more trained to teach English through Grammar Translation, and that materials are designed to teach English Communicatively, but some researchers, like Hafseth *et al.* (1993), observed that even young teachers may tend to teach the language the way they were taught putting aside the communicative use of the language and focusing on the structural aspects of the language.

- The Audio-lingual Method is chosen not because it was in fashion in Saudi Arabia, but because it was a popular method that was used intensively in the United States since 1949 (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983), and had world-wide reputation. The schooling system in Saudi Arabia is more like that in America and there were American teachers in Saudi Arabia during the oil discovery period. It might be possible to find traces of such theory to language teaching in Saudi Arabia.
- The Communicative Language Teaching is the aim in this study as the Saudi English Curriculum is organized according to the communicative functions and notions.

**Table 3. Questions about language teaching asked to the EFL teachers during interviews with them**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should language teaching focus on meaning? On structure and form? Or on native like pronunciation?</li> <li>• Should dialogues in the classroom be about things that students need in real life and not be memorized?</li> <li>• Should they focus on structure and be memorized? Or are they not of great value at all?</li> <li>• Is language learning learning structures? Learning to communicate? Or learning words?</li> <li>• Is drilling preferable? Not of great value? Or essential?</li> <li>• Student's use of the target language in the classroom: Should it be encouraged from the beginning? Should it only be allowed after drilling and exercises? Or is it not of great value and might be a waste of time?</li> <li>• The use of the students' native language: Should it be acceptable when feasible? Should the norm and the native language be the medium of instruction? Or should it be strictly forbidden?</li> <li>• Reading and writing: Can they be started from the first day along with listening and speaking? Should they be the main focus because language learning is learning how to deal with texts? Or should they be deferred till speech is mastered?</li> <li>• Language teachers: Are they people who help students deal with language and offer stimulus? Are they authorities in the class? Or are they people who control and prevent the learners from doing anything that conflicts with the theory that language is speech?</li> <li>• In language teaching, is error natural because language is created by the individual often through trial and error? Should it be penalized? Or must it be prevented at all costs because language is a habit?</li> <li>• Is language learned by doing? By cognition? Or through habit formation?</li> <li>• In language teaching, can translation be used where students need it? Is it essential? Or should it be forbidden?</li> </ul> |
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The idea behind the above procedure is that we can account for our teachers' current theoretical background and assumptions about language teaching by examining the overall preferences of the EFL teachers. That is, by looking at the overall preferences of an EFL teacher, we can place that teacher in one of these three schools of thought. The aim of this investigation is to examine whether or not EFL teachers are communicatively oriented. This also would help us evaluate the type of pre-service training programs that Saudi English language teachers go through, knowing that the type of materials distributed by the Ministry of Education are designed for Communicative Language Teaching. That is, if our teachers demonstrate a communicative orientation to language teaching, then this might mean that the current teacher-training program that prepares teachers to teach the English language communicatively is effective. If our teachers demonstrate a Grammar-translation tendency to language teaching, then this might mean that this method is still deeply rooted in the practice of language teaching in Saudi Arabia and that the teacher-training program is not doing what it is supposed to do (to prepare teachers to teach English communicatively).

The interview data, emerged from the above questions, indicated Grammar-translation and Audio-lingual preference among the EFL teachers. Most of the EFL teachers were in favor of Grammar-translation showing an overall preference for this school of thought. Although the Grammar-translation preference can be considered high bearing in mind that EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia are no longer trained to teach English using this approach and the materials are not designed for that approach, these results are not supportive of the assumption that the sample would show more Grammar-translation preference due only to the lack of proper teacher training.

During interviews, EFL teachers were also asked to define CLT in their own words. Most of them said that it was a difficult task. Their definitions included, for example, that there has to be a need for communication, self expression, exchanging opinions in English, understanding English utterances, not worrying about grammar, guessing from contexts, and general comprehension. The EFL teachers reported that CLT applies to all four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). According to these interpretations, there is congruence between these teachers' understanding and the Curriculum that the goal of CLT is to exchange message in English, with little attention paid to linguistic forms.

In order to explore their philosophies of language teaching, a follow up straightforward question asked the EFL teachers how they would teach English if they could teach the language in a hypothetical ideal situation. The EFL teachers' responses revealed some incongruities with their above definition. Most EFL teachers expressed their belief that learners need to receive some type of grammar instruction before they attempt any communicative task, as a Saudi EFL teacher expressed:

"... before students reach to a certain point, they need to know the basic sentences and expressions. In order to acquire them ... they should be able to read and write. Then they can speak, but before speaking, they should be able to understand."

Another EFL teacher commented stating:

"... I will try my best to use English all the time in the ideal teaching situation, but I wonder about grammar ... I mean every thing will be taught in English, but I do not have confidence yet. Maybe I will start teaching grammar ... so the grammar explanation will be conducted in Arabic [the students' mother tongue] at the beginning of the class."

