Teachers' Experience about the Roles of Classroom Questioning Technique in English Language Teaching: A Narrative Inquiry

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Abstract

The present study aims to investigate secondary level English Language (EL) teachers' lived experiences regarding the role of Classroom Questioning (CQ) strategy in English Language Teaching (ELT). The participants of this narrative inquiry consisted of four EL teachers who have been teaching at four different secondary level community schools in Banke district. I employed convenience sampling to select the schools and purposive sampling to select the participants. The data was collected employing unstructured interview and each of the interviews were audio recorded using an audio recorder. The collected data were transcribed and the findings of the study were presented and analyzed employing the thematic technique of qualitative data analysis. The study's key findings showed that CQ is important for assisting new teachers in the initial stages of their teaching profession with creating interactive classrooms, evaluating students' level of proficiency, determining students' language learning difficulties, directing the classroom, promoting critical thinking and fostering a democratic environment in the classroom. Based on the results, it is concluded that CQ is an undeniable aspect of classroom interaction and functions as a fundamental and effective for teaching EL.

Keywords: question, classroom questioning, roles, secondary level, English language teaching

Introduction

CQ is one of the most prevalent and important strategies for developing the communicative competence of students. It makes language classes more dynamic, interesting, vibrant and responsive. Cotton (2001) believes that questions asked by teachers serve as instructional stimuli necessary for arousing interest in the classroom. Behnam and Pouriran (2009) suggest that it is one of the most frequently utilized and significant strategies used by teachers in the field of ELT. In this regard, Kalantari (2009, p. 426) notes that "questioning strategy is one of the key strategies in fostering classroom interaction in ELT." Questioning in the classroom serves different purposes and functions. According to Tofade et al. (2013, p.1) "it serves as a language teaching technique which can be used by the teachers to assess students' knowledge, increase comprehension, and stimulate critical thinking." It is intimately related to the development of all language skills. It is more beneficial for building communicative skills in students. The success of this technique, however, depends on several factors, including the teachers' knowledge of questioning techniques, students' level, subject matter being covered, the

lesson's objectives, and general classroom setting. Research studies on questioning in Nepalese context were heavily concentrated on the quantitative examination of the types and frequency of teachers' questions and questioning strategies employed by teachers. However, studies have paid little attention to teachers' beliefs about questioning and its significance in the classroom. Thus, the present study sought to explore the role of CQ technique as experienced by secondary level EL teachers employing narrative inquiry research approach.

The study will be useful to all English language teachers for gaining insights into the role and importance of CQ in ELT. Furthermore, this research can help curriculum designers, textbook writers, English language teachers, students, and schools to create a culture of CQ to promote a communicative, vibrant, and responsive classroom environment. In addition to this, this study will be useful to anyone who wants to undertake research about classroom interaction and the importance of CQ in ELT.

Literature Review

Question, Questioning and Classroom Questioning

The term *question* refers to an interrogative statement used to elicit responses or information. Lynch (1991, as cited in Shomoossi, 2004, p. 97) defines a question as "an utterance with some illocutionary impact." Similarly, Drain (2010) defines a question as a sentence, phrase, or even a gesture indicating that the addresser wishes the reader or listener to supply some information. It is always intended to evoke specific responses or to do some action. *Questioning* is the art or ability to ask questions. Wilson (1997) believes that questioning is an art for eliciting meaningful responses. It can be used to assist learners' comprehension, make inferences, and enhance their creativity, inventive thoughts, and critical thinking. The questions are asked to promote interaction, discussion, and critical thinking in the classroom. *CQ*, on the other hand, *is* regarded as the most important strategy for creating a lively and engaged classroom. Teaching and learning is a bidirectional and collaborative process in which CQ is crucial for classroom activities. Moreover, it promotes an active, engaging, and responsive teaching atmosphere. Thus, it is a tactic or strategy or technique aimed at improving students' communicative abilities, motivating and managing students in the classroom, as it contributes to a more exciting and engaging language classroom.

