

Probing Iranian English Teachers' Communicative Activities and Perspectives on Iran's Fundamental Reform Document of Education

Abbas Pourhosein Gilakjani^{1*}, Mitra Alizadeh²,
Hossein Khazaei³, Reihaneh Sheikhy Behdani⁴

^{1*,2,3,4} Department of English Language Translation, Lahijan Branch,
Islamic Azad University, Lahijan, Iran

*) Corresponding Author

Email: abbas.pourhosein@iau.ac.ir

DOI: 10.18326/rgt.v18i1.30-47

Submission Track:

Received: 10-12-2024

Final Revision: 01-06-2025

Available Online: 13-06-2025

Copyright © 2025 Authors



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

Abstract

In 2011, Iran's educational system underwent a significant transformation through the implementation the Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE). Alongside other revisions, the FRDE mandated reforms in English teaching practices to align with the communicative language teaching (CLT) principles. This study aims to (1) assess the communicativeness of English teaching practices in Iranian high schools using Littlewood's (2004) continuum, (2) explore the perspectives of teachers regarding the FRDE and CLT, and (3) identify challenges in implementing the FRDE in English education. Data collection involved observing 60 English teaching sessions conducted by 15 English teachers from

the first and second three years of high school. Subsequently, focus group interviews were conducted with the same teachers. The data were coded and analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020 and NVIVO 11. The results showed that most teaching activities used categorized by Littlewood's (2004) as non-communicative and pre-communicative such as mechanical repetition, ask-and-answer practices, memorization and acting out conversations, etc. Notably, there was a limited representation of real-life communicative activities or structured communication tasks, indicating a systemic misalignment with CLT goals. The interviews provided insights into the varying opinions held by the teachers regarding the FRDE and CLT. While some teachers emphasized the values, others expressed concerns about its practicality in the Iranian context due to various constraints. These included the shortcomings of the FRDE, the unfamiliarity of the Iranian teachers with the CLT principles, the emphasis on teaching to the test, and the reluctance of students and parents to engage in practices beyond those preparing them for Iran's university entrance exam (Konkur).

Keywords: *Communicative Activities, Communicative Language Teaching, Focus Group Interview, Fundamental Reform Document of Education*

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, educational systems have undergone paradigm shifts in their objectives and curricula. For example, during the Industrial Revolution, education shifted from an emphasis on *classical education* and *memorization* to a *focus on practical and vocational skills* (Himmetoglu et al., 2020). Such a trend has persisted until recent times, when there was a call for a shift from such a *factory model* to the *21st-century model* of education (Sprott, 2019). Various factors have contributed to these paradigm shifts, but among them was the inadequacy of educational systems in developing "effective communication, critical-thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills to meet the demands of the knowledge society" (McBeath, 1994, p. 165).

As outlined by Cheng (2009, p. 70), the educational reform efforts in the Asia-Pacific region are characterized as "the reform syndrome," highlighting a competitive landscape among countries striving to enhance their educational systems. This competition stems from the

understanding that the quality of education is crucial for economic success, prompting nations to undertake reforms for better global standing. However, despite substantial investments in curricular changes, these reforms have occasionally proven ineffective and unsustainable (Cheng, 2009; Gouëdard et al., 2020; Kara & Bümen, 2022). Cheng (2009, p. 70) identifies the resulting “bottleneck effect,” which imposes restrictions on schools and teachers, even with well-intentioned initiatives and sufficient support. Figure 1 illustrates the negative impacts of this bottleneck effect, which often confines teachers to teaching to the test and relying on past strategies, thereby stifling their creativity. This can lead to burnout, dissatisfaction, and diminished student engagement and achievement.

The Iranian K–12 Education System

The Iranian education system comprises two main components: K–12 and higher education. The Ministry of Education oversees K–12, while the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education oversees higher education. The basis of K–12 is primary education (ages 6–12) and secondary education (ages 12–18), with primary education being compulsory. While free state schools are available, private non-profit schools such as Nemuneh Mardomi, Shahed, and SAMA schools offer higher quality education and charge tuition fees. Primary school students are required to pass national examination in various subjects, including mathematics, science, Persian literature, social science, and theology. These examinations are conducted through qualitative assessments, such as using qualitative ratings (e.g., *excellent*, *good*, etc.) rather than numerical grades. Secondary education is structured into a compulsory lower secondary (the first three years of high school, grades 7–9) and an optional upper secondary (the second three years of high school, grades 10–12). Both are free of charge and attract high enrollment. Upper secondary education offers three pathways—*academic*, *technical*, and *vocational*—determined based on the exam results from the lower secondary cycle. While all pathways lead to a high school diploma, the vocational pathway also confers a technician's certificate upon qualified students.

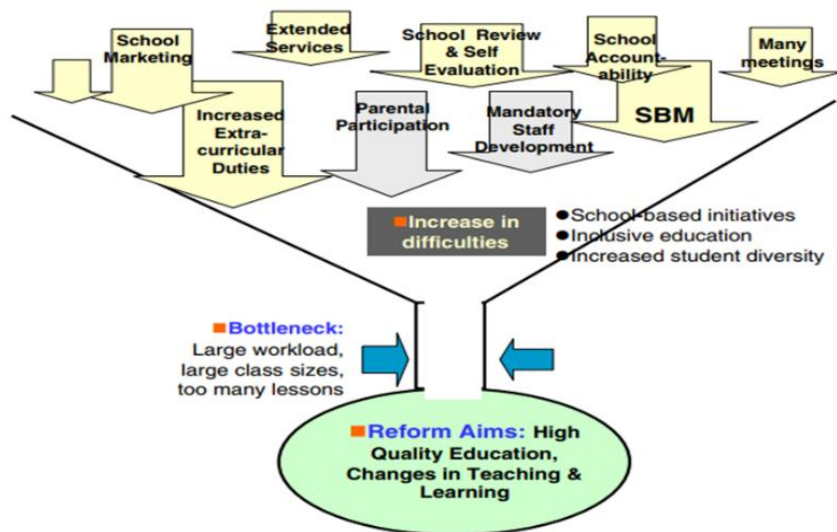


Figure 1. Bottleneck Effect (Cheng, 2009)

The Fundamental Reform Document of Education (FRDE)

The FRDE was approved by the Iranian Ministry of Education, the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, and the Supreme Council of Education in December 2011 (Supreme Council of Education, 2011). It aimed to bring innovations to Iran's K-12 education, focusing on the country's 2025 vision. The FRDE outlines key objectives for language education, emphasizing communicative language teaching (CLT) as a central approach.

The FRDE outlines two core principles: communication as a primary objective and integrated skill development. These principles demonstrate the FRDE's adherence to CLT's theoretical foundations while adapting them to the specific educational context of Iran. Following the approval of the FRDE, English instructional materials for schools were revised into a series of newly developed materials, presented in six volumes. Each volume includes with supplementary materials, including a teachers' guidebook, student book, student workbook, CD/DVD, and so forth (Khazaei & Gilakjani, 2022). English textbooks for lower secondary (grades 7, 8, and 9) are titled "*Prospect*", while those for upper secondary (grades 10, 11, and 12) are titled "*Vision*".

Despite significant efforts, research has indicated that Iranian state high school English teachers encounter challenges in effectively implementing CLT principles due to limited knowledge and training, inadequate resources, large class sizes, and traditional assessment methods (Abahussain, 2016; Kardoust & Saeedian, 2021). The potential ineffectiveness of CLT implementation in Iranian schools may represent a critical gap with far-reaching consequences (Kalanzadeh et al., 2013; Soodmand Afshar et al., 2018). Globally, CLT is lauded for equipping learners with the ability to negotiate meaning, collaborate across cultural boundaries, and apply language in real-world contexts (Savignon & Wang, 2003). However, numerous reports suggest that Iranian classrooms predominantly emphasize grammar-focused instruction and high-stakes examinations, thereby neglecting interactive activities such as role-plays, debates, or peer feedback (Shakhsi Dastgahian, 2021). This deficiency leaves students inadequately prepared for practical communication, as evidenced by Iran's declining performance in English proficiency indices and widespread reports of learner anxiety in speaking tasks (Shakhsi Dastgahian, 2021).

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

This study conducts a qualitative analysis of the implementation of communicative activities in English instruction in Iranian state high schools to better understand the realities of these classes following the adoption of the FRDE. Drawing on Littlewood (2004), we aim to identify the communicativeness of English teaching practices in Iran's FRDE K–12 curricular policy. Additionally, we seek to examine Iranian teachers' perspectives on the FRDE and CLT, as well as the challenges they face in implementing them. The following research questions prompted this study:

1. Based on Littlewood's (2004) communicativeness continuum, what level of communicativeness is seen in English teaching practices in state high schools in Iran?
2. What are the Iranian English teachers' perspectives on FRDE and CLT?
3. What are the challenges for the implementation of FRDE in state high schools in Iran?

RESEARCH METHOD

Design of the Study

To achieve the aims of this study, a qualitative case study approach was adopted to examine the realities of English language teaching (ELT) classrooms. Case studies offer several advantages, including (a) obtaining a rich and comprehensive picture of the multiple data sources in the phenomena of interest to researchers, (b) “studying the social phenomena in their natural setting with no manipulation and control over the setting,” (c) “describing the object of the study from the perspective of participants (emic perspective),” and (d) “using thick description” (Riazi, 2016, p. 256). A key consideration in case studies is defining the unit of analysis; here, the broader unit was Iran’s FRDE curriculum, with a focus on individual classrooms as micro-level realizations. Data collection methods included classroom observations—evaluating ELT activities’ communicativeness using the Littlewood’s (2004) continuum and their alignment with CLT—followed by post-lesson focus group interviews with teachers to gain deeper insights.

Teacher Participants

The participants comprised 15 English teachers (8 female, 7 male) from state high schools in Iran’s Guilan and Mazandaran provinces, regions exhibit diverse socioeconomic backgrounds among residents, including variations in education, income, and occupation. Despite these disparities, families in these areas enroll their children in state high schools—both tuition-free and tuition-based (e.g., Sama, Shahed). All of these schools adhere to the same national curriculum (i.e., FRDE), although teacher quality and extracurricular offerings may vary. The participants were selected via purposive sampling, with key inclusion criteria being willingness to actively participate in the study, experience in secondary education, and permission to record classroom sessions. All teachers had a minimum six years of experience in Iranian state high schools: seven teachers taught in the lower secondary cycle (grades 7–9) and eight teachers in the upper secondary cycle (grades 10–12). Their demographic details are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic profiles of the teachers in the study

ID	Gender	Education	Grades teacher teach	Experience (in years)
1	Male/Mazandaran	B.A. in English teacher training	7,8,9	12
2	male/Mazandaran	B.A. in English teacher training	7,8,9	15
3	male/Mazandaran	B.A. in English teacher training	10,11,12	13
4	female/Mazandaran	B.A. in English teacher training	7,8,9	23
5	female/Mazandaran	B.A. in English teacher training	9	9
6	female/Mazandaran	M.A. in English teacher training	11	8
7	female/Mazandaran	M.A. in English teacher training	11	6
8	female/Mazandaran	B.A. in English teacher training	11	6
9	Male/Guilan	B.A. in English teacher training	10,11,12	6
10	male/Guilan	B.A. in English teacher training	7,8,9	7
11	male/Guilan	M.A. in English teacher training	10,11,12	7
12	male/Guilan	M.A. in English teacher training	7,8,9	8
13	female/Guilan	B.A. in English teacher training	10,11,12	7
14	female/Guilan	B.A. in English teacher training	11	6
15	female/Guilan	M.A. in English teacher training	7,8,9	6

Data Collection Procedures

Observing Teaching Activities

This study consisted of two phases: four weeks of intensive observations in Mazandaran followed by four weeks in Guilan. A total of 60 lesson observations (each lasting 50 minutes) and two focus group interviews (each lasting 90 minutes) were conducted. The objective was to categorize ELT practices according to

Littlewood's (2004) communicative continuum. These observations were carried out during regular lessons that reflect the teachers' standard classroom practices (Deng & Carless, 2009). The average number of students per sessions was 30. The observed 50-minute sessions primarily emphasized grammar instruction and reading comprehension, with minimal attention to communicative skills. Typically, classes followed a structured routine: (1) The teacher introduced a grammar topic (e.g., verb tenses, passive voice), elucidating the associated rules and providing examples while students took notes; (2) Students engaged in practice exercises, including fill-in-the-blank, sentence transformation, or error-correction, with the teacher providing individual feedback; (3) A reading passage was analyzed, with vocabulary translated into Persian and comprehension questions (e.g., multiple-choice, short-answer) were answered silently; (4) Occasionally, writing tasks emphasized grammatical accuracy over creativity. Interactions were predominantly teacher-centered, with students working individually in a formal, exam-oriented environment. Notably, speaking and listening practice were noticeably absent, reflecting a priority on textual analysis and grammatical precision.

Procedures of Focus Group Interview

Following four weeks of classroom observations, the researchers conducted two focus group interviews with the participating teachers to explore their perspectives on the FRDE curriculum, CLT, and the challenges they faced in implementing FRDE. The focus group method (Krueger & Casey, 2002) was chosen to facilitate dynamic discussions, allowing teachers to share and compare their experiences collectively. The interview questions were carefully developed in three stages: (1) conducting a brainstorming session with four university professors familiar with the study's focus, (2) drafting a structured "questioning route" based on the initial suggestions while avoiding excessive questions to prevent superficial responses (Krueger & Casey, 2002), and (3) refining the questions based on expert feedback. The final interview consisted of five key questions (see Table 2), probing teachers' general views on FRDE, the role of CLT in Iranian high schools,

challenges in applying CLT, perceived opportunities for improvement, and potential solutions for implementation.

Each 90-minute session was moderated by one of the researchers, with school deans serving as co-moderators to ensure smooth recording, note-taking, and participant engagement. To uphold ethical standards, all sessions were recorded with prior consent, ensuring that confidentiality was strictly maintained—no personal data or recordings were shared beyond the research team. The researchers also minimized their influence during observations and interviews, ensuring teachers felt comfortable expressing their views openly and honestly. This approach enabled a rich, emic understanding of the challenges and dynamics of ELT practices within state high schools in Iran.

Table 2. Focus group teacher interview items

-
- | | |
|----|--|
| 1. | What is your opinion about the newly developed FRDE curriculum in general? |
| 2. | In your opinion, what is the importance of CLT in teaching English in Iranian state high schools? |
| 3. | Have you encountered any difficulties planning and implementing lessons based on the CLT guidelines? |
| 4. | In addition to these challenges, what opportunities have you gained? |
| 5. | What measures do you think should be taken to overcome the challenges you faced in implementing CLT in Iranian state high schools? |
-

Data Analysis Procedures

To investigate the implementation of FRDE and assess the communicativeness of English teaching practices in Iranian state high schools, a multi-stage qualitative analysis was conducted. The study employed classroom observations and focus group interviews, with data being systematically coded and subjected to thematic analysis.

1. Classroom Observation Analysis

- **Entextualization and Coding:** Video-recorded observations were transcribed and analyzed using MAXQDA Analytics Pro

2020, following Young's (2018) concept of "entextualization"—focusing on relevant teaching aspects while filtering out extraneous details.

- Littlewood's (2004) Communicative Continuum (Table 3): Classroom interactions were coded into five categories:
 1. Non-communicative learning (form-focused, e.g., grammar drills)
 2. Pre-communicative language practice (controlled meaning-based exercises)
 3. Communicative language practice (structured interaction, e.g., role-plays)
 4. Structured communication (semi-authentic exchanges)
 5. Authentic communication (real-world, spontaneous interaction)
- Inter-coder Reliability: A Cohen's Kappa test in NVIVO 11 showed substantial agreement ($\kappa = 0.73$) between coders.
- Statistical Analysis: The crosstab function in MAXQDA was used to quantify the prevalence of communicative vs. non-communicative activities.

2. Focus Group Interview Analysis

- Thematic Analysis: Interview transcripts were analyzed using the following methods:
 - First-cycle coding (Saldaña, 2013): Initial codes (27 codes) were generated based on teachers' perspectives on FRDE, CLT, and implementation challenges.
 - Second-cycle (pattern) coding: Codes were consolidated into 12 themes, later refined into 7 major themes aligned with research questions.
- Inter-coder Agreement: A Cohen's Kappa score of 0.78 confirmed a strong consistency among coders.
- Expert Validation: Four university professors reviewed the thematic structure, enhancing analytical rigor.

3. Ensuring Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Elo et al., 2014; Riazi, 2016), the study employed:

- Triangulation: Cross-verification of findings from observations and interviews.
- Member Checking: Teachers validated interview transcripts to confirm accurate representation of their viewpoints.

Table 3. Continuum of communicativeness of activities (Littlewood, 2004)

Focus on forms	→	→	Focus on meaning	
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. 'question-and-answer' practice	Practising pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap activities or 'personalized' questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language, but with some unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion
'Exercises'	→	(Ellis)	→	'Tasks'
'Enabling tasks'	→	(Estaire and Zanon) tasks'	→	'Communicative tasks'

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Answering research question 1

The Analysis of the observational data and the crosstab output from MAXQDA indicated that most activities undertaken by Iranian English teachers in state high schools exhibited the form-oriented aspect of Littlewood's (2004) continuum. They focused on non-communicative learning and pre-communicative language practice, indicating a low level of communicativeness in general. Table 4 presents the crosstab output from MAXQDA.

Table 4. The level of communicativeness of activities

Non-communicative learning	68.7%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explanation (24.6%) <i>Using the whiteboard to give deductive explicit explanations of a wide range of linguistic items, including grammar, pronunciation rules, spelling rules, vocabulary, etc.</i> <i>Substitution drills</i> <i>Explaining the meaning of texts</i> • Mechanical repetition (11.5%) <i>Repeating teacher's words one by one</i> <i>Reading the texts together</i> • Mechanical written exercises (32.6%) 	
Pre-communicative language practice	31.3%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask-and-answer practice (22.2%) <i>Ask-and-answer about a picture, situation, or topic</i> • Activities with actions (9.1%) <i>memorizing and acting out conversations,</i> <i>Responding to teacher's instructions by actions</i> <i>Using language to do contextualized practice</i> 	
Communicative language practice	0
Structured communication	0
Authentic communication	0
SUM	100.00
N = Documents	1

As indicated in Table 4, Iranian English teachers in the observed state high schools were not providing their students with the necessary communicative opportunities. The implementation of CLT was minimal in these English classes. The teaching activities consisted of mechanical repetition, ask-and-answer practices, memorization, acting out conversations, and so forth. There was a noticeable lack of real-life communication activities or structured communication tasks. The results highlight a systemic misalignment with CLT goals.

Analysis of the Interviews

Answering research question 2 (based on interview questions 1 and 2)

In addressing interview questions 1 and 2, the teachers shared compelling perspectives. The major themes that emerged indicated that while ***FRDE represents a significant advancement, it has notable shortcomings in its practical implementation.*** Additionally, they expressed that CLT is not an effective solution for state high schools, as students turn ***to private institutes to learn how to communicate in English.***

For example, one of the female teachers considered FRDE an unhelpful shift in education. She believed that despite the curriculum emphasizing communication and CLT, it placed excessive focus on the ability to communicate without allowing students to foster truly understand the language. She argued that mechanical repetition and imitation are essential to for students to grasp the language fully and achieve fluency.

Teacher 4: *I suppose imitation is the first step in learning. I think the cornerstone is mechanical repetition and imitation. How are pupils supposed to acquire linguistic proficiency without imitation?*

Another female teacher considered FRDE a breakthrough for which large-scale practical underpinnings were necessary. She asserted that, given the geographical diversity of the of Iran and the limited facilities in a number of provinces, the implementation of an approach like CLT poses considerable challenges. She mentioned:

Teacher 5: *I think communication is very important in today's English, but the question is whether we have the necessary facilities to introduce CLT throughout Iran. Do learners need communication in classes with a large number of students who come from different families? Some families consider English only a school subject, while others consider it a skill*

required for immigration and higher education.

One male teacher considered FRDE and CLT similar to dessert at dinner. He mentioned that such a colorful choice of words for an educational curriculum did not meet the needs of learners in state high schools who are supposed to prepare for entrance exams to Iranian universities (Konkur). He argued that teaching the language associated with these exams is more important.

Teacher 1: *I think FRDE is only playing with words. You cannot expect change when learners' needs are not considered. Learners need to be prepared for university entrance exams. They even attend extra-curricular classes for this. I think FRDE should consider two separate optional modules for language instruction. One should be dedicated to Konkur, while the other should be on communication skills.*

Answering the research question 3 (based on interview questions 3, 4, and 5)

In response to interview question 3, teachers expressed diverse views. The major themes that emerged indicated misalignment between CLT and ***the educational training the teachers had received. Additionally, the implementation of CLT in Iran necessitates in-service workshops for teachers.*** The teachers identified several challenges, including:

- *There is insufficient time to effectively implement a large-scale program like CLT.*
- *Most classes, except for those in non-profit schools, do not have access to technological tools, making it challenging to engage in communication-based activities.*

- *Educators feel unmotivated, as they believe that teaching through CLT requires a higher income than their current salaries, given the increased effort and time in demands.*

In response to interview question 4, a variety of perspectives emerged from teachers. The major theme underlined the importance of focusing on the latest educational methodologies, ***particularly highlighted through the emphasis on CLT in the FRDE***. The teachers noted that following the introduction of FRDE, they felt motivated to read teaching methodology books, despite having previously studied these topics during their undergraduate or graduate courses. This renewed engagement led them to enhance their knowledge and improved their teaching methods. For instance, one teacher shared her experience of discovering cooperative learning techniques through a book she had never encountered before.

