

Giving Instruction in the English Language Classroom: Principles and the Practices

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Abstract

Teaching English is often perceived as a challenging task to the teachers . One of the reasons behind the challenge is teachers' difficulties to get students attentive in learning and help them understand the meaning . Not only the case of teachers, many of the learners find learning English as a headache . Sowell (2017) admits that one of the probable headaches in learning English is not being able to receive proper instruction . Sometimes students receive very little instruction whilst sometimes they receive no instruction at all . In my experience too, most of us just ask students do language tasks, such as listen and complete, read and write summary, give a short description, etc . without providing clear cut instruction on what to do, how and why . Teachers' instruction in the classroom works as the guidance for task completion . And the absence of proper instruction in teaching English creates difficulties to perform required tasks and misleads the students, as a result, students show very little interest to do what they are asked to do or even leave the task incomplete . Considering such a situation, this article aims at introducing the instruction in teaching, discussing the importance, presenting the principles, suggesting processes and sharing hands-on tips for instruction giving in ELT classes . It has been developed from the review of related literature and self-reflection . The entire discussion enabled me to conclude that instruction giving is always desirable in teaching English if we wish to get students complete the tasks and have meaningful learning.

Keywords: *Instruction, Mother-tongue, Practical tips, Principles, Processes, Students engagement*

Introduction

In a teaching context, instruction is given to the students for clarifying the purpose and suggesting them the ways to do the desirable tasks . Instruction is an integral part of pedagogy in which teachers draw the attention of the students into the learning and provide guidance to them on how to complete the assigned task . Instructions are given to take or select right paths in learning . We can also take instruction as a strategy to create ease in learning . The instructions should be comprehensible . It can be problematic in doing written and spoken tasks in English if students get no instruction or if they find the instruction quite difficult to understand (Mertová, 2018) . Different classroom management theories, for example, communicative language teaching, natural approach, participatory approach, etc . claim that giving instructions is of great assistance for both understanding and guidance for the learners (Radeva, 2021).

So far, I experienced, instruction is always purposive in the classroom, most probably, to facilitate the students in doing tasks in the most appropriate way is one of the purposes amid the others . Students do a different thing from the real assigned task either due to the lack of instruction or misunderstanding of the instruction . So, giving instruction is obvious in learning and teaching.

Thornbury (2006) perceives instructions as verbal or written orders that belong to the strategies of classroom management . He says that instructions can be given any point of time in the classroom . For example, we give instructions at the beginning of the class; sometimes at the end of a previous activity and the commencement of a new one . The procedure of instructions basically means what the learners need to do, how and why . For example, whether to do activity in oral or written; whether they perform the task as a gist or detailed . Similarly, instruction can be about timing that has to do with or the cue which is a sign for learners to begin doing their activity . Thornbury argues that class activity instructions should be delivered by means of imperative and sequence words such as first, next, then, after that, finally . Instruction giving often takes part in the form Physical Response activity, where the pupils perform physical instructions supplied by their teachers (Sanchez, 2015) . Instruction also takes part in the form scene setting . For instance, teachers can engage students in some moving and entertainment-based activities and share what they need to do further . Instruction can be like a warm up activity to involve students in get attention, set work and go for the success (Chang et.al., 2021)

Instructions also function as instructional support to the students as a part of guidance and the guidance can be given on any language of students' comfort ability . Instructions have particular roles in being explicit on the process of task completion and in minimizing the errors . According to Scrivener (2005), it is possible