Questions asked in the classroom setting should be more focused. Durey (2010) believes that to conduct effective teaching and learning, teachers need be fully aware of the types of questions that may be asked in the classroom. It obviously implies that teachers should be sensitive and aware of asking questions and should ask such questions which are helpful for linguistic and intellectual growth of the students. Teachers may employ oral or written questions in classroom teaching. When a teacher assigns a written exercise, test, or examination, written questions are employed. These questions are designed to help students improve and assess their writing abilities. Oral inquiries, on the other hand, are employed to help students improve their speaking skills by eliciting oral responses. As a result, when used correctly, both sorts of inquiries play a significant role in the language classroom. According to Erickson (2007), there are three categories of questions: factual, conceptual, and provocative. The factual question seeks information and only assesses the students' remembering abilities. Conceptual questions are posed to determine whether students have grasped certain conceptions while provocative questions are concerned with gauging students' criticality on specific themes. The provoking questions are sometimes combative and difficult. So, they help to elicit analytical and critical

answers from students, leading to an improved level of language learning. As suggested by Ellis (1994), there are two major types of teacher questions. They display referential questions. Display questions, according to him, are those for which the teacher is aware of the answer and the student is expected to know the answer as well. He further views that these types of questions are used to assess students' prior knowledge or to test what they have already learnt. Brown (2001, p. 171) characterizes display questions as "questions for which the teacher knows the solution and/or which need a single or brief response of the low-level thinking kind." Therefore, such questions are typically used to check comprehension, confirm, and clarify demands. Research studies carried out by Shomoossi (2004); Durey (2010) Paudel (2011) also indicated that display questions are used more frequently in English language classroom. Referential questions, often known as open questions, are those to which the teacher does not know the answer. Brown (2001, p. 171) defines referential questions as "questions that involve more thought and create longer responses and for which the teacher does not know the solution in advance." Similarly, Shomoossi (2004, p.98) defines referential questions as "questions for which the teacher is unaware of the answer." Such inquiries may necessitate interpretation and judgment on the part of the responder." Students must respond to these questions by expressing their own ideas, viewpoints, and opinions on various issues. Referential questions are thought to help students not just acquire fluency but also think openly and share their own thoughts. Nunan (1987) claims that in the classroom, teachers mostly ask display questions. However, the overuse of display questions prevents students from connecting language to their surroundings, causing them to focus solely on remembering facts. In this regard, he believes that referential questions are more effective than display questions in fostering genuine conversation in the language classroom.

Questions are crucial and beneficial for promoting interaction in the classroom if the teachers use them wisely. According to Van Lier (1988), any type of classroom question is focused on persuading students to develop linguistic ability. It is vital for giving 'comprehensible input' (Krashen, 1985) and for triggering 'pushed output' (Swain, 1985) in the sense that when teachers ask questions to their students, they are attempting to make their students grasp the subject matter while simultaneously forcing them to produce language. Furthermore, the comments of the students might be used as input for other students in the classroom. According to Kalantari (2009, p. 432), "it provides a continued interaction that helps learners to improve their language." In line with this Rosenshine (1971, as cited in Brualdi 1998) mentioned that prominent level of interactions between teachers and students boost students' achievement. Similarly, Brualdi (1998, p.1) opined that "teachers must recognize that factual knowledge and conceptual understanding can be transferred through the process of asking questions." Therefore, questions in the classroom are critical for identifying and diagnosing students' learning issues. In the same vein, Adedoyin (2010, as cited in Hamiloglu and Temiz, 2012, p. 1) writes "teachers' questions are of significant values for many instructional purposes, eliciting student reflection and challenging deeper student understanding and engagement in the classroom". It implies that questions are catalytic components of any interactive and communicative classroom, engaging learners in a variety of communicative and brainstorming activities to improve their communication and thinking abilities. Therefore, questions might be considered supportive components of an effective teaching and learning process.

