

FOREIGN LANGUAGES AND VIETNAMESE

**CLASSROOM QUESTIONING IN TEACHING GRAMMAR
TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORED IN CHINESE
AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL IN VIETNAM:
THE GRAMMAR LESSON ON THE PARTICLE “把”****DANG VAN HIEN***

ABSTRACT: Teaching a foreign language as a major to university students is not merely a process of knowledge transmission and acquisition; it requires students to apply what they have learned in communicative contexts, using integrated listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills to fulfill the objective of learning for use. Whether students can understand and apply their newly acquired knowledge, in conjunction with prior knowledge, to real-life situations and enhance their communicative competence depends largely on the effectiveness of teachers' classroom questioning. The article employs relevant theoretical frameworks to examine teachers' classroom questioning practices in lessons on the particle “把” to Chinese university students at the elementary level.

KEY WORDS: Questioning techniques; grammar instruction; 把; elementary level; Vietnamese students.

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1. Introduction

In today's world, foreign languages serve as essential tools for global connection, facilitating cooperation among countries across diverse fields. Thus, teaching and learning foreign languages, as well as studies of foreign language pedagogy, have received growing attention. In classroom-related issues, research on teachers' classroom questioning to enhance teacher-student interaction has yet to be examined. It has been shown that how teachers pose questions in a classroom is not merely a matter of knowledge but also an art, which helps students acquire knowledge quickly and on a scientific basis, thereby applying such knowledge in real-life contexts and developing higher-order thinking skills. Teaching foreign languages in general and teaching a foreign language as a major to university students in particular go beyond knowledge transmission as they require teachers to create opportunities for students to apply what they have learned in communicative contexts through listening, speaking, reading, and writing to achieve the objective of learning for use. Whether students can understand the new lesson's content, apply it in real-life contexts, and enhance communicative competence depends largely on the quality of teachers' classroom questioning.

Traditionally, teachers' classroom questioning has been primarily used in reading lessons. During vocabulary and grammar instruction, teachers should utilize eliciting and guiding questions to lead students into the lesson. However, teachers tend to rely on one-way knowledge transmission followed by practice activities, which fail to promote students' autonomy, creativity, and self-directed learning. Students' passive listening may result in cognitive inhibition and diminished learner engagement. The current study draws on relevant theoretical issues to investigate teachers' classroom questioning practices in lessons on the particle “把” at two universities: a key university in Hanoi and a local university. “把” is selected for study in the paper because it is one of the core components of Chinese grammar. “把” involves multiple levels of complexity, is highly frequent in use, and is a common source of learner errors. The research findings help to identify both the strengths and limitations of

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teachers' classroom questioning practices. Subsequently, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the quality of foreign language teaching in general and grammar instruction in particular.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Foundations

2.1. Classroom questioning in foreign language teaching and learning

As international cooperation continues to develop, foreign language teaching and studies have received considerable attention. In recent years, scholars both domestically and internationally have focused primarily on teaching methodologies, language acquisition, error analysis, and second language curriculum design. However, there is a dearth of studies on classroom questioning techniques in foreign language teaching and learning. In China, several publications address the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, and classroom questioning has been discussed to some extent. Cui & Yang (2002) introduced instructional techniques in their eight-chapter book, focusing on teaching phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, Chinese characters, and the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In the book, considerable attention was devoted to examining teachers' questioning techniques in helping students understand content and construct discourse. Huang (2008) conceptualized Chinese teaching as an art by highlighting 11 principles of classroom instruction. Among those principles, the multidimensional interactions between teachers and students, and among students themselves, are emphasized.

Studies that directly address classroom questioning in the context of teaching Chinese to international students include Yang (2006). The author analyzed the functions and principles of questioning, highlighting such key features as novelty, flexibility, elicitation, and appropriateness. Kuang (2008) also examined classroom questioning strategies, offering a detailed analysis of the relationship between questioning practices and the level of Chinese language acquisition among international students, and subsequently proposing effective questioning strategies. More recently, Shen (2023) investigated classroom questioning within the teaching of cultural studies in foreign language education. The study emphasizes how questioning can facilitate students' ability to draw on prior knowledge and life experience to acquire new knowledge. The author also discussed the quantity, types, and content of questions used in the classroom, as well as which types of content should be prioritized.

