The Research on Strategies of College English Teachers Classroom Questioning

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Abstract

Questioning is one of the most frequently used strategies in classroom teaching, as well as the most influential teaching skill. It is a useful way for teachers to output information, to convey information and to obtain feedback from students. Teachers can also use it to communicate with their students. Effective questioning in class can encourage students to give relative and complete answers. It can activate students' thought, develop their recognition and organize the class as well. However, there is little research in teachers' questioning, especially in which teachers' questioning and students' expectations are combined. This study aims to explore the teachers' questioning characteristics from the following aspects: the types of questions, the ways of answering questions, questioning strategies, the distribution of questions, wait time and feedback in college EFL class. The results may contribute to the teachers' questioning and the second language acquisition in EFL classrooms; meanwhile it may train students' language competence and improve the efficiency of teaching quality.

Keywords: questioning features, questioning strategies, teachers' feedback, students' expectation

1. Introduction

Teacher talk is one of the main ways for learners to receive comprehensible target language input in English class. It is not only a tool to impart knowledge, but also serves as a crucial source of input. One of the interaction features of teacher talk is questioning, which is a fundamental way for teachers to control the classroom discourse and keep students participating in the class. Therefore, it has attracted considerable attention from researchers of language classroom teaching, and it has a significant effect on the quantity and quality of student interaction in the class. Investigations indicate that teachers raise questions in class in order to enhance interaction. Chaudron's (1988) studies show that teachers' questioning behavior takes 20% to 40% of classroom talk. Teachers' questions have attracted many researchers' attention these days (Nunan, 1989). Richards and Lockhart (1994) believed teachers' questioning plays an important part in language learning.

Teacher questions are considered to be "the basic unit underlying most methods of classroom teaching" (Gall, 1970). According to Gall and Ellis (1994), questioning is served as a valuable medium of instruction in which students are stimulated to think and learn. Meanwhile, questions can be seen as a device for controlling the flow of interaction on the whole class. Ellis said that questions were significant because they require responses and serve as a means of obliging learners to be involved in classroom interaction with communicative language. Questioning is regarded as one of the most frequently used strategy as well as the major source of comprehensible language input in classrooms.

Good questions can help students to improve their linguistic competence and strategic questioning can stimulate the students' imagination, and motivate them to search out new knowledge. More effective classroom questioning can encourage all students to think at higher cognitive levels. However, the study of teachers' questioning in China is far from satisfactory, and it is lack of width and depth. Previous studies about teachers' questioning never take the expectation of students into account or even overlook it. This study will fill the gap and also provide some effective ways to improve college English teachers' classroom questioning.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Classroom Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is the study of the relationship between language and the contexts (McCarthy, 2002). It studies how sentences in spoken and written language form larger meaningful units in different social contexts. Thus, the data resulting from discourse analysis illustrates that the language use for human communication is intertwined socially, cognitively, and linguistically (Hatch, 1992). Recently, discourse analysis has been carried out in the classroom so that we can evaluate output of the teachers, input of the students, the procedures in classrooms, and the types of relationships between teachers and students. The forms and talks between the student and the student, or the students and the teacher can be revealed.

The language classroom research of Bellack et al. (1966) is traditionally viewed as a pioneering study, which offers a simple description of classroom discourse involving a four-part framework: 1) structure, 2) solicit, 3) respond, 4) react (Allwright & Bailey, 1991, p. 98).

Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) conducted an important study at the University of Birmingham, and developed a model for the description of teacher-pupil talk based on a hierarchically structured system of ranks (Chaudron, 1988). According to the hierarchical structure, the discourse level includes five ranks: lesson, transaction, exchanges, move, and act, and each of them builds up the elements of the higher rank. They find there is a pattern of three-part exchanges in the native-speaker school classrooms, including: 1) teacher elicitation, 2) student response, 3) teacher feedback.

2.2 Teachers' Questions

Long and Sato (1983) states there are two kinds of questions the teachers ask in classroom: display questions and referential questions.

Display questions are referred to as known information questions, that is to say, the teacher already knows the answer but asks to check if the students can produce it. For example, what does the text tell us? What is the answer to this question?

Referential questions are the questions to which the teacher does not know the answer and there is a genuine exchange of information. The focus is on what is said, not on how it is said. For example, what is your opinion? What do you think of him or her? Can you say something about him or her? Referential questions are designed to elicit students' real communication.

In the EFL classroom, questions take much of the class talk and are of various kinds. Questions play an important role in classroom and can serve different functions in EFL instruction. Kauchak and Eggen (1989, p. 104) and Ellis (1994) view that the functions of questions can be mainly sorted into three categories: diagnostic, instructional and motivational. Kauchak and Eggen (1989), in the book of Learning and Teaching, list the functions of teacher's questions:

- Questions can encourage verbal interaction between teachers and students.
- Questions focus students' attention on particular aspects or features of a topic.
- Questions are used to evaluate students' knowledge and comprehension.
- Questions help to review and check essential content in a subject.
- Questions stimulate thinking and the mental activity.
- Questions can be used to prompt both low and high level cognitive processes.
- Questions can be used to control the social strategies of students.
- Questions are often used to encourage desirable or restrict undesirable strategies.