Roles of Classroom Questioning

The role of CQ in ELT is evident because it aids in the creation of a communicative

atmosphere. However, the aim of asking questions varies depending on the context, the level of students, the beliefs of the teachers, the nature of the students, and the nature of the topics. CQ can serve several functions, including assessing students' knowledge and understanding, capturing their attention, and monitoring their learning. Morgan and Saxton (1991, as cited in Brualdi, 1998) state that the act of asking the question helps teachers keep students actively involved in the lesson, provide opportunity to openly share their opinions and thoughts while answering questions, let other students to hear various explanations of the content provided by their peers, allow other students to hear various explications of the content from their peers, assists teachers in pacing their sessions and managing student conduct and assists teachers in evaluating student learning and revising their lessons as needed. Thus, questioning is one of the most important techniques or strategies in the language classroom for getting students to participate in their learning, measuring their level of understanding, diagnosing their learning, managing the classroom, creating an interactive and responsive environment, developing their habit of thinking and responding in the language being taught, and developing their critical thinking ability. Therefore, CQ serves numerous functions and goals in allowing students to use the language.

Although several studies have been carried out in CQ strategy, they were mostly focused on the types of teacher questions and questioning skills. Therefore, it is the first attempt to explore the roles of CQ in ELT employing narrative inquiry research design.

Methodology

I have chosen narrative inquiry research design to explore the participants' lived experiences on the issue. Clandinin and Connelly (1990, as cited in Ferguson, 2013), argue that the 'experience' of teachers should be central in classroom research so that we can have a better understanding of the teaching method and teaching learning environment which serves as both research method and phenomenon. Therefore, narrative inquiry research design was used for this study. Moreover, as suggested by Creswell (2007), qualitative research is most appropriate when a problem or issue needs to be explored through the participant's lived experiences having exploratory mindset. Most importantly, this design is more appropriate for CQ because it is one of the significant topics in critical research. The population of this study consisted of secondary level English teachers of Banke district. The sample population consisted of four secondary level English language teachers from four different public schools in Banke district were taken as the sample population for the study. For the selection of the sample of this study, convenience sampling strategy was used. I used this sampling strategy to choose secondary level teachers who had at least ten years of teaching experience. Moreover, it was convenient for me to collect the required stories due to my familiarity with the place and participants. I employed unstructured interview research technique for the collection of required data. The selected teachers' interviews were also recorded with the help of an audio recorder.

Result and Discussion

The participants were asked to share their perspectives on the reasons for implementing CQ technique in ELT. They shared several intriguing experiences based on their own teaching experiences. The following reasons have been recognized as the themes from the participants' narratives:

Effective Strategy to Stay from Student Rejection

All the participants stated that the initial stage of a teaching career is the survival phase.

Therefore, the beginning period of teaching is crucial for novice teachers. Novice teachers confront a variety of problems and difficulties in the classroom. So, there is a high chance of being rejected by the students. That is why the teachers asked many questions to prevent the rejection of the students. In this regard, Abhudaya said:

> After joining the teaching profession, I was very worried that the students would reject me. The subject matter that was prepared to teach for 45 minutes could be taught in 25 minutes and I spent the rest of the time asking questions. Because of a lack of experience, the students also used to ask questions in the classroom. That is why I used to ask many questions to the students. I employed the questioning method mostly to engage the students in classroom activities. Really speaking, it assisted me in adjusting, surviving, and feeling at ease in ELT.

According to the above-mentioned Abhudaya's passage, asking questions in ELT is one of the most effective survival techniques that a novice teacher may employ. Most importantly, teacher questions can be stated to reduce teachers' stress and load in the classroom while also making them feel competent in the classroom. Abhinav stated a similar belief that CQ, particularly instructor questions, is extremely beneficial to inexperienced teachers. He expressed his thoughts;

> It was quite difficult for me to stand in front of the students in English subject lessons due to my lack of experience. At the beginning of my teaching career, I was not overly confident in the classroom. I found it quite challenging to manage the lesson and motivate the children. However, I began asking a lot of questions to the students, which helped me encourage them, manage the classroom, and readily assess their level.

