



TEACHERS' CLASSROOM QUESTIONING IN COLLEGE ENGLISH CLASS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching activities in classroom are communication activities between teachers and students. Classroom questioning is a form of language communication which plays an important role in promoting students' thinking in English class. In this paper, five teachers' college English classes from North China Electric Power University are selected as the research subjects. Based on the ways of asking questions, question types, and teachers' feedback on students' answers from all the collected questions, the current situation of teachers' questioning in college English class is firstly investigated and analyzed. And, then the existing problems and some teaching strategies are put forward intending to help teachers to carry out more effective classroom questioning and reach the purpose of improving teaching quality.

Key words: classroom questioning, teachers' questions, questioning strategies, students, effective questioning.

1. Introduction

Teacher talk is an important element in foreign language classroom. It is not only a tool for teachers to implement teaching plans, but also an important source for students to input and output language. Additionally, it plays a vital role in organizing classroom teaching and learners' language acquisition. Teacher talk is not only a direct factor affecting the development of students' language, but also directly related to whether teaching can proceed smoothly. Therefore, the quality of teacher talk and the talk skills in class are key factors in classroom teaching.

Nowadays, the teaching mode of "learner-centered" is prevailing; classroom questioning is playing an increasingly important role in this teaching mode. Teachers' questioning is a kind of teacher talk, and it is an inevitable part in language

learning class. Teachers can arouse students' interest in learning, inspire students' thinking and concentrate their attention by asking right questions. Teachers' questions can also check students' mastery of knowledge and completion of homework. For language class, giving chance for students to speak is very important. The teachers' questions can provide opportunities for students output of language.

This paper adopts the method of classroom observation to observe and record five college teachers' questions and students' responses in college English class, summarize the characteristics of teachers' questions in class, explore problems in classroom questioning and provide some strategies for effective teaching.

2. Literature Review

In the 1960s, experts in foreign language teaching began to study the teachers’ questioning in foreign language classes. Many achievements have been made abroad. Researches on classroom questioning mainly focus on the classification of teachers’ question, waiting time after questioning, question allocation and so on. Barnes (1969; 1976) classified teachers’ questions into open question and close question. Long and Sato (1983) classified teachers’ question in classroom into display question and referential question. From the researches of Long and Sato(1983), Brock(1986), Nunan(1987) on teachers’ questions in classroom teaching, they drew a conclusion that teachers were preferable to display questions in class and most of the questions were display questions. Jack R. Fraenkel, classified questions into four types for different purposes. Berrott(1 982) and Ornstein(1 990) and Jacnbsen et a1. (1999) studied the questioning strategies.

The research on teachers’ question discourse analysis at home only started in the 1990s. Tian Zhaoxiang(2001), Hu Qingqiu(2004), Lin Linan(2015), Zhao Lijuan(2018), Peng Ying(2012), ect. They analyzed the teachers’ questions in college English class. Li Qiaolian(2010), Huang Ying(2016) made an analysis from interpersonal perspective on teachers’ question discourses. Liu Xianghui(2019) analyzed teachers’ questions in classroom teaching within the framework of educational ecology.

Classroom questioning is an important part of the teaching process, and teachers’ classroom questions play a vital role in cultivating students’ interest in learning and promoting thinking ability. With more and more researches on teachers’ classroom questioning at home and abroad, teachers pay more and more attention to classroom questioning. Previous researches have provided a reference on research methods and research directions for future researches on this topic. Although we gradually realize the importance of teachers’ classroom questioning, there are still some problems in classroom teaching. This paper will analyze the current situation of teachers’ classroom questioning, and suggest some methods to improve

classroom questioning based on the problems, in hope of providing some reference for teachers’ classroom questioning.

3. Design of the Research

Method of classroom observation will be adopted in this study. The data will be collected in real classroom environment or specific teaching environment through manual or electronic devices.

