Factors Shaping the Classroom Enactment of Communicative Language Teaching in Omani Post-Basic Schools

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.102100252

Received: 06 November 2026; Accepted: 12 November 2026; Published: 19 November 2026

ABSTRACT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been promoted in Omani English language education for more than two decades, yet communicative proficiency among school leavers remains a recurrent concern. Existing Omani research has identified many constraints on CLT, mainly through teachers' reports, but has seldom examined how these factors are manifested and combined within the lessons themselves. This article reports an observation-led qualitative case study of the factors shaping the classroom enactment of CLT in government post-basic schools (Grades 11–12) in Muscat Governorate. Six purposively selected Omani English teachers were each observed teaching one complete lesson, and semi-structured interviews were used as supporting evidence to explain observed patterns and identify factors not directly observable. Data were analysed thematically through a codes–categories–themes workflow with a three-of-six commonality criterion, and the adequacy of the sample was assessed through retrospective saturation. Five themes and twelve sub-themes were identified: teacher factors, student factors, classroom factors, curriculum and assessment factors, and instructional realisation factors. Communicative activities featured in the observed lessons, but interaction was teacher-directed in all six, instruction was organised around form-focused curriculum tasks and time-pressured pacing, and planned activities remained unfinished in five lessons. Group seating and smaller numbers of students present did not by themselves produce broad participation. The findings indicate that the factors did not operate as independent barriers; they interacted and were mediated through teachers' in-lesson decisions and the way tasks were enacted, so that CLT was reshaped into bounded, teacher-mediated communication rather than abandoned. The study shifts attention from whether CLT is implemented to how it is reshaped, and identifies implications for practice-based professional learning, lesson-level task enactment, and the review of curriculum pacing and assessment alignment.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Classroom Observation, EFL Teachers, Oman, Post-Basic Education

INTRODUCTION

English has a prominent place in the Omani school curriculum. It is taught from Grade 1, and successive curriculum reforms, including the introduction of the Basic Education System, have encouraged Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the means of developing learners' ability to use the language (Al-Issa & Al-Bulushi, 2012). Nevertheless, concern about the communicative proficiency of Omani school leavers has persisted. Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2018) link limited communicative competence among secondary graduates to the

demands of higher education and employment, and a recent study of Grade 12 learners in rural Omani schools reported barriers to speaking that included limited exposure, low self-confidence and fear of negative evaluation (Akram & Saadat, 2024). The post-basic stage (Grades 11–12) is particularly important in this respect, because it is the final point at which the school system can prepare learners for the communicative demands of university study and work.

A substantial international literature shows that teachers may endorse CLT while enacting it selectively, and that implementation is shaped by learners, class size, time, examinations and institutional expectations (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2007; Nishino, 2012). Research in Oman has reported a similar pattern. Teachers express positive attitudes and good awareness of CLT principles, but report difficulties associated with training, preparation time, learner proficiency, class size and assessment (Al Kalbani et al., 2019; Al-Sawafi et al., 2019), while document analysis has shown that communicative competence is only partly represented in national examinations (Al Mamari et al., 2018).

Two limitations of this evidence base motivate the present study. First, constraints have been identified mainly through teachers' reports. Questionnaire and interview studies establish what teachers experience as obstacles but say less about how those obstacles appear in the organisation of lessons. Where observation has been used in Oman, it has served either to estimate the degree of implementation alongside large-scale questionnaires (Al-Sawafi et al., 2019) or to examine a specific area such as grammar teaching (Al-Abri et al., 2022). Second, factors are typically listed as separate barriers. Such lists are useful, but they do not show how factors combine within a lesson, or whether they prevent communicative teaching or change its form. In addition, a search of Oman-focused CLT research published between 2015 and 2025 identified no eligible empirical studies after 2022 within the defined search boundaries, which suggests a need for more recent classroom evidence.

This article addresses these gaps by reporting the factors that shaped the classroom enactment of CLT among six Omani English teachers in post-basic schools in Muscat, with classroom observation as the primary source of evidence and teacher interviews as supporting evidence. It forms part of a larger doctoral study (Alhanashi, 2026); teachers' perspectives on CLT, which were examined in a separate research question, have been reported elsewhere (Alhanashi & Sulaiman, 2026) and are referred to here only where they help interpret classroom evidence. The article is guided by one research question:

What factors influence the classroom implementation of Communicative Language Teaching among Omani English teachers in post-basic schools?

