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مراجعة بعض الدراسات السابقة في المنطقة العربية حــــول استخدام أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي في تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية : عقبات وحلول

د . سكينة مصطفى أبوالقاسم عمر ــ قسم اللغة الإنجليزية ــ كلية الآداب و التربية/ جامعة صبراتة

sakina.omar@sabu.edu.ly

الملخــــــــــص:

يعـــد أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي (CLT) نهجًا موجودًا منذ أكثر من أربعين عامًا، ويقدم المقال الحالي دراسة متعمقة حول استخدام أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي مع متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في بعض الدول العربية، فمن خلال مراجعة بعض الدراسات السابقة المتوفرة في هذا المجال؛ تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى دراسة الوضع الحالي لتعليم اللغات باستخدام أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي والتحري عن العقبات التي تواجه تطبيق هذا النهج في بعض الدول العربية، و تسلط نتائج الدراسة الضوء على بعض فوائد أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي في عملية التعلم حيث إنه يشجع التفاعل والتواصل بين الطلاب، ويسهل عليهم استخدام اللغة في مواقف العالم الحقيقي، ويساعدهم ليصبحوا أكثر استقلالية باكتساب قدرات التفكير النقدي ومهارات حل المشكلات، وقد كشفت النتائج أيضًا أن أهم العوائق التي تواجه العديد من معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية عند اتباع هذا الأسلوب التعليمي هي نقص الموارد اللازمة، و نقص أو انعدام فرص التدريب، وتعود المعلمين على طرق التدريس التقليدية و مقاومتهم للتغيير، ومع ذلك لا يزال أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي موجودا في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية في الدول العربية مع تقييد التنفيذ، ومن أجل تحقيق أهداف هذا النهج، تشير الدراسة الحالية إلى أن المعلمين يحتاجون إلى المساعدة للتغلب على العقبات المذكورة أعلاه من خلال تزويدهم بالتدريب المناسب والموارد الكافية، و دمج التكنولوجيا في العملية التعليمية في الفصول.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أسلوب تدريس اللغة التواصلي (CLT)، العالم العربي، تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، عقبات وحلول

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A Review on Implementing CLT in the Arab Context: Challenges and Solutions

Sakina Mustafa A. Omar

English Department/ Sabratha University

sakina.omar@sabu.edu.ly

Abstract

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach that has been known for more than forty years. The current study presents an in-depth look into the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for EFL/ESL learners in the Arab countries. Through reviewing some of the available literature in the field, this study aims to investigate the existing status of CLT instruction and the obstacles faced while applying this approach in some Arab countries. The findings of the study highlight some of the benefits of the CLT approach on the learning process as it encourages students' interaction and communication, makes it easier for them to use the language in real-world situations, and helps them to become more independent with good critical thinking abilities and problem-solving skills. The findings have also revealed that the main impediments faced by many teachers of English are the lack of resources, lack of training, and resistance to change the traditional teaching practices. In conclusion, the current study indicates that CLT continues to exist in the English language classroom with restricted implementation in the Arab world. Therefore, in order to achieve the goals of this approach, teachers need help to overcome these encountered obstacles through providing them with appropriate training, adequate resources, and integrating technology knowledgeably.

Key words: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Arab world, EFL classes, challenges and solutions

1. Introduction

As language teaching theory evolves, methods of teaching change to reflect new ideas and test their effectiveness. Throughout the years, many different language teaching methods and approaches have existed starting from the grammar-translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, silent way, Suggestopedia, community language learning, total physical response

and reaching the communicative language teaching approach (Larsen-freeman, 2000). These teaching methods and approaches are still being developed and evolve according to the needs and requirements of the education process. The time of merely focusing on methods such as the grammar-translation method and the audio-lingual method is fading away. The flaws of these methods have been noted and the search for a more effective teaching method has proceeded. Our focus in this study is on the communicative language teaching approach (CLT) and its effectiveness in teaching English in some Arab countries. CLT focuses on interaction as the means of learning a language and views the main function of language as a tool of communication (Nunan, 1998). This change in focus has created a lot of positive and negative feedback on its effectiveness in teaching a new language to students and its impact on the learning outcomes.