This study will randomly select five English classes in North China Electric Power University as research subjects. The students of the five classes are freshman and each class size is about 50 students. Text book they use is *New Horizon College English*. The observer will not tell the teachers of the five classes in advance, so as the real class will be shown. During the class observation, the discourses about the questions of teachers and students will be recorded.

4. Analysis

This part will analyze the data collected from five College English classes. The number of teachers’ questions in each class, the ways how teachers ask students to answer questions, the types of questions, the feedback on students’ answers and the questioning mode will be discussed.

4.1 Number of Teachers’ questions in class

Table 1, Number of teachers’ questions

Teac hers	Teac her 1	Teac her 2	Teac her 3	Teac her 4	Teac her 5	SU M
TQ	26	19	21	24	15	105

The English class duration for each session is 50 minutes in NCEPU, and two sessions for one time. Table 4.1 shows that in the 100-minute class, all the five teachers have given chances for students to answer questions. However, the class is still dominated by the teacher, and teacher talks occupy most of the time so that the students can only have limited time to present themselves.

4.2 Ways of Question Asking

Classroom teaching is realized through classroom communication between teachers and students. The most common classroom

communication is teachers' questioning in classroom, that is, teachers initiation questions and then students respond the questions. By observing the five classes, five ways are used to ask questions in classroom teaching.

Table 2, Question Initiation Mode

Teacher	TQ	Volunteer		In Chorus		Group Discussion		Naming	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teacher 1	26	3	0.11	8	0.30	1	0.038	14	0.53
Teacher 2	19	1	0.05	5	0.26	0	0	13	0.68
Teacher 3	12	1	0.08	6	0.5	0	0	5	0.41
Teacher 4	21	3	0.14	5	0.23	2	0.09	11	0.52
Teacher 5	15	2	0.13	3	0.2	1	0.066	9	0.6
SUM	105	10	0.10	27	0.26	4	0.038	56	0.53

College English classes are mostly taught in large classes with a large number of students, usually more than fifty, which causes many teachers not familiar with their students and not clear about the English level of each student. Through classroom observation, in the mode of initiating questions, five teachers use Naming to ask questions most frequently, because they think naming students randomly to respond questions can make most of the students think actively in class. Although this method can expand the scope of the students to answer questions, promote the students to think, the atmosphere of class is too tense, students are not active and just keep silent there, which is bad for students to cultivate the interest of learning English, after all, interest is the language teacher. In order to relieve the tense atmosphere in class, teachers usually choose some questions to ask students answer together, such as the translation of short sentences, the meaning of words, etc., but there is only a small part or even a few students who think actively and answer questions. To make an active class, teachers adopt group discussion and then get the answers to questions. Through discussions and mutual inspirations, students will be more active in answering questions, but this method is used in minority in all questioning methods. From the chart

above, we can find that the method of naming and responding in chorus will be used frequently then the other two question asking ways.

4.3 Types of Questions in Classroom Teaching

According to Jack R. Fraenkel, four types of questions are asked in class to meet different purposes. The first one is Factual Question, the purpose of this type question is to make students acquire factual knowledge, this type of questions often have the key words "who", "what", "when", and "where". and there is one correct answer for this type of question. Following are some questions of this type asked by teachers from the five tested classes.

- T: What's the meaning of "employ" in this sentence?
- T: Find the suffixes of the words in this paragraph and make a classification.
- T: According to this paragraph, what are the three main kinds of these positive external controls?

The second type of question is Descriptive Question, the purpose of this type is to train students' ability to synthesize the information they have acquired, the key word in this type is "how". Such as, ask students to make a summary of the whole passage or one paragraph, or make a

comparison. Following are some questions of this type asked by teachers from the five tested classes.

T: Paraphrase this Sentence.

T: How to find the main idea and what's the main idea sentence?

T: How to divide this passage? And what is the main point of each part?

The third type of question is Explanatory Question; the purpose of this type question is to train students' ability to analyze the knowledge acquired. This kind of question needs students to tell why the answer is that, many answers can be acceptable. The key word of this type is "why". Following are some questions of this type asked by teachers from the five tested classes.

