Factors Affecting Asking Questions in College Classrooms:

The Ethiopian Context*

Seime Kebede **

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Introduction

This study is designed to identify and examine the factors that students think hinder them from asking questions in class. My interest in the potential contribution to learning of learner and teacher questions stems from the suggestion put forward by Allwright (1989, 1991), that for pedagogic discourse to have any value it must have material in it that is in some sense 'new'. This 'new' material must in some sense constitute a challenge for the learners' understanding which we may expect to be commonly handled by a process of question and answer, either with the teacher asking questions of the learners to check that they have understood, or learners asking questions of the teacher to resolve their own doubts about the new material.

The Importance of Questioning

Lecturing is seen as a key feature in higher educational establishments of Ethiopia (Stoddart, 1986). The present study starts with the working assumption that lecture comprehension can be enhanced by students' and lecturer's questions in the classroom. If we can improve the quality of teacher's and students' questioning we may improve the learning

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opportunities for the class. Student questioning is believed to be important (Wilen, W.W. 1992; Borich, G. D. 1992; Hunkins, F.P. 1989; Callahan, J. F. & Clark, L. H. 1988; Newcomb, L. H., McCracken, J. D., & Warmbrod, J. R. 1986) in that it helps the learners to be capable of self-regulating their learning by being sensitive to their own knowledge deficits and by seeking information that repairs such deficits. It is also important for teachers as it provides them with the opportunities to get some feedback on students' problems in understanding certain parts of the lecture.

Questioning is one of the observable indicators of effective teaching (Perrott, 1986). It is also a technique of teaching which can be referred to as versatile and all-embracing, because it goes across any method of teaching, any grade level, and any subject area. Moreover, questions are fundamental tools of teaching; when well used, they "provide a ladder up which the pupil climbs towards fuller and deeper understanding" (Ferrant, (1988: 168).

Questioning is not the only educational device that might be worth investigating. Clarity of lectures and explanation might be an other. But there is more literature on questioning than there is on explanations (Perrott, 1986). The literature on questioning suggests that they have special importance to the learning and teaching process (Gall, 1970; Wong, 1991). It appears both student and teacher questioning in an EFL setting in a subject teaching classroom are important to study since they constrain classroom discourse, and because of their potential for promoting negotiation and interaction and hence lecture comprehension. Thus, questioning is at least a plausible way in which things become memorable and, because questions are overt behaviour that can be recorded they are relatively easily investigatable.

There is a substantial body of literature about the kinds of questions teachers ask, but little research has been done on the relationship between the types and levels of questions teachers ask and certain features of students' responses. The results of these scanty studies, however, suggest that, by and large, the level of a question affects what students say in response. For example, Willson(1973), Cole and Williams (1973) indicated a positive relationship between the cognitive levels of the

teachers' questions and the cognitive level, length, and syntactic complexity of pupils' responses. The intellectual or cognitive level of questions was defined as ranging from those calling for recognition or recall of factual information question, which were at the lowest level of the hierarchy, to those calling for evaluation or judgement, which are the highest.

Rationale for the Research

In Ethiopia, where English is the medium of instruction and lecturing is an important mode of delivery, a lot of complaints are heard (among teachers and learners) against English language education. The claim that students' lecture comprehension is below the level of expectation is frequently made by some lecturers. Students also complain about their instructors' lack of concern to make their lectures understandable. Before we jump to the conclusion that all the faults are on the side of learners and their prior English language education, we should perhaps consider the possibility that there might also be obstacles to questioning on the learners' side.

It is possible that the lecturers are unaware of certain aspects of their classroom behaviour and its impact upon students lecture comprehension. If lecturers are unaware of the negative effects of their behaviour on students, then, they are likely to continue to interact with students in ineffective ways. Probably, some lecturers may not perceive many classroom events because:
  (1) They have not been trained to monitor their own behaviour;
  (2) The classroom interaction proceeds at a rapid pace; and
  (3) They rarely get feedback from their students since much of the lesson is dominated by teacher talk.

Whatever the reasons might prove to be, such a lack of awareness in monitoring their behaviour is likely to interfere with their classroom effectiveness. Lecturers, therefore, need to perceive classroom events more clearly, put a higher priority on developing their teaching skills and be equipped with specific teaching devices, not so much for analysing and labelling classroom behaviour as an end in itself but as a means to enhance students lecture comprehension. Lecturers can, for example,

influence students' understanding of lectures by asking questions and by giving students the chance to ask questions in turn. Such a device would enable the lecturers to identify and hopefully rectify some of the learners' problems. Such question asking may serve not only as a means of feedback to the lecturers, but also may enable the students to contribute their share to the lesson which might turn out to be more focused than it would otherwise have been and memorable to other students.

