

The Functions and Mediational Features of Instructional Directives in College English Classroom

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Abstract: *With the continuous development of modern educational technology and methodology, the role of teachers in the classroom is also gradually changing. Among them, the instructional directives of teachers, as a tool for classroom management and student guidance, are increasingly valued by educational scholars and practitioners. This article mainly focuses on college English classrooms, deeply analyzing the functional and mediational features of teachers' instructional directives, as well as various factors that affect their choices. In addition, through a detailed interpretation of actual teaching cases, we further reveal the key role that teachers' instructional directives play in effectively promoting student learning, managing the classroom, and establishing good relationships with students. The research results not only provide valuable references for English teaching, but also provide useful insights for educational practices in other disciplines and fields.*

Keywords: *Instructional Directives; College English; Classroom Interaction; Teaching Strategies; Student Participation*

1. Introduction

In the field of education, classroom interaction has always been a core issue, and among them, the teachers' instructional directives are particularly crucial. These seemingly simple sentences are actually a bridge for communication between teachers and students, and a means to initiate, guide, or adjust learning activities. However, despite its undeniable importance, there has been little in-depth exploration on how to effectively use and optimize instructional directives. The purpose of this article is to deeply analyze the instructional directives used by teachers in college English classrooms, explore its logical, functional, and influencing factors, and reveal its application and effectiveness in actual teaching through case analysis. The author hopes that through such exploration, more insights can be provided for educators on how to better communicate with students and guide them, thereby promoting further improvement in classroom teaching.

2. Research Status

With the deepening exploration in the fields of education and linguistics, the role of classroom instructional directives in effective teaching interaction has gradually attracted the attention of researchers. Previous studies have mainly focused on teachers' teaching strategies and methods, but as Nunan (1991) pointed out, teachers' discourse, especially instructional directives, play a crucial role in language classrooms, particularly in second or foreign language teaching.[1]

Firstly, the instructional directives of teachers are regarded as an important means of classroom management. How to provide instructional directives effectively and clearly, as well as how to ensure that students understand and follow them, is crucial in the teaching process. Pica, Young, and Doughty (1987) emphasized that clear and accurate instructional directives have a direct impact on the success of students' participation in classroom tasks.[2] Secondly, instructional directives are also considered a key factor affecting students' learning motivation. Dörnyei and Csizér's (1998) study showed that when teachers' instructional directives include positive feedback and encouragement, students' learning motivation and engagement increase.[3] In addition, considering language teaching in a multicultural context, teachers' instructional directives are also influenced by cultural differences. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) found that students from different cultural backgrounds may have different interpretations of the same instructional directives, which suggests that teachers need to consider students' cultural backgrounds when giving instructional directives.[4]

Overall, as emphasized by Walsh (2006), current research has recognized the importance of instructional directives in teaching, but more in-depth research is still needed to explore its applications and effects in different educational, cultural, and disciplinary contexts.[5]

3. The Functions of Instructional Directives in College English Classroom

Instructional directives are a powerful assistant for every teacher, especially in college English classrooms, as it can shape and guide the classroom atmosphere, promote student participation and learning. Next, we will provide a detailed explanation of the five core functions of these instructional directives.

1) Initiating function

The instructional directives of initiating function are usually used at the beginning of an activity or when changing topics, aiming to activate students' attention. For example, a teacher may say, "Now, let's move on to the next topic" or "Next, I'd like you all to focus on the second paragraph of this passage". This initiating way provides students with clear direction and sets a new learning framework for them.

2) Management function

Effective management of classroom order, time, and student behavior is the key responsibility of every teacher. Through instructional directives of management functions, such as "Please settle down and pay attention" or "We have a tight schedule today, so let's stay on track", teachers can ensure the class goes smoothly and maximize learning effectiveness.

3) Guidance function

Through the instructional directives of guidance function, teachers guide students' learning direction and key points. For example, "This point is crucial, please take a note." or "I want everyone to think about this particular idea." These instructional directives aim to stimulate students' thinking, guide them to deeply understand and explore the learning content.

