

Original Paper

EFL Teachers' Awareness, Practices and Challenges of Teaching English Communicatively in Oman Post Basic Education Schools

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Abstract

This study investigated the perceived knowledge and actual practice of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) among post basic education teachers in Omani schools, along with the influence of gender and length of teaching experience years on teachers' practice of this approach. It also explored the different challenges faced by teachers when implementing CLT.

A total of 122 EFL Omani teachers took part in this study. The respondents completed the following: (1) a twenty-five item questionnaire concerning CLT principles; and (2) a questionnaire regarding the challenges of CLT.

The results revealed that Omani EFL teachers have a high degree of awareness of the principles of CLT. However, they practice this approach at a moderate level, while their gender and length of teaching experiences have little impact on their actual practice of this approach. The findings further indicated that the implementation of CLT in Omani classrooms is hindered by: (1) teachers' lack of training in CLT; (2) lack of time to prepare communicative activities; (3) students' low levels of proficiency in English; (4) large class sizes; and (5) difficulties assessing the linguistic aspects of the language. This resulted in the drawing up of a number of recommendations.

Keywords

Communicative language teaching, CLT awareness, CLT practices, Omani Schools, Post Basic Education

1. Introduction

Teachers are considered the most influential factor in the students' achievement. Thus, an examination of the practice of teachers (including how they absorb and employ curriculum policies based on their beliefs and educational philosophy) is viewed as an efficient method of improving the quality of education (Freeman & Richards, 1996). Rogan (2006) indicated that it is insufficient to develop a new curriculum, as attention needs to be focused on how curriculum principles are shaped into practice. This ensures the need for an analysis of the practice of teachers, in order to achieve the "fit" between the framework principles, curriculum content and learning experiences. Therefore, the current study focuses on an investigation of teachers' implementation of the proposed methodology (i.e., Communicative Language Teaching, CLT), as prescribed by the Omani English language curriculum framework.

World Data in Education (2010) has revealed a low level of performance in final English tests in Oman, along with grade-level repetitions at school. Although the framework calls for CLT (which focuses on meaning and language use), learning outcomes remain insufficient, leading to the English skills of graduates failing to achieve the expected outcomes (Al Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al Hajri, 2010, Al-Lamki, 2009; Al Salmi, 2005). This leads to the possibility that the high rates of failure, combined with the poor quality of the students' performance, reflect the instructional quality of post basic education schools, i.e., teachers' practice of CLT. This could indicate that inappropriate teaching methods are a factor in the poor performance of students, and the widely-noted fall in the standard of education in Oman. This includes the possibility that a lack of training in CLT has had a negative impact on teaching practice.

1.1 Context of the Problem

Since the 1980s, there has been considerable focus placed on the use of CLT in the field of language teaching. In CLT, language is employed as a tool to communicate purposefully, rather than focusing on teaching the grammatical form of a language. The purpose of this approach is to improve students' "communicative competence" in real and natural contexts, in which speakers consider many factors, i.e., the sociocultural context, participants and settings. Scholars tend to agree that CLT places a primary focus on authenticity and communicative competence (Hymes, 1971; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2006). However, a number of researchers have claimed that CLT is not appropriate to the Asian culture, which lacks CLT materials (Ellis, 1996).

Effective teachers are vital to the successful acquisition of language. Thus, teachers' methods of instruction are highly significant in assisting students to engage with the learning process, and to equip them with a number of different skills. It is therefore essential to investigate the awareness and practice of teachers concerning the enhancing of students' communicative skills necessary for different academic and professional orientations (Al Najar, 2016).

2. Literature Review

English has now become a powerful language, leading to a global increase in the number of those wishing to learn the language. Empirical studies have demonstrated that countries in the Arab world have experienced a number of issues concerning methods of EFL teaching. One of these countries is Oman. This study therefore analyzes teachers' knowledge and implementation of their roles in communicative language classrooms and examines the challenges faced by post basic education English teachers in implementing CLT in Oman.

In this literature review, the researcher focuses on three main categories: (1) EFL in Oman; (2) concepts related to teachers' awareness of CLT principles and their application of their role in the communicative language classroom; and (3) the challenges faced by teachers of English in applying this approach in other countries. Finally, this chapter reviews previous studies associated with CLT, both in Oman and elsewhere.

