

Historical Development of ELT Methods in Iraq (1970s–2025)

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Abstract

The present historical qualitative research paper examines the development of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Iraq between 1970s and 2025. These sources include curriculum frameworks, instructions given by the Ministry of Education, textbooks and teacher guides (New English Course for Iraq, Iraq Opportunities, English for Iraq, Sunrise), and reports of the British Council, UNESCO, World Bank, and Iraqi researches. It is structured by decade and places pedagogical change in contexts of the prominent socio-political events of the time, such as nation-building, armed conflict, sanctions, reconstruction, displacement, and the COVID-19 era.

It is identified to be going through four phases: the structural/audio-lingual period (1970s-1990s), reformation under the influence of Communicative Language Teaching (2000s), solidification through multi-syllabus coursework (2010s) and stabilization and hardening in the 2020s. Throughout these stages, a consistent gap of

implementation is created between the intentions of curriculum and classroom realities, a gap to be influenced by exam-driven practices, large classes, uneven teacher preparation, limited resources and a culture of curriculum-as-textbook.

This research holds that sustainable development would require a match that is made between assessment and communicative goals, strengthening educator growth, and ensuring a sufficient provision of viable classroom engagement.

Keywords: Iraq; English language teaching; Audio-Lingual Method; Communicative Language Teaching; historical analysis.

نظمت ندوة في كركوك بتاريخ ١٤ / ٣ / ٢٠٢٥ (١٤٠٠ هـ) في كركوك

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تتناول هذه الدراسة التاريخية النوعية تطور تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية (ELT) في العراق خلال المدة الممتدة من سبعينيات القرن العشرين حتى عام ٢٠٢٥. وتعتمد الدراسة على مجموعة من المصادر، تشمل أطر المناهج الدراسية، والتعليمات الصادرة عن وزارة التربية، والكتب المدرسية وأدلة المعلمين) مثل New English Course for Iraq، و Opportunities، و English for Iraq، و (Sunrise، فضلاً عن تقارير المجلس الثقافي البريطاني، ومنظمة اليونسكو، والبنك الدولي، ودراسات وبحوث عراقية. وقد نظمت الدراسة وفق تقسيم زمني بال عقود، مع وضع التحولات التربوية ضمن سياقات أبرز الأحداث الاجتماعية-السياسية في كل مرحلة، مثل بناء الدولة، والصراع المسلح، والعقوبات، وإعادة الإعمار، والنزوح، ومرحلة جائحة كوفيد-١٩.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن هذا التطور مر بأربع مراحل رئيسية: مرحلة البنيوية/السمعية-الشفهية (سبعينيات القرن العشرين-التسعينيات)، ثم مرحلة الإصلاح تحت تأثير منهج التدريس التواصلي

للغة (العقد الأول من الألفية/السنوات ٢٠٠٠)، تلتها مرحلة الترسّخ عبر مقررات متعددة المنهج (العقد الثاني/السنوات ٢٠١٠)، وصولاً إلى مرحلة الاستقرار والتصلّب في العقد الثالث/السنوات ٢٠٢٠. وعبر هذه المراحل، يتكرر ظهور فجوة ثابتة بين مقاصد المنهج وواقع الممارسات الصفية؛ وهي فجوة تتأثر بممارسات مدفوعة بالاختبارات، وكثافة الصفوف، وتفاوت إعداد المعلمين، وشح الموارد، وهيمنة ثقافة "المنهج بوصفه كتاباً مدرسياً". وترى هذه الدراسة أن تحقيق تنمية مستدامة في هذا المجال يتطلب موازنة بين التقويم والأهداف التواصلية، وتعزيز النمو المهني للمعلمين، وضمان توفير كافٍ لفرص تفاعل صفّي فعّالة وقابلة للتطبيق.

كذلك تُدعى هذه الدراسة بـ: "تحليل أثر المنهج في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين في العراق".
 وتهدف الدراسة إلى: ١- التعرف على واقع الممارسات الصفية في العراق. ٢- التعرف على احتياجات المعلمين من أجل تطوير كفاءتهم. ٣- التعرف على دور المنهج في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ٤- التعرف على دور التقويم في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ٥- التعرف على دور الموارد في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ٦- التعرف على دور الاختبارات في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ٧- التعرف على دور الثقافة في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ٨- التعرف على دور التفاعل في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ٩- التعرف على دور الفعالية في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين. ١٠- التعرف على دور قابلية التطبيق في تطوير كفاءة المعلمين.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and rationale

The English language has been prominently placed, though changing through the years, in the Iraqi education system over a hundred years. The teaching in the earlier twentieth century was mainly based on reading–translation practices that were typical of the area. By the early 1970s the state had opened a nationally written curriculum, the New English Course to Iraq (NECI) that was oriented towards aural–oral and Audio–Lingual (AL) and a structurally sequenced syllabus. Amin (2017) points out that NECI was specifically planned on a structural basis and the Audio–Lingual method had been specifically suggested; since 1973, the volumes have been distributed to schools at an approximation of one book a year (Amin, 2017). This reform was similar to the large state investment in schooling, which has been characterized by many as comparatively strong up through the 1970s and at the beginning of the 1980s (Alwan, 2004; UNESCO, 2004), and led to the professionalization of English teaching (Altae, 2020; Burhan, 2024).

