*Original Article*

# A Study of Questioning Strategies in Senior English Reading Teaching from the Perspective of Thinking Quality

Liu Chishen[1], Wang Hongyuan[2]

[1,2]School of Foreign Languages, Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Zigong, China

**Abstract -** *It is explicitly stated that, in General Senior High School English Curriculum Standards (2017 Edition Revised in 2020), the English curriculum for general senior high school should further promote the development of the English subject core competencies, including thinking quality, based on compulsory education. This points out the development direction for English education and also brings challenges. Senior English reading, which carries rich cultural connotations, has an outstanding advantage in cultivating students' thinking quality. Classroom questioning, as an important way of teacher-student interaction, is a concrete and operable way to develop students' thinking quality. However, at present, teachers generally neglect the development of students' thinking quality in classroom questioning. Based on Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives theory and constructivist learning theory, this study analyzes the research status of thinking quality and classroom questioning at home and abroad by adopting the literature research method. It puts forward a series of classroom questioning strategies to cultivate thinking quality.*

*Keywords* - *Thinking quality, Reading teaching, Senior english, Questioning strategies.*

## 1. Introduction

Thinking is the "core" of language, and thinking quality has been singled out as an important element in English reading teaching. This demonstrates the close relationship between language and thought. Wang (2015) clearly points out that English reading teaching carries the important responsibility of cultivating students' thinking qualities. However, the current English language teaching partly neglects the creation of thematic contexts and deeper inquiry into the meaning of themes, making it difficult to develop thinking. In the context of core competencies, teachers should help students gain a deeper understanding of the information in the text in addition to helping them understand the text's important words and phrases (Ge, 2012).

In the teaching of English reading, classroom questioning is the most significant form of teacher-student interaction and a crucial component of the entire instructional process. The main purpose of classroom questioning is to develop students' thinking qualities. According to Jin (1997), one of the main goals of reading classroom questioning is to encourage students to think at a higher level to use what they have learned to enhance their critical and creative thinking. However, some teachers are unaware of the role of classroom questioning in developing students' thinking quality, and teachers' questions typically check to see if students have mastered a particular point and infrequently lead to the development of students' critical and creative thinking.

The study of senior high school English classroom questioning strategy based on the cultivation of thinking quality can provide a new perspective for the study of high school English reading teaching on the one hand. On the other hand, it can also provide some guidance for classroom practice.

## 2. Literature Review
### 2.1. Research Related to Classroom Questioning
#### 2.1.1. Definition of Classroom Questioning

Etymologically speaking, the word "questioning" comes from the Latin word meaning "to seek". As an integral part of teaching and learning, questioning has received the attention of many scholars abroad. According to Richard (2002), a question is a sentence that the questioner presents to obtain information about facts from the listener. According to Wragg (1984), any interaction that arouses students' interest in learning and stimulates their thinking and response can be called a question. Chaudron (1998) defined questioning as a series of instructional prompts teachers use and activities that require students to respond. Jung (1997) defined questioning as instructional prompts, stimuli that convey instructional content or instructions to students on what to do or how to do it.

Domestic scholars have also defined questioning from their perspectives. Jin (1998), who first introduced the concept of teacher questioning in China, defined questioning as a kind of instructional guidance, instructing students "what to do" or "how to do". According to Rong (2000), teacher questioning is a series of questions that teachers ask based on their own experiences and teaching objectives. Zheng (2000) considered all the words teachers use in the classroom to consolidate students' knowledge, facilitate their learning, and develop their thinking as questions. Pi (2000) defined questioning in terms of classroom interaction.

In summary, both domestic and foreign scholars have emphasized the function of teacher questioning when defining it. It is worth noting that teacher questioning is not just a mere pedagogical term used by teachers in the classroom. However, it plays a role in the teaching process to improve teaching effectiveness and help accomplish teaching objectives.

### 2.1.2. Strategies of Classroom Questioning

As early as 1912, R. Stevens conducted a study on classroom questioning and found that teachers asked an average of 2-4 questions per minute during lectures and that teachers took up almost 80% of the classroom time asking questions. Hence, the importance of classroom questioning is obvious. However, it is not easy to ask good questions in the classroom. In order to make classroom questioning more effective, scholars at home and abroad have conducted rich research on classroom questioning strategies.

