

Strategic Questioning in EFL Classrooms: A Closer Look at Higher-Order, Factual, Probing, and Divergent Questions

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate how English teachers' questioning techniques affected their students' cognitive growth and engagement. The study aimed to determine the kinds of questions that English teachers employ when instructing their students. Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with two instructors and twenty students from SMP Negeri 49 Makassar were among the qualitative approaches used in the study. The results showed that both professors used various questioning techniques, such as factual, higher-order, divergent, and probing questions. Divergent questions promoted creative thinking by permitting numerous responses, whereas probing questions prompted students to consider more deeply and elaborate on their solutions. This study's importance stems from its ability to shed light on the function of questioning techniques in EFL classes. The study also offers practical implications for improving teaching practices and student learning outcomes. Future research could explore the impact of questioning strategies across different educational contexts and learning levels and their long-term effects on students' academic performance. This study contributes to the growing body of research on questioning strategies in EFL classrooms, providing valuable insights into how questioning methods can improve student engagement and cognitive development. It also offers practical recommendations for educators to optimize questioning techniques to enhance teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: *Questioning strategies, EFL classroom*



1. Introduction

Questioning techniques are crucial in teaching and learning, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Good questioning can boost active participation in the learning process, foster critical thinking, and increase student engagement (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Students can practice and improve their language abilities in the EFL context by using instructor questioning as a bridge between language acquisition and classroom participation (Mercer & Howe, 2022). Given the importance of questioning in the classroom, understanding the questions used and their impact on student engagement is crucial to improving teaching effectiveness. This research has social value as it provides insight into how teachers use questioning strategies to increase student participation and critical thinking, necessary skills for academic success and real-world communication.

This study contributes to the growing research on questioning strategies in EFL contexts. Previous studies have examined various types of teacher questioning, such as factual, probing, divergent, and higher-order questions, and their impact on classroom interactions (Lee, 2020). However, while significant attention has been given to the role of questioning in teaching practice, there remains a gap in understanding the specific questioning strategies employed by English teachers in their classrooms. This study addresses this gap by analyzing the questioning strategies used by English teachers, focusing on how they structure and apply different types of questions throughout the lesson. The originality of this research lies in its in-depth exploration of teacher questioning practices and its contribution to enhancing teaching strategies in the EFL classroom.

The study is based on Bloom's Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which categorizes questions into different cognitive levels, ranging from low-level thinking skills (LOTS), such as remembering and understanding, to higher-level thinking skills (HOTS), such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. Bloom's Taxonomy provides a theoretical basis for understanding the types of questions teachers use and their purpose in promoting students' cognitive development. In addition, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978) highlights the importance of interaction in the learning process, emphasizing that dialogue

between teachers and students, facilitated through effective questioning, can help students move within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). These theories are interrelated by illustrating how questioning strategies can serve as a tool to enhance cognitive development and social interaction in the classroom.

This study aims to analyze the questioning strategies used by English teachers in EFL classrooms and their role in enhancing student engagement and cognitive development. The specific objectives are as follows: to identify the types of questions used by English teachers in teaching, examine how these questioning strategies impact students' engagement and understanding, and explore the relationship between the types of questions and students' cognitive development based on Bloom's Taxonomy. By addressing these objectives, this study aims to provide valuable insights for educators to optimize their questioning strategies, which can ultimately improve teaching effectiveness and student learning outcomes in the EFL classroom.

2. Method

According to Prasetyawati (2015), the researcher employed qualitative approaches in this study, which concentrate on obtaining, evaluating, and interpreting narrative and detailed data to reveal several intriguing occurrences. Qualitative approaches were selected because they enabled a more in-depth and comprehensive investigation of the subject, especially when examining the questioning techniques employed by English teachers in the classroom. A more thorough grasp of how questioning techniques affect students' learning experiences was made possible by this method. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 49 Makassar, where the subjects were English teachers and students from classes VII.5 and IX.9. A total of 20 students, 10 from each class, participated. The selected schools are public institutions with diverse student populations and an emphasis on English language learning. The classroom settings included a 7th-grade and 9th-grade class, providing a range of contexts to analyze questioning strategies across different age groups and proficiency levels.

The study population included English teachers and students from the two selected classrooms. Two English teachers participated in this study, one from each grade level. Purposive sampling was used to select these teachers based on their experience, teaching style, and willingness to participate. The student participants comprised 20 students (10 students from each class), who were selected through a representative sampling strategy to ensure diverse data results. The data collection process utilized two primary tools: classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted to analyze the types and frequency of questions posed by teachers during the lessons. These observations were carefully recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers and 20 students to gather more profound insights into their perceptions of the questioning strategies. To maintain the reliability and relevance of the interview questions, they were validated by experts. The validity of the data collection tools was further ensured through triangulation, where findings from observations and interviews were compared to enhance credibility. Data collection was carried out over two weeks during regular class hours to minimize disruption to the teaching and learning process.

The data analysis techniques followed Miles and Huberman's (2011) framework, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. These steps enabled the researcher to simplify and organize raw data, present it clearly and concisely, and draw meaningful conclusions. Verification ensured the conclusions' reliability and credibility, supporting the findings' validity. