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Exploring CLT-Related Pedagogical Content Knowledge Among English Teachers in Bahrain

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Abstract

This study examined communicative language teaching (CLT) related pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) reported by Bahraini in-service English language teachers during professional training. PCK was examined through teachers' perceptions of CLT benefits and principles, their conceptual understanding of CLT, perceived demands on teachers, implementation barriers, and suggested improvements. A quantitative survey design was employed using a 40-item questionnaire rated on a five-point Likert scale. The data were analysed descriptively, with attention to response patterns, central tendencies, variability, and the reliability of the questionnaire dimensions. The findings revealed generally favourable perceptions of CLT, with perceived benefits receiving the highest rating ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.80$), while the remaining attitudinal and implementation-related dimensions recorded mean scores ranging from 3.63 to 3.78. Despite this favourable orientation, responses to four statements reflecting common misconceptions about CLT indicated areas of conceptual uncertainty, with 44%–52% of respondents endorsing these statements. Intensive training emerged as the most strongly supported improvement (73.5%), while 48.5% of respondents perceived CLT as insufficient preparation for the final examination. These findings suggest that the development of CLT-related pedagogical content knowledge is characterised by a combination of favourable pedagogical orientations, conceptual uncertainty, and contextual constraints. The findings offer an exploratory contribution by describing a cohort's receptiveness to CLT alongside areas of conceptual uncertainty, and by identifying professional-development priorities that support the Ministry of Education's emphasis on systematic needs analysis to inform targeted training in Bahrain.

Keywords: pedagogical content knowledge, communicative language teaching, teacher training, non-native English teachers, EFL, Bahrain

1. Introduction

Teachers' knowledge has recently represented an important focus for researchers in education (Gutek, 2011). One of the initiatives in researching and theorising this topic was taken by Shulman (1987) who classified teachers' knowledge into seven categories; they are: (a) content knowledge, (b) general pedagogical knowledge, (c) curriculum knowledge, (d) pedagogical content knowledge, (e) knowledge of learners and their characteristics, (f) knowledge of educational context, and (g) knowledge of educational ends, purposes and values. Shulman gave pedagogical content knowledge particular weight, describing it as the blend of content and pedagogy that is distinctive to teachers, and it is this category that the present study examines.

In English language education, attention to teachers' knowledge is especially relevant when an instructional approach requires teachers to connect subject knowledge, pedagogy, learner needs, and classroom context. CLT places communication and purposeful language use at the centre of instruction, but teachers may interpret its principles differently in different settings. Research has repeatedly shown that teachers' practical understandings of CLT do not always correspond fully with theoretical descriptions (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). Surveying teachers' perceptions during professional development is one way to locate both the understandings they share and the points on which

clarification is still needed.

The present study is descriptive. It draws on questionnaire responses to document what the participating teachers think of CLT, what they would change about the way it is implemented, and which challenges they perceive.

Interest in subject-specific teacher knowledge has grown, but König et al. (2016) describe the scientific understanding of teachers' professional knowledge for teaching English as a foreign language as very limited. A systematic review of empirical studies of PCK in foreign and second language education reached a similar verdict, finding a variety of conceptualisations and research methods but no generalisable conclusions (Evens et al., 2016). Little is known, in particular, about the features of PCK that language teachers construct while they are in in-service training and are asked to adopt a particular approach such as CLT. In Bahrain, studies of English teaching have examined language policy (Hayes, 2018), the washback of the national examination (Al-Wadi, 2020), and collaborative professional development (Alwadi et al., 2020), while research at the national teachers' college has evaluated its pre-service teaching practice (Fateel, 2024). None of these studies asks how public-school English teachers themselves understand CLT while they are being prepared in service. In-service programmes are built on assumptions about what teachers already know. Three research questions follow from it. RQ1 asks what features of CLT-related pedagogical content knowledge the teachers report; RQ2 asks how, in their view, the implementation of CLT could be improved; and RQ3 asks which challenges they see as hindering it. The questions are stated in full, with the two sub-questions of RQ1, in Section 3.1.

2. Literature Review

In the field of English language teaching as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL), although there is a growing body of research on teacher knowledge, the literature has often emphasised the content and skills needed by novice language teachers. Velez-Rendon (2002) argued that second-language teacher education also needs to attend to how teachers connect knowledge with their situated pedagogical decisions. This issue is particularly relevant for non-native English-speaking teachers, whose professional knowledge is shaped by their education, language experience, learners, and teaching context. How EFL/ESL teachers understand and enact their pedagogical knowledge is also shaped by the teaching approach they are asked to adopt.