(Kauchak & Eggen, 1989, p. 103)

2.3 Teachers' Questioning Strategy

With questioning strategies, teachers pose questions skillfully so as to fulfill some teaching aims, that is, to motivate class interaction, elicit from learners mole appropriate responses, and utterances of higher quality, to set a lively student-centered class environment and to promote L2 language competence of learners. Teachers' questioning strategies include prompting, probing and repeating and redirecting.

a. Prompting

"Prompting implies that a pupil cannot give a correct response-the question is beyond him. The teachers have to

prompt or help him by going back two or three steps, and by making his/her prompting questions simpler." (Kerry, 1982, p. 13). Perrott (1982, p. 63) listed the characteristics of prompting strategy "The teacher asks a question. The pupil replies with 'I don't know' or provides a weak reply. The teacher goes on to give him a hint to guide the pupil to a better answer to the initial question." Prompting can be further divided into several other strategies, such as paraphrase, giving examples, decomposition, simplification, prolonging wait time and description.

b. Probing

"Probing involves a series of questions or comments usually addressed to one student that is designed to elicit a more complete or more adequate answer. Frequently, teachers probe to encourage students to think at higher levels, to support their statements- the main function of probing is 'why' " (Hunkins, 1995, pp. 211-212).

c. Repeating

Repeating strategy means repeating the question after posing one question and before anyone responds to it or when no volunteers or no one is nominated to answer a proposed question. Teachers repeat the original question for the following purposes: 1) to make sure all the students are listening to the question; 2) to check if students have understood the question; 3) to encourage students to express their opinions; 4) to break the silence and activate the class; 5) to leave more time for students to think .

d. Redirecting

As Perrott defined, redirecting means to direct the same question to several students (Perrott, 1982, p. 79). It is also named as shifting interaction. If a student's response is incomplete or incorrect, the teacher should try to prompt that student first. If the prompting is not productive, the same question should be redirected to a second or even a third student.

The strategy of redirecting questions to other students is also used when the teacher wants other students to illustrate more or to provide more examples. For example, the teacher may say "Jim, do you agree with Lucy?" or "Can you say something more to your desk mate's answer?" By doing it, interactions between students will be enhanced.

3. Theoretical Framework—Sinclair and Couthard' Model

Since the late 1940's there has been a growing interest in studies of language interaction inside the classroom. Sinclair and Couthard (1975) investigated daily conversation and classroom discourse, and on the basis of Halliday's (1961) study, they developed an analyzing model of classroom discourse involving a series of ranks and levels arranged in a hierarchical order.
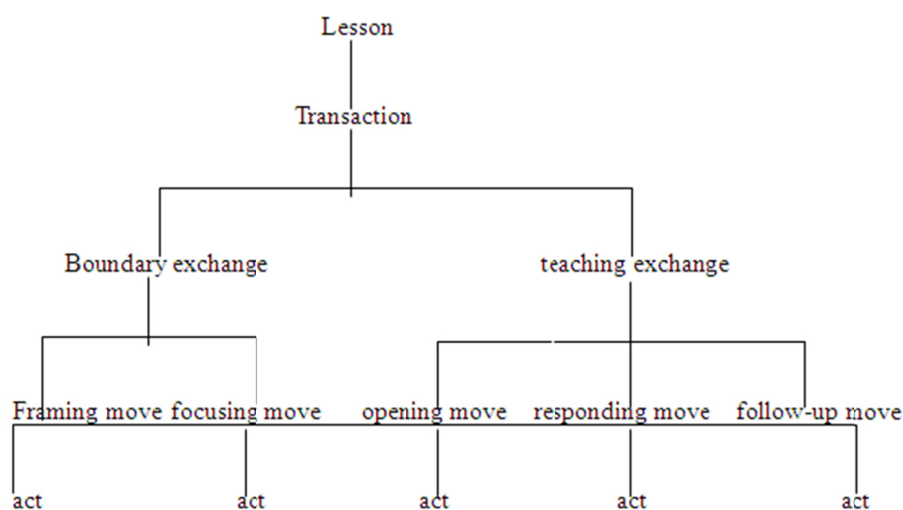

Figure 1. Sinclair and Couthard's model

Act—It is the smallest unit of discourse structure which is expressed by clauses or a single word and is different from speech act.

Move—Move is the second smallest unit of discourse structure and sometimes it may be a sentence, a phrase, a word, even gestures or silence. The structure is expressed in terms of one or more acts. It is the minimum contribution to an exchange by one speaker.

Exchange—The structure expressed in terms of one or more moves, with IRF as its basic structure. It is the primary unit of language interaction.

Transaction—Transaction is the unit whose boundaries are typically marked by "frame" and "focus". Frame in this context means something linguistic which indicates to the students that transaction has ended, another is beginning. Focus is the metastatement which tells the students what the transaction is going to be about.

