

The effect of explicit instruction in SLA

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Abstract: This paper mainly discussed the application of explicit instruction and implicit instruction in the second language teaching environment through comparison and analysis. The paper mainly discuss the reason why the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction from two perspectives, the first one is direct instruction, and the second one is explicit error correction. Finally the paper concluded that explicit instruction has more advantages in second language teaching and is more suitable for second language teaching.

1. Introduction

For a long time in SLA field, researchers have a different idea about whether the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction or not. And this topic has gained much attention during recent years. As the SLA develops, more scholars begin to realize the importance of the practical meaning of SLA. And as we know, the explicit instruction is an essential aspect of TESOL teaching and learning field. So, the question whether the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction or not needed to be put into consideration. Some researchers hold an opinion that the language learning is more effective when taught in a more natural environment, and students will feel ease and be willing to learn a new language under an implicit instruction. However, some other researchers think that the explicit instruction is more efficient than implicit instruction because the explicit instruction has more clearly aim of the study, and teachers can have better control over the class, in the meanwhile students can be more concentrate on the knowledge they need to learn, because the textbooks or syllabus already show what needs to be done in this semester. Especially in the field of feedback, there are several pieces of evidence indicate that the explicit is more effective than implicit. So, in my perspective, I agree that the explicit instruction is more efficient than implicit instruction. And I will support my point in main two agreements.

2. Direct instruction

The first perspective I want to discuss is direct instruction. The direction instruction contains many different language teaching methods, such as oral presentation, teach metalinguistic knowledge, and explain some grammar rule to students. The direction instruction will give students the clear definition of some scientific concepts; students can follow some procedures to produce their language. And in my perspective, the direct instruction is effective in EFL teaching and learning, following examples can support my position.

Compare the effect of explicit instruction of consonant clusters with an implicit instruction of

consonant clusters, in the research paper, the author uses an experiment to examine whether the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction, the author in this article set up three groups, one is explicit instruction group, another is the implicit group, the third is control group (this group receive neither explicit instruction or implicit instruction), each group was given a pre-test before their courses, and each group also have a post-test. The teachers of three groups will provide them with different instructions, and in the explicit group, the teacher will give students some explicit instruction about a certain linguistic phenomenon, like the author mentioned: "the teacher explicitly provided the students with a detailed explanation of what he meant by English consonant cluster rules", "Whenever necessary, the teacher provided the students with an explanation of the syllable structure of the words including consonant clusters, presented some extra examples, and even compared the rule in English with that in Persian.". In the other two groups, the implicit group receives implicit instruction and control group have no instruction. In the end, of course, the teacher will give them post-test and teachers will collect data and then analyze. After evaluating their performance, the author gave a clear result: "the participants in the explicit group outperformed the other two groups on the post-test. This is because the rules underlying consonant clusters were explicitly presented to them. In fact, explicitly presenting the participants with the rules underlying consonant clusters helped them learn such clusters sooner than the participants in the other two groups." And the author also mentions that: "explicit instruction helps the students notice the difference between what they say and what they mean, and accordingly, causes them to improve better and faster in the target language. The conclusion is that explicit instruction can increase the speed of learning and thus can produce more positive effects on pronunciation in a classroom setting in a short run in comparison to implicit instruction" [1]. Through this research, we can notice that the explicit instruction has a better effect than the implicit instruction of consonant cluster teaching. The conclusion is quite the same as the previous study, and the explicit instruction can raise students' awareness, and students can easily notice the explicit instruction and they could master the knowledge more effectively.

Another research paper can also support my point. Mahdi and Parviz and Reza compare the effect of explicit instruction and implicit instruction towards the speech act of thanking among Iranian Male and Female EFL learners. They also set up three groups, one group receive the explicit instruction, other group receive the implicit instruction, another group received no instruction. And they used several methods to evaluate the performance of the students. Finally, they give a conclusion: "According to the results gained from the instruments of this study, it can be claimed that explicit instruction of the speech act of thanking improves its usage by Iranian EFL learners significantly." [2]. And the author also claimed that: "The reason for such finding may be because the explicit teaching of speech acts can raise EFL learners' awareness of speech acts, and this leads to higher mean scores of experimental groups when they are exposed to the explicit teaching of the speech act of thanking." The conclusion is quite the same as the previous study, and the explicit instruction can raise students' awareness, and students can quickly notice the explicit instruction and they could master the knowledge more effectively.

The direct instruction can teach students some basic metalinguistic knowledge in a relatively short period. Students can comprehend and absorb that knowledge in a relatively short period. Students can comprehend and absorb that knowledge in a relatively short time period. And this promotes the efficiency of teaching. Because in many countries, one of the important purposes of students learning English is to pass the English exam, which usually means that students need to master a large amount of knowledge in a short period of time to pass the exam. Under this premise, explicit instruction is undoubtedly more effective.