CLT has received sustained attention in diverse EFL contexts. Its implementation may be shaped by teachers' understandings, learners' proficiency and motivation, assessment expectations, available materials, class conditions, and opportunities for professional preparation. Chang and Goswami (2011), for example, documented factors that promoted or hindered CLT implementation in Taiwanese college English classes. Jansem (2019) likewise examined teachers' practices and knowledge base in CLT implementation, while Ariatna (2016) emphasised the need to maintain CLT in Indonesia. These studies justify examining teachers' own perceptions without assuming that findings from one context automatically apply to another. Accordingly, this study explored the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) that in-service EFL/ESL teachers report, as reflected in their questionnaire responses.

For the purposes of this questionnaire study, pedagogical content knowledge is approached descriptively through teachers' reported views of CLT benefits, principles, demands, and barriers, together with their responses to selected knowledge statements. These groupings organise the presentation of the data and are not treated as proven latent constructs.

2.1 Pedagogical Content Knowledge and CLT

Shulman (1986, 1987) introduced pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) to name what allows a teacher to make a subject teachable: the representations, examples, and explanations that suit a topic, together with an understanding of what makes that topic easy or difficult for particular learners. PCK therefore sits where content knowledge and general pedagogical knowledge meet, and Grossman (1990) showed how it draws on knowledge of learners and of the context in which teaching takes place. Language teaching complicates the picture. Here the subject is also the medium of instruction, and the teacher's own command of the language is part of the knowledge on which teaching draws: Andrews (2003) places teacher language awareness, which links knowledge about the language with proficiency in it, within the professional knowledge base of the L2 teacher and examines its effect on pedagogical practice. Even so, König et al. (2016) were able to assess the content knowledge, PCK, and general pedagogical knowledge of future English teachers as distinct but closely related components. The field has not settled on a single model of language teachers' PCK, and studies conceptualise and measure it in different ways (Evens et al., 2016).

Communicative language teaching gives this knowledge a specific content. Teaching communicatively involves knowing what the approach holds about meaningful interaction, the integration of skills, and the place of grammar

(Richards, 2006), and knowing how those principles can be turned into tasks, materials, and assessment for a given class. Where that knowledge is incomplete, implementation suffers. Butler (2011) counts misconceptions about CLT among the conceptual constraints on its implementation in Asian classrooms, and Thompson (1996) set out four widespread misconceptions, among them the belief that CLT means teaching only speaking, which item 12 of the present questionnaire echoes. On this view, the questionnaire clusters capture different parts of CLT-related PCK. The perceived benefits and the knowledge statements concern what teachers understand about how CLT promotes learning. The demands on the teacher concern the proficiency and cultural knowledge that communicative teaching presupposes, the strand of teacher knowledge that Andrews (2003) describes. The barrier clusters correspond to the knowledge of learners and of educational context that Shulman (1987) and Grossman (1990) place alongside PCK, and the normative principles show how teachers think CLT ought to be enacted. This reading follows research on language teacher cognition, which links what teachers know and believe to what they do in class (Borg, 2003). But the clusters remain reported reflections of CLT-related PCK, not direct measures of it.

2.2 CLT in EFL Contexts

CLT is generally understood as an approach that makes meaningful communication and purposeful language use central to classroom activity. In EFL settings, however, implementation is not a simple transfer of techniques. What a teacher makes of CLT depends on the local curriculum, the examinations, the learners' proficiency, the conditions of the class, and the teacher's own professional knowledge. Attitude and understanding are separable. Earlier research has kept them apart, distinguishing a favourable attitude toward CLT from the practical and conceptual understanding needed to implement it consistently. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) found that teachers' practical understandings of CLT could drift some distance from its formal accounts, and Ariatna (2016) argued that teachers' conceptual and pedagogical engagement with the approach has to be continually sustained.

Not every barrier is a matter of teacher preference. In Taiwanese college English classrooms, Chang and Goswami (2011) traced the influences on CLT implementation to four sources at once: the teachers, the learners, the curriculum, and the wider context. Jansem (2019) tied teachers' implementation practices to the professional knowledge base that communicative teaching presupposes. Therefore, an analysis of CLT uptake has to cover perceived benefits, conceptual understanding, teacher demands, learner and community factors, system and assessment conditions, and proposed improvements. And what is found in one EFL setting has to be read against that setting's own institutional and linguistic environment.

Recent scholarship keeps finding the gap between accepting CLT and enacting it under local conditions. Al Kalbani et al. (2019), working in Oman, related teachers' attitudes toward CLT to the difficulties they perceived in their classrooms. Phothongsunan (2020) turned instead to teachers' conceptions of the approach. Alharbi (2024), in a critical appraisal of CLT in Saudi Arabia, placed implementation squarely within the constraints of a Gulf EFL context. Taken together, these studies suggest that a positive disposition is not evidence of coherent pedagogical knowledge; conceptual clarity, adaptation to context, and practical support are separate requirements.

