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# Afghan EFL Teachers' Perceptions Toward Challenges They Encounter in **Implementing CLT in Their Classes**

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Received: 12-10-2023 Accepted: 15-01-2023 Published: 20-01-2024 This study aimed to identify the challenges that Afghan EFL teachers encounter when implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their classes. The study utilized a descriptive quantitative research design, employing a survey questionnaire. A total of 25 EFL teachers from different public universities of Afghanistan participated in this study. The results revealed that in teacher-related challenges, insufficiency in spoken English, lack of training in CLT, shortage of time for developing communicative materials, and lack of knowledge about the culture of the target language are the primary obstacles to the application of CLT. Additionally, challenges in student-related factors such as low English proficiency, passive learning styles, and lack of motivation were identified as critical difficulties hindering the implementation of CLT in their classes.

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#### 1. Introduction

ver the past six decades, advancements in high technology and modern science have been instrumental in transforming the world into a global village. Simultaneously, globalization policies have facilitated close contact among people from different parts of the world. These two main factors have led to the widespread use of the English language as a communication tool. Presently, English plays a significant role in various domains, including education, technology, science, tourism, politics, economy, and trade. Consequently, in many non-English speaking countries where English is taught as a foreign language, the teaching method has transitioned from traditional approaches such as grammar translation to a communicative-focused teaching method known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The concept of Communicative Language Teaching was first proposed as a teaching approach in England in the 1970s. This approach fundamentally emphasizes communication in the language learning classroom and is considered revolutionary in language teaching and learning. Initially used in English as a Second Language (ESL) methodology, CLT gained extensive acceptance in Western countries. Its appearance in Englishspeaking countries rapidly spread worldwide as a response to outdated teaching methodologies. Furthermore, this methodology has become a primary influence on English language teaching practices in both ESL and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Currently, CLT is implemented in many countries and has shown significant positive results in foreign language learning and teaching. It is considered the most common and extensively implemented teaching method that leads to the expected result of communicating effectively (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, the implementation of CLT in EFL classes has encountered various challenges, as highlighted by Ellis (1996). Similarly, Afghan English language teachers also face numerous obstacles that hinder the implementation of CLT in their English classes. A study by Takal & Ibrahim (2019) emphasized the lack of adequate and limited research on CLT in Afghan public universities. As the researcher investigated the conducted studies regarding CLT in Afghanistan context it shows that there are very limited studies on CLT in Afghan EFL context. This study aims to explore the challenges related to teachers and students in Afghan universities based on the perceptions of Afghan EFL teachers.

## 2. Research Objective

This study is conducted with the following objective:

To explore the perceptions of Afghan EFL teachers toward challenges they are encountered implementing CLT in their classes.

#### 3. Literature Review

While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a methodology emerged long time ago, its implementation represents a relatively novel teaching approach in the

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Afghanistan EFL context. The intricacies of CLT, including its application in EFL classrooms and its focus on specific language features, pose challenges for both teachers and students. This section provides a concise overview of the characteristics of CLT, and the challenges encountered by teachers in its application, drawing on existing studies in the EFL context.

CLT indicates a viewpoint of teaching based on communicative language use and defines it as "an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence and that seeks to make meaningful communication and language use a focus of all classroom activities" (Richards & Schmidt, 2013, p. 90). Furthermore, Sabrina (2020) asserts as it is clear from its name, the Communicative approach looks language learning entirely on employing a variety of circumstances to provide opportunities for learners to communicate effectively. Since, its conceptions reflect a communicative viewpoint of language learning, CLT is perceived an approach not a strategy. Learners in a CLT class find the opportunity to show their qualities and share their feelings and opinions (Tekliuk, 2020).

Similarly, Ho (2020) believes that CLT intends to enhance students' communicative competence in many language skills including listening, speaking, reading, writing, written interactions, and additional features of communicative skill. Students need language rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, cultural awareness, social status, interpersonal skills, consistency, cohesiveness, related knowledge, and meaning beyond the sentences.

Regarding the types of activities that can be utilized in a CLT class, Ho (2020) states that icebreaking, role plays, think-pair-share, interviews, problem solving tasks, group discussion, jigsaws, games, tests, and other popular communicative doings are often used in CLT classrooms. He also adds that reciprocal actions, performance, implications, assignment orientation, and reality are associated with communication activities.