The next several decades were turbulent times. The armed conflict (1980–1988), international sanctions in the 1990s, and repeated cycles of war and displacement led to resource depletion, constrained teacher

development, and an exam-focused habitus (UNESCO, 2004; UNESCO-IBE, 2011; Velloso de Santisteban, 2005). Following the 2003 regime change, international collaboration intensified and reform-based coursebooks were introduced, such as Iraq Opportunities (reported as introduced around 2010/11, and implemented in phases depending on grade and governorate), English for Iraq (introduced in 2013/14 and rolled out in phases), and Sunrise in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Al-Akraa, 2013; Fayadh, 2022). Nevertheless, classroom implementation often falls short of textbook goals due to large class sizes, limited lesson time and resources, and high-stakes examinations (World Bank, 2021; Taha, 2022; Borg & Capstick, 2024).

1.2 Aim, research questions and contribution.

The present research aims to conduct a historical and qualitative investigation of the English Language Teaching (ELT) practices in Iraq between the 1970s and 2025 that links the official methodological decision-making, which includes Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with the conditions of classroom implementation (Amin, 2017; Asadi & Raouf, 2024).

Research questions.

1. What mode of ELT methods and syllabuses were dominant per decade (1970s –2020s), at what time did they come (or last updated) into practice?
2. What was the political, social and educational context (i.e. war, sanctions and reconstruction, assessment policy, teacher development) at the time of adoption and what are the implications of this for adoption and enactment?
3. What were the received successive methods by teachers/learners and how can success or limitations be evidenced?
4. Which of the old elements (e.g., curriculum-as-textbook culture; exam washback) are there, and are there signs of innovation culture?

Contribution. This work brings the otherwise dispersed Iraqi and partner resources, curriculum notes, guides / meta-descriptions of teachers, evaluation, and sector plans into one decade-based narrative which anticipates the policy as put to practice in a manner that shows that method labels are inadequate on their own, proposing policy as put to practice instead.

1.3 Research design overview

Methodologically, this article used document analysis of open-access Iraqi and international resources (Bowen, 2009). It uses page-anchored excerpts in which documents specifically say method or syllabus such as English for Iraq, which is stated as mixed functional/structural (Asadi & Raouf, 2024, pp. 1230–1234). No additional interviews were made; the information about teachers/policymakers is consulted in published publications and reports (e.g., RTI International, 2013; Burhan, 2024).

1.4 Scope and delimitations

- **Levels.** It focuses on basic and secondary education (primary, intermediate, preparatory), where national education systems and examinations have the greatest impact on pedagogy; teacher-education and higher education are mentioned in cases where they affect the schools (World Bank, 2021).

- **Geography.** Coverage is confined to federal Iraq and Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI); events in the federal system are described in more detail because of the availability of sources, KRI information (e.g., Sunrise) is mentioned through published curriculum evaluations and analyses (Kawthar, 2016; Saeed, 2022; Mahmud, 2018).

Timeframe. 1970s –2025 stuck to historical milestones in the curriculum and systemic crisis (UNESCO-IBE, 2011; World Bank, 2024).

1.5 Significance

To begin with, historical clarity can be useful for present-day decision-making: issues such as speaking/listening assessment, class size, and the use of L1 scaffolding have recurred across decades; mapping them reduces the likelihood of repeating ineffective reform cycles (e.g., introducing communicative textbooks without assessment reform) (Alwan, 2004; World Bank, 2024). Second, by shifting the emphasis from method labels to conditions of enactment, improvement is reframed around assessment alignment and feasible interaction in large classrooms, alongside quality-assured materials that are regularly corrected (as illustrated by the English for Iraq revision notes). Third, the research balances international diagnoses with Arabic-language Iraqi scholarship and partner reports (Burhan, 2024; Altae, 2020).

1.6 Definitions and critical center of analysis.

Individual rules and characteristics observed in the studied classrooms:

– Method: pedagogic orientation (ALM, CLT, TBL); signatures in class (dialogue – drill; pair work/ information gaps; task cycles).

• **Potential Knowledge:** arrangement of content (structural, functional/notional, lexical, or a combination of them), realized in course design (Nation & Macalister, 2010).

• **Implementation:** practical application of proposed pedagogy commenced in evaluation scenarios, time travel, and classroom division, educator expertise, resources, and educational society (Richards, 2001; Nation & Macalister, 2010).