The study makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides recent, observation-anchored evidence of how CLT was enacted in Grades 11–12 lessons in Oman. Analytically, it shows that the factors influencing CLT operated in combination and were mediated through teachers' in-lesson decisions and task enactment. Conceptually, it argues that in this context CLT was reshaped rather than abandoned, which directs attention towards the form that communicative teaching takes under particular conditions.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

CLT as a context-sensitive approach

CLT is best understood as an approach, a set of principles centred on meaningful language use, rather than a fixed method with prescribed procedures (Richards, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Its goal derives from Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence: the ability to use language appropriately in social context, not only to produce grammatically correct sentences. Because the approach specifies goals more than procedures, its classroom form has always varied. Howatt (1984) distinguished a weak version, in which communicative practice is integrated into a wider programme, from a strong version in which language is acquired through communication itself, and much school-level practice internationally resembles the weak version.

The appropriateness of CLT across contexts has been extensively debated. Holliday (1994) argued that methodology must be understood in relation to the social context of the classroom, and Bax (2003) proposed

that pedagogical decisions should be guided by the learning context instead of a predetermined methodological preference. Kumaravadivelu's (2001) post-method pedagogy similarly emphasised particularity and practicality, positioning teachers as constructors of context-sensitive practice. Rogan's (2007) notion of a zone of feasible innovation offers a related lens from curriculum reform: the extent of change that can be implemented depends on the capacity and conditions of particular schools. From these perspectives, departures from an idealised communicative classroom are not automatically failures of implementation; they may represent adaptation to what is feasible.

Factors influencing CLT implementation

Research has grouped the influences on CLT implementation at several levels. At the teacher level, beliefs, prior learning experiences and professional preparation shape instructional decisions (Borg, 2003, 2006). The relationship between stated beliefs and practice is not straightforward: correspondence tends to be greater in planned aspects of teaching and among experienced teachers (Basturkmen, 2012), and teachers may hold core beliefs about control and coverage that take precedence over less central beliefs about communicative activity (Phipps & Borg, 2009). Nishino (2012) found that Japanese teachers' positive beliefs about CLT influenced practice only indirectly, while examination expectations and students' communicative conditions also shaped what was done.

At the learner level, limited proficiency and reluctance to participate are among the most frequently reported constraints (Al-Sawafi et al., 2019; Liu & Deris, 2023). Learner reluctance to speak, however, is not only a learner characteristic. Tsui (1996) associated it with fear of making mistakes but also with classroom practices such as limited tolerance of silence and uneven turn allocation, and research on willingness to communicate treats readiness to speak as situational and responsive to classroom conditions (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

At the classroom level, large classes, limited instructional time, fixed seating and scarce resources are repeatedly identified as constraints (Farooq, 2015; Shi et al., 2019). At the institutional level, curriculum coverage and assessment are central. Al Mamari et al. (2018) found that communicative competence was not fully represented in five Grade 10 Omani final examinations. The washback literature, however, cautions against assuming that examinations determine teaching. Alderson and Wall (1993) argued that washback must be demonstrated through empirical evidence, and Wall and Alderson (1993) found that a new Sri Lankan examination influenced what teachers taught more than how they taught. Messick (1996) located washback within the consequences of test use, noting that instructional effects may arise from factors beyond the test itself.

Two observations follow from this literature. First, factors are usually identified through teachers' reports, so less is known about how they appear in observed lessons. Second, they are commonly treated as discrete barriers, even though the constraints reported across contexts tend to co-occur (Butler, 2011; Jeon & Yin, 2022). A recent review of empirical studies in EFL settings again identified exam-driven curricula and restricted instructional time among recurring constraints (Chen & Shuib, 2026), but such reviews necessarily identify recurring factors without examining how they operate within individual lessons.

