

# Defining Quality in Language Arts Secondary Instruction: A Systematic Conceptual Mapping Review

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*This systematic conceptual mapping review investigated definitions of instructional quality in secondary language arts (LA) research. Although LA inherently integrates multiple competencies, such as reading, writing, and oracy, educational research frequently isolates topics, thus limiting comprehensive definitions and overarching instructional frameworks. By analyzing 39 studies from 2000–23, we identified nine core quality themes representing varied definitions of instructional quality, notably including competence support, intellectual challenge, fostering a community of learners, student engagement, and instructional coherence. Our findings identified a critical epistemological tension between linear conceptions of quality, focusing on isolated instructional practices, and systems-oriented approaches, emphasizing dynamic interactions within instructional contexts. Results emphasized the need for integrated frameworks to better capture the complexity and multidimensionality of quality in secondary LA education. This review contributes to ongoing discussions regarding instructional quality, offering a nuanced synthesis to inform teacher education, professional development, and future research frameworks in LA secondary education.*

Keywords: *secondary language arts, epistemology, best practices, curriculum design, teacher education*

## Introduction

Language arts (LA) is a core subject for students to become competent, critical, and empowered citizens through the subject's broad mission of supporting literacy—that is, supporting the development of skills, knowledge, and competencies for taking part in complex and situated communication situations. What we mean by being literate, what kind of role education plays in supporting students in becoming literate, and what kind of literacies education should prioritize are complex questions raised and debated, for example,

by representatives of New Literacy Studies (e.g., Barton, 1994; Gee, 2008; Street, 1984; The New London Group, 1996). Further, that each school subject holds responsibility for literacy practices specific to them has been highlighted and exemplified within research on disciplinary literacies (Fang & Schleppegrell, 2010; Moje, 2008; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Although the LA subject traditionally has a specific responsibility for general literacy education, it also holds responsibility for the knowledge base, skills, and competencies specific to this school subject. The focus on disciplinary literacy becomes stronger as students move into



secondary instruction (Moje, 2015; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Still, it is not given which literacy practices and which knowledge base should constitute the core of the LA subject—neither locally nor globally. Given these ongoing debates and reflections, we take as a starting point that we want all students in the LA classroom to develop rich competencies related to LA and become literate citizens. To fulfill this goal, it seems obvious that high-quality LA instruction is crucial. Yet, if literacy is understood in multiple, partly competing ways within the LA subject, it follows that instructional quality cannot be assumed to have a single, stable meaning. However, examining how instructional quality in secondary LA is defined in empirical research would provide a productive beginning to a well-informed discussion about the school subject and its related research. From this stance, this study addresses this landscape through the following research question: How is the concept of instructional quality in the secondary LA subject defined in empirical studies?

The question “What is quality?” is a complex one within education and, specifically, LA instruction. First, it is far from obvious what the field means by high-quality instruction in general and how we might measure such quality (Blikstad-Balas et al., 2021). Linked to this first question are additional questions of stakeholders—quality for whom?—and what components make up our understanding of instructional quality—whether we understand quality as an essential matter or as a vague concept attentive to changing contexts (Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). For example, claiming that high-quality instruction includes teacher modeling or high-frequency applications of a certain instructional practice tends toward defining the *essence* of instructional quality, whereas insisting that quality is to be considered in light of contextual awareness is to accept the *vagueness* of the concept.

Second, the LA subject has in many countries been a primary vehicle for establishing a national identity and for enrolling students in the culture and values perceived as core to this identity (Erixon & Green, 2020). This central role of an identity-, culture-, and nation-building and nation-consolidating subject also unfolds in national standards/curricula that, despite similarities, vary quite a lot across the globe. For example, the National Council of Teachers of English (n.d.), a U.S. professional organization, defines LA broadly as six interconnected literacies of reading and writing, listening and speaking, viewing and visually representing, and these are viewed not as isolated skills, but as social practices embedded in cultural and technological contexts. By contrast, England’s National Curriculum for English frames the subject primarily as a disciplinary and cultural enterprise, emphasizing mastery of standard English, grammatical knowledge, and sustained engagement with canonical and seminal works of British literature (Department for Education, 2013). An interesting example of acknowledging

that every country takes a unique stance is the initiative taken by the Special Interest Group of Research on Literature Education in the International Association for Research in L1 Education to map how more than 20 countries across all continents teach students to read, interpret, and value literature in the LA secondary classroom (Dera et al., 2026).

Third, the nature of the LA secondary school subject integrates skills, knowledge, and competencies from various domains and subdisciplines and is even said to be a poly-paradigmatic subject (Van de Ven, 2005). In many countries, a continual integration of new domains (e.g., visual literacy and media literacy) and texts leads to a subject that by far surpasses traditional instruction in reading and writing. Together these nuances suggest that LA is complex, continually evolving, and meeting the demands of competing ideologies and cultural traditions, making it especially challenging to deduce and provide evidence for the idea of quality within the subject.

Likely because of the complexity, LA-related research typically has concentrated on specific skills or subdisciplines (e.g., argumentative writing, literature discussions, and vocabulary knowledge). This is particularly the case for research in secondary school, where instruction gets increasingly specialized by subdisciplines, and research tends to align with the subdisciplines. One could make an analogy that if the LA subject is an orchestra, the research approach often focuses on improvement of one instrument’s performance, such as the violin section, without consideration of the violins’ role and coherence in the entire orchestra. Hence, when research studies make the basis for providing implications for instruction, there is a risk that given the many possible concepts of quality and the limited scope of each study, proposed actions might improve one aspect of LA instruction only to make others worse and to contribute to an inconsistent school subject. To continue the analogy, we may say that even when the orchestra plays a polyphonic piece, it is still intended to sound like one, coherent piece.

Although measures of teaching quality often link the teaching of subskills or the use of distinct practices to achievement (Muijs et al., 2014; Senden et al., 2022), the pronounced aspects of civic participation, national and personal identity, and the political domains permeating the LA subject also highlight a need for consideration of what an appropriate validation of teaching quality in LA looks like. Standards-based reforms and international comparisons versus responsiveness to cultural and linguistic diversity of students (Doecke et al., 2024) and context sensitivity to ideals and identities of language development (Hall, 2011; Spada, 2007) raise additional questions that make distinctions of quality a complex issue in LA.

Although instructional quality has been widely studied in education, definitions of quality in secondary LA remain fragmented across subdomains, theoretical traditions, and methodologic approaches. This review responds to this

fragmentation by systematically mapping how instructional quality is conceptualized across empirical LA research rather than evaluating the effectiveness of specific practices. In doing so, it provides a field-level account of what counts as *quality* in LA instruction and where conceptual tensions persist.

### Background and Theoretical Framework

Quality in educational research has consistently been a multifaceted yet fundamental concept. Whether quality can be defined as a constant component across contexts has been debated. Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011) argue that the very concept of quality is better understood as a vague concept, meaning that asking for an objective definition of quality in education is not a productive approach. Rather, our expectations concerning concept clarity and unity should be modified, accepting that a definition will include gray zones and boundary problems. We will highlight two approaches to identifying quality as a concept.

First, referring to the Sorites paradox—with reference to Timothy William’s (1996, in Wittek and Kvernbekk, 2011, p. 680) soritis problem of the heap—that is, if one grain is not a heap, adding one grain at a time, when do the grains turn into a heap?—Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011) illustrate the point that even though a boundary between presence and absence of quality does not exist, high and low quality still may exist. Or, in other words, experts in the field often can identify whether quality is high or low but may lack the nuance to describe why the quality can be identified as such. This point also implies that a practice that might be good in one situation is not infinitely good or good under all circumstances.

Second, Wittgenstein’s concept of *family resemblance* is helpful (e.g., the same shape of the face may be similar between the first and second siblings, the form of the eye may link the second and third, and body structure the first and the third). Even when we recognize traits across different examples of instructional quality, the specific features that connect those examples may differ, suggesting that quality can be identified through overlapping similarities rather than fixed boundaries.

Further, through the lens of Harvey and Green’s (1993) categories of quality in higher education—as tied to such different concepts as expectation, perfection, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation—it becomes obvious that different definitions of educational quality draw on unique educational purposes and ultimately respond to different stakeholders. In empirical research studies, such purposes are sometimes explicitly stated, sometimes inherent in the scope of the study, the theoretical framework, or the methods employed. Biesta (2009) advocates that in a time where research is more focused on outcomes than on educational purposes when discussing “good education,”

establishing what good education should be once and for all is not the best solution. Rather, he calls for an ongoing discussion about the purpose of education. As a first step, he suggests a framework for such discussions based on three functions of education: *qualification* (e.g., providing knowledge, skills, and understanding), *socialization* (e.g., emphasizing the norms and values and culture and tradition), and *subjectification* (e.g., individualizing and contributing to students becoming more autonomous and independent in their thinking and acting).

Biesta’s (2009) three-part framework aligns naturally with a systems-oriented view of educational quality. Systems thinking (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Jacobson & Wilensky, 2009) that emphasizes understanding educational quality through the dynamic interactions within the whole system rather than isolated components parallels Biesta’s critique of outcome-focused educational discourse (Biesta, 2007). Both perspectives caution against simplistic or reductionist measurements of educational quality, instead advocating for richer, multidimensional conceptualizations. Specifically, systems thinking involves understanding complex problems by viewing the whole system and interactions among its parts rather than focusing solely on individual components (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Meadows, 2008).

Using the orchestra analogy, systems thinking considers how instruments collectively produce harmony or dissonance, recognizing that adjusting one element affects the ensemble’s overall sound. In contrast, linear thinking might focus on perfecting the pitch of only the violin section without considering how it blends with the rest. A systems-oriented approach to LA education thus prioritizes coherence among subdisciplines rather than isolated excellence. Systems thinking also impacts measurement; using simplistic proxies (e.g., spelling as a measure of writing competence) can oversimplify complex realities, as illustrated by Meadows’ (2008) iceberg model, where observable outcomes (above surface) reflect deeper systemic structures and dynamics beneath.

### Approaches to High-Quality Instruction

Regardless of the educational purpose, teachers must be positioned centrally when defining and enacting quality in practice (Hattie, 2013; Muijs et al., 2014). Although theoretical frameworks and empirical research can offer valuable insights into what constitutes high-quality instruction, it is ultimately the teacher who navigates the complex, dynamic classroom environment, making real-time decisions that shape student learning (Ball & Forzani, 2009). In this sense, teachers are not just implementers of predefined standards but active interpreters of what quality means in diverse contexts. Teachers must mediate between competing definitions of quality, prioritize among multiple instructional goals, and negotiate the tensions that arise when focusing on one domain may risk neglecting others (Biesta, 2009; Cochran-

Smith & Lytle, 2013). This makes teaching not only intellectually demanding but also ethically charged.

This interpretive nature of teaching raises important questions about how instructional quality is assessed in research (Praetorius et al., 2020). While teachers make nuanced, moment-to-moment decisions in their classrooms, empirical studies must rely on frameworks and tools that attempt to capture these complex practices in measurable ways (Dobbelaer, 2019). As such, the way instructional quality is conceptualized in research is closely tied to the methods and instruments used to observe and evaluate it. When investigating instructional quality empirically, the measures used to evaluate quality might be more or less representative of the explicit or implicit concepts of the quality of the study (Gitomer & Bell, 2016).

