



Curriculum Innovation and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): EFL Teachers' Attitudes Towards CLT's Main Principles

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum innovation fosters a change in methods and investigating teachers' attitudes plays a crucial role in its successful implementation (Richards, 2015). This study explores the EFL teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) across curriculum innovation in the Gaza preparatory schools' context. The study addresses two key questions: (1) What are the EFL teachers' attitudes towards the main principles of CLT? (2) What are the potential implications of these teachers' attitudes towards the main principles of CLT in terms of implementing CLT and teachers' awareness of the main aspects of CLT? To answer these questions, a questionnaire was used for data collection. The collected data were analyzed through means and percentages using SPSS v17.0 statistical package. Findings reveal teachers generally hold mildly favourable attitudes towards CLT. They strongly favoure CLT's principles that emphasize the role of the learner and the importance of error correction. Meanwhile, they are moderately favourable towards teacher's role and pair/group work activities. However, their attitudes towards the place and importance of grammar are less favourable. These findings suggest that many teachers may not be fully aware of CLT's principles and may face some contextual difficulties adopting them. It is, therefore, recommended that curriculum developers and other Palestinian educational concerned bodies should take into account teachers' attitudes in the process of change of materials and methods. Furthermore, when introducing the innovation, it is necessary to consider the cultural and social circumstances in which it operates, so that CLT may fit well within the Gaza preparatory schools' context.

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INTRODUCTION

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an innovation in English language teaching (Romanowski, 2017). Richards (2015) believes that CLT has been regarded an innovation in language pedagogy due to its emphasis on developing language learners' communicative competence i.e., their ability to

use linguistic knowledge of language appropriately in a variety of social situations. Since its appearance in early 1970's in the UK, CLT has widely been spread and rapidly gained popularity worldwide (Yang, 2024). According to Salam & Luksfinanto (2024) CLT is regarded not as Western-centric approach but rather as a global methodology designed to address the learners' needs in various cultural and educational contexts.

As an innovation, CLT moves beyond rote memorization to meaningful interaction. It enhances students' confidence and encourages fluency in real life situations (Hramer , 2015). In addition, CLT promotes students' autonomy through integrating tasked-based learning and authentic materials. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2016) stated that CLT fosters students' motivation, engagement and cooperative learning through pair/group work activities. CLT's flexibility allows teachers to perform lessons based on the needs of students as well as their local contexts (Savignon, 2018). Overall, CLT has been celebrated as an effective, dynamic and an adaptable method in diverse educational settings (Richards, 2015).

Despite the global recognition of CLT as a promotional approach across curriculum reforms in many ESL/EFL contexts, its adoption is still problematic (Khodamoradi, 2017). Recent research on CLT's implementation reveals that CLT is often more aspirational than actual, with teachers' behaviors still reflecting traditional teaching styles rather than communicative ones (Undewood, 2017). Scholars in the field of English teaching and learning like Pham & Renshaw (2015) argue that CLT's implementation within curriculum innovation still stands as a significant challenge and its transition into classroom instruction is inconsistent and contextually inhibited (Underwood, 2017). Such conclusion was supported by Al-Issa & Dahan (2018) who pointed out that CLT brought about a mismatch between practical realities and theoretical ideals, calling into question the cross-cultural applicability of CLT pedagogy as an innovation in EFL/ESL context.

Similarly, Pitikornpuangpetch and Suwanak (2021) found that the majority of the Thai EFL teachers expressed favourable attitudes towards CLT, however, when observed, the principles of CLT were not fully enacted in their classes. They also noted that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are deeply embedded and often unaligned with the methodological demands of CLT. The gap between CLT's theory and teachers' practice has attracted many researchers who have conducted studies to investigate the apparently prominent reason behind the discrepancy between what teachers often state and what they actually practice by investigating their educational attitudes (Ali & Alnufaie, 2023; Nguyen & Khuat, 2022; Savigon & Wang , 2021).

Most recent studies such as Al-Asmari (2015), Chang and Suparmi (2020), Khodamoradi (2024), Qasem and Quvanch (2024), and Underwood (2017) reveal that the gap between teachers' attitudes and their classroom practices may be attributed to some specific contextual barriers including learner-related, teacher-related, institutional, cultural and methodological factors. These challenges are evident in practical issues including large-class sizes, grammar-based exams, students' low motivation, teachers' low English proficiency, lack of support, inadequate training, and limited resources resulted in teachers' expressing idealistic attitudes that are difficult to enact in practice (Nam, 2023). The previous studies collectively highlight that while CLT is theoretically recognized, its practical implementation is obstructed by cultural, systematic and institutional obstacles across different ESL/EFL contexts.

In Palestine, the new English language curriculum has been introduced in the Gaza preparatory schools' context since 2015. The new 'English for Palestine' textbook doesn't seem to follow a structural approach, as its focus is not mainly on forms and grammar rules. The main aim of the new Palestinian English textbook is to enable the students to use English for social communication and interaction. Hence, activities which involve the students in pair/group work such as information gap, tasks, games, songs and so forth have characterized the new materials of 'English for Palestine' textbook which has been introduced into the Gaza preparatory schools' context since then. (Abdel Razeq, 2020; Abu Hussein, 2024; Bianchi & Abdel Razeq, 2017; MoEHE, 2015; PCDC, 2017).

Consequently, the Palestinian EFL teachers have been encouraged by the curriculum developers and the MoEHE to use CLT in their classrooms in the Gaza preparatory schools' context. Many workshops and seminars have been held to inform the Palestinian EFL teachers of CLT's principles and encourage them to adopt CLT. However, until now there is no empirical information about what Palestinian EFL teachers think about CLT and how they perceive its principles. With this in mind, this study is set out to explore the Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the main principles of CLT. The results of this study may provide potential implications in terms of implementing CLT in the Gaza preparatory schools' context and teachers' awareness of the main principles of CLT.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aimed to investigate the Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT in the Gaza preparatory schools' context. The study also sought to explore potential implications in terms of implementing CLT in the Gaza

preparatory schools' context and teachers' awareness of the main principles of CLT. Two research questions guided the study: (1) What are the Palestinian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the main principles of CLT? (2) What are the potential implications of these teachers' attitudes towards CLT in terms of implementing CLT and teachers' awareness of the main principles of CLT? According to Etikan et al. (2016) the most common sampling method is opportunity sampling where the sample selection is based on particular criteria such as ease of accessibility, availability, and geographical proximity. The sample of the study consisted of 60 male and female EFL teachers from 6 public preparatory schools located in the South, the Middle, and the North of the Gaza Strip.

According to Lageson (2017) a number of techniques are used to collect data through questionnaires. The Likert scale is one of them. The attitude scale used for the purpose of this study, was an adaptation of the one used by Karavas (1996) to examine Greek EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT. The attitude scale was originally composed of 24 items including the main aspects of CLT. These items fall into five thematic factors namely; the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, the place and importance of grammar, pair/group work activities, and the quality and quantity of error correction. In the adaptation, it was decided to drop twelve of the items from the original attitude scale in order to make the analysis easier and doable during a limited period of time. There were five scales ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). The statements of the attitude scale included both favourable statements (items 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11) aligned with CLT principles and unfavourable statements (items 2, 4, 5, 8, 10, 12) reflecting a non-communicative view of language teaching. To determine the validity of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted. The researcher randomized the 12 items of the questionnaire group wise, and in terms of favourable and unfavourable items. The researcher distributed the questionnaires to 5 EFL teachers at a public school in the Middle governate. Having collected the data, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed as shown in table 1 confirming that the adapted items retained the same grouping as the original scale.