In response to interview question 5, teachers had various views. Some believed that students should be granted more freedom and autonomy, while others argued for closer regulation and monitoring of students' activities. The major themes identified from this question included the necessity for classes to incorporate ***technological advancements*** and ***the importance of involving teachers from all regions of Iran in future changes to educational programs. In fact, micro-localized English language instruction programs may present a more effective solution than a one-size-fits-all program.***

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that most classroom activities observed over eight eight-week period resided within the *non-communicative learning* and *pre-communicative language practice* dimensions of Littlewood's (2004) continuum. This indicates a predominant focus on language forms and structures rather than on meaningful communication. In follow-up focus group interviews, teachers mentioned curriculum pressure and restriction on time as barriers to the incorporation of communicative activities. Additionally, they expressed a deficiency

in resources, leading them to prioritize passive knowledge acquisition (e.g., vocabulary and grammar) over interactive language use. Role-plays were occasionally used, but these were often scripted rather than spontaneous.

A thorough review of the syllabus and instructional materials revealed that lessons were structured around themes and functions, however, these themes did not necessarily align with students' needs or interests. Consequently, teachers often adhered to the syllabus out of convenience rather than pedagogical effectiveness. The observed teachers held traditional beliefs about language learning, emphasizing memorization, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and explicit grammar instruction—practices rooted in rote learning (Yang, 2008; Yang & Dai, 2011). Such an approach overlooks the emphasis on meaningful tasks, contextualization, and real-world language usage that characterize CLT.

The teachers in this study justified their reliance on traditional methods by arguing that repetition and structural practice were essential for internalizing language patterns, enabling students to apply them in different contexts. They viewed imitation and mechanical drills as foundational for developing automatic recall and deeper comprehension. Notably, communicative activities were absent from their pedagogical rationale.

Interview analysis further identified key constraints hindering CLT implementation: (1) teachers' unfamiliarity with CLT principles, (2) a strong focus on exam preparation (Iran's *Konkur*), (3) inadequate CLT training, and (4) resistance from students and parents toward non-exam-focused practices. Collectively, these factors limited the adoption of CLT-aligned strategies, such as pair or group work and collaborative language tasks (Littlewood, 2011; Richards, 2005).

The findings are consistent with prior research (e.g., Al Asmari, 2015; Alakrash, 2021; Anderson, 1993; Ansarey, 2012; Butler, 2011; Heng, 2014; Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2010; Rahman et al., 2018; Rasti, 2018; Tajeddin & Chamani, 2020; Wei et al., 2018), which highlights the challenges of implementing CLT in Asian contexts and advocates for more context-sensitive adaptations. The

study underscores that while CLT is a widely accepted pedagogical model, cultural and institutional barriers—such as high-stakes testing—impede its effectiveness in certain educational settings (Vongxay, 2013).

Given the restrictive role of examinations (Razavipour & Rezagah, 2018), it is posited that CLT-based assessment could theoretically facilitate broader adoption of CLT. However, as evidenced by the study conducted by Qin and Qi's (2004) in China, adjustments in assessment methods may not alter entrenched beliefs; consequently, teachers and students may prioritize perceived expectations of examiners over communicative goals. Thus, reforming assessment practices alone may prove insufficient without addressing these underlying attitudes.

Finally, Iran's FRDE encounters notable implementation gaps that contribute to a "bottleneck effect" (Cheng, 2009, p. 70). Core issues include rigid execution of policies, inadequate teacher training, limited stakeholder involvement, resource shortages, and fragmented policy frameworks. To mitigate these challenges, proposed reforms should focus on the following areas:

- Adaptive implementation strategies
- Comprehensive teacher training programs
- Sustained stakeholder engagement
- Increased funding and resource allocation
- Policy consolidation
- Robust monitoring and evaluation systems

Addressing these deficiencies could enhance the sustainability of educational reforms in Iran, thereby fostering an environment that is more conducive to CLT and other learner-centered approaches.