Existing frameworks for observing and measuring instructional quality either approach the task (a) in a generic way across instructional domains, (b) at a subject-specific level, or (c) by combining generic and subject-specific measures (Senden et al., 2022). In recent decades, many frameworks have been developed (Charalambous & Praetorius, 2022). One widely used generic framework for measuring classroom quality is CLASS (Pianta & Hamre, 2009) and its adapted instrument for secondary school, CLASS-S (Classroom Assessment Scoring System for Secondary; Pianta et al., 2012), an observational tool that analyzes the quality of teacher–student interactions closely linked to student achievement. This tool produces ratings of teacher performance on the broad domains of emotional support, instructional support, and classroom organization and has been validated across countries and subjects (e.g., Virtanen et al., 2018). A second observation tool, PLATO (Protocol for Language Arts Teaching Observation; Grossman, 2015), differs from CLASS by targeting teacher–student interactions related specifically to LA content and skills. It was developed to capture four underlying domains of instructional quality in LA: (a) instructional scaffolding, (b) disciplinary demand, (c) representations and use of content, and (d) classroom environment. PLATO was used in the large-scale measures of effective teaching study and validated against achievement in LA (Grossman et al., 2014; Kane & Staiger, 2012). Other examples of tools that specifically evaluate aspects of instructional quality in LA or practices central to LA instruction are the Writing Observation Framework (Henk et al., 2003), developed to guide evaluation and support of writing instruction; a (nonnamed) tool developed by Swanson et al. (2016) for capturing vocabulary and comprehension instruction; and Winkler’s (2020) framework for literature instruction, where subject-specific quality is operationalized through cognitive activation. The Toolkit for Systematic Educational Dialogue Analysis identifies productive forms of student–teacher and peer group talk, but not exclusively in LA (Vrikki et al., 2018). Framework for Teaching (Danielson, 2007) was developed

for capturing broad domains of teaching quality in both math and LA and has been widely used in the United States, but PLATO remains a rare example of a protocol capturing the whole range of content and skills areas in LA specifically.

Finally, beyond observational frameworks for teaching quality, we found further descriptions of teacher quality in LA from diverse sources, including professional standards, studies of exemplary practice, teachers’ self-studies of practice, and student perceptions. Specifically, *professional teaching standards*, such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards in the United States (2022), provide a research-informed vision of accomplished teaching, emphasizing commitments to student learning, in-depth subject mastery, adaptive pedagogy, and collaboration. These standards serve as a benchmark for interpreting quality in context rather than prescribing uniform practices. Meanwhile, empirical studies of *exemplary literacy teachers* (Collinson, 2014; Duke et al., 2018) have suggested that high-quality LA instruction blends academic rigor with relational practices, for example, fostering inclusive classroom climates, valuing students’ cultural and linguistic resources, and balancing reader-oriented and analytic approaches to texts. Teachers’ own *systematic reflections and self-studies* (Farrell, 2022; Van de Ven, 2016) further demonstrate that quality develops through cycles of inquiry, adaptation, and critical self-examination, highlighting the interpretive and evolving nature of teaching. *Students’ perspectives of teaching quality* add another essential dimension, emphasizing fairness, approachability, and motivational support over purely technical competencies (Ida, 2017). Together these strands of research expand the definition of instructional quality beyond observable behaviors to include the professional, ethical, and relational commitments that teachers bring to their work.

## Methods

To address our research question—How is the concept of instructional quality in the secondary LA subject defined in empirical studies?—this study employed a systematic conceptual mapping review to critically investigate how instructional quality was defined in empirical studies of secondary LA instruction. This implies that we are taking the complex landscapes of LA instruction and research field into account and that rather than approaching our review with an a priori framework, we are investigating the disparities and synergies in how current researchers define instructional quality in LA. While we followed systematic review procedures (Page et al., 2021), our aim varied from that of most traditional reviews (e.g., synthesizing intervention effects). First, in line with mapping reviews (Booth, 2016), we sought to identify, categorize, classify, and characterize themes in the existing literature. This allowed us to make visible how the concept of quality was constructed across studies, often exposing variation, trends, and silences in how constructs

were framed. Second, we critically examined the range of, as well as relationship between, conceptualizations of instructional quality across a fragmented and interdisciplinary research field.

Our approach combined inductive and interpretive analysis, including grounded coding of both implicit and explicit definitions of quality, thematic synthesis, and classification of studies by domain specificity (i.e., reading, writing, or oracy) as well as epistemological orientation (i.e., systems vs. linear thinking). Importantly, in the “Discussion” section, we also critically examine the underlying theoretical and philosophical assumptions that shaped different definitions of quality—drawing on perspectives such as Biesta’s (2009) educational purposes (i.e., qualification, socialization, and subjectification), Harvey and Green’s (1993) dimensions of quality, and Wittek and Kvernbekk’s (2011) notion of quality as a vague concept. This discussion enabled us not only to map what definitions exist but also to interrogate what visions of education they imply and for whom they hold value. In doing so, we aim to support more coherent and reflective conversations about instructional quality in LA education.

#### *Positionality*

The authors of this paper bring diverse international perspectives and extensive experience in literacy and LA education across Norway, Sweden, and the United States. Collectively, our backgrounds span primary, secondary, and university-level teaching as well as teacher preparation, literacy intervention, and educational research. We drew on sociocultural, sociocognitive, dialogic, and reader-response traditions in our research to examine how students learn and engage with language and literature in varied contexts and how teaching quality can be conceptualized and measured across systems.

Our collaborative team integrates complementary expertise that directly informs the goals of this systematic review. We contribute deep knowledge of literature instruction, oracy, engagement, and co-/team teaching (AFG); reading motivation, visual literacy, and teacher preparation (EMM); writing instruction, comprehension-based interventions, and preservice teacher beliefs (TSH); and literature instruction, reading comprehension, and teaching quality (MT). Methodologically, we bring extensive experience with systematic literature reviews and meta-analyses, survey and instrument development, interview and observation studies, and multiple classroom observation protocols (e.g., the Argumentation Rating Tool [ART]; Reznitskaya & Wilkinson, 2021), CLASS, PLATO, Rating Inquiry Dialogue About Literature (Tengberg et al., 2024), and the Texas Teacher Evaluation Support System (Texas Education Agency, 2022)). This blend of perspectives allowed us to situate our work within and across multiple educational systems, highlighting both shared challenges and locally

specific approaches to defining, enacting, and assessing high-quality LA instruction. Additionally, it allowed us to take an intentionally agnostic approach toward our data, not putting one main theory on the studies but rather approaching them inductively.

#### *Identifying Studies*

*Conceptualization and Searches.* As a first step in identifying search terms, we began by defining three main categories to clarify our area of interest (see Figure 1): (a) the school subject “language arts,” (b) the concept of “instructional quality,” and (c) the educational context of “secondary school.” Next, we expanded each category by identifying synonyms and related concepts, aiming to identify terms that together formed a search string that was inclusive with regard to theoretical stances, research designs, and methods. For instance, terms such as “educational quality,” “student outcome,” and “teacher competence” were associated with the second category, whereas terms regarding student grades, age, and institutional levels related to the third category. For the first category, related terms such as “L1” were identified. However, because the LA subject varies internationally regarding which skills, domains, and texts are emphasized, a more detailed conceptualization was necessary to capture relevant studies across diverse national contexts. During this phase, we relied on our contextual knowledge of LA instruction, which was drawn from our diverse countries and extensive international collaboration. We focused initially on core skills common to LA internationally—reading, writing, and oracy. Subsequently, we identified specific domains and related subdomains typically associated with these core skills (e.g., literature instruction and reading/writing strategies), recognizing that these domains frequently integrate multiple skills. Lastly, we noted typical texts associated with each domain (e.g., novels, drama, argumentative texts, and debates).

From the LA conceptualization, we identified related terms, synonyms, and various spellings (e.g., nonfiction and non-fiction). Next, we tested the search strings using a combination of the identifiers and Boolean operators. Based on the results, and considering the accuracy of results, we revised the combination of search terms. The final search string (see Appendix A) was used to perform searches in the databases ERIC and Scopus. Updated searches from June 20, 2023, were imported to the web-based software program EPPI-Reviewer. This web-based software program for managing and analyzing data in all types of systematic reviews has proven to be a strong choice for complex reviews (Schmidt et al., 2023; Waffenschmidt, 2023). Before screening, EPPI-Reviewer identified 41 items as duplicates. After manually revising and removing those items, the data source included 912 records for screening (see Figure 2 for an overview of the selection procedure).

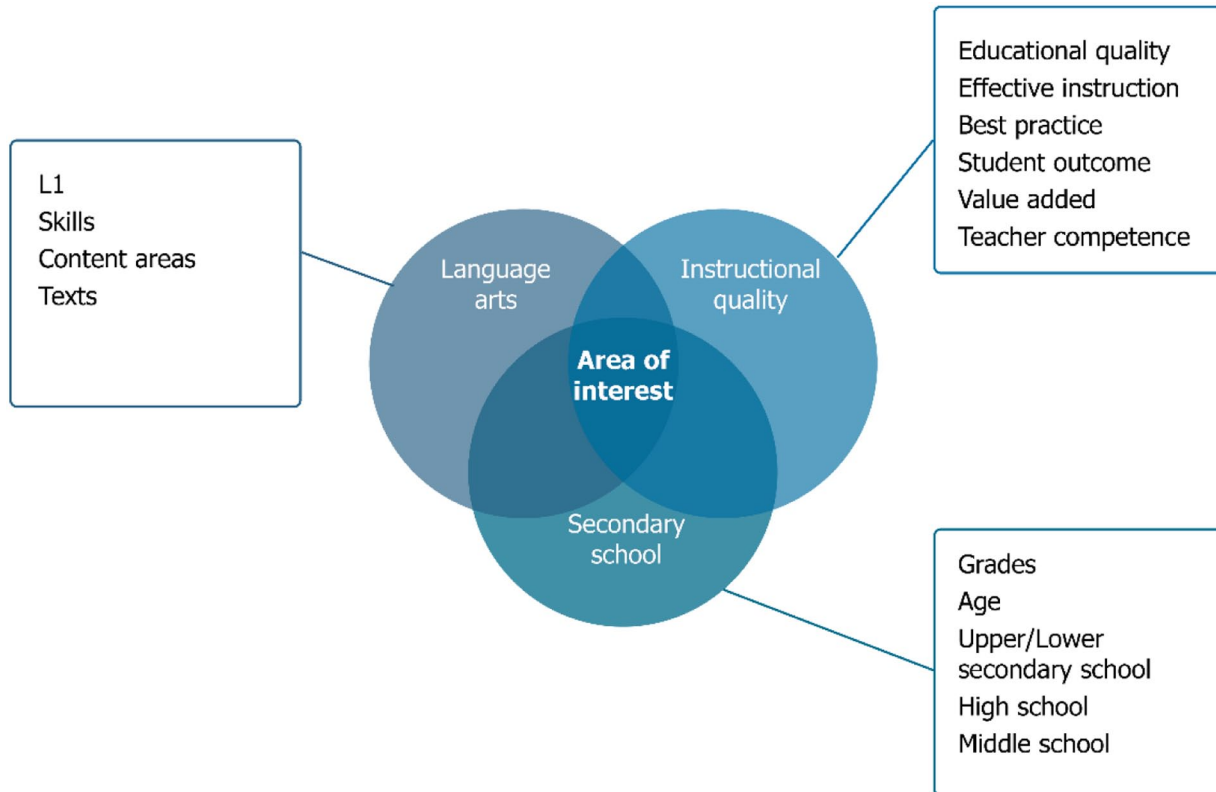


FIGURE 1. *Area of interest.*

*Selection Criteria.* To guide the selection of relevant studies, we established (a) inclusion and exclusion criteria related to publication type, date, and language; (b) educational level and classroom context; (c) type of data and study design; and (d) study quality (see Table 1 for details and Table B1 in Appendix B for exclusion examples).

We limited our review of studies to those published from the year 2000 onward, covering a 24-year period. Given that LA is one of the oldest and most foundational subjects in modern education, some might argue for an earlier start date. However, while some aspects of education remain relatively stable over time, others evolve rapidly. Considering the global scope of our study, we determined that country-specific historical rationales for an earlier cutoff were not sufficient. We selected the year 2000 as our starting point because it marks the launch of the first Program for International Student Assessment. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s initiative to assess and compare student competencies internationally, as well as the influence of these assessments on national education systems, has sparked considerable debate (Zhao, 2020). As the subject most directly responsible for developing students’ literacy skills, LA has been particularly affected. In numerous participating countries, LA curricula have undergone evaluations and revisions to better align with outcome-focused educational objectives.

We further limited our data to peer-reviewed research papers published in English. Because the LA subject is closely related to national identity, we might assume that this is a research field where research studies are also regularly published in national languages. This language limitation is a possible shortcoming of this study.

Regarding the studies’ classroom context, for the sake of ecological validity, we included research studies where instruction was carried out in an intact classroom, led by the LA teacher. Such classrooms vary a lot—for example, by being more or less heterogenic when it comes to students’ academic needs and language background. However, it is this somewhat messy place that constitutes the LA instruction’s common place and the everyday operationalization of this school subject.

Another set of criteria addressed the type of data included in eligible studies. Because we focused on teaching quality, we limited our selection to studies including empirical data on teacher or instruction where students’ performance is linked to teacher quality or teacher instruction. This criterion opens for both observations of instruction and students’ or teachers’ reports on instruction through surveys or interviews. However, it excludes studies where student performance is not linked to empirical instructional data.

Because our focus was to map the complex landscape of LA instructional quality, we did not limit our study to

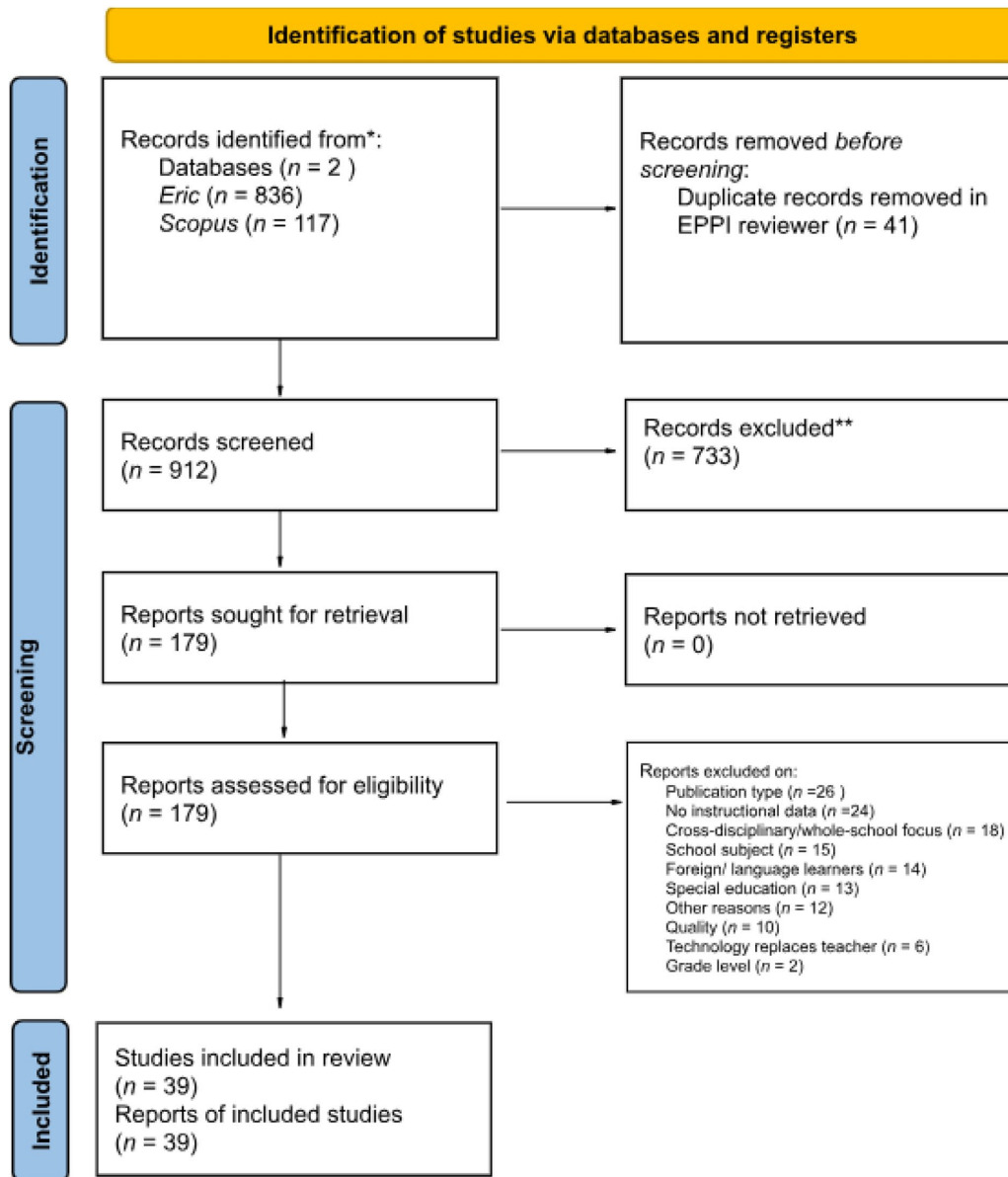


FIGURE 2. PRISMA diagram detailing inclusion and exclusion totals during selection procedures.

specific methods or report measures of teaching quality. However, we set a quality criterion with regard to methodologic clarity, allowing for replication. First, such clarity is decisive for the empirical research field to build knowledge over time—even in a field where we may ask whether replication is possible given the contextual boundaries. Second, to understand each study’s concepts of instructional quality in depth, we needed insight into its design and methods.

#### *Screening*

The first two authors screened all records for inclusion based on titles, abstracts, and keywords. To assess intercoder

reliability, 13% of the records (98 items) were double-coded, yielding an agreement rate of 86%. This initial screening led to the exclusion of 733 records, resulting in 179 reports for full-text review. At the full-text level, 22% of the reports (39 items) were double-coded, with a reliability of 92%. Ultimately, 39 reports were included in the final review. During both stages of screening—at the record and report levels—the coders flagged all borderline cases, which were then discussed during regular coding meetings. These discussions occasionally led to revisions of the inclusion and exclusion criteria to improve clarity. One example of such a process was initiated by Chen and Lin’s (2016) study where the LA teacher was present in the classroom during the

TABLE 1.  
*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria*

Criterion	Included	Excluded
Publication type	Peer-reviewed research articles	Non-peer-reviewed research article, essays, book chapters, books, dissertations
Publication date	2000–2023	Before 2000, after 2023
Publication language	English	Other languages
Educational level	Secondary school (grades 7–13)	University/college courses, preschool and primary schools
Classroom context	Research occurs in an intact classroom and may be composed by students with diverse academic needs and language backgrounds. Instruction is led by the LA teacher.	The students are a specified group of students (e.g., special education students or language learners) in a separate group or class. The students are in an inclusion model classroom, but the study only focuses on the particular group of students. Instruction is led by someone other than the LA teacher (e.g., a researcher, teacher, student, or librarian).
Type of data	Empirical data of teacher or instruction (e.g., observation, interviews, or surveys). The focus of the students’ performance is linked to teacher quality or teacher instruction.	No empirical instructional data. The focus is not on or linked to teacher instruction (e.g., only analysis of student texts).
Publication quality	Reports detailed methodologies that could be recreated from the information given.	Does not report detailed methodologies that could be recreated.

intervention, but the experimental instruction consisted of using a digital game. This study made us specify that the LA teacher should carry out the instruction in included studies and that studies where technology replaced the teacher were to be excluded.

For excluded items, specific exclusion codes were applied. However, many items, particularly at the record level, met multiple exclusion criteria. In such cases, the most salient reason for exclusion was reported. All included reports represented unique studies, although two studies were closely related (Olson et al., 2017, 2020).

### *Data Analysis*

#### *Establishing Thematic Categories of LA Instructional Quality.*

After finalizing the dataset of 39 reports, we conducted a multistep analysis to examine how instructional quality was conceptualized in each study. In the first phase, we used EPPI-Reviewer to identify and code both explicit and implicit definitions of instructional quality (see Table B2 in Appendix B for examples). Nine studies included clear, explicit definitions, which we coded *in vivo*. For the remaining 30 studies without explicit definitions, we highlighted relevant text passages that offered insight into how quality was understood or operationalized. These were coded as implicit definitions. Throughout this process, we also used EPPI-Reviewer’s “info” box feature to record notes that captured contextual details or interpretive reflections.

Next, we exported all coded data and notes from EPPI-Reviewer. In the third phase, we conducted an inductive

thematic analysis of the synthesized definitions using established qualitative coding procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2020). The first and second authors first compiled the full, verbatim definitions of instructional quality from each article. In many cases, a single study yielded multiple synthesized definitions to reflect complex or layered understandings of quality. The two authors then independently condensed these into shorter synthesized definitions to enable cross-study comparison. This process resulted in 107 unique synthesized definitions supporting quality in L1 instruction.

Working from these condensed definitions, the first and second authors identified recurring ideas and generated tentative codes, which were reviewed collaboratively with all four authors to refine code definitions and boundaries until a mutually agreed-on set of working codes was established. Using this finalized scheme, all four authors then independently coded the articles (blind to each other’s decisions), achieving high levels of agreement. Any discrepancies were addressed through detailed, iterative discussions, leading to further clarification of code definitions and the boundaries between codes. Table 2 shows this analytic progression from verbatim excerpts to synthesized definitions, working codes, and final thematic categories. Table 3 describes the final nine themes: Competence/Learning Support, Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking, Community of Learners, Engagement, Instructional Coherence, Student Centered, Inclusive Text Definition, Context Dependent, and Class Structure. Finally, Table B3 in Appendix B provides examples of synthesized definitions for all nine themes.

TABLE 2.

*Example of Analysis From In Vivo Coding to Theme of Instructional Quality*

Report	In vivo coding	Synthesized definition	Theme
Early & Saily (2014)	Page 1: "A surface-level focus for teaching revision represents an incomplete approach to teaching writing (Torff, 2011), which does not expose students to the full range of skills and strategies necessary to substantially revise written work. Substantive revision involves diagnosing problems in a piece of writing and then executing solutions (Bartlett, 1982)."	Substantive revision strategies Identifying and acting on problems	Competence/Learning Support Intellectual Challenge/ Critical Thinking

TABLE 3.

