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# The Existing Problems of Questioning Teaching Method in Elementary Chinese Language Teaching in Cambodia

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## Abstract

This article thoroughly investigates the application and issues of questioning-based pedagogy in primary Chinese language teaching in Cambodia and proposes practical solutions to address these issues. Drawing on a comprehensive review of previous research findings and personal teaching experience, this article delves into the strategies and forms of classroom questioning in Chinese language teaching and provides a detailed analysis of the actual challenges faced by Cambodian learners of Chinese when asking questions in class. Through contextual analysis, this article comprehensively describes and deeply analyzes the current status of questioning in Chinese language classrooms in Cambodia, and puts forth a series of specific recommendations to address the existing issues in questioning practices in primary Chinese language classrooms in Cambodia. The aim is to provide practical assistance to Chinese language teachers and researchers in this field and to promote continuous improvement in Chinese language teaching in Cambodia.

**Keywords:** Inquiry-based teaching method; Cambodia; Elementary Chinese language instruction; Teacher questioning strategies

## 1. Introduction

The significance of classroom questioning in primary education cannot be denied. It not only assesses students' mastery of learned knowledge but also stimulates their interest in learning (Gou Mei Hua, 2019). As a common

teaching strategy, classroom questioning complements inquiry-based teaching methods, helping teachers guide students in exploration and knowledge construction. Modern education emphasizes the significance of student engagement and interaction, and inquiry-based teaching is an effective approach to achieving this goal. Inquiry-based teaching utilizes questions to help students learn, with teachers posing questions based on student's existing knowledge, guiding them to think critically, take risks, and learn to question and explore. The goal is to cultivate students' abilities to identify, analyze, and solve problems, as well as develop self-directed learning and self-development skills. By nurturing self-awareness and self-improvement abilities, students learn to recognize their strengths and develop good habits of respect and cooperation with others during the learning process(Zhang Yong, 2012). In recent years, with the increasing exchange between Cambodia and China, more and more Cambodian students have shown a strong interest in learning Chinese. In order to improve the effectiveness of Chinese language teaching, more and more Chinese language teachers are adopting flexible and diverse teaching methods, including inquiry-based teaching. Sufficient evidence has shown that inquiry-based teaching is an efficient teaching strategy in primary education, helping students better understand and apply learned knowledge, stimulating their interest in learning, and improving their academic performance. Therefore, further in-depth research and application of inquiry-based teaching are of great significance for optimizing the effectiveness of primary education. Although some preliminary research results have been achieved in Cambodian Chinese language teaching, the current research is still relatively limited, as will be demonstrated in the literature review below.

## **2. Literature review**

The study "The Use of Classroom Questioning in Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: A Case Study of Chinese Teaching at Jing Huai Ying (2014)" focuses on the application of classroom questioning in Chinese language teaching, using the example of Chinese teaching at the Zhongshan Primary School in Kro Lanh, Cambodia. Through transcription of recordings and questionnaire surveys, statistical analysis was conducted on the types of classroom questions, distribution of classroom questions, the number of classroom questions, and the effects of classroom questions in the initial stage of Chinese language teaching. The study also conducted a theoretical analysis of the questioning strategies employed by teachers. Based on this, the shortcomings of classroom questioning in the process of Chinese language teaching in Cambodia were analyzed in detail, and corresponding strategies were proposed(Jing Huai Ying, 2014).

In another study "A Comparative Study on Questioning Types, Forms, Distribution, and Strategies of Volunteer Teachers in Chinese Classrooms at Four Levels of Wu Gong High School in Siem Reap, Cambodia (2020)" by Zeng Yi Fang, comparative research conducted on the questioning types, forms, distribution, and strategies of volunteer teachers in Chinese classrooms at four levels of Wu Gong High School in Siem Reap, Cambodia. The author used quantitative statistics and situational analysis to provide a detailed description and analysis of the current situation of questioning in Chinese language teaching at different levels and made suggestions for addressing the problems of questioning in Chinese classrooms at different levels (Zeng Yi Fang, 2020).

Through these studies, we gain a deep understanding of the strategies and forms of questioning used by teachers, as well as the differences in questioning practices in Chinese language classrooms at different levels. However, these studies also reveal some issues that need further research and resolution. For example, issues such as low quality of teacher questioning, self-answering, excessively difficult or easy questions, low student participation, and lack of motivation and proactivity among some students are prominent, especially in primary-level Chinese language teaching in Cambodia, but there is relatively limited research on Cambodian primary-level Chinese language learners. Therefore, based on the existing research findings and combined with personal teaching experience and observations, the author intends to further explore the issues faced by Cambodian primary-level Chinese language learners in classroom questioning, and attempts to propose targeted teaching methods for Chinese language teachers in Cambodian primary-level classes, aiming to provide practical assistance for Chinese language teachers and researchers engaged in related work.