Besides, in a typical classroom the teacher is responsible for initiating discussion. Part of this responsibility entails stimulating students to think. Posing a problem by asking questions is more likely to be the most direct and efficient method of stimulating students to thought. In addition questioning can stir up learners' interest. It provides a convenient and effective means of putting things from the point of view of the learner. It turns the lecturing session into more of a two-way form of communication, increasing the chances of achieving a thorough understanding by the learners. A study of questioning behaviour in Ethiopian classrooms will give some indication of how this may affect learners' participation and learning in lessons.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to explore some of the factors that students themselves think are inhibitory in asking questions in class in an EFL setting in a tertiary level science classroom in Ethiopia. A secondary purpose is to investigate any gender effects here.

Subjects and Procedures of the Study

Subjects

The sample for the study was drawn from Kotebe College of Teacher Education and Addis Ababa University. A questionnaire was set to elicit students' ideas (students drawn from Kotebe College of Teacher Education) about their own questioning behaviour. This questionnaire had 23 items and was administered to biology and physical education students of KCTE. Of the 40 students who received this questionnaire (i.e., SQ1), 36 returned the questionnaire duly filled and completed. It was based on

this questionnaire that the present questionnaire (i.e., SQII) was designed and later administered to science students of Addis Ababa University.

Procedures

I elicited the KCTE students' responses regarding the frequency of instructor's and students' questions and their level of satisfaction, the impact of home upbringing, students reasons for asking and not asking questions in class, etc., using a questionnaire. This questionnaire was written in Amharic to minimize misunderstanding, and the involvement of other variables. From the students' responses to the questionnaire it was possible to identify 29 factors that the students thought inhibited asking questions in class. In the quest to identify the extent to which each of the factors hindered Ethiopian college students from asking questions, I designed another questionnaire based on the students' responses to the first questionnaire. The final questionnaire (i.e., SQII) was administered to another group of science students attending Addis Ababa University.

When designing the second questionnaire I listed the 29 factors that the sample students reported as inhibitory in SQ I I requested the students in the Faculty of Science at Addis Ababa University to indicate the extent to which each of the 29 factors hindered them from asking questions. These students were drawn from 18 sections. Each section had about 40-42 students of which only 0-5 were females. Thus to avoid under-representation of females it was found essential to administer S.Q. II to 18 sections of students.

The procedure that I followed when administering this questionnaire is as follows. First, I randomly selected 9 freshman English instructors who teach in the science faculty. Each of these instructors has two sections (a section consists of 40 students). In all these 18 sections there were about 35 female and 685 male students. The sample for this questionnaire, i.e., 35 females and 35 males were drawn from these subjects. The purpose of the questionnaire was to identify the conditions that are necessary for Ethiopian students to ask questions in class.

The learners were told beforehand the purpose of the present study. They were informed of the questionnaire that they would fill. I also told them that whatever they said or wrote will only be used for the present undertaking and their names would not be passed on to anybody. Such clarification, it was hoped, would help to avoid any sort of misunderstanding.

The questionnaire was distributed to 35 males and 35 females, but 25 females and 19 males returned the questionnaire duly filled and completed. Based on this group of students (total = 44) an attempt is made to identify the major factors that Ethiopian college students perceive as barriers to asking questions in class.

To identify the major factors, the students were required to indicate the extent to which each factor exerted an influence on their questioning behaviour by rating each of the 29 factors using a seven-point scale:

Extremely often = 1	Sometimes = 4	Rarely = 5
Very often = 2		Very rarely = 6
Often = 3		Never = 7

I then added up the number of students who rated the factor 1, 2 or 3. In other words I totalled the frequency of students that rated each of the factors 'Extremely often', 'Very often' and 'often'. I then worked out the percentage of that number for both males and females. The students' ratings indicate that 9 of the 29 factors are reported to be inhibitive by more than 50% of the students. Of these 9 factors, 6 of them were reported as limiting by more than 56%. Thus, the result and the discussion section is confined to these 6 major factors that were reported by the vast majority of both male and female students.

Results and Discussion

Results

The following are the 6 major factors and their corresponding percentage of students

➤ Threat to self-esteem and embarrassment due to language deficiency (75%)

➤   Fear of being perceived by others as showy (66%)
➤   Too little time is allotted for the huge amount of course content.
     (66%)
➤   Lack of good rapport with the instructor (59%)
➤   Gender identity (59%)
➤   School experience (57%)

Table Major Factors that hinder students from asking questions in class.

