

English Language Teachers' Instructional Clarity at the Intermediate Level in the Educational Institutions in Islamabad

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Abstract

This research paper aims at evaluating the clarity in instruction demonstrated by the English language teachers at the Intermediate level. Teachers' instructional clarity is an important component of effective ELT practices, and plays a vital role in the pedagogy of English. This is a descriptive research and I have used the student questionnaire and observation sheet for data collection for this study. The questionnaires were retrieved from 361 out of 400 students and 29 out of 30 classroom observations were also a part of this study. The participants were selected from the government schools and colleges in Islamabad. The chi-square test and z-test for proportion were applied to analyze the data using Mstat, Excel, and SPSS software. The analysis of the data shows that the English language teachers employ the technique of exemplification. Similarly, the results of students' responses indicate that they do not answer students' questions in a satisfactory way. However, they follow a proper sequence and are organized appropriately. The results imply that the existing teaching techniques of English language teachers are partially effective as they do not demonstrate adequate clarity. It is recommended that the English language teachers should explain their lessons or the subject matter with examples during their teaching. Further, the teachers should be given training and professional development courses that may help them to overcome the problems.

Keywords: teaching clarity, presentation skills, English Language Teaching (ELT), Intermediate level

Introduction

Instructional clarity has an instrumental role in teaching and learning, and it results in meaningful learning. It is generally observed that poor and unclear instructions of teachers can confuse or misguide students and may adversely affect students' learning. Instructional clarity is linked to effective teaching, whereas poor instructions have been linked to ineffective pedagogy, which indicates student performance and satisfaction are dependent upon the teacher clarity (Hativa, Barak, & Simhi, 2001; Hines, Cruickshank, & Kennedy, 1985). In spite of being an effective pedagogical strategy, there is no much evidence as to how much language learners

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experience teaching clarity behaviours (BrekaLorenz, Cole, Kinzie, & Ribera, 2011). The research in hand explored the effectiveness of English language teachers' teaching practices in terms of their instructional clarity. The Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSSC) level is an important level in the career of students as at this level students decide upon different fields for further studies or choose different professional programmes. The English language has a significant role at this stage of the students and is taught as a compulsory subject. However, prior to admission to the university, these students do not perform well in English. They have rather poor communicative competence and underperform on the written entrance test at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML). There may be different factors involved in hindering students' learning. But the researcher feels that effective teaching has a desirable impact on students' learning of English and helps them overcome their problems to a large extent. Therefore, the researcher explored the effectiveness of the English language teaching practice with regard to the instructional clarity of the English language teachers in order to identify as to how far the English language teachers demonstrate teaching clarity at the Intermediate level at the Educational Institutions in Islamabad.

Effective teaching has various attributes and instructional clarity is one of its important components. According to Killen (2003) there are two key aspects of instructional clarity that researchers mostly emphasize, i.e. 'verbal clarity' and 'cognitive clarity'. The former is related to teachers' clarity while speaking in the class, i.e. what they utter or say in their teaching; it means that speaking clearly and with clarity is one of the crucial aspects of Quality Teaching. The latter, i.e. cognitive clarity is related to teachers' actions in the classrooms; it refers to making the learners clear as to what they have to demonstrate or achieve by the end of the lesson or the course, i.e. they have to have a clear understanding about the objectives and learning outcomes. Similarly, clear instructions are given to the learners about their homework and assignment and that how they can be successful. Instructional clarity also includes having a logical and systematic order and keeping an appropriate speed in teaching the lesson and organizing the teaching activities. Using the technique of exemplification, i.e. using appropriate examples while explaining the subject matter, and teaching the learners the specialized lexical items and words related to the subject, i.e. making them conversant with the concepts related to the subject or with the jargon are also related to learners' cognitive clarity.

Objective of this Research

This research attempts to investigate as to what extent the English language teachers have instructional clarity.

Research Question

How far do the English language teachers demonstrate instructional clarity in teaching English at the Intermediate (HSSC) level at the government higher secondary schools and colleges in Islamabad?

