

THE POWER OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTION AND ITS CRUCIAL ROLE IN DISCOVERING UNANTICIPATED ANSWERS, GATHERING ADDITIONAL DETAILS AND IMPORTANT INSIGHTS

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Abstract

This study explores the role of open-ended questions in enhancing communication during interviews. The research highlights how these questions encourage deeper responses, foster engagement, and reveal underlying thoughts and feelings of participants. A mixed-methods approach was employed, utilizing surveys and interviews with interviewers and candidates across various fields. The results indicate that open-ended questions significantly improve the quality of responses, leading to more insightful discussions. Additionally, the findings suggest practical strategies for incorporating open-ended questions into interview practices to facilitate better communication and understanding. This research contributes to the field of communication studies by demonstrating the effectiveness of open-ended questions in various contexts.

Keywords: open-ended questions in education, questioning techniques in communication, role of open-ended questions, conversational psychology, closed-ended responses, social nature of learning.

Introduction

Open-ended questions encourage detailed responses and promote deeper conversation. They can be crucial in interviews to gauge a person's thoughts, feelings, and experiences. From different sources or studies, it's well-known for everybody that open-ended questions require more than a simple one-word answer. They encourage respondents to elaborate and share their thoughts and feelings. Unlike closed-ended questions, which can typically be answered with "yes" or "no," open-ended questions often start with words like "how," "why," "what," or "describe."

When it comes to open-ended questions' features, many researchers emphasize their importance in promoting critical thinking, deeper communication, and more thoughtful responses. Here are a few researchers and their ideas on open-ended questions:

Neil Mercer (2000) discusses how open-ended questions encourage exploratory talk, where participants think together and articulate their reasoning, rather than giving one-word answers



(Book: “Words and Minds: How we use Language to Think Together”, about the concept of ‘exploratory talk’ published in 2000).

Lev Vygotsky (1934) emphasized the social nature of learning, where open-ended questions in conversations help scaffold knowledge by allowing individuals to build on each other's ideas (Book: “Thought and Language” 1934).

James Dillon (1982) focuses on the educational context, where open-ended questions are critical for stimulating reflective thinking, especially in classroom discussions. He believed they encourage students to think more broadly and deeply (“The Classroom Discussion: A Study of Teachers’ and Students’ discourse” 1982).

Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam (1998) argue in their formative assessment research that open-ended questions are key to revealing students' thought processes, which helps teachers assess understanding more effectively (Monograph: “Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment” 1998).

Socrates (via the Socratic method) is a historical figure whose ideas remain relevant. He used open-ended questioning to stimulate critical thinking and illuminate ideas, encouraging dialogue and discovery.

These researchers have contributed greatly to our understanding of how open-ended questions can foster learning and engagement in various contexts.

Recent research highlights several benefits of using open-ended questions in both communication and education. Open-ended questions allow participants to express their thoughts more freely, leading to deeper insights than close-ended questions, which often restrict answers to limited options. In qualitative research, these questions encourage participants to provide detailed feedback, offering richer data for analysis. For example, they are valuable in exploring personal attitudes, such as in studies on social issues like attitudes towards refugees. Here, participants' own words provided nuanced understanding that would be missed with closed-ended responses.

In education, open-ended questions have been found to foster critical thinking and reflection. These questions allow learners to explore topics in more depth and encourage the expression of unique perspectives, contributing to better engagement and understanding. Additionally, researchers recommend careful planning and testing of open-ended questions to ensure they are clear and aligned with the research goals.

Researchers have continually explored the role and impact of open-ended questions in both communication and education, providing valuable insights over the years.

In 2017, a study by Croucamp et al. focused on the use of open-ended questions in measuring attitudes towards refugees in Australia. The study showed that open-ended questions allowed participants to frame their opinions more freely, providing deeper insights into their thoughts and feelings, which would not have been captured through close-ended questions. In more recent research, Amberscript in 2023 emphasized the use of open-ended questions in qualitative



research, particularly in interviews and focus groups. They outlined several categories of these questions, such as exploratory, probing, and descriptive questions. These questions aim to uncover detailed and thoughtful responses, offering more depth and understanding, which is critical in qualitative studies.

Moreover, Kotzur et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of open-ended questions in exploring stereotypes and attitudes towards refugees. By asking respondents to express their opinions in their own words, researchers were able to gather richer, more meaningful data, showcasing the value of this approach.

