GHANAIAN ESL TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CORE COMPETENCIES OF GHANA'S NEW ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM

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Abstract:
Teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of the Standard Based Curriculum (SBC) at the basic school level in Ghana. Scholars and educationists disagree over what comprises ESL instructors' beliefs, how ESL teachers' beliefs influence SBC implementation, and how teachers' beliefs differ by gender. Hence, this study conducted an in-depth investigation into the influence of ESL teachers' beliefs on the development of pupils' core competencies in the SBC and its gender implications. The study was guided by three research objectives and questions. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design was adopted. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 100 participants for the study. A questionnaire, a structured interview guide, and observation were adopted as research instruments for data collection. Findings of the study revealed that ESL teachers have varied beliefs about the development of core competencies. While some beliefs are positive, such as the need for skill and effectiveness in teaching, others are negative, such as the difficulty in developing digital literacy, classrooms that are frequently too large, additional training that should be provided, and teaching and Learning Materials (TLM) that are severely lacking. It was discovered that there are gender differences in how ESL teachers implement core competencies in the classroom. One major implication of the study is that the government and GES should increase collaboration and support for teachers through regular and effective training on various segments of the curriculum and ensure that resources are adequately provided for their use.

Keywords: second language curriculum, core competencies, teacher beliefs, curriculum implementation, standard-based curriculum

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1. Background to the Study

Teachers hold a unique position in educational settings, and their perceptions or beliefs can either make or break their classroom practices (Shaiegy & Abdelrahman, 2021; Agbofa, Mensah, Opoku-Amankwaah, Kyeremeh, & Adu-Boahen, 2023; Yaccob, Yunus, & John, 2023). According to Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory framework, teachers' beliefs are intertwined with self-efficacy, which is the teacher's attitude or perception of their *"capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations"* (Bandura, 1986, p. 3). As a result, teachers' ideas influence their classroom practices and their perception of the educational curriculum to a great extent. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) and Agormedah et al. (2022) conceptualize teacher's belief as involving their feelings, attitude or belief concerning their personal capability to succeed in transmitting valuable information to enhance pupil's learning experience. Hence, Shaiegy and Abdelrahman (2021) indicated that due to teachers' unique position in education, they play a significant role in the adoption or implementation of educational curriculum.

Educational reforms often involve the introduction of a new curriculum (Bassah, 2020; Mahama, 2022; Ndomondo, Mbise, & Katabaro, 2022; Agormedah et al., 2023), and teachers' beliefs about the new curriculum could either make or mar the extent to which they are willing or able to modify or adjust their teaching practices to adopt the new ideas and practices in the new curriculum (Wyatt, 2020; Shaiegy & Abdelrahman, 2021; Agbofa et al., 2023). This could be very difficult because Fullan (2011) argued that due to issues involving educational values, level of knowledge, and experience, it is not always easy for teachers to change their previous beliefs, perhaps due to the relative ease of implementation or familiarity with the mode of delivery. This is the case with the recent educational reform in Ghana.

The new Standards-Based Curriculum (SBC) by the Government of Ghana (GoG) in 2019 requires a major shift in connection with teaching practices. Because the new curriculum is competency-based, teachers must assist students in developing core competencies or 21st-century skills in order for them to compete effectively with colleagues globally (NaCCa, 2019; Apau, 2021; Agormedah et al., 2023).

English is considered the language of mobility, and its domination over other languages worldwide is so profound that Dionne (2014) notably stated that its "*sun never sets*" (p. 11). Alluding to Dionne's (2014) statement, Gustafson (2015) observed that the English language controls modern technology and innovations to a level to which no other language aspires. Hence, in Ghana and several nations worldwide, proficiency in English is indicative of being educated with relevant communicative skills as a global citizen since English is "*now spoken by approximately 1.35 billion people worldwide*" (Graton, 2023).

Though English is taught and learned as a second language in Ghana, it is a core subject at the basic level. As a result, the rationale for teaching and learning English coincides with the overall focus of SBC. Since English is the official language of education

and business in Ghana, ESL teachers must devise relevant strategies to effectively implement SBC and fast-track pupils' acquisition of the English language as an impetus for developing the six core competences, the prerequisites for global citizens.

Implementation of SBC has been very difficult for many teachers due to reasons ranging from low-level information about SBC, worries over instructional materials, logistics, time and level of how they have to make major changes to their previous teaching beliefs and practices (Aboagye and Yawson, 2020; Mpuangnan & Adusei, 2021). In consonance with Roehrig, Kruse, and Kern (2007) and Shaiegy and Abdelrahman (2021), effective implementation of the new curriculum is often inseparably interwoven with teachers' skills, knowledge, perceptions, feelings, and beliefs about the curriculum.

As a result, it is imperative to ascertain the extent to which teachers' beliefs are affected in the implementation of SBC, especially in relation to facilitating pupil's capacity to develop 1) "Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving" (CP), 2) "Creativity and Innovation" (C1), 3) "Communication and Collaboration" (CC), 4) "Cultural Identify and Global Citizenship" (CG), 5) "Personal Development and Leadership" (PL), 6) "Digital Literacy" (DL).

