

Language teacher response



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Teacher's questioning

Strategies in EFL classrooms

- 1) What type of questions does the teacher use?

- 2) Is there a predominance of any particular type(s)?

- 3) What modification techniques does s/he employ when questions are not understood?

- 4) How much L2 production do questions generate from the learners?

Questioning is considered by researchers as one of the commonly used strategies in language classrooms. Questions are a very important aspect of classroom talk and teacher's talk is largely made up of questioning (Tsui 1995). Educational studies on language classrooms 'have focused on the effect of teacher questions on learner's production of the target language and on the types of learner response' (Tsui 1995). Teachers' questions are a means of engaging learners' attention, encouraging verbal responses, and assessing learners' progress (Chaudron 1988). Tsui (1995) has elaborated the functions of questions as a source of checking students' understanding, to confirm if they have gained the knowledge imparted, to focus their attention, make them involved in the lesson, to take the lesson forward and some teachers ask questions to maintain discipline in the classroom and especially in language classroom questions serve the purpose of making students practice a certain language item and to use the target language for communication. Questioning can either assist target language production or result in meaningful content-related responses by learners (Chaudron 1988). Ellis (1994) gives more emphasis on questioning as a way of keeping control

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over the classroom discourse. Long (1981) argues that questioning probably facilitates interaction by establishing the topic and who is likely to speak next (Chaudron 1988). Questions provide learners with the opportunity to speak the language and generate a series of follow up conversation among learners as well as helping teacher to check comprehension (Brown 1994). But on the other hand Chaudron (1988) is of the opinion that the nature of questions may strictly limit the possibilities for the students to respond at length.

According to Tsui (1995) in majority of the ESL classrooms main part of classroom interaction is created by the teacher posing questions and these can be nearly 70 percent of the classroom talk. But Chaudron (1988) attributes only 20 to 40 percent classroom talk to questioning. Johnston (1990) observed a total of 522 questions of different types in three hours of language class. Similarly, Long and Sato (1983) observed a total of 938 questions in six ESL lessons (Ellis 1994).

Types of Questions

'The type of questions that the teacher asks affects the kind of response that the students produce' (Tsui 1995)

'Much of the work on questions has centered on developing taxonomies to describe the different types' (Ellis, 1994: 587).

There are so many different types of questions that it is difficult to decide on different categories (Richards and Lockhart 1996, Ellis 1994). However, Tsui (1995) argues that various types of questions are based on the factors such as their cognitive demand and their effect on students.

Closed and Open Question

'Closed' and 'Open-ended' questions are distinguished by an early study on L1 classrooms (Barnes 1969 cited in Chaudron 1988). In the earliest classification Barnes (1969; 1976)

Closed questions have a short and fixed answer (Barnes 1969). The questions that begin with 'where', 'who', 'when' and 'what' are considered 'factual questions' (Barnes 1969 cited in Tsui 1995) having closed and usually brief set of responses (Chaudron 1988). For example

'Where were you born?'

(Chaudron 1988)

Open questions begin with 'why' and 'how' and are classified having longer response therefore the length and nature of the expected response is left open (Chaudron 1988). They can be referred as 'general information' questions (cf. Naiman et al. 1978; Bialystok et al. 1978 cited in Chaudron 1988). For example

'What did you do on trip?'

(Chaudron 1988)

Questions that seek for reason ('how'? and 'why'?) can be both open and close, much of the distinction is made by Barnes (1969) between these two types of reasoning questioning (Ellis 1994). 'Closed' reasoning-type questions are the ones that allow one acceptable answer where as 'open' are framed to allow a number of different acceptable responses. However,

'Barens also points out that many questions have the appearance of being open, but, in fact, when the teacher's response to a student's answer is examined, turn out to be closed; he calls these pseudo-questions'(Ellis 1994).

Long and Sato's Taxonomy (1983)

The taxonomy which will be used in this research paper is given by Long and Sato (1983) which is based on Kearsley's (1976) framework of question types (Ellis 1994). Long and Sato (1983) made necessary changes in Kearsley's (1976) taxonomy of question types according to their study of ESL teacher's questions (Ellis 1994). This taxonomy cited by Ellis (1994) is as follows:

Echoic

Comprehension checks e. g., All right?; OK?; Does everyone understand 'polite'?

Clarification requests e. g., What do you mean?; I don't understand; What?

Confirmation checks e. g.,

S: Carefully.

T: Carefully?;

Did you say 'he'?

Epistemic

Referential e. g. Why didn't you do your homework?

Display e. g. What's the opposite of 'up' in English?

Expressive e. g. It's interesting the different pronunciations we have now, but isn't it?

Rhetorical : e. g. Why did I do that? Because I...

This framework of questions is based on two main question types, echoic questions and epistemic questions with seven sub-categories. 'Echoic questions' seek for repetition of an utterance or confirm that it has been understood by the listener whereas 'epistemic questions' obtain information from the learners (Ellis 1994). The sub-categories include comprehension checks, clarification requests and confirmation checks under echoic questions and referential, display, expressive, and rhetorical are the sub-categories of epistemic questions (Ellis 1994).

Display and Referential Questions

Taxonomies by Koivukari (1987) and Hakansson and Lindberg (1988)

Questioning Behavior

Questions and learner production

Modification of questions

According to Richards and Lockhart (1996) questioning 'can be used to allow the learners to keep participating in the discourse and even modify it so that the language used becomes more comprehensible and personally relevant'.

Wait Time

Socio-Cultural Contest