Communicative Language Teaching in Public Universities in Afghanistan: Perceptions and Challenges

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Abstract—While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been advocated in Afghanistan, little is known about the perception of Afghan EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers on CLT. This study aims to investigate the perceptions and challenges of CLT in Afghan public universities from the perspectives of EFL teachers. The study employed a mixed-method approach comprising survey questionnaires and a qualitative interview. A sample of sixty-two Afghan EFL teachers was selected to participate in a survey questionnaire, while five were interviewed. Findings from the questionnaires and interview showed that Afghan EFL teachers have positive perceptions regarding CLT. The results also showed that the education system is one of the significant challenges for CLT implementation in Afghan public universities. The current study is valuable for policymakers, teachers, and students for improvement of EFL classes in Afghanistan.

Index Terms—Afghanistan, communicative language teaching, post-war education, EFL classroom, EFL Lecturers' perceptions

I. INTRODUCTION

With a history of about four decades of war, Afghanistan struggles to rebuild its education sector by improving the primary education quality, training teachers, preparing learning materials, and strengthening the Ministry of Education as the administrator of the education system (Dandawate & Dhanamjaya, 2019). The Afghan government has also acknowledged the importance of English and introduced English language courses as compulsory subjects from the primary up to the tertiary educational levels (Singh & Sadri, 2019). From 1985 to 2004, English was only taught starting from grade seven; today, English is taught as a compulsory subject from grade four of school (Alamyar, 2017), indicating the significant importance the English subject has received. Moreover, English has gained recognition as a language of trade, politics, and employment both in the private or public sectors (Alamyar, 2017). For example, many international non-governmental organizations such as United Nations (UN) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) have offices in the country, and they require employees who have English skills. Likewise, although English was not a requirement for governmental positions from 2001-2008, the current situation portrays a different picture. Knowledge of the English language seems advantageous for job seekers in the public sectors as many offices (e.g., the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) have started to have dealings requiring the use of English. With all these new changes and development, more and more Afghans are motivated to acquire and improve the mastery of the English language, and the teaching and learning (TnL) of English have also received increasing attention.

However, being in a war-stricken country, many schools, universities, and other educational institutions suffer from the lack of the proper infrastructure and equipment for effective TnL of English. Most of these educational premises do not even have the basic equipment such as projectors or DVDs. If they do, the equipment is not suitable for modern language TnL. The dominance of traditional teaching methods such as Audio-lingual and Grammar-translation further contributes to the problems associated with ineffective TnL of English (Hikmat, 2009). Noori (2018), however, revealed that Afghan EFL teachers were very positive about using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an approach to improve the scenario of English language teaching in Afghanistan. Therefore, this study aims to investigate in greater depth the Afghan EFL teachers' perceptions about CLT and the challenges they face in the implementation of CLT in their lessons.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The whole concept of CLT focuses on developing L2 students' communicative competence, hence the emphasis on

teaching English for communication (Hymes, 1972; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Ying, 2010). In CLT classrooms, students are taught to become users of the target language (Hymes, 1992) that can handle meaningful communication with suitable linguistic proficiency in different social contexts (Dos Santos, 2020). Indeed, according to Hymes (1972), communicative competence covers both linguistic and social competence, i.e., the ability to "know when to speak, when not, what to talk about, with whom, when, where, in what manner" (Hymes, 1972, p227). In practice, CLT has been perceived as having the capability to engage learners in communication as a prerequisite for the development of communicative competence (Savignon, 2007), unlike the established traditions that emphasize learners' formal knowledge acquisition.

CLT is a combination of various techniques and goals to improve students' components of communicative competence, namely grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence (Brown, 2000; Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 1997). Communicative activities in the classroom (e.g., games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks) offer learners opportunities to practice their communication skills meaningfully in different contexts and take on different roles (Ozsevik, 2010). All these could equip students with essential and relevant skills of communication.

