Attitudes of EFL learners towards communicative language teaching

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the attitudes of EFL students towards CLT in an Afghan EFL setting. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as a responsive teaching approach to the needs of learners, has been extensively recognized as a favorable approach for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and learners around the world. It also attempts to determine the effects of CLT activities on their motivation and CLT challenges based on their demographic profile. The data were collected from 201 English major undergraduate students from the Faculty of Language and Literature at Takhar University purposefully through a questionnaire that consists of 30 items. For answering the research questions, descriptive statistics, sample T-test, and a one-way ANOVA test were employed. The findings revealed that Afghan EFL students have positive attitudes towards CLT approach. The study also showed that the attitude of the students towards CLT is positive in terms of their gender. Moreover, there is no statistically significant difference among the group factors (age, first language, and English learning experience) of the participants.

Keywords: *Afghan, Afghanistan, Approach, CLT, Communicative language teaching, EFL, GTM, Learners, Motivation, Takhar.*

Highlights of this paper

- Dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods (e.g., Grammar-Translation Method) is growing among EFL teachers.
- Positive and negative attitudes were identified in aspects of CLT, such as challenges, group work activities, and low English proficiency.
- There are no significant differences in attitudes based on gender, age, class level, first language, or English learning Experience.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many people around the world, both teachers and learners, favor Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for its focus on real-world communication and learner needs. This approach aligns well with goals of improving communicative competence, which scholars define as the ability to use a language, including foreign languages, both accurately and in a way that suits different situations (Akramy, Noori, Orfan, & Hashemi, 2022; Ndulila & Msuya, 2017; Sherwani & Kilic, 2017; Tootkaboni, 2019; Wong & Barrea-Marlys, 2012).Moreover, language users believed that CLT enabled them to learn English skills and functions in a more systematic way. Seeking a teaching approach that is more appropriate and learner-centered to communicative aims is CLT. To add more, this teaching approach also extracts meaningful engagement from EFL learners to convey meaning more accurately and properly (Akramy, 2021). EFL teachers' dissatisfaction with the previously held approaches to language teaching is decreasing dramatically, e.g., Grammar-Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method, and Direct Method (Akramy, Habibzada, & Hashemi, 2022).

While CLT is popular, implementing it effectively can be tricky. One hurdle is the gap between teachers' understanding of CLT principles and their ability to put them into practice. Teachers might be hesitant to fully embrace CLT's "meaning-based" approach, leading to poorly designed communicative programs (Wajid & Saleem, 2017). Ju (2013)further highlights a disconnect between teachers' self-perceived methods and how students actually experience learning, adding another layer of complexity.

English has been a major subject in Afghan schools and universities for years. It's taught as a foreign language, starting in primary grades and extending to higher education, where it's mandatory for all majors (Orfan, 2020; Orfan, Noori, Hashemi, & Akramy, 2021). The demand for English proficiency has further fueled the growth of private language centers across the country since 2001, catering to learners of all ages (Akramy, et al., 2022).

Despite numerous studies on student attitudes towards CLT elsewhere, research in Afghanistan has solely focused on lecturers' perceptions and student challenges (Noori, 2018; Takal, Ibrahim, & Jamal, 2021). This presents a significant gap, considering the widespread presence of English-language education in Afghanistan through universities and language centers. The rising demand for English further underscores the need to understand Afghan EFL learners' perspectives on CLT.The language centers here in Afghanistan utilize different English textbooks, particularly their own developed English textbooks, which lack the requirements necessary for developing English textbooks. Individuals who develop textbooks lack expertise in learning theories and teaching methods (Akramy, et al., 2022). Although the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) recommended Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to all universities where English is taught as a foreign language in English departments, many Afghan EFL teachers cannot implement or do not know how to apply CLT in their classrooms. It might also be due to some particular challenges that Afghan EFL teachers face while teaching in their classrooms. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical research investigating the situations in Afghan educational contexts (Daqiq & Hashemİ, 2021; Hashemi & Na, 2020). To fill the gap in the literature, this current study aims to investigate attitudes of Afghan EFL students, in particular Takhar University's students, towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of implementation of CLT in an EFL setting and the effects of CLT activities on their motivation. It