The comments above reveal that EFL teachers think they need to teach grammar before giving learners opportunities to use and apply the target linguistic forms in communicative tasks. These data show that EFL teachers' understanding of CLT is more semantic than conceptual. In defining CLT, they report a list of features which include exchanging messages and self-expression, but their definitions lack the coherence of a methodology incorporating goals, planning, and tasks. In contrast, their philosophy of their teaching reveals a conceptual schema in which grammar instruction serves to build knowledge about language, and CLT consists primarily of fluency building and grammar manipulation activities. Some recent studies of the implementation of communicative approaches in Asian contexts (e.g. Carless, 2003; Sakui, 2004; Jeon and Hahn, 2006) show that, while EFL teachers exhibit a reasonable degree of understanding about communicative teaching concepts, most of them express negative views on implementing communicative teaching with regard to its classroom practice. The teachers describe a major focus as to teach language items such vocabulary and grammar. They also believe firmly in the need for a strong disciplinary foundation in their teaching. These

studies report that this belief in the importance of discipline seems to discourage the implementation of communicative approaches in which the teacher is required to release some control.

The above results also suggest that the EFL trainee teachers' pre-service program in Saudi Arabia did not prepare Saudi English language teachers to be communicatively oriented. They still preferred Grammar-translation. This implies that the type of training provided for Saudi EFL teachers by departments of English in Saudi Arabian universities was not enough to give teachers the communicative orientation that could pull them away from a long tradition of ELT through Grammar-translation. During the interviews, EFL teachers were asked to evaluate their pre-service training program and to state how useful the study of methodology has been to their actual classroom practice and how much the program has met their needs as language teachers. The data, in this regard, revealed that the majority of the interviewees realized the importance of the study of methodology for language teachers and thought that the study of methodology benefited their classroom practice. They also thought that the pre-service training program they have been through fell short of providing them with what they needed.

### Time Constraints

In order to teach a foreign language and help learners benefit, time becomes an important factor. "Time available for the acquisition of the target language is a key factor and can easily be determined since any planning takes into account the available hours per week, weeks in the school year, and even years for the course. The objectives and the ways in which that can be achieved as always are dependent on the amount of time available and how it is distributed" (Dubin and Olshtain, 1986: p. 32). Time becomes even more significant if the syllabus, as in the Saudi Arabian context, has a lot to cover and EFL teachers have to finish it from cover to cover because of deadlines or specific plans. This is evident in many contexts, for instance, Carless (2003) reports that in the Hong Kong context there appears to be a perception amongst English teachers that there is pressure to complete the syllabus or textbook and this impacts on the time available to carry out communicative activities and tasks.

In the current schedule of Saudi boys' secondary schools, the time allocated to English is four periods a week, each lasting 45 minutes. This means that EFL students meet their language teachers less than 4 hours a week. By this limit, the rate of learning falls

off disastrously, as Strevens (1977: p. 29) puts it:

"... it is possible that there is a lower limit below which the rate of learning per hour of teaching falls off disastrously. I would put this limit at about 4-5 hours per week. Below this rate of intensity it seems that the effectiveness of learning is much less, per hour, than above it. Perhaps there are too many opportunities for forgetting; or learning does not reach a necessary impetus or drive."

In addition, when teachers do meet their students there are many small tasks that use up the teaching and learning time. The experience of a Saudi EFL teacher was typical. He stated: "I find that the first five minutes of the period can be easily wasted. This happens through calming the students down, asking them to get their books and notebooks out ...".

From a glance at the content of Year 1 and 2 of the course textbooks, we find that they cover 12 units, each of which is divided into 8 lessons. Year 3 textbooks cover 12 units, each of which lies in 6 lessons. EFL teachers are required to finish every unit of the course textbook. To be able to cover the syllabus in four periods a week each of 45 minutes means to devote one class period for each lesson. Put it another way, teachers will not be able to cater to a class made up of 40-45 students. They will not be able to pay enough attention to individual differences. The EFL teachers interviewed also reported that the 45-minute period is not sufficient to finish the whole lesson, as some lessons need more than one period to cover them. This becomes even problematic as it affects the implementation of CLT. A Saudi EFL teacher commented stating:

"... there is a lot to cover and one class period is not enough to do so. We find it hard to finish all the sections of the lesson. So the 45 minutes are not enough to finish the whole lesson in one period. We have to worry about the students in the class and make sure that the 40 or 45 students all have understood the lesson and are able to participate in class activities and discussion."

What does that imply for the teaching of English bearing in mind the three main factors in the Saudi educational process: the teacher, the students and the textbook? Firstly, the teachers find themselves under pressure to cover the suggested plan and work towards that. Secondly, some lessons need more than one class period to teach it. With the time allocated that means teachers need either to speed up during the period to cover the syllabus or to fall behind. As a result, the

teachers are not able to cater for individual students' needs. The students, on the other hand, do not all have the opportunity to participate because the teacher opts to focus on good students and not the poor ones albeit in order not to deviate from the lesson plan he has to follow. This may explain why EFL teachers, during observation sessions, concentrated on a few students, who seemed to be the most proficient in the language, and neglected others. The true objectives of the ELT are not met because of the lack of time.

Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989: p. 31), acknowledging the crucial role of time in the teaching/learning process, state that:

"The success of attaining FL objectives depends largely on the hours allocated to language teaching. Some techniques and teaching strategies require more time than others, and if the teacher wants to cater for the individual problems of his pupils, he will need more time than prescribed in order to work in different ways with different pupils. But the time frame fixed."

They also indicate that five hours or less per week may seriously affect the attainment of EFL objectives and lead to the imperfection of the teaching/learning process as they say:

"In fact, in some Arab educational systems, the FL hours have recently been reduced to the minimum five hours per week. This time is inadequate and results in improper implementation of any methodology to be used. It also leads to ineffective teaching or learning. In such conditions, unless the teacher provides for individualized instruction the whole English program will liable to failure" (Al-Mutawa and Kailani, 1989: p. 31).

The experience of a Saudi language teacher at one of the secondary schools under this study confirmed that:

"... I think that the curriculum is not the problem as it is in the number of periods allocated to teach English. In my opinion, four periods are not enough to help the students learn the language and use it as a means of communication."

#### **Unavailability of Required and Adequate Teaching/Learning Aids**

The unavailability of required and adequate teaching/learning aids is considered as another factor that hinders EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context from implementing CLT in their teaching. The

classroom observations, conducted in this study, revealed that most of EFL teachers did not use teaching/learning aids in their teaching. The most common instructional aids, which were used in the observed EFL classes, were the textbooks and the board. It was noticed that no EFL teachers used pictures, magazines, charts or other authentic materials. It was also noticed that there were not any teaching/learning aids on the classroom walls which could help EFL teachers and students to enhance study. When the EFL teachers were asked, during interviews, to identify "why?", their reply was simply because of the unavailability of the required and adequate teaching/learning aids. It is true that, all the nine secondary schools visited in this study suffer from lack of English teaching/learning aids. The interviews with EFL teachers revealed a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the availability of teaching/learning aids. A Saudi EFL teacher had this view regarding the lack of teaching/learning aids. He said:

"... Despite the demerits of ELT there are many facilities that we teachers do not have like the wall charts, flash cards, overhead projectors, etc. which we do not find available in our school. ... the unavailability of a tape is also a major problem we face in this school as the first lesson of each unit in the course book is a listening lesson which can not be taught effectively and properly without using the tape. I usually read to my class, from the teacher's guidebook that I have, whenever it is time for a listening activity."

Furthermore, according to EFL teachers even where teaching/learning aids are available, they are out-of-date, in poor condition or of low quality. A Saudi EFL teacher has formed his own point of view regarding the material he uses:

"The tapes accompanied the textbooks are not of good quality. That will not help the students to develop their listening and speaking skills if that is the goal the Ministry sets to accomplish. In my point of view the purpose from a tape in language learning is to present the language by its native speakers so learners can get the correct pronunciation, grammatical structure and sentence structure. But this is not fulfilled because the tape is not clear. Thus to overcome this technical problem I tend to read to my students whenever it is time for a listening activity. When I complain about the tape and its poor quality, the EFL educational supervisor tells me to check with another school if the tape quality is of any good so I can borrow it and duplicate it. I have checked

with another school but I find that problem is the same and that has to do with the quality of the master copy."

Another Saudi EFL teacher elaborated:

"... Posters and audio cassettes are the only EFL teaching aids that are available in this school, but unfortunately they are old versions. They differ from the content of the course textbook that we teach now. For example, some of the information and pictures on the posters are old and do not match those in the current course books ... ."

The EFL teachers' comments above indicate that the poor facilities in the schools and the shortage of adequate teaching/learning aids make the task more difficult, and it is almost impossible to teach some lessons. It seems that the shortage of audio and visual aids is a detrimental factor that prevents teachers from implementing CLT and teaching the language communicatively.

Some writers assert the importance of teaching/learning aids. Lapp and Flood (1983: p. 476), for example, stress the value of using both audio and visual aids, stating the educational benefits made possible by the utilization of these technical aids. They state that:

"Individualized instruction becomes a reality because the classroom teacher is aided with instructional implementation, curriculum materials based on sequential development are made available, students are matched with materials according to their strongest learning modality, and the classroom teacher is provided with planning time."

Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989: p. 149), on the other hand, point out that "Many [teaching/learning aids] are utilized for presentation, demonstration, reinforcement and communicative practices". They mention that such aids are used for several purposes like: "(a) stimulating interest in the foreign language; (b) explaining concepts or illustrating meanings; (c) reinforcing learning; (d) directing or promoting conversations in groups; and (e) providing cultural backgrounds".