*Themes with Working Definitions and Number of Synthesized Definitions Attributed to Each Theme*

Theme	Definition	<i>n</i>
Competence/Learning Support	Instruction that explicitly supports student learning, for example, through modeling, explicit strategy instruction, frequent feedback, and repeated guided practice	28
Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking	Instruction that engages students in higher-order cognitive processes, such as critical thinking, evaluation, problem solving, and completing challenging tasks	18
Community of Learners	Instruction emphasizing peer collaboration and mutual support, including valuing each student's contributions (This can involve opportunities for student autonomy, distributed authority, and inviting student perspectives.)	17
Engagement	Instruction designed to foster student motivation and agency, for instance, by offering relevant text choices, acknowledging student interests, and ensuring task legitimacy	13
Instructional Coherence	Instruction demonstrating clear alignment and consistency across activities, subdisciplines, or skills within the domain of language arts	11
Student Centered	Instruction adapted and responsive to the individual needs, interests, and abilities of students	9
Inclusive Text Definition	Instruction intentionally incorporating a diverse range of text genres, types, and modalities in reading and/or writing activities	6
Context Dependent	Instruction adapted to contextual factors, including teacher values and beliefs, local conditions, and the collective needs and characteristics of the student group	5
Class Structure	Instruction emphasizing effective classroom management and clear organization of learning activities and routines	4

*Differentiating Conceptual Orientations.* During the process of reviewing the synthesized definitions and thematic codes across the 39 reports, we noticed a distinction in underlying theoretical orientations that shaped the definitions that were not fully captured by our initial themes. For instance, some studies approached quality through a narrow focus on a single instructional practice (e.g., a specific strategy for teaching argumentative writing) and examined its effects on a defined outcome, often using controlled texts or tightly delimited tasks. Other studies, by contrast, conceptualized quality more holistically, attending to how an instructional approach (e.g., using sources for evidence) was applied across multiple aspects of LA or, alternatively, how multiple instructional practices, classroom interactions, and contextual factors worked together over time to shape

students' learning experiences. To address this difference, we turned to systems thinking (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Meadows, 2008) as an interpretive lens and reconceptualized the distinction as one between *linear* and *systems-oriented* thinking. Studies aligned with linear thinking tended to conceptualize instructional quality as measurable through discrete, often decontextualized teacher behaviors, which were assumed to directly influence student outcomes. These studies frequently relied on proxy indicators as representations of broader constructs. In contrast, studies reflecting a systems thinking orientation viewed instructional quality as an emerging property arising from dynamic interactions among multiple factors, including teacher beliefs, student engagement, curricular alignment, classroom relationships, and broader sociocultural contexts. These studies emphasized

the embeddedness of instruction within a complex educational ecosystem. (For coding examples of conceptual orientation, see Table B4 in Appendix B.)

This reframing allowed us to better understand the epistemological assumptions underpinning the research: whether quality is treated as a stable, observable property or as a dynamic, relational process. It also highlighted an important tension in the field between reductionist approaches that seek to isolate causal variables and those that acknowledge the complexity and embeddedness of instructional quality in LA classrooms.

## Results

Our final inclusion criteria resulted in 39 reports (see Appendix C for an overview of included reports with definitions of quality, theme, and domain). Only nine included explicit definitions of quality, while definitions were communicated implicitly in the majority ( $n=30$ ) of the studies. In the following sections, we look closer at what we found that extends the difference between explicit and implicit definitions. First, we address the themes by presenting the characteristics of each of the nine themes (see Table 3) before reporting on how synthesized definitions were distributed across the themes and how the themes related to each other in our data. Second, we present the distribution of themes by the domains of reading, writing, and oracy. Finally, we report on the included studies' epistemological orientation and map the relationship between epistemology and explicitness of quality definition and domain.

### *Theme Characteristics: What Are the Themes Telling Us About the Concept of Instructional Quality?*

To better understand how instructional quality is conceptualized, we identified nine overarching themes. Each theme groups together codes that show both shared elements and important variations, revealing the richness and complexity inherent in the concept of instructional quality. In the sections that follow, we present each theme in turn, highlighting the thematic range within and across definitions.

*Competence/Learning Support.* Supporting students' competence and learning support involves a multifaceted instructional approach that combines explicit teaching, scaffolding, high-quality feedback, and opportunities for guided and independent practice. In our sample, 28 codes across 22 studies focused on this definition. Central to this support was the direct teaching of reading strategies such as summarizing, questioning, and synthesizing (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007; Bråten et al., 2019; Kiuahara et al., 2009). Teachers modeled these strategies and demonstrated their application across contexts (Katsuta & Sawada, 2021; Nwosu et al., 2021; Olson et al., 2020), often pairing them with metacognitive

instruction that encouraged students to monitor and regulate their thinking (Magnusson et al., 2019; Müldür & Çevik, 2021). Similar attention to strategic support was found in writing instruction, which included explicit teaching of writing processes, evidence-based practices, and revision strategies (Howell et al., 2017; Hu & Wang, 2022; Muñoz, 2007).

Scaffolding was also prominent in this theme, enabling students to comprehend complex texts and tasks through supports such as graphic organizers, guided questioning, and think-alouds (Murphy et al., 2017). Teachers created space for students to practice self-regulation and navigate tasks involving multiple sources and critical evaluation (Bråten et al., 2019; Casado-Ledesma et al., 2021). Connected to scaffolding was the notion that high-quality feedback plays a pivotal role when it is intentional, timely, and embedded throughout instruction. Rather than functioning as isolated corrections, feedback served to clarify expectations, reinforce strategies, and guide improvement (Alston & Brown, 2015; Spörer & Brunstein, 2009).

Finally, studies emphasized the value of frequent opportunities for independent practice. Sustained engagement with reading (Lau & Chan, 2007), vocabulary instruction (Lee, 2001), and voluminous self-selected reading (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014) all were identified as critical for developing literacy competence. Together these practices created learning environments that fostered persistence, agency, and meaningful application of skills.

*Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking.* Another prominent dimension that occurred 18 times across 17 studies was intellectual challenge, defined through engaging students in higher-order thinking, critical reasoning, and independent analysis. Across the literature, high-quality instruction consistently involved prompting students to comprehend texts deeply, evaluate complex information, and synthesize multiple viewpoints (Alfassi, 2004; Applebee et al., 2003; Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007; Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). This emphasis on intellectual challenge was found especially beneficial for lower-achieving students, helping them develop richer comprehension and stronger analytic skills. Specifically, studies by Alston and Brown (2015), Early and Saidy (2014), and Casado-Ledesma et al. (2021) showed that instruction that prompts students to draw their own conclusions, engage independently in reasoning, and weigh multiple perspectives is associated with improved argument/counterargument integration, more thorough use of evidence from sources, and higher-quality synthesis in student discourse and writing. Bråten et al. (2019) and Janssen et al. (2009) similarly underscored instructional strategies that supported students in evaluating information critically and guiding them toward meaningful construction of knowledge.

Moreover, intellectual challenge involved fostering deep cognitive engagement and content mastery, often by presenting students with complex and thought-provoking texts

(Hill, 2013; Hochweber & Vieluf, 2018; Lau & Chan, 2007). Lesley et al. (2021) and Pantaleo (2019) advocated for instructional practices such as guided questioning and analysis of symbolism in literature as effective ways to stimulate critical thinking. Peskin et al. (2010) added that explicit teaching of genre-specific metalanguage further enabled students to critically analyze textual features, whereas Sak and Oz (2010) recommended creative approaches such as using paradoxical thinking to encourage original thought and idea generation in writing.

Across these studies, instructional quality was consistently characterized by providing sustained opportunities for students to engage deeply, critically, and creatively with content, thus supporting the development of sophisticated, independent thinking skills.

*Community of Learners.* Seventeen codes across 14 studies related to the theme of community of learners. These codes consistently underscored the relationship between social interaction and instructional quality. Within this theme, the classroom was portrayed as a socially dynamic space (e.g., Lesley et al., 2021) where authority is shared between teacher and students (Hébert, 2008), the teacher adopts the role of facilitator (Janssen et al., 2009), student voices are actively valued (Applebee et al., 2003; Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002), and peer support is encouraged (e.g., Florence & Kolski, 2021; Spörer & Brunstein, 2009).

Importantly, across all studies in this theme, community was not conceptualized as a purely social construct. Rather, it was framed as a context in which learning is central. This emphasis is evident either directly in the codes or through the interplay between these codes and other codes within the same studies. For instance, Spörer and Brunstein (2009) defined quality in terms of *paired reading practices*, whereas Katsuta and Sawada (2021) emphasized students *sharing their interpretations of text*. Similarly, Hébert (2008) stressed that while authority should be distributed, high-quality instruction requires a balance between structure and freedom.

*Engagement.* A key dimension identified across 13 codes in six of the included studies was student engagement. While some of these codes highlight the importance of the teachers' focus on and role in developing students' reading interest, motivation, and engagement in more general terms (Hu & Wang, 2022; Katsuta & Sawada, 2021), others highlight more specific means for student engagement. This includes the teachers' role in communicating the *value of reading* (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014), providing student choice of text (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002; Katsuta & Sawada, 2021) or student choice more generally (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Muñoz, 2007), and relating texts to students' lives (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Lee, 2001). Lee's (2001) study was particularly interesting for the last point made because all three

synthesized definitions that relate to engagement in this study stressed the acknowledgment of personal, cultural, and out-of-school aspects that students bring to school, albeit partly in combination with disciplinary-specific responses such as *response to issues of form and structure of literature*. The cultural aspect was also highlighted by Hill (2013) in the definition *maintaining high expectations for all cultural groups*.

*Student Centered.* The theme of student centered has nine synthesized definitions related to it, stemming from six unique studies. The codes highlight adaptive and responsive instruction, either in more general terms, such as *responsive instruction* (Gilbert, 2018) and *student-centered instruction* (Newell et al., 2014), or in more specific ways, such as *providing adequate learning time* (Hu & Wang, 2022) and *differentiated instruction for writing—particularly for students who need extra support* (Kihara et al., 2009). It is interesting to note that half the studies within this theme also defined instructional quality as context dependent and as such highlighted a link between adaptivity, responsiveness, and context. However, the six studies together drew on rather different and various other themes of quality. These studies also investigated different domains of LA instruction. One final observation of note with this theme is that the focus is on providing ownership of the learning to students, considering their emotional, psychological, cognitive, and social needs.

*Inclusive Text Definition.* The concept of text has been broadened beyond traditional print to include diverse modes and media over recent decades. The rise of the internet, digital technologies, and smartphones has reshaped what constitutes a text in our daily lives, leading to increased incorporation of digital and multimedia formats. Within our sample, only six codes across five studies focused on an inclusive text definition. Our review of the literature highlighted a significant emphasis on digital texts in school literacy as well. For instance, scholars such as Hobbs and Frost (2003) and Pantaleo (2019) explicitly argued for expanding the definition of texts to integrate visual and electronic media alongside print. Additionally, Howell et al. (2017) and Hu and Wang (2022) stressed the importance of integrating digital literacy skills directly into instruction. Lesley et al. (2021) further advocated for writing instruction that transcends discrete skills to engage students in exploring relationships between print and visual media, particularly within multimedia-rich contexts. This inclusive approach aligns literacy instruction more closely with students' contemporary experiences, fostering relevance, engagement, and critical literacy.

*Context Dependent.* The five codes across five studies related to the theme of context dependent explore diverse

understandings of instructional quality within LA, making them particularly relevant to this review. These studies typically examined the reflective practices of experienced teachers or analyzed schools that systematically achieve improvements in students' reading or writing performance over time. The titles themselves reveal the reflective and exploratory nature of this theme, often highlighting inherent tensions in teaching contexts. For instance, included studies focused on specific strategies such as *reciprocal teaching and collaborative learning* (Gilbert, 2018), *integrated reading and writing* (Langer, 2001), and *argumentative writing* (Newell et al., 2014). A central idea in this theme is that instructional quality is inherently complex, dynamic, and dependent on contextual factors. For example, synthesized definitions explicitly emphasize that *quality needs to be explored connected to the context/quality is dynamic* (Langer, 2001), that *quality is plural* (Agee, 2000), and advocate for *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Hill, 2013).

*Class Structure.* Effective class structure is foundational to quality instruction in LA and can be conceived in multiple approaches. These multiple approaches resulted in only four definitions from four studies focusing on this theme, making this one of the less prominent themes in our study. Florence and Kolski (2021) emphasized the importance of a flipped classroom model paired with strong teacher support to maintain student engagement and ensure understanding. Hochweber and Vieluf (2018) highlighted the significance of clarity, structure, and strong classroom management in supporting equitable student learning outcomes. Hu and Wang (2022) echoed these findings, underscoring that teacher-directed instruction and deliberate management of classroom climate are essential for creating an environment where all students can succeed. While disparate in their approaches, these studies highlighted the importance of structuring the classroom environment, both in engagement and in physical space, in a way that supports student learning. Additionally, these studies included both a strong teacher-directed focus and providing intentional opportunities for students to take the lead, such as in the flipped-classroom model.

