

# Impediments to the Application of Communicative Approach: Survey Among Saudi University Teachers

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**Abstract**—Communicative language teaching (CLT), which is considered to be a promising approach to language teaching-learning, has appeared as a reaction to situational approaches which mainly focus on teaching structures in limited contexts rather than on communication. However, the applicability of communicative language teaching in all contexts is still under debate. This study intends to explore the impediments university lecturers face in applying communicative language teaching in Saudi Arabia's social context. It also examines the feasibility of attaining communicative competence as a central goal of communicative language teaching. Twenty-six professors and lecturers from three universities were interviewed to collect the data. The findings revealed that in the social context of teaching English as a foreign language, the low English learning outcomes at secondary school and the low motivation of learners are some of the impediments to the successful implementation of CLT. Moreover, the findings demonstrated that communicative competence is difficult to attain in a society with an EFL context without engaging learners in various social interactions and multicultural contexts in real life. The mere sensitization of sociolinguistics competence will not serve the purpose of achieving communicative competence.

**Index Terms**—impediments, communicative approach, communicative competence, English language teaching, EFL social context

## I. INTRODUCTION

When language teaching methods are developed, social contexts, circumstances, and surrounding learners should be considered. Collentine and Freed (2004) cited Hymes, who stated that 'the key to understanding language in context is to start not with language but with context ... (and then to) systematically relate the two'. Hymes observed that knowing what happens outside the school setting is necessary to understand what happens inside. Kumaravadivelu (1994) argues that any serious attempt to study the development of teaching methods for second and foreign languages necessarily entails the study of social contexts as important variables. If a teaching method is not based on a proper study of learners' social contexts, it might face some obstacles at the application level. Its applicability and success in a certain society owing to supportive social contexts and conditions might not be replicated in another society with different conditions.

The communicative language teaching (CLT) is generally a prominent approach with convincing principles. It owes its origin to the British linguist Michael Halliday and the American linguist Dell Hymes, besides others. In European societies, this approach is convenient, as it was developed based on European conditions and social atmosphere. However, the approach might not be appropriate in some other societies, such as Saudi Arabia or the rest of the Arab world, where English is learned at schools only as a foreign language and is not used for communication as a second language. In this light, it could be said that a social context which is not convenient or supportive for the implementation of the approach becomes a barrier to its successful application. Furthermore, the CLT approach aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching; this is quite difficult to attain in social contexts in the Arab world, as it is defined in terms of four components—grammatical competence, sociolinguistics competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence—the specific contextual difficulties of which will be discussed later in the article. According to Canale and Swain (1980), the central component of communicative competence is sociolinguistic competence, which needs a supportive environment that enables learners' involvement in various real-life situations that expose them to different language samples. Thus, the suitability of the CLT approach in the context of Saudi Arabia and the challenges that lecturers face while attempting to apply it should be investigated.

However, inadequate research has been done to fill the gap in the literature about the social and cultural factors that influence preferences and predilections in terms of language choice. Saudi Arabia is unique not only in relation to Western contexts but also in the context of the Gulf region. In the Saudi context, English is considered not merely foreign, but alien. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in the previous research locating social and cultural factors that influence preferences and predilections in terms of language choice. It adds valuable knowledge to the field of research, and the findings will help researchers, education policymakers, curriculum designers, students, and instructors formulate CLT in such a way that the sociolinguistic component or the social context will be prioritized.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Communicative Language Teaching Approach*

