



The perception-practice paradox: A post-method analysis of communicative language teaching in Saudi Arabian secondary education

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this research was to explore the persistence of the disjunction between institutional pedagogical expectations and the realities of practice in English language education in Saudi Arabia, using a post-method pedagogy lens. Despite forty years of government-supported Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Saudi Arabia, learners' English proficiency remains significantly deficient in the context of the global economy. The continued existence of substantial disjunctions suggests fundamental incompatibilities between imported methodologies and local educational ecologies. Using a cross-sectional survey, this research examined the interrelationships between teachers' perceptions, their teaching practices, and the obstacles they encountered as part of their institutionally mandated pedagogic practices. Thirty secondary school English teachers (50% Saudis, 50% expatriates) participated in the study. The data revealed an interesting paradox. Teachers exhibited substantially high levels of CLT perceptions ($M=3.95$, $SD=0.70$), indicating a strong correlation with their self-reported practices ($r=.810$, $p<.001$), but encountered substantial structural barriers: High levels of pedagogic labor ($M=4.03$), assessment practices that emphasized grammatical over communicative competence ($M=3.87$), and student resistance to learner-centered approaches ($M=3.77$). Based on Kumaravadivelu's post-method framework, the study concluded that teacher professional capacity in English language teaching cannot entail adherence to a single methodology. Instead, principled eclecticism that accommodates the 'messy' nature of pedagogic practice is an acceptable pedagogic adaptation. The implications extend beyond the borders of Saudi Arabia, challenging the assumed universality of Western-originated pedagogical approaches and enabling pedagogies that allow for new, local knowledge production while promoting learners' communicative competence on the global landscape.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature by reframing CLT challenges in Saudi Arabia through post-method pedagogy. It documents teachers' adaptations as contextually legitimate rather than failures, originates a practice-centered analytical lens, and is one of the few studies investigating principled pedagogical responses to local constraints in EFL classrooms.

1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of the English language as a lingua franca has led countries across the globe to change their language education policies. As a result, many countries have enacted radical changes by adopting Western pedagogical methods. One such example is Saudi Arabia, which has required Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in public schools since 1981. The country has also made investments in teacher development, curriculum modification, and

building relationships with international stakeholders (Alharbi, 2022; Alharbi, 2024). However, after 40 years, Saudi Arabia is witnessing a troubling paradox: despite extensive government support and teacher training, Saudi students' English language proficiency is substantially below the government's intended aim (Alqahtani & Albidewi, 2022; Banafi, 2025). Notably, the gap between policy intentions and practice requires theoretical perspectives that may go beyond simplistic stories of implementation failure.

Bala Kumaravadivelu's (2003) and Balasubramanian Kumaravadivelu's (2006) framework of post-method pedagogy helps explain the paradox of Saudi language education reform since it goes beyond categorizing methods as neutral, and that is simply something learners can learn and transfer to their context. Post-method pedagogy recognizes the political, cultural, and contextual nature of pedagogies. In other words, the post-method pedagogy recognizes that traditional notions of method require educators to teach students through accurate fidelity to what was intended in methods instructional literature, and that it is the culmination of teachers' negotiating their own theory with the discourses of methodology and the realities of their educational contexts that foregrounds their English teaching methods (Saiyara, 2022). This theoretical lens is particularly helpful for understanding Saudi language education, which is rife with competing forces powerful enough to influence language instruction. These forces threaten the continuity of instruction by attempting to integrate globalization and modernity, while also creating ambivalence towards cultural preservation, identity maintenance, and the forces of modernization and global integration (Alrahaili, 2018).

The Saudi context introduces a very specific set of difficulties that cannot be addressed with simple solutions from CLT. Educational practice operates within a hierarchy of values where Islamic values and national identity provide a foundation and mediate teaching practices enacted in classrooms (Elyas & Picard, 2018; Mohd-Asraf, 2005). Conservative forces in society view the learning of English, particularly communicative approaches that emphasize cultural aspects of language learning and consider learners as producers of their own knowledge, as a potential threat to Arabic linguistic superiority and the integrity of Islamic culture (Alfian, Yusuf, & Nafiah, 2022). Not only are these concerns about culture in the abstract, but they also manifest as tangible realities such as censorship of textbooks, limited authentic materials, and pedagogical advance guarding teachers must contend with as possible barriers (Munandar & Newton, 2021).

The structural conditions in Saudi public education, such as large class sizes, an examination system that privileges grammatical accuracy over communicative competence, and high teaching loads, create material barriers to the interactive, learner-centered practices associated with CLT (Alharbi, 2021; Hakami, 2025). These factors suggest that the continued failure to implement CLT in Saudi Arabia may not be due to teacher incompetence or fidelity, but rather a genuine conflict between decontextualized prescriptions of methods and localized educational paradigms.

The aim of this study is to explore how Saudi secondary school English teachers reconcile these situations, specifically examining the relationship between their beliefs about pedagogy, reported practices, and perceived constraints. Analyzing teachers' experiences through a post-method analytical framework allows us to reframe assessments of failure as teacher adaptations to local demands or specific conditions of teaching contexts. The study is focused on the following four research questions:

1. What Are Public High School Teachers' Understandings of CLT in Saudi Arabia?
2. What teaching practices do public high school teachers report utilizing in alignment with CLT?
3. What is the relationship between teachers' understanding of CLT and their reported use of CLT?
4. What constraints do public high school English teachers identify as barriers to implementing CLT?

We hope that through these questions, we have contributed to the increased body of scholarship that outright denies the global applicability of Western-based approaches to teaching and recognizes teachers as legitimate knowledge makers and the programs they build as contextually relevant pedagogies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Theoretical Frameworks

From Method to Post-Method: The concept of "methods" in language teaching has been a cornerstone of applied linguistics for the past few decades, with a succession of models purportedly improving upon the ones before them, from the Grammar-Translation Method to Audio-Lingualism, and most recently, Communicative Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The "methods era" has developed with the assumption that learning a second language (L2) occurs correctly when practitioners apply procedures derived from theory, resulting in views of teachers as technicians implementing best practices laid out by experts in the field. The knowledge gained from research and practice indicated a consistent misalignment between its methods as presented and theorized, and methods as practiced, which Balasubramanian Kumaravadivelu (2006) termed the "persistently troubling problem" of the theory-practice gap.

Post-method pedagogy is based on the recognition that a methods construct or idea is problematic. Brown (1997) argues, for example, that methods are ideological constructs that mask the complexity of situated teaching but can also help facilitate linguistic imperialism. Kumaravadivelu (2003) discusses a post-method pedagogy referring to three interrelated parameters: particularity (sensitivity to local contexts), practicality (theory of practice developed by the teacher), and possibility (awareness of sociopolitical dimensions of their teaching and identity). Kumaravadivelu (2003) post-method framework, thus, hypothetically, conceptualizes teachers as strategic thinkers rather than agents of method. Instead, they have created "situation-specific, need-based microstrategies or techniques" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003).