Abhudaya and Abhinav's narratives reveal the widespread use of CQ in ELT. In other words, as new teachers, they both shared their experiences motivating and guiding the classroom through questions. We can relate their ideas to Ginns, Heirdsfield, Atweh, and Watters' (2001, p. 110) ideas that "the first year of teaching is an important phase in any teacher's professional growth because the school and classroom experiences of beginning teachers may either catalyze or inhibit a lasting commitment to effective teaching." The excerpts above also show that, when beginning our careers as beginner teachers, asking questions can help us become acquainted with our students' levels of learning and alter our pedagogical techniques accordingly. As new teachers, we can use CQ technique to motivate and manage ELT. Although instructors may have pedagogical expertise gained throughout their academic careers, putting that information into practice is a challenging task. However, as a newbie teacher, asking questions in the classroom is a simple and worthwhile technique/strategy that teachers use to acclimate to their new classroom setting.

Powerful Means to Make the Classroom Interactive

Most of the pedagogical activities between teachers and students take place in the classroom. An excellent language classroom should be participatory. Participants in this survey strongly believed that CQ is essential for fostering genuine dialogue in the classroom. In this regard, Anita argued:

> Undoubtedly, CQ plays a critical role in developing a dynamic classroom atmosphere." I believe that without questions, we cannot imagine interaction. We can use questions to introduce a variety of communication activities in the classroom, such as role play, information gap exercises, and collaborative activities. As a result, it is the most useful

strategy in ELT.

It also implies that CQ is not a separate technique but occurs concurrently with many sorts of teaching and learning activities in ELT. It assists us in developing or implementing different forms of interactional activities that entail collaborative information sharing. As a result, CQ can be used to help create an engaging classroom. Similarly, Agrata stated, "Interaction, in my opinion, presupposes the question-answer activity in the classroom." In our environment, one of the most effective techniques for fostering an engaging and natural classroom is CQ. Teaching and inquiry cannot be separated. Umm… They are mutually related because they occur concurrently in the teaching and learning process.

The preceding excerpt from Agrata's story demonstrates that CQ is a powerful method for establishing a dynamic classroom. Their beliefs are like Wallace's (2003, as referenced in Ziyaeemehr, 2016, p. 1428), who stated, "questioning is a vital method for effective communication and education in academic settings." Unless one wants to add a monologue, there is no conversation without questions." In our Nepalese context, where there is less opportunity to use English in a natural setting, CQ is one of the most effective tactics for creating a natural classroom environment. Most importantly, his views demonstrate that questioning is an essential aspect of the teaching and learning processes that occur in the classroom.

The most Reliable Means of Assessing Students

CQ is not simply a teaching strategy; it also serves as a testing instrument. In other words, we may teach different language skills interactively, assess students' learning, and use suitable tactics in ELT. In this regard Abhudaya mentioned:

Both teacher and student questions are extremely beneficial in determining the present level of students' learning. It aids in identifying students' strong and weak points and improving their level of knowledge and abilities. We can utilize questions to determine students' current level of understanding and apply relevant pedagogical strategies in ELT. It is useful to know how many of the objectives have been met.

According to Abhudaya's excerpt, CQ is a useful technique for measuring students' achievement in an ELT. In other words, by asking students questions, we can quickly determine whether they understand the subject matter and apply the proper teaching strategy. Furthermore, students' queries reveal their present level of learning and learning challenges, allowing teachers to create appropriate ways and strategies for their effective learning. Similarly, Agrata stated:

CQ is a crucial tool for assessing students' English language proficiency. In the classroom, teaching and testing go hand in hand. I mean, we can assess students' English language proficiency using the questioning technique. Not only that, but we can identify and diagnose their learning issues. In my lesson, I constantly strive to assess my students' reactions to my questions. It provides a clear picture of their learning level and challenges. As a result, it allows me to reflect on my instructional techniques and make appropriate changes.

If we examine Agrata's experience, we can conclude that CQ is essential for evaluative and diagnostic purposes in ELT. It also implies that teaching and testing are inextricably linked in the sense that without teaching, testing becomes useless, and without testing, teaching becomes worthless. As a result, it can be argued that questioning serves as an excellent tool for assessing students' learning while also assisting us in reflecting on our own teaching techniques.