Table 1.
Confirmatory Factor Analysis of the Attitude Scale

1. Group/ pair work (2 statements)
2. Quality and quantity of error correction (3 statements)
3. The role and contribution of learners in the learning process (2 statements)
4. The role of the teacher in the classroom (2 statements)

5. Place/importance of grammar (3 statements).

Creswell & Plano (2018) indicate that the most popular indices of reliability are based on a scale's internal consistency. According to the gathered data from this study, the overall internal consistency of the attitudes' scale was also determined using Cronbach alpha (CA) which turned out to be 0.8. Moreover, (CA) of the five factors is shown in table 2 which indicates that the grouped factors' reliability is confirmed as they are all above 0.7 (Taber, 2018).

Table 2.
Cronbach Alpha of the Five Factors

1. Pair/group work activities	0.9
2. The place and importance of grammar	0.70
3. Teacher's role	0.8
4. Error correction	0.7
5. Learner's role	0.9

Given the strong internal consistency and the validity of the 12 items of the adapted questionnaire, no further modifications were required. Data collection then took place after receiving formal approval from the headteachers of the selected schools. Total 60 questionnaires along with a cover letter and a consent form were given to the participants. Having received the questionnaires, 40 completed questionnaires were retained for data analysis while 20 questionnaires were excluded due to incomplete or inconsistent responses. The data from all the questionnaires that were collected from the 40 teachers' responses were then gathered and analyzed using SPSS v17.0 statistical package. Descriptive statistics were performed on these data to obtain the mean and standard deviation. The frequency procedure (count & percent) was also performed to assess how the teachers rated each of the 12 items. Tables and graphical techniques typically bar and pie charts were used to display the results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from 40 Palestinian EFL teachers in 6 Gaza public preparatory schools, was processed by SPSS v17.0 statistical package. The SPSS is possibly the most widely used computer software for the analysis of quantitative data (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). A high score obtained from the attitude scale would mean a favourable (or positive) attitude towards CLT, whereas low score would mean an unfavourable (or negative) attitude. The 5-point Likert type scale consists of 12 items. The statements of the attitude scale were grouped into the following five thematic factors:

1. The role of the teachers consists of one favourable and one unfavorable item.

2. The role and contribution of the learner in the learning process includes one favourable and one unfavourable item.
3. The quality and quantity of error correction that includes two favourable and one unfavourable item.
4. Pair/group work activities consists of one favourable and one unfavourable item.
5. The place and importance of grammar includes tow unfavourable and one favourable item.

As such, the favourable items of the scale were scored 5 for “strongly agree” decreasing to 1 for “strongly disagree” whereas the scores for unfavourable items were reversed by assigning 1 for “strongly agree” and increasing up to 5 for “strongly disagree”. Hence, all the scale values were summed in order to give overall positive scales.

Teachers’ Scores of the Attitude Scale

The scores obtained reflect the teachers’ attitudes towards CLT. The highest possible score that can be obtained in the attitude scale and the one indicative of the most favourable attitude towards the CLT is 60 (by scoring the highest mark for all 12 items), while the lowest and the one indicating the least favourable attitude towards the CLT is 12 (by scoring 1, the least mark for all 12 items). Respondents’ scores can therefore fall within a continuum from 12 to 60, the middle (neutral) point of the continuum being 36 (achieved by uncertain about all 12 items).

According to Karavas (1996, p.192) establishing a neutral point (neutral score) is one of the difficult tasks in Likert type scale. The neutral point is not necessarily the mid-point between the extreme scores. The respondent can obtain such a score either by being uncertain about many items, or by holding inconsistent or strongly favourable or strongly unfavourable attitudes towards the attitude object. For the purpose of presentation, however, the score 36 was taken as the neutral or middle score of this study’s attitude scale.

