TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: A STUDY OF ENGLISH TUTORS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION, GHANA

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Abstract:
Understanding and addressing teachers' perceptions are essential steps in promoting effective implementation of modern language teaching methodologies. While research on CLT practices and its associated challenges and perceptions is widespread among EFL communities, such studies are missing among ESL language teacher educators preparing the practising teachers to propel the pedagogy effectively. It is unclear in the ESL context whether the English language teacher educators can effectively employ the pedagogy to train their student-teachers to drive home new language teaching approaches such as CLT. In this study, I examined the perception that teacher educators hold about CLT in six thematic areas, using Eagly and Chaiken's (1998) ABC Model of Attitude as analytical framework to measure teacher beliefs of CLT principles. A convergent parallel-mixed methods design was employed with questionnaire and focus group interview as research tools. The study found out, on a 7-point rater scale, that CELTs' perception of communicative language teaching in the colleges of education is positive in five thematic areas: CLT as student-centered learning (6.372); teachers' knowledge on CLT principles (6.068); CLT as integrated skills pedagogy (5.314); CLT as collaborative learning (5.307) and CLT being authentic and functional language use (4.498). In spite of this positive perception, the teachers hold the belief that assessment strategies in the college classroom are not aligned with CLT principles (2.407). The teachers also believe that CLT applicability in CoE classroom to achieve the literacy standard-based curriculum goals is threatened by tutors' loyalty to product-based approach to language teaching. The study made some recommendations to enhance CLT applicability in the teacher training institutions.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, teacher educator, perception, curriculum, teacher training, communicative competence

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1. Introduction

Whenever a change in curriculum of any kind is introduced, it is important to understand the current beliefs, knowledge and views of those expected to carry out the change (Bowers *et al.*, 2007). Such understanding may give a preliminary impression of what goes on in the classroom regarding teacher instruction towards the new curriculum implementation and may help explain later, at the stage of implementation, why certain challenges emerge in the classrooms. Numerous ways have been created in the long-running quest for the so-called ideal method in ELT (English Language Teaching). Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth CLT) has established a position in the English teaching curriculum, education policy declarations, course publications, and teacher education programs around the globe. Brown (2014) emphasizes the relevance of real-world communication in today's shifting ELT setting and the growing tendency towards CLT by creating unrehearsed language performance outside of the classroom, promoting linguistic fluency, and supporting lifelong language acquisition. Brown (2014) also summarizes the key characteristics of CLT as follows: classroom objectives are directed at all components of communicative competence; they are not limited to grammatical or linguistic proficiency. Language teaching approaches and strategies are intended to engage students in the pragmatic, genuine, and functional use of language for purposeful communication. Linguistic structures do not reflect the major emphasis of the language, but rather those features of the language that allows the learner to fulfil those goals. Additionally, there are two essential characteristics: fluency and accuracy, which are seen as complementary concepts that underpin communication approaches. Brown observed that, at times, fluency may need to take precedence over accuracy in order to keep learners engaged in meaningful usage. He recognized that, eventually, students in a communicative classroom must use the language constructively and receptively in unrehearsed circumstances.

As with Brown, Yang and Cheung (2013) claim that CLT places a premium on purposeful and meaningful activities, the incorporation of genuine components, the use of non-textbook resources, the avoidance of mechanical drills in pair or group work activities, and the variety of activities. Previously, Richards (2006) emphasized the purpose of language acquisition as communicative ability. Language acquisition, he believes, should aim to teach students how to utilize the language effectively for a variety of diverse goals and tasks. The pertinent concerns include how to adapt language usage to the situation and participants, how to generate and comprehend a variety of text kinds, and how to continue communication despite the speaker's limited grasp of the foreign language.

In Ghana, the first-ever standard-based curriculum (henceforth SBC) was introduced in 2019 across the basic schools. It spells out clearly what learners are expected to know and be able to do even after school. The SBC makes provision for four (4) literacy standards in the language curriculum: communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, often abbreviated as the 4Cs to be attained by the Ghanaian learner of

English by completion of basic school (Ministry of Education, 2019). These literacy standards call for appropriate collaborative language pedagogies and approaches to drive them to the desired level of attainment; and CLT, with its learner-focused principles, could be a potential pedagogical choice for teachers.

However, there is much evidence to suggest that research on CLT practices and its associated challenges and perceptions have been extensive mainly among EFL communities (Abahussain, 2016; Fang, 2016; Gorsuch, 2001; Guangwei-Hu, 2005; Heng, 2021; Li, 2020; Oszevik, 2010; Taguchi, 2008; Vasilopulous, 2008; Vongxay, 2010; Wang, 2013). Few that have been done in ESL context such as Ghana are however limited to pre-tertiary language teachers (Ariatna, 2016; Decoo, 2011; Ko, 2014; Linnell, 2001; Walz, 2003). Such studies on CLT practices are missing among language teacher educators such as the Colleges of Education (henceforth CoEs) to ensure that language teacher educators can effectively employ the pedagogy to train their student-teachers to drive home the literacy standards. The literature to suggest that the English Language teacher educator in the Ghanaian CoEs is well equipped with the know-how on CLT to employ its principles and pedagogy that will prepare the student-teacher to effectively drive the standard-based curriculum is minimal. This lacuna poses a looming threat to the implementation of the standard-based curriculum to achieve the literacy standards for the Ghanaian learner of English at the basic school. What is worse is that, over the years, the language teaching scene across all levels of the Ghanaian education system, including the CoEs, has been form-focused in preparing learners towards examination whereas language teachers in the Ghanaian CoEs are 'addicted' to the traditional form-focused approaches. In effect, tutors may not find a tangible reason for how to create a communicative classroom context (Hiep, 2007). The starting point therefore, is to find out the views and beliefs of College English Language Tutors (henceforth CELTs) in order to carve a direction of their use of CLT in preparing the student-teachers in Ghana. A varying perception teachers hold about teaching pedagogy determines its applicability in the classroom. In all these, it is evident that the use of CLT in most CoE ESL classrooms may encounter a methodological problem in terms of their perception of the approach, let alone employing its principles in their teaching to develop learners' communicative competence. Taking into account Ghana's new standard-based curriculum's emphasis on language for its function, where tutors are expected to leave learning in the hands of their student-teachers, a study on how English teachers in CoEs perceive and implement CLT methodology can serve to shed light on the impact of training on professional practice in Ghanaian Colleges of Education. For this reason, this paper set out to uncover the perception of English language tutors towards communicative language teaching methodology in the CoE classroom.