	Factors	Respondents					
		Female		Male		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	Threat to self-esteem and embarrassment due to language deficiency	17	68	16	84.21	33	75
2	Fear of being perceived by others as showy	17	68	12	63.15	29	65.9
3	The amount of course content is vast but instructors are demanded to cover in a given time.	17	69	12	63	29	65.9
4	Lack of good rapport with the instructor (social distance b/n students and instructors	16	64	10	52.63	26	59.09
5	Gender identity has a powerful structuring role particularly people in the country side ascribe females who check their talk as 'gentle, well brought-up, well-bred and a potential and ideal. Wife'.	14	56	12	63.15	26	59.09
6	At school I was encouraged to listen more to ask few	13	52	12	63.15	25	56.81
7	Fear of negative instructor's reactions	14	56	10	52.63	24	54.54
8	Fear of being perceived by other students as trying to establish andmaintain relationship with the instructor for academic shelter	13	52	11	57.89	24	54.54
9	The socio spatial arrangement of interaction held by the society at large	13	52	9	47.36	22	50
10	I don't like to be judged as competent or incompetent by the question I ask.	10	40	11	57.89	21	47.72
11	Not to be perceived by others as ill-mannered or ill-bred by interrupting the instructor.	13	52	7	36.84	20	45.45
12	Fear of disrupting the instruction as well as other students' concentration.	9	36	10	52.63	19	43.18
13	The teacher is seen as oracle of truth and fountian of knowledge.	13	52	5	26.31	18	40.90
14	Fear of being molested by raising a question that could possible be perceived by the instructor as a question set to test his knowledge	7	28	11	57.89	18	40.90
15	The instructors' pedagogical choice i.e., lecture review-test cycle	5	20	10	52.63	15	34.09

As can be seen from Table 1, male and female ratings are comparable for the first nine factors. The first factor, 'threat to self-esteem and embarrassment due to language deficiency', for example, is rated by the highest percentage of both females and males: 68% and 84.21%, respectively. In other words, what were significant factors for females were significant for males as well. There were no huge discrepancies between male and female ratings of each of the first nine factors. The 9th factor, for example, 'The sociospatial arrangement of interaction held by the society at large' is rated by the least percentage of both males and females.

But this was not the case for the other 20 factors. In the table, we see that factors 14 and 15 (i.e., 'Fear of being molested by raising a question that could possibly be perceived by the instructor as a question set to test his knowledge' and 'The instructors' pedagogical choice i.e., lecture review-test cycle') are perceived by more than 50% of males as inhibitive while only less than 30% of females attribute to it. Conversely, above 50% of females perceived factors 11 and 13 (i.e. 'Not to be perceived by others as ill-mannered or ill-bred by interrupting the instructor' and 'The teacher is seen as oracle of truth and fountain of knowledge') as limiting student questioning in class, while less than 37% of males think other wise.

Discussion

I will discuss each of the six major factors in turn.

Threat to self-esteem and embarrassment due to language deficiency

One major barrier is students' fear of threat to self-esteem and embarrassment due to language deficiency. Classroom oral production has been highlighted by a number of researchers as being particularly anxiety inducing. Howitz, Howitz, and Cope (1986) suggested that speaking in class provided the greatest emotional challenge to second language learners. Howitz et al (1986:128) further pointed out, any performance in L_2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self conscious, fear or even panic.' Tsui (1996:149) also reported that the requirement to perform in a

language that students are still trying to master, has effects on learners' self concept. When communicating in a language in which they are not fluent, students cannot help but feel uneasy. Thus, when they are called upon by the instructor to answer a question, as Allwright and Baily (1991:127) noted, 'they speak in a very soft voice, which is barely audible to the instructor.' Such students can be helped to see themselves more positively by organizing workshops that prepare these students for the ways of learning.

If students have a poor perception of their potentialities in oral production, they will confine themselves to a low-key type of behaviour. The relevance of students' self-esteem to the promotion of second language production has been the focus of various researchers. Moskowitz (1976:18), for example, is of the view that 'increasing one's self esteem enhances learning'. It is therefore imperative that researchers should endeavour to develop approaches which will help students increase their self esteem as it has an important effect not only on second language learning but also on subject learning as well (Gall, 1970; Wilen, 1992).

