

# The Impact of College English Teachers' Instructional Directives on Students' Understanding and Completion of Tasks

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**Abstract:** *This article aims to explore the impact of teacher's instructional directives on students' task understanding and completion in college English classrooms. By analyzing examples of instructional directives in English textbooks, it is found that instructional directives play a key role in improving students' task completion efficiency and learning quality. The article first introduces the definition, importance, and theoretical basis of instructional directives, then delves into the application of instructional directives in college English textbooks, and finally proposes some suggestions to optimize the use of instructional directives and improve teaching effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** *College English, Instructional Directives, Student Tasks, English Textbooks*

## 1. Introduction

In college English classrooms, teachers' instructional directives are an important component of learning and teaching. Teachers use instructional directives to guide students in completing various learning tasks, such as listening exercises, reading comprehension, writing, and oral expression. However, inappropriate instructional directives may lead to students misunderstanding of the task, reducing their learning motivation and enthusiasm. Therefore, studying the impact of teachers' instructional directives on students' understanding and completion of tasks is of great significance. This article will first introduce the definition and importance of instructional directives, and then explore its application and influence in practical teaching by analyzing examples of instructional directives in college English textbooks. Finally, the article will provide some suggestions to help teachers better use instructional directives and improve teaching effectiveness.

## 2. Overview of Instructional Directives

### 2.1. Definition and Background of Instructional Directives

Instructional directives are crucial to college English learning, which are used to express or understand specific tasks, instructions, or requirements. In college English learning, students need to master and use various directive expressions in order to effectively communicate and express their ideas in the classroom, exams, and daily communication. The importance of instructional directives lies not only in helping students understand and follow the requirements of teachers or examiners, but also in improving the quality of academic and social communication, cultivating students' communication skills, and laying a solid foundation for their future career development.

### 2.2. The Importance of Instructional Directives

In college English learning, instructional directives play a crucial role in the academic environment. Students need to be able to understand and follow the instructional directives given by teachers in class, which may involve completing specific tasks, reading specific materials, or participating in discussions. In addition, in academic writing, students also need to master instructional directives to ensure that they accurately answer questions and articulate arguments. If students cannot effectively understand and apply instructional directives, they may lose points in class and affect their academic performance. Therefore, mastering instructional directives is crucial for achieving success in the academic environment of universities. [1]

In addition to its importance in the academic environment, instructional directives also have a profound impact on students' social communication and career development. In daily life, people often need to follow various instructional directives, whether it's working with colleagues or participating in activities in social situations. If students cannot effectively understand and apply instructional directives, they may feel confused or embarrassed in social interactions, which can affect the establishment of interpersonal relationships. In addition, good communication and understanding skills are key to success in career development. Mastering instructional directives can help students better understand their boss's instructions, collaborate with colleagues, and communicate effectively with clients or partners in their work. Therefore, instructional directives also have a positive impact on students' social and career development.

### ***2.3. Theoretical Basis of Instructional Directives***

Firstly, social interaction theory. Social interaction theory emphasizes that language is a product of social interaction, and language acquisition can only be truly achieved through social interaction. This theory provides a theoretical basis for the application of instructional directives in college English learning. Social interaction theory suggests that by interacting with others, students can gain practical language input and feedback, thereby improving their language skills. In college English learning, teachers can use the principles of social interaction theory and instructional directives to guide students to participate in classroom interactions. For example, teachers can use open-ended questions to encourage students to participate in discussions, use words of praise and encouragement to boost students' confidence, and use instructional directives to clarify tasks and goals, such as "Please discuss the main points of this article" or "Please complete this project in group. [2]

