On the Techniques of Raising Questions for Classroom Teaching of University

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Abstract: With the development of the curriculum reform, classroom-questioning is becoming an effective tactics and an essential component in classroom-teaching. This study analyzes the types of teachers' questions and factors affecting questioning. What's more, the study discusses the effective techniques on raising question in university and gives suggestions for the university teachers.

Keywords: Classroom Teaching of University; Affecting factors; Questioning techniques

Introduction

Questioning works as a link between teaching and learning, and it is also one of the methods used to change the teacher-centered instruction. Besides, the teacher's questions will be an effective tool to help students communicate with each other. What are the influential factors in questioning for teaching in university classroom? What positive techniques should be employed in order to carry out effective questioning? This study tries to solve the above problems.

1. Factors Affecting Questioning for Classroom Teaching of University

Questions play a very important role in classroom interaction, and there are several factors affecting questioning in classroom instruction of university.

1.1 Ways of Questioning

There are several ways of distributing questions, for instance:

The teacher asks a question and then lets the students raise their hands if they think they know the answer. However, sometimes the teacher can choose one of the volunteers to answer the question, but sometimes, there's no volunteer in university classroom. It is a good idea to call on non-volunteers when it is believed that students can respond correctly, but it will also increase the likelihood that the weaker and shy students will be included in classroom activities and it may embarrass them because of their inability to answer the question.

Research on classroom management confirms that it is better to be unpredictable in calling on students to answer questions than following a predictable order, because more students will think about the question if they do not know who will be called on. However, it is only a good way of asking routine and easy questions, because if the question is too difficult, students might be threatened.

Some teachers choose another way. Firstly, this teacher chooses one student, and then asks the student a question. If he of she cannot answer it, the teacher passes the question to another. It is acceptable to use this way of distributing questions to curtail disruptive

or inattentive behavior but it is better to ask the question first and then decide who is to answer, because if the teacher chooses the target first, all students except the one being called on can switch off.

From above, we can find that there is not the single best way of questioning. It is necessary for us to be aware of both advantages and disadvantages of each way and be flexible in using them in teaching practice[1].

1.2 Wait-time

Generally, researchers regard two kinds of "wait-time": "Wait time 1", a post-question wait time, is the pause after a teacher poses a question and before a student answers. "Wait time 2", post-response wait time, is the pause present after a student answers and prior to the teacher reacting."(Hunkins, 1989)

For "wait time 1", skillful employment of wait-time is a factor that greatly affects classroom questioning. Instances of long wait-time and frequent pauses always occur during a lecture. Teachers may feel the discomfort during a pause which leads to an extended silence. However, research on classroom questioning and information processing indicates that students need a certain period of time to comprehend a question, consider the available information, formulate an answer, or even get the courage to raise their hands, and begin to respond. The specific length has to depend on the level of the questions and the familiarity of the material.

As for the "wait time 2", when students respond to a question, the teacher should think carefully about them. If it can be developed further, the teacher should ask them about it. It not only develops the line of questioning, but also shows the student that the teacher really cares about what they say and make them feel that it is important to join the discussion.

1.3 The Targets of Questions

Although most of the teachers' questions are composed of a mixture of ability and are directed to the whole class, the teacher needs to take student's different ability into consideration and designs different questions directed to low-ability or high-ability students. It's believed that questions specifically designed for more able students, average students, and less able students and directed to individuals will keep all students alert and engaged in the learning process.

1.4 Feedback

Feedback is the most useful method when it is immediate, links success with effort and provides information about improvement and mastery (Schunk, 1989). Substantive feedback about competence and goal progress increases self-efficacy and enhances interest of learning. Teacher's feedback will either increase or reduce motivation. On the one hand, a number of university students are afraid of being criticized for mistakes.So, frequently interrupting students who are answering to correct errors may both disturb their thinking and weaken their confidence in using the target language. On the other hand, positive feedback, either verbal or nonverbal, greatly encourages students' participation.