*Instructional Coherence.* We conclude with the theme of instructional coherence, which underscores the importance of alignment within and across instructional activities, occurring in 11 codes across 11 studies. Some of the synthesized definitions within this theme examine the importance of coherence between (Bråten et al., 2019) or more specifically the order of (e.g. Peskin et al., 2010; Sak & Oz, 2010) different stages or components in the learning cycle or the integration of instruction throughout the day. Another focus of attention relates to systematically integrating multiple strategies (Okkinga et al., 2021), combining different writing forms (Howell et al., 2017), or integrating literacy tasks of reception and production (Pantaleo, 2019). The theme also includes definitions of a more general alignment

between assessment and instruction (Muñoz, 2007) and reading, writing, and discussion in the LA classroom (Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). Finally, Newell et al. (2014) stressed the importance of coherence at an even more fundamental level between teachers' values, instructional goals, and instructional strategies.

#### *Distribution of Synthesized Definitions Across Themes of Instructional Quality*

Identifying which theme of quality (see Table 3) most closely aligned with each synthesized definition (code) resulted in ascribing one theme to most codes, whereas four of the codes related to two themes each (e.g., *maintaining high expectations for all cultural groups* was coded as both Engagement and Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking). Table 3 reports on the number of codes in the dataset attributed to each of the nine themes. The codes were most frequently associated with the themes Competence/Learning Support, Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking, and Community of Learners and least frequently related to Class Structure, Context Dependent, and Inclusive Text Definition.

In analyzing the relationships between synthesized definitions and thematic categories for each included study (see Appendix C), we observed two key patterns. First, nearly all studies (33 of 39) presented multiple synthesized definitions of instructional quality and/or definitions that mapped onto several thematic categories. The exceptions were six studies that offered more singular or narrowly defined conceptualizations of quality.

Secondly, it is important to note that we also observed variation in how the synthesized definitions related to the thematic categories, specifically whether the definitions reflected broad, generalizable instructional concepts or were more closely tied to LA-specific practices. Some studies framed instructional quality in terms of broadly applicable educational constructs, such as *high-quality feedback* and *intellectually challenging assignments* (Alston & Brown, 2015), which can be described as domain neutral (Banse et al., 2018). Other studies, however, offered definitions that were more distinctly situated within the domain of LA, including references to a *repertoire of reading strategies* (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007) or *students sharing their interpretations of text* (Katsuta & Sawada, 2021), which can be seen as domain specific. In other words, some definitions of quality reflected general pedagogic frameworks, whereas others were connected to the unique practices of LA instruction. This pattern was visible across the nine themes, suggesting that both domain-neutral and domain-specific perspectives contribute to how instructional quality is conceptualized in the field.

#### *Theme Relationships*

Figure 3 allows us to see the interconnections more clearly because it shows the relationships among the nine

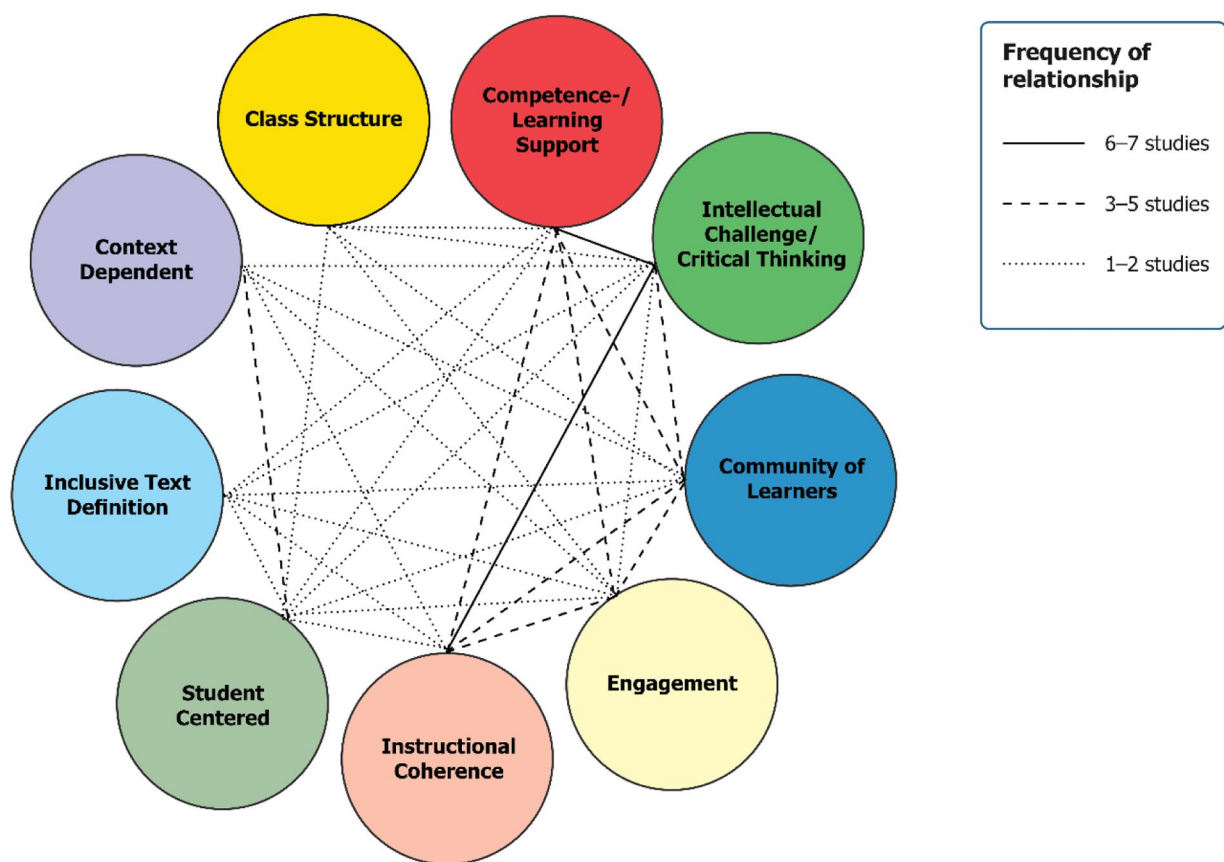


FIGURE 3. Relationships among themes of instructional quality.

themes of instructional quality, illustrating how frequently they co-occur within studies. Overall, the figure shows considerable overlap across themes, underscoring that few studies addressed themes in isolation. Competence/Learning Support appears most frequently and tends to cluster with Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking and Instructional Coherence, reflecting their shared emphasis on cognitive processes and strategy use. A somewhat weaker but still notable pattern links Community of Learners and Engagement with these three cognitive-oriented themes, suggesting that social and motivational dimensions frequently intersect with competence and challenge. Other themes, such as Student Centered and Inclusive Text Definition, also appear alongside multiple themes but at lower frequencies, indicating a broad but uneven distribution of focus across the field. Taken together, Figure 3 highlights not only the dominant cognitive clusters but also the pervasive interconnectedness of cognitive, social, and motivational constructs within high-quality LA instruction.

#### *Themes and Domains of LA Instruction*

In addition to examining the themes within the included studies, we noticed that some of the themes are related to

different domains of LA instruction. Most of the studies ( $n=26$ ) were within the domain of reading or reading in combination with writing and/or oracy. Twenty addressed the domain of writing and 10 the domain of oracy. Although the domains of reading and writing were addressed frequently alone (in 12 and 11 studies, respectively), only one study (Murphy et al., 2017) solely addressed the domain of oracy. Two studies addressed all three domains of reading, writing and oracy (Applebee et al., 2003; Carbonaro & Gamoran, 2002). The uneven distribution across domains reflects the state of the empirical literature rather than the priorities of the review. The relative absence of oracy-focused studies highlights an important gap in research on instructional quality in secondary LA and suggests a need for greater attention to oral language practices in future work.

Looking more closely at the combination of themes and domains, most of the definitions related to studies within reading alone or in combination with writing and/or oracy within the themes of Community of Learners ( $n=12$  definitions), Engagement ( $n=12$ ), and Student Centered ( $n=4$ ). For the remaining themes, the domains were more equally distributed between reading and writing. The theme Community of Learners may align with reading instruction because activities such as collaborative text discussions,

literature circles, and shared interpretations were common instructional approaches. These practices fostered dialogue, encouraged diverse perspectives, and created collective meaning-making experiences. The frequent connection between reading instruction and engagement may stem from the recognition that motivating students to read requires carefully selected texts that resonate with students' interests and cultural backgrounds. Instructional strategies such as providing choice in reading materials, connecting texts to students' lives, or emphasizing the personal and social value of reading inherently boost student motivation and sustained engagement.

Although oracy was underrepresented compared with the other domains, it was relatively well represented in studies with definitions related to the themes Community of Learners ( $n=6$ ) and Engagement ( $n=3$ ). This connection might be explained by the inherently social and collaborative nature of oral communication tasks. Oracy instruction typically involves structured opportunities for dialogue, group discussions, and peer interactions, activities that naturally foster a communal classroom atmosphere, shared meaning making, and mutual support among learners. Additionally, through practices such as debates or structured dialogues, oracy instruction aligns closely with pedagogic approaches that emphasize distributed authority, student autonomy, and active participation—all core elements of a learning community.

#### *Epistemological Orientations and Their Relationship to Explicitness of Definition and Domain*

Most of the included studies ( $n=28$ ) aligned with systems thinking, whereas 11 aligned with linear thinking. The linear-oriented studies typically focused on a specific component of the LA subject or on a particular instructional practice. For instance, Peskin et al. (2010) defined quality as writing instruction starting with *thinking with paradoxes for idea generating* and measured students' use of paradoxical thinking and writing in poems, stories, and sentences, hence a very direct relationship. In contrast, most systems-thinking studies typically looked into a broader aspect of the subject and combined practices. An example of such studies is Guthrie and Klauda's (2014) broad approach to high-quality reading instruction, including teachers' various actions to support students' engagement and competence, while emphasizing instructional coherence. However, we also noted some systems-thinking studies that were less broad in scope. These latter studies tended to focus on a particular practice within LA instruction, such as sourcing (Bråten et al., 2019) or students questioning literature (Janssen et al., 2009), and focused on the depth of the practices, carefully considering the complexity of the teaching and learning in the practice of interest.

Figure 4 highlights patterns in how epistemological approach (systems vs. linear), domain focus (i.e., reading,

writing, or oracy or combinations thereof), and explicitness of definition (i.e., explicit vs. implicit) intersect across the included studies. Overall, the figure shows that systems-oriented studies were far more common than linear-oriented studies across all domains, suggesting a fieldwide trend toward viewing quality as dynamic, relational, and context bound rather than as discrete, measurable behaviors. Reading-focused studies represented the largest group and were more likely than writing or multidomain studies to include explicit definitions of quality, perhaps due to the availability of external frameworks and established assessment traditions in reading instruction. In contrast, writing studies predominantly featured implicit definitions, with only one explicitly defined example. Studies combining reading, writing, and/or oracy almost universally presented implicit definitions, suggesting that more integrative approaches coincide with less explicit conceptualizations of quality. As noted earlier, oracy appeared least frequently as a primary focus, with only one study addressing it alone.

