Directive Speech Acts in English Teachers' Classroom Talk: A Discourse Analysis in Indonesian Vocational High School

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Abstract

This study examines the use of directive speech acts in an English teacher's classroom talk at an Indonesian vocational high school. It explores how these directives support classroom management and interaction in EFL learning. One teacher and 34 eleventh-grade OTKP students participated in the study. The classroom observation spanned three class meetings, totaling four instructional hours, and was conducted over a two-week data collection period. Data were collected through classroom observations, video recordings, transcripts of teacher-student interaction, and field notes. The teacher was purposively selected for active engagement in classroom communication and willingness to be observed, making the participant appropriate for the research aims. Employing a qualitative discourse analysis design, the study identified the types and functions of directives used during instruction based on Searle's (1979) and Yule's (1996) classifications. A total of 25 directive speech acts were found: seven commands, nine requests, three suggestions, four invitations, and two prohibitions. Commands and requests appeared most frequently, showing how the teacher balanced classroom control with student involvement. Suggestions and invitations supported comprehension and participation, while prohibitions helped maintain order. The findings indicate that directive speech acts play central managerial and pedagogical roles in shaping classroom interaction. In addition to contributing to pragmatic and classroom discourse research, the study offers practical implications for teaching, emphasizing the need for teachers to intentionally employ directives to guide learning, sustain engagement, and create a more supportive, well-managed EFL classroom.

Keywords: Directive Speech Acts, Teacher Talk, Classroom Discourse

Introduction

Classroom discourse is central to the language-teaching and language-learning process because it shapes participation, meaning-making, and instructional flow. Through interaction, teachers provide instructions, clarify meanings, guide tasks, and create opportunities for meaningful communication. Walsh (2011) notes that classroom discourse is not only a medium for delivering content but also a pedagogical tool that constructs learning opportunities. Teacher talk, therefore, strongly influences students' motivation, comprehension, and engagement.

Discourse analysis helps examine how classroom meaning is co-constructed and how teachers and students negotiate roles, relationships, and knowledge. It also reveals how instructional moves, turn-taking, repair, and feedback contribute to the learning environment (Walsh, 2011; Cazden, 2001). Teacher talk, including prompts, questions, scaffolding, and evaluations, frames expectations and sustains interaction during lessons.

Directive speech acts are an essential part of teacher talk because they organize routines, support learning, and guide student participation. Directives such as *open your book*, *work with your partner*, and *raise your hand* serve managerial and pedagogical purposes. Previous studies in Indonesian EFL settings (Rido, 2017; Setiawati and Sukyadi, 2016; Aini et al., 2023) show that directives are widely used to manage interaction and maintain engagement.

Research on directive speech acts in vocational high schools remains limited. Vocational classrooms differ from regular secondary schools in several ways. Students often show a wider range of proficiency levels, and learning behavior is more practical and task-based. The curriculum emphasizes applied skills that require active interaction. The school involved in this study is a state vocational high school located in Kabupaten Tangerang, and the participating class belongs to the Office Administration (OTKP) program, where students typically engage in practice-oriented tasks.

These conditions influence how teachers communicate and how they balance instruction with classroom management. Vocational students also tend to rely more on concrete tasks and hands-on activities, which requires teachers to give more explicit and carefully shaped directives. Such conditions create interactional demands distinct from those in general academic settings, making the study of directive speech acts in this context especially relevant for understanding how teachers manage communication with diverse learners.

This study addresses these gaps by examining the use of directive speech acts in a vocational high school EFL classroom. The research focuses on how an English teacher employs directives and how these directives shape interaction during lessons.

The research questions guiding this study are:
- What types of directive speech acts does the teacher use in classroom

interaction?

- How are these directive speech acts realized linguistically and pragmatically?
- How do directive speech acts influence interaction and learning opportunities in the vocational EFL classroom?

A clearer understanding of directive speech acts can strengthen the connection between pragmatic theory and classroom practice. Effective use of directives supports interaction, promotes engagement, and contributes to meaningful learning experiences. Such insights are critical in vocational classrooms where communication must remain clear, structured, and responsive to varied student needs.

Method

This study employs a qualitative discourse analysis design. Discourse analysis is appropriate because it allows for a detailed and systematic examination of how language is used in classroom contexts, particularly focusing on how English teachers employ directive speech acts during instructional interaction. Through this approach, the study does not only identify linguistic forms but also interprets how these forms function pragmatically within real-time communication. As Gee (2014) and Walsh (2011) emphasize, discourse analysis moves beyond surface-level meaning, enabling researchers to uncover the interactional patterns, underlying intentions, and pedagogical roles embedded in teacher talk.

