

Obstacles to Implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Libyan Primary Schools: A Rural Perspective

A. Bernia Hussein Al-Mukhtar Al-Mashloukh – Faculty of Arts, Asaba – University of Gharyan

عقبات تطبيق التدريس التواصلي للغة CLT - في المدارس الابتدائية
الليبية- منظور ريفي

أ. برنية حسين المختار المشلوك - كلية الآداب الأصابعة - جامعة غريان

areensmum@gmail.com

الملاـصـص :

على الرغم من الطلب الملحوظ على إتقان اللغة الإنجليزية المتقدم في التعليم العالي الليبي، فقد تم إهمال المدارس الحكومية الابتدائية، وخاصة في المناطق الريفية، وتحقق هذه الدراسة النوعية في ضرورة تطبيق منهجيات محسنة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) في المدارس الحكومية الابتدائية الليبية، باستخدام بلدية الغواليش الريفية التي مررت بالصراع كدراسة حالة. تم جمع البيانات عبر استبيانات وملحوظات صافية من عشرة معلمين وعشرة تلاميذ في الصف الثالث. كشفت النتائج عن الاعتماد المنهجي على الطرق التقليدية للترجمة والقواعد (Grammar- Translation Methods)، ونقص حد في الموارد (بما في ذلك الوسائل التعليمية الأساسية وتقنيات المعلومات والاتصالات)، والحد الأدنى من مشاركة الطلاب. وأظهر المعلمون تطبيقاً محدوداً لمبادئ التدريس التواصلي للغة (CLT)، مع التركيز بشكل أساسي على الحفظ الصمّي والتمارين الكتابية. ونتيجة لذلك، أشار التلاميذ إلى انخفاض الدافعية والفشل في استيعاب الفائدة العملية للغة. تخلص الدراسة إلى أن هناك حاجة ماسة لصلاح جوهري في أساليب تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا، موصيةً بدمج الوسائل السمعية والبصرية، والتعلم القائم على الأنشطة، والاستخدام الاستراتيجي لتقنيات المعلومات والاتصالات (ICTs) لتعزيز الدافعية الذاتية وبناء أساس مستدام لإتقان اللغة الإنجليزية.

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Abstract

Despite the critical demand for advanced English proficiency in Libyan higher education, primary public schools, particularly in rural areas, have been neglected. This qualitative study investigates the imperative for implementing improved methodologies in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Libyan primary public schools, using the post-conflict rural municipality of Al Gwaleesh as a case study. Data were collected by questionnaires and classroom observations from ten teachers and ten third-year pupils. The findings reveal a systemic reliance on traditional Grammar-Translation Methods, a stark deficiency of resources (including basic teaching aids and ICT), and minimal student engagement. Teachers demonstrated limited application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles, focusing predominantly on rote memorization and written exercises. Consequently, pupils reported low motivation and a failure to grasp the language's practical utility. The study concludes that a fundamental overhaul of EFL pedagogy in Libya is urgently required, recommending the integration of audio-visual aids, activity-based learning, and strategic incorporation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to foster intrinsic motivation and build a sustainable foundation for English proficiency.

Keywords: EFL, primary education, Libya, CLT, ICT, rural education, teaching methodologies

1. Introduction

The acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become a cornerstone for educational and professional advancement globally. In Libya, while the demand for a proficient English-speaking cadre in universities and higher institutes is acute, the foundational stage of this learning journey—**primary public education**—has not received commensurate attention. For decades, the Libyan EFL curriculum has remained stagnant, characterized by textbooks centered on text

comprehension questions and a pedagogical reliance on the **Grammar-Translation Method (GTM)**, which emphasizes vocabulary memorization and grammatical rules over communicative competence.

The official introduction of **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** in 2001, which prioritizes interaction and communication skills, marked a potential shift. However, this transition has been largely unsuccessful. A pervasive "mediocre" standard of spoken English persists among students, a problem often attributed to non-native teachers' accents and a lack of immersive practice. This failure is exacerbated by socio-political upheavals, including the 2011 war and the global pandemic, which have disrupted educational continuity and left schools to fend for themselves. The disparity is further widened by geography; students in **rural areas** lack access to the private tutoring and native-speaker instruction available in urban centers.

2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the Ministry of Education's official adoption of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach over two decades ago, there is a **systemic and observable failure** to transition away from the outdated Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) in Libyan primary public schools, particularly in disadvantaged **rural municipalities like Al Gwaleesh**.