These recent findings continue to build on the long-standing belief that open-ended questions are crucial for gathering in-depth, qualitative data in both research and educational settings.

Now let's take a closer look at **open-ended** and closed-ended questions and evaluate their differences and functions in sentences. The differences between open-ended and closed-ended questions are essential for understanding how each type functions in conversation and their roles in eliciting responses. Here's a breakdown:

Example:

Closed-ended: "Do you like your job?"

Open-ended: "What do you enjoy most about your job?"

Open-ended questions are designed to elicit detailed responses. They encourage elaboration and reflection, allowing the respondent to express thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

Examples:

"What do you think about climate change?"

"How did you prepare for the exam?"

Functions in Conversation:

1. Encourages Dialogue: These questions promote discussion and keep the conversation flowing.
2. Fosters Engagement: They invite the other person to share their insights and experiences, increasing participation.
3. Explores Depth: Open-ended questions encourage deeper thinking and exploration of topics.

Role in Answers:

Responses are typically longer and more descriptive. They provide insights into the respondent's perspective and can reveal their emotions and reasoning.

Open-ended answers allow for a variety of interpretations and can lead to unexpected directions in the conversation.

Closed-ended questions typically require a simple, specific answer, such as "yes" or "no," or a choice among provided options.

Examples:

"Do you like chocolate?"

"Which city do you live in: New York or Los Angeles?"

Functions in Conversation:



1. **Gathers Specific Information:** These questions are useful for obtaining clear, concise facts.
2. **Guides the Conversation:** Closed-ended questions can direct the conversation towards specific topics or points.
3. **Quick Decision-Making:** They can facilitate quick responses, which is useful in situations requiring immediate answers.

Role in Answers:

Responses are usually short and straightforward, providing limited insight into the respondent's thoughts or feelings.

They may lead to follow-up questions, but they do not encourage extensive elaboration or exploration of ideas.

Here is a table (picture 1) showing examples of open-ended and close-ended questions and their differences: **Picture 1**

Closed-ended questions	Open-ended questions
Would you recommend our product/service?	What were the main reasons you chose our product/service?
Did you experience good customer service?	How did you feel about our customer service?
Would you consider using our product/service again?	What would make you use our product/service again?
Did you like our product/service?	What is the most important feature of our product/service for you?
Are you interested in buying product/service today?	Why are you looking for product/service today?
Are you happy with your experience with us?	How would you describe your experience with us?
Did you find what you were looking for today?	How can we help you find what you are looking for today?



Summary of Differences

Detail: Open-ended questions invite detailed responses, while closed-ended questions lead to short, specific answers.

Engagement: Open-ended questions promote engagement and dialogue, whereas closed-ended questions can result in more transactional interactions.

Depth of Insight: Open-ended responses offer deeper insights into the respondent's thoughts and emotions, while closed-ended answers tend to focus on factual information.

To put it in a nutshell, understanding the differences between open-ended and closed-ended questions is vital for effective communication. Open-ended questions foster engagement and exploration, while closed-ended questions are efficient for gathering specific information. Each type has its place in conversations, depending on the desired outcome.

Role in Conversations

Open-ended questions are essential in conversations because they promote deeper engagement and understanding. They invite the other person to express their thoughts fully, leading to a more meaningful dialogue.

Example:

Instead of asking, "Did you enjoy the event?" you could ask, "What were your thoughts on the event?" This invites a more detailed response.

Importance in Interviews

In interviews, open-ended questions help interviewers gather comprehensive insights into a candidate's experiences, values, and personality. They allow candidates to showcase their skills and thought processes more effectively.

Example:

Instead of asking, "Did you meet your sales goals?" an interviewer might ask, "Can you describe a time when you met a challenging sales goal? What strategies did you use?" This prompts a narrative response that reveals more about the candidate's abilities and approach.

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

Here are a few examples across different contexts:

1. Personal Conversation:

"What inspired you to pursue your current career?"

2. Job Interview:

"How do you handle conflicts within a team?"

3. Research Context:

"What factors do you believe contribute to student success in online learning environments?"

4. Counseling:

"How have your experiences shaped your perspective on relationships?"



Impact on Outcomes

Using open-ended questions can lead to richer, more informative responses, which can help build trust and rapport. They often reveal nuances in opinions and emotions that closed-ended questions may miss.