also attempts to determine the respondents' perceptions of CLT challenges in Afghan EFL settings based on their participation in language classrooms, i.e., group work activities, low English proficiency, and English learning experience. Furthermore, this study helps students and teachers gain an understanding of teaching and learning English through the application of CLT in their own teaching contexts in Afghanistan. It also gives ideas for teaching approaches based on a number of variables, such asgroup work activities, low English proficiency, and English learning experience of the students.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is a multi-perspectival approach that builds on a couple of disciplines, such as linguistics, psychology, sociology, and education. The focus of this approach is predominantly on performing and conducting methodologies which can widely increase the learners' functional language ability through an authentic communicative approach (Asassfeh, Khwaileh, Al-Shaboul, & Alshboul, 2012). In addition, CLT is known as an approach that supports a level of consistency in the theoretical framework to widen individual interpretation and variation. It is not a method to provide the chance of designing and executing a particular program (Sherwani & Kilic, 2017). In this approach, Albahri, Yang, and Moustakim (2018) promote real and authentic communication, and meaningful interactions, discussion, and pair/group work are to be considered. Thus, it may sometimes come into conflict with particular elements of EFL cultural practice where a formal relationship between both students and teacher is one-way dominant.

In addition, Albahri et al. (2018) stated that CLT is recognized as an approach that confesses that the core role and function used in language learning is communication. That is, the main purpose of this approach is to facilitate the development of learners' communicative competence in a language learning program. Richards (2006) believed that CLT is a functional view of a language to keep the language as a vehicle for the expression of language items and the purposeful meaning of the target issue. It clearly illustrates that instead of focusing on some grammatical structures, it can show the learner a way of concentrating on the communicative dimension. Albahri et al. (2018) reported that CLT was first introduced during the 1970s and later replaced with other traditional methods of language teaching. Traditional methods focused more on the centrality of grammar, but they did not have the aspect of communication in which students could freely communicate and express themselves with each other. Therefore, the prime goal of CLT in a language classroom is to produce students successfully rather than being careful about their input. As Tootaboni and Khatib (2017) stated, CLT is considered an important and leaner-centered approach because it seems ironic to ignore learners' beliefs and attitudes towards its principles. It means the success of students is clearly seen in the attitudes they show towards CLT.

In conclusion, various descriptions regarding CLT have been stated by a large number of authors around the world to introduce a specific and suitable approach that can be tailor-made for foreign language teachers and students. Connecting this to the Afghan context, numerous problems and challenges exist while teaching English to Afghan learners. For instance, CLT is a new approach for Afghan EFL teachers, and they do not have a clear picture of what CLT is and how it is applied in the Afghan teaching context. They are not also familiar with the premise and principles of CLT while planning their course materials. They do not know how to implement some of the CLT principles in their teaching context. For further clarification, while teaching grammar, teachers usually, Akramy, et al. (2022) teach their students deductively (focusing on structures). Instead of getting their students involved in classroom activities, they themselves give lectures, which are no longer useful and helpful without any relevant and practical activities. Instead of being ready to improve their fluency, they are still trying to enhance

their accuracy. Therefore, there are a lot of problems to get fixed in order to have a comfortable approach to learning English. Moreover, CLT is a great response to all the unanswered questions of teachers and learners in their language classrooms because, throughout this teaching approach, the learners not only learn the language properly, but they also get familiar with other skills that are indispensable to humans and educational communities. That is, they know how to communicate with each other, have confidence, and many other things in order to be successful both in educational and life careers.

2.2. Students' Attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching

Ahmad and Rao (2013) stated that Turkish university students are very interested in Communicative Language Teaching. The study also showed that students' preferences for CLT and their delight in it improved their potential in some activities conducted in language classrooms, such as whole-class discussion, pair work, and group work. Similarly, students held positive attitudes towards CLT in Taiwan. Furthermore, the learners reported that CLT is a helpful approach that helped them enhance their communicative competence for language acquisition through a wide range of classroom activities (Albahri et al., 2018). Another study was carried out in Oman by Kalbani, Solabarrieta, and Touq (2018), who investigated the effects of CLT on Omani students in a private university. The results of the study revealed that students expressed their positive preferences for CLT. They further confessed that CLT helps them speak English after a short period of time. They also reported that their teacher was acting like a facilitator and gave chances to everybody in the class to take part in the lesson, activities, and any other presentation sessions. The study showed that students were happy with their teacher because their teacher would not correct them while the students were speaking or doing a particular activity in the class. The teacher usually reminds them of their errors at the end of the lesson in the error correction stage.