Analytically, method adoption is in terms of the policy-practice mediation: the intention is conveyed through textbooks and official instructions; teachers are influenced by local opportunities and limitations (World Bank, 2021; UNESCO, 2004; Richards, 2001).

2. Literature Review

2.1 ELT methodology trends around the globe and its importance to Iraq.

Historical descriptions of English Language Teaching (ELT) follow a path of Progression since Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is succeeded by the Direct Method, the Audio–Lingual Method (ALM), of which more communicative methodologies (e.g. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task Based Learning (TBL)) fell on one end and contents integrated models on the other since the late 1970s. GTM has an emphasis on translation and written accuracy; the Direct Method on target–language use and teaching grammar inductively; the ALM on repeat of dialogue–drills, habit formation; communicative method on the foregrounding of meaning, interaction, and serviceability (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Hybrid, multi–syllabus systems, which are strands consisting of functional, notional, structural and lexical components, have become more common in most national systems, especially when high–stakes examinations dominate pedagogy (World Bank, 2021). In the case of Iraq, the international context explains why labels of method like communicative cannot be translated into the change of assessments–based classroom practice unless the reform of the examination and resources takes place (Alwan, 2004; Richards, 2001).

2.2 A historical overview of ELT in Iraq.

Open–access literature usually refers to four general phases: (1) the pre–1970s phase of grammar–translation and reading–intensive practice with imported courses; (2) a nationalization phase (1970s–1990s) with the introduction of the New English Course for Iraq (NECI), characterized as structurally ordered and aligned with an aural–oral/Audio–Lingual orientation; (3) a reform period in the 2000s associated with communicative textbook initiatives; and (4) a 2010s–2020s phase of multi–syllabus materials and incremental revisions

(Amin, 2017; Altae, 2020). A culture of curriculum-as-textbook is one persistent feature, in which curriculum is discussed primarily by textbook title rather than by overarching goals and conditions of implementation (Borg & Capstick, 2024, p. 25).

2.3 Frameworks of curriculum, assessment and alignment.

Without the evaluation of listening and speaking, classroom time is preponderantly displaced by exam-salient grammar and reading activities, which is a usual washback effect (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Alwan, 2004; World Bank, 2021; World Bank, 2024). Preparation pressure towards Grade 9 and Grade 12 examination is consistently reported by the Iraqi teachers, which limits the practice of such communicative methods as pair work and task cycles (Taha, 2022). This observation justifies why communicative intentions that have been presented in guides are selectively practiced (Taha Abdul, 2015; Richards, 2001). According to recent qualitative research studies conducted at the school level in Baghdad, oral activities included in textbooks are often overlooked whereas the focus is made on written assessment even in classes with about 45 pupils (Abdulrazzaq et al., 2024).

2.4 Technology, sustainability and equity.

The Iraqi population in the COVID-19 pandemic anecdotally depended on low-bandwidth interventions such as television lessons, messaging applications, and paper packs, which led to inconsistent continuity but small gains in the basic familiarity with digital (World Bank, 2021; ACAPS, 2020). In the case of ELT, the progress that can be achieved includes straightforward audio delivery and access to materials disconnected to platforms instead of those that are resource-intensive (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO IITE, 2020). Most recently, institutionalization of continuous professional development, mentoring, expansion of the Education Management Information System,

operationalization of educational technology, and national learning assessment strengthening are among the interventions proposed by the EU-funded iTALEEM program (January 2024 October 2027), which have the potential to significantly improve the circumstances under which communicative ELT can be enacted, should the program be sustained.

2.5 Knowledge, beliefs and professional learning of teachers.

The analyses of Iraqi research indicate that educators support the idea of communicative goals but do not suffice to implement them on a large scale because of the scale of classes, time limitations, exam stress, not-balanced preparation, and discrepancies in resources (Taha, 2022; Taha Abdul, 2015; UNESCO, 2004). Thus, numerous lessons turn out to be hybrids: communicative facades and teacher-centered routines based on accuracy (Richards, 2001; Taha Abdul, 2015). Cascade training and Teacher Activity Groups are allegedly beneficial to micro-techniques implementation (e.g. rotating pair work or quick oral check), but its sustainability depends on timetabling, supportive supervision and rehearsal and feedback opportunities (Borg and Capstick, 2024).

2.6 Multilingual realities, L1 role and contextual pedagogy.

Although it is often recommended to use L1 as much as possible, intentional, bilingual scaffolding, including short Arabic/Kurdish explanations of tasks mechanics, contrastive grammar or vocabulary checks, is widespread and helps to keep up with the pace and behavior in large classes (Taha, 2022; Taha Abdul, 2015). Translanguaging can act as an entry point to involvement in the context of mixed-ability or displacement, in case teachers recycle English and finish activities with a meaningful production (Taha Abdul, 2015).