T: Why do you think the passage can be divided in that way?

T: Make a conclusion of this paragraph?

T: What stops us from committing crimes?

The fourth type of question is Heuristic Question, the purpose of this type is to make students have creative thought, and students can use their imagination to find the answer that they think what is right. Following are some questions of this type asked by teachers from the five tested classes.

T: Can you give some other ways to prevent crime?

T: Have you been to Hutong, what do you think of Hutong?

This classification is based on student's cognitive level; the last two types need higher cognitive level than the first two types. Both factual questions and descriptive questions belong to display questions, they are mostly factual and require students to recall and summarize what they have learned. Display questions focus on the text content and exam students' mastery of the text they have learned. The main purpose of display questions is to test whether students have a comprehensive understanding of the text and then decide whether to proceed to the next teaching stage. At the same time, such questions help students understand the text more clearly and provide more opportunities for students to speak and then they can practice oral speaking.

Explanatory question and heuristic question are referential questions, students not only need to recall the information, but also communication, express their own opinions. To answer the last two types of questions students need to analyze, compare, synthesize, give reasons, organize words and think with imagination.

Table 3, Questions in Class

Teacher	TQ	Display questions				Referential questions			
		Factual Question		Descriptive Question		Explanatory Question		Heuristic Question	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teacher 1	26	14	0.53	9	0.34	2	0.07	1	0.038
Teacher 2	19	12	0.63	5	0.26	1	0.05	1	0.05
Teacher 3	12	7	0.58	4	0.33	1	0.08	0	0
Teacher 4	21	12	0.57	7	0.33	1	0.05	0	0
Teacher 5	15	8	0.53	4	0.27	2	0.13	1	0.07
SUM	105	53	0.50	29	0.28	7	0.07	3	0.028

From the chart above, we can find that although there exists certain differences in the number of the five teachers' questions in classroom, the common characteristics of their questions in

classroom is that display questions are far more than referential questions. Students can find answers of the display questions in classroom from their knowledge they have got or from books, and

teachers know the answers of these questions in advance. There is only one answer for these questions. Thus it is not good for students' critical thinking and creative thinking. From the observation of the class, the referential questions are often discussed in groups, students can use their imagination to find answers and display their

language ability, and then the class will be more active. But there are still less time for them to show themselves, so more referential questions are needed to form and develop students' critical thinking and creative thinking.

4.4 Evaluation on Students' Answers

Table 5. Feedback on student's answer

Teacher	TQ	Feedback		Simple Comment		Brief Comment		interruption		No word	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Teacher 1	26	20	0.76	16	0.615	1	0.038	3	0.16	6	0.23
Teacher 2	19	15	0.78	13	0.68	0	0	2	0.11	4	0.21
Teacher 3	12	7	0.58	6	0.5	0	0	1	0.08	5	0.41
Teacher 4	21	17	0.81	13	0.62	0	0	4	0.20	4	0.20
Teacher 5	15	9	0.6	8	0.53	0	0	1	0.07	6	0.4
SUM	105	68	0.65	56	0.53	1	0.01	11	0.1	25	0.24

Based on the classroom observation, all the five teachers give positive feedback after the right answers of questions. Positive feedback will make students more confident, increase interest in English learning, and they will be more positive in class. However, the evaluation is too simple, simple words like that, *Very Good! OK, Good!* The feedback is too general, so the effect is not very big. The simple positive feedback accounts for 53% in all the questions, and brief feedback only accounts for 1%. For the wrong answers, the teacher doesn't give feedback, and continues to ask another student to answer, or answer the question by themselves. Educator Bloom pointed that teachers' feedback and evaluation are an important to cultivate students' creation. So teaches should not only give simple feedback to students' answers, but also give indirect guidance or direct negation and correction to wrong answers.