In addition, Albahri et al. (2018) stated that the main reason behind the low achievement of Saudi learners in English is applying some traditional teaching methods, such as the grammar translation method and the Audio-lingual method, in the absence of CLT in their educational contexts. They also said that CLT gives the learners a kind of consideration when using a foreign language to communicate. Saudi learners stated that after the implementation of CLT in their classrooms, they witnessed a revolution in the language learning focus to learn a couple of skills while being coached and instructed through the application of CLT. According to Matsuura (as cited in Asassfeh et al. (2012)), Japanese students intend to consider speaking, grammar, listening, cultural differences, and reading important for learning English communicatively. The majority of students believe that it is necessary to respond to each other and interact with their teachers. They have more preferences for learning English through communication that can only be possible through the use of CLT. Tootkaboni (2019) asserted that EFL learners in Iran are positively interested in English learning, which is based on communication. The EFL learners in Iran also reported that they learn English better with CLT than traditional methods. It means that through CLT, they learn English language in order to communicate and interact with others in a positive manner. The traditional methods will get them familiar with structures, forms, and memorization systems that are no longer useful for them.

Another study was conducted in Turkey, and the students showed more favorable attitudes towards CLT and got convinced that CLT is the most recent language teaching approach, which has a great deal to offer English language teaching (Ozsevik, 2010). That is, students believe that CLT is a helpful and useful approach to be implemented in their classrooms because they need to improve their English sufficiently, and based on the students' perceptions, CLT is the only approach they can use to access other important English opportunities. Regarding this issue, it has beenstated that when teachers applied CLT in their classrooms in Pakistan, they found that CLT enhanced the learners' confidence and gave a sense of satisfaction to the teacher as well. They also reported that

CLT is better than any other traditional method because they can do different things in CLT, but when they switch the approach and come to traditional methods in their classes, their students get bored. The reason is that there has been no positive change in classroom activities, and no creative ideas have emerged in classroom seating arrangements. Therefore, they welcomed CLT in their classrooms in order to have a productive language learning process.

Furthermore, in Thailand, CLT was an appropriate teaching approach in Thai context. Thai students have had the desire to feel some changes in their learning styles to learn a language fundamentally and properly. As it is tried and applied several times in the class, most of the students have positive attitudes towards CLT. According to Rao (2002), learners' beliefs and perceptions towards a specific method of teaching are crucially important because they may have a profound influence on learning behavior and learning outcomes. Therefore, some activities like pair/group works, whole-class discussion, and games were conducted by the teachers of Chinese university; the learners were more active in these activities than in some other activities done through grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods.

In opposition to the above ideas, Rao (2002) stated that most EFL Chinese undergraduates' perceptions are different towards the CLT approach because of some activities like drills and the teacher's direct explanation of grammatical rules done in the class. The learners show their interest in them and say that they can learn the language this way better than imposing any other approach that is no longer useful. Based on their perceptions, they are delighted to have their teacher's authority and direct explanation of grammatical rules in their classrooms. Irrespective of positive attitudes, Asassfeh et al. (2012) asserted that there is still some discrepancy between students' learning preferences and their actual instructional practice. When CLT was applied for the first time in language classrooms, they could not get familiar with it easily. They would rely on what it was before. Based on their expressions about the way of teaching, they said that they were interested in form-focus language teaching rather than meaning-focus language teaching. That is, learners learn a language by focusing more on structures, forms, and grammar patterns. The language of communication is rarely felt in their language classroom.

Besides the effectiveness of the CLT in some contexts, the majority of Afghan EFL teachers and learners face problems while applying Communicative Language Teaching approach in their classrooms. For example, a study conducted by Noori (2018) studied the effects of CLT from EFL teachers' perspectives. The study pointed out that CLT approach requires more time to design and prepare materials for the learners. The participants of the study also stated that if they plan to prepare handouts for students, they sometimes have no electricity to print them out and give them to the learners. Moreover, the study showed that learners are not ready to welcome CLT to their classes. They preferred the traditional teaching methods like Grammar-Translation Methods (GTM), which do not help them learn a foreign language communicatively. Another problem is that teachers still lack knowledge when they want to apply CLT in their language classrooms. That is, they do not know what the purpose of CLT is or what it wants the learners to know. The only thing they know is that CLT focuses on communication, but teachers are not capable of preparing materials for their students (Akramy, 2021; Orfan et al., 2021).

2.3. The Effects of CLT Activities on Students' Motivation

Research by Ochoa, Cabrera, Quiñónez, Castillo, and González (2016) highlights the crucial role of motivation in language learning. They view it as a goal-oriented force characterized by four key aspects: setting clear goals, exhibiting positive behaviors, desiring to achieve those goals, and maintaining positive attitudes towards learning activities. Similarly, Harmer (2001) defines motivation as the internal drive that propels us towards desired outcomes. In essence, motivation serves as a foundational element for success in most learning domains, including

language acquisition. Without it, learners lack the necessary drive to invest effort in mastering a specific language within a given context (Akramy, et al., 2022).