to guide students to do a class task in the target language . Scrivener establishes that long wordy directions that embed the essential part of the instructions are typically unplanned; this happens since the teacher is unwary that they are talking in this way until they hear themselves and realize how badly they have done it . Though very few students ask the teachers to clarify a vague notion that they are supposed to do, many of the teachers give instructions, tell the students start working . As a teacher, I have had rich experience of giving instructions in case of students misunderstanding or incomprehensible contents . Due to the constructive role of instruction in shaping good learning of the students, mastering instruction giving is a fundamental aspect of good classroom teaching practice (Sowell, 2017) . Ur (2013) argues that a good delivery of instruction is one of the determining factors of a successful lesson . Ur quotes research finding and states “that learners see the ability to explain things well as one of the most important qualities of a good teacher” . Hence, Ur means to say that giving explanation of the task or message is giving instruction and it is highly valued in learning . The systematic planning of instruction giving ensures the effectiveness of instruction in learning a new language . In this regard, Scrivener (2005, p . 90) states that unplanned instruction sounds “like a joke” as teachers “are often unaware that they are talking in this way.” However, providing instruction is not an ease for the teachers because the teacher should be a master of the know-how to do, when and why .

Creating good learning atmosphere is must for giving instruction . Instruction is introducing students what to do, and how can they accomplish activities more easily . Teachers draw students’ concentration and keep themselves focused on learning by giving instruction . In this sense, instruction helps teachers achieve their aims . Students may feel comfortable to do the activities and their learning will be much more effective since teachers will clarify the learning problems related to the activity by giving instructions repeatedly.

Methods

This study followed document analysis method . The theoretical insights and practical strategies for instruction giving were explicated from the desk review of the available literature . Besides the review, authors’ self-reflexivity has been exposed for the explanation of classroom procedures of instruction giving.

Results and Discussion

The following sub sections present the details of instruction giving including the principles and procedures.

Rationale Behind Giving Instruction

Good instruction keeps learners motivated and interested in the task and does not let them get distracted . Instruction is given to help students understand the task, so instruction giving has explicit effect on learning . In the absence of instruction, students may fail to get what they are supposed to do and their learning activity becomes chaotic . Instruction giving works as a skill to stimulate students' interest and concentrate them on doing task . Though it is a challenge and sometimes ignored by the teachers, instruction giving is mandatory in teaching (Scrivener, 2012) . Teachers can have different perspectives on giving instruction, for example, novice teachers might assume instruction giving as a skill developed along with the process of teaching while, experienced teachers might assume it as a natural part of learning . Whatever they opine, I think, instruction giving skill has significance on students' learning behavior . It deserves as an integral part of teaching practice because it has a major impact on how well students are able to carry out activities and, as a result how well they learn (Sowell, 2017) . Instruction, if it is provided clearly using simple language, prevents the learners from doing a different thing from the real assigned task because sometimes they can have misunderstanding . Hence, instruction has role resulting in to lead the task in the most appropriate way . Instruction giving is righteous in the classroom . The following points show the importance of instruction in learning:

Instruction has particular significance on the enhancement of the effective classroom communication . It is also relevant to get students fully engaged in classroom activities by creating ease through instruction and to ensure students feel confident and clear in doing tasks with the support from teachers' instruction . Instruction is a strategy to build rapport by addressing students' curiosities and to cultivate better encouragement towards students by transmitting the message of what is to be done how and why . Instruction enables students to be able to do the task (Fekih, 2019) . Similarly, it is required to address or solve the potential problems that the students might have to face and to support learners at the beginning to later to work independently (Bentley, 2010) . By means of instruction of the teacher may organise emphasize the lesson objectives and to assist the learner with the comprehension of class activity.

Furthermore, instruction giving is relevant to clarify what they have to do before actually doing a task; to exemplify as a gist or detailed task so as to enable students not to lose focus of learning, so that they can perform well in book activities and class tasks too; to keep learners psychologically strong so that they can overcome the obstacles in learning; to guide students to do a class task providing them with context via instruction; to get students attentive and awake their curiosity of finding out what they have to do with; to provide learners with tricky directions; and to prevent students from socio-pragmatic failure within the classroom (Benattabou, 2020).