2.3 English-Language Education and Teacher Development in Bahrain

English is established in Bahrain as one of the main subjects from primary to tertiary levels. Abou-El-Kheir and MacLeod (2017) call it an integral component of schooling in the Kingdom, taught from the first year and carrying substantial weight in higher education as well. Ponnuchamy's (2017) historical review ties the Grade 1 starting point to a wider set of reforms in curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Communicative competence in English therefore has clear practical value in Bahrain. Yet English is taught inside an Arabic-speaking national context, and across several educational stages.

A second element of the context is teacher preparation. Mohammed Jaber Al Ansari College for Teachers, as Taha Thomure et al. (2025) describe it, is the national provider set up to improve teaching and learning in public schools, and it does so by preparing new teachers and by training in-service teachers and school leaders. This mandate makes an in-service programme such a suitable place to ask what teachers understand by CLT, which barriers they perceive, and what professional support they believe they need.

Teacher learning in Bahrain is also linked to the policy and institutional settings in which it happens. Al-Wadi (2020) found that the national English examination had influenced secondary EFL teachers' beliefs' generating washback effects that constrained opportunities for communicative language teaching. Hayes (2018) found ambivalence and a tacit rejection of English-language policy, which suggests that implementation in Bahrain is negotiated rather than simply complied with. Whether teachers value CLT is only part of the question. How assessment demands and readings of policy shape the knowledge teachers report, and the choices actually open to them, matters as much.

The professional development literature generally favours sustained, collaborative learning over isolated workshops. Alwadi et al. (2020) present participatory lesson study as a way of strengthening and sustaining English-language teaching and leadership. Al Mahdi et al. (2023) show professional learning communities supporting reflection in Bahrain and Oman. Yaqoot et al. (2020) add the organisational layer, finding that cultural support helps to explain whether training in Bahrain is effective. On this evidence, CLT-related pedagogical content knowledge is not acquired alone. It develops socially and institutionally, wherever teachers are given the chance to plan, observe, discuss, and revise their practice.

The literature offers good evidence on English-language policy, examination washback, teacher ambivalence, and collaborative professional development in Bahrain and comparable Gulf settings. What it does not offer is a direct empirical account of the CLT-related perceptions and conceptual understandings that Bahraini public-school English teachers themselves report while they are in in-service preparation. No claim to national representation is made. What the study offers instead is a context-sensitive account of one programme cohort that can inform instrument refinement and larger needs-assessment studies.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, the study draws on Shulman's (1987) account of pedagogical content knowledge as the integration of subject matter with pedagogy, and on Mason and Payant's (2018) two-part description of PCK in EFL teaching, which distinguishes a teaching aspect (methods, learning processes, and learner characteristics) from a subject-content aspect (subject matter, skills, and competencies). Research question (RQ) 1 addresses the first two aspects, while RQ 2 and 3 concern the conditions under which that knowledge is enacted. Consistent with the descriptive design, these aspects organise the presentation of the results.

The current study attempted to explore the nature of the pedagogical content knowledge that the Bahraini EFL teacher trainees were developing during their in-service training programme and how it was influenced by their non-native context. In this regard, three research questions were posed, the first with two sub-questions:

RQ1: What are the common features of pedagogical content knowledge in which CLT is normally implemented when teaching English to EFL/ESL learners as viewed by a group of English language teachers while they are attending their in-service professional development programme?

a) What aspects of general pedagogical knowledge do teachers perceive as commonly applied when implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) in foreign language instruction?

b) What common aspects of content knowledge do teachers identify as shaping their instructional priorities when implementing CLT in the teaching of English as a foreign or second language (EFL/ESL)?

RQ2: How can the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) be improved in EFL/ESL contexts from the perspectives of in-service non-native English language teachers?

RQ3: What challenges may hinder the effective implementation of CLT in non-native English-speaking contexts?

The questionnaire was used as the source of evidence for answering these questions. RQ1 was addressed through descriptive summaries of perceived benefits (C1), knowledge statements (C2), and teacher demands (C3). RQ2 was addressed through the improvement-related items defined in Section 3.3, namely the normative CLT principles (C6) and item 17, and RQ3 through the learner/community (C4) and system/materials/assessment (C5) barrier items.

3.2 Study Context and Participants

The study was carried out at a teachers' college in the Kingdom of Bahrain that offers a postgraduate diploma in education (PGDE) to equip and train in-service English language teachers at the Ministry of Education with the English language teaching skills and educational foundations to become officially recognised as practitioner teachers nationwide. The participants were treated as trainees and postgraduate students at the same time during their enrolment in the PGDE programme.

