

УДК 372.881.1

DOI 10.47388/2072-3490/lunn2025-71-3-154-167

## COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE MIDDLE EAST: PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES

Arkhawan Fattah Audil<sup>1</sup>, Hema Rosheny Mustafa<sup>1</sup>,  
Sofi Hama Ali Hussen Hama Ameen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University Teknologi Malaysia, Johor Bahru, Malaysia

<sup>2</sup> Linguistics University of Nizhny Novgorod, Nizhny Novgorod, Russia

Communicative Language Teaching has become a well-known approach worldwide for its emphasis on building communicative skills, thus shifting from conventional approaches that prioritize grammar and memorization. Nonetheless, the Middle East, due to its cultural, educational, and linguistic characteristics, faces distinct obstacles and advantages when incorporating Communicative Language Teaching. This article explores the implementation and challenges of Communicative Language Teaching in the Middle East, providing a historical background on language instruction in the area and contrasting the Communicative Approach with traditional approaches like the Grammar Translation Method. The article examines case studies from different Middle Eastern nations to emphasize the achievements and challenges of incorporating Communicative Language Teaching. It focuses on balancing the student-centered, interactive nature of Communicative Language Teaching with the traditional teacher-centered methods common in the region. Moreover, the article delves into the importance of teacher education, ongoing training, and incorporating new methods and technologies to improve Communicative Language Teaching realization. The results highlight the importance of creating customized approaches that target the unique obstacles in the Middle Eastern environment, such as the significance of establishing thorough evaluation frameworks that are in line with Communicative Language Teaching principles. The article recommends a number of promising emerging paths for Communicative Language Teaching in the area, stressing the significance of adjusting the method for diverse cultures and languages, tackling economic and social inequalities, and utilizing technologies of improving communication skills.

**Key words:** communicative language teaching; the Middle East; teaching methods; grammar translation method; teacher training.

**Citation:** Arkhawan, Fattah Audil, Hema, Rosheny Mustafa, & Sofi, Hama Ali Hussen Hama Ameen. (2025) Communicative Language Teaching in the Middle East: Practices and Challenges. *LUNN Bulletin*, 3 (71), 154–167. DOI 10.47388/2072-3490/lunn2025-71-3-154-167.

**Коммуникативное обучение иностранным языкам на Ближнем Востоке:  
практика и проблемы**

**Архаван Фаттах Аудил<sup>1</sup>, Хема Рошени Мустафа<sup>1</sup>,  
Софи Хама Али Хуссен Хама Амин<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Университет технологий Малайзии, Джохор-Бару, Малайзия

<sup>2</sup> Нижегородский государственный лингвистический университет  
им. Н. А. Добролюбова, Нижний Новгород, Россия

Коммуникативный метод в преподавании иностранных языков широко применяется во всем мире в связи с трендом на развитие коммуникативных навыков, в отличие от традиционного подхода, где приоритет отдается грамматике и запоминанию. Тем не менее Ближний Восток, в силу своих культурных, образовательных и языковых особенностей, сталкивается со специфическими препятствиями при внедрении коммуникативного метода обучения иностранному языку. В этой статье рассматриваются проблемы, связанные с внедрением коммуникативного метода обучения языку на Ближнем Востоке. Дается историческая справка о системе обучения иностранным языкам в этом регионе, коммуникативный метод сравнивается с традиционными подходами, поскольку они по-прежнему широко здесь применяются при обучении языкам. Предлагается выработать баланс между интерактивной природой коммуникативного обучения, ориентированного на студента, и аналитическими традиционными методами, ориентированными на учителя. Кроме того, в статье рассматривается вопрос подготовки педагога, его непрерывном обучении и внедрении в его педагогическую практику новых технологий. Иными словами, ставится вопрос о комплексе средств, которые могут облегчить внедрение коммуникативного метода в процесс обучения иностранным языкам на Ближнем Востоке. Подчеркивая важность адаптации коммуникативного метода к различным культурам и языкам, авторы статьи акцентируют внимание на необходимости учета не только лингвокультурологических факторов, но и социальных, таких как экономическое и социальное неравенство, доступ к образовательным ресурсам, социальная регламентированность принципов и правил общения.

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникативный метод преподавания иностранных языков; Ближний Восток; методы обучения; грамматико-переводной метод; непрерывное образование учителей.