Principles of Instruction Giving in Learning

Being teachers, we should be aware of the necessity of giving clear and concise instructions timely . We should communicate the students what they have to do, when to do and how to do it . We teachers need to make sure learners understood each and every single part of the task . In order to make our instructions meaningful, we should be guided through some principles . Here, principles set fundamental guidance to give comprehensible instructions the students . The principles enable us to perceive instruction-giving as a fundamental aspect of good classroom teaching practice . The principles become more useful when they are accompanied with examples of how they can be implemented in the classroom . The teachers should strive to design and develop effective, consistent and meaningful instructions . Chickering and Gamson (1987) identified the following seven principles for the effective instructions to be given to the learners which work as the teachers' efforts of best practice in teaching and learning:

Encouraging Students for Learning by Verbal Appreciations, at the Beginning

Initiating the class by providing verbal appreciations is a most important factor in student motivation and involvement . The teacher helps students get through acknowledgement of their prior work and inform the task they need to do at present . Teacher's verbal appraisal enhances students' interest for learning and encourages them to think about their own plans and purposes.

Developing Reciprocity and Cooperation between Teachers and Students

Learning is enhanced when it is organized in more like a friendly manner . Good learning, like good work, is collaborative and social, not competitive and isolated . The teacher's simple and clear instruction often increases involvement of students in learning . Sharing effective tips and asking students for sharing their ideas improves thinking and deepens understanding . For this, the teacher should establish guidelines for class work so students understand what they are expected to do.

Using Active Learning Techniques

Learning is not simply getting things from the teacher, rather constructing the meaning from self-experiences of doing communicative tasks like asking for and responding to . Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to the teacher, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers . Teacher should create those opportunities that must let students talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives . Students must make what they learn part of themselves.

For this, teachers shall use an in-class discussion technique such as think-pair-share in which all students are posed a question or situation to think about, then pair up with a classmate to continue to discuss the topic, and then share their thoughts with the entire class.

Utilizing Instructions as Prompt Feedback

The teachers should not use instructions just as a part of order/command/guidance, they should use them as prompt feedback because students might need help in assessing their existing knowledge and competence . Along with teachers' instructions, students think about what they know and what they don't know . Hence, instruction helps them focus on their own learning . Besides, the teachers should provide frequent opportunities to perform and to receive constructive feedback on students' performance . At various points of learning students need opportunities to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they might assess themselves . Hence, the teachers shall establish instruction as a means for feedback and give prompt feedback when students need.

Emphasizing Production and Comprehension by Setting Task on Time

Classroom learning is both for the comprehension and production of meaningful language . So, teachers' instruction should be supporting enough to promote both of the skills, together . Teachers can set task both productive and cognitive tasks on time because time plus tasks equals learning . For the purpose of effective learning, teachers can establish realistic tasks to promote expression and understanding, keeping in mind that many of their students want to learn through tasks on time.

Communicating High Expectations in the Instructions

It is said that if we expect more and we will get more . The classroom instructions can also be used as the ways for expecting high level performance . the teachers should communicate high expectations through their instructions . High expectations are important for every learner . We, teachers, shall communicate high expectations at the beginning of the class . It may be helpful to provide examples of certain expectations (project work, peer interaction) to convey our expectations so students know what we are looking for.

Respecting Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

It is assumed that different students bring different talents and styles to the classroom environment . in this regard, instructions can also be used as the strategies of respecting

diverse talents of the students and their ways of learning as a part of motivating them for further learning . Students can have multiple talents and flexibility and variety in classroom tasks often promote their multiple talents . Bright students might possess lots of hands-on experience and they need opportunities to show their talents and learn in ways that work for them . So, the instructions given to them respect learning potentials and provide tips for further learning . Then, students can be motivated to learn in new ways. Besides the above, some other principles are as follows:

Giving Instruction in Student's First Language or the Most Common Language of the Classroom .