Fear of being perceived by others as showy

A second barrier to question asking involves fear of being perceived by others as showy. Allwright and Baily (1991) point out that some competent students are anxious because if they do not make mistakes, they will stand out from their classmates and be resented. To avoid this, as Wu (1991:15) observes in his analysis of Hong Kong classroom data, 'when students are called upon to respond, they may prefer to hesitate and give short answers where possible so that they do not give their peers the impression that they are showing off.' Indeed, this 'maxim of modesty' is also a wide spread phenomenon in Ethiopian college classrooms. Very often students who know the answer do not take the initiative to answer the question unless, of course, they are asked by the instructor to do so. Conducive environments will help learners open up and shed their inhibitions (Krashen, 1981; 1982). As a consequence, students will interact and thereby create learning opportunities for themselves. In other words, the creation of an affectively positive environment to foster social interaction is of paramount significance to enhance learning.

Too little time is allotted for the huge amount of course content

A third barrier lies in the amount of course content that instructors are demanded to cover. It is widely held that the main goal of science instructors is to allow their students to make sense of science concepts. But the way they go about this task varies from instructor to instructor. Many Ethiopian instructors (as the respondents pointed out) use the traditional lecture - note taking - test cycle which provides little challenge or practical utility to many students. In their haste to cover the portion, instructors rarely give the students the time to ask questions. But they need to give their students a chance to reflect about what they have said, to formulate answers that make sense, and then to respond to questions.

The dominant approach to the teaching of biology in the lessons observed can be characterised as involving the following steps: an instructor in a monologue explains the daily lesson and ensures that all the essentials, usually factual details, have been covered; and instructor tests the students to see how well they can recall the material covered.

As seen from the above descriptions, the approach to the teaching of biology constitutes what we might call a 'Transmission Approach to education.' Underlying this transmission approach to educational practice is the basic assumption that there is a body of fixed 'worthwhile' knowledge, which students should master and digest without raising questions or discussions about it. Teaching in the transmission approach is characterised by what the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire (1972) calls a 'culture of silence' whereby knowledge is given to learners who are not expected to discuss, question or change that knowledge. Teaching in such a situation is a unilateral process (engaged in by the instructor) which does not enhance the creative capacity of students to interpret what they are taught.

Learners experiencing this transmission approach to education are not, as a rule, given the opportunity to do things for themselves. They are told or made to feel that their opinions are worthless; that they should follow, not lead, listen and remember not work out things for themselves.

Because it fails to relate textbook knowledge to the needs, circumstances, and experiences of the students, but rather emphasises unquestioned acceptance of to the teachings and beliefs of authority figures, the

transmission approach effectively alienates students from the educational process. Thus, it is no wonder that the students identified 'constraint of time for covering the vast course content as a major factor contributing to the students' passive participation in the class.

Lack of good rapport with the instructor

A fourth barrier is lack of good rapport with the instructor (i.e. social distance between students and instructors). Learning is a socially constructed act that involves establishing relationships with students and helping them to construct meaning of the world they encounter. In order for this to happen, positive relationships must be established with students. But the present study demonstrates that students perceived instructors as not caring about them and not providing them sufficient opportunity to ask questions because of the growing social distance between students and instructors.

One possible reason for the lack of good rapport between the instructors and the students might be related to teacher education and training. There is no one particular college/university *per se* which specifically trains teachers for secondary and tertiary level education. It thus appears that teacher education and training in Ethiopian higher institutions is facing, among other things, two major problems. First, the growing number of unqualified and untrained teachers could subsequently be a threat not only to the quality of teaching and learning, but also to the standard of education in general. Second, the lack of specific and clear policy with regard to university lecturer training, recruitment and selection criteria curriculum, duration of training, accountability, etc., contributes to the first problem.

It seems, as some educators claim, that the training programme for training lecturers for higher institutions of learning is just a token and not a genuine professional preparation. As a result, it would not be surprising if people who graduate and become lecturers from these higher learning institutions fail to have a clear background in teaching and do not show any awareness of various educational innovations to compliment their instruction.

In addition to this, opinions such as that the typical university lecturer is untrained as a teacher, is unwilling or unable to evaluate the success or failure of his courses in terms of changing behaviour, and is esteemed by

the university in terms of his or her publication record rather than his or her teaching ability, would appear to have a wide currency. This seems unfortunate for, with the university failing to recognise teaching ability as a key attribute of a lecturer, there is little incentive for her/him to improve her/his institutional skills. However, this attitude is now coming under increasing fire from students.