2.1 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Oman

The purpose of Omani post basic education grades eleven and twelve is to develop fundamental skills using an appropriate approach, in order to improve communication and social skills, eradicate information technology illiteracy and enhance mathematical skills.

The current study focuses on education in Oman, highlighting current issues in post basic education system. Furthermore, this study has a practical rationale, focusing on bridging the gap between higher education institutions and the outcomes of basic education in Oman.

The current research was inspired by the identification of previous educational system issues and knowledge gaps in the field that requires deeper analysis. This study therefore focuses on a single factor (i.e., teachers), examining their practice of the proposed methodology of the new education system.

2.2 Teachers' Awareness and Implementations of their Roles in Communicative Language Classrooms

2.2.1 Teachers' Roles in CLT

The role of the language teacher is central to assisting learners to master compulsory skills and develop communicative competency. This is achieved by the teacher playing a variety of roles. Harmer (1991) reported that the role changes from one activity to another, or from one phase to another. Harmer (1991) categorized the roles of language teachers, dividing the roles of EFL teachers into two categories: (1) controllers and (2) facilitators. However, when defining the role teachers play in the communicative classroom, Larsen-Freeman (1991) noted that teachers find themselves speaking less and listening more, as their students take the initiative to become assistants. In addition, Yigezu (2010) described the roles of language teachers as follows:

- The first role is to promote the communication process to all participants in the classroom, as well as among various activities and tests.
- The second role is as an independent participant in the learning group.

2.3 Students' Role in CLT

Yigezu (2010) suggested that the role of students in CLT classroom should be: "negotiating for meaning,

communicating, discovering, and contributing to gain knowledge, skills, experience and information” (pp. 95-96). In their description of students and the role of teachers in CLT classroom.

2.4 Teaching Competence

Brundrett and Silcock (2002) defined teaching competence as “a base-line for teaching effectiveness” (p. 8), indicating that competence forms the main representation of effective teaching. A competent teacher can be defined as one possessing and developing required skills through continuous effort. These skills can be determined from theories of education and practical situations in the classroom. The word “competence” aligns with terms of quality, efficiency, and adequacy. Brundrett and Silcock (2002) noted that teaching competence forms a set of abilities, skills, knowledge and beliefs employed by a teacher to enable effective teaching and learning processes. Therefore, competency consists of the possession and understanding of skills to undertake a specific kind of work in a satisfactory manner.

Teachers develop a professional concept of educational theories from: (1) the subjects they take in colleges and universities; (2) from actual classroom experience; and (3) from training and innovation. As a result, teachers are expected to show enthusiasm in learning how to be competent, thus enabling them to perform their roles in a professional manner.

2.5 Classroom Practice in CLT

A number of language teachers claim that they follow specific EFL teaching methods, i.e., CLT. However, a number of authors, including Yigezu (2010), have noted that there is a low correlation between the statements and classroom practice of teachers (particularly in relation to CLT). In addition, trainee teachers using CLT principles on their language courses may encounter difficulties when it comes to putting these into practice. Thus, despite their desire to implement the principles of CLT, attempting to promote the performance of western CLT practices, a number of situational factors (i.e., matching in group work) can result in conflict. An increasing number of studies that focused on classroom-based practical communicative language practice have concluded the existence of a lack of opportunities to employ authentic communicative language in a foreign language classroom, including by those committed to CLT (Kumaravadevelu, 1993; Nunan, 1991). This is due to a considerable number of factors, including: traditional examinations; large classes; cultural constraints characterized by beliefs; teacher and student roles and classroom relationships; personal constraints; low levels of motivation; unequal ability to participate in independent active learning practices; and teachers’ creation of communicative activities, i.e., group work activities (Bax, 2003; Widdowson, 1987).