According to Sreehari (2012), a wide variety of activities (e.g., role plays, interviews, discussions, information gap activities, language games, language learning simulations, problem solving tasks, quizzes, and surveys) are used in language classroom because all the above-mentioned activities have aspects of communication and raise the motivation of students in an EFL context while they are paying close attention to learning languages. Related to the point, Wajid and Saleem (2017) acknowledged that when learners are actively involved in the learning process through making positive changes in teaching practices, the students will surely show their interest and get their motivation through participation in different activities. The more they are involved in communicative activities, the more capable they can become in their educational careers (Hashemi & Na, 2020). Larseen-Freeman (2000) asserted that with more changes in a language setting in terms of activities, language learning environment, and reducing 'Teacher-Talking Time', the learners can properly show their interest in learning and they can get motivated to eagerly participate in classroom activities and answer what is to be expected.

In addition, Ozsevik (2010) stated that to motivate the students towards the language learning process, the teacher may have to create a communicative-based learning environment. That is, the teacher brings positive changes to classroom practices, bringing supplementary materials if possible, and the learners can easily be in touch with classroom activities by showing their motivation. Ahmad and Rao (2013) reported that using song activities in language classrooms is also helpful and useful for increasing students' motivation. Communicative exercises include exercises characterized by student-to-student interaction with little influence from the teacher in the class; activities that are communicative-based are mostly related to songs, interviews, whole-class discussions are helpful as well. They will improve the students' extrinsic motivation, and the language learning process can go smoothly and successfully.

Another study was carried out by Rasheed (2011), who investigated the effectiveness and enhancements of CLT in Bangladesh. He found in his study that to increase the students' motivation, it is important to have the parents' involvement in their learning process. That is, while teaching the students in language classroom where the principles of CLT are applied, the parents may have to be invited to the class and watch their children. It not only improves students' motivation, but it also make them feel like they are part of the learning. Furthermore, Chen (2018) stated that students' motivation in a language classroom can be improved through collaborative learning. For example, the teacher can apply a wide range of activities (i.e., problem-solving activities, group discussion, games, and group work activities) to enhance the motivation of students in learning. Similarly, the students' motivation and their autonomy can be increased by bringing some real objects (realia) to the language classroom. The more reflective classroom a teacher creates, the more effective and capable students will be delivered to the community (Koosha & Yakhabi, 2013).

2.4. Importance of Study

The current research study provides valuable insights into how Afghan EFL learners perceive and respond to CLT. This information is crucial for designing and implementing CLT programs that are effective and engaging for them. By understanding students' preferences and challenges, educators can tailor their teaching methods to better address the specific needs of their learners, maximizing their learning outcomes. The research helps us understand how cultural factors may influence Afghan learners' attitudes towards CLT. This is important because CLT can be perceived as a Western approach to language teaching, and it may not be readily accepted in all cultures. The research allows for cultural sensitivity and adaptation of CLT to fit the specific Afghan context, ensuring its

effectiveness and encouraging better student engagement. Positive attitudes towards CLT have been shown to be linked to improved language learning outcomes. Furthermore, this research contributes to improving educational outcomes for Afghan EFL learners by identifying factors that contribute to their success and creating a more favorable learning environment. It also provides valuable evidence for policymakers and educators to consider when developing language education policies and practices. The findings extracted from this study can inform the development of resources and training programs to support teachers in implementing CLT effectively in the Afghan context.

2.5. Purpose of the Study

The study aims to investigate the attitudes of Afghan EFL learners towards CLT in terms of its implementation in an Afghan EFL setting and the effects of CLT activities on their motivation. Furthermore, the attempts to determine the participants' attitudes towards CLT challenges in an Afghan EFL setting and their demographics, i.e., gender, age, first language, and learning experience. The study also makes efforts to provide answers to the following questions:

(1) What are the attitudes of Afghan students towards Communicative Language Teaching in Afghan EFL classrooms?

(2) What challenges do Afghan students face while learning English through the implementation of CLT in their classrooms?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In this study, two types of statistics (i.e., descriptive and inferential statistics) were employed to analyze the data. As a measuring instrument, a questionnaire consisting of 30 items aimed to explore the attitudes of Afghan EFL learners towards Communicative Language Teaching was utilized in the study.