2.7 Manuals and manuals of teachers: method clues in books.

Themes based Unit, integrated skills unit, functional example, scaffolded grammar/lexis lesson, project-like activities, and guided stages of the

teacher are mentioned in the Iraq Opportunities and English evaluations (Al-Akraa, 2013; Yasseen & Al-Noori, 2019). Evidence collected by teachers also suggests that the so-called literature spots may lead to linguistic growth and cultural awareness, but are usually considered to be poorly assembled and require major reworking (Sharhan & Janfeshan, 2024). Several open access analyses describe English for Iraq as having a mixed functional/structural syllabus and sensitive assessment requirements (Yasseen & Al-Noori, 2019). Asadi & Raouf (2024, p. 1230) describe the revised series as follows: "It has a mixed functional/structural syllabus and is divided into six theme-based sections and two review units."

2.8 The pathway of Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)

KRI initiative is often described as a communicative reform, but evaluative research states that there are still constant gaps and disproportionate influence on communicative achievement (e.g., low efficacy in the acquisition of listening skills and learner autonomy), alongside traditional implementation strains, including class size, assessment, and variability of resources (Kawthar, 2016; Saeed, 2022; Mahmud, 2018). Cross-system mobility is of the utmost importance to get together maps of progress beyond textbook presentation (UNESCO, 2004; UNESCO-IBE, 2011).

2.9 Gaps in the literature

Across all the open-access literature reviewed, however, there appear to be several major gaps: (a) few large-scale classroom-observation studies that compare multiple governorates; (b) few studies that capture learners' perspectives at scale; (c) few longitudinal studies reporting proficiency outcomes following curriculum or textbook reforms; (d) very little evidence from assessment-reform pilots (especially in speaking/listening) that report feasibility, reliability, and validity; (e) limited documentation of primary-stage ELT classroom ecology and

everyday pedagogy; and (f) limited descriptions of material–quality assurance pipelines that systematically incorporate teacher feedback into revisions.

2.10 Synthesis

Overall, the major and most significant issue that Iraq is facing is not necessarily the choice of an allegedly right approach, but rather the design of conditions of enactment, in other words, the system of assessment that will incentivize utilization, materials based on the lesson time, practical routines of large classes, extended professional growth, and minimum resources (Richards, 2001; Nation & Macalister, 2010; World Bank, 2024). In where the alignment is there, the interaction and confidence are enhanced, and where there is no alignment, the classrooms are among other things reverted to exam–focused accuracy work (Taha, 2022; Burhan, 2024).

3. Methods

3.1 Design and orientation

The research used a historical–qualitative design aimed at analyzing publicly available documents (Bowen, 2009, as the general methodological framework, applied to the Iraqi English language teaching context). The analysis sought to reconstruct the methodological trajectory (e.g., ALM, CLT/TBL; mixed functional/structural syllabuses) and conditions of enactment (assessment regimes, resources, teacher development) in Iraqi schools from the 1970s to 2025. Consistent with best practice in qualitative historical synthesis, the analysis emphasized triangulation of sources, explicit excerpting, and an audit–like chain of evidence linking claims to documents.

Scope note: No new interviews with human subjects were conducted. Where teacher or policymaker perspectives are reported, they are drawn from published open–access studies and reports (e.g., RTI International, 2013; UNICEF, 2023).

3.2 Corpus and inclusion criteria

The corpus consists of freely accessible documents (Arabic and English) directly concerned with ELT methods, syllabuses, curriculum frameworks, teacher guides, textbook series, and system strategies:

Curriculum and materials: Summaries or guides on New English Course for Iraq (NECI), Iraq Opportunities, English for Iraq (including a note regarding a 2023 revision), and Sunrise in the Kurdistan Region (Al-Akraa, 2013; Asadi & Raouf, 2024; Yasseen & Al-Noori, 2019; Kawthar, 2016; Saeed, 2022; Mahmud, 2018).

System/strategy documents: World Data on Education (UNESCO-IBE, 2011); national strategy and reform-path documents (World Bank, 2021; World Bank, 2024); and sector financing review (UNICEF, 2023).

Academic summaries and curricular research: Iraqi overviews and evaluations of method history and implementation problems (Amin, 2017; Altae, 2020; Taha, 2022).

Inclusion criteria were: (1) the item was openly accessible (freely downloadable PDF or an open-access link/identifier); (2) it covered school-level ELT in Iraq (primary, intermediate, or preparatory); and/or (3) it reported documentary or empirical evidence relevant to ELT implementation (e.g., class size, lesson time, examination structure). Paywalled items, items without verifiable provenance, and items that were purely opinion without documentary/empirical support were excluded. Background theoretical literature (e.g., curriculum design or ELT methodology) was used to frame the analysis and was cited separately; it was not treated as part of the corpus.

