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Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Botswana: Perceptions of implementation by some teachers in Botswana's Junior Secondary Schools

Abstract

This paper reports on the first phase of a research project that focused on understanding the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation of CLT in the English Second Language (ESL) classrooms in Botswana's Junior Secondary Schools (JSSs). CLT has been the dominant English language teaching paradigm in Botswana for fifteen years. Educators and commentators often refer to an inadequate mastery of English at tertiary institutions and in the workplace, indicating a potential disenchantment with the implementation of CLT in English in Botswana. The data reported in this article come from a questionnaire survey conducted among JSSs English teachers located in Botswana's urban areas (n=135). The data indicate a conflicted view of CLT among the participants. On the one hand they

believe that they have been trained well to implement CLT and their responses to some questions indicate that they have some knowledge about CLT. On the other hand, responses to some questions indicate a lack of knowledge of CLT and that the participating teachers believe that CLT does not necessarily lead to improved English proficiency among their learners. The data seem to point to a certain disjunction between perceptions, theoretical knowledge and views of the usefulness of CLT for English in Botswana. Future studies should consider to compare these views with actual classroom observations.

Key words: Botswana, Communicative Language Teaching, English second language teaching, perceptions

1. Introduction and background

Littlewood (2011:550 ff.) discusses research about the lack of compatibility between CLT and the beliefs and traditions of specific contexts. This article seeks to contribute to the large body of research about CLT mentioned by Littlewood (2011) by reporting on the perceptions of selected English languages teachers towards CLT in Botswana's urban secondary schools.

The research was prompted by the perception in Botswana amongst educators and commentators alike that CLT appears not to be delivering on an early promise to improve the quality and outcomes of English Second Language (ESL) teaching in Botswana (cf. for example, Nkosana, 2006; and Thobega, 2014). In Botswana, English has the status of an official language alongside Setswana. As is the case in many African countries, school pupils and students not only have to learn English as a second language, but English is also used as the language of teaching and learning at school (from standard five on) and university. Problems with pupils' and students' English language proficiency (ELP) are therefore regarded as very serious, because lack of proficiency in one's language of learning and teaching (LoLT) is related to general academic achievement by several scholars (Van der Walt, 2013; Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015).

The often inadequate mastery of English at secondary and tertiary level has long been a matter of concern in Botswana because of the effect a lack of academic proficiency in English has on students' performance both at university and in the workplace. Since 1977 various reports have expressed concern regarding the level of the ELP of school learners and graduates at all levels of Botswana's education system (see for example "Education for Kagisano", Government of Botswana, 1977; the "Report of the National Commission on Education", Government of Botswana 1993; the "Revised National Policy on Education", Government of Botswana, 1994; the "Task Force Seven Report", University of Botswana, 1995; Nkosana, 2006; and Akindele and Trennepohl, 2008). The report of the ad hoc committee on the "Future of Communication and Study Skills at the University of Botswana" (1998: 26), for example, states:

Employers of the University of Botswana graduates, certificate and diploma holders, were unhappy with the inability of graduates to express themselves fluently [in English]. External Examiners too had observed that University of Botswana students were unable to use information from references, compile data, analyse it and write coherent reports [in English].

Elsewhere in the world, the ineffectiveness of English teaching and learning is reflected in constant public, corporate and media concern that schools are failing to develop sufficient language and literacy skills to enable students to handle the language demands of the workplace (Cummins, 2000:53; Van der Walt, 2013; Van Rooy and Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015).

Botswana's response to the international movement for inculcating international competitive skills as well as a culture of life-long learning among learners, was to introduce the BGCSE (Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education) in 1999, in the place of the COSC (Cambridge Overseas School Certificate). Botswana sought to take advantage of the new BGCSE curriculum package to reform English language teaching as well and, being the dominant paradigm, the CLT approach was officially endorsed by curriculum planners and policy makers at all levels of secondary education. In junior secondary education, for example, the pre-eminence of the communicative approach is acknowledged as follows:

The emphasis throughout this syllabus is on a communicative approach where the students learn the language by using it in meaningful interactions, communicative activities and problem-solving tasks, thereby encouraging spontaneous and natural discourse. (Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation 1995: i).

In a similar vein, the BGCSE Teaching Syllabus explicitly endorses the vital role of communicative strategies in the teaching of English with the observation that “the teaching methodology is based on a communicative approach” (Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation 2000: i).

Despite the trust placed in the new CLT curriculum, evidence appears to suggest that learners' ESL proficiency did not improve dramatically. Among the Botswana scholars who have highlighted this are Nkosana (2006) and Akindele and Trennepohl (2008). Nkosana (2006), for example, remarks that despite the adoption of the CLT approach, English second language tuition in Botswana continues to be theoretically-oriented owing to the “wash-back effects” of the examination process. He further complains that due to the heavy influence of examinations on English, teaching with a communicative objective in view is often sidelined in favour of teaching focused on promoting a mastery and / or recall of individual language elements appropriate for examinations. These comments echo the “Revised National Policy on Education”, Government of Botswana, 1994, which refers to the “academic nature” of Botswana's school curriculum, and laments that language teaching and testing emphasise mastery and accuracy in using certain grammatical features (in other words, formal grammatical correctness) to the detriment of developing communicative skills in a variety of contexts.

Due to logistical problems, constraints imposed by inadequate resources and a change-over from a two-year to a three-year Junior Certificate Education (JCE) system, it was not possible to implement the communicative curriculum in its entirety from the onset in 1999. A phased transition was therefore implemented. In addition, regular revisions were introduced to ensure that the blend of communicative reform introduced in 1999 was in tune with international developments. According to some reports (cf. *Botswana Daily News* Tuesday 22 January 2013: 2), one of the major omissions from Botswana's CLT syllabus at JCE level, was the deferred implementation of so-

called “Communicative Language Testing”. One aspect of Communicative Language Testing according to Lightbown and Spada (2006: 110) is the fact that students’ ability in the second language is often measured in terms of their ability to get things done and not in terms of their accuracy in using certain grammatical features. The lack of a long history of the implementation of “Communicative Language Testing” could be very influential in determining the success of the implementation of CLT, as it is well-known that:

Assessment defines for students what is important, what counts, how they will spend their time and how they will see themselves as learners. If you want to change student learning, then change the methods of assessment (Luckett & Sutherland, 2000: 98).