Until the late 1960s, situational language teaching (SLT) was the main British approach to teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). In SLT, teachers focus on structures in situation-based activities. The need for the CLT approach was felt when SLT was found not to meet the stated goal of language teaching and support the process of imparting communicative elements in language learning. Manoliu (2012) pointed out that two significant views led to the CLT approach. First, Noam Chomsky in his *Syntactic Structures* stated that structural theories of language could not account for creativity and uniqueness in individual sentences, which he viewed as the fundamental characteristics of language. Second, applied linguists and philosophers such as Van Ek and Alexander (1980) and Wilkins (1972) emphasized the importance of the functional and communicative potential of language. Moreover, economic development and globalization was a major factor that created demand for communication among nations, and thus, new approaches and methods of language teaching that focus on communication have been explored. One of these approaches was CLT, which was based on Hymes's views in the 70s. The CLT approach has been proposed as an alternative to traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-lingual Method, with a focus on communication, not grammar and structure. Little et al. (1994) stated in their book *The Communicative Approach and Authentic Texts* that communicative approaches emphasize teaching language in terms of real-life situations, interactive communication, and meaningful context, whereas traditional methods of teaching second language concentrate on grammatical rules, imitation, drillings, and memorization.

The influence of the CLT approach was not limited to teaching but also to curriculum design and textbooks. Many countries have started to apply methods that emphasize communication. For instance, the Ministry of Education in Taiwan has initiated many reforms since 1994 in the field of English education and moved away from traditional pedagogy, which emphasizes grammar and translation, to more effective methods which focus on enhancing learners' communicative proficiency. This has been done in response to the demands created by internationalization and globalization (Huang, 2016). Japan has launched a major initiative to improve English language teaching in its educational system and concentrate on communicative competence of learners in the country (Ohno, 2002). Nevertheless, the question of the applicability of the CLT approach in all societies is still controversial, and requires more investigation. This paper attempted to discover how EFL social context hinders the application of CLT in Saudi Arabia where English is taught only as a foreign language. It also highlights reasons behind the difficulty of attaining communicative competence as the final goal of CLT approach.

### B. *EFL Context and the Implementation of CLT*

Adopting CLT is a difficult task compared to traditional methods. In CLT, teachers are not confined by textbooks to teach the structure, grammar, and vocabulary of a language. They should teach learners how to use the language in real life communication situations. Widdowson (1990), for example, emphasizes the importance of getting learners to do things with language. To accomplish this task, teachers need to update and modify their teaching techniques; they need to be creative and innovative in selecting appropriate supplementary materials to expand their knowledge beyond textbooks and use a variety of materials that reflect an authentic environment and correspond with the principles of CLT. Effective supplementary materials selected from real life situations not only trigger learners' desire to learn, but also expand their knowledge and horizons. Besides, the CLT approach requires a supportive environment and society for successful implementation. Therefore, these questions are important: 'Can we apply CLT in any context irrespective of the social dynamics which underpin society? Which context is more congenial and supportive for CLT: English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL)?'

Application of a new method in language teaching may cause problems unless social context, environment, culture, and economic conditions are considered. The ESL context where the community uses English to communicate is more convenient to utilize CLT as there is room for learners to involve themselves with the community and practice the language. However, an EFL social context might affect the effectiveness of CLT approach and cause some impediments to EFL teachers due to the environment that does not help them apply CLT approach which emphasizes utilizing real life situations. A society that considers English as a foreign language has differences compared to a society where English is a second language; thus, the social norms and contexts should be considered. Lamie (2004) asserts that a proposed language teaching method should be compatible with the prevailing standards and norms in a society. Ellis (1996) states that for its successful application in a society, the CLT approach needs to be culturally attuned and accepted. He points out that ESL is integrative and occurs in an English-speaking society where students can test out or practice new language skills in authentic situations. ESL is designed to help individuals function in a community whereas EFL is only a part of the school curriculum and depends on teachers' language proficiency, teaching resources, and the availability of teaching materials. Learners cannot practice English if it is not used in a community for communication. Sometimes, they might not even be motivated to learn English seriously when they observe that it is not used in their daily life.

