

## Questioning Strategies: Employed the Most During Cross-Examinations in Pakistani Courts

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<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.2.63>

### Abstract

*This research study aims to ascertain the questioning strategies employed the most during cross-examinations in Pakistani courts. A quantitative method, based on power dynamic as the conceptual framework, has been used to explore the research topic at hand. The data were collected through a questionnaire from a random sample of 300 law practitioners. They were quantitatively analyzed, using percentage, standard deviation, and ANOVA to explore their questioning strategies to deal with witnesses. The study found that "establishing fact" and "contradiction and inconsistency" are the most widely used questioning strategies. While "leading questions" and "emotional appeal" are the rarest strategies employed by Pakistani law practitioners during cross-examinations. The study has honestly reported the results with some recommendations, such as training law practitioners in using diverse questioning strategies and investigating linguistic power imbalance, among others, for future researchers.*

**Keywords:** Law Practitioners, Pakistani Courts, Questioning Strategies, Leading Questions.

### Introduction

The current paper is projected to explore the most frequently employed questioning strategies during cross-examination in Pakistani law courts. According to Vago et al. (2017), "Every society has disputes, and law provides an important means for settling disputes." (p.17). While defining "Law," Hoebel (1954) stated, "To seek a definition of the legal is like the quest for the holy grail." (p.18). According to Glenn (2014), man, throughout history, has had modes to declare, alter, administer, and enforce the definitions and rules of relationships utilizing which people lead a life in a society. Law is no exception in this case. Cross-examination is considered the most significant part of the adversarial system of common law. As Heffer (2005) asserts, "The principal means of challenge in the trial is through cross-examination" (p. 81). The purpose of cross-examination is to elicit favorable evidence as well as to cast doubt on the witness's evidence and undermine their credibility at the same time. According to Merriam-Webster (2004), cross-examination is "the examination of a witness who has already testified in order to check or discredit the witness's testimony, knowledge, or credibility." Several deliberate as well as spontaneous strategies are employed during the cross-examination process. The leading questions strategy is aimed at extracting specific information and is employed to challenge the witness's credibility. Impeachment questions as a strategy are meant to challenge the prior statements of witnesses. Contradiction and inconsistency questioning strategy is intended to highlight discrepancies in the

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statements of witnesses. The strategy of establishing facts is employed to seek confirmation of key facts that support the case theory of the cross-examiner. In the expertise challenge strategy, cross-examiners may want to challenge the witness's qualifications, expertise, or understanding of the subject matter. The clarification and elaboration strategy is meant to seek clarification or elaboration on specific points raised during direct examination. Narrative control, as a type of questioning strategy, is used to ask narrative questions to allow the witness to provide a detailed account of events to control and elicit information from them strategically. In the strategy of emotional appeal, emotional appeal is employed to evoke the witness's or the judge's sympathy. Other strategies employed could include Ambush questions, i.e., surprising the witness with unexpected evidence, the strategy of asking direct and focused questions not to allow the witness to give unnecessary information, and Waddington's (2018), repeating, reversing, and clarifying questioning strategy to control difficult witnesses during cross-examination. In the law courts, lawyers have the upper hand in controlling the witness in the power asymmetry of the courtroom dynamics, as stated by Gibbons (2008) "The lawyers have control of the questioning process, and witnesses are obliged to reply. Lawyers are also in a position to pressure witnesses to agree with their version of events" (p. 116). Besides questioning strategies, the format in which the questions are used is also of great consideration, and these should be asked directly without much ambiguity to ensure that the witness is kept on track. As stated by Woodbury (1984), "The varying pragmatic properties of the different question types can be exploited by lawyers, not only to control the utterances of witnesses but also the understandings of jury members" (p. 5).

## Literature Review

It is pertinent to mention some existing studies on the strategies employed during cross-examination briefly. In this connection, Cotterill's (2004) linguistic landscaping involves lexical and semantic decisions that lawyers make to cast doubt on the witness's account of events while formulating their account. Drew (1992) provided another strategy, contrast, and summary, where the lawyer juxtaposes the witness's answer to indicate inconsistency. Danet (1980) identifies three other linguistic strategies used in cross-examination which include the use of rhetorical questions, identification of the audience, and repetition. Compatibility, tone, and attitude of the lawyer during cross-examination, in addition to any other thing, greatly determines the success of the cross-examination. According to Waddington (2018), law practitioners can employ specific techniques, such as repeating questions for evasive witnesses, to control their witnesses effectively. But he warns that, while law practitioners might control witnesses' responses by employing some linguistic tactics, rules of conduct for cross-examination, however, must be followed. Similarly, Dickinson (2017) suggests that law practitioners can use various linguistic and tactical techniques to shape the witness's responses.

