

## **English Teachers' Directive Speech Acts in The Classroom at Elementary Schools**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the types and interactional strategies of directive speech acts (DSAs) used by an English teacher in an elementary school classroom. Grounded in speech act theory by Rust (2009) and classroom pragmatics, the study employs a qualitative descriptive design through classroom observation, audio recording, and teacher interviews conducted in a Grade V classroom. The findings reveal that questions and requests were the most frequently used directive types, while advice and prohibitions appeared less frequently but remained important in maintaining classroom discipline and supporting learning activities. Questions functioned as the dominant directive type because they enabled the teacher to monitor students' comprehension, maintain attention, and encourage participation among learners with limited English proficiency. In addition, the interactional strategies identified in classroom communication included the use of politeness devices, code-switching between English, Indonesian, and regional languages, as well as cooperative responses that supported student engagement and classroom management. Rather than emphasizing statistical measurement, the findings descriptively demonstrate how directive speech acts contribute to effective teacher-student interaction in young learner EFL classrooms. This study contributes to classroom pragmatics research by highlighting the role of multilingual and interactional strategies in supporting communication and learner participation in primary school EFL contexts.

**Keywords:** *Elementary School; Pragmatics; Speech Acts; Teachers Directive*

### **Introduction**

This article is discussed in pragmatics through the concept of speech acts. Rust (2009) explains that speech acts are actions performed through utterances, which he categorizes into five types: assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives. They occur during conversations and are essential for guiding learners. Teachers are expected to use speech acts effectively to engage students and foster meaningful participation in learning activities (Ariyanti, 2017). When appropriately applied, speech acts help create a dynamic and supportive learning environment. Among the various types of speech acts used in education, directive speech acts play a pivotal role. Teachers can activate and sustain classroom interaction through directives such as asking questions, giving instructions, granting permission, issuing prohibitions, and offering guidance. Each subtype of directive speech act serves as a distinct function in the teaching-learning process. The importance of directive speech acts in education has been highlighted in several previous studies. Teacher talks in an Indonesian EFL classroom and observed that teachers frequently used directives to guide interaction and involve students in the lesson (Zahra et al., 2023).

Primary education plays a crucial role in shaping the foundation of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that children carry throughout their lives. In Indonesia, the National Education System Law (*Undang-undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional*) emphasizes elementary school (*Sekolah Dasar, SD*) as the first formal stage after early childhood education. The introduction of English at the primary level is not without challenges. In Indonesian primary schools, students often speak regional languages at home, use Indonesian at school, and learn English as a foreign language. This multilingual setting leads to frequent code-switching, with teachers mixing languages to aid understanding and connect with students. Therefore, teachers face the task of balancing language input with interactive and playful methods.

Previous studies on classroom discourse in Indonesia, written by (Sumedi & Rovino, 2020) and (Narulita & Arifin, 2024) have focused on secondary schools or vocational settings. Research has examined teacher talk, feedback, code-switching, and directive speech acts in contexts where students are already more cognitively mature and have prior exposure to English. However, fewer studies have concentrated on primary education, where the developmental stage of learners, their limited proficiency, and their reliance on the teacher as a model make the dynamics of classroom communication quite distinct.

At the elementary school level, research remains scarce, despite the fact that young learners display distinctive traits; such as limited attention spans, concrete cognitive development, and restricted English proficiency, that significantly shape classroom communication. These conditions give rise to unique patterns in the use of directive speech acts, including frequent reliance on questioning strategies to sustain engagement and code-switching to aid comprehension. The lack of systematic inquiry underscores the need for studies that specifically investigate how English teachers in primary schools employ directive speech acts to regulate interaction, maintain discipline, and simultaneously foster language growth. In response, the present study aims to address this gap and contribute fresh perspectives to pragmatic research within the context of early language education.

Studying how English teachers in primary schools use directive speech acts provides insights into several key questions. To what extent do teachers rely on English, Indonesian, or local languages when giving instructions? Why do they choose certain types of directives in specific contexts? And how do they implement politeness strategies to ensure that children respond positively? By addressing these questions, research can illuminate the relationship between language use, teacher competence, and the effectiveness of English teaching at the primary level.