Feedback can be provided by various approaches. However, the purposes of feedback, no matter what approach is employed, are to get the students encouraged to participate actively in classroom activities as well as convey certain information of knowledge. As far as the learners' acquisition and production are concerned, praise will bring about better results than criticism.

2. Techniques of Questioning for Classroom Teaching of University

Designing appropriate questions and using various forms of questions can increase university students' ability of thinking and expression. Teachers should learn to use questioning techniques[2].

2.1 Repeating

Teachers often adopt the repeating technique to make the question clearer so as to be understood easily. For example:

T: What is the main idea of the passage? Can you tell me the general idea?

According to the examples above, the teacher say the questions again to the selected students to make sure that students know what they should answer and the small changes are involved in the repetition to make the questions more focusing.

2.2 Paraphrasing

Before a teacher asks a question using the words that is beyond the learners' competence, she/he can paraphrase the question with easier words of sentence patterns to make the questions easier to be understood and provide hints to help students go further. For example:

T: Can you introduce the biography of Dewey? For example, Dewey's education thinking and his moral thought?

2.3 Prompting

After receiving an unsatisfactory answer, the teacher supplies extra information to the students so as to lead them closer to what is required. Prompting implies that the student cannot give a correct response—the question is beyond him. The teacher will then have

to prompt or help him by going back two or three steps, and by making the prompting questions simpler. (Kerry, 1982) For example:

T: Can you tell me the difference between the individuality and sociality?

S: Humans have sociality.

T: Different person also has different individuality. So try something else.

2.4 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. When the students' answers are correct, the teacher should also keep on asking the more complicated questions in order to highlight the discussion to make students understand the question more deeply. For example:

T: What do you think of this essay?

S: So-so.

T: So-so? Why?

2.5 Self-answering

When a question is beyond the students after the teacher's making modification of the question, both the teacher's face and the students' face are threatened. Therefore, an important technique is the application of questions asked and answered by the teacher himself or herself. The teacher sometimes asks a question then answers it himself or herself without asking of waiting for students to respond.

2.6 Eliciting collective answers

Sometimes teachers elicit collective answers to avoid threatening students' face. To answer in chorus seems much safer to some timid students. Some students may get to know the correct answers during the process of answering together. In this sense, the students avoid losing face before the whole class when named by teachers.

In a word, when questions are difficult for students to answer, teachers will offer help, such as prompting questions, probing questions or giving hints. Sometimes they may resort to eliciting collective questions or answering by themselves. Teachers can adopt these techniques not only for offering chances for students to answer questions and promoting the classroom interaction, but also for protecting students from injuring their self-esteem and concerning with their emotional need.

3. Suggestions for University Teachers

Due to various reasons, some teachers cannot always ask effective questions in university classrooms, and the low-efficient questioning will cause bad effect. Therefore, teachers should try their best to optimize the questioning activities and to improve classroom teaching in universities. To specific, the suggestions for teachers are as follows[3]:

3.1 Employing More Questions of Communicative Significance

Teachers should take advantage of class questioning so that students' ability of analyzing problems and solving problems can be trained and the teacher can effectively improve the efficiency of class teaching.

3.2 Designing Appropriate Questions and Using Various Forms of Questions

Designing appropriate questions and using various forms of questions can increase students' thinking ability. Teachers should not only use display questions, they should also ask more referential questions to stimulate the students thinking and encourage them think actively. And if the student cannot give an answer, the teacher can give help by simplifying the question. She can change the question form to help he or she work out the answer. Appropriate and effective questioning can promote the university classroom interaction, save the classroom time and train the students' competence.

4. Conclusion

Feedback on students' responses greatly influences their initiative in further participation. Therefore, during the course of questioning, the teacher should be kind, friendly and easy to get close to, narrowing the gap between the teacher and students. The teacher needs to listen to students attentively and timely give objective and adjustable comments so as to eliminate their nervous mood.

References:

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