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Research Paper

Exploring the Challenges of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach in the EFL Context of Arab Learners

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Abstract

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been the dominant method for teaching English as a Foreign Language in Arabic-speaking countries for over four decades. However, in recent years, there have been criticisms and debates regarding the effectiveness of this approach and its impact on learning outcomes. The present exploratory study investigated this further, involving 206 university students from Lebanon and Jordan. An online questionnaire consisting of four sections was administered via Google Forms in the spring of 2023 to gather the students' responses. To ensure the reliability of the questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability was calculated using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Descriptive and inferential statistics were then employed to address the research questions, including independent samples t-test and the Mann-Whitney U test. The study's findings revealed that CLT continues to cause tension among instructors and Arab students alike. In conclusion, this study suggests solutions for

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acclimatizing CLT to the needs of non-native learners in this poly-lingual and universally interlaced era.

Keywords: Arab World, Communicative Approach, English as a Foreign Language, Education, Grammatical Competence

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1. Introduction

The demand for knowing and being able to properly use foreign languages has been everlasting (Kim, 2020). Such demand derives from the continuing interaction of multiple cultures worldwide for general commerce and informational transactions (Getie, 2020; Papi & Hiver, 2020). Nevertheless, the importance of getting acquainted with foreign languages has drawn a lot of attention in the last 100 years since a strong connection has been established between knowing a language and its renderings in the economy, in general. The assimilation of foreign languages was interlaced with the spread of the colonialist movement within the limits of Arabia back in the 1800s. Concerning this phenomenon, English and French were the dominant foreign languages to learn back in the day, along with native Arabic (Catania, 2022).

Nowadays, the English language is the most powerful second language that L2 learners are taught. It is the framework language for worldwide digital media, universal commerce, technology, education, finance, and foreign policy (Jiang et al., 2023). Considering the transition in the media background over the last years, the requirements of the current EFL learners have altered, too. Specifically, learners should be capable of talking in numerous interactions and construction patterns. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) gave the impression of resolving any issues that former

teaching methods for a second language left hanging based on the following individual causes.

One such cause is that the CLT depends on L2 learners' synergistic engagement in terms of relevant contexts. This synergy revolves around the replication of everyday interaction patterns and highlights the importance of genuine language activities, which are bound to be less structured. CLT's primary leverage is that it aims to ease the flow of language fluency rather than its accuracy; this is what motivates learners further (Aranas, 2023). Problems inherent to this approach include the fact that handling communication in authentic situations has proven to be challenging for L2 learners considering the lack of any structural foundation.

Arab learners face specific challenges and opportunities when acquiring English as a foreign language due to linguistic, cultural, and educational factors. The Arab region encompasses a wide range of countries, each with its unique sociocultural and linguistic characteristics, which influence language teaching and learning practices. Exploring the application of CLT within this context offers valuable insights into its effectiveness and potential adaptations to cater to the specific needs of Arab EFL learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Beginnings of the Communicative Approach

The CLT as far as language learning is concerned emerged in the 1960s, in the United Kingdom. This method was forged to make up for the obvious setbacks of former pedagogical methods concerning language learning. The extensive accumulation of Richards' and Roger's conceptions, also known as CLT, followed the formerly popular approach of Audio-lingualism (Richards et al., 2001). Chomsky (1965) was a vigorous opponent of the audiolingual approach in terms of pedagogy, and he followed a discordant path when the CLT came to the foreground.

Hymes (1972) pinpointed the weaknesses concerning Chomsky's model. These weaknesses revolved around the latter's divergence between competence and performance. According to Hymes, competence and performance were inextricable. He strongly stated that learning a language in terms of meaningful interaction demands a certain fluency concerning the language background and its implementation on behalf of the speaker. Adequate interaction came into being designated by conclusive background interaction (Al Mamun et al., 2022; Farooq, 2015). Aspects of pedagogy align with attributes like suitability and eloquence and not just grammatical precision, as far as fluency is concerned. These attributes result in expressiveness. To quote Canale and Swain, these combined attributes are "getting one's meaning across" (1980, p.15). The audio-lingual approach (AL) does not consist of conditions that accredit appropriate and articulate utterances.

The 16th Annual Conference for the Association for Teachers in Lebanon took place in 2013. During its course, Bax (2013) chose a fictional anecdote that manifested why automated recurrence of AL is not effective:

Teacher: I am standing. What am I doing?

Class: You are standing up.

Teacher: Again.

Class: You are standing up.

Teacher: (pointing with a finger) You -no -you -yes. What's your name?

Pupil: Ngoroge.

Teacher: Ngoroge, stand up [...]

Teacher: What are you doing?

Ngoroge: (thinly) You are standing up.

Teacher: (slightly cross) What are you doing?

Ngoroge: (clears his throat, voice thinner still) You are standing up.

Teacher: No, no! (to the class) Come on. What are you, you doing? (n.p.)