Teacher cognition and pedagogical decision-making: In order to understand how teachers experience tension between methodological prescriptions and the realities of their classrooms, it is essential to understand teacher cognition, which is a complex collection of teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and thinking that shape pedagogical decisions (Borg, 2003). Research shows that teachers' beliefs often trump formal training or institutional policies in influencing classroom practices (Boubris & Haddam, 2020; Qasserras, 2023). Teacher beliefs can act as interpretive filters through which teachers make sense of new pedagogical information, resulting in the adaptation of innovations into their existing conceptual frameworks (Walsh & Schunn, 2025).

In situations where imported methods conflict with the local educational culture, teachers engage in what Al-Khamisi and Sinha (2022) consider as a contextual approach to language teaching, involving pragmatic adaptations that prioritize contextualized approximations of methods over procedural fidelity. Swanson (2000) argues that technical cultures can be categorized as "routine/uncertain" and "non-routine/certain," illustrating how institutional environments influence adaptation trajectories. In routine/uncertain cultures, teachers often work in pedagogical isolation and tend to rely on habitual practices, which results in superficial integration of innovations while maintaining core traditional methods. Conversely, non-routine/certain cultures foster at least some degree of pedagogical experimentation and genuine classroom innovation, often achieved through collaboration with colleagues. These distinctions highlight the importance of institutional support and collaborative environments in facilitating meaningful educational change (Sánchez-Barbero, Chamoso, Vicente, & Rosales, 2020).

2.2. Communicative Language Teaching: Promise and Problematics

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1970s as a meaningful paradigmatic conception of language as a functional field of study rather than a structural one, emphasizing the importance of meaning-making over the formal aspects of language (Salam & Luksfinanto, 2024). CLT is based originally on Hymes (1972) notion of communicative competence, then developed further by Swain and Canale (1982), with the promise to develop learners' ability to use language in ways that are appropriate to particular contexts of use. The approach aligns with current scholarly understandings of language as a social rather than an abstracted practice (Coffey, 2022).

Despite the promise of CLT, its widespread implementation worldwide has revealed considerable and persistent challenges to enacting it effectively in EFL contexts (Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2011). Li (1998) identifies many of these challenges as being associated with the lack of clarity in theory and practice for practitioners. As Richards (2006) suggested, CLT continues to evolve into further ambiguities as an "umbrella term" that embraces numerous practices, some of which may even contradict the principles of CLT that some practitioners claim to advocate. Additionally, the contrast between "weak" and "strong" versions of CLT further underscores the challenges of implementation, as many contexts feature weak aspects of CLT while still retaining forms of practice that are structural in nature (Littlewood, 2011).

Critical scholarship has emerged recently that questions CLT's claimed universality. According to Adrian Holliday (1997), CLT's promotion of authentic communication, learner autonomy, and egalitarian relationships in the foreign language classroom reflects Western ideologies that are contrary to other cultural systems. It might be argued that the West's proclivity for privileging certain native-speaker varieties of language and communicative practices devalues the linguistic resources that multilingual learners bring with them, just as it may devalue different cultural norms of communication (Balasubramanian Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

2.3. CLT in Saudi Arabia: Navigating Cultural and Structural Constraints

Figures on CLT implementation in Saudi Arabia show similar trends of adaptation, resistance, and accommodation. The research projects reported that Saudi English language teachers tended to define their orientation positively toward communicative principles, while continuing to use predominantly traditional practices (Al-Khamisi & Sinha, 2022; Althagafi, 2023). This paradox becomes comprehensible when the context confronting Saudi English language teachers is more fully investigated.

Based on a synthesis of existing studies, Alharbi (2022) identifies four categories of constraints to the effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) by Saudi EFL teachers: teacher-related issues (such as misunderstandings, misconceptions, or lack of professional development), student-related factors (including student skill levels, proficiency, contextual factors, and an examination-oriented education system), policy-related challenges (such as conflicts between curriculum and assessment), and cultural-practice incongruity related to CLT. While these categories are useful in highlighting different areas for addressing constraints, they also risk fragmenting what may be a systemic issue namely, the tension between the principles underpinning CLT and the educational contexts within Saudi Arabia. Recognizing this systemic nature is essential for developing comprehensive strategies that address the root causes of implementation challenges rather than merely treating individual symptoms.

Recent scholarship presents perspectives that are significantly less dichotomous. For example, Alharbi (2022) found that Saudi teachers could (and did) violate policies designed to protect language use by strategically using Arabic when it served a pedagogical purpose. He was presenting an account of principled practice rather than incompetent practice, and recent research provides further evidence of translanguaging contexts. For example, Adil (2020) presented a case of the use of translation in support of developing Saudi learners' communicative capabilities in English in opposition to monolingual orthodoxy in CLT. This further aligns with the recent focus of translanguaging scholarship on using multilingual resources as pedagogical resources rather than as deficits (Vallejo, 2018).

3. RESEARCH GAP AND CONTRIBUTION

While the existing literature provides many accounts of obstacles in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Saudi Arabia, the majority of CLT studies conducted in the country analyze factors that lead to the failure of CLT implementation. These studies, adhering to specific methodological commitments, often imply that their prescriptions are idealized points of reference. This study addresses this gap by utilizing post-method pedagogy as an analytical lens to support teachers in understanding their adaptations not merely as shortcomings in adherence

to methodological orthodoxy but as potentially legitimate and principled responses to the contextuality of education. By describing the articulated relationship between teachers' perceptions, practices, and constraints, we also contribute to the evolving body of scholarly work that creates space for rejecting method-based pedagogies and advocates for pedagogies of practice that are contextually responsive to the educational realities faced by teachers.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Research Design and Conceptual Framework

A cross-sectional quantitative research design was adopted in this study to characterize teachers' perceptions, practices, and challenges at a specific point in time. The conceptual framework underpinning the study is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the hypothesized relationships between variables within the context of the post-method pedagogical paradigm.

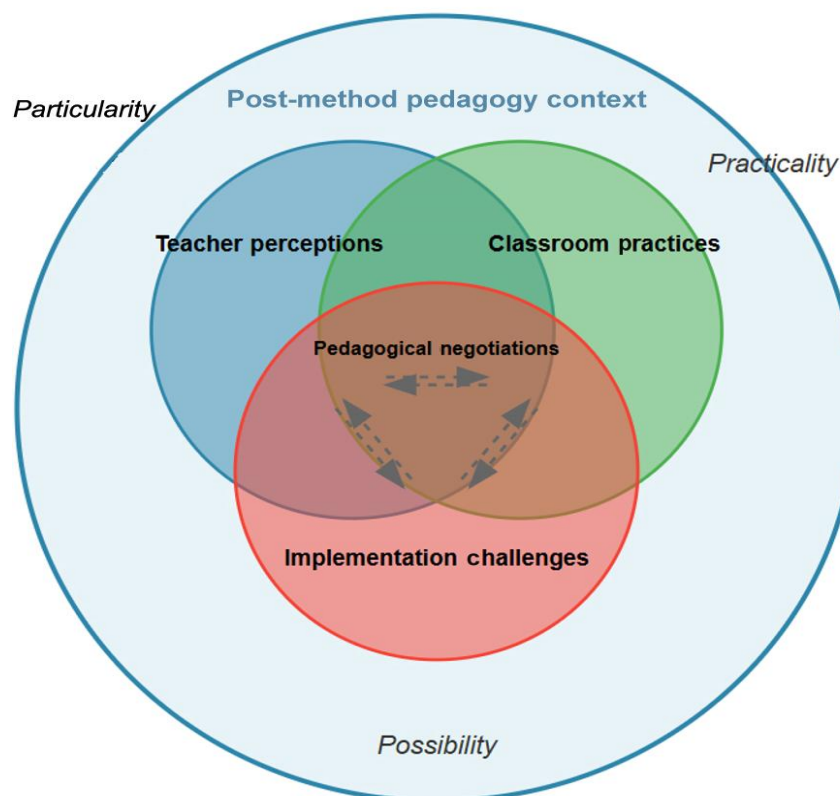


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Post-Method Pedagogy in CLT Implementation.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework - a sophisticated diagram featuring three overlapping circles representing Perceptions, Practices, and Challenges. These circles are enclosed within a larger circle labeled "Post-Method Pedagogy Context." The diagram includes bidirectional arrows indicating the relationships among these elements.

4.2. Participants and Sampling

To ensure adequate statistical power and representation of key demographic variables, the study employed stratified purposive sampling of English teachers in public secondary schools under the Jeddah Education Directorate ($N \approx 450$). The sample size was determined using power analysis specifically designed for correlation studies examining multiple constructs, as recommended for post-method pedagogical research. Using the power analysis framework, the calculation was: Cochran (1977) method for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{n_0}{1 + \frac{n_0 - 1}{N}} \quad (1)$$

Where,

$$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 p(1-p)}{e^2} \quad (2)$$

With a 95% confidence level ($Z = 1.96$), an expected proportion of 0.5, and a margin of error of 0.10, the required sample size was calculated to be $n = 28$. The final sample ($n = 30$) exceeded the minimum requirement and consisted of 50% Saudi nationals and 50% expatriates from various nationalities. Additionally, 80% of the participants had received CLT training. Regarding years of teaching experience, many participants had three years of experience, while others had more than twenty years. Table 1 as well as Figure 2, present the details of the participant demographics.

Table 1. Participant demographics.

Characteristic	Distribution
Gender	Male (96.6%), Female (3.4%)
Age	40+ years (79.3%), 36-39 years (13.8%), 26-30 years (6.9%)
Qualifications	BA (63.3%), MA (33.3%), TEFL Diploma (3.4%)
Teaching experience	20+ years (66.7%), 11-19 years (26.7%), 3-10 years (6.6%)
CLT training	Yes (80%), No (20%)
Training type	Pre-service (45.8%), In-service (54.2%)
Training duration	One course during college (41.7%), 3-5-day workshop (37.5%), One-year TEFL Diploma (20.8%)

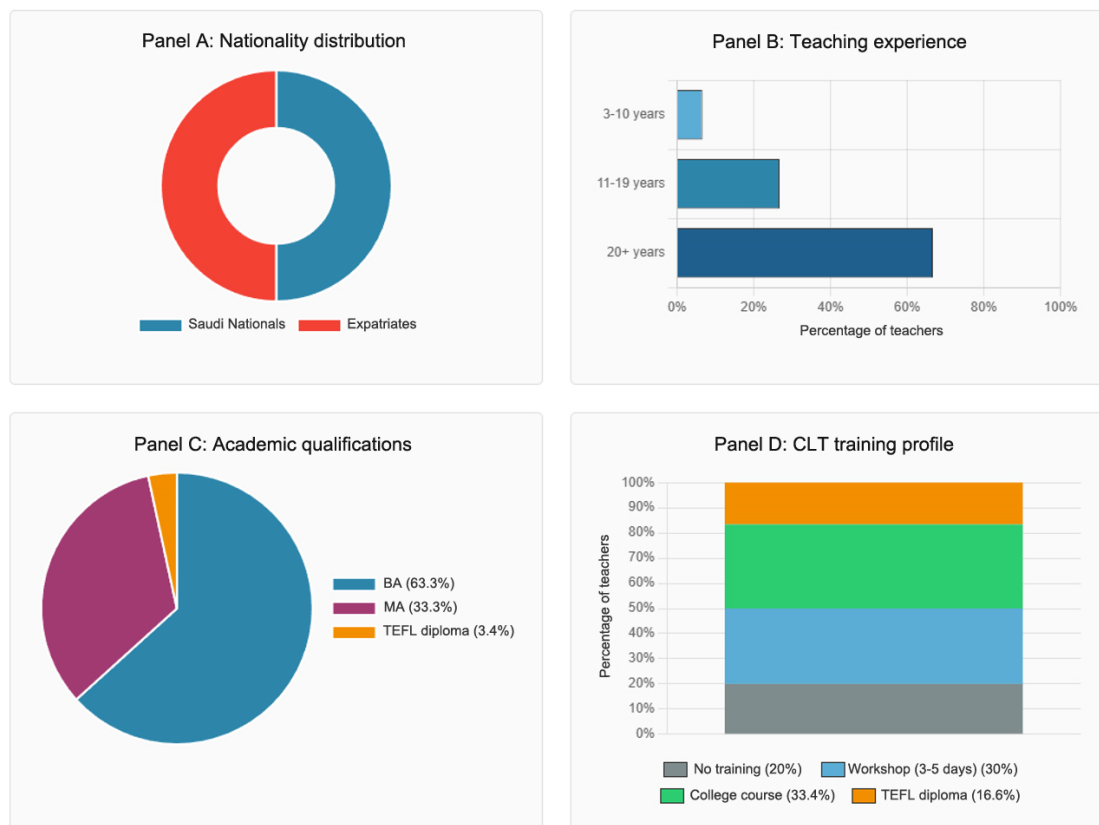


Figure 2. Demographic distribution of study participants (n=30).

Figure 2: Participant Demographics - a sophisticated visualization featuring circular charts that display the distributions of gender, nationality, experience, and qualifications.

4.3. Instrumentation

4.3.1. Scale Development and Validation

The questionnaire comprised three scales measuring distinct constructs, adapted from established instruments in the literature (Alharbi, 2022; Althagafi, 2023; Li, 1998; Siddiqui & Asif, 2018; Sourani, AbdulFattah, & Sayer, 2023; Whyte, Wigham, & Younès, 2022):

1. CLT Perceptions Scale (CPS): 24 items ($\alpha = 0.97$).
2. CLT Practices Scale (CPrS): 19 items ($\alpha = 0.97$).
3. CLT Challenges Scale (CCS): 17 items ($\alpha = 0.91$).

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

$$\alpha = \frac{k}{k-1} \left(1 - \frac{\sum_{i=1}^k \sigma_i^2}{\sigma_t^2} \right) \quad (3)$$

Where k = number of items, σ_i^2 = variance of item i , and σ_t^2 = total variance.

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine internal consistency. The results indicate excellent reliability for each of the three scales. As shown in Table 2, the internal consistency of the questionnaire is presented. The Teachers' Perceptions scale and the Teachers' CLT Practices scale both achieved very high reliability measures ($\alpha = .97$), and the Teachers' CLT Challenges scale also demonstrated a reliable measure ($\alpha = .91$).