Research on the perception of CLT implementation in ESL or EFL contexts have consistently shown that teachers are optimistic about the benefits of CLT on their students, despite the challenges that CLT presents in their context. For example, a study among 75 secondary school teachers in Iran (Anani Sarab et al., 2016) revealed that, while the teachers agreed with the principles of CLT, its implementation had to start with improvements in various aspects including teacher training and teaching materials, and some influential contextual factors, particularly the class size. Similarly in Pakistan, Ahmad & Rao (2013) found that teachers were enthusiastic about applying CLT in their classrooms. Yet, lack of appropriate materials, grammar-based examinations, and insufficient teacher training were some of the problems that must be overcome. In another study, Huang (2016) reported that Taiwanese teachers agreed that cultivating English language proficiency among students was necessary. The teachers, however, were concerned with their insufficient communication proficiency and confidence in implementing CLT. In Thailand, Kwon (2017) investigated six teachers using the interview method. The results indicated that the teachers were very optimistic that the implementation of CLT would improve their students' English language proficiency. However, low English language proficiency among both teachers and students did not allow a full use of English as the medium of instruction (MOI). In short, although many curricula have shifted their focus to CLT from traditional theories, mismatch still prevails between theories and practice (Littlewood, 2007) and much literature shows that traditional methods are still commonly used in most EFL settings (Littlewood, 2007; Rao, 2013; Li, 1998).

In Afghanistan, the scenario does not differ much. In his study involving Afghan EFL lecturers, Noori (2018) found that while the lecturers already put CLT into practice, they disagreed that it was effective. Various challenges mentioned ranging from large classes, grammar-based focus, weak support from the administration, and student-related issues, such as low English language proficiency and motivation to participate in lessons. In a case study involving two English teachers, Faizy (2020) discovered that they commonly used their mother-tongue and focused on error corrections in their teaching. While these practices are the opposite of the CLT principles, the constraint faced, including students' poor language proficiency, grammar-based examinations and large class sizes would only allow for teacher-centered teaching. Kakar et al. (2020) agreed large and crowded classes would limit teachers from giving individual attention to students, not to mention opportunities for each student to practice communicative skills. Worse, there are some students who are reluctant to shoulder learning when teachers switch from teacher-centered to student-centered teaching (Kakar et al., 2020).

In short, although CLT would improve students' communicative competence, the issues that CLT presents could not simply be ignored, particularly when the challenges come from various aspects. CLT implementation in Afghan English language classes is increasingly popular, yet the challenges that teachers and students face remain. So, this paper aims to investigate the perceptions of the Afghan public universities EFL lecturers regarding the implementation of CLT in their classrooms, and the challenges they face/perceive in relation to CLT implementation.

III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a concurrent mixed-method design comprising a quantitative questionnaire and qualitative interviews which would offer a powerful combination of quantitative and qualitative data (Miles et al., 1994). Sixty-two EFL lecturers from 20 public universities and three higher education institutions were selected for this research through convenient sampling, where participants were selected based on their willingness and accessibility (Creswell, 2012). So, this research chose the convenient sampling method due to the foreseen difficulty of accessing the participants, i.e., the lack of Internet in some areas and transportation issues of travelling from one university to another during the data collection phase.

Two cross-sectional survey questionnaires were used. The first questionnaire, adopted from Karavas-Doukas (1995), gathered the perceptions of EFL lecturers on CLT. This questionnaire used 1-5 Likert scales and contained five themes with 24 items, namely place and importance of grammar (1,3,12,17,23), group and pair work (2,9,13,21,22), quality and quantity of error-correction (6,10,14,15), the role of teacher in the classroom (7,16,19,24), and the role of learners (4,5,8,11,18,20). According to the questionnaire developer, the means above three is considered positive, and lower than

three is negative. For the reliability of the questionnaire, the coefficient of split-half has been reported as 0.88.

The second quantitative questionnaire was adopted from Ozsevik (2010), and consisted of 18 items. The first six (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6) were related to teachers and the next four (7, 8, 9, 10) were student related. Items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 were related to education-system and the last four items (16, 17, 18) were related to CLT. This questionnaire also used a Likert scale of 1-4 where 1=not a challenge at all, 2=a challenge, 3=a mild challenge, and 4=a major challenge.

To collect the data, first, the quantitative questionnaires were sent online to the respondents. Online data collection is widespread nowadays and can help gain systematic and organized data (Skarupova & Blinka, (2013). After the questionnaires were collected, interviews were conducted with five respondents to gather in-depth information about CLT in Afghanistan. Later, both quantitative questionnaires (questionnaire of perceptions and questionnaire of challenges) were analyzed through SPSS IBM Version 25 for descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and frequency), while the interviews were analyzed through thematic network analysis which is a very flexible data analyzing method that can be modified for different purposes (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

IV. FINDINGS

The respondents of this research are male (85%) and female (15%) EFL lecturers whose age ranged from 20-25 (15%), 26-30 (62%), 31-35 (20%) 36-40 (1.5%) and above 40 (1.5%). Qualification-wise, 35.1% of the respondents possess a bachelor's degree, 62.5% have a master's degree, while 2% have PhD. Most of the respondents (46%) have less than five years of teaching experience, another 43.5% had 6-10 years of experience, while the rest have been teaching for 11-15 years (7%) and more than 15 years (1.5%).