4.5 Questioning Modes of Classroom Teaching

As the organizer and implementer of classroom teaching, teachers play a dominant role in classroom teaching. Chinese scholar Song Zhenshao (2004) pointed that the main form of communication between teachers and students in class is asking and

answering. And he thinks classroom questioning model can be divided into three modes from the roles of the initiator and the receiver of the questions, and from the sequence of questioning asking and questioning answering. The three questioning modes of classroom teaching are teacher asking questions and then students answering, students asking and teachers answering, students asking and students answering.

4.5.1 Teacher Question---Students Response

The first questioning mode teachers ask question---students respond--teachers give feedback is the most common mode of classroom questioning. Although a lot of questions are initiated under this questioning mode, they are almost display questions and the quality of these questions is not high, which cannot stimulate students' deeply thinking about these questions. Through the classroom observation of the five college English classes, the main classroom questioning mode of these five teachers is the teacher asking and students answering. Under this single questioning mode, students always think and answer questions passively, some students even lose interest in answering questions, or afraid to be asked by

teachers. Thus students' problem consciousness and active thinking ability can not be trained.

4.5.2 Students Question--Teachers Response

Another mode of classroom questioning is that students question and teachers answer, which is almost never used. Under this questioning mode, students can improve their attention, the ability of oral expression, reading and writing, and critical thinking by asking questions. But students need higher cognitive level to initiate questions and teacher also needs to cooperate with students. Although people were aware of the importance of giving chance to students to ask questions, because of teachers' authority, students' weak ability and deep-rooted old ideas, it is hard for students to ask questions. On the other hand, teachers always adopt the first questioning mode during classroom teaching; students have been accustomed to this mode of classroom questioning, and accustomed to being a questioner.

4.5.3 Students Question--Students Response

In this classroom questioning mode, students initiate questions and students solve problems by themselves. This questioning mode can give students the right to ask and solve problems.

The essence of language is communication, and the aim of foreign language teaching is to cultivate students' communicative competence. In English class, in order to cultivate students' ability to communicate in English, teachers can carry out student-student interaction to create a classroom atmosphere of free communication, so that students are put in a communicative environment, which makes students have the learning motivation. Student - student classroom questioning is a main mode of student - student interaction. If teachers can correctly guide students to adopt this questioning mode, students' learning enthusiasm can be stimulated, their thinking ability can be practiced, and their communication and cooperation ability can also be improved.

Group presentation before the class is most frequently used for student-student interaction. 15-minute presentation is made by a group of students which contains two or three students before each

class. They can choose topics they are interested in by reading English magazines and newspapers or surfing the Internet after class, the selected articles should meet the given requirements. Then group members work together to make slides to present, including the topic and summary of this article, new words, relevant pictures, audio or video, and some questions, etc. Other students make notes when listening. At the end of the presentation, the group asks or answers questions from their classmates. This activity can promote the communication and cooperation among students, cultivate their team spirit, and also make class active, so as to stimulate students' interest in learning English.

In each of the five teachers' English class, there is a group of students to make a presentation before class, during or after the presentation, some questions are asked and answered by students. So we can see, this teaching mode is welcomed by teachers.

5. Strategies to Improve Classroom Questioning

Through the analysis on the total quantity of questions, the question asking way, the types of questions and teachers' feedback on students' answers, we can find that there are some problems in five teachers' classroom questioning. For the quantity of questions in classroom teaching, although the number of teachers' questions in class is large, there is still room for improvement on the quality of these questions. Such as, the sentences uttered by teachers to ask questions are simple and single, which makes the class more boring, and the difficulty of questions is not well controlled by teachers, which has a bad effect on students' enthusiasm to answer questions. In terms of the ways of questioning, the way is single. A single way of asking questions is not conducive to students to show themselves, and students will not want to participate in this classroom interaction. The most commonly used way for five teachers to ask questions in class is random roll call. In terms of question types, most of the questions raised by teachers are display questions, which is not good to cultivating students' critical thinking. Following are some strategies to improve teachers' questioning.