3.3 Data management strategy and retrieval

Documents were retrieved from official portals and credible repositories, including British Council Teaching English, World Bank Documents, UNESCO-IBE, repositories of Iraqi universities, and CORE. For each item, bibliographic information and a persistent identifier (e.g., DOI/URL)

were recorded. English translations of Arabic titles were included in the reference list (e.g., Burhan, 2024). To maintain an audit trail, page-anchored quotations were copied verbatim with page numbers (e.g., Asadi & Raouf, 2024).

Because the research questions are periodization-centered, the analysis was organized by decade (1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, 2010s, 2020s). In each decade band, documents were examined for:

- (a) Method claims (e.g., aural-oral ALM, aural-oral/ALM, aural-visual, communicative, task-based);
- (b) Syllabus type (structural, functional/notional, lexical, or mixed);
- (c) Assessment orientation (including whether speaking/listening are included in high-stakes examinations; and the nature of written items);
- (d) Teacher development (cascade training, guides, activity groups); and
- (e) Contextual constraints (class size, time, resources, shocks).

Decade descriptions were supported, where space allowed, by short page-matched anchors. For example, Amin (2017, p. 579) notes that the books were introduced in schools from 1973 at a rate of one book per year. In the 2023 revision note, English for Iraq is described as having a mixed functional/structural syllabus and being divided into six theme-based sections and two review units (Asadi & Raouf, 2024, p. 1230). These anchors were then interpreted in relation to broader documentary evidence (Burhan, 2024; UNESCO, 2004).

3.5 Coding scheme

A deductive-inductive codebook was used.

Deductive codes (theory- and question-driven): ALM/aural-oral, CLT, TBL, structural syllabus, functional/notional, mixed, assessment washback, teacher development, class size, resources, curriculum-as-textbook.

Inductive codes (derived from Iraqi texts): curriculum–assessment alignment; audio/technology dependency; Arabic/Kurdish scaffolding; cascade sustainability; revision/errata cycles; COVID–19 workarounds.

Coding was conducted at the document–segment level (paragraph/table). Analytic memos recorded how each code manifested in the Iraqi setting (e.g., paired work was proposed in a guide but replaced with exam–drill routines; Taha, 2022).

3.6 Analytic procedures

Analysis was conducted in three cycles:

Documentary pass (within–decade): extraction of method and syllabus indicators and collection of verbatim quotations with page numbers (e.g., NECI aural–oral claims; descriptions of English for Iraq by Asadi & Raouf).

Cross–decade synthesis: identification of dominant methodological signals and key conditions of enactment to track continuities and shifts across decades (e.g., persistent exam washback alongside changes in textbook design and starting grades).

Interpretive integration: linking curricular/material signals with systemic strategies (World Bank, 2024; UNESCO–IBE, 2011) and teacher–reported difficulties (Taha Abdul, 2015; Taha, 2022) to explain recurring mismatches between policy and practice.

Claims of effectiveness were treated cautiously due to the documentary nature of the data; where studies reported perceived impacts or barriers, those claims were attributed to the original authors (Amin, 2017; Taha, 2022).

3.7 Trustworthiness and limitations–in–method.

To promote credibility and confirmability, the study included:

- Triangulation of subjects of the policy, guides, evaluations, scholarly articles as well as Arabic and English as languages (UNESCO, 2004; Burhan, 2024).

- Heavy citation using the page–matched excerpts to enable readers to check the interpretations (Asadi & Raouf, 2024; Alwan, 2004).
- Negative evidence checks, taking note of locations of claims in dispute or thinness (e.g. restricted OA to full NECI teachers guide).

In the original, Arabic–language sources are read and English translations of titles are given in the references. In both the quoting of Arabic texts (e.g. titles of studies), the gloss is translated into English and included in brackets; in case of policy quotes, preferably the official English version of the quotes was used (World Bank, 2024). Any slight stylistic changes in quoted English (e.g. punctuation) have ellipses or brackets around them to maintain meaning.

3.9 Ethics –in–method and positionality.

All the materials were open and referenced; none of personal data were gathered that could be identified and, as such, no new research and human subjects without the institutional ethical approval were to be conducted. Positionality: the analysis aims to balance between federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and wherever possible, use the sources of Iraqi authors, cross–verify the reports of their external partners, to reduce the risk of single–source bias (Altae, 2020; Burhan, 2024; UNESCO, 2004; RTI International, 2013).

4. Historical Overview (by decade)

4.1 1970s: NECI and aural–oral turn Nationalizing ELT.

Curricular shift. During the early 1970s, Iraq switched to a nationally written, structurally ordered program: The New English Course for Iraq (NECI) (Fayadh, 2022; Momen, 2021). Amin (2017) describes NECI as structurally based and accompanied with an Audio–Lingual instructional suggestion; in addition, he claims that since 1973 NECI volumes were being presented in schools at a rate of about one book per year (Amin, 2017). Aural–oral focus is in line with the Audio–Lingual Approach,

which lays more emphasis on dialogue–drill cycles, controlled practice, and accuracy first sequencing (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

System conditions. It is also during the 1970s when there was great state involvement in education; retrospectively, the period has been described as comparatively strong in the capacity of the educational system in Iraq (Velloso de Santisteban, 2005; Alwan, 2004; UNESCO, 2004). These circumstances supported the NECI scale of routines and teacher in–service provision.

