The Importance of Teachers' Instructions in Middle School English Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

The importance of language instructions is not only reflected in the message conveyed by the sender but also reflected in the receiver's feedback on the message. Therefore, the role of teachers' language instructions in the classroom is very crucial. Teacher's instruction, as an essential part of teachers' classroom discourse, is like a hub that links every part of classroom teaching and helps teachers achieve their teaching purpose. It refers to the language used by teachers to organize classes and instruct students to learn. It aims to help students improve their language and development skills. Therefore, the use of instructions directly influences students' learning efficiency. This paper applies the input hypothesis, interactive hypothesis, scaffolding theory, and speech act approach to study the importance of teachers' instructions in middle school English class. Besides, we summarize the three forms of teachers' guidance, vocabulary, phrase, and sentences. The most important thing is that vague instructions can reduce classroom efficiency and thus affect teaching steps. Effective preparation can make the classroom smooth and improve students' abilities.

Keywords: English class; Instructions; Middle School Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers' instructions play an essential part in classroom teaching. The words that are associated with the context are called directives (Ur, 1996). According to Ur(996), the teacher plays a leading role so the teachers' instructions cannot be ignored since they affect the process and quality of classroom activities. English classroom teaching should not only improve students' linguistic competence but also improve their four skills. Therefore, the use of teachers' instructions should not only pay attention to the accuracy of language but also the appropriation of language.

Since teachers' classroom instructions have such a significant influence on education, the lack of empirical research on this aspect will inevitably affect the comprehensive development of middle school English subjects. Moreover, researchers always focus on teachers' instructions. In recent decades, with the efforts of scholars, the research results of English classroom instructions have been abundant. However, the specific empirical research on teachers' guidance in middle school English classroom teaching is scattered. To sum up, it is necessary to carry out a detailed study of the English teachers' classroom instructions and understand the application of teachers' education in English classrooms.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 The Definition of Teachers' Instructions

In English class, teachers' classroom language is the leading way of language input. At the same time, it is also the main channel to promote students' language output and construct the language environment of students' English learning. Therefore, how to enrich and effectively

use classroom instructions to organize teaching is a crucial subject in English teaching. The classroom instruction is challenging for students who have just entered middle school. However, if it can be adequately used, the difficulty of controlling it in the level of *i+1* will result in useful language input (Krashen, 1985).

According to Ellis (1984), the person who gives the instructions has the right to make the listener obey and this right often depends on the authority of the person who gives the direction. From this definition, we can get that the instruction is used in the English classrooms and the teacher has the right to let the students hold an individual behavior through a precise instruction language.

With the study of language teachers' instructions, Ur (2000) has given a more detailed definition: "the language of instruction is often used to introduce English learning tasks, it will cause students independent behavior and limit the students to complete the tasks and procedures." This definition indicates that the teachers' instruction is regarded as an explanation of the classroom implementation process. In addition, Zhu Donghua (2002) pointed out that the classroom instruction of explaining task contents and procedures is interactive. In the English classroom, when a teacher issues a direction for a designed task or activity for an interactive purpose, education is used to convey the teachers' intention. That is to say; instruction is an interpretive and interactive speech act.

2.2 The Classification of Teachers' Instructions

John Searle (1975) points out the speech act classification standard, "When a speech act is not only for the behavior performative purpose but also to express the other kind of speech act, it can refer to indirect speech act." So the instructions can be divided into direct instructions and indirect instructions. According to the relationship between the language form and the language function, straightforward guidance direct instructions and indirect instructions are separated.

According to Wangbing's paper (2011), Andrea and Shriver study the teachers' instructions in terms of effectiveness and ineffectiveness. They believe that teachers' instruction will have a certain effect on students' behavior. When teachers use practical guidelines, the degree of student's cooperation is high, otherwise, the degree of students' coordination is low. Effective teacher instruction is usually simple and easy to understand. In middle school English classes, students' English foundation and ability are weak. Therefore, adequate English instructions are more important. Teachers should pay attention to the choice of keywords and try to be as simple as possible. Besides, to avoid students' boredom of a single style, teachers should pay attention to changing instructions' forms when making sure to give useful instructions.