2.6 Empirical Studies

This section discusses Omani studies focusing on CLT as a teaching method. There is a notable lack of empirical research dealing with the communicative approach in the Omani context (Wyatt, 2009), i.e., Al Shabibi’s (2004) examination of the types of questions employed by teachers in the Omani primary education system aimed at enhancing students’ communication skills in English. The researcher investigated the practice of twelve teachers, three males and nine females. Twelve lessons were reordered and analyzed. The overall findings indicated that teachers use more display questions than referential

questions. Moreover, the result revealed a significant difference occurred in the amount of display and referential questions applied by experienced and inexperienced teachers. Al Shabibi (2004) argued that teachers need to focus on the types of questions they employ to increase the amount of genuine communicative language available in the classroom.

Al Hosni (2012) investigated the impact of both focused and unfocused communicative tasks on learners' oral production. She examined thirty students, who were divided into ten groups, in order to investigate their oral production using three instruments: (1) focused and unfocused tasks; (2) field notes; and (3) semi-structured interviews. The researcher measured two types of communication tasks (i.e., focused and unfocused) on the same group of learners, who were from a single class. The results revealed no significant difference in the frequency of negotiation of meaning between the two types of task. The interview analysis revealed that the attention of some students was focused on conveying meaning rather than focusing on the form employed. In addition, the research findings suggested that it would prove a more effective strategy to provide learners with opportunities encouraging them to perform as language users rather than learners.

Wyatt (2009) employed observations, interviews, and reflective writing to identify the growth in the practical knowledge of CLT of a lower secondary teacher in the Middle East. He investigated the development of an English teacher while studying on a three-year course of practical knowledge in CLT longitudinally. The study focused on a part-time in-service BA (TESOL) program run by the University of Leeds in conjunction with the Ministry of Education in the Sultanate of Oman. The participants consisted of teachers of English in possession of diplomas, following an intensive three-year course during the summer and winter semesters. They were observed in their schools once each semester by a regional tutor, who employed feedback sessions to assist in relating theory to practice, however his teaching practice was not assessed. The researcher gathered qualitative data using the instruments noted above. The findings revealed that each teachers' practical knowledge of CLT developed considerably during the course. In addition, he called for further research into the influence on practical knowledge of teacher education TESOL programs.

The studies discussed above failed to investigate teachers' actual practice of the communicative approach, leading to a need for further investigation. Widdowson (1979) (cited in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979) noted the inefficiencies in the teaching of secondary school teachers, who also failed to follow the teaching approach taught in training colleges. This leads to questions concerning the extent to which teachers apply CLT in their classes. This has led the current researcher to conduct a study that will establish the extent to which: (1) these teachers are aware of the principles of communicative teaching; and (2) teachers of English implement a communicative approach in grade eleven and twelve classes. Furthermore, this current research examines the challenges faced by these teachers in applying this approach.

3. Methodology

3.1 Population and Sample

The population of this study included all EFL Omani teachers in post basic education schools in the Al Dahira Governorate of Oman teaching grades eleven and twelve during the academic year 2016/2017. The total number of the population was 142. The sample comprised of one hundred teachers randomly selected, and representing approximately 70% of the total population of EFL teachers (both male and female) in Al Dahira Governorate. The remainder (i.e., 15.5%) were assigned as respondents of the pilot study, while the remainder consisted of non-Omani teachers. The subjects included forty-five male and fifty-five female teachers from thirty-seven separate government schools. The researcher also selected a smaller group of thirty individuals from the sample of EFL teachers, in order to examine their actual practice of communicative language teaching inside their classrooms through the use of a classroom observation checklist.

3.2 Research Instruments

3.2.1 Questionnaire (CLT Principles)

The researcher adapted a questionnaire from Karavas-Doukas (1996) and Kim (1999), as cited in Beyene (2008) in order to collect data concerning teachers' knowledge of CLT principles. The questionnaire underwent a number of modifications, due to a number of items having a parallel meaning, while the items of the structural activities dimension were categorized under several separate dimensions. The questionnaire consisted of two main parts: (1) the first part focused on the respondent's gender, length of experience and the number of in-service CLT courses followed; and (2) the second part focused primarily on CLT principles.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five items, and was based on a 5 point Likert scale. The teachers were requested to rate the items in the questionnaire according to their perceived knowledge of CLT principles and techniques using the following scale: 5=Strongly Agree (SA); 4=Agree (A); 3=Undecided (UD); 2=Disagree (D); and 1=Strongly Disagree (SD).