Many educators and experts express their reservation over the suitability of CLT approach to teaching ESL. Ellis (1996) stated that the application of CLT has encountered resistance in EFL classrooms. Littlewood (2007) pointed out

that despite the interest of East Asian educators and governments in CLT, some reports have expressed practical and conceptual concerns regarding its implementation. Other researchers believe that CLT approach occurred as the result of studies, surveys, and analyses in Western societies, where conditions and environment are different from those in many Asian and African countries. Alsyed (2018) claims that adopting CLT is a challenge for EFL teachers mainly because of its Western origins and that the method clashes with many local EFL contexts and cultural settings.

Wei et al. (2018) claim that the CLT approach shares many commonalities with two hypotheses proposed by Krashen (1981)—'Comprehension Hypothesis' and the 'Affective Filter Hypothesis'. Combining these two hypotheses, Krashen argues, 'We acquire language when we receive comprehensible input in a low anxiety situation', rather than 'by learning about language, by studying rules and by memorizing vocabulary' (Krashen, 2003, p. 3). Krashen emphasizes that a learning environment with rich language input and anxiety-free context provides exactly optimum conditions required to develop communicative competence using CLT. Canale and Swain (1980) claim that sociolinguistic competence is the central component for achieving communicative competence; by sociolinguistic competence, they meant that learners should have sufficient knowledge of sociocultural communication rules to successfully handle communications in different sociolinguistic contexts, in accordance with settings, topics, and relationships. Unlike ESL societies, in EFL societies such as Saudi Arabia or other Arab countries, the opportunity for learners to practice and communicate in a native sociolinguistic context is unavailable. Therefore, learners cannot achieve sociolinguistic competence as long as the environment does not enhance communication practice in social contexts. In the EFL context, the classroom is the predominant source. In contrast, in ESL context, non-native speakers mainly communicate in English, thereby practicing language skills using a variety of registers and using English to meet various life demands (Wei et al., 2018). Therefore, applying CLT approach in EFL societies, such as Arab countries, is not easy because of serious challenges. Bax (2003) criticizes CLT for completely neglecting the context of learning language and considering only the teaching methodology as an essential factor. To reflect the importance of contexts and reject the CLT approach, Bax suggests a new method, which he called the Context Approach. He argues that good training and good teachers prioritize context and that in CLT, methodology is generally dominant, and the context is secondary. There are some other factors that affect the application of CLT relevant to learners. Chang (2011) conducted a study on factors affecting the implementation of CLT and found out that students' resistance and low English proficiency weaken the teachers' efforts to use CLT and caused difficulties carrying out communicative activities. Sherwani and Kilic (2017) pointed out that lack of English proficiency and insufficient fluency of students undermine the efforts of teachers during CLT implementation. Alharbi (2022) listed a number of difficulties with the implementation of communicative language teaching approaches, such as students' passive style and resistance to communicative activities, low motivation, and the absence of a real need to use English outside the classroom.

### *C. Challenge of Achieving Communicative Competence*

The term 'communicative competence' is interpreted in different ways. Chomsky (1965) defined it first as the shared knowledge of the ideal speaker-listener set in a homogeneous speech community. This shared knowledge enables users to produce and understand an infinite set of sentences from a finite set of rules. Chomsky only focused on linguistic competence and claimed that social factors were not part of the domain of linguistics. Hymes (1972) disagreed with Chomsky's notion of competence, stating that the theory does not consider language use competency in social life. Arguing that this notion ignores the socio-cultural dimension, Hymes says that social life influences outward performance and internal competence. He added that social life restricts utilization of grammar because rules of use dominate the rules of grammar. Based on this argument, Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence as the ability not only to control linguistic form but also to use grammatical competence in a variety of communicative contexts. That is, Hymes added the notion of sociolinguistics to Chomsky's definition of competence. Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence as the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behaviours, which requires learners' active involvement in the production of the target language. Vesnabagarić (2007) pointed out that Savignon (1972, 1983) described communicative competence in a different way than Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980) or even Widdowson (1990), stating that Savignon (1972, 1983) emphasized the aspect of ability in her concept of communicative competence. She described communicative competence as 'the ability to function in a truly communicative setting—that is, in a dynamic exchange in which linguistic competence must adapt itself to the total informational input, both linguistic and paralinguistic, of one or more interlocutors'. Canale (1983) explained communicative competence more deeply, regarding it as a term encompassing four components: grammatical competence (the rules of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation), sociolinguistic competence (the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts), discourse competence (the ability to understand, construct, and structure language into cohesive texts—either spoken or written), and strategic competence (communicators' capability to maintain communication and repair communication breakdown).