2.3 The Functions of Teachers' Instructions

In the English classroom teaching, the teachers' instruction is a language unit that expresses specific meaning. Hughes (1993) believed that there are three main language functions of instruction language, namely command, request, and suggestion. In healthy social interaction, the choice of these three language functions depends on the speaker's social status, role, and speaking situation. However, in English class, teachers choose different instruction functions to reflect the potential attitude toward students. Zhu Donghua (2002) studied the instruction language of teachers in the middle school classroom in China. He considered the teacher classroom instructions to have two basic functions, namely interactive function and classroom organization function. Teachers organize classes in three language functions (commands, requests, suggestions) and become the organizer in the classroom. In the school, before the student doing an activity, the teacher needs to explain the program or rules of the operation which fulfills the interactive function of the direction. From the perspective of

teachers' English teaching language, Xu Wenrong (2011) makes a clear definition of the purpose of "instructions" in the English classroom teaching language. "Teachers' instructions are to trigger, activate, or stop students' learning behavior, as well as to organize and maintain classroom teaching activities."

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Theories About Instructions

Through the study of second language acquisition, Krashen (1982) proposed the language input theory, including the acquisition-learning distinction hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, affective filter hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, and the input hypothesis. From those proposed hypotheses, the input hypothesis is the core of the theory. Krashen (1982) believed that only when learners access to "comprehensive input," which is slightly higher than his existing language skill levels of the second language input, he can focus on the understanding of information rather than the form which leads to acquisition. This is his famous "$i+1$" formula. "i" represents the current level of input, and "1" represents a language material that is slightly higher than the current level of the learner. According to Krashen (1982), people do not need to provide this type of input on purpose, and only the learned can understand the material. To achieve a complete understanding of language materials, learners must meet a basic knowledge of language information before input. Only then can these materials attract the attention of learners; otherwise these words and sound documents are meaningless. The relevance and interest in learning materials are also significant.

The interaction hypothesis was proposed by Michael Long (1983) based on the input hypothesis of Krashen (1980). Long's interaction hypothesis holds that in second language acquisition, interaction serves as the negotiation of meaning that plays a decisive role in second language acquisition. During meaning negotiation, such collaborative efforts should be beneficial: comprehension checks, confirmation checks, clarification requests, or self-repair, which increase the comprehensible interaction. Long pointed out that interactive adjustment is particularly essential in meaningful communication, and he believes that language acquisition can promote through semantic negotiation. A classroom is a crucial place for students to use English. The interaction between teachers and students should not be simply a question and answer, but a process of mutual understanding which should be more like natural communication in life. Therefore, in the classroom, teachers need to use all kinds of conversational skills and strategies to organize, repair the conversations, and test the students' feedback information to ensure that students accurately understand the information.

Zone of Proximal Development Theory was first proposed by Vygotsky(1931). He believed that teaching should not be repeated at the level of the students' knowledge; otherwise, it would be regarded as ineffective teaching. Vygotsky agrees there are two levels of students' development: one is the current level of students and the level of problem-solving that can be reached when they are independent; the other is the level of development that students can develop, which is the potential that achieved through teaching. The difference between the two is the zone of proximal development. The implementation of "scaffolding" in scaffolding teaching must be based on the Zone of Proximal Development Theory. During this period, teachers should pay attention to the relation between the old and new knowledge and the accurate position between the two levels. Scaffolding is meant to be a temporary construction tool to help with construction and is now a widespread noun in the education field. Its concept was first proposed by Wood, Bruner & Ross (1976). We can reach conclusions that the scaffolding is others' help that makes learners realize the process of problem-solving and task completion or others' support that helps learners achieve the goal that they cannot succeed without others' help. Slavin (1994) points out that scaffolding instruction is a process

in which teachers guide teaching to make the children master, construct, and internalize knowledge skills, allow them to reach a higher level of understanding.