## **Discussion**

### *A Complex Map Reflecting the Richness of LA Education*

We began our study with the goal of contributing to the understanding of the concept of instructional quality in the LA secondary subject. Through our mapping of the conceptualization of instructional quality in empirical studies, we found that most of the definitions were implicit ( $n=30$  of 39 studies). This asymmetry is telling: It suggests that instructional quality often functions as a taken-for-granted construct within LA research, perhaps an assumed marker of "good teaching" rather than an explicitly theorized phenomenon. The absence of explicit definitions may suggest that *quality* has become a familiar term within educational discourse—used to signal good practice but less often examined as a concept in its own right.

Yet, this very implicitness provided an analytic opportunity. By examining how authors *enacted* rather than *declared* their conceptions of quality, we can uncover the deeper theoretical orientations embedded in their work. Our identification of systems-oriented versus linear approaches provides a layered account of how the field conceptualizes quality, often without explicitly naming it. The reliance on implicit definitions also exposes a disciplinary paradox: While LA education values reflection and interpretation, its research literature frequently naturalizes the notion of quality. Recognizing this gap suggests a challenge for future studies to more clearly examine and articulate notions of instructional quality. Collectively, these findings highlight that the field's conceptual map is necessarily complex, reflecting both the richness of LA education and the challenges of defining quality within it.

If we recall the analogy of an orchestra and apply it to the field of LA instructional quality, we may read the research as

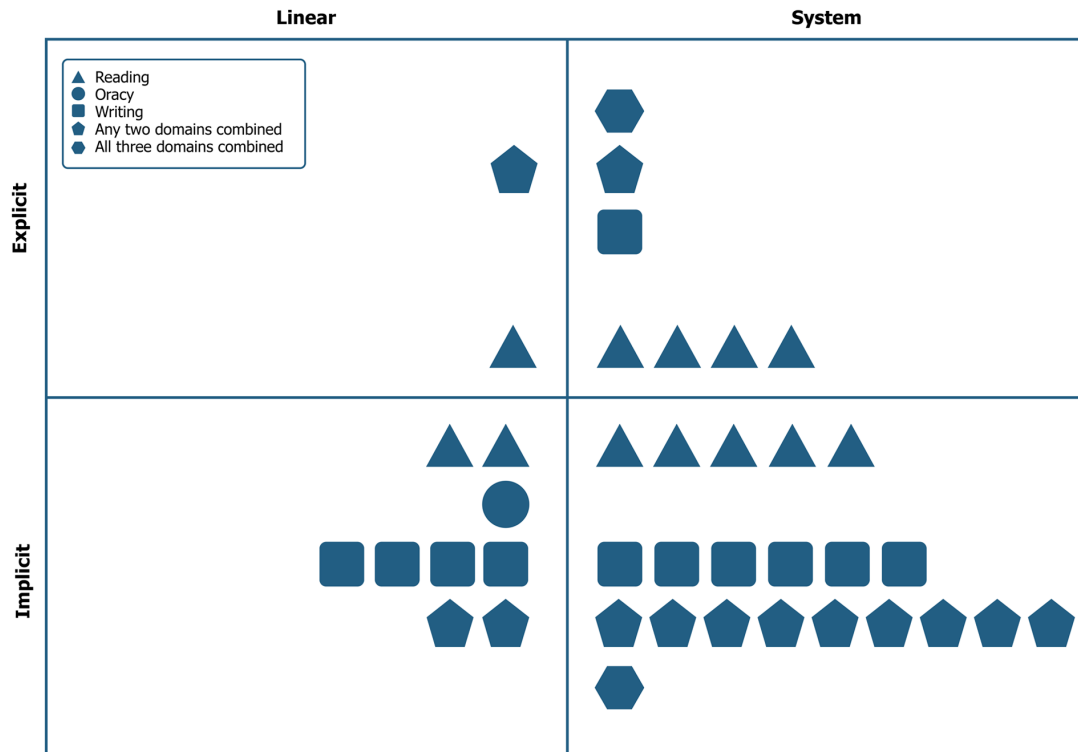


FIGURE 4. *Studies per domain distributed by epistemological orientation and explicitness of quality definition.*  
*Note.* Each figure represents one included study.

music scores of different kinds. While some composers provide rather detailed specifications of interpretation—of tempo, volume, ornamentation, and so on—others leave a lot more of the interpretation to the conductor, relying on their interpretative competence and experience. This latter group reminds us that scores and music are not the same and that music should adapt to changing contexts in real life, such as the setting (e.g., cathedral, amplified outdoor scene, or a school’s sports hall), the musicians’ level of expertise, and other factors. If we leave the analogy and draw on Wittek and Kvernbekk’s (2011) argument of quality as a vague concept or as family resemblance, we may say that some of the studies in our corpus answered the question of what is LA instructional quality in secondary school by drawing detailed representations of the instructional characteristics, giving the impression that they are valid across contexts. Others illuminated gray zones and boundary problems, looking for family resemblance. These latter studies highlighted the need for adapting to shifting contextual conditions and taking the whole complexity of the subject and instructional context into consideration. Through this latter perspective, LA instructional quality cannot be defined only as systems or linear or implicit or explicit. Instead, it is a rich tapestry, or a full orchestra, that can only be embodied through the careful integration of these many ideologies as well as

through the integration of domain-neutral and domain-specific instructional practices (Banse et al., 2018)

#### *Relating Themes of Secondary LA Instructional Quality to Established Frameworks*

Our systematic conceptual mapping identified nine themes that encapsulate core aspects of instructional quality in LA classrooms. Although analytically distinct, these themes rarely appear in isolation in the empirical literature. Instead, the studies consistently examined instructional quality through combinations of themes, indicating that these dimensions are interdependent rather than independent. As shown in Figure 3, connections among themes extended across the entire conceptual map, with some relationships appearing more frequently and more strongly than others. Taken together, the map suggests that instructional quality in LA classrooms is best understood as an integrated system of mutually reinforcing practices rather than a set of discrete components. In the following, we will relate the themes and the map created by their interconnectedness to the established framework.

The themes in our map, such as Competence/Learning Support, Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking, and Community of Learners, closely align with established dimensions in observation tools, specifically PLATO

(Grossman, 2015) and CLASS-S (Pianta et al., 2012). For instance, Competence/Learning Support corresponds with PLATO's emphasis on modeling and strategy instruction as well as CLASS-S's focus on content understanding and quality feedback. Similarly, Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking aligns clearly with PLATO's Intellectual Challenge and CLASS-S's Analysis and Inquiry. This convergence reinforces the validity of our thematic coding and underscores a shared understanding among experts regarding the elements of quality instruction at the secondary level.

However, our themes also introduce distinctive dimensions that expand the understanding of instructional quality. We identify three key distinctions. First, Inclusive Text Definition emphasizes the deliberate inclusion of diverse genres, modalities, and cultural perspectives in LA instruction, a facet not as explicitly addressed in PLATO or CLASS-S. For example, CLASS-S's Instructional Learning Formats encompasses formats beyond text, including instructional methods and materials. PLATO's dimension of Text-Based Instruction emphasizes continued engagement with text and deep processing but does not highlight text modalities.

Second, our theme of Context Dependent underscores the idea that instructional quality is not a fixed or universally transferable construct. Instead, it is intricately tied to the specific cultural, institutional, and community contexts of learners. Articles coded under this theme highlighted the idea that effective instruction must be responsive to the unique needs, backgrounds, and circumstances of students, suggesting that what constitutes quality can vary significantly across different settings. This situational responsiveness is not explicitly captured in standardized observation tools such as PLATO or CLASS-S, which may not fully account for the nuanced ways in which context shapes instructional practices.

Finally, our theme of Instructional Coherence emphasizes the seamless integration of skills and concepts across activities and subdisciplines within LA instruction, promoting a cohesive and aligned curriculum. Although PLATO and CLASS-S effectively assess specific dimensions of instructional quality, they are not designed to fully capture the holistic integration of dimensions. By focusing on discrete elements, these tools might overlook the overarching structure that ensures consistency and continuity in learning experiences. Our findings suggest that although our themes resonate with established measures of instructional quality, they also provide additional insights that encapsulate the complexities and interconnectedness inherent in high-quality LA teaching practices.

The theme of Instructional Coherence also exposes a deeper epistemological divide in how instructional quality is conceptualized. Coherence demands attention to the relationships among practices, ideas, and learners, in short, a *systems view* (Arnold & Wade, 2015; Jacobson & Wilensky, 2009) that challenges models treating instructional moves as isolated variables. Our findings suggest that definitions of

quality are not simply different in emphasis but rooted in fundamentally divergent ways of knowing: Linear thinking seeks to deconstruct and measure discrete practices, whereas systems thinking understands quality as emerging, relational, and contextually bound. Recognizing this divide is crucial because it shapes not only research methods but also the educational values and futures that we prioritize. Our findings suggest that definitions of instructional quality are never purely technical. In fact, they are deeply entangled with visions of human development, societal aims, and the kinds of futures we imagine through education. Recognizing this, we now turn to a broader examination of purpose, using Biesta's (2009) framework to reflect on how the functions of qualification, socialization, and subjectification are woven into prevailing conceptions of quality in secondary LA instruction.

#### *Purposes, Functions, and Stakeholders: Quality for What and Whom?*

We have seen that the various definitions of instructional quality in the LA secondary subject identified in our data also relate to established frameworks of instructional quality in general. Even though such frameworks have a large audience, they are not neutral. As we have seen, educational quality is best understood as a vague concept (Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011) and as tightly bound to questions of value (Biesta, 2007) and stakeholders (Harvey & Greens, 1993). Biesta (2009) challenges us to reflect on the functions of education as a point of departure for discussing educational quality. Looking at our themes, we have seen that they represent complexity along several lines, particularly when it comes to breadth of scope and epistemological thinking. Taking a step back, we may follow up on Biesta's (2009) challenge and ask how our findings relate to his three suggested functions of education (i.e., qualification, socialization, and subjectification).

First, the function of qualification seems well represented. At a surface level, the largest theme, Competence/Learning Support, most obviously relates to this function by highlighting how teachers support broad or more discrete competencies in the subject. However, if we look under the surface, the function is well represented across all themes. Second, socialization also seems to be a prominent function of high-quality instruction according to our themes, through enhancing the value of the mutually dependent relationship between the individual student and the group in Community of Learners. However, this function is also an important dimension in other themes. Engagement may serve as an interesting example here. At a first glance, many of the definitions falling into this theme reflect awareness of the individual's need for choice and the feeling of relevance and as such may witness instruction pointing to education's function as subjectification. Nevertheless, the awareness of students' needs and culture also may be read as a means for

socializing students into specific culture(s) and values. In our data, this is most clearly represented when engagement is a means to communicate the value of reading and to develop students' identity as readers. Third, we may argue that subjectification is represented in several themes, such as the example of Engagement but also in Critical Thinking and Intellectual Challenge. However, when digging more into these themes, this function seems to be represented in a lower voice, serving more as a means to qualification and/or socialization than as taking the role as first violin.

The dominant roles of the functions of qualification and socialization in our data may also be studied considering the question of stakeholders. Raising the question of "Quality for whom?" is considering that the different functions feed different purposes and interests of different stakeholders. Through this lens, it seems like the traditionally important role of LA being a main vehicle for developing good citizens—citizens who incorporate desired values and competencies and who serve the country's needs for a competent working force and a well-functioning democratic society—is still present. Such observations might be of little surprise studying official policies, such as expressed in state standards or formal curriculum (cf. Gourvenec et al., 2020 for an example from Nordic countries) because while democratic society also needs critical thinkers and individuals who question the status quo, highly competent citizens with shared core values may be seen as the basis for a well-functioning and effective society. However, when our data show that even research leans toward qualification and socialization as the main functions when defining high-quality LA instruction, it is worthwhile to ask whether current research also serves the role as being a critical voice (e.g., by asking whether putting the function of subjectification in parenthesis leads to a risk of dehumanizing education).