Secondly, comprehensible input. Since in college English classrooms it is necessary for the students to comprehend completely what the teachers' instructional directives mean. Then a question of how to make the instructional directives (input) understood by students will be raised for the teachers. 'Input' in language learning literature refers to the language which the learners hear or read, that is, the language samples to which they are exposed. [3] 'Comprehensible input' refers to the target language samples that make sense, i.e. are understandable, to English learners. How to achieve comprehensibility? As for college English classroom, teachers should try out to provide the students with a sufficient amount of meaning-focused and comprehensible input. Here, we related the teachers' instructional directives to the teaching input. The ultimate purpose of teachers' instructional directives is to make students understand what they are required. Thereby, the degree of instructional directives might be unnecessarily too high to be understood for the language learners. In college English classrooms, in order to reduce the degree of complexity in listening and avoid the ambiguity of comprehension to save the limited class time, it seems necessary for the teachers to transfer sufficient and comprehensible instructional directives so that a good pedagogical effect can be achieved.

Thirdly, theory of pragmatics. Theory of pragmatics focuses on the usage and meaning of language, with a particular emphasis on the communicative function of language. In college English learning, theory of pragmatics provides a foundation for the effective use of instructional directives. Theory of pragmatics holds that language is not only a tool for transmitting information, but also a key element of social interaction. In the classroom, teachers can apply the principles of theory of pragmatics to use instructional directives to ensure that their instructions are clear and concise, avoid ambiguity, and encourage effective communication. For example, teachers can use polite expressions to make requests, such as "Can you share your viewpoint?" This expression is more helpful in establishing a positive learning atmosphere. In addition, teachers can also teach students social norms related to language, helping them better understand and apply instructional directives.

## **3. The Application of Instructional Directives in College English Textbooks**

### ***3.1. The Application of Instructional Directives in Learning Activities***

In college English textbooks, instructional directives are often used for learning activities to guide students on how to complete specific tasks. This helps students understand and follow the requirements in the textbooks, improving their learning outcomes, such as:

Reading comprehension tasks: textbooks may include articles and then require students to answer a series of questions. Instructional directives such as "Read the passage and answer the following questions." can tell students what to do.

Essay exercises: when textbooks require students to write articles, instructional directives such as "Write an essay on the topic of Square Dance Disturbance" can guide students to choose a topic and start writing.

Group discussion: sometimes, textbooks encourage students to engage in group discussions. Instructional directives such as "Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of e-book with your group members" can guide students in engaging in dialogue. These instructional directives help students clarify tasks and expectations, making their English learning more targeted and efficient.

### ***3.2. The Application of Instructional Directives in Oral Communication***

Oral communication is an important aspect in college English textbooks. Instructional directives play a key role in this regard, helping students better understand and apply oral skills. The following examples will illustrate:

Role playing: a common oral practice is role-playing. Textbooks may include instructional directives such as "Role play a customer and a salesperson in a shopping mall." Such instructional directives can guide students to participate in actual conversations and improve their oral expression skills.

Telephone communication: instructional directives can help students practice telephone communication skills. For example, "Make a phone call to schedule a meeting with your classmate." This instructional directive can encourage students to use appropriate language and politeness for phone communication.

Debate competition: in some college English courses, debate competition is a common activity. Instructional directives such as "Debating — Arguments for or against giving first priority to economic status in choosing a spouse" can help students clarify the topic and task of the debate. Through these oral exercises, students can participate in oral communication with greater confidence, improving their oral fluency and expressing abilities.

### ***3.3. The Application of Instructional Directives in Writing Tasks***

Writing plays a crucial role in college English education, and the application of instructional directives in writing tasks helps students understand writing requirements and engage in creativity. Here are some specific examples:

Thesis requirements: when textbooks require students to write a paper, instructional directives such as "Write a research paper on the impact of social media on society." This type of instructional directives can help students clarify the topic and scope of the paper.

Writing Plan: during the writing process, students need to develop a writing plan. Instructional directives such as "Create an outline for your essay with an introduction, body paragraphs, and a conclusion." These instructional directives can guide students in organizing their thinking.

Revision and editing: textbooks may include tasks of revision and editing. Instructional directives such as "Revise your essay to improve clarity and coherence." can guide students in improving their writing. These instructional directives help students maintain direction during the writing process and ensure that their works meet the requirements.