Due to the imperfections of many earlier methods and approaches, there was a call for implementing the CLT approach in some Arab countries. The reason for applying CLT was to overcome the difficulties faced by language learners and to solve several problems that arise during the teaching and learning process, which led to embracing the CLT approach in their classrooms (Al-khafaji, 2015).

2. Methodology

esearch Objectives

This academic paper aims to clarify the principles and

practices of the CLT approach, offering a thorough com-

prehension of its theoretical underpinnings and outlining

its main distinguishing features. Moreover, our objective

is to analyze the key benefits and constraints linked to

the adoption of this instructional approach. This study

serves as a vital contribution to the ongoing academic con-

versation on language instruction approaches, providing

insightful perspectives on the dynamic nature of language

education.

2.3. Research Questions

1. How does the implementation of communicative

language teaching (CLT) in English language teach-

ing (ELT) contexts affect the development of students' communication skills and overall language proficiency, considering its merits as a student-centered approach?

2. What challenges and limitations arise in the application of communicative language teaching (CLT) in English language teaching (ELT), particularly in terms of accuracy and potential issues related to neglecting explicit language instruction?

2.4. Data Extraction

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This academic paper aims to clarify the principles and practices of the CLT approach, offering a thorough comprehension of its theoretical underpinnings and outlining its main distinguishing features. Moreover, our objective is to analyze the key benefits and constraints linked to the adoption of this instructional approach. This study serves as a vital contribution to the ongoing academic conversation on language instruction approaches, providing insightful perspectives on the dynamic nature of language education.

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2.4. Data Extraction

2.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to look into the principles and practices of the CLT approach, offering a comprehensive understanding of its theoretical foundations and outlining its main characteristics. Moreover, it analyzes the key benefits and constraints linked to the adoption of this approach in the EFL classroom in some Arab countries.

2.2 Research Questions

What challenges and limitations encounter the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the English language classroom in some Arab countries? And what are the solutions to overcome these challenges?

3. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

3.1 Background of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Language teaching is shifting from the traditional methods that emphasize knowledge of language systems and accuracy in language use (i.e. grammar translation, audio-lingual method) to an approach that trains learners to communicate in the language in authentic situations. This has resulted in the widespread adoption of Communicative Language Teaching. It was presented in the1970s by some British and American scholars to advance the teaching communicative skills in EFL instruction. As Richards (2005, p.2) explains, CLT is "a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kind of classroom activities that best facilitate learning and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom". This method highlights the importance of interaction and communication to teach a foreign language efficiently. Students are encouraged to take part in everyday situations to encounter in the target language. The main goal of CLT is learning to communicate in the target language instead of focusing on accuracy.

Howatt (1984) distinguishes two versions of CLT: the strong version and the weak version. The strong version is based on students getting a chance to communicate in the target language as they learn by interaction; that is, using the language to learn it. This is where the target language is acquired through communication and learned by interaction. On the other hand, the weak version emphasizes using the language for communicative purposes

through a language-teaching program; that is, learning to use the language. This version was more common particularly during the first decade of its existence.

The sociocultural theory by Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and the Interaction theory (Long, 1996) complement CLT by dealing with how learning takes place and that interaction of meaning during language use encourages language acquisition, confirming the fundamental notion in CLT of student-centered communicative learning.

3.2 Importance of CLT

The Communicative Approach, as well as the later version, Communicative Language Teaching, stresses the ability to communicate a message in the target language. The CLT approach represents authentic activities and authentic communication. It encourages learners to acquire a real-life skill and competence in the target language. Traditional methods rely on students practicing using language forms and teacher-controlled practice activities. The ultimate result here is that students are not ready to use the language as needed. As pointed out by Nunan (1989: 21), "Instruction does not prepare the students for the real use of language outside the classroom". Many learners have studied English for several years; however, they still do not have the ability to communicate in English or understand it. Learners of English are often labeled as having learned the language while, in fact, they have just studied it for many years using traditional methods.