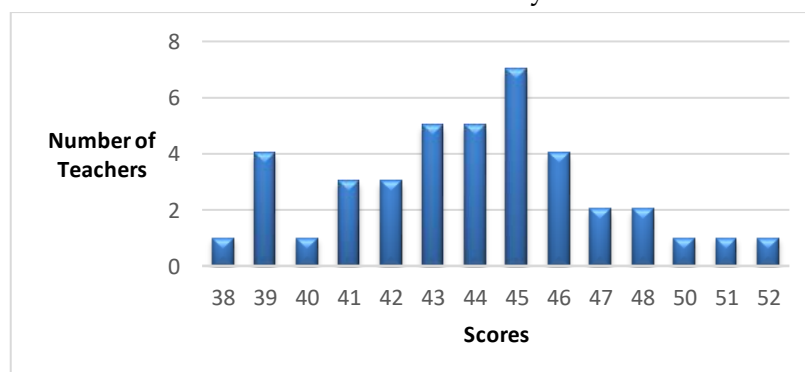


Figure 1.
Teachers’ Scores of the Attitude Scale

As shown in figure 1, most of teachers' scores range between the area of "undecided" (36) and "Agree" (48). The highest number of the teachers obtained the scores of 45, 44 and 43 respectively, indicating that teachers' scores are inclined to the favourable position. However, none of the teachers achieved the score of the middle point (36) or below. Similarly, none of the teachers obtained the highest point in the scale which is (60). Data also show that only 3 teachers out of 40 obtained the scores between 50-52.

The Distributions of the Teachers' Scores of the Attitude Scale

The percentage of the teachers' scores in the attitude scale is shown in figure 2. As can be observed from figure 2, the percentage of the teachers' scores that fall in between the neutral point and the favourable point is 92%, whereas the percentage of the teachers' scores that fall in between the favourable and the most favourable points is 8%.

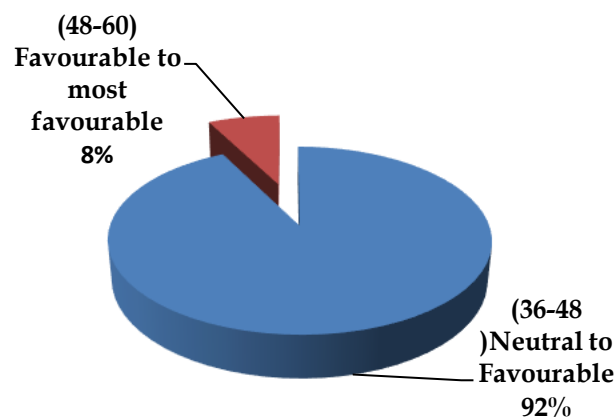


Figure 2.

The Distributions of the Teachers' Scores of the Attitude Scale

It seems that the teachers were converged in their responses to this particular area in the scale which is between the neutral point and the favourable point. This may suggest that teachers sometimes responded in the same manner to both favourable and unfavourable statements of the attitude scale, which may reveal their lack of awareness of CLT principles or inconsistent attitudes towards the statements of the attitude scale. The mean score and standard deviation obtained in the attitude scale, however, were taken into account in the analysis of these findings. Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of teachers' scores in the attitude scale.

Table 3.
The Mean and Standard Deviation of the Teachers'
Scores in the Attitude Scale

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teachers scores in the attitude scale	40	38.00	52.00	44.0000	3.27383
Valid N (list wise)	40				

As can be seen in table 3, the mean score of the teachers in the scale was 44 and standard deviation 3.27. Taken at the face value, teachers scores seem to suggest that, on the whole, teachers hold mildly favourable attitudes towards CLT.

Grouped Factors

Teachers' scores to each statement in the attitude scale were calculated in order to obtain the mean for each statement. The mean score for each statement indicates the average number of teachers' responses on each statement. The statements of the attitudes scale were grouped into five thematic factors namely:

1. The role and contribution of learners in the learning process consist of 2 items, 4 and 9.
2. Pair/group work consist of 2 items, 5 and 7.
3. The role of the teacher includes items 1 and 10.
4. The place and importance of grammar include items 2, 6 and 12.
5. The quality and quantity of error corrections consist of 3 items 3, 8 and 11.