### **3. Methodology**

This article delves into the challenges of applying the interrogative teaching method in primary Chinese language instruction in Cambodia and presents viable solutions to address these issues persuasively. Firstly, the importance of classroom questioning in early Chinese language education is emphasized, highlighting the interrogative teaching method as a commonly effective instructional strategy. Secondly, this article employs rigorous research methods, including situational analysis, to comprehensively review and deeply analyze the issues identified in existing research from the perspective of teachers. Furthermore, the specific problems faced by Cambodian primary Chinese language learners during classroom questioning are thoroughly analyzed. Lastly, a series of targeted teaching approaches are proposed to address these issues. The research findings hold significant implications for improving the quality of primary Chinese language education

in Cambodia and offer valuable insights into Chinese language education in other countries and regions.

## **4 Questioning Issues in Primary Chinese Language Teaching in Cambodia: Analysis of Teacher's Perspective and Student Engagement**

### **4.1 Issues from the Teacher's Perspective**

Based on previous research, the author further summarizes the problems in Chinese language teaching in Cambodia and draws the following conclusions. From the perspective of teachers, the main issues with classroom questioning are as follows:

#### **4.1.1 When asking questions:**

(1) Teachers tend to excessively focus on high-achieving students while overlooking those who are struggling or shy (Zeng Yi Fang, 2020). This approach may result in some students feeling left out and lacking in confidence, which can affect their interest and motivation in learning Chinese. Several reasons contribute to this phenomenon. Firstly, teachers may assume that high-achieving students are smarter and more capable, thus preferring to call on them to answer questions. Secondly, teachers may perceive struggling or shy students as lacking in confidence or initiative, and therefore reluctant to give them opportunities to answer questions. Lastly, teachers may view giving more time for struggling or shy students to think and prepare their answers as a waste of class time.

(2) Insufficient preparation and grasp by teachers during classroom questioning may result in ineffective questioning, thereby affecting students' mastery and understanding of Chinese language knowledge (Zeng Yi Fang, 2020). There are multiple reasons for this issue. Firstly, teachers may not have a thorough understanding of students' Chinese language proficiency and learning situation, which leads to questions that are not tailored to their cognitive level and learning needs. Lack of awareness of students' actual situation makes it difficult for the questions to align with students' cognitive level and learning requirements. Secondly, teachers may not have adequately prepared the questions in advance, resulting in unclear thinking or lack of specificity during questioning. Insufficient preparation may prevent teachers from accurately guiding students' thinking during classroom questioning, thus affecting students' understanding of the questions and the accuracy of their answers. Additionally, teachers may not have mastered the timing and manner of questioning, resulting in students' inability to understand or answer the questions. The timing and manner of questioning have a significant impact on students' cognitive stimulation and ability to respond. If teachers fail to grasp these elements effectively, students may become confused or unable to actively participate in classroom interactions.

(3) The number of teacher questions in the classroom, whether too many or too few, can negatively impact both classroom efficiency and student engagement(Jing Huai Ying, 2014). Excessive questioning may prevent students from fully answering each question, resulting in decreased learning outcomes. On the other hand, insufficient questioning may lead to a lack of interaction and inspiration in the classroom, restricting students' deep thinking and active participation. There are several possible explanations for this phenomenon. Firstly, some teachers may have insufficient academic and knowledge levels, resulting in too few questions or focusing only on certain aspects, thus failing to comprehensively guide students' thinking and participation. Secondly, some teachers may lack understanding of students' actual conditions and are unable to reasonably set the quantity of questions based on students' different characteristics and levels, resulting in too many or too few questions. In addition, some teachers may lack design and utilization of reference questions, failing to set the difficulty and depth of questions appropriately, resulting in an imbalance in the quantity of questions. Lastly, some schools may require teachers to spend a significant amount of class time on explaining new words and texts, making it difficult for teachers to set enough reference questions and quantity of questions within the designated time frame.