This failure manifests in several critical areas:

- Pedagogical Ineffectiveness:** EFL teachers continue to rely on rote memorization, transcription, and grammatical drills, leading to students who are structurally competent yet communicatively incompetent.
- Resource and Infrastructure Deficiency:** Rural schools suffer from a severe lack of essential teaching aids, audio-visual materials, and reliable ICT infrastructure, which are vital components for successful CLT implementation (Nengsi, 2024).
- Low Learner Motivation:** Primary school pupils demonstrate significant disengagement, reporting a dislike for English classes and a failure to grasp the practical, real-world utility of the language, despite expressing a desire for fluency.

The core problem is the persistent gap between the national policy mandate for CLT and the observable, entrenched GTM-based classroom reality in

rural primary schools, ultimately undermining the foundation of English proficiency in the entire Libyan educational system.

3. Significance of the Study

This study holds significant theoretical, practical, and policy implications:

3.1. Theoretical Significance (Addressing the Gap)

This research addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by providing an **in-depth, localized qualitative perspective** on the EFL challenges in a specific, under-researched, **post-conflict rural Libyan context (Al Gwaleesh)**.

- **The Gap:** While Orafi and Borg (2009) and Abukhattala (2016) established the "theory-practice divide" in Libyan EFL, their work largely focused on urban centers or general national surveys. There is a **dearth of qualitative data detailing how infrastructural, post-conflict, and rural-specific adversities directly impede pedagogical reform at the foundational primary level**. This study bridges that gap by connecting teacher beliefs, resource scarcity, and student attitudes in a disadvantaged setting.
- **Contribution:** It offers empirical evidence that the *context*—specifically the **resource-deprived and unstable rural environment**—is the primary variable dictating the persistence of GTM, providing a richer, context-driven explanation for the failure of CLT policy implementation in Libya.

3.2. Practical and Policy Significance

1. **Curriculum Reform Blueprint:** The findings provide the Ministry of Education with **specific, actionable data** detailing the exact obstacles faced by rural teachers, allowing for the design of a targeted and realistic primary EFL curriculum.
2. **Targeted Teacher Training:** The study reveals that a BA degree is insufficient. It offers empirical justification for **customized professional development programs** that focus not just on CLT theory but on practical, low-resource teaching techniques and basic ICT integration training tailored for rural contexts.
3. **Resource Allocation Prioritization:** By documenting the "stark deficiency of resources," the study provides a compelling case for **prioritizing the allocation of basic teaching aids and minimal ICT infrastructure** (e.g.,

projectors, audio players) to schools in marginalized rural areas to ensure equitable educational opportunities.

4. **Boosting Foundational Skills:** By identifying the source of low student motivation at the primary level, the study offers a clear pathway for pedagogical intervention (audio-visuals, activity-based learning) that can **build a sustainable and intrinsically motivated foundation** for English proficiency, which is crucial for success in higher education and the global workforce.

2. Literature Review

This review synthesizes existing research pertinent to Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Libya, structured around five critical themes: the centralized policy environment, the evolution of pedagogical frameworks, the role of technology, the importance of foundational skills, and international parallels that contextualize the Libyan experience.

2.1. The Libyan EFL Context and Policy Challenges

The Libyan educational landscape is characterized by a highly centralized model, where the Ministry of Education in Tripoli exerts absolute control over curriculum design, textbook authorship, and nationwide distribution (Orafi, 2013). This top-down approach, while intended to ensure uniformity, often results in significant bureaucratic delays. As noted in the original study, these delays disrupt the academic calendar and exacerbate resource shortages, particularly in remote rural schools which are the last to receive materials and support. This creates a *de facto* two-tiered system, privileging urban centers.

The mandated shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the early 2000s represents a key policy initiative aimed at modernizing language instruction. However, research indicates that this reform has been largely superficial. Orafi and Borg (2009), in a seminal study on Libyan teachers, found that while teachers often held positive attitudes towards CLT principles, their classroom practices remained overwhelmingly traditional. This "theory-practice divide" is a critical barrier to progress, stemming from a lack of immersive teacher training, inadequate support materials, and an assessment system that continues to prioritize grammatical accuracy over

communicative competence. The policy, therefore, remains an unrealized ideal, failing to translate into meaningful classroom interaction.

2.2. Pedagogical Frameworks: From GTM to CLT

The Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) has been the historical cornerstone of EFL teaching in Libya and many similar contexts. Its focus on rote memorization of vocabulary, grammatical rules, and translation exercises aligns with a view of language as a static system of rules rather than a dynamic tool for communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This method produces students who may be able to decode complex texts but are often "structurally competent yet communicatively incompetent" (Abukhattala, 2016, p. 78).