#### *Implications for the Classroom*

Taken together, the findings of this review suggest that high-quality LA instruction is characterized neither by implementing specific instructional practices nor by the resolution of instructional tensions. Rather, it is characterized by teachers' ongoing navigation of tensions within a complex and living classroom landscape. Specifically, LA teachers are routinely called on to balance competing, and sometimes falsely dichotomized, dimensions of instructional quality, including rigor and relevance, individual competence development and collective meaning making, and disciplinary norms and students' cultural and linguistic resources. An implication for classroom practice, therefore, is not the adoption of singular best practices but the development of pedagogic repertoires that allow teachers to hold these tensions productively. In short, LA instruction is about intentionality and authenticity alongside breadth and depth.

One of these central tensions that surfaced across the reviewed studies was the need to simultaneously support

students' disciplinary competence while fostering a robust community of learners. Rather than treating community building and competence support as competing priorities, the literature suggests that effective LA instruction integrate these dimensions in mutually reinforcing ways. For example, sociocognitive research in middle school English LA classrooms has shown that explicit instruction in comprehension and writing strategies, such as inferencing, concept mapping, and textual analysis, can be embedded within collaborative structures including peer partnerships and student-led discussions (e.g., Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). In these classrooms, community-oriented practices functioned as vehicles through which students practiced and deepened disciplinary thinking. This aligns with long-standing calls in literacy education to conceptualize engagement, motivation, and cognition as interdependent rather than separable features of instruction (Guthrie, 2003).

A related but distinct tension concerns the alignment of academic literacy practices with students' cultural and linguistic identities, particularly in historically marginalized communities. Sociocultural research in secondary English LA classrooms has demonstrated that validating students' funds of knowledge and language practices need not dilute disciplinary rigor; instead, such alignment can serve as a powerful resource for developing analytic competence. For instance, in Lee's (2001) cultural modeling work, teachers leveraged students' familiarity with African American discourse practices to support instruction in literary analysis, including figurative language, symbolism, and irony. Structured tools such as reflective writing, graphic organizers, and guided questioning supported individual sense making, whereas dialogic classroom norms positioned students as co-constructors of meaning. These findings echo broader conversations in LA and literacy education that emphasize culturally sustaining pedagogies and disciplinary literacy as complementary aims.

In summary, these examples underscore a broader implication of our conceptual map for LA teachers. Instructional quality in LA is less about choosing between rigor and responsiveness or structure and dialogue and more about designing learning environments in which these dimensions are intentionally intertwined. Teachers must make intentional, targeted decisions about when to emphasize explicit modeling, when to open space for student-led inquiry, and how to ensure that all students are positioned as capable participants in disciplinary meaning making. For practitioners, this means attending not only to what strategies are used but also to how and why they are orchestrated in relation to students, texts, and instructional goals.

#### *Limitations*

Some limitations shape the scope and interpretation of our findings. First, a search string represents a net with limitations. While aiming to be inclusive with regard to

theoretical stances, research design, and methods, we may assume that some relevant studies were not identified in our searches. However, among the studies identified, we found a large variety that seemingly confirmed that specific theoretical stances or methodologic approaches are not excluded up front.

Second, our inclusion criteria restricted the review to peer-reviewed articles published in English. This language-based limitation may have led to the overrepresentation of studies from predominantly English-speaking and Western countries, particularly North America and parts of Europe and Asia. As highlighted in previous discussions on L1 research (e.g., Araújo et al., 2021), such linguistic filters may inadvertently marginalize diverse international perspectives on instructional quality.

Third, although our conceptual mapping approach sought to identify both explicit and implicit definitions of instructional quality, it is possible that some nuances were lost in the process of synthesis. Although we attempted to preserve contextual meaning through careful coding and collaborative analysis, synthesized definitions may not fully reflect the richness or layered interpretations present in individual studies. This is particularly relevant when interpreting studies where definitions were implicit or inferred from broader instructional aims.

Fourth, despite our aim to be inclusive across the domains of reading, writing, and oracy, our final dataset revealed an uneven distribution. Oracy was particularly underrepresented as a primary domain focus, suggesting a potential gap in the research literature or in its visibility within the databases searched.

Finally, we acknowledge the complexity of evaluating studies that operate from fundamentally different epistemological orientations. Our use of the systems versus linear thinking framework aimed to make these orientations visible, yet categorizing studies along this continuum also risks oversimplification. While this distinction helped us surface patterns and theoretical assumptions, the nuances of each study's approach may not always map neatly onto binary distinctions.

### *Further Directions*

This systematic conceptual mapping review has the potential to inform teacher education, professional development, and future research on LA secondary instruction in various ways. First, it contributes to an ongoing discussion about instructional quality in this centrally positioned subject in education across the globe. Taking Biesta's (2007) stand, such ongoing discussions about educational purposes are a hallmark of a democratic society. Rather than taking our findings as defining instructional quality once and for all—or in essence—the complex landscape we have

identified should inform this ongoing discussion among pre-service teachers, teacher educators, and researchers.

In particular, the vagueness of the concept highlighted in our themes Context Dependent and Instructional Coherence is important when preparing teachers for LA instruction. Often, focusing on more scripted practices or recommending practices dealing with isolated parts of the subject seems more manageable for both teachers and teacher educators. Although teachers can profit from such recommendations, highlighting the need to respond and adapt guidelines to the context and integrate them in a coherent subject is important. Inspired by Wittek and Kvernbekk (2011), as a means for LA teachers to reflect on the intersection between research-based practices and instructional quality, LA teachers may ask such questions as, Under what circumstances is this a good practice? When is this practice not a good practice anymore? and How does this practice relate to the grounding purposes of the LA subjects and the outline of LA in this class?

If we ask ourselves the question, Who is responsible for instructional coherence in the LA secondary subject? we would argue that this complex task should be a shared responsibility among teacher educators, professional-development facilitators, school leaders, and teachers—among others. As teacher educators and professional developers, this implies that not only do we need to teach a coherent LA subject ourselves, but we also should make the question of instructional coherence an explicit one.

As researchers, we also need to consider the complexity of instruction when studying instructional quality. First, when identifying best practices, we should critically evaluate whether and how these practices are rooted in a larger system and take that into account when investigating, evaluating, and communicating them to our readers. In doing this, we should critically raise questions of educational purpose and their relationship to instructional quality.

Based on our findings, we invite future research on LA secondary instructional quality to investigate the relationship between definitions of quality and measures of quality to examine how measures respond to explicit or implicit and often quite complex definitions, for example, whether definitions witnessing systems thinking are mirrored in the measures used. Such investigations may shed further light on discussions about what appropriate validations of instructional quality in LA might look like. Further, systematically examining the relationship between definitions of instructional quality and the conceptualization of literacy, reading, writing, and oracy could bring additional insight into how this school subject is conceptualized in the global research body. Finally, translating the identified definitions of quality into instructional practice, keeping in mind the need for contextual awareness and instructional coherence, should be an ongoing objective for educational researchers.

## Appendix A

### *Search String as Written in the ERIC Database*

(TITLE-ABS-KEY (l1 OR “language art\*” OR “English language arts” OR ela OR “literature course\*” OR “literature instruction” OR “literature education” OR “literature class\*” OR “literature advanced class\*” OR “reading instruction” OR “reading comprehension” OR “non-fiction\*” OR “non-fiction\*” OR “non fiction\*” OR “expository text\*” OR “informational text\*” OR “novel\*” OR “drama\*” OR “poem\*” OR “poetic text\*” OR “short text\*” “literary history” OR “history of literature” OR “literary criticism” OR “literary analysis” OR “literary interpretation” OR “reading strategies” OR “critical reading” OR “composition” OR “writing instruction” OR “writing strategies” OR “grammar instruction” OR “argumentative text\*” OR “narrative text\*” OR “descriptive text\*” OR “essay\*” OR “oral presentation\*” OR “Conversation\*” OR “Discussion\*” OR “Debate\*” OR “rhetoric\*” OR “speech\*” OR “oracy” OR “oral skill\*” OR “English I” OR “English 1” OR “English II” OR “English 2” OR “English III” OR “English 3” OR “English IV” OR “English 4” OR “reading instruction” OR “literary criticism” OR “literary analysis” OR “literature analysis” OR “literature instruction” OR “literature education” OR “teaching literature” OR “history of literature” OR “literary history” OR “reading strategies” OR “writing” OR “writing strategies”

OR “oracy” OR “oral presentation\*” OR “conversation\*” OR “debate\*” OR “speech” OR “public speaking” OR “rhetoric\*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“secondary school” OR “high school” OR “gymnasium” OR “upper secondary” OR “lower secondary school” OR “grade 7” OR “grade 8” OR “grade 9” OR “grade 10” OR “grade 11” OR “grade 12” OR “grade 13” OR “aged 13” OR “aged 14” OR “aged 15” OR “aged 16” OR “aged 17” OR “aged 18” OR “aged 19” OR “13 years” OR “14 years” OR “15 years” OR “16 years” OR “17 years” OR “18 years” OR “19 years” OR “13-year-old” OR “14-year-old” OR “15-year-old” OR “16-year-old” OR “17-year-old” OR “18-year-old” OR “19-year-old”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“instruction” OR “teaching” OR “pedagogy” OR “instructional practice\*” OR “instruction\* approach\*”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“quality” OR “instruction\* quality” OR “education\* quality” OR “quality in instruction” OR “best practice\*” OR “effective practice\*” OR “effective instruction” OR “instructional effectiveness” OR “effectiveness” OR “student growth” OR “student outcome\*” OR “student achievement\*” OR “student impact\*” OR “high\* qualified teacher\*” OR “teacher competence\*” OR “teacher knowledge” OR “content knowledge” OR “value added” OR “value-added\*)) AND NOT TITLE-ABS-KEY (STEM OR “science, technology, engineering and mathematics“ OR “mathematics”) AND PUBYEAR > 1999 AND PUBYEAR < 2023

## Appendix B

### Codebook

TABLE B1.  
*Inclusion Criteria*

Criterion	Code	Description	Example
Publication type	Include	Peer-reviewed research articles	
Publication date	Exclude	Non-peer-reviewed research article, essays, book chapters, books, dissertations	Illustration of a teaching practice (Pollock, 2008)
	Include	2000–2023	
Publication language	Exclude	Before 2000, after 2023	N/A
	Include	English	
Educational level	Exclude	Other languages	Spanish (Galeano-Sánchez & Ochoa-Angrino, 2022)
	Include	Secondary school (grades 7–13)	
Classroom context	Exclude	University/college courses, preschool and primary schools	Grade 5 (Cer, 2019)
	Include	Research occurs in an intact classroom that may be comprised by students with diverse academic needs and language backgrounds. Instruction is led by the LA teacher.	
Type of data	Exclude	The students are a specified group of students (e.g., special education students or language learners) in a separate group or class. The students are in an inclusion-model classroom, but the study only focuses on the particular group of students. Instruction is led by someone other than the LA teacher (e.g., a researcher, teacher student, or librarian).	Small-group out-of-class intervention for nonproficient readers (Burlison & Chave, 2014) Instruction is led by a teacher candidate (Smagorinsky et al., 2013).
	Include	Empirical data of teacher or instruction (e.g., observation, interviews, or surveys)	
	Exclude	The focus of the students' performance is linked to teacher quality or teacher instruction. No empirical instructional data The focus is not on or linked to teacher instruction (e.g., only analysis of student texts).	Technology replaces the teacher. Focus on implementation quality (Lau, 2006) Focus on the algorithm development of a tool (Li, 2022)
	Include	Reports detailed methodologies that could be recreated from the information given.	
Publication quality	Exclude	Does not report detailed methodologies that could be recreated	Analysis is not described (Rosita et al., 2019).