3.3 Characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching

Brown (2001) summaries four connected characteristics that define communicative language teaching. Firstly, language-teaching goals should encompass all components of communicative competence. After studying the target language, learners should be able to read average-difficulty printed work and be capable of writing properly. In addition, learners should go beyond merely listening to authentic speech; they should speak confidently and make themselves understandable. Moreover, practical and functional use of language for meaningful purposes is crucial, and although organizational competence is not the primary emphasis, it does facilitate the achievement of the purpose. Thus, the main focus of CLT is real

communication where organizational competence plays a vital role (Brown, 2001).

3.4 Communicative Competence

Developing a functional communicative L2 competence is the major goal of CLT. Communicative competence is a notion coined by Hymes (1971), and it is the aim of CLT (Richards, 2005). CLT begins with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to improve learners' communicative competence. As demonstrated by Canale (1983), the communicative competence includes four components: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. These components consist of some aspects that interact together making one of the main interests of CLT to be able to incorporate these types of competencies to help learners engage in meaningful communicative interactions.

According to Wolfson (2014), communicative competence means knowing what, how and when to say what needs to be said. The communicative competence model has gone through many changes and additions starting with Chomsky's theories (1965) that focused only on the linguistic component until Celce-Murcia et al.'s (1995) model that divided it into the linguistic, strategic, sociolinguistic, actional and discourse competence.

Thus, communicative competence does not only include the structure of a language but the rules of speaking too. In other words, communicative competence does not refer to one skill as it has been commonly misinterpreted for so long, but rather it includes all the skills.

3.5 Implementing CLT in the EFL classroom

An important principle in this respect is that language is best learned through practice of language in use, rather than as language as a system. Using drill type activities does not reflect real communication, and as a result, it does not help learners to achieve the communicative competence, which is the goal of foreign language learning. Advocates of CLT such as (Owen & Razali 2018; Rambe, 2017; Bao & Du, 2015) recommend replacing these drill type activities with exercises in language in use. This can be anything like problem-solving tasks, information gap activities, or simulations of real-life activities. The general guideline is that the tasks should be stimulating and should lead to language use both inside and

outside the classroom, which can be meaningful and attention-getting. These types of activities are perceived helpful in the learners' mastery of the target language.

The implementation of the CLT approach offers a number of benefits; it facilitates the use of language in an authentic setting, enhances critical thinking, and improves the problem-solving ability for the learner. Furthermore, the approach promotes the improvement of student autonomy (Qasserras, 2023).

4. Communicative Language Teaching in the Arab World

Globalization is just the tip of the iceberg with respect to the reasons that Arab people want to learn English. Reasons and needs are many, and in recent years, there has been an increasing realization that earlier methodologies of language instruction did not allow people to develop the ability to communicate in a foreign language as they mainly focused on rote grammar translation or the teaching of isolated language skills. CLT, which has already had success in other parts of the world, is now considered the most effective way to enable learners to develop communicative competence (Thamarana, 2015). In order for the Arab world to implement this method, there needs to be an initial recognition of what has hindered English language teaching and learning in the past, and a willingness to make a change.

English has become a global language, and people in the Arab world need to learn it because they want to read its literature, to comprehend its social, economic and political systems, and to communicate with others whose native language is English. However, in this age of globalization and the need for English language learning and acquisition, the situation in most Arab countries is still far from what is needed and required. Therefore, it is crucial to examine and understand where and how communicative language teaching is situated in the Arab region.

4.1 Challenges and solutions for implementing CLT in the Arab world

Any teaching method has its advantages and disadvantages and CLT is no exception**.** The approach can be difficult to implement in practice and this is one of the primary criticisms facing CLT. The communicative approach was applied to encourage interaction and communication and to develop the

skills necessary to challenge daily issues (Lagga et al., 2004). There was need to change the role of teachers into a facilitator of language (Salih, 2018). In many cases, teachers are unable to prepare and implement activities according to their students' necessities. Sato and Ballinger (2016) believe that peer interaction occupies a great amount of classroom time and it is crucial to have the necessary knowledge about the levels of learners and type of activities used that might affect interaction in foreign language learning. Owen and Razali (2018) point out that the level and gender of the learner play a critical role when applying the communicative activities in the EFL classroom since some learners sometimes consider these activities unsuitable for them and refuse participating with their classmates. On the other hand, others find these activities really useful in language learning through CLT. Implementing communicative activities in the classroom transforms it into an interactive and engaging learning experience. These activities help provide the opportunity to practice the language through communication and improve students' speaking performance (Owen & Razali 2018; Bao & Du, 2015).