The choice of code or language for classroom communication has particular impact in the understanding of message . Though, both first language and second language are permissible in instruction giving, the use of learner's first language or the languages of their interest and choice creates more ease in getting ideas clearly . Atkinson (1987), Auerbach (1993), and Macaro (1997) agree that instruction giving is an occasion that warrants use of the first language in the English language classroom . However, Ur (2013) admits that instruction in mother tongue is better for learners' comprehension . It shows the different opinions of the scholars regarding the use of any other language besides English while giving instructions in English . Salaberry (1995) and Gardner (2000) assert that students should be introduced to the use of English from the first class while Brown (2008) prefers to use any language of students' choice for the instruction . What I personally believe is that instruction in mother language or the most familiar language is more meaningful to the students in a multilingual classroom . The use of mother language or more familiar languages help students understand the instruction and is justifiable for the sake of efficiency and clarity . Our aim in teaching is creating comfort in learning, ensuring meaningful communication and maximize both the comprehension and production abilities of the students . So, this principle suggests to give instruction using students' native language or most frequently used language in their communication to the young learners.

Being Brief, Simple and Sufficient

Instruction from the side of teacher is the input for meaningful learning and interaction . Only simple and sufficient input maximizes students' achievement in second language learning (Krashen, 1985) . The lengthy instruction often creates ambiguity to understand and the complex language creates difficulty to get what teachers ask to do . So, this principle suggests to keep instructions brief, simple and sufficient while teaching English .

Engaging Students an Action-based Activities with Command

We teachers shall engage the students in doing physical activities that elicit different actions and responses . Asher (2009) believes that physical activities keep students active and solicit their response promptly . Students may perform actions based on teacher's command and learn new language items indirectly . For this, the command should be in mild voice, short and specific . For example, teachers can give the commands like: put your bag out and turn the page; be face-to-face with your friends, ask for the topics of their interest; look at the dialogue; write any five sentences about you; repeat the words/sentences after me, etc . So far, I have experienced, command-based action of the students enhances their confidence and make students outspoken . However, it is important to give command using typical classroom language with necessary repetition so that the students can have positive attitude towards learning English.

Using Instruction as Scaffolding

Instruction is integral part of learning . It should be used as verbal support rather than direction, alert or caution . Teachers should expose students with sufficient chunks and formulaic expressions in the classroom . The supporting language to the students at the time of their speech and writing is scaffolding . Scaffolding is understood to be a series of steps which allow learners to build broken pieces of directions given by teachers to do an activity . Scaffolding has an aim to support learners at the beginning to later . It permits them to work independently as they grow up in their foreseeable future studies (Bentley, 2010).

Using Multiple Semiotic Resources for the Instruction

Instruction through language only may be insufficient to the learners get the ideas clearly and perform the tasks effectively . So, teachers should use multiple means of meaning making, for example, sentence/utterance, body language, gestures, pictures/images, clues/symbols, maps, etc . teachers should make eye contact with the class, establish a gesture that indicates they would like to say something and be patient until everyone is completely silent . Instruction through multimodal communication builds better interaction between the teachers and the learners . It may foster more explicit support to become students more engaged (Pustika et al., 2019) . Giving instruction by using gestures and body language is more comprehensible to the learners.

The above principles are used for meaningful instruction and meaningful instruction is for effective learning . Talking about the meaningfulness of the instruction, Scrivener (2005) has proposed five steps towards the improvement of the instruction

giving . According to him, firstly, teachers must become aware of their own instruction-giving . Secondly, they should pre-plan their instructions by short sentences and simple and clear language in a sensible order . Thirdly, they should separate instructions from distractions for instance chit-chatting, telling off, joking, etc . Fourthly, modelling is the key rather than just telling . And finally, as fifth step is to use instruction checking questions .