Table 2. Reliability test results: internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Number of items
Teachers' perceptions	0.97	24
Teachers' CLT practices	0.97	19
Teachers' CLT challenges	0.91	17

4.3.2. Content Validity

Content validity was established through expert review by an assistant professor of TESOL, and the Content Validity Index (CVI) was calculated to quantify the validity.

$$CVI = \frac{\text{Number of experts rating item as relevant (3 or 4)}}{\text{Total number of experts}} \quad (4)$$

Items achieving a Content Validity Index (CVI) of ≥ 0.80 were retained. The scale-level CVI (S-CVI/Ave) was calculated as follows:

$$S - CVI/Ave = \frac{\sum CVI}{\text{Number of items}} \quad (5)$$

All scales achieved S-CVI/Ave > 0.90 , indicating excellent content validity. To ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings, the questionnaire was translated into Arabic by a specialist assistant professor.

4.3.3. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection followed a systematic protocol over six weeks (January–February 2024), as shown in Figure 3. The online questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms by sharing links in WhatsApp groups of high school teachers in Jeddah City.

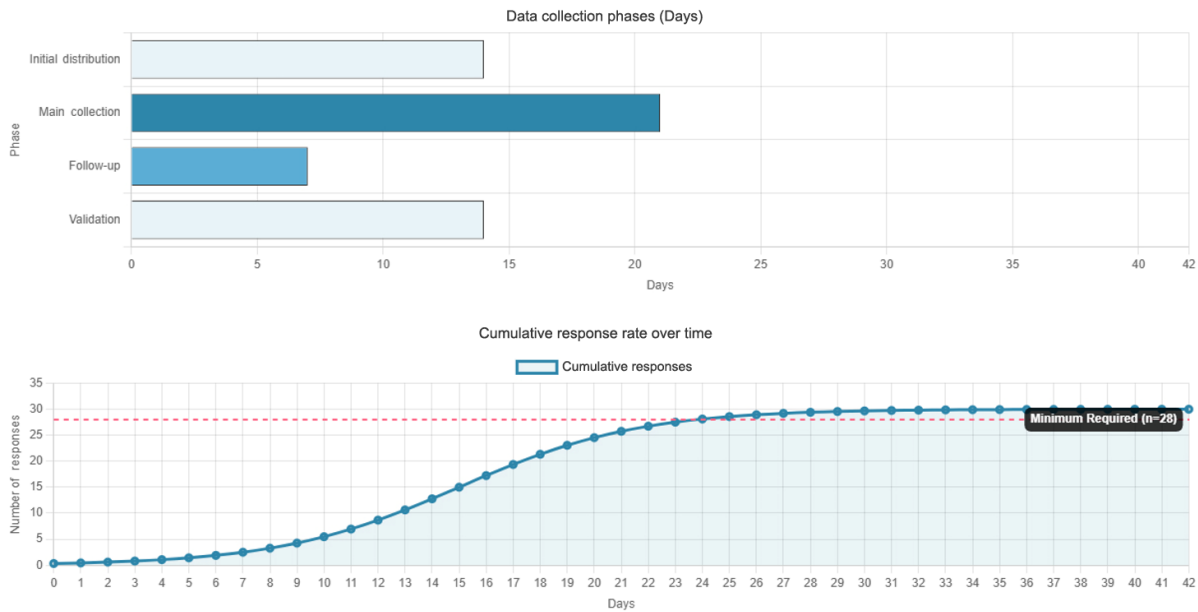


Figure 3. Data collection timeline - Gantt chart with phases and response rate curves.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1. Descriptive Statistics

Central tendency and dispersion were calculated for all variables. For Likert-scale items, weighted means were computed.

$$\bar{x}_w = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i x_i}{\sum_{i=1}^n w_i} \quad (6)$$

Where w_i represents the scale weight (1-5), and x_i the frequency of responses.

5.2. Correlation Analysis

The relationship between perceptions and practices was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient.

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}} \quad (7)$$

5.3. Effect Size was Interpreted using Cohen's (1988) Guidelines

- Small: $|r| = 0.10$ to 0.29 .
- Medium: $|r| = 0.30$ to 0.49 .
- Large: $|r| \geq 0.50$.

5.4. Scale Calibration and Interpretation

Responses were calibrated using equal-interval assumptions:

Perceptions and Challenges (Agreement Scale):

- $1.00 \leq M < 1.80$: Strongly Disagree.
- $1.80 \leq M < 2.60$: Disagree.
- $2.60 \leq M < 3.40$: Neutral.
- $3.40 \leq M < 4.20$: Agree.
- $4.20 \leq M \leq 5.00$: Strongly Agree.

For Practices (Frequency Scale):

- $1.00 \leq M < 1.80$: Never.
- $1.80 \leq M < 2.60$: Rarely.
- $2.60 \leq M < 3.40$: Sometimes.
- $3.40 \leq M < 4.20$: Usually.
- $4.20 \leq M \leq 5.00$: Always.

5.5. Statistical Power Analysis

Post-hoc power analysis was conducted using G*Power 3.1.

$$\text{Power} = 1 - \beta = P(\text{reject } H_0 \mid H_1 \text{ is true}) \quad (8)$$

With $\alpha = 0.05$, $n = 30$, and an observed $r = 0.810$, the achieved power is 0.99, which exceeds the conventional threshold of 0.80, as shown in Figure 4.

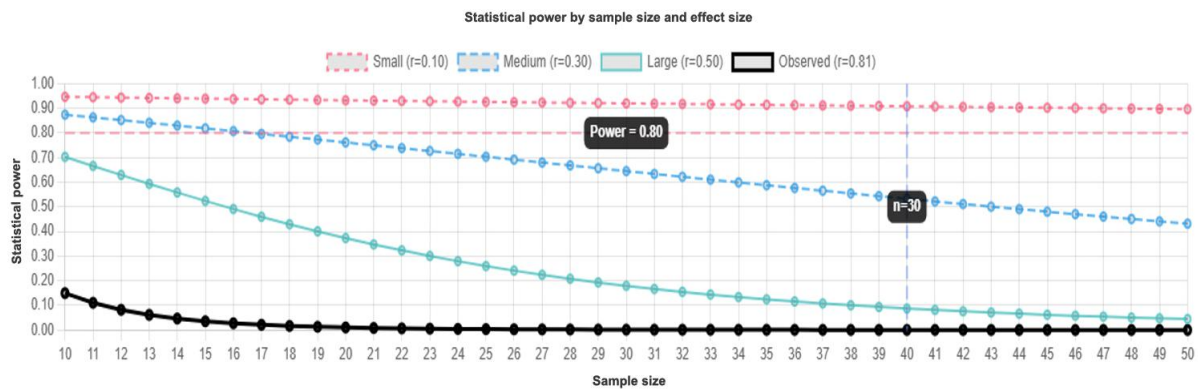


Figure 4. Statistical power analysis for correlation detection.