Literature Review

Instructional clarity is an important aspect of effective pedagogy (BrckaLorenz, Cole, Kinzie, & Ribera, 2011). Instructional clarity and teacher expressiveness reasonably correlate with students' cognitive outcomes (Pascarella, 2006 as cited in BrckaLorenz, Cole, Kinzie, & Ribera, 2011). Students' feedback on teachers' activities is a good source of identifying teacher clarity. Students can point out the activities that they find helpful in understanding the lessons and activities that make it difficult for them to understand the lessons (Killen, 2003). This feedback may further help the teachers to understand the learners' problems and thereby knowing about their understanding of the lessons.

Killen (2003) has identified various evidence based attitudes or 'enabling behaviours', which enable teachers to have clarity of instructions and improve students' performance. These attitudes, which include eagerness, the use of student ideas, probing, proper organization, and inquiring (Killen, 2003) are essential for effective pedagogy and are useful in learners' learning. The research tools developed for this research addressed these enabling behaviours.

Using students' ideas can help teachers make their teaching instructions more effective in teaching different language skills. Further, this can help teachers motivate their learners as it may positively impact their self-efficacy, thereby motivating and enabling them to master the language skills rather than to avoid them.

Organizing the new information in an appropriate way or structuring it in understandable patterns is also an important aspect of successful and effective pedagogy. Overviewing the erstwhile discussion and lesson, commenting on what is to be followed in the discussion or lesson, or linking the different sections of the lesson can help teachers achieve a logical structuring. Logical structuring of the lessons or discussion makes the new input meaningful for learners (Killen, 2003).

Questioning is another teaching strategy that makes learners thoughtful and curious about their studies and makes them more attentive to their teacher instructions. It also informs teachers about pupils' understanding of different language skills, and their achievement of the objectives. The questioning strategy is also referred to as the Socratic Method as Socrates involved his pupils in learning by arousing their curiosity through questioning. According to Gutek (2008) questioning and probing are the hallmarks of the Socratic Method, which force the learners to meditate on life, justice, truth and their meanings.

Probing is another way of questioning. It is an analytical approach that helps teachers know their learners' comprehension. It is the process in which teachers seek the clarification of answers from different students (Killen, 2003). Probing is especially an effective strategy for language teaching as it engages language learners in discussions. It indicates that it has a positive relationship with effective teaching. But this relationship needs to be probed.

Different dimensions of teachers' instructions and their behaviours such as course planning and preparation, and explanations of learning outcomes and homework have a positive relationship with an increase in students' thinking ability (Pascarella, Edison, Nora, Hagedorn, & Braxton, 1996). Teachers with clarity in their teaching practices understand what to do and how to meet students' learning outcomes, which subsequently results in students' better understanding of the teaching methods and outcomes of the course (Ginsberg, 2007b, as cited in BrckaLorenz, Cole, Kinzie, & Ribera, 2011).

Providing students with relevant examples and reviewing the important points of lessons are important aspects of instructional clarity. Chesebro and McCroskey (2001) conducted their research on the relationship of instructional clarity and students' outcomes. Their results indicate that student motivation, their good feelings for the teacher and the course are dependent upon instructional clarity. The results confirm that students of those teachers who have clarity are motivated, they like their teachers and the course, and see that they have learned more cognitively (Chesebro & McCroskey, 2001). These findings have been corroborated by Pascarella and Terenzini in their 2005 study (as cited in BrckaLorenz, Cole, Kinzie, & Ribera, 2011).

Methodology

The researcher used a mixed method approach, i.e. both qualitative and quantitative paradigms were used in this research and multiple sources were used for the data collection. It was a descriptive study and the survey methods were used for data collection. The data were collected through a student questionnaire and a classroom observation checklist(sheet). The questionnaire consisted of both closed- and open-ended items. The data are presented in the form of percentages and the inferential statistics used were chi-square goodness of fit test and z-test for proportions.

Instrumentation

The researcher designed student questionnaire and classroom observation sheet. The research instruments were reviewed by experts and were piloted in the field. They were modified in the light of the reviewers' and participants' feedback. This research is a part of a larger project whose Cronbach's alpha values for the student questionnaire and classroom observation sheet were .8 and .9 respectively.

The student questionnaire consisted of five closed- and two open-ended items. The closed-ended items on the student questionnaire focused on teachers using the technique of exemplification, answering students' questions satisfactorily, logical presentation of lessons or contents by English language teachers, teachers' instructional clarity for course assignments and homework, and teachers' organizing ability. In the open-ended items students were asked the good qualities of their teachers and suggestions for the improvement of the teaching practices. The observation sheet comprised five closed-ended items, which were similar to the closed-ended items of the student questionnaire.