Vygotsky (1962) in his social learning theory emphasized that people learn through interactions and communications in social contexts with others. He added that culture is the primary determining factor behind knowledge construction and we learn through the cultural lens by interacting with others. Hymes (1972, 1979), Canale and Swain (1980), Savignon (1972, 1983), and Canale (1983) strongly emphasize the role of social contexts and setting in attaining communicative competence. Theorists and linguists unanimously agree that social context is essential to achieve communicative competence.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Despite the interest in many Asian countries in applying the CLT approach at schools and universities, some reports claim that teachers and lecturers encounter challenges during the application, particularly in EFL contexts. In the light of literature and from the perspectives of university lecturers at Jazan University, King Khalid University, and Bisha University in Saudi Arabia, this study attempted to locate impediments to the application of CLT. Specifically, it aimed to address the following research questions:

- What are the impediments university teachers face to the application of CLT?
- How feasible is the achievement of communicative competence in the Saudi EFL context?

### IV. METHODS

#### A. Participants

Participants in this study have been drawn from lecturers at three universities, whose majors were English language, linguistics, and applied linguistics. To obtain reliable and valid results a purposive sample was selected by the researcher. From nearly ninety-two academics, twenty-six professors and teachers were selected as a non-random sample and can be referred to as an expert sample to fit the purpose. Purposive sampling was selected to get a targeted population that is homogenous, has the same attributes, and consists of highly qualified faculty. Participants were selected based on their experience, readiness, and availability. They were categorized as four associate professors, eleven assistant professors, and eleven lecturers with experience of at least five years.

#### B. Data Collection

The design of the study is qualitative, to better investigate human attitudes. The researcher used an interview as a tool to collect the data since interviews are the most appropriate and commonly used instrument for collecting data in qualitative research. A semi-structured interview was utilized as it allows the interviewer to probe for information and enables participants to crystallize their ideas. Interviews with the participants were recorded. The interview consisted of two sections, according to the research questions of the study. The first section consisted of a number of key questions to obtain data to answer the first research question which explored information pertinent to impediments to the application of the communicative approach. For example, some of the key questions were ‘while using the CLT approach, what challenges do you encounter? Are there any difficulties caused by students? Are there any impediments caused by the social context in Saudi Arabia? Is CLT an appropriate teaching method? Do you give your students examples of communicative interactions from real-life situations? Do students participate effectively in activities?’ For more details, follow-up questions were raised where needed, such as ‘why do you have difficulties in applying CLT? Can you explain why the social context is not supportive? Do students face difficulties in carrying out communicative activities? Why do you think students’ participation is very low?’

The second section consisted of key questions to elicit data related to the second research question which investigates the feasibility of achieving communicative competence in the Saudi context. In this section, the interviewer asked key questions followed by follow-up questions when needed. Some of the key questions, for instance, were ‘what is the main goal of communicative language teaching approach? Is it easy for students to achieve communicative competence? Are there any difficulties students face to achieve communicative competence as the main goal of CLT? Do students use English outside classes, in the community? Do you take your students to real-life situations to allow them to hear authentic conversations? Do you think that Saudi social context is a barrier to achieving communicative competence?’ Follow-up questions were used by the interviewer where necessary to obtain more reliable data, such as ‘why do you think students face difficulties to achieve communicative competence? Are students active or passive participants? Why so? Do students find opportunities in community to practice English skills? What do students need to achieve communicative competence?’