TABLE B2.  
*Definition of Quality*

Code	Description	Example
Implicit	Definition(s) of LA instructional quality is implicitly stated in the text.	“On a surface level focus for teaching revision represents an incomplete approach to teaching writing (Torff, 2011), which does not expose students to the full range of skills and strategies necessary to substantially revise written work. Substantive revision involves diagnosing problems in a piece of writing and then executing solutions (Bartlett, 1982).” (Early & Saily, 2014, p. 209)
Explicit	Definition(s) of LA instructional quality is explicitly stated in the text.	“In the European context, Klieme et al. (2009) presented a theoretical framework of teaching quality. . . . Their model assumes three comparable dimensions, (a) classroom management, clarity, and structure; (b) cognitive activation and deep content; and (c) supportive climate. . . . Complementary to Pianta et al.’s work, research based on this framework has focused mainly on secondary school classrooms. In this study, we primarily refer to Klieme et al.’s (2009) conceptualization.” (Hochweber & Vieluf, 2018, p. 269)

TABLE B3.  
*Themes of Instructional Quality*

Code	Description	Example
Class Structure	Instruction emphasizing effective classroom management and clear organization of learning activities and routines	Flipped classroom with teacher support (Florence & Kolski, 2021) Teacher-directed instruction (Hu & Wang, 2022)
Community of Learners	Instruction emphasizing peer collaboration and mutual support, including valuing each student’s contributions (This can involve opportunities for student autonomy, distributed authority, and inviting student perspectives.)	Students sharing their interpretation of text (Katsuta & Sawada, 2021) Help students translate their cultural discourse and knowledge to literary discourse (Lee, 2001)
Competence Support/Learning Support	Instruction that explicitly supports student learning, for example, through modeling, explicit strategy instruction, frequent feedback, and repeated guided practice	Strategies of handling multiple sources and evaluating information (Bråten et al., 2019) Explicit writing instruction (Howell et al., 2017)
Context Dependent	Instruction adapted to contextual factors, including teacher values and beliefs, local conditions, and the collective needs and characteristics of the student group	Quality is plural (Newell et al., 2014) Quality needs to be explored connected to the context/ quality is dynamic (Langer, 2001)
Engagement	Instruction designed to foster student motivation and agency, for instance, by offering relevant text choices, acknowledging student interests, and ensuring task legitimacy	Student choice of reading material (Katsuta & Sawada, 2021) Acknowledging students’ out-of-school literary competencies (Lee, 2001)
Inclusive text definition	Instruction intentionally incorporating a diverse range of text genres, types, and modalities in reading and/or writing activities	Extended definition of text (Hobbs & Frost, 2003) Integration of digital literacy (Howell et al., 2017)
Instructional Coherence	Instruction demonstrating clear alignment and consistency across activities, subdisciplines, or skills within the domain of language arts	Teachers’ values, instructional goals, and instructional strategies are in alignment (Newell et al., 2014) Instruction should be integrated throughout the day (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014)
Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking	Instruction that engages students in higher-order cognitive processes, such as critical thinking, evaluation, problem solving, and completing challenging tasks	Multiple viewpoints and cognitive flexibility (Boyd & Ikpeze, 2007) Identifying and acting on problems (Early & Saily, 2014)
Student Centered	Instruction adapted and responsive to the individual needs, interests, and abilities of students	Adapted/responsive instruction (Agee, 2000) Supportive climate (Hochweber & Vieluf, 2018)

TABLE B4.  
*Conceptual Orientations*

Code	Description	Example
Systems-Oriented Thinking	Dynamic interaction among multiple factors is a prerequisite for instructional quality.	Focus on supporting reading through a whole-school program over time with a reading culture rooted in all levels of school and instruction (Francois, 2013)
Linear Thinking	Discrete or decontextualized characteristics of instruction are indicative of instructional quality.	Focus on including a broader set of texts in LA instruction, without addressing how to work with them in class (Hobbs & Frost, 2003)

## Appendix C

Overview of Included Reports with Definitions of *Quality*, *Theme*, and *Domain*

Study reference	Definition	Synthesized definition of quality	Theme	Domain
Agee (2000)	Explicit Systems thinking	Quality is plural Adapted/responsive instruction Student centered	Context Dependent Student Centered Student Centered	Reading
Alfassi (2004)	Implicit Systems thinking	Higher-order questions lead to integration of background knowledge	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking	Reading
Alston and Brown (2015)	Explicit Systems thinking	High-quality feedback Intellectually challenging assignments	Competence/Learning Support Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking	Writing
Applebee et al. (2003)	Implicit Systems thinking	Examine multiple perspectives Student voice High-quality discussion	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Community of Learners Community of Learners	Reading, writing, oracy
Boyd & Ikpeze (2007)	Implicit Systems thinking	A repertoire of reading strategies Multiple viewpoints and cognitive flexibility	Competence/Learning Support Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking	Reading
Bråten et al. (2019)	Implicit Systems thinking	Learning cycle Strategies of handling multiple sources and evaluating information	Instructional Coherence Competence/Learning Support	Reading, writing
Carbonaro & Gamoran (2002)	Explicit Systems thinking	Strategies of handling multiple sources and evaluating information Student voices Student choice of text Instructional coherence (reading, writing, discussion)	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Community of Learners Engagement Instructional Coherence	Reading, writing, oracy
Casado-Ledesma et al. (2021)	Implicit Systems thinking	Challenging/complex tasks Facilitating critical thinking, reasoning, perspective taking, and drawing conclusions	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Competence/learning Support	Writing, oracy
Early & Saïdy (2014)	Implicit Systems thinking	Facilitating critical thinking, reasoning, perspective taking, and drawing conclusions Substantive revision strategies	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Competence/Learning Support	Writing
Florence & Kolski (2021)	Implicit Systems thinking	Identifying and acting on problems Flipped classroom with teacher support Peer support	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Class Structure Community of Learners	Writing
Francois (2013)	Implicit Systems thinking	Small-group collaborative writing Community of practice of reading	Community of Learners Community of Learners Community of Learners	Reading
Gilbert (2018)	Implicit Systems thinking	Collaborative learning Adaptive to the context Responsive instruction	Community of Learners Context Dependent Student Centered	Reading
Guthrie & Klauda (2014)	Explicit Systems thinking	Emphasis of collaboration Competence support (competence, feedback, level of text, and goal setting) Connect texts to students' lives Emphasizing importance of reading to communicate the value of reading	Community of Learners Competence/Learning Support Engagement Engagement Engagement	Reading
Hébert (2008)	Implicit Systems thinking	Providing choice (books, topics, learning formats) Instruction should be integrated throughout the day. Distribute authority/balance structure and freedom Peer teaching to internalize reading strategies	Instructional Coherence Community of Learners Community of Learners	Reading, oracy

(continued)

APPENDIX C. (CONTINUED)

Study reference	Definition	Synthesized definition of quality	Theme	Domain
Hill (2013)	Implicit Systems thinking	Culturally relevant pedagogy Maintaining high expectations for all cultural groups Maintaining high expectations for all cultural groups	Context Dependent Engagement	Reading, oracy
Hobbs & Frost (2003)	Implicit Linear thinking	Extended definition of text Valuing visual and electronic media	Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Inclusive Text Definition	Reading, writing
Hochweber & Vieluf (2018)	Explicit Systems thinking	Classroom management, clarity, and structure Cognitive activation and deep content Supportive climate	Inclusive Text Definition Class Structure Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Student Centered	Reading
Howell et al. (2017)	Implicit Linear thinking	Explicit writing instruction Integration of digital literacy	Competence/Learning Support Inclusive Text Definition	Writing
Hu & Wang (2022)	Explicit Systems thinking	Explicit instruction that connects conventional and digital writing forms Managing the classroom climate Teacher-directed instruction Providing teacher feedback Reading skill and strategy instruction Demonstrating teacher interest Teacher's stimulation of reading engagement Teaching of digital skills Adaptive instruction Providing adequate learning time Providing support as needed Teacher as facilitator Readers questioning literature Students sharing their interpretation of text Combine direct instruction on close reading with independent reading Supporting a large reading volume Focus on developing reading motivation and reading interest Student choice of reading material Frequent writing Use of evidence-based writing practices Differentiated instruction for writing—particularly for students who need extra support Quality needs to be explored and connected to the context/quality that is dynamic	Instructional Coherence Class Structure Class Structure Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Engagement Engagement Inclusive Text Definition Student Centered Student Centered Student Centered Community of Learners Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Community of Learners Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Engagement Engagement Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Student Centered Context Dependent	Reading Reading
Janssen et al. (2009)	Explicit Systems thinking		Competence/Learning Support	Writing
Katsuta & Sawada (2021)	Implicit Systems thinking		Competence/Learning Support Student Centered Context Dependent	Writing
Kiuhara et al. (2009)	Implicit Systems thinking		Engagement Engagement Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Student Centered Context Dependent	Reading, writing
Langer (2001)	Implicit Systems thinking		Engagement Engagement Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Student Centered Context Dependent	Reading, writing
Lau & Chan (2007)	Implicit Systems thinking	Direct instruction on comprehension strategies for lower-achieving students Teacher modeling and teacher support of comprehension strategies for lower-achieving students Focusing more on higher-order comprehension than on decoding for lower-achieving students Low-achieving students actively constructing their reading comprehension	Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking	Reading

(continued)

## APPENDIX C. (CONTINUED)


Study reference	Definition	Synthesized definition of quality	Theme	Domain
Lee (2001)	Implicit Systems thinking	Help students translate their cultural discourse and knowledge to literary discourse Explicit instruction on literary texts for underachieving students Acknowledging students' out-of-school literary competencies Expecting that response to literature includes a personal, empathetic response as well as a response to issues of form and structure Understanding students' text cultures and competence Classrooms should include much social interaction during the writing processes. Writing instruction should not focus on discrete skills but on the intersection of print and images. Writing instruction can occur through a lens of critical literacy, particularly focusing on power of language, text, and discourse. High-quality reading instruction should include explicit reading comprehension strategies instruction. Allows time and supports students use of self-regulation Teacher explicitly models and students follow the model. Students use skills and strategies independently. High-quality writing instruction should follow a sequential instructional process. Sustained and frequent practice with reading Scaffolding students' comprehension, including explicit strategy instruction Student choice for motivation Teachers use assessment to inform instruction. Vocabulary should be intentionally and explicitly taught in secondary LA instruction.	Community of Learners Competence/Learning Support Engagement Engagement Engagement Community of Learners Inclusive Text Definition Intellectual Challenge/Critical Thinking Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Competence/Learning Support Engagement Instructional Coherence Competence/Learning Support	Reading, oracy
Lesley et al. (2021)	Implicit Systems thinking			Writing
Magnusson et al. (2019)	Explicit Linear thinking			Reading
Müldür & Çevik (2021)	Implicit Systems thinking			Writing
Muñoz (2007)	Implicit Systems thinking			Reading, writing
Murphy et al. (2017)	Implicit Linear thinking			Oracy
Newell et al. (2014)	Implicit Systems thinking			Writing
Nwosu et al. (2021)	Explicit Linear thinking			Reading, oracy
Okkinga et al. (2021)	Implicit Linear thinking			Reading
Olson et al. (2017)	Implicit Linear thinking			Writing
Olson et al. (2020)	Implicit Linear thinking			Writing
Pantaleo (2019)	Implicit Systems thinking			Reading, writing
Peskin et al. (2010)	Implicit Linear thinking			Reading
Sak & Oz (2010)	Implicit Linear thinking			Writing
Spörer & Brunstein (2009)	Implicit Linear thinking			Reading, oracy

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## Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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