3.2.2 Classroom Observation Checklist

The classroom observation checklist was employed to collect data regarding teachers' actual practice of their roles in CLT in classrooms. The researcher selected thirty teachers on a random basis, to be observed twice using this instrument, which was adapted from Al Magid (2006), although with the omission of the instructional material section, due to the focus of these observations being on investigating the role of teachers in communicative classrooms. Moreover, a number of items were added concerning grammar and assessment.

3.2.3 Questionnaire (Challenges)

A further questionnaire was adapted from a study conducted by Coskun (2011), in order to identify teachers' difficulties in implementing CLT. The teachers' questionnaire consisted of thirteen items investigating a number of different challenges. The researcher also added a section enabling teachers to specify any further difficulties they wished to discuss. The response mode of the questionnaire

consisted of three scales: 1=No Problem; 2=Manageable Problem; and 3=Serious Problem.

3.2.4 Procedures for Data Collection

As noted previously, the sample of this study was drawn from thirty-seven government schools in Al Dahira Governorate, i.e., twenty-one male and sixteen female. The researcher obtained permission from Ministry of Education to undertake the study, and a letter for each school was given from Directorate General for Education in Ibri. One hundred copies of the two questionnaires were delivered to the regional supervisors of English, who were responsible for distributing and collecting the questionnaires. In addition, the researcher observed the practice of fifteen female teachers teaching in six separate schools, while the English supervisor simultaneously attended the classes of fifteen male teachers teaching in six separate schools. Each teacher was observed on two occasions. All observations were completed, and there was a 100% return rate of the questionnaires from the regional.

3.3 Data Analysis

This research followed a descriptive research design in which two questionnaires and a classroom observation checklist were used to collect data. The first questionnaire was used to establish the degree of teachers' perceived knowledge concerning CLT principles and techniques, while the second questionnaire was used to establish the difficulties faced by the teachers in implementing CLT in their classrooms. The classroom observation checklist was administrated to establish the degree of teachers' practice of their roles in CLT, and whether their practice differed according to gender and total number of years of experience. Thus, the data obtained from these tools were subjected to the following statistical techniques:

1. Means and Standard deviations were employed to answer the first and the second research questions, which are:

- To what extent are Omani English language teachers of post basic education schools aware of communicative language teaching?
- To what extent do Omani teachers teach English language communicatively in post basic education schools?

2. Person's correlation coefficient was used to establish the correlation between teachers' practice of CLT and two different variables (i.e. gender and length of experience), in order to answer the third research question, which is:

- How does teachers' practice of their roles of CLT vary according to gender and total length of experience?

3. Frequency was established regarding the most difficult challenges from the teachers' perspective when it came to implementing CLT, in order to answer the fourth research question, which is:

- What are the challenges faced by teachers when implementing CLT.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the statistical analysis of the data, in order to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are Omani English Language teachers of post basic education schools aware of their roles in teaching English communicatively in their classrooms?
2. To what extent do Omani English teachers practice their roles in teaching English language communicatively in post basic education schools?
3. How does teachers' practice of their roles of CLT vary according to gender and length of experience?
4. What are the challenges faced by teachers when implementing CLT?

4.2 Teachers' Awareness of CLT Principles

The first research question investigated the degree to which teachers are aware of the principles of CLT. The researcher employed a five point Likert scale questionnaire to answer this question. As noted previously, the instrument consisted of twenty-five items, which were grouped into the following six dimensions: (1) the conceptual perspective; (2) the students' learning perspective; (3) the perspective concerning the role of the teacher; (4) the perspective concerning the role of students; (5) the perspective concerning the importance of grammar and error correction; and (6) the perspective concerning assessment. The following criterion was applied to interpret the general results shown in Table 1.

- 1.00 – 1.79 Very Low Knowledge.
- 1.80 – 2.59 Low Knowledge.
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderate.
- 3.40 – 4.19 High Knowledge.
- 4.20 – 5.00 Very High Knowledge.