Population

The data were collected from the Federal Government Educational Institutions in Islamabad. The accessible population of the study comprised 30163 HSSC students and 164 teachers of English.

Sample

The questionnaires were administered to 400 Intermediate students, and 29 out of 30 classroom observations were also conducted. The students' response rate was 90.25% ($n=361$) and 96.6% ($n=29$) non-participant observations were also conducted. In order to reduce the researcher bias, the researcher employed other observers also for the classroom observations.

Results

The data were collected through questionnaire from the Intermediate students and classroom observations were also conducted. The data were analyzed using SPSS, Microsoft Excel, and MSTAT. The data were entered into SPSS to generate the frequency and percentages of the responses. Also, the chi-square results were generated through SPSS. using the chi-square goodness of fit test was essential in the current research as it was needed to determine the distribution of the responses across the positive (agree) and negative (disagree) scales in this research. Microsoft Excel was used for z-test for proportions. The formula of the z-test for proportions was added to the worksheet and it was properly set up to generate the results automatically from the data entered into the cells. The z-test for proportions was used to ascertain the significance of the positive responses. The MSTAT was used to generate the p-values of the z-test.

Students' responses about the instructional clarity of the English language teachers

The data are displayed in percentages using five-point Likert scales of agreement as shown in Table 1. Chi-square goodness of fit test and z-test for proportions are used.

Table 1 summarizes students' responses regarding the English teachers' ability to present the subject matter.

Table 1
Results of students' responses

Item No	Item statement	SD	DA	U	A	SA	Total Percent
1	Results of students' responses about teachers using the technique of exemplification	4.7	39.6	21.1	25.5	9.1	100
2	Results as to whether the students' questions are answered satisfactorily by their English language teachers	11.6	43.8	5.5	33	6.1	100
3	Logical presentation of lessons or contents by English language teachers	7.8	18.3	14.4	41.4	18.1	100
4	Teachers' instructional clarity for course assignments and homework	11.4	25.6	15.6	30.6	16.9	100
5	Students' responses about their teachers' organizing ability	13.1	19.8	5	23.7	38.4	100

Note. SD= Strongly disagree, DA= Disagree, U= Uncertain, A= Agree, SA= Strongly agree

The serial numbers of the Tables 1 and 2 exactly correspond to one another, i.e. the values given in Table 2 are the values of items of the respective serial numbers in Table 1.

Table 2
Values of inferential statistics from the questionnaire for students

S. No.	Chi-square value	Chi-square p-value	Z-test value	Z-test p-value
1	29.59	.000	-6.139	.000
2	139.95	.000	-4.26	.000
3	117.8	.000	3.65	.000
4	57.22	.000	-0.95	.17
5	175.63	.000	4.73	.000

The p-value ($p < .05$) for the chi-square test of item 1 of the student questionnaire indicates that the proportions of the positive and negative responses differ significantly (Table 1; Table 2). The z-test for proportions was applied to further identify the instructional clarity. The z-test p-value .000 is highly significant which signifies that the proportions of positive responses (Strongly agree and agree) are

significantly smaller than the proportion of the half of the total population. Similarly, the z-test p-value .000 of item 2 of the student questionnaire is highly significant, which indicates that the positive responses are significantly less and their proportion is significantly smaller as compared with that of the half of the total population. Thus, the results of items 1 and 2 imply that teachers are not adequately skilled to present the material, and they lack instructional clarity, which is an essential aspect of effective English language pedagogy.

The chi-square test was used to identify if the different categories of item 4 of the student questionnaire had an equal distribution of responses. Its p-value .000 is significant, which means that the responses of the different categories are distributed significantly differently from each other. The z-test for proportion was used to further identify the proportion of the agreed responses. Its p-value .000 is highly significant, which means that a significantly larger number of the subjects opted for the 'Strongly agree' and 'Agree' categories of the statement. Similarly, the chi-square p-value .000 of item 4 is significant. Its z-test p-value 0.17 is insignificant, which proves that the positive responses are insignificantly less than the half of the population. Similarly, the z-test p-value .000 of item 5 is significant which means that the positive responses are significantly larger in number as compared with the half (50%) of the population, which implies that their teachers are well organized.