4.1.1 Challenges in implementing CLT

It has been mentioned earlier that there is a number of challenges that can hinder CLT application but the focus will only be on three of them, namely: lack of resources, lack of training, resistance to change the traditional way of teaching.

1. Lack of Resources

There are similar factors and conditions in most Arab countries that influence the application of CLT in their EFL classes. In Sudan, due to the lack of authentic materials and big classroom size, CLT is not properly implemented in classrooms (Abdelmageed & Omer 2020). According to Armnazi and Alakrash (2021), factors like limited teaching and authentic materials as well as inefficient assessment instruments hinder benefitting from the communicative approach in Syrian classrooms.

In addition, El-Fiki (2012) demonstrates three factors that hinder CLT application in Egypt: the social psychological factor, the educational factor, and the economic factor. The social psychological factor includes the different attitudes and beliefs on the teaching and learning process while the

educational factor deals with the curriculum and the issues related to it such as content and assessment, and the economic factor is related to the lack of materials, resources and funds. In Iraq, the shortage of resources that are required for implementing the approach is also one of many factors that affect CLT application there (Sherwani & Kilic, 2017). Consistently, Dakhil et al. (2022) assert that in order to see an improvement in teaching in Iraq, the approach needs to be carried out effectively. Furthermore, as mentioned by Omer (2020), the teachers in Erbil are not applying CLT in their classrooms because of the limited resources that are necessary for teaching and learning in addition to lack of training. Teachers there as well as students consider the English language as a subject that should be studied to pass the exams rather than a language to learn for communication.

Similarly, the educational system, teaching resources, instructing strategies and passive learning habits of students are the main factors that hinder the application of this approach in Libyan classrooms (Athawadi, 2019). The researcher further explains that the educational factor comprises of the large classes and test-based teaching, and also the lack of teaching resources and material necessary to implement the approach. On the other hand, the student factor includes low English proficiency, resistance to participation, and lack of confidence and readiness for the approach. Moreover, difficulties in applying the approach, lack of knowledge and shortage of teaching material, teaching skills and training are all factors that impede the implementation of the CLT approach by teachers in language classrooms (Athawadi, 2019).

2. Lack of training and development needs

The results of a study by Armnazi and Alakrash (2021) that was conducted in Syrian schools revealed that there are many challenges that face CLT implementation, and lack of training is one of the major challenges faced by many teachers. Two studies that were conducted In Saudi Arabia by Alharbi (2022) and Alrabai (2016) demonstrate the low quality of training programs for teachers as an educational factor among other factors that hinder achieving the goals of learning a language.

The results of a study by Sherwani and Kilic (2017) reveals that Iraqi teachers of foreign languages generally have positive attitudes towards CLT principles, but some factors like the educational system, teachers, students, and CLT needs influence its implementation. The educational system includes test-based curriculum, large class size, and underpaid teachers. The teacher factor involves lack of training and relevant courses, and deficiency of knowledge of ELT methods, whereas the student factor comprises of family restrictions and lack of fluency. All of these factors obstruct implementing CLT in the Iraqi context and probably most other Arab contexts.

3. Resistance to change and traditional teaching practices

When the educational system resists change according to the needs of the learning and teaching process, it can impede the implementation of any method or approach. For instance, in the Syrian context, tolerating large classes and using inappropriate curriculum have become an issue when trying to implement a method like CLT that is based on communication (Armnazi & Alakrash, 2021). A study conducted by Ibrahim and Ibrahim (2017) show how teachers in public schools in Egypt remain traditional in their teaching practice despite all of the efforts made by the Egyptian Ministry of Education to transform and improve English language education. The case is similar in Iraq as indicated by Fattah and Saidalvi (2019) who point out that English language teachers in Iraq partially implement the communicative approach in their classroom procedures as they mainly focus on vocabulary and grammar while teaching instead of communication. This is due to the traditional teaching practices, crowded classrooms and teachers' limited awareness of the importance and benefits of CLT in teaching. Another example is taken from the Libyan context where the curriculum in schools has been based on CLT since 2000; nevertheless, it has not been practiced fully due to many challenges including the negative attitude of educators towards applying this approach (Owen et al, 2019).