(4) In classroom questioning, teachers lack the use of guiding and thought-provoking reference questions that require students to engage in critical thinking and inquiry(Jing Huai Ying, 2014). Such questions can stimulate students' thinking and creativity, encouraging them to actively participate in the learning process. However, the absence of these types of questions in classroom questioning by teachers may deprive students of opportunities for active thinking and inquiry, resulting in negative impacts on their learning outcomes. This phenomenon may be attributed to several reasons. Firstly, students may have limited language organizational skills due to their lower Chinese language proficiency, making it challenging for them to answer complex reference questions. Especially in elementary school students who are the target of the investigation, their limited practical communication abilities due to their beginner-level Chinese proficiency may hinder their ability to respond to more complex questions. Secondly, reference questions typically do not have fixed answers and require students to engage in prolonged thinking and inquiry, which may take up a significant amount of classroom time, making it difficult for teachers to fulfill their instructional responsibilities.

(5) The lack of personalized design in teacher-led classroom questioning may significantly impact student engagement and motivation, thus negatively affecting their learning outcomes(Jing Huai Ying, 2014). This issue stems from several reasons: firstly, teachers may lack understanding of

students' individual circumstances, preventing them from tailoring their approach based on students' backgrounds, interests, and learning styles; secondly, teachers may not recognize the differences and characteristics among students, leading to a lack of customized design to meet diverse student needs; moreover, teachers may have insufficient knowledge and application of Chinese language teaching methods and techniques, preventing them from personalizing their instruction based on varied teaching objectives and content.

(6) The lack of diverse questioning techniques used by teachers in the classroom may result in students feeling monotonous and disengaged (Jing Huai Ying, 2014). This issue can stem from multiple reasons: firstly, teachers may lack knowledge and application of different types of questions and questioning methods, relying solely on one or a few fixed approaches; secondly, teachers may fail to deeply understand students' cognitive development and cognitive levels, thus unable to vary their questioning strategies based on students' cognitive abilities; and finally, teachers may lack understanding and application of Chinese language teaching methods and techniques, leading to a lack of diversified questioning based on different teaching objectives and content.

(7) Teachers' excessive focus on language points during classroom questioning may result in students lacking practical application skills (Jing Huai Ying, 2014). The main reason for this issue is that teachers are influenced by the exam-oriented education system, overly emphasizing students' mastery of language points while neglecting the importance of cultivating their overall contextual understanding and language usage skills. This approach limits students' ability to apply language in practical contexts, preventing them from effectively dealing with challenges in real-life language communication, thus affecting their language learning outcomes.

#### **4.1.2 When providing an answer:**

(1) When providing answers in class, teachers tend to excessively focus on students with higher proficiency levels and extroverted personalities, while neglecting shy students with lower proficiency levels (Zeng Yi Fang, 2020). This practice may result in some students feeling excluded and lacking confidence, thereby impacting their interest and motivation in learning Chinese. Several factors may contribute to this phenomenon. Firstly, teachers may assume that students with higher proficiency levels and outgoing personalities are more likely to provide accurate answers, and therefore tend to choose them more frequently. Secondly, teachers may believe that shy students with lower proficiency levels lack confidence or initiative, and thus may be unwilling to call on them to answer questions. Additionally, teachers may worry that shy students with lower proficiency levels may require more

time to think and prepare their answers, which could be seen as a waste of classroom time.

(2) The lack of timely feedback in the classroom may result in students feeling undervalued or losing interest (Jing Huai Ying, 2014). This issue stems from various factors. Firstly, teachers may lack careful observation and analysis when students answer questions, making it difficult to identify errors and weaknesses in a timely manner. Secondly, teachers may lack a deep understanding and flexible application of Chinese language teaching methods and techniques, making it challenging to provide immediate feedback based on individual student needs. Additionally, time constraints and classroom management pressures may hinder teachers from providing timely feedback to all students within limited class time. These factors collectively contribute to students not receiving adequate feedback in the classroom, which can impact their motivation and interest in learning.

(3) Teachers who lack challenging and inspiring responses to students' answers may lead to student boredom or lack of motivation (Jing Huai Ying, 2014). The fundamental cause of this issue lies in the insufficient understanding and application of Chinese language teaching methods and techniques by teachers, as they fail to ask questions that are both challenging and thought-provoking based on different situations, thereby impacting the effectiveness of teaching.

The valuable insights gained from previous research findings and the issues summarized from the perspective of teachers provide compelling reference information for Chinese language instruction in Cambodia. This solid foundation based on previous research and teacher practical experience will help us to optimize classroom questioning practices with scientific rigor and effectiveness. Adopting this approach, which is grounded in the achievements of past research and the insights of experienced educators, will contribute to the improvement of Chinese language instruction in Cambodia, resulting in enhanced learning experiences and academic achievements for our students.