Lesson—Lesson is the highest rank in this rank structure which refers to a period of teaching a particular lesson in the classroom.

In addition, an exchange has a structure made up of three parts: the initiation by the teacher, response from the student, then follow-up (Feedback) move usually from the teacher, known as the IRF pattern. From the observation, we see that the most common type of classroom interaction is "IRF". IRF are the initials of initiation, response and feedback, terms popularly used in conversation analysis. The typical classroom IRF discourse pattern consists of three moves: the initiating move from the teacher, the responding move from the student and a follow-up (feedback) move from the teacher which is usually regarded as an evaluation.

We can use the IRF model to analyze the question-answer structure. In this situation, the initiation of IRF is a question. In most situations, it is the teacher who initiates the interaction by asking questions. The response of IRF is an answer which is predicted but itself sets up no exceptions, therefore response or answer is characterized by an utterance from students. For example,

T: (elicit) Have you done some prepare work?

S: (reply) Have a little.

T: (feedback) A little is enough…

IRF is the typical structure in the classroom interaction and is also the basic and skeleton structure, and they are also some extensions of the IRF structure.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 The Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions.

1) What are teachers' questioning features in college English classroom?

2) What are the effective ways of college English teachers classroom questioning?

3) What is the relationship between teachers' questioning behaviors and classroom interaction?

4) Are there any ways for teachers to improve their questioning strategies? If any, what are they?

4.2 Participants

The participants of this study consist of five teachers and their 150 students in Henan Polytechnic University. Both the students and the EFL teachers share the same native language-Chinese. The average size of each class varies from 45 to 60 students.

4.3 Instruments

Instrument l: Observation and Recording in classrooms

Instrument 2: Questionnaire

Instrument 3: Interviews

Instrument 4: SPSS 17.0

4.4 Data Collection

The data collection was mainly from the writer's in class observation and recording, the questionnaire and interviews.

4.5 Data Description

The data were sorted according to the need of the present study, includes the questions, the strategies; the adequate amount of data ensured the impartiality of our analysis and conclusion.

4.6 Limitations in Data Collection

Firstly, the writer mainly collected the data through tape-recording in class, ignoring body language, such as facial expressions, gestures, etc, of the subjects. Secondly, a small amount of the recording was unintelligible and had to be left alone. These limitations might to some extent affect the data for the present study.

5. Results and Discussion

5.1 College English Teachers' Classroom Questioning Features

5.1.1 Frequency of Display and Referential Questions

Table 1 Teachers' display and referential questions

Teachers	Questions		Total
	Referential	Display	
T1	9	89	98
T2	12	69	81
T3	7	35	42
T4	10	56	66
T5	2	16	18
Total	40	265	305

According to the Table 1, we can see the five teachers totally produce 265 display questions and 40 reference questions. T1 put forward 98 questions; T5 put forward 18 questions. Teachers often ask more display questions instead of referential ones in class, by which teachers are confined to a form of questioning and answering. For example,

T: Do you know anything about Milton?

Ss: Yes.

T: Do you think he is a great poet?

Ss: Yes. I think so.

This type of questioning is quite common in class. Reasons for this may be these: on the one hand, the size of class is too big and it is impossible to involve too many students and the teachers have to finish the teaching tasks in limited class time; On the other hand, knowledge-display questions elicit more student turns than referential (idea-expressing and evaluation-making) questions, because students only need to provide "yes" or "no" or a single-word answer to knowledge-display questions. In addition, knowledge-display questions merely test recall whereas idea-expressing and evaluation-making questions require inference, evaluation, appreciation, so more time is needed. Finally, the teacher's problematic questioning behaviors should be considered. Sometimes although the teacher asks students to discuss a question or a topic, he does not ask the question in an ideal way, so the students are confined to the answer "Yes" or "No", and eventually it cannot elicit more answers from the students. If he made some modifications, things might be different. The teacher can ask questions mentioned above like this,

T: Now, let's discuss Milton and his poems. Who would like to say something about him or his poems? Student 1. Please.

Sl: As far as I know, Milton is one of the famous English poets. He wrote poems and epics.

S2: Milton is famous for his works: *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*.

So, teachers should make efforts to use fewer display questions because these prevent the interaction that promotes language acquisition.

We can see the effect of referential questions on the students' language output through the following excerpts.

T: Do you find that computer is very helpful or beneficial to your life? (Referential question)

S1: I think computer is good for us. I often write the blog and surf the internet.

T: Oh, really? Very good! You're a writer.

S2: Usually we can do it for study, and we can relax by playing computer games.

T: Excellent. I agree with you. I often do online teaching. Anyone else?

S3: I think computer is useful. I often read some novels or read some, er, such as, read some flash. I think computer can have me study.

T: Ok, Right. Thank you.

So, teachers should use different types of questions, especially more referential questions should be used in class instead of display questions to create more chances to stimulate the students' desire to participate in class interaction to enhance their language competence and communicative competence.