Wang (2013) studied CLT at a Chinese foreign language school and found that it helped students improve their proficiency in all aspects of the language and that instructors and students alike were more appreciative despite the challenges. That is not all, according to him, teachers have also noted success in the classroom. According to Fang (2016), contextual elements, such as classroom environment, may have a profound

effect on instructors and may influence their teaching practices. Therefore, a different strategy for teaching English as a second or foreign language must be considered. Li (2020) conducted a study to examine the problems English teachers experience while attempting to use CLT in their classrooms in Korea. He found out that, due to the prominence of text-based and grammar-based practices in Korea, teachers have difficulties integrating CLT in their classrooms. Gorsuch (2001) also found that teachers' opinions on the usage of CLT were impacted by students and classroom settings. Although high school instructors were still employing exam-oriented teaching methods, Taguchi (2008) discovered that they sought to develop communication abilities. In a related study by Gorsuch (2001), it was found out that instructors in Japanese high schools were somewhat supportive of CLT activities, but it also came up that teachers encountered obstacles and hurdles when attempting to implement CLT activities in their classes (Gorsuch, 2001).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching

One of the most important things that language does is to connect people who live together in the same society in speech and writing. There is much evidence to suggest that traditional ways of teaching a second language did not do a good job of meeting the language needs of natural communication without breaking social and cultural rules (Canale & Swain, 1980; Littlewood, 2011; Sagvinon, 2002). It has made it clear that language education needs a completely new way of teaching. In a world that changes quickly, people already know that their communication needs are different from what they were being taught. This is how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became a revolutionary idea in the early 1980s. It suggested new ways to teach foreign languages to students so that they can communicate well with people in the community who speak the target language. Today, communicative competence is a broad term for the ability to use language for different kinds of communication tasks. Even though it has become a catchphrase for many, the answer to the question of what communicative competence means will always be different. If, as the Oxford English Dictionary says, "*competence*" means "*the ability to do something well*," then "*communicative competence*" could mean "*the ability to communicate well*." But the idea of communication is a lot deeper than what this simple view shows. In a normal conversation, there is a lot going on behind the scenes that you might not notice at first glance. Because of how important different parts of communicative competence are, it is important to be more careful when talking about communicative competence and its parts.

The term "*communicative language teaching*" refers to a collection of principles that govern the purpose of language instruction, the process by which learners acquire a language, the types of classroom activities that most effectively aid learning, and the roles of instructors and students in the classroom (Richards, 2006). With an emphasis on qualitative assessments of the learner, this means that CLT is a teaching technique that

prioritizes the learner. It constitutes a significant shift away from the nineteenth-century approach to grammatical translation. The primary consideration for the instructor when using a CLT strategy is to keep learners engaged and to diversify the teaching process. Savignon (2002) emphasizes the importance of group work, as well as reading and writing activities. Although they may not seem to be so at first look, they may also be communicative when interactions, meaning negotiation, and expressions are included. Byram (2004) highlights CLT principles by stating that they apply equally to reading and writing activities that involve the student in expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning. The objectives themselves are context-dependent and are determined by the learner and his or her requirement in a particular situation. CLT does not need pair work; in fact, bigger group assignments have been shown to increase motivation and realism for many tasks. CLT does need some knowledge and understanding of discourse norms, grammar, and what is socially acceptable. In brief, CLT aims to give learners chances to improve their communication ability. Savignon (2002) quotes Berns' summary of eight CLT principles to include the fact that language instruction is grounded on the concept of language as communication. Orally or in writing, it is used to convey meaning and communication for a certain goal. It lends itself to diversity as a component of language development and use.

## 2.2 Theoretical Perspective of Communicative Language Teaching

The way language is taught rather than it should be taught; and the way it is learnt rather than it should be learnt are questions that have occupied human thought for a long time (Griffiths, 2014; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). For teaching and learning to take place efficiently, there should be a scientific method based on theories of teaching and learning. An important learner-centered methodology to mitigate the traditional phenomenon of form-focus language teaching to a more functional type may be Communicative Language Teaching. As noticed by Larsen-Freeman (2000), the goal of most of the teaching methods is for students to communicate in the target language. Meeting such a goal inevitably entails the ability of communication among learners, especially outside the classroom; otherwise, the method would be a failure. Grammar-based methods, one would say, may lead to memorizing many grammatical rules and patterns without being able to effectively communicate outside the classroom to meet the needs of daily life. CLT has emerged to fill this void left by grammar-based methods. CLT aims to make communicative competence the ultimate goal of language teaching and communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

According to Richards and Rogers (2001), CLT marks the beginning of a major paradigm shift within the field of language teaching from the 1960s onwards. This method, as pointed out by Richards and Rodgers (2001), is based on the theory of language as communication aiming to develop communicative competence. In CLT, the role of the teacher is different. Their role is to enable students to communicate in a foreign language by establishing situations to stimulate communication. The role of the students is also different. Students participate actively in communicating and engage actively in

negotiating meaningful conversation (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). For CLT to be applied in Ghanaian CoE classrooms, it requires a change of examination format. From the researcher's own experience of teaching in Ghana, particularly in CoE, teachers, including language teachers, resort to preparing students for examination at the expense of developing communicative competence in the second language; a situation that emphasizes memorization and rote learning among students. This traditional test-oriented approach to lessons does not give enough weight to second language learners' skills in performing in real-world communication. An important point to raise here is that for CLT to be implemented successfully, teachers and learners should be sustainably motivated as pointed out by Canale and Swain (1980).

Communicative language teaching is all about getting people to be better at communicating. Hymes (1972) sets up a four-part framework for communicative competence by saying that it is the ability to have meaningful communication within the changing limits of socially effective ways of interacting. Building on Hymes' four pillars of formal possibility, feasibility, performability, and appropriacy, Canale and Swain (1980) group these sub-competencies under linguistic system and functional aspects. Later, in Bachman's (1996) model of communicative competence, these linguistic systems and functional aspects become organizational competence and pragmatic competence, respectively. Then came Savignon (2005) with an inverted pyramid framework that created a perfect storm in communicative language teaching.

2.3 ABC Model of Attitude as Analytical Framework of Tutors' Attitude towards CLT
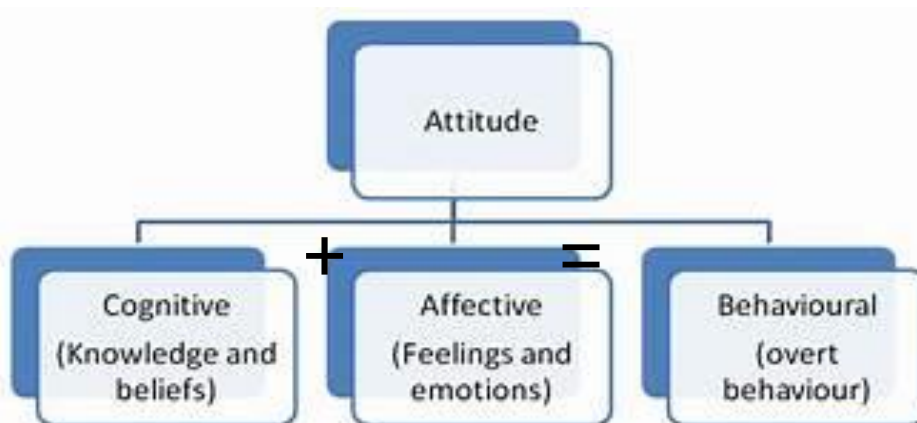
Figure 1: Eagly and Chaiken's (1998) ABC Model of Attitude

As illustrated in the figure above, the ABC model of attitudes consists of three components: Affect (A), which represents the emotional or feeling aspect of an attitude and reflects an individual's emotional response or "liking" toward an object, person, or idea. Behavior (B) which refers to the intentions or actions related to the attitude. It suggests that attitudes influence our behaviour, and understanding the link between attitudes and behaviours is crucial. Cognition (C), which involves the thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge that a person has about the object. It reflects the intellectual aspect of an

attitude. The model implies that these three components are interconnected to define human attitude and therefore, changes in one component can lead to changes in the others. For example, if a person's affection (A) toward a particular product is positive, it is likely to influence their behavioural intentions (B) to patronize that product, and this behaviour, in turn, can reinforce their positive knowledge and beliefs (C) about the product. Since this study considers CLT a product that competes with other pedagogies in the ESL market, the tutors' knowledge and beliefs about it, their feelings and emotions towards it will carve a direction on its employability in the classroom. It is therefore imperative to assess their perception towards the pedagogy to determine this applicability.

2.4 Related Studies

Many studies have been conducted on communicative language teaching as an effective instructional pedagogy in developing language competence. A lot of these studies have unraveled the role CLT plays to link the classroom to the world of work in terms of communication. For example, Guangwei-Hu (2005) found that, as a result of the Chinese government's education policies, which place an emphasis on improving students' communication skills, CLT has gained popularity in the country. So, China's Ministry of Education was impressed by how well-known the method was around the world and was sure that it was the best way to solve the problem of students not being able to communicate well in English even after years of formal instruction in the language (Guangwei Hu, 2005; Wenjie, 2009).

Aslam, *et al.* (2020) performed a study on the use of the CLT in Pakistani teacher education programs. They found that CLT builds learners' confidence and also provides a feeling of fulfillment for the instructor, since she/he is effective in getting pupils to utilize the foreign language in their discussion. CLT clarifies the phrase. The communicative approach outperforms all other language education approaches in general, and the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in particular. According to Wei *et al.* (2011), given the disparity between the CLT method and the issues facing EFL teaching and learning, the majority of nations should carefully examine their English teaching conditions and determine how CLT might best serve their students' requirements and interests. Thus far, research in this area indicates a rising acceptance of CLT application in EFL contexts. Though teachers' opinions and practices are inconsistent, their attitudes about the implementation of CLT are increasingly changing.

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to use CLT in their classrooms in Korea. He found out that, due to the prominence of text-based and grammar-based practices in Korea, teachers have difficulties integrating CLT in their classrooms. Gorsuch (2001) also found that teachers' opinions on the usage of CLT were impacted by students and classroom settings. Although high school instructors were still employing exam-oriented teaching methods, Aslam, *et al.* (2020) discovered that they sought to develop communication abilities. In a related study by Gorsuch (2001), it was found out that instructors in Japanese high schools were somewhat supportive of CLT activities, but it also came up that teachers encountered obstacles and hurdles when attempting to implement CLT activities in their classes (Gorsuch, 2001). The studies so far explored have been extensive in the EFL context, focusing more on learner competence at the pre-tertiary level. It is therefore important to look into how teacher educators in the ESL context also perceive CLT as a pedagogy for developing communicative competence. This will intend to carve a direction for its applicability in teacher education institutions in Ghana.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1 Study Approach and Design
Considering the research questions to address in this study, the study is structured basically within the framework of a mixed methods approach. Bergman (2008) noticed that the mixed method is one of the most used methods in research methodology today. According to him, its aims and benefits appear simple because, by adopting this method, an appropriate combination of both qualitative and quantitative data is needed. Denscombe (2007), cited in Cohen *et al.* (2013) also suggests that by using mixed method research design, the researcher can guarantee the accuracy of data collected and is able to provide a cleaner image of the problem under investigation than would be expected in a mono-method. Creswell and Clark (2007) share the same view and state more clearly that the combination of qualitative and quantitative data maintains a better understanding of the research problem under investigation than when only one method is used. The type of research objective raised in this study necessitates the choice of mixed methods. When scrutinized closely, the questions require the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data to ensure that the answers are not biased towards one or the other. By employing this triangulated approach, the findings of the study guaranteed a complete image of the problem under study. This, in effect, strengthened the results of the study.

In carving the methodological direction of the study, I recognize the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches and aim to capitalize on the advantages of each method to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the research objective, and in effect settled on convergent parallel design. The strength of using convergent parallel design lies in its ability to provide a more holistic and robust understanding of research objectives by capitalizing on the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. One other reason for my choice of convergent parallel design is to obtain

an insightful and more comprehensive understanding of the research objective and for the purpose of methodological triangulation (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). The study employed multiple data tools of questionnaire and focus group discussion; and it is believed that participants' responses in one data set may be contradictory in another. For this reason, the convergence of findings from different methods provides a form of triangulation, increasing the validity and reliability of the results. If data from both methods support the same conclusion, it strengthens the overall study. Again, in order to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings and to help mitigate biases or limitations inherent in any single method, my choice of this design becomes more rational as the strengths of one data set may compensate for the weaknesses of another to build the overall robustness and credibility of the research findings.

3.2 Participants and Instrumentation

In total, two hundred and ten (210) ESL tutors across 46 public CoEs were derived to have constituted the population of this study. This was arrived at, in consultation with the Heads of the Department of Languages, Vice Principals and, in few cases, the Principals of the Colleges who provided data on staff strength and enrolment in the Departments. To provide complete coverage and accurate representation of the entire population, a census sampling technique was employed in the questionnaire, which invariably culminated in convenience sampling for the focus group interview. The questionnaire provided the option where participants could express their willingness to be part of the group interview. This group later formed the sample size for the focus group interview. The purpose of census sampling for the questionnaire was to include all CELTs across the 46 public Colleges of Education in Ghana.

Data collected is presented, analysed and discussed under two broad categories: (i) CELTs' demographic data, and (ii) CELTs' perception towards CLT pedagogy in English language classrooms in Colleges of Education. Data on demography is further discussed under age group, qualification, and teaching experience. The second category of data were generated from research tools that addressed issues relating to the broad study objective, thus, *"to examine the perception of English language tutors towards Communicative Language Teaching in the Colleges of Education"*. Six sub-themes on the perception of CLT were carved and used to examine the broad objective through survey items and focus group discussion. The themes were based on CLT principles such as CLT as student-centered learning, tutors' knowledge of CLT practices, CLT being authentic and functional language use, assessment and feedback procedures in CLT classrooms, CLT as integrated skills and contextualized learning and CLT as collaborative learning (Richards & Rogers, 2016). The analysis was premised on Eagly and Chaiken (1998) ABC model of attitude using these CLT principles. The study considers CLT a product that competes with other pedagogies in the ESL market and therefore, the tutors' perception of its principles will carve a direction of its patronage in the classroom.

Questionnaire data which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions were analysed on a 7-point rater scale. On this rater scale, 1 to 3 represent strongly

disagree, fairly disagree and disagree respectively; 4 represents indecision and 5 to 7 represent agree, fairly agree and strongly agree respectively. The closed-ended questions were analyzed with the help of the statistical analysis software program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Frequency calculations (i.e. how many teachers selected each answer) were used to produce descriptive central tendency statistics that were used to present an overall picture of the teachers' perceptions of CLT. The open-ended questions, on the other hand, were analyzed through the themes and categories prompted by the questions with respect to teachers' understanding of and attitude towards CLT and its use in the classroom. In analyzing the qualitative focus group interview data, I used the content analysis technique, which can be described as drawing up a list of coded categories and each segment of transcribed data into one of these categories. Content analysis enables researchers to shift through large volumes of data with relative ease in a systematic fashion. It also allows inferences to be made which then can be corroborated using other methods of data collection (Merriam, 2001). Within this framework, with the interview data in hand, I identified patterns of the different categories of constraints that the interview participants reported. Themes were also worked out regarding the possibilities, means and degrees to overcome the reported difficulties. Participants were coded in their responses according to the focus group they belonged to ensure data safety and confidentiality; for example, T2/4, 2023 means teacher 2 in focus group 4; T1/3, 2023 means teacher 1 in focus group 3.

4. Results and Findings

4.1 Demographic Data on Participants

In a study such as teaching methods, understanding the demographic characteristics of participants is fundamental for comprehending the context and implications of research findings. In the realm of education, where teachers play a pivotal role in shaping learning experiences and outcomes, examining the demographic profile of teacher participants provides valuable insights into the diversity, experiences, and qualifications within the teaching profession.

Table 1: CELTs' Age Group

No:	Age Group of Tutors	N	Frequency (%)
1	Below 30yrs	1	0.5
2	30 – 35yrs	2	1.0
3	36 – 40yrs	18	8.6
4	41 – 45yrs	51	24.4
5	46 – 50yrs	63	30.
6	51 – 55yrs	53	25.4
7	56 – 60yrs	21	10.0
	Total	**209**	**100**

With regards to age distribution of ESL tutors, data in Table 1 revealed that majority of them (98.5%) were adults between 36 years through to compulsory retirement age of 60 years. Only two (2) and one (1) of the tutors were in their early 30s and below 30 years respectively. Of all the age categories of participants, it is remarkable to note that close to 80% of them are in their very active and productive years of 41 to 55 years old. The remaining minority group of 20% were identified to have belonged to two extreme groups. The first group of 10% was the new entrants into the college system, numbering 21 whose ages ranged from 30 to 40 years. This category of tutors requires some kind of mentorship and continuous, on-the-job professional training to be able to possess pedagogical skills such as CLT for effective delivery. The second minority of 10% were those getting close to retirement and may no longer have the flair for classroom delivery. Such experienced tutors could serve as mentors to the new entrants and provide support to them for the remaining few years before they exit the college system.

Table 2: CELTs Teaching Experience

No:	Years of Service in College	N	Frequency (%)
1	0 – 5yrs	55	29.3
2	6 – 10yrs	54	28.7
3	11 – 15yrs	48	25.5
4	16 – 20yrs	20	10.6
5	Above 20yrs	11	5.9
	Total	**188**	**100**

Teachers' overall teaching experience can have a positive impact on job performance. Studies on teaching experience on job satisfaction revealed teachers' improved pedagogical skills and content mastery (Binti-Rusbadrol, Mahmud & Arif, 2015; Limon & Nartgün, 2020), classroom management, relationship building, professional development (Rezaee & Sarani, 2018) as well as mentorship skills and reflective practice. Data in Table 2 revealed that more than 70% of ESL tutors in the CoEs have had a long-standing teaching experience ranging from 6 years through to 20 years and above, while less than 30% of them had been in the college between 0 to 5 years. This minority group may need some mentoring from the experienced and more knowledgeable ones in terms of professional knowledge and pedagogical content as espoused in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). However, it is essential to note that the quality of teaching experience matters as much as the quantity, as not all teachers may develop these skills equally over this long-standing period of their stay in the college. Therefore, continuous support, exposure to professional development seminars, workshops and opportunities for growth are crucial, especially for the less knowledgeable ones to enable them maximize the quality of teaching experience on their job performance.

4.2 Discussion of Perception of CLT as Students-centred Instruction

Table 3: CLT as Student-centered Instruction

		N	Mean	SD
1	I see communicative language teaching as an approach that prioritizes the needs and interests of the students.	208	6.33 (90%)	0.95
2	I believe in creating an interactive and engaging learning the environment where students actively participate in meaningful communication tasks.	208	6.41 (92%)	0.95
3	I believe that CLT is a more student-centred approach to teaching English than the traditional 'chalk-and-talk.	209	6.53 (93%)	0.97
4	I think that CLT encourages learner autonomy by providing opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own learning.	207	6.39 (91%)	0.92
5	I think that CLT promotes self-reflection, goal-setting, and independent language practice, empowering students to become lifelong learners.	207	6.01 (86%)	1.44
6	I am sure CLT approaches can empower students to take ownership of their learning, encouraging them to explore language resources and make decisions about their learning path.	208	6.41 (92%)	0.95
7	I believe CLT acknowledges the diverse needs, interests, and abilities of individual learners, providing opportunities for personalized learning experiences that cater for different learning styles.	209	6.53 (93%)	0.97
	Total		**6.372**	

As revealed in Table 3 above, it is evident in the data that CELTs see CLT as an engaging approach that puts the learner in focus and prioritizes their needs and interests in developing language skills (Savignon, 2002). They (92%) also hold the view that CLT empowers students to take ownership of their learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Richards, 2017), encourages them to explore language resources and make decisions about their learning path (Curits, 2017; Nunan, 2002). Tutors believe that creating an interactive and engaging learning environment enables students to actively participate in meaningful communication tasks, empowering them to take ownership of their learning and providing opportunities for personalized learning experiences.

These findings are further corroborated by what some of the tutors stated in the focus group interviews that CLT is an approach that "*immerses learners into activities and moves teachers away from the traditional 'chalk-and-talk approach*" (T2/5, 2023). The overall perception of tutors about CLT being learner-centred instruction has been positive.

4.3 Discussion of Tutors' Knowledge of CLT Practices
Teachers' knowledge of a teaching strategy is fundamental to creating engaging, effective, and inclusive learning environments where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally (Jacob *et al.*, 2020). By leveraging their expertise in teaching strategies, teachers can maximize student learning and help prepare students

for success in school and beyond. Some studies on teacher knowledge and students' achievement (Brandl, 2008; König & Pflanzl, 2016; Taylor, *et al.*, 2019) suggest that teachers who possess a deep understanding of various teaching strategies are better equipped to deliver instruction in ways that are engaging, effective, and tailored to students' needs. They can select and adapt strategies to match the content, context, and diverse learning styles of their students. A diverse classroom typically includes students with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds, and learning preferences. Therefore, teachers who are knowledgeable about their teaching methods can differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all students, ensuring that each learner is appropriately challenged and supported. Good knowledge of a teaching pedagogy such as CLT is particularly essential in promoting critical thinking skills and creating opportunities for students to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and apply their knowledge in meaningful ways. More importantly, teachers who can incorporate interactive activities, discussions, technology-enhanced lessons, and real-world applications into their instruction capture students' interest and make learning more enjoyable and relevant. Based on this, the study sought the views of tutors on whether they possess the required knowledge of CLT (Table 4) to be able to employ it in their teaching.

Table 4: Tutor Knowledge on CLT Practices

		N	Mean	SD
1	I am familiar with the practices and methodologies of CLT.	206	4.05 (58%)	1.17
2	In CLT classroom, I know that activities should be meaningful and involve real communication.	207	6.24 (89%)	0.74
3	I believe I have a lot of self-confidence when it comes to using CLT activities in my lesson.	205	6.05 (86%)	0.86
4	I sometimes feel intimidated and get nervous when I have to think of using any interactive teaching strategy like CLT.	206	2.02 (29%)	0.87
5	If given the opportunity, I would like to learn more about CLT and its use.	205	5.61 (80%)	0.92
6	I have difficulties integrating CLT in my classrooms due to the prominence of text-based and grammar-based practices.	194	6.21 (89%)	0.81
7	I feel that I can adopt a balanced approach by addressing errors that hinder communication while maintaining a supportive and non-threatening atmosphere.	198	6.30 (90%)	0.85
	Total Mean of Means		**6.068**	

From the table above, it emerged that CoE English language tutors' overall CLT knowledge base is positive, yet a lot of them are not sure whether they are familiar with the practices and strategies of CLT. There is also much confidence among CELTs in CoEs to integrate CLT in teaching but they think that the pedagogy cannot be used due to their inclination to a traditional grammar-based approach. This finding supports (Li *et al.*, 2020) who found that, due to the prominence of text-based and grammar-based practices in Korea, teachers have difficulties integrating CLT in their classrooms. It is also

interesting to note that a lot of these tutors admitted that they would want to learn more about CLT pedagogy if given the opportunity. This revelation is an expression of a strong desire to engage in professional development. Providing professional development opportunities by the school authorities is therefore very paramount to ensuring that tutors keep updating knowledge and skills in the implementation of CLT pedagogy. There is also the need to address the bottlenecks of the few tutors who admitted being intimidated and nervous when they had to think of using any interactive teaching strategy like CLT. The perception of the tutors on their knowledge of CLT has been positive. Given the necessary resources available to tutors, CLT pedagogy can receive patronage in the CoE English Language classroom and by extension, able to drive the standard-based curriculum at the basic school.

4.4 Discussion of CLT as Authentic and Functional Language Use

Table 5: CLT as Authentic and Functional Language Use

		N	Mean	SD
1	I believe that CLT emphasizes the use of authentic language in teaching.	205	6.32 (90%)	0.77
2	I believe in exposing students to real-life situations and encouraging them to use the target language for practical purposes, *such as expressing opinions, negotiating meaning, and solving problems*.	206	6.21 (89%)	0.88
3	I think that the English tutors in the CoE make use of CLT activities that enable interactive teaching strategies with students in class.	204	3.22 (46%)	1.85
4	I think that applying CLT in CoE classroom can help achieve the literacy standards in the new SBC.	207	5.47 (78%)	1.07
5	I believe that the existing approach to teaching English in the CoE classroom can transform CoE language classroom from form-focused approach to language function.	207	2.51 (36%)	1.48
6	I think there is a need to apply CLT approach to teaching in the CoE class.	206	5.95 (85%)	1.31
7	I believe that in a CLT learning, the focus is on developing students' functional language skills, enabling them to use the language effectively in various communicative contexts.	204	3.91 (56%)	1.55
8	Language teaching techniques should be designed in such a way that they encourage learners to use the target language in a more functional and communicative way.	200	2.40 (34%)	1.50
	Total Mean of Means		**4.49 (64%)**	

The overall perception of CLT as functional language use has been positive, confirming what Brandl (2008) and Lochland (2012) also found out. However, CELTs admitted in their responses (item 3; Table 5) that they did not think that their language classes are more interactive enough to engage students in independent language learning. The tutors were doubtful that their own classroom practices are in synch with CLT. A greater number of them (64%) admitted that the existing approach to teaching English in the

college classroom cannot transform CoE language classroom from a form-focused approach to language function (item 5; Table 5). Data also revealed that the greater number of CELTs (54%) failed to use such expressions and activities that enable interactive teaching strategies. The difficulty in integrating the approach could stem from their loyalty to text-based and grammar-based practices (Lee & VanPatten, 2003; Li *et al.*, 2020), which they (89%) earlier admitted in their responses in Table 4; item 6. The good news however, is that CELTs admitted and held the belief that applying CLT in CoE classrooms can help achieve the literacy standards in the new curriculum and that, there is a need to practise the approach in the CoE class because it emphasizes the use of real-world language in teaching.

4.5 Discussion on Assessment and Feedback in CLT Classroom

Table 6: Assessment, Error Correction and Feedback in CLT Classroom

		N	Mean	SD
1	I perceive assessment as an integral part of communicative language teaching.	150	1.00 (14%)	0.00
2	I think that CLT-oriented lesson uses formative assessment strategies, such as observations, performance-based tasks, and self-assessment, to provide ongoing feedback and guide instructional decisions.	188	1.00 (14%)	0.00
3	I recognize the importance of error correction and providing constructive feedback to students.	160	3.85 (55%)	1.04
4	I believe that people learn a language best when using it to do things rather than through studying how language works and practising rules.	188	1.00 (14%)	0.00
5	I see CLT classrooms emphasizing the importance of teaching language for specific purposes, *such as socializing, giving presentations, and engaging in discussions*.	146	4.01 (57%)	1.02
6	I believe that English language should not be learnt through rote memorization and grammar rules but through social interaction.	209	3.97 (57%)	1.06
7	I believe that in CLT, functional aspects of language is given importance in my assessment modes.	209	3.88 (55%)	1.18
	Total Mean of Means		**2.67 (38%)**	

It emerged from the data that many CELTs (86%) did not recognise assessment and feedback as an integral part of CLT. They hold the view that assessment strategies in the college classroom are not aligned with CLT principles. Some responses they gave in the group discussion supported this finding from the questionnaire. For instance, a participant indicated, *"if we really want to practise this methodology in our lessons, we need to reconsider the way we assess our students in the end-of-semester examinations to include such performance-based tasks" (T2 4, 2023).* This submission points to the fact that CELTs do not use such CLT-oriented assessment strategies such as observation, self-assessment and performance-based tasks to evaluate their lessons. Another participant has this to say in the discussion:

"How do we get the CAs on individual students when we engage them to work in groups……….and the next day, they call you to submit CA scores? You see, it also means that we need more time to be able to engage students in a series of activities" (T₃1, 2023).

This is emphatic of their loyalty to product-based instructions and the desire to meet students' expectation and produce results. CELTs, in their teaching, are more focused on grading towards certification than what goes into the functional aspect of language.

It was also revealed that a lot of CELTs do not believe that using the language to do things is the best way of learning it as opined by Austin (1975); rather, they prefer studying how language works and practising grammar rules. It could be argued that knowledge transmission was found to be key in most CELTs' teaching practices in this study. This is because most of what CELTs do in their classes is intended to meet students' expectations and produce results. Moreover, CELT roles, teaching materials and assessment procedures all relate to that ultimate aim. This suggests that CELTs in their teaching practices seem to care about the end result of their teaching more than about what goes on in their classes. In other words, the idea of education as a product rather than as a process is being stressed in CELTs' teaching practices (Nunan 2002; Richards & Rogers, 2016; Richards, 2006). Richards (2006) further argues that in product-based teaching, the focus is on the knowledge and skills which learners should gain as a result of teaching. To achieve this, CELTs subscribe to a teaching style which Christopher (2012) termed 'mimetic teaching', in which some techniques are used to ensure smoothness and precision in the transmission of knowledge from one person (teacher) to another person (student). In effect, much of classroom interaction is still in the hands of the CELTs in the CoE classroom, placing them at the centre of the teaching and learning process and allocating most of the classroom time to them.

Overall, CELTs perception on assessment strategies and feedback in the colleges does not favour CLT principles, and this is worrying in the bid to the implementation of the standard-based curriculum at the basic schools in Ghana.

4.6 Discussion of CLT as Integrated Skills and Contextualized Learning

Table 7: CLT as Integrated Skills and Contextualized Learning

		N	Mean	SD
1	I perceive communicative language teaching as an approach that integrates the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing.	198	3.18 (45%)	0.74
2	I am sure CLT aims to create opportunities for students to develop the language skills simultaneously and in an interconnected manner.	208	5.57 (80%)	0.98
3	I believe in a teaching approach that provides meaningful and context-rich language learning experiences to learners.	208	5.56 (79%)	1.14
4	I think that CLT teachers should design activities and tasks that reflect real-world situations and encourage students to	209	5.43 (78%)	1.19

	apply their language skills in authentic contexts.			
5	I think that language should be taught by integrating all language skills and not by only one skill at a time.	207	5.89 (84%)	1.11
6	I believe that CLT emphasises communication in the second (English) language and promotes learner proficiency in English.	209	4.53 (65%)	1.80
7	I know that one of the goals of CLT is to improve the accuracy and fluency in the use of the target language.	209	3.06 (44%)	1.11
	Total Mean of Means		**5.31 (76%)**	

Richards and Rogers (2017) maintain that CLT is an approach that integrates the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing in learners. Contrary to this assertion, a higher number of English language tutors (55%) do not agree with this, even though they (84.14%) hold the view that language teaching in general, should incorporate all language skills in an integrated manner and not by only one skill at a time. The reason for their divergent position could stem from the fact that these tutors face curriculum constraints, due to over-reliance on a single approach over time. Some of them uphold the view that the existing curriculum structures and standardized testing systems are not aligned well with CLT principles (Li, 2020; Taguchi, 2008); and so, these tutors faced constraints in adapting their teaching strategies to prioritize communicative language teaching over traditional content (Gorsuch, 2001). This is evident in some of their submission made during the focus group interview as: *"Yes, there will be some resistance because many of us are accustomed to the usual lecture style that focuses heavily on exams and grammar rules; and that is how the course outline has been structured"* (T3/3, 2023). This may account for why the greater number of these tutors (56%) in the colleges do not perceive CLT to improve both accuracy and fluency in the use of the English language as revealed in the data. To them, accuracy is best achieved if grammar is decoupled from other language skills and taught as a single unit.

Again, many of the tutors (78.4%) agreed that they design activities and tasks that reflect real-world situations and encourage students to apply their language skills in integrated contexts. The tutors also hold the view that any teaching approach should provide meaningful and context-rich language learning experiences to learners.

4.7 Discussion of CLT as Collaborative Learning

Data in Table 8 revealed that CELTs (76%) perceive and endorse CLT as a collaborative activity; and believe that the pedagogy creates a dynamic and interactive learning environment where students are active participants in their language-learning journey. CELTs throw very high support (88%) to the view that CLT teachers should encourage learners to explore different cultures and perspectives, promoting respect and understanding among diverse groups. Many of them (78%) subscribe to the view that collaborative teaching strategies often lead to increased students' engagement where students are actively involved in discussions, group activities, and projects, role-plays, and tasks that reflect real-world language use and enhances their understanding of the material. The strategy also builds tolerance of cultural diversity of perspectives by

embracing inclusivity and valuing the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of all learners where students are exposed to a variety of ideas, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and creating an environment where diversity is celebrated, and all voices are heard and respected.

**Table 8**: Discussion of CLT as Collaborative Learning

		N	Mean	SD
1	I am sure that CLT is a method that promotes collaborative learning environments where students work together in pairs or groups to achieve communicative goals.	209	5.46 (78%)	1.33
2	I believe that interaction and cooperation among learners facilitate language learning and provide opportunities for peer feedback and support.	209	5.47 (78%)	1.12
3	I support the view that social interactional activities: dramas, role-plays, games, etc should be used in the CoE English classroom to promote real-world communication.	208	4.38 (63%)	1.95
4	I support the view that CLT lessons should emphasize the development of students' cultural awareness and intercultural competence.	206	5.86 (84%)	0.98
5	I support the view that CLT teachers should encourage learners to explore different cultures and perspectives, promoting respect and understanding among diverse groups.	207	6.13 (88%)	1.01
6	I believe that CLT practices encourage opportunities where students actively engage in conversations, role-plays, and tasks that reflect real-world language use.	209	5.47 (78%)	1.12
7	CLT embraces inclusivity by valuing the unique linguistic and cultural backgrounds of all learners, creating an an environment where diversity is celebrated, and all voices are heard and respected.	208	4.38 (63%)	1.95
	Total Mean of Means		**5.30 (76%)**	

It also came up in the discussion with participants that there is the development of team spirit in collaborative teaching, *"helping students develop essential teamwork and communication skills, which are valuable in both academic and real-world settings"* (T4/1, 2023). Participants in the discussion also added that *"What is more is its enhancement of critical thinking skills as a result of its group discussions* (T3/5 & T4/5, 2023) *and problem-solving activities that encourage students to analyze information from different angles"* (T1/5, 2023). The result of these responses is that both teachers and students become innovative through a supportive network of colleagues, exchanging insights and strategies to address challenges and improve practice. There is increased motivation where students often motivate each other in a collaborative setting with a sense of responsibility to contribute to group success. CELTs, in their focus group discussion, also submitted that: *"These strategies also contribute to the creation of a positive classroom environment* (T2/4 & T5/2, 2023), *fostering a sense of community and mutual support among students"* (T2/1, 2023). The findings support earlier studies (Johnson, 2009; Willis & Willis, 2007; Swain, 2000) that collaborative teaching and learning admits cultural exchange, negotiation of meaning

(Johnson, 2009), group project, facilitation, fostering an atmosphere of cooperation and mutual learning (Willis & Willis, 2007; Swain, 2000). It is important to note, however, that, in spite of the potential benefits that CELTs subscribe to; successful implementation of collaborative teaching strategies in the CoEs will require thoughtful planning, clear objectives, and ongoing assessment to ensure positive outcomes.

5. Summary of Findings and Classroom Implications

Overall, a cursory look at CELTs' perceptual scale of CLT in relation to the six themes under which their perceptions are measured is illustrated in Figure 5.1 below.
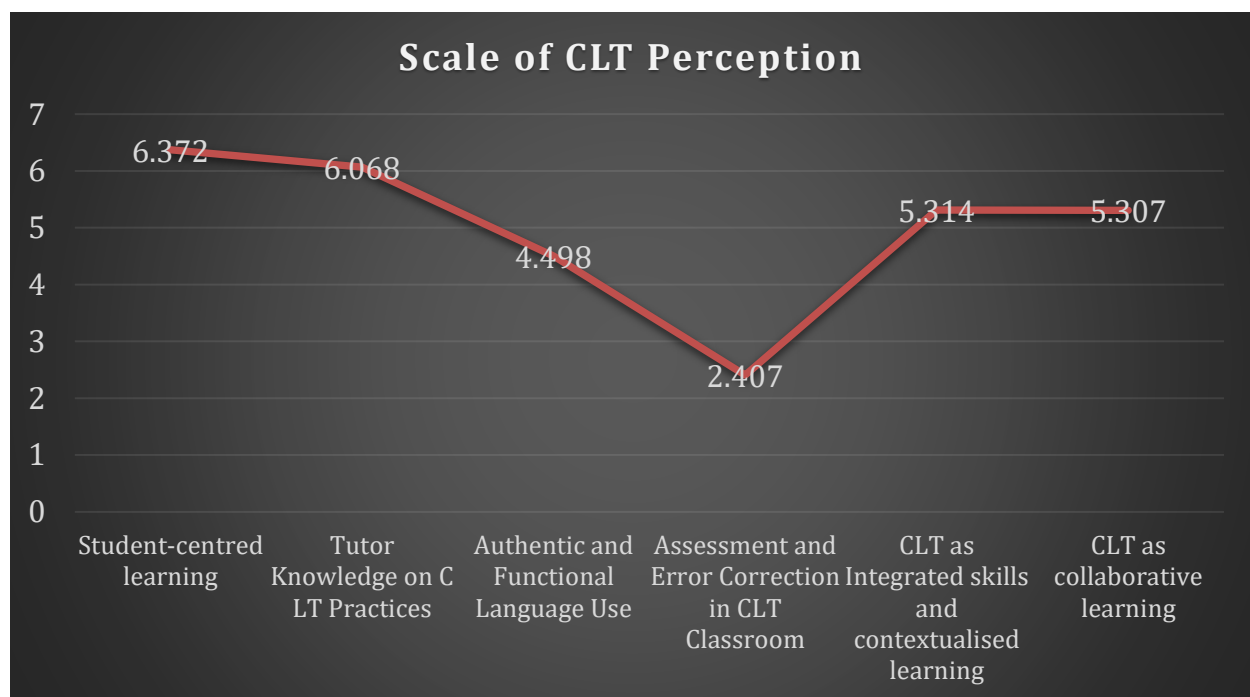
Figure 5.1: Perception Scale of CLT

There is enough evidence to suggest from Figure 5.1 above that CELTs' perception of communicative language teaching pedagogy in the colleges of education is high, except in the area of assessment and feedback procedures in CLT classes. If this high perception of CLT is carried into the classroom, there is the tendency of CELTs adopting a student-centered approach, where students actively participate in communicative activities to promote a more engaging and interactive learning environment. CELTs are more likely to design activities that simulate authentic language use, helping students to apply language skills in practical contexts. This will call for incorporation of real-world materials and scenarios, multimedia resources, language learning apps, and online platforms into their lessons to enhance the learning experience and expose students to genuine language use and cultural aspects. It will foster students' motivation by making language learning relevant and enjoyable. CELTs' embracing CLT are likely to create dynamic lessons that appeal to students' interests, leading to increased motivation and

enthusiasm for learning. Again, and with this positive perception of CLT, CELTs may prioritize helping students use language meaningfully, even if it involves occasional errors because CLT places a greater emphasis on the functional use of language for communication.

However, CELTs' applicability of CLT to help achieve the literacy standards in the basic school curriculum is threatened by their loyalty to a product-based approach to language teaching. Evidence of CLT applicability in the CoEs English language class is minimal in the data, though tutors' knowledge base on the approach is high. There is much evidence in the literature (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005; Jacobs & Farrell, 2003; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Spada, 2007; Vongxay, 2013) that looks at CLT addressing multiple language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing; and teachers who appreciate CLT often provide a more comprehensive language learning experience that develops all aspects of language proficiency. However, CELTs are not likely to meet this holistic language skills development of their students. There is the tendency of some of the language skills not receiving attention in the language classroom, even when CLT is applied in CoE classroom because many of the tutors do not perceive CLT to improve both accuracy and fluency in use of the English language. They hold the view that accuracy is best achieved if form-focused teaching of language is decoupled from a functional approach to language teaching. The high perception of CELTs towards CLT has serious implications for college administration and policy direction in terms of the provision of language resources in CoEs to enable CLT to receive patronage from tutors.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the pedagogical perception of College English Language Teachers (CELTs) towards communicative language teaching instruction. CLT framework recognizes that language is a tool for communication (Littlewood, 2011) and language learning is most effective when learners are engaged in meaningful interactions and tasks that mirror real-life situations (Richards & Rodgers, 2007; Yang & Cheung, 2013). It is worth noting that this approach aligns well with college English tutors' views on language teaching and effective pedagogical practices. The study revealed much of what CELTs perceive CLT to be in the ESL classroom, particularly its learner-oriented and collaborative nature; its ability to integrate and contextualize language learning skills and more importantly in terms of assessment and feedback strategies in the Colleges of Education. CLT is a product that receives much cognition (knowledge base) and affection of CoE English tutors. Overall responses of tutors towards CLT principles could be described as favourable, recognizing its importance in driving the Ghanaian basic school curriculum. However, appropriate CLT assessment strategies remain an issue in CoE language class if CLT is to receive tutors' consent for implementation.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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