#### C. Data Analysis

After gathering the data orally, a thematic content analysis was conducted to identify patterns or themes in the data. The researcher at first listened to the recorded data properly once, to become familiar with the data before transcription. Then, the recorded data were transcribed into texts, annotations were used to label the relevant qualitative data in the transcribed data, and brief descriptions of what was said by the interviewees were coded. Identified themes and data were reviewed and refined again for the purpose of confirmation and improvement. A report of the findings was written to answer the research questions of the study.

#### D. Ethical Considerations

For the sake of scientific and ethical integrity, several measures were taken. Participants were informed about the nature, purpose, and benefits of the study. They were told that they would be interviewed and recorded. At the same time, they were assured that the recorded data would be strictly confidential. Participants chose to participate willingly on the basis of informed consent, without any coercion, and were offered the right to withdraw their participation.

Furthermore, the researcher abided by the university code of conduct, and the research design was approved by the institutional review board.

## V. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study intended to address the following research questions:

- What are the impediments university teachers face to the application of CLT?
- How feasible is the achievement of communicative competence in Saudi EFL context?

The data obtained through the interview with professors and instructors are thematically analysed below, based on the research questions of the study and in sequence.

### A. Analysis of Research Question 1

What are the impediments university teachers face to the application of CLT?

The analysis of the data for the first research question revealed the following findings:

Participants asserted that the social context was a challenge that hindered the successful application of CLT. Approximately 69% of the participants noted that the CLT approach was developed in a European context, which is completely different from the social context of Saudi Arabia, and due to the difference in social contexts, they stated that they encountered difficulties applying CLT in Saudi Arabia EFL contexts. Thus, they emphasized the importance of considering social contexts when proposing and developing new teaching methods. They believe that language teaching is a cultural negotiation, and students' motivation is largely culturally influenced. Thus, awareness among educators and theorists of the social context of learners is essential to develop teaching methods compatible with the social context. Furthermore, participants noted that the purpose of learning languages is not only to further academic skills but to achieve social functions, affirming that to know where to start in language teaching, we should know where we are located in social context. Therefore, a method which is based on principles that ignore the social context of a certain society might not be sufficiently feasible or applicable to that society.

The majority of the participants pointed out that EFL social context in Saudi Arabia is a barrier to the effective implementation of CLT. About 81% of the participants claim that the community in Saudi Arabia does not use English to communicate in daily life, which makes the social environment discouraging and unsupportive for learners to enhance and reinforce what they have learned in class through the exercises of authentic communicative interactions. Another challenge in applying CLT is poor outcomes from learning English in secondary school. The participants stated that students usually finish secondary school with low proficiency in English, which makes them unable to cope with CLT classes, as these classes require active interactions, collaborative work, role-play activities, and communication. Students' low motivation is another challenge to the successful implementation of CLT. About 76% of participants emphasized the negative influence of students' low motivation on successfully applying CLT, stating that students at schools were passive participants—they played the role of receivers rather than active participants. They ascribed learners' low motivation and passiveness to the influence of the traditional methods, such as the Grammar-Translation Method, which are still used at schools. These methods concentrate only on memorizing grammatical patterns, translations, and teaching vocabulary through bilingual word lists.

The participants stated that they faced challenges in finding authentic teaching materials covering real-life sample situations—principles outlined in CLT—in Saudi Arabia to be utilized in classes. They also encountered difficulties arranging authentic activities outside classes, to enhance strategies used in the communicative approach and motivate students to get involved in authentic interactions in social contexts, such as restaurants, malls, and clothes shops. Instructors are directly able to facilitate language learning in classroom activities only. For the majority of the participants, social environment and context are real hindrances to the effective application of CLT. They believed that creating a social environment conducive for learners to naturally practice English is important; otherwise, English departments will produce mere machines that can memorize only meaningless utterances, rather than social humans who can communicate in ways appropriate to cultural and social contexts. The practice of shifting from native to a second or foreign language is still missing in Saudi Arabia.