2. Problem Statement

This study seeks to fill the conundrum concerning ESL teachers' beliefs and their influence on basic school pupils' development of core-competencies in the SBC alongside its gender implications among ESL teachers. This is prudent because teacher's beliefs are strong determinants of successful implementation of educational curriculum (Wyatt, 2020; Agormedah et al., 2023). The study will also help to resolve the mixed results on how gender influences curriculum implementation (Mahama, 2022; Agbofa et al., 2023).

Close study of several studies investigating the influence of teacher's beliefs on the development of communicative skills through innovative strategies are often done within developed countries such as United Kingdom, Japan, or United States (Zimmerman, 2000; Leeming, 2017; Han & Hiver, 2018). However, in line with Nguyen and Dang (2020), the findings of these studies often lack applicability in L2 settings because methods or strategies propounded are mostly not contextualized to teaching and learning English as a second language (Wyatt, 2020; Nguyen & Dang, 2020).

Additionally, studies by Macaro, Curle, Pun, and Dearden (2018) and Faez, Karas, and Uchihara (2019) conducted within second-language settings often made recommendations based on native speakers' perspectives, which mostly position second-language teachers' classroom practices as inadequate or insufficient to enhance pupils' proficiency, which Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) described as "*imposter syndrome*" (p. 32). Wyatt (2018, 2020) observed that findings in studies by Macaro et al. (2018) and Faez et al. (2019) are "*insufficiently close to L2 teachers' and learners' concerns and contexts*". Wyatt (2018) found, corroborated by Apau (2021) and Agormedah et al. (2023) results, that two of the major worries Ghanaian basic school teachers have been about low-level information on SBC and their capacity to fully implement the new curriculum.

Critical analysis of the methodological approaches to conducting studies on teachers' beliefs regarding learners' acquisition of skills or proficiency is predominated by standardized instruments, especially the "Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale" (TSES) by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001). However, studies using qualitative methods, such as those conducted by Wyatt and Dikilitas (2019) and Thompson (2020) are minimal. As a result, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, a study employing a self-made questionnaire, personal interviews, and observation is yet to be conducted in Ghana. A study of such stature will promote reflexive professionalism among ESL teachers. It will also provide insight into strategies L2 teachers could adopt to reflect classroom context and pupils' concerns. It will augment knowledge of the new curriculum and the development of core competencies among basic school pupils. This study therefore conducted an in-depth inquiry into ESL teachers' beliefs and their influence on the development of core competencies by pupils in the basic schools in the Central region of Ghana.

2.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to conduct an in-depth investigation into the influence of ESL teachers' beliefs on the development of pupils' core competencies in the SBC and its gender implications. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1) Ascertain ESL teachers' beliefs about the core competencies of the SBC.
2) Investigate gender influence on teachers' beliefs regarding the implementation of the core competencies of the SBC in the classroom.
3) Explore ESL teachers' mode of implementing the core competencies of SBC in the classroom.

2.2 Research Questions

The following research question guided the course of this study:

1) What are teachers' beliefs regarding the core competencies of the SBC in selected basic schools?
2) How does gender influence ESL teachers' level of implementation of the core competencies of SBC in selected basic schools?
3) In what ways do ESL teachers implement the core competencies of SBC in selected basic schools?

3. Literature Review

3.1 Concept of Beliefs

Belief has been variously defined by scholars, culminating in what Pajares (1992) described as "*the messy construct of beliefs*" (p. 309). For example, while Pehkonen and Pietila (2003) defined beliefs as the type of "*knowledge that is subjective and experience-based*" (p. 2), Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) consider them "*a conceptual portrayal that signals a reality, truth, or trustworthiness to its holder… as a guide to personal thought and action*" (p. 79).

A close reading of the definitions above shows that belief could either be a conscious or unconscious proposition, often inferred from an individual's action. Underscoring the messy nature of what constitutes a belief, Rokeach (1968) indicated that there is no one-size-fits-all definition because beliefs are integrative and can be categorized as follows: *"Descriptive (e.g., I teach diverse students), evaluative (e.g., S/he won't do well on the test), and prescriptive elements (e.g., An achievement gap will always exist)"* (p.37).

Rokeach's (1992) description of beliefs, reveals that they occur in a system that Jones and Carter (2007) refer to as embedded belief systems. Belief systems are driven or governed by a certain set of assumptions. These assumptions, according to Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017), comprise 1) variance in beliefs; 2) beliefs with less variance or beliefs that are central, with the propensity to resist change the most; and 3) when central beliefs change, induces changes in the larger belief system.

In larger belief systems, beliefs have sub-structures such as value and attitude (Bereczki & Karpati, 2018; Davis & Willing, 2023). Attitude, according to Simpson, Koballa, Oliver, and Crawley (1996), refers to an individual's predisposition to respond negatively or positively to certain ideas, things, or issues, while values involve "*evaluative, comparative, and judgmental functions of beliefs and replace predisposition with an imperative to action*" (p. 314).