A. Questionnaire for Perceptions

As mentioned, the quantitative data were analyzed through SPSS IBM Version 25 for descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency) to find the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers. The results show the respondents had positive views towards all the five principles included in the questionnaire (refer to Table 1). The highest mean score of all principles examined was the role of teachers in CLT classrooms, with the mean value of 3.91. For the other principles, namely the role of learners and their contributions in learning, the Place /Importance of Grammar, the Pair/Group Work, and the Quality/Quantity of Error-Correction, their mean values are 3.73, 3.48. 3.38 and 3.17, respectively. In the following sections, all the data obtained from the questionnaire with their descriptive statistics are explained. For ease of reference, Tables 2, 3 and 6 below present details of the respondents' responses on all the five principles, together with the individual items associated with each principle.

TABLE 1
OVERALL DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FOR PERCEPTIONS OF CLT

No	Principles	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Place/Importance of Grammar	3.48	0.67
2	Group/Pair Work	3.38	0.87
3	Quality/and Quantity of Error-correction	3.17	0.48
4	The Role of Teacher in Classroom	3.91	0.31
5	The Role and Contribution of Learners in the Learning Process	3.73	0.73
	Overall Mean of the Questionnaire	3.53	

B. Perceptions of Afghan EFL Lecturers about CLT and Its Principles

The first principle is the role of teachers in CLT which has received the highest mean among all the five principles examined. As shown in Table 2, 61.3% of the respondents believe that the teachers' role as the authority and instructor in a language classroom is no longer adequate to describe them as teachers. About 77% of the respondents acknowledge that transmission of knowledge is one of the differing roles teachers should play. Next, 69.4% of the respondents agreed that the role of teachers is to impart knowledge through various activities such as writing and giving examples. Most of the respondents (87.1%) believe textbooks alone are not sufficient to meet the needs of students and that teachers must use supplementary materials to meet the needs of students' learning. All these items highlight that most Afghan EFL lecturers are aware of the different roles that they have to assume with the CLT implementation.

TABLE 2
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON ROLES TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN CLT

No	Principle	Statements	Percentage of Item					Mean	STD
			SA	A	N	D	SD		
1	Role of Teachers	7. The teacher as "authority" and "instructor" is no longer adequate to describe the teacher's role in the language classroom.	24.2 %	37.1 %	19.4 %	12.9 %	6.5 %	3.59	1.17
		16. The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of a lesson	30.6 %	46.8 %	14.5 %	6.5 %	1.6 %	3.98	0.93
		19. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example.	22.6 %	46.8 %	19.4 %	8.1 %	3.2 %	3.77	0.99
		24. A textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the students.	54.8 %	32.3 %	4.8 %	6.5 %	1.6 %	4.32	0.95
2	Role of Learners in their own learning	20. Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them.	48.4 %	43.5 %	4.8 %	3.2 %	0 %	4.37	0.72
		8. The learner-centered approach to language teaching encourages responsibility and self-discipline and allows each student to develop his/her full potential.	67.7 %	25.8 %	3.2 %	3.2 %	0 %	4.5	0.71
		11. It is impossible in a large class of students to organize your teaching so as to suit the needs of all.	35.5 %	30.6 %	9.7 %	16.1 %	8.1 %	3.69	1.32
		18. For most students, language is acquired most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct or explicit way.	16.1 %	51.6 %	22.6 %	9.7 %	0 %	3.7	0.84
		4. Since the learner comes to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of the language, he/she is in no position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her.	16.1 %	27.4 %	17.7 %	27.4 %	11.3 %	3.09	1.28
		5. Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is futile since learners are not used to such an approach.	8.1 %	33.9 %	24.2 %	12.9 %	21.0 %	2.95	1.28

Next, the Afghan EFL lecturers also expressed positive views on their perceptions of students' roles and contributions in CLT. About 91.9% of the respondents agreed that all classroom tasks and teaching activities must suit the students' needs. Another 83.5% believe that learner-centered teaching approaches can contribute to students' potential and make them responsible for their learning. Approximately 66% of the teachers think that CLT would not be effective in a large class, implying the requirement for small classes to implement CLT in their context.