3. Explicit error correction

Another perspective I want to address is explicit error correction. There are many types of error corrections, and according to the research conducted by Lyster and Ranta [3], there is mainly six typical feedback which teachers are frequently used, there is explicit correction, recast, clarification request, metalinguistic feedback, elicitation, and repetition. And many research pays attention to recast and explicit correction and metalinguistic feedback. And in my opinion, those three feedbacks are explicit feedback, because teachers will let their students know precisely what's their language problem is, and teachers will give clear metalinguistic knowledge about what's the right form for the sentence. Although some scholars hold an opinion that recast is not typical explicit error correction, but in my opinion that the form of the recast is quite similar to the explicit instruction. Because unlike repetition, when teachers repeat the sentence which students make a mistake in this sentence, a teacher will intentionally change the form or content of the sentence, the differences between the original sentence and the sentence which teacher reform is obvious. So, I think that recast is one of the explicit instruction. In the field of grammar rules teaching, the explicit instruction is especially important. Rod and Shawn and Rosemary [4] explore how the explicit feedback will influence the grammar learning process. They found out that as far as grammar is concerned, the explicit feedback is more effective than implicit instruction, and they also give an opinion that: "In particular, explicit feedback seems more likely to promote the cognitive comparison that aids learning".

Metalinguistic feedback and explicit feedback is typical the explicit feedback, many types of research have been done about this phenomenon, in the next section I will talk about the evidence why the explicit instruction is better than the implicit instruction in the field of feedback.

As far as metalinguistic feedback as a concern, trying to find out whether the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction, in the article, the author pays attention to the feedback of learner's pragmatic development, and the author also uses three group experiments to illustrate the phenomenon. The author set up three group (explicit instruction group, implicit instruction group, control group), and the author analyzes their performance at the end of an experiment, and the result is also evident: "explicit feedback which raises the learners' consciousness and contributes either directly or indirectly to interlanguage development is more effective than implicit techniques which always run the danger of not being perceived as corrective in purpose." [5] And as we know, giving feedback to students in a very important aspect when we teach our students, and for a long time, many scholars hold different opinions about whether the explicit instruction is better or not. But recent findings show that explicit instruction is better.

Refer to the explicit feedback, Azizollah, and Helen use experiment to figure out whether explicit error correction is better than implicit error correction on learner's performance. The procedure they use is quite similar as the former scholars used, they also set up two different groups, and one group will receive explicit error correction, and another group will receive implicit error correction. By analyzing the data from the experiment, the authors gave a conclusion: "Explicit correction was significantly more effective than the implicit correction." [6], what's more important, after giving the conclusion, the author also analyze the reason behind the result: "(1) explicit correction created more attention, (2) the fact that learners were explicitly corrected on their errors created a contrast with the form in their interlanguage, (3) the provision of the correct form in implicit correction may not have been effective because it was less clear to learners what was wrong with their erroneous utterances and without such understanding, hypothesis revision was not possible, and (4) learners most likely perceived the explicit corrections as corrective feedback requiring them to correct their errors whereas this was not the case with the implicit feedback." From their experiment, we can see that the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, I mainly discuss the reason why the explicit instruction is better than implicit instruction from two perspectives. And I give a determination that the explicit instruction is better than the implicit instruction, especially when we talk about the EFL settings. The advantage of the explicit instruction is distinct, it's time-saving, more efficient, and students can comprehend and master knowledge in a relatively short period.

Admittedly, in some research papers, some scholars hold an opinion that the implicit instruction is more beneficial to students in the field of communicative skills. The implicit instruction could help students to internalize speaking skills and help students to learn a language in the more natural way, students won't feel too much pressure and they could remember the knowledge through some practical tasks, and students may find out that the implicit instruction is more funny and relaxing than the explicit instruction. We have to admit that the implicit instruction does have some advantages, but overall, in the EFL setting, especially in the country which native language is not English, the explicit instruction could help students to have a solid base for future language learning in a relatively short time period, in some rural area of developing country, the explicit instruction is most time-saving and economic method to teach foreign language, as we know that the implicit instruction need to combine some different method to present content, like video, audio, and even some electronic courseware, but in some area of developing country, it's impossible for some school to have that equipment to show those methods. Maybe as the society develops, the implicit instruction could be introduced to other countries, and if we could combine the explicit instruction with the implicit instruction effectively, the English teaching process will be promoted dramatically. At the same time, the explicit instruction is more effective and time-saving, because the metalinguistic knowledge is clearly presented to students, and students can comprehend that knowledge in the relatively short period. From this perspective, the explicit instruction is more suitable for students.

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