Although it is true that one of the major thrusts of the new JCE curriculum syllabus was the introduction of a “criterion-referenced” assessment method as being more appropriate to assess the knowledge, skills, competencies, abilities and personal attributes that are pertinent to the needs of an emerging global workforce market, it is possible that lack of the implementation of “Communicative Language Testing” potentially limited the success of the implementation of CLT to date. Although the implementation of CLT would be accompanied by “Communicative Language Testing” that should theoretically contrast clearly with new ways of assessing English communicative proficiencies, one is not so sure how much of the CLT approach was already implemented in the first examinations using the new assessment methods that were written in 2012.

2. The problem

Based on the discussion above, the following problem was identified: ESL *teaching* in general in Botswana still leaves much to be desired. Botswana is in the process of implementing CLT and there is little information available about the knowledge and perceptions of English teachers about CLT and its potential to enhance the English proficiency of their learners. As stated above, it is widely known that the levels of English proficiency of learners in Botswana are not good enough. One reason for this state of affairs can possibly be found in the ESL secondary school classrooms. The major factors which scholars (including Mitchell & Lee, 2003; Tomlinson, 2005; Akindede & Trennepohl, 2008) have often cited as underlying the inadequate English language communicative proficiency of learners in Botswana, can broadly be referred to as pedagogic, including perceptions of teachers about the teaching and learning culture. More information about the teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of the CLT curriculum could contribute information that could be used by educational planners to improve the implementation of CLT in English language teaching in Botswana.

3. Research questions of the study

The research questions of this study relate to the knowledge and perceptions of selected English teachers in Botswana towards the implementation of CLT. The first research question relates to the knowledge of participating teachers of CLT. The second research question relates to the perception of the participating teachers about the usefulness of implementing CLT in English in Botswana. Based on these findings, some implications for the implementation of CLT in English teaching in Botswana would be considered.

4. Key concepts: Communicative Language Teaching and Communicative Competence

In this section we briefly elucidate two very important concepts underpinning the theoretical basis of our research.

4.1. CLT

CLT, also known as the Communicative Approach (CA), developed during the late 1970s and early 1980s (cf., among others, Roberts, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Galloway, 1993; Wilkins, 1976). CLT was developed as an approach that was better suited to develop learners' communicative competence in the target language than preceding methods such as the Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual methods. CLT was primarily motivated by the need to redress the challenges (or deficits) of the traditional, structure-based methods of L2 teaching. Characteristics of CLT include the following (cf. Richards and Rogers, (1986: 71) and Brown, (2007: 241-242):

- The emphasis is on the communicative function of language and classroom goals are not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
- Teaching is student-centred and not teacher-centred.
- The "real world" where language is used to perform certain functions, should be the focus of teaching. Students must be engaged in the pragmatic, functional and authentic use of language.
- Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles.

CLT is currently the accepted language teaching approach used in Botswana as espoused by the Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development (Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 1995; Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 1997; Botswana Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2000).

4.2. Communicative competence (CC)

Historically, CC is a term whose first emergence is attributed to Dell Hymes (1972). According to research (Brown, 2007; Savignon, 2005; Richards, 1999), the introduction of the concept CC was inspired by concern with the lack of depth in the definition of the term “competence” that had been proposed by Chomsky in 1965.

The perspective of Hymes and other pioneers of CC such as Canale (1983), was that the development of communicative proficiency was underpinned by interdependence between knowledge of the grammatical rules of a language and rules of language use suitable to a particular context. CC is generally described by Larsen-Freeman as involving “knowing when and how to say what to whom” (2000: 121). Cummins (2000: 61), citing Bruner (1975) also describes CC as the ability to make utterances that are appropriate to the context in which they are produced and to comprehend utterances in relation to the context in which they are uttered.

4.3. CLT: Disenchantment or misunderstanding?

As was mentioned above, CLT was embraced in Botswana as a response to and remedy for the perceived deficiencies in the country's educational system as far as ESL went. This was in line with the general reception of the new communicative approach worldwide. A whole range of scholars agree that, in contrast to the methods preceding the advent of CLT, this approach offers a broad and all-encompassing view about language, language acquisition, language learning and language teaching. It starts with the overt characterisation of language as a medium that is used first and last as medium of communication. Hiep (2007: 197) extols CLT's virtues thus:

CLT is the right method not only for teaching English, but the spirit of it can also benefit teaching other subjects. It aims to teach things practically useful to students in a relaxing manner.

The almost universal appeal of CLT is underscored by Savignon: “CLT has become so familiar to discussions about the practice and theory of second and foreign language teaching as the Big Mac is to fast food” (2005: 635). Littlewood (2011: 543) expresses little doubt about the value of CLT as a way of developing a “postmethod pedagogical framework (...) within which teachers can design methods appropriate to their own contexts but based on principled reflection” and as he rightly puts it: “(t)he term still serves as a valuable reminder that the aim of teaching is not to learn bits of language but to “improve the students’ ability to communicate” (Littlewood 2011: 542).

Despite what seems a universal acceptance of CLT as an innovation marking a major and real paradigm change in language teaching, it has often been presented as a loose teaching regime. Cook (2009:250) for example, describes the communicative style of teaching as having a *laissez-faire* attitude. Wedell (2011:3) mentions reports by Nunan (2003) and Wedell (2008) that suggest that “there are relatively few state school

classrooms anywhere in which most learners are developing a useable knowledge of English”. Heugh (2013) points to the following so-called unintended consequences of CLT that are evident world-wide but especially in the global South:

- Ambiguous signals were given to teachers.
- There was an inadequate training of teachers.
- There was a de-emphasis on writing and reading skills development.
- ELP was often misunderstood as being mainly about speaking and not about reading and writing.

Many scholars have mentioned the “problem of definition that bedevils CLT” (Littlewood 2011:541). Compare for instance Harmer (2003: 289) who states that “the term has always meant a multitude of different things to different people”. In Ethiopia, for example, teachers reported “that their understanding of ‘communicative language teaching’ was that acceptable teaching practice included ‘practising’ their own ‘broken English’ on students in the classroom” (Benson et al 2012: 46). Research has shown that there are numerous interpretations of the meanings, techniques and goals of CLT (see, for example, Thompson, 1996, Brown 2007; Hiep 2007). Thompson (1996: 9) mentioned that teachers the world over are uncertain or hold misconceptions about CLT, which are born out of numerous contradictory interpretations of the paradigm: “I am constantly struck by the very disparate perception they have of CLT”.

This seems to be the case in Botswana’s schools as well, providing the impetus for the current research that aims to provide some information about the participating teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of CLT as a useful approach for English teaching. In the following sections we present our methodology and findings that relate to the perceptions of participating teachers on the state of the art of CLT in Botswana’s schools.

5. Methodology

This article reports on the results obtained during the first phase of a larger research project. In this phase, quantitative data was collected from teachers by means of a questionnaire. The most widely adopted instrument for collating and analysing quantitative data is the questionnaire or the survey technique. Walsh (2001:69) refers to the value of a questionnaire as entailed in enabling the researcher to decipher “patterns and relationships about which [they] could only generalize from a large number of respondents”. Quantification of data, according to some scholars (Selinger & Shohamy, 1989:115; Mouton, 2001:153), is beneficial in guaranteeing that the research results are generalized to a large population.

The main disadvantage associated with the use of the questionnaire is that its entries often consist of close-ended questions, rating scales and forced choices. Thus, they may inhibit respondents from offering open and authentic opinions on the subject matter. Data collection possibilities are pre-limited by the researcher, as respondents can only provide responses to a restricted range of questions or scales (Walsh, (2001:64). In analyzing questionnaire responses a researcher must often try to make sense of seemingly contradictory responses. "Questionnaire fatigue" may also contribute to half-completed surveys. When using a questionnaire cross-referencing the responses against theoretical insights from research is also necessary to place the answers in a broader context and to help with interpretation of the data.

Well aware of the draw-backs of using a questionnaire, we nevertheless chose to use this instrument for data collecting as it enabled us to get an overall idea of the knowledge, opinions and attitudes towards CLT of a big group of teachers in Botswana's Junior Secondary Schools. In a second phase of the research we intend to augment this data with qualitative data collected with techniques such as interviews and classroom observation.

5.1. The questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this study was a self-designed questionnaire that consisted of a combination of Likert scale statements (with which respondents could strongly agree – agree – be neutral – disagree – strongly disagree) and YES / NO / UNCERTAIN questions. The questionnaire is presented in Appendix A below. There was one open-ended question in which the respondents were requested to describe their knowledge of and attitude towards CLT.

5.2. The research group

Due to financial and time constraints as well as other logistical challenges, a decision was taken to concentrate the focus of the study solely on the 34 JSSs in Botswana's urban areas and to include the entire cohort of ESL teachers at these JSSs as the research population for this study. This meant a target population of 158 ESL teachers. Of the 34 schools one school was used to pilot the questionnaire, and another declined to participate. The JSSs accommodate pupils from Form 1 (usually from 14 or 15 years), Form 2 (usually from 15 or 16 years) and Form 3 (usually from 16 to 17 years). When the field work for this study was conducted, the requisite enrolment figure for each class was 39-40 students.

Notwithstanding a relatively lengthy questionnaire, there was a good response rate: 135 teachers out of the potential 158 teachers, that is 85% of the target population, completed the questionnaire with 21 of the 32 participating schools selected for the study recording a 100% response rate.

5.2.1 The respondents: demographic data

5.2.1.1 Age and gender

The respondents were relatively young with the majority aged between 20 and 39. Almost half of the teachers, namely 67 (49.26%) were between 30-39 years old; 52 (38.5%) were between 20-29 years. 14 teachers (10%) were older than 40 years and 2 participants (1%) did not disclose their age. 101 respondents were female and 34 were male.

5.2.1.2 Nationality

Of the participating teachers, almost all the teachers (133/135) are Botswana citizens, only 2 were expatriates. This means that the data we got were from Botswana teachers, making our findings very pertinent for Botswana itself.

5.2.1.3 Qualifications

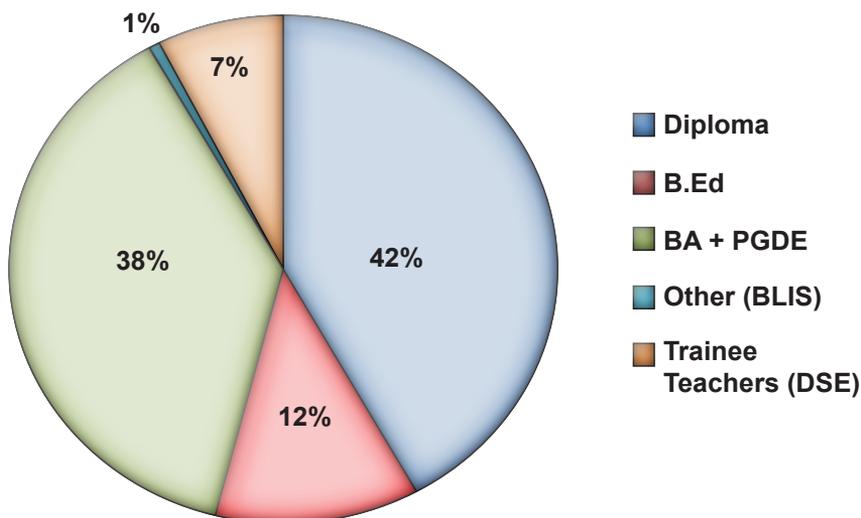


Figure 1: Qualifications

The survey showed that the majority of the teachers are well qualified: 50% either have a B.Ed. or a B.A. degree plus a PGDE (Post Graduate Diploma in Education); and 42% obtained a diploma. 7% of the respondents were trainee teachers. This data points to adequately trained teachers in the JSS's, even though Molefe et al. (2008: 9), point out that in many nations the entry level for teachers at both primary and secondary levels is a bachelor's degree in a subject area plus a masters in education. Botswana is still a long way from this standard. In the research group no teacher holds a master's degree.

5.2.1.4 Teaching experience

Table 1: Teaching experience

Teaching Experience	Number of teachers	Percentage
0-11 months	18	13.33%
12 months—5 years	48	35.55%
6 —10 years	32	23.70%
11—15 years	33	24.44%
16—20 years	3	2.22%
21 —25 years	0	0
26—30 years	1	0.74%
Total	135	100%

As the table shows, almost half (66/135) of the teachers have been teaching for less than 5 years, meaning that they have a little less experience than the rest of the teachers (69/135) who have more than 5 years of teaching experience.

6. Data presentation and analysis

This section provides a presentation and discussion of the questionnaire responses received. Careful analysis is important in the light of the fact that the responses to different sections of the questionnaire are often inconsistent. Questionnaire surveys typically do not afford respondents the opportunity to explain their answers. The interpretation of seemingly inconsistent data therefore includes some speculation by the researchers as to possible reasons for the findings. Where speculation does occur, it is tied to the findings of other researchers in the same field to strengthen its claims.

6.1. Perceptions of ELP in Botswana's JSSs

One of the aims of the study is to understand how teachers perceive the current ELP of their pupils. These perceptions are important, because one would be able to infer in some way if teachers believe that the CLT approach is providing learners with the correct experiences that would strengthen their ELP.

Teachers could strongly agree, agree, be neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: The ESL proficiency of Botswana secondary school learners is inadequate.

The majority of the teachers (80% in total) agreed (67%) or strongly agreed (13%) that the ESL proficiency of their students is inadequate. This is an important finding, confirming the view outside the school system that Botswana pupils do not master English well enough. It must be noted that it is difficult to gain full insight into teachers' views on this matter owing primarily to a lack of clarity on what the teachers understand the concepts "communicative competence" and / or "language proficiency" to mean.

An important cautionary note must be added here. According to widely held anecdotal evidence and based on the experience of the researchers themselves, it seems to be a particular trait of language teachers world-wide to think that their pupils' language proficiency (also in the home language) is not very good (Van Rooy & Coetzee-Van Rooy, 2015). In the past teachers, researchers and administrators also often blamed a perceived low level of ESL proficiency on their pupils' bilingualism as Cummins (2000), citing Cummins (1979); Cummins & Mulcahy (1978); Edminton Public School Board (1979) and Hanson (1979) noted.

We therefore keep this in mind and interpret our findings against this background.

Question 11 in the questionnaire (cf. Appendix A) that also related to the perceptions of the participating teachers of the English proficiency of their pupils was: Are the following true of your students? The participants were given a list of the following possible characteristics of their pupils' English, and they could respond with strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree. The participating teachers reported as follows when they reflected on the characteristics of their pupils' English:

Table 2: Characteristics of ESL pupils

Characteristic	"Agree" to "Strongly agree"
Pupils code-switch between English and their mother tongue when speaking.	87%
Pupils are uncomfortable with using English outside the classroom.	81%
Pupils directly translate from the mother tongue when speaking English	79%
Pupils lack creative expression when writing.	79%
Pupils lack confidence when speaking.	71%
Pupils find it difficult to interpret materials in English.	57%
Many get low marks (and even fail) in English language exams and tests.	48%

Regarding the last characteristic in the table above: note that the majority (52%) of the teachers are of the opinion that their pupils do not fail their tests and examinations; and yet the teachers did not rate the ELP of these same pupils as being adequate.

The following two questions in the questionnaire related to the factors that cause inadequacy in the ELP of the participating teachers' pupils: "If you agree in 8 above, do you think that the following factors **outside the classroom** contribute to a low ESL proficiency?" and "If you agree in 8 above, do you think that the following factors **inside the classroom** contribute to a low ESL proficiency?"

Outside the classroom the main factor that was identified was the interference of the mother tongue with 94% of the respondents agreeing to this statement. 87% agreed that the lack of an English speaking culture was an important factor that contributes to inadequate English proficiency among their pupils.

The participating teachers believed that the following factors inside the classroom influence the ELP of their pupils:

Table 3: Factors inside the classroom contributing to low ELP

Factor	"Agree" to "Strongly agree"
Large class size	84%
Gap between theory (of CLT) and practice	61%
The current CLT curriculum	46%
Unsuitable teaching methods	37%
Inappropriate training of teachers	30%

Large class sizes remain an important issue that teachers perceive to influence the success of their pupils' ELP. This finding is in line with previous research findings (cf. Mitchell, 1988; Tomlinson, 2005; Savignon, 2005; Kirkgoz, 2010) which indicated that large numbers lower ESL communicative proficiency. This situation is also typical of African language learning contexts (O'Connor and Geiger, 2009) and we should not forget this very important and practical issue when we consider the success or failure of curriculum implementation in language teaching. Concerning the knowledge or attitudes of participating teachers related to CLT, we should note that 61% of the teachers agreed that there exists a gap between the theory and practice of CLT, while only 46% seemed to think that the current CLT curriculum contributed to low ELP. It is difficult to determine

if teachers and researchers understood the same content with the phrase “Gap between theory (of CLT) and practice”, so this finding should be interpreted with caution. A further limitation of the questionnaire method, is that it does not allow us to infer the ways in which the present format of the Botswana ESL curriculum contributes to learners’ unsatisfactory English communicative proficiency. Looking at the literature, though, we note that the ELT curriculum is often blamed for not adequately preparing learners to perform certain social functions through the medium of language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Roberts, 2004; Hiep, 2007). The curriculum is often regarded as a mere window dresser, whilst teaching continues to be conducted in the same old ways. In other words, it is possible that the participating teachers are stating that they are aware that there is a gap between the ideals underlying CLT and the ways in which these are implemented in their classrooms or classrooms that they are familiar with. This notion would have to be explored via direct classroom observations in future and no conclusive claim can be made related to a potential gap between the theory of CLT and the implementation of CLT. The biggest group of the participating teachers (44%) either disagreed with the claim that inappropriate teacher training was a factor, or they remained neutral (26%) about this. The 30% that did agree with this statement are in the minority. The participating teachers therefore do not believe that inadequate training in CLT relate to the lack of ELP of their learners.