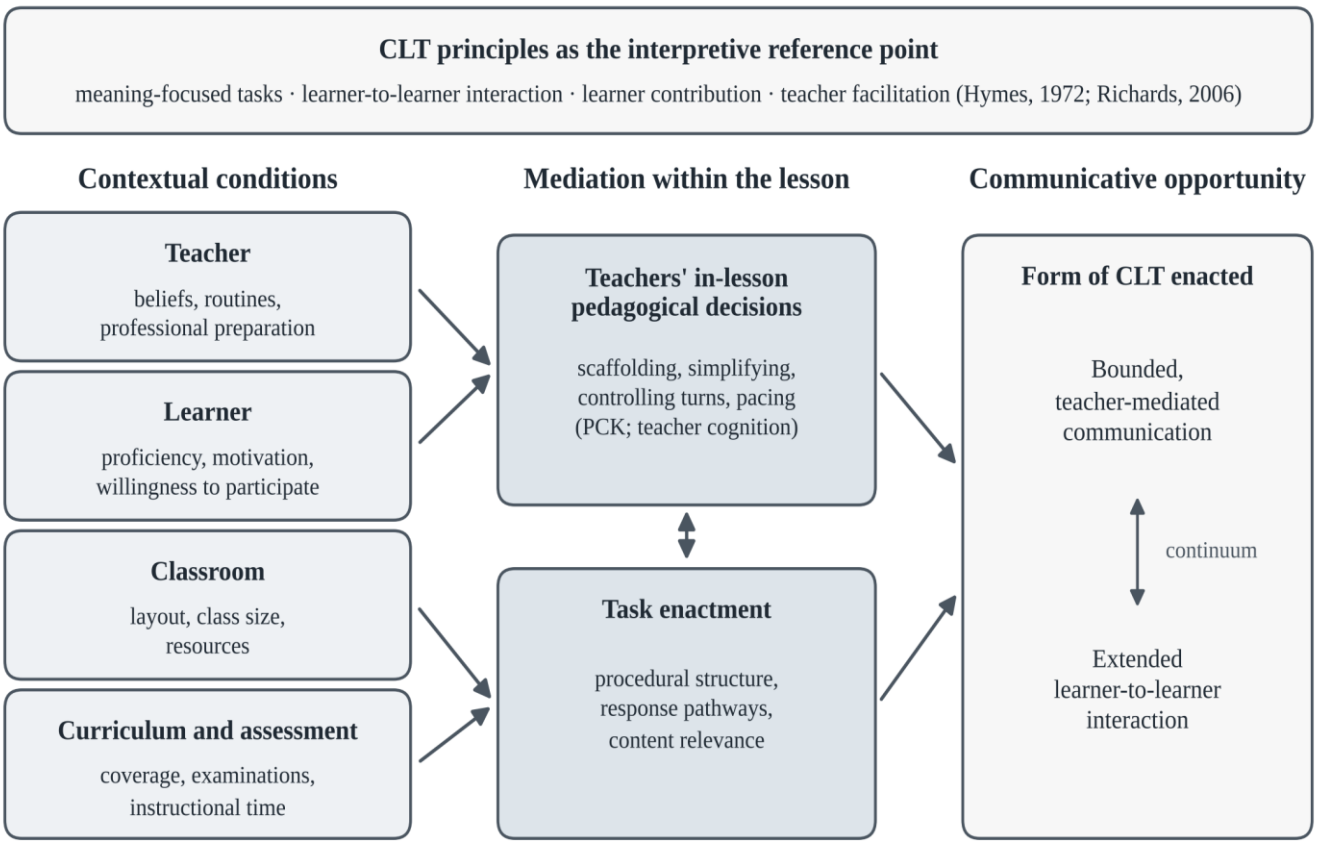
Communicative design and communicative enactment

A further distinction is between the communicative potential of an activity and the interaction it generates. Littlewood (1981) distinguished pre-communicative activities that prepare learners linguistically from communicative activities in which learners convey and interpret meaning. Ellis (2009) identified four criteria for a task: a primary focus on meaning, a gap to be closed, reliance on learners' own resources, and an outcome beyond the display of language. These criteria describe design, but an activity designed as communicative may be enacted through teacher questioning and short display answers, and a group task may be completed by one or two learners while others remain silent. Interaction research (Long, 1996) suggests that the processes of negotiating meaning, not only the existence of a task, matter for learning. Recent studies show that teachers find it difficult to design and sustain meaning-focused communicative activities even when they value them (Gu, 2025). For a study of implementation, then, the question is not only whether communicative activities appear in lessons but how they are enacted.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study draws on three complementary lenses. CLT provides the instructional reference point against which classroom interaction is interpreted: learner-to-learner interaction, meaning-focused tasks, learner contribution and teacher facilitation. Teacher cognition research (Borg, 2003) indicates that teachers' decisions are shaped by beliefs, experience and context, so that observed practice must be interpreted in relation to the conditions under which it occurs. Shulman's (1987) pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) explains the professional reasoning through which teachers transform content and goals into forms that are workable for particular learners; it directs attention to the in-lesson adjustments teachers make when learners struggle, time runs short or tasks do not develop as planned. Taken together, these lenses suggest the working model shown in Figure 1: contextual conditions at several levels do not act directly on classroom communication but are filtered through teachers' pedagogical decisions and the way tasks are enacted, which together shape the communicative opportunities available to learners. The framework was developed for this article as a sensitising device, extending the doctoral study's framework of communicative competence, CLT and PCK with insights from teacher cognition research. It guided interpretation but was not tested, and it was not used to impose categories on the data, which were coded inductively.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Contextual Conditions Mediated Through Teacher Decisions and Task Enactment



METHODOLOGY

Research design and case

The study adopted a constructivist qualitative case study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). The case was defined as teachers' implementation of CLT within government post-basic English education in Muscat

Governorate. It was bounded administratively by the participating government schools, educationally by the Grade 11–12 English programme, temporally by the data collection period (April–June 2025), and conceptually by teachers' implementation of CLT. The six teachers were embedded units within a single case and were analysed as part of the same bounded case.

