



## **Level of Instructional Clarity of English Language Teachers at Selected Secondary Schools**

**Abate Demissie Gedamu**

Arba Minch University, College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Department of English Language & Literature,

---

### **ABSTRACT**

Instructional clarity is an essential issue for understandable and quality teaching. To this effect, this study aimed to examine the level of instructional clarity of English language teachers at selected secondary schools in Gamo Zone, Ethiopia. Accordingly, the study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design to collect and analyze quantitative data at one point in time about the instructional clarity of teachers. I selected 62 English language teachers using a comprehensive sampling technique from eight public secondary schools. The study employed a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire. I utilized a one-sample t-test to examine whether the English language teachers' instructional clarity was statistically above the expected mean (3.00). The study concluded that English language teachers maintained an overall instructional clarity meaningfully above average despite poor practices and ambivalent stances on some aspects of instructional clarity.

**Keywords:** Instructional clarity, level of clarity, quality teaching, student understanding

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1. Background and Justification of the Problem**

Quality teaching is critical to producing innovative citizens that could solve societal problems. It enhances all students learning in which they are involved and be the owners of their learning (Postareff et al., 2008; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). Quality teaching is related to the degree to which teachers demonstrate instructional clarity to promote understanding (Bellens et al., 2019; Bergem et al., 2016; Blömeke et al., 2016; Ferguson & Danielson, 2014; Neumann et al., 2012; Wagner et al., 2016). Instructional clarity relates to a clear and comprehensive teaching practice through setting clear learning goals, providing a summary at the end of the lesson, and linking new and old topics (Bergem et al., 2016; Cohen & Grossman, 2016). Besides, it is the

clarity and explicitness of the delivery and explanation of the content of the lesson (Brekelmans et al., 2000; Maulana et al., 2016) and teacher support and respect ideas and questions of students and encouraging classroom discussions among students (Blömeke et al., 2016).

Studies indicated clear and intelligible instructions had the strongest association with quality teaching, students' understanding of contents (Brekelmans et al., 2000; Feldman, 2007; Hativa et al., 2001), and student academic motivation, cognitive load, and achievement (Alles et al., 2017; Bolkan et al., 2016; Schneider & Preckel, 2017; Yagan, 2021). Besides, instructional clarity enhances learners' engagement, maximizes their learning, and encourages active participation in classroom activities (Chen & Lu, 2022; Demkanin, 2022). Moreover, instructional clarity increases students' ability to process learning information (Bolkan et al., 2016; Wackermann et al., 2010). Furthermore, instructional clarity guarantees students' learning opportunities and engagement in classroom activities (Chen & Lu, 2022; Demkanin, 2022; van de Pol et al., 2010).

The studies currently reviewed on instructional clarity are drawn from within and across different disciplines, although the results could vary across disciplines (Darmaji et al., 2019; Houichi & Sarnou, 2020; Praetorius et al., 2018). Besides, almost all the studies reviewed have been conducted elsewhere, and the results may not be pertinent to English as a foreign language in Ethiopia. The instructional clarity of English language teachers, where English is a foreign language, seems scarce. Therefore, it is legitimate to examine secondary school English language teachers' instructional clarity at some selected secondary schools in the Gamo Zone, Ethiopia.

## **1.2. The Underlying Theories of Instructional Clarity**

The information-processing model, assimilation to schema theory, and adaptive instruction theory explain instructional clarity (Titsworth et al., 2015). The information-processing model and the assimilation to schema theory deal with cognitive load theory (CLT) (Benton & Li, 2021). The Information-Processing Model explains the cognitive processes, or mental activities, that enable students to represent, store, and transfer information within memory. Instructional clarity manifests in education when the teacher provides concrete and worked examples and explanations and applies signaling, vagueness, redundancy, and coherence (Alles

et al., 2017; Bolkan et al., 2017). The instruction has to have clarity to reduce extraneous cognitive load (Bolkan et al., 2017), and students are more likely to transfer the information into long-term memory (LTM).

Assimilation-to-schema is another cognitive theory that is relevant to instructional clarity. Students construct meaning from new material by integrating the information into existing mental frameworks stored in LTM. Students participate in cognitive processing and construct a meaningful representation of verbal and visual information (Benton & Li, 2021). Teachers activate schemata through advance organizers, which are statements or explanations that connect what students learn with what they already know about the topic. Teaching vocabulary associated with the new subject matter can also help students create schemata to assist in learning and assimilation of the information (Mayer & Moreno, 2003).