In view of the classification of questions, about nearly l3% can be regarded as referential questions and all the others are displayed ones. The percentage of display questions is obviously higher than that of referential questions. Lower cognitive questions are more effective than higher level questions but cannot elicit or promote learning. Simply asking higher cognitive questions does not necessarily lead students to produce higher cognitive responses. Teachers often ask referential questions just to encourage all the students in class to participate in the class activities.

5.1.2 The Ways Questions Answered in English Class

Who are required to answer the question: the whole class or the certain student(s)? The following Table 2 shows that T2 and T5 answer lots of questions by themselves in order to save time, with the importance of questioning reduced. Although T2 and T4 provide more questions, as well as providing answers, which do harm to the performance of some students. Some active volunteers always seize the chance to answer question and threaten the principle of equality. If the teachers always nominate volunteers to answer questions, the class will be dominated by them. So teachers should resist the temptation of questioning volunteers in order to provide more opportunities to students in the whole class especially those who are idle, inactive and quiet.

Table 2. The way questions answered in English classes

		The Way Questions Answered in English Classes				Total
		In chorus	volunteer	appoint	self-answer	
	T1	5	5	4	1	15
	T2	26	27	3	13	69
Teachers	T3	30	10	5	5	50
	T4	14	25	3	2	44
	T5	50	13	10	17	90
Total		125	80	25	38	268

5.1.3 Teachers' Questioning Strategies

A good teacher has the ability to use the classroom questioning strategies and know when and how to use them in different cases. According to the classroom observations, some teachers often modify their questions by various ways when the students cannot give satisfactory answers. For example,

T: We learned some words to express one's mind. They are "excited", "happy", and "gloomy". Can you tell me what "gloomy" means? (Pause. Silence.)

T: Well, when do you feel gloomy? (Pause. Silence.)

T: Can you remember a time when you felt gloomy? What did you do at that time when you were gloomy? (Pause. Lily raises her hand.)

T: Yes, Lily?

Lily: Last week, my boyfriend said he would go to cinema with me on Sunday evening, but he didn't show up. I felt very gloomy and ate a lot of snacks.

T: Oh, maybe he was hampered by important issues. I'm sure he will explain.

The purpose of the questions in this sample is to review the new words learned in last lesson. The teacher's first question "what does gloomy mean?" is clear itself, but obviously it is not practical enough. Even if the students understand the meaning of "gloomy", it is not easy for them to explain. So the teacher turned the question to another form and asked students to recall the situations in which they were gloomy by asking "when do you feel gloomy". This question might also be too vague and big because students might have experienced many times of being gloomy. Then the teacher specified his question and asked students to give just one time and describe what they did in that situation. "Can you remember a time when you felt gloomy?" and "What did you do at that time when you were gloomy?" these two questions are clear and practical. Students can answer them easily.

Table 3. Questioning strategies adopted by teachers

		Questioning Strategies				Total
		prompting	probing	repetition	redirecting	
Teacher	T1	7	3	16	4	30
	T2	6	2	8	0	16
	T3	13	4	9	2	28
	T4	20	3	7	1	31
	T5	4	1	2	1	8
Total		50	13	42	8	113

From the Table 3, we can see that when the students cannot answer the questions correctly or they often keep silent, the teachers often use the strategies of prompting and repetition. They apply prompting strategy most (44.2%). Teachers apply prompting strategies frequently because they consider it is a way of saving time. Offering students the prompts, teachers can help students figure out the meaning or answer of the questions more quickly. They also tend to repeat the question when their students do not catch the meaning of the current question. The ratio of repetition is 37.2%. Just as teachers said, this strategy is very convenient for teachers to use. When students cannot catch the meaning of a question, the teacher can simply repeat it. However, probing and redirecting are not used frequently in class. Probing often involves the use of follow-on or leading questions, which can help the student to answer the initial question or to provide a more complete answer. For the limited time in class, teachers do not raise follow-up questions frequently. And this strategy involves teachers' high cognitive and logical ability, thus, some teachers usually cannot raise appropriate follow-up questions. And they redirect the question to another student when the first one cannot give a satisfactory answer. We know that the reason of the fewness of redirecting is that teachers are not willing to hurt the current student's self-respect.

To explore the topic of questioning strategies deeply, we know that prompting can be further divided into several other strategies, such as paraphrasing, giving examples, decomposition, simplification, prolonging wait time and description. Different kinds of prompting strategies are applied by five teachers. The most frequently used prompting strategy is paraphrasing (30.3%); followed by translation (23.8%), giving examples (18.4%), description (10.5%), decomposition (8.9%) and simplification (8.1%). Here is an example of paraphrase,

T: Do you think some students still hung out even if the final examination is around the corner?

S: What?

T: Some students still kill their time even if the final examination is coming, do you think so?

S: Yes. (Laugh)

The purpose of this question is to focus students' attention on the coming examination. The teacher's first question include two informal expressions " hang out" and "around the corner", which are unfamiliar to students. So the teacher changes the question with simple sentence pattern by asking "Some students still kill their time even if the final examination is coming, do you think so?" Students can answer it definitely.