Participants

Twenty teachers meeting the inclusion criteria (Omani nationality, currently teaching Grade 11 or 12 in a government post-basic school in Muscat, at least five years' teaching experience) were invited through school principals. Ten agreed, and data collection proceeded sequentially with six, the remaining four being available if further data were required. The six participants taught in three schools, two from each. All were female; gender was not a selection criterion but reflected recruitment and the strong representation of women in Omani teaching. Each taught three classes and 18 lessons a week. None reported having received training specifically in applying CLT (Table 1).

Table 1. Participant Profile

Teacher	Grade taught	Qualification	Teaching experience (years)	CLT-specific training
T01	12	MA (TESOL)	19	None reported
T02	12	MA (TESOL)	9	None reported
T03	12	MA (TESOL)	18	None reported
T04	11	BA (Teaching English)	8	None reported
T05	11	BA (Teaching English)	7	None reported
T06	11	BA (Teaching English)	11	None reported

Data sources and their roles

Because the research question concerned factors influencing implementation, classroom observation was designated the primary source and semi-structured interviews the supporting source (Table 2). Each teacher was observed once, for a complete lesson of approximately 45 minutes, in a non-participant role from the back of the classroom. A study-specific guide listing broad CLT-related focal areas (for example, interaction patterns, learner participation, task organisation and use of time) served as a reminder; it was not a checklist or scoring instrument, and open field notes recorded events beyond these areas. Field notes were handwritten during the lesson and completed in typed form the same day. A fixed camera directed at the teacher's teaching area was used solely to support completion of the field notes; it was not analysed, students were not intentionally recorded, and the recording was permanently deleted the same day.

Individual face-to-face interviews (45–60 minutes) were conducted after the observation, so that teachers could explain instructional decisions in the observed lesson. The protocol was reviewed by an expert in English language education and qualitative research and piloted with one participant; one question inviting reflection on the observed lesson was added, and the pilot participant answered it in a follow-up interview so that all six responded to the same final protocol. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai, verified against the audio, and returned to participants to confirm accuracy; the files were then deleted from the service. Interview evidence was used to explain observed patterns and to identify factors, such as curriculum expectations and resource provision, that are not fully visible in a single lesson.

Table 2. Data Sources and Their Roles in Addressing the Research Question

Source	Role	Quantity	What it provides
Classroom observation (field notes)	Primary	6 lessons, one per teacher, 45 minutes each	Enacted interaction, task organisation, seating, numbers present, pacing and completion

Source	Role	Quantity	What it provides
Semi-structured interviews	Supporting	6 interviews, 45–60 minutes each	Teachers' explanations of observed decisions; factors not directly observable

Analysis

Each data source was analysed separately using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) operationalised through a codes–categories–themes (CO-CAT) workflow: familiarisation, open coding of verbatim extracts or field-note segments, grouping of codes into categories, development of initial themes for each teacher, and cross-participant analysis to identify shared conceptual labels. A shared label was retained as a common theme when it was represented in the data of at least three of the six teachers; this was a transparent decision rule for commonality, not a statistical threshold, and patterns that did not meet it were retained in the analytic records. Observation-based themes formed the structure of the findings; interview evidence was integrated where it corroborated, explained or qualified them, and interview-derived factors were added where they met the commonality criterion. Where sources differed, the difference was retained in the interpretation. Participant codes and counts are reported in the findings to show how widely each pattern was represented across the bounded case; they are not estimates of prevalence beyond it.

The adequacy of the sample was assessed retrospectively before deciding whether to collect data from the four remaining volunteers. As Table 3 shows, new shared conceptual labels for this research question declined from 12 with the first teacher to none with the fifth and sixth, and no new common themes were added after the third teacher. This decline, together with the homogeneity of the participants, the focused aim and the use of two data sources per participant, was judged to provide sufficient information power (Malterud et al., 2016), and data collection was concluded.