Table 4 shows the average values and standard deviation for the five factors.

Table 4.
Grouped Data for the Five Factors

No.	Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
1.	Role and contribution from learners	4.08	0.66
2.	Quality and quantity of error correction	3.96	0.50
3.	Pair/group activities	3.60	0.60
4.	The role of the teacher	3.53	0.75
5.	The place and importance of grammar	3.21	0.60

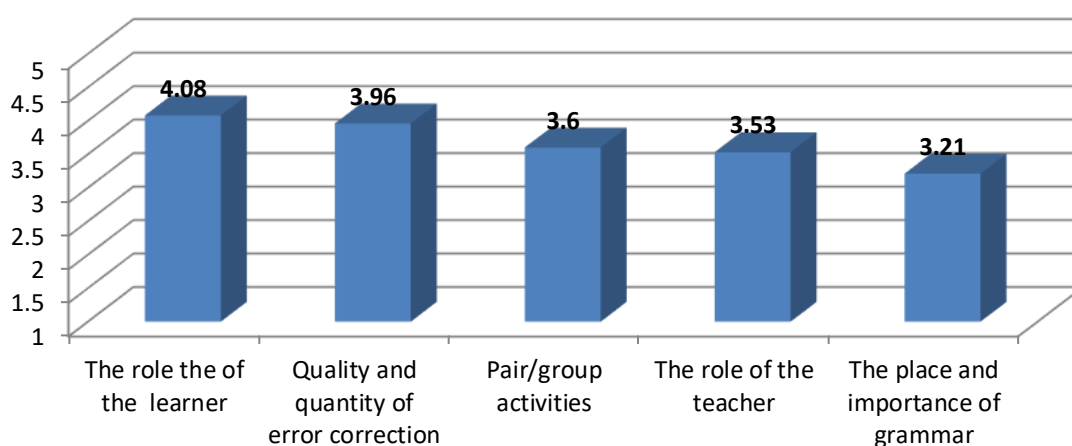


Figure 3.
The Means for the Five Factors

As can be observed from figure 3, most of the teachers' scores are centered between the values 3 and 4, in other words teachers scores in general ranged in the area between "undecided" (3) and "agree" (4). The highest mean value of 4.08 obtained from teachers' scores in the attitude scale was for the role and contribution of learners themselves. The next highest mean value of 3.96 was for quality and quantity of error correction. This is followed by pair/group work activities with a mean value of 3.6 and the role of the teacher in the teaching/learning process with a mean value of 3.53 indicating that teachers hold mildly favourable attitudes towards these two factors. The place and importance of grammar on the other hand seems to be the least favoured by the teachers with a mean value of 3.21, indicating that teachers' attitudes towards this factor are in fact inclined towards the neutral position "middle point". The grand mean value of teachers' attitudes towards the five factors of CLT is 3.7.

Discussion

The data from the study yields an overall mean score of 3.7 out of 5 indicating a mildly favourable orientation towards CLT. The results mirror trends in contemporary EFL studies, such as (Al-Asmari, 2015; Chang & Suparmi, 2020; Khodamoradi, 2024; Qasem & Quvanch, 2024; Underwood, 2017). Among the five thematic categories, the role and contribution of the learners received the highest mean score 4.08, reflecting a growing recognition among the teachers that students should be active participants in their language learning. This finding aligns with Savignon and Wang's (2021) conclusion that learner agency is cornerstone of communicative teaching. It is also consistent with Al-Asmari (2015) perspective which emphasizes the shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction in successful communicative environment. Similarly, error correction scored a mean of 3.96, indicating that

teachers increasingly see errors not a sign of failure but rather part of their leaning process. Such finding represents a progressive orientation resonating with Underwood's (2017) finding which reveal that tolerating students' mistakes is considered as a crucial aspect of communicative learning. This result may signal a significant pedagogical shift in the Gaza Strip's context where educational context is rooted in traditional approaches.