The introduction of CLT marked a paradigm shift, proposing that language learning's primary goal is communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction, fluency, and student-centered activities like role-plays and problem-solving tasks. However, its implementation in Libya has faced multifaceted challenges. As Richards and Rodgers (2014) outline, successful CLT adoption requires not just a change in method but a fundamental shift in the roles of teachers (from knowledge-transmitters to facilitators) and learners (from passive recipients to active participants). This shift is hampered by large class sizes, a cultural ethos that respects teacher authority, and, as previously mentioned, a misalignment with examination systems. The result is a hybrid, often ineffective, pedagogy where CLT activities are occasionally bolted onto a fundamentally GTM structure.

2.3. The Role of Technology and Resources

The integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is recognized as a powerful catalyst for language acquisition, offering access to authentic materials, enabling personalized learning through Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), and fostering global connections (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). In developed contexts, technology is seamlessly woven into the fabric of education. However, the global digital divide severely impacts rural areas. Howley et al. (2010) documented how rural schools in the United States struggled with inadequate infrastructure and teacher preparedness, a challenge magnified in developing nations.

In Libya, this divide is chasmic, particularly in post-conflict rural areas like Al Gwaleesh. Abu Khattala (2016) explicitly notes that "computers are not widely used in Libyan foreign language classrooms" (p. 80), attributing this to a combination of insufficient funding, unreliable electricity, and a lack of technical support and training. This technological deprivation excludes students from the very tools that define modern language learning—interactive software, online pronunciation guides, and digital storytelling platforms—therefore perpetuating their reliance on outdated, print-based methods and widening the gap between them and their urban counterparts.

2.4. Foundational Skills and Multilingualism

The repercussions of a weak primary-level EFL foundation are profound and long-lasting. Hamed's (2018) study of Libyan university students is illustrative; it revealed a high frequency of basic errors in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure—skills that should be automatized in early education. This suggests that primary instruction is failing to establish the fundamental "building blocks" of the language, forcing tertiary education to remediate rather than advance.

This foundational weakness also has macro-level implications. In an increasingly globalized world, multilingualism is a key national asset. Cenoz (2013) defines multilingualism as both an individual capacity and a social resource that enhances a country's cultural, economic, and diplomatic capital. For Libya, improving English proficiency is not about cultural substitution but about equipping its citizens to engage effectively in international trade, diplomacy, and academic collaboration. As Marland (1977) argued, multilingualism fosters "increased trade, greater competitiveness and greater employability" (p. 15). A failure to build a strong base in primary education thus undermines the nation's strategic position in the global arena.

2.5. International Parallels

The challenges documented in Libya are not isolated but reflect a broader pattern in many EFL contexts, which underscores the universality of the issues. In Indonesia, Erni and Hamidah Yamat (2021) investigated why students performed poorly in reading comprehension despite a lengthy period of instruction. They identified familiar culprits: teacher-centered

methodologies, a focus on exams over understanding, and a lack of engaging reading materials. Similarly, in Saudi Arabia, Al-Malki (2023) found that tourism undergraduates, for whom spoken English is a vocational necessity, possessed critically weak speaking skills, linking this directly to pedagogical approaches that neglected oral fluency.

These international parallels are instructive. They demonstrate that the obstacles—resistance to pedagogical change, resource inequality, and the theory-practice gap—are common across diverse cultures. Consequently, the solutions must also be comprehensive, focusing not only on changing curricula but on systemic support for teacher development, resource allocation, and the alignment of assessment with communicative goals. The Libyan context, with its unique post-conflict challenges, requires a tailored but equally concerted strategy focused on the foundational primary years.

3. 3. Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to conduct an in-depth, contextual investigation into the realities of EFL teaching and learning in a disadvantaged, post-conflict Libyan context. The following sections detail the research design, setting, participants, instruments, procedures, and analytical framework.

3.1. Research Design

This study adopted a **qualitative, multiple-case study design** situated within an **interpretivist paradigm**. The interpretivist approach is predicated on the understanding that social reality, such as the dynamics of a classroom, is constructed through the meanings that participants assign to their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A qualitative methodology was deemed most appropriate as it facilitates a deep, nuanced exploration of complex phenomena in their natural context, prioritizing depth of understanding over breadth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The multiple-case study design was selected because it allows for the investigation of a contemporary phenomenon (EFL pedagogy) within its real-life context, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). In this research, each classroom observed constituted a single case, and the cross-case analysis enabled the identification of common patterns and unique variances in teaching

practices and student engagement across the sampled schools in Al Gwaleesh.

