The Perceptions and Attitudes of Saudi EFL Students Toward the Use of Communicative Language Teaching in Oral Communication Classes

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ABSTRACT*: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely and extensively practiced in language teaching, especially in EFL classes. In fact, most educators consider it to be the most effective and practical approach to language teaching. Early studies indicated that the positive or negative attitudes of learners toward CLT can affect their language learning process. As a result, the current study aims to unveil the perceptions and attitudes of Saudi college and graduate students toward the implementation of CLT to enhance their speaking and listening skills. Furthermore, gender role is also considered since Saudi has a segregated system of education. Questionnaire items adopted from Komol et al. (2020) were rated on a Likert scale which ranged from "Strongly Disagree" (1, very low) to "Strongly Agree" (5, very high). Mean Likert scale scores were used to evaluate the responses of participants along with the standard deviation (SD). The study found that Saudi participants displayed a higher perception of CLT activities when compared to their attitude. Moreover, females showed a higher perception and attitude toward CLT activities than males did. The highest mean scores of perception items among females are "Making a short video" because it allows them to get more exposure to English use while males have chosen "Teacher's instruction on class CLT activities" as more significant. Concerning attitudinal items, males believe in using CLT activities to promote their language proficiency. In contrast, females believe in using role-play activities to improve their language proficiency. Finally, females showed less preference for CLT group or class activities than males did.*

KEYWORDS*: perception, attitude, CLT, males, females*

INTRODUCTION

All around the world, spoken English is known as an essential skill to possess for international communication (Mahmud et al., 2023a). As English is often considered the world's lingua franca,

this means inadequate oral communication skills in English can influence the success of communication as a whole, and especially international communication which is a critical skill for both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners to acquire.

The communication competence of an individual reflects his/her cognitive ability, knowledge, and self-esteem (Luoma, 2004). Moreover, communication capacity enables humans to convey their ideas, feelings, and attitudes by using verbal and nonverbal cues. Those who achieve high competence in oral skills in English have vast opportunities to succeed in academia and in their professional careers (Brown, 2001; Cook, 2003; Crystal, 2003; Mahmud et al., 2023b). Consequently, oral communication competence is highly demanded as a lingua franca skill.

Oral communication skills require learners to use their skills in dialogues where they have to interact with others, turning them into members of a group; writing skills, on the other hand, are practiced individually (Tran, 2022). Oral communication is a skill that is in high demand in business, technology, media, publications, and education (Jenkins, 2007; Rahman et al., 2021; Rao, 2019). Learning spoken English is a crucial skill because it is the most significant output skill of the language acquisition process (Thi & Trang, 2022). Consequently, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Saudi Arabia, and especially speaking skills, play an ultimate role in achieving the goals of Saudi National Vision 2030 (Oddah Ahmad Al-Zahrani & Rajab, 2017).

The challenges facing EFL learners concerning their speaking skills are remarkable and undeniable because they dissuade learners from accomplishing good language comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency, all of which are necessary for communicative competence.

English has social and economic prestige, and it is the only foreign language taught in Saudi schools (B. Alharbi, 2022a). Still, even though Saudis have studied English for years in schools, many students still face issues with speaking (Mudhaffer, 2023). Lazaraton (2014) stated that "speaking is an unfavorably complex and bewildering skill" (p. 107). Further, when speakers engage in a group conversation, the particulars of speaking such as suprasegmental sound (for example, intonations, rhythm, stress, and so on), colloquial language use, or hesitation techniques come naturally (Brown, 2001). However, EFL learners encounter multiple mental processes in speaking which causes noticeable communication struggles in oral communication.

Lom (2012) stated that active communicative language teaching using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is a more effective language teaching strategy for EFL learners. Studies have supported the claim that when CLT is used in foreign language teaching, it is very beneficial, especially through CLT's interactive classroom activities. The goal of CLT is to facilitate the language ability of learners to communicate effectively which can be accomplished

through successful acquisition of language and language use (Alamri, 2018). Achieving the goals of language learning is based on how well learners develop their communicative competence (Al Asmari, 2015). Moreover, through the use of CLT, students are more active and realistic, and they rely more on learning from communication rather than memorization (Toro et al., 2019; Wahyuni et al., 2021).

The oral communication skills of Saudi learners are still based on memorizing some vocabulary and terms in English and trying to phonetically pronounce them correctly when speaking. This means students are not completely aware of the meaning of the words they are using and how to effectively apply them when communicating. Accordingly, it's necessary to understand the attitudes and views of Saudi learners concerning Communicative Language Teaching CLT activities employed in listening and speaking classes. This is especially true after Saudi Arabia deployed a new policy where, instead of using the grammar approach to teaching English, CLT is extensively used (A. O. Alharbi, 2020).