3.2. Participants

The study recruited 201 participants, including 69 females who were majoring in English at the Faculty of Language and Literature of Takhar University. The researchers purposefully selected the participants from four classes: freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior. (67.7%) of the participants' ages ranged from 21 to 25 years, while (32.3%) of them had 15 to 20 years. The respondents' first languages are (Dari, Pashto, and Uzbek). To know more about them, Table 1 shows that the majority of the participants were Dari speakers (62.7%). The majority of the participants who were recruited for this study had English learning experience as well.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards CLT by first language.

First language		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
	Dari	126	62.7	62.7
	Pashto	25	12.4	12.4
Valid	Uzbek	43	21.4	21.4
	Other	7	3.5	3.5
	Total	201	100.0	100.0

3.3. Data Collection Instrument

The researchers prepared a questionnaire after they reviewed a rich body of literature. The questionnaire items were adapted from a wide range of studies conducted by Wong and Barrea-Marlys (2012);Ozsevik (2010) and

Sherwani and Kilic (2017). The questionnaire items were set in three main sections. The first part of the questionnaire inquired about the participants' demographics. The second part, containing 15 items, attempted to determine the attitudes of Afghan EFL learners towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) while the last part sought the perceptions of students they have about challenges in CLT (i.e., group activities, low English proficiency, and participation of the participants in language classroom activities). The questionnaire was expected to ask the participants to indicate to what extent they agreed or disagreed on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= undecided, 4=agree, and 5= strongly agree).

3.4. Validity

For the validity of the questionnaire, it was given to four of our colleagues in the English Department of Takahr University for revision and improvement. After the researchers received their feedback concerning the questionnaire, problematic items were identified and edited (Daqiq & Akramy, 2023).

3.5. Reliability

This study conduct a pilot test with 15 randomly chosen students from Takhar University's English Department in recognition of the crucial role that question wording plays in successful research, as Cohen, Menion, and Morrison (2000) stressed. These participants responded to 30 questionnaire items on a 5-point Likert scale. Subsequently, the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to analyze the questionnaire items. The analysis revealed a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.853, indicating strong internal consistency and confirming that the questionnaire items were appropriate for the main study.

3.6. Data Collection Procedure

The researchers gathered data from 201 students from the English Department, Language, and Literature Faculty at Takhar University. The data collection procedure was arranged in 12 weeks (three months) in coordination with the participants after the researchers received their confirmation through signing a consent letter. Moreover, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and its scope to the participants. The participants were assured that there were no true or false responses while participating in the study. They were asked to read the questionnaire items carefully and select an answer for each item that was appropriate to them. It took only 10 minutes to complete and fill out the questionnaire.

3.7. Data Analysis

The researchers analyzed the data collected from participants through SPSS version 26.0. The frequency, the mean, and the standard deviation of the data were investigated through descriptive statistics. Moreover, the independent sample T-test and a one-way ANOVA test were also conducted to determine the differences between groups of participants in terms of their demographic profile (i.e., gender, age, and learning experience) in the study.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Students' Attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching

4.1.1. Effects of CLT Activities on Students' Motivation and Using Group Work Activities

(Table 2) shows that the majority of the participants (70%) agreed with the seven statements provided (1 – 7) that CLT approach, when applied in the language classroom, enhances their motivation. They believe they can learn English while they help, interact, and cooperate with other partners in the class. Furthermore, the CLT approach as

an effective teaching approach improves the confidence of students because they have a wide range of possibilities and opportunities while being coached by their teachers. (8-18) statements report that using group work activities was also emphasized by (80%) of the participants. They think that their teacher gives them more opportunities to learn language through a wide range of different activities (i.e., group work, pair work, discussion, and role plays) in order to improve their language proficiency. Additionally, the table reveals that there are a large number of students (35%) who disagree with the statements. They believe that CLT approach does not improve their motivation when it is applied by the EFL instructors. Finally, the table concludes that the majority of the participants feel comfortable and welcome more different types of classroom activities, e.g., group work activities to improve their motivation through the use and application of CLT in their language classrooms.

Table 2. Effects of CLT activities on students' motivation and using group activities.