3.2. Research Setting and Participants

Setting: The research was conducted in public primary schools within the municipality of **Al Gwaleesh**, a rural area in northwestern Libya. This setting was purposefully selected as a **critical case** (Patton, 2015) due to its experience of significant socio-economic and infrastructural disruption following the 2011 civil war. Schools in this region are characterized by chronic resource scarcity, unreliable basic services (e.g., electricity), and a history of educational instability, making them a potent site for examining the challenges of implementing modern EFL pedagogies in adverse conditions.

Participants: A **purposive sampling** technique was used to recruit participants who could provide rich, information-laden insights into the research problem (Patton, 2015). The sample comprised two distinct groups:

1. **Teacher Participants (N=10):** All teachers held a Bachelor's degree in English or English Education, a mandatory qualification for public school English teachers in Libya. Their teaching experience ranged from 6 to 12 years, meaning they had experience with the pre- and post-2011 educational landscape. Their ages ranged from 30 to 40 years. This profile was selected to capture the perspectives of practitioners who are neither novices nor near-retirement, thus representing the core of the current teaching workforce.
2. **Pupil Participants (N=10):** The pupils were in their third year of primary school, approximately 8 years old. This cohort was chosen because they have had two years of formal English instruction, making them capable of providing rudimentary feedback on their learning experiences, yet they are still at a formative stage where pedagogical approaches critically shape their attitudes and foundational skills.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two sequential phases over a two-month time to ensure comprehensive data triangulation.

Phase1:Questionnaires

Two separate, self-developed questionnaires were administered:

- **Teacher Questionnaire:** This instrument contained 10 items, combining both closed-ended (e.g., Likert-scale and multiple-choice) and open-ended questions. It was designed to gather data on:
 - Perceptions of resource adequacy and key obstacles (Q1, Q4).
 - Beliefs about teaching methodologies and their effectiveness (Q3, Q5, Q6).
 - Self-reported practices regarding motivation and classroom techniques (Q2, Q7).
 - Professional challenges and contextual evaluations (Q8, Q9, Q10).
- **Pupil Questionnaire:** This instrument contained 7 simple, child-friendly items, primarily using pictorial Likert scales (e.g., smiley to frowny faces) and yes/no questions, with supplementary open-ended prompts. It aimed to assess:
 - Affective dimensions (enjoyment, attitude towards the teacher) (Q1, Q2).
 - Motivational drivers (desire for fluency, career aspirations) (Q3, Q5).
 - Receptivity to alternative learning mediums (e.g., cartoons) (Q4).
 - Specific grievances and understanding of the subject's purpose (Q6, Q7).

Procedures: Prior to distribution, ethical approval was secured from the relevant school principals. The researcher was present during questionnaire administration to provide clarifications. For the pupils, each question was read aloud, and key concepts were explained in their first language (Arabic) to ensure full comprehension and reliable responses. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed for all participants; teachers were offered the use of pseudonyms.

Phase2:Non-Participant Observation

The researcher conducted **non-participant observations** of one 45-minute English lesson for each of the participating teachers. A structured but flexible **observation protocol** was used to guide note-taking. The protocol focused on:

- **Pedagogical Methods:** The dominant teaching approach (e.g., GTM vs. CLT), types of activities (e.g., drilling, pair work, games).
- **Resource Utilization:** Use of textbooks, blackboards, and any supplementary aids (flashcards, audio).
- **Classroom Interaction Patterns:** Teacher-to-student and student-to-student communication, frequency and quality of student participation.

- **Student Engagement:** Behavioral cues such as attentiveness, enthusiasm, and participation.

Manual note-taking was chosen over audio or video recording to minimize the **observer's paradox**—the risk of participants altering their behavior due to the presence of recording equipment (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.4. Data Analysis

A multi-stage analytical process was employed to make sense of the collected data.

1. **Questionnaire Data:** Data from the closed-ended questions were analyzed using **descriptive statistics** (percentages, frequencies) to identify general trends and patterns. Responses to open-ended questions were transcribed and subjected to **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved repeated reading of the responses, generating initial codes, and collating these codes into potential themes (e.g., "Frustration with Ministry," "Desire for Audio-Visual Aids," "Lack of Student Understanding").
2. **Observational Data:** The handwritten observation notes were expanded and transcribed immediately after each session. These detailed narratives were then analyzed using a **thematic analysis framework** parallel to that used for the questionnaires. Codes were developed inductively from the data (e.g., "Teacher-Centered Instruction," "Exclusive Textbook Use," "Minimal Student Talk") and then grouped into overarching themes that described the prevailing classroom culture and pedagogical practices.
3. **Triangulation:** The findings from the teacher questionnaires, pupil questionnaires, and classroom observations were integrated and compared in a process of **methodological triangulation**. This process allowed for the cross-verification of insights, enhancing the validity and credibility of the conclusions. For instance, teachers' self-reported beliefs about CLT (from questionnaires) could be checked against their actual classroom practices (from observations).