5.1 Preparation for Right Questions

In classroom teaching, all kinds of right questions should be prepared. Teachers need to continually ask themselves: "Why am I doing this?" By asking themselves this question, and arriving at a satisfactory answer, they can determine what questions to ask their student. (JACK R. FRAENKEL) The right questions are those which assist the teacher in achieving a particular objective or set of objectives he considers important. (JACK R. FRAENKEL). According to the classification of questions in classroom teaching mentioned above, different types of questions correspond to different purposes, compared with the display questions, referential questions requires students a higher cognitive level, this kind of questions can exercise students' ability of analysis, synthesis, evaluation, stimulate students' creative thinking, promote the development of students' thinking ability. So teachers should enrich the type of referential questions which are high cognitive questions. During language class, as referential questions examine students' comprehensive ability, students may have unclear thoughts or unclear words in answering questions. Teachers should constantly inspire students and guide them to answer questions in the target language.

To ask right questions, teachers also need to pay attention to the connection between the questions and real life when designing questions before class, which is conducive to arousing students' positiveness and initiative in answering questions, answering questions actively is conducive to the cultivation of students' communicative ability in English. In addition, teachers should grasp the difficulty of questions and design problems based on students' cognitive level, from simple into difficult, step by step, so that students' thinking is gradually deepened, and students' thinking logic is practiced.

5.2 Different Ways to Answer Questions

The ways teachers always used to let students answer questions is randomly naming, but it's not very good to let students be interested in the class. So language teachers should flexibly use different ways to let them answer questions, which can arouse students' positiveness and make every

students participate in the class, so as to create a flexible and effective learning class.

Group discussion is an important way of answering questions. Teachers can actively carry out group activities to inspire students to think in class, so that as many students as possible participate in class activities. The class should be students - centered and let students improve language speaking ability, communicative competence and heighten interest in English learning by making them in colorful classroom activities.

5.3 Positive and Specific Evaluation on Answers

According to Bloom, teachers' evaluation is the most important in classroom teaching. Bloom also regards teachers' feedback and evaluation as an important part for creation. Whether students' answer is correct or not, teachers should listen patiently and give timely and effective feedback to their answers. When listening to students, teachers should pay attention to their facial expressions, give students some positive and encouraging eye contact. After students answer questions, teachers should evaluate students' answers specifically and pertinently.

5.4 Fine Classroom Atmosphere

According to communicative language teaching, student-centered teaching method is emphasized, it also suggesting that good teacher-student relationship is helpful in improving students' interest in learning and their learning effects. Good teacher-student relationship is helpful to form fine class atmosphere. The most common mode of classroom questioning is that teachers ask questions and students answer. This kind of questioning mode will result in a lack of vitality in the class and students' lack of interest in answering questions. Under this questioning mode, teachers dominate the class, the class atmosphere is dead. College students all have their own cognition and opinions. Teachers can appropriately adopt the other two questioning mode referred above, which will make students active in class and alleviate the relationship between teachers and students. If the problems raised by students can be solved by themselves under the guidance of teachers, the interaction

between students can be strengthened. Under these two questioning mode, the class atmosphere is fine, students are willing to learn in class and have more interest in learning in this fine learning atmosphere.

6. Conclusion

As an important part of college English class teaching, classroom questioning plays an important role in students' speech output and improving second language acquisition. Foreign language class provides a language environment for students to learn this language, while questions in language class maximize the opportunities for students to use the language. Teachers' careful design of these questions, various ways of asking questions and specific feedback on students' answer will motivate students' enthusiasm to answer questions and improve their interest in language learning. Due to the limitations of the surveyed teachers, students and subject, this survey may not represent the situation of classroom questioning of all college English teachers' class, but teachers' grasp of classroom questioning skills can make effective classroom questioning. Effective questioning can stimulate students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning, develop the interest in learning, and activate their thinking, so as to promote their all-round development.

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