Adaptive instruction theory advocates that clarity of instruction is attained by modifying the instruction following student feedback (questions, comments, and performance on assessments) through teacher-student communication back and forth to negotiate meaning (Civikly, 1992). Effective teacher helps students to understand that they are active learners who draw upon information stored in LTM and integrate it into new subject matter (Bergem et al., 2016; Cohen & Grossman, 2016). When there is a lack of clarity, students should be encouraged to signal to teachers their need for further explanation and articulate their misunderstanding or confusion (Benton & Li, 2021).

The information-processing model contends that teachers ought to provide concrete and worked-out examples and explanations to maintain instructional clarity. Assimilation-to-schema theory emphasizes the need for activating learners' schemata to link the new information to their prior knowledge to enhance the construction of meaning. In contrast, the adaptive instruction theory advocates modifying the instruction following student feedback, and negotiation for meaning can maximize the clarity of instruction. It appears that the three theories that underpin instructional clarity are complementary. The three theories are integrative and enhance a comprehensive understanding of instructional clarity. The current study integrated these theories to comprehensively understand and examine the instructional clarity of English language teachers.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This study aimed to investigate the level of instructional clarity of English language teachers at selected secondary schools in Gamo Zone, Ethiopia. To this effect, the study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive research design to collect and analyze quantitative data at one point in time about the instructional clarity of teachers. The study employed a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree and 3= un-decided as the mid-point. The study used the mid-point (3) as the cut-off expected mean to decide the level of instructional clarity of English language teachers.

### **2.2. The Study Sample**

The study included 62 English language teachers drawn from eight public secondary schools using a comprehensive sampling technique. I gathered the data in the 2023 academic year. The sample encompassed 18 females and 44 males, with 19 having first degrees in English language instruction. The remaining 43 had second degrees in teaching English as a foreign language from various public universities. In terms of teaching experience, seven teachers had less than two years, eight had three to five years, eighteen had six to ten years, and the remaining 29 had more than eleven years.

### **2.3. Data Collection Tool**

The researcher developed a questionnaire for instructional clarity based on the information-processing model, assimilation to schema theory, and adaptive instruction theory (Benton & Li, 2021; Bolkan et al., 2017; Titsworth et al., 2015). Accordingly, the tool included items on providing concrete examples and explanations of the information-processing model. Besides, it comprised activating learners' schemata, an aspect of the assimilation-to-schema theory, and adapting instruction through discussion and feedback for instructional clarity. The instructional clarity scale consists of 12 items with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), undecided (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

Seven senior instructors of the College of Social Sciences and Humanities validated the tool for content validity. Each reviewer independently rated the relevance of each item on the questionnaire using a 4-point Likert scale (1=not relevant, 2=somewhat relevant, 3=relevant,

4=very relevant). The researcher organized and calculated the Item-level Content Validity Index (CVI) and The Content Validity Index for Scales (S-CVI). The result showed Item Content Validity Index (I-CVIs) for the instructional clarity scale was between .83 and .94 while that of S-CVI/Ave was .92. Therefore, the results of the evaluation indicated the instructional clarity scale is valid for content and appropriate to measure the intended constructs.

The study ran Pearson Product Moment Correlations between an item score and the total score to test the construct validity of the instructional clarity scale. The results indicated statistically significant correlations ranging from weak ( $r = .34$ ) to strong ( $r = .87$ ) in magnitude,  $p < .01$  alpha level. Therefore, the instructional clarity scale is relevant to measure the intended construct. Besides, the study checked the internal consistency reliability of the instructional clarity scale. The result indicated a Cronbach's Alpha value of .75 that implied the scale can consistently measure the instructional clarity of the teachers.

#### **2.4. Methods of Data Analysis**

The study aimed to examine the English language teachers' level of instructional clarity. The study employed descriptive and inferential statistics to describe and analyze data. I used mean and standard deviation to describe the characteristics of the data. I utilized a one-sample t-test to examine whether the English language teachers' instructional clarity, as measured through the mean score of the scale and items, was statistically above the expected mean (3.00). In addition, I used eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) as a measure of effect size to describe the magnitude of the difference.