**Цитирование:** Архаван Фаттах Аудил, Хема Рошени Мустафа, Софи Хама Али Хуссен Хама Амин. Коммуникативное обучение языку на Ближнем Востоке: практика и проблемы // Вестник Нижегородского государственного лингвистического университета им. Н. А. Добролюбова. 2025. Вып. 3 (71). С. 154–167. DOI 10.47388/2072-3490/lunn2025-71-3-154-167.

## **1. Introduction**

Communicative Approach or the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become the most common approach in teaching of English in the 21st century. Its focus is on building communicative skills of the learners to help them successfully use the language for real-life situations. Yet, applying CLT in the Middle East encounters distinct hindrances influenced by the cultural, educational, and linguistic settings of the region.

In the Middle East, conventional language instruction techniques like the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) have been dominant for a long time, emphasizing the memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary (Jafari, Shokrpour & Gueterman 2015). However, at the beginning of the 21 century there has been a growing acceptance of the importance of a more interactive and applied method of teaching languages in both public and private schools across the region, leading to a move towards implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Zughoul 2003). Even with this change, the transition has not been smooth. Educators frequently face major challenges such as reluctance to change, restricted resources, and the widespread impact of exam-focused educational systems (Saba 2013).

This article delves into the ways and obstacles involved in applying CLT in the Middle East. It gives a summary of the historical background of language instruction in the area, analyzes examples of CLT application in different Middle Eastern nations, and talks about the continuous attempts to blend traditional teaching methods with the communication needs of contemporary societies. This review article aims to examine the implementation of this approach in teaching the English language in the Middle East and provide insights on the future of English language teaching in the region.

## **2. Material and Methods**

Communicative Language Teaching transformed language teaching methodology in the region only on the verge of the 21th century. It emphasized moving away from grammar and memorization to prioritize meaningful communication and interaction. According to CLT, the main goal of language teaching is to enhance students' ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in authentic contexts. This approach is based on a number of important concepts and principles that sets bases for its use in language classrooms worldwide. The key principles are:

### **1) Communicative Competence**

Communicative language teaching focuses on improving language skills through communication in authentic situations. This teaching method offers real chances for learning that go beyond simply repeating and memorizing grammar patterns on their own. An important idea in the communicative approach to language teaching is the concept of communicative competence: the skill of using language effectively to communicate in real-life environments, not just in simulated situations. According to Canale & Swain (1980), communicative competence covers four spheres that are grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies necessary for successful communication.

### **2) Learner-Centered Instruction**

CLT focuses on making learners the focal point of the learning journey, stressing the importance of engaging in active participation and interaction. Instead of just

absorbing information, students participate in purposeful tasks that involve using language to communicate. The teacher's job changes to being a supporter or guide who helps learners improve their language skills through interaction, exploration, and discovery instead of just giving out information (Nunan 1991).

### 3) Task-Based Learning

Richards and Rodgers (2014) indicate that task-based learning focuses on communication through completing tasks. Students engage in tasks they are interested in, using only the target language and its elements. For example, in a unit on recycling, students complete various tasks leading to a presentation using authentic language and tools like the Internet. Activities such as role-plays and problem-solving tasks give the learners chances to practice the language in real life situations. Thus, the focus is on the use of correct language but rather on the task outcome and fluency (Ellis 2003).

### 4) Use of Authentic Materials

The CLT approach emphasizes the use of authentic materials in the teaching and learning of language. These authentic materials can be taken from any source of materials such as texts, news scripts, podcasts, pictures, novels, songs, or TV programs. Teachers have the opportunity to develop dynamic and interesting lesson material using real-world content, personalized to meet the needs of their students (Richards 2006).

### 5) Integration of Language Skills

CLT focuses on combining the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) instead of teaching them separately. In actual communication, these abilities are usually applied simultaneously, thus CLT promotes tasks that demonstrate this interconnection. One task could include listening to a conversation, talking about it, reading a related text, and writing a response to utilize all four skills effectively (Richards 2006).

### 6) Focus on Meaning and Interaction

The main idea of CLT is that the main purpose of language is to communicate. Hence, the method emphasizes the importance of language meaning and usage rather than memorizing grammar rules. Although accuracy remains crucial, the emphasis is now on fluency and effectively conveying meaning. In this process, interaction is essential as it allows learners to practice language in social situations, clarify meanings, and get feedback (Littlewood 1981).