The survey sample comprised 35 in-service EFL/ESL teachers. Item-level percentages use the valid responses available for each item. For cluster summaries, the stated 80% item-completion rule was applied separately to each cluster; consequently, cluster-level sample sizes ranged from 33 to 34. The demographic profile is reported only to describe the sample and is not used for inferential comparisons. (see table 1)

Table 1. Survey Sample Profile (N = 35)

Variable	Level	n	%
School location	Urban (City)	26	74.3
	Rural (Village)	9	25.7
School level	Secondary	17	48.6
	Intermediate	10	28.6
	Primary	5	14.3
	Primary-Intermediate	3	8.6
Average class size	20-25 students	3	8.6
	25-30 students	8	22.9
	30-35 students	17	48.6
	40-45 students	7	20.0
Grade taught (banded)	Primary (Cycles 1-2)	5	14.3
	Intermediate	13	37.1
	Secondary	17	48.6

Note. The class-size bands are those offered in the questionnaire.

3.3 Instrument

The instrument was a 40-item questionnaire in which each item is a statement about CLT rated on a five-point Likert scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = To some extent, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The items are organised in four parts, as headed in the instrument: CLT methodology (items 1–10); teachers' views on content knowledge in applying CLT (items 11–20); student-related difficulties and challenges in using CLT (items 21–30); and teachers' perspectives on how CLT can be reshaped to suit non-native English language learning (items 31–40).

The questionnaire contained 40 items; however, the present analysis focused on 38 items. Thirty-four items were summarised across six descriptive categories, and four were reported individually. The six categories were perceived benefits of CLT (C1, 8 items), accuracy of CLT knowledge (C2, 4 negatively worded and reverse-scored items), perceived demands on the teacher (C3, 3 items), learner- and community-related barriers (C4, 7 items), system-, materials-, and assessment-related barriers (C5, 5 items), and normative CLT principles (C6, 7 items). Four additional items (1, 11, 29, and 36) were reported individually. Items 16 and 32 were excluded from the category scores because they did not align clearly with the category definitions. These categories were used for descriptive purposes. The improvement-related evidence for RQ2 comes from Part 4 of the questionnaire, which asks how CLT can be reshaped to suit non-native English language learning. Seven of its items form the normative-principle cluster (C6); of the remaining three, item 33 is one of the four knowledge statements (C2), item 36 is reported individually, and item 32 was excluded. Item 17, from Part 2, asks whether applying CLT in the classroom requires intensive training; it belongs to C3 but is also reported on its own because it bears directly on RQ2. For the same reason, the four knowledge statements (items 6, 12, 14, and 33) and the examination item (item 30) are reported at item level in Section 4.2, in addition to contributing to their cluster scores.

3.4 Data Collection and Ethics

Before data collection, the official and ethical approvals were obtained from the departmental research committee and the college academic board, and the study was then sent to the Ministry of Education - Higher Education Council (HEC) for the final approval.

The questionnaire was administered electronically. Participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous, and no identifying information is reported. Thirty-five responses were returned and included in item-level summaries, subject to the availability of a valid response to each item.

3.5 Data Analysis

The analysis was descriptive and exploratory. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for individual questionnaire responses. For each cluster, the mean, standard deviation, and 95% confidence interval were reported

based on the available valid responses. The four negatively worded knowledge items (6, 12, 14, and 33) were reverse-scored so that a higher cluster score represented greater consistency with the study's selected interpretation of CLT principles. Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega, with bootstrap 95% confidence intervals, were retained as descriptive indicators of score consistency. Analyses were conducted in R (version 4.5.2) using the psych package (version 2.6.5); the complete analysis can be reproduced from the response file with a single script.

Because the questionnaire was completed by a small programme sample, emphasis was placed on the direction and distribution of responses rather than population inference. The statistical plan was limited to item and cluster summaries and internal-consistency estimates.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Profile of Questionnaire Clusters

Table 2 summarises the six questionnaire clusters. Respondents generally expressed favourable perceptions of the benefits and principles of CLT, with perceived benefits producing the highest mean (M = 3.94). Perceived demands on the teacher and normative CLT principles also yielded means above the midpoint of the five-point scale. At the same time, the system/materials/assessment and learner/community barrier clusters were above the midpoint, indicating that respondents also perceived notable challenges to CLT implementation. The reverse-scored knowledge-accuracy cluster was the only cluster with a mean below the scale midpoint (M = 2.52), suggesting some inconsistency with the CLT principles represented by these items. Cluster sample sizes varied according to the availability of valid responses.(Figure 1)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Questionnaire Clusters (1–5 Scale)

Cluster	n	M	SD	95% CI
C1 Perceived benefits of CLT	34	3.94	0.80	[3.66, 4.22]
C2 Knowledge accuracy (reverse-scored)	33	2.52	0.69	[2.27, 2.76]
C3 Demands on the teacher	34	3.78	0.77	[3.52, 4.05]
C4 Learner/community barriers	33	3.63	0.73	[3.37, 3.89]
C5 System/materials/assessment barriers	33	3.70	0.72	[3.45, 3.96]
C6 Normative CLT principles	33	3.70	0.75	[3.43, 3.96]

Note. Cluster scores were calculated for respondents answering at least 80% of the items in the relevant cluster.