The teaching/learning aids, Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989) refer to, include pictures, flash cards, posters, overhead projectors, taped materials, language laboratory, television, video tapes, paper games, board games, etc. These aids fall into the four categories they pointed out above. Rowntree (1982) argues that the use of such teaching/learning aids

contributes to engaging students' motivation, facilitating recall, and providing new learning stimuli.

The importance of utilizing audio and visual teaching/learning aids in language teaching and learning was also indicated by the EFL teachers interviewed in this study. The interviewed EFL teachers pointed out that using teaching/learning aids, such as pictures, flash cards, posters, cassettes, video tapes, overhead projectors, etc., would be of great value for the students to understand and comprehend the study materials introduced to them. It also makes language learning more enjoyable for them. They also added that using computers, games, and video would break the routine of language teaching and learning, besides enhancing the language so that students could grasp it more easily.

With regard to the importance of the teaching/learning aids, a non-Saudi EFL teacher expressed his point of view saying:

"... the EFL course book contains listening and discussion topics which cannot be taught or practiced by students while their textbooks are opened as they contain the information and answers ready for students. Thus, the presence of teaching aids relieves students from their textbooks and makes them concentrate more. It also allows the teacher to teach, at least these kinds of topics properly."

The discussion above reflects that EFL teachers are aware of the importance of teaching/learning aids, and know they would be beneficial. An impression might be gained that EFL teachers recognize the value of teaching/learning aids as an aid to comprehend and to add variety and interest to the teaching and learning process. But it seems that the EFL teachers are generally equipped with a few wall charts/posters. Very few schools have a tape or cassette recorder. Even those materials are not in good quality and are out-of-date. The poor quality of the teaching/learning aids available makes them difficult to use and renders the value of using them questionable. The EFL teachers find it difficult to obtain suitable materials from their schools and therefore design their own materials. However, I noticed, during classroom observations, that flash cards and pictures made by EFL teachers were small, colorless and unsuitable. The EFL teachers find obtaining these resources extremely difficult.

### **Inadequate EFL Examination System**

Several EFL teachers, among those included in this study, believe in the importance of CLT, but they feel the need to primarily conduct teacher-fronted

non-communicative activities. This is, in their views, also due to the final EFL examinations.

According to the regulations of student evaluation in the Saudi educational system, the EFL end-term tests in the secondary stage are divided into two parts, an oral test, which evaluates students' skills in listening and speaking; and a written test, which assesses their skills in reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. The interviewed EFL teachers highlighted that they always follow the instructions and student evaluation scheme described by the General Directorate of Education in designing EFL exams for their students. Table 4 details the student evaluation scheme.

Looking at Table 4, we can see that the student evaluation scheme allocates 25 marks to the written test and 5 marks for the oral test. This means that the oral test accounts for only 10% of the overall mark which is 50 marks for each term (20 marks for class-work and 30 marks for final exams at the end of the term).

Interviews with EFL teachers showed that they were not satisfied and disagreed with the 5 marks allocated for EFL oral tests as they pointed out that they are little in comparison with the marks allocated to the written test. This small proportion of marks (only 5 marks out of 50), in their view, makes students undervalue speaking and listening skills. The EFL teachers also expressed their dissatisfaction with regard to the way oral tests were handled, blaming the Saudi educational system for not giving teachers enough time to conduct the tests effectively and claiming that there was no specific organized mechanism for undertaking the tests as one of the EFL teachers interviewed expressed:

"... I believe the five marks allocated each term for assessing students' English speaking and listening skills is very little, in comparison with the marks allocated for the English written test, for evaluating students on these two important language skills. Furthermore, there is no real test for students' listening skill. In fact, we only evaluate their speaking skills by asking them two or three simple questions and having them read one or two sentences from a chosen reading passage, you know why, this is due to the limited time we have to use for the English oral tests compared it with the large number of students we have to evaluate."

With regard to the written examination, EFL teachers interviewed indicated that a standardized format was imposed on them and that they should follow it in designing the written tests for their students. The type of questions and the marks for each question were suggested by the Ministry of

Education, the Directorate of Education (see Table 4). The EFL teachers had to follow that format. They could not ignore it or deviate from it, otherwise they would be blamed and criticized by their educational supervisors, which would negatively affect their annual evaluation reports.

While conducting this phase of the study, I randomly collected some samples of English final examinations set for different levels of the boys' secondary stage. A close examination of these samples showed that the English examination paper generally consisted of composition, reading comprehension, dialogue, grammar, information questions, and vocabulary exercises.

For composition, students were asked to write about topics already presented in their textbooks. Topics discussed in class were committed to memory, and, in the examination, words of guidance were given to students to refresh their memory. This suggested that students would follow the procedures of the model composition in their textbooks. Therefore, students would not use their creativity or imagination to add to or change the writing activities in their textbooks. By doing this, it was clear that there was a total encouragement for mechanical copying and a total neglect of creativity in the students' writing activities.