### 7) Emphasis on Learner Autonomy

CLT encourages learners to assume responsibility for their own learning, fostering independence and self-initiated learning. Through participating in communicative tasks, students acquire the abilities and self-assurance required to pursue independent learning further. This principle supports the overall educational objective of

equipping students to apply language in real-world scenarios outside of school (Benson 2001).

The main principles that underpin CLT are communicative competence, learner-centered instruction, task-based learning, use of authentic materials, integration of language skills, focus on meaning and interaction, and learner autonomy. The principles promote a shift from the traditional methods of teacher-centered teaching to a more student-centered practices that supports interaction and develop communication skills of the language learners.

### **3. Results and Discussions**

#### ***3.1. Historical Overview of Language Teaching in the Middle East***

Language teaching in the Middle East has been influenced by a variety of cultural, religious, and political factors throughout history. English has become a central focus in education throughout the region as a result of globalization and the requirement for communication in global settings. Nevertheless, the application of contemporary language teaching approaches, like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), shows significant differences among Middle Eastern nations.

In the Middle East, language teaching commonly utilized the Grammar Translation Method, which prioritized memorizing vocabulary and grammar with minimal emphasis on speaking (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi 2012). This method, although successful for certain individuals, frequently resulted in the fact that students who excelled in reading and writing were unable to communicate in everyday circumstances.

In the past few years, there has been a slow change towards a deeper adaptation of CLT, especially in such countries as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, and Saudi Arabia, where changes in education aim to match language instruction with global norms (Elyas & Picard 2012). Despite attempts, the integration of communicative approaches like CLT has encountered obstacles, like opposition from educators used to traditional methods and the continued presence of exam-centered education systems prioritizing grammar correctness over communication skills (Alharbi 2022).

However, there are areas of improvement, especially in private schools and urban regions where resources are more plentiful and educators have greater opportunities for professional growth. These establishments are more apt to implement CLT, leading to enhanced language results for students. Nevertheless, discrepancies persist, especially among urban and rural schools, and public and private educational institutions.

In general, although there have been considerable advancements in updating language instruction in the Middle East, the area still struggles to find a balance between traditional teaching methods and the needs of a globalized society.

### *3.2. Challenges and Results in Adopting CLT across the Middle East: Case Studies*

The adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Middle Eastern nations has been faced with a mix of obstacles and levels of achievement. This section delves into the experiences of various countries in the area, focusing on the specific challenges and successes linked to adopting CLT.

In Saudi Arabia, CLT was implemented as a component of a wider educational restructuring focused on enhancing English language skills. Nevertheless, Alharbi (2022) highlights that the adoption of CLT has faced difficulties because of the nation's emphasis on exams, favoring memorization and grammar correctness rather than communication skills. Educators frequently struggle to harmonize the student-centered, interactive approach of CLT with the teacher-centered techniques that are prevalent in Saudi classrooms. The disparity between CLT principles in educational materials and their actual implementation frequently causes teachers to fall back on traditional methods such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which hinders the objectives of CLT.

The Ministry of Education in Oman has actively worked to encourage CLT in the English language program, stressing the significance of effective communication skills for international involvement. Nevertheless, the same obstacles are still present such as teachers lacking English proficiency and a strong emphasis on exam results, as pointed out by Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi (2012). Although private schools equipped with superior resources and teacher training have experienced greater success in adopting CLT, the overall effect has been inconsistent.

Iran has shown a combination of opposition and adjustment in dealing with CLT. Sadeghi and Richards (Sadeghi & Richards 2016) note that despite being supported in official documents, the practical application of CLT principles commonly fails as a result of the focus on traditional beliefs and the centralized educational system. Iranian teachers often modify CLT strategies to match local cultural norms, creating a blend of communicative activities and conventional methods. This compromise enables some improvement in communicative skills but does not fully achieve the potential of CLT.

In the UAE, CLT has been integrated into a wider educational reform plan. Major funds have been allocated towards educator coaching and content creation, especially within the private education sector. Nevertheless, it is observed (Troudi 2005) that the results vary, with private schools typically outperforming public schools. Uneven implementation of CLT persists in the UAE due to differences in teacher qualifications, class sizes, and availability of resources, despite the country's ongoing commitment to prioritizing CLT in its educational strategy.