### B. Analysis of Research Question 2

The second research question of the study examined the feasibility of achieving communicative competence in Saudi Arabia, the central target of the CLT approach. Participants illustrated that communicative competence is difficult to attain in the EFL social context, where English is only superficially taught at school and the connection of the language to real-life situations is not maintained. The participants emphasized that experience using English in real-life contexts would give learners not only confidence in using English but also patterns or scripts of narratives, which would help them produce meaningful utterances with confidence when these patterns were turned into internal structures or power. The participants pointed out that language learning is not just limited to learning the rules of grammar in classrooms or conversations that are isolated from real-life situations; it is all about using language appropriately to a range of contexts or settings. The cultivation of contextual intelligence is impossible through classroom discourse, as a wide range of examples of variations in language use cannot be authentically brought to the restricted classroom setting. Learners' sociolinguistic competence needs to be enhanced by teachers by engaging them in various social interactions,

so that the learners can attain communicative competence. Mere sensitization for sociolinguistic competence will not serve this purpose; exposure to multicultural contexts in real life is essential to achieve communicative competence, which, according to the participants, is unattainable in a society with an EFL context. But it might be more convenient and achievable in ESL social contexts.

### *C. Discussion*

Twenty-six professors and teachers willingly agreed to be interviewed in this study. These participants shared their experiences with regard to the communicative language teaching approach. The research objective was to enquire about the impediments university lecturers encounter to the application of CLT and to explore the perspectives of lecturers on the feasibility of achieving communicative competence, the main goal of CLT. This discussion is drawn from the findings of the study presented above.

The study showed some significant findings concerning impediments to the application of CLT in the Saudi EFL context. First, participants stated that social context is a major hindrance, as CLT is an approach that originated as a response to the needs of the European context, with principles that are most probably applicable in an ESL society but are incompatible with the EFL context in Saudi Arabia. This finding implies that EFL social contexts require methods that take into account the characteristics and culture of the society. This conforms to Ellis (1996) who stated that the CLT approach needs to be culturally attuned and accepted that ESL is integrative and occurs in an English-speaking society and is designed to help individuals function in that community, whereas EFL is only a part of the school curriculum and depends more on teachers' language proficiency, teaching resources, and the availability of teaching materials. The study identified that low English proficiency and low motivation undermine lecturers' efforts to carry out communicative activities. This result corresponds with previous findings (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Sherwani & Kilic, 2017) which indicated that students' resistance and low English proficiency undermine lecturers' efforts. Students' low motivation is another barrier that hinders the application of communicative activities such as role play, pair work, and collaborative work. It could be said that low language proficiency and low motivation connected together weaken teachers' ability to focus on communicative interactions. This agrees with the findings presented by Alharbi (2022) who asserted that low motivation, students' passive style and resistance to communicative activities, and absence of the need to use the language outside class are real challenges to successful implementation of CLT. Another challenge faced by teachers that hinders their effort to apply the principles of CLT is the absence of opportunities to arrange authentic activities outside classes to enhance strategies of the communicative approach and motivate students to get involved in authentic interactions in social contexts. This corresponds with Widdowson (1990) who pointed out that teachers need to be innovative in selecting a variety of authentic supplementary materials that enhance the principles of CLT and expand learners' horizons.

With regard to communicative competence, the results of the study showed that communicative competence is unattainable in a social context where the connection to the language of real-life situations is not maintained. It is inferred from the findings that using language in real-life contexts is crucial to enhance learners' confidence and allow them to acquire various patterns of narratives, which would help them produce meaningful utterances and facilitate their task of achieving communicative competence. This insight is also advocated by Canale and Swain (1980), Savignon (1972, 1983), and Canale (1983), who strongly emphasize the role of social contexts and settings in attaining communicative competence. Moreover, the findings illustrated that sociolinguistic competence needs to be enhanced by teachers, by engaging learners in various social interactions to achieve communicative competence. The study highlighted that the promotion of contextual intelligence is impossible or very difficult in a restricted classroom setting. Exposure of learners to activities in sociolinguistic contexts in real life equips them with communicative techniques that would help them to achieve communicative competence. This result agrees with Canale (1983) who asserted that sociolinguistic competence is a central element in achieving communicative competence.