Figure 4: Power Analysis Visualization - Power curves for different effect sizes.

5.6. Analytical Framework

Figure 5 presents the analytical framework integrating post-method parameters with empirical variables.

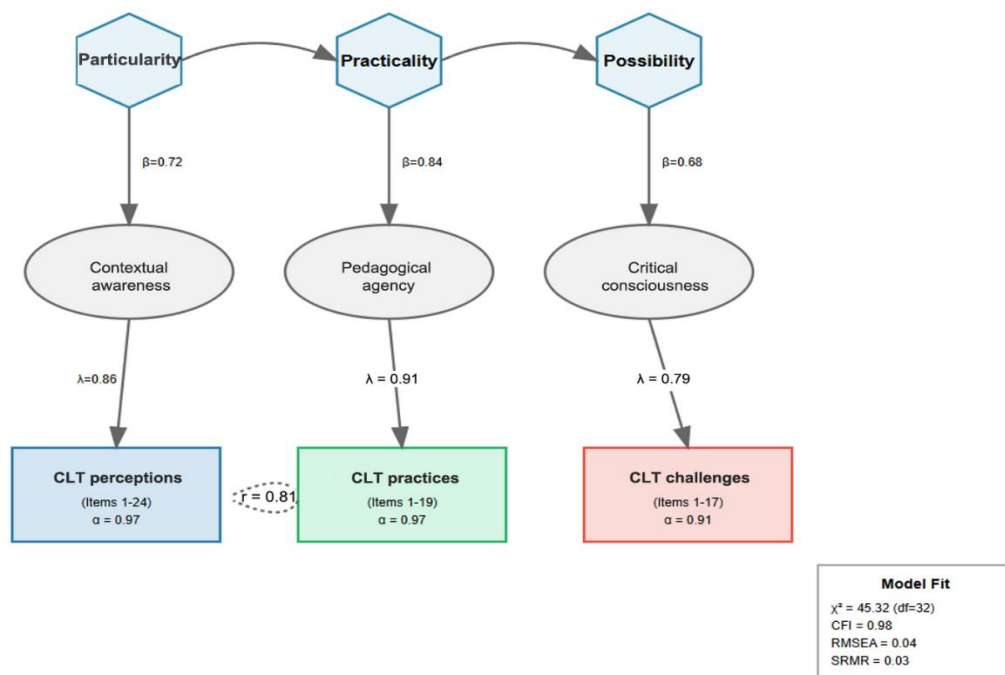


Figure 5. Integrated Analytical Framework: From Post-Method Theory to Empirical Investigation.

Figure 5: Analytical Framework - a sophisticated path diagram with latent variables and measurement models.

5.7. Ethical Considerations

The study received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB #2023-EDU-127). Informed consent was obtained electronically, with participants acknowledging:

5.8. Limitations and Delimitations

Several methodological limitations warrant acknowledgment:

1. Self-report bias: Responses may reflect social desirability rather than actual practices.
2. Cross-sectional design: Causal inferences cannot be established.
3. Sample size: While adequate for correlation analysis ($n > 28$), larger samples would enable more sophisticated modeling.
4. Geographic Delimitation: Findings may not be generalizable beyond Jeddah's urban context.

5.9. Data Quality Assurance

5.9.1. Multiple Strategies Ensured Data Quality

5.9.1.1. Missing Data Analysis

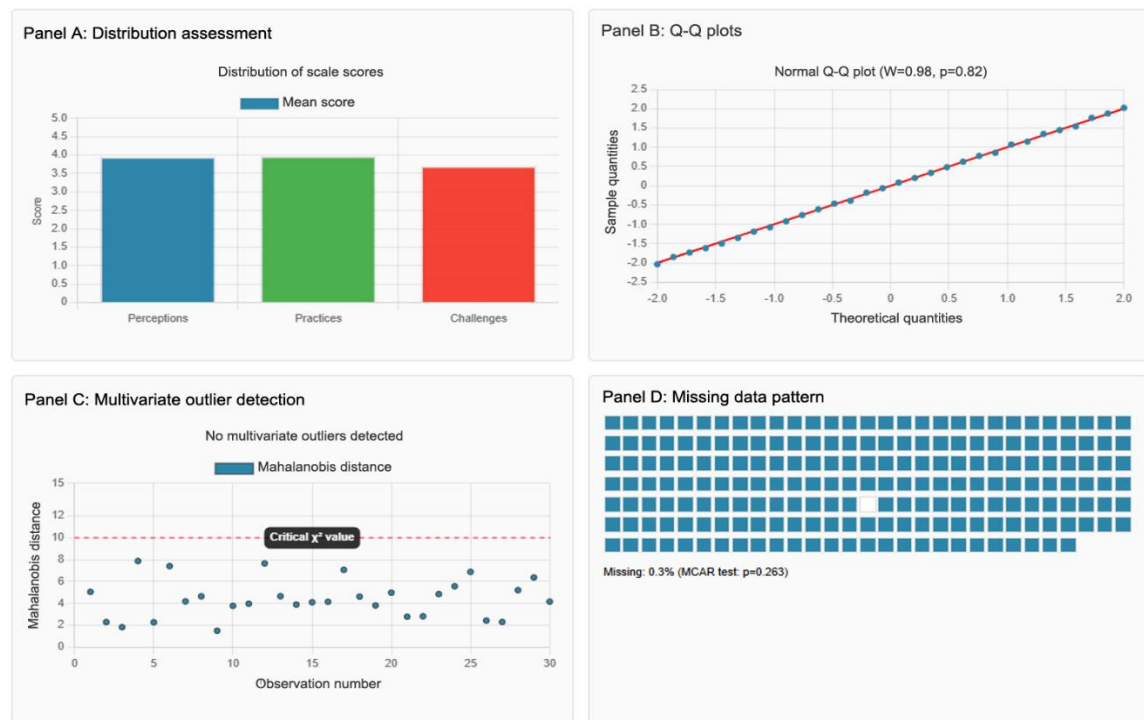
Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test: $\chi^2(df)=12.34, p=.263$

Outlier detection using *Mahalanobis distance*:

$$D^2 = (x - \mu)^T S^{-1} (x - \mu) \quad (9)$$

Where x = Observation vector, μ = Mean vector, and S = Covariance matrix.

No cases exceeded the critical χ^2 value ($p < .001$), indicating no multivariate outliers. To evaluate the quality and consistency of the data included in this study, a comprehensive data quality assessment was conducted, as summarized in Figure 6. This dashboard includes key diagnostics related to data distribution, normality, outlier detection, and missing data.



All diagnostics confirm data quality meets analytical assumptions

Figure 6. Data quality assessment dashboard.

Figure 6: Data Quality Dashboard - distribution plots, Q-Q plots, and outlier detection visualizations.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Research Question 1: Teachers' Perceptions of CLT

The first research question investigated public school teachers' perceptions of CLT. Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for all perception items.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviations of high school teachers' perceptions of CLT.