4) Feedback function

Effective feedback is an important component of the learning process. By using instructional directives such as "Well done, that's exactly right!", "You did a great job" or "You're on the right track, but consider this..." Teachers provide students with clear evaluations to help them understand their strengths and areas for improvement.

5) Social function

In order to establish a positive classroom atmosphere, teachers need to build good relationships with students. Instructional directives for social functions, such as "I appreciate all your efforts today" or "It's always a pleasure to see your enthusiasm," can demonstrate the teacher's care and support, thereby enhancing students' sense of belonging.

Based on the above, we can see that each function of instructional directives has its irreplaceable value in college English classrooms. Teachers need to flexibly apply these instructional directives based on the actual situation in the classroom to ensure the effective achievement of teaching objectives.

4. The mediational features of instructional directives in college English classroom

In college English classrooms, the teachers' instructional directives serve as a bridge, connecting teachers and students, ensuring the transmission and understanding of teaching content. These instructional directives have a series of mediational features, making them particularly crucial in the teaching process. We will discuss in detail these features and their manifestations in English teaching.

1) Simplicity

Teachers' instructional directives usually pursue simplicity and conciseness, which help to quickly convey information and ensure that students can quickly grasp key points. For example, a teacher may say "Listen up!" or "Turn to page 23" when guiding students to do a certain activity. Such simple and direct sentences can quickly attract students' attention and lay the foundation for future learning activities.

2) Clarity

Clarity is another key feature in instructional directives. To ensure that students can accurately understand and follow instructions, teachers need to use clear language structures and clear intentions. For example, indicating "Highlight the main idea in the passage" is more explicit than "Do something with the main idea", as the former clearly tells students the specific actions that need to be taken.

3) Repeatability

In English teaching, repetition is a common and effective strategy, especially in key concepts or instructions. By repeatedly emphasizing, teachers can ensure that students better understand and remember. For example, when introducing a new vocabulary, the teacher may say, "The word is complementary. Can everyone say it with me? Complementary. One more time, complementary." This repetition method helps students better absorb and remember new knowledge.

4) Rhetorical devices

In order to make the classroom livelier and more interesting, teachers often use various rhetorical devices. Questioning is a common form, such as "What do you think this word means in this context?" Through questioning, teachers can stimulate students' thinking and encourage them to participate in discussions. In addition, metaphor is also a commonly used rhetorical device, for example: "Learning a new language is like building a bridge to another culture." Through metaphor, teachers can help students better understand abstract or complex concepts.

5) Affective support

Affective support in instructional directives can enhance students' learning motivation and establish a positive learning atmosphere. For example, when a student answers a question correctly, the teacher may say, "Brilliant job!" or "I'm proud of your hard work!" These affective supporting feedbacks can encourage students and boost their confidence.

In summary, the mediational features of instructional directives used by college English teachers ensure the effective conduct of teaching activities. These features not only help students better understand and absorb knowledge, but also provide support for establishing a positive and harmonious learning environment.

5. Factors affecting teachers' choice of instructional directives

Instructional directives are crucial to classroom teaching. However, the choice of words used by teachers when giving instructions is not random, but is influenced by many internal and external factors. We will explore in detail these key factors that affect teachers' choice of instructional directives.

1) Teacher's personality, experience, and educational background

Teachers have their own unique educational philosophy and teaching style, which is largely influenced by their personality, past experiences, and educational background. For example, a teacher who grew up in a strict educational environment may prefer to use imperative language such as "Paraphrase this sentence."; and a teacher who encourages students to actively participate may say, "How about this one? Can we try it?". In addition, experienced teachers are often better at using concise and clear instructional directives because they understand what kind of instructional directives are easier for students to accept and understand.

2) Students' language proficiency, background, and learning attitude

The background of students also greatly influences teachers' choices of instructional directives. For beginners or students with lower English proficiency, teachers may need to use simpler and more direct language. For example, "Look.", "Listen.", "Repeat." For advanced students, teachers can use more complex sentence structures and vocabulary, such as "Could you possibly analyze this passage for me?" If students come from different cultural backgrounds, teachers may need to adjust their language and instructional directives to ensure they are culturally sensitive and appropriate. In addition, students' learning attitudes - their enthusiasm, participation, and feedback - can also affect how teachers give instructional directives.

