Enhancing Instructional Clarity in Teaching English: A Case Study in Pre-Service Microteaching in Uzbekistan

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Abstract

This applied research case study investigates whether the pre-service teachers use Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs) and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs) to improve their instructional clarity in the microteaching of the practicum course. According to the study, 24 out of 26 pre-service teachers (92.31 %) did not apply ICQs, and no one effectively used CCQs. Even though they had passed the instructional methods, teaching English to Young learners, and lesson planning courses, the participants of this study failed to give clear instructions and check students' understanding of grammar and vocabulary in the classroom. The author used qualitative applied research with basic descriptive statistics. The observations and analyses were conducted on the recordings of the practicum microteaching course. The findings represent that overuse of teacher talk, lack of instructional scaffolding, and no application of conceptual understanding are the essential issues. The gaps found in the literature also align with the findings from the studies on pre-service educator practices. In conclusion, there is a need for more experiential and practice-oriented courses in higher educational institutions in Uzbekistan. The research advocates for a structured reflective approach, explicit modeling, clear demonstration, reduction of Teacher Talking Time (TTT), and feedback sessions. The article suggests that the curriculum should incorporate more practical topics on ICQs, CCQs, a discussion of the reflective approach, modeling technique, the use of TTT, constructive feedback, and as well as critical pedagogy.

Keywords: Instruction checking questions; Concept checking questions; Reflective approach; Explicit modeling; Constructive feedback

INTRODUCTION

Instructional teaching in English Language Teaching (ELT) is a multifaceted endeavor that goes far beyond the mere transmission of content knowledge (Williamson-Hawkins, 2018). Effective instruction is deeply intertwined with how well a teacher can guide students through learning tasks, make the expectations clear, and build student confidence throughout the process (Yulian, 2021; Kawinkoonslate, 2019). Language learners, particularly those at beginner or intermediate levels, heavily rely on precise and structured instructions to understand both the content of the lesson and the nature of the activities they are expected to perform. Thus, clear, targeted communication becomes a foundational pedagogical skill. It is especially important in language classrooms where misunderstandings of task directions can easily snowball into disengagement, confusion, and failure to achieve learning objectives.

The need for clear instructional communication in the ELT context has long been discussed by scholars such as Scrivener (2011), Harmer (2015), and Garton and Graves

(2014). These experts highlight that teaching is not merely about knowledge transfer, but also about facilitating learner autonomy and understanding through strategies like Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs) and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs). ICQs are short, focused questions that confirm whether students have understood what they are expected to *do* in a task—essentially clarifying the *procedure*. On the other hand, CCQs check whether students have grasped the *meaning* of language items or concepts being taught. Both types of questions serve crucial roles in student learning and class management. They ensure that students are not left wondering about expectations or meaning, and they enable teachers to identify and address misunderstandings before they disrupt the learning process.

However, despite the theoretical emphasis placed on these strategies in ELT literature and teacher training manuals, many teacher education programs—particularly in contexts such as Uzbekistan—still lack a sufficient focus on the practical implementation of ICQs and CCQs. Often, courses on instructional methodology, teaching English to young learners, and lesson planning provide detailed theoretical knowledge but fail to bridge the gap between knowing *what* ICQs and CCQs are and knowing *how* and *when* to use them effectively in real classrooms. This disconnect is especially concerning because the early teaching experience shapes future classroom behavior, and failure to implement these strategies effectively at the beginning of one's teaching career can result in long-term issues in classroom communication and management.

This case study emerged from a recognition of this very gap. The author, having observed numerous microteaching sessions of practicum students in Uzbekistan, identified a recurring problem: even students who had completed coursework on teaching methodology were unable to apply ICQs and CCQs appropriately during their classroom simulations. This observation raised important questions about the effectiveness of the pedagogical training these future teachers were receiving. Although the theoretical foundations were present, the practical tools for applying those theories in real teaching contexts were either absent or under-emphasized. As a result, novice teachers were often unable to provide clear instructions, leading to classroom sessions that were disjointed, unproductive, and stressful for both learners and educators.

The implications of these instructional gaps are far-reaching. According to Hattie (2009), clear instruction is among the most influential factors affecting student achievement. Effective instruction requires more than just stating directions—it involves ensuring that students actually understand what they are being asked to do and why. Harmer (2015) argues that when tasks are not well explained, the result is not just confusion, but wasted class time and missed learning opportunities. Scrivener (2011) further asserts that skilled teachers continually monitor student understanding, adapting their instruction based on immediate feedback. ICQs and CCQs, then, are not optional techniques; they are essential tools for building a responsive, communicative classroom where learners can thrive.