The researcher reviewed the data for the assumptions of the descriptive and inferential statistics used above to avoid flaws that could have resulted from violations of the assumptions. The result showed skewness and kurtosis values between +1.3 and -1.5, indicating normal data distributions for running descriptive and inferential statistics for data analysis.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1. English language teachers' level of instructional clarity

Table 1: One-sample t-test results related to instructional clarity

	Items	M	t	p
1	set clear learning goals for my instruction	3.59	4.18	.000
2	provide a summary at the end of the lesson	3.42	3.24	.002
3	link the new lesson with the previous lessons	3.15	1.04	.302
4	present lessons in a clear and structured manner	3.85	5.88	.000
5	explain the subject matter in simple language	3.74	5.38	.000
6	give several examples of each topic	3.56	4.36	.000
7	explain a topic again when students do not understand	3.91	5.87	.000
8	answer questions thoroughly	3.20	1.53	.129
9	deliver feedback flexible to an individual student's needs	2.67	-3.20	.002
10	provide support the students need	2.90	-.84	.403
11	provide adaptive explanations	2.74	-2.50	.013
12	encourage classroom discussions	3.24	2.64	.009
	<b>Sub-scale</b>	<b>3.33</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>.005</b>

df= 61, test value or expected mean= 3.00

Table 1 indicates three categories of results concerning teachers' level of instructional clarity. The results showed significantly higher observed mean values than the expected mean value of 3.00 at  $p < .009$  for questionnaire items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 12. In this view, the results disclosed that the English language teachers set clear learning goals, provide a summary of the lesson, present lessons in a clear and structured manner, explain the subject matter in simple language, give several examples, explain a topic again when students do not understand, and encourage classroom discussion above the expected average. In contrast, the results revealed significantly lower observed mean values than the expected mean value of 3.00 at  $p < .013$  for questionnaire items 9 and 11. The results show that the teachers deliver flexible feedback to individual needs and provide adaptive explanations below the expected average. However, the results show no significant differences between the observed mean values and the expected mean value of 3.00 at  $p > .05$  for questionnaire items 3, 8, and 10. In other words, the English language teachers are neither delivering instruction above nor below the expected mean value with clarity for items 3, 8, and 10. Therefore, the teachers have ambivalent stances on linking the new lesson with

the previous lessons, answering questions thoroughly, and providing the support the students need for instructional clarity.

Despite the results in three categories, the results displayed a significant overall difference between the expected mean and observed mean value ( $M = 3.33$ ,  $t = 2.83$ ,  $p = .005$ ,  $p < .05$ ) in favor of the scale. The result implies that the English language teachers maintained instructional clarity above the expected average, regardless of the differences observed in their endeavors. The effect size at the scale level, as measured by Cohen's  $d$ , was  $d = 0.42$ , indicating a medium effect.

### **3.2. Discussion**

The study aimed to examine the selected secondary school English language teachers' level of instructional clarity. The study revealed three categories of results about teachers' level of instructional clarity at the item level. Accordingly, the English language teachers have conserved instructional clarity significantly above the expected average on some instruction issues while maintaining it significantly below the expected average on some other aspects. The results implied that the teachers have skills of delivering with clarity, but in some aspects, they have done poorly. Besides, there are issues of instructional clarity on which the teachers have taken ambivalent stances. At a scale level, however, the results disclosed that English language teachers have maintained an overall instructional clarity significantly above the expected average.

The current study concluded that English language teachers have maintained an overall instructional clarity above the expected average. Instructional clarity leads to students' understanding of the contents (Maulana et al., 2016) and ability to process learning (Bolkan et al., 2016; Wackermann et al., 2010). Besides, instructional clarity is strongly associated with students' achievement (Schneider & Preckel, 2017) and affective and cognitive learning (Bolkan et al., 2016). Moreover, instructional clarity maximizes the students' engagement and participation in classroom activities (Chen & Lu, 2022; Demkanin, 2022; van de Pol et al., 2010). Furthermore, clear and structured instruction is an indispensable criterion of quality teaching (Bellens et al., 2019; Bergem et al., 2016; Brekelmans et al., 2000; Feldman, 2007; Hativa et al., 2001).

Specific to detailed classroom instructional clarity, the present study revealed that the English language teachers set clear learning goals, provide a summary of the lesson, deliver lessons in a clear and structured manner, explain the subject matter in simple language, give several examples, explain a topic again when students do not understand, and encourage classroom discussion above the expected average. Early studies also confirmed that clear instruction has been known through setting clear learning goals and providing a summary at the end of the lesson (Bergem et al., 2016; Cohen & Grossman, 2016), delivering and explaining the content of the lesson explicitly (Brekelmans et al., 2000; Maulana et al., 2016), and explaining in simple language in response to the needs of students (Blömeke et al., 2016). In contrast to the previous works that discovered the need for linking new and old topics (Bergem et al., 2016; Cohen & Grossman, 2016) and responding to students questions thoroughly (Blömeke et al., 2016), the current study results, however, disclose that the English language teachers have shown ambivalent stances in linking the new lesson with the previous lessons, answering questions thoroughly, and providing the support the students need instead of working toward instructional clarity.