Table 1. Teachers' Responses for the Six Dimensions (n=100)

No.	Dimension	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Conceptual Perspective	4.55	.39
2.	Students' Learning Perspective	4.52	.29
3.	Teacher's Role Perspective	4.54	.32
4.	Students' Role Perspective	4.38	.71
5.	Importance of Grammar Perspective	4.45	.63
6.	Error Correction Perspective and Assessment	4.26	.44
	Grand Mean	4.35	.23

Table 1 reveals that teachers have a high degree of CLT knowledge ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .23$). The following subsections deal with each dimension separately, followed by the statement of a number of justifications.

4.2.1 Conceptual Perspective

Table 2. Teachers' Responses for Conceptual Perspective (n=100)

No.	Conceptual Perspective	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	The primary focus of CLT is teaching language through interaction	4.79	.48
2.	CLT encourages learners to develop their full learning potential	4.43	.61
3.	The communicative approach pays equal attention to the four language skills	4.43	.69
	Grand Mean	4.55	.39

Table 2 indicates that the majority of teachers hold a favorable perception of CLT in relation to the conceptual perspective ($M = 4.55$, $SD = .39$). It can thus be generalized that the participants had a positive degree of knowledge in relation to the first dimension.

4.2.2 Students' Learning Perspective

Table 3. Teachers' Responses Regarding Students' Learning Perspective (n=100)

No.	Students' Learning Perspective	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Students' involvement in their learning can be effectively achieved through communicative EFL classrooms	4.58	.52
2.	CLT promotes students' social development	4.52	.58
3.	Students are more likely to take risks (e.g., making grammatical mistakes) in communicative EFL classes than teacher-centered classes	4.53	.52
4.	CLT improves students' fluency and accuracy	4.45	.59
	Grand Mean	4.52	.29

Table 3 demonstrates that the majority of participants indicated strong views concerning the concepts related to their learning in relation to CLT, with a total mean value of (4.52).

4.2.3 Teacher's Role Perspective

Table 4. Teachers' Responses for Teacher's Role Perspective (n=100)

No.	Teacher's Role Perspective	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Teachers facilitate students' learning in CLT classrooms	4.52	.57
2.	Teachers promote collaborative learning	4.51	.59
3.	Teachers participate in group work	4.55	.54
4.	Teachers supplement textbooks with additional relevant materials	4.57	.56
	Grand Mean	4.54	.32

Table 4 leads to the conclusion that a large number of teachers are aware of their roles in communicative classrooms ($M = 4.54$, $SD = .32$).

4.2.4 Students' Role Perspective

Table 5. Teachers' Responses Regarding Students' Role Perspective (n=100)

No.	Students' Role Perspective	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Learners suggest the content of the lesson in CLT classrooms	3.76	1.14
2.	Learners propose the activities they find useful in CLT classrooms	3.89	.97
3.	Learners are responsible managers of their own learning	3.83	.88
4.	Learners interact with each other in CLT classrooms	4.38	.71
	Grand Mean	3.97	.68

From Table 5, it can also be inferred that the teachers degree of knowledge concerning students' role in CLT classrooms is within the high knowledge range, as noted in the criterion above, despite this dimension achieving the lowest mean score in comparison with other dimensions ($M = 3.97$).

4.2.5 Importance of Grammar Perspective

Table 6. Teachers' Responses Regarding Importance of Grammar Perspective (n=100)

No.	Importance of Grammar Perspective	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	English language performance is judged by the correctness of students' grammar and an ability to communicate purposefully	4.34	.71
2.	Knowledge of the rules of language is insufficient to judge learners' abilities to use the language for communicative purposes	4.39	.60
3.	Linguistic aspects of language can be acquired effectively when taught implicitly (e.g., through highlighting the structure in a reading passage)	4.33	.67
4.	Learners' communicative proficiency in English cannot be achieved by teaching the rules and terminology of grammar in a direct and explicit manner	4.45	.63
	Grand Mean	4.38	.34

Table 6 reveals that the majority of teachers revealed a positive degree of knowledge of CLT concerning perceptions related to the importance of grammar ($M = 4.38$, $SD = .34$).