The findings of this study help address the lack of focus on the sociolinguistic context of language learning, which may adversely impact applicability and learning outcomes. The participants whom the author interviewed to collate data for this study pointed to several context-specific issues that impede the successful application of CLT in Saudi Arabia's context. The findings of the study will help researchers, curriculum designers, students, and instructors formulate CLT in such a way that the sociolinguistic component or the social context will be prioritized.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Though CLT approach has achieved enormous popularity among various sections of the English language teaching community, this approach has suffered severe limitations in contexts which are less open to the influence of instructional interactions. While the participants of this study emphasize the pivotal role of social context in allowing learners to construct knowledge and enhance their communicative skills, the real dilemma lies in the fact that the social context in Saudi Arabia does not provide appropriate opportunities for learners to practice English through social interactions. EFL social contexts in Saudi Arabia and similar Arab countries have unique characteristics and cultures which require a corresponding teaching method. The study concluded that pitfalls and challenges are apparent and are due to the implementation of teaching materials and communicative language teaching techniques without a thorough analysis and understanding of the nature of the reality of the social context of EFL learners in Saudi Arabia and similar

Arab countries. Teaching method, techniques, and materials must emanate from the social context to be feasible. Learners' low-level English proficiency, low motivation, and lack of authentic materials are other impediments to the successful application of CLT. Communicative competence is an essential aim in CLT, but it also remains challenging. To achieve communicative competence, sociolinguistic competence should be achieved, as indicated by Canale (1983). It is not easy for learners in the Saudi Arabian EFL social context to achieve sociolinguistic competence in a situation where they have no exposure to English outside the class.

This paper argued that a single-minded focus on 'communication' alone, while ignoring contextual challenges and realities, will not yield any tangible results in terms of language acquisition. The applicability of CLT in Saudi Arabia's context poses several challenges that should be addressed not only from an academic perspective but also from social and cultural perspectives. Finally, the application of CLT in Saudi Arabia and other similar countries has not been based on the needs of the Saudi Arabia context, but was the result of a change in the methods of teaching English in the West. Therefore, there is a need to develop a teaching method that emerges from EFL social contexts and conditions—what Bax (2003) called 'a context approach'.

#### A. Implications

This study suggests practical and theoretical implications helpful for stakeholders, educators, policy-makers, researchers, curriculum designers, students, and instructors. One implication is the importance of exploring new dimensions of the applicability of the much-hailed CLT, in order to make it more accommodative and dynamic than what it is now. A thorough analysis of the EFL social context in Saudi Arabia, as well as the needs of learners, can be carried out, and accordingly, appropriate teaching materials and techniques can be decided on. Another implication is that policymakers and educators need to reconsider the way the English language is taught at public schools, to ensure communicative activities and improve students' English proficiency. Moreover, stakeholders and teachers should create a more motivating English environment that maximizes learners' use of and involvement in English by providing effective visual aids that support communicative activities and extracurricular activities that enhance communication.

As communicative competence is difficult to achieve due to the real absence of practice of sociolinguistic activities, it is suggested that various patterns of language use from sociolinguistic contexts should be brought to the classroom to provide students with examples from real-life situations to enhance their communicative competence.

#### B. Limitations

This study investigated the impediments to the implementation of CLT from the perspective of university professors and lecturers in the south of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to universities all over Saudi Arabia, only the southern region. In addition, it was planned to interview males and females lecturers, but due to cultural constraints, only three females were interviewed.

Since this study was limited to universities in the southern region of Saudi Arabia, further studies are recommended in other universities in the Northern and Eastern regions and at secondary schools as well. This study focused on the feasibility of CLT from the perspectives of lecturers; students were not included. Therefore, there is a need to explore learners' perspectives on the CLT approach.

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