The contributions of such research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it enriches pragmatic studies of classroom communication by showing how directives operate in early education, where children's developmental needs shape language use. It also provides data that may refine theories of politeness and teacher talk in multilingual contexts. In practice, the findings can inform teacher training programs, helping educators develop strategies for managing young learners through effective, polite directives. They can also guide curriculum designers and policymakers in aligning expectations with the realities of classroom interaction.

Research on directive speech acts in elementary schools is highly important, as it provides a pragmatic perspective that contributes to language development in the primary education context. However, there remains a problem of studies that specifically examines how English teachers in elementary schools employ directive speech acts, particularly in classroom management situations characterized by limited

student vocabulary, short attention spans, and the need for intensive teacher–student interaction. Therefore, the central research problem addressed in this study is: What are the forms, functions, and strategies of directive speech acts used by English teachers in elementary schools, and how do these speech acts influence student engagement and comprehension in the learning process?

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that effective communication between teachers and students is essential for creating a supportive and conducive classroom atmosphere. As (Maelasari & Wahyudin, 2017) note, educators and learners pursue specific objectives through various forms of speech, while (Rahmah et al., 2024) emphasize that teacher utterances can foster a comfortable learning environment even when students do not respond directly. In the context of young learners, directive speech acts are not merely instructional tools but also strategies for sustaining attention, reducing anxiety, and promoting active participation. By investigating these communicative practices, this study seeks to provide empirical insights that can enhance teacher training, inform curriculum design, and ultimately improve the quality of English language learning in Indonesian elementary schools.

In addition, the reason researchers chose to conduct research in this classroom was because fifth-grade students in primary school are transitioning into more complex language tasks, yet they still require structured guidance from teachers to maintain their concentration and understand abstract English instructions. Elementary school students often do not understand what teachers mean when conveying information related to subject matter and instructions. In fact, many students ask teachers for help. Therefore, teachers need to optimize their ability to formulate strategies in order to create memorable learning activities.

Other findings indicate that the functions of Indonesian teachers' directive speech acts in classroom learning include requests, invitations, commands, prohibitions, permissions, and advice (Hasanah, 2020). Based on this description, the importance of the present study can be explained in two ways. First, research on politeness strategies in directive speech acts provides a pragmatic scientific study that enriches the development of pragmatics in primary schools. Second, the study of directive speech acts can be used to support the advancement of science education. The purpose of this research is to analyze the types of directive speech acts used by teachers and to describe the strategies employed by both teachers and students during the learning process.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design, in which data analysis was presented in narrative rather than numerical measurement (Leeming, 2018). This design was selected because the study aims to examine the types and functions of directive speech acts as they naturally occur in a real classroom setting, where meaning and communicative intent cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measures alone. The descriptive dimension allowed the researchers to systematically document and categorize the teacher's directive speech acts without manipulating the classroom environment, making it well-educated. This study was conducted at Elementary School grade V in English language learning, involving one teacher and twenty-six students.

Data were collected during the teaching and learning process through recording and observation. A voice recorder was used to record interactions in the classroom, especially the teacher's speech. Observation sheets were used to help the researcher categorize the type and function of directive speech acts. The interview guide is also

used to obtain clearer information about speech acts during learning so that it is clearer from the teacher's point of view. The researcher was involved in all processes of the research starting from the data design until the data report.

In this study, the researchers had three main roles. First, the researcher conducted direct observation in the classroom during English lessons by sitting at the back of the classroom, taking notes, and recording the teacher's utterances without disrupting the teaching and learning process. Second, when students struggled to complete a task, the researchers helped those students by giving simple guidance or re-explaining the instructions in Indonesian. Third, after the learning activity had finished, the researchers interviewed the teacher to explore the reasons behind the selection of the directive discourse acts and the politeness strategies employed.

