

Revisiting Perceptions and Their Alignment with Practices among Iranian EFL Teachers in the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract

Developing a learner's ability to communicate in a second language is the goal of communicative language teaching (CLT). Many EFL teachers now accept and employ CLT as a teaching method. Although teachers' views have a significant influence on how they practice CLT, there haven't been many studies about teachers' attitudes about CLT in a specific context, such as Iran. This was revealed through a study of related literature. The current study sought to examine how EFL teachers felt about CLT. The first aim of the present study is to ascertain how EFL teachers feel about CLT. Examining the fundamental causes of instructors' attitudes is the second goal. Thirdly, determining whether there is a disconnect between instructors' perceptions about CLT and their classroom behavior. The researchers employed a mixed-methods strategy in this study. The study included 30 EFL instructors. Three phases made up the research design: firstly, a questionnaire for gathering quantitative data was used, then interviews and observations were used for gathering qualitative data. The findings of this study showed that, in general, EFL teachers had positive attitudes about the CLT's tenets and exhibited CLT's traits in their teaching. There was not much of a discrepancy between the teachers' perceptions about CLT and their actual classroom actions. This study offers valuable insights that can inform curriculum development, teacher training, and policy decisions, ultimately enhancing the quality of English language education in Iran and similar contexts around the world.

Keywords: [communicative competence](#), [concepts of CLT](#), [attitudes of EFL teachers](#), [communicative language teaching](#)

1. Introduction

The field of English Language Teaching (ELT) has witnessed a significant evolution in recent decades, marked by a transition from traditional language instruction methods to a more dynamic and communicative approach. One such approach that has garnered considerable attention and acclaim is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT, rooted in the belief that language acquisition is most effective when learners engage in meaningful and authentic communication, has gained favor among educators and applied linguists globally (Karim, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

While CLT has proven to be a transformative force in ELT, its implementation can be a complex undertaking, particularly in diverse educational contexts. The challenges arise from the need to align teachers' understanding of CLT principles with their actual classroom practices. These challenges also encompass resistance from teachers, the intricacies of implementing a meaning-based CLT program, teachers' willingness to embrace CLT instructional objectives, and learners' unfamiliarity with this teaching method (Bax, 2003; Ghout-Khenoune, 2012; Kasper & Kellerman, 2014; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2016; Wang, 2003; Wang et al., 2015).

Addressing these complexities and facilitating the successful integration of CLT into English language classrooms is of paramount importance, especially in contexts where traditional teaching methods have long been the norm. One such context is the Iranian educational landscape, where English teachers are now encouraged to adopt the tenets of CLT (Rambo & Riazi, 2006; Razmjou & Ghazi, 2013). This transition presents a unique opportunity to delve into the perceptions and attitudes of EFL teachers regarding the principles and practices of CLT.

Understanding how teachers perceive CLT is critical, as perceptions significantly influence teaching and learning behaviors (Maldonado, 2017). By exploring these perceptions within the Iranian EFL context, we can gain insights into the alignment or discrepancies between the views held by teachers regarding CLT, thus shedding light on the challenges and opportunities associated with this pedagogical shift.

This study, situated in the context of private English institutes in Iran, aims to accomplish the following objective: it seeks to examine the perceptions held by EFL teachers regarding CLT and its principles. Through this investigation, we aim to contribute to the broader discourse on the implementation of CLT in diverse ELT settings, with a particular focus on the Iranian context.

What follows are the questions of this study:

1. What are the general perceptions of EFL teachers in Iran on communicative language teaching?
2. What motivations underlie the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward CLT?
3. To what extent do the teachers' perceptions and practices match in the implementation of CLT?

2. Literature Review

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has seen widespread adoption and recognition in English Language Teaching (ELT) worldwide, reflecting a broader shift towards communicative and learner-centered language instruction (Karim, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). CLT, rooted in the belief that language acquisition is most effective when learners engage in meaningful and authentic communication, offers a departure from traditional methods that emphasized linguistic form over function (Chang, 2011; Sukirlan, 2014).

However, the successful implementation of CLT presents a complex challenge, particularly in diverse educational contexts. The challenges emanate from the need to align teachers' understanding of CLT principles with their actual classroom practices, as well as issues related to resistance from teachers and learners, complexities in meaning-based CLT program implementation, teachers' willingness to embrace CLT objectives, and learners' unfamiliarity with this teaching method (Anderson, 1993; Bax, 2003; Kennedy & Trofimovich, 2016; Rabab'ah, 2016; Savignon & Wang, 2003).

In the Iranian context, a significant shift has taken place in English language education. English teachers are now encouraged to integrate CLT principles into their classrooms (Mirsane & Khabiri, 2016; Moattarian, 2012; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). This transition offers a unique opportunity to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of EFL teachers and regarding the principles and practices of CLT.

2.1 The Alignment of Perceptions and Practices in Iranian EFL Teachers' Implementation of CLT

Understanding how teachers perceive and implement CLT is crucial as these perceptions significantly influence teaching and learning behaviors (Puchta, 1999). The alignment or misalignment of these perceptions can reveal the complex interplay of factors that impact the successful integration of CLT in the Iranian educational landscape. Several studies have focused on the attitudes and beliefs of teachers in various ELT contexts, shedding light on the perceived benefits and challenges associated with CLT.

2.2. Studies on Teachers' Perceptions and Implementation of CLT

While international research has explored teachers' perceptions and behaviors regarding CLT, a limited body of literature has addressed this issue in the Iranian context. Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) investigated EFL teachers' beliefs about CLT and its implementation, reporting generally positive attitudes toward CLT. However, the study also indicated that some teachers struggled to fully align their beliefs with their classroom practices. This observation suggests that the implementation of CLT principles may vary among Iranian EFL teachers.