CONCLUSIONS

This study addresses critical research gaps in Iran's FRDE and its mandate for CLT by empirically assessing classroom practices, teacher perspectives, and systemic challenges—areas previously underexplored in the Iranian context. Using Littlewood's (2004) continuum to analyze 60 high school English sessions and conduct

focus group interviews with 15 teachers, the study reveals a significant misalignment between policy and practice, with most activities falling into non-communicative categories (e.g., mechanical drills, memorization) rather than communicative ones. This highlights the dominance of exam-oriented pedagogy (Konkur). The novelty of this study lies in its mixed-methods approach, focus on public high schools (a less-studied setting), and identification of culturally specific barriers (e.g., parental resistance, teacher unfamiliarity with CLT) that hinder reform. The findings challenge assumptions about CLT's universal applicability, emphasizing the need for context-sensitive adaptations in exam-driven systems. The impact extends beyond the classroom, influencing policy (exposing flaws in top-down reform), pedagogy (calling for teacher training and assessment reforms), and theory (contributing to sociocultural debates on language learning constraints). By bridging the gap between policy intentions and classroom realities, this study offers actionable insights for Iran and similar contexts struggling with communicative approaches amidst high-stakes testing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to gratefully acknowledge the teachers who participated in the present research. Their invaluable contributions have provided insightful data and fostered a supportive environment for the study.

REFERENCES

- Abahussain, M. O. (2016). *Implementing communicative language teaching method in Saudi Arabia: Challenges faced by formative year teachers in state schools* [Ph.D. Thesis]. University of Stirling: The School of Education. <https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/24166/1/Majed%20abahussain%20final%20thesis%20%28Jan%202016%29.pdf>
- Al Asmari, A. A. (2015). Communicative language teaching in EFL university context: Challenges for teachers. *Journal of Language*

- Teaching and Research*, 6(5), 976-984.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17507/jltr.0605.09>
- Alakrash, H. (2021). Factors affecting the application of communicative language teaching CLT in Syrian schools. *TESOL and Technology Studies*, 2(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.48185/tts.v2i1.143>
- Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System*, 21(4), 471-480. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X\(93\)90058-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(93)90058-0)
- Ansarey, D. (2012). Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Teachers' attitude and perception in Bangladesh. *ASA University Review*, 6(1), 61-78. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351904109_Communicative_Language_Teaching_in_EFL_Contexts_Teachers_Attitude_and_Perception_in_Bangladesh
- Butler, Y. G. (2011). The implementation of communicative and task-based language teaching in the Asia-Pacific region. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 36-57. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000122>
- Cheng, Y. C. (2009). Teacher management and educational reforms: Paradigm shifts. *Prospects*, 39, 69-89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-009-9113-2>
- Deng, C., & Carless, D. (2009). The communicativeness of activities in a task-based innovation in Guangdong, China. *Asian Journal of English Language Teaching*, 19, 113-134. https://cup.cuhk.edu.hk/chineseexpress/journal/AJELT19/AJELT19_113-134.pdf
- Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *Sage Open*, 4(1), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440145226>
- Gouédard, P., Pont, B., Hyttinen, S., & Huang, P. (2020). *Curriculum reform: A literature review to support effective implementation*. OECD Publishing.
- Heng, K. (2014). *Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Challenges and suggestions for successful implementation* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Faculty of Arts and Design,

- University of Canberra, Australia. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332142131> 1 Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Contexts Challenges and Suggestions for Successful Implementation
- Himmetoglu, B., Ayduğ, D., & Bayrak, C. (2020). Education 4.0: Defining the teacher, the student, and the school manager aspects of the revolution. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 21(Special Issue-IODL), 12-28. <https://doi.org/10.17718/tojde.770896>
- Kalanzadeh, G. A., Mirchenari, N. A., & Bakhtiarvand, M. (2013). Perceived problems in using communicative language teaching (CLT) by EFL Iranian teachers. *The International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World*, 2(3), 1-13. https://www.ijllaw.org/files/ugd/6bee84_3486134891ec4d689adca188ca6caa9d.pdf?index=true
- Kara, Z. Y., & Bümen, N. T. (2022). The Search for an effective curricular change adoption in foreign language education: A meta-synthesis. *Uluslararası Eğitim Programları ve Öğretim Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 12(2), 337-366. <https://doi.org/10.31704/ijocis.2022.014>
- Kardoust, A., & Saeedian, A. (2021). Iranian EFL teachers' conceptions and practices of communicative language teaching curriculum. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 10(2), 171-202. <https://doi.org/10.22054/ilt.2021.58226.569>
- Khazae, H., & Gilakjani, A. P. (2022). Assessing the level of communicativeness of activities in Iran's FRDE-based state high school English textbooks (Prospect and Vision series). *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 19(3), 1098-1108. [Doi:10.18823/asiatefl.2022.19.3.25.1098](https://doi.org/10.18823/asiatefl.2022.19.3.25.1098)
- Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2002). *Designing and conducting focus group interviews* (Vol. 18). Citeseer.
- Littlewood, (2004). The task-based approach: Some questions and suggestions. *ELT Journal*, 58(4), 319-326. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.4.319>
- Littlewood, W. (2011). Communicative language teaching: An expanding concept for a changing world. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of*