By analyzing naturally occurring classroom data, this design provides a comprehensive understanding of how directive speech acts shape participation, guide classroom management, and structure learning opportunities in vocational high school EFL settings.The participants of this study are one English teacher and thirty-four students from an Indonesian vocational high school. The teacher is purposively selected based on active engagement in classroom interaction and willingness to be observed. The choice of a single teacher is acknowledged as a limitation; however, the selection allows for in-depth analysis of naturally occurring discourse.

Future research may include multiple teachers for broader comparative findings. The choice of the vocational high school context is deliberate, as at this level students' language proficiency and classroom dynamics are more complex, requiring teachers to balance instructional objectives with classroom management through language use. The primary sources of data are classroom recordings, transcriptions of teacher-student interactions, and field notes taken during observations. These multiple sources ensure a rich, triangulated dataset that captures both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of classroom discourse in the vocational high school setting (Creswell, 2014).

The duration of the classroom observation covered three class meetings with a total of four instructional hours conducted across a two-week period. Data

collection involves non-participant observation of English classroom sessions in a vocational high school. Each lesson is recorded using audio and video devices to ensure accuracy in capturing classroom talk. Field notes are simultaneously taken to document contextual information, classroom atmosphere, and notable interactional moments. Ethical procedures were followed through informed consent from the teacher and students, and all personal identities were anonymized to maintain confidentiality throughout the study.

Where necessary, informal conversations with teachers may supplement the recordings to clarify classroom practices and decisions (Mills & Gay, 2019; Rido, 2017). The data were analyzed through a systematic coding process in which the teacher's utterances were identified and classified according to the taxonomy of directive speech acts proposed by Searle (1979) and Yule (1996). Both classifications include five major types of directives: command, request, suggestion, invitation, and prohibition. Categorization of function: each directive is analyzed for its pragmatic function in classroom discourse, such as instruction-giving, eliciting participation, scaffolding learning, or managing behavior, with particular attention to how these are realized in the vocational high school context (Setiawati & Sukyadi, 2016).

To enhance reliability, the raw data were sent to a supervising lecturer for reliability coding. This process served as an inter-rater verification to ensure consistency in identifying and interpreting directive categories. Additional peer-checking discussions were conducted to confirm the accuracy of analytic decisions. Triangulation: to enhance validity, triangulation is carried out through cross-checking field notes, recordings, and, if necessary, brief interviews or member-checking with teachers to ensure the interpretations reflect actual classroom practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

By combining discourse analysis with a focus on directive speech acts in vocational high school classrooms, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how teachers use language to manage interaction and facilitate learning opportunities for adolescent learners. A summary of methodological components is provided in Table, to enhance clarity.

Table 1. Summary of Methodological Components

Component	Description
Participant	One English teacher; 34 eleventh-grade students
Instruments	Classroom observations, video recordings, transcripts, field notes
Data collection phases	Observing lessons, recording classroom sessions, transcribing the interaction, and verifying information through field notes.
Data analysis steps	Coding teacher utterances, categorizing directive types, analyzing their pragmatic functions, conducting

	reliability coding, and completing triangulation.

Results

The findings of this study show that directive speech acts function as essential tools for managing classroom discourse. A total of 25 directives were identified across the three observed lessons, consisting of 7 commands (28%), 9 requests (36%), 3 suggestions (12%), 4 invitations (16%), and 2 prohibitions (8%). These directive types appeared consistently throughout the instructional process and contributed to organizing activities, maintaining order, and encouraging student participation. The following tables present examples of each directive type, followed by concise interpretations.

Table2. Types of Directive Speech Act: Command

Time	Teacher's utterance	Students' response	Context
00.00:37/ SMK/T	*Before we start this lesson, please pray first.*	S: *Yes, Miss.*	The teacher commands the students to start the lesson with a prayer.
00.03:52/ SMK/T	*Please have one student come forward.*	S1: *I will, Miss.*	The teacher commands one student to lead the song.
00.03:59/ SMK/T	*Everyone, stand up, please.*	S2: *Students stand silently*	The teacher instructs all students to stand up before singing.
00.06:07/ SMK/T	*Please take out your book and pencil.*	S3: *Okay, Miss.*	The teacher commands students to prepare their learning materials.
00.10:25/ SMK/T	*Please look at the slides about motivation today.*	S4: *Already, Miss.*	The teacher asks students to pay attention to the displayed slide.
00.32:04/ SMK/T	*Everybody, may I have your attention, please?*	*Students stop talking.*	The teacher commands students to focus on her explanation before questioning.
00.27:27/ SMK/T	*Please be silent and do the exercise on the Google Form individually.*	S5: *Yes, Miss.*	The teacher directs the students to work quietly on their online exercise.