In summary, open-ended questions are vital for facilitating in-depth conversations and interviews. They foster connection, understanding, and a more profound exchange of ideas.

Characteristic Features of Open-Ended Questions

1. **Encouragement of elaboration:** Open-ended questions prompt respondents to provide detailed answers rather than simple affirmations or negations.
2. **Exploratory nature:** They invite exploration of thoughts, feelings, and experiences, which can lead to unexpected insights.
3. **Flexibility:** These questions allow the respondent to steer the conversation based on their interests and experiences.
4. **Building rapport:** By asking open-ended questions, interviewers or conversational partners show genuine interest, fostering trust and openness.

Role in Revealing Insights about a Person

Open-ended questions can reveal a great deal about an individual's personality, values, and experiences. Here's how:

1. **Thought Process:** Responses can show how a person thinks and processes information. For example, asking, "How do you approach problem-solving?" can reveal their analytical or creative thinking style.
2. **Values and Beliefs:** Questions like "What do you believe is the most important quality in a leader?" can highlight a person's values and priorities.
3. **Emotional Responses:** Open-ended questions can elicit emotional reactions, helping to understand a person's feelings about certain situations. For instance, "How did you feel when you faced a major setback?" can provide insights into resilience and coping strategies.
4. **Life Experiences:** Asking about experiences, like "Can you describe a significant challenge you've overcome?" allows individuals to share their narratives, which can highlight their strengths and adaptability.

Its roles in Interrogation process

Open-ended questions play a crucial role in the interrogation process, especially in eliciting information from a suspect or perpetrator. Here's how they can impact the interaction between the interrogator and the suspect:

Building Rapport

Starting with open-ended questions helps create a more conversational atmosphere. This can make the suspect feel more comfortable, encouraging them to share information. When suspects feel they are being listened to, they are more likely to open up.



Encouraging Detailed Responses

Open-ended questions prompt suspects to provide more detailed narratives about events. For instance, asking "Can you describe what happened on the night of the incident?" encourages a more comprehensive account rather than a simple "yes" or "no" answer.

Revealing Inconsistencies

As the suspect elaborates, the interrogator can identify inconsistencies or contradictions in their story. For example, if a suspect gives different accounts when asked open-ended questions, it may raise suspicion and lead to further questioning.

Eliciting Emotions and Reactions

Open-ended questions can help elicit emotional responses, which may reveal the suspect's feelings about the situation. For example, asking "How did you feel when you realized what happened?" can provide insight into their mindset and potentially uncover guilt or remorse.

Encouraging Self-Reflection

When suspects are asked to reflect on their actions or thoughts, they may inadvertently provide information that contradicts their earlier statements. An open-ended question like "What led you to make that decision?" can prompt introspection and lead to revelations.

Reducing Resistance

Using open-ended questions can reduce the likelihood of defensiveness. If a suspect feels attacked by direct or closed questions, they may shut down. However, open-ended questions can create a more inviting space for dialogue.

Facilitating Information Gathering

Open-ended questions allow interrogators to gather more comprehensive information, including context and background. This helps in constructing a clearer picture of the events in question. For instance, asking "What can you tell me about your relationship with the victim?" can provide valuable context.

To sum up, I would concede that open-ended questions in an interrogation setting can facilitate communication, encourage detailed responses, reveal inconsistencies, and create a more comfortable environment for the suspect. This approach can lead to more effective information gathering and a deeper understanding of the suspect's perspective.

Its roles in classroom management

Open-ended questions are a powerful tool in classroom management and lesson delivery. Here's how they can enhance the learning environment and facilitate effective teaching:

As a teacher with nearly 12 years of experience, I have implemented a variety of strategies in my classroom. Based on these practices, I can conclude that at the initiation, progression, and conclusion of lessons, as well as when fostering a positive dialogue with students, the role of open-ended questions has been both unparalleled and invaluable. For instance, rather than



using specific, closed-ended questions to review previous lessons, incorporating open-ended questions has consistently yielded more effective outcomes, often exceeding my expectations. Examples of such questions include: "Tell me a bit about...", "Describe a time when...", "What do you think about this...", "How did you feel about that...", "What were your expectations...", and "What factors did you consider...?" These types of inquiries not only elicit more detailed and insightful responses but also encourage greater student participation. As a result, the overall level of engagement in the classroom has notably increased.