Table 3. Sequential Development of Codes and Themes Across Participants for the Research Question

Level of analysis	T01	T02	T03	T04	T05	T06
New open codes	40	36	21	10	10	11
New shared conceptual labels	12	4	2	1	0	0
New labels retained as common themes (≥3 of 6)	12	4	1	0	0	0

Note. Participant codes follow the chronological order of data collection. Data sources: classroom observations (primary) and interviews (supporting).

Trustworthiness and ethics

Credibility was supported by the use of two sources with defined roles, a consistent observation procedure across all six lessons, transcript verification by participants, and an audit trail of coding, category and theme tables. Dependability and confirmability were supported by supervisory review of coding and theme development; this was not independent double coding, and no inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated. The first author works as an English Language Supervisor in the Ministry of Education. She did not supervise or evaluate any participant, had no prior relationship with them, and informed participants that participation would have no bearing on their evaluation; her positive orientation towards CLT was acknowledged and monitored through repeated return to the source data. Permission was obtained from Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology and the Omani Ministry of Education, and all participants gave written informed consent.

In the findings, extracts are labelled by source (OBV = observation; INT = interview) and participant (T01–T06).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 summarises the five themes and twelve sub-themes, with the participants represented in each. Table 5 summarises the observable conditions in each lesson, drawn from the field notes.

Table 4. Themes and Sub-Themes on Factors Influencing CLT Implementation

Theme	Sub-theme	Participants	Main evidence
Teacher factors	Teacher-centred instructional practices	T01–T06	Observation, supported by interview
	Teacher beliefs and instructional decisions	T01, T02, T03, T04	Observation, supported by interview
Student factors	Student motivation and participation	T02, T05, T06	Observation, supported by interview
	Student proficiency level	T01–T06	Observation, supported by interview
Classroom factors	Classroom layout	T01–T06	Observation, supported by interview
	Class size	T01, T02, T05, T06	Observation, supported by interview
	Resource availability	T01–T06	Mainly interview
Curriculum and assessment factors	Assessment system	T01, T02, T03, T04	Observation, supported by interview
	Curriculum-driven form-focused instruction	T01–T06	Observation, supported by interview
	Time constraints and lesson pacing	T01–T06	Observation, supported by interview
Instructional realisation factors	Nature of task implementation	T01, T02, T04, T06	Observation only
	Content relevance and authenticity	T01, T02, T04, T06	Observation, supported by interview

Note. Resource availability was identified mainly through interviews and incorporated because it met the three-of-six criterion; its participant representation reflects interview accounts rather than observed lessons.

Table 5. Observable Lesson Conditions Recorded in the Field Notes

Teacher	Grade	Seating	Students	Lesson focus noted	Start of lesson	Planned activities completed
T01	12	Rows	Class of 35–38	Reading, gap-fill and grammar correction	About 10 minutes late	No
T02	12	Rows	Class of 35–38	Writing practice for final examination	5 minutes late	No
T03	12	Rows	Class of 35–38	Teacher-led questioning and group task	On time	No
T04	11	Groups	21 present of 26	Practice questions for final examination	On time	Yes
T05	11	Groups	24 present (11 absent)	Picture discussion, vocabulary matching	On time	No
T06	11	Groups	Class of 35–38	Grammar with sentence-building tasks	On time	No

Note. Observed classes ranged from 35 to 38 students, except one class of 26.

Teacher factors: communication organised through the teacher

The most consistent pattern across the six lessons was teacher-directed interaction. In every observed lesson, students responded individually to teacher prompts, generally without first discussing answers with peers, and

contributions were short and oriented towards the correct answer (OBV, T01–T06). In three lessons teachers continued explaining while students were expected to work on tasks (OBV, T02, T04, T05), and in two they intervened during student responses by adding information or directing the answer (OBV, T01, T03). Communicative activities were not absent: in four lessons such activities were present but were reorganised into structured sequences in which the teacher decided when and how students took part (OBV, T01–T04).

Interviews indicated that these patterns were connected to learners, time and form-focused requirements. One teacher explained, "In low-level class… I become the centre of the class" (INT, T04), another that "Teachers are in hurry… give rules and move on" (INT, T01), and a third that "Grammar rules… we have to explain" (INT, T06). Teachers also identified teacher beliefs, awareness and preparation as factors: "The teacher has to believe first… if the teacher is not aware… they will not implement it" (INT, T03), and "Teachers need professional development on CLT… workshops or training programs" (INT, T03).

This observed pattern contrasted with the way the same teachers described CLT in interview, as learner-centred interaction with a facilitative teacher (Alhanashi & Sulaiman, 2026). The contrast is reported here as a tension between orientation and enactment, not as inconsistency on the teachers' part.

