

Classroom Interaction: A Review of Teachers' Questions

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Abstract

Under the new curriculum standards, classroom teaching needs to focus on innovative classroom interaction. By changing the role of teachers, innovating teaching methods, and emphasizing classroom evaluation, various means can be used to promote interaction and cooperation between teachers and students, in order to stimulate students' learning interest and enthusiasm as well as improve teaching effectiveness. Through effectiveness classroom interaction, students can continuously think, ask questions, and engage in in-depth discussions, forming their own ways of thinking and habits. This article proposes the use of questioning and interactive methods through research on domestic and foreign literature on classroom interaction, as well as classroom observation in academic writing classes, to encourage students to consciously learn.

Keywords

Classroom interaction; Teachers' questions; Curriculum reform.

1. INTRODUCTION

Research into the field of classroom interaction in the L2 context has gradually developed since the 1960s, and classroom interaction is defined as a particular type of interaction that occurs between the teacher and students, as well as students and students in a classroom setting [1]. During the processes of classroom interaction, learners could be equipped with a wide range of linguistic input and output [2]. Furthermore, Tsui [3] claims that whether the teaching objectives of a lesson can be realized is heavily dependent on the interaction between the teacher and students.

It has been demonstrated that class interaction is crucial for both teachers and students. With regard to students, their communicative competency might be improved through class interaction since they can have the opportunity to communicate with their peers and the teacher in various classroom activities (e.g., brainstorming; group discussion; debate) [4]. From the perspective of teachers, class interaction could be used as an effective tool for teachers to facilitate their teaching practices [5].

Classroom interaction can stimulate curiosity. Classroom teacher-student interaction can stimulate students' curiosity. When teachers ask questions and stimulate thinking, students are no longer passively receiving knowledge, but actively participating in thinking and discussion. This initiative helps cultivate students' thirst for knowledge. Teacher's questioning can guide students to think and stimulate their deep thinking. And students' answers are a reflection of their understanding of knowledge. By answering questions, they internalize knowledge into their own thoughts. Discussion and debate in the classroom is one of the important ways for teacher-student interaction. By participating in discussions, students can share different perspectives and insights, thereby expanding the breadth of their thinking.

In addition, classroom interaction can promote active participation in the classroom and help establish a positive learning atmosphere. Students feel that their viewpoints are respected and valued, and they are more willing to participate in classroom discussions and activities. Encourage collaboration and sharing, as well as teacher-student interaction and student collaboration and sharing. Through interaction with classmates, students can learn from each other, inspire each other, establish cooperative relationships, and work together to solve problems.

Teacher student interaction is not only a way of classroom teaching, but also an art of education. Through active teacher-student interaction, students can stimulate their interest in learning, cultivate deep thinking, promote self-directed learning, establish a positive learning atmosphere, and improve teaching effectiveness. Educators and students should work together to create a positive and interactive classroom environment to achieve higher quality education. In teacher-student interaction, teachers should play the role of mentors, guiding students to explore the depth and breadth of knowledge. They should encourage students to ask questions, think, discuss, and collaborate. At the same time, students should also actively participate and demonstrate their independent thinking and innovative abilities. Teacher-student interaction is a process of mutual inspiration and growth, which not only enables students to acquire knowledge, but also cultivates their thinking patterns and learning attitudes.

Finally, teacher-student interaction is not limited to within the classroom, but can also extend to extracurricular activities and social interactions. Students can actively seek advice from teachers, and teachers can also provide additional learning resources and guidance for students. In this positive interaction, the spark of education will continue to burst out, and the growth of students will also be more rich and interesting.

The domain of class interaction contains many important areas, especially teachers' questions and corrective feedback. Lee [6] states that asking questions is one of the most prevalent types of teacher talk while teaching a language, and Comber et al. [7] add that the teacher tends to spend approximately sixteen percent of the time in asking questions in a whole lesson. Considering the statements mentioned above, the capacity for asking appropriate questions needs to be valued by all teachers [8], and therefore teachers' questions are worthwhile to be discussed in this paper.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The term "teachers' questions" is defined as a particular input that is given by teachers to students [9]. The purpose of teachers' questions is to create a favourable learning environment for learners so as to motivate them to engage in class interaction [10], which is conducive to facilitating the processes of teaching and learning.