Here is an example of decomposition,

T: Suppose you are in emergency, what and how should you do and why?

S: What?

T: OK, let me make it simple. If you are in danger or in emergency, what should you do?

S1: I will keep calm.

T: Keep calm, why?

S1: Because when I keep calm, I can think of proper way to solve the problem.

T: OK, well done. But how will you solve the problem?

S1: Dial 110.

T: OK, thank you.

In this example, at the very beginning, the teacher asks questions with "what" "how" and "why". It's difficult for students to remember what the teacher asks. Hence, students respond with "what". Then the teacher divides the questions into smaller ones and makes them easy to understand for students. In this way, students provide answer successfully. This is a typical technique of decomposition.

Redirecting can give bright and active students the chances to answer questions. It can be used when the questions is difficult. The weakness of the frequent use of this strategy is that the bright and active students will deprive the weak and silent students of their chances to answer questions.

5.1.4 Teachers' Distribution of Questions

Among the five teachers, four of them pay more attention to the students whose seats are in the front and in the middle of the classroom. The students in the left, right and back are nearly ignored by them. The question distribution is far away from uniformed and equal. If teachers always ask questions towards the students in the front or middle part of the classroom, it will hurt the students' initiative and intensify the polarity of top students and underachievers. Teachers should be the embodiment of equality and justice. Otherwise, the teaching effect will be affected.

5.1.5 Teachers' Wait Time

Given the wait time of proper length, students may search for the answer freely or without too much stress. As we have discussed in the literature review, researches on classroom questioning and information processing shows that students need at least four seconds to understand a question, consider the available information, organize an answer and begin to respond. Many positive effects appear since teacher waits 3 to 5 seconds for student responses (Rowe [34~35], 1974, 1986).

However, according to the present study, there are only two teachers (T2 and T4) who wait more than 3 seconds after asking questions.

5.1.6 Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback plays a vital role in classroom interaction. In the present study, the researcher divides feedback into three kinds: positive feedback, implicit negative feedback and explicit negative feedback.

Table 4. Teachers' feedback to questions

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A	36	24.5	24.5	24.5
B	67	45.6	45.6	70.1
C	39	26.5	26.5	96.6
D	5	3.4	3.4	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

Among all the questions raised by the teachers, four fifth of the teachers will give feedback, which demonstrates that teachers are used to providing answers to their own questions. In the feedback, most of them are positive feedback (97%), 3% are negative feedback. The result is also identical to Zhou's (2002) research.

Giving explicit negative feedback will not only attack the student who is being criticized at the present time, but also affect other students, which will eventually influence the whole classroom atmosphere.

5.2 Results of Questionnaires and Discussions

The author designed the questionnaire to investigate students' idea about their teachers' questions. It consists of

16 questions, including types of questions, types of questioning strategy, modifications,wait-time,answer-seeking strategies and distribution of teacher's questions. 64.6% of the students like to be questioned by their teachers and questioning takes a large percent of teaching. Most students believe that the proportion of questions depend on the different situations. 80.2 % of students think the teacher asks more display questions than referential questions mostly. 44% of the students think their teacher often asks lots of questions, which are related to vocabularies, phrases, and sentence structures they have learned. Whereas some questions reflect on students' knowledge, attitudes and beliefs about the texts are seldom asked. The results show that some teachers still have the same view as Pica and Long's (1986, p. 93) that teachers are persons whose primary function is to give information and to test whether students have received it by asking them to display their new knowledge. 45% of the students say that there is little discussion or group-work in the classroom. As a result, they can get less chance in learning. No. 6 question is about the distribution of teacher's questions. According to the result, 40.8% of teacher's questions are distributed to all the students, 34% of teacher's questions are distributed to the volunteers, and 18.3% of teacher's questions are distributed to the students the teacher appointed. As for the aspect of question modification, the table indicates that teachers are likely to use various modification devices. According to the results，the more frequently used modification devices are repetition (4.1%), probing (7.5%), and elicitation by providing cues and examples (78.8%). However, only 9.5% of the students think that their teacher prefers to change the question into another one to decrease the difficulty and push the students to reply.

5.3 Results of Interview and Discussions

5.3.1 Results of the Interview with Teachers

All the teachers think questioning plays an important role in the class. But they are not sure whether their questions are closely related to their teaching objectives, they have less confidence in the clarity and logic of their questions and how to distribute the questions, they often feel confused.

They always let the volunteers answer or in chorus because if they arrange particular students to answer, some students might be embarrassed and get hurt when they could not provide the correct or proper answer. They all regard this as a problem, but they could not find the solution.

Most teachers ask some referential questions before the lessons in order to lead in the class. These questions usually help the students get familiar with the topic. They think this procedure can activate student's mind. Some teachers don't ask questions in lead-in part, when they give lectures to students. The reasons are as follow:

First, both teachers and students are not native-English speakers. So the information and knowledge stored in their mind is quite important for both the teacher and his/her students. EFL teachers have to make use of the existing knowledge to put across the new information, that is, to exploit what the learners have already known.

