

INSTRUCTION-GIVING STRATEGIES IN NON-ENGLISH MAJOR CLASSES: A CASE STUDY IN THE MEKONG DELTA, VIETNAM

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Abstract – *In the era of integration, teaching and learning English is one of the significant issues in Vietnam. Effectively teaching and motivating students are perpetual concerns for educators. Providing clear instructions stands out as an essential method to trigger students' learning motivation. This study was conducted at a university in the South of Vietnam. The descriptive study was carried out with 129 non-English-major freshmen. The questionnaire was delivered to investigate the frequency with which teachers use strategies in giving instructions in EFL classrooms and students' feedback on those strategies' usage. The findings revealed that teachers flexibly combine all strategies when giving instructions in class. In addition, students have positive feedback on the teacher's instructions. This means that, in giving instructions, what the teachers do is similar to what students expect them to do. This study enriches the quality of English teaching and learning in order to meet the learners' needs.*

Keywords: *EFL classroom, instruction-giving, non-English majored students.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Teaching English is one of the most significant issues in the realm of education in Vietnam. How to motivate students to learn English is what most teachers are strictly concerned about. A number of teaching innovative approaches, techniques, and strategies in teaching and learning English have been found and applied. More importantly, how the teachers instruct the activities

they plan is not simple. Instruction-giving plays an important role in EFL classrooms [1–4]. In EFL classes, when the students understand the teacher's instructions, they will know what they should do to fulfill their tasks. In the context of teaching English to non-English majored students, giving effective instruction is more significant. For those mentioned reasons, the current study aims to find the frequency at which the teacher uses effective strategies in giving instructions and students' feedback on those strategies. Therefore, the current study is carried out to answer the following questions:

1. What is the frequency of teachers' instruction-giving strategies usage?
2. What is the students' feedback on teachers' instruction-giving strategies?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Instruction-giving

According to Cambridge Dictionary, instruction is 'the act of teaching someone how to do something' [1]. Instructions play an important role in the teaching and learning process. Matheson et al. [5] stated that if the instructions are ineffective, the students will less engage in the learning activities. Song [6] confirmed that giving instruction is 'a tricky business' [p. 51] in EFL classrooms in which students are at a low level of English proficiency. Similarly, Sowell [7] confirmed that instruction-giving is one of the teacher's skills in teaching and it has an impact on students' language acquisition. El Kemma [2] shared a similar view and stated that giving effective instruction in EFL classrooms is a kind of difficult work. If the students do not know what to do, the teaching process will fail. As a result,

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the students might not acquire knowledge and skills although the teacher has a well-prepared lesson plan.

B. Strategies of effective instructions

Effective instructions need strategies. Therefore, a number of researchers have found useful tips for giving effective instruction [2, 7, 8]. El Kemma [2] figured out nine strategies for giving effective instructions as follows. Firstly, before starting the lesson, teachers should prepare what they are going to instruct in class in their lesson plan. Secondly, teachers should give the instructions briefly. Thirdly, teachers should say the keywords again and paraphrase their utterances (if necessary). Fourthly, teachers should demonstrate or ask students to model what the teachers say. Fifthly, to support the instructions, teachers should use non-verbal facilitators like pictures, realia, gestures, and facial expressions. Sixthly, teachers should use appropriate structures of directives as imperatives, interrogatives, and declaratives. Moreover, when giving instructions, teachers should use techniques to get students' attention. In addition, teachers should follow the right order in giving the instructions. Finally, after instructions are given, teachers should use various techniques to check students' understanding.

Similarly, Sowell [7] classified the instruction-giving process into three main stages, including the preparation stage, the delivery stage, and the post-delivery stage. Each stage involves specific techniques. In the preparation stage, teachers should write the instructions in the lesson plan and make sure that they are short and clear. When planning the lesson plan, teachers should think and decide what kinds of aid should be used to support the instructions and when they deliver handouts or materials. In the delivery stage, Sowell [7] suggested that teachers have to follow some strategies, such as sitting the students in a group before giving instructions, making sure the instructions are brief, demonstrating the instructions before asking students to do them, using body language, facial expressions, or visual aids to support the instructions, dividing

the instructions into smaller sections/utterances, and making questions to check how much students understand.

In the post-delivery stage, teachers need to observe and control the students' activities [7]. In this study, the fourteen mentioned strategies were adapted in designing the questionnaires to investigate the students' feedback on the teachers' use of those strategies in giving instructions in EFL classes.

C. Students' feedback

Hattie et al. [9] indicated that feedback was a kind of information that someone made on one's performance and understanding. In an educational context, feedback was understood as a process of understanding which students get from different sources to improve their learning [10]. Similarly, students' feedback is the student's opinion about what they have experienced like the learning process, and the school's facilities or services [11]. In this study, students' feedback on the teacher's instruction-giving strategies is what the students perceive on how the teacher instructs in their classroom.