Student factors: proficiency, motivation and the redirection of tasks

Students' proficiency was associated with a recurrent sequence in the observed lessons. When students had difficulty expressing ideas or completing a task, teachers increased explanation, simplified the task or guided students step by step, so that activities intended to promote communication were redirected towards teacher-led interaction (OBV, T01, T03, T04, T06). In five lessons students produced short responses, depended on prompts and rarely extended answers beyond basic structures (OBV, T02–T06). Teachers described the same constraint: "They cannot express… they use Arabic" (INT, T04); "They cannot even speak a sentence… they cannot express their opinion" (INT, T03). One explained its consequence for lesson time: "I started from zero… I took more time explaining… the lesson finished" (INT, T03).

Participation was uneven in three lessons, concentrated among a few students while others listened or waited for direction (OBV, T02, T05, T06). Organising students into groups did not guarantee interaction: in two lessons some group members participated while others observed or relied on more active peers (OBV, T05, T06), and in another, group work was initiated but students worked individually (OBV, T02). Teachers attributed this to motivation and shyness: "The majority… are not willing to speak… they are shy" (INT, T05). One teacher noted the reciprocal effect on teachers: "If students are not interested… teacher will not be motivated" (INT, T04).

Classroom factors: conditions that enabled but did not determine interaction

Seating differed systematically across the observed classrooms. Students in the three Grade 12 lessons sat in fixed rows (OBV, T01–T03); when group work was introduced, many students continued working individually, and in one lesson students who stood to join other groups found the arrangement physically awkward and discussion was not sustained (OBV, T03). Students in the three Grade 11 lessons sat in groups (OBV, T04–T06), and discussion was observed within several groups, but participation remained uneven, with in some groups only two of six members actively engaged. Group seating therefore created opportunities for interaction without ensuring that they were taken up.

Class size showed a similar pattern. Most observed classes contained 35 to 38 students, and in four lessons only a limited number responded or engaged while many remained silent (OBV, T01, T02, T05, T06). Teachers linked size to their ability to monitor and distribute participation: "if you have 40 students… you will not have time to go for each group" (INT, T06). However, uneven participation was also observed when fewer students were present, with 21 present in one lesson and 24 in another because of absences (OBV, T04, T05). Class size thus shaped the management of interaction but did not by itself explain limited participation.

Resource availability emerged mainly from interviews. Teachers described limited materials beyond the textbook, unreliable Wi-Fi, a small number of shared tablets, and the need to fund resources themselves: "I use

my own internet… I pay… printing outside school" (INT, T04). Others noted that students could not always afford materials requested for activities (INT, T05). These accounts suggest that resource constraints narrowed the range of communicative activities teachers felt able to plan, although the observations offered limited direct evidence of this.

Curriculum and assessment factors: coverage, examinations and time

Form-focused, curriculum-driven instruction was observed in all six lessons. Teachers explained rules, guided controlled practice and confirmed correct responses, and interaction was directed towards producing the target forms (OBV, T01–T06). Teachers described the same orientation: "exam oriented… final exams about accuracy… no room for communicative teaching" (INT, T03), and "textbook-centred teaching… is not actually supporting the implementation" (INT, T02).

Assessment preparation was directly visible in two lessons: one was devoted to writing practice for the final examination and the other to practising examination questions (OBV, T02, T04). In both, teachers moved quickly between tasks and prioritised completion over discussion. Fixed time frames with little room for developing responses were also observed in two other lessons (OBV, T01, T03), but in these cases the pacing cannot be attributed to assessment alone. Teachers explicitly connected examinations to instructional priorities: "we have to spend time on tests… more important than student-centred activities" (INT, T06).

Time was the condition that most directly linked the others. Across lessons, teachers moved from one activity to the next with limited wait-time (OBV, T04–T06), and planned activities were left unfinished in five of the six lessons, with teachers indicating that tasks would continue in the next lesson (OBV, T01–T03, T05, T06). Two lessons began late because students were arriving from elsewhere in the school, about ten minutes in one case and five in the other (OBV, T01, T02). The only lesson completed as planned was a practice-test lesson without extended communicative activity (OBV, T04). Teachers made the trade-off explicit: "teacher-centred is faster… students need more time for activities" (INT, T04), and "we have limitations… exams… text to cover… communicative activities need a lot of time" (INT, T03).