In effect, human belief systems are interwoven and reciprocal. It is comparable to a window or pinhole through which an individual sees the world, other humans, and oneself (Nelson & Guerra, 2009). Hence, as shown above, beliefs are subjective, experience-based, difficult to change, and can be inferred from an individual's actions. An individual attitude and values are aspects of the beliefs system which has a direct bearing on how people view the world, and see others and themselves. Hence, individual belief systems are vastly different from their knowledge or profession and can be understood based on their actions and inaction, acceptance, or rejection (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Hofer & Lembens, 2019).
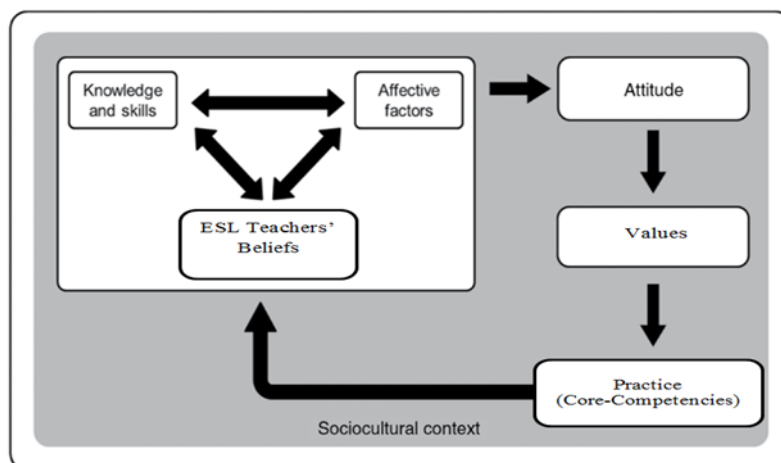
3. Teachers' Beliefs

Human belief systems are complex and highly influential on how an individual sees the world, other people, and oneself (Nelson & Guerra, 2009). As a result, as demonstrated above, beliefs are subjective, experience-based, difficult to alter, and may be deduced from a person's actions. Individual attitudes and values are parts of the belief system that have a direct impact on how people perceive the world, others, and themselves. As a result, individual belief systems range greatly from their expertise or profession and can be understood by their acts and inaction, acceptance, or rejection (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Hofer & Lembens, 2019).

A critical evaluation of teachers' beliefs within the theoretical framework of Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1977) shows that effective implementation of any aspect of the school curriculum is a function of teachers' beliefs about themselves. In his conceptualization, Bandura (1986) refers to beliefs about self as "*self-efficacy beliefs*" (p. 3).

Bandura defined self-efficacy beliefs as "*beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations*" (p. 3).

Teachers' attitudes and values influence their potential to succeed in any course of action and effectively adopt ways to achieve instructional goals in a specific situation (Bereczki & Karpati, 2018; Davis & Willing, 2023). According to Bandura (1986), Roehrig et al. (2007), and Agormedah et al. (2023), the interaction of teachers' knowledge and abilities (instructional competences), perception, and self-efficacy beliefs is required for the effective implementation of core competencies or any section of SBC. As a result, to guide the investigation, the following minimal conceptual framework was developed: A critical assessment of numerous research on teachers' beliefs conducted by Jones and Carter (2007, p. 842), Hofer and Lembens (2018, p. 4), Guerra and Wubbena (2017, p. 37), and Agormedah et al. (2023) aided in the development of the conceptual framework to guide the study indicated below:

Figure 1: Conceptual framework on Teachers' Beliefs
and Implementation of Core-competencies of SBC

Source: Researcher's Construct (2023)

The depicted framework in Figure 1, reveals that attitude and values (beliefs substructures) are products of the complex interaction between teachers' knowledge and skills (instructional competencies), teachers' beliefs, and affective factors. The attitude, a predisposition by the teacher, influences his or her values or judgement, and evaluative appraisal of the curriculum so as to formulate a plan or resolution resulting in the teacher's practices in the classroom concerning the implementation of core-competencies of SBC.

Close reading of the framework shows that there exists a dynamic, interdependent, and cyclical interaction between the three components (affective factors, beliefs and knowledge and skills) and the sociocultural context within which the teacher operates.

The conceptual review has demonstrated that the determination of the extent to which teachers' beliefs influence the implementation of the curriculum is dependent on

the teacher's attitude and values as well as the prevailing sociocultural setting within which the teacher teaches. In effect, there is no one-size-fits-all finding, approach, or framework for investigating the outcome of certain groups of teachers' beliefs on their level of implementation of the school curriculum.

A case-by-case study is to be conducted with a view to ascertaining the nature of the influence teachers' beliefs exert on teachers' modes of implementing curriculum. The next segment of the study considers what constitutes core competencies in SBC with a view to deepening insight into the sociocultural setting of ESL teachers.

3.1 Core-Competencies of SBC

According to NaCCA (2019, p. 4), one of the overarching goals of GoG, the "Ministry of Education" (MoE), the "Ghana Education Service" (GES), and the "National Council for Curriculum and Assessment" (NaCCA) for the new curriculum reform (SBC) is to assist learners in developing certain 21st-century skills relevant to Ghana's development and ensuring sustainability.