Summary. At the end of the decade, the written technique was Audio–Lingual based on a structural syllabus; the institutional ability to execute it, training, supervision and textbook logistics, was relatively great in the area (Amin, 2017).

4.2 1980s: Consolidation amid war

Continuity with strain. National English Curriculum Initiative (NECI) was the most common pedagogical system during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988). In spite of the fact that the methodological signal was still of aural–oral/Audio–Lingual Method (ALM) featuring structural sequencing, the war made teacher training and the availability of materials worse. Less supervision and resources often made classroom practices focus on controlled practice of accuracy, thus conforming to NECI inherent built–in drills (Velloso de Santisteban, 2005; Alwan, 2004).

Assessment and practice. The form–based work was strengthened by high–stakes examinations (Amin, 2017). Teachers would also use chalk–and–talk versions, which still fit the pattern–practice core of ALM, in the absence of audio or visual aids.

Summary. The structural/ALM pedagogy of the 1980s was deeply embedded on the brink of scarcity on resources; the formal curriculum was now effectively reduced to what was possible in the wartime schools (Velloso de Santisteban, 2005).

4.3 1990s: Pedagogic inertia, attrition and sanctions.

System shock. The acute shortages of materials and teachers and the stalling of the textbook and professional development renewal cycle were caused by United Nations sanctions (Velloso de Santisteban, 2005; Alwan, 2004). Although NECI titles continued to be used, copies became worn out and replenished slowly; as a result, teachers were reduced to grammar–translation drills which could be taught with little resources.

Policy frame. The profile of the Iraqi system, as presented in Iraq: World Data on Education (UNESCO–IBE, 2011), highlights the effects of the shocks of the 1990s on quality and equity.

Washback. As listening and speaking were virtually eliminated on high–stakes tests, the time allocated to testing was now devoted to exam–salient grammar and reading activities a pattern that is findable in both traditional washback mechanisms and Iraqi policy restrictions (Alderson & Wall, 1993; Alwan, 2004; Taha Abdul, 2015).

Summary. The ten–year period is defined not so much by a shift in formal method, but by drift in terms of resources: the structural/ALM curriculum continued to be taught on paper, the work of exam accuracy prevailed in classroom instruction.

4.4 2000s: The communicative turn reconstruction and Iraq Opportunities.

New series and earlier start. A political room of the curricular reform was developed through the post–2003 reconstruction period. The Ministry constituted an English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum committee in 2001 to develop the communicatively oriented Rafidain English Course in Iraq, and Book1 was put into service in 2002–2003 (Fayadh, 2022). Iraq Opportunities series were then started to be used around 2010/11, and started being replaced since 2013/14 (Fayadh, 2022; Hanan, 2015). Although the Opportunities have been frequently

explained as communicative and integrated–skills, the close textbook analysis demonstrates that the PPP/grammar–based and teacher–centered pedagogy towards the classroom is a strong underlying philosophy (Kadhim, 2019).

Evaluation signals. A skills integration and graded grammar/lexis are strengths of an open–access account of Iraq Opportunities 3 reports, whereas the content load, culture familiarity, and time are issues (Al–Akraa, 2013; Hanan, 2015).

External partners. International organizations assisted in the reconstruction of sectors, and the domestic policy laid more emphasis on quality and access (UNESCO–IBE, 2011; World Bank, 2021).

Summary. The 2000s decade is characterized by a policy–level change of structural/ALM paradigm to the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) paradigm. Nevertheless, the implementation was still weak, predetermined by the willingness to work with teachers, the size of the classroom and the necessity to assess (Amin, 2017; Fayadh, 2022; Mohammed, 2018).

4.5 2010s: Iraq (federal) and Sunrise (KRI) consolidation through English.

Adoption and method signal. Opportunities was gradually phased out in the federal system in 2013/14 and replaced with the English for Iraq series (Fayadh, 2022; Borg & Capstick, 2024; Krebt, 2018; Majeed & Hussein, 2017; Nafashi et al., 2024). According to a revision note, the series "has a mixed functional/structural syllabus and is divided into six theme–based sections and two review units" (Asadi & Raouf, 2024, p. 1230). This mixed–syllabus design can be interpreted as a compromise between communicative purposes and accuracy–sensitive assessment needs.

Quality assurance and implementation. Iterative QA is evidenced in the same 2024 note, which identifies specific answer–key corrections. For

example, it reports that "on page 107 of the Teacher's Book, an error is identified in the answer key ... the correct answer is the word 'who'" (Asadi & Raouf, 2024, pp. 1232–1233). These details suggest an (albeit uneven) feedback loop between publishers and classrooms.