CLT can be implemented in a learner-centered class than in a teacher-centered class. The accountability of a teacher in the classroom is to ease students' interaction by practical learning activities. Students are usually given the opportunity of to be engaged and contribute with each other. Students are usually able to interact with each other, converse and share peer assessments, and help to each other's assignments (Losi & Nasution, 2022).

The CLT approach constantly motivates the teachers and students to search materials for teaching and learning and devices in their own environments, communities and cultures. For illustration, in one of the latest studies Dos Santos (2019) discovered that teachers are able to produce visual-based teaching and learning materials through using students' societies as an authentic source. Some of the breathtaking, authentic and new instructing and learning sources that provide students with the opportunities to interact and communicate about their daily lives can be selected from communities such as cities, halls, school buildings, municipalities, shopping centers, and dorms (Miguel & Santos, 2020).

Many CLT supporters believe that utilizing role-play activities (Tweedie & Johnson, 2018), problem-based learning (da Silva Cintra & Bittencourt, 2015), demonstrations between groups and classmates (Dimond-Bayir, Russell, Blackwell, & Flores, 2017) technologically assisted strategies and visual only teaching strategies can be good learning activities in CLT classrooms.

As a final point, CLT emerged as an alternative to traditional teaching methods and develops learners' communicative competence. It has been theorized by many specialists, such as Richards & Rogers (2001) and the most generally acknowledged CLT theory in use is as follows:

- A combination of linguistic practice, meaning and performance should be insisted.
- Learners should have the chance of being involved in the practical, accurate and functional use of language for meaningful purposes.
- Fluency and accuracy are complementary principles underlying communicative techniques.
- The philosophies of CLT also utilize to reading and writing skills.
- In class teaching and learning, priority should be given to paired or group work.
- Making mistakes in the learning process should be accepted as a natural and common point.
- In evaluation, fluency and accuracy should be considered as the main point.

# 3.1 Previous Studies on the Most Common Challenges of CLT in EFL Context

The literature on the application of CLT in the EFL context suggests that the success of CLT is not confirmed to a great extent by conducted studies. The selection of teaching methods and classroom activities is generally based on teaching and learning goals, available sources, and the proficiency level of learners. However, the implementation of a teaching method in a specific geographical area with particular goals and using it in another area presents obstacles and challenges (Holliday, 1994). This challenge is also applicable to CLT, which was initially provided in Western countries based on the needs of their own culture and society.

Studies conducted in various countries, including Bangladesh (Islam & Bari, 2012), Thailand (Kwon, 2017), Japan (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999) and China (Li, 2004) showed that the cultural discrepancy between CLT and students, grammarfocused evaluations, are social-cultural issues hindering CLT implementation. Additionally, some other researchers presume that the reason why CLT could not be applied in all contexts is that CLT cannot make some of its principles such as sociocultural elements well-matched with definite contexts. One of the controversial socio-cultural principles of CLT is the shortage of differences between the EFL and ESL teachers. Such as, the distinction between the role of teachers and students in eastern and western societies. For instance, Ellis (1996) presumes that the role of instructors varies from the EFL to ESL contexts. The teacher in the EFL classroom is the only source of providing knowledge for the students who do not have the opportunity of learning language outside the classroom. In contrast, the ESL teacher acts simply as a facilitator since the learners could have access to social communications to a great extent. In consequence, learners can learn outside the classroom than inside the classroom. This is a discrepancy that was not considered in CLT implementations. Cultural differences may also negatively influence the application of CLT. For instance, many cultures especially eastern cultures lead the students respect their teachers and do not refuse their opinions even when the teacher is not right. This cultural difference is in contrast with CLT features.

Furthermore, research conducted in Indonesia by Musthafa (2009) identified challenges in the applicability of CLT in the Indonesian context. The study revealed that the use of CLT in Indonesia is not constructive for students, citing challenges such as teachers' lack of confidence in using the target language, large class sizes, and limited time for common communication. Other challenges included a preference for written exams, a lack of authentic sources, and limited opportunities for students to practice English outside of the classroom.