Austin put forward the speech act theory in 1962 in which the philosophy was further enriched by Searle in 1969. Austin divides speech into three categories, namely elocutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary. Searle confirmed Austin's speech act theory, then he revised and developed it. Searle (1974) proposed the concept of indirect speech act which is an essential development of speech act theory. The idea of indirect speech act theory proposed by Searle makes the study of speech act have significant progress. In middle English teaching, the teacher's instruction is also a kind of speech act. The teacher gives instructions in the English classrooms, and the student completes the tasks according to the teachers' instructions. The language of teacher instructions plays an essential role in the language input of students. The teacher sometimes needs euphemisms to show respect to their students if they want to achieve teaching aims. The views of Austin and Searle have no virtual differences.

3.2 Studies of Teachers' Instructions Abroad and at Home

The teachers' instruction is a part of the teacher's classroom discourse output, as well as an essential source of language input. As a result, teachers' instruction language in foreign language teaching and learning plays a vital role. Yorkey (1970) studied the instructions given by a teacher to a vocabulary task. Because the instructions given by the teacher were not clear, the students tried to understand the teachers' intentions while attempting to complete the job. The results show that unclear instructions affect the job. Parrott (1993) proposed four principles that teachers should follow when issuing instructions.

Harmer (1997) believed that in the second language classroom, teacher instruction should be correct. He suggested that teachers should follow the main principles of simple and logical when issuing instructions.

Zhu Donghua (2002) argues that the teachers' instruction language should be simple, concise, clear, and able to help students, especially beginners, to understand instructions. He researches instructions from the following three aspects: (1) In terms of pronunciation, you should slow down the speed of speech, and every word should be stressed, which will help students to grasp important information; (2) In terms of vocabulary, teachers should mainly choose the specific words rather than professional or abstract words to organize the instructions; (3) In terms of syntax, teachers should use simple and short sentences to express teachings.

He Weiyun (2000) divides instructions into teaching instructions and discipline instructions in English classrooms. The results show that the grammatical organizational structure of the preparation has a particular influence on students' socialization.

Zeng Danjun (2008) studied the form and characteristics of teacher language and analyzed the language form and function of teacher language. The results show that direct instruction is often used to manage the classroom order, and in the organization teaching, it is commonly used in declarative sentences and interrogative sentences. Xu Wenrong (2011), based on the previous studies, proposed that teachers should consider the students' foreign language proficiency when using the target language to instruct. The instruction of foreign language teaching must be concise, easy to understand, clear, and logical. Chen Jizhen (2011) tried to analyze the language features, language function types, and speech behavior characteristics of English teacher instructions. It was found that the number of direct instructions used was much higher than the indirect instructions. The result shows that simple or easy to understand instructions and reflects the same attitude of teachers and students are usually the best

instruction. Li Xuening (2013) studied the English classroom instructions in junior middle school and found that the number of direct instructions was higher than that of indirect instructions.

4. THE FEATURES AND FUNCTIONS OF TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONS

4.1 The Linguistic Features of Teachers' Instructions in Middle School

The primary purpose of teacher instruction is to organize students and engage students in classroom activities so it is vital to have clear and precise instructions. Many vocabularies employed by teachers. As Feuerstein (1980) suggested, when providing any learning task to learners, teachers should express precisely what they want the students to do by providing a clear set of instructions. In terms of vocabulary, Brown (1996) concluded that teachers prefer to use essential and straightforward vocabulary in English class. This enables students to understand the teachers' instructions.

Many studies have shown that teachers can have a positive effect on students' hearing if they use short sentences. Weinstein (2012) found that brief instructions were helpful to the students' language input. The use of phrases usually comes in the three cases, namely the beginning, the process, and the end. We have summarized the use of words and phrases in the teacher's classroom instructions. However, the use of sentences in English classrooms is also important. The syntax can be divided into there forms, namely simple sentences, coordinate sentences, and complex sentences. In English teaching, teachers often use these three forms of instruction. Teachers can use simple sentences to simplify instruction. Teachers can also use them to streamline education and avoid the piling of clauses. The teacher should organize the preparation logically and follow the steps to give instructions. It is best to provide information in short sentences by the measures of the activity. This can make it easier for students to understand instructions.