In the SBC, six core competencies were expected to be developed in pupils. Kim, Raza, and Seldman (2019) described these core competencies as 21st-century skills relevant to fast-tracking the acquisition of requisite skills for nation-building, especially within the context of developing countries, including Ghana.

Effective implementation of the core competencies in SBC is very useful in the context of Ghana because, according to Mahama (2023), Agbofa et al. (2023), and Agormedah et al. (2023), it will equip and imbue pupils with a set of requisite skills, knowledge, and behaviors so that they can function effectively as global citizens, confidently address thorny real-world issues, foster collaboration, and effectively navigate the turns and twists in life.

However, there is a dichotomy of opinion as to the best approach to developing the identified core competencies (CP, CI, CC, CG, PL, and DL) in pupils. Findings of several studies have revealed that teachers 1) are highly efficacious (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2002; Weisel & Dror, 2006), possess a positive attitude, willingly adopt educational innovation in new curriculum (Snyder & Fisk, 2016; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016), are capable of managing and organizing classrooms effectively through result-oriented planning (Dibapile, 2012), and are determined to improve instructional quality (Holzberger, Philip, & Kunter, 2012; Zee & Koomen, 2016).

A close examination of these studies revealed that most of them were done outside the context of the ESL classroom. Wyatt (2020), in consonance with Nguyen and Dang (2020), indicated that the findings of several studies on the development of core competencies in pupils are very applicable in developed countries such as the US or UK because they were done within the sociocultural contexts of these countries. Hence, in line with the conceptual framework of this study, the applicability of the findings of the highlighted studies is doubtful because the sociocultural settings of non-native speakers of English (ESL) are vastly different from the settings of native speakers in countries such as the UK and US. Moreover, the findings of the highlighted studies are very applicable

in highly resourced countries in Europe or the Americas in comparison to Ghana, which has low-level technological infrastructure and digital technologies (Adarkwah, 2021; Maqbool, Saiba, Altuwaim, Rashid & Ashfag, 2023).

A close examination of several studies investigating the influences of language teacher self-efficacy beliefs and the implementation of curriculum revealed a serious gap in knowledge. The majority of the studies (Macaro et al., 2018; Faez et al., 2019) are prescriptive and often present ESL teachers' mode of teaching or instruction as falling behind the received pronunciation or public discourse standard for native speakers (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011; Wyatt, 2020).

In effect, the findings of these studies on teachers' beliefs are based on generalized information and not within an ESL setting, which could have sufficiently retrieved valuable information concerning the socio-cultural context of teachers and their concerns (Dornyei & Ushioda, 2011; Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Wyatt, 2020). This would have touched on naturally occurring data with a reliable and well-validated outcome, which is highly applicable in understanding ESL teachers' beliefs and addressing their concerns.

There are controversies concerning how SBC was introduced and how it should be implemented, including the development of core competencies in learners. In their studies, Aboagye and Yawson (2020), Apau (2021), and Mpuangnan and Adusei (2021) highlighted some concerns that Agormedah et al. (2023) indicated are inimical to teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and could seriously impact their capacity to effectively implement the content of the new curriculum.

Agormedah et al. (2023) conducted an extensive investigation into "*whether teachers' experience and self-efficacy beliefs will influence the implementation of the new curriculum reforms across gender in Ghana*" (p. 3). The study was not specifically oriented toward ESL teachers and their belief systems. Agormedah et al.'s (2023) study focused on teachers' experiences and self-efficacy beliefs across genders and not specifically on the development of core competencies of SBC in their pupils.

Agormedah et al. (2023) discovered that gender did not influence teachers' self-efficacy beliefs during the course of implementing the new curriculum. However, while the findings of Mahama's (2022) and Orakci, Yuregilli, and Karagoz's (2023) studies coincide with the result of Agormedah et al.'s study on gender differences in self-efficacy and creative nurturing, it is inconsistent with the results of studies by Sarfo, Amankwah, Sam, and Konin (2015) and Lesha (2017) that there are gender differences among teachers in terms of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement.

It is worth noting that several studies (Mahama, 2023; Agormedah et al., 2023; Agbofa et al., 2023) investigating teachers' beliefs and implementation of the new curriculum employed the quantitative research paradigm as a research design for eliciting relevant data and analyzing the data. There is a dearth of studies employing the qualitative paradigm; as a result, Agbofa et al. (2023) recommended the use of the qualitative paradigm to conduct similar studies.

It is therefore prudent to conduct an in-depth investigation into the impact of ESL teachers' beliefs on the development of pupils' core competencies in the SBC and its gender implications. The study employed mixed methods to critically examine the nature of the influence teachers' beliefs have on how ESL teachers implement segments of SBC focusing on core competencies. The study also ascertains whether there is a gender difference between male and female teachers in relation to the focus of this study.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design
This study adopts a transformative philosophical framework and a mixed-methods research approach. In specific terms, this study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design. The choice of sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design within a transformative philosophical framework was predicated on the justifications of Mertens (2010), Creswell and Creswell (2018), and Creswell and Hirose (2019). In line with Mertens (2010), a transformative philosophical paradigm "*is a framework of belief systems that directly engage members of culturally diverse groups*" (p. 10). ESL teachers are culturally diverse groups of people, and in harmony with the conceptual framework for this study, it is vitally important to interact with them or deal directly with them with a view to understanding their context and concerns. Hence, an explanatory research mixed-methods design, according to Creswell and Hirose (2019), possesses strong quantitative initials with insight into the frequency or level of occurrence of a phenomenon among subjects. The design also provides a forum to collect naturally occurring data through personal interviews and observation with subjects so as to "*probe a contextual understanding*" The research design also affords the researcher the opportunity to gain insight into the belief systems and experiences of the subjects. Such inquiry will elicit relevant data that is peculiar to the ESL teacher's context and could either hinder or enhance their efforts at implementing the core competencies of the new curriculum.