Additionally, some international studies have pointed to the discrepancy between teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching and their in-class behavior. For instance, Mangubhai et al. (2007) found that teachers' conceptualizations of CLT differed from those presented in the literature, revealing that their beliefs about CLT's features and their practical implementation were not always congruent. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) similarly highlighted variations in Japanese teachers' conceptions of CLT, revealing that some teachers viewed CLT as an approach focused on speaking and listening, while others emphasized grammar instruction. A more recent study by Chang (2011) explored the perceptions of Taiwanese college teachers toward CLT and found that these teachers held favorable attitudes toward CLT principles and features. The study indicated that the teachers perceived CLT as highly effective and beneficial for enhancing their instructional practices. Similarly, Karim (2004) investigated the attitudes of EFL teachers toward CLT in Bangladesh and reported that the teachers perceived CLT as an essential and beneficial dimension of their programs.

2.3 The Alignment of Perceptions and Practices in the Iranian Context

In the Iranian context, where a significant shift toward CLT has occurred, there is limited research on teachers' attitudes and behaviors regarding this approach. Existing studies, such as Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), offer valuable insights into teachers' beliefs about CLT but leave room for further exploration of the alignment between perceptions and classroom practices.

2.4 The Present Study and Its Significance

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the alignment or misalignment of perceptions and practices among Iranian EFL teachers in the implementation of CLT. By exploring the factors that impact the successful integration of CLT in the Iranian educational context, this research seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationship between teachers' beliefs and instructional practices. The findings of this study have the potential to inform curriculum development, teacher training, and policy decisions, ultimately enhancing the quality of English language education in Iran and similar contexts worldwide.

In conclusion, while CLT has gained recognition as a transformative approach to ELT, the challenges associated with aligning teachers' perceptions and classroom practices highlight the need for further research in specific contexts like Iran. Bridging the gap between what teachers perceive and how they implement CLT is essential for improving language education and fostering meaningful and authentic communication in English classroom.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The study included 30 EFL instructors who worked at four various institutions in Esfahan city. To go over the specifics, there were 21 female and 9 male EFL instructors. The oldest teacher was a man in his fifties, while the youngest was a woman in her twenties. Their years of classroom experience ranged from two to thirty. Each participant was chosen at random.

It was a really time consuming and tiresome task finding 30 participants in different locations and asking them to participate sincerely in the study. Because they had a full-time job and, therefore, they did not have enough time to fill the questionnaire. Three of the participants delivered their questionnaires blank, so the author had to find and ask three other participants to help. Although the researcher ensured them that the answers would be confidential, some did not fill out the background information, such as name, age, gender, years of experience, and etc. 10 out of 30 of the questionnaires were filled out by snowball sampling, that is to say, the researchers asked two colleagues to distribute the papers in other language institutes they work, and have the questionnaires filled.

3.2 Research Design

The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach in this study. The researchers used a three-phase design for this study. Since the researchers distributed questionnaires to gather quantitative data, the initial stage of this investigation was quantitative. In the second phase, which was qualitative, the researcher

conducted interviews with a selected group of participants (who had already participated in phase 1) to elucidate their questionnaire responses. The third part, which was qualitative as well, involved the researcher's observation of some of the teachers they had previously interviewed.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection Procedures

3.3.1 Quantitative Phase (Questionnaire)

Overall Perception of CLT (Quantitative): This can be measured on a Likert scale, where respondents rated their perception from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The initial phase included the creation of a questionnaire, adapted from Karavas-Douka's (1996) study on teachers' attitudes towards the communicative approach. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items, utilizing a Likert scale with five response options, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The questions were grouped into five main categories, addressing the significance of grammar, the role of pair work, error correction, the teacher's classroom position, and learners' requirements and roles in the learning process. Respondents' scores on the attitude scale could range from 24 to 120, with 72 indicating a neutral stance, and the highest score showing a favorable attitude, while the lowest indicated an unfavorable attitude.

3.3.2 Qualitative Phase (Interviews)

Influencing Factors (Qualitative): Through Interviews, researchers identify and categorize the factors influencing teachers' motivation for adopting CLT. The second phase involved conducting interviews with a selected group of participants who had completed the questionnaire. The interviews aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the reasons behind their questionnaire responses. The study faced difficulties in scheduling interviews due to the participants' busy teaching schedules. Only ten teachers consented to being interviewed. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

3.3.3 Qualitative Phase (Observation)

Discrepancy between Perceptions and Practices (Quantitative): researchers used a checklist to observe the alignment between teachers' stated perceptions (from Instrument 1) and their actual classroom practices. The third phase encompassed the researcher's observations of the classrooms of teachers who had participated in the interviews. The purpose was to determine if the teachers who expressed support for CLT in interviews also implemented these practices in their classrooms. During the observation, researchers cross-referenced classroom practices with the answers provided in the questionnaire and interviews. Any contradictions between the responses and actual practices were noted for further analysis. The researchers aimed to identify if there was consistency or discrepancy among the observed teachers regarding their practice and beliefs toward CLT.

These instruments provide a structured approach to collect and measure data for each research question. The measurable variables allow for quantitative analysis and comparison of perceptions, motivations, and the alignment between perceptions and practices related to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) among EFL teachers in Iran.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative and qualitative research techniques were also used to analyze the data. The replies to the survey items were tabulated in Excel for the purpose of conducting a quantitative data analysis, and the percentage and mean of participant responses to the survey items were computed. Then, a second table was created, and the items were separated into five groups based on the five main CLT principles: the value of grammar, the value of group and pair work, the quantity and quality the importance of error correction, and the teacher's position in the classroom, and the role and needs of the students in the learning process. The categorized data was then analyzed using a descriptive analysis.

To explore the motivations behind EFL teachers' opinions toward CLT, Transcribing and evaluating the recorded interviews in terms of qualitative data. Afterward, the researchers used classroom observations to examine whether there was any discrepancy between EFL teachers' beliefs toward CLT and their practice in the classroom. This study's three phases were complementary to one another in that each one's findings added to and clarified those of the others.

4. Findings

Findings for Research Question 1:

4.1 Analyzing Teachers' Questionnaires

This phase of data collection was intended in response to the initial research question:

1. What are the general perceptions of EFL teachers in Iran on communicative language teaching?

Purpose: To assess the general perceptions of EFL teachers in Iran on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Three questions on the participants' age, years of experience, and gender were asked at the outset of the surveys.