4.2.6 Error Correction and Assessment Perspective

Table 7. Teachers' Responses Regarding Error Correction and Assessment Perspective (n=100)

No.	Error Correction and Assessment Perspective	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	In CLT, students are given a chance to self-correct their errors	3.94	1.09
2.	In CLT, students are encouraged to correct each other's errors in groups	4.11	1.06
3.	Effective evaluation focuses on both accuracy(i.e., grammatical correctness) and fluency	4.33	.73
4.	Students' progress in English language proficiency is measured by means of routine classroom communicative activities (e.g. role play)	4.35	.58
5.	Students become effective communicators if teachers' feedback focuses on the appropriate use of language and the linguistic forms of students' responses	4.48	.56
6.	Since errors are a natural part of learning, teachers should take notes during fluency based activities, in order to discuss these during subsequent accuracy-based activities	4.35	.70
Grand Mean		4.26	.44

Table 7 indicates that the grand mean value of teachers' responses to this dimension is $M = 4.26$. This represents high knowledge of teachers' perception concerning CLT in terms of error correction techniques and assessment.

The above data analysis of the six dimensions leads to the conclusion that teachers have a high degree of CLT perception ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .23$). This can be attributed to three reasons. Firstly, this forms evidence that Omani teachers of post basic education schools have a high level of knowledge regarding CLT principles, which support the teaching method prescribed in the national curriculum framework, along with teachers' books for use with grades eleven and twelve (Ministry of Education, Oman, 2013/2014).

Secondly, this high degree of knowledge can be attributed to programs of study both in universities and colleges of education. These programs have equipped teachers with sufficient knowledge concerning different teaching methods, enabling them to enter the real teaching practice field with adequate exposure to CLT principles.

Thirdly, this result can also be credited to in-service workshops and courses attended by participants, as indicated in their answers to the question stated in the demographic section of the questionnaire (i.e., 48% followed two courses; 39% followed one course; and 13% followed three courses).

The above result match the findings of some research noted in the literature review (Yembise, 1994;

Geburu, 2008; Beyen, 2008; Coskun, 2011). They revealed that teachers were aware of CLT principles.

4.2.6 Analysis of Classroom Observations

The classroom observation checklist contains fifteen items and has a five point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics using frequency, percentage and mean score were applied in order to answer the second research question, i.e., focusing on the degree to which teachers of post basic education schools practice their roles in CLT classrooms.

The following scale is applied to answer the second research question. It is notable that, in order to facilitate the discussion, the first two alternatives of the observation classroom checklist scales were replaced by “very high” and “high”, and the final two alternatives were replaced by “low” and “very low”. In addition, the option “sometimes” was substituted by the word level of “moderate”.

- 4.20 – 5.00 Very High Level of Practice.
- 3.40 – 4.19 High Level of Practice.
- 2.60 – 3.39 Moderate Level of Practice.
- 1.80 – 2.59 Low Level of Practice.
- 1.00 – 1.79 Very Low Level of Practice.

Table 8. Teachers’ Practice of Instructional Activities (n=30)

No.	Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1.	Uses English as the main medium of instruction in classroom	4.83	.38
2.	Provides activities that maximize communication opportunities	3.00	.79
3.	Provides activities that focus on functions and an appropriate and meaningful use of language	2.97	.93
4.	Provides activities undertaken in pairs or groups	3.07	.64
5.	Utilizes minimal use of L1	4.57	.63
6.	Integrates a variety of language skills during teaching	2.83	.79
7.	Teaches grammar implicitly	2.57	.82
8.	Facilitates and monitors class activities	3.53	.78
9.	Creates a positive and motivating atmosphere	3.60	.81
10.	Participates as a co-communicator in group work	1.70	.70
11.	Participates as a co-communicator in pair work	1.43	.57
12.	Tolerates learners’ errors	3.67	.66
13.	Encourages learners to engage in self-correction	2.23	.82
14.	Encourages learners to correct each other’s errors	2.20	.99
15.	Corrects selected errors	3.20	.6
	Grand Mean	3.03	.35

Table 8 reveals the teachers' degree of practice of CLT, from which it can be inferred that the thirty teachers observed in this study practiced CLT principles in their classrooms at a "moderate" level ($M=3.03$, $SD=.35$). This indicates that teachers are in tune with practicing teacher led (i.e., traditional) views during their teaching practice. However, despite of their high level of perception of CLT principles, some CLT features were neglected. For example, participating as a co-communicator in pair work and group work scored a very low level of practice. Similarly, teachers' error correction techniques (i.e., engaging students in self-correction in pairs to encourage them to correct each other's mistakes) scored a low level of implementation inside the classroom, along with the principle concerning the implicit teaching of grammar. This can be attributed to variety of difficulties, including: (1) class size; (2) length of teaching time; and (3) instruction oriented towards tests (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Coskun, 2011).