Regarding students' acquisition of the language, about 68% of the EFL lecturers agreed that the communicative use of language, i.e., students learn language through using it, would be effective. This suggests these EFL lecturers have confidence that CLT could help their students with the language. However, when asked whether students should be allowed to suggest contents and/or activities to be conducted in class, 43.5% answered that students do not have the right knowledge to do so, while 38.7% thought otherwise. This finding is significant as more than one-third of the respondents indicated their willingness to allow students to contribute to their language learning. However, perhaps the approach would be too drastic as 42% of the respondents agreed that the students were not used to taking responsibility for their own learning.

TABLE 3
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON ACTIVITIES IN CLT

No	Principle	Statements	Percentage of Item					Mean	STD
			SA	A	N	D	SD		
3	Group work and pair work	2. Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students.	71.0 %	21.0 %	4.8 %	1.6 %	1.6 %	4.58	0.80
		9. Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some measure of control over their own learning. It is therefore an invaluable means of organizing classroom experiences.	46.8 %	27.4 %	12.9 %	9.7 %	3.2 %	4.04	1.13
		22. Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue	12.9 %	25.8 %	9.7 %	35.5 %	16.1 %	2.83	1.33
		21. Students do their best when taught as a whole class by the teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but it can never replace sound formal instruction by a competent teacher.	9.7 %	24.2 %	9.7 %	41.9 %	14.5 %	2.72	1.25
		13. Group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time.	21.0 %	9.7 %	9.7 %	40.3 %	19.4 %	2.72	1.43

In Table 3, findings regarding the third principle - the importance of pair and group work – evidently show that generally, most of the respondents view this principle positively. A high percentage (92%) of the EFL lecturers agreed that group work is essential for building cooperative relationships among students, which could eventually lead to genuine interactions. About 74% of the lecturers agreed that group work can help learners develop their autonomy for learning, thus contributing towards rewarding classroom experiences. This perception is further emphasized as 51.6% of the respondents disagreed that group work have little use. This response indicates that the lecturers may not have difficulty monitoring students' performance in group work. Similarly, about 56% of the respondents disagreed that students do their best when taught as a whole class and that small group work can never replace formal instruction even by a competent teacher. These findings imply that the lecturers see students working with peers as valuable to learning. In fact, 59.7% of the respondents view group work activities as not difficult to prepare and that the time spent preparing the activities was worthwhile. In general, we can conclude that the EFL lecturers realize the efficiency of cooperative work in a CLT classroom.

TABLE 4
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON IMPORTANCE OF GRAMMAR AND ERROR

No	Principle	Statements	Percentage of Item					Mean	STD
			SA	A	N	D	SD		
4	Impor-tance of Grammar	12. Knowledge of the rules of a language does not guarantee ability to use the language.	21.0%	48.4%	22.6%	6.5%	1.6%	3.80	0.90
		3. Grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.	14.5%	46.8%	27.4%	11.3%	0%	3.64	0.87
		23. Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively	14.5%	33.9%	22.6%	12.9%	16.1%	3.17	1.29
		1. Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged	9.7%	32.3%	16.1%	32.3%	9.7%	3.0	1.20
		17. By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker	12.9%	17.7%	12.9%	38.7%	17.7%	2.69	1.31
5	Error correc-tion	6. For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teacher's feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not the linguistic form of the students' response.	22.6%	51.6%	14.5%	6.5%	4.8%	3.80	1.02
		14. Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.	16.1%	33.9%	19.4%	25.8%	4.8%	3.30	1.16
		15. The Communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners.	9.7%	27.4%	16.1%	35.5%	11.3%	2.88	1.21
		10. The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make. If errors are ignored, this will result in imperfect learning.	11.3%	24.2%	9.7%	33.9%	21.0%	2.70	1.34

Next, the findings show the respondents' views on the importance of Grammar in CLT (see Table 4). It should be noted that in Afghanistan, the Grammar Translation Method has been a dominant teaching approach in English language classrooms. Thus, it is not a surprise to have a mean of 3.48 (Refer to Table 2), which indicates a positive perception regarding the role of grammar in CLT. About 69% of the participants also agreed that the knowledge of grammatical rules could not guarantee the ability of students to use the language nor be fully capable of communicating with native speakers (56.4%). Accordingly, 61.3% of the respondents agreed that grammar should be taught to an end, not as an end to itself, implying that grammar should be taught to help students use the language correctly. In relation, about 48% of the respondents agreed that the direct instruction of grammar rules is essential for effective communicative purposes. However, when asked whether grammatical accuracy should be an important criterion to judge language performance, 42% of the respondents each expressed their agreement and disagreement. This finding is fascinating as it could clearly reflect the notion of fluency versus accuracy in language teaching (see Brumfit, 1984) that many language lecturers are torn between. In this context, as Grammar Translation Method has long been a dominant approach, it would be expected to find Afghan EFL lecturers who wish for students to use the language grammatically, and those who wish students to be fluent, particularly with the implementation of CLT.