Table 1. Demographic data of the participants

Gender	Male	9
	Female	21
Age	21-30	20
	31-39	8
	40-50	1
	51-60	1
	1-5	14
	6-10	11
Years of teaching experience	11-12	4
	21-30	1

The questionnaire included a possible range of 24 to 120 points, with 72 serving as the neutral point. In other words, if all 24 items of the questionnaire are answered *Strongly disagree* (number 1), the total will be 24 which is the minimum score of the questionnaire. On the other hand, if all 24 items of the questionnaire are answered strongly agree (number 5), the total will be 120 which is the maximum score of items of the questionnaire. The middlescore between 24 and 120 is 72. Therefore, the scores higher than 72 show positive and favorable attitudes towards CLT, and the scores lower than 72 represent negative and unfavorable attitudes towards CLT (Karavas-Doukas, 1995). The total scores of the participants attitudes spanned from 56 to 90, had a mean of 78.16, and a standard deviation of 7.16. Table 2 shows descriptive statistics of the attitudes.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of the Attitudes Scores (N=30)

	Min	Max	M	SD
Score	56	90	78.16	7.16

Three of the participants scored less than 72, and among these three participants, one got 56 (the lowest score), due to leaving 6 questions with no response. In other words, subject number 2 had six missing responses. The others all acquired scores higher than 72, which indicate the positive and favorable attitudes of participants toward CLT.

4.1.1 Categorizing the Items of the Questionnaire

The five fundamental principles of CLT that were previously described have been used to categorize the items of the questionnaire created by Karavas-Doukas (1996). Descriptive statistics were employed to estimate the means of each principle in order to examine instructors' attitudes about these principles. The opinions of instructors toward these ideas are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean of teachers attitudes towards the five principles of CLT (N=30)

Principles	Mean
1. Place/importance of grammar	3.2
2. Group/pair work	3.1
3. Quality and quantity of error correction	2.95
4. The role of the teacher in the classroom	3.63
5. The role and needs of learners in the learning process	3.32

The figures represent the median replies to questionnaire items that were categorised in accordance with CLT principles. The table shows a general agreement among teachers about main principles of CLT. Teacher's role acquired the highest mean (M= 3.63) followed by the learner's role and needs (M= 3.32), the role and significance of grammar (M= 3.2), groupwork and pair work (M= 3.1) and finally error correction (M= 2.95). Therefore, based on participants' views, the most favorable principle of CLT is teachers' role in EFL classes and the least favorable principle is error correction. Figure 1 has been created to illustrate the instructors' perspectives on the five key areas of CLT in order to provide a better and clearer understanding.

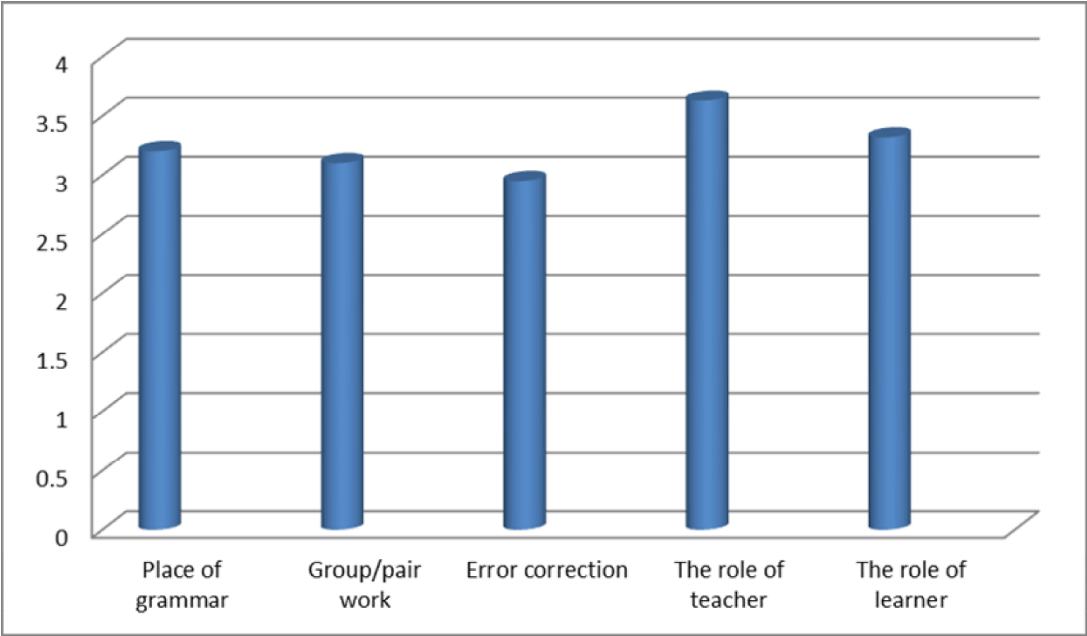


Figure 1. Means of the teachers' views

As it is demonstrated, it can be expressed that participants generally endorsed the CLT's five guiding principles, but the order of their agreement is different. Category 4 which refers to the role of the teacher in classroom, demonstrates the highest degree of agreement among participants, and category 3 which refers to quality and quantity of error corrections shows the lowest amount. This means that for the participants of this study CLT is mainly associated with the role of the teacher. In other words, it seems they believe CLT is, to a great extent, defined by what the teacher 'does' in the classroom.

4.1.2 Descriptive Analysis

Table 4 demonstrates frequency and percentage of EFL teachers' responses to each of the 24 questionnaire items. This means that for the participants of this study CLT is mostly connected to the teacher's job. Alternatively put, it seems they believe CLT is, to a great extent, defined by what in the classroom, the teacher "does."