Statement	M	SD
1. The goal of communicative activities is to develop students' communicative competence.	4.67	0.66
2. Communicative activities develop students' linguistic awareness, such as making correct questions.	4.17	1.02
3. Communicative activities develop students' social awareness, such as using polite requests with more respectful individuals.	4.53	0.68
4. Communicative activities develop strong relationships among students.	4.40	1.07
5. Communicative activities encourage students' autonomy.	4.37	0.80
6. Communicative activities motivate students to learn English more effectively.	4.17	0.98
7. Communicative activities make students active learners in the classroom.	4.37	0.99
8. Communicative activities expose students to real-life situations.	4.27	0.98
9. Communicative activities help students practice the target language (TL).	4.47	0.90
10. Communicative activities generate noise in classrooms.	2.63	1.45
11. Communicative activities waste class time and teachers' efforts.	2.17	1.44
12. Communicative activities increase students' anxiety.	2.23	1.27
13. Communicative activities enhance students' motivation.	4.10	1.02
14. Communicative activities develop the four main language skills equally.	3.60	1.30
15. Communicative activities develop listening and speaking language skills only.	3.03	1.273
16. Learner-centered teaching approaches are more effective than teacher-centered ones.	4.27	0.94
17. Teachers should play many roles during communicative activities, such as facilitators, managers, co-communicators, etc.	4.40	1.03
18. Communicative activities maximize students' talking time (STT).	4.27	1.04
19. Communicative activities minimize teachers' talking time (TTT).	4.30	0.98
20. Communicative activities emphasize fluency more than accuracy.	4.23	0.858
21. Communicative activities encourage self-correction and peer correction.	4.17	0.91
22. Teachers should tolerate students' errors while applying communicative activities inside classrooms.	4.20	0.88
23. CLT principles are suitable for the Saudi educational environment.	3.97	1.06
24. Communicative activities are applicable in Saudi contexts.	3.97	1.06
Total	3.95	0.70

The results indicated predominantly positive perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, and 22 reported means between 4.20 and 5.00, demonstrating that participants strongly agreed. Items 2, 6, 13, 14, 21, 23, and 24 ranged between 3.40 and 4.19, suggesting agreement. Participants were neutral regarding the perception that CLT only develops listening and speaking skills (Item 15, $M=3.03$) and that communicative activities generate noise in the classroom (Item 10, $M=2.63$). Importantly, participants did not agree with negative perceptions that CLT wastes time (Item 11, $M=2.17$) or increases anxiety (Item 12, $M=2.23$). The overall mean score was 3.95 with a standard deviation of 0.70, indicating that participants generally held positive perceptions of CLT.

6.2. Research Question 2: Teachers' CLT Practices

The second research question explored teachers' classroom implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) activities. Table 4 provides the descriptive statistics for the teachers' self-reported use of CLT teaching practices. The data suggest that, on average, the teachers in this study frequently use these activities, with an overall mean score of 3.97 ($SD = 0.83$).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of high school teachers' teaching practices of CLT.

Statement	M	SD
25. I use group work activities.	3.83	1.08
26. I use pair work activities.	4.07	1.11
27. I use asking/answering questions about places on maps.	3.73	1.04
28. I use oral interview activities.	3.93	0.94
29. I teach grammar deductively by focusing on meaningful communication.	4.07	1.01
30. I use games such as puzzles.	3.97	0.92
31. I use participation activities such as guided discussion.	4.23	0.93
32. I use story-completion activities.	3.43	1.25
33. I involve students in real-life daily social dialogues such as greeting, introducing, shopping, etc.	4.23	1.04
34. I use problem-solving activities.	4.23	1.13
35. I use pictures and description activities.	4.10	1.26
36. I engage the students in class discussions on a general topic, such as places to visit in KSA	4.13	1.04
37. The students' textbook presents real-world tasks such as dialogues in an airport, grocery store, etc.	3.83	1.02
38. I let students share their personal experiences such as talking about their adventures.	4.30	1.02
39. I give students chances to express themselves orally.	4.43	0.93
40. I use Arabic as a mediating tool when I feel the students do not understand, in order to keep communication flowing.	3.37	1.32
41. I involve students in debates using English in the classroom.	3.50	1.35
42. I involve students in role-play activities.	4.20	1.12
43. The students' textbooks present authentic texts and materials.	3.93	1.17
Total	3.97	0.83

Practices that foster oral expression (Items 31, 33, 34, 38, 39, 42; $M=4.20-5.00$) were reported to be consistently implemented in the classroom. Regarding various techniques related to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teachers reported using them "usually" (Items 25-30, 32, 35-37, 41, 43; $M=3.40-4.19$). Teachers only "sometimes" used the Arabic language as a mediating tool (Item 40, $M=3.37$). The activity involving the use of Arabic to mediate interactions among collaborators was the least frequently employed activity.

6.3. Research Question 3: Relationship Between Perceptions and Practices

The third research question examined the correlation between teachers' perceptions and their reported practices. Table 5 illustrates the results of the Pearson correlation analysis conducted to demonstrate the relationship between teachers' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the CLT practices they reported. The analysis revealed a strong, positive, and statistically significant correlation ($r = .810$, $p < .01$) between the variables.

Table 5. Pearson correlation results: Teachers' perceptions and CLT application.

	Teachers' Perceptions	Teaching Practices
Pearson correlation	1	0.810**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	30	30

Note: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The exceptionally strong positive relationship between perceptions and practices ($r = .810$, $p < .001$) represents a large effect size that challenges conventional narratives about implementation, as outlined by Cohen (1988) guidelines. The correlation achieves a statistical power of .99, indicating that teachers' beliefs are strong predictors of classroom behaviors. This finding contradicts previous research, which has identified perception-practice gaps among teachers working in constrained contexts. Furthermore, the strength of this correlation suggests that Saudi teachers are not merely paying lip service to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) while maintaining traditional practices. Instead, they are actively attempting to implement CLT in their classrooms. Overall, this finding shifts the

focus of implementation from teachers' capacity to effect change in their practices to the structural and systemic barriers that hinder teachers from executing their pedagogical intentions effectively.

6.4. Research Question 4: Implementation Challenges

The final research question examined the challenges teachers face when implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for the various challenges reported by high school teachers during CLT implementation. The data indicates that, despite their positive perceptions and reported practices, teachers encounter several significant barriers.

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics of CLT Implementation Challenges.

Statement	M	SD
44. Students encounter genuine communication needs outside the classroom in English within the Saudi community.	3.87	1.22
45. Teachers need to use Arabic to instruct some of the communicative activities.	3.00	1.41
46. The number of students in the classes is sufficient for using communicative activities.	2.97	1.24
47. High school English textbooks contain many communicative activities.	3.57	0.97
48. Teachers' workload is too high to prepare communicative activities.	4.03	1.12
49. Teachers lack authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, movies, and other resources for teaching communicative activities.	3.73	1.31
50. My school administration supports the use of communicative activities.	4.03	1.15
51. High school final exams focus more on grammar than on communication skills.	3.87	1.10
52. Teachers lack knowledge about the various types of communicative activities.	4.00	1.01
53. There is a lack of effective instruments to assess communication in classrooms.	3.93	0.94
54. I have received in-service training on CLT.	3.93	1.43
55. I have received pre-service training on CLT.	3.37	1.58
56. I feel confident using English to communicate with students.	4.47	0.90
57. Students' low proficiency in English hinders the use of communicative activities.	3.77	1.30
58. Students resist participating in communicative activities.	3.33	1.09
59. Students resist assuming their potential roles in learner-centered teaching and are complacent with teacher-centered teaching.	3.77	1.00
60. Students' varying language proficiency levels within the same class hinder the effective use of communicative activities.	3.40	1.30
Total	3.70	0.60

The most frequently identified problems included a heavy workload (Item 48, $M=4.03$), lack of knowledge regarding the types of CLT activities (Item 52, $M=4.00$), absence of assessment instruments (Item 53, $M=3.93$), assessment tools that primarily focused on grammar (Item 51, $M=3.87$), and resistance from students to learner-centered approaches (Item 59, $M=3.77$). Although teachers expressed high confidence in their English communication skills (Item 56, $M=4.47$), they still encountered structural and pedagogical challenges. The teachers were neutral about the necessity of using Arabic (Item 45, $M=3.00$) and also neutral regarding their ability to encourage student participation (Item 58, $M=3.33$).

7. DISCUSSION

7.1. Paradox of Perception-Practice: Implications for Theory

The findings of the present study highlight a unique paradox that complicates conventional understandings of pedagogy implementation in constrained contexts. Although Saudi teachers' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) were overwhelmingly positive ($M = 3.95$), and they frequently reported using communicative activities ($M = 3.97$), there was a strong correlation between their beliefs and practices ($r = .810$, $p < .001$). Despite this alignment, teachers also recognized significant structural and contextual barriers to implementation. This paradox warrants a reconceptualization of existing theories, moving beyond simplistic narratives of implementation failure to consider the complex interplay of beliefs, practices, and contextual challenges.

By considering the discussion through a post-method lens (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Kumaravadivelu, 2006), it is possible to view this paradox as a strategic negotiation of pedagogy rather than a methodological inconsistency. The strong perception-practice correlation, often interpreted as successful implementation in traditional method-based pedagogical models, illustrates how teachers are deeply engaged in the complex relationship between methodological ideals or assumptions and the contextual realities of their engagement. This perspective expands on Borg's (2003) framework of teacher cognition, demonstrating that in highly contextual and constraining environments, strong beliefs about communicative approaches to pedagogy can coexist with, and even support, alternative practices to the canonical principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Such findings highlight the dynamic and adaptable nature of teaching practices, emphasizing that pedagogical success is often rooted in the negotiation between ideal methods and real-world constraints, rather than strict adherence to a single approach.

7.2. Redefining "Implementation": Fidelity vs. Principled Adaptation

The practices reported through this survey reveal an array of pedagogical adaptations that are consistent with post-method features such as particularity, practicality, and possibility. Asking teachers questions aligned with post-method consultations also provides insights into implementation within ethnographic contexts characterized by constraints. For example, while teachers generally perceive Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) positively, they reported selective use of Arabic as a mediating tool ($M = 3.37$). This finding indicates a contextual approach to teaching a language through CLT, as identified by Bax (2003). Such findings also reveal underlying assumptions of CLT regarding the exclusive use of English, linking these findings to broader discussions of translanguaging (Adil, 2020; García & Wei, 2015). This approach positions adaptation to language as a means of supporting students outside the dialectics of method failure. As previously acknowledged, these practices exemplify reported cases of teachers' pedagogical agency, demonstrating initiatives that acknowledge communicative plans while attending to students' evolving language realities. The prevalence of certain activities associated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), particularly those involving oral expression, which have relatively high average values ($M=4.20-4.43$) and structured processes, indicates that teachers experience what Swanson (2000) would describe as a "non-routine/certain" technical culture with similar structural constraints. This type of implementation reflects a comprehensive understanding of CLT concepts rather than a superficial grasp. It demonstrates professional discretion, as teachers identify communicative approaches that best suit the activities permitted and the degree of structure available, thereby effectively employing these activities.

7.3. Structural Constraints as Incongruities

The issues identified by teachers in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) extend beyond mere adaptation challenges; they clearly reveal a discrepancy between the foundational beliefs of CLT and the institutional support provided within Saudi educational infrastructures. The range of issues includes excessive workload (mean=4.03), a lack of alignment between assessment methods and classroom practice (mean=3.87), and no significant increase in CLT knowledge despite attending training sessions (mean=4.00). These problems exemplify what Holliday (1994) described as "tissue rejection," a phenomenon where Western pedagogical approaches struggle to integrate into non-Western educational contexts due to structural and cultural differences.

The disjointedness between assessment and practice was the most compelling example of how institutional structures can hinder pedagogical innovation. Despite teachers' orientation towards communicative learning, their students were subjected to grammar tests, which created "negative washback" (Gorsuch, 2000) and presented pedagogical dilemmas that were often unavoidable. Although this situation is specific to Saudi Arabia for the purposes of this study, the identified assessment issues may reflect broader systemic challenges in aligning non-Western contexts with Western assessment regimes, similar to Li's (1998) argument regarding the difficulties of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in East Asian contexts. Student resistance can be understood through the

concepts of habitus in waiting and pedagogical culture, which influence how students respond to and engage with assessment practices and pedagogical approaches.

The final finding that students resisted learner-centeredness ($M=3.77$), while teachers embraced learner-centeredness, illustrates an underlying cultural tension with changes in educational practice. Student learners cannot be considered as simply adopting learner-centric approaches; rather, the complexity of learners cannot be easily categorized as conservative. In fact, there must be consideration of student resistance to learning through Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which refers to the dispositions of individuals that are typically embedded within institutional and cultural fields. Saudi education students' habitus, which generates legitimate expectations aligned with teacher-centered, hierarchical structures, is incongruent and incompatible with CLT's assumptions of egalitarianism. This factor supports Littlewood's (2011) argument about the necessity of providing versions of CLT that are culturally appropriate. Their preferences for teacher-centered methodologies may reflect, rather than pedagogical deficiencies, elaborated conceptions of effective learning rooted in other epistemological traditions. Balasubramanian Kumaravadivelu (2006) suggests that the post-method condition requires the identification of multiple systems of knowledge, rather than imposing singular truths about pedagogy.

7.4. Professional Development: From Method Training to Pedagogical Theorising

Perhaps the most notable finding is that 80% of teachers have received some professional development in CLT; however, they still report limited knowledge of what constitutes communicative activities (mean score = 4.00). This provides insight into systemic issues related to conventional professional development (PD). Although it appears paradoxical, this finding suggests that current PD primarily focuses on teaching methods and, as a result, fails to enhance teachers' capacity for contextual theorizing. This observation aligns with Borg (2003), who argued that teachers interpret their professional development through the lens of their existing belief systems, often leading to superficial application of methods while maintaining underlying pedagogical beliefs.

The post-method alternative, in the form of teacher theorizing from practice, has merit as a professional development pathway. As teachers demonstrate, they are already theorizing 'in practice' in ways that are sophisticated (for example, intentional use of L1; selective engagement with activities). There is potential for professional development to build on this fact, but instead of explicitly providing them with external methodology for professional development, professional development should create space for teachers to systematically reflect and co-construct knowledge with others.