Jordan has also encountered difficulties when it comes to putting CLT into practice, especially because of the contrasts between urban and rural educational environments. According to Faruk (2014), urban schools in Oman are advancing in implementing CLT, whereas rural schools face challenges due to insufficient teacher training and resistance to moving away from traditional teaching methods. As a result, students living in rural areas are more inclined to receive a grammar-centered education rather than the communicative approach promoted by CLT.

In Iraq, the adoption of CLT has faced challenges due to the intricate sociopolitical setting and the enduring focus on conventional teaching approaches (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi 2012). Many schools are currently lacking the resources needed to implement contemporary teaching methods due to post-conflict issues. Despite attempts to implement CLT in cities, the Grammar Translation Method remains the primary teaching approach in public schools. The main reasons for this are the lack of thorough teacher training and the continued use of high-pressure exams that prioritize grammatical correctness over communication abilities.

In general, the situation in these Middle Eastern nations demonstrates notable difficulties of applying CLT in their specific settings, and this is distinctly different from the original Western situation. Although the potential advantages of CLT are well-known, actual implementation is impeded by certain obstacles, such as lack of resources, inadequate teacher training, and cultural opposition. The successful adoption of CLT in the region often correspond to the factors that are opposite to the challenges listed here, namely: resource availability, teacher training, and educators' willingness to accept new teaching methods. The lessons learned from case studies in Middle Eastern countries reforming their educational systems will play a crucial role in guiding future efforts to enhance English language teaching through CLT.

### ***3.3. Teachers' Training and Professional Development for CLT Practitioner***

Successful adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Middle East depends on thorough professional development and training specifically designed for the region's distinctive educational context. CLT necessitates educators to shift from conventional, teacher-focused methods to student-centered, interactive approaches. This change requires a thorough comprehension of the underlying principles of CLT, including communicative competence and the incorporation of language abilities. In several Middle Eastern nations, where traditional approaches such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) have been prominent for a long time, professional development initiatives need to emphasize enhancing teachers' comprehension of these fundamental principles and the importance of communicative methodologies (Richards & Rodgers 2014).

Hands-on experience is just as crucial, especially in Middle Eastern countries where teachers frequently deal with overcrowded classrooms, limited materials, and the demands of test-driven teaching methods. Teachers must have workable tactics

to incorporate CLT within these limitations. Professional growth should involve interactive workshops, peer evaluations, and chances for educators to practice creating and carrying out communicative activities with real materials. Training programs need to consider how to modify CLT to fit local circumstances in the face of unique challenges in the region, like cultural norms and inflexible curricula. This could mean developing strategies that blend traditional techniques with the gradual integration of communicative tasks (Littlewood 2014).

Continuous professional development is of utmost importance in the Middle East, given the constant changes in language education and the necessity for ongoing adjustment. Educators should be motivated to join professional learning groups, go to conferences, and take part in mentorship initiatives. These chances enable teachers to exchange top strategies, talk about region-specific challenges, and stay informed about the most recent advancements in CLT. Ongoing professional development is crucial to help teachers in Middle Eastern nations successfully apply CLT and address their students' communication needs (Freeman & Johnson 1998; Harmer 2007).

In conclusion, training for CLT professionals in the Middle East should be thorough and tailored to their specific contexts. The focus should be on both the theoretical and practical sides of CLT, offering solutions for regional obstacles and encouraging ongoing education. Professional development is crucial in effectively incorporating CLT into Middle Eastern classrooms by providing teachers with the required skills and knowledge.

#### ***3.4. Assessment and Evaluation in CLT: The Middle Eastern Context***

In the Middle East, the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has faced substantial obstacles, especially regarding assessment and evaluation. In the past, assessment methods in the area have focused on memorization and accurately replicating grammar rules, mirroring the test-driven aspect of numerous education systems. This conventional emphasis is very different from the principles of CLT, which highlight the importance of acquiring communication skills and effectively using language in everyday scenarios.

In the Middle East, a significant obstacle is the lack of utilization of formative assessment, which is vital for promoting the communicative approach. Relying heavily on summative exams limits opportunities for the continuous, feedback-focused methods present in formative assessment. Teachers may find it difficult to include activities like role play, discussions, and task-based learning, which enhance communication skills, due to the pressure of ensuring that students excel in standardized tests. Furthermore, professional development opportunities, which specifically target formative assessment techniques, crucial for successful CLT implementation, are frequently lacking.