In Vietnam, research on questioning techniques in teaching Chinese to Vietnamese students has been addressed, notably, by Liang (2022). As a Chinese lecturer teaching Chinese to Vietnamese students, the author used surveys, theoretical issues, and personal teaching experience to discuss classroom questioning techniques in reading classes. The study concluded with seven recommendations for teachers and five recommendations for students to maximize the effectiveness of questioning in teaching and learning in reading classes. Additionally, Fan & Fan (2020) examined the introduction of new lessons in teaching Chinese speaking and writing skills to Vietnamese students and identified classroom questioning as a key technique for directing students' attention. Specifically, questioning is used to connect prior knowledge with new content and to establish continuity between lessons and class sessions, thereby fostering student engagement from the beginning of the lesson. However, to date, there has been no research in Vietnam that specifically examines questioning techniques in grammar instruction.

2.2. Theoretical Foundations

2.2.1. Principles of foreign language teaching

Foreign language teaching aims to enable students to apply their understanding of the target language in real communicative contexts, so they can interact effectively with native speakers or engage in translation activities, which is in line with the principle of "learning for use". Therefore, instructional activities should follow a communicative approach.

Teaching Chinese to Chinese-major students in Vietnam should adhere to the principles of second-language teaching and acquisition. Modern pedagogical theories identify two fundamental principles: (1) a learner-centered approach, in which the teacher acts as an organizer; and (2) the

principle of enhancing interaction, reducing psychological pressure, and emphasizing practical communicative use over purely theoretical linguistic knowledge. These principles require teachers to demonstrate a strong mastery of lesson content, to create communicative contexts that are practical, natural, and diverse, thereby establishing an immersive language environment and designing a system of questions that actively engage students in the learning process. Classroom questioning is an essential pedagogical technique for fostering interaction not only between the teacher and students but also among students themselves, while simultaneously eliciting feedback from learners. Lyster and Ranta (1997) classified classroom feedback into six types, one of which involves elicitation through guiding questions that prompt learners to explore and construct understanding [as cited in: 11, p. 157]. This highlights that the use of eliciting questions in the classroom is one of the most critical components of effective teaching and learning.

2.2.2. Principles of classroom questioning in foreign language teaching

Communication in the classroom is largely shaped by teachers, who rely on instructional objectives, content, learner characteristics, and pedagogical tasks to construct contexts that are relevant to real-life situations. These contexts are designed to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge, reinforce prior knowledge, and provide opportunities for students to practice language skills in each lesson. Kuang (2008) affirmed that classroom questioning is one of the key techniques for fostering interaction in second language teaching [9, p. 3083]. Teachers' classroom questioning plays a crucial role in guiding students to engage with the lesson's content and actively accomplish learning tasks. Teachers' questions posed during instruction should be varied, ranging from reviewing prior knowledge to open-ended questions that address various linguistic dimensions, such as phonetics, vocabulary, and grammar. In the case of Chinese language teaching, particular attention must be given to the writing system. Moreover, questions should be integrated across the four language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, thereby continuously fostering and enhancing students' cognitive abilities.

2.2.3. “把” in Modern Chinese

“把” is one of the central grammatical points in teaching Chinese. First, it occurs frequently in spoken language, whereas the form “将” is often used as a variant of “把” in written discourse. Second, the use of the “把” involves several formal constraints. The object of “把” is simultaneously the object of the main verb. The verb typically requires a complement or modifier. Negation can be expressed using “不” or “没”. Modal (auxiliary) verbs must precede “把”. The objective of the verb and “把” is definite. The use of the “把” in a sentence involves the elements that occur both before and after the main verb, creating structural balance. Semantically, “把” typically expresses how the subject handles or disposes of an object in response to a given situation. It can be seen that many rules govern the use of “把” in a sentence, so students are prone to making errors if a single condition is overlooked.

3. Research methods and data sources

In this study, several principal research methods and techniques were employed. Synthesis was used to generalize and systematize relevant theoretical issues. Direct observation was used to investigate current classroom questioning practices of teachers in grammar instruction, specifically in the context of teaching the particle “把”. The observation involved five teachers who are delivering Chinese courses to first-year Chinese-major students, and their teaching experience ranges from 4 to 19 years. Among them, three instructors are from a key university in Hanoi (hereafter referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, and Teacher C), and two are from a local university (hereafter referred to as Teacher D and Teacher E). For confidentiality reasons, the names of the institutions and instructors are not disclosed. Classroom questioning was examined across several dimensions, including quantity, structural form, and content, in comparison with sentences that do not use “把” and equivalent expressions in Vietnamese, as well as student practice and feedback. A survey was

conducted to investigate students' perceptions after each grammar lesson on the particle “把” is completed by teachers A, B, C, D, and E. The classes are abbreviated as Class 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, corresponding to the classes taught by each teacher. Statistical analysis, combined with comparative methods, was used to clarify the role of classroom questioning and to identify the strengths and limitations of the questioning system and its pedagogical effects.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results and discussion from the perspective of teachers