Additionally, Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicated that unlike narrative, historical, and grounded theory designs, which focus on associations between variables, the sequential mixed-methods research design based on a transformative philosophical framework promotes causal research, which places emphasis on causes and effects between variables. Creswell and Hirose (2019) observe that due to the strong quantitative initials, the findings of the study can be generalized to a larger population. This agrees with the result of studies by Fowler (2008) and Creswell and Creswell (2018) that the findings of quantitative studies comprising the frequency of views, behaviors, or patterns of a representative sample of a population can be generalized over the larger population.

4.2 Participant Selection
The target population of the study comprised all ESL teachers in the basic school in the Central region of Ghana. However, the accessible population was 335 due to logistical

and other limiting issues. The accessible population comprises in-service teachers already employed by GES. Some of these teachers are undergoing training in the UEW sandwich degree program.

Participants were selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. The first stage comprises the purposive sampling technique, which is a non-probability sampling technique. Purposive sampling is appropriate for the study because all the teachers in the population are qualified as ESL teachers and capable of providing all the data required. However, in view of Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, Nigam, and Rahman's (2023) finding that a purposive sample is deficient in representativeness, the study adopted stratified sampling, which is a probability sampling technique. Rahman (2023) indicated that stratification of the population fosters the representativeness of the selected sample. Hence, the study employed two strata for selecting participants. This comprises junior high and primary schools.

The determination of sample size was done based on Neuman's (2006) recommendation that a population less than 1000 can use 30% of the accessible population for representativeness. As a result, a purposive sampling technique was used to select 50 ESL teachers in each of the strata. In all, 100 ESL teachers were selected for the study.

4.3 Research Instruments

The study employed a self-made questionnaire, structured interview guide, and observation to elicit relevant data from the research site. Upon adjusting the instruments based on the outcome of a pilot study, the internal consistency of the instruments was determined using Cronbach Coefficient Alpha of the Statistical Production for Service Solutions (SPSS). The reliability coefficient value was 0.68, which is a good measure of internal consistency.

4.3.1 Quantitative Inquiry

This segment covers the first two research objectives on what constitutes ESL teachers' beliefs and gender implications for the study. The questionnaire comprised 22 items involving closed and open-ended questions. This facilitated the retrieval of valuable data for the resolution of research problems. The three major variables in this study are teaching attitude, teaching values, and gender. The subsequent segment of the study enumerated how each of these key variables is measured.

4.3.1.1 Teaching Attitude (TAt)

Teaching attitude is conceptualized as one-way teachers perceive the implementation of the core competencies of SBC. Attitude is one of the sub-structures of teachers' belief systems, and it is often reflected in how they perceive an idea, instruction, or issue (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). As a result, TAt was measured using five Likert scales, scored as 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= not sure, 4= agree, and 5= strongly agree.

The adoption of the Likert Scale was based on Creswell and Hirose's (2019) observation that it is suitable for measuring psychological concepts such as emotions, feelings, or attitudes since it reveals their depth or intensity. It will help in deciphering the intensity of how teachers perceive the processes of implementing the core competencies of SBC. This harmonizes with the formulated conceptual framework and findings of several studies (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017; Hofer & Lembens, 2019) that teachers' beliefs, often exhibited through their attitudes, are reflected in how they perceive the new curriculum.

4.3.1.2 Gender

This study conceptualizes gender as male or female. Unlike some studies (Short, Yang, and Jenkins, 2013; Agormedah et al., 2023), this study does not include intersex in its conceptualization due to the limited occurrence of such reproductive organs and because it is outside the ambit of this study. Hence, participants are given two options for indicating their gender: "male" or "female."

4.3.1.3 Teaching Value (TVt)

Teaching value is conceptualized as teachers' judgment or decision to willingly implement the core competencies of SBC in the classroom. This is reflected in the extent to which they employ strategies to develop core competencies in pupils (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). Hence, similar to TAt, TVt was measured using a five-point Likert Scale and scored in similar ways as shown in the preceding section.

4.4 Qualitative Inquiry

A structured interview guide was used for the retrieval of qualitative data. The selection of a structured interview guide was as a result of the findings of Creswell and Poth (2018), that it facilitates the retrieval of valuable data at a faster pace in comparison to an unstructured interview or personal interview. Yin (2018) and Mohajan (2020) also indicated that it promotes confidentiality and a high level of autonomy to participants and it fosters retrieval of first-hand information without coercion from either the researcher or other participants. This is relevant to understanding ESL teachers' beliefs and the sociocultural context they teach.

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The guide was structured to coincide with the third objective of the study. In harmony with Dornyei and Usioda (2011) and Wyatt (2020), it provides ample opportunity and sufficient space for ESL teachers to freely express their mode of developing core competencies in their classroom. They detract from "imposter syndrome" and allow every interviewee to freely express themselves in relation to the mode of implementing core competence based on their sociocultural context.

The researcher observed some teachers during classroom sessions. This was done to retrieve naturally occurring data. Though participants were informed of the observation session in advance, the researcher determined the exact time, circumstance, and participant to be observed. McLeod (2023) indicated that this approach often fosters reliable data since the participant will be doing the regular thing that she is doing, which is a reflection of his or her teaching beliefs (attitude and value).

4.5 Data Collection Procedure

Approval was sought from the respective headmasters and/or their assistants, and each of the participants was provided ample information prior to the commencement of the data collection exercise. By means of the initial meeting with participants, informed consent was obtained. Some of the headmasters and/or their assistants volunteered to assist the researcher in collecting data. Due to the busy schedule of the participants, data collection spanned two months, a period of three weeks (April 24, 2023, to May 9, 2023). With the help of the research assistants (headmaster and assistant headmaster), the questionnaire was completed in less than 15 minutes. However, the structured interview guide was completed within 20–25 days.

4.6 Data Analysis

The retrieved data were sorted, cleaned, and coded for analysis. The first and third objectives were attained using descriptive statistics. The second research question on gender influence entails the use of both descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of an independent sample t-test. The third research objective was achieved through the content analysis of qualitative data. The study employed Statistical Product for Services Solution (SPSS) version 21 for the computation of both descriptive and inferential statistics.

4.7 Ethical Consideration

The researcher ensured that none of the participants in the study were coerced into participating, either directly or implicitly. Participants' consent was individually sought and obtained before participation. Relevant authorities within the school were contacted and provided useful information about the study. During the initial meeting with participants, they were provided useful information about the study and the purpose for which their participation was beneficial. All participants were informed that the confidentiality and anonymity of their personal information would not be divulged to

another entity or third party, and their names would not be used in any segment of the study.

Table 1: ESL Teachers' beliefs about Core-Competencies of the SBC (n = 100)

Statement	Agree				Not Sure				Disagree			
	N	%	Mean	St. Dev	N	%	Mean	St. Dev	N	%	Mean	St. Dev
1. Skilled and effective teachers facilitate pupils' critical thinking capacity.	87	87	5.0	1.5	0	0	0	0	13	13	1.0	1.1
2. Digital Literacy is very difficult to develop in pupils because we lack an internet connection at school.	83	83	4.9	1.4	2	2	3.1	1.4	15	15	1.8	1.1
3. The duration for covering each of the six core competencies is too short.	21	21	1.5	1.3	0	0	0	0	79	79	4.9	1.3
4. The classroom is often too large for a practice section for each of pupil.	72	72	4.0	1.0	12	12	3.4	1.4	16	16	1.9	1.3
5. There is a need for additional training on the six core competencies in my teaching.	92	92	5.0	1.6	0	0	0	0	8	8	1.3	1.0
6. There is a serious lack of TLM to promote students' capacity to teach creatively and independently.	54	54	4.1	1.2	12	12	3.6	1.3	34	34	1.4	1.1
7. Developing core-competencies in pupils is too laborious and time-consuming.	23	23	2.4	0.9	18	18	3.7	1.0	59	59	4.3	1.4
8. Pupils have difficulty remembering terms, facts and dates	66	66	4.4	1.2	0	0	0	0	34	34	2.6	1.0
9. Several learners do not have textbooks or other tools for practice	61	61	4.3	1.2	0	0	0	0	39	39	2.5	1.1
10. There is little support and collaboration by the administration on the development of core-competencies	88	88	4.8	1.5	0	0	0	0	12	12	1.2	1.3

Source: Field Survey (2023).

5. Results

5.1 ESL Teacher's Attitude about Core-competencies of the SBC

The first objective is oriented towards ascertaining ESL teacher's beliefs about core-competencies of the SBC. The results of the study are presented in Table 1.

Close reading of Table 1 shows that participants' belief (teaching attitude) regarding the notion that skilled and effective teachers can facilitate pupils' critical thinking capacity was very high with a mean value of 5.0 while the standard deviation was 1.5. This means the participants' strongly belief that skilled and effective teachers can successfully develop pupils' critical thinking. The value of standard deviation (1.5) showed that the data is reliable and averagely clustered around the mean. However, the mean value of participants' beliefs in relation to the duration assigned in the curriculum for the development of core competencies was 4.9, while the standard deviation was 1.3. This shows that participants strongly believe that the duration allocated for enhancing pupils' core competencies is not too short and that the data is reliable.

Results from Table 1 in connection with the classroom size being too large for practice sessions for each of the pupils show that participants' mean value was 4.0 while the standard deviation was 1.0. In effect, it shows that most of the classrooms are often too large for each of the pupils to participate in practice sessions to aid in the development of core competencies. Table 1 also revealed that for additional training, participants' mean value was 5.0 and the standard deviation was 1.6. The results for this section show that participants believe that effective training should be organized for teachers to enhance their skills and competence.