Because many Saudi CLT studies concentrated on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers towards CLT, the primary aim of the study is to reveal the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi EFL learners toward the use of CLT in class activities to enhance their listening and speaking language skills. Even though Saudi Arabia has a segregated system of education where girls' education is completely separated from boys, both genders have the same quality of educational facilities (Al-Johani, 2009). Therefore, gender role has to be considered in order to unveil any gender differences between Saudi males and females in their perceptions and attitudes toward using CLT in EFL listening and speaking classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Attitudes and Perceptions of Foreign Language Learners

The terminology "attitude" refers to participants' "inclination to accept or reject ideas by describing whether they prefer this idea or not" (Ngoc, 2013). Moreover, an attitude toward language is known as a person's mental attitude toward themselves or others' languages. Consequently, it plays a significant role in language learning because a positive attitude facilitates language learning whereas a negative one discourages the language learning process or creates psychological barriers to language learning.

Put differently, attitude plays a crucial role in the success or failure of achieving communicative competence. Therefore, the attitudes of learners toward language learning have to be considered, especially when there is a conflict between the points of view of teachers and learners regarding the learning process (Oskamp & Schultz, 2004). Students' lack of motivation to learn the language, a passive learning style, and their resistance to participate in communicative activities are major challenges in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in language learning (Al Asmari, 2015).

Even though attitude is a significant component of success in language learning, few studies have examined the attitude of language learners (Komol & Suwanphathama, 2020). A study that examined the attitudes of EFL Iranian medical students toward learning the English language found that learners obtained a favorable attitude toward language learning (Arani, 2004). This study is compatible with another study that investigated the attitudes of Iranian medical students toward learning the English language (Soleimani & Hanafi, 2013). Yang (2010) demonstrated that Chinese college students held a positive attitude toward learning English through the use of CLT in teaching the language. Arab learners also displayed a positive attitude toward English language learning, especially favoring the use of CLT in teaching (Asassfeh et al., 2012). Other studies examined the attitudes of Saudi EFL learners toward learning a foreign language and discovered that Saudis generally held a positive attitude toward learning English (B. Alharbi, 2022b; Alkaff, 2013; Akram, 2016; Khan, 2016). NGOC & Iwashita (2012) conducted a study on the attitudes and perceptions of Vietnamese towards CLT which revealed that learners showed a positive attitude toward using CLT in learning the English language. In short, the positive attitudes and perceptions of learners toward using CLT in language learning are significant in accomplishing language communicative competence.

B. The Background of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
The concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) goes back to the 1960s in Europe and America (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) when the European Council began to consider the significance of language in enhancing effective communication. CLT was first used as a practical classroom application in the 1970s and was designed to be student-centered (content-based, task-based) rather than a traditional teacher-centered approach. Today, the primary reason for using CLT is to provide people with the ability to communicate and express their thoughts, feelings, and attitudes in the classroom.

Communicative Language Teaching is identified as an approach that describes the language as a whole and utilizes different situations to enable learners to communicate effectively (Saberina, 2020). Numerous attempts have been made to define CLT, though the most common definition is that it is a teaching approach used to encourage students to communicate and be active in the classroom learning process (Tran et al., 2022). Since CLT reflects a communicative perspective of language learning, it is considered an approach rather than a strategy of language learning, and its influence is evidenced by the widespread implementation of CLT around the globe especially in teaching English listening and speaking skills in Saudi Arabia (AL-Garni et al., 2019).

Furthermore, learners are not passive in CLT classes because they initiate the activities and engage in thoughtful communication. Because it is student-centered, they are in charge and monitor their own learning process. Additionally, when using the communicative approach, teachers can combine teaching the primary language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and vocabulary (Tran et al., 2022). Unlike the grammatical approach or audio approach of teaching, CLT is based on active learning interaction in the classroom. It enables teachers to engage learners

in different learning activities such as discussions, group activities, theater, role-playing, and so on. Moreover, CLT significantly contributes to revealing the personalities of learners and encourages them to share their opinions and participate in class (Tekliuk, 2020).

C. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Language Learning

Plenty of studies have been carried out that extensively examined language learning students and agreed that the significance of communicative activities in developing language competence is crucial (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Jeyasala, 2014; Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003; Richards, 2006). The ability of students to communicate is significantly improved when teachers apply the CLT communicative approach in teaching (Thamarana, 2015). Still, learning a language does not mean that learners can use the language fluently and accurately (Richards, 2006). Therefore, learners need to encompass their language abilities with knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, syntax, semantic, and knowledge of the target language use or social use to fluently and accurately use the language. By utilizing CLT, learners can have the opportunities for authentic accurate use of the language in a learning context. In short, the CLT teaching approach includes the knowledge of various uses of language, knowledge of language context, and the knowledge of dealing with any incompetency of language use.

English students can be enthusiastic and have a motive to speak and communicate during class activities. Moss & Ross-Feldman (2003a) demonstrated that learners can develop their speaking and listening skills since they express ideas about themselves and seek information to use in their communication. To encourage language learners to speak fluently, they need a real-life context where they can use the language effectively. To achieve communicative competence, learners are required to gain sufficient knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, semantics, social and cultural awareness, interpersonal skills, cohesiveness, and meaning beyond the sentence (Ho, 2020).

TABLE 1
FRAMEWORK OF CLT ADOPTED FROM HO (2020)

Communicative Language Teaching	
Objective:	Enhance learners' communicative competence in verbal and nonverbal skills.
English Skills:	Listening, speaking, reading, writing skills are interrelated, fluency is more valued than accuracy.
First Language and Target Language:	Learners' mother tongue is not discouraged during lessons and they use English as much as they can to meet daily-life communication purposes.
Teacher's Role:	Teachers facilitate English learning and create abundant communication opportunities in class.
Learner's Role:	Learners take an active role in English learning. They participate in ample communicative activities.
Communicative Activities:	Brainstorming, information gap, role-plays, think-pair-share, interviews, problem-solving tasks, group discussion, jigsaws, games, etc.

The table above, created by Ho (2020) explicitly demonstrates how CLT is an effective approach for teaching listening and speaking skills, especially when this method is compared to other teaching methods where it is found that using CLT in teaching listening and speaking is very beneficial for learners. This means learners dramatically enhance their listening and speaking skills, their confidence, and their knowledge of culture by applying CLT in the classroom (AL-Garni et al., 2019).

D. CLT Implementations in the Saudi Context

Many studies have investigated the implementation of CLT in Saudi Arabia focusing on teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward CLT rather than the attitudes of students because the Saudi education system is known for teacher-centered instead of student-centered education (Albedaiwi, 2014). These studies indicated that the implementation of CLT in Saudi education was not as successful as it was assumed it would be due to numerous challenges which included a system of centralized education, the low language proficiency of teachers, the lack of sufficient knowledge of CLT, the passive learning style of students, the lack of learners' motivation to learn the target language, grammar-based examinations, insufficient class time to apply CLT, and large class size (Abahussain, 2016; Al Asmari, 2015; Almohideb, 2019; Batawi, 2006; Farooq, 2015; Alharbi, 2022; Alharbi, 2020). Alharbi (2020) suggested that since the Saudi use of CLT centers around the textbook, a broader approach might be used to improve the motivation of learners to use communicative activities.

In a study by Batawi (2006), interviews with Saudi language teachers revealed that they prefer the grammatical approach over the communicative approach. Logically, teacher preference for a certain teaching approach impacts learners' attitudes toward the language. Another study explained teachers' misconception of CLT where they think CLT norms can be applied only by "an unrealistically superhuman teacher" (Al Asmari, 2015, p. 979). In the meantime, the problem with the attitudes and perception of Saudi learners towards CLT remains vague because studies focus more on teachers' perception and awareness of the CLT approach rather than students' perception and attitude toward the use of CLT in language learning classes, especially in listening and speaking lessons.

The concern for gender differences in attitudes and perceptions of CLT in the Saudi context has not been sufficiently explored even though Saudi has a segregated educational system (Almohideb, 2019). Studies focused either on the attitudes and perceptions of male or female EFL students toward CLT (B. Alharbi, 2022b; M. S. Alharbi, 2018; Almohideb, 2019) and none of these studies have studied both genders or made a comparison between the attitudes and perceptions of male and female EFL students toward CLT. Hence, the current study aims to take into consideration gender's role in studying the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi EFL learners toward using the CLT approach in listening and speaking classes.

E. Oral Communication

Oral Communication, or speaking, is a gifted human skill where it is used to interact and communicate anywhere at any time. In learning English, the foremost skill to learn is speaking because it enables learners to express their ideas, feelings, or opinions in a particular situation. The primary goal of language learning is to achieve communicative competence (Indriyani, (2020). Nonetheless, speaking skills are not easily acquired or mastered since it is a complicated language skill (Ngan, 2013). The difficulty comes from the fact speaking involves knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structure, pronunciation, intonation, and social language use (Wahyuni et al., 2021). Communicating effectively is the primary goal of speaking, and according to these difficulties, teaching and learning speaking attracts the attention of both educators and learners (Chau, 2021).