Practicing Instructions in the Classroom: Some Practical Tips

Obviously, instruction giving is mandatory in teaching . It has a direct effect on learning . Instruction is purposive for managing learning activities smoothly . Teachers' instructions work as valuable resources and provide proper guidance to the learners (Gardner and Gardner, 2000) . Generally, classes start with greeting followed by instruction . In my observation, teachers make instruction reachable to the students by keeping eye contact with the class, establishing a gesture that indicates they would like to say something and be patient until everyone is completely silent . Teachers try out building different forms of instructions to get students more engaged and task oriented . Simply, instruction can be given in the form of opening speech or orders or scaffolding or support for language comprehension and production . As this text aims at explaining the ways of making effective practice of instruction giving in the classroom, based on my experience as well as from the review of related literature, here I have discussed some practical tips:

- **Well preparation:** Preparation is the prerequisite of any meaningful activity in teaching and learning . So, good instruction giving too begins with a well preparation of the teachers . Some teachers may perceive that instruction giving is not a big deal so it does not require sound preparation . However, if we really wish to improvise instruction, we need to prepare for what we want to engage students in and how can we better support them both verbally and visually in the classroom . Ur (2013) argues that a good way to ensure instruction as clear and concise is the well preparation.
- **Develop or collect repertoire /chunks/formulaic expressions:** We provide instruction to the students by our words, utterances, clues or by using visuals like gestures . Scrivener (2011) suggests that teachers should develop good repertoire of instructing giving strategies . The chunks or expressions that we use in giving instruction should be simple and meaningful . It is a good way for teachers to sticking with words that are familiar to their students . We should not use quite a long instruction which may create confusion to them . We can develop and use concise instructions, for example, pass your ideas, listen carefully, get out

a piece of paper and write what you've got from the friends, etc.

- **Bring variations in instruction giving pattern:** We shall provide instruction in different ways, for example, in the form of encouragement, persuasion, command, clues/symbols, gestures, guidance and motivation . The variation in the instruction giving patterns not only attract the students' attention, equally direct them to do the desirable tasks . The teachers should facilitate using gestures, pictures, drawings, chart or written instructions . However, the choice of pattern depends upon the context of learning, students' proficiency levels, nature of the activity/task and interest of the students . In my experience, instruction by using pictures and words is the most appealing for the young learners.
- **Use materials and instructions together:** The instructions for engaging students learning based on particular materials, for example, worksheet should be provided along with the materials . As soon as we give materials for reading or practice, we have to guide them properly on how can they work with the materials.
- **Management of learning behavior:** Sometimes we may ask students to work on peer or in group . Students' may not have explicit ideas on how to proceed work in peer or group . It seems better to give instruction after peer or group arrangement . If we give instructions before arranging pairs and groups, they might forget the instructions (Proctor, 2024) . So, at first, we have to make necessary management and then provide instructions .
- **Solicit the attention before and while giving instructions:** Students' attention is must for meaningful reception of the ideas that we share with them . If students are not attentive in the class, the purpose of instruction seems irrelevant (Scrivener, 2012) We can solicit their attention in many different ways, for example, clapping the hands, drawing picture, telling a story, singing a song or simply raising hands . Besides, we can use extra linguistic devices like gestures, facial expressions, emojis and other visuals to attract attention and to help them understand the instructions.
- **Keep the instructions short and simple taking frequent pause:** The students should understand what we say or ask to them . Instruction giving using short and simple language creates ease in understanding . For such, we shall use short imperative and sentences and the statements like 'now you can start and see the things in your book and make a list of things related to everyday habits' . Similarly, use of timely pauses in giving instruction helps learners get the message . Talking about the value of teachers' simple and clear classroom language, Doff (1988) argues that simple and repeated language is effective for organizing learning

behavior of the students . However, we should not be too polite and complex in our language choice . The complex structure and elaborated explanation become confusing to internalize .