3) The content and structure of the textbook

Textbooks are another important factor in teachers' selection of instructional directives. A clear and structured textbook may require more direct and simple instructional directives, such as "Turn to Unit 2." A textbook that encourages exploration and discussion may lead teachers to use more open and guiding

languages, such as "What are your thoughts on this section?" The content in textbooks - their difficulty, topics, and styles - can also affect how teachers interact with students and guide them.

4) Teaching methods and strategies

Different teaching methods and strategies require teachers to use different instructional directives. For example, task-based language teaching requires students to use language in real-life situations, so the teacher's instructional directives may be more practical and specific, such as "Work in pairs and role play a teacher-student conversation." In more traditional lecture based classrooms, teachers may use more instructional directives such as "Listen carefully to me!"

In short, teachers are influenced by many factors when giving instructional directives. Understanding these factors not only helps us gain a deeper understanding of teachers' decision-making processes, but also enables teachers to choose and use instructional directives more effectively to promote students' learning.

6. Case Analysis

Case 1: Parents' Concerns: Emotions and Interpretations in Dialogue

Teacher: Now I want you to look at the dialogue on the paper. While reading, highlight the main points. OK?

Students: OK.

Teacher: Just like the conversation between Suyuan and her daughter. Highlight the parts where Suyuan expresses her concerns and her daughter's responses. That's your main focus. Let's try, shall we?

Student 1: Suyuan is worried because her daughter could not understand her language and traditional Chinese culture. And her daughter feels it is a kind of interference and she doesn't like it.

Student 2: Suyuan's expectations and admirations for her daughter is covered in harsh criticism and strictness. She loves her daughter in Chinese way, but her daughter doesn't know, doesn't understand her.

Case analysis:

In the clip, the teacher first gives a clear instructional directive in turn 1: have the students read the dialogue on the paper and highlight the main points. The purpose of this instructional directive is to enable students to identify and emphasize key parts of the dialogue while reading. The students respond with a simple "OK" indicating that they roughly understand the instructional directive. However, in order to ensure that students not only understand the task, but also know how to execute it, the teacher provides a more specific guidance in turn 3, pointing out the two main roles in the dialogue - Suyuan and her daughter, clarifies the parts that students should pay attention to. This clear guidance provides students with a specific reference framework, making task execution more precise. From the feedback from student 2 and student 3, we can see that they both successfully capture the key information in the dialogue according to the teacher's guidance. This indicates that by providing clear instructional directives and demonstrations, teachers can help students better understand and execute tasks. Ur (1996) mentioned that teachers should provide students with more opportunities to receive and understand instructional directives when giving them, which is well reflected in the clip.[6] The teacher not only gives clear instructional directives, but also further clarifies the content and format of the task through examples, ensuring that students can effectively perform the task. In general, a successful classroom instructional directive should not only be concise and to the point, but also take into account students' understanding ability and the need to perform tasks. By providing clear instructional directives and relevant examples, teachers can ensure that students can effectively understand and execute tasks, thereby achieving teaching objectives.

Case 2: Trends in the Graph: Interpretation and Prediction

Teacher: Ok, everyone, now let's look at this graph. It shows the percentage of people aged over 60 in China. Now, based on this graph, can you predict next year's trend?

Students: (Murmurs)

Teacher: I'll give you a hint. Focus on the pattern. Is there a rise or drop? Do you notice any regularity?

Student 1: It seems like the percentage have been increasing every 10 years.

Teacher: Good observation! Now, based on this pattern, what would be your prediction for the next year?

Student 2: If the trend continues, the percentage will increase next year.

Teacher: Exactly! Good job. Remember, when interpreting graphs, always look for patterns and trends. They give you a clue about what might happen next.