Picture 2

Even when asking students about their homework, I made a conscious effort to use open-ended questions effectively:

"Tell me about your homework and your preparation for today's lesson." This invites a detailed response, prompting the person to share what they've done without feeling like it's just a yes or no question.

"How are they done?" This is a nice follow-up that allows the person to explain the process or how they approached their tasks. It also shows interest in their method, not just the completion.

1. Instead of "Did you understand the lesson?" I used: "Can you explain what you learned from the lesson?"

This encourages students to share their understanding in their own words.

2. Instead of "Did you finish the task?" I tried: "How did you approach the task?"

This allows students to discuss their process and the steps they took.

3. Instead of "Is everything clear?" I usually use: "What questions do you have about today's topic?"

This invites students to think about any confusion or doubts they might have.

4. Instead of "Do you have any ideas?" I posed: "What ideas can we explore together on this topic?"

This helps create an environment for brainstorming and collaboration.

5. Instead of "Did you complete your group work?" I would like to try: "How did your group manage to divide the tasks, and what was the outcome?"

This encourages reflection on teamwork and how they solved problems.



While this type of broad question can sometimes produce a rambling answer, it also tends to unfetter the students to say anything they want which can be very advantageous

During the lesson, when I posed open-ended questions to the students, I observed a significant increase in engagement on multiple occasions. Even the more passive students began expressing their opinions. The exchange of ideas was dynamic and diverse, though somewhat disjointed at times.

Open-ended questions are particularly effective when investigating the reasons behind a student's inability to attend classes, especially when the student is reluctant to disclose certain details. I would like to briefly cite an example from one of my own experiences. I began an interview with a student by employing open-ended questions, which proved to be an effective method. This approach allowed me to gather accurate and truthful insights about the student's situation.



Picture 3

The student in question was initially reserved and reluctant to open up about his difficulties. However, by asking open-ended questions, I was able to foster a more comfortable and friendly conversation. As a result, the student revealed the reasons for his absence, and by the end of our conversation, he promised to attend classes regularly moving forward. The open-ended questions I used during this interview included:

It is natural for each individual to experience challenges that may not be visible or apparent to others, just as our own problems often go unnoticed unless we choose to share them. As human beings, we cannot remain indifferent to these difficulties. With this understanding in mind, I would like to ask: What serious reasons led you to miss classes?

Given your situation, how do you think you can compensate for the missed classes and catch up on the lost time?

I think these questions are accurate in this situation. They are empathetic and encourage the student to reflect and provide thoughtful answers. The first question gently acknowledges the

student's difficulties without being confrontational, and the second invites them to think proactively about solutions. This approach fosters an open and constructive dialogue. They are thoughtful and effective for encouraging reflection. They show empathy and aim to get the student to think about their situation and find solutions.

Overall, this is a clear and effective way to engage the student.

I found that using this question in large gatherings and meetings was effective in initiating conversations, fostering an open environment for discussion, and encouraging participants to freely share their experiences. This, in turn, helped me work towards achieving my objectives. For instance, I organized a workshop for English teachers at my workplace, where we engaged in roundtable discussions to identify challenges in the teaching process and propose solutions. While I had some prior knowledge of the meeting's goals, I was eager yet slightly anxious about how to initiate the conversation and manage its flow. I was particularly focused on how to encourage meaningful exchanges, gather valuable information, and compile purposeful reports. Effective communication, especially when interacting with educators, requires asking the right questions in the right manner.

I conducted this workshop three times, and each instance provided valuable lessons that helped me refine my approach.

At the beginning of the meeting, I introduced myself, thanked everyone for their valuable time, and outlined the purpose and key details of the meeting. I intentionally kept the formalities brief, as my main goal was to listen to the teachers' perspectives without taking up too much time. Given the limited time and the need to keep the meeting engaging, I focused on asking a broad question to the group.



Picture 4

I said: 'As teachers, we strive to guide children and learners in the best way possible, but we often encounter various challenges along the way. I now declare today's meeting open, and I encourage each of us to share questions or issues we face, based on our experiences, and propose potential solutions. We will vote on these suggestions and choose the most favorable one.'



One of the questions I posed was: 'Do you encounter challenges in your professional activities? And are most of these challenges related to classroom management?' My objective was to determine whether a majority of teachers faced such issues and to identify if classroom management was the main concern, as I had prepared suggestions and guidelines on management techniques that could help address these challenges.