Even after the existence of CLT for several years, the Libyan teachers of English still use the Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The class is

teacher-centered and it is founded on teaching the grammatical rules and translating the target language into the mother tongue, and communicative activities are rarely used. As mentioned by Ben Hamid (2010), learners' lack of self-confidence to speak English properly is attributed to neglecting communication skills, which is an example of the difficulties encountered by EFL Libyan learners. The focus on grammar teaching and grammar-based examinations in EFL classes are other issues that affect applying and benefiting from CLT (Ben Hamid, 2010; Abduljalil, 2009; Orafi & Borg, 2009). According to Alshibany, (2014), teachers have insufficient information about the CLT approach and this is due to the lack of proper training and limited focus on methodologies throughout undergraduate education. She further explains that some of the impediments that face teachers are cultural factors, limited class time, large classes and examination burdens. Dalala, (2019) emphasizes the importance of training teachers to be able to implement the role of a facilitator through employing both CLT and student-centered learning in order to enhance student independent language learning.

Libyan teachers continue to use the traditional approaches and methods of teaching English (Abusrewel, 2023; Abukhattala, 2016). Similarly, based on the results of several studies, this is the case in a number of Arab countries such as Egypt (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2017; Fairley & Fathelbab, 2011), Sultanate of Oman (Wyatt, 2009), Iraq (Abdullah, 2015), Saudi Arabia (Farooq, 2015; Alsowat, 2016), and Jordan (Asassfeh et al., 2012). They all agree that this problem is an obstacle to benefiting from CLT and it needs to be addressed.

As a result of the traditional teaching methods, memorization is a principal aspect of the learning process for Saudi students, tracing back to the old schooling of Quran, which is based on teaching by memorization (Alwazir and Shukri, 2017; Shukri, 2014). Memorization can be effective at early stages where learners require new vocabulary and grammatical structures, but relying on it broadly may negatively influence acquiring the target language. According to Al-khafaji (2015), CLT was adopted for Arab learners to develop the speaking and communication skills; however, the

goals were not achieved because of the traditional ways of teaching that focused on the GME method where 'G' stands for grammar, 'M' represents memorization, and 'E' refers to exercises.

4.1.2 Solutions and opportunities for implementing CLT

The CLT approach is widespread in many countries around the world. It promotes students-centred learning. In the CLT classroom, the main role of the teacher is to be a facilitator who guides and encourages student interaction.

This approach supports active participation, develops critical thinking skills, and encourages problem-solving abilities. Nevertheless, the approach has some challenges and constraints that include impediments encountered during the implementation process. In order to gain a balance between pedagogical approaches that emphasize communication and the need to overcome these limitations, it is essential to enable successful language learning (Qasserras, 2023). The following are some ways that can simplify the implementation process of CLT.

1. Integration of technology in language classrooms

In traditional language classrooms, teachers generally use teacher-centered, book-based methods and rely mostly on the students' native language. The computer is usually employed primarily as a tool for the drill and practice of language forms. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) means technology is an instrument of learning 'to support the pedagogical goals of the class and curriculum' (Brown, 2001, p. 200). Through integrating technology into the language classroom, Arab teachers of English can develop a digitally-enriched environment that will better engage students in the learning process.

Several researchers such as Tseng (2016), Ahmed (2014), and Ploog et al., (2013) report that Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has an important impact on EFL and ESL learners' communicative competence by using communicative activities. As Al-Tuhafi (2015) indicates, EFL Arab learners can develop their competence while communicating in a comfortable context by using modern educational and technology aids, which can provide a desire to learn the target language. Lack of the

appropriate technology in the Saudi language classroom has limited achieving the desired educational targets (Alrabai, 2016). It is further confirmed that technological aids foreign language learning and learners' needs and interests in addition to promoting academic language skills (Siddiqui & Asif., 2018; Alrabai, 2016).

