THE ROLE OF QUESTIONS IN EFL CLASSES

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Modern research into the nature of learning has emphasized the active role learners play in the learning process. Learning can be described as a process of forming, testing, and revising hypotheses and, moreover, the effort to accommodate new information to old is at the heart of learning. V. Zamel described classroom interaction as a circular loop of information and feedback [3].

In classes using the communicative approach, the demand placed on teachers to understand the role of questions is especially important. In such classes there may be few display questions and many referential questions, which can vary greatly in their cognitive difficulty. Research suggests that the cognitive level of the question has a dramatic impact on students' response. There are important differences in the impact of different types of questions on learners and the learning process. Some questions require nothing more than simple recall of a phrase, a detail from a text, or a vocabulary item, while other questions may require students to formulate and express an opinion or an evaluation of an event or a reading passage. Differences such as these affect not only the cognitive complexity of students' responses, but the grammatical complexity as well.

The taxonomy divides questions into five levels of complexity: I — literal comprehension, II — reorganization, III- inferential comprehension, IV — evaluation, and V — appreciation. These categories are ordered according to increasing difficulty based on the demands on cognition that each level places on the student. Questions on levels I / II may resemble a testing situation in which explicit information from a text must be recalled or reorganized. Teachers untrained in questioning techniques may feel that a class is successful if students are able to answer all level I / II questions correctly. What would be missing, however, is inducement to think, to become personally involved in understanding and communicating, and therefore in actively processing input. Moreover, such low-level cognitive responses may be expressed in relatively simple grammatical structures. By including level III / IV /V questions in their lessons, teachers may better engage learners in processing input, in communicating, and informing and expressing their own views.

The surface grammatical form of questions does not necessarily reveal the level of cognitive difficulty of the question. Although there is no simple relationship between the form of questions and their level in the taxonomy, certain key phrases are associated with each level. The following list of question types and key phrases can help instructors identify the levels of their questions.

**Literal comprehension questions** which require the student to focus on ideas and information explicitly stated in the text may include:

1. **Recognition questions** requiring the student to locate or identify information explicitly stated in the text (e.g., Find... Locate... Identify... Point out... Read the line that...)
   - recognition of details
   - recognition of main ideas
   - recognition of a sequence
   - recognition of comparisons
   - recognition of cause-effect relationships
   - recognition of character traits.
2. **Recall questions** which require the student to recall from memory information explicitly stated in the text (e.g., Tell me... State... List... Recall... Describe... What caused... )
   - recall of details
   - recall of main ideas
   - recall of a sequence
   - recall of comparisons
   - recall of cause-effect relationships
   - recall of character traits.

**Reorganization questions** that require the student to analyze, synthesize, or organize information involving both quotation, summary and paraphrase (e.g., Compare... Contrast... Paraphrase... Classify... Divide... Summarize... How is... different from... ) can be

- classifying
- outlining
— summarizing
— synthesizing.

**Inferential comprehension questions** require the student to use information explicitly stated in the text along with personal experience and knowledge in order to conjecture and to form hypotheses (e.g., Pretend... Suppose... How would... What might have happened if... If we assume... what might... What would the consequences be if... What are the implications of... )
— inferring supporting details requiring the student to conjecture about information that might have been included in the text;
— inferring the main idea;
— inferring sequence requiring the student to conjecture about what might have occurred in addition to explicitly stated events and includes conjecture about extending events beyond the completion of the text;
— inferring comparisons;
— inferring cause-and-effect relationships;
— inferring character traits;
— predicting outcomes questions require the student to conjecture about the outcome of the text after considering a portion of it;
— interpreting figurative language.

**Evaluation questions** require the student to compare information and ideas in a text with material presented by the instructor or other authorities and with the student's own knowledge and experience in order to form judgments of various kinds (e.g., In your opinion... Do you agree... What part of the story best describes... Would you have... )
— judgments of reality and fantasy require the student to answer the question «Could these events really happen?»;
— judgments of fact or opinion require the student to evaluate the author's or speaker's ability to provide support for conclusions and the author's or speaker's intent (to persuade, inform, etc.);
— judgments of adequacy and validity require the student to compare the text to related materials in order to express agreement or disagreement;
— judgments of appropriateness require the student to determine which part of the text is most important (e.g., in defining characters, in determining outcomes, etc.);
— judgments of worth, desirability, and acceptability require the student to make judgments based on value systems, moral codes, personal experience, etc.

**Appreciation questions** require the student to articulate emotional and aesthetic responses to the text according to personal standards and to professional standards of literary forms, styles, genres, theories, critical approaches, etc. (e.g., In your opinion... Do you agree... Do you believe... )
— emotional response to the text requiring the student to articulate feelings of interest, boredom, excitement, etc.;
— identification with characters or incidents;
— reactions to the author's or speaker's connotative and denotative use of language;
— reactions to imagery.

M. H. Long and C. J. Sato found that teachers ask more «display» questions, which request information the questioner already knows, than «referential» questions, which request new information [2]. According to C. A. Brock referential questions elicit longer and more syntactically complex responses, and these responses contain significantly more connectives, which play an important role in helping nonnative speakers to communicate successfully [1]. One reason that referential questions significantly increase the syntactic complexity of learners' language is that they normally require more thoughtful responses. Whereas display questions merely test recall, referential questions require inference, evaluation, appreciation, and other complex cognitive tasks.

Fortunately, questions within classroom interaction can be restated, revised, and clarified. But it should never be necessary to abandon a question because students do not understand, for misunderstandings present opportunities for learning. Teachers should challenge students' cognitive abilities as well as their command of the language. It is when students move from lack of knowledge to understanding that language acquisition takes place. By being aware of the cognitive complexity of the questions they ask, teachers can better assess the complexity of the challenges their questions present to students, and so can better determine how to help students.
Literature