D. Related studies

There have been a number of studies on the instruction-giving in EFL classrooms. In Vietnam, Nguyen Hong Lien [12] conducted research in the pedagogical university context. The study involved three teachers and five students. Fourteen lessons were recorded and analyzed and the interview with five freshmen was carried out to collect data. The findings were that two main teacher-teaching styles were pointed out - one with more teacher-student interaction and the other with less student involvement. The positive and negative sides of instruction-giving were also implied in the study. She stated that teachers sometimes make mistakes in giving instructions; however, it did not affect students' understanding. Besides, effective instruction-giving techniques were figured out, such as giving short utterances and using non-verbal signals. Glaser [3] analyzed

two trainee teachers in Primary English Language teaching during their practicum duration. The author figured out the significant role of planning the instructions. This affects the success of giving instructions in EFL classrooms. Şen [13] conducted a Master thesis on instruction-giving EFL classrooms in a foundation university in Turkey. Seven teachers were joined in this study. The 56-hour lessons were synthesized and analyzed and the interviews with those teachers were carried out. The research results confirmed the importance of instructions in English teaching and learning. Six effective techniques for giving instructions and four techniques for checking instructions were found. Dzulqodah et al. [14] investigated how teachers instruct in online speaking classes. The researchers recorded the class lessons and interviewed two teachers. The study revealed that, when giving instructions, the teachers used different sentence structures, and repeated and paraphrased their utterances. The current research aims to find how teachers apply strategies in giving instructions in the tertiary context.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Context

This study was conducted in the first term of the 2023–2024 academic year at a university in the Mekong Delta, the South of Vietnam. In this university, students in any major, except English major, have to study English as a non-major subject in their course. There are four General English courses in total with 270 hours. The current study was conducted when the students were in the second course in their first year. All of them must take a replacement test at the beginning of their first year. Based on their replacement test scores, they were arranged in a suitable course. These courses are General English 1, General English 2, General English 3, or General English 4. After finishing each course, they must take a final test.

B. Participants

This study involved 129 students (69 females and 60 males) who were in their first year at the university. Their average age is about 20. They were randomly chosen from a variety of majors like medicine, chemical engineering, music studies, biotechnology, and primary education. During the period of investigation, the students were studying General English 2, the second course of the whole curriculum. The study combined simple random sampling and convenience sampling techniques in choosing this sample due to the limited time for conducting the study [15, 16]. Students' background is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Students' backgrounds

Backgrounds		Percentage (%)	Total (%)
Age	19–22 years old (129)	100	100
Gender	Male (60)	46.5	100
	Female (69)	53.5	
Major	Music (24)	18.6	100
	Chemical (32)	24.8	
	Biotechnology (28)	21.7	
	Primary education (28)	21.7	
	Medical (17)	13.2	

C. Data collection

To collect data, the researcher used a survey questionnaire. A 28-item questionnaire was classified into three clusters: (1) personal background, (2) the frequency of teacher's instruction-giving strategies (3) and students' feedback on teachers' instruction-giving strategies. In the first 14 questions in the second part, participants were required to mark their response for each item from 'Never' to 'Always'. In the second cluster, they were asked to mark from 'Strongly disagree' to 'Strongly agree'. The questionnaire was piloted so that the researcher could see whether they were valid. The researchers revised the questionnaires after piloting them. The official version of the questionnaire was delivered directly to the students to explore their feedback on the instruction-giving strategies. After the data from the questionnaire was collected, it was analyzed

by using the Statistical Package of the Social Science (SPSS) version 26.0.

According to Oxford et al. [17], the five-point Likert scale is classified into three levels: high ($M = 3.5-5.0$), medium ($M = 2.5-3.49$), and low ($M = 2.4$ or lower).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Findings

Table 2: Frequency and students' feedback on instruction-giving strategies

Cluster	Min	Max	M	SD
The frequency of using instruction-giving strategies in EFL classrooms	2.40	3.80	3.33	1.03
Students' feedback on instruction-giving strategies in EFL classrooms	2.80	4.50	3.84	.95

Note: $M = \text{mean}$, $SD = \text{standard deviation}$

As can be seen from Table 2, the level of frequency was rather high ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 1.03$). This means that teachers usually use strategies and techniques to instruct the class. Meanwhile, the mean score of students' feedback is approximately scale 4 on a five-point scale ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .95$). It can be concluded that, to students, the students believe that the strategies should be often used when giving instructions in EFL classes.

The frequency of using giving-instruction strategies in EFL classrooms

Figure 1 shows that teachers use almost all strategies in instructing class. The most frequent strategies are writing keywords on the board ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 1.00$) and demonstrating the instruction ($M = 3.78$, $SD = .95$), followed by making questions to check the instructions ($M = 3.74$, $SD = .89$) and paraphrasing the utterances ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .90$). In addition, the teachers also use different sentence structures in their instructions ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .94$) and repeat their utterances ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .80$). Meanwhile, teachers rarely use L1 (Vietnamese) in their instructions ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .80$); and teachers' use of English in all instructions is not so often ($M = 2.80$, $SD = .90$). Other strategies

such as using body language, short utterances, and different intonations are occasionally used by the teachers.

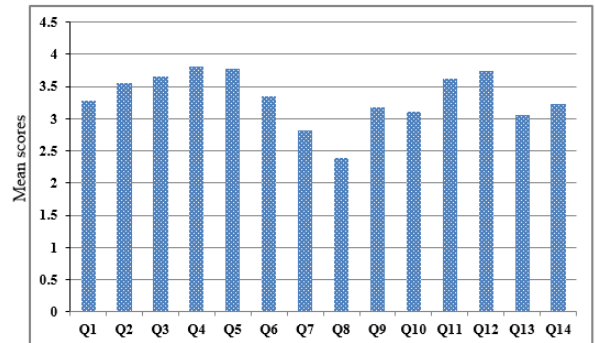


Fig. 1: The frequency of using giving-instruction strategies in EFL classrooms

Students' feedback on giving instruction strategies in EFL classrooms

The data from Figure 2 demonstrates that students expect the teachers to use all strategies when giving instructions in class. The strategies that students want teachers to apply are writing key words on the board while talking ($M = 4.5$, $SD = .50$) and demonstrating what the teachers instruct before asking students to do ($M = 4.4$, $SD = .60$). Besides, students suggest that the teachers should paraphrase their utterances ($M = 4.3$, $SD = .50$) and repeat what they say when necessary ($M = 4.2$, $SD = .60$). Meanwhile, students recommend that the teachers should not use English throughout their instructions ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.00$). Teachers should not use all Vietnamese when instructing ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .50$). Teachers should translate difficult words into Vietnamese ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .77$). Besides, students suggest that teachers should use body language and facial expressions ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .80$). Handouts and other materials should be delivered before giving instructions ($M = 3.75$, $SD = .94$). Teachers should check the instructions to ensure all students understand correctly and know what they are going to do ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .80$). When instructing, teachers should use a variety of structures such as imperative,

interrogative, and declarative ($M = 3.98$, $SD = .80$).

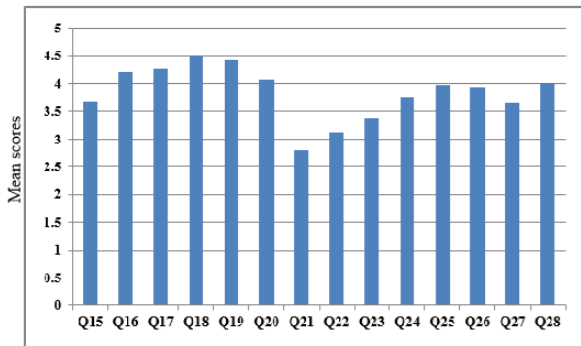


Fig. 2: Students' feedback on instruction-giving strategies in EFL classrooms

B. Discussion and limitation

From the statistical analysis, there is a strong connection between what the teachers do and what students expect the teachers to do when giving instructions in class. Particularly, students highly expect the teacher to write keywords on the board and demonstrate what is instructing. Likewise, the teachers use those strategies frequently. In addition, regarding language use in the instructions, the teachers rarely use Vietnamese in their instructions as students expect. The teachers only translate specific words that might be misunderstood into the first language.

The results of the study are consistent with the previous studies on instruction-giving strategies in EFL classes [2, 11–13]. More specially, the findings are in line with what El Kemma [2] and Sowell [7] conducted. The teachers often combine those strategies when giving instructions in class. However, in those studies, the authors did not mention the frequency of each strategy as in the current one. The authors adapted those strategies when designing questionnaires. Therefore, the strategies are used in a different way to be suitable to students' levels and needs.

Though the current study achieved its research aims, it exposes several limitations. First of all, the sample size of the study was not large enough.

As mentioned, the students under investigation were studying General English 2. The sample was not presented for all of the non-English major students at the target university. Thanks to the large population, the data collection would be more valid and representative of the case. In the further study, the researchers will investigate the students who are in other English courses to have a better sample. Secondly, the teacher's voice was not focused. Therefore, the study needs to investigate teachers' voices to have a full view of this issue. Finally, the authors only used questionnaires to collect data; as a result, the insight of the data was limited.

V. CONCLUSION

In summary, for non-English major students, giving instruction can be challenging for teachers. This mainly depends on the student's level and their learning style. This study investigated how teachers use strategies to instruct in class. The researchers revealed significant techniques that are effective in giving instruction in EFL classes, including writing key words on the board and demonstrating their instruction as an example, asking questions to check the student's understanding, and using different words to explain the instructions. Those techniques are mentioned by non-English major students in the context under investigation. The study results shed light on teaching and learning techniques in English teaching in modern society.

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