Second, the teachers' personal academic level affects students' performance in class. If the teacher is a knowledgeable one, he/she always updates information and heoretical explanation and can skillfully participate in the interaction with the students; students will be more enthusiastic to give their opinions.

Most teachers will give some positive feedback to students even students who keep silent, because they think they won't let them feel embarrassed in public. After all they are college students, teachers do not want to let them lose face; maybe it will discourage their enthusiasm in the further study.

And if teachers give more relevant hints, but students still cannot answer correctly, teachers may ask them to sit down and sometimes even say some inspiring words.

5.3.2 Results of the Interview with Students

Most students think the way of a teacher's questioning can affect their English learning. Some of them say that if teachers' questions are clear and interesting, they would like to take part in the communication with teachers and they would like to give response. On the other hand, for the higher-level students they would like to challenge and want to infer from teacher's questions, and if teacher's question cannot stimulate their attention, they'd like to learn by themselves.

Most students think requiring volunteers seems to be the best way. They cannot feel shamed or embarrassed if they cannot give the correct answer. And when they cannot answer questions in the class or keep silent, they will care more about the attitude and feedback of teachers. Most of them are eager to interact with the teacher, but sometimes they lack the ability in expression and comprehension. And they expect teachers to give more clear and ostensive stimulus in their questioning techniques.

All of them do not like when teachers repeat questions, because they feel bored in the same way. They say it is a waste of time. And if teachers can simply paraphrase or give some analogies, it will be better.

The majority of students would like teacher questioning to be clearer, interesting, challenging, stimulating, and encouraging the extended or varied answers and not to be only one correct-standard answer.

They hope teachers can take questioning as an art and take them into consideration when questions are necessary, and do not only let them answer "yes," or "no". In fact, they would like to communicate with teachers and even with students in class, they hope teachers can design and give more appropriate information.

All of them are eager to get positive feedback from teachers. Because they think it is important for further study, what's more, teacher's praising words can even motivate their study after class.

5.4 Students' Expectation towards Teachers' Classroom Questioning

Through the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews with students, we know that students consider that asking questions in college English classes will provide benefits for their English learning generally.

Table 5. Questionnaire to investigate students' idea about their teachers' questions

Items	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A	18	12.2	12.2	12.2
B	122	83.0	83.0	95.2
C	7	4.8	4.8	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

The above Table 5 shows that among the 147 students, 140 students (95.3%) hold a positive attitude towards teacher's questioning. 122 (83%) students think that teachers' questioning are more or less beneficial for their English learning and 18 (12.2%) students think their teachers' questions are quite helpful for their English learning. In the interview with students, they suggest that teachers should ask them more questions, for the purpose of checking what the students have learnt and draw their attention.

Table 6. Question 4 in the questionnaire

Items	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A	29	19.7	19.7	19.7
B	118	80.3	80.3	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows the students' preference for different kinds of questions.

Students prefer referential questions. Among 147 students, 118 students (80.3%) like referential questions. Students show more interests in referential questions because *they are very interesting and can draw our attention*.

Table 7. Question 5 in the questionnaire

Items	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A	41	27.9	27.9	27.9
B	20	13.6	13.6	41.5
C	54	36.7	36.7	78.2
D	32	21.8	21.8	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

We can also see that among 147 students (27.9%) favor wh-questions, 54 students (36.7%) prefer the yes/no questions and 20 students (13.6%) like the elicitation questions. On the one hand, teachers want to cultivate

students' language ability, on the other hand, students also expect their spoken English to improve.

In this aspect, teachers questioning suits the students' expectation because teachers and students all consider that wh-questions can elicit more language production than yes/no questions.

According to the social constructivist approach, knowledge is constructed by learners themselves. If the teachers answer the questions by themselves, they will deprive the students of the chance to express themselves and construct knowledge by themselves. Teachers ask students questions, arouse their attention and guide them to think and find their own answers. When students get the answer easily from their teachers, it does not mean that students have comprehended it, which is not a way of real learning.

Table 8. Question 9 in the Questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Percent
A	6	4.1	4.1	4.1
B	11	7.5	7.5	11.6
C	14	9.5	9.5	21.1
D	116	78.9	78.9	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

For the questioning strategies, 78.9% of students favor prompting strategy, followed by redirecting, probing and repetition. Among the prompting strategies, 59 students (40%) are most willing to be given the simplifying strategy when there are some difficulties in answering the current question. They hope the words should be clear and clarify, when they ask some questions in the classes. 29 students (25%) like the decomposition strategy. However, the teachers do not pay much attention to this strategy. They do not highlight the importance of decomposition. When a question is too general for students to get an exact answer, it is desirable to divide it into smaller or more concrete ones. Decomposition is not frequently used by College English teachers from the present study. As T4 admits, teachers are not familiar with this strategy and teachers usually hold that paraphrase and translation are the major technique of questioning modification. There is a gap between teachers' performance and students' expectation. Decomposition needs to be considered by teachers. Students also think giving examples are a major and effective questioning strategy because they tell the researcher that when they cannot figure out the meaning of a question or the answer to it, they are willing to be given vivid examples. This strategy also deserves to be improved by teachers.

