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Review

Classroom questioning as an invaluable teaching strategy in Social Studies

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Questioning is a teaching technique that indispensably pervades all teaching methods and the other techniques. Questions are sentences used in getting information; the information given indicates the respondent's knowledge of something or lack of it. Teachers may pose questions to students or vice versa. This work explores questioning techniques, types of questions, the importance of questioning, teachers' questions and wait-times, and how a teacher can field students' questions. Questioning, the paper observes, can be a rewarding technique in teaching provided the teacher understands its purposes and warns that questioning should not be used for filling up time such as when the teacher has completed work and there is nothing left to be done. Questions asked at such a time are usually ill-prepared, as are answers given. It is recommended, inter alia, that teachers need to possess the mastery of knowledge and skills in asking good questions in class. Such mastery will stimulate inquiry and reflective thinking among pupils.

Keywords: Classroom, Questioning, Teaching Technique, Social Studies

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is, in many ways a philosophical activity. This means that teaching must necessarily involve questions and questioning. A question is a written or spoken sentence that is worded in such a way as to request information or an answer. Questioning in the classroom is a statement intended to evoke a verbal response. Questions stimulate thinking and the level of thinking stimulated depends on the type of question asked. Some questions require the use of memory only to answer them while others require critical and reflective thinking. Question asking is therefore an important strategy which teachers use in the class to achieve lesson objectives

and curriculum goals. Questions are expected from teachers as mediators of knowledge and also from the students as active participants in the course of exploring new knowledge.

Questioning and Stages of Instructional Process in the Classroom

Question asking is versatile in the classroom discourse. At every stage in education, questions are the core around which all communications between teacher and pupils take place in the classroom. That is, it is used at all stages of instructional process and can be used singly or in combination with any learning activity. The stages of

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classroom can be divided into:

The beginning of the lesson

At the beginning of the lesson, the Social Studies teacher should use questions as advance organisers to prepare the pupils on the learning task they would be exposed to. The advance organisers would provide a “mental road map” of what pupils have accomplished, where they are presently and where they are going. This can help pupils avoid unpleasant surprises and help them set realistic goals (Walberg and Paik, 2000). Teachers need to know the cognitive readiness of their pupils to enable them to determine whether their pupils’ entering behaviour would enhance the learning of new concepts the teachers are going to teach. This calls for questioning. The answers given by pupil would likely help the teacher to know whether to start the new lesson based on their knowledge of the pupils’ cognitive ability and readiness. Asking questions at the beginning of a lesson would help bring the pupils into the lesson by motivating them to be alert and ready.

During the Lesson

Questions asked during the lesson help the teacher to see if the pupils are following his/her line of thinking as the content of the lesson demands. When they are probing questions, it is possible that pupils’ thinking will be stimulated thereby making them develop insights into the subject-matter. Good questions asked during the lesson enable pupils to see the relationship between what they already know and the current knowledge thereby helping them understand the sequence and continuity of the subject- matter. Learning is an active process so the pupil uses his past knowledge to construct new ideas and concepts based on the relationship he/she has established between the current and the past knowledge. Since the Social Studies Curriculum is spirally organised, the questions which teachers ask during the lesson should make for the use of prior knowledge and the curriculum materials on hand to construct new ideas and concepts. As a management strategy, good questions help in securing attention and control in the class. They engender confidence by encouraging the learners to participate in the lesson, especially the withdrawn and slow learners.

During the Summary/Evaluation Stage

Questions asked during the summary/evaluation enable the teacher to determine the quality and quantity of knowledge the pupils have derived from the lesson.

Questions also would help the teachers assess their ability in teaching the lesson. The pupils’ attitude towards the lesson content and their reaction to the methods and instructional strategies used by the teacher will be evaluated through questioning. If there were shortcomings in achieving the lesson objectives and invariably, the curriculum goals, the teacher would restructure the lesson and the instructional strategies as the case may be. As a lesson summary, questions would guide or direct the pupils to independent or group study. This could be in the form of group discussions, assignments, individual or group projects. Questions provide the necessary feedback on how far the curriculum content has been successfully implemented and what remains.

Kinds of Questioning Techniques and their Characteristics

Questions can be categorized into:

- (a) Zevin’s questions typology
- (b) Gallagher and Ashner’s questions category
- (c) Socio-Scientific Inquiry question classification
- (d) Guilford questions category
- (e) Nnaka’s questions category
- (f) Blooser’s questions categorisation and
- (g) Bloom’s questions categorisation.

Zevin’s questions classificatory typology

Gallagher and Achner (1963) in Mezieobi (1994) classified questions into four; namely:

- i. Cognitive memory questions those that are concerned with selective retrieval of previously learned content, material.
- ii. Convergent: Questions directed to a single answer
- iii. Divergent: Questions that elicit a variety of answers or solutions to a given problem. They ginger the creative spirit in the learner.
- iv. Evaluative: Questions that are value-judgement oriented.