A total of seven commands (28%) were used by the teacher. Commands appeared during transitions, preparation of learning materials, and moments requiring immediate regulation of behavior. Although commands typically produce brief or non-verbal responses, the data show that students acknowledged these directives either verbally (e.g., "*Yes, Miss," "Okay, Miss*") or through compliant action (e.g., *standing up, stopping conversations*). These responses indicate that commands effectively structured classroom routines and helped maintain order. The frequent use of *please* also softened the authority of commands, contributing to a polite yet controlled interactional environment.

Requests were frequently used by the teacher to encourage participation, elicit answers, and guide students through classroom tasks. These directives were generally polite, giving learners opportunities to respond voluntarily while still maintaining instructional flow.

Table3. Types of Directive Speech Act: Request

Time	Teacher's utterance	Students' response	Context
00.01:39/S MK/T	*When I mention your name, you have to answer present or absent. Do you understand me?*	S1: *Yes, Miss.*	The teacher requests verbal responses during attendance.
00.08:14/S MK/T	*Please mention someone, raise your hand, please.*	S2: *I think it is B.*	The teacher requests that students raise their hands to answer.
00.20:13/S MK/T	*What is the definition of procedure text?*	S3: *Procedure text is about how to make something.*	The teacher asks students to respond to her question.
00.25:00/S MK/T	*So what are the ingredients?*	S4: *Coffee, sugar and hot water.*	The teacher requests that students answer the meaning of the vocabulary.
00.42:31/S MK/T	*I will count from one to three. Please sit with your group.*	*Students move to their groups.*	The teacher asks students politely to arrange themselves into groups.
00.58:31/S MK/T	*Everybody, do you have a question? Please raise your hand.*	*Students raise hands.*	The teacher requests that students ask questions after the presentation.

00.59:17/S MK/T	*Give applause!*	*Students clap.*	The teacher requests that students give appreciation to their friends.
01.10:02/S MK/T	*Now, please close.*	*Students end the presentation.*	The teacher requests that students end the presentation.
01.14:26/S MK/T	*Please raise your hand.*	*Several students raise hands.*	The teacher requests that students respond to a question.

A total of nine requests (36 percent) were identified in the data. Requests were used primarily during the core learning activities to encourage participation, prompt verbal answers, and organize group dynamics. Student responses, both verbal and action-based, show that the use of requests supported cooperative interaction and helped maintain an engaging classroom atmosphere. The teacher consistently used polite forms such as "please," which softened the directive intent and increased student willingness to participate. This pattern indicates that requests played an important role in sustaining interactive exchanges and guiding learners without exerting excessive authority.

Suggestions were used to guide students, encourage self-awareness, and support learning decisions. These directives appeared when the teacher provided advice or prompted students to reflect on their work.

Table 4. Types of Directive Speech Act: Suggestion

Time	Teacher's utterance	Student Response	Context
00.06:07/ SMK/T	*Check your condition; check your floor around you.*	Students adjust their seating and clean the area.	The teacher suggests that students ensure cleanliness and readiness.
00.18:19/ SMK/T	*You have to understand the structure and elements of a procedure text.*	S1: *Yes, Miss.*	The teacher gives advice related to learning objectives.
01.30:03/ SMK/T	*How was the learning today, enjoyable or not?*	S2: *Enjoyable, Miss*	The teacher indirectly suggests reflection and feedback from students.

Three suggestions were identified in the data, representing 12 percent of all directive utterances. These suggestions appeared when the teacher aimed to guide students toward better learning practices, encourage awareness of classroom readiness, and prompt reflection at the end of the lesson. Student responses, both verbal and action-based, indicate that suggestion forms helped students consider

their learning process more thoughtfully. The teacher's use of gentle advisory language created a supportive environment that encouraged students to become more responsible, attentive, and reflective in their learning.

Invitations were used to encourage voluntary participation and create a positive and engaging classroom atmosphere. These directives helped build enthusiasm and fostered a sense of togetherness among students.