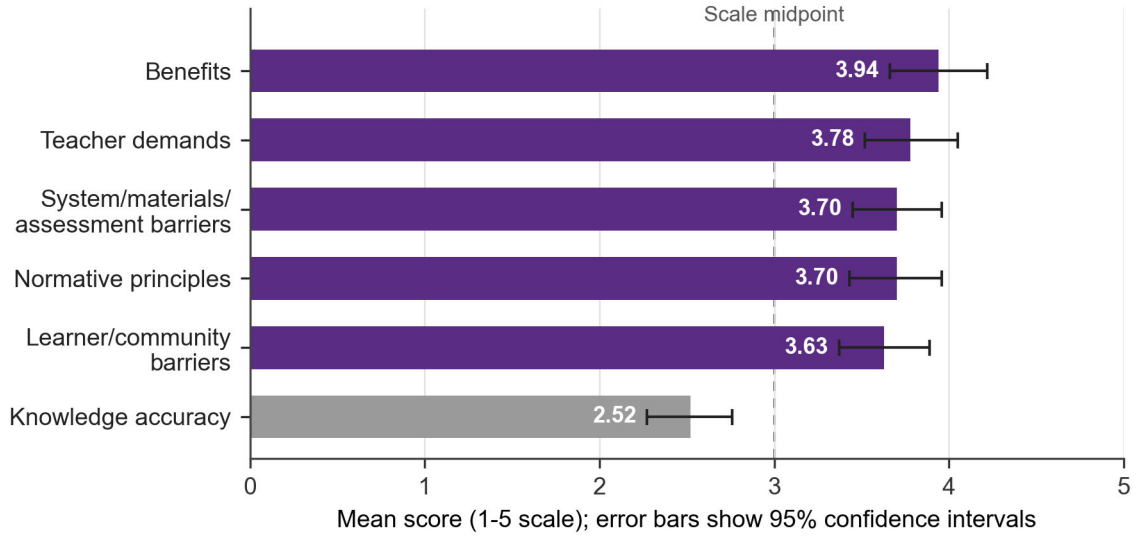


Figure 1. Mean Scores for the Six Descriptive Questionnaire Categories

4.2 Item-Level Findings Relevant to the Research Questions

The item-level distributions clarify the lower mean for C2. Agreement was recorded for 48.6% of respondents on the statement that CLT enables the teacher to dominate the classroom (item 6), 44.1% on the statement that learners practise only speaking and listening (item 12), 50.0% on the statement that CLT is an ESL rather than EFL methodology (item 14), and 51.5% on the statement that grammar requires deductive teaching (item 33). In this study, these four statements were treated as inconsistent with the selected CLT literature. They should be read as individual response patterns, not as a validated diagnostic score.

The individually reported items complete the profile. Just over half of the respondents (57.1%) agreed that they always applied CLT in their teaching (item 1). Of the remaining items, 64.7% agreed that CLT emphasises fluency over accuracy (item 11), 63.6% that the main culture to be addressed is the learners' own (item 36), and 42.4% that CLT ignores differences between the learners' culture and the target-language culture (item 29). On improvement, 73.5% agreed that applying CLT in the classroom requires intensive training (item 17); the full set of improvement-related items is reported in Table 3. On barriers, 48.5% agreed that CLT did not adequately prepare learners for the final examination (item 30). In short, the group was well disposed toward CLT, wanted further training, and was uneasy about whether communicative teaching aligns with the examination.