In the light of the increasing interest in the university lecturer as a teacher, and in view of the aforementioned problems, improving the quality of teacher education and training programs, and modifications of teaching behaviour in the required direction become imperative.

Another background issue related to 'good rapport' is sex role socialisation. Anthropologists (e.g., Heath, 1982; Erickson et al 1982), and applied linguists (e.g. Sato, 1981) assume group behaviour also influences school behaviour in classrooms. These group differences are cultural in origin and are due in part to conventionally shared definitions and expectations of what is appropriate in every day social interaction. The culture asserts what one has to know in order to act appropriately as a member of a given group and how to anticipate and judge the actions of others.

In Ethiopia, the hierarchical structure of the society is manifested in the relationship between male and female members of the society and the roles assigned to the two sexes. In addition to the need for females to behave in accordance with the expectations of the society concerning age-group behaviour outside the classroom including at home, there are other cultural 'restrictions' imposed on them as girls or women. One such cultural expectation concerns the need for any female to monitor the amount of talking she does. It seems that while the society is less critical about the amount of talk by males, it, however, places greater demand on females to keep their talk in check in order to look gentle and descent. Thus, the society will describe a woman as 'gentle' and 'descent' and, therefore, a promising 'ideal wife', when she demonstrates that she is less inclined to express her views or initiate discussions in public.

The pedagogical implication of such cultural expectations is that female learners are faced with dual challenges in the classroom. That is to say, female students, apart from having to behave in a way that is appropriate

to their age group, should make sure that they talk less and hardly initiate or provoke discussions. The corollary is that even in the classroom questions initiated by male learners are expected to be much more than those asked by female students. This in part is due to the cultural assumptions of the society and partly the expectation of the teacher who is also the product of the patriarchal society. The fact that the bulk of the teaching population is male also poses some problems to females. Thus one would expect female students to be much more inhibited with a male teacher who is also assumed by the students to play a paternal role.

To make things more complicated (particularly in the countryside), the culture also expects minimum contact between the two sexes before marriage and strongly demands that females should not mix with boys of their own age and perhaps older than them. Observing this cultural restriction is regarded as one of the measures of purity and chastity for women. What this means in pedagogical terms is that in their attempt to prove their loyalty to the culture, their classmates, the teacher and the society at large, females will probably tend to be less active and less secure in asking or answering questions in a classroom composed of both sexes.

Likewise, the behaviour of the male classroom teacher is very likely to be influenced by the cultural elements pertaining to sex differences. Being aware of the cultural restrictions with regard to establishing and maintaining close contact with his female students, the male teacher, especially if unmarried, would try to avoid any suspicions of being 'wrongly' interested in female students. He would think it is safer to give more attention and more opportunities to his male learners than to female learners or maintain minimum contact with both sexes. This is to say the teacher, like his students, is likely to suffer from the conflicting demands of the classroom culture and the culture outside the classroom.

Gender identity

The fifth barrier the students reported relates to gender. In a similar vein, Duff (1986) in her study that compared the behaviour of NNS (Japanese and Chinese) students in the classroom found that men asked more questions and women used longer utterances. In another study, Pica et al (1991) examined the different patterns of negotiation in same-sex vs.

cross-sex dyads. They reported that "negotiation was significantly greater among same gender dyads for female NNSs and about equal in both same and cross gender dyads for male NNSs " (Pica et al 1991:357). Skilton and Meyer's study (1993:88) shows that the 20 men and the 20 women in their study asked different amount of questions depending on the participation structure: men asked more questions than women during teacher fronted activities and women asked more questions than men during small group activities.

These studies show that students participation in interaction is constrained by who we are, how we perceive our interacting 'others' and how we think they perceive us. When students come to class they come as individuals with their cultural upbringing, school experience, home background, geographical region; and their gender. How they interact with each other is to a large extent mediated by their perceptions and evaluations of these groups to which they and their interactants belong. The knowledge of our own group members, together with the values associated with them, comprise our social identities.

Our social identities mediate our participation in interaction. That is, when we come to class (be it a student or an instructor), we see each other as we have been socialised to see each other, for example, as an Ethiopian female from the countryside, as a man or a woman brought up by a clerical family etc.

When students find it difficult to comprehend a lecture that may otherwise be well within their conceptual competence, they are expected to resolve their doubts/challenges by asking questions. Contrary to this expectation, there are many forces operating against female learners in asking or answering questions in the classroom and thereby preventing them from making the lecture understandable, and consequently making their academic carrier worthwhile. Thus, the way female students perceive their teacher, the extent to which they adhere to the cultural restrictions which are superimposed upon them, their awareness of the need to modify their behaviour and their willingness to adjust themselves to the demands of the classroom culture are significant in not only asserting their personality but also in determining the extent to which they wish to go public and ask questions and thereby succeed in their academic careers.