Similarly, Marr (2021) found that witnesses may be more likely to consent to the questioner's suggestions when asked leading questions. As far as the nature and categories of questioning strategies and the type of questions employed during cross-examination, Quirk et al. (1972) categorized questions according to the sort of responses they may expect into yes-no questions, Wh-questions, and choices questions. Huddleston (2002) divides questions into Yes/No questions and Wh-questions.

Furthermore, Maley (1994) takes into consideration the intention of the questions and divides questions into two types: hypothesized on the two types of motives which are confirmation-seeking and information-seeking. Hence, according to Maley (1994), confirmation-seeking is found to be more answer-constrained than information-seeking.

Moreover, Heffer (2005) talks about 'display questions' (p. 111). He adopts a classification of questions into narrational, specification questions, and confirmational questions.

Similarly, a study by Snook et al. (2012) found that suspects give almost 100 words in their answers to open-ended questions, and this is far more than the combined number of words to multiple-choice questions. Examinees provided an average of 16 words in their responses to follow-up questions posed to suspects. Closed-ended yes/no, forced choice, multiple choice, and leading questions can be classified into four main ineffective questioning strategies. Concerning the length of responses to conservative questions, Snook et al. (2012) established that the closed yes/no, forced choice and directive elicited reactions of less than 13 words, and multiple questions elicited 17-word responses from the suspects. Until now, a vast number of studies have analyzed the effects of legal language on witnesses and examined how lawyers work with such important groups of witnesses as children and people with a limited intellectual capacity. Most of the current knowledge about how lawyers make questions in courts is based on the interrogation of children in New Zealand, Scotland, the United States, and other related places (Andrews & Lamb, 2016; Andrews et al., 2015; Hanna et al., 2012; Klemfuss et al., 2014; Zajac & Cannan, 2009; Zajac et al., 2003).

By utilizing questioning strategies as the main linguistic tool, the lawyers from both the defense and the prosecution bring out the hidden truth and integrity of the witnesses involved before the judge to smoothly and judiciously arbitrate the case under trial and dispense justice for the betterment and prosperity of a given society. So, this study is aimed at finding out which questioning strategy is used more frequently inside the Pakistani courts of law during cross-examinations.

The available literature, as mentioned above, exhibits a research gap in terms of questioning strategies employed during cross-examination in terms of demography, geography, and epistemology. There needs to be more established literature regarding the judicial systems working in countries other than Europe and America. This study is designed to fill the demographic and geographic gap by choosing a population of 300 respondents from the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa region of Pakistan. The study is important for providing insights to future researchers as well as to law practitioners in particular and policymakers in general for a much better understanding of the questioning strategies employed by Pakistani law practitioners.

## Methodology

This study is Quantitative in nature, which, according to Remeyni et al. (1998), is a research approach with the sole focus on quantifying the data. It is also deductive, as its sole emphasis lies in testing the theory by collecting specific instances of it in the form of data using random sampling techniques. As asserted by Macnee and McCabe (2007), it uses validity and reliability to measure rigor.

The population of the study was all the law practitioners of the judiciary of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. A sample of 300 law practitioners was randomly selected. A 8-item Likert scale questionnaire was used as a data collection tool. The data processing involved data cleaning, data coding procedure and data transformation procedure to convert, standardize, normalize, and tabulate the data. Descriptive statistical procedure involved finding the measures of central tendency, such as mean and percentage, and measures of central tendency, such as standard deviation, to describe the typical value of the data and to describe the spread of the data, respectively. Inferential statistics, involving hypothesis testing, was employed using statistical tests such as ANOVA and post-hoc tests such as Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference (HSD).

## Data Analysis and Discussion

The descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the collected data has been presented in various tables according to the analysis procedure and discussed and concluded in the sections following.