It has been well-documented that teachers' questions may have various functions such as: (1) arousing and maintaining learners' learning interest; (2) maintaining and improving learners' class engagement; (3) offering learners the chance to express their opinions and understanding of the concepts and issues; (4) checking and evaluating learners' understanding; (5) giving learners more opportunities to practice their L2 speaking ability; (6) helping teachers to make clarifications or confirmations. Taken together, these statements imply that teachers' questions might play a significant role in promoting the teaching and learning processes, which is supported by Brualdi [11]. Nevertheless, the main limitation of the claims is that they may fail to specify that any type of teacher question could only have one or several functions mentioned above instead of including all the functions.

Given the fact that the type of teachers' questions has significant influences on L2 teaching and students' class engagement, numerous taxonomies of teachers' questions have been proposed to investigate this topic further. A typical taxonomy classifies teachers' questions into

two types (see Figure 1): open-ended questions and close-ended questions [3]. Close-ended questions refer to questions that have one correct answer, whereas open-ended questions are questions that could have many possible answers. Tsui’s [3] seminal study provides valuable insights into the research of teachers’ questions.

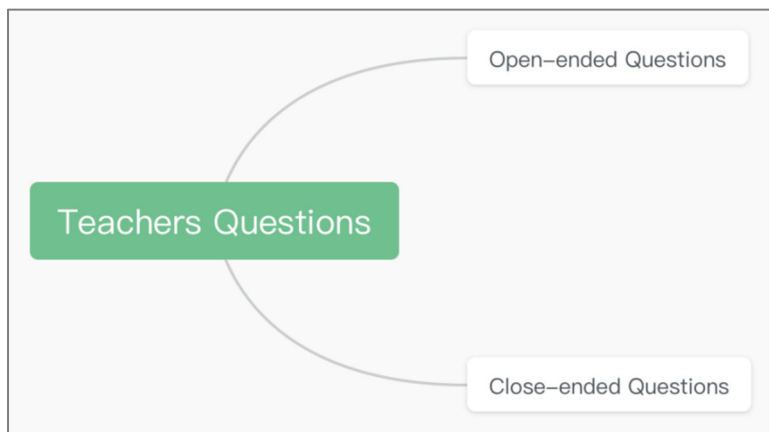


Figure 1. Taxonomy of teacher question types

However, the potential weaknesses of this classification could be that it ignores the complexity of teachers’ questions and does not classify the teachers’ questions in a systematic way. Additionally, Kawalkar and Vijapurkar [12] maintain that close-ended questions require less cognitive thinking processes, whereas open-ended questions require a higher level of thinking abilities. Nevertheless, this statement might be problematic since close-ended questions sometimes require high-level cognitive abilities. For instance, if an L2 teacher asks a closed-ended question that requires learners to analyze a complex grammatical structure in a long sentence, this question may still require learners to have high-level cognitive skills, which is corroborated by Kersten et al’s [13] research.

As a response to the previous taxonomy, Ellis [14] provides a more rounded and in-depth taxonomy, including two main branches with several sub-categories (see Figure 2) [15]. Specifically, echoic questions and epistemic questions are the two main branches. Echoic questions emphasize confirmation, clarification and learners’ comprehension, whereas epistemic questions focus on obtaining more in-depth information.