Thus, the participants' opinions clearly indicate that CQ is a valuable tool for both teaching and testing purposes, allowing us to identify the learners' areas of difficulty and diagnose them accordingly.

An Effective Means of Improving Language Skills

Another important aspect of CQ, explored through the participants' narratives was the development of English language skills. Each of the participants strongly agreed that CQ aids in the development of speaking skills. However, several of them curiously believed that it could also be used in ELT to strengthen reading, writing, and listening abilities. We can use CQ to improve their English language skills when doing any type of classroom activity connected to any language skills. In this regard, Abhinav investigated:

> CQ can help us build oral abilities as well as the other three skills (listening, reading, and writing). In my English lesson, I use the questioning technique to teach all the language skills. For example, when teaching speaking skills, I use a variety of conversational exercises followed by a variety of questions. While teaching reading and listening skills, I pose several questions in pre, during, and post-teaching activities to help students focus on the job at hand. Similarly, while teaching writing skills, I ask a lot of questions about the topic matter, which helps students conceive and memorize what they are going to write, as well as build their level of confidence in writing. For example, while drafting an essay on the dowry system in Nepal, we can ask the students many questions such as: What is the dowry system? What is the state of dowry in Nepal? In which part of our country is it more prevalent? Is this system good or bad? What are the negative consequences of the dowry system? How can we abolish it? What are your options as a student? As a result, these types of inquiries assist students in conceptualizing the topic matter and organizing their writing.

If we examine his extensive investigation on the role of CQ in building English language abilities, we may conclude that by using CQ strategy, we can develop both productive and receptive language skills in an ELT. Although this technique/strategy appears to be associated mostly with speaking skills, it can be used to develop all four language skills. Most crucially, CQ is one of the most influential and wide-ranging strategies for teaching any language skill. As a result, CQ can be utilized to teach all language abilities.

An Interesting Technique to Foster Students' Critical Thinking

According to the participant narratives, CQ style or strategy plays an important influence in the development of critical thinking abilities in students. Teachers in ELT not only teach linguistic forms and rules, but they also teach other subjects at the same time. The development of critical thinking skills is vital in today's ELT. According to the views of the participants, CQ assists teachers in developing critical thinking in their students. Abhudaya expressed his worry in this regard:

> When we ask open-ended or contentious questions, they usually think about and communicate their own experiences and thoughts. For example, we may pose some essential concerns to them, such as "How can we grow our society?" What factors contribute to global warming? Which is more powerful (money or education)? How can our country empower women? There are diverse types of texts or contents in the secondary level English course, which encompass numerous critical subjects and ideas. As a result, we should ask several types of critical questions in ELT which are beneficial

to their language and intellectual development. In my opinion, not only students but also teachers can profit from using the CQ technique.

According to the extensive passage from Abhudaya's narrative, CQ is an effective technique/strategy for fostering critical thinking skills in students. Higher level, open or referential questions are useful for this. This idea is related to Far, Saifi, and Etemadzadeh's (2013, p. 1024) belief that the "questioning technique is considered as the key tactic to develop students' critical thinking." It implies that by involving students in various sorts of brainstorming and critical concerns in ELT, we may not only strengthen the students' language abilities but also their critical thinking abilities. It also argues that in ELT, students can express their critical and creative thoughts through CQ. Most importantly, it encourages students to be bold in asking questions and responding to a variety of critical and thought-provoking themes.

A Means of Effective Classroom Management

According to the findings of the study, CQ plays a key role in classroom management. Parsons, Hinson, and Sardo-Brown (2003, as cited in Ahmad et al. 2012, p. 173) write "Classroom administration is a key component of the overall education process." It includes all of the phases involved in the relationship between the educator and the learner."

The participants in this study also stated that their opinions on the problem were based on their personal classroom experiences. Most notably, when it comes to the usage of questioning techniques in ELT, it has been discovered from their narratives that they employ this technique/strategy for classroom management purposes. Abhudaya had this to say:

> In the English classroom, the questioning method is extremely important. It inspires the students. All our efforts will be futile unless we can motivate the students. At the start of each lesson, I always pique the students' attention by asking questions concerning the previous day's lesson, that day's topic, or other supplemental subject matter. As a result, asking certain questions before beginning the lesson is critical for class management. Analyzing Abhudaya's above opinion, it is evident that we can ask certain signpost questions before beginning the lecture. Similarly, Agrata stated, "The first stage in good teaching is to warm up." Questioning is beneficial for preparing students to learn. As a result, it is one of the most essential responsibilities of inquiry in ELT."

Similarly, Anita agreed that the CQ strategy is effective for inspiring students and regulating disruptive conduct in the classroom. She continued, saying:

> Umm… questioning is the most potent strategy in the classroom for preparing children intellectually and emotionally for learning. When students make unnecessary noises or exhibit disruptive conduct, I ask them questions. I pose random questions to individual students to keep them focused on class.

As a result of the participants' comments, it is apparent that they are employing the CQ technique to manage the classroom by motivating them towards the topic. They all shared similar views on the role of CQ in ELT management. According to the examination of each participant's narratives, asking questions to students draws their attention to the issue, which aids in achieving the intended learning results in ELT. It can also be described as one of the most effective rejuvenating instruments in the classroom, as well as the most potent method for classroom management.

A Way to Democratize ELT

A democratic classroom is one in which students have the freedom to express themselves. In such a setting, there is no fear in the classroom. The concept of a child-friendly and student-centered classroom setting is now regarded as an essential component of a democratic classroom.

According to the examination of the participants' narratives, one of the important roles played by CQ is the formation of a democratic classroom environment. "Asking questions to students and allowing and encouraging them to ask questions is one of the fundamental aspects of a democratic classroom," Abhudaya added. It is really important in making our class democratic." Similarly, Abhinav contended that "questioning is tied to freedom of expression." So, using a questioning strategy/technique is the best method to promote democracy in the classroom." Agrata in a similar vein, argued "CQ is a humanistic technique to education." It is also a means of showing respect for our students."

The participants' opinions above imply that CQ permits and encourages students to ask questions anytime they are puzzled or have some worries. It is related to free expression, which surely aids students in their learning. From a humanistic standpoint, students can learn more effectively if they are free to ask questions. In other words, classroom inquiry, involving both instructor and student questioning, aids in the creation of a cooperative learning environment. Most significantly, if there is a fearless climate for dialogue or questioning, it helps students learn. Students will learn more swiftly and easily if we teach them in a democratic environment.

Thus, one of the useful humanistic and democratic ways for immersing students in learning in a free and collaborative setting is CQ. As a result, it is essential for ensuring democratic classroom practices. However, it is mostly dependent on the teacher's belief or philosophy.

Conclusions and Implications

This narrative research incorporates the teachers' actual classroom narratives. The teachers' narratives were examined under many themes. Based on the findings, it is concluded that CQ is an irrefutable component of classroom interaction which serves as a basic and powerful teaching technique in the hands of teachers. It is one of the important techniques that can be successfully applied in an ELT is CQ. It can also be viewed as a potent teaching technique with substantial value in creating an engaging, energetic and enjoyable classroom environment. It is an effective technique for making the classroom more engaging. Furthermore, its diagnostic and evaluative value for student learning cannot be overstated. This technique is more effective for teaching language skills and it plays a significant role in building a democratic classroom environment. It can also be used effectively to develop students' critical thinking skills. Moreover, it is incredibly crucial for preparing students to learn. Furthermore, it is an undeniable and vital aspect of classroom interaction that serves as a basic but effective teaching instrument in the hands of EL teachers. Most importantly, it can be used to help students develop their linguistic, intellectual, and social skills. The efficiency of this technique, however, can be modified or determined by a variety of factors. Therefore, teachers should study the factors that influence CQ to improve its effectiveness. Teachers must also be aware of its significance as well as the elements that influence the proper implementation of CQ. So, the teachers should employ this strategy with adequate analysis of their students' level and class objectives.

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