Even though Bax (2013) stressed that this is imaginary, there have been certain workshop copies of his, which indicate that English lessons for

students in the Arab world “illustrate similar patterns of behavior” (Bax, 2013, par. 4). The logic behind this is that mechanical repetition leaves no place for conveyable abilities which would result in students' compliance with an appropriate context regarding the circumstances or even an appropriate context of disparate nature. Angles of automated recurrence such as ignorance regarding the context of utterance and learners' molding on passive grounding used to be language learning attributes that CLT founders aimed to enhance.

Consequently, EFL teachers should consider CLT's fundamental theories while preparing their lessons (Farooq, 2015). Educational exercises must focus on students' communicative adaptation in genuine and practical circumstances to enhance their competence and fluency (Nunan, 1991). The simultaneous alignment of generating incentives and choosing fluency over accuracy has sired complications with applying CLT in a classroom environment. One way to justify this issue is that CLT is not a method that consists of assigned means and applications, rather it is an approach. This implies that EFL teachers have no definite theoretical basis to lean on.

The concept of communicative competence has emerged from a series of characteristics that are part of it since its early articulation by Hymes. There are four elements that Canale and Swain (1980) have specified out of interaction capability:

- 1- Grammatical competence: This is analogous to Chomsky's interpretation of competence (1975). It consists of expertise in linguistic semiotics like terminology proficiency along with guidelines about semantic, grammatical, well-formed, and error-free orthographic rules. All of the above facilitate an application of determined dexterity and mastery on behalf of the speaker,

which ultimately leads to comprehending and scrutinizing the literal meaning of sentences.

- 2- Sociolinguistic competence: This refers to the ability to use language in a variety of social, cultural, and linguistic environments which aligns with Hymes' concept of communicative competence.
- 3- Discourse competence: This involves a command of conventions that enable the speaker to associate form and meaning to accomplish a substantial synthesis of either an oral or inscribed document. According to Canale (1983), both cohesion devices (pronouns, conjunctions, synonyms, etc.) and coherence devices (repetition, consistency of ideas, progression, etc.), establish meaningful combinations of utterances and sentences can be of supplementary value. The logic behind that is to achieve reasonable and purposeful association between spoken or written text.
- 4- Strategic competence: It is the ability to keep communication going when a disruption occurs due to either inadequate expertise or comprehension of a grammatical or communicative tool. Such a course of action involves duplication, use of alternate interpretations, eluding certain words, changing register and style, speculating, and so on.
- 5- Pragmatic competence: This attribute refers to the ability to develop and interpret utterances, discourse, and sociolinguistic conventions rendering the utterance and discourse suitable for a particular context.

Components of communicative competence have been adapted and changed according to various approaches that were proposed and

subsequently used, such as the one proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and the one by Bachman and Palmer (1996). Even so, many approaches indicate their interest in the communicative competence principle. According to these interests, competent speakers need to be aware of the language as well as be capable of adjusting their knowledge regardless of the various communicative situations. Under these circumstances, the development of the learners' communicative competence revolves around the design of the course for the second language (SL), also known as a foreign language (FL), as well as the curriculum and classroom teaching materials.

Thus, CLT is broadly recognized within the language teachers' community. Nevertheless, numerous issues and challenges have impeded the implementation of the said approach in terms of various social-cultural contexts, until today (Sarmin, 2022). CLT's prosperity is obvious mainly in English-speaking contexts where students learn to speak English as a second language. Yet, CLT has repeatedly come up against challenges and issues within such backgrounds. The next section will elucidate the Arabic background where numerous sociocultural, educational, and sociological factors intervene to impede CLT implementation.

2.2 The Communicative Approach in the Arab World

The 1970s was the period when the Arab World embraced the basic framework of CLT. Moreover, the Arab world honored CLT as an answer to the EFL challenges in such backgrounds (Hameed, 2020). EFL teachers in the Arab World referred to the communicative suggestion as a problem-solver since it drew all attention as the preferential approach in universal L2 teaching backgrounds (Al-Khafaji, 2015). According to studies based on the EFL method, implementing CLT in EFL classrooms can iron out fluency issues in the area (Hammad, 2014).

Procedure alterations have acted on changes in the pedagogical movement. Educators, administrators, and professional organizations on the global stage are responsible for such alterations. The educational framework of these determinants has resulted in a powerful alteration regarding procedures as far as the CLT syllabus is concerned (Abbas, 2012). Nevertheless, based on current research, a majority of schools across the Arab region make use of traditional pedagogies with a particular focus on memorization (Hammad, 2014). The typical source material for memorization includes paragraphs, learning new vocabulary by rote as well as duplicating full texts (Coon & Mitterer, 2014).