In the context of ELT, ICQs and CCQs serve another purpose as well: they support the development of communicative competence. As Ur (2012) and Thornbury (2006) point out, these question types help learners engage with language meaningfully and practically. They create opportunities for authentic interaction, even within the structure of a lesson, and encourage learners to process language at a deeper cognitive level. However, studies such as those by Farrell (2016) have demonstrated that novice teachers often misunderstand the purpose of these checks. Rather than using ICQs and CCQs to assess student understanding, they tend to reiterate explanations, mistakenly believing that re-explaining the content serves the same purpose as checking comprehension. This

misunderstanding not only undermines the instructional goal but also deprives learners of the chance to engage actively with the material.

A key reason for this problem may lie in how teacher training programs approach these instructional tools. Richards and Lockhart (2007) emphasize that ICQs and CCQs should not be presented merely as theoretical concepts; they must be practiced and refined through repeated application. Instructional methods should incorporate reflective teaching practices such as microteaching, peer feedback, and video analysis to help pre-service teachers recognize the strengths and weaknesses of their classroom communication. Borg (2015) and Johnson & Golombek (2020) advocate for reflective teaching as a means to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Through self-observation and guided feedback, teachers become more aware of their instructional choices and better equipped to make improvements.

Unfortunately, in many teacher education programs—especially in resource-constrained or developing contexts—such reflective practices are still rare. Kamhi-Stein and Lee (2020) note that in countries with limited infrastructure for practice-based education, instructional strategies like ICQs and CCQs remain underutilized because trainee teachers are not given enough opportunities to experiment with or receive feedback on their use. In Uzbekistan, the issue is compounded by curriculum design that prioritizes academic knowledge over hands-on classroom practice. As a result, pre-service teachers may graduate with a strong grasp of linguistic and pedagogical theory but struggle when it comes to executing a smooth, interactive lesson plan in real classroom settings.

The current study seeks to address these gaps by investigating the extent to which ICQs and CCQs are integrated into teacher preparation programs in Uzbekistan. It also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of these tools when used by pre-service teachers during microteaching sessions. By analyzing the quality of instructional interactions and assessing whether students were able to follow tasks or comprehend language structures based on the teacher's guidance, this research hopes to shed light on where and how training programs can be improved. The findings will contribute not only to the academic discourse surrounding ELT instruction but also to the practical design of teacher education curricula.

Instructional clarity is a non-negotiable element of effective English language teaching. ICQs and CCQs are critical tools for fostering that clarity, yet their potential remains under-realized in many teacher training contexts. As this case study demonstrates, it is not enough for future teachers to *know* about ICQs and CCQs—they must *practice* them, receive feedback, and reflect on their application in varied classroom scenarios. Embedding these practices into teacher education will help bridge the theory-practice divide and support the development of confident, competent ELT professionals who can manage classrooms with clarity, purpose, and responsiveness. Only by doing so can we ensure that our instructional methods truly serve the learners they are meant to support.

Research Questions
1. To what extent do MA TESOL pre-service teachers use ICQs and CCQs in their teaching practice?
2. What are the common challenges in their instructional delivery during classroom task introduction and explanation?
3. What are the solutions for the implementation of ICQ and CCQ usage in the ELT classroom?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed an applied qualitative case study approach to explore the practical implementation of instructional techniques—specifically Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs) and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs)—by pre-service teachers during their microteaching practicum. The case study design allowed for an in-depth exploration of real-world teaching behaviors within a bounded context, namely the practicum sessions conducted by pre-service teachers who had previously completed coursework in instructional methods and lesson planning. This design was chosen to closely examine how theoretical knowledge is transferred into practical application and to identify potential gaps in pedagogical execution. The qualitative nature of the research aligns with the study's aim to uncover nuanced understandings, experiences, and instructional behaviors in naturalistic teaching environments.

Participants

The participants in this study were pre-service teachers enrolled in a microteaching practicum course at a higher education institution. All participants had successfully completed prerequisite coursework in instructional methods and lesson planning, which are essential components of their teacher education program. As part of their practicum, each participant was required to deliver a 45-minute microteaching session in an authentic instructional setting. These sessions were conducted with actual students who were enrolled in English language learning programs at schools and community learning centers. The selection of participants was purposive, focusing on individuals who had demonstrated adequate theoretical preparation and were in the process of applying their knowledge in real teaching scenarios. Ethical approval for the study was obtained, and all participants provided informed consent through signed permission forms. To ensure anonymity and protect participant confidentiality, identifying information was removed from all data during analysis and reporting.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

Two primary data sources were utilized in this study: video recordings of the participants' microteaching sessions and unstructured interviews. Each participant submitted a video of their 45-minute microteaching session as part of their practicum requirement. These videos served as the central data corpus for analyzing instructional performance, particularly the usage and quality of ICQs and CCQs, as well as broader teacher-student interaction dynamics.