Table 5. Types of Directive Speech Act: Invitation

Time	Teacher's utterance	Student Response	Context
00.03:46 /SMK/T	*Before we start to study, let's sing an Indonesian song.*	Students begin singing together.	The teacher invites students to sing together before learning.
00.06:43 /SMK/T	*Let's begin with the ice breaker.*	Students follow the teacher's lead.	The teacher invites students to start the fun activity.
00.20:59 /SMK/T	*Let's say together the definition of procedure text.*	Students repeat the definition as a group.	The teacher invites students to repeat the definition collectively.
00.43:52 /SMK/T	*For more spirit, if I say "English," answer "Yes, I can!"*	Students respond loudly, *Yes, I can.*	The teacher invites students to respond enthusiastically.

Four invitations were identified in the data, representing 16 percent of all directive utterances. These invitations were used to build enthusiasm, encourage collective participation, and create an engaging classroom environment. Student responses show active involvement in singing, group repetition, and motivational chants. The teacher's use of inclusive forms such as *let us* contributed to a friendly atmosphere where students felt comfortable participating together. This pattern suggests that invitations supported classroom spirit and strengthened the sense of unity among learners.

Prohibitions were used to maintain discipline and keep the learning process focused. These directives appeared when students needed reminders to stay quiet or avoid disruptions.

Table 6. Types of Directive Speech Act: Prohibition

Time	Teacher's utterance	Student Response	Context
00.27:27 /SMK/T	*Please be silent and do the exercise on the*	Students work quietly	The teacher prohibits students from talking during the exercise.

	Google Form individually.	on their devices.	
00.59:01 /SMK/T	*If there are no questions, please don't talk.*	Students remain silent.	The teacher prevents unnecessary interruptions during closing.

Two prohibitions were identified in the data, representing 8 percent of all directive utterances. Although infrequent, these prohibitions served an important role in maintaining order during individual work and closing discussions. Student responses, which included immediate compliance and quiet behavior, indicate that these directives were effective in restoring focus. The teacher delivered prohibitions politely through expressions such as *please be silent* and *please do not,* which helped maintain discipline while preserving a respectful learning environment.

Table7. Frequency of Directive Speech Acts

Type of Directive Speech Act	Frequency	Percentage
Command	7	28%
Request	9	36%
Suggestion	3	12%
Invitation	4	16%
Prohibition	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Discussion

In classroom interaction, directive speech acts are among the most dominant forms of communication between teachers and students. These acts, which include commands, requests, suggestions, invitations, and prohibitions, enable teachers to manage classroom activities, organize learning tasks, and stimulate student participation. The teacher's role therefore extends beyond academic instruction and includes managerial, motivational, and interpersonal functions that help sustain a productive learning environment. Classroom discourse scholars such as Walsh (2011) highlight that teacher talk shapes participation and learning opportunities, while Gee (2014) emphasizes that meaning emerges through interaction and social engagement.

These perspectives help explain why the analysis of directive speech acts is highly relevant for understanding classroom communication. Based on the findings, a total of 25 directive speech acts were identified across three classroom meetings: seven commands, nine requests, three suggestions, four invitations, and two prohibitions. Requests and commands appeared most frequently, indicating that the teacher regularly balanced control and cooperation throughout instruction. These directive types were used from the opening to the closing phases of the lesson to maintain discipline, guide participation, and motivate learners.

The distribution suggests that the teacher managed classroom order while still encouraging student involvement. The interpretation of these findings is supported by Searle (1979), who defines directives as utterances intended to make the hearer perform an action. Yule (1996) further classifies directives into commands, requests, suggestions, invitations, and prohibitions. These theoretical constructs align with classroom discourse analysis, where directives serve both instructional and interactional functions. Following Walsh's (2011) view, teacher directives help manage participation, sustain interactional flow, and co-construct learning opportunities.

These theoretical links validate the relevance of examining directive speech acts as central components of teacher talk. Commands were used to control learning activities, direct transitions, and maintain student focus. Examples include "Please pray," "Everyone stand up, please," and "Please take out your book and pencil." Commands often contained polite markers such as "please," which softened authority and fostered respectful compliance. This finding supports Yule's explanation that commands are typically issued by speakers with higher institutional authority.

Commands in this class helped maintain structure and supported the smooth progression of learning activities. Requests were the most frequent directive type, with nine occurrences. Requests such as "Please raise your hand" and "Can you take out your book and pencil?" emphasized cooperation and student responsibility. Their polite forms encouraged voluntary responses and lowered anxiety. This reflects Searle's view of requests as attempts to persuade the hearer to act without assuming full obligation. Requests appeared primarily during core learning activities and contributed to a collaborative and interactive environment.