The application of a learning method based on communication has faced impediments in a variety of backgrounds across the Arab region (Bacha & Bahous, 2011). For example, implementing CLT in Egypt is rather problematic considering the firmly established cultural traditions. The anxiety of insulting their interlocutor or suffering disgrace holds Egyptian students back when they need to articulate their point of view within a team or an assignment (Gahin & Myhill, 2001). Egyptians treat educators as if they were prophets. Such treatment reinforces their power within the classroom and this reality contradicts the communicative principles. The deficiency of Egyptian EFL teachers in sociolinguistic and strategic competence is also an issue of concern.

Saudi Arab students are unlikely to perform well in a communicative classroom for a similar reason to Egyptian students. Several cultural patterns prevailing in Saudi Arabia are opposed to CLT principles such as focusing on group work and learning based on students' capabilities (AlHarbi, 2022). Saudi Arabian educational authorities question the positive influence of teamwork, oral practice, and the teachers' ability to alter the perception of

their role. Moreover, since the majority of EFL teachers are not English native speakers, such an attitude benefits cultural continuity.

Operating communicative classes in the Arab World runs into one more impediment. There is a shortage of CLT experts who can professionally educate EFL teachers. For instance, in Morocco EFL teachers are reported to favor the old grammar-translation approach to CLT. Working in pairs or groups is disfavored for they lack the CLT techniques that could help in managing communicative practices structured as such (ElBoubekri, 2022).

An important CLT objective is to captivate students in authentic communication to enhance their communicative competence. Therefore, this objective should be a priority in their textbook drafts. Yet, Iraqi teachers have not replaced the teaching methods that revolve around grammar while teaching using the most recent CLT textbooks (Abbas, 2012). This implies that teachers are still unaware of the differences when it comes to distinguishing the traditional teaching methods, which expend on grammar, word memorization, interpretation, and exercising, from CLT conventions. Additionally, rigorous governmental policies restrain EFL teachers' implementation of the current teaching methods (Hammad, 2014).

From the moment the Arab World embraced CLT as a novel approach, a severe discrepancy between what the teaching principles and strategies of this approach demand and what the Arab context provides has emerged. Teachers and students are mouthpieces of their cultural burdens and beliefs as far as teaching and learning are concerned. These factors exert great influence on both teaching and learning the language. Once these values and attitudes contradict contemporary theories and approaches, the outcome is the misuse of communicative language learning. The problem of teaching English extends beyond Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq to other countries in the Arab region: Gaza, Lebanon, and Jordan where foreign textbooks

concentrate on vocabularies that are inappropriate for the teaching context in question.

The implementation of the CLT approach faces several difficulties in the Arab World. CLT aspires to the desired outcome, which can only be achieved through a critical rumination of the methods, curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks for teaching the English language across the Arab World. Given the importance of examining the difficulties and challenges faced by EFL learners in various contexts, including those related to teachers, students, the educational system, and the CLT approach for enhancing the implementation and effectiveness of CLT, the present study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of students regarding communicative activities in the English classroom?
2. What are the challenges and difficulties that students perceive when engaging in CLT activities in English classes?
3. Is there any significant differences in the perception of CLT difficulties between Jordanian and Lebanese learners?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

A total of 206 university students were recruited for the study, hailing from two Arab countries: Lebanon ($n = 100$, 48.54%) and Jordan ($n = 106$, 51.46%). Among the participants, 146 (70.87%) were majoring in English Language and Literature, while the remaining 60 (29.13%) were enrolled in other university fields (Business, Psychology, Engineering, and Science). The distribution of participants across academic years was as follows: 66 (32.04%) freshmen, 78 (37.86%) sophomores, 35 (16.99%) juniors, and 27 (13.11%) seniors. The majority of participants, 161 (78.15%), were females. It should be noted that all participants had previous exposure to CLT as part

of their English classes at the university level. Consequently, they possessed a solid understanding of the terminology employed in the questionnaire.

3.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in the present study is structured into four sections, as outlined in Appendix A. Section A pertains to the collection of students' personal information, including their university level, gender, and major. Section B consists of 15 statements that describe various scenarios that may occur in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, representing communicative language practices. These statements encompass activities in which students require minimal supervision from the instructor (items 1, 2, 4, 7, 9, and 13) as well as situations that necessitate direct supervision by the instructor (items 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, and 15). Participants were asked to express their personal opinions by selecting one of three options: *Always*, *Rarely*, or *Never*. Section C focuses on 13 difficulties that students may encounter when engaging in communicative activities within an EFL context. Participants were provided with a rating scale and instructed to indicate their level of agreement using the following response options: *Strongly Agree*, *Agree*, *Neutral*, *Disagree*, or *Strongly Disagree*. To ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings, all statements in the questionnaire were formulated straightforwardly. Finally, Section D consists of an open-ended question in which the students were invited to mention any additional difficulties they may encounter in the EFL environment.