These findings accord with the results published by Al Mahrooqi (2012), who investigated this issue from the perspective of university students, identifying that teachers practice low levels of CLT, leading her to call for urgent investigation of this issue. Moreover, the above result also match the findings of further research noted in the literature review (Yembise, 1994; Gebru, 2008; Coskun, 2011). The results of the questionnaire and classroom observation checklist identifies a mismatch between teachers' perceived knowledge of CLT principles and their implementation of this approach in classrooms. This result is consistent with the findings in studies conducted by Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), Savignon (2002) and Beyene (2008), which all revealed the existence of a low correlation between the statements of teachers regarding CLT knowledge in the questionnaire and their actual practice.

4.2.7 Correlation between Teachers' Practice and Gender as well as Number of Teaching Experience Years

As noted above, thirty teachers (who varied according to gender and length of teaching experience) were observed on two occasions. The following table demonstrates the demo-graphic information reported by these teachers.

Table 9. Distribution of the Participants by Gender and Total Number of Teaching Experience Years (n=30)

Variable		f	%
Gender	Male	15	50%
	Female	15	50%
Teaching Years of Experience	0-5	5	16.7%
	6-10	8	26.7%
	Above 10	17	56.7%

Table 9 illustrates that an equal number of male and female teachers took part in this study. Moreover, 56.7% of the teachers observed possessed over ten years of teaching experience. The researcher found this to be common, as school administrations generally assign teachers with greater teaching experience to teach grades eleven and twelve. The following subsections focus separately on each variable, due to a separate statistical tool being employed.

4.2.8 Are There Any Differences among Teachers Practice of CLT Which Can be Attributed to Gender?

An independent sample t-test was used to determine the impact of gender on teachers' practice of CLT. Table 12 reveals the existence of any statistically significant differences in teaching practice as a result of a teacher's gender.

Table 10. Independent Sample T-test for Classroom Practice of the Observed Teachers (n=30)

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	Sig.
Male	15	3.1422	.28269	1.858	.075
Female	15	2.9111	.39009		

The above table indicates a lack of any statistically significant differences between the implementation of CLT by male and female teachers. The t-test results and the significance difference levels were greater than (2-tailed) value (0.05) as $p = .075 > 0.05$. This leads to the conclusion that teacher's gender difference has no impact on their practice of CLT. This align with findings of Beyene (2008) that indicated teachers' gender difference does not influence their perceptions and practices of CLT.

This result can be viewed as resulting from the similar circumstances of teachers of both genders, i.e. class size, students' English proficiency level, and the duration of each lesson. A further factor contributing to this result is that different in-service courses and workshops tend to be general in nature, and therefore do not serve individual needs and abilities.

4.2.9 Are There Any Differences among Teachers' Practice of CLT Which Can be Attributed to Total Number of Teaching Years' Experience?

A one way ANOVA was also undertaken to compare the practice of teachers in relation to different lengths of teaching experience. The participants were divided into three groups: (1) 0-5 years; (2) 6-10 years; and (3) above 10 years.

Table 11. One-way ANOVA for Classroom Practice of the Observed Teachers According to the Total Number of Teaching Years' Experience (n=30)

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	210	2	.105	.826	.448
Within Groups	3.439	27	.127		
Total	3.650	29			

Table 11 illustrates that no statistically significant differences (at the $p < 0.05$) were identified in the implementation of CLT by these three groups ($p = .45$). This result can be attributed to teachers practicing values and beliefs developed over many years of teaching. This demonstrates that the majority of teachers selected to teach in post basic education schools had over ten years of experience in this field.

It can therefore be concluded that gender and length of teaching experience have little influence on the practice of these teachers when it comes to the implementation of the CLT approach.