The interview helped clarify the data that had been recorded. The other instrument was observation and interview sheets. To record the activity, the researcher used a voice recorder and photos particularly to record the interaction in the classroom, including teacher's utterances. In addition, observation sheets observation checklists were also used in collecting the data. The collected data were analyzed using Miles & Huberman terminologies namely; data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/ verification(Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Directive utterances represent a crucial element of everyday communication, enabling speakers to articulate their intentions with precision to listeners (Rust, 2009). In speaker-listener interactions, these utterances must be tailored to the conversational context, as context forms the fundamental basis for interpreting communicative meaning. Directive speech acts encompass linguistic forms intended to motivate listeners to execute actions in line with the speaker's objectives. According to the study's outcomes, four categories of directive speech acts, which are questions, requestives, prohibitives, and advisories, are utilized by the teacher during the instructional process, while permissives and requirements were not observed. The ensuing section provides a classification table for directive speech acts.

**Table 1.** Classification of English teacher Directives Speech Acts in Learning

Directive Speech Acts	Amount of Data	Percentage
Question	8	53.33%
Requestives	5	33.33%
Prohibitive	1	6.67%
Advisories	1	6.67%
Permissive	0	0
Requirements	0	0
Total	15	100.00%

### 1. Question

Directive speech acts in the form of questions are statements delivered by the speaker with the aim of obtaining information, explanations, or responses from the interlocutory(Olshtain & Cohen, 1990). In teaching and learning activities, teachers often use questions as a means to engage students, check their level of understanding, and encourage interaction in the classroom (Nisa & Abduh, 2022). This type of speech

act illustrates the role of teachers as communication facilitators who seek to foster active student participation through questioning.

The data in this study was obtained from an English teacher in a fifth-grade elementary school, who used various types of questions to students during the learning process, both individually and in groups:

**Table2.** Directive Speech Acts Question

Speech	Context	Meaning	Source
(1) How are you today?	Class opening.	Checking on students' well being (phatic), prompting a response	(5 November 2025)
(2) <i>Kemarin tugasnya membawa apa?</i> ("What did you have to bring for yesterday's assignment?")	Pre-activity check.	Checking compliance and readiness of homework.	
(3) <i>Siapa yang membawa lem, raise your hand?</i> ("Who brought glue, raise your hand?")	Equipment check.	Requesting students who brought glue to raise their hand.	
(4) <i>Siapa yang membawa gunting?</i> ("Who brought scissors?")	Equipment check.	Checking for the availability of scissors.	
(5) <i>Mau mengerjakan tugas dikelas atau diluar kelas?</i> ("Do you want to do the assignment inside or outside the classroom?")	Determining work location	Prompting students to make a choice/decision.	
(6) <i>Tugasnya apa?</i> ("What is the assignment?")	Understanding check?	Requesting students to state the task again.	
(7) <i>Bisa?</i> ("Can you?")	Capability check?	Requesting confirmation of ability/understanding.	
(8) <i>Ada yang mau ditanyakan?</i> ("Is there anything you want to ask?")	End of materials	Encouraging students to ask questions (requesting the action of asking)	

The discourse in data (1)–(8) shows that teachers use questions as a means to guide and stimulate student responses during English learning activities. These various questions serve to check students' readiness, help them recall previous material, ensure their level of understanding, and increase participation in class. These directive speech acts in the form of questions reflect how teachers manage the dynamics of classroom interaction in order to create an active, interactive, and communicative learning environment.

## 2. Requestives

In the context of classroom learning, teachers often use this form to stimulate student engagement, foster a sense of responsibility, and create a learning atmosphere of mutual respect and support (Zahra et al., 2023). Unlike commands, which are authoritative in

nature, requests are usually conveyed in a more subtle tone, giving students room to make their own decisions. This reflects the teacher's role as a facilitator of communication, encouraging reciprocal interaction (Rust, 2009).

In teaching and learning activities, requests serve as guidelines for students in completing tasks, preparing equipment, or participating in group work (Nisa & Abduh, 2022). These requests are often formulated in a polite and thoughtful manner, thereby strengthening the interpersonal relationship between teachers and students. This type of speech demonstrates the communication strategies used by teachers to build emotional closeness and motivate students through a gentle approach. The data in this study was obtained from an English teacher in a fifth-grade elementary school, who applied various forms of requests to students during the learning process:

**Table 3.** Directive Speech acts Requestives

Speech	Context	Meaning	Source
(9) <i>Cari tempat yang teduh, satu kelompok!</i> ("Find a shaded spot, stay with your group!")	Giving location instruction.	Command to immediately find and occupy a working location.	(5 November 2025)
(10) <i>Wes ngadhek, mlayu-mlayu.</i> ("You are already standing, now running around.")	Managing class behavior.	Command to stand up or an implied command to stop running/misbehaving.	
(11) <i>Diselesaikan dikumpulkan.</i> ("Finish it and collect it.")	Final task instruction.	Command to complete and submit the work immediately.	
(12) <i>Diselesaikan karena mau jam nya istirahat.</i> ("Finish it because it is almost recess time.")	Motivation/instruction.	Command to finish the work before the break.	
(13) <i>Terimakasih untuk hari ini, yang belum selesai segera diselesaikan.....</i> ("Thank you for today, for those who haven't finished, please complete it soon.....")	Class closing.	Softened request/command to finish the assignment (combined with an expression of gratitude).	

The discourse in data (9)–(13) shows that teachers utilise requests as a communication approach to encourage student collaboration and build a respectful learning atmosphere during English lessons. These requests serve as guidelines for students in completing tasks, organising group work, and maintaining classroom order in a way that supports independence and mutual respect.

### 3. Prohibitive

In classroom learning, teachers use prohibitive speech acts to set clear boundaries on unacceptable behaviour. Prohibitive forms are more assertive and direct than requestives, which are usually conveyed in a more subtle and polite manner. Teachers establish clear rules to ensure that the learning environment remains calm, focused and conducive so that students can complete their tasks smoothly (Hasanah, 2020).

Prohibitions are often used to maintain classroom rules, uphold discipline, and remind pupils of the behavioural boundaries they must adhere to, particularly when activities take place outside the classroom. These prohibitions demonstrate the teacher's role in managing the learning situation by ensuring that all pupils are in a safe environment (Hermansyah et al., 2022). As shown in the following example, the research data illustrates how teachers give pupils direct prohibitions to guide their behaviour:

**Table 4.** Directive Speech Acts Prohibitive

Speech	Context	Meaning	Source
<sup>(14)</sup> <i>Tidak boleh mengganggu kelas yang lain!</i> ("Do not disturb the other classes!")	Establishing a rule.	Explicit prohibition against disturbing other classes while working outside.	(5 November 2025)

To assert boundaries firmly but with an educational purpose, teachers use prohibitive methods, as shown in the data in Table 4 (14). The prohibition 'Do not disturb other classes!' serves as a reminder of the rules and prevents imbalance in the classroom. Teachers ensure that students understand the importance of respecting other learning groups by explaining the prohibitions clearly, especially when activities are carried out outside the classroom or in the corridors. This example shows how prohibitive speech acts help maintain an orderly learning environment and reinforce students' awareness of appropriate behaviour at school.

#### 4. Advisory

Advisory speech acts are used by teachers in the learning process to provide advice, guidance, or suggestions that help students when they encounter difficulties in completing tasks. This speech act does not coerce or prohibit, but rather emphasises providing support so that students can complete tasks to the best of their ability. Students often receive advice when encountering technical problems, confusion, or situations that result in incomplete work. By using this communication strategy, teachers seek to reduce student anxiety, build their confidence, and ensure that the learning process proceeds without undue pressure (Hasanah, 2020).