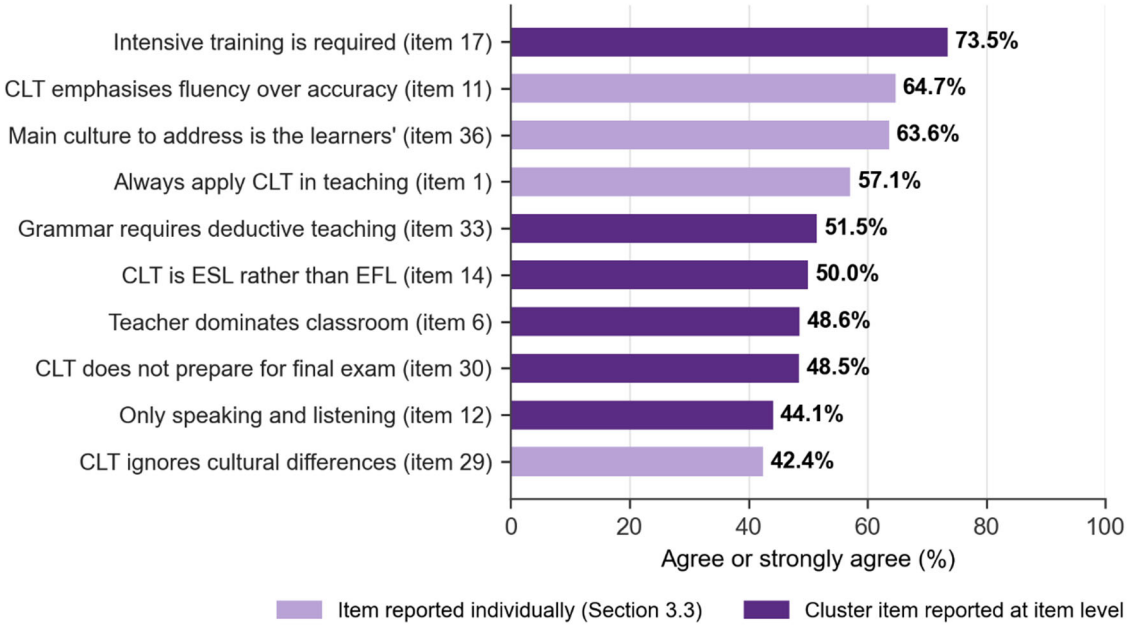


Figure 2. Percentage Agreement with Selected Questionnaire Items

Note. Items 1, 11, 29, and 36 are reported individually (Section 3.3). Items 6, 12, 14, and 33 belong to C2, item 17 to C3, and item 30 to C5; they are shown at item level because each answers a research question directly.

Table 3 brings together the responses that bear on RQ2: item 17 and the seven normative-principle items of Part 4 of the questionnaire. Intensive training (item 17) drew the clearest agreement, at 73.5%, and only one respondent disagreed. The normative items, which describe how CLT should be carried out, were endorsed by between 51.5% and 63.6% of respondents. Group and pair work (item 38, 63.6%) received the widest support, followed by equal practice of the four skills (item 34, 57.6%) and the use of an international rather than a native-like standard of proficiency (item 37, 56.2%). Equal roles for teacher and learners (item 31) and in-house materials (item 40) were endorsed least, at 51.5% each. On every normative item, roughly a third of respondents (30.3% to 39.4%) chose 'to some extent', and disagreement was low, never exceeding 15.2%. No proposed direction was rejected. But support was measured, and it was strongest where the change concerned the teachers' own preparation. The two other Part 4 items analysed here, the grammar statement (item 33) and the culture statement (item 36), are reported above and in Figure 2.

Table 3. Responses to the Improvement-Related Items (RQ2)

Item	Statement (as administered)	n	Disagree (%)	To some extent (%)	Agree (%)	M (SD)
17	Applying CLT in the actual classroom requires intensive training.	34	2.9	23.5	73.5	4.00 (0.82)
38	CLT lesson must involve group and pair work.	33	3.0	33.3	63.6	3.91 (0.88)
34	CLT lessons should include equal practice of the four language skills.	33	9.1	33.3	57.6	3.70 (1.02)
37	Language proficiency is measured according to an international standard rather than a native-like model.	32	6.2	37.5	56.2	3.75 (0.92)
35	Fluency and accuracy must be represented equally in the assessment criteria.	33	15.2	30.3	54.5	3.67 (1.05)
39	Individual work should be used as summative assessment only in CLT lessons.	33	6.1	39.4	54.5	3.67 (0.85)
31	CLT should be based on equal roles of the teacher & learners.	33	15.2	33.3	51.5	3.64 (1.06)
40	In-house materials will facilitate learning a foreign language more than out-house made materials.	33	12.1	36.4	51.5	3.58 (0.94)

Note. Agree = Agree or Strongly Agree; Disagree = Disagree or Strongly Disagree; 'To some extent' is the scale midpoint. Item 17 belongs to C3 (demands on the teacher); the other seven items form C6 (normative CLT principles). Percentages are based on the valid responses to each item.

4.3 Internal Consistency

Table 4 presents estimates of internal consistency for the six descriptive categories. C1, C4, C5, and C6 demonstrated acceptable to strong internal consistency. C2 and C3 produced comparatively lower alpha estimates, although their omega estimates were slightly above .70. These results should be interpreted in relation to the small number of items in C2 and C3 because internal-consistency coefficients are influenced by scale length (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). The confidence intervals were relatively wide, as may be expected with the small sample. The high coefficients for C1 indicate strong internal consistency but do not, independently, establish construct validity.