In summary, the challenges of implementing CLT in EFL contexts are multifaceted and can be categorized into four main areas: the teachers, the learners, the education system, and CLT

principles (Li, 1998). These challenges underscore the complexities associated with integrating CLT into diverse EFL contexts.

# 4. Methodology

# 4.1 Research Design

This study was a descriptive quantitative study that aimed to determine the perceptions of Afghan EFL teachers regarding the challenges they face when implementing the CLT approach in their classes. According to Creswell (2017), quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of numerical data using statistically based methods. Additionally, considering the study's objective, a descriptive quantitative survey method was deemed suitable as the research methodology for this investigation.

#### 4.2 Research Instruments

In this study, the questionnaire utilized was adapted from a previous study conducted by Rahimi and Naderi (2014). Their study focused on exploring the challenges of implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach from the perspectives of EFL teachers.

#### 4.3 Participants

The participants were 25 EFL teachers from different public universities in Afghanistan. The participants' teaching experience ranges from 2-20 years. They teach different subjects in English and Literature Departments in public universities. It's important to note that the group of teachers who completed the questionnaire were not randomly selected. However, it was assumed that their experience in teaching English and their participation in methodology trainings made them a representative sample of EFL teachers in similar teaching situations.

# 5. Findings

The study was conducted to assess the perceptions of English teachers regarding the challenges encountered in implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in English classes at Afghan universities. It consisted of two parts: teacher-related difficulties and student-related difficulties, each containing multiple items. The findings of the study were based on the analysis of the teachers' questionnaires, with each part of the data being analyzed separately.

#### Participants' Educational Qualifications

This fugure displays that the majority of participants, 14 (56%) hold a master's degree, while a few of the participants 2 (8%) own Ph.D. degree. Additionally, about 9 (36%) of the participants have bachelors degree. In conclusion most of the participants in this survey have masters degree.

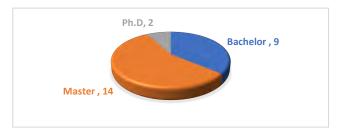


Figure 1. Participants' educational qualifications

#### 5.1 Part One: Teacher-Related Difficulties

The study outlined six significant limitations related to teachers, including: insufficient proficiency in spoken English,

limited knowledge about the accurate practice of language in context, limited chances for teachers to get preparation in CLT, challenges with precise language usage in context, misconceptions about CLT, and limited time for developing teaching materials for communicative classes. These limitations highlight the complexities faced by teachers in implementing the CLT approach.

#### 5.1.1 Deficiency in Spoken English

The collected data demonstrated that all the participants asserted their own defficiency in speaking English as an obstacle while, 10 (40%) of them observed it as a challenge. In the same way, 6 (24%) of the subjects found it a major challenge. Also, 4 (16%) of them thought as a mild challenge imposing them in implementing CLT in their classroom. Only 5 (20%) subjects believed that this was not a challenge at all. By taking into account earlier assertions stating that teachers need fluency in implementing CLT methodology. The existance of this difficulty is considered a massive challenge in the effective use of CLT in Afghanistan.

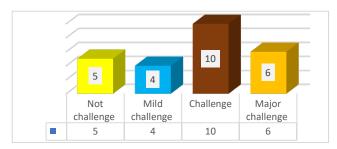


Figure 2. Teacher deficiency in spoken English.

# 5.1.2 Teachers Lack the Information About the Proper Use of Language in Context

The subjects certified that their insufficient skill of utilizing varieties strategies, as well as sociolinguistic features of the language causes challenges to apply CLT in their classes. 14 (56%) of the participants found this a challenge to implement CLT in their classes. 5 (20%) of the subjects thought this a major challenge and 5 (20%) believed it a mild challenge. Only one teacher stated that a teacher deficiency is not a challenge at all.



Figure 3: Teachers lack of information regarding the proper usage of language in context

## 5.1.3 Lack of Training in CLT

There are not much more differences in subjects' answers to the question about the opportunities they had in CLT. Ten of the participants 10 (40%) believed it was a challenge; ten (40%) of the teachers considered it a mild challenge while 4 (16%) found it a major challenge. In contrast, a single 1 (4%) participant said that receiving training in CLT was not a challenge at all.