**Table 1: Standard Deviation of Questioning Strategies Employed During Cross-Examination**

Row Labels	Most	Very Often	Often	Some Times	Rarely	Never	Grand Total	Mean	Mean <sup>2</sup>	SD
Leading question	39	66	78	87	21	9	300	3.96	17.26	3.646
Impeachment question	93	69	57	63	18	0	300	4.52	22.08	4.190
Contradiction and inconsistency	123	78	27	48	21	3	300	4.75	24.43	4.436
Establishing facts	126	39	60	63	12	0	300	4.68	23.62	4.352
Expertise challenge	72	60	78	54	33	3	300	4.25	19.87	3.952
Clarification and elaboration	99	54	63	51	24	9	300	4.42	21.62	4.147
Narrative control	96	51	54	57	42	0	300	4.34	20.92	4.071
Emotional appeal	51	42	57	69	30	51	300	3.54	15.3	3.429

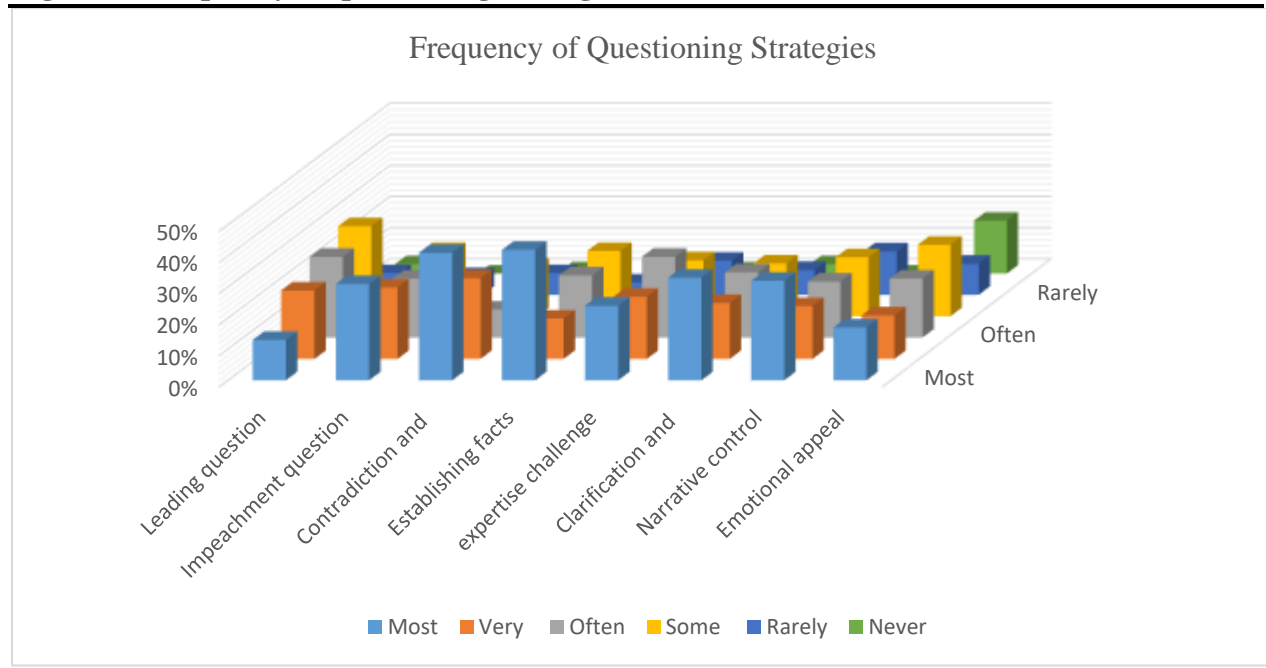
## Discussion

Table 1 shows different questioning strategies along with their respective observed frequency and standard deviation in Pakistani courts during cross-examination procedures. Standard deviation depicts the spread of a set of data points around the mean or the dispersion of the data by quantifying those individual data points that deviate from the mean. A questioning strategy with a larger standard deviation indicates comparatively greater variability or spread of data points around the mean with more spreading out and less consistent around the mean. A smaller standard deviation, on the contrary, indicates that data points are closer to the mean and relatively consistent and clustered closely around the mean. Similarly, the smaller the standard deviation, the shape formed by the data shall be more likely to be concentrated around the mean, which leads to a more symmetrical distribution. On the contrary, the larger the standard deviation, the more potentially skewed may be the data distribution. The highest mean and mean<sup>2</sup> are “contradiction and inconsistency” which is a questioning strategy for finding contradictions in the witness’s testimony in order to undermine their credibility. We can conclude that this is the most common and primordial questioning strategy among the set of other such cross-examination questioning strategies. Whereas, on the other hand, the lowest mean and mean<sup>2</sup> were recorded for “emotional appeal”, a questioning strategy for eliciting emotional responses from the witness, such as sympathy, anger, guilt, etc. This implies that this is the least common and least important type of question for law practitioners as frequently resorting to emotional appeal could be considered a cheap tactic in cross-examination which is a purely logical and psychological interlocution with little space for emotions. Similarly, “establishing facts,” a question for establishing the facts and evidence of the case as well as for clarifying the details of the events had the highest frequency of the highest rating, “6” on the Likert scale, which depicts that this is the most often employed type of questioning strategy during cross-examination process. On the other hand, we found that the question with the highest frequency of the lowest rating, option “1” on the Likert scale, is “emotional appeal”, which connotes that this type of questioning strategy is rarely used at the lowest level. A probable reason could be its inappropriateness for challenging witnesses' testimony