With the consent of the course instructors, direct classroom observations were conducted and audio recordings were used to collect data for statistical analysis and classification. First, regarding the number of questions each teacher posed in class, those that targeted the particle “把” were counted, excluding peripheral or unrelated questions. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 1. The frequency of teachers' questions in the classroom

Teacher	Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher C	Teacher D	Teacher E
Number of questions	21	18	23	3	14

Within a 45-minute lesson on “把”, four teachers posed 14 - 23 questions to facilitate teacher-student interaction. Only one teacher asked three questions, including: (1) “把”的词类是什么? (What part of speech is “把”?) and (2) and (3), which were practice-oriented questions such as 假如车上的服务员要检查你的车票, 他会怎么说? (If a conductor on the vehicle needs to check your ticket, what would they say?).

The other four teachers used a series of questions to guide students toward the key aspects of this grammatical point. After presenting example sentences on the board or screen, they asked questions about sentence structure with “把”, such as: 这一句的主要动词是什么? (What is the main verb of this sentence?); 动词前是什么成分? 是哪种结构? (What element appears before the verb? What type of structure is it?); 动词后是什么成分? (What element appears after the verb?); 你对“把”的宾语和动词的宾语有什么发现? (What do you observe about the object of “把” and the object of the verb?); and “把”对行为的客体起了什么作用? (What role does “把” play with respect to the object of the action?). Through these questions, the four teachers enabled students to observe and identify the structural features of “把” in sentences and to recognize its function and role.

Teacher A and Teacher C further asked students to compare sentences with and without “把” and relate them to equivalent expressions in Vietnamese. Notably, after explanation and practice, teacher C asked students to refer to the reading text, locate sentences containing “把”, and analyze their components. After providing their explanations, teacher A and teacher C presented five pre-prepared sentences (included in their electronic lesson plans), four of which were incorrect. Students were asked to identify and correct the errors in response to the question: 上面五个句子中哪个是错句, 怎么改正? (Which of the five sentences above is incorrect? How should it be corrected? The remaining questions were used in practice activities.

It is observed that some questions elicited immediate choral responses from students, such as those about the part of speech of “把” or the element preceding the verb. However, other questions, particularly those involving error identification and correction, required students to think and discuss for up to 55 seconds before responding.

Interestingly, all five teachers concluded by summarizing the fundamental characteristics of the “把” and presenting a sentence model that incorporated all its essential components. The survey results are presented in the table below:

Table 2. The content of teachers' questions

Teacher	CONTENT				
	Part of speech	Structure	Meaning	Comparison	Practice
A	+	+	+	+	+
B	+	+	+	-	+
C	+	+	+	+	+
D	+	-	-	-	+
E	+	+	+	-	+

Table 2 shows that two teachers used a system of eliciting questions to guide students to explore the construction of “把” across multiple dimensions, including structural form, semantic emphasis, and comparative analysis of sentences with and without “把” in Vietnamese. Such comparative analysis helps students identify similarities and differences among various expressions and between corresponding expressions in Chinese and Vietnamese. This enables students to avoid negative transfer from their native language (Vietnamese) during the acquisition of the target language (Chinese). All five teachers used information technology, particularly electronic lesson plans, which allowed students to engage multiple sensory channels, like combining auditory and visual input to access the lesson content. Notably, some teachers guided students in identifying sentence components and their positions within sentences, thereby reinforcing students' grammatical knowledge.

Teachers' questions were also diverse and flexible, employing a range of interrogative pronouns to inquire about categories, properties, positions, reasons, and manner, such as 什么 (what), 哪 (which), 怎么 (how), and 为什么 (why). Each question targeted different aspects of the content, creating a sense of novelty for students and continuously engaging them in active cognitive processing of the issues the teacher raised. Such eliciting questioning contributed to a dynamic classroom atmosphere. The interaction between the teacher and students became the dominant mode, resembling a natural conversation, with the discussion focused on the characteristics and usage of the “把” in Chinese.