One study examined the use of communication games and role-play on secondary school students in developing their speaking skills and revealed that learners were very active and confident in their communication (Hernández-Chérrez et al., 2021). Lumettu & Runtuwene (2018) explored the effectiveness of employing impromptu speaking to enhance learners' speaking ability and found that applying impromptu activities such as storytelling, interviews, speeches, and discussions leads to developing speaking skills. Furthermore, a study conducted by Eissa (2019) examined using digital storytelling in teaching speaking to females and found that Saudi learners suffered from a lack of fluency in English speaking.

Wajid & Saleem (2017) studied where low proficiency in speaking by Saudi learners comes from. They indicated that a lack of sufficient opportunities to practice speaking is an essential reason for speaking deficiency. Additionally, memorization of English paragraphs is another obstacle to developing Saudi learners' speaking ability (Alwazir et al., 2017). Also, a lack of real situations to use to practice speaking is another hindrance to developing the oral communication proficiency of Saudi EFL students (Shumin, 2002). Still, learners can enhance their language speaking and listening skills by deploying communicative activities because they have more information and authentic situations to talk about their ideas and points of view (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003b).

In summary, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) plays a crucial role in language learning. Although many studies attempted to demonstrate the attitudes and perceptions of teachers toward CLT, a few studies have investigated the attitudes and perceptions of EFL learners toward CLT as a way to enhance their language learning, especially with Saudi EFL learners. In addition, a very limited number of studies have examined the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi learners toward CLT along with considering gender difference since the system of education is a segregated system.

METHODOLOGY

A. Research Questions

Since the study's main objective is to unveil the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi EFL learners toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation in listening and speaking

classes while also considering gender differences at the same time, three research questions were used to elicit college students' attitudes and perceptions of CLT:

1. What are the attitudes and perceptions of learners toward learning English listening and speaking skills through the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT)?
2. Are Saudi learners willing to continue learning through CLT?
3. What are the differences between the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi males and females toward learning English listening and speaking skills through CLT?

A. Study Methodology

(a.)Research Instrument

A questionnaire was used to answer research questions. These survey items were adopted from Komol et al. (2020) who examined the attitudes and perceptions of Thai EFL students toward using CLT in listening and speaking classes. Then, these items were modified with minor changes made to elicit the attitudes and perceptions of Saudi male and female students toward the use of CLT in EFL listening and speaking classes. The instrument's internal consistency was 0.95 implying the study questionnaire was reliable.

Twenty-two questionnaire items were used to answer the research questions. The first two questions asked about gender and education level. Then, the next ten items were used to investigate the EFL participants' perceptions of CLT in classroom activities, and the last ten items examined the students' attitudes toward the use of CLT in classroom activities.

(b.) Data Collection

Advanced technology provides researchers with unlimited tools to assist them in their research journey. One of the more popular methods for collecting study samples is employing social media. It is a common approach due to its accessibility and convenience. Thus, a link to a survey prepared on Survey Monkey was sent to study participants through WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter over a three- to four-week period.

(c.) Data Analysis

Both mean scores and standard deviation scores were used to evaluate participants' attitudes and perceptions about CLT implementation in EFL listening and speaking classes. A mean score of 1.00 to 1.80 represented "Strongly Disagree" (Very Low) while 1.81 to 2.60 referred to "Disagree" (Low). Furthermore, 2.61 to 3.40 represented "Undecided or Neutral Level of Agreement" (Moderate), 3.41 to 4.19 referred to "Agree" (High), and 4.20 to 5.00 points referred to "Strongly Agree" (Very High).

(d.) Data Analysis

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(e.) Participants

The participants of the study included a total of 101 Saudi EFL college and graduate students who expressed their perception and attitude toward the implementation of CLT in listening and speaking activities. There were fifty-one males and fifty females that participated in the study at different university levels as shown in Table 2. College students' ages ranged from 19 to 24 years old while graduate students' ages ranged from 25 to 29 years old.

TABLE 2
SAUDI EFL COLLEGE & GRADUATE PARTICIPANTS GENDER & EDUCATION DISTRIBUTION

Study Participants					Total
Gender	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior	Graduate	
Male	5	16	21	8	1	51
Female	8	6	25	7	4	50

Participants were university students either enrolled in college or graduate-level courses. A large portion of the study participants were college sophomores, juniors and graduate students from different Saudi colleges (See Table 2). All study participants were from the English Departments of a variety of Saudi where English language is taught as an exclusive language used in teaching as well as the primary tool for classroom communications.