To assess the reliability of the questionnaire, the internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The results, as displayed in Table 1, indicate that the Communicative Language Learning (CLL) activities section exhibited a reliability coefficient of 0.814, and for the CLL difficulties section the reliability coefficient was 0.857. These

findings suggest that the questionnaire demonstrated an acceptable level of reliability in measuring both CLT activities and difficulties.

Table 1
The Reliability Test Results of the Participants' Responses

CLL Activities		CLL Difficulties	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.814	15	.857	13

3.3 Procedure

During the second semester of the 2022-2023 academic year, an online questionnaire was administered through Google Forms. The primary purpose of the questionnaire was to align with the study's objectives, which involved gaining insights into students' opinions regarding communicative activities and the challenges they encounter while studying in EFL classrooms. The authors of the study recruited participants from both countries by utilizing social networks and making announcements. To ensure a systematic flow of responses, the participants were instructed to follow a specific sequence while answering the questionnaire. They began by providing demographic information in Section A, followed by their opinions on the activities that might take place in EFL classes. Subsequently, they proceeded to address the difficulties they might encounter in EFL classrooms in Section C. Lastly, an open-ended question was presented, inviting participants to share any additional challenges they believed could arise in EFL classrooms.

3.4 Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyze and present the research questions concerning students' opinions and the difficulties they encountered in EFL classrooms. These descriptive statistics provided an overview of the data and helped to identify trends and patterns. Following the analysis of descriptive statistics, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine potential differences in opinions and difficulties between students

from different countries. This statistical test aimed to determine if there were significant variations in students' perspectives and challenges based on their country of origin.

4. Findings

In response to the first research question, students provided their personal opinions about activities in the EFL classroom using a rating scale ranging from *Always* to *Never*. To analyze their opinions about communicative activities, the researchers categorized the corresponding codes of the three scale options into three ranges: 1-1.69 representing *Never*, 1.7-2.39 representing *Rarely*, and 2.4-3 representing *Always*. Accordingly, if the mean value falls within the first range, it indicates that students never liked the EFL activities. If the mean value is within the second range, it suggests that students rarely liked the activities. If the mean value falls within the third range, it signifies that the students always liked the activities.

Table 2 presents the mean scores, standard deviations, and participants' opinions regarding the studied communicative EFL activities. The overall mean suggests that students consistently enjoyed the EFL activities. However, when examining individual activities, variations in students' attitudes toward them became apparent. The activities B1, B2, B5, B8, B10, B12, B14, and B15 received high levels of students' appreciation. On the other hand, activities B3, B4, B6, B7, B9, B11, and B13 were moderately liked by the students. None of the activities were reported as being *ever* liked by the participants.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Students' Opinions about Communicative Activities in English Classroom

Items	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
B1	206	2.52	0.57	Always
B2	206	2.41	0.66	Always
B3	206	2.34	0.68	Rarely
B4	206	2.38	0.69	Rarely
B5	206	2.62	0.58	Always
B6	206	2.17	0.72	Rarely
B7	206	2.26	0.68	Rarely
B8	206	2.64	0.55	Always
B9	206	2.32	0.67	Rarely
B10	206	2.46	0.61	Always
B11	206	2.35	0.70	Rarely
B12	206	2.47	0.64	Always
B13	206	2.33	0.70	Rarely
B14	206	2.57	0.60	Always
B15	206	2.57	0.64	Always
Total	206	2.43	0.65	Always

Research Question 2 aimed to explore the perceived difficulties of students regarding CLL in English classes. To analyze the participants' responses, the 5-point Likert scale was divided into five intervals to interpret their answers. The range of 1-1.79 represents *Strongly Disagree*, 1.8-2.59 represents *Disagree*, 2.6-3.39 represents *Neutral*, 3.4-4.19 represents *Agree*, and 4.2-5 represents *Strongly Agree*. The overall mean of the participants' responses in section C of the questionnaire was 3.44, indicating that they generally agreed that all the items in this section represent difficulties for Arab EFL learners. However, the mean values for individual items suggest that Arab EFL learners held a neutral stance towards the difficulties mentioned in items C1, C2, C4, C5, C8, C12, and C13, as presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Difficulties Faced by Students in Communicative EFL Classroom

Items	N	Mean	SD	Interpretation
C1	206	3.33	1.25	Neutral
C2	206	3.02	1.32	Neutral
C3	206	3.63	1.14	Agree
C4	206	3.34	1.09	Neutral
C5	206	3.17	1.03	Neutral
C6	206	3.69	0.94	Agree
C7	206	3.50	0.93	Agree
C8	206	3.35	1.10	Neutral
C9	206	3.65	1.22	Agree
C10	206	3.69	0.97	Agree
C11	206	3.70	1.04	Agree
C12	206	3.34	1.11	Neutral
C13	206	3.23	1.135	Neutral
Total	206	3.44	1.10	Agree