KRI pathway. The Sunrise course in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) also pursued a comparable communicative direction. Research on Sunrise reports that the curriculum is often referred to by the textbook series itself (Saeed, 2022; Mahmud, 2018; Kawthar, 2016; Momen, 2021), which concisely illustrates the long-term culture of curriculum-as-textbook in Iraq.

Teacher experience. Classroom research indicates that teachers support communicative targets but struggle with large classes, limited time, constrained resources, and exam washback, resulting in hybrid "textbook-CLT" practices that often take the form of teacher-centered accuracy monitoring (Lafta, 2021; Taha, 2022; Taha Abdul, 2015; Mohammed, 2018).

Summary. The integration of CLT-inspired, mixed-syllabus courses is broadly entrenched across the 2010s; however, conditions of enactment (assessment practices, class size, CPD provision) reduce uniform uptake.

4.6 2020s: Re-strategy, resiliency, and refinement.

Policy architecture. The INES 2022–2031 includes targets such as universal completion of primary education by 2025 and intermediate education by 2028 (World Bank, 2024, p. 8).

Equity, crisis, and technology. COVID-19 prompted low-bandwidth responses (TV lessons, messaging applications, paper packs). These measures supported partial continuity and increased basic digital familiarity, though unevenly (World Bank, 2021; ACAPS, 2020). In ELT, simple audio delivery and offline-accessible materials are typically more

scalable than platform-intensive tools (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO IITE, 2020).

Materials revision. English for Iraq editions (e.g., the 2023 3rd Intermediate edition) highlight continuing editorial QA and the incorporation of teacher feedback (Asadi & Raouf, 2024, pp. 1230–1234).

Enduring constraints. Evidence across sources suggests that class size, assessment washback, and resource disparities remain limiting factors for enactment, even when policy documents articulate communicative competence as a goal (Alwan, 2004; RTI International, 2013; Taha Abdul, 2015; Taha, 2022).

Summary. Strategic intentions around quality, completion, and teacher allocation should be coupled with incremental, materials-level improvements. Achieving communicative goals at scale depends on assessment alignment, school-based CPD, and regular resource provision in ordinary classroom environments.

5. Discussion

5.1 Method on paper and method in practice.

Over the past 50 years, Iraq's official ELT programs have shifted from the aural-oral orientation associated with NECI and the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) to communicative, multi-syllabus programs such as Iraq Opportunities, English for Iraq, and Sunrise in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). However, classroom practice is often still form-based and test-oriented, especially in higher grades. This division is less a result of individual teacher inefficiency than a systemic effect of high-stakes tests, large classes, limited teaching time, and recurrent variation in resource availability (Burhan, 2024; UNESCO, 2004; RTI International, 2013; Taha, 2022).

5.2 Assessment as the center of gravity

Teachers in Iraq are repeatedly reported to work in a high-stakes testing environment; the removal of listening and speaking from high-stakes assessment inevitably shifts instructional time toward grammar-translation, reading comprehension, and controlled writing activities (Alwan, 2004; Taha, 2022; RTI International, 2013). This is a typical washback effect: assessment systems predefine curriculum priorities irrespective of textbook rhetoric (Alderson & Wall, 1993). Even communicative series can be readily decontextualized into accuracy-drill sequences when end-of-cycle tests promote discrete grammatical and lexical units (Al-Akrra, 2013; Yasseen & Al-Noori, 2019). Therefore, structural routines associated with NECI have persisted not because new materials were rejected, but because examinations continued to bias instruction toward form over use (Burhan, 2024; UNESCO-IBE, 2011).

5.3 Teacher knowledge, work, and professional learning.

Most open-access Iraqi studies indicate that teachers support communicative goals but struggle to implement them in conventional classes of 35-50 (or more) students, with limited lesson time (Taha, 2022). Cascade training and Teacher Activity Groups (TAGs) can help teachers acquire micro-techniques (e.g., rotating pair work, one-minute oral checks, quick exit tickets). Sustainability depends on enabling conditions such as effective timetabling, local mentoring, and supervisory cultures in which process is valued alongside coverage (Borg & Capstick, 2024). Without such scaffolding, teachers may revert to teacher-centered practices that are easier to manage under high workload pressure (Taha Abdul, 2015).

5.4 Materials and assurance of quality.

Comparisons of Opportunities and English for Iraq suggest integrated-skills or theme-based units with a mixed functional/structural syllabus

(Al-Akraa, 2013; Yasseen & Al-Noori, 2019; Asadi & Raouf, 2024). This mixed format can facilitate communicative work while maintaining an explicit grammar sequence for exam alignment. Editorial QA–evidenced by the 2023 revision note and specific Teacher's Book answer–key corrections (e.g., p. 107)–suggests a feedback mechanism between classrooms and publishers, albeit not fully systematic (Asadi & Raouf, 2024, pp. 1232–1233). More broadly, textbooks may reflect classroom constraints and routines to some degree. Nevertheless, teachers commonly report tensions between content load and instructional time, as well as difficulties using audio in low–technology settings (Al-Akraa, 2013; Burhan, 2024; World Bank, 2020).