STUDY ANALYSIS

A. Saudi Males' Perception Toward the Use of CLT In Speaking Classes

Item No.	Statement	Females Mean (SD)	Males Mean (SD)
1	The role-play activities help me gain confidence in my speaking skills.	4.00 (0.91)	3.75 (0.96)
2	The role-play activities allow me to be more creative.	4.17 (0.90)	3.89 (0.81)
3	The role-play activities allow me to be good at pronunciation.	4.08 (0.86)	3.85 (0.83)
4	The teacher's instruction on how to do class activities is necessary.	4.19 (0.97)	4.24 (0.74)
5	I think the group discussion activities allow me to learn speaking skills.	3.60 (1.17)	3.89 (0.99)
6	I think group discussion helps me improve my listening skills.	3.57 (1.23)	3.78 (1.17)
7	I think making an English short movie video allows me to get much exposure to using English.	4.26 (0.84)	3.81 (1.04)
8	The role of the teacher as a facilitator in the language classroom is very important.	4.13 (0.91)	4.20 (0.85)
9	Role-play, group discussion, and language video-making help me to gain confidence in speaking.	4.02 (1.02)	3.92 (1.03)
10	Role-play, group discussion, and making videos help me have confidence in listening.	3.77 (0.90)	3.72 (1.02)

TABLE 3

SAUDI STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARD THE USE OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

The study mean scores of Saudi males' perception of using CLT in speaking classes ranged from a very high to a high mean score according to Table 3. The first very high mean score recorded for males' perception was the mean score of 4.24 for Item 4. This item discussed the necessity of teacher instruction for class activities. Meanwhile, this item has a low dispersion of standard deviation score (SD= 0.74) which means participants' answers were less spread out and more concentrated on certain choices. However, the lowest mean score was Item 10 (3.72 = 1.02). This item displayed Saudi learners' perception of how role-play, group discussion and watching English videos increase students' confidence in their listening skills. Second was a very high mean score item concerning the significance of the teacher's job as a facilitator in the language classroom (4.20) with a moderate low or low dispersion and diversification score (SD = 85).

The males' high mean scores range from (3.92) to (3.72). First, a high mean score of 3.92 goes with Item 9 which explained using role-play, group, discussion, and videos that assisted them in becoming more confident in speaking. The survey Item 9 statistical result reflects a high dispersion of SD = 1.03 score which means participants' answers were spread out. Other high mean scores were displayed on perception survey Items 2 and 5. Item 2 which discussed how role play increases creativity in classroom activities has a mean score of 3.89. Likewise, Item 5 which examined

learners' perception of how group discussion activities allow them to learn speaking skills has the same high mean score but with a slight SD difference (SD = 0.99) where it has a low dispersion score.

According to Table 3, Item 3 asked about developing pronunciation through role-play activities, and Item 7 explored the role of using videos to expose students to the use of English by native speakers. Both of these have almost the same high mean score though the SD is different since participants were more diversified in answering Item 7 (SD= 104) than they were answering Item 3 (SD = 0.83). This means Saudi participants' answers to Item 3 are less dispersed than they are for Item 7. Moreover, the highest diversified SD among the males' perception survey items is found with Item 6 (SD = 1.17) which explored learners' perception of enhancing their listening skills by using group discussion activities even though the mean score is high for this same item.

B. Saudi Females' Perception Toward the Use of CLT in Speaking Classes
Saudi female participants reflected a higher awareness of using CLT in classrooms. The highest mean score (4.26 = 084) for females' perception of CLT comes with survey Item 7 which talked about watching short English videos that would give them more exposure to using English with a low dispersion of SD while the lowest mean score (3.57 = 1.23) goes to Item 6 which examined learners' thoughts about the role of group discussion activities in developing listening skills with the highest diversified SD score. Then, Item 4 which discusses learners' perception of the necessity of teachers' instructions for class activities has the second very high mean score at 4.19 with a low standard deviation score of SD= 0.97; however, this is not too low which means participants' answers were not widely spread on choices.