These findings also reflect cultural norms in Indonesian classrooms, where politeness markers such as "please" and indirect question forms are routinely used to maintain harmony and avoid face-threatening acts. Suggestions appeared in three instances and were used to offer advice, reminders, or encouragement, such as "Check your condition" and "You have to understand the structure and elements of a procedure text." Suggestions motivated students to improve learning readiness and awareness. According to Yule (1996), suggestions encourage listeners to act for their own benefit. The teacher's use of suggestions demonstrated care, encouragement, and pedagogical sensitivity toward students' diverse needs.

Invitations, found in four utterances, included expressions like "Let's sing an Indonesian song" and "Let's begin with the ice breaker." Invitations fostered collective participation and enthusiasm, helping build classroom rapport. The use of "let's" indicates an inclusive orientation that supports shared learning experiences. These findings illustrate the teacher's effort to create a supportive and enjoyable atmosphere, which is particularly important in vocational settings where students respond well to hands-on, interactive activities. Compared with general senior high schools, vocational high school students tend to prefer concrete tasks

and collective engagement, making invitations especially useful for maintaining energy and involvement.

Prohibitions appeared least frequently, with two utterances such as "Please be silent and do the exercise individually" and "Please don't talk." These were used to maintain order during tasks requiring concentration. The polite tone associated with prohibitions reflects a balance between authority and respect, preventing disciplinary issues without resorting to harshness. This aligns with Searle's description of prohibitions as restricting the hearer's actions in a socially appropriate manner.

Overall, the distribution of directive types shows a communication style that emphasizes cooperation, politeness, and student engagement. Requests were the most frequent type, followed by commands, invitations, suggestions, and prohibitions. This pattern suggests a learner-centered orientation rather than an authoritarian one. The teacher strategically used directives to promote participation, organize activities, and maintain discipline in ways that align with the pragmatic norms of Indonesian classrooms. Cultural expectations of respect, hierarchical roles, and collective harmony in Indonesian schooling may also influence the teacher's frequent use of polite forms and indirect strategies.

Several pedagogical implications arise from these findings. First, teachers can optimize directive use by employing polite and clear forms that promote student willingness to participate. Second, prohibitions can be softened with politeness markers to avoid discouraging students. Third, teachers' pragmatic awareness plays a significant role in shaping student emotions, comfort, and readiness to engage. Fourth, requests and invitations can be used strategically to encourage dialogic learning and reduce classroom anxiety. These implications can guide teachers in employing directive strategies more effectively to support communication in EFL classrooms.

This study also has limitations. The data were collected from one teacher in a single vocational high school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The relatively short observation duration provides only a partial view of classroom interaction. Future research may compare directive use across multiple teachers, different school types, or diverse educational settings, including Islamic schools, senior high schools, and universities. Such comparisons could reveal interesting contextual differences in how directive strategies are used across institutions.

In conclusion, directive speech acts are central to teacher talk and play a vital role in structuring classroom interaction. The balanced and polite use of directives by the teacher in this vocational high school demonstrates pragmatic competence and pedagogical awareness that supports student engagement and classroom harmony. The findings affirm that directive strategies function not only as instructional tools but also as social mechanisms that contribute to meaningful and productive classroom communication.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that directive speech acts constitute a fundamental component of teacher talk in vocational high school EFL classrooms. Based on Searle's (1979) and Yule's (1996) classifications, five types of directive speech acts were identified: commands, requests, suggestions, invitations, and prohibitions each serving distinct pragmatic and pedagogical purposes. A total of 25 directive utterances were found, with requests (9) and commands (7) appearing most frequently. This distribution reflects a communication style that balances classroom control with opportunities for student participation and interaction.

Commands were primarily used to structure learning sequences, manage routines, and maintain students' focus. Requests functioned to encourage voluntary engagement and foster a cooperative classroom atmosphere. Suggestions allowed the teacher to guide students' learning behavior and promote self-awareness, while invitations helped build enthusiasm and collective participation. Prohibitions, though less frequent, ensured discipline and minimized distractions during instruction and assessment.

Overall, the teacher's varied and polite use of directive speech acts illustrates pragmatic sensitivity to the learners' needs and classroom dynamics. These directives not only facilitated smooth classroom management but also created interactional spaces that supported learning opportunities. The study underscores the importance of directive speech acts as tools for organizing classroom activities, scaffolding student involvement, and sustaining productive teacher-student interaction.

Future research may involve comparing directive speech acts across different school levels, exploring the impact of teachers' linguistic choices on students' emotional responses and participation, or examining how students interpret and respond to different directive forms. Such investigations could deepen understanding of the role of directives in shaping communicative and pedagogical effectiveness in EFL classrooms.

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