6.2. Knowledge and perceptions of CLT in Botswana

The participating teachers’ knowledge and perceptions regarding CLT in Botswana will now be presented and discussed.

6.2.1 *Knowledge*

This section of the questionnaire included a series of sub-questions that attempted to elicit answers that would provide a comprehensive picture of the knowledge that the teachers have of CLT. When asked whether they were familiar with the concept of “communicative competence” (CC) 65% of the teachers answered “Yes”, 25% were uncertain and 10% answered “No”. This response raised expectations that a majority of teachers would also be able to elaborate on some theoretical aspects concerning CC when required to do so later on in a follow-up, open-ended question. However, only 3 out of the possible 135 participating teachers gave an in-depth answer by mentioning grammatical competence, interactive skills, cultural knowledge and discourse competence. 4 teachers gave a satisfactory answer and 17 gave a poor response, meaning they could name one only aspect of CLT. 111 teachers did not attempt to answer the question at all. While one can guess at a few reasons for this state of affairs (ranging from questionnaire fatigue, disinterestedness, to real ignorance) the fact remains that the response to this question in particular does not point to in-depth knowledge and internalization of this knowledge. Another option is that the way of asking the question was wrong. Instead of asking teachers to write down an understanding of CC, teachers could have been provided with a set of definitions that relate to CLT or that do not relate to CC and they could have been asked to indicate which of the statements or definitions are “true” for CC and which of the

statements or definitions are “not true” for CC. Responses to this type of question later on in the questionnaire rendered more data.

The finding that so many of the participating teachers were not able to describe CC in some detail is nevertheless disturbing, because knowledge of what the term “communicative competence” entails is important. Uso–Juan and Martinez–Flor (2008: 157) quote Celce–Murcia and Olshtain (2005) as stating that “the implementation of communicative methodology is not an easy task since it requires an understanding of the integrated nature of the theoretical concept of communicative competence”. However, as stated above, the question could be asked very differently to “test” the knowledge of participants about CC in future.

6.2.2 Perceptions about the reception of CLT

First of all, we wanted to see whether teachers perceived CLT as a suitable approach for improving learners’ ESL proficiency (cf. Question 12 in Appendix A). Figure 2 illustrates the responses of the participants: 81% agreed or strongly agreed that CLT was a suitable approach.

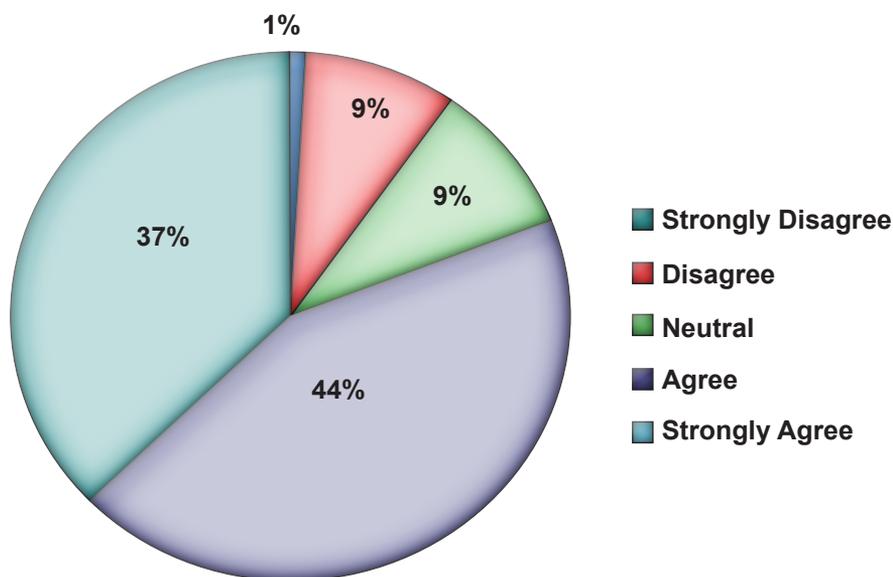


Figure 2: Suitability of CLT

In a follow-up question teachers could strongly agree, agree, be neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the statements regarding CLT made below. The percentages of teachers that agreed or strongly agreed with the statements provided are given between brackets.

CLT ...

- focuses on improving learners' oral communication skills (93%);
- states that grammar plays a crucial development role (84%);
- promotes spontaneous use of the language (81%);
- considers writing as an essential element in ESL teaching (74%); and
- tolerates errors as a means of ensuring adequate practice of language use (1.5%).

The majority of the participants also endorsed the claim that the following aspects of CLT are novel:

- more emphasis on communication than on a systematic study of grammar (60%);
- learner-centred (92%);
- a social context as a basis for effective ESL teaching is created (78%);
- learners should do most of the classroom talking (76%); and
- equal emphasis on all four language skills (65%).

The following table gives the responses to claims made about the CLT curriculum as used in Botswana schools (cf. Question 13, Appendix A).

Table 4: The Botswana CLT curriculum

Statement	“Agree” to “Strongly agree”
Absence of suitable communicative tasks.	75%
Overemphasis on writing to the neglect of oral communication skills.	69%
The emphasis on “Western” educational and cultural values hinders students from other cultures.	50%

From the responses reported above, it would seem that the participating teachers do have an adequate knowledge of the key elements of CLT, although they are not able to formulate what CC actually means in their own words. They understand that communicative tasks are important and that all skills, and not only writing, must receive equal attention in class. They also seem to be aware of the fact that CLT might be perceived as “Western” with different underlying cultural values – a significant 50% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with this claim. Scholars in related contexts, (Chen and Hird, 2006; Girvan, 2000 and Tomlinson, 2005) note that an imported curriculum should ideally be accompanied by the necessary adaptation to make it suitable to the local environment.

It must be acknowledged, of course, that the questionnaire itself actually presented these aspects of the curriculum to the teachers — they only had to agree or disagree with the statements made. Future questionnaire items should consider to include items that do NOT relate to CLT as well, to see if participating teachers could discern between CLT and non-CLT elements in teaching approaches.