The last item investigated is error-correction. Based on Table 4, generally, the respondents formed a positive perception about error-correction, although it has the lowest mean (3.17) among the five principles. From Table 4, 74.2% of the respondents agreed that lecturers should provide feedback that focuses on appropriateness rather than linguistic form. However, much correction was considered a waste of time by half of the respondents and in fact, about 55% of the respondents felt that lecturers should not correct all grammatical errors produced by students. In addition, 46.8% of the respondents disagreed that CLT would produce fluent but inaccurate language users. The findings related to error correction imply the balance that the lecturers intend to achieve with CLT utilization. Although the lecturers have confidence in CLT as a suitable method to help their students improve in language learning and language use, their view on grammatical language is also strong, considering the decade-long focus on grammar teaching and the grammar-focus examinations.

In general, based on the findings gathered on the respondents' views on the five principles of CLT included, the

lecturers involved in the survey were very positive with the prospect of improving their students' learning and use of language through the utilization of CLT. The findings also indicate that the teachers were willing to assume new roles, adopt different teaching approaches and reduce their classroom authority while still maintaining a critical aspect of the language, i.e., the accuracy of the language use, which has been dominant in their context. The following section discusses the challenges that are associated with CLT as perceived by the respondents.

C. Challenges in Communicative Language Teaching for Afghan EFL Lecturers

This section presents the descriptive statistics based on findings from the questionnaire for challenges in CLT. Of the 62 participants in the study, 83.87% (52 persons) responded that they apply CLT in their classes, while the other 16.12% (10 persons) responded otherwise. Below are tables that provide detailed descriptive statistics for each challenge with all the statements included in the questionnaire, for lecturers applying CLT (indicated by Y) and those who do not (indicated by N).

Table 5 shows that the education system is the first big challenge for CLT application perceived by both groups. The first area of concern is the large class size. Most lecturers (those who apply - 51.9% and those who do not apply CLT - 60 %) agreed that large class size is a significant challenge in CLT implementation. In addition, 77 % of the lecturers applying CLT consider grammar-based examinations a challenge, which is agreed by 60% of their colleagues who do not use CLT. As for the lack of authentic materials for CLT, a significant percentage of lecturers who use CLT agreed that this is a challenge; interestingly, while 50 % of those who do not use CLT decided that this was a challenge, another 40% believed that this was a mild challenge. When asked about the traditional views on teachers' and learners' roles that are not compatible with CLT, lecturers who use CLT expressed that it would be a challenge (agreed by 67.3%), while those who do not use CLT disagreed this as a challenge. In terms of lack of support from the administration, quite a big percentage of those who use CLT and those who do not regarded this as a challenge.

TABLE 5
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON EDUCATION SYSTEM-RELATED CHALLENGES

Statement	Not a Challenge at all		Mild Challenge		Challenge		Major Challenge		Mean		STD	
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
14. Classes are too large for the effective use of CLT.	5.8	0	19.2	20	23.1	20	51.9	60	3.21	3.40	0.95	0.84
15. Grammar-based examinations have a negative impact on the use of CLT.	3.8	0	19.2	40	38.5	20	38.5	40	3.11	3.0	0.85	0.94
12. Teachers lack authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, movies etc.	11.5	10	11.5	40	34.6	20	42.3	30	3.07	2.70	1.0	1.05
13. Traditional views on teachers' and learners' roles are not compatible with CLT.	9.6	50	23.1	30	28.8	10	38.5	10	2.96	2.80	1.0	1.03
11. There is a lack of enough support from administration.	11.5	10.	19.2	40	40.4	20	28.8	30	2.86	2.70	0.97	1.05

Student-related challenges portrayed in Table 6 are the second-highest challenge for lecturers who apply CLT. From the table, a large percentage of lecturers (75% of lecturers that use CLT and 70% of those who do not use CLT) believe that the students' low proficiency is a challenge in CLT. Furthermore, 65.4 % of the lecturers utilizing CLT agreed that the students' passive learning style is a challenge. Similarly, more than half of the lecturers who use CLT admitted that students who resist participating in class and lack the motivation to develop communicative competence would pose a challenge to CLT implementation. In contrast, about 70 to 80% of lecturers who do not use CLT did not see these three characteristics of students as a challenge.