4.2.10 The Challenges Faced by Teachers While Implementing CLT Approach

As discussed in the methodology chapter, the researcher adapted an existing questionnaire in order to establish the serious challenges faced by teachers of post basic education schools when practicing the principles of CLT. The questionnaire contained thirteen items, and teachers were asked to scale each difficulty, according to the following three scales: (1) no problem; (2) manageable problem; and (3) serious problem. Table 12 reveals descriptive statistics using frequency, percentage and mean score applied to answer the fourth research question. The items are in an ascending order, and the following scale value was applied to interrupt the above results:

No Problem (1):	1.00-1.67
Manageable Problem (2):	1.68-2.34
Serious Problem (3):	2.35-3

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Responses for Conceptual Perspective (n=100)

No.	Items	M	SD
1.	Lack of support from administration	1.89	.85
2.	Teachers' lack of knowledge of the target culture (i.e., English)	1.94	.86
3.	Excessive load work	1.95	.85
4.	Lack of supportive authentic teaching materials	2.00	.83
5.	Teachers' lack of a clear understanding of the CLT approach	2.10	.78
6.	Students' resistance to communicative class activities	2.18	.79
7.	The dominance of traditional grammar-based assessment	2.21	.76
8.	Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments	2.31	.66
9.	Teachers' lack of time to prepare communicative materials	2.41	.57
10.	Students' low-level of English proficiency	2.43	.57
11.	Large class size	2.43	.54
12.	Difficulties in assessing the linguistic aspects of language in CLT	2.51	.54
13.	Teachers' lack of training in CLT	2.52	.50

Table 12 reveals that five items are considered to result in serious issues when applying a CLT approach, including (1) a lack of time to enable teachers to prepare communicative activities; (2) students' low level of proficiency in English; (3) large class sizes, (4) difficulties assessing linguistic aspects of language in CLT; (5) a lack of training in how to deal with CLT challenges. These points scored a mean value above 2.35, ensuring they are measured as significant issues.

Moreover, the above table indicates a number of manageable problems, including: (1) teachers' lack of knowledge of the target culture (i.e., English); (2) a lack of supportive authentic teaching materials; (3) students' resistance to communicative class activities; (4) a lack of support from the administration; (5) excessive load work; (6) teachers' lack of a clear understanding of the CLT approach; (7) a lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments; and (8) the dominance of traditional grammar-based assessment. These difficulties scored a mean value between 1.68 and 2.34, identifying them as a manageable problem. However, none of the above challenges were considered as not being a problem from a teachers' perspective.

Thus, this study has revealed that obstacles preventing the application of CLT principles in a comprehensive manner include: (1) teachers' lack of training; (2) lack of time to prepare communicative activities; (3) large class sizes; (4) students' low level of English proficiency; and (5) difficulties assessing different linguistic aspects of CLT. These findings accord with those of other researchers investigating this issue (Mowlaie & Rahimi, 2010; Chang & Goswani, 2011; Coskun, 2011; Ju, 2013).

5. Summary and Conclusion

This study reveals that EFL Omani teachers demonstrated a high level of knowledge concerning CLT principles. However, while they practiced some principles, others were rarely observed in their actual practice. This result is similar to the findings of similar studies in other contexts, including those of Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), Savignon (2002) and Beyen (2008).

Teachers experienced a number of difficulties in fully applying CLT principles, as a result of: (1) their lack of training in CLT; (2) lack of time available to prepare communicative activities; (3) large class sizes; (4) students' low proficiency in English; and (5) difficulties assessing the different linguistic aspects of CLT. These align with the findings of other studies, including those of Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010), Chang and Goswani (2011), Coskun (2011) and Ju (2013).

Two variables were taken into consideration when investigating teachers' practice of CLT in Oman, i.e., (1) gender and (2) total years of experience. The results revealed no statistically significant differences between male and female teachers in their implementation of CLT, implying that both genders practice this approach in an equal manner. In addition, no statistically significant differences were found in terms of the length of teaching experience between the three groups (0-5 years, 6-10 years and above 10 years of teaching experience). This indicates that, at a certain level, the three groups practice CLT in an equal manner.

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