The findings reported so far should be embedded in the existing body of knowledge. Worldwide, the ELT curriculum is often blamed for not adequately preparing learners to perform certain social functions through the medium of language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Roberts, 2004; Hiep, 2007). This might be because the curriculum is often used by teachers as a mere window dresser, whilst teaching continues to be conducted in the same old ways. This finding should also be viewed in light of the fact that curriculum change is often viewed as a top-down imposition that bears little or no teacher input. Compare section 6.2.3 below which shows that a large part of the participants (45%) disagreed that they were consulted by educational authorities regarding the introduction of CLT. Note as well that a large part of the participants (43%) remained neutral on this aspect. Teachers might therefore resist the innovation and continue to teach and assess the discrete linguistic forms and not the functional and social uses of language, as are advocated by CLT. As Larsen-Freeman, (2000), Savignon, (2005), Tomlinson, (2005) and Wilkins, (1976) also observed, in practice, teaching continues to emphasise mastery of the formal properties of the language as an end in itself, without paying attention to the ways in which those forms are employed to express communicative needs.

6.2.3 *Perceptions about the acceptance of CLT*

There were several questions that related to the perceptions of the participating teachers about the acceptance of CLT in Botswana. One of the questions was: “Botswana’s ESL teachers are adequately trained to handle teaching under the new CLT regime.”

.Only 40% agreed and a large part of the participants (34%) disagreed with the statement. A relatively high percentage, 26%, remained neutral on this issue.

A slightly different picture emerges in the following question, which asked the teachers to evaluate how their training equipped them with the skills needed to teach English that

were listed in the table below. The responses here seemed to contradict those of the previous question.

Table 5: Perceptions regarding training

My training equipped me with the following skills	“Agree” to “Strongly agree”
Confidence in the English language	79%
Ability to monitor (manage) student’s interaction	74%
Initiative and creativity	69%
Spending an equal amount of time on speaking and writing in the classroom	53%

A follow-up question regarding different modes of training sheds some light on the apparent contradiction. 82% of the teachers were of the opinion that their personal efforts and own initiatives, and not their formal training or in-service training, played a significant role in developing their understanding and knowledge of CLT. This suggests that these teachers are in fact, very interested in increasing their knowledge of CLT through their own efforts.

Overall, the picture that emerges from these findings is somewhat unclear. On the one hand Botswana teachers are not convinced that they are adequately trained to teach using the communicative approach; on the other hand, they seem quite confident that they possess the necessary skills to teach using a CLT curriculum and they even attach great importance to their own individual efforts at improving their knowledge and skills.

Respondents’ answers to certain questions provide some insight into their “ownership” of CLT. These questions attempted to get a general understanding of the overall perceptions and attitudes of Botswana teachers regarding CLT. As can be seen from Figure 2 above, 81% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed to the claim that CLT is a suitable approach for developing ESL communicative proficiency. According to the responses to Question 15, “If you are familiar with communicative competence, do you think that its development is a suitable goal for ESL teaching in Botswana?” 88% of the participating teachers agreed or strongly agreed that it is indeed a suitable objective for ESL instruction. These responses seem to point to an acceptance of the current approach — at least at an intellectual level.

When asked in Question 28 to respond to the statement “Teachers were consulted during the discussion and subsequent introduction of the CLT innovation in Botswana’s ESL teaching”, a large group of the participants (43%) remained neutral, 45% disagreed and a very small group (12%) agreed with the claim. According to the responses to

Question 29, “If you disagree in 28 above, do you think that non-consultation of teachers had the following effects?” the lack of consultation had a definite effect as is clear from Table 6 below.

Table 6: Effects of perceived non-consultation about CLT among participants

Effect of non-consultation	“Agree” to “Strongly agree”
Teachers are unable to approve of CLT because they have an inadequate understanding and knowledge of CLT.	91%
Teachers only select aspects of CLT that they consider applicable to their students.	89%
Teachers continue to use traditional (drill-orientated) methodologies	84%
Teachers do not teach communicatively	78%

Once again, the findings seem to point to two attitudes. On the one hand, teachers approve of the CLT approach, but according to the findings presented in Table 6 it is clear that the majority of teachers do not implement the whole curriculum in their classrooms, showing that they do not in fact claim complete ownership of the introduction and implementation of the CLT innovation in Botswana’s ESL teaching.

The answer to the question, “Do teachers take ownership of CLT?” is that the biggest part of the participating teachers declined ownership of the introduction and implementation of the CLT innovation in Botswana’s ESL teaching and learning. This finding is not surprising bearing in mind that research (Savignon, 2005; Tomlinson, 2005; Girvan, 2000) rated absence or inadequate consultation amongst the major inhibitions of the implementation of curricular innovation world-wide. In Japan, for example, evidence shows that English teachers in particular have been subjected to all sorts of top-down educational changes during the last decade (Girvan, 2000:133).

6.2.4 Perceptions about practice

When asked to answer questions pertaining to teaching practice, teachers gave the following responses.

Table 7 presents responses to Question 20: “The following are true of Botswana’s teaching (and assessment) methods”.

Table 7: Perceptions of classroom practice

Statement	“Agree” and “Strongly agree”
There is an over-reliance on course book materials	83%
There is not enough practice in each skill	70%
Learners memorise too much	65%
The learning culture is too passive	56%

Teachers could agree or disagree with the statements listed above – statements that characterise a classroom where CLT is not the dominant approach. Savignon (2005: 208), describes the main techniques for teaching ESL through traditional methods as consisting of translation, memorisation of vocabulary lists and verb conjugation, for instance. An endorsement by 65% of the teachers that learners memorise too much could imply that a more traditional method where learners must master discrete language forms and rules is still used. Research (Mitchell, 1988; Roberts, 2004 and Savitri, 2009) has shown that repetition, memorisation and exact production have failed to meet the unpredictability criterion of the communicative approach.

A too heavy dependence on course books could be an indication that CLT has not been internalised enough and that teachers hesitate to improvise by making use of their own authentic teaching materials. In the traditional classroom the text book was regarded as the primary teaching tool which was recommended as a “script” to be memorized verbatim.