After organizing the literature, it has been found that the research on classroom questioning strategies in China is relatively rich, and the relevant research has achieved certain results. For example, teachers should provide timely feedback after students' answers (Tang, 2019; Lv, 2014; Liu, 2012; Gao, 2010). Teachers should also encourage students to ask questions in class (Lv, 2014; Liu, 2012; Mu, 2000). Teachers should give students time to think (Gao, 2010; Liu, 2012; Rong, 2009). The timing of giving questions should be appropriate (Xiang, Wang & Xiong, 2021; Liu, 2012; Dong, 2006). Questions should be hierarchical (Lv, 2014; Wu, Tong, 2018; Li, 2016).

Throughout the research on classroom questioning strategies at home and abroad, it is simple to find that to do a good job of classroom questioning, and teachers should design questions according to students' knowledge levels before asking questions. The questions should not be too difficult or simple, as both extremes are not conducive to achieving teaching objectives. When asking questions, teachers should give students enough time to think, focusing on the interesting nature of the questions to attract students' attention and giving feedback to students after the questions have been answered, regardless of whether their answers are correct. It is important to note

that domestic and foreign studies have mentioned that teachers should encourage students to ask questions. However, it is in stark contrast to the current situation, in which most students in the classroom are passive recipients of information, and very few of them take the initiative to ask questions.

### 2.2. Research Related to Thinking Quality

Beginning with some Soviet psychologists, foreign research on the nature of thinking was first conducted in the Soviet Union. In the 1950s, several psychological works published in the Soviet Union dealt with the concept of thinking quality. However, Guilford (1950) was the first to put forward the concept of thinking quality. In his study, he laid emphasis on the volatility, creativity and flexibility of thinking. The aforementioned theories helped to lay a solid foundation for additional investigation and drew more academics and educators to focus on and research how thinking abilities develop.

At the theoretical level, Bruner (1987) proposed the cognitive-discovery learning theory, which believes that learning is a process in which learners discover knowledge autonomously and actively form cognitive structures through categorical processing activities. Gardner (1999) put forward the theory of multiple intelligences, which has led to an in-depth study of the view of intelligence and thinking.

At the practical level, in order to develop three different modes of thought, Sternberg (1997) carried out a number of educational experiments. His work produced significant findings that changed how people think and improved the quality of thinking while influencing subsequent research and discoveries. Guilford (1991) measured thinking quality through an experimental study, stating that innovative thinking is characterized by "fluency", "flexibility", "originality", and "refinement". The role of teacher assessment is particularly significant in developing students' thinking, according to American psychologist Cattle (2004), who noted that the speed of thinking must be studied based on the results of intelligence tests and that he believed that the speed of thinking is reflected to some extent in words, sentences, ideas, and expressions.

The early relevant domestic research belongs to the scope of psychology. Some psychologists first began to focus on the quality of thinking, and its connotations are discussed. As early as 1984, Lin proposed the concept of thinking quality, which he believed reflects intellectual characteristics in individual thinking activities.

Thinking quality has drawn the attention of many academics in the field of education, and there is now a wealth of research on its intersection with education. Liu (2018) made a detailed distinction between thinking, thinking quality, and thinking ability, exploring the

feasibility of developing students' thinking quality and thinking ability in English subjects, classifying thinking quality into logical thinking, critical thinking, and creative thinking, and proposed specific strategies for developing each type of thinking. Cheng & Zhao (2016) pointed out that learning a language other than the native language can enrich thinking and further promote the development of thinking skills. They argued that the process of comprehension and expression in English is conducive to students' development of generic thinking skills and their gradual development of thinking styles and thinking skills that are unique to or good for English language speakers.

To sum up, both domestically and abroad, the research on thinking quality approaches teaching, which is good proof that teaching is an important means to develop students' thinking quality. Most of the domestic research on the development of thinking quality is focused on the subject of English, which shows that English learning does not only include the language itself, but teachers should also pay attention to the development of students' thinking in teaching.

## 3. Theoretical Basis

In the 1980s, research on thinking quality emerged in foreign countries and then gradually came to the attention of scholars in China. Since introducing *the English Curriculum Standards for General Senior High School* (2017 Edition), the development of thinking quality in English teaching has been highly respected. Designing classroom questions based on the purpose of developing students' thinking quality requires scientific theories as support. The English reading classroom questioning study has received significant theoretical support from constructivist learning theory and Bloom's taxonomy theory of educational objectives.

### 3.1. Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivism is a new concept that emerged in the field of educational psychology in the 1990s. It specifically falls under a subset of cognitive learning theory, which is the result of people's ongoing investigation into their own cognitive functions (Chen, 2016). Constructivist theory is a vast theory, and its proposal has been called by researchers as a revolution in contemporary educational psychology (Wang, 2018).

Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that learning is a process in which learners actively construct based on their existing knowledge and experience, reflecting the centrality of students in the learning process (Fan, 2003). Constructivism holds that knowledge is not acquired through transmission by teachers but through meaningful construction by learners with the help of others and the use of necessary learning materials in certain contexts, i.e., social contexts. In the constructivist learning environment, teaching design should consider not only the analysis of teaching objectives but also the creation of contexts conducive to students' construction of meaning and regard context creation as one of the most important elements of instructional design. According to the constructivist theory of teaching and learning, students should be the primary source of learning, and the teacher should serve as an organizer, guide, helper, and facilitator. In addition, under the guidance of constructivist theory, teachers should also guide students to engage in cooperative learning, organizing discussions and exchanges in the form of teacher-student or student-student, and use classroom questions to guide the process of cooperative learning so that students' thinking can develop in the direction of effective meaning construction (Cao, 2013).

In summary, in teaching, educators should pay close attention to learners' learning process and help students engage in knowledge construction. Secondly, constructivism holds that students can construct knowledge with the help of others, which shows that teacher-student interaction and student-student interaction are especially important. Constructivism brings inspiration to English reading teaching, and teachers should integrate constructivist learning theory into classroom questioning in reading teaching.

### 3.2. Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives

Bloom and others proposed the taxonomy theory of educational objectives in 1956. The formation of this theory filled a gap that previous educational programs could not meet. It enabled educators to systematically evaluate student learning for the first time with reason and evidence, and the theory has been widely used in educational circles both at home and abroad. Since its introduction, the theory has been modified by many researchers, and now it has tended to be perfected, becoming the most widely used and authoritative educational objective classification theory in the field of education worldwide. This taxonomy of educational objectives is one of essential knowledge for every educator, highlighting its importance and influence (Wen, 2008).

In the cognitive domain, Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives provides an important reference for understanding learners' thinking activities under different educational objectives. In reviewing the pertinent literature, it is found that many studies on teachers' questioning have adopted Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives as the theoretical basis, and its authority speaks for itself.

## 4. Strategies for Cultivating Students' Thinking Quality

Classroom questioning is one of the highly artistic teaching tools which can often mobilize students' interest in learning, making students participate in learning, to inspire students to think. Therefore, based on Bloom's

taxonomy of educational objectives and constructivist learning theory, this study will propose improvement strategies for classroom questioning from three perspectives, namely, before class, during class and after class.

## 4.1. Before Class

### 4.1.1. Designing Layering Questions

Teachers should take into full consideration the students' actual level and the class's specific characteristics to design some hierarchical questions when carrying out teaching design. Teachers can break down the difficult problems into simpler, interesting and small problems and then split the big questions into a number of small questions, interlocking, gradually in-depth, to guide the student's thinking to develop vertically.

According to Bloom's classification of cognitive objectives, teachers should reasonably set up questions of memorization, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation and innovation. When designing questions, teachers should carefully analyze the characteristics of teaching content, reasonably allocating the proportion of various types of questions. Memorization questions stimulate students to recall and retell prior knowledge. Comprehension questions enhance students' understanding of new knowledge. Application questions cultivate students' ability to apply what they have learned to new environments. Analysis and evaluation questions cultivate students' critical thinking. Innovation questions help students transform knowledge into practical abilities. Memorization and comprehension questions belong to lower-order thinking questions, so students do not have to think when answering these questions, and their thinking cannot be developed. Therefore, when designing questions, teachers cannot design them all as lower-order thinking questions. Application, analysis, evaluation, and innovation questions belong to higher-order thinking questions, which need students to think when answering, and their thinking can be developed. However, teachers cannot design all the questions to be higher-order thinking questions regardless of the student's cognitive level. What is more, if the questions are too difficult will confuse the students, which will not be useful for putting forward the development of the students' thinking.

### 4.1.2. Designing Classroom Questions Based on Textbook

The textbook is the basis of classroom teaching, and the design of classroom questioning is also inseparable from the textbook. Effective classroom questioning should be closely related to the content of classroom teaching and centered on the requirements of teaching objectives (Hu,2015). Teachers should study the textbook in depth, seize the breakthroughs that inspire students' thinking, and consciously set up problems to form obstacles to cause students contradictions in their understanding. In that case, students' desire to solve the problems can be stimulated, and students' thinking gets improved.

### 4.1.3. Designing Classroom Questions Based on the Students' Situation

Teachers' classroom questioning design should fully understand students' cognitive level and age characteristics.

First of all, teachers should understand the thinking characteristics of senior high school students. Senior high school students are transitioning from image to abstract thinking. For students at this stage, teachers should actively induce them to develop higher-order thinking and create a pleasant teaching environment and atmosphere in classroom teaching. Question situations are used to mobilize students' desire for knowledge, stimulate them to think and explore actively, and guide them to use what they have learned to analyze and solve questions.

Secondly, teachers should understand the English level of students. Teachers should consider the goals of teaching and learning when designing questions. Teachers can understand the actual level of students through individual dialogues between teachers and students or diagnostic evaluations, etc. Based on this, they can design the classification of questions according to the target and constantly create the students' ZPD to lead students' development.

Finally, for those students who have a good foundation in English but find it difficult to concentrate in class, teachers should create forms of activities and questions that can mobilize their interest in learning and fully mobilize their subjective initiative.

To summarize, only when teachers know their students can they train their thinking and cultivate their thinking quality.

### 4.1.4. Studying Questioning Theory

A qualified teacher should have rich subject knowledge and important theoretical knowledge about questioning. Since classroom questioning is one of the teaching tools teachers use daily, teachers can only carry out reasonable classroom-type design if they have the guidance of rich classroom questioning theory. The use of appropriate questioning strategies can inspire students to think and develop their thinking qualities. To this end, teachers can enrich their theoretical knowledge by reading related literature and books on English.

First of all, regarding the design of classroom questioning, teachers can design hierarchical questions according to Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives to promote students' thinking development. Secondly, regarding the waiting time for classroom questioning, teachers should leave students reasonable thinking time after classroom questioning according to the cognitive level of students and the difficulty of the questions. Once again, regarding classroom questioning techniques,

teachers should, based on consolidating the theoretical learning of questioning, flexibly utilize questioning strategies such as prompting, diversion and decomposition to inspire students to think. Finally, regarding classroom feedback, teachers should combine specific targeted positive feedback with negative feedback when facing different answers from different students to play the role of feedback to promote students' active thinking, regulate the learning state, and promote students' thinking and language development.

### 4.2. During Class
#### 4.2.1. Giving Reasonable Waiting Time

After the teacher asks a question, the students begin to think actively. If the teacher does not give students time after asking a question, it will be difficult for students to think and develop their thinking.

On the one hand, teachers can appropriately and consciously reduce the amount of time students spend reading because they need to provide students with a limited time to think after posing a question, especially the time to comprehend the question itself. Secondly, teachers can also reasonably reduce students' thinking time by stipulating the way students answer questions after asking them so that students can realize their thinking potential and thus develop their thinking agility.

On the other hand, by flexibly stipulating the waiting time in the classroom, teachers can guide students to think flexibly about the problems and understand the knowledge to enhance their flexibility of thinking. First of all, after teachers put forward analysis and application questions, teachers can extend the waiting time appropriately to guide students to learn by example because these questions require students to think in a diffuse manner. Teachers' moderate waiting can increase students' answers' correctness, enhancing their self-confidence and making them more active in future questions. There is no definite conclusion on how much time teachers should give students to think. In actual teaching, teachers have to judge students' responses to questions based on their expressions and raising hands. In a word, teachers should extend or shorten waiting time according to the actual situation. For example, for difficult questions, teachers can appropriately extend the waiting time, giving enough time to guide students to think independently and organize the language, guiding them to divergent thinking, to develop their flexibility of thinking.

#### 4.2.2. Using Questioning Strategies Flexible

Teachers should use various questioning strategies to guide students to think deeply after asking questions. In the current English reading classroom, teachers use a single way of questioning, resulting in students answering questions without the flexibility to think in relation to what is known, making it difficult for students to develop their thinking ability. Therefore, teachers should be good at dealing with questioning strategies flexibly, such as repetition, follow-up questions, rephrasing, prompting, etc., which can guide students to think deeply and thus improve the profundity of students' thinking.

First, the teacher's reasonable follow-up questions can help students grasp the knowledge deeply, guiding students to think deeply and develop profound thinking. The follow-up questions can be generally divided into two categories, one is the follow-up questions on the teaching content, and the other is the follow-up questions on the students' answers (Li, 2020). Regardless of the type of follow-up questions, their nature is based on known information, which is conducive to students' deeper grasp of theoretical knowledge and the development of the depth of their thinking. Secondly, repetition means that the teacher restates the question after the teacher asks a question, and the students do not respond. Rephrasing means that the teacher rephrases the question to the student in a sentence that the student can understand, which helps the student to understand the question and answer it accurately and fully. Therefore, if the students do not respond after the teacher asks a question, the teacher may try to ask the question again using a repetition or rephrasing strategy to guide the students' thinking. Finally, the prompting means that when students are unable to answer a question correctly or completely, the teacher gives a similar relevant example to guide students' thinking, which helps to reduce students' nervousness and gives them ideas to develop deeper thinking.