In the reading comprehension part, the passages provided for students to read and answer some questions on them were chosen from the students' textbooks. All questions presented were based upon the reading passages and attempted to sum up what has been learned and to ensure that the linguistic message was presented in the same context as that in which it was initially met.

In the dialogue part, students were given an incomplete dialogue, chosen from their textbooks, and they were asked to complete it.

The grammar, information questions and vocabulary parts involved exercises like choosing the correct answer, supplying the correct form of the verb, doing as shown in brackets, filling in blanks, matching words, answering a few multiple choice questions, etc. Texts and exercises which have been already read and done in class were included in these exercises.

It was also noticed that the listening and speaking skills were not included in the English final examination papers which, therefore, would lead students to neglect these skills and see them as unimportant. It was also observed that reading and writing skills were dealt with separately and were focused upon at the expense of listening and speaking skills. Study and reference skills were altogether ignored.

**Table 4. The distribution of English language marks for intermediate and secondary stages**

Items	Stage	Intermediate			Secondary		
		1st	2nd	3rd	1st	2nd	3rd
		Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade	Grade
		1st & 2nd terms			1st & 2nd terms		
Composition (guided/free)		-	-	3	5	5	7
Dialogue or letter writing		-	-	3	2	2	2
Comprehension questions on a seen passage		3	3	5	6	6	6
Information questions based on PB about everyday life		4	4	2	-	-	-
Grammar		5	5	5	5	5	6
Vocabulary		5	5	5	5	5	6
Spelling (dictation)		4	4	2	2	-	-
Handwriting (cursive)		4	4	-	-	-	-
Questions based on the Reader book (lessons 7 & 8)		-	-	-	-	2	-
Questions based on the Writing book		-	-	-	-	-	3
Total writing test marks		25	25	25	25	25	30
Oral test (listening & speaking)		5	5	5	5	5	-
<b>Total marks</b>		<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>

Source: <http://www.madinaedu.org.sa/idara/index.htm> (2007)

The conclusion one could draw from the close examination of the EFL final examination of the boys' secondary stage was that English language examinations were not stimulating. They did not aim to measure genuine communicative use of the language. They were still restricted to two skills: reading and writing. Even test items on reading and writing did not assess the ability of the students to read or write. They merely assessed their ability to memorize. All questions given in the English final examination papers did not fulfill the objectives laid down by the Ministry of Education. They were arid, not varied, not interesting, subject-centered, and did not assess skill development. The questions in general appeared to test very basic knowledge of English.

According to Hughes (1989: p. 1), examinations have direct and indirect effects on teaching methods and on learning as well called "the backwash effect". This impact may be a positive or negative one. Hughes writes:

"The effect of testing on teaching and learning is known as backwash. Backwash can be harmful or beneficial. If a test is regarded as important then preparation for it can come to dominate all teaching and learning activities. And if the test content and testing techniques are at variance with the objectives of the course, then there is likely to be harmful backwash."

There is also an evidence in the literature that concerns the examination impact on the implementation of communicative activities and tasks. For example, Li (1998) and Sakui (2004), analyzing perceptions of barriers to the

implementation of communicative approaches in their contexts: Korean and Japanese contexts, point out that because of the need to prepare students for grammar-based tests, EFL teachers devote considerable time for teaching test-taking skills or drilling students on multiple choice grammar items which leave the teachers with little or no time to carry out communicative tasks.

During the interviews, EFL teachers expressed their views regarding the effects of examinations on their performances in the classrooms. Interview with them revealed that the standardized format of the final written exams had a negative impact (negative "backwash") on the language teaching and learning process. It also suggested that EFL students and teachers became exam-oriented. EFL teachers themselves, perhaps, became very tense around the examination period as the students' success and/or failure rates have an effect on their own annual reports. Therefore, during the year, EFL teachers tend to focus on preparing the students for their final examinations. A Saudi EFL teacher indicated his view saying:

"... we teachers are affected by the standardized format of the final written exams. I believe the teacher teaches his students keeping in his mind how to make them learn certain information in order to be able to answer the question about it which will come in the final written exams. Sometimes, the teacher speeds up in his teaching in certain lessons in order to have enough time at the end of the lesson to teach students how to answer some questions about this lesson. Thus, I say the standardized format of the end-term written exams has its impact on teachers'

practice in teaching the language. Even students are aware of that format. Some students keep asking me to provide them with the Ministry questions after each lesson. They completely neglect or ignore the learning and teaching operation. They became exam oriented because English language exams have become boring and repeated. This situation put pressure on us teachers to follow certain teaching methods."

EFL teachers' comments, during interview sessions, indicated that examinations play a very important role in shaping the EFL teaching and learning process and in preventing EFL teachers from implementing CLT prescribed by the study program. It seems that EFL teachers and students are trapped in the examination cycle. The syllabus objectives are sacrificed in an attempt to cover the demands of the examination. EFL teachers, in their teaching, emphasize the skills needed for achieving success in passing the final exam, in order to fulfill the students' desire to pass the test and to satisfy their educational supervisors.