Typically, questions like this prompt respondents to reflect before answering, which was the case here. However, discussing problems in a group setting can be uncomfortable for some, so while someone in the room acknowledged the issue, there was no clear or detailed response. Additionally, such questions require thoughtful preparation, as they focus on a specific topic, which can limit spontaneous answers. The response I received was vague—essentially a mix of 'yes' and 'no.' It was unsatisfactory and felt like a missed opportunity to dive deeper into the issue. Although one participant attempted to share their thoughts, others seemed hesitant to engage with the question."

"In my second attempt, I adopted a different approach by sharing my own experiences and discussing the challenges I had encountered. This significantly increased participation and agreement among the attendees. I observed that introducing a sense of openness, freedom, and friendly rapport fostered a more collaborative atmosphere. I said, 'I'm sure that's what we're all aiming for today... isn't it? Who's going to start? Who wants to go first?' The responses were immediate: 'Yes, yes, I agree, that's why we're here. May I share my opinion?'

In the next round, I asked: 'What challenges do you think teachers might face in their professional activities? What are the interests and concerns of today's youth, and how can we direct their focus towards the lesson? What factors might lead to difficulties in managing a class?' These questions encouraged participants to draw on their experiences and knowledge, allowing them to provide well-considered responses. This method not only gave them the freedom to speak openly but also facilitated the gathering of rich information, guiding the discussion toward the intended goals.

After these questions, nearly everyone in the room actively participated, offering various perspectives and even sharing personal experiences to support their points. Based on these observations, I can confidently assert that open-ended questions can effectively accomplish the following tasks:

Encouraging Student Engagement

Open-ended questions promote active participation. When students are invited to share their thoughts, they become more engaged in the lesson. For example, asking "What do you think about the theme of this story?" encourages students to express their opinions and connect personally with the material.

Fostering Critical Thinking

These questions stimulate critical thinking by prompting students to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. Instead of just recalling facts, students can explore concepts more deeply. For instance, asking "How would you solve this problem in a different way?" encourages them to think creatively.



Promoting Discussion

Open-ended questions can spark discussions among students. They can build on each other's ideas, leading to richer dialogues. For example, asking "What are the implications of this historical event?" can lead to diverse perspectives and collaborative learning.

Assessing Understanding

Teachers can gauge student comprehension through their responses to open-ended questions. This can help identify areas where students may be struggling. For instance, if a student responds with confusion to "What was the main idea of the lesson?" the teacher can clarify the concept.

Building a Positive Classroom Environment

Using open-ended questions can create a supportive classroom atmosphere. When students feel their thoughts are valued, they are more likely to share openly. For example, asking "How did you feel about this experiment?" allows students to express emotions and opinions, fostering trust.

Encouraging Reflection

These questions can prompt students to reflect on their learning experiences. For instance, asking "What did you learn from this project?" encourages students to think critically about their growth and understanding.

Differentiating Instruction

Open-ended questions can cater to different learning styles and abilities. They allow students to respond in various ways, whether through spoken words, writing, or group discussions. This flexibility accommodates diverse learners and promotes inclusivity.

Guiding Group Work

In group activities, open-ended questions can help steer discussions and ensure that all voices are heard. Questions like "What are the pros and cons of our approach?" encourage collaboration and critical evaluation within groups.

In summary, open-ended questions in the classroom can enhance engagement, foster critical thinking, promote discussion, and create a positive learning environment. They allow teachers to assess understanding and encourage reflection, making them a valuable tool in lesson management and delivery.

Conclusion

This research highlights the significant power of open-ended questions in fostering effective communication. The findings reveal that such questions not only encourage participants to share deeper insights but also create a more engaging and interactive dialogue. By promoting a richer exchange of ideas, open-ended questions enhance understanding and build rapport between interviewers and candidates. The implications of this study extend beyond interviews,



suggesting that open-ended questions can be instrumental in various communication settings, including education, counseling, and team discussions. Future research should explore the long-term benefits of incorporating open-ended questions across different disciplines to further understand their transformative potential in communication. It also examined the impact of open-ended questions on communication during interviews. The findings indicate that these questions significantly enhance participant engagement and lead to more comprehensive responses. This research underscores the importance of effective communication strategies in interviews, suggesting that incorporating open-ended questions can improve outcomes for both interviewers and candidates. Future research could explore the long-term effects of using open-ended questions in various communication contexts, providing further insights into their efficacy.

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