#### 4.2.3. Giving Feedback on Students' Response Timely

Teachers should listen carefully to students while they are answering questions. After students have finished answering, teachers should give them feedback. If the teacher does not give feedback, this may result in the student's self-doubt that the teacher does not approve of him, which may develop low self-esteem.

It is inevitable for students to make mistakes in answering questions. However, teachers should not correct them whenever they see mistakes, as this will interrupt students' thinking and easily discourage them from answering questions. The correct approach is that the teacher can let other students correct or supplement when students' answers are wrong or incomplete. When necessary, the teacher can give students certain tips. When students' answers are basically correct, the teacher should encourage and praise the students. When praising students, the teacher's language should be varied and sincere so that students can really feel affirmed by the teacher. Only in this way can students have a sense of achievement. Thus, they can be more positive when answering questions.

In conclusion, after students have answered the questions, the teacher should give feedback regardless of whether the students' answers are correct or not so that classroom questioning can be effective.

### 4.2.4. Encouraging Students to Ask Questions

In the classroom, the teacher is usually in the role of asking questions. More specifically, teachers ask questions, and students respond. However, constructivist learning theory emphasizes the subjectivity of students in educational activities. Compared with traditional teacher questioning, student questioning reflects the students' subjective position in teaching and learning. It can promote students' self-internalization of what they have learned and self-construction of the system of subject knowledge, and it is conducive to stimulating students' creative thinking. Moreover, students' question is the basis of innovation (Hu, 2021).

Therefore, teachers should cultivate students' awareness of asking questions in teaching activities. The traditional classroom has been centered on the teacher for a long time, and the students have formed the thinking stereotype of passively accepting knowledge and dare not to ask questions. In order to make students dare to ask questions, teachers must create an equal and democratic atmosphere, paying attention to the dialogue between teachers and students, ensuring the democracy and equality of the dialogue between teachers and students, and helping students to overcome their fear of teaching activities. In addition, teachers must pay attention to every student and give students ample opportunities to ask questions. Teachers should notice that not only the questions of high-achieving students are valuable.

In short, teachers should put students in a relaxed and harmonious learning environment so that students can overcome their fear. In addition, teachers should respect students and treat every student equally.

### 4.3. After class

Teachers' after-lesson reflection is an effective way to improve teaching effectiveness and promote teacher development. Teachers can reflect on the following aspects. First, teachers should reflect on whether the design of the questions is reasonable. Reasonably designed questions can not only make students' understanding of knowledge more profound but also cultivate students' thinking quality. Teachers should reflect on whether the question design is in line with students' realities, whether the designed questions are progressive and whether the designed questions can guide students to think deeply. Secondly, teachers should reflect on whether they have made adaptive changes in the classroom. For example, whether the teachers utilize the questioning strategy flexibly according to the student's responses. Finally, teachers should reflect on whether the whole class has achieved the expected effect, whether the teaching objectives have been achieved and whether students' thinking quality has been developed, which can be utilized as criteria to improve their teaching in the future.

## 5. Conclusion

The main aim of the current senior high school English program is no longer simply to improve students' language proficiency. With the introduction of the new curriculum standard, the cultivation of thinking quality has also been included in the curriculum objectives of the English program. In actual teaching, teachers should actively explore how to develop students' thinking quality while developing their language ability. As a frequently used and effective teaching tool, classroom questioning undoubtedly plays an important role in cultivating students' thinking quality. However, there are still some problems with teaching questioning in the current senior high school English reading classroom, so this study proposes some questioning strategies that can be used to facilitate teachers cultivate students' quality of thinking in the following three stages, namely, before class, during class and after class. Before class, the teacher should design questions carefully. All the questions should be designed based on students' situations and textbook content. More importantly, teachers should learn some questioning theory. During class, teachers should give students time to think. When students cannot answer the question, teachers should use appropriate questioning strategies to help them. After students answer, teachers should give feedback to them. What is more, teachers should also encourage students to ask questions. After class, teachers should reflect on their teaching to improve it timely.

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