TABLE 6
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON STUDENT-RELATED CHALLENGES

Statement	Not a Challenge at all		Mild Challenge		Challenge		Major Challenge		Mean		STD	
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
7. Students have low-level English proficiency.	13.5	10	11.5	20	26.9	30	48.1	40	3.09	3.20	1.07	1.22
8. Students have a passive style of learning.	5.8	0	28.8	70	30.8	10	34.6	20	2.94	2.50	0.93	0.84
9. Students resist participating in communicative class activities	9.6	20	34.6	60	30.8	10	25.0	10	2.94	2.30	0.95	1.25
10. Students lack motivation for developing communicative competence	13.5	20	28.8	60	38.5	10	19.2	10	2.63	2.20	0.95	1.13

While student-related challenges are the second-highest challenge perceived by the lecturers who apply CLT, lecturers who do not use CLT perceived CLT-related challenges as the second-highest challenge (refer to table 9). These could probably be the assumptions that may have driven them to regard CLT as unfavorable. Indeed, their assumptions were not baseless, as from Table 7 we could see that lecturers who use CLT formed significant percentages about these ICT-related challenges. For example, about 73% of lecturers who use CLT (comparatively to 70% of their counterparts) answered that the lack of effective and efficient instruments to measure communicative competence formed a challenge to them. In addition, while only 40% of those who do not use CLT felt that Western education assumptions were not suitable for Asian contexts and that this was a challenge, the percentage is more prominent (58%) for the other group of lecturers. Finally, half of the respondents from each group agreed that it is a challenge that CLT does not take into account the differences between ESL and EFL contexts.

TABLE 7
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON CLT-RELATED CHALLENGES

Statement	Not a Challenge at all		Mild Challenge		Challenge		Major Challenge		Mean		STD	
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
16. There is a lack of effective and efficient instruments to assess communicative competence	9.6	0	17.3	30	32.7	20	40.4	50	3.03	3.20	0.98	0.91
18. Western educational assumptions are not suitable within Asian contexts	12.0	10	30.0	50	38.0	20	20.0	20	2.66	2.50	0.93	0.97
17. CLT doesn't take into account the differences between EFL and ESL teaching contexts.	19.2	10	30.8	40	28.8	40	21.2	10	2.51	2.50	1.03	0.84

Table 8 shows the findings on teacher-related challenges, and data in Table 9 illustrates that teacher-related challenges were the least challenges by both groups of lecturers. As shown in Table 9, the mean of teacher-related challenges for lecturers who do not use CLT is 2.55, while for their counterparts who use CLT, the mean is 2.10, indicating that these challenges form a mild challenge. In fact, a high percentage (more than 70%) of teachers in each group (referring to Table 8), for example, agreed that lack of knowledge about the appropriate use of language or insufficient proficiency in the English language among the teachers was not a challenge. However, there is one exception, which is related to lack of time to develop teaching materials. Both groups of lecturers felt that the lack of time to develop materials for communicative classes was a challenge (agreed by 51.9% of those who use CLT and 60% of those who do not). The lecturers have conflicting views about whether each item is a challenge for the last three items in Table 8. First, while more than half (55.8%) of lecturers who use CLT agreed that lack of opportunities to attend CLT courses is a challenge, only 40% of their counterparts shared the same view. Next, while most lecturers (75%) who use CLT claimed that teachers' lack of knowledge about the English culture is not an issue, 60% of their counterparts thought otherwise. Likewise, although about 81% of the lecturers who use CLT felt that lecturers' misconception about CLT was not a challenge, their counterparts were split (50/50) about this factor as a challenge. In short, most of these items were collectively seen as not seriously challenging CLT implementation. Perhaps, the lecturers who did not use CLT in their lessons have their own reasons, which may not be covered in this research.