Table 4. Frequency and percentage of participants' responses, the highest percentages are bolded (N=30)

Items	5 SA	4 A	3 U	2 D	1 SD
1	2 6.66%	10 33.33%	5 16.66%	12 40%	1 3.33%
2	21 70%	8 26.66%	1 3.33%	0 0%	0 0%
3	13 43.33%	14 46.66%	2 6.66%	0 0%	0 0%
4	5 16.66%	5 16.66%	5 16.66%	14 46.66%	1 3.33%
5	1 3.33%	4 13.33%	6 20%	12 40%	5 16.66%
6	0 0%	10 33.33%	11 36.66%	9 30%	0 0%

7	0	17	6	4	1
	0%	56.66%	20%	13.33%	3.33%
8	7	16	5	2	0
	23.33%	53.33%	16.66%	6.66%	0%
9	5	9	3	12	0
	16.66%	30%	10%	40%	0%
10	4	12	5	8	3
	13.33%	40%	16.66%	26.66%	10%
11	4	12	5	8	0
	13.33%	40%	16.66%	26.66%	0%
12	7	19	0	4	0
	23.33%	63.33%	0%	13.33%	0%
13	0	2	6	15	6
	0%	6.66%	20%	50%	20%
14	3	10	7	8	1
	10%	33.33%	23.33%	26.66%	3.33%
15	1	9	14	6	0
	3.33%	30%	46.66%	20%	0%
16	5	18	6	1	0
	16.66%	60%	20%	3.33%	0%
17	2	5	1	13	9
	6.66%	16.66%	3.33%	43.33%	30%
18	6	12	10	2	0
	20%	40%	33.33%	6.66%	0%
19	2	15	8	4	0
	6.66%	50%	26.66%	13.33%	0%
20	7	14	5	3	1
	23.33%	46.66%	16.66%	10%	3.33%
21	1	12	11	5	0
	3.33%	40%	36.66%	16.66%	0%
22	2	2	7	18	1
	6.66%	6.66%	23.33%	60%	3.33%
23	1	7	8	9	3
	3.33%	23.33%	26.66%	30%	10%
24	10	16	2	1	0
	33.33%	53.33%	6.66%	3.33%	0%

Based on the collected data in table 4 only those responses with the highest percentage have been focused on. The vertical column shows the number of items of the questionnaire and the horizontal column demonstrates the degree of participants' agreement with each item of the questionnaire. In order to comprehend it better and easier analysis, table 5 has been drawn to show only the average of the percentages for the five CLT categories and to demonstrate the outstanding points of Table 4. The highest percentage of response to each item of each category is added up and

then multiplied by the quantity of items of the given category in order to find its mean.

Table 5. Mean of percentages of five principles of CLT

Principles	Mean of Percentages
1. Place/importance of grammar	43.66%
2. Group/pair work	55%
3. The role and needs of learners in the classroom	44.44%
4. Quality and quantity of error correction	39.16%
5. The role of teacher in the classroom	54.99%

The first category of the questions concerned the role and importance of grammar and contained items 1, 3, 12, 17, 21, and 23. According to the obtained statistics from these items and the mean of percentages of this category (43.66%), one can say most participants of this study did not consider grammar as the only component of language learning. They thought that grammar accuracy is not the only criterion to evaluate learners' knowledge; there are other criteria that along with grammar make up learner's language competence.

The second category of the questions centered on pair and group work and included items 2, 9, 13, and 22. The mean of percentages of this principle (55%) shows that participants mostly agreed with such activities and knew CLT as a medium of communication between language learners. In the third group of questions including items 4, 5, 8, 11, 18, and 20, the focus was on the role and needs of language learners. The findings revealed that the majority of participants (44.44%), did pay attention to learners' needs and let them participate in the process.

The fourth category included items 6, 10, 14, and 15 which were related to how much and how well errors are corrected and which got the least percentage (39.16%). The participants had no idea about items 6 and 15, but 40% chose item 10. They preferred to correct the errors and believed that most of grammatical errors must be corrected, for they lead to partial learning. This shows that participants were meticulous about error correction process, but 33.33% indicated that not all errors in any situation are likely to be corrected. Based on these two items (10, 14) and highest percentage of 40%, one can say that participants preferred to correct the errors after it is made, because they are barriers to learning. This is while some of the participants (33.33%) mentioned correcting any error wastes the time. In other words, they checked that not every error has the possibility to be corrected, for these errors are parts of the learning process, or simply, a sign of learning. To sum up the findings of items 10 and 14, errors should be corrected but not all the times and in every situation.

The last category consisted of items 7, 16, 19, and 24, concerning the role of teachers in the class. Based on the acquired data and the mean of percentages of this category (54.99%), participants did not consider the teacher as the source of transferring knowledge; rather, this is one of many different roles of teachers in the CLT classes. Participants, who believed that teachers are the transferors of knowledge, believed that transmission is possible through explanations and practice. In other words, teachers transfer the knowledge indirectly through activities and examples.

Concerning the given responses to each item of the questionnaire and taking the answer of the first research question in to account, this conclusion is driven that the study participants mostly hold positive and favorable attitudes towards principles of CLT, although the significance of these principles were not the same from teacher to teacher (See table 3). Figure 2 shows the average of the participants' responses to the five CLT principles.