#### **4.2 Issues from the Student's Perspective**

Based on careful observation and research on students, the author has identified two key factors that contribute to the questions raised during classroom discussions: external factors and internal factors. External factors refer to issues arising from the external environment and pressures students face in the classroom, while internal factors are inherent to students themselves. These two factors interact in the classroom and collectively influence students' performance. By gaining a deeper understanding of and addressing these factors, we can better comprehend the challenges students

face when asking questions in class, and take appropriate measures to resolve these issues, thus enhancing the effectiveness of classroom learning.

#### **4.2.1 External Factors**

(1) **Language Communication:** Many foreigners who come to Cambodia, including volunteer teachers dispatched by Han Ban (Confucius Institute Headquarters) from China to work in Cambodia, often face language communication issues [5]. Due to their lack of proficiency in Khmer, they encounter a series of difficulties in Cambodia. Especially in the classroom, language communication becomes one of the most common challenges for teachers. Due to limited English proficiency among students, teachers are unable to use English for questioning and have to resort to using Chinese. However, due to students' low proficiency in Chinese, teachers find it challenging to explain problems to students, which negatively impacts teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

(2) The prevalent age disparity among students in Cambodia has garnered attention in academic circles, as noted by researchers (He Qi Ying, 2016) and (Zhao Hong Xian, 2019), This was also observed by the author of this article. In the class he taught, there were children as young as 10 years old to adults in their 30s. There are two main reasons for this phenomenon: on one hand, they all started learning Chinese from scratch and should have been in the same grade level; on the other hand, there are fewer adults, making it impractical to have separate classes for them, so they have to study with children. However, in Cambodia, studying with children often brings psychological pressure on adults. They need to overcome the sense of shame of being in the same class as children, which often results in their silence in class. They also tend to be less receptive to teachers' questions and assignments, posing a thought-provoking issue for Educators to consider.

#### **4.2.2 Internal Factors**

(1) **Cultural Factors:** Cambodian people are generally perceived as shy or reserved in character, which may result in Cambodian students displaying traits such as speaking less, slower reactions, and difficulty in expressing opinions in the classroom. This could lead teachers to mistakenly assume that Cambodian students are not attentive or proactive in class, lacking active participation and initiative. Especially when teachers ask questions, Cambodian students tend to react slowly. However, it is crucial to understand this point. Otherwise, teachers may mistakenly think that students are unwilling to answer questions, thus impacting the effectiveness of teacher-student interaction.

(2) **Fear of Making Mistakes:** Through long-term observation, it is evident that Cambodian students in classrooms are afraid of being ridiculed,



which results in their reluctance to proactively answer questions when teachers ask. In my view, this situation is due to the inherent traits of Cambodian students. Cambodian primary and secondary school students have a strong sense of self-esteem (Zhao Hong Xian, 2019), and being mocked or ridiculed by other students for answering incorrectly in class is a significant blow to their self-esteem. As a result, they often hesitate to voluntarily respond to their teachers' questions. This not only negatively impacts students' learning outcomes but also poses challenges for teachers to accurately assess students' proficiency in the Chinese language.

(3) Lack of Confidence: Through careful observation, it is evident that many students in Cambodian classrooms lack sufficient confidence during question-and-answer sessions. They often become self-conscious and timid in class due to fear of being ridiculed by their peers. When teachers pose questions, students often hesitate and struggle to overcome their inner psychological barriers, even though they want to raise their hands and participate. Many students do not want to draw attention to themselves in class, which causes them stress and distress. This phenomenon deserves educators' profound attention.

## **5 Optimizing Questioning Techniques in Primary Chinese Language Teaching in Cambodia: Integrating Previous Research Findings with Teacher Practices**

The following recommendations are based on previous research findings, combined with the practical situation of Chinese language teaching in Cambodia, with the aim of providing teachers with practical reference information and hoping to play a positive role in Chinese education in Cambodia.

(1) When Chinese teachers are teaching in Cambodia, it is important for them to maintain a positive attitude and take measures to effectively reduce classroom questioning issues. One feasible approach is to spend some time before class preparing questions for students. This way, teachers not only have enough time to think about simpler questions but also have a good grasp of the questions and can explain them to students in simple language at any time. In addition to pre-class preparation, teachers should also make efforts to learn some local languages as an auxiliary tool for solving language communication issues. Such practice not only improves communication with students but also enhances cultural exchange and understanding with the local community. By implementing these measures, Chinese teachers can confidently and effectively handle classroom questioning, making positive contributions to the improvement of teaching effectiveness.