In addition, the current study revealed that English language teachers could not deliver flexible feedback to individual needs and provide adaptive explanations above the expected average. The results implied that the teachers could not provide adaptive feedback and differentiate the instruction for clarity and cognizance of individual differences. There could be several factors that could inhibit teachers from providing flexible feedback to individual needs and adaptive explanations.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The study concluded that the English language teachers have maintained an overall instructional clarity profoundly above average. Therefore, the teachers have conserved instructional clarity meaningfully above the average on most issues, while they still poorly practiced on some other aspects of instructional clarity. Besides, the study concluded that teachers have shown ambivalent stances on a few aspects of instructional clarity.

Although the study concluded that English language teachers have practiced profound instructional clarity, there are limitations they need to work on to improve instructional clarity. For instance, the teachers took ambivalent stances on a few aspects of instructional clarity that

implied they remained indecisive in executing their roles. Besides, the study concluded that there are some issues with instructional clarity that the teachers have implemented poorly. Therefore, poorly practiced aspects of instructional clarity and indecisive stances of the teacher in executing their roles may indicate gaps they need to fill. However, I suggest further studies from students' and teachers' perspectives on large samples with additional data collection tools for generalization.

## REFERENCES

- Alles, M., Seidel, T., & Gröschner, A. (2017). Toward better goal clarity in instruction: How to focus on content, social exchange and active learning support teachers in improving dialogic teaching practices. *International Education Studies*, 11(1), <https://doi.org/10.5539/ies.v11n1p11>
- Bellens, K., Van Damme, J., Van Den Noortgate, W., Wendt, H., & Nilsen, T. (2019). Instructional quality: Catalyst or pitfall in educational systems aiming for high achievement and equity? An answer based on multilevel SEM analyses of TIMSS 2015 data in Flanders (Belgium), Germany, and Norway. *Large-scale Assessments in Education*, 7(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40536-019-0069-2>
- Benton, S., & Li, D. (2021). Teacher clarity: Cornerstone of effective teaching. *IDEA Paper #83* (May), 1-20. [https://www.ideaedu.org/idea\\_papers/teacher-clarity-cornerstone-of-effective-teaching/](https://www.ideaedu.org/idea_papers/teacher-clarity-cornerstone-of-effective-teaching/)
- Bergem, O. K., Kaarstein, H., & Nilsen, T. (2016). TIMSS 2015. In O. K. Bergem, H. Kaarstein, & T. Nilsen (Eds.), *Vi kan lykkes i realfag [We can succeed in mathematics and science]* (pp. 11–21). <https://doi.org/10.18261/97882150279999-2016-02>
- Blomeke, S., Olsen, R. V., & Suhl, U. (2016). Relation of student achievement to the quality of their teachers and instructional quality. In T. Nilsen, & J.-E. Gustafsson (Eds.), *Teacher Quality, Instructional Quality and Student Outcomes: Relationships Across Countries, Cohorts and Time* (pp. 21–50). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41252-8\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-41252-8_2).
- Bolkan, S., Goodboy, A. K., & Kelsey, D. M. (2016). Instructor clarity and student motivation: Academic performance as a product of students' ability and motivation to process instructional material. *Communication Education*, 65(2), 129–148. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1079329>
- Bolkan, S., Goodboy, A. K., & Myers, S. A. (2017). Conditional processes of effective instructor communication and increases in students' cognitive learning. *Communication Education*, 66(2), 129–147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2016.1241889>
- Brekemans, M., Slegers, P., & Fraser, B. J. (2000). *Teaching for active learning*. In P. R. J. Simons, J. L.
- Chen, X., & Lu, L. (2022). How classroom management and instructional clarity relate to