Another five items - Items 2, 8, 3, 9, and 1 - have close mean scores ranging from 4.17 to 4.00. In other words, these items have a high mean score as displayed in Table 3. Initially, Item 2 examined students' perception of how role-play activities allow them to be more creative with a high mean score and low SD (4.17 = 0.90). Admitting the significant role of the teacher as a facilitator for the class activities, Item 8 has a high mean score level of 4.13 and Item 3 which explored participants' perception of how role-play activities develop their pronunciation has a high mean score of 4.08. Survey Item 9 which explained students' perception of role-play, group discussion, and language videos helping them to gain confidence in speaking and one that examined participants' perception of role-play activities in developing their confidence almost have the same mean score level (4.02= 1.02 and 4.00= 0.90, respectively) but with a very slight SD difference. Item 9 participant responses were more diversified than Item 1. The last three lowest items were Items 10, 5, and 6. Item 10 examined learners' perception of using CLT activities such as group discussion, role-play, and making videos that have positively influenced listening skills with a high mean score of 3.77.

With a high mean score of 3.60, Item 5 investigated students' perception of how group discussion enhanced their speaking ability.

To conclude, there were, indeed, some gender differences in perceiving CLT activities in EFL classrooms. Females displayed a higher perception of the first three items which were concerned with role-play activities that developed their confidence in speaking, pronunciation, and creativity compared to males. The mean score of the three items ranged from 4.00 to 4.17 while the males' mean scores ranged from 3.75 to 3.89. Meanwhile, the biggest difference in the mean scores between males and females was found in Item 7 which discusses getting more exposure to English by making English videos. Remarkably, not only did the mean scores of females outweigh males (F. 4.26 = 0.84; M. 3.81 = 104), but also the males' standard deviation is quite different which shows males' responses were more diversified than females on this item. In general, Saudi females have reflected higher perceptions of CLT classroom activities than males.

C. Saudi Males' Attitude Toward the Use of CLT in Speaking Classes
Another important factor examined in the research was concerned with Saudi students' attitudes toward the use of CLT in EFL classes, especially speaking classes. As seen in Table 4, the mean score of Saudi males' attitude toward CLT is not very high when compared to their perception of CLT. The highest mean score recorded (3.92= 0.87) was for Item 4 which expresses students' use of this method to practice English in their own time. On the other hand, the lowest mean score (3.45 = 1.22) was recorded for Item 9 which talks about taking a long time to make a video. Clearly noticeable is that Item 9 has a higher SD than Item 4 which means participants' responses for Item 9 deviated more than they did for Item 4. Two more items that have a high mean score are Items 1 and 2. Study attitudinal Item 1 (3.91 = 0.94) discusses using role-play as a useful method to improve English speaking skills; meanwhile, Item 2 (3.91 = 1.07) talks about using group discussion to help participants be more creative. Finally, Item 1 has a higher SD score, but that is not significant. Also in Table 4, Item 3 (3.85 = 1.05), which discusses participants' hope in implementing CLT in other English classes, and Item 10 (3.85 = 1.12), which demonstrates learners' willingness to apply CLT activities in practicing other English courses, have the same mean score and only a slight difference in SD. Three more items with a close mean score are Items 6, 7, and 8. Item 6 (3.75 = 0.80) and Item 7 (3.75 = 0.89) have the same high mean score with a small SD difference. They examined learners' attitudes toward role-play activities which take a long time to recite when enhancing their listening and speaking skills. The second lowest mean score found among the males' attitudes toward the implementation of CLT was recorded for Item

5 which investigated participants' attitudes toward maintaining the use of CLT even though it takes a bit longer to do.

TABLE 4
SAUDI STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING ACTIVITIES

Item No.	Statement	Females Mean (SD)	Males Mean (SD)
1	I think using role-play as a way to promote English speaking is a useful method of learning English.	4.09 (0.71)	3.91 (0.94)
2	I think using group discussion is very useful to help me to be more creative.	3.68 (1.13)	3.91 (1.07)
3	I hope that the teacher will implement this teaching method in other English classes.	3.96 (0.94)	3.85 (1.05)
4	I will use this communicative language learning to practice English in my own time.	3.68 (1.01)	3.92 (0.87)
5	Even though this method takes me some time to practice on my own, I will continue using it.	3.60 (0.96)	3.66 (1.05)
6	Even though role-play activities take me a lot of time to recite lines of the dialogue, it helps me to improve my speaking skills.	4.00 (0.74)	3.75 (0.80)
7	Even though, role-play activities take me a lot of time to recite lines of the dialogue, it helps me to improve my listening skills.	3.72 (1.06)	3.75 (0.89)
8	I hope that the teacher will assign the students in other English classes to make a video since it is very useful for them to write their own English script as a way to improve their English capabilities.	3.89 (0.99)	3.72 (1.16)
9	It takes me a long time to make a video but I really enjoy doing it.	3.49 (1.22)	3.45 (1.22)
10	I can apply all activities to my other English subjects since those activities are very useful for me to improve my English listening and speaking skills.	3.74 (0.93)	3.85 (1.12)