No	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	%
1	The lessons motivate the students to keep learning English.	6%	10.9%	2.1%	44.2%	36.8%	100%
2	Students' security is enhanced by cooperative interaction.	3%	27.9%	0%	56.7%	12.4%	100%
3	Teacher supports the students when they are in a communication troubles.	1%	17.2%	3.2%	48.3%	30.3%	100%
4	Students enjoy communicating in English with their partners.	6.5%	10%	1.3%	45.5%	36.7%	100%
5	Students are less confident and less prepared for CLT.	6.5%	36.8%	1%	38.3%	17.4%	100%
6	Students are not encouraged when they are in the class.	11.4%	37.8%	2.2%	44.3%	4.3%	100%
7	Students interact with one another in the class.	3%	19.4%	1%	62.2%	14.4%	100%
8	Teacher helps students to take part in group work activities.	4%	22%	1%	43%	30%	100%
9	Teacher gives students more opportunities to express their individuality.	8.5%	20.9%	0%	52.7%	17.9%	100%
10	Pair and group work activities help to provide more chances for developing useful and helpful interaction among students.	6%	6.3%	1.2%	42.8%	43.8%	100%
11	Pair and group work activities waste the teachers' and students' time.	27.4%	38.3%	3.8%	21.5%	9.0%	100%
12	Pair and group-work activities help students to focus purposefully on understanding language skills.	2%	7.5%	0 %	58.2%	32.3%	100%
13	Teacher gives students more opportunities to express their individuality.	8.5%	20.9%	0%	52.7%	17.9%	100%
14	Teacher uses more group-work activities in the class.	7.5%	15.9%	0%	50.2%	26.4%	100%
15	Activities are often carried out by students in small groups.	1%	21.4%	4.5%	60.2%	12.9%	100%
16	Students help each other when they participate in activities.	4%	13.9%	2.8%	48.3%	31%	100%
17	Teacher uses more group-work activities in the class.	7.5%	15.9%	4.2%	46%	26.4%	100%
18	Students use English through communicative activities such as game and role plays.	4.5%	15.9%	5%	55.7%	18.9%	100%

Note: SD = Strongly disagree, D = Disagree, U = Undecided, A = Agree, SA = Strongly agree.

4.1.2. CLT Challenges and low English Proficiency

More than 60% of the participants concur that they face more difficulties while their teechers use and apply CLT. They believe that although CLT is used in the classes, many things are not observed based on the CLT premises and principles. For example, the progressive and final achievement tests are not set based on the CLT principles. The tests usually ask them about the forms and grammar structures. In addition, statements (25-30) in (Table 3) indicate that the majority of the participants (80%) have agreed that they feel weak while dealing with the principles and premises of the CLT approach. Furthermore, the table shows the teachers do not provide authentic materials that respond to the learners' needs today. Many activities are designed and created, but they cannot be conducted in a real-life setting to give students a real-world picture. The table further highlights that many participants have disagreed with the following six statements: That is, the participants do not believe they have challenges while CLT is being used in the class. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants see CLT approach as a big challenge when it is applied. The students also face difficulties digesting the activities and learning the language through the principles of CLT.

Table 3. The respondents' attitudes of CLT challenges and their low english proficiency (%).

No	Statements	SD	D	U	A	SA	%
19	The exams are usually designed based on the traditional methods' principles.	8.5%	41.3%	1.3%	37.3%	11.6%	100%
20	The language classrooms are much smaller with a big number of students.	11.9%	31.7%	3.1%	41.3%	11.9%	100%
21	There are not enough authentic teaching materials to use in the class.	8.5%	26.9%	0%	52.2%	12.4%	100%
22	Students resist in active participation.	31%	30.3%	2.3%	29.9%	6.5%	100%
23	Teacher does not gives the students chance of opening their mouth to say something in English.	20.4%	39.1%	3.7%	28.4%	8.5%	100%
24	The teacher's and students' focus is on grammar rules not communication.	10%	37.8%	2.3%	35%	14.9%	100%
25	Students have low-level English proficiency in the class.	15.9%	24%	4.4%	44.3%	11.4%	100%
26	Learning English through communication is important for students not the grammar only.	5%	17.4%	0%	44.8%	32.8%	100%
27	Everything is mostly done with communicative intent.	5%	15.5%	7.6%	53.7%	18.4%	100%
28	There is some lack of sufficient spoken English competence in teachers.	10.9%	41.7%	3.1%	38.3%	6%	100%
29	Teacher has little time to prepare communicative materials	9.5%	34.3%	0%	47.8%	8.5%	100%
30	The students do not often practice English in their real life situation.	4%	14.9%	7.9%	44%	29.2%	100%

4.2. Attitudes and Demographic Profile of the Participants

The researcher attempts to describe the demographic factors that affect the participants' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching. The factors are, i.e., gender, age, first language, and their English learning experience.