Case analysis:

In the clip, the teacher guides students to interpret and analyze the graph by using instructional directives. In turn 1, the teacher first asks the students to focus their attention on the graph and asks questions to stimulate their thinking. The instructional directives here help locate students' attention and set goals for subsequent exploration. The "hint" in turn 3 is used to further guide students to pay attention to the pattern in the graph for prediction. Here, the teacher does not provide a direct answer, but instead provides a method to guide students on how to observe and interpret the data. Student 1 presents his/her own observation in turn 4, from which we can see that the teacher's instructional directives successfully help students lock in key information. In turn 5, the teacher further challenges the students to make predictions based on observed patterns. Student 2's response demonstrates that he/she has mastered the parsing skills, which is also acknowledged by the teacher in turn 7. The teacher's final words emphasize the key information to be sought when interpreting the graph, providing students with a specific learning strategy. In summary, through instructional directives, the teacher successfully guides students to observe, analyze, and predict information based on the graph. At the same time, this interactive approach also encourages students to actively participate, think, and communicate effectively with the teacher. Ur (1996) mentioned that effective teaching instructional directives are not only about telling students "what to do", but more importantly, about helping them understand "why to do" and "how to do". [6] The interaction in this case reflects this concept, where the teacher not only guides students on how to proceed, but more importantly, teaches them a method and strategy.

7. Conclusion

With the deepening of research in the field of education, the use of instructional directives by teachers in the classroom has become an important focus that cannot be ignored. As discussed in this article, teachers' instructional directives are not only related to teaching management, but also involve students' cognitive and emotional responses, directly affecting learning outcomes and motivation.

Through in-depth analysis of the two cases, we can see the power of instructional directives and its application in teaching. How teachers can give clear, explicit, and effective instructional directives, and how they can use examples to help students understand and execute them, are all key to successful teaching. In the case of "Parents' Concerns: Emotions and Interpretations in Dialogue", we observe how the teacher guides students to focus on the core content of the dialogue and help them grasp the main information in the conversation. In the case of "Trends in the Graph: Interpretation and Prediction", the teacher provides templates to help students clearly understand the task requirements and encourages them to describe the graph in their own way. Both cases fully demonstrate the importance of instructional directives and their application in teaching. However, we also need to recognize that instructional directives do not exist in isolation, they are embedded in the entire teaching environment. Based on the present study, we hope to evoke the teachers' awareness of seeking and making use of a great deal of instructional directives with a variety of expressions to have the students acquire easily the foreign language and to cultivate their English level. A successful teacher not only provides clear instructional directives, but also makes adjustments based on students' reactions, establishes emotional connections with them, and encourages them to participate in interactions. When necessary, teachers can explain their instructional directives. They can also repeat the key points for several times to make the directives clear and comprehensible. Checking helps to make sure students understand their intentions. In addition, teachers need to regularly reflect on themselves and continuously improve their instructional directives to make them more in line with the actual needs of students. As mediators, teachers need to create a relevant context to make students comprehend their instructional directives. When necessary, guiding students with some strategies and providing them with some resources to make them better implement the directives. Sometimes giving affective support through instructional directives is essential to boost their confidence. Ur's (1996) viewpoint reminds us that in order to make instructional directives more effective, teachers not only need to provide clear guidance, but also give students sufficient opportunities to understand and digest these instructional directives. [6] This understanding is not achieved overnight, but needs to be gradually established through continuous interaction between teachers and students.

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that although instructional directives play an important role in teaching, the ultimate goal is still to promote students' deep learning. Only when students truly understand and internalize the teacher's instructional directives, can they better participate in classroom activities and achieve deeper learning. In short, through in-depth research on the instructional directives used by college English teachers, we can not only better understand its role in teaching, but also provide more suggestions and strategies for teachers on how to improve the effectiveness of classroom instructions. But the study is a small-scale study, it cannot reflect all the features of the teachers' instructional directives. In the present study, the author thinks that clear and simple instructional directives can lead to students' comprehension. But it is still unclear to what degree such instructional directives might play in task comprehension and performance. The author hopes this article can provide useful references for teachers and researchers, and promote further development of educational research and practice.

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