D. *Saudi Females' Attitude Toward the Use of CLT In Speaking Classes*

In Table 4, the study's statistical outcome on females' attitudes toward the use of CLT in EFL classes revealed that the highest mean score and lowest SD were recorded for Item 1 (4.09 = 071) which talks about how role play is a useful tool for developing English speaking. Participants' answers were less deviated and more concentrated on certain options concerning this item than any other attitude survey item. However, the lowest mean score and highest SD (3.49 = 1.22) was recorded for Item 9 which talks about taking a long time to make a video recording in English. The SD outcome reveals a high diversification in students' responses to this item. Another high mean score was found in Item 6 (4.00 = 0.74) which discusses how using role-play activities takes a lot of time though it helps in enhancing speaking skills. Again, the SD is low compared to other attitude items.

Two pairs of survey items concerning Saudi females' CLT attitude have a very close high mean score: Items 3, 8, 10, and 7. First comes Item 3 (3.96= 0.94) which investigated participants' attitudes toward using the CLT teaching approach in other English classes, followed by Item 8 (3.89= 0.99) which examined females' attitudes toward assigning them to make videos in other English classes since it is a useful approach. The next two high mean scores were Items 10 and 7. Item 10 (3.74= 0.93) explored learners' attitudes toward applying CLT activities for other English subjects because those activities are useful for developing listening and speaking skills. Item 7 (3.72= 1.06) studied female students' attitudes toward using role-play activities in other English classes even though it takes a long time. Moreover, the SD deviation of Item 7 is higher than Item 10.

The females' attitude items that have the same high mean score but a slight SD difference are Items 2 and 4. According to Table 4, Item 2 (3.68= 1.13) studied females' attitudes towards using group discussion to improve their creativity, and Item 4 (3.68= 1.01) examined females' attitudes toward using the CLT approach in practicing the English language by themselves. Although these items have the same high mean score, there is a difference in their SD where participants' responses for Item 2 are more diverse than they are for Item 4. The lowest mean score recorded for females' attitude toward maintaining using CLT even if it takes a long time was Item 5 (3.60).

Comparing males' and females' attitudes toward the implementation of CLT in EFL would lead again to the obvious fact that females overshadow males when it comes to their attitudes. The highest mean scores for females are found in Items 1, 6, and 3, respectively where their mean

scores range from 4.09 to 3.96. Additionally, these items discuss using role-play to develop language and speaking skills with their desire to apply the CLT approach to teaching other English classes. On the other hand, the males' highest mean scores represented in the study survey were for Item 4 which tested participants' willingness to use CLT in their self-learning of English, Item 1 which examined their attitude toward the use of role-play to promote their English, and Item 2 which explored their thoughts on using discussion to enhance their speaking. Still, there was no difference between the lowest mean scores of males and females where both genders' mean scores were recorded in Items 5 and 9.

DISCUSSION

First of all, most research that examined the Saudi context of CLT implementation attitudes and perceptions were based on segregated gender where they separately studied males or females (Almohideb, 2019) while the present study included studying both males and females at the same time. In addition, the study revealed that both Saudi males and females have good perceptions and positive attitudes toward the use of CLT in language learning especially in speaking classes. Therefore, the study goes along with previous studies which indicated Saudis have positive attitudes toward learning the English language (B. Alharbi, 2022b; Alkaff, 2013; Akram, 2016; Khan, 2016). However, gender differences were found in the perceptions and attitudes toward the use of CLT. Even though both males and females displayed positive attitudes and perceptions toward CLT and learning the English language, Saudi females presented a higher perception and attitude than males.

Study participants have expressed the significance of using CLT in learning language skills which is compatible with early studies on the importance of CLT for EFL learners (Breen & Candlin, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Jeyasala, 2014; Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003; Richards, 2006). Interestingly, in contrast to Saudi males, females believe that using technology in language activities like recording a speaking video is more helpful in developing listening and speaking skills than teacher instructions as a facilitator to an activity is. However, both of them agreed on the vital role of CLT in developing their speaking and listening skills which coincides with Moss & Ross-Feldman (2003) study.