This calls for a change of expectations based primarily on gender since these limit girls' and women's ability to develop to their fullest potential. While some stereotypical views and practices have disappeared, others continue. Therefore, it is the responsibility of schools and teacher education to help create an educational environment free of gender bias. This can be facilitated by increasing understanding and use of gender balanced resources and teaching strategies.

School experience

A sixth barrier is that the "styles of learning" some Ethiopians are made to use at school differ markedly from those they are introduced in the college classroom. As Hymes (1967) has pointed out, it may lead to sociolinguistic interference when teacher and student do not recognise their efforts to communicate with one another. The students' responses to this questionnaire show that they participate less in verbal interaction as they go through school. This minimal participation in question and answer - exchange in the classroom (or more generally patterns of speech usage) appears to be governed by the social conditions. It seems the social conditions determining when it is appropriate for a student to speak in the classroom differ from those that govern verbal participation in some Ethiopian social interactions.

When discussing why Ethiopian learners fail to participate verbally, i.e. in question and answer exchange, at least two aspects of verbal participation in classroom contexts should be borne in mind. Firstly, since a learner's use of speech in the classroom during structured lesson sessions is a communicative performance, it involves demonstration of sociolinguistic competency - a combination of linguistic competency and social competency. Social competency, among other things, involves knowledge of when and in what style one must present his/her utterance.

Secondly, in the present research context, lecturing is the main mode for communicating knowledge in higher learning establishments. Consequently, when the classroom talk is unilaterally dominated by instructors, the students are deprived of creating learning opportunities for themselves and others. In other words, the channel through which learning sessions are conducted is in part cut off, and the structure of classroom interaction that depends on dialogue between lecturer and student breaks

down and no longer functions as it is supposed to. Thus, the question "why don't Ethiopians talk more (i.e. ask/answer questions) in class'?" is basic and crucial . And this lack of talk (failure to ask/answer questions) is a problem that needs to be dealt with if Ethiopian students are to learn what is taught in Ethiopian schools.

On the whole, students' beliefs play a significant role in learning. Their beliefs are influenced by the social context of learning and can influence both their attitude towards their instructor and the subject. Their belief systems cover a wide range of issues and can influence their motivation to learn, their expectations about the course, their perceptions about the instructor, as well as the kind of strategies they favour.

Conclusion

The present study examined classroom questioning from a perspective which assumes that the likelihood of understanding classroom dynamics is enhanced when students' perceptions of events are taken into consideration. Such a research study on students' and teachers' thought processes promises to enhance our understanding of teaching and its outcomes by providing information about the ways students understand lectures.

Learners may feel too inhibited to actively take part in a lesson by contributing to the teacher led discussions and asking questions to find out more about the topic under discussion, to clear doubts, etc. This is to say that; the classroom culture demands the learner to 'go public' and ask questions about those things that s/he did not understand in that lesson. But, the learner brings conflicting cultural assumptions to the class and is therefore caught between two cultures: the classroom culture and the culture of the community outside the school.

A learner who finds himself or herself in such a dilemma has two options. One is to stick to the norms of the community and not to risk getting the most out of his lesson and thereby jeopardising his or her academic carrier. The other option is to abandon the norms of the society and conform to the norms of the classroom which require him/her to behave in a way different from what s/he is expected to behave outside the classroom. The learner is thus forced to choose between social and pedagogic considerations.

Furthermore, the situation is further is aggravated by the instructor's sense of success. Most instructors in Ethiopia would assess their effectiveness of their teaching through tests and exams. They gain reassurance from the quality of the students' performance in the tests and exams they administer. Thus, the instructors' sense of success is solely based on the outcomes of the teaching. It appears here something is missing, i.e., the means of monitoring what actually has happened in the lesson. In other words, the events or activities which have given rise to the students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction and have led to test or exam performances of better or worse quality is neglected. Instructors' attention has tended to be directed towards product rather than process (i.e., the events or activities) which led to these products.

If schooling is to help students become progressively more self-reliant and self-directed, and if what students bring to the class influences their own learning, it seems necessary to examine the extent to which learners respond to the demands made by the classroom culture and the degree of influence of the community culture on the learner's questioning behaviour on a larger sample.

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