#### **Hindrances Related to Students Control**

This is another issue that the interviewed EFL teachers considered as a factor that shaped their practice and prevented them from implementing CLT. All the EFL teachers interviewed reported that the number of students in their classroom ranged from 40 to 47 students. The classrooms were too small to accommodate comfortably the large number of students. During the observation sessions, I noticed that EFL teachers, in classrooms with more than 40 students, could not reach many of their students because of the very little space between rows of desks and chairs. The classrooms were not designed for language classes, which ideally involve pupil-pupil interaction. Students, in every school included in this study, were seated in rows with the teacher facing them in front of the blackboard. Classrooms were also small in size and overcrowded. In my opinion, crowded classes were one of the great challenges facing English language teachers.

Classes with large number of students have always been a dilemma to the language teachers. In activities where quick oral response is necessary, the opportunity for participation of the individual student is small. McKeachie (1978: p. 207) argues "Large classes are simply not as effective as small classes for retention of knowledge, critical thinking and attitude change". He adds:

"While many teaching methods could be used in large groups, it is probable that more time is devoted to lecturing than in smaller classes. The large class often reduces the teacher's sense of freedom in choosing teaching methods, assigning papers, or testing to achieve varying objectives. Assuming that teachers have some repertoire of relevant skills, anything that handcuffs instructors is likely to be educationally damaging, and this may be the major way in which large classes are likely to sabotage education" (McKeachie, 1978: p. 207).

A non-Saudi EFL teacher confirmed this view:

"Teaching classes with large number of students makes it difficult for me to have every student participate and practice the language. This also hinders me from using a variety of methods such as dividing students into small groups, listen to every one and give every one the opportunity to participate. With the large classes we have in this school it is really impossible. I tried once to divide one of my classes with 47 students into small groups. Every group was to make some sentences on the grammatical rule already taught to them and say those sentences in front of the class. It was a good idea but I could not make it successful because of the large number of students combined with the small size of the classroom."

The interviewed EFL teachers also indicated that the large number of students in each class presented them with difficulty in controlling such classes. The reality of this problem was evident in the classes I observed. The teachers of such classes were trying hard to control their students and attract their attention to the English activity involved. In general, in the classes observed, it appeared that teachers were experiencing difficulty in their teaching of the language rather than showing the importance of the language and motivating students to learn the language effectively.

According to Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989: p. 31) large classes limit student participation. They acknowledge the crucial role of class size in the teaching/learning process:

"The size of the class should be normal ... in order to ensure more active pupil participation in learning especially when the main objective of English instruction is the mastery of oral fluency. In large classes, oral interaction is limited to one exchange at a time, whether teacher-pupil or pupil-pupil."

A Saudi EFL teacher reflected on his experience with large classes. He said:

"... in a reading lesson I have more than 45 students which makes it difficult and even impossible to have every one read and supervise his pronunciation with the time allocated which is 45 minutes. This is an important point to know your students' level, but if the number of the students in the class is well over 45 students, then how can have every one to read and how can I supervise each student and know his exact level of ability and help him?"

From the comments made by EFL teachers, during interviews with them, it appears that large classes prevent the EFL teachers from coping effectively with their duties. This goes in line with Al-Mutawa and Kailani's point of view (1989: p. 31) who argue that "Large classes also make it difficult for the teacher to supervise every pupil, which means ineffective teaching and learning". This deeply affects teaching and learning process. Large classes make good discipline difficult to maintain and give teachers insufficient time to identify and deal properly and effectively with each individual student's interests and needs. The class with large number of students is a factor, for the EFL teachers interviewed in this study, in not being able to implement CLT and to develop the language skills of their students. This coincides with Jeon and Hahn's findings (2006) which highlight that large class size is one of the reasons that Korean EFL teachers indicate for avoiding the implementation of task-based language teaching (one of the communicative approaches). It is also considered to be problematic with regard to disciplinary situation in task-based group work.

Another reason why CLT is not implemented in Saudi EFL classroom is the EFL teachers' lack of confidence in conducting CLT. Sakui (2004) and Jeon and Hahn (2006), in their studies, find out that lack of confidence, among a total of plausible reasons, is the main reason EFL teachers are reluctant to implement communicative approaches. During interviews, most of the EFL teachers expressed a lack of confidence by stating that if they use pair work or group work, the students may revert to conversing in their mother tongue 'Arabic'. They added that they did not want to deal with classroom management issues while experimenting with different types of communicative activities. This coincided with my classroom observations that students were much easier to manage when performing pencil-and-paper exercises. EFL teachers need to ensure that students

understand the activity procedures, follow instructions and perform the activity.