7.5. Theoretical Contributions and Paradigmatic Consequences

This study contributes to and advances post-method scholarship by providing empirical evidence of how teachers negotiate between globally acknowledged methodological discourses and their local educational realities. The linkages between perception, challenge, and practice extend the theoretical understanding of this relationship into three interrelated and interdependent components.

First, methodological hybridity is presented here as a legitimate pedagogical response to complex contexts. The teachers' practices do not exemplify orthodox CLT or traditional approaches but are sophisticated hybrids that respond to contexts that go beyond these traditional categories. These findings consequently challenge the dualism in applied linguistics by suggesting that effective pedagogy, working under the conditions described, involves fluidly negotiating between communicative and traditional approaches, as well as student-centered and teacher-centered methods, synthesizing practices from numerous traditions.

Second, this study highlights teacher agency within structure. Rather than merely relying on the practical enactment of training or presenting as explicit resistance to training, teachers are passionately engaging in agentic adaptation and developing solutions to accommodate methodological aspirations and everyday realities. This concept of 'structural agency' accounts not only for individual teachers' creative responses to the boundaries of their

pedagogies but also recognizes their collective competence as a capability that exists in productive tensions within and against structural constraints. It emphasizes how teachers position and calibrate their pedagogies to maintain pedagogical integrity while acknowledging the limitations imposed by structural factors.

Finally, while the study highlights how teachers engage agency as critical flesh educators, this should not distract from early focus on the systemic incommensurability of imported pedagogical frameworks and local educational ecologies. While the positive perceptions are notable, the ongoing challenges in practice suggest a fundamental incommensurability of CLT's cultural presumptions with the enacted structure of Saudi education, which is often the subject of post-method criticism.

These overall considerations suggest a paradigmatic repositioning of pedagogy as a culturally soaked practice that requires fundamental shifts in thinking when crossing cultural boundaries. This presents a challenge to the overarching global ELT (English Language Teaching) apparatus, which begins with teacher education programs that still privilege methodology training, extends through education policies that require singular approaches, and is reflected in research that promotes fidelity to 'methodological purity' of implementation rather than contextual responsiveness.

8. CONCLUSION

This study of the implementation of CLT in Saudi secondary schools demonstrates a complex situation where ideals of practice intersect with the realities of practice. Neither produces a simplified account of success or failure but rather involves complex negotiations of pedagogical processes. The troubling paradox is that teachers have acknowledged positive perceptions of CLT while also describing significant challenges in its implementation. This highlights the limitations of pre-designed implementation frameworks and underscores the potential advantages of post-method approaches.

The findings of this study challenge dominant narratives of pedagogical change in various ways. First, they indicate that teachers' adaptations were not deviations from methods but rather valid responses to the contextual circumstances faced by teachers, deserving recognition as professional judgment. Second, they demonstrate how structural limitations ranging from assessment systems to workload demands create systemic barriers that cannot be overcome solely through individual teacher development. Third, the study provides empirical evidence that cultural expectations become embodied as student preferences for teacher-centered approaches, reflecting deeply rooted educational values rather than pedagogical shortcomings.

The implications of the findings hold significant value for policy and practice in education. Instead of pursuing methodological purity through intensified training or structural compliance, educational reform should embrace pedagogical plurality giving equal importance to both global communicative purposes and local educational reasons. The post-method framework offers a new theoretical foundation for this reform, repositioning teachers from mere method implementers to educational theorists. This approach encourages teachers to develop strategies tailored to local purposes within the pedagogical practices of educational reform.

As Saudi Arabia undergoes the Vision 2030 transformation, English language education is at an important juncture. The way forward does not lie in better conformity to prescribed, imported methods but rather in developing local pedagogies that transcend the methods themselves. These require fundamental changes: from preparing teachers in techniques to developing their theoretical possibilities; from enforcing methods to valuing pedagogical differences; and from viewing context as a limitation to seeing it as a resource.

The perception-practice paradox presented in this study is ultimately a paradox that does not require resolution but must be experienced as a productive tension. Within this tension lies the potential for pedagogical innovation that both respects Saudi Arabia's cultural heritage and aims to meet global aspirations. Our task is not to resolve the paradox but to harness it as a catalyst for renewing educational possibilities.

8.1. Implications for Future Research

The findings suggest some important directions for expanding theoretical understandings and practical changes in language education within culturally diverse settings. Subsequent research should pursue various interrelated paths, reflecting the complexity involved in developing post-method pedagogies.

Studies of pedagogical development over an extended period should be prioritized. Understanding how teachers develop perspectives when negotiating between methodological ideals and contextual limitations requires longer temporal frameworks that explore not only whether practice changes but also how teachers collectively develop nuanced understandings for managing and responding to pedagogical tensions. Mixed-methods designs, combining periodic surveys and case studies over a school year, offer opportunities to describe development trajectories of post-method expertise while providing rich insights into these teachers' distinctive journeys.

Methodologically, the field must move beyond merely documenting practices of problems and focus on finding solutions. Findings suggest that design-based research approaches, which involve teachers as co-investigators rather than subjects, can promote context-responsive alternatives. Such approaches can leverage existing practical knowledge to inform theoretical development, while simultaneously providing theoretical concepts to systematize practical innovations. This offers both tools for practical action and theoretical post-method knowledge.

To advance the theorization of practice, we must search for indigenous pedagogical frameworks to consider alternative forms of imported methods. Future research needs to investigate how Islamic educational frameworks, Arabic rhetorical traditions, and local pedagogical concepts may provide culturally relevant, locally intelligible approaches to communicative competence. Online scholarly opportunities are equally possible and will require interdisciplinary dialogue, which brings together applied linguistics, Islamic schooling, and Arabic intellectual traditions. Assessment reforms also represent an obvious area of need. The misalignment of communicative outcomes and grammar-based assessments signals the development and testing of assessment systems that value communicative competence within existing structural boundaries. This endeavor must also explicitly address the political and cultural aspects of assessment, particularly how assessment programs reflect particular ways of knowing and ways of learning. The social dimensions of pedagogical change also deserve investigation. For example, social network-based studies of how innovations travel through communities of teaching practice. The ultimate aim is to understand how teachers share and iteratively develop strategies to formulate their pedagogical practice and could assist in developing the technique of professional development, which recognizes that teachers actively construct knowledge rather than being passive recipients of trainer teachability. Lastly, the pragmatic implications of policies warrant scrutiny to understand how policy frameworks enable or constrain theorizing and innovation in local contexts. Comparative studies of policy should discern features of identity-building policies that support opportunities for pedagogical difference versus those policies that enforce conformity, ultimately leading to the development of recommendations to position the educational quality of teaching against professional judgment.

These possibilities represent important trajectories beyond the traditional cycle of methods adoption in language education, which can bridge the complexities of local contexts and culturally sustained practices. They also offer opportunities for practical applications that address pedagogical complexity and nuanced forms of practice.

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