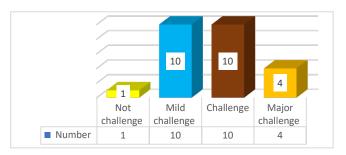


Figure 4. Shortage of training in CLT

# 5.1.4 Lack of Sufficient Time for Providing Communicative Materials

As the finding showed, the participants believed that the lack of sufficient time for providing resources for communicative classes is another constraint to use CLT. Nine of them reported it a challenge, seven of them found it a challenge and six of them believed it a major challenge to implement CLT in their classes. In contrast, only three of them did not consider it as a challenge.

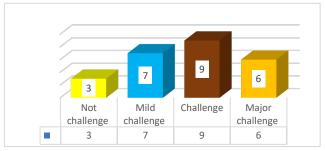


Figure 5. Teachers have insufficient time to provide communicative materials.

## 5.1.5 Misconceptions About CLT

The findings discovered that there are some uncertainties about the methodology of CLT. Plenty of subjects seemed not to be well aware of the general principle of CLT.

Nine of them found it a challenge, seven of them supposed it mild challenge and seven of them believed it a major constraint to implement CLT successfully in English classes. Only three of them do not consider it a challenge.



Figure 6. Misconceptions about CLT

# 5.1.6 Teachers Lack Knowledge About Target Language (English) Culture

The survey participants testified that the lack of awareness about the culture and values of the target language is another barrier to implementing CLT in their classes. Nine of the respondents believed it a major challenge, eight of them found it a mild challenge and, seven of them considered it a major

challenge. In contrast, a subject assumed that this was not a challenge at all.



Figure 7. Teacher lack of knowledge about the target language culture

#### 5.2 Challenges Related to Student

The second significant type of obstacle was related to the students. These obstacles consist of students low English proficiency level, their inactive learning style, their reluctance to join in communicative classroom activities and their lack of motivation for enhancing communicative skills.

# 5.2.1 Low English Proficiency

The findings revealed that the low English proficiency level of the students is the constraints for the lecturers implementing CLT in English classrooms. Nine of the participants certified that the learners' low English proficiency was a major challenge. Nine participants found it a challenge. Only two of the subjects believed that the low English proficiency level of the students was not a challenge to apply CLT in their English classes.



Figure 8. Student low English proficiency

#### 5.2.2 Students Inactive Style of Learning

The survey data demonstrated that students' passive style of learning was considered as a serious problem that prevented the teachers from using CLT in their English classes. Nine of the teachers supposed it a major change, nine teachers found it a challenge and five of them indicates it as a mild challenge. Only two of the subjects did not consider learners' passive style as a challenge.

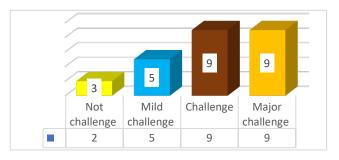


Figure 9. Students' inactive style of learning

#### 5.2.3 Reluctance to Take Part in Communicative Activities

According to the findings of the study students' resistance to taking part in communicative class activities was another major constraint to using CLT in English classes in Afghanistan. Majority of the subjects reported that their students are not interested to be involved in class activities which prevented the teachers from implementing CLT in their classes. Only one participant stated that his students did not resist participating in communicative activities.



Figure 10. Students' reluctance to be involved in communicative class activities.

## 5.2.4 Demotivation for Developing Communicative Skills

The shortage of students' motivation for enhancing communicative skills was also reported as a significant obstacle to implementing CLT in their classes. Totally, twenty-one teachers labeled this point the major, challenge, mild challenge obstacle. In contrast, four of them believed it was not a challenge to use CLT practices in their classes.



Figure 11. Lack of motivation of the students to enhance their communicative competence.

#### 6. Discussion

The challenges and restrictions that prevent Afghan EFL teachers from implementing CLT in their classes are divided into two main categories: teacher-related and students-related problems.