4.2.1. Participants' Gender

To understand the influence of gender on participants' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its implementation in classrooms, descriptive statistics were employed. Examining Table 4, we see that female participants held a slightly more positive attitude towards CLT, with an average score of 3.44 (with a standard deviation of 0.45) compared to the male participants' average of 3.41 (with a standard deviation of 0.35). The minimal difference between their averages, just 0.03, suggests no notable variation in overall attitudes. Further solidifying this observation, Table 5 presents the independent sample T-test results. Both the Leven's test (p-value = 3.15) and the t-test (p-value = -0.61) yielded p-values exceeding the significance level (0.05). This statistically insignificant evidence confirms the conclusion: a lack of statistically significant differences between female and male participants' perceptions of CLT.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards CLT by gender.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean
Female	69	3.44	0.45	0.05
Male	132	3.41	0.35	0.03

Table 5. Independent samples T-test of attitudes towards CLT by gender.

	Levene's test for equality of variances		t-test for equality of means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	3.158	0.077	-0.617	199	0.538	-0.03	0.05	-0.15	0.07
Equal variances not assumed			-0.573	113.199	0.567	-0.03	0.06	-0.15	0.08

4.2.2. Participants' Age, First Language, and Learning Experience

The study employed three types of statistics to uncover potential influences on participants' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): descriptive statistics, independent sample t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. Analyzing age groups (15-20 and 21-25) via descriptive statistics in Table 6, we see mean scores of 3.4725 and 3.3981, respectively, with standard deviations of 0.31543 and 0.42538. The Independent Samples T-test in Table 7 shows that Levene's test (3.725) and the T-test (1.190) have a p-values higher than the significance level (0.05). this means that there isn't a statistically significant difference in how these age groups feel about CLT.

Table 1 shows the diverse range of native languages among participants, including Dari, Uzbek, Pashto, and others. Notably, 126 participants spoke Dari, compared to 43 Uzbek, 25 Pashto, and 7 representing other ethnic groups. A one-way ANOVA test performed in Table 8 yielded a p-value of 0.709 (F = 0.463), again surpassing the significance level (0.05), suggesting no significant differences in CLT attitudes based on participants' first languages. Finally, Table 9 reveals that 150 participants had prior English learning experience both inside and outside the university. Table 10 presents a one-way ANOVA test result showing a p-value of 0.799 (F = 0.336), once again exceeding the alpha level (0.05). This indicates no statistically significant difference in CLT attitudes between participants with and without prior English learning experience.Taken together, the analyses across age

groups, first languages, and learning experiences demonstrate a lack of statistically significant differences in participants' attitudes towards CLT.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards CLT by age.

Age	N	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. error mean	Percent	Valid percent
15-20	59	3.47	0.31	0.04	32.3	28.4
21-25	142	3.39	0.42	0.03	67.7	67.7

Table 7. Independent Samples t-test of attitudes towards CLT by age.

Levene's test for equality of variances				t-test for equality of means				
F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std. error difference	95% confidence interval of the difference	
							Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	3.725	0.055	1.190	199	0.236	0.07	0.06	-0.04	0.19
Equal variances not assumed			1.341	140.13	0.182	0.07	0.05	-0.03	0.18

Table 8. Differences of the participants' age by ANOVA test.

	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.201	3	0.067	0.463	0.709
Within groups	28.453	197	0.144		
Total	28.653	200			

Table 9. Descriptive statistics of attitudes towards CLT by learning experience.

Learning experience		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent
	0-1 year	51	25.4	25.4
	1-5 years	128	63.7	63.7
Valid	5-7 years	17	8.5	8.5
	7-10 years	5	2.5	2.5
	Total	201	100.0	100.0

Table 10. Differences in the attitudes by learning experience through ANOVA test.

	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	0.146	3	0.049	0.336	0.799
Within groups	28.507	197	0.145		
Total	28.653	200			

5. DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Afghan EFL students towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of the implementation of CLT in Afghan EFL setting and the effects of CLT activities on their motivation. Another aim of the study was to examine the effects of CLT activities on students' motivation. Furthermore, it also attempted to determine the respondents' perceptions of CLT challenges in an Afghan EFL setting based on their participation in language classrooms (i.e., group activities and low English proficiency) and demographic profile of the participants, such as gender, age, and English learning experience. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the participants held positive attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching approach, and they thought that applying and utilizing CLT as an affective teaching approach, which focuses more on students' communication skills and self-confidence, is necessary in an EFL learning context. The finding is in line with theresults of the studies conducted by Albahri et al. (2018);

Ahmad and Rao (2013), and Jafari, Shokrpour, and Guetterman (2015), who reported that the participants of their studies had strong attitudes towards implementation of CLT principles in a language learning classroom.