Another claim is that CLT requires considerable time. EFL teachers, included in this study, were in constant demand in dealing with many administrative and non-academic responsibilities. The EFL teachers had responsibilities in relation to school administration. The EFL teachers, interviewed in this study, highlighted their duties in this regard. One of the many administrative tasks they had to perform was to 'keep order' during morning assembly and breaks and at prayer time.

A Saudi EFL teacher commented:

"... students have two breaks during the school day and one prayer time; three main times, apart from gaps between one lesson and another. During break-times we, the teachers, first make sure all students are out of their classrooms and in the school yard to have their breakfast. We also supervise them having their snacks and cold drinks, etc., to prevent trouble that might occur among students. When the break ends we make sure all students are back in their classrooms. At prayer time and at dismissal time, the teachers make sure that every student leaves the classroom and is doing what he is supposed to be doing. In addition, we keep order and discipline students before and during the morning assembly."

Throughout the interviews, the EFL teachers also identified two other administrative tasks which they said were imposed on them besides 'keeping order' task. These tasks were EFL 'class supervision' and 'filling in for absent teachers'. A non-Saudi EFL teacher described the nature of the supervision duty, which encompasses pastoral care, academic monitoring, and liaison roles:

"... besides my main duty which is teaching, I have been designated the role of a supervisor for one specific class, where I have to follow and monitor the students' progress, listen to their problems and difficulties and try to solve them or take them to the school administration. I also have the responsibility of organizing with students their mid-term exam timetable and collecting the students' results for all subjects from the teachers who teach that class and handing them in to the school administration. In addition, at the end of each academic term, I have the responsibility of informing each student in that class of his results."

A Saudi EFL teacher expressed his resentment of the task of filling in for absent teachers stating:

"... classes with absent teachers are horrible. They are worse than monitoring students during break times or prayer times. We really suffer these classes. I usually fill in for absent teachers in classes, which are not my classes, where students do not care, but want to chat. They do not respect teachers... ."

EFL teachers, during the interviews, claimed that these administrative tasks put more load on them, caused physical tiredness and stress, and consumed time needed for teaching. Furthermore, they affected their preparation for lessons and their performance in the classroom. In addition, they hindered them from making a follow up for their students. In their studies in the Hong Kong and Japanese contexts, Carless (2003) and Sakui (2004) conclude that EFL teachers' heavy workload seems to reduce the time available for lesson preparation and when time is scarce, traditional teaching or following the textbook may be preferred to preparing communicative teaching.

In the above discussion and comments, our EFL teachers expressed their dissatisfaction and resentment at tasks imposed on them other than their main task, which is teaching the language. They felt they must be helped to keep a clear mind, and to give their students as much help as they can, rather than being burdened with extra work, which could be performed equally well by non-teaching staff, or even delegated to senior students, leaving them to give all their time and energy to their main task. This intrusion into teachers' non-teaching time—a time they could otherwise be using as either preparation time or recuperation time—leaves the teachers with very limited time, if any, to relax and get ready for their classes. It also affects their concentration on teaching the language which, at the end of the day, is their main task.

### **Conclusion**

The present study reveals that ELT in Saudi Arabian boys' secondary schools is, in theory, communicative. Yet all EFL teachers, included in this study, resort to the Grammar Translation Method and the Audio-lingual Method. When there is a mismatch between the material and the methodology, the result will be a very low-level secondary school graduate as the case is in Saudi Arabian context. Even though the English curriculum in Saudi Arabia is communicatively oriented, it seems that the implementation of CLT is a serious challenge for the EFL teachers. Although written goals emphasize the importance of CLT, in reality it loses its prominence

as a 'side-show' (Howatt, 1984: p. 279). The EFL teachers in this study struggle to implement this approach of teaching as smoothly as the documented instructional goals prescribe.

The difficulty in implementing the CLT arises from different challenges deriving from both internal and external factors. One internal factor is the EFL teachers' inadequate theoretical background. The EFL teachers, included in this study, demonstrate a tendency towards the Grammar-translation school of thought. The present study reveals that the current pre-service teacher-training program in Saudi Arabia is not completely able to replace the deeply rooted tradition of language teaching through Grammar-translation. Moreover, it involves an opinion poll on the effectiveness of the pre-service teacher-training program in Saudi Arabia. The results of the EFL teachers' own evaluation suggest that they think that the pre-service teacher-training program they go through is not sufficiently providing them with what they need in the classrooms. The other internal factor is the discrepancy between the EFL teachers' definition of CLT and the situated understanding of it. The EFL teachers' situated understandings of CLT includes some elements of a weak version of CLT (Howatt, 1984: p. 279), because a weak version proposes that linguistic structure should be integrated while communicative activities are performed. However, the EFL teachers' practices are much closer to the Grammar Translation Method and to the Audio-lingual Method.