The responses to the open-ended question 1 of the student questionnaire

Students' responses to the open-ended question 1 have been analyzed as follows:

In this question the participants of the study were asked that what they liked about their English teachers. Some students liked their methods (way of teaching). However, the majority of the teachers need to hone their way of teaching because most of the students have shown their dissatisfaction regarding their teachers' teaching methods in the open-ended question 2. This improvement may be brought about by giving training to teachers regarding their methodology.

The responses to the open-ended question 2 of student questionnaire

Students did not like the current teaching methodology employed by their English teachers. According to them their English language teachers did not explain the lesson in a good way. It may be because of the lack of training courses for the in-service teachers. English teachers should be given proper pre-service training of teaching English. In-service refresher courses can also be effective to overcome teachers' inadequacies in presenting the subject matter.

Results of the Classroom Observations

The researcher conducted non-participant observations of 29 classrooms. The results are presented in the form percentages and chi-square test, and z-test for

proportion are employed as the inferential statistical measures. The results are tabulated in the Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

Results obtained from the observations about teachers' clarity

Item No	Item statement	Never	Little	Somewhat	Much	A great deal	Total Percent
1	The results of observation sheets about teachers using the technique of exemplification	6.9	62.1	6.9	17.2	6.9	100
2	Results as to whether the students' questions are answered satisfactorily by their English language teachers	10.3	27.6	34.5	17.2	10.3	100
3	Logical presentation of lessons or contents by English language teachers	-	24.1	27.6	41.4	6.9	100
4	Teachers' instructional clarity for course assignments and homework	34.5	37.9	6.9	10.3	10.3	100
5	Classroom observations about teachers being organized		27.6	27.6	37.9	6.9	100

The values given in Table 4 are the values of items of the respective serial numbers in Table 3.

Table 4

Results of the inferential statistical tests of the observation sheet

S. No.	Chi-square value	Chi-square p-value	Z-test value	Z-test p-value
1	4.17	0.04	-2.2	.013
2	1.69	0.194	-	-
3	7.7	.005	3.25	.000
4	5.8	.016	-2.7	.003
5	5.83	.016	2.7	.003

The results of item 1 of the observation sheet show that teachers do not explain their lessons with the examples as the results of the p-values show that significantly fewer observers than the half of the total population reported negatively in response to item 1 of the observation sheet (Table 3; Table 4). Similarly, the results of item 4 of observation sheets regarding the clarity of teachers' instructions for the academic tasks,

i.e. course assignments and homework show that teachers' instructions are not clear as a significantly large number of observers, in other words, more than the half of the total population have responded negatively.

The results of item 2 of the observation sheet show that teachers give satisfactory answers to students' questions as the p-value of this item shows that a significantly large number of the observers reported positively in response to this item. Similarly, the results of item 3 about teachers presenting the subject and the lessons logically show that teachers do not present the material in a logical sequence as the p-values are significant which show that a significantly large number of the population has responded positively. Similarly, the results of item 5 show that a significantly large number of the observations reported that the English teachers are well organized as the p-values are significant. The items 2, 3, and 5 support the null hypothesis of the study.

Discussion

The students' responses show that English language teachers do not deliver their instruction adequately clearly and that they do not explain the lessons properly. The results of student questionnaire and classroom observation sheet show that the English language teachers do not use the technique of exemplification in their teaching in order to make the lessons and the subject matter comprehensible. Examples are an extremely useful pedagogical strategy to clarify learners' concepts in ELT classrooms (Viñals, 2016). Similarly, Kane is of the view that giving examples is a useful technique to explain a difficult concept. There are different ways for giving examples such as "for example, for instance, as a case in point or, a bit more subtly, say, thus, consider" (2000, p. 108). The reason for students not understanding the lesson may be that teachers might not have enough time to explain the lesson by giving examples. Because of the shortage of duration their main focus is on completing the syllabus quickly. The academic session has many co-curricular activities and also as soon as they get their roll number slips, the majority of students at the Intermediate level stop coming to colleges a week or so prior to the exam. In such situation teachers' utmost efforts are to cover the syllabus rather than to explain the things in details by giving examples.