However, Teacher D posed only three questions throughout the entire teaching process for this complex grammatical point. This was largely due to the teacher's reliance on a traditional teaching approach focusing primarily on one-way knowledge transmission. Although the teacher explained the content at a relatively slow pace, using both Chinese and Vietnamese, and allowed students to take notes, interaction between the teacher and students was limited. As a result, students remained passive recipients of information and had few opportunities to use Chinese in class. The classroom atmosphere was rather subdued. It was found that Teacher D has only four years of teaching experience and therefore lacks pedagogical experience. In practice, some teachers do not fully exploit the potential of question-and-answer interaction in teaching grammar and vocabulary to engage students actively. In teaching Chinese vocabulary at the elementary level, if teachers effectively incorporate questioning techniques to guide students in exploring structural patterns, identifying the roles of components (radicals), and understanding the relationships among these components in compound characters, this can provide a scientific basis for enhancing students' interest and helping them memorize characters more quickly and retain them more effectively.

4.2. Results and discussion of student survey

After each lesson, a brief survey was conducted with students using concise questions, including Question 1: *Can you understand and apply the lesson content during class?*, Question 2: *Do you find that the teacher's questioning in class helps you better understand the lesson content?* and Question 3: *Do you like the teacher's questioning strategies?*. The results of the student survey are presented as follows:

Table 3. Students' responses

Class	Question 1		Question 2		Question 3	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
1	22/24 (91.67%)	2/24 (8.33%)	24/24 (100%)	0 (0%)	23/24 (95.83%)	1/24 (4.17%)
2	21/25 (84%)	4/25 (16%)	24/25 (94%)	1/25 (6%)	20/25 (80%)	5/25 (20%)
3	24/25 (96%)	1/25 (4%)	25/25 (100%)	0 (0%)	25/25 (100%)	0 (0%)
4	11/26 (42.30%)	15/26 (57.70%)	9/26 (34.61%)	17/26 (65.39%)	8/26 (30.76%)	18/26 (69.24%)
5	18/27 (66.67%)	9/27 (33.33%)	16/27 (59.26%)	11/27 (40.74%)	19/27 (70.37%)	8/27 (29.63%)

Table 3 indicates a clear disparity in in-class comprehension rates between two groups of students: those from a key university in Hanoi and those from a local university. Students' evaluations of the effectiveness of questioning also reflect teaching practices. Teachers who emphasized eliciting and guiding questions to lead students into the lesson were highly regarded and appreciated, and this was positively correlated with students' ability to understand and apply new knowledge during the class. Notably, among the three teachers from the Hanoi-based university, one received 100% positive evaluations from students regarding both the effectiveness of their questioning and the level of engagement it generated. In these classes, most students were able to comprehend and apply newly acquired knowledge immediately. In contrast, teachers who relied on one-way knowledge transmission and did not prioritize questioning were rated less favorably by students, and their classes showed the lowest levels of in-class comprehension. These findings suggest that the quality of a lesson depends primarily on two key factors: first, teaching methodology, particularly the use of eliciting and guiding questions to engage students; and second, student characteristics, which are influenced by admission quality and students' initial proficiency levels.

It is shown that the content of teachers' questions regarding the construction of “把” in sentences has so far been limited to the introductory section of the textbook, specifically from pages 70 to 72 (Volume 2, Lower Level, *Chinese Language Course*, six-volume series edited by Yang Jizhou), which both institutions use. Another important point concerning “把” is that the verb must be accompanied by a complement that directly modifies its meaning. This complement is not only realized as a post-verbal complement but may also take the form of an adverbial element preceding the verb. For example:

售票员把我的护照往前面一推, 说: “没票了!” (The ticket seller pushed my passport forward slightly and said, “No tickets left!”).

In the above sentence, the verb 推 (to push) concludes the first clause, followed by a comma. However, immediately preceding the verb is the numeral 一 (one), which directly modifies the verb. This indicates that there is no pause between 一 and 推, as it functions to create a transitional effect leading into the subsequent action.