In the Socio-Scientific Questioning Model, Osakwe and Itedjere (1993) gave the elements of the questioning technique as:

- i. Expressing doubt
- ii. Formulating a problem
- iii. Formulating a hypothesis
- iv. Analyzing the data
- v. Deriving generalization

Guilford’s Question Model has two very broad dimensional models of questions: convergent and divergent which can further be categorized into the following five types of questions:

Zevin's (1992) broad questions categorization and the constituents of the broad categories are

	Broad Questions Categorization	Questions Type Constituents
1.	Didactic Question	(i) Recall Questions (ii) Comprehension Question
2.	Reflection Question	(i) Application Question (ii) Analysis Question
3.	Affective Question	(i) Awareness (ii) Personal feelings (iii) Choice (iv) Imagination (v) Judgement

Source: Mezeobi, 1994

(a) Rote memory questions (including visual and auditory) entail recall or "factual" questions.

(b) Cognition questions – entail comprehension, ability to discover relationships, problems and articulate implications.

(c) Convergent (thinking) question – Focuses on one correct or best answer.

(d) Divergent thinking – These are open-ended questions that allow many answers or solution to a problem.

(e) Evaluation question – This focuses on the ability of learners to make their value judgements on something.

Blosser (1975) classified questions into four broad types: management, rhetorical, closed and open.

Bloom's Model

Blooms (1956) six level categorisation of questions in their order of complexity and relevance to Social Studies classroom and learning are:

1. Knowledge Question: entails recall of knowledge, facts, theories, concepts, subject matter which had been previously learnt e.g. who was the army officer who staged a coup d'état in Nigeria in 1966?

2. Comprehension Question: entails grasping what has been learned in such a way that it (what is previously learnt) explains or summarises, interprets or helps predict future consequences or trends. Comprehension question would normally begin with: Explain, compare, contrast, illustrate. For example, compare the democratic rule of President Goodluck Jonathan with the military rule of ex-President Ibrahim B. Babangida.

3. Application Question: This entails the capacity to utilize what is previously learnt in novel or specific situations. For example, if a US Dollar exchanges for N160, how much would you pay for US150?

4. Analysis Question: This requires the breaking down of subject matter learned into component parts and the ability to distinguish one part from the other or to relate one component to thither. Questions in this category begin with "analyse". For example, analyse the effects of corruption on Nigerian economy.

5. Synthesis Question: It is divergent, creative thinking and open-ended questions which require the ability of the learners to combine or integrate many different parts into a new form. An example of a synthesis question is: what solutions would you proffer for examination malpractices in our school system?

6. Evaluation Question: This is the highest level of thinking according to Bloom's Taxonomy (Vikoo, 2003). Evaluate positions require students to make judgements or place value on something. Evaluative questions require the use of predetermined criteria in order to be able to provide correct answers. For example, do you think fuel subsidy removal was good for Nigerians?

Questions are often used for many purposes; these are:

- (a) to find out something one did not know;
- (b) to find out whether someone knows something;
- (c) to develop the ability to think;
- (d) to motivate pupils to learn;
- (e) to provide drill or practice;
- (f) to help interpret materials;
- (g) to help interpret materials;
- (h) to emphasise important points;
- (i) to show relationships, such as cause and effect;
- (j) to discover pupils interest;
- (k) to develop appreciation;
- (l) to provide preview;
- (m) to give practice in expression;
- (n) to reveal agreement or disagreement;
- (o) to establish rapport with pupils;
- (p) to diagnose;
- (q) to evaluate;
- (r) to obtain the attention of wandering minds.
- (s) Because the above purpose is varied, a teacher should ask questions to reflect whatever purpose he has in mind. (Callah and Clark, 1997 in Esu, Umoh and Obi, 1995).

Guidelines to Effective Questioning in Social Studies

The following are the creed for effective questioning social studies according to Mezieobi (1994).

1. Ask brief, clear, unambiguous questions.
2. Questions should not have a clue to the answers.
3. Questioning in social studies should be predominantly higher-level questions. Low level questions become significant in as much as they help to ginger reflective learning or provoke thought, creativity and critical thinking.
4. Questions should be tailored to the age level, interests, experience and ability of the learners and to satisfy teaching activity objectives.
5. Questions should be planned. But at times spontaneous questions become a learning facilitator.
6. When questions are posed, allow the 'wait time' before a response.
7. After a question had been asked, allow 'productive time' the time students determine the accuracy or otherwise of the response.
8. The teacher should guide the students to the right direction in the event of their derailing.
9. Questions posed in an open climate or class environment, when the students are relaxed and free to ask questions, or express their opinions, elicit the best of results.
10. Keep the students on the alert, ready to answer the questions by addressing the questions to the whole class or group. Questions should not only be directed to the above average or intelligent students.
11. Motivate students to ask questions and participate actively in the interactive process.
12. The 'wait time'- sufficient or adequate time allowed students when questions are posed to consider the questions and their answers – factor in questioning should be tenaciously adhered to. 'Wait time' is a critical element in eliciting higher level thinking from the students.