It is noteworthy that in Table 1, participants' beliefs on the lack of TLM to promote pupils' creativity had a mean value of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 1.2. This means that the data is reliable, and participants believe that TLMs are sparingly available for use in the classroom. Concerning the laborious and consuming nature of developing core competencies in pupils, participants' beliefs had a mean value of 2.4 and a standard deviation of 0.9. This is notable because it means participants disagree with the notion that the development of core competencies is laborious and time-consuming. The computation in Table 1 shows teachers' beliefs in connection with pupils' memories of terms, facts, and data had a mean value of 4.4 and a standard deviation of 1.2, which signifies that the data was reliable and participants strongly believed that pupils were not conversant with dates, facts, and terms on core competencies. In connection with the use of textbooks and other tools, participants have a mean value of 4.3 and a standard deviation of 1.2, which indicates most of the participants believe learners are in need of textbooks and other tools.

It is worth mentioning that, in connection with collaboration and support from the administrative arms of the educational sector, participants' beliefs scored a mean value of 4.8 and a standard deviation of 1.5. It means that participants strongly believe that there is a need for increased support and collaboration from respective authorities in the educational sector.

In Table 1, it was discovered that participants had the following beliefs regarding core competencies: Skill and effectiveness are important; the development of digital literacy is difficult; the duration allocated for core competencies is not too short; classrooms are often too large; additional training should be provided; TLM is seriously lacking; pupils do not remember terms, facts, and dates; textbooks and other tools are not available; and administration needs to provide adequate support and collaboration.

5.2 Gender Influence on Teacher's Beliefs Regarding the Implementation of Core-competencies

This segment of the results provided ample insight into the level of gender influence on teachers' adoption of strategies for the implementation of core competencies in the classroom. Results are summarized in Tables 2 and 3. Table 2 entails the group statistics for all the participants in relation to their gender (male and female).

Table 2: Group Statistics on Implementation of Core-Competencies (n = 100)

Item	Description	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Gender	Female	50	12.30	0.492
	Male	50	8.10	0.568
p≤0.05				

Source: Field Survey Data (2023).

Close examination of the computation in Table 2 revealed that the mean score of female participants (M = 12.30) was greater than the mean score of the male participants (M = 9.40). In effect, there is a difference in the level of implementation between male and female participants.

Table 3: Independent Sample T-Test (n = 100)

Independent Samples Test		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Gender	Equal variances assumed	17.733	.049	1.645	197	.0415	.15000	.11359	-.02498	.412598
	Equal variances not assumed			1.645	174.245	.0415	.15000	.11359	-.02417	.412617
p≤0.05										

Source: Field Survey Data (2023).

Depicted in Table 3 is the result of the independent sample t-test to ascertain the level of significance of the difference between male and female pupils. However, a close look at

the difference revealed that it was not significant at the 0.05 level (t (100) = 1.645, *p*=0.049), because *p* is lower than 0.05, although it should have been equal or lesser than 0.05 (p≤0.05). This implies that the difference between female and male participants is statistically significant and it is not as a result of chance or other factors, rather it was due to the influence of gender.

6. Discussion

This study sought to ascertain teachers' beliefs on the implementation of core competencies in the classroom and whether gender has any influence on the mode of implementation of the core competencies among ESL teachers. Findings of the study revealed that teachers hold certain beliefs that are inimical to the implementation of core competencies in their classrooms. For example, participants had the belief that digital literacy is very difficult to implement because several schools lack internet connections. Moreover, participants also indicated that they needed additional training because only skilled and effective teachers can implement core competencies.

The finding in this section is consistent with Adarkwah (2021) and Maqbool et al. (2022) that there is low-level adoption of modern technology in the country and the digital infrastructure is still underdeveloped. Findings of studies by Mahama (2022), Agormedah et al. (2023), and Agbofa et al. (2023) resonate with the result of this study regarding participants' interest in receiving additional and adequate training to be better equipped to implement or develop the six core competencies in their pupils.

Results in Table 1 revealed that there is little support and collaboration with the administrative body of Ghana's educational sector. This finding lends credence to the findings of Dornyei and Ushioda (2011) and Wyatt (2020) that it is vitally important that the context and concerns of ESL teachers be ascertained with a view to facilitating positive outcomes in the implementation of educational reforms. This is consistent with the outcome of Gilakjani and Sabouri's (2017) study, which found that teachers' modes of classroom practices are primarily influenced by their belief systems in the form of attitudes and values. Hence, understanding the difficulties and sociocultural settings of these teachers will promote a synergistic approach to SBC.

The findings of the study are inconsistent with the formulated framework, which showed that ESL teachers' sociocultural settings influence teaching practices, which are a product of their belief system (attitude and value). Little collaboration from respective authorities in the school shows that little is done to promote teachers' capability to transcend inertia that may have been as a result of sociocultural setting and ESL teachers' belief system.