Some CLT studies on the Saudi context displayed some challenges in applying the CLT approach such as centralized education, teachers' low language proficiency of teachers, lack of sufficient knowledge, and insufficient class time; subsequently, they influence EFL learners' attitude toward

CLT (Abahussain, 2016; Al Asmari, 2015; Almohideb, 2019; Batawi, 2006; Farooq, 2015; Alharbi, 2022; Alharbi, 2020). Nevertheless, study participants' responses to the survey items which examined their perceptions and attitudes toward CLT activities implemented in EFL classes reflected the ultimate conclusion that not all Saudi education is not centralized, that there is no lack of sufficient knowledge, and that teachers have no problem with language proficiency because if these problems exist, they would profoundly impact learners' perceptions and attitudes toward CLT implantation in their language classes. This study shows that this is clearly not the case. According to Batawi (2006), teachers' attitudes toward a specific teaching methodology influence learners' attitudes; therefore, participants' positive attitudes toward CLT come from their teachers' attitudes.

Last but not least, whether in perception or attitude, gender differences found in the study may come from their teacher's approach to implementing CLT class activities. In other words, females have a higher perception and attitude because their female teachers were more successful in applying CLT class activities than their male counterparts. Still, class size, teaching approach, students' language level, and other factors need to be considered in order to decide whether females are more successful in applying CLT class activities than males. However, according to the study participants' perception and attitude toward CLT activities, females reflected a higher perception and attitude than males. Moreover, after careful examination of Saudi males' and females' attitudes toward CLT activities, it can be observed that in contrast to males, females' highest mean scores did not go with group or pair activities of the EFL classes. The reason for this may be that females are more introverted learners than males because they might be shyer when sharing and practicing the language with their peers.

CONCLUSION

Even though a plentiful amount of research has attempted to explore Saudi implementation of CLT in EFL classes, very little or none of it has considered perceptions and attitudes when examining gender differences since the system of education in the kingdom is a segregated system. The current study investigated Saudi college or graduate students' attitudes and perceptions toward the implementation of CLT. The study unveiled Saudis have a higher perception and awareness of CLT activities and display a positive attitude toward these activities. Additionally, gender differences were found in their perceptions and attitudes.

Initially, the study revealed that Saudi females reflected a noticeably higher perception toward using CLT in EFL classes than male participants. After careful examination of participants'

responses, the study found some perception survey items that have higher mean scores that are shared by both males and females. In other words, Saudi males and females showed high mean scores with items that described the significance of teacher instruction in CLT activities and the role of the teacher as a facilitator for in-class activities. Still, there are some differences in perception items between males and females. Males considered role-play, group discussion, and language video-making to increase speaking confidence to be the third-highest mean score. On the other hand, females chose making short videos which allows them more exposure to using English which led to the third-highest mean score. In addition to the high mean scores of CLT perception displayed by Saudis, their attitude toward CLT activities reflected high mean scores, too.

Another remarkable finding with gender differences was found in Saudi attitudes toward CLT activities. First of all, females displayed a higher positive attitude toward the implementation of CLT activities than males. The study showed that Saudi males' highest attitude mean score goes with using CLT activities in the self-learning of English while females go with using role-play as a way to promote their English language proficiency. Females displayed positive attitudes toward dialogue CLT activities to develop their speaking skills and wished English teachers would apply CLT activities in other classes as well. Males reflected positive attitudes toward using group discussion which would help them to be more creative in using the language. The only shared high mean score between males and females is using role-play as a way to promote their English language.

In summary, the study provides in-depth insight into Saudi's attitude and perception toward CLT activities especially in speaking classes where females and males showed a higher perception and awareness of CLT activities in EFL classes besides also demonstrating a positive attitude toward these activities. Gender differences were found between Saudi males' and females' perceptions and attitudes toward CLT activities; though some of these differences were not significant, other differences were remarkable, especially within the Saudi context which has a segregated system of education.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Despite the large number of studies that examined the CLT approach to teaching in the EFL or ESL context, very few of them considered gender differences in perception and attitude toward CLT activities because it requires researchers to take further steps. Major future directions need to be highlighted for further examination of implementing CLT in Saudi EFL classes, as follows:

1. Since the system of Saudi education is segregated, there is a desperate need to unveil differences between female and male English teachers' implementation of CLT activities in their EFL classes. Therefore, observations must be included to reveal the current practices of CLT activities that are instructed by teachers.
2. Examining the usefulness of CLT activities to Saudi college EFL students and how they use them in their self-learning of English. In other words, studying how CLT activities assist learners in overcoming their language problems.
3. Again, gender issue needs further insight by researching the psychological factors that may influence learners' preferences for some CLT activities. This means we have to find an answer to the question of what makes Saudi females prefer individual CLT activities to group activities such as discussions.

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