- students' academic emotions in Hong Kong and England: A multi-group analysis based on the control-value theory. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 98, 102183. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2022.102183>
- Civikly, J. (1992). Clarity: Teachers and students make sense of instruction. *Communication Education*, 41, 138–152. [Doi: 10.1080/03634529209378876](https://doi.org/10.1080/03634529209378876)
- Cohen, J., & Grossman, P. (2016). Respecting complexity in measures of teaching: Keeping students and schools in focus. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 55, 308–317.
- Darmaji, D., Astalini, A., Kurniawan, D. A., & Perdana, R. (2019). A study relationship attitude toward physics, motivation, and character discipline students in senior high school, in Indonesia. *International Journal of Learning and Teaching*, 11(3), 99–109. <https://doi.org/10.18844/ijlt.v11i3.4207>
- Demkanin, P. (2022). Scaffolding in a fine-grained framework—preparation of physics teachers for the use of sensors in physics experiments planned by pupils. In J. Borg Marks, P. Galea, S. Gatt, & D. Sands (Eds.), *Physics teacher education. Challenges in Physics education* (pp. 215–225). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06193-6\\_16](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-06193-6_16)
- Feldman, K. A. (2007). Identifying exemplary teachers and teaching: Evidence from student ratings. In R. P. Perry & J. C. Smart (Eds.), *The scholarship of teaching and learning in higher education: An evidence-based perspective* (pp. 93–144).
- Ferguson, R. F., & Danielson, C. (2014). How Framework for Teaching and Tripod 7Cs evidence distinguish key components of effective teaching. In T. J. Kane, K. A. Kerr, & R. C. Pianta (Eds.), *Designing teacher evaluation systems* (pp. 98–143). New York: Wiley
- Hativa, N., Barak, R., & Simhi, E. (2001). Exemplary university teachers: Knowledge and beliefs regarding effective teaching dimensions and strategies. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 72(6), 699–729. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2001.11777122>
- Houichi, A., & Sarnou, D. (2020). Cognitive load theory and its relation to instructional design: Perspectives of some Algerian university teachers of English. *Arab World English Journal*, 11(4), 110–127. <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol11no4.8>
- Maulana, R., & Helms-Lorenz, M. (2016). *Perceived beginning teachers' self-efficacy across the second and third years of professional practice*. Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Washington, DC, United States.
- Mayer, R. E., & Moreno, R. (2003). Nine ways to reduce cognitive load in multimedia learning. *Educational Psychologist*, 38(1), 43–52. [https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3801\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1207/S15326985EP3801_6)
- Neumann, K., Kauertz, A., & Fischer, H. E. (2012). Quality of Instruction in Science Education. In B. J. Fraser, K. Tobin, & C. J. McRobbie (Eds.), *Second international handbook of science education* (pp. 247–258). Netherlands: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9041-7\\_18](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-9041-7_18).
- Praetorius, A.-K., Klieme, E., Herbert, B., & Pinger, P. (2018). *Generic dimensions of teaching quality: the German framework of three basic dimensions*. *ZDM*, 50, 407–426. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11858-018-0918-4>
-

- Postareff, L., Lindblom-Ylänne, S., & Nevgi, A. (2008). A follow-up study of the effect of pedagogical training on teaching in higher education. *Higher Education*, 56, 29–43. [doi.org/10.1007/s10734-007-9087-z](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-007-9087-z)
- Schneider, M. & Preckel, F. (2017). Variables Associated With Achievement in Higher Education: A Systematic Review of Meta-Analyses. *Psychological Bulletin*, 143(6), 565– 600. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/bul0000098>
- Titsworth, S., Mazer, J. P., Goodboy, A. K., Bolkan, S., & Myers, S. A. (2015). Two meta analyses exploring the relationship between teacher clarity and student learning. *Communication Education*, 64, 385–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2015.1041998>
- Trigwell, K., & Prosser, M. (2004). Development and use of the approaches to teaching inventory. *Educational Psychology Review*, 16(4), 409–424. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-004-0007-9>
- Van de Pol, J. E., Volman, M. L. L., & Beishuizen, J. J. (2010). Scaffolding in teacher-student interaction: A decade of research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 22(3), 271–296. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-010-9127-6>
- Wackermann, R., Trendel, G., & Fischer, H. E. (2010). Evaluation of a theory of instructional sequences for physics instruction. *International Journal of Science Education*, 32(7), 963–985. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09500690902984792>
- Wagner, W., Gollner, R., Werth, S., Voss, T., Schmitz, B., & Trautwein, U. (2016). Student and teacher ratings of instructional quality: Consistency of ratings over time, agreement, and predictive power. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 108, 705–721. <https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000075>
- Yagan, S. A. (2021). The relationships between instructional clarity, classroom management and mathematics achievement: The mediator role of attitudes towards mathematics. In W. B. James, C. Cobanoglu, & M. Cavusoglu (Eds.), *Advances in global education and research* (Vol. 4, pp. 1–11). <https://www.doi.org/10.5038/9781955833042>