Table 4. Internal Consistency of the Six Clusters (Bootstrap 95% CIs)

Cluster	k	n	α [95% CI]	ω [95% CI]
C1 Benefits	8	34	.938 [.897, .961]	.939 [.902, .963]
C2 Knowledge accuracy	4	33	.681 [.453, .809]	.704 [.559, .821]
C3 Demands	3	34	.698 [.370, .854]	.716 [.528, .862]
C4 Learner barriers	7	33	.844 [.706, .917]	.856 [.758, .922]
C5 System barriers	5	33	.785 [.594, .883]	.802 [.646, .890]
C6 Normative principles	7	33	.894 [.792, .948]	.898 [.809, .951]

5. Discussion

5.1 Features of Reported Pedagogical Content Knowledge

The descriptive results address RQ1 by revealing a two-part pattern. Respondents generally reported favourable views of the benefits of CLT, while responses to four selected knowledge statements were less consistently aligned with the study's interpretation of CLT. Endorsement and conceptual uncertainty coexisted, and the pattern is close to what Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) observed when they noted how far teachers' practical understandings of CLT can

drift from its formal descriptions. Karavas-Doukas (1996) noted the same discrepancy between teachers' professed commitment to the communicative approach and largely structural classroom practice, and developed an attitude scale to investigate it among Greek secondary teachers. In this small Bahraini programme sample, the item-level findings are more defensible than treating the reverse-scored cluster as a comprehensive or validated measure of PCK.

More recent evidence from the Gulf and from wider EFL settings points the same way. Al Kalbani et al. (2019) and Phothongsunan (2020) both separate teachers' orientation toward CLT from the difficulties and conceptions that govern implementation, and Alharbi (2024) insists that CLT be appraised against local educational conditions. Favourable ratings show receptiveness to communicative aims. Uneven responses to selected knowledge statements show where clarification is needed. They do not show a general deficit in teacher competence.

The demands on the teacher cluster adds a second part to the answer to RQ1. Respondents perceived CLT as professionally demanding: the demands they named were proficiency, cultural knowledge, and training. Their understanding of the approach, then, reaches past classroom technique to the professional resources on which any technique depends.

These demands are relational rather than separate. The teacher has to hold together language proficiency, cultural knowledge, task design, learner readiness, assessment expectations, and institutional resources. This supports linking professional learning to the analysis and rehearsal of realistic Bahraini classroom situations.

5.2 Perceived Improvements

RQ2 concerned how the implementation of CLT might be improved. Results show that intensive training was needed. What this establishes is a professional-development priority as the participating teachers themselves report it. Further preparation, then, was something the respondents regarded as important for implementing CLT. Whether sustained, practice-oriented professional development actually improves teachers' conceptual understanding and classroom practice is a question for future programme evaluation.

The question, then, is what such preparation should entail. The literature reviewed earlier identifies two complementary forms of professional learning. The first is participatory lesson study, an iterative process involving collaborative planning, classroom observation, reflection, and subsequent lesson revision (Alwadi et al., 2020). Professional learning communities supply the organisational structure within which dialogue and shared inquiry continue between those cycles (Al Mahdi et al., 2023). Neither model, however, can be expected to operate effectively across all contexts. Evidence from Bahrain indicates that the impact of professional development is shaped by contextual factors, particularly organisational culture and the level of social support available to teachers (Yaqoot et al., 2020). Read in that light, the endorsement of intensive training is better translated into sustained, supported, practice-based development than into a single intensive workshop.

The normative-principle items extend this answer beyond training. Most of the changes the teachers endorsed concern the design of lessons and assessment: group and pair work, equal practice of the four skills, and assessment criteria that weigh fluency and accuracy equally. The first two are among the practices that Richards (2006) treats as central to CLT. The teachers' support for judging proficiency against an international standard rather than a native-like model (item 37) is of particular interest in a setting where the teachers themselves are non-native speakers of English. That said, no normative item reached the level of support given to training, and about a third of the respondents placed themselves at the midpoint of each. This measured endorsement differs from the very high awareness of student-centred pedagogy and assessment that Nazim et al. (2024) reported among EFL faculty members at a Saudi university, although the two groups differ in setting and role. The teachers' view of improvement is best read as a firm call for preparation, combined with more tentative agreement on what a communicative classroom should look like.

5.3 Perceived Challenges

RQ3 addressed the challenges that may hinder CLT implementation. The findings point to constraints arising from both classroom conditions and the wider educational system. In particular, the perceived mismatch between CLT and final-examination preparation suggests that assessment demands may limit the space available for communicative practice. Comparable constraints have been reported well beyond the Gulf. Li (1998) traced South Korean secondary teachers' difficulties in introducing CLT to the teachers themselves, the students, the educational system, and CLT itself, and reviews of East Asian and Asia-Pacific classrooms identify examination systems and public assessment demands as recurring constraints (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2007).