4.2 The Function of Effective Instructions in Middle School English Classrooms

Proper instruction will stimulate students' interest. Interest is a guide for people which is one of the motivations for learning. Stimulating interest is the way to enlighten the mind and activate the internal cause. "Interest is one of the main ways to create a happy and bright teaching environment," says Comenius. Einstein said, "interest is the best teacher." Confucius also said, "the wise are not as good as the good, but the good not so good." Therefore, students must stimulate their interest in learning. Keen learning interest can mobilize students' enthusiasm for learning and stimulate the brain to be in a high state of excitement, form the best attitude to acquire knowledge and explore the unknown. In this state of mind, students' attention, memory, thinking ability, imagination, and so on will improve.

(1) Scaffolding is crucial for students' second language acquisition. For the first time, Bruner (1976) proposed scaffolding teaching. He thought that the first step is to create a specific surrounding for learners and bring learners to the subject of study. This will allow learners to enter a good learning state from the beginning.

4.3 Factors of Ineffective Instructions in Middle School English Classrooms

In the middle school English class, students sometimes confuse teachers' instructions. One reason is that the students are not familiar with the English instruction, and the other is that the guidance is more than required.

From the perspective of understanding, clear teachers' instruction is fundamental. If the instructions given by the teacher are difficult to understand, the student cannot complete the task. According to John Searle (1975), the preparation can be divided into direct instructions and indirect instructions. In the above examples, both direct and indirect instructions may

have good or bad effects on students. Teachers need to choose correctly. Direct instruction is simple and clear, and students tend to understand teacher intentions, but sometimes they make students nervous. Indirect instructions are polite, but sometimes they do not work very well. For example, when a teacher wants to control the classroom, the effect of indirect instructions is not evident because of the fuzziness of the instructions. In modern classroom teaching, teachers can choose to use indirect instruction to express respect to students and establish a friendly atmosphere. For example, use the pattern "Let's…" The structure shows that the teacher is at the same angle as students. However, when teachers want to achieve specific teaching goals, they must avoid using fuzzy instructions. The teachers' instructions are not brief and accurate, therefore redundant. Firstly, the teacher wants students to match the picture, but he does not tell students the details about the task. And the students do not understand the purpose of the assignment. From the example, we can conclude that the unclear instructions will cause lousy class. According to Hammer (2000), the instruction must be as brief as possible and the teachers' teaching must be logical. In the example, the teacher only has two purposes, one is matching the pictures and the other is finding the boy. It is a kind of ineffective instructional instruction that affects the efficiency of English teaching.

5. CONCLUSION

Functional language teachers' instructions can organize student activities, ensure the standard order of the classroom, provide students with a real scenario using the target language communication opportunity, and promote the students' language acquisition.

According to this article, teachers' instruction as an essential part of teachers' classroom discourse, has there functions. Firstly, it can organize students' activities and deliver specific activities. Secondly, it enables students to communicate with others in a real environment. Thirdly, it promotes students' second language acquisition. Therefore, how to give adequate instructions and how to make students understand them are the problems that teachers should think of. In the article, the application of guidelines in middle English classrooms is studied, and the practical and ineffective directions are also explored. It is hoped that the reviews can help English teaching.

Likewise, with the development of education, the teacher's level will be improved, and the teaching methods are getting richer and more vibrant. Students' understanding ability is limited, which is sufficient to explain the importance of the teacher's instructions. When the instructions given by the teachers are clear, the students can understand the teacher's intention well and can promote the effectiveness of the classroom activities. Meanwhile, when teachers' instruction language is unclear, it is easy to cause students' misunderstanding and even reduces their interest in learning English.

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