Nowadays, teachers are overloaded with great quantities of software and internet resources of varying quality and effectiveness; therefore, they need training and practice in evaluating the potential effectiveness of these resources for their curricular and instructional objectives. Thus, teachers can get in touch with CALL material developers to engage in research and development projects that can help find and use suitable technology for their classrooms.

As Warschauer and Meskill (2013) argue, while access to technology is generally quite limited in the developing world, the problem with introducing technology into schooling lies not so much in offering people the access to computers but rather in defining how the tools will be used to change the course of education. They maintain that technology offers tremendous potential for changing the process of language education in developing countries, particularly, in its ability to modify instruction and bring authentic materials and communicative tasks to a wide number of recipients.

2. Allocating Sufficient Resources

Based on a study done by Abusrewel (2023), Libyan teachers have problems in accessing CLT resources, in addition to other issues such as lack of motivation among students, and the examination system that hinders CLT implementation.

Teachers need guidance to learn how to deal with the huge amount of internet resources and creative teaching aids. Alharbi (2022) emphasizes that limited resources and equipment is an important factor when CLT implementation is onboard.

3. Providing Training and Development Programs

Teacher training has been labelled as an essential access to a successful application of the teaching methods and approaches. Because teacher-

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centered learning and grammar-based examination hinder learners from benefiting from CLT, it is crucial to focus on providing the necessary training for teachers to cope with the new priorities and needs (Orafi & Borg, 2009; Abduljalil, 2009). Specific training programs have been appeared to lead the changes in teachers' teaching and learning beliefs and their classroom practices. To be able to ensure a successful implementation of CLT in the Arab world, where language teaching has been previously dominated by audio-lingual and grammar-based methods, teacher-training programs have started to be essential and inevitable.

A number of researchers recommend that there should be more attention to training EFL teachers to implement the CLT method to teach EFL learners how to communicate with others in the English language. This will help in achieving the goals towards openness to global cultures and civilizations (Alharbi, 2022; Alharbi, 2020; Abahussain, 2016).

The results of a study done by Sherwani and Kilic (2017) show that training teachers efficiently and giving them appropriate courses can promote their awareness of CLT, and consequently, this will maximize the benefits of this approach. They also emphasize that lack of training may lead to an inadequate comprehension and implementation of CLT.

A more successful approach to ensuring the effective learning of any new skills and appropriate teaching techniques can be achieved through launching appropriate training programs. One example of a promising teacher-training program is the one held at the American University in Cairo (AUC). The program, which is aimed for Egyptian secondary school teachers, focuses on improving the teachers' own language ability and then giving them an understanding of how this can be reflected in language classrooms. This is a crucial factor since many language teachers in Egypt and other Arab countries possess a good level of English, but they do not know how to teach it. Overall, it is important that training programs for CLT advocates be widely available and eventually become essential for language teachers in the Arab world.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the findings from the literature review

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The CLT approach, which is based on learner-centeredness and meaningful dialogues, presents a number of benefits. This approach promotes active participation by students, facilitates the application of language in authentic contexts, and improves their ability to communicate effectively in accordance with the current theories of language learning. Furthermore, the implementation of the CLT approach fosters the development of student autonomy, enhances critical thinking skills, and cultivates problem-solving ability.

Despite some negative views on CLT, this approach is considered potential in developing communicative skills in English among EFL Arab learners, which is an essential skill in any language. It is believed to be an ideal approach, as revealed by the different studies presented in the Arab world.

In conclusion, the aforementioned studies emphasize that the schools should be provided with adequate resources and suitable technological gadgets that are necessary for CLT implementation. The teachers who adopt CLT as a teaching approach need to be aware of the importance of this approach, its principles and how these principles are practiced within the language classroom. In addition, training and development programs are continuously required for the teaching and learning process to support and benefit from the approach.

5.2 Implications for future research and practice

This study is non-empirical and the findings are solely from pervious literature and studies presented and conducted in some parts of the Arab world. The study did not include all of the Arab countries; therefore, further research can be done on the rest of the countries that apply CLT in their language classrooms. Taking the mentioned challenges and the suggested solutions for implementing CLT into account, future research that explores different EFL classrooms in different Arab countries is required.

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