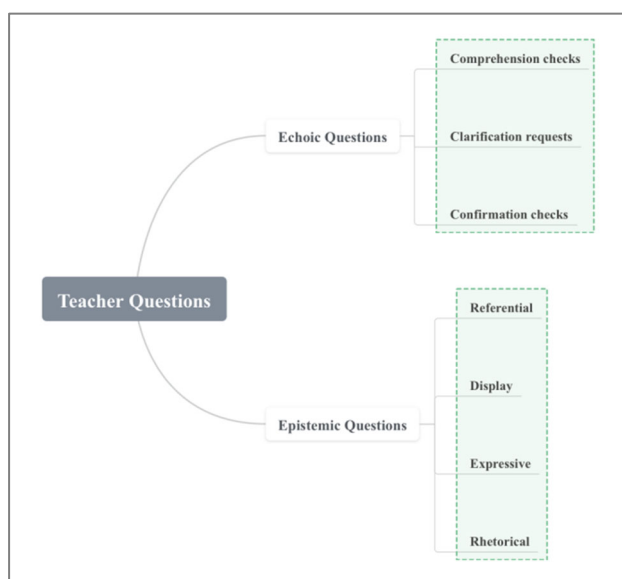


Figure 2. Taxonomy of teacher question types

The former contains three sub-categories, namely “comprehension checks, clarification requests and confirmation checks” [15]. And the latter comprises four sub-categories, namely “referential, display, expressive and rhetorical questions” [15]. Among these sub-categories, display and referential questions are the two kinds of questions that teachers utilize more frequently in the language classroom. Thus, display and referential questions for L2 teaching have been extensively investigated in recent decades. Display questions refer to questions that teachers have known what the correct and conclusive answer is, and learners could have the chance to show their knowledge through display questions. By contrast, referential questions are questions that teachers do not have a conclusive answer to, and this type of question allows learners to share their own views and line of thought. Yang [16] concluded that display questions are used more frequently by teachers in the L2 classroom, whereas teachers seldom use referential questions.

However, Yang [16] seems to ignore that many potential contributing factors could implicitly influence the language teachers’ choice of questions. In speaking lessons, referential questions could be used more frequently for learners with higher proficiency, which might be because they are able to give rational responses to the referential questions. Furthermore, compared with the display questions, referential questions could give rise to more class interaction, and this phenomenon may be more obvious among learners with a higher level of language competence. Moreover, Bozorgian and Fallah [17] argue that referential questions could increase the word production and prolong the learners’ speaking time, which is conducive to enhancing learners’ oral ability. However, this may not be the case for learners with low-level proficiency. Farrell and Mom [15] found that, in speaking lessons at the elementary level, more display questions than referential questions are asked to improve learners’ class engagement. The underlying reason might be that the display questions are more likely to enhance the class engagement of learners with relatively weak proficiency than the referential questions, considering that these learners may not have sufficient linguistic abilities to answer referential questions. Collectively, with respect to the speaking lesson, it is almost certain that display questions are used more frequently for learners at the elementary level, while referential questions are used more frequently for learners at the intermediate and advanced levels, which is corroborated by.

In comparison with the referential question, display questions are asked more frequently in reading lessons since teachers need to use display questions to check learners’ understanding of the reading materials. Similarly, display questions might also be frequently used to examine learners’ comprehension of the listening materials used in listening lessons. Likewise, in grammar lessons, display questions could still be dominant in the class, and the purpose of asking display questions is to assess students understanding of grammatical rules and whether they can use these rules.

In addition, for teachers who have teaching experiences for many years, they tend to become more autonomous and flexible in preparing and teaching the lesson, which means that they are more likely to tactfully utilize different types of questions according to learners’ actual reactions in the classroom. Overall, considering all of these statements, it can be concluded that the learners’ language proficiency, the type of language skill instructed in the language lesson and teachers’ experiences could be the potential contributing factors affecting the use of teachers’ questions in actual teaching practices.

3. CRITICAL REFLECTION

The test-oriented EFL education system is still prevalent in the Chinese context. In other words, the objective of EFL teaching and learning is to achieve satisfactory scores in various EFL examinations. To realize the goal, the majority of Chinese EFL teachers prefer to ask display

questions rather than any other questions since they need to use plenty of display questions to check learners' understanding of the content taught in the class. However, if the display questions are overused, the EFL learners could have less time and opportunities to express and exchange their opinions and ideas on the topics in the class.