5.5 The place of Arabic /Kurdish (L1) in communicative classrooms.

Even though most guidelines recommend reducing L1 use, the research–based observations reveal that in big classes, deliberate bilingual scaffolding can keep the progress and coherence of the conversation intact, whether it is the short task assignment, brief contrastive grammar remarks, or even a quick vocabulary check and then quickly switch to target–language communication (Taha, 2022; Taha Abdul, 2015). This method is in line with contextual CLT, where the goal is to maximize meaningful target–language use in the established constraints as opposed to purifying. With time, the normalized planned L1 intervention (e.g. 30 seconds Arabic/Kurdish briefing) can reduce the off–task talk and consequently enhance the time that the two can put their output to pair–work in English.

5.6 Equity and resources and technology

The crises of the 1990s and later contributed to uneven infrastructure and staffing across the country, and the center–periphery gap persisted (UNESCO, 2004; UNESCO–IBE, 2011; UNICEF, 2023). The COVID–19 crisis spurred the use of low–bandwidth services (TV, WhatsApp,

paper packs), which despite being uneven, introduced some basic digital familiarity (World Bank, 2021). In the case of English language teaching (ELT), the most viable short-term benefits include basic audio delivery (e.g., a speaker and offline tracks), task cards that can be printed, and simple routines of monitoring-less platform-dependent and more likely to scale across schools (World Bank, 2020; UNESCO IITE, 2020).

5.7 Federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region (KRI): divisiveness in convergence.

Although in both settings there is convergence of the two systems to communicative and multi-syllabus courses (English for Iraq; Sunrise), educators in both settings report similar pressures of enactment (Taha Abdul, 2015; Saeed, 2022; Mahmud, 2018; Kawthar, 2016). One aspect of the culture that may be considered salient is the framing around curriculum-as-textbook, in which teachers and other administrators tend to discuss the curriculum using the name of the textbook series (e.g., Sunrise), thus continuing to legitimize the idea that simply replacing the textbook series is the answer to reaching curriculum reform (Qadir, 2023; Momen, 2021). Without assessment and CPD shifts, it is the book changes which cannot produce new classroom routines.

5.8 Towards viable CLT/TBL in classrooms in Iraq.

The synthesis of the documentary record implies four conditions of making the communicative learning functional on a large scale in Iraq:

1. Assessment alignment. Introduce listening/speaking components and adopt analytic rubrics for controlled oral production (e.g., assisted dialogues and short information-gap tasks), so that what 'counts' in high-stakes assessment moves toward communicative language use (World Bank, 2024; Alderson & Wall, 1993).

2. Manageable unit design. Minimize content load, offer time-budgeted cycles of tasks (e.g., 3 -2 -1 speaking tasks; a jigsaw with role cards),

and offer low-tech versions of tasks that require audio (Al-Akraa, 2013; Yasseen & Al-Noori, 2019; World Bank, 2020; UNESCO IITE, 2020).

3. School-based CPD. Institutionalize teacher-written guides/lesson study on pair work management, monitoring and checking for formative feedback, ensure that heads of department have time to coach B & C 2024.

4. Material QA loops. Formalize errata reporting and annual micro rev quicker, exemplified up to 2023 with English for Iraq corrections, Asadi & Raouf.2024, pp.1230-1234.

5.9 Reinterpreting the historical arc

Read through this lens, Iraq's move from NECI (ALM/structural) to CLT/mixed syllabuses is not a simple substitution of one method for another. It is a shift from scripted accuracy routines towards interaction-centered routines that are feasible only when conditions permit. In the 1970s – 1980s, relatively strong institutional capacity supported NECI's routines; in the 1990s, resource collapse shifted practice back towards grammar-translation; in the 2000s – 2010s, communicative courses arrived but collided with legacy exams and large classes; in the 2020s, strategic plans exist but must be converted into assessment pilots, CPD architectures, and QA cycles (Burhan, 2024; UNESCO, 2004; UNESCO-IBE, 2011; World Bank, 2021; World Bank, 2024).

5.10 Discussion of the current evidence and research needs.

Since the available corpus consists mostly of reports and assessment, causal statements about the learning gains should be wary. Among the priority gaps, there are large-scale classroom observation inter-governorate, student view, and assessment reform trial with an analysis of feasibility, reliability, and validity (Richards, 2001; Altae, 2020; World Bank, 2024; RTI International, 2013). Short and open-access design studies – including piloting a five-minute speaking task with marking

based on rubrics in Grade 9 – could provide actionable evidence for policy.

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