In addition to video analysis, the researcher conducted basic unstructured interviews with each participant. These interviews were designed to probe the participants' conceptual understanding of ICQs and CCQs and their perceptions of their own use of these strategies. The interviews were flexible in nature, allowing participants to elaborate on their teaching experiences and reflect on the challenges they encountered during instruction. The dual data collection approach allowed for both the observation of teaching behavior and the exploration of teacher cognition, providing a richer understanding of the issues under investigation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and rigor in identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. The microteaching videos were carefully reviewed multiple times to identify instances of instructional interaction, with particular focus on teacher-student engagement, the presence and effectiveness of ICQs, and the deployment of CCQs. Thematic codes were generated inductively and grouped under pre-determined categories, including "teacher-student interaction," "instruction checking questions (ICQs)," and "concept checking questions (CCQs)."

Interview transcripts were also analyzed using the same thematic framework to identify participants' theoretical understanding of the concepts and any dissonance between knowledge and practice. Cross-comparison between observed teaching behaviors and reported teacher intentions enabled the researcher to triangulate findings and ensure analytical depth. The entire analysis process was conducted in a systematic and ethical manner, with regular memo writing and data reflection to enhance credibility and transparency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the discrepancy between pre-service teachers' theoretical understanding of instructional checking techniques—particularly Instruction Checking Questions (ICQs) and Concept Checking Questions (CCQs)—and their practical application in the classroom. The interview data reveal a promising baseline: a majority of the participants (20 out of 26, or 76.92%) demonstrated an adequate grasp of the theoretical foundations and purposes of ICQs and CCQs. This suggests that higher education institutions are effectively delivering the conceptual framework of these techniques in instructional methods and lesson planning courses (Wahyuningsih & Putra, 2020; Vallente, 2020). However, the real issue emerges when we examine the practical implementation of these tools during the actual teaching sessions.

Despite their understanding of the concepts, only 2 participants (7.69%) successfully incorporated ICQs into their teaching, and none used CCQs at all. This striking gap between knowledge and practice highlights a systemic shortfall in the transition from theory to real-world classroom application. It suggests that knowing *about* ICQs and CCQs is not enough; what is crucial is having multiple, structured opportunities to practice these skills in realistic teaching environments.

A closer analysis of the 26 microteaching videos reinforced this finding. The instructional delivery of the majority of participants was fraught with recurring errors. For instance, 24 out of 26 teachers (92.31%) were observed giving overly long, ambiguous instructions. These instructions lacked clarity and conciseness, and most teachers failed to implement any form of "wait time" after delivering them—depriving learners of the chance to mentally process the task before execution. When faced with student confusion, most teachers did not attempt to check comprehension through ICQs. Instead, 20 teachers (76.92%) merely repeated the same instruction verbatim, mistakenly equating repetition with clarification. Meanwhile, 22 participants (84.62%) ignored students' signs of confusion altogether, failing to acknowledge or adapt to the learners' lack of understanding. In more troubling cases, 7 teachers (26.92%) responded with frustration or visible aggression, potentially undermining student confidence and classroom rapport.

One of the most widespread issues uncovered was the tendency of teachers to rely on ineffective comprehension checks such as "Did you understand?" or "Is it clear?", as used by 24 participants (92.31%). These types of global yes/no questions are discouraged in ELT pedagogy because they often elicit automatic, non-committal responses and do not genuinely reveal whether students have understood the instructions or the content (Irfani et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2024). These questions may serve a performative function but fail to yield actionable information for the teacher.

Another striking finding was related to pacing and delivery. Seventeen of the 26 pre-service teachers (65.38%) delivered instructions at a uniform, unmodulated speed, without strategic pausing or verbal chunking. This constant flow of information did not allow students to mentally process what was being said, increasing the likelihood of confusion. Additionally, more than half (53.85%) distributed handouts before giving instructions. This sequencing error diverted student attention to the written material before they had a clear understanding of what to do, causing disruption and repeated clarification requests.

Students were more focused on deciphering the handouts than listening to the teacher, illustrating the importance of timing and staging in instruction.