TABLE 8
PERCEPTIONS OF LECTURERS ON TEACHER-RELATED CHALLENGES

Statement	Not a Challenge at all		Mild Challenge		Challenge		Major Challenge		Mean		STD	
	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N
2.Teachers lack the knowledge about the appropriate use of language in context	46.2	20	30.8	50	13.5	20	9.6	10	1.86	2.20	0.99	0.91
1.Teachers' proficiency in spoken English is not sufficient	51.9	30	25.0	50	17.3	10	5.8	10	1.76	2.0	0.94	0.94
5. Teachers have little time to develop materials for communicative classes.	21.2	10	26.9	30	26.9	0	25.0	60	2.55	2.10	1.09	1.19
4. There are few opportunities for teachers to get CLT training.	17.3	30	26.9	30	30.8	10	25.0	30	2.63	2.80	1.04	1.75
3. Teachers lack the knowledge about the target language (English) culture	25.0	20	50.0	20	17.3	30	7.7	30	2.07	2.70	0.85	1.15
6. Teachers have misconceptions about CLT.	53.8	20	26.9	30	11.5	30	7.7	20	1.73	2.50	0.95	1.08

TABLE 9
SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES FOR BOTH GROUPS OF LECTURERS

No	Challenges	Lecturers who apply CLT		Lecturers who do not apply CLT	
		Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Education System-related	3.04	0.13	2.92	0.29
2	Student-related	2.90	0.19	2.55	0.45
3	CLT-related	2.73	0.26	2.73	0.40
4	Teacher-related	2.10	0.39	2.55	0.40
	Overall Mean	2.69		2.68	

D. Findings Derived from the Interview

As mentioned, five respondents were interviewed about their perceptions and challenges faced in relation to CLT implementation in Afghanistan public universities. Based on the analysis, several themes emerged. Most findings are consistent with those from the questionnaire, and they further explain the respondents' perceptions of CLT and the challenges encountered. One of the perceptions that may have discouraged the lecturers from using CLT is that CLT is an approach for teaching speaking only and CLT focuses solely on the speaking ability of students. Therefore, CLT is considered an approach that is in contrasts with the requirement of the curriculum that emphasizes grammar focus. With this view, some Afghan EFL teachers have been reluctant to employ CLT. This is clearly a misconception as the communicative competence as defined in CLT emphasizes the combination of discourse sociolinguistic, strategic and grammar competences (Canale & Swain, 1980).

About challenges, students' low English language proficiency and a mixture of students of various proficiency levels in a class are strongly viewed as a challenge and have become obstacles in the CLT implementation. The interviewees further commented that students' proficiency issues combined with other challenges, namely large-size classes, inadequate teaching materials, and teachers' lack of knowledge in CLT, may affect the effectiveness of CLT implementation in their classes.

In short, these additional findings from the interview data are insightful and further enlighten the results of the questionnaires. For instance, while the questionnaire data showed lecturers' great interest in using CLT, the interview data revealed that they still have some misconceptions regarding CLT. In other words, although Afghan EFL lecturers are positive about CLT, they require the appropriate training on aspects of CLT, including the underlying theory and the teaching methodology. It is hope that with appropriate knowledge of CLT, the lecturers will be even more optimistic about employing CLT to help their students improve their speaking ability and all aspects of English, including grammar.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to investigate the perceptions of Afghan EFL lecturers about CLT implementations and its challenges in Afghan public universities. The overall findings reveal that Afghan EFL lecturers have positive perceptions about CLT despite many challenges derived from their context. The lecturers' positive perceptions resonate with studies in Afghanistan (Noori, 2018) and in other EFL contexts (e.g., Rahimi & Naderi, 2014; Vaezi, & Abbaspour, 2014). In fact, a study investigating Iraqi lecturers using the same questionnaires also resulted in very similar results (Sherwani & Kilic, 2017).

The findings also reflect closely with that of Chang's (2011), who investigated Taiwanese EFL lecturers. The apparent similarity concerns the role of teachers in CLT, suggesting that EFL lecturers in Afghanistan and Taiwan view the significant roles of teachers in CLT. The importance placed on the role of teachers in CLT coincides with the view that teachers are vital in any teaching methodologies (Ellis, 1996), including in a learner-centered classroom, such as in CLT. While Ellis (1996) believes in the requirement of lecturers' proficiency and resources in CLT, Larsen-Freeman (2000) emphasizes the multiple roles lecturers play in CLT classrooms including as facilitators, advisors, and co-communicators. Similarly, Littlewood & William (1981) state that lecturers in CLT classrooms have to participate in class activities so that students can actively negotiate meaning. Thus, when the Afghan EFL lecturers believe that the teachers' role is important, they may possibly indicate their beliefs in the different roles that they have to play during lessons. Nonetheless, it is important to note that as the Afghan society has a top to bottom hierarchy for its social relationships, the role of lecturers as co-communicators may not be optimally exercised as students may feel awkward to have teachers as co-communicators in classroom activities.