Take the author's experiences in observing EFL writing classes in the Y University. The teacher tended to offer students a considerable number of sentences and told students that these sentences were important and were commonly used in the academic writing. After that, the teacher explained the meanings and usages of these sentences to students, and students were required to memorize these sentences in the limited time. Then, the teacher would check students' understanding of these sentences by using writing tasks. Unfortunately, it is unlikely to develop students' academic writing skills in such a way of teaching EFL writing, since the application to such sentences are different from the actual writing situations to a large extent. Taken together, it is almost certain that the current Chinese EFL teaching practices may hinder learners' academic writing ability. Based on the literature discussed in this paper, it is better to use some more referential questions in EFL class since this type of question could give learners the opportunity to present their thinking and opinions, which would be helpful for improving learners' academic writing ability.

Some implications could be made to improve the program for foreign language teacher education in universities in China. First, the English departments in the majority of Chinese universities tend to arrange many courses regarding English literature and Western culture for their students, while the courses related to language teaching are quite limited. Accordingly, it is necessary to design a course about language teaching methodology and add the knowledge of teachers' questions to this course. Further, the strategies of asking questions should also be added to this course since Kholisoh and Bharati [18] suggest that it is vital for teachers to learn some knowledge of teachers' questions as well as questioning strategies. The purpose of this move is not only to equip teachers with the knowledge of teachers' questions but also to strengthen their ability to devise and ask questions effectively and appropriately. Effective questioning helps students use their brains to think, gain a deeper understanding and apply knowledge, and transform the traditional practice of rote memorization. Questioning is a necessary part of classroom teaching. In addition, answers between teachers and students can help guide students to continuously diverge their thinking on a certain topic, advance towards unknown fields, promote effective construction of thinking systems, and stimulate creative thinking. Effective questioning can promote students to better integrate into the process of interactive teaching, improve questioning skills, and teachers can focus on these aspects:

Firstly, questioning should focus closely on teaching objectives and serve them. Secondly, questioning should be concise and clear, allowing students to know from which aspects they should think about the problem. Thirdly, it is best to ask divergent questions, as they provide students with something to say and leave ample space for their creative thinking. Fourthly, the questions raised should have a certain level and height, and questions with a higher starting point can effectively stimulate students' interest in learning and creative thinking.

Moreover, the teacher may not apply or not have the awareness of applying the knowledge and principles in their actual teaching practices, even though the teacher has obtained the knowledge and ability to ask questions. Accordingly, an effective way to alleviate this issue could be writing diaries. Writing diaries have been widely recognized as an approach for teachers to reflect on their teaching practices. During the process of writing diaries, teachers' awareness of applying the teaching theories (such as knowledge related to teachers' questions) could be improved. For example, an EFL teacher asks an excessive number of display questions in the previous speaking class. As a consequence, the learners' reactions to these questions are not

active, and, in this case, the teacher could reflect on the reasons by writing a diary and consider how to improve this situation in the next lesson.

4. CONCLUSION

The curriculum reform advocates exploratory learning, advocating for students to participate in practical activities and learn by doing. On the surface, these ideas all point to the learning of students, but in essence, they all emphasize interactive teaching between teachers and students.

Teachers and students, students and students, and people and objects can train students' thinking qualities, improve their intellectual abilities, develop their non intellectual factors, and cultivate them into "well-rounded individuals" through emotional, behavioral, and cognitive interactions. Constructivism believes that the teaching process must have four basic elements: teaching context, writing sharing, dialogue and communication, and meaning construction. Among them, the teaching context is crucial, which can support and promote students to construct the meaning of the knowledge they have learned, guide students to independently recognize and freely explore within it, and naturally collaborate and share with teachers and other students.

Effective interactive teaching is to mobilize all positive factors, focus on promoting student development, transform the state of "false" interaction and one talk, guide students to think, and create classroom teaching with "autonomy, cooperation, and exploration" as the main melody. Therefore, the essence of interactive teaching is also to promote the development of students. The effectiveness of interaction directly affects the development of students and determines the quality of classroom teaching. The development of effective interaction requires teachers to transform the advanced concepts they have learned into actions, starting from practice, and carefully design, plan, and implement effective interactive teaching.

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