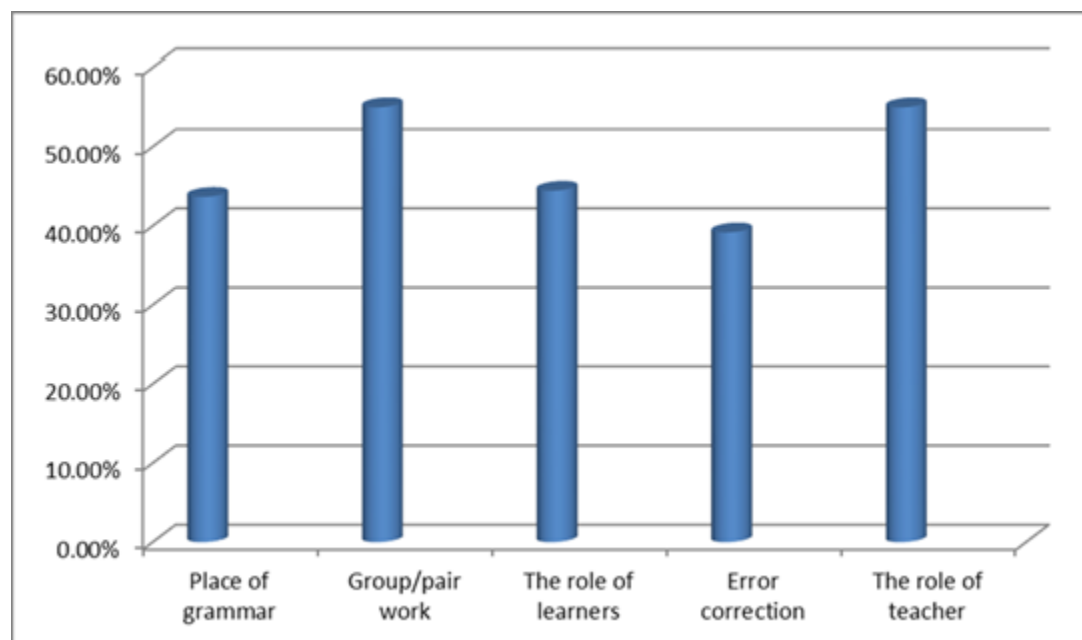


Figure 2. Percentages of the teachers' views

As it is demonstrated, it can be expressed that the study participants have positive/ favorable perspectives on the CLT's five guiding principles. Principles 2 and 5 which refer to group/pair work and the teacher's role in the classroom respectively, enjoyed the highest percentages followed by principles 3, 1, and 4 which refer to learners' needs and needs in classroom, place/importance of grammar, and quality and quantity of error correction respectively.

Findings for research question 2:

4.2 Analyzing Teachers Interviews

This phase of data collection was intended in response to the second research question:

2. What motivations underlie the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward CLT?

Purpose: To explore the motivations that underlie the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers toward CLT.

An unstructured interview was done to obtain information for the study's second topic, which asked what factors contributed to the Iranian EFL teachers' opinions about CLT. Because it was required for participants to elaborate on the factors influencing their replies to questionnaire items, the interview questions were developed using the questionnaire's items and the five key principles of CLT.

Interviews were conducted with 10 of the participants. They declared their attitudes towards CLT and expressed reasons for holding such beliefs in detail. What follows is a selective part of the participants' answers to the interview questions that were most pertinent. To respond to the second research query, the following categorization of CLT principles have been made to clarify and describe the specific causes behind participants' replies to questionnaire items.

4.2.1 Place and Importance of Grammar

Data from this round of data collection revealed that most participants supported CLT because it aids students in developing their communicative skills and grammatical knowledge. They demonstrated via their views that that grammar alone is an insufficient aspect and does not ensure learners' success in a communicative setting. They claimed that grammar is one of the components of language's web-like structure, which they compared to. During the discussion, one person said:

Language is a network of different parts and grammar is only one part of. It's not reasonable to underestimate or overestimate the role of grammar. I personally believe that a skillful teacher should teach grammatical points in class but indirectly.

Therefore, they believed that CLT does not underestimate grammar, although its main goal is communication. Both grammar and function are of high priority for teachers, since grammar is the basic building block of

communication, and in actuality, it completes the communication and helps students have an effective and successful communication. One experienced teacher expressed:

Grammar helps an efficient communication. A successful communication can never be achieved without having knowledge about the main building blocks of a language.

I usually teach grammar inductively. In fact, I ask my students to read the grammar and explain what they have understood, and then I give them a brief explanation. When they figure out something by themselves or ask and help each other in order to get the point, they will learn it better and easier and never forget it. I believe grammar is part of language, you know it's part of linguistic knowledge and cannot be ignored.

No one can claim that communicating what you mean can be achieved without the knowledge of grammar. I think that most English teachers, even those who claim they don't care about grammar, do devote part of their classes to teaching and explaining grammatical points, directly or indirectly.

4.2.2 Group/Pair Work

According to the interview results for pair work, participants approved of such activities. Even though planning such activities requires more time, students are more ready to participate in group/pair activities.

You know., designing and arranging discussions or group work is too difficult because you have to devote a lot of time to make an activity that attracts learners' attention, I mean something interesting, and on the other hand practicing it in classroom takes the time of teaching, but I think it is worth it because I see how much it piques the curiosity of my students.

Working in groups and pairs make learners interact with each other and learn faster in a friendly atmosphere.

Whenever it comes to group work. (She laughs) .my students wake up; I can see how they receive much energy from each other but the only problem is that they don't want to stop.

Some of the participants expressed an interesting point about effective variables; they believed that pair work and group work result in a better communication among students and, unlike traditional and formal methods, create a friendly atmosphere in the class. In such an atmosphere, which is away from stress, learners find opportunities to freely express their minds. In addition to the atmosphere CLT creates, it helps learners establish a cooperative relationship.

They are really good communicators in groups and they are nice friends too, they help and support each other to minimize their mistakes. In my opinion, in this kind of atmosphere my learners have no stress. When they are relaxed, they learn better.

4.2.3 Quality and Quantity of Error Correction

The teachers who were interviewed thought that errors are a necessary aspect of learning in terms of both the number and quality of error correction. But it's crucial to pay attention to the state of errors. For instance, if mistakes are made during class discussions, the instructor may choose to ignore them or may choose to note them down so they can be corrected after the speaker has finished speaking, if not at the end of the discussion. However, if it happens when students are learning grammar or speech, teachers prefer to rectify the mistake right away. According to one of the participants:

It isn't right to correct every kind of errors in every situation; in my idea, the level of learning in which errors happen is very important, well. I mean, let me put it this way, when they practice the conversation for the first time or when they are at the level of learning grammar, I correct their errors and the pronunciation mistakes to avoid fossilization, but I never interrupt them while reading something or taking part in discussions.

Interrupting them while speaking, will cause frustration. Doing this will block their learning; I in person believe that sometimes making errors is a part of learning.