In addition, the results showed that the respondents had positive and negative attitudes in terms of three aspects of CLT (i.e., challenges of CLT in an EFL setting, using group work activities, and the low English proficiency of students in utilizing CLT approach). The finding is corroborated by the results of studies conducted by Asassfeh et al. (2012);Rao (2002), and Takal et al. (2021), who studied the challenges of CLT in language classrooms, low English proficiency, and using group work activities considering the CLT principles in the teaching classrooms. Their studies reported that there is still some discrepancy between students' learning preferences and their actual instructional practice. When CLT was applied for the first time in language classrooms, they could not get familiar with it easily. They would rely on what it was before. Based on their expressions about the way of teaching, they said that they were more interested in form-focus language teaching than meaning-focus. That is, learners learn a language by focusing more on structures, forms and grammar patterns. The language of communication is rarely felt in their language classroom.

The results of the study also reported that there were no significant differences in the attitudes and perceptions of the participants based on their gender. The finding is in line with the results of the studies conducted by Noori (2018). However, this finding is contradicted by the studies carried out by Wong and Barrea-Marlys (2012), who reported that male and female participants held different attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching approach in language classrooms. That is, the demographic profile of the participants affects their attitudes towards CLT to some extent. Wong's and Barrea-Marlys's findings reported that the more participants showed interest in CLT, the more positive perceptions they held of the approach. Moreover, the results did not reveal any significant differences in the attitudes and perceptions of the participants by their age, class level, first language, or English learning experience. This finding supports the results of the studies done by Noori (2018), who investigated to determine whether age had any significant effects on the students' perceptions and attitudes.

Finally, the results reported that Afghan EFL students, with their English learning experiences, held more negative attitudes towards CLT approach in an Afghan EFL setting. This finding is in support of the study carried out by Wong and Barrea-Marlys (2012), who attempted to examine the perceptions of the participants towards Communicative Language Teaching in terms of their age. They reported that students had more negative attitudes than those of those who held positive attitudes towards CLT.

6. CONCLUSION

The main goal of this study was to investigate the attitudes of Afghan EFL students towards CLT in terms of the implementation of this approach in an Afghan EFL setting. Another aim of the study was to determine the effects of CLT activities on students' motivation. Furthermore, it also attempted to explore the respondents' perceptions of CLT challenges in an Afghan EFL setting based on their participation in language classrooms (i.e., group activities and low English proficiency) and demographic profile of the participants (e.g., gender, age, and English learning experience). The findings of the study reveal that the overall attitudes and perceptions of Afghan EFL students towards CLT are both positive and negative. Moreover, the respondents show their preferences to welcome a greater variety of classroom activities (i.e., group work activities, discussion, pair work, and role plays) in order to improve their language. Moreover, their attitude towards CLT by their gender is positive, and there are not any significant differences in the attitudes of the participants by their age and English learning experiences.

6.1. Implications and Suggestions

In light of the findings, the study proposed numerous implications for the Ministry of Higher Education of Afghanistan. The study reports that the participants requested that the Ministry make a reform to the current examination system, which is the grammar-oriented. They acknowledge that the exams are not based on the principles and premise of CLT. What they study in the class is different from the items brought on the exam sheets. The study also suggests that special attention may have to be paid to teachers, particularly novice teachers. They have to be provided some professional training courses (e.g., conferences, seminars, and workshops) to enhance their positive attitudes towards CLT and get acquainted with the CLT principles. Moreover, the study proposes that the class size and number of students have to be taken into account. The students cannot learn language properly when the class contains a large number of students. The study shows that all the activities being designed for language classrooms are in accordance with the principles of CLT. It is difficult to benefit from activities when the class has 50 to 70 students. The study proposes that the class be changed and the number of students be decreased from 70 to 20 to 25 to enable teachers and students to benefit from the CLT approach.

As the most evident limitation of the study, the researchers designed all the items of the questionnaire themselves. They did not give students any space for more open and deeper responses to their attitudes and degrees of motivation. Questionnaire designed for this study failed to collect richer and more in-depth answers because it is not clear how much exposure the participants of the study had to CLT. It is also worth mentioning that some of the questions did not deal with motivation in the questionnaire for the study. The researchers attempt to improve the items of the questionnaire in further studies. Moreover, the gender was measured in the study purely quantitatively. In future studies, it will be measured qualitatively because it is a qualitative dimension.

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