Before proceeding with the analysis, the study sought to assess the assumptions of the independent samples t-test, namely normality and homogeneity of variance. This evaluation was conducted using statistical tests, specifically the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. The results of the Shapiro-Wilk test and the Levene's test showed that the assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variance were violated, $W = 0.952$, $p < .001$ and $p < .001$ respectively. Thus, the Mann-Whitney U test was used as an alternative to the independent samples t-test. The results of the Mann-Whitney U test (Table 9) revealed no statistically significant difference in the opinion of Jordanian students (Median = 2.4, $n = 106$) and Lebanese students (Median = 2.47, $n = 100$), $U = 5087$, $z = -.499$, $p = .618$, $r = 0.04$ as far as communicative EFL activities are concerned. However, when tested individually, activities B5, B8, B12, B14, and B15, which all belong to activities requiring direct supervision from the instructor, showed statistically significant differences between Jordanian students' and Lebanese students' opinions, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4

The Results of Mann-Whitney U Test Related to CLL Activities Based on Country

Items	Jordan			Lebanon			Mann-Whitney U Test			
	N	Median	SD	N	Median	SD	U	z	p	r
B1	106	3	0.54	100	3	0.61	5221	-0.21	0.83	0.015
B2	106	3	0.63	100	2.5	0.69	5138	-0.42	0.67	0.031
B3	106	2	0.67	100	2	0.69	5032.5	-0.68	0.49	0.051
B4	106	2	0.69	100	3	0.68	5040	-0.67	0.50	0.049
B5	106	3	0.60	100	3	0.54	4584	-2.03	0.0*	0.135
B6	106	2	0.68	100	2	0.76	4655.5	-1.63	0.1	0.122
B7	106	2	0.68	100	2	0.69	5203	-0.249	0.8	0.018
B8	106	3	0.59	100	3	0.49	4555	-2.12	0.0*	0.141
B9	106	2	0.65	100	2	0.69	4828	-1.21	0.225	0.089
B10	106	3	0.60	100	3	0.61	5206	-0.248	0.8	0.018
B11	106	2	0.67	100	2	0.74	5140	-0.411	0.68	0.030
B12	106	2	0.66	100	3	0.58	4065	-3.261	0.0*	0.233
B13	106	2	0.68	100	2	0.71	4916	-0.985	0.32	0.073
B14	106	3	0.62	100	3	0.58	4552.5	-2.056	0.04*	0.141
B15	106	3	0.68	100	3	0.59	4467.5	-2.318	0.02*	0.157
Total	106	2.40	0.64	100	2.47	0.64	5087	-0.499	0.618	0.04

*The difference is significant at 0.05.

To address research question 3, an independent samples t-test was employed to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the

perception of CLL difficulties between Jordanian EFL learners and Lebanese EFL learners. The results of the test (Table 5) revealed that generally EFL learners from Jordan ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.10$) and those from Lebanon ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.08$) perceived CLL difficulties equally, $t(204) = 1.724$, $p = 0.086$. Thus, the difference between them is statistically not significant. However, there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups of EFL learners in their perception of the CLL difficulties stated in items C1, $t(204) = 2.669$, $p = 0.008$; C2, $t(204) = 2.67$, $p = 0.008$; C5, $t(204) = 3.168$, $p = 0.002$; C11, $t(204) = -2.169$, $p = 0.031$; and C12, $t(204) = 2.354$, $p = 0.02$. This suggests that the difficulties C1, C2, C5, and C12 are more serious for Jordanian EFL learners than for Lebanese EFL learners, but for difficulty C11, this is exactly the opposite.

Table 5

The Results of Independent Samples T-Test for the Difficulties Faced by Jordanian and Lebanese EFL Learners

Items	Jordan			Lebanon			t-test		
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p-value
C1	106	3.56	1.24	100	3.1	1.22	2.669	204	0.008*
C2	106	3.25	1.29	100	2.77	1.32	2.67	204	0.008*
C3	106	3.64	1.11	100	3.62	1.17	0.135	204	0.893
C4	106	3.41	1.06	100	3.27	1.12	0.895	204	0.372
C5	106	3.39	1.03	100	2.94	0.993	3.168	204	0.002*
C6	106	3.62	1.01	100	3.77	0.863	-1.123	204	0.263
C7	106	3.61	0.99	100	3.39	0.852	1.729	204	0.085
C8	106	3.44	1.12	100	3.25	1.07	1.266	204	0.207
C9	106	3.54	1.24	100	3.76	1.21	-1.305	204	0.193
C10	106	3.7	1.03	100	3.69	0.907	0.06	204	0.952
C11	106	3.55	1.04	100	3.86	1.03	-2.169	204	0.031*
C12	106	3.52	1.05	100	3.16	1.13	2.354	204	0.02*
C13	106	3.35	1.12	100	3.1	1.14	1.579	204	0.116
Total	106	3.51	1.10	100	3.36	1.08	1.724	204	0.086

*The difference is significant at 0.05.