Incorporating genuine evaluation, an essential element of CLT, also brings difficulties in the Middle East. Conventional education systems in the area usually do

not endorse assessments that accurately reflect real-life language use, like oral presentations, interviews, and collaborative projects. Many view these techniques as supplementary rather than core components of evaluating, resulting in a continued focus on written tests that evaluate grammar and vocabulary separately. Additionally, teachers often do not have the necessary resources and training to create and carry out genuine, real-life tasks, which makes transitioning to more communicative assessment methods challenging.

Self-evaluation and evaluation by peers, essential for promoting learner independence in CLT, are also not fully used in the Middle East. The underusage is influenced by cultural aspects and traditional classroom structures where the teacher is usually seen as the main authority on student development. Students might also not have the required training and self-assurance to confidently participate in self-evaluation or peer evaluation, which hinders their ability to enhance critical thinking and independent learning skills.

To sum up, the implementation of CLT in the Middle East encounters significant challenges, specifically in regards to assessment and evaluation. The region's typical focus on final exams clashes with the communicative, process-based approach of CLT. In order to overcome these difficulties, there must be a change in educational focus, as well as an increased focus on teacher training and a wider acceptance of assessment methods that support communication goals.

### ***3.5. Innovative Approaches and Technologies in CLT***

In the Middle East the integration of innovative approaches and technologies into Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has led to substantial progress, showing promising prospects for improving language learning. As educators in the area aim to enhance language learning results, they are more and more utilizing these tools and techniques to establish livelier, more captivating, and efficient communicative learning settings. Yet, despite the fact that technology can make the teaching-learning process much easier, for many countries it has remained a challenge as their schools do not have access to such recourses and technologies.

Blended learning which is a combination of traditional classroom teaching and online learning has recently gained popularity in countries such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This method enables students to practice their language skills via digital platforms while also receiving in-person instruction. Platforms such as Moodle and Google Classroom are more and more frequently utilized to complement classroom tasks with online activities, conversations, and evaluations, thus improving students' ability to communicate effectively (Jeffrey et al. 2014).

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is another method that complements CLT and has been used in creative ways in the Middle East. Virtual reality (VR) and simulation software are applied in Qatar and the UAE to involve students in real-life

situations, like engaging with tourists or managing business deals. These technologies offer practical, real-life opportunities for the use of language beyond typical classroom contexts.

The use of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has grown as smartphones and tablets have become more widely used in the region. Apps such as WhatsApp and Edmodo in nations like Jordan and Oman enable instant communication, peer assessment, and cooperative learning beyond the traditional classroom. MALL provides flexibility and convenience, allowing language learning to be accessed at any time and place, which is especially advantageous in areas where traditional classrooms are not readily available (Alsalem 2013).

The Middle East is also witnessing an increase in the popularity of gamification, as educational institutions in Egypt and Kuwait are integrating gamified language learning apps like Duolingo and Memrise into their courses. These platforms incorporate gaming elements to establish a competitive yet fun learning space that motivates students to practice and enhance their communication skills in a stress-free environment.

Incorporating Artificial Intelligence (AI) and adaptive learning technologies into CLT has recently become common in the region. AI-driven platforms such as Lingvist and Busuu are employed in Saudi Arabia and the UAE for offering individualized learning experiences that cater to the unique requirements of every student. These technologies use personal performance data to provide tailored exercises and feedback, ensuring that learners are consistently challenged at a suitable level of difficulty (Alqaed 2024).

Nevertheless, even with all these signs of progress, restricted availability of technology continues to be a major obstacle in numerous areas of the Middle East. Students and teachers in places like Yemen, Iraq, and Syria, as well as rural parts of Jordan and Egypt, frequently do not have the required equipment, like computers and dependable Internet access, needed to use these digital resources effectively. The digital gap prevents the extensive use of blended learning, MALL, and other technology-enhanced methods in CLT, exacerbating existing educational disparities. Addressing these infrastructure obstacles is essential to guarantee that every student in the area can benefit from advancements in language teaching technologies (World Bank 2020; United Nations 2021).

Simply put, creative methods and technologies are vital in reshaping Communicative Language Teaching in the Middle East. Incorporating these learning opportunities into the CLT framework can help teachers experience a more effective and engaging language teaching practices. Yet, to fully make use of this technology, it is necessary to tackle the obstacles that hinder access to the relevant resources. Taking advantage of these innovations can improve language skills of the students in Middle Eastern countries.

#### 4. Conclusions

As CLT evolves in response to global educational trends and learner needs, we can see a number of key areas crucial for its future development. These emerging goals are intended to address the challenges in applying CLT in the Middle East, while also taking advantage of new possibilities and opportunities for improving language teaching methods.

##### 1) Developing CLT in Multicultural and Multilingual Environments

Future directions for CLT involve adapting and expanding it in multilingual and multicultural contexts. As classrooms become more diverse, traditional CLT approaches designed for monolingual learners may not fully address the complexities of multilingualism. Future research should focus on developing CLT models that incorporate translanguaging practices, where students use their full linguistic repertoire to engage in communication. This approach validates students' native languages and leverages them as resources for learning English, creating a more inclusive learning environment (García & Wei 2014).

##### 2) Addressing Socioeconomic Disparities in CLT Implementation

Socioeconomic differences make it difficult to apply CLT, particularly in places with limited resources. Large class sizes, a shortage of teaching materials, and insufficient teacher preparation are typical obstacles. Cost-effective options, like the use of community language programs and mobile technology are required to improve CLT in contexts with limited resources. In order to provide fair access to high-quality language instruction and to encourage broader and more effective CLT implementation, policy advocacy is needed (Or 2016).

##### 3) Enhancing Teacher Professional Development and Support

For CLT to be implemented successfully, teachers' attitudes, practices, and beliefs are essential. Some teachers continue to use traditional methods despite the growing popularity of communicative approaches because they lack confidence or expertise in CLT. Future expansion of CLT should prioritize comprehensive professional development programs that offer initial training and ongoing support through communities of practice, mentoring, and reflective practice. According to Borg (2011), these programs must equip teachers with practical strategies for integrating CLT into their classrooms and addressing implementation challenges.

##### 4) Integrating Technology to Enhance Communicative Competence

Integrating technology in CLT offers promising avenues for future development. Language learning apps, online platforms, and virtual reality environments provide authentic, interactive practice opportunities for students. Research should explore effective integration of these technologies to enhance communicative competence. Blended learning models and AI for personalized feedback can be valuable. As technology advances, its role in CLT will likely become crucial (Richards 2015).

##### 5) Developing Comprehensive Assessment Frameworks

Assessment in CLT traditionally focuses on tasks testing real-life language use. However, there's a need for more comprehensive frameworks measuring both communication skills and linguistic accuracy. Future CLT should develop tools that would balance these aspects for a more holistic view of language abilities. Research should also explore adapting traditional assessment methods to align with CLT principles, assessing both language knowledge and effective communication skills (Bachman & Palmer 1996).

The future of Communicative Language Teaching depends on its flexibility to meet learner needs and educational changes. Emphasizing multilingualism, addressing socioeconomic gaps, supporting teachers, incorporating technology, and creating thorough assessments will help CLT remain effective in preparing students for real-life communication. Research and practice will ensure CLT's continued relevance in language education.

Introducing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Middle East encounters various obstacles, such as the area's dependence on conventional teaching approaches and an educational system that prioritizes exams. In spite of these challenges, there are positive advancements, especially in urban and private educational environments, where resources and training for educators are easier to obtain. The incorporation of technology in CLT methods is also starting to demonstrate promising possibilities. Language learning apps, virtual reality, and online platforms provide students with additional interactive and engaging opportunities to enhance language skills, complementing traditional classroom methods with practical communication experiences. Nonetheless, in order to fully enjoy the advantages of these technological achievements, there need to be more extensive initiatives to close the digital gap, guaranteeing that every student has access to essential digital tools and resources.

Evaluation methods must also change in order to better align with the objectives of CLT. Conventional evaluation techniques in the Middle East frequently prioritize grammar and memorization through repetition, potentially detracting from the communicative aspect of CLT. In the future, it is important to create more comprehensive assessment frameworks that both evaluate linguistic accuracy and measure communicative competence. This involves using formative assessments like peer reviews, self-assessments, and performance tasks to gain a deeper understanding of students' language skills in practical situations. By adopting these advancements in technology and assessment, educators in the Middle East can improve their teaching methods to better connect with the principles of CLT, ultimately boosting language learning achievements for students in the area.

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