(2) The undeniable age gap between adults and children can result in different learning patterns in the classroom. Therefore, it is advisable for

teachers to avoid a one-size-fits-all teaching approach and instead adopt a more targeted teaching model. Engaging in more communication with older students can be an effective method. For example, before class, teachers can inquire about students' learning difficulties or how they feel about the course. After class, teachers can ask if students have any areas of confusion and respond to their questions in a gentle manner. By employing such personalized teaching methods, teachers can not only bridge the gap between themselves and their students but also protect students' self-esteem. This individualized approach to teaching is more likely to ignite students' interest and potential, thus enhancing the effectiveness of instruction.

(3) Different ethnicities possess unique characteristics, and this is something that Chinese teachers working in Cambodia need to deeply understand. Firstly, teachers should acknowledge that Cambodian students may appear shy and may have different habits in the classroom. Everyone has inherent differences in their personalities that are not easily changed in a short period of time. Therefore, teachers should avoid using words that may hurt students, such as viewing shyness as a lack of proactivity. When asking questions, teachers need to have patience and give students more time to think, while trusting that students will be able to provide satisfactory answers. Such an educational approach is more likely to boost students' confidence and active participation in classroom activities.

(4) In order to overcome the inherent lack of motivation among students and help them overcome their inner fears, teachers should play the role of external motivators in the classroom, encouraging them to actively participate in answering questions. The author believes that the most effective way to achieve this is by directly calling on students to answer questions, using their names to address them, and avoiding the use of full names. In Cambodia, it is considered impolite or disrespectful to use full names unless on formal occasions or when necessary. When students provide correct answers, teachers can choose to immediately affirm their responses or first allow other students to attempt the question and then inform the class that the answer provided by the initial student was correct. Regardless of the approach, teachers should use encouraging and praising language to motivate students, making them feel affirmed and supported. If students provide incorrect answers, teachers can choose not to immediately disclose the correct answer. A better approach is to flexibly encourage more students to attempt the question, avoiding repetitive incorrect answers and providing as many opportunities as possible. Finally, the correct answer can be revealed to the students. This approach not only reduces the burden of being the first to answer for students who may provide incorrect answers but also minimizes the risk of ridicule from other students in the class. By serving as external motivators for students, using direct name-calling, being mindful of addressing manners, and handling incorrect answers

with flexibility, teachers can effectively engage students and reduce negative emotions and pressures they may face in Cambodian elementary Chinese language teaching.

(5) Every time teaching activities commence, teachers should be keenly aware that some students may be hesitant to answer questions due to their lack of confidence. Therefore, when posing questions in the classroom, teachers should strive to evenly distribute them to every corner of the class to encourage participation from all students. For those students who lack confidence, teachers can adopt a guiding approach, such as providing hints or cues to help them answer questions. Furthermore, teachers should consciously praise and encourage students, igniting their courage and self-assurance. As Dong Zhao Jun and Liu Ai Xin (2005) state, 'Students' bravery and confidence are cultivated through praise, especially for younger students.' (Dong Zhao Jun & Liu Ai Xin, 2005) By constantly acknowledging the presence of these students and utilizing appropriate teaching methods, teachers can significantly improve their learning outcomes. This not only stimulates students' interest in answering questions but also helps them become more courageous and proactive, thereby greatly enhancing the effectiveness of classroom instruction.

## **Conclusion**

In recent years, the rapid development of Chinese language education in Cambodia can be attributed to the deepening of bilateral relations and extensive cooperation between the two countries. Against this backdrop, the significance of Chinese language instruction in Cambodia has gained increasing attention and recognition, serving as a crucial bridge for enhancing cultural exchange and cooperation between the two nations. Undoubtedly, the importance of elementary Chinese language education in Cambodia is self-evident. However, in reality, there are still numerous issues in actual classroom teaching, as mentioned earlier. These issues cannot be ignored as they may impact the quality and effectiveness of elementary Chinese language instruction in Cambodia.

In Chinese language teaching for foreigners, the elementary stage is typically the stage with the largest number of students (Liu Xun, 2014). The elementary stage is the first impression for students when learning any foreign language, and it is a crucial stage for establishing a solid language foundation. Furthermore, the elementary stage serves as an important reference for students to decide whether to continue their language learning journey. The quality of teaching in the elementary stage directly impacts students' future language development. Therefore, we should highly value the foundational stage of language learning and not overlook the critical importance of the

elementary stage. A high-quality education in the elementary stage will lay a solid foundation for a student's future learning journey.

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