Advisory speech acts actually demonstrate a more empathetic and solution-oriented approach. In order for students to complete tasks under any circumstances while maintaining learning objectives, teachers provide options or flexibility. The following example shows how teachers give reassuring advice to students when they have difficulty completing tasks:

**Table 5.** Directive Speech Act Advisory

Speech	Context	Meaning	Source
<sup>(15)</sup> <i>Kalau potongannya hilang nggak apa apa, dikumpulkan seadanya.</i> ("If the pieces are missing, it's okay, just collect what you can.")	Handling task issues.	Advice/Suggestion to submit the work regardless of missing pieces.	(5 November 2025)

The recommendations provided by teachers demonstrate how advice can be used to create a more calming and supportive learning environment, as shown in the data in Table 5 (15). Teachers can easily handle technical problems encountered by students, as

shown by the statement, 'If the pieces are missing, it's okay, just collect what you can.' Teachers can reduce students' frustration and encourage them to complete tasks even if the results are poor. This shows that advice not only serves as advice, but also as a way to keep students motivated and emotionally comfortable during the learning process.

This study demonstrates that teachers deliberately employ various forms of Directive Speech Acts (DSAs) to manage classroom interaction. A key finding is the predominance of interrogative forms (questions) as directive strategies. Unlike traditional imperative commands, the teacher uses questions to capture attention and sustain student engagement. By framing instructions as inquiries, teachers employ DSAs dynamically across different lesson stages (opening, core, closing), aligning with the current study's observation that interrogatives are central to classroom management and engagement (Anggraeni & Setiawan, 2026).

The teacher also shows strong linguistic adaptability through systematic code-switching between English, Indonesian, and Javanese. English is primarily used for instruction (presentation and practice), while Indonesian and local languages are strategically used for classroom management and rule enforcement. This multilingual approach ensures directives are both comprehensible and culturally resonant, bridging instructional clarity with emotional rapport.

Previous studies (Zahra et al., 2023) (Fatmawati et al., 2020) criticized teachers' reliance on closed-ended "Yes/No" questions, which limited students' cognitive engagement. In contrast, both the present study and (Anggraeni & Setiawan, 2026) highlight the pedagogical shift toward WH-questions, which require elaborated responses and stimulate Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS). This shift reflects a broader trend in Indonesian ELT toward pragmatic competence and communicative classroom atmospheres.

The implications suggest that effective classroom management depends on the grammatical and pragmatic choice of speech acts. The successful use of "WH-questions" illustrates that teachers can maintain order without restricting student autonomy. Consequently, professional development programs should emphasize pragmatic competence, encouraging teachers to move beyond binary questioning toward open-ended directive strategies that cultivate a communicative learning atmosphere (Noprilia & Tressyalina, 2025) (Prayitno, 2025).

Nevertheless, this research has limitations. It is based on a single case study involving one teacher and one classroom, making the findings less generalizable across different educational levels or socio-cultural contexts in Indonesia. Future studies should broaden the scope by including multiple participants across various grade levels and institutions. Such expansion would enable more comprehensive comparative analyses of how teaching experience, subject matter, and institutional culture shape the use of DSAs and politeness strategies in English Language Teaching (ELT).

## **CONCLUSION**

This study examined the types and strategies of Directive Speech Acts (DSAs) utilized by an English teacher in a Grade V primary school classroom. Questions (53.33%) and requestives (33.33%) were predominantly realized through direct utterances, dominate the teacher's communicating style, according to the research findings. For young learners who are navigating a multilingual environment and have limited fluency in the target language, this high frequency of direct instructions is a strategic and practical decision that ensures rapid clarity and comprehension. The use of advisories (6.67%) also indicates attempts to maintain politeness and emotional

support during classroom interaction, potentially helping reduce students' anxiety. This study is constrained in scope, as it examines the classroom practices of a single teacher during a limited instructional period. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted with caution, since the predominance of certain directive speech act types may stem from the teacher's individual communicative style or the task-driven nature of the lesson rather than representing a broader trend. Nevertheless, the study reveals noteworthy tendencies in the use of directive speech acts with young learners. The future studies may employ larger datasets, longitudinal classroom observations, or multimodal discourse analysis to explore how directive speech acts influence student engagement and classroom interaction across different educational settings.

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Hopefully, this research can give a positive impact and contribute to the improvement of English teaching and learning in Indonesia, especially at the elementary school level.

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