Typically, the structure 把我的护照往前面一推 does not function independently as a complete sentence; rather, it serves as an adverbial expression indicating time or manner, providing the context for the action that follows (in this case, the verb 说 means to say). Despite this, the sentence remains grammatically acceptable and well-formed. It is noteworthy, however, that some textbooks merely emphasize that in the construction of “把” in sentences, the verb must be followed by a complement, without further clarification. In certain cases, as illustrated here, when the verb is directly modified in combination with the subsequent clause to complete the meaning, the sentence remains valid. At the

same time, during the lesson, teachers have not consistently incorporated this point into the “points to note” section on the use of “把”.

4.3. Some Pedagogical Recommendations

The results indicate that teachers’ classroom questioning can be applied broadly across all types of lesson content. It plays an important role in eliciting responses and engaging students in learning activities and should therefore be emphasized by teachers from the lesson preparation stage and applied flexibly in the classroom. Question-and-answer interaction enhances student engagement, supports the implementation of a communicative approach oriented toward “learning for use”, and contributes to a more positive overall classroom atmosphere. The questions posed by teachers should address both form and content, enabling students not only to acquire new knowledge but also to reinforce prior knowledge. They should be tailored to students’ proficiency levels to engage the entire class. This also provides teachers with opportunities to differentiate instruction, nurture high-achieving students, and support those who are struggling. The effective use of eliciting and guiding questions in the classroom aligns with modern principles of foreign language pedagogy, particularly the communicative approach, which positions learners at the center while teachers act as organizers. This approach is clearly superior to traditional, one-way transmission methods.

From the perspective of teachers, especially novice teachers, it is essential to develop a sound understanding of the role and function of classroom questioning, and to continuously engage in professional development to enhance both theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills in second language instruction. At the same time, teachers should actively participate in professional exchanges, including peer observation and reflective practice, to learn from colleagues. As teaching is inherently a two-way process, teachers need to observe the classroom and communicate with students to understand their needs and feedback. This allows for ongoing refinement of teaching methods, particularly the improvement of classroom questioning techniques.

5. Conclusion

Classroom questioning is an essential tool for teaching Chinese grammar to university students. Teachers can use eliciting questions to develop students’ cognitive abilities, stimulate learner’s interest and facilitate students’ knowledge acquisition. To construct an effective set of eliciting questions, teachers must demonstrate a strong mastery of the lesson content and identify its learning objectives. Thus, teachers should design an eliciting questioning system that is diverse in form and in-depth in content.

The study employed the direct classroom observation and interviews conducted with both teachers and students, which provides an in-depth insight into a teaching-learning process. Each teacher uses questions in the classroom in a different way, so teachers should observe others to enhance their classroom questioning techniques. The study was carried out at two universities with different admission cutoff scores, reflecting that classroom questioning can be used for students at different language proficiency levels. The findings are helpful for improving the quality of teaching and learning Chinese in general, and using questions in the classroom in particular. There is a small number of participants in the current study, so future research should be carried out with more participants. This study focuses on teachers’ questioning techniques in grammar lessons; therefore, future studies can be conducted in other lessons such as teaching four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking).

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Phương pháp nêu câu hỏi trên lớp trong giờ dạy ngữ pháp cho sinh viên chuyên tiếng Trung giai đoạn sơ cấp ở Việt Nam: Trường hợp giờ dạy câu dùng từ 把

Tóm tắt: Dạy học ngoại ngữ nói chung và dạy học ngoại ngữ như một chuyên ngành cho sinh viên đại học nói riêng không chỉ là quá trình truyền thụ và tiếp nhận kiến thức, mà còn phải tạo điều kiện cho sinh viên vận dụng những điều đã học vào quá trình giao tiếp thông qua các kỹ năng nghe, nói, đọc, viết, nhằm đạt được mục tiêu: học để sử dụng. Sinh viên có thể hiểu và vận dụng kiến thức mới kết hợp với kiến thức đã học vào thực tiễn, nâng cao năng lực giao tiếp hay không, phần lớn đều lệ thuộc vào hệ thống câu hỏi vừa đúng, vừa trúng của giáo viên. Trong khuôn khổ bài viết này, trên cơ sở tổng hợp lại một số vấn đề lý thuyết có liên quan, chúng tôi chọn nghiên cứu về phương pháp nêu câu hỏi trong giờ dạy ngữ pháp tiếng Trung cho sinh viên Việt Nam giai đoạn sơ cấp, trường hợp nêu câu hỏi trong giờ dạy kiểu câu dùng từ 把.

Từ khóa: Nêu câu hỏi; dạy học ngữ pháp; câu dùng từ 把; sơ cấp; sinh viên Việt Nam.