- research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 541-557). Routledge.
- McBeath, R. J. (1994). The impact of paradigm shifts on education. *Educational Media International*, 31(3), 165-170. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0952398940310306>
- Ostovar-Namaghi, S. A., Kamali, S., & Moezzi-pour, F. (2010). Exploring techniques of addressing grammar in CLT classes: A qualitative study. *The Qualitative Report*, 27(1), 187-196. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2022.4363>
- Qin, X., & Qi, Z. (2004). Renwu ji renwujiaoxue de zairenshi [Re-explore task and task-based learning]. *Waiyu Jiaoxue*, 25(3), 69-74.
- Rahman, M. M., Pandian, A., & Kaur, M. (2018). Factors affecting teachers' implementation of communicative language teaching curriculum in secondary schools in Bangladesh. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(5), 1104-1126. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3220>
- Rasti, A. (2018). Iranian EFL teachers' sense-making of policy reforms: The case of the new communicative-based curriculum. *Teaching English as a Second Language Quarterly (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)*, 37(2), 169-193. <https://doi.org/10.22099/jtls.2019.30819.2580>
- Razavipour, K., & Rezagah, K. (2018). Language assessment in the new English curriculum in Iran: Managerial, institutional, and professional barriers. *Language Testing in Asia*, 8(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40468-018-0061-8>
- Riazi, A. M. (2016). *The Routledge encyclopedia of research methods in applied linguistics*. Routledge.
- Richards, J. C. (2005). *Communicative language teaching today*. SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage.
- Savignon, S. J., & Wang, C. (2003). Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Learner attitudes and perceptions. *IRAL*, 41, 223-249. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2003.010>
- Shakhsi Dastgahian, E. (2021). Teachers' incentive for grammar instruction in Iran's reformed EFL context. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 31(3), 508-525. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12350>

- Soodmand Afshar, H., Ranjbar, N., Yousefi, M., & Afshar, N. (2018). A qualitative analysis of Prospect Series and Vision 1 from intercultural and metacultural communicative competence perspectives. *Educational Measurement and Evaluation Studies*, 8(21), 107-139. https://jresearch.sanjesh.org/article_30963.html?lang=en
- Sprott, R. A. (2019). Factors that foster and deter advanced teachers' professional development. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 77, 321-331. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2018.11.001>
- Supreme Council of Education. (2011). *Fundamental reform document of education (FRDE) in the Islamic Republic of Iran*. <http://sanadtahavol.ir/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/sanand-tahavol.pdf>
- Tajeddin, Z., & Chamani, F. (2020). Foreign language education policy (FLEP) in Iran: Unpacking state mandates in major national policy documents. *Teaching English as a Second Language (Formerly Journal of Teaching Language Skills)*, 39(3.1), 185-215. <https://doi.org/10.22099/jtls.2021.38870.2904>
- Vongxay, H. (2013). *The implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) in an English department in a Lao higher educational institution: A case study* [Unpublished Master thesis]. Unitec Institute of Technology.
- Wei, L., Lin, H. H., & Litton, F. (2018). Communicative language teaching (CLT) in EFL context in Asia. *Asian Culture and History*, 10(2), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ach.v10n2p1>
- Yang, S. H. (2008). Narrative of a cross-cultural language teaching experience: Conflicts between theory and practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(6), 1564-1572. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2007.12.003>
- Yang, W., & Dai, W. (2011). Rote memorization of vocabulary and vocabulary development. *English Language Teaching*, 4(4), 61-64. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v4n4p61>
- Young, R. F. (2018). Habits of mind: How do we know what we know? In A. Phakiti, P. De Costa, L. Plonsky, & S. Starfield (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of applied linguistics research methodology* (pp. 31-53). Palgrave Macmillan.