- **Model the activities in different steps:** Modeling is an effective technique in teaching English . Teachers' encouragement for modeling of the good behavior sets a good habit of learning of the students . The modeling can be used as an example, or demonstration or question-answer . Students can get the ideas quickly and quietly by looking at teacher's and/or peer's modeling . So, whenever possible, we should display the demonstration on how to do the expected task before we engage them in doing . Modeling can be done on our own, with a student, with a pair of students, or with the whole class . For the better comprehension of the students, it is important to model an activity in two steps, using our own and asking the students to do . For example, if we want to teach students how to greet and take leave in conversation, first provide self-demonstration and second ask two students to model on how do they greet and take leave in conversation . Modeling of one or two examples can be sufficient to help students get ideas on what they are supposed to do.
- **Manage instructions subsequently with the sequence of learning tasks:** Sometimes we may ask students to do the activities/tasks having several steps, in such a situation, we should give instructions in step-by-step form . In other words, we need to instruct after each step, not at once all . The instructions given all at once might have the potential to confuse students . So, it is better to provide one part of the instructions at a time which will enhance their comprehension.
- **Ensure students' understanding of the instructions:** We should observe whether the instruction provided to them is understood . It means, after we give instructions and before we start an activity, we have to make sure that the students get what they are asked to do . Sometimes learners get confused and turn their attention towards others it is because of misunderstanding or not getting instructions clearly . We can use concept-check questions (i.e., simple questions that students can respond to with a short answer, e.g., 'what is to do at first, why do you need to complete it?, etc.) 'to ensure their understanding rather than asking yes or no type questions like 'do you understand what I say', did you get what I intend to do with you'?, etc .
- **React the response promptly but gently:** Once we ask students do the tasks along with instructions, mostly, students start doing and might come up with response may be verbal or written . Meantime, we need to react them verbally may be in the form of appreciation or in the form of scaffolding . Teachers' anticipation

of verbal assurance has power to keep students interested in learning . Besides the verbal, we can use some visual cues like raising thumb, clapping hands, or emotive facials to react . Negative reaction may impede their enthusiasm in doing task, so we should react positively even though the response may be incorrect .

- **Handle with care:** We should not show any hostile or defensive action to the students before and after giving instructions . It is better to monitor student activity and provide necessary support to them for the completion of desired tasks . All students do not possess same characters and learning behavior, often some of them can be counterproductive . In such a situation, we should not place blame on them, instead deal with gently with back up and repair of their response . In case of students' incompleteness in work, we can simply repeat the instructions or recast the instructions in different words .
- **Use instructions as communicative acts:** Instruction is a part of classroom procedure and it should be given along with the sequence of classroom tasks and progress . It is not only constructive for the students, instruction giving is equally important for the teachers to have smooth management of learning activities and the fulfillment of the lesson objectives . For this, we should use instructions as communicative acts of the classroom . So, we should make our instructions as natural as possible . Explicit timely instruction maximizes meaning negotiation to achieve the communicative intent of the classroom . Achieving communicative intent is undoubtedly, one of the objectives of a language teaching classroom .

Conclusion

Instruction giving should be a regular practice of teaching learning activity if we really wish to bring expected learning outcomes in reality . Instructions in the classroom are the determining factors to whether a lesson succeeds or fails . Simple and clear instructions before asking students do the tasks enhance learning potentials . Effective instruction Teachers' instructions facilitate the students what to do how and why . Students can accomplish activities more easily with instruction . Instructions should be used to motivate, direct, guide and concentrate the students in the task . Instruction giving is equally beneficial for the teachers, for example, they may feel easy to manage discipline problems and to achieve their aims . To become aware on our instruction-giving practices, we need to incorporate self-oriented methods, such as self-reflection and self-observation, and outside-oriented methods . Tailoring the instructions on the basis of the nature of learning task and providing by using gestures, visuals, texts, pictures seem quite effective for meaningful learning . Sometimes lessons get failed because of incomplete instruction . So, we teachers should perceive instruction as a skill not

acquired naturally, rather learned throughout the experiences of learning . The teacher education and teacher training courses should include instruction giving as one of the areas of teacher support .

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