The examination barrier has a local precedent. Al-Wadi (2020) documented the national examination's influence on

the beliefs of Bahraini secondary EFL teachers, and Hayes (2018) traced the ambivalence toward policy that such pressure produces. It also bears on the wider argument of Rouffet et al. (2023) for constructive alignment between language curricula, teaching, and assessment. The implication is systemic. Teachers can hardly sustain communicative tasks when a high-stakes examination rewards a different kind of knowledge. Professional development can help teachers design communicative preparation for assessed outcomes; lasting change will also require closer alignment among curriculum objectives, materials, classroom pedagogy, and examinations.

5.4 Implications

The findings of this exploratory study sustain needs-responsive professional development. This recommendation runs with current policy in Bahrain. A recent Ministry of Education framework already commits the sector to structured professional training, continuous professional development, and the systematic monitoring and evaluation of training programmes, in the service of the Ministry's strategic objective of empowering human resources and improving their efficiency (Ministry of Education, 2026). What this study adds is a teacher-reported account of CLT-related professional-development priorities.

Among the recommendations of this study is a systematic needs assessment, which can be achieved via a short, carefully validated questionnaire, administered before training, to identify uncertainty about CLT principles, perceived implementation barriers, and priorities for instructional and assessment support. The results could then guide targeted activities, including concept-clarification sessions, analysis of Bahraini classroom scenarios, collaborative lesson planning, model communicative lessons, and assessment-design workshops. At the end, a follow-up assessment would show whether the programme had met the needs identified at the start.

It follows from the study findings and the literature that improvement of pedagogical content knowledge should be coordinated at three levels. For the teacher, training should clarify CLT principles and support context-sensitive task and assessment design. For the school, lesson study and professional learning communities need protected time in which collaborative experimentation and feedback can take place (Alwadi et al., 2020; Al Mahdi et al., 2023). And for the system, curriculum and examination expectations should be reviewed for communicative alignment, with organisational support monitored as part of programme evaluation (Rouffet et al., 2023; Yaqoot et al., 2020). This model is a proposal for future evaluation, not an effect that this descriptive study has demonstrated.

One further implication of this study concerns how Bahraini teachers take up and sustain pedagogical innovation. The findings suggest that the construction of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) during in-service training is strengthened when teachers are not only introduced to new pedagogical principles but are also given opportunities to interpret, adapt, and apply them within their own classroom contexts. This finding is congruent with Farhat (2026), who found that greater awareness strengthened teacher educators' willingness to embrace innovation, while stronger willingness was associated with fewer perceived challenges.

5.5 Limitations

The findings should be interpreted within the exploratory scope of the study. The sample comprised 35 teachers from one in-service programme; therefore, the results are intended to describe this cohort rather than represent Bahraini English teachers more broadly. As the data were based on self-reported perceptions, the cluster scores are best understood as descriptive patterns rather than distinct measures of teacher knowledge or practice. The questionnaire categories were informed by expert judgement and would benefit from further validation with larger and more diverse samples. Future studies could also incorporate broader demographic information, classroom observation, and longitudinal data to extend and strengthen the present findings. The class-size question also offered bands that were not continuous, with no option for 35–40 students.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to describe the CLT-related pedagogical content knowledge that Bahraini non-native English teachers reported while attending an in-service programme. Its answer to RQ1 has two sides. The teachers valued what CLT can do for learners, and they recognised how much the approach demands of them in language proficiency, cultural knowledge, and training. Yet close to half of them agreed with statements that the CLT literature treats as misconceptions, such as that learners in CLT lessons practise only speaking and listening or that grammar must be taught deductively. A favourable attitude had not yet settled into a consistent understanding of CLT.

On RQ2, the teachers located improvement first in their own preparation: intensive training drew more support than any other improvement item. Their views on group and pair work, balanced practice of the four skills, assessment

that weighs fluency and accuracy equally, and international rather than native-like standards of proficiency were favourable but more guarded. On RQ3, barriers arising from learners and the community and from the system, materials, and assessment were both prominent. The examination stood out. Nearly half of the teachers felt that CLT does not prepare learners for the final examination.

The study contributes in two ways. It gives a direct, if small-scale, account of how Bahraini public-school English teachers understand CLT during in-service preparation, a group whose own reports have received little attention. It also shows, in a Gulf setting, a pattern documented elsewhere. Endorsement of CLT can coexist with uncertain knowledge of its principles, and a high-stakes examination can narrow the space in which teachers act on what they endorse. For in-service education in Bahrain, the findings point to training that opens with a short needs assessment and clarifies the principles about which teachers are unsure. Teachers also need time to plan and review communicative lessons together. And training of this kind is more likely to last if communicative aims and national examinations are brought into closer alignment.

These conclusions rest on the self-reports of 35 teachers in a single programme and describe that cohort rather than Bahraini English teachers in general. Classroom observation, a larger and more varied sample, and follow-up after training would show whether the patterns hold, and whether targeted training changes what teachers understand and do.

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