Students expect that their teacher can wait for 3~5 seconds after posing questions.

In the questionnaire, 60 students (40.8%) favor 5 seconds and 49 students (33.3%) think 3 seconds are satisfactory. 14.8% of them expect their teacher to leave 10 seconds for them to think about the question and 11.1% of the students expect that the teacher's wait time will be less than 3 seconds. However, in the current study, the average wait time is 1.8 seconds. Teachers should wait longer after asking a question.

In the interview, one student said: My teacher likes asking questions, but I find that after raising each question, she sometimes appoints someone to answer; we don't have enough time to think. Since there is not enough time to ponder the question or prepare, my classmates or I will certainly not answer the question well. If we have more time to think about it, we can perform better in class.

It is urgent for teachers to prolong the wait time. Researches on classroom questioning convey that students need at least 4 seconds to understand a question, collect the available information, organize the answer and begin to reply. Students have more time to think about the question and prepare their answers and they are more likely to answer successfully when more wait time is offered.

Furthermore, 142 students (97%) expected teachers' positive feedback when they have answered a question. Besides, as for the different types of positive feedback, 67 (45.6%) students believed that the positive feedback with explanation in detail is more favorable, repetitions and simple feedback were expected by 39 students (26.5%) and there are 36 students who demand teachers' simple positive feedback. In the classroom observations, we knew that teachers offer positive feedback most of the time, which accords with students' expectation. However, among teachers' positive feedback, the focus is the simple positive feedback, which is not expected by students.

Students hope to be provided with the positive feedback with explanation in detail just because this type of feedback can explain the reason why the answer is true or false; as well it won't hurt students. The simple positive feedback is too mechanical and automatic. On one hand, teachers want to save time in class and usually provide students simple positive feedback. On the other hand, there is little beneficial effect toward students, and fewer students don't like positive feedback with explanation in details. Thus, teachers should try to explain and comment the answer.

In the aspect of questioning distribution, we can see from the following table, 85 students (57.8%) think that the teachers often ask the volunteers to answer questions, then followed by appoint and in chorus.

The students who are interviewed think that teachers should be equal and fair in distributing questions. They suggest that teachers should ask questions to top students, average students and underachievers. They also emphasize that the students whose seats are in the front and in the middle of the classroom are usually asked questions by teachers, which represent unfairness.

Table 9. Question 6 in the questionnaire

Item	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
A	2	1.4	1.4	1.4
B	16	10.9	10.9	12.2
C	44	29.9	29.9	42.2
D	85	57.8	57.8	100.0
Total	147	100.0	100.0	

They expect that their teacher can pay attention to all the students in class when posing questions and does not neglect the feeling of students sitting in the corner or at the back.

5.5 The Effective Ways of English Teachers' Classroom Questioning

According to the results of the teachers' questioning in class and the students' expectation, we find there are some effective ways of college English teachers' classroom questioning.

Referential questions create more interaction in the classroom than display questions do. Students also expect the teacher to raise more referential questions than the display ones. Referential questions can increase the amount of learner output; therefore, an increased use of referential questions may create communication, which can produce a flow of information from students, and may create more classroom interactions. Display questions require short or even one-word answers and hence are less likely to get learners to produce large amounts of speech. However, we cannot generalize that referential questions and real questions are more useful for language learning or display and text questions are useless. In the present research, the teachers have not raised the referential questions to a balanced proportion. According to the standard proposed by Borich, Teachers need to increase the number of referential questions to a proper ratio, 70:30 (display: referential) split for low-efficient learners, 65:35 split for average students and 60:40 (display: referential) split for high-efficient learners, and at the same time, also value the importance of display and text questions.

There are several ways of answering questions. Both teachers and students in the present study show a preference to volunteers' answering questions, because this method can cultivate students' initiative and their courage. However, teachers should avoid depending upon the same few and active students to answer questions all the time. If only the active and extrovert students are asked, the whole class will be monopolized by them and it will leave the other students no opportunity to answer questions. Under the condition that active students always put their hands up after the teacher's questions, the teacher can tactfully thank them for their continuous contributions, and ask for other volunteers. Besides, teachers should call upon non-volunteers, boy-students or absent-minded students in a friendly non-threatening manner. Teachers should present challenging and stimulating questions to all students, not just those perceived as having higher ability or knowledge and try to develop a plan or design some activities for students to answer questions.

Teachers need to be impartial with each student. However, in our research, we find teachers tend to focus their eyes on the students sitting in the front or at the back, while students expect that teachers give equal attention to the students sitting in the four corners of the classroom.