Thematic analysis of the video data highlighted several core issues in instructional delivery. First, teachers often provided lengthy explanations without using non-verbal cues or gestures, both of which are known to aid comprehension, especially for lower-level learners. Second, teacher talk time dominated the lessons, leaving little room for student interaction, clarification, or questions. This imbalance reflects a teacher-centered approach and runs counter to communicative language teaching principles that emphasize student engagement. Third, modeling—a key strategy in instruction—was almost entirely absent. None of the teachers demonstrated tasks through examples before asking students to perform them, thereby missing an essential opportunity to scaffold learning. Fourth, suprasegmental features of speech, such as intonation, stress, and pausing, were largely ignored, making instructions monotonous and harder to follow. Finally, there was no visible evidence of reflection on instructional delivery; participants did not self-correct or adapt based on student response, nor did they demonstrate awareness of the need to improve for future sessions.

These findings resonate with prior research on the challenges faced by novice teachers. Farrell (2016) and Reinders & Farrell (2021) assert that early-career educators often struggle with the practical implementation of instructional strategies despite receiving adequate theoretical preparation. This study adds to that body of literature by illustrating the persistence of this gap, particularly concerning ICQs and CCQs.

One of the most critical gaps exposed by this study is the total absence of CCQs in the observed microteaching sessions. Even when participants were teaching vocabulary or grammar—contexts where CCQs are most valuable—not a single participant used them to verify conceptual understanding. This oversight has serious implications. In communicative language teaching (CLT), understanding meaning must precede mechanical practice. Without checking whether learners understand key concepts or vocabulary, any subsequent activities (e.g., drilling, dialogues, or practice tasks) risk reinforcing errors or superficial learning. Harmer (2015) and Ur (2012) stress that CCQs are central to ensuring learners have correctly understood the semantic and contextual aspects of the target language. The absence of CCQs signals a fundamental weakness in the scaffolding of learning in these sessions.

The failure to apply ICQs and CCQs in practice—even after learning about them in coursework—points to an urgent need for reform in teacher education programs. As Burns and Richards (2009) and Garton and Graves (2014) suggest, instruction in teaching strategies must be paired with opportunities for application, reflection, and feedback. Simply learning about pedagogical tools through lectures does not equip teachers to use them confidently or correctly in dynamic classroom environments. Instead, pre-service programs should integrate simulation-based learning, structured peer feedback, and ongoing mentorship.

To address this, teacher educators should implement more practice-based activities such as classroom rehearsals, role-plays, and microteaching sessions followed by immediate feedback. These should explicitly target ICQs and CCQs, with criteria for success and iterative opportunities to refine use. Additionally, during teaching practicums and observations, mentor teachers must provide not just content-focused feedback but also evaluate instructional techniques, interactional competence, and scaffolding strategies. Such feedback should be developmental and formative, helping teachers identify not only what went wrong, but how it can be improved.

This study highlights the disconnect between knowing and doing in the realm of ELT instructional strategies. While pre-service teachers in Uzbekistan may understand the theoretical underpinnings of ICQs and CCQs, their ability to apply these tools effectively

in classroom contexts is lacking. The consequences are visible in poor task delivery, student disengagement, and limited learning outcomes. To close this gap, teacher education programs must prioritize experiential learning, guided practice, and reflective teaching. Only then can we ensure that instructional knowledge translates into classroom competence—ultimately benefiting both teachers and their students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on this case study, pre-service English language instructors in the Uzbek context struggle to provide clear instructions and use essential strategies, such as ICQs and CCQs. Despite their theoretical knowledge, their teaching techniques lack practical internalization. According to the study, practice-based, experiential teacher education that emphasizes teaching clarity in addition to information is beneficial. Future research in teacher education should look at training programs and relevant methodologies to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The author also suggests that supervisors should organize discussions on minor but effective strategies for teaching skills during lecturing sessions. Based on the author's recommendation, mentors should provide constructive feedback in detail not only on the content knowledge of pre-service teachers in their microteaching but also on the power of teaching skills, strategies, and techniques after their microteaching practices. Mentors should facilitate the pre-service teachers applying their theoretical knowledge into practice. Pre-service teachers should master public speaking skills to ensure the use of gestures, eye contact, and wait time strategies. The author suggests varying tones and applying stress and pitch to make their instructions more comprehensible. Besides, after detailed instructions, there should be structured questions on what to do and how to do it. Moreover, pre-service teachers should master a modeling technique to provide detailed examples.

Additionally, Concept Checking Questions (CCQs) are crucial for ensuring that pupils have comprehended new language concepts, especially those related to grammar or vocabulary. Instead of asking "Do you understand?", it's recommended to apply CCQs and organize exact questions that evaluate meaning rather than just recognition. CCQs require students to demonstrate their understanding. This strategy helps pre-service teachers identify and analyze misunderstandings, encourages student engagement, and makes learning more effective and learner-centered. By including ICQs and CCQs in their lesson plans, teachers may encourage deeper knowledge, increase student confidence, and create more interesting and meaningful learning experiences.

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