One inexperienced teacher said:

It's difficult for me to ignore errors whenever they happen, (She laughs) I just try to keep myself silent and say nothing. Yes it's difficult but I wait until they finish and then I feel relief (She laughs) because it's the time to correct the errors.

...

4.2.4 The Role of Teachers in Classroom

According to the information the researcher learned from the interviews, instructors often have favorable opinions of their roles in CLT classes because they see the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than just a

converter of information. They held that it is preferable for teachers to impart indirect learning through exercises and examples rather than directly teaching each concept, encouraging students to take ownership of their own education through interaction with peers and joint study of grammar points. This would allow them to learn more effectively and advance more quickly. In other words, the teacher plays more than just the position of an instructor in the classroom; in addition to imparting knowledge, he also plays other duties.

Some participants stated:

In CLT classes teachers are actually facilitator for students' learning. They instruct and teach them how to learn. I in person don't give them everything because I think sometimes it's necessary to leave some points in order to be found by students.

Some teachers think that teaching means just talking and explaining, well in fact they see themselves as an explainer in classes but it is totally wrong way to follow.

I give them a chance to speak and work on unknown points, I don't want to be an explainer. A skillful teacher teaches indirectly, I mean ... maybe through tasks or other kinds of activates.

To be an explainer is too boring both for teachers and students, you know I used to be one of them, at the end of my classes I was tired of too much explaining and still I was not satisfied of my teaching. Most of the time I felt that in spite of too much explanation, my students did not get the point, it was really disappointing for me.

4.2.5 Learners' Needs and Their Role in the Learning Process

The independence of the student and their involvement in the learning process in the CLT classroom was another topic covered earlier. Participants agreed that students should take ownership of their education and not rely solely on their instructors. As a result of their inability to take ownership of their own learning, some participants expressed opposition to this strategy pertaining to students at lower levels of skill. They argued that using CLT creates chaos in the classroom and requires teachers to pay close attention and control it because when students are encouraged to work in groups or pairs, they frequently diverge from the primary point and each one goes their own way... Some teachers mentioned:

Most of the time when I ask my students to practice with each other they just start talking loudly and sometimes discussing about their own favorite topics.

It is difficult to manage students while doing group work. They just prefer to talk a lot and sometimes it is really difficult to stop them.

Thus, and based on principle of CLT, teachers take learners' responsibility into consideration. They expressed that it must be the priority of teaching to consider learners' needs and interests. To do so, teachers should ask for learners' ideas during the process of learning, not to assign them some activities and exercises those learners have no interest in. This makes them tired and frustrated.

Students' needs are important while designing the syllabus or arranging tasks and activities in class. If they are interested in something, they learn it eagerly and with more motivation.

A good syllabus is made based on learners' needs and interest; the best way of teaching is to have a syllabus which has been designed with learners' cooperation.

Generally, the interviewees had a general consensus about CLT. They described this approach as a successful method; for it is based on cooperation and makes teachers take learners' needs and ideas into consideration while designing or assigning tasks and activities. As one of the teachers indicated:

Teaching based on CLT is cooperative.

Doing so, learners feel like being important, their self-confidence increases, and they take responsibility for their own learning. The other participant added:

Tasks and activities should not be imposed on learners, but it is better to adapt activities to meet the basic needs of learners, specifically their future needs.

Learners come to classes with different needs and purposes in their mind, they and their needs both are key parts of learning process, I think ignoring their needs will negatively affect their learning.

Generally speaking, and according to gathered information and detailed explanations from interviewees, participants expressed favorable attitudes toward CLT because:

1. They believed that CLT helps students gain more grammatical and conversational proficiency.

2. Pair work and group work in this approach make learners interact with each other and learn faster in a friendly atmosphere.
3. CLT considers errors as parts and signs of learning.
4. CLT considers the teacher as a facilitator of learning rather than just a source of information.
5. CLT considers the learners' needs and interest into account.

Findings for research question 3:

4.3 Analyzing Class Observations

This phase of data collection was intended in response to the third research question:

2. To what extent do the teachers' perceptions and practices match in the implementation of CLT?

Purpose: To measure the extent to which teachers' perceptions and practices match in the implementation of CLT.

The penultimate step in data collecting was class observation. In addition to serving as a stepping stone for the other two phases of data collection, this stage was essential to determining how much teachers actually put their beliefs into practice. To address the third research question—is there a disconnect between instructors' perceptions in the direction of CLT's actual classroom practices—class observation was carried out.

The researchers wanted to see if instructors' methods were founded on the five CLT principles and if they lived out their beliefs. 10 courses of the interviewees' participants were observed in order to accomplish this purpose. 2 out of 10 classes were beginner, 4 of them were pre-intermediate level and 4 of them were intermediate level. Each class was observed once. While observing each class, the researcher tried to locate the five principles of CLT and the extent to which they were realized in practice.

4.3.1 Place and Importance of Grammar

As they indicated during the interviews, the teachers neither overestimated nor underestimated the role of grammar. They were trying to devote some of the class time to grammar. Then they practiced the grammar points through some activities and practical exercises. In eight classes, teachers taught grammar inductively, they asked students to read the grammar box silently, and then had them hypothesize the rule and argue for their rules. At the end, the teacher wrote the formula on the board with students' help. In fact, the goal was getting the students explore grammatical points by themselves. The teacher aimed at teaching grammar implicitly and indirectly. 10 to 15 out of 90 minutes of class time was devoted to teaching and practicing grammar. In two other classes, the teacher asked students to read the grammar section. As the students were reading, the teacher wrote some examples on the board (the new grammatical points were in red) and asked students to give as many examples as they could. After practicing and giving examples, the teacher gave a brief explanation of the grammatical value. Based on the collected data from observations, it was revealed that the participants followed what they believed in. It was shown that the participants, as they mentioned earlier in the interview phase, did not underestimate grammar since it was a significant component of communication.

4.3.2 Group/Pair Work

Both pair and group work were other issues to be investigated in the interviews and then in the observations. Teachers who believed in the usefulness of such activities both in the questionnaires and interviews, did in fact put their beliefs into practice. Students assigned to different groups and pairs got engaged in activities such as modeling conversations, filling out tables based on the information provided with them, discussing, playing games and role playing. One thing that was interesting in most classes was that, while having discussions or group work, the teacher gave and assigned different roles and responsibilities to each member of the group. For example, in groups of four members, one of them was responsible for taking notes, the other for taking time, the other for managing turn-taking and the last person was responsible for reporting and summarizing the results of his/her group's discussion to other groups.

Different and interesting group works and games were observed during teaching vocabulary. For example, in one of the classes after listening to words, played by DVD, and repeating them by learners, the teacher asked pupils should put their books away and try to remember the words which were just studied and say it loudly to the class. This was called, Memory Game and learners eagerly tried to remember as many words as they could. In another class in order to practice new words and their correct spelling, one of the students was invited to the board by the teacher and choose one word among new words in the new lesson and draw blanks on the board instead of numbers of the letters of the chosen word and other students had to guess one by one the building

letters of that word. The first student who could guess the word was the winner and the next person to go to the board and choose a new word. As the participants revealed their beliefs regarding group/pair work in the interview section, they tried to design games and pair or group activities in order to facilitate learning for students and have learners interact with each other in a friendly atmosphere. In other words, they put their beliefs regarding group/pair work in to practice through designing various games and activities.

4.3.3 Quality and Quantity of Error Correction

Error correction seemed to be really challenging for teachers. Teachers who believed in error correction in appropriate situations, did what they said. For instance, during discussions and group or pair work, teachers let students finish their speech then corrected the possible errors. But sometimes, specifically during modeling conversations, they interrupted learners and made them aware of the errors related to the pronunciation and intonation. Interestingly, one of the teachers who disagreed with error correction was somehow mystified about the learners' errors and the time to correct them. Three teachers continuously interrupted their language learners and that caused learners to forget what they were going to say and sometimes students were reluctant to speak for the next time. Two teachers postponed correcting errors to the end of the class, but in this case, students could not remember their errors. Some peer corrections also were observed in some classes. One of the teachers corrected grammatical errors through recasting, in a way that she repeated the original sentence made by the learner, but this time substituted the correct form instead of the error in the sentence. Three teachers really tried to postpone correcting errors to the end of the conversation, but it was observed that sometimes they were not successful to avoid interrupting learners and correcting their errors.

4.3.4 The Role of Teachers in Classroom

Teachers' role was another item to be examined. Teachers did not consider themselves the main source of knowledge in classroom. Most of the time, they were walking among learners who were doing group work or pair work in order to provide them with needed help. In order to teach grammar teachers asked learners to hypothesize the rule and then argue for the rules; in fact, it was the learner who figured the grammatical points out and then there was a brief explanation provided by the teacher. Teachers' role was observed as a facilitator in class; they just provided students with cues and modeled instructions. No explicit explanation was given; they just tried to facilitate students' learning. Therefore, as participants stated during interview phase, it was observed that they considered various roles for themselves as teachers in CLT classes.

4.3.5 The Role of Learners in Classroom

Learners were explorer of instructional points. Sometimes learners got the chance to suggest what the content of discussions and lessons should be, based on their interest and needs. For example, during one of the observations, the teacher wrote some topics on the board to discuss and the students chose the one that matched their interests. Some participants began from students' experiences in order to introduce new teaching points. Each student got the opportunity to take part in various activities and discussions to express their own voices. Participants also considered the feeling of learners while teaching. For example, during one observation, the students complained that they were tired so the teacher arranged an interesting game called Hot Chair to refresh the class. Broadly speaking, the participants took in to account the role and feeling and needs of learners during the learning process.

In a nutshell, the findings of the observations demonstrated that teachers acted in accordance with their opinions and those revealed in surveys and interviews. Or, to put it another way, they lived out their beliefs. The majority of teachers who were knowledgeable about the CLT method and its guiding principles were successful in controlling the class, teaching, and meeting the requirements of the students. As a result, it is possible to say that there was little to no contrast or gap between participants' views about CLT and their actual practices in the classroom in order to respond to the third study question.

5. Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and assess how well their beliefs align with their classroom practices. The findings of this study suggested that participants' sentiments toward CLT are typically favorable. In other words, it was shown that there was widespread agreement among participants regarding the fundamental ideas behind CLT and that they incorporated elements of CLT into their beliefs. These uplifting and

supportive opinions were found to be crucial in putting the core ideas of CLT into practice. This particular study's conclusion generally agreed with the earlier studies (Chang, 2000; Hawkey, 2006; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Karim, 2004; Liao, 2003; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006).

As the statistics showed, high percentages of teachers expressed that group work helped students find their own errors by themselves; therefore, they can manage their learning process better. They believed that pair work improves students' self-confidence. Thus, many teachers disagreed with traditional teaching methods and thought there must be an opportunity for learners to communicate with each other. Only in this way can they help each other better and solve their problems. They indicated that designing a task to pair work is neither difficult nor time consuming and learners enjoy doing such activities. According to Ming Chang's (2011) contention, teachers' attitudes have a significant role in their decisions to use CLT because attitudes are thought to have a significant impact on behavior.

The findings of the observations logically proved that teachers put into practice whatever they professed to believe or believe in surveys and interviews. Those who were knowledgeable about the CLT strategy and its guiding principles were generally successful in managing the class, teaching, and meeting the requirements of the students. According to Karavas-Doukas (1995), participants' beliefs nevertheless played a significant effect in their decisions to adopt CLT, even if they were practicing in accordance with what they had been instructed to do. In order to effectively apply a method, instructors' thoughts and opinions must and must not be disregarded.

The results of the current study revealed that the majority of Iranian EFL teachers hold a positive view of CLT, considering it an essential and beneficial approach in their classrooms. This alignment with CLT principles is consistent with prior research findings (Chang, 2011; Hawkey 2006; Karim, 2004; Mangubhai et al., 2007; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). Teachers universally acknowledge the importance of grammar instruction in language teaching. They see it as fundamental for effective communication, in line with the belief that understanding linguistic forms and functions is crucial for language proficiency. They perceive grammar instruction as a means to achieve communicative goals rather than as an isolated objective, aligning with the view that CLT does not exclude the teaching of grammar rules (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006).

Teachers universally emphasize the significance of group and pair work activities in their classrooms. They concur on the need for these activities as alternatives to traditional whole-class instruction. Learners also find activities like pair and group work beneficial as they foster problem-solving and collaboration. This mirrors the notion that such activities enhance the communicative atmosphere in classrooms, creating authentic settings for language use (Cheng, 2011). Teachers express a tolerant approach to learner errors, emphasizing the importance of error correction in cases where errors could impede effective communication. They recognize error correction's role in preventing fossilization, which could hinder language proficiency (Han, 2002). It's noteworthy that teachers' views on error correction align with an ideal communicative classroom, even though students' perceptions may differ (Brown, 2009).

Teachers unanimously believe that in CLT classrooms, their roles change from being an 'authority' and 'instructor' to encompassing various functions, including providing feedback, motivating learners, and creating a conducive learning environment. They emphasize the significance of exposing learners to the target language and encouraging learner autonomy and independence. Teachers are expected to introduce learners to different strategies and promote independence. Learner-centered instruction and encouraging frequent language use by learners are considered essential (Chang, 2011). The study highlights the value placed on learner responsibility by teachers. They encourage learners to independently and autonomously engage in communicative language tasks, aiming to enhance their language proficiency. However, it's important to strike a balance to prevent the acquisition of inaccurate or inappropriate language forms (McDonough and Chaikitmongkol, 2007). While Iranian EFL teachers hold positive attitudes towards CLT, the study suggests that their classroom practices may not always perfectly align with their beliefs. This discrepancy can be attributed, in part, to entrenched educational cultures and practices in contexts like Iran, where traditional, product-based instruction remains prevalent (Abdollahzadeh, 2010).

This investigation provides valuable insights into how Iranian EFL teachers perceive and practice CLT. Despite their generally favorable attitudes towards CLT, the study uncovers various factors, including institutionalized educational traditions, that can impact the alignment of beliefs and practices in language classrooms. These findings contribute to our understanding of the challenges and intricacies associated

with implementing CLT in specific educational settings.

6. Conclusions and Implications

This study aimed to investigate the attitudes of both learners and teachers toward instructional practices in English language institutes in Iran. The findings suggest that EFL teachers generally hold a positive view of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and instruction that prioritizes meaning. However, there appears to be a misalignment between their perceptions and expectations, indicating that the current EFL instruction in Iranian institutes may not fully meet the desires, preferences, and needs of teachers. Nonetheless, the strong support for CLT principles suggests a willingness to transition from traditional teaching methods to CLT, which would require appropriate support and guidance.

The current research also demonstrated that teachers have favorable attitudes toward instruction that emphasizes meaning and communication. This is a promising development for those interested in implementing CLT in Iranian educational settings, as it signifies that fundamental concept such as learner-centeredness and autonomy are widely accepted by both groups. This acceptance is not only beneficial for teachers and learners but also for policymakers, course coordinators, material developers, and syllabus designers.

Given the prevalent product-based approach to language teaching in Iran, this study offers valuable insights that can help teachers gain a better understanding of their learners' needs and preferences. It can help explain why certain individuals excel in specific language activities but not in others, why particular language behaviors are observed, and why specific language content is generated. Furthermore, by raising learners' awareness of their needs and preferences, teachers can harness their innate strengths and inclinations in the instructional environment, ultimately empowering learners to take more responsibility for their language learning activities.

EFL teachers and teachers undergoing training in training centers can make use of the findings of the current study. EFL teachers will better accept its concepts if they are aware of the type of approach they are teaching. As was already established, attitudes are thought to affect behavior. As a result, once EFL teachers accept the method and its guiding principles, they develop favorable opinions of it and work to incorporate these opinions into teaching practices. According to [Karavas-Doukas \(1995\)](#), teachers' attitudes may be to blame for the discrepancy between a theory and practice. Therefore, in the case of EFL teachers developing favorable attitudes about a theory or a particular approach, the idea of the method and its actual use in a classroom setting won't differ greatly from one another.

The creators of curricula and syllabus can also use the research's findings. According to [Karavas-Doukas \(1996\)](#), the failure to consider instructors' attitudes before introducing any new strategy may be caused by a mismatch between beliefs and actions. Before creating an educational program, it is preferable for curriculum and syllabus designers to look at teachers' perspectives. This is because teachers are in charge of putting principles and techniques into practice in language classrooms, so if they are unaware of the given curriculum or are unfamiliar with its established values, they will teach and practice according to their own beliefs, which will cause a significant gap between theories and practices.

6.1 Study Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The findings of the study have indicated that EFL instructors that took part in the study have a favorable opinion of CLT and exhibit CLT features in their beliefs. However, the current study includes a few restrictions: No matter what the study's conclusions and consequences are, one should be cautious in making generalization from these findings. This is because the participants in the study are from four institutes in Esfahan who were selected on an availability basis; consequently, the findings cannot be applied to other situations, and other EFL teachers.

Another limitation is related to population of these studies who were EFL teachers in private English institutes, and did not focus on teachers from public schools, so the findings cannot be generalized to public schools. There have been several recommendations made for additional study:

1. More research can be done to ascertain whether demographic information (such as age, gender, and years of experience) has an impact on the beliefs of EFL teachers.
2. Research that takes into account the opinions and viewpoints of the learners would help to clarify the situation of CLT in Esfahan.
3. The sample of current study was 30 EFL teachers from four language schools in Esfahan; further study conducted with educators in different settings would be advantageous and would improve the study's findings.

The outcomes of the study could be improved by more quantitative or qualitative research that looks at teachers' practices and beliefs from various perspectives.

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