In addition to internal factors mentioned above, the EFL teachers' practices are often driven and influenced by external constraining factors which the EFL teachers frequently have to face when trying to implement CLT. These external factors include time constraints, unavailability of required and adequate teaching/learning aids, inadequate EFL examination system and hindrances related to students control. It seems that shortage of time, lack of adequate teaching/learning aids, inadequate EFL examination system, over-crowded classrooms and administrative tasks imposed on the EFL teachers lead to a constant feeling of stress and pressure on the EFL teachers, which appears to be reflected in their approach to teaching the language.

### **Developmental Implications**

The present study has implications for EFL teacher development and educational reform. On the one hand, it may be preferable for EFL teachers in Saudi Arabian context to gain a thorough understanding of the Communicative Teaching

Method at both instructional and conceptual levels before they can implement it effectively in their teaching contexts. On the other hand, educational reform is driven by external factors handed down to EFL teachers. If the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia supervises both the policy of language teaching and the teacher-training program, then they should go hand in hand to deal positively with these factors and to overcome the constraints that hinder EFL teachers from doing their main job (teaching the language) effectively and teachers are also supposed to be trained to teach English communicatively.

Furthermore, the purpose of situated evaluation is not only to identify areas requiring improvement, but also to allow us to appreciate the complexity of the whole system through detailed descriptions. From this perspective, the present study hopes to serve to encourage further examination of every educational institutional component and all of the participants involved.

Finally, the present study may suggest a growing call, at least in some teaching contexts, for the recognition of the complexity of CLT implementation, which is often overlooked in language pedagogy discussions.

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شعبة اللغة الإنجليزية، قسم العلوم الإنسانية،  
كلية الملك خالد العسكرية

(قدم للنشر في ٢٥/٠١/١٤٢٩هـ؛ وقبل للنشر في ٠٤/١١/١٤٢٩هـ)

. بالرغم من أن مقررات اللغة الإنجليزية للمرحلة ما قبل الجامعية في المملكة العربية السعودية مصممة على طريقة وأسلوب تعليم اللغة الاتصالي Communicative Language Teaching، وبالرغم من أن الطلاب يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية لمدة سبع سنوات (سنة واحدة في المرحلة الابتدائية، وثلاث سنوات في المرحلة المتوسطة، وثلاث سنوات في المرحلة الثانوية)، إلا أن أغلبهم يتخرج من المرحلة الثانوية وهم غير قادرين على استخدام اللغة للتخاطب. قد يرجع ذلك لعدة أسباب منها على سبيل المثال عدم ملائمة المواد المعدة لتدريس اللغة، أو ضعف وقصور تدريب المعلمين قبل وأثناء الخدمة، أو موقف الطلاب السلبي من تعلم اللغة، أو هذه الأسباب مجتمعة مع بعضها البعض. وإنني أعتقد بأن كل سبب من الأسباب آنفة الذكر يجب أن يتم بحثه وأن يتم التعامل معه على حدة من أجل الوصول إلى مستوى أفضل في مجال تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية. أما بحثنا هذا فسوف يكون التركيز فيه على المعلم، ذلك العنصر المهم في العملية التعليمية والذي يقوم بتطبيق وتنفيذ المنهج الدراسي على أساس أنه عنصر يحتمل مساهمته في المشكلة التي نحن بصدد حلها.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن كيفية فهم وتطبيق معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية في المرحلة الثانوية من التعليم العام بالمملكة العربية السعودية لأسلوب ونهج تعليم اللغة الاتصالي. ومن أجل معرفة مدى نجاح أو فشل تطبيق المنهج على هذا النهج، قمت بدراسة واقعية للحالة مستخدماً الملاحظات الصفية والمقابلات الشخصية مع معلمي اللغة كأدوات لجمع البيانات اللازمة.

ولقد أسفرت الدراسة عن أن الطرق التقليدية في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية مثل نهج النحو والترجمة Grammar Translation Method، وبعض سمات النهج السمعي الشفوي Audio-lingual Method هي الطرق المتبعة من قبل المعلمين في تدريسهم للغة، كما أظهرت الدراسة بأن معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية يواجهون صعوبة في تطبيق نهج تعليم اللغة الاتصالي بالرغم من أن أهداف تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية تشير إلى سلاسة التطبيق. ولقد تبين أن الخلفية النظرية عند معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية تشكل عاملاً يقف أمام تطبيق ذلك النهج، بالإضافة إلى ذلك أشار معلمو اللغة الإنجليزية إلى أن تطبيق نهج تعليم اللغة الاتصالي ليس من السهولة بمكان وذلك لعدد من العوائق كضيق الوقت، وعدم توفر ما هو مطلوب من الوسائل التعليمية الملائمة والمناسبة، ونظام الامتحانات غير الفاعل وغير الملائم، وبعض المعوقات ذات العلاقة بالطلاب والصف على سبيل المثال كثرة عدد الطلاب داخل الصف، والأعمال الإدارية الملقاة على عاتق المعلمين.