However, the mean score for pair/group work 3.6 and the role of the teacher 3.53 indicate more moderate acceptance of these principles. Such findings echo Qasem and Quvanch (2024) who found that while teachers express support for group-based learning and teacher's role as a facilitator at the level of theory, they struggle to enact these principles in their teaching practices. In Gaza, these challenges may be attributed to the national exams, insufficient resources, students' low motivation, and large class sizes which make group-based learning difficult to be implemented effectively. Teachers' hesitance reflects teachers' fixed belief that control and authority are essential for good teaching. Such convention seems to be difficult to eliminate without extensive diffusion of long-term institutional as well as cultural change.

Most telling is the lowest mean score of 3.21 for the place and importance of grammar. Such finding indicates a lingering attachment to form-focused instruction due to the exam-based teaching which prioritize grammar accuracy. Ali and Alnufaie (2023) emphasized how EFL teachers in Arab context obstructed due to the top-down assessment criteria which discourage communicative risk-taking. Nguyen and Khuat (2022) observed that teachers stand in a pedagogical grey zone promoting CLT's principles while maintaining grammar instruction and controlled practice. This perspective is clearly reflected in the data of the current study. Interestingly, the data also show that no participants selected the extreme ends of the attitude scale i.e. strongly agree or strongly disagree for any of the 20 items. This teachers' tendency towards the neutral position reveals that they were cautious or uncertain about most of the CLT's statements reflecting partial understanding or misconception of CLT's principles. As Savigon and Wang (2021) state that the discrepancy between teachers' attitudes and practice occurs because of teachers' conflicting expectations from curriculum developers, administrators, and students' families.

In Summary, the results indicate that the teachers hold mild favourable attitudes towards CLT's principles. Although teacher-participants favour many of the CLT's core principles such as students' contribution and teachers' tolerance for students' errors, they continue struggling with the more transformative principles of CLT such as employing pair/group work, reducing

their authority or de-emphasizing grammar instruction. These findings point to a significant implication that the teachers may face specific barriers in implementing some of the CLT's principles. These challenges may arise, for example, due to large class sizes, grammar-based exams, and students' low motivation. As for teachers' awareness of CLT's principles, the way they responded to both favourable and unfavourable statements on the attitude scale highlight a degree of inconsistency indicating teachers' misconceptions about the core principles of CLT. It can be inferred that teachers' awareness of CLT's full scope seems to be partial rather than comprehensive. These findings align with Ali and Alnufaie's (2023) assertion that teachers' inconsistent responses often indicate misconceptions of CLT, however, their inclination to particular aspects of CLT reveals that most EFL teachers in Arab context are eclectic in their teaching blending communicative principles with traditional practices that may be better fit to their context. From a critical perspective the findings of this study show teachers' attitudes are encouraging, but at the same time highlight the importance of equipping teachers with practical techniques to enable them fully conceptualize the principles of CLT, overcome challenges and consequently hold strong positive attitudes towards CLT.

CONCLUSION

In light of the findings, this study generally revealed that teachers' attitudes towards CLT are not strong vis-a-vis the emphasis that put on them in the literature. In other words, teachers' reactions cannot be said to give an impression of great enthusiasm towards most of the favourable statements in the attitude scale. It was inferred that the teachers may hold their own reservations which may reflect some constraints that hamper the implementation of CLT in the Gaza preparatory schools' context. These constraints could be linked to the broader Palestinian context where cultural, social and economic factors may play a significant role- it is important to note that identifying these obstacles with certainty falls beyond the scope of this study. As there might be a gap in empirical research conducted to examine these issues in depth, they remain speculative and require further extensive investigation to be fully understood. Ultimately, the sustainability of CLT in Gaza preparatory schools may not only rely on the educational reform but also on wider systematic conditions that may continue to defy predictability.

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