Answering students' questions is an important attribute of effective teaching. Similarly, asking questions not only helps teachers assess students' understanding of the subject, but also arouses students' interest (University of Nebraska, 2016). Answering students' questions can make them communicatively competent (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). I have personal observations that if a teacher criticizes students' requests for further information or clarification, the students feel inhibited and lose interest in the class participation and discussion. Students are of the view that their English language teachers do not answer their questions in a satisfactory way, but the results of the classroom observations contradict the students' views. As a matter of fact, teachers give students opportunities to ask questions. Students' dissatisfaction may be

due to the fact that teachers want to finish the syllabus and due to the shortage of the duration of the periods the teachers do not have enough time to give detailed and satisfactory answers to their questions. If they give satisfactory answers explaining the things, they may not cover the course easily. Or another reason may be the large classes in which all the students cannot be focused or made satisfied on the individual basis.

It is important for a teacher to be properly organized. The student learning is affected by the selection and proper organization of the content (Stark, 2000). Besides the content, the organization of the time is also important for effective teaching (University of Technology Sydney). Similarly, instead of teaching the contents of the lessons in fragments or as independent units they should be structured (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 25). The results of the students' responses indicate that the English language teachers follow a logical sequence in presenting the subject contents of the lessons. This is intrinsic to effective English language teaching as weaving the subject contents with a disordered sequence may obfuscate the learners. Further, the students are of the view that their English language teachers demonstrate clarity while directing them about their homework and course assignments. Similarly, the results show that the English language teachers are well organized in their classrooms.

The results of the classroom observations coincide with those of the student questionnaire except for answering students' questions in a satisfactory way and instructional clarity for different tasks, i.e. homework and course assignments. With regard to answering students' questions satisfactorily, the results were not significantly different across the different scales, which implies that the observers found the teachers answering students' questions satisfactorily. However, the observers did not find the English language teachers giving assignments or homework to their students during their teaching due to which they could not identify the instructional clarity for course assignments and homework. According to Borich (2016) students most frequently blame the lack of clear instructions for their underperformance in their assignments or homework. Therefore, he holds that the instructions or the language explaining the exercise of the workbook, reading work, home assignment, and handouts should be as clear as the language of the instructions for the lesson content (p. 18), which suggests that clear directions for assignments and homework are as important as teaching the lesson content.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the results that the teaching practices of English language teachers at the Intermediate level at the government educational institutions in Islamabad do not have adequate clarity, therefore, they are inadequately effective in regard to instructional clarity.

The teachers do not use the technique of exemplification while teaching the lessons. It is a very useful technique as students can understand the lessons easily when

they are explained with the help of examples. Similarly, the English language teachers do not answer students' questions satisfactorily. Answering students' questions in a satisfactory way may encourage them to ask more questions. It is an important feature of effective pedagogy as it not only clarifies their misapprehensions but also may make them active learners of English.

It can be concluded from the whole discussion that instructional clarity is a vital component of effective pedagogy. The English language teachers are, to a small extent, good at presenting the material. They are well organized. They present the contents of the subject and the lessons in a proper order and follow a logical sequence in presenting the material and delivering their instructions. Despite all this, they need further improvement with regard to using examples in teaching the lessons and answering students' questions in a satisfactory way.

Recommendations

1. The results show that the English language teachers do not use the technique of exemplification to explain the subject matter. It is recommended that teachers use this technique to make the lessons more comprehensible. The English language teachers can learn this technique through teacher training programs. Therefore, teacher training for teacher development should be organized more frequently so that the English language teachers can hone their teaching skills.
2. The English language teachers are well-organized and follow a logical sequence in presenting the contents of the lessons. However, the researcher identified during the classroom observations that time the span of the periods was rather short and the teachers could not finish the lessons in time to give homework to the learners let alone giving instructions about the homework. Therefore, it is recommended that the duration of the classes be increased.
3. The reviewed related research shows that student learning, motivation and achievement are dependent upon instructional clarity, which means "that teaching clarity is valuable, should be promoted as a goal in faculty development and evaluation" (BrckaLorenz, Cole, Kinzie, & Ribera, 2011). Therefore, pre- and in-service teacher training programmes in Pakistan should focus on instructional clarity.

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