### ***3.4. The Application of Instructional Directives in the Cultivation of Listening Skills***

The cultivation of listening skills is equally important in college English courses. Instructional directives help students better understand and respond to listening materials. Here are some specific examples:

Listening exercises: textbooks may include listening exercises with instructional directives such as "Listen to the audio recording and answer the questions that follow." These instructional directives can guide students in listening and extracting information.

Listening notes: students may need to take notes during the listening process. Instructional directives such as "Take notes while listening to the lecture on environmental conservation." can help students focus their attention.

Listening feedback: textbooks can also include listening feedback tasks, with instructional directives such as "Discuss the main points of the interview you just listened to with your partner." These

instructional directives can encourage students to share the information they have heard. Through these instructional directives, students can better utilize listening materials and improve their listening skills.

### ***3.5. The Application of Instructional Directives in Autonomous Learning***

Autonomous learning is a key aspect of college English education, and the application of instructional directives in this area helps students to self-manage their learning process. Specifically:

**Learning schedule:** students can use instructional directives to plan their learning schedule. For example, the instructional directives "Create a study schedule for the upcoming exams." can help students schedule their study time.

**Independent research:** Sometimes, textbooks may encourage students to engage in independent research projects. Instructional directives such as "Choose a topic of interest and conduct an independent research." Such instructional directives can encourage students to actively learn.

**Self-assessment:** textbooks can also help students assess their learning progress on their own. Instructional directives such as "Assess your language skills and set goals for improvement." can guide students to reflect on their performance. These instructional directives encourage students to actively participate in autonomous learning, improve their learning outcomes and self-management abilities.

It can be seen that the application of instructional directives in college English textbooks is of great significance, which can help students clarify tasks, improve oral and written communication skills, effectively write, enhance listening skills, and promote autonomous learning. Through these specific examples, it can be seen that instructional directives have various applications in the field of education, which help students better understand and apply English, improve their academic achievements and career development prospects. As to the instructional directives applied in different learning tasks in college English textbooks, teachers should make full use of them to support students' learning and growth, to help them successfully understand and complete tasks.

## **4. Optimization Strategies for the Use of Instructional Directives by College English Teachers**

Sometimes being an independent learner, sense of competence is inevitable. If learning is to be successful, it is crucial that teachers establish in their classrooms a climate where confidence is built up, where students can bravely express themselves in English, where students can use the language without embarrassment. Teachers can optimize strategies for their use of instructional directives to achieve such effectiveness.

### ***4.1. Clearly Defining Teaching Objectives and Expressing Them Clearly***

The first step in optimizing instructional directives is to clarify teaching objectives and convey them through clear expression. The ability to provide clear instructional directives is an essential management skill for all teachers. Nunan and Lamb suggested that in second and foreign language classrooms where the teacher chooses to give instructional directives in the target language, clear instructional directives are critical to the success of classroom tasks and exercises. [4] Teachers should carefully plan before the start of the course and ensure that they have clear teaching objectives and learning tasks. Once these goals are clear, they should be conveyed to students in concise and clear language. In this process, teachers need to pay attention to the following key points: firstly, try to avoid complex sentence structures and lengthy texts, use simple and direct language, and ensure that students can easily understand. Simple instructional directives really have some effects on students' task comprehension and performance. The simpler the instructional directives are, the better the students' task comprehension and performance, no matter he is a higher achiever or a lower achiever of English learning. Secondly, emphasizing key words in instructional directives helps students better understand the requirements of the task. If necessary, teachers can choose to repeat the instructional directives several times. Ur suggested that when giving effective instructional directives teachers should present the information more than once for learners' attention wanders occasionally, and it is important to give them more than one chance to comprehend what they have to do. [5] Teachers should avoid using ambiguous words and phrases, such as "maybe," to ensure that students do not confuse or misunderstand the task. Not all the instructional directives are clear and simple, improper use of instructional directives may cause students' misunderstanding to their teachers' intentions and lead to their failure of completing the tasks. In addition, in some complex tasks, teachers can provide examples to illustrate the