The fact that 70% of the participating teachers are of the opinion that there is not enough practice or assessment of each skill might point to the dominance of writing in these classrooms, although one can not conclude this from the responses here. Research has shown that all four skills should be used interdependently in order to produce language which is not only fluent, but also appropriate to its context of use (Uso-Juan & Martinez-flor, 2008; Kirkgoz, 2010). The absence of certain skills could perhaps also tie in with the perception of 56% of the respondents that the learning culture is too passive, implying perhaps that learners do not take enough part in oral communication. This finding must be seen in conjunction with some scholarly findings (Akindele and Trennepohl, 2008; Molefe et al., 2007) documenting a passive national social character for Botswana.

All in all, it does not appear as if classroom practice adheres very strictly to CLT requirements.

The following table shows teachers’ views on the regularity with which they use the following teaching techniques:

Table 8: Perceptions of teaching techniques

Teaching technique	“Agree” to “Strongly agree” that this technique was used regularly
Error correction	99%
Grammatical exercises	98%
Assessment of writing skills	97%
Use of content-based topics	94%
Assessment of speaking skills	75%

These responses paint a picture of a very traditional classroom. If the above-mentioned techniques are used regularly (and speaking skills are clearly not used as much as the other techniques), there does not seem to be much opportunity for major CLT techniques often mentioned in the literature like group work, role play, information-gap exercises and task-based learning. (See Richards and Rodgers (2001) for a good overview of typical CLT teaching techniques and also Cook, 2009; Ellis, 2004; Mitchell, 1988; Nunan, 1987; Roberts 2004 and Savitri, 2009, amongst many others.) However, the next question in the questionnaire, namely a set of statements regarding the frequency with which certain teaching and learning strategies are used in class, elicited responses which are important because they give an indication of the extent to which CLT theory has in fact been put into practice by the teachers in the research group. These responses seem to indicate that the ESL classrooms of the research group teachers are perhaps not as traditional as might seem from the responses listed in Table 7 and that the participating teachers, according to their own perceptions, do follow the guidelines about teaching practice that are associated with CLT.

More than 80% of the participating teachers agreed that they regularly used teaching strategies such as group discussions, role plays and classroom discussions and 61% indicated that they made use of paired work. 78% of the teachers indicated that they know what is meant by “authentic materials”; 58% used these materials often or very often. 38% only use authentic materials “sometimes”.

7. Conclusions

7.1. Limitations of this study

The research reported on here made use of a quantitative method. Disadvantages of using this method was already mentioned above. Although the findings emanating from the survey are significant in our opinion, more data is needed to form a full picture of the

interface between theory and practice in Botswana's JSSs, as we also point out above. Another limitation of the study is that, due to time constraints, only urban schools were used as its research site, thus leaving out the rural areas of Botswana. Further research is therefore necessary to arrive at a more comprehensive overview of the situation in Botswana. Hesitation is therefore called for before generalising these findings to the whole of the Botswana education system. However, when one considers the findings for these urban teachers, one can assume that rural teachers would probably have the same or less informed knowledge and perceptions of CLT.

7.2. Perspective

As stated in the introductory section, the problem of an inadequate English proficiency in Botswana was presumed to have its roots in the present teaching curriculum, which, although communicatively based, does not appear to be delivering the results predicted by the world-wide paradigm shift.

Our main finding is that the results of the quantitative study were inconclusive. On the one hand teachers appeared to approve of and knew what CLT was. On the other hand, their theoretical knowledge did not seem as sound as it should be. We acknowledge that future self-designed instruments could aim to ask more effective questions. Many aspects of CLT are apparently incorporated into ESL teaching, but this must be investigated further with real classroom observations, since the possibility does exist that teachers do not implement CLT even to the extent that their answers to the questionnaire items foretell. A comparison of the perceptions stated in the questionnaire study and real life classroom observations would be the only way to determine if there is a true gap between policy and practice.

Botswana's junior secondary school teachers are relatively young, an observation, taken together with the fact that they are also well qualified, might lead one to assume that they were introduced to CLT during their teacher training. However, most teachers could not list important aspects of communicative competence in the open-ended question, suggesting a lack of theoretical understanding of CLT. Their responses to other questions indicate that they were able to recognise the most important characteristics of CLT and that they do in fact, claim to adhere to some of the well-established CLT practices, like using authentic materials and encouraging discussion in class. Still, a large majority of teachers admit that methods like error correction and grammar exercises are still used regularly in class – once again a finding that points to the possibility that there does indeed exist a gap between theory and practice.

Of importance are those responses where the teachers could indicate what the problems with classroom practice are, like the absence of communicative tasks (there is little task-based learning), and overemphasis on writing versus speaking. Half of the respondents also agreed that the "Western" nature of the curriculum hinders Botswana pupils. This perception clearly needs to be investigated further.

Regarding their professional readiness to teach ESL (despite some ambiguity in the findings), it would seem that the teachers are on the whole well acquainted with the principles and practice of CLT, but that they do not really take ownership of CLT mainly because of a perceived lack of consultation before the new curriculum was introduced. Lack of consultation by educational authorities appears to be a genuine problem. Scholars like Girvan, (2000), Savignon, (2005) and Tomlinson (2005) rate absence of, or inadequate consultation amongst the major inhibitions to curricular innovation world-wide. The teachers definitely seemed to feel that they were left out of the decision making process and their answers also suggested that they had to rely on their own initiatives to augment their teaching.

In view of the structured nature of the questionnaire, it was not always possible for the respondents to make follow-up comments or expand on their answers. This might be the reason for the contradictory answers to some of the questions so that a somewhat unclear and fluid picture emerged. The findings do, however, seem to point to a certain disjunction between the perceptions, theoretical knowledge and potential classroom practice regarding CLT in Botswana's Junior Secondary Schools. This clearly needs to be explored further.

7.3. Recommendation

The quantitative study must be followed up with a qualitative investigation into actual classroom practice, in order to find out where exactly the possible gap between theory and practice occurs. When this is ascertained, possible remedies for the current schoolroom practice can be offered.