First, most Afghan English teachers' proficiency is unsatisfactory, and consequently, they find it difficult to lead their classes in English. Furthermore, they do not have sufficient knowledge of using appropriate language in context because of their shortage of sociolinguistic and strategic skills in English. Moreover, the majority of Afghan English teachers do not have enough knowledge of CLT and its principles. Another important point that prevents Afghan EFL teachers from applying CLT in their classes is the lack of time to develop sources for communicative activities. About most participants found it to be a significant challenge to use CLT in their classes. Likewise, they actually do not know how to put into practice the principles of CLT. Since they have not gotten enough training opportunities. Lastly, as the principles of CLT require most of teaching and learning materials to be selected from real sources, including societies, cultural issues, since the Afghan EFL teachers lack knowledge about the culture of the target language (English), in some cases they feel difficulty in implementing activities that

enhance students' communicative competence. When the results of the study regarding the teacher-related challenges in terms teacher's English language proficiency, teachers' knowledge about the use of CLT and their limited access to the target language culture and limited time to develop materials for CLT were compared with findings from previous studies, close similarities were observed. Chang & Suparmi (2020) reported the mentioned challenges in their findings about teachers' related challenges for implementing CLT in English classes. A similar study was conducted by Ozsevik (2010), who investigated the Turkish EFL teachers' perception about the constraints hindering them from utilizing CLT in their classes, the reported results showed that they had almost the same difficulties as Afghan EFL teachers. The only difference was that Turkish EFL teachers had sufficient knowledge of the CLT principles. Another study conducted by Takal & Ibrahim (2019) to identify the challenges observed by Afghan EFL teachers' in implementing CLT showed that studentand system related challenges are higher compared to teacher related changes. Their study found that the grammar-based examination, large classes and students' low proficiency in English are the constraints that prevent teachers from implementing CLT in their classes.

students-related challenges Regarding the implementing CLT, the first constraint is students' low English proficiency level. It causes some more challenges for the teachers such as communicating with students about what they are expected to do in the class. In this case, students cannot effectively communicate with each other. Another challenge is the students' passive style of learning. They mostly prefer to use their traditional learning styles. This hinders the use of CLT in their classes. Students' reluctance to participate in class activities is another reported constraint that makes it hard to apply CLT. There are other contributing causes to this challenge. The last and most significant point is students' lack of motivation to enhance their communicative competence. This can be due to the paperbased and grammar-based examinations, students prefer to develop language structure over other language skills. Pertaining on the students-related challenges hindering the implementation of CLT, many studies were conducted. A similar study was conducted by Ozsevik (2010) and the results showed that students' low English proficiency, passive style of learning, reluctance to participate in communicative classroom activities and lack of motivation to enhance their communicative competence are the main challenges of applying CLT, his study findings are similar to those of this study. Another study carried out by Jafari, Shokrpour & Guetterman (2015) in Iran found the educational system to be main constraint utilizing CLT in their classes. in a similar study conducted by Alakrash (2021) to explore the perceptions of Syrian schools' English teachers toward emerging challenges, they found students-related challenges the main part of constraints including low proficiency, passive learning style, and lack of motivation.

# 7. Conclusion and Implications

The current investigation looked at the challenges and constraints that Afghan EFL teachers faced while applying CLT in their teaching process. These obstacles are examined from two perspectives, including teacher and student-related challenges. Initially, the main causes of preventing the CLT approach are teachers lack of sufficient competence in spoken English, lack of knowledge and training in CLT principles, sufficient time to devise communicative teaching materials, and unfamiliarity about the culture of the target language.

The main implication of the study for existing challenges related to teachers and students is providing training programs to improve their own communicative competence. These types of training can be held in summer and winter vocations and last from a few weeks to one year. As a result, the teachers will not only learn to improve their own speaking ability, but also learn the principles of teaching communicatively. The teacher will also acquire the skill of pedagogical methods that can help them deal with learners' difficulties in the classroom, for instance, how to deal with teaching communicatively, how to motivate students to take part in communicative activities, familiarizing with target language culture and develop authentic materials for CLT activities.

Another significant finding of the study is that Afghan EFL teachers do not have enough time for developing communicative materials. The second implication of the study is that the teachers' heavy workload should be decreased and their work conditions should be improved.

With regard to the challenges related to the students, the study implies another investigation should be carried out to find their difficulties in application of CLT based on their own perceptions. As a result of a review of conducted studies in EFL contexts, the researcher suggests the students should practice constantly to improve their communicative competence. To overcome the challenges, they may face during practicing, they can work in pairs and small groups to practice conversation skills.

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