or reliability during cross-examination. Similarly, in the same category, variation, or dispersion in the ratings of questioning strategy was calculated through standard deviation where the higher the standard deviation, the more variation or spread in the data there is. This can imply that there is less agreement on how often a type of questioning strategy is employed than the type of questioning strategy itself. On the other hand, the lower the standard deviation, the lesser there is variation or spread in the data. This can mean that there is more agreement or consistency on how often to employ that type of questioning strategy. “Contradiction and inconsistency” as the questioning strategy was the highest in terms of standard deviation. This might imply a high degree of variation or spread in this questioning strategy’s ratings, which implies that this type of question is employed “very often” while others employ it “never.” This also depicts the different strategies and styles of cross-examinations among law practitioners. The questioning strategy, on the contrary, with the lowest standard deviation is “emotional appeal” on the same scale of quantitative measurement. There exists a low degree of variation or spread in the ratings of this questioning strategy by the respondent law practitioners. This might be because this type of questioning strategy is not highly effective as it does not directly challenge the witness’s testimony, veracity, or reliability.

**Table 2: Percentage of Questioning Strategies Employed during Cross-Examination**

Row labels	Most	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Leading question	13%	22%	26%	29%	7%	3%
Impeachment question	31%	23%	19%	21%	6%	0%
Contradiction and inconsistency	41%	26%	9%	16%	7%	1%
Establishing facts	42%	13%	20%	21%	4%	0%
expertise challenge	24%	20%	26%	18%	11%	1%
Clarification and elaboration	33%	18%	21%	17%	8%	3%
Narrative control	32%	17%	18%	19%	14%	0%
Emotional appeal	17%	14%	19%	23%	10%	17%

**Figure 1: Frequency of questioning strategies**

## Discussion

Table 2 shows the percentage of respondents who rated dissimilar categories of questioning strategies on a scale from “most” to “never”. A higher mean indicates more agreement with the statement, while a lower mean indicates less agreement. In order to identify the most commonly used questioning strategy, we can look for items with the highest mean scores.

The questioning strategy “establishing facts,” which is employed to establish the evidence as well as to clarify the circumstances of the events, was found to have the highest percentage of the highest rating, which implies its consistency of being employed during the cross-examination procedure in a case. Alternatively, the “emotional appeal” type of questioning strategy, pleaded or sought to evoke emotion from the witness, was option “6” on the Likert for having the lowest percentage of highest rating on the Likert scale which in turn means it is the least consistently used type of questioning strategy during cross-examination. The questioning strategy “emotional appeal” also turned out to have the highest percentage of the lowest rating, thereby implying it to be the most controversial and avoided type of questioning strategy during cross-examination. This makes it a questioning strategy least desired, inappropriate, irrelevant, and too emotion-driven for cross-examination as it is deficient in fulfilling the criteria of directly challenging the testimony of the witness or their reliability in a logical manner. On the contrary, the questioning strategy “impeachment question,” employed to discredit the witness by demonstrating that they are lying, are biased or are inconsistent, was found to have the lowest percentage of the lowest rating and establishes it to be the least controversial and least avoided type of questioning strategy. As the main purpose of cross-examination is to expose the lies, this type of questioning strategy is almost always employed during the cross-examination stage of the case. As far as the variation of spread in the same data set is concerned, the questioning strategy “narrative control,” was found to have the highest variation, which implies a high degree of variation or spread in the ratings of this questioning strategy. This means that some law practitioners employ this questioning strategy very often, while others use it rarely or never. This may also demonstrate the fact that law practitioners

tend to use different strategies and styles of cross-examination. On the contrary side, the questioning strategy “emotional appeal,” was found to be the questioning strategy with the lowest variation. This reflects a low degree of variation or spread in the ratings of this questioning strategy which implies that most law practitioners agree on employing this questioning strategy rarely or never. In other words, this questioning strategy is not considered highly effective or relevant as it fails to directly challenge the witness’s testimony or their reliability.