Teachers should not generally ask the students in the front rows because other students will think that they are neglected, thus decreasing their interest in participation. Teachers need to direct attention to all the students (including those sit at the back or in the corner) and walk around the classroom when posing questions to make them approachable to every student.

For the questioning strategies, when the teachers pose a question, they should pay more attention to the sequence of the questions. The questions to be asked can follow the sequence from easy ones to difficult ones. The sequencing of questions also needs to meet the text content and students' level. Teachers need to master how to use different questioning strategies for different situations. When the student nominated cannot figure out the answer to the question, teachers should offer appropriate strategies, such as prompting, repetition, probing and redirecting, etc. Students expect teachers to give more prompting and repetition. And when students cannot provide a well-done answer, teachers should ask follow-up questions to guide students to finish their answer through dropping hints or giving examples. If the current student still cannot answer it, teachers can redirect a second or third student in order to avoid the awkward silence. Using this strategy can reveal the difference between a student's accurate understanding and misconceptions and increase students' participation. It is suggested that teachers adopt more decomposition, which can make students comprehend the question more clearly according to students' expectation.

From the teachers investigated in the study, we know that teachers should offer both enough post-question wait time and post-response wait time. As we discussed before, if teachers can wait 3 to 5 seconds to response, positive effects emerge. Most students also expect that teachers wait for 3 or 5 seconds after a question is posed for them to organize their answers to the question.

If no one can give a response to the question posed by the teacher after 15 seconds, just leave it unanswered. Teachers need to tell the students to think about it after class and teachers will raise the question again at the beginning of the next period. Another important tip teachers should notice is the significance of the post-response wait time. The five teachers in this research give a very short post-response wait time in average. Teachers should prolong the post-response wait time to 1 second to let students finish their speaking totally.

In short, feedback and error correction are the other important aspects of teacher's questioning. In addition, teachers should avoid providing the sweeping feedback such as 'yes', 'good', 'thank you', etc. They should make comments or explanations on students' response. Moreover, teachers should give more positive feedback to underachievers when their answers are correct and satisfying, to encourage and praise them, thus, they will be more interested in learning. At the same time, avoid giving students explicit negative feedback because it will hurt their dignity. Hearing the students' answers are wrong, teachers should not interrupt their answer and correct them, which will deprive their initiative. If it is an important mistake, the teacher can give implicit negative feedback, correct and explain it in detail after students' answer. If it is a minor mistake, the teacher can let it go if it doesn't hinder the communication. Besides the oral feedback, teachers can make appropriate gestures such as nodding, smiling, etc. to express their evaluation.

To sum up, teachers not only need to pose good questions in class to stimulate students' performance and their interaction but also conduct skillful questioning strategies to make their class lively and interesting.

6. Conclusions

The research was executed to figure out the general characteristics of college English teachers questioning in Henan Polytechnic University. The major findings were based on the observation and the analysis of transcripts. The following are some main findings.

First, the author found that English teachers employed more display questions than referential questions in class, which is consistent with the conclusion made by Long and Sato (1983). Meanwhile, according to the results of teachers' questionnaires, teachers are gradually aware of the importance of employing referential questions, which can provide an information gap for students to better their oral English and develop their communicative skills.

Second, the IRF pattern has the dominance of the subjects' class on the whole. The discourse pattern of I1Rl (InRn) F (19%) and IRlF1 (RnFn) (17%) were employed to some extent. There is relationship between the use of classroom discourse pattern and questioning strategy as well as ways of feedback. The employment of classroom discourse patterns is also limited by time. That is, within a time-limited class the teachers have to complete the text comprehension task and at the same time provide learners equal opportunities to practice the target language. Therefore, the employment of the IRF discourse patterns as well as the probing and redirecting feedback should be increased in L2 class in order to improve the students' output and class interaction with the purpose to

develop the critical thinking of students and improve the students' competence.

Third, of all the questions, 37.0% were posed with questioning strategies. Most of the teachers preferred to employ promoting (44.2%) and repetition (37.2%) as questioning strategies. Repetition is employed to break unwanted silence in class and it also can attract students' attention. Other types of strategies like probing (11.5%), redirecting (7.1%), were also employed but not that much. The author also found that the teachers seldom answered questions by themselves, and seldom appointed some students to answer the questions, which showed that they more than often preferred to use strategies to make questions easier for students to answer and it will reduce the students' confidence and lead to the reduction of interaction in class, though they want to give students more equal chances for them to express themselves.

Fourth, short wait-time within 3 seconds on average and long wait-time of 10 seconds both appeared occasionally, but it failed to encourage greater learner production.

Fifth, in terms of feedback, acceptance and repetition were the two main methods, with various non-verbal cues such as nodding, smiling and other gestures. In a word, positive rather than negative feedback has been used when students make errors, in order to create relaxed, friendly but controlled atmosphere.

In conclusion, the present study provided some practical suggestions for EFL teachers to improve the quality of classroom teaching and interactional activities, as well as to develop students' communicative competence and overall abilities in second language learning.

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