Instructional realisation factors: how tasks were enacted

In four lessons, tasks were implemented through fixed procedural steps and predetermined response pathways, with the teacher monitoring completion and deciding when the class moved on (OBV, T01, T02, T04, T06). Tasks presented as sets of questions with fixed answer formats were worked through individually or with minimal interaction (OBV, T02, T04). Teachers did not discuss procedural structure in interview; this factor was identified from observation alone. Although such activities could appear communicative in design, their enactment left little room for spontaneity or negotiation of meaning.

Content relevance also shaped engagement. In two lessons students participated less when content was distant from their experience and more readily when it was familiar (OBV, T01, T06), and in four lessons tasks remained tied to textbook material without extension into students' own contexts (OBV, T01, T02, T04, T06). Teachers reported adjusting or omitting tasks for this reason: "Lesson talking about something far from our culture… students cannot relate" (INT, T06); "Students face difficulty… this is not applicable… I skip that task" (INT, T02).

Convergence and divergence between sources

The two sources converged most strongly on conditions that an observer can see: limited time and unfinished activities, large classes, examination-oriented lessons, and participation concentrated among a few students. In each case, observation documented the condition and interviews confirmed that teachers experienced it as influential. The sources differed in emphasis rather than direction on resources, which were prominent in interviews but only partly visible in single lessons, and on task procedure, which was evident in observations but not raised by teachers. Because each teacher was observed once, convergence indicates that these conditions were present in the observed lessons, not that they were typical of each teacher's practice.

DISCUSSION

From barriers to mediated conditions

The findings confirm many of the constraints reported in earlier Omani research, including learner proficiency, class size, assessment and limited training (Al Kalbani et al., 2019; Al-Sawafi et al., 2019), and the deductive, teacher-led pattern reported in grammar teaching (Al-Abri et al., 2022). The contribution of the present study lies less in identifying new factors than in showing how they operated in lessons. Three features of the evidence are important.

First, no single factor explained the observed patterns. Group seating did not produce shared discussion; fewer students present did not produce broader participation; and lessons with and without overt examination preparation shared similar teacher-directed pacing. Structural conditions such as class size and layout, widely reported as constraints (Farooq, 2015; Shi et al., 2019), therefore appeared in these lessons to enable or constrain interaction rather than to determine it.

Second, factors appeared to combine in recognisable patterns. When learners struggled to respond, teachers increased explanation and control; additional explanation consumed time; and time pressure favoured the quicker teacher-led route, which in turn reduced learners' opportunities to produce extended language. This pattern is an interpretation built from co-occurring observations and teachers' own explanations, and single-lesson qualitative evidence cannot establish its causal ordering. It is nevertheless consistent with how teachers described their decisions ("teacher-centred is faster"), which suggests a reasoned response to competing demands without necessarily indicating a lack of commitment to CLT. It is also consistent with Tsui's (1996) observation that turn allocation and limited tolerance of silence contribute to reticence: participation may be partly produced within the lesson, not only brought to it by learners.

Third, the factors acted on classroom communication through teachers' in-lesson decisions and the way tasks were enacted. This is the mediation shown in Figure 1. Teachers did not remove communicative activities; they reorganised them into structured, teacher-controlled sequences that could be completed within the time and with the learners available. Read through Shulman's (1987) PCK, these are transformations of a communicative goal into a form judged workable for particular learners. Read through Rogan's (2007) zone of feasible innovation, the observed lessons show the form of CLT that was feasible under these conditions.

Reshaped, not abandoned

Much CLT research implicitly classifies classrooms as communicative or not. The present evidence suggests that this two-way distinction overlooks what happens in practice. Communicative activities were present in all six lessons, but the interaction they generated was bounded: initiated and closed by the teacher, directed towards correct answers, and carried by a minority of learners. In Howatt's (1984) terms, what was enacted was a strongly controlled version of the weak form of CLT. The point is not to judge this outcome but to recognise that implementation was a question of form and degree. This interpretation extends earlier Omani findings of high awareness alongside moderate implementation (Al-Sawafi et al., 2019): moderate implementation, in these lessons, meant communicative activity reshaped by the conditions in which it was enacted. The pattern is not unique to Oman. In an observation-based case study in Ethiopia, Adem and Berkessa (2022) found that teachers' practice of teaching speaking departed from CLT principles in comparable ways, and Nuby et al. (2019) reported that practice in rural Bangladeshi higher secondary schools fell short of the aims of a communicative curriculum. What the present study adds is evidence of the lesson-level conditions through which such departures took shape, and of the communicative activity that persisted within them.