**Table 3: ANOVA of Questioning Strategies Employed during Cross-Examination**

Summary					
Groups	Count	Average	Variance		
Leading question	300	3.1	1.85619		
Impeachment questions	300	2.42	1.5889		
Contradiction and inconsistency	300	2.24	1.8887		
Establishing facts	300	2.48667	1.94965		
Expertise challenge	300	2.92	2.00027		
Clarification and elaboration	300	2.62	1.96214		
Narrative control	300	2.72	2.26916		
Emotional appeal	300	3.43	2.71415		
ANOVA					
Source of Variation	SS	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	320.8329167	45.8333	22.5931	8.21934E-30	2.0134
Within Groups	4852.516667	2.02864			
Total	5173.349583				

## Discussion

For table 3, we can state two hypotheses:

- Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no significant difference between the mean groups.
- Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): There is a significant difference between the mean groups.

The null hypothesis states that there are no significant differences between the means of the groups, while the alternative hypothesis states that at least one group's mean is different from the others.

Table 3 shows the results of an ANOVA test that compares the means of eight questioning strategies across diverse groups of strategies employed by law practitioners. Based on the table, we can see that the ANOVA test rejects the null hypothesis for all questioning strategies except for “clarification and elaboration” and “narrative control.” This means that there is a significant difference among the group means for the following questioning strategies:

“Leading question,” “impeachment question,” “contradiction and inconsistency,” “establishing facts,” “expertise challenge,” and “emotional appeal”. For these strategies, we used Tukey’s honestly significant difference as post-hoc tests to identify which groups differ significantly from each other.

## Significance

The decision rule is, do not accept the null hypothesis if p-value is less than alpha  $\alpha = .05$ , otherwise do not reject the null hypothesis. Here 0.05 is equal to  $5 \times 10^{-2}$ . While the p-value is  $8.22E-30$

which is equal to  $8.22 \times 10^{-30}$ . In this case, 0.05 ( $5 \times 10^{-2}$ ) is significantly larger than  $8.22 \times 10^{-30}$ . Hence, we do not accept “the null hypothesis of no difference” between the mean scores. In short, the ANOVA test of the same data set regarding the questioning strategies was performed to compare the means of eight questioning strategies employed during cross-examination. The test rejected the null hypothesis of no significant difference for six out of eight questioning strategies, which reflects that there is a significant difference among the huge majority of six out of eight group means for those strategies. The p-value for each questioning strategy under consideration was found to be much smaller than the significance level of 0.05, which indicates that this significant difference had an extremely low probability of being the result of chance. The null hypotheses in those six questioning strategies that have a significant difference among the group mean included, “leading question,” “impeachment question,” “contradiction and inconsistency,” “establishing facts,” “expertise challenge,” and “emotional appeal.” The other two with no significant difference among the group means included “clarification and elaboration” and “narrative control.” This implies that there is no significant variation in terms of using these two types of questioning strategies during cross-examination among law practitioners.

**Table 4: Honestly significant difference (HSD) between the Means of Questioning Strategies during Cross-Examination**

Comparison	ABS mean difference	Q critical value	Significant or not
Leading vs impeachment	0.68	0.352448	Significant
Leading vs contradiction	0.86	0.352448	Significant
Leading vs establishing fact	0.613333333	0.352448	Significant
Leading vs expertise challenge	0.18	0.352448	Not Significant
Leading vs clarification/ elaboration	0.48	0.352448	Significant
Leading vs narrative control	0.38	0.352448	Significant
Leading vs emotional appeal	0.33	0.352448	Not Significant
Impeachment vs contradiction	0.18	0.352448	Not Significant
Impeachment vs establishing facts	0.066666667	0.352448	Not Significant
Impeachment vs expertise challenge	0.5	0.352448	Significant
Impeachment vs clarification	0.2	0.352448	Not Significant
Impeachment vs narrative control	0.3	0.352448	Not Significant
Impeachment vs emotional appeal	1.01	0.352448	Significant
Contradiction vs establishing fact	0.246666667	0.352448	Not Significant
Contradiction vs expertise challenge	0.68	0.352448	Significant
Contradiction vs clarification	0.38	0.352448	Significant
Contradiction vs narrative control	0.48	0.352448	Significant
Contradiction vs emotional appeal	1.19	0.352448	Significant
Establishing fact vs expertise challenge	0.433333333	0.352448	Significant
Establishing fact vs clarification	0.133333333	0.352448	Not Significant
Establishing fact vs narrative control	0.233333333	0.352448	Not Significant
Establishing fact vs emotional appeal	0.943333333	0.352448	Significant
Expertise challenge vs clarification	0.3	0.352448	Not Significant
Expertise challenge vs narrative control	0.2	0.352448	Not Significant
Expertise challenge vs emotional appeal	0.51	0.352448	Significant
Clarification vs narrative control	0.1	0.352448	Not Significant
Clarification vs emotional appeal	0.81	0.352448	Significant
Narrative control vs emotional appeal	0.71	0.352448	Significant



## Discussion

Table 4 shows the results of Tukey's Honestly Significance Difference (HSD) test which is a significance test for comparing the means of different questioning strategies across distinct groups of law practitioners. The table uses the following decision rule for significance testing:

- Decision Rule: If the absolute value of the difference between means is greater than or equal to the required difference, then the result is significant.
- If the absolute value of the difference between means is less than the required difference, then the result is not significant.

The required difference between means is 0.5 for all comparisons.

- Honestly, Significant Difference (HSD) = 0.352447529
- Required Difference Between the means = 0.352448

The table suggests that the mean ratings of the "leading question" and "impeachment question" are significantly different from the mean ratings of "contradiction and inconsistency" and "expertise challenge" but not from the mean ratings of the other strategies. This means that the law practitioners had different preferences or opinions for these four strategies, i.e., "leading question" and "impeachment question," "contradiction and inconsistency," and "expertise challenge," but not for the others.

In short, the analysis of Tukey's Honestly Significance Difference (HSD) test reveals that only four out of a total of 12 comparisons are significant, which implies an honestly substantial difference between the mean ratings of the given questioning strategies from each other. This may indicate that four questioning strategies are more distinctively selected for cross-examination purposes than the others, as mentioned in the above discussion.

## Conclusion

From the above discussions, we can conclude that law practitioners predominantly and most commonly employ the questioning strategy of "contradiction and inconsistency" to control the responses of their witnesses during cross-examination, which is trailed behind by "establishing facts" as a strategy. On the contrary, "emotional appeal," as one of the questioning strategies, was found to be the least important type of strategy. The reason could be that frequently resorting to emotional appeal could be considered a cheap tactic in cross-examination, which, in reality, is a purely logical and psychological interlocution with little space for emotions. Another probable reason could be its inappropriateness for challenging witnesses' testimony or reliability during cross-examination. This also depicts the different strategies and styles of cross-examination among law practitioners. This makes it a questioning strategy least desired, inappropriate, irrelevant, and too emotion-driven for cross-examination.

In terms of percentage, we can conclude that "establishing facts" as a questioning strategy was found to be the highest, followed by "impeachment question." This implies that the former is the highest consistency of both these strategies being employed during the cross-examination procedures. The least frequent strategies employed were "emotional appeal" and "narrative control," which were found to have the highest variation and least frequency and, hence, the most controversial and the most avoided type of questioning strategies during cross-examination.

Similarly, in terms of the ANOVA test, we can conclude that the test rejected the null hypothesis of no significant difference for six out of eight questioning strategies, which reflects that there is a considerable difference as well as significant variations in terms of the using various types of questioning strategies during cross-examination among the law practitioners, with the implication that there is a high degree of variation or spread in the ratings of these questioning strategies. This

also demonstrates the fact that law practitioners use different questioning strategies and styles during cross-examination.

The study at hand offers useful recommendations and guidelines for burgeoning law practitioners, judges, as well as investigators on proper and effective questioning processes of witnesses in law courts in order to help them avoid or minimize the potential biases, errors, or distortions hidden in different questioning techniques. Knowledge of questioning strategies can help them predict and counter the strategies employed by the opposing party and help them adapt their cross-examination questioning strategies according to the context of the trial. For lay people, like non-expert witnesses, plaintiffs, or defendants, knowledge of such strategies could train them to some extent to prepare for the cross-examination process and manage the pressure and anxiety in a better fashion than before. In terms of legal education and training, it is important for legal professionals to understand the impact of diverse types of questioning strategies on the accuracy of witnesses and to learn effective questioning techniques that are clear and concise. Future scholars could explore how the choice of questioning strategy and the purpose of the question affect the way witnesses present their accounts and, subsequently, the understanding of the witness's message by the judges.

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