Finally, the participants were provided additional insights by responding to the open-ended question, "Would you like to add other difficulties you face in the learning environment?" Their responses were collected and categorized based on their frequency. Table 6 presents the difficulties added by the participants, which were distinct from those addressed in section C of

the questionnaire. According to the data presented in Table 6, it is evident that Arab EFL learners most frequently face challenges related to the lack of oral practice in the classroom. Anxiety and the role of instructors were reported as the second most common difficulties experienced by Arab EFL learners. The learners also highlighted the inappropriate learning environment as a significant obstacle to their English language learning process. Other reported difficulties, although present, were not as frequently mentioned.

Table 6

Other Difficulties Faced by Arab EFL Learners

No	Difficulty	Count
1	Lack of oral practice	6
2	Anxiety	4
3	The instructor	4
4	Inappropriate learning environment	3
5	Difficulty in communication	2
6	Lack of motivation to learn English	2
7	Lack of native English teachers	2
8	Difficulty in answering exam questions.	1
9	Lack of communicative activities	1
10	Lack of a fundamental program	1
11	Lack of variation in activities	1
12	Not enough English classes	1
13	Poor education in schools	1
14	Use of mother language by the instructor	1
15	Use of mother language by students	1

5. Discussion

The findings related to the first research question suggest that Arab EFL learners hold a generally favorable attitude towards engaging in communicative activities within the classroom, although there is some variability in their responses. This aligns with the findings of the previous studies conducted in various Arab countries, which have explored the attitudes of both students and teachers toward CLT. For instance, Alharbi (2021) conducted a study involving 74 Saudi EFL students, revealing a positive attitude toward the implementation of communicative activities in their classes. Similarly, Alghamdi (2021) examined 42 EFL Saudi teachers and found that they also held a positive attitude toward CLT. In a study by

Alshwater (2021) involving 115 Jordanian female students, it was observed that they exhibited a preference for CLT. Elashhab (2020) investigated the attitudes of 48 female university students in Saudi Arabia towards participating in group work in EFL classes, and the majority of participants displayed positive attitudes. In Morocco, Hattani (2018) explored the attitudes of 16 EFL teachers and found a positive inclination toward the implementation of CLT.

Al-Bulushi and Al-Issa (2017) conducted a study in Oman to explore the attitudes of Omani students and teachers toward the incorporation of games in language teaching. The findings indicated that the students held a highly positive attitude towards the use of games, while the teachers' attitude was moderately positive.

In a separate study conducted in Soran town in northern Iraq, Sherwani and Kiliç (2017) surveyed 58 EFL Iraqi teachers from secondary and high school classrooms. The results revealed that the teachers exhibited overall positive attitudes towards the implementation of CLT approaches. Furthermore, Asassfeh et al. (2012) investigated the attitudes of 1525 Jordanian EFL school learners towards traditional form-focused instruction (FFI) and communicative meaning-oriented instruction of English. The findings demonstrated that the students expressed a preference for meaning-oriented instruction over FFI, indicating a favorable attitude toward communicative approaches.

These studies collectively support the notion that Arab EFL learners and educators exhibit positive attitudes toward the adoption of communicative language learning methods. These studies contribute to the understanding of attitudes toward language teaching methodologies within specific contexts. They provide evidence of positive attitudes towards the use of games, CLT, and communicative meaning-oriented instruction among students and

teachers in Oman, Iraq, and Jordan, respectively. The findings of the present study further contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the consistency of these positive attitudes within the Arab EFL context.

Moreover, the comparison between Jordanian and Lebanese EFL students' responses regarding communicative activities revealed a significant influence of nationality on attitudes toward the implementation of these activities in the classroom; there were significant differences in the opinions of Jordanian and Lebanese EFL students specifically regarding the communicative activities B5, B8, B12, B14, and B15, with Lebanese students exhibiting more positive attitudes towards these activities. This is due to the Lebanese students' exposure to different teaching approaches or educational environments that prioritize and emphasize communicative language learning. This exposure could have contributed to their more positive attitudes towards these activities compared to Jordanian students. The specific activities mentioned earlier likely have characteristics that are more highly favored by the Lebanese students, leading to their preference. These activities might involve more interactive and collaborative tasks, opportunities for authentic communication, or content that aligns with the cultural background or interests of Lebanese students. On the other hand, Jordanian students may have different preferences or experiences that influence their attitudes toward these activities.

Furthermore, the descriptive statistics have shown that the participants agree on all the difficulties listed in section C of the questionnaire. However, the mean values related to individual items show that "C3: fear of making mistakes, C6: variation in the students' proficiency level, C7: preference for exam-oriented English teaching, C9: lack of practice in English outside the class, C10: traditional ways of teaching and C11: lack of enough

communicative activities in the curriculum” are the major difficulties that Arab EFL learners suffer from.