expected results, which helps students better understand the nature and requirements of the task. After teachers' statement of instructional directives, they often add some explanation to their directives in order to make them clear and comprehensible. For the debating task mentioned above, teachers can further explain the instructional directives like "Is it right to give first priority to economic status in choosing your future husband or wife?" If teachers want their students to make small efforts to comprehend their instructional directives, they provide them with relevant context or resources to get a large effect (students' better performance on task). By setting clear goals and expressing themselves clearly, students can ensure that they understand what they need to do in class, thereby improving their learning outcomes. [6]

#### **4.2. Actively Interacting with Students and Encouraging Their Participation**

One of the optimization strategies for instructional directives is to actively interact and encourage student participation. In college English classrooms, active interaction helps to stimulate students' interest in learning and enhance their participation. Specifically, teachers can use open-ended questions to guide students to think and express their opinions, avoiding simple "yes/no" questions and encouraging students to engage in in-depth thinking and discussion. Secondly, teachers should create a safe learning environment for students and encourage them to participate more actively in classroom discussions. Teachers should avoid critical language and provide constructive feedback instead. In college English class, teachers often use such instructional directives as "You have a discussion on this topic." or "Read the two sentences, please.", these instructional directives can save time and improve classroom efficiency for they are concise, clear and convenient. But such kind of instructional directives make students feel nervous. The tone of *Let's...* and *Could you/Can you/Would you...?* is tactful and moderate. When hearing these instructional directives, students will not feel nervous and they can perform better. In addition, teachers should also give praise and encouragement to students when they show active participation and effort in learning, in order to stimulate their learning motivation and boost their confidence. Teachers sometimes create a confident climate in their class through instructional directives. Successful learners tend to be those who feel competent and capable of learning. In order to foster a sense of competence, teachers can give students some affective support through their instructional directives to encourage their confidence in performing a task. For example, when teachers find that their students are not very bravely doing something, they will say "*Come on. Just give it a try*". By actively interacting and encouraging participation, teachers can create a positive English learning atmosphere for students and improve their learning outcomes.

#### **4.3. Providing Personalized Guidance and Feedback**

One of the optimization strategies for instructional directives is to provide personalized guidance and feedback. Different students have different needs and progress rates in learning, so teachers should adjust instructional directives and feedback based on individual differences among students. Specifically, teachers should first try to understand each student's learning style, interests, and needs, by communicating with them, observing their learning behavior, and engagement. Secondly, teachers should adopt different teaching methods and resources based on the differences among students. For example, for students facing difficulties, additional tutoring and materials can be provided, while for students progressing faster, more advanced tasks can be offered. At the same time, teachers should provide timely feedback to help students understand their progress and propose improvement suggestions. The feedback should be specific and clear so that students can understand and take action. In addition, teachers should encourage students to actively participate in learning, provide opportunities and resources for autonomous learning, cultivate students' learning motivation and autonomy, better meet students' learning needs through personalized guidance and feedback, and improve students' academic performance and satisfaction. Since in college English classrooms it is necessary for the students to comprehend completely what the teachers' instructional directives mean. Thereby, the degree of instructional directives might be unnecessarily too high to be understood for the learners.

### **5. Conclusion**

In summary, teachers' instructional directives play an important role in college English teaching. By using clear, concise, and specific instructional directives, teachers can improve the efficiency and quality of students' task completion, thereby promoting their English learning and development. The clearer and simpler the instructional directives are, the more relevant the context is, the better the students' task

comprehension and performance, no matter the students are higher achievers or lower achievers of English learning. However, when faced with instructional directives in which improper words or phrases are used, students may have difficulty in comprehension and therefore, fail to complete the task. So teachers should constantly reflect and improve their instructional directives to meet the needs of different students and enhance teaching effectiveness.

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