The results of the study demonstrated that there is a significant difference between the modes of implementing core competencies among male and female participants. The finding of this study is consistent with the results of studies by Sarfo et al. (2015) and Lesha (2017) showing that there are gender differences among teachers in terms of aspects of implementing several segments of the school curriculum. The results of this

study corroborate Sarfo et al.'s (2015) findings that female teachers had a higher level of teaching attitude to foster effective implementation of curriculum in comparison to male teachers.

However, it is noteworthy that the findings of this study are inconsistent with the results of studies by Mahama (2022), Orakci et al. (2023), and Agormedah et al. (2023) that found no gender differences between male and female teachers in connection with the implementation of schools' curricula. Unlike

The results of the quantitative study underscore the set of beliefs participants have concerning the implementation of SBC and, more importantly, confirm that the differences between male and female participants are a result of gender influence.

The next segment of this study adopts qualitative data for the achievement of the third research objective. This section was analyzed using qualitative research methods. The content analysis of the retrieved data was done with a view to highlighting trends, patterns, and themes concerning how ESL teachers are implementing the core competencies of SBC in the classroom.

6.1 Strategies Adopted in the Implementation of Core Competencies of SBC

The responses of the interviewees showed that, though they were fully aware of the need to develop the six core competencies in pupils, they were more concerned about helping pupils understand the linguistic concepts. In effect, by virtue of the interview and observation, the research discovered that interviewees were not keen on activities that would facilitate the development of the six core competencies in the pupils. The following responses of the interviewees are representative of their beliefs and mode of implementing core competencies.

> *"All the core competencies can be achieved fully if required resources are provided for their implementation."* [EsL5, Female, with 15 years working experience]

> *"I am reluctant to implement the core competencies because I don't get the understanding of the competencies."* [EsL9, Male, with 16 years working experience]

A close examination of the EsL5 comments above, which harmonize with 83% of the interviewees, shows that interviewees strongly believe that there are low-level resources to promote the implementation of core competencies. It is noteworthy that they are fully aware of the strategies or various activities needed to implement the core competencies. This was borne out by one of the interviewees (EsL16) with 17 years of working experience, who stated: *"Strategies should be enforced to bring out the various competencies. Examples of group work, role-play, research, and brainstorming should be used."*

The comment of EsL9 is noteworthy since it demonstrated that he held the belief that he does not possess the needed competence to implement core competencies. Hence, EsL9 can be helped to remove his reluctance through additional and consistent training in the core competencies.

Findings in this section show that most (92%) of the interviewees know that they should provide opportunities to collaborate through group work to aid pupils' interaction and capacity for thinking outside the box. As shown above, interviewees are also aware that they should use brainstorming, which entails the resolution of puzzling real-world situations, to foster critical thinking. As EsL16 pointed out, "role play" could help pupils develop their core competence of creativity so that they can express themselves in various ways, either in music, art, or prose reading. These activities will enhance their creativity.

However, as shown in their responses, interviewees are seriously impacted by their belief that there are few resources to foster implementation and that training is inadequate. The researcher's observation corroborated the interviewees' responses and discovered that the majority (95%) are mostly concerned about linguistic concepts and how to enhance pupils' proficiency in English.

The findings of the study corroborated the results of the quantitative section and are consistent with the conceptual framework for this study. Findings also corroborated the findings of several studies (Aboagye & Yawson, 2020; Mpuangnan & Adusei, 2021) that teachers' beliefs over low-level information about SBC, instructional materials, logistics, time, and level of how they have to make major changes to their previous teaching beliefs and practices limit their capacity to implement core competencies in the ESL classroom.

The results of this section also resonate with Roehrig, Kruse, and Kern (2007) and Shaiegy and Abdelrahman (2021), who argue that effective implementation of the new curriculum is often inseparably interwoven with teachers' skills, knowledge, perceptions, feelings, and beliefs about the curriculum.

6.2 Pedagogical Implication

The study has several implications for pedagogy at the basic level. Teachers should bridge the gap between their knowledge and practice. As shown above, several teachers are aware of how to strategize for effective implementation of core competencies, but because of their beliefs concerning resources and inadequate training, they are experiencing inertia. Relevant authorities should increase support and collaboration with teachers to enhance their capacity to implement the new curriculum.

It is paramount that the concern and context of teachers should be elicited especially prior to and during the decision-making processes for educational reforms. Teachers' role is irreplaceable and they are at the forefront of implementing new curriculum, hence they should be among adequately consulted.

The study showed that low-level training makes it difficult to adopt a result-oriented strategy for implementing the new curriculum; hence, regular and effective training should be organized for teachers on the new curriculum. It is paramount that the concerns and context of teachers be elicited, especially prior to and during the decision-making processes for educational reforms. Teachers' roles are irreplaceable, and they are

at the forefront of implementing new curriculum; hence, they should be adequately consulted.

The study showed that low-level training makes it difficult to adopt a result-oriented strategy for implementing the new curriculum; hence, regular and effective training should be organized for teachers on the new curriculum. It was shown that resources or instructional materials are meager, so it will be appropriate to boost resources to facilitate the implementation of the core competencies.

Conflict of Interest Statement
Authors have no conflict of interest to declare

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