Previous studies have also highlighted a range of difficulties and challenges encountered by Arab EFL learners in CLL. For example, in a study by Alakrash et al. (2021) involving 50 English language teachers from 25 Syrian public schools in Aleppo Province, four types of challenges were identified. These included teacher-related challenges such as lack of training, scarcity of authentic materials, and insufficient knowledge of the English culture. Students-related challenges encompassed low proficiency levels, passive learning styles, and lack of motivation. The challenges related to the educational system included a lack of support, large class sizes, and an unsuitable curriculum. Additionally, CLT-related challenges were identified, including the absence of effective and efficient assessment instruments and a dearth of teaching materials. In a separate study conducted by Diouani (2020) in Morocco, challenges to the implementation of CLT were attributed to learners' low proficiency levels and motivation, inappropriate textbooks, and teachers' limited knowledge of CLT.

Kadi and Madini (2019) conducted a study involving 136 Saudi female EFL students, who identified factors contributing to their unwillingness to communicate. These factors included fear of making mistakes, low language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, lack of self-confidence, and inefficient school education. Similarly, in a study by Sherwani and Kiliç (2017) involving 58 EFL Iraqi teachers from secondary and preparatory schools, it was found that the successful implementation of CLT in Iraq depended on four key factors: the educational system, teachers, students, and the nature of CLT itself. These findings are in line with the results of the study by Al Asmari (2015) conducted in the Saudi context.

Alyan (2013) investigated the difficulties faced by Palestinian university students in Gaza and identified several challenges in their oral communication. These challenges included poor pronunciation and vocabulary, limited exposure to English, interference from their mother tongue, lack of self-confidence, and inadequate listening and reading skills.

The findings further revealed that, in general, Jordanian and Lebanese EFL learners encounter similar challenges. This similarity was determined through an independent samples t-test, which compared the difficulties faced by the two groups of learners. However, when examining the difficulties individually, certain differences emerged. The difficulties of "lack of motivation for English learning, unwillingness to communicate in English, deficiency in first language literacy and knowledge, in addition to non-native English-speaking instructors" were found to be more significant for Jordanian EFL learners compared to Lebanese EFL learners. This indicates that Jordanian learners struggle more with these particular aspects of English language learning. On the other hand, the difficulty of "not having enough communicative activities in the school's English curriculum" was reported as a more serious issue for Lebanese EFL learners compared to Jordanian EFL learners. This suggests that Lebanese learners feel a lack of opportunities to engage in communicative activities within their English curriculum.

These findings highlight the common difficulties and challenges faced by Arab EFL learners in various contexts, including factors related to teachers, students, the education system, and the CLT approach itself. Addressing these challenges is essential for enhancing the implementation and effectiveness of CLT in Arab EFL classrooms.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations for Future Studies

This study highlights the importance of considering the specific needs and challenges faced by learners from different cultural and linguistic

backgrounds. In the case of Jordanian EFL learners, addressing issues such as motivation, willingness to communicate, first language literacy, and instructor proficiency may be crucial for enhancing their English language learning experience. For Lebanese EFL learners, providing more opportunities for communicative activities within the curriculum could be beneficial.

Yet, in the Arab cultural context, the implementation of CLT faces significant challenges in five key areas, which serve as substantial obstacles. These challenges include inadequate preparation of teachers to effectively utilize CLT, limited motivation among students due to social and cultural restraints, a preference for instructor-centered approaches over student-centered approaches, resource materials that may be perceived as unsuitable based on cultural standards, and a lack of appropriate assessment techniques. These factors collectively contribute to the complexity of integrating CLT in the Arab cultural context, requiring careful consideration and targeted strategies to address the specific challenges posed by each area. By addressing these obstacles, it becomes possible to enhance the effectiveness and applicability of CLT within the Arab EFL classroom.

In a quandary regarding the best solution to employ the instruction of the English language within an Arabic setting; being trapped between whether to focus on forms in the sense of teaching language as a discrete set of rules or focus on communication in the sense of teaching grammar through communicative tasks and authentic situations (Tosuncuogulu, 2013), and being unclear about whether to favor accuracy over fluency or vice-versa have left the teachers in a state of indecision about which approach to teaching is better in English classrooms within an Arab country.

When striving to establish an effective approach that enhances foreign language learning for students, two additional factors warrant consideration:

the level of enthusiasm displayed by learners and the psychological impact of each instructional approach. Furthermore, sociocultural and psychological influences, such as concerns about losing face or discomfort discussing certain topics, can significantly contribute to students' anxiety when engaging in peer activities. Consequently, teaching discrete grammatical rules may offer psychological compensation.

While grammar represents just one aspect of achieving competence in communication, research has consistently emphasized its importance on par with other facets. Arab EFL students often encounter difficulties in comprehending the structural foundations of the English language and Western cultural nuances due to disparities between English textbooks and the language used in natural settings. In the Arab context, it is impractical to employ the CLT without incorporating grammatical competence, as students and instructors require exposure to grammar to deepen their understanding of the foreign language. Consequently, grammar and the communicative teaching approach are considered inseparable aspects of foreign language instruction in Arab countries.