The distinction between communicative design and enactment is central here. Activities that met the design features of tasks could be enacted through fixed response pathways that removed the gap and reduced learners' reliance on their own resources (Ellis, 2009). This aligns with evidence that EFL teachers find it difficult to design and sustain meaning-focused activity (Gu, 2025) and suggests that support for CLT should address enactment, the management of a task once it begins, as much as task design.

Assessment and time as connected rather than separate pressures

The washback literature warns against assuming that examinations determine teaching (Alderson & Wall, 1993). The present findings respect that caution. Examination preparation was directly visible in two lessons, and teachers clearly perceived assessment as competing with communicative work, but similar pacing appeared in lessons with no overt examination focus. Curriculum coverage, lost minutes at the start of lessons and the time needed for weaker learners also contributed. Wall and Alderson (1993) found that a new examination changed the content of teaching more than its methods; in the present case, examination and coverage pressures appeared to be expressed partly through content (examination practice) and partly through pace, which in turn constrained method. Because examination documents were not analysed, the study cannot establish whether Grade 11–12 assessments under-represent communicative ability, although teachers' perceptions are consistent with document evidence from Grade 10 (Al Mamari et al., 2018).

Implications

The findings suggest implications at three levels, offered as possibilities that have not been evaluated as interventions. For professional learning, the absence of CLT-specific training among all six experienced teachers, together with the observed difficulty of sustaining interaction, points towards practice-based professional development that focuses on enactment: managing pair and group talk in rows, structuring tasks so that each learner's contribution is needed, allowing wait-time, and separating meaning-focused phases from correction. Peer observation and collaborative lesson study could make these decisions visible and open to professional discussion. For lesson design, short pair rehearsal before whole-class sharing may suit fixed-row classrooms, and connecting textbook topics to learners' own experiences may support participation. For curriculum and assessment, the recurring pattern of unfinished lessons and lost instructional minutes suggests that curriculum pacing and timetabling warrant review, and the perceived misalignment between communicative aims and examinations warrants document-based investigation for Grades 11–12.

Limitations

The study has several limitations. Each teacher was observed once, so observed patterns may not represent teachers' practice across lessons, classes or the school year, and observer presence may have influenced behaviour. Participants were six female teachers in three schools in one governorate; male teachers and other regions were not represented. Grade and seating coincided (all Grade 12 lessons in rows, all Grade 11 lessons in groups), so their influences cannot be separated. Students were not participants, and their proficiency, motivation and experiences were interpreted from observable participation and teachers' accounts. Curriculum and examination documents were not analysed. Coding was carried out by the first author with supervisory review but without independent double coding. The pilot participant was retained in the dataset after a minor protocol addition. The findings are therefore offered as an in-depth account of a bounded case whose transferability readers can judge from the contextual description provided.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors influencing the classroom enactment of CLT in Omani post-basic schools through observation of six lessons supported by teacher interviews. Teacher, student, classroom, curriculum and assessment, and instructional realisation factors were identified. In all six lessons, interaction was teacher-directed and instruction was organised around form-focused curriculum tasks under time pressure, while group seating and smaller numbers did not by themselves produce broad participation. The central finding is that these factors did not simply block CLT. They combined and acted through teachers' in-lesson decisions and the enactment of tasks, reshaping communicative teaching into bounded, teacher-mediated forms. Supporting CLT in this context may therefore depend less on persuading teachers of its value, which they already recognise, than on helping them sustain learner interaction within the conditions they face, and on reviewing the pacing and assessment arrangements that define those conditions. Future research could observe teachers across multiple lessons and assessment periods, include learners' perspectives, and analyse Grade 11–12 curriculum and examination documents alongside classroom practice.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Contextual Conditions Mediated Through Teacher Decisions and Task Enactment

Table titles

Number	Title
Table 1	Participant Profile
Table 2	Data Sources and Their Roles in Addressing the Research Question
Table 3	Sequential Development of Codes and Themes Across Participants for the Research Question
Table 4	Themes and Sub-Themes on Factors Influencing CLT Implementation
Table 5	Observable Lesson Conditions Recorded in the Field Notes

Declarations

Ethics statement. Permission to conduct the study was granted by Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology and the Ministry of Education, Sultanate of Oman. All participants provided written informed consent; participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any stage.

Data availability. The data are not publicly available because they contain information that could compromise participant confidentiality. Anonymised extracts are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Acknowledgement. The authors thank the participating teachers, the Ministry of Education, Oman, and Kuala Lumpur University of Science and Technology (KLUST), Malaysia, for their support. The first author acknowledges the guidance of Prof. Dr. Tajularipin bin Sulaiman and Prof. Dr Suraya Amirrudin. This article is derived from doctoral research conducted at KLUST.

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