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Appendix A

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS			
Please fill or tick (✓) the appropriate space. Continue writing on a separate sheet, if necessary.			For office use only
SECTION A – BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION			
1	Respondent number	V1	
2	Name of school: _____	V2	
3	Employment terms: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Citizen <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Expatriate <input type="checkbox"/>	V3	
4	Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> 1 Male <input type="checkbox"/> 2 Female	V4	
5	Age: _____ years	V5	
6	Qualifications:		
	<input type="checkbox"/> 1 Diploma	V6.1	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 B.Ed	V6.2	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 3 BA + PGDE	V6.3	
	<input type="checkbox"/> 4 M.Ed	V6.4	
	<input type="text"/> Other (specify)	V6.5	
7	Work experience: _____ years	V7	

SECTION B - ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) PROFICIENCY							
		1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree	
8	The ESL proficiency of Botswana secondary school learners is inadequate						V8
9	If you agree in 8 above, do you think that the following factors outside the classroom contribute to a low ESL proficiency?						
	1. Interference of first language.						V9.1
	2. Negative attitude towards English.						V9.2
	3. Lack of “English-speaking culture”.						V9.3
	4. Lack of education or poor language background of parents.						V9.4
10	If you agree in 8 above, do you think that the following factors inside the classroom contribute to a low ESL proficiency?						
	1. Large class size.						V10.1
	2. The current (CLT) curriculum.						V10.2
	3. Unsuitable teaching methods.						V10.3
	4. Inappropriate training of teachers.						V10.4
	5. Gap between theory (of CLT) and practice.						V10.5
11	Are the following true of your students?						
	1. Many get low marks (and even fail) in English language exams and tests.						V11.1
	2. They lack creative expression in written language.						V11.2
	3. They lack confidence when speaking.						V11.3
	4. They code-switch between English and mother tongue when speaking.						V11.4
	5. There is direct translation from the mother tongue.						V11.5

	6. There is discomfort with using English outside the classroom.							V11.6	
	7. They find it difficult to interpret materials in English.							V11.7	

SECTION C - THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) CURRICULUM									
		1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree			
12	CLT is a suitable teaching approach for developing ESL communicative proficiency in Botswana.						V12		
13	If you agree in 12 above, comment on these aspects of the curriculum:								
	1. There is overemphasis on writing to the neglect of oral communication skills.						V13.1		
	2. Absence of “motivational” (suitable communicative) tasks to enable students to embrace the target foreign and/or second language.						V13.2		
	3. The emphasis on “Western” educational and cultural values hinders students from other cultures.						V13.3		

SECTION D - KNOWLEDGE OF CLT										
14	Are you familiar with the concept “communicative competence”?								V14	
	1 Yes		2 No		3 Uncertain					
				Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree		
15.	If you are familiar with communicative competence, do you think that its development is a suitable goal for ESL teaching in Botswana?								V15	
16,	The following are important/critical aspects of CLT									
	1.Focuses on improving learners’ oral communication skills.								V16.1	
	2. .Achieves communicative competence.								V16.3	
	3.Promotes spontaneous use of the language.								V16.3	
	4.Tolerance of errors as a means of ensuring adequate practice of language use.								V16.4	
	5.Writing is a critical element.								V16.5	
	6.Grammar plays an important development role.								V16.6	
17.	The following aspects of CLT are significantly innovative:									
	1.Syllabus emphasizes learners’ communication in the target language over a systematic study of grammar.								V17.1	
	2.Using a learner-centred approach.								V17.2	
	3.Creating a social context as the basis of effective ESL instruction.								V17.3	
	4.Spending equal time on each of the four skills.								V17.4	
	5.Learners do most of the classroom talking.								V17.5	
	6.Assessment of communicative effectiveness								V17.6	

18.	Identify and briefly explain the main components of “communicative competence”.							
							V18.1	
							V18.2	
							V18.3	
							V18.4	
19	According to CLT, there should be equal emphasis on speaking and writing.							
	1 True		2 Not true		3 Uncertain		V19	

SECTION E- TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT METHODS								
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree		
20.	The following are true of Botswana’s teaching (and assessment) methods:							
	1.The learning culture is too passive.						V20.1	
	2.There is an over-reliance on course book materials.						V20.2	
	3.Learners memorise too much.						V20.3	
	4.There is not enough practice in each skill.						V20.4	
		1 Never	2 Rarely	3 Sometimes	4 Often	5 Very often		
21.	How frequently do you use each of the following teaching and learning strategies?							
	1.Paired work						V21.1	
	2.Group discussion						V21.2	
	3.Individual learning activities						V21.3	

	4.Seminar/tutorial presentations							V21.4		
	5.Project work							V21.5		
	6.Role plays							V21.6		
	7.Class discussions							V21.7		
22	How frequently do you do each of the following in your teaching?									
	1.Assess speaking skills							V22.1		
	2.Give grammatical exercises							V22.2		
	3.Assess writing skills							V22.3		
	4.Correct errors							V22.4		
	5.Use content-based topics							V22.5		
23	Do you know what is meant by “authentic material”?									
	1 Yes		2 No		3 Uncertain			V23		
24	If your answer in 23 above is Yes , how often do you use authentic materials?								V24	

SECTION F - TEACHER PREPAREDNESS							
		1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree	
25	Botswana's ESL teachers are adequately trained to handle teaching under the new CLT regime.						V25
26	Expand your answer in 25 above, by evaluating your personal training. Do you feel that you are adequately trained in the following areas?						
	1.Ability to monitor (manage) student's interaction						V26.1
	2.Confidence in the English language						V26.2
	3.Spending an equal amount of time on speaking and writing						V26.3
	4.Initiative and creativity						V26.4
27	The following types of training played an important role in inducting you into the communicative approach to ESL teaching:						
	1.Formal teaching and learning programs						V27.1
	2.In-service training						V27.2
	3.Individual teacher's activities (initiative)						V27.3
28	Teachers were consulted during the discussion and subsequent introduction of the CLT innovation in Botswana's ESL teaching.						V28
29	If you disagree in 28 above, do you think that non-consultation of teachers had the following effects?						

	1. Inadequate understanding (knowledge) of the principle of CLT to be able to approve of it.						V29.1	
	2. Continued use of traditional (drill-orientated) methodologies.						V29.2	
	3. Underutilisation of the communicative objective – teachers do not teach communicatively						V29.3	
	4. Teachers only select aspects of CLT that they consider applicable to their students.						V29.4	

Thank you very much for completing the Questionnaire.

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