The findings of the study have implications for language teachers and curriculum designers. The results highlight the importance of considering students' cultural backgrounds and preferences when designing and implementing communicative activities in the EFL setting. By incorporating activities that appeal to students from different nationalities, educators can create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment that caters to diverse student populations. Moreover, the findings from the current study, along with previous relevant research, highlighted the challenges and obstacles associated with implementing CLT in Arab countries. These obstacles have contributed to the limited success of CLT in these educational contexts. As a result, stakeholders need to take proactive measures in addressing these barriers and supporting educational institutions in

effectively implementing CLT in EFL classes. Further research could explore the underlying reasons for these differences in attitudes between Jordanian and Lebanese EFL students. Additionally, investigating other factors such as language proficiency, prior exposure to communicative approaches, or individual learning styles could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the observed variations in attitudes towards communicative activities.

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APPENDIX A

Dear Learners,

We invite you to take part in this study, which will look at the challenges and opportunities of CLT in the Arab EFL context. Please complete the following survey, which includes questions about your CLT experience. The survey should not take more than 5 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous, confidential, and only used for research purposes.

If you have any questions, please contact: f.abdelfattah@aau.edu.jo, maha.sourani@ul.edu.lb

Section A. Personal Information

1. Country: list of countries
2. University Level: Undergraduate students or graduate students
3. Gender: Male, female
4. Major (College): Health, Engineering, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, Business.

Section B. The following are statements that describe things that might happen in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class. Please give your personal opinions about them by choosing one of the answers. Do you like ...? 3: Always, 2: Rarely, 1: Never.

Serial	Description	3	2	1
		Always	Rarely	Never
B1	to do a written exercise in which you are asked to fill in the correct forms of verbs in sentences?			
B2	to be given the words to a current hit song in English, and then listen to the recording, or watch the video?			
B3	the instructor to give you a list of words that occur in a story or article, and then ask you to look up the words in an English-English dictionary to copy the definitions?			
B4	the instructor to divide you into small groups in which you and your classmates talk about things you like and things you don't.			
B5	the instructor to explain a grammatical rule that is printed in the textbook in English, and then give you examples in English as well?			
B6	the instructor is to speak ARABIC when explaining a grammatical rule that is printed in the textbook,			

Exploring the Challenges of ...

- and then give examples in English
- B7 to find and report on an interesting newspaper or magazine article in English?
- B8 the instructor to correct all mistakes in your exercises?
- B9 to receive a sheet of paper with many sentences like:
 _____ is a fantastic dancer.
 _____ has visited a big city.
 and then move around the classroom, ask your classmates questions in English, and try to fill the blanks with as many different names as possible.
- B10 the instructor to speak a series of sentences and ask the entire class to respond orally to each sentence by changing it in some way? For example:
 John walks to school.
 INSTRUCTOR: John doesn't walk to
 CLASS: school.
 INSTRUCTOR: John is walking to school.
 CLASS: John isn't walking to
 school.
- B11 the instructor to call on all students, in turn, to change a sentence in some way? For example:
 "John walks to school",
 Maria.
 INSTRUCTOR: John doesn't walk to
 MARIA: school.
 INSTRUCTOR: Very good. "John is walking
 VICTOR: to school", Victor.
 John isn't walking to
 school.
- B12 the instructor to lead a class discussion of a topic such as population problems, movies, or places to visit in your country.
- B13 to interview English speakers and report on the interviews in English?
- B14 to do an exercise in which you should find grammar mistakes and correct the mistakes?
- B15 the instructor to give you feedback on how much you have learned.

Section C: The following are some difficulties that other students in EFL situations had in adopting communicative activities. Did you come across these difficulties or do you think they might be difficulties for you in using communicative activities?

5: Strongly Agree, 4: Agree, 3: Neutral, 2: Disagree, 1: Strongly Disagree

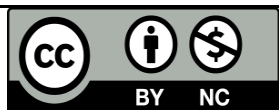
Difficulties related to you or other STUDENTS while 5 4 3 2 1

learning in English class		SA	A	N	D	SD
C1	lack of motivation for English learning					
C2	unwillingness to communicate in English					
C3	fear of making mistakes					
C4	low English-speaking proficiency					
C5	having low first language cognitive resources “deficiency in first language literacy & knowledge”					
C6	Variations between students’ levels of general English proficiency					
C7	preference for exam-oriented English teaching					
C8	resistance to communicative activities.					
C9	not having enough opportunities to practice English in real situations outside the classroom.					
C10	teachers' preferences to teach English using more traditional ways.					
C11	not having enough communicative activities in the school's English curriculum.					
C12	non-native English-speaking instructors.					
C13	large class size.					

Section D: Would you like to add other difficulties you face in the learning environment?

.....

Thank you!



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