The finding that revealed Afghan EFL lecturers placed importance on the role of students in CLT, implies the former's enthusiasm to utilize CLT in their lessons. There could be ample reasons why the lecturers support CLT for their students. First, it may be related to the traditional methods that focus more on grammar rather than communicative use of the language, thus hindering the development of students' oral communicative skills. As communication in English has continued to become vital (Hu, 2002), when students cannot communicate in English, the lecturers may want to find alternatives that can improve the situation (Hikmat, 2009). The next reason could be triggered by the lecturers' own educational experiences. In this study, almost 65% of respondents had their higher education abroad; they

may have personally gone through a better system elsewhere and/or engaged in CLT. Upon returning to work they are possibly inspired to help Afghan students learn and improve their language skills through CLT.

Thirdly, according to Afghanistan's National Higher Education Strategic Plan 2010-2014, English was the MOI in 2015; nonetheless, the plan was not materialized. The students' English language proficiency remains low. Afghan EFL lecturers may probably be motivated to prepare the students for the upcoming change. Should the decision to make English as the MOI revive students would have the appropriate language proficiency to function in the new academic environment. Yet, if the current situation persists, Afghan EFL lecturers may use CLT to adopt the 21st century teaching methods which focus on communication, culture, collaboration, and critical thinking.

Regarding challenges of CLT, the data showed that the top challenge was the education system, which covers aspects such as the curriculum, the administration, facility and infrastructure, teacher training, and teaching load. These findings are not uncommon: Noori (2008) for example, found that lack of support in administration, large classes, heavy teaching load, students' low proficiency, and grammar-based exams formed challenges to CLT implementation. Thus, classes of 65-200 students mentioned by interviewees in this study are certainly a significant problem. According to the American Council on Teaching the Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the maximum number of students in one class should be no more than 15. The National Education Association (NEA) and the Association of Department for Foreign Languages (ADFL) also recommend 18 students per class. These suggested numbers would enable teachers to have sufficient time for teacher-student and student-student interactions and close monitoring of the students' progress. In Afghanistan, with big EFL class size, it is problematic to meet these suggestions, thus jeopardizing the potential success of CLT. These challenges as expressed by the lecturers require urgent attention so that language TnL in the country would be advanced, appropriate with the trend worldwide. And as propagated by Li (1998), the mismatch between what is required by CLT and what the system allows should be resolved to reap the benefits of CLT.

Findings gathered also highlighted other challenges such as the lack of support and inadequate infrastructure, the lack of appropriate resources, and the lack of teachers' training and thus knowledge of CLT. These did not differ much from those found in other EFL settings (e.g., Abate, 2014; Rahman, 2015; Anani Sarab et al., 2016; Huang, 2016; Kwon, 2017). Regrettably, some of these constraints have contributed in the unwillingness to use CLT as shown by the questionnaire results. Instead of taking risks to use CLT in a less-than-adequate environment, the lecturers remain with the traditional methods which they are very familiar with. These findings, nonetheless, are valuable as insights to the authority on how to improve some TnL practices in Afghanistan.

This study has contributed new insights into the academic community of Afghanistan, particularly on research on CLT. The insights on perceptions of the lecturers on CLT and the challenges that could hinder effective implementation of CLT in Afghanistan have been discussed. As a widely used teaching approach that is suitable with the requirements of 21st century learning, CLT should be advocated as a teaching method in Afghan EFL classes to help Afghan students acquire good English language communication skills that may open many more doors of opportunities for young Afghans in the academic field and future careers.

VI. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Studies investigating both teachers' and students' beliefs about CLT should be conducted to determine the level of preparedness that teachers and students have on CLT implementation. Next, as issues related to the administration have been highlighted as a challenge, an investigation focusing on perceptions and views from the administrative side would further balance, if not complete the insight into CLT implementation. Finally, a study with a more rigorous methodology that includes other than questionnaires and interviews plus a larger number of respondents may provide better insight into the prospects of utilizing CLT in Afghanistan.

VII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since this study only covered 23 universities and higher education institutes and 62 EFL lecturers, the results are not generalizable to all universities in Afghanistan. Likewise, since only five respondents were interviewed, the results may not be comprehensive enough to portray the actual situation. In addition, due to the limited Internet coverage, this study only included those lecturers who had the Internet access. Including the views of lecturers who could not get the Internet access may have provided better insights about CLT in Afghan public universities.

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