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Limitations

Approval was obtained from school principals. Participants were informed of the study's objectives, and pseudonyms were offered to ensure confidentiality. Limitations include the small, non-generalizable sample, the

disruption caused by past conflict (including the loss of experienced teachers and archival records), and infrastructural challenges like unreliable electricity and internet, which constrained access to broader literature and resources.

4. Findings

4.1. Teachers' Perspectives

The teacher questionnaires revealed a consensus on the need for improved methodologies (100% agreement) and a belief that teacher encouragement is vital (100%). However, they highlighted a severe lack of resources, with 60% stating available resources were insufficient. When asked to identify the major obstacle to modernizing their methods, 50% cited a lack of resources, 30% cited bureaucratic inertia, and 20% cited a lack of training. Despite being BA holders, observational data indicated their techniques were mediocre. Classroom instruction was overwhelmingly textbook-centric, with a focus on copying texts from the board and memorizing grammar rules. There was a notable absence of teaching aids (e.g., flashcards, murals). Student participation was minimal, and lessons were predominantly teacher-centered, with little effort to develop listening or speaking skills. Only one teacher attempted to create an engaging, "fun" atmosphere.

4.2. Pupils' Perspectives

The pupil questionnaires painted a picture of disengagement and demotivation. An overwhelming 90% reported that they did not enjoy learning English, and 100% stated they did not want to become English teachers. However, a paradoxical 100% expressed a desire to speak English fluently, and 70% liked their teacher's method, suggesting a potential affinity for the teacher personally rather than the subject itself. When asked what they disliked, common responses centered on an inability to understand the language and a hatred of homework.

5. Discussion

The findings align with existing literature on the challenges of EFL in Libya and similar contexts. The persistent use of GTM-based methods, even after the official adoption of CLT, confirms the gap between policy and practice (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The absence of resources and ICT

infrastructure in Al Gwaleesh mirrors the "digital divide" noted by Howley et al. (2010) and Abu Khattala (2016), effectively excluding rural students from modern language learning tools.

The study underscores that teacher qualifications (a BA degree) do not automatically translate into effective pedagogical skills. The observed over-reliance on rote learning fails to trigger the intrinsic motivation necessary for language acquisition (Al-Hoorie & MacIntyre, 2019). The pupils' expressed desire for fluency, coupled with their dislike for the classes, indicates a profound failure of the current system to harness and direct learner motivation.

The solution lies not in incremental changes but in a fundamental restructuring of primary EFL pedagogy. As Brown (2000) argued, integrated skills teaching leads to greater motivation and retention. This supports the study's hypothesis that incorporating audio-visual means and activity-based learning can make lessons more enjoyable and effective. Creating dedicated language labs or "learning environments," as suggested in the original text, could provide the stimulus young learners need to absorb language naturally, as theorized by Chomsky. Furthermore, leveraging "Extramural English" (EE)—the English encountered outside the classroom through digital media—could bridge the gap between formal instruction and real-world language use.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that the standard of EFL teaching in Libyan primary public schools, particularly in rural areas, is critically low. The traditional methodologies employed fail to engage students or build a sustainable foundation for language proficiency, stifling both individual potential and national development ambitions.

The following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Curriculum and Pedagogical Overhaul:** Mandate a shift from GTM to an integrated, activity-based approach that balances all four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing). Lesson plans should incorporate songs, stories, games, and role-playing.

2. **Strategic Integration of ICT:** Prioritize the provision of age-appropriate ICT tools (e.g., computers, projectors, audio players) and reliable internet to schools. Invest in CALL software and digital libraries.
3. **Teacher Training and Development:** Implement continuous professional development programs focused on CLT methodology, classroom management for interactive learning, and the effective use of technology. Teacher proficiency should be periodically reviewed.
4. **Resource Provision:** Ensure all schools, especially in rural areas, receive basic teaching aids like flashcards, posters, and graded readers before rolling out more advanced technology.
5. **Policy Decentralization and Support:** Empower local schools and teachers with more autonomy to adapt curricula to local needs while providing them with consistent and reliable logistical support from the Ministry of Education.

Investing in a robust, engaging, and modern foundation of English language education at the primary level is an investment in Libya's future. It is the essential first step toward creating a generation capable of engaging confidently on the global stage.

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