13. Always diagnose "why questions fail to engender a desired response or degree of participation" (Zevin, 1992).

Corbin (1983) in Shuaibu (2012), however warns that questioning should not be used for the following:

- a. Filling up time such as when the teacher has completed work and there is nothing left to be done. Questions asked at such time are usually ill-prepared, as are the answers given.
- b. Encouraging the pupils to guess at facts they do not know.
- c. Recalling memorized facts.

Teacher's Questions and Wait-times

Deture (1979) had observed that wait-time is a very important and integral part of teacher's questioning behaviour. Wait-time is the amount of time a teacher is willing to allow between the time he finishes asking a question and the time he expects a student to start

answering the question.

Rowe (1973) found that extended wait-times (3-5seconds) have a number of significant effects on pupils' classroom behaviour. He concluded that when teachers practise extended wait-time, the following results are obtained.

- a. The students are able to give more elaborate response.
- b. The numbers of "I do not know" answers are drastically reduced.
- c. The students are able to do more and better speculative thinking.
- d. The students are better able to give inferential answers.
- e. The students ask more questions to help them clarify fuzzy ideas.
- f. Slow students are given more opportunity to respond to teacher's questions and therefore more students are involved in the teaching-learning interactions.
- g. More students tend to give unsolicited but very relevant responses which help the class to deepen their insight into the topic being discussed.

Fielding Students' Questions

The approach teachers adopt in responding to students' question is crucial for a healthy classroom interaction. Hyman (1980) identified sixteen fielding options available to a teacher in fielding students' questions options. These are:

1. Responding and giving the answer as requested
2. Responding and saying, "I don't know" or "I have no opinion now"
3. Returning the question to the questioner (How would you answer that question?)
4. Relaying the question to the class as a whole (Does anyone want to respond to Akpan's question?)
5. Relaying the question to a specific classmate (Okon could you please respond to Akpan's question?)
6. Praising the question (That's a good question) and then possibly taking another step such as numbers 1 and 3 above or 10 below.
7. Rejecting the question (That's irrelevant here; that's getting us off the topic).
8. Waiting silently for either the questioner or another student to respond to the question.
9. Seeking clarification of the question (when you say "causes" of the petrol shortage, what do you mean by causes?) and then possibly taking another step such as number 4 above and 11 below.
10. Asking a different question, to the class in general or questioner in particular, this will lead to the desired response.

11. Launching into a new topic or sub-topic so as to lead to the desired response (Let's pick that up and talk about the military in Nigerian politics).

12. Excluding the new topic inherent in the question (That idea will lead us off on a tangent if we pursue it. So let's drop it and stick to what we have before us).

13. Calling on another student who has raised a hand to speak (Go ahead, Amina).

14. Calling for further research (Let's do some research on that).

15. Continuing in the interaction as if the question was not asked.

16. Repeating the question and then possibly taking another step such as number 2 above.

Fielding a student's question is as important as the teacher asking penetrating questions during class teaching.

CONCLUSION

The work has examined the questioning techniques, types of questions, the various fielding students' question options. Teachers are expected to set higher order questions and the approach teachers adopt in responding to students' questions is crucial for a healthy classroom interaction. Pupils' questions and their attitude to questions are important elements in curriculum implementation. Therefore, the natural urge of pupils to ask question should not be suppressed. Questions should be challenging. Such questions encourage a systematic development of clear thinking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are found apposite:

The responses which pupils make to teachers' questions are important in realizing curriculum goals. They need to know about the types and classification of questions, examine and comment on the types of questions each student asks as well as their answers.

Teachers should lead students to appreciate the importance and advantages of knowing the types of questions asked by either teacher or pupil. Such knowledge will help them give richer and better answers in their class and home work.

Teachers should be sensitive to the very important effect of wait-times on both the attitude and achievements in school. They should recognize that if students are not given adequate opportunity to respond to questions, they may become frustrated in the class and with time, the motivation to participate in classroom discussions may be destroyed. Also, slow learners are greatly affected when teachers do not practise adequate wait-times.

Teachers should endeavour to take care of individual differences. Teachers' wait-time behaviour can be greatly enhanced by the fielding techniques they employ in students' questions.

Teachers need to possess the mastery of knowledge and skills in asking good questions in class. Such mastery will stimulate inquiring and reflective thinking among pupils.

The accepted procedure for asking questions should be adapted:

- i. State the question
- ii. Give a pause time
- iii. Call on the name of the student to avoid a chorus answer
- iv. Listen carefully to the answer
- v. Always evaluate and make a comment on the answer
- vi. Do not react emotionally if a student fails to answer the questions correctly.

It has been found that many teachers confine their questions to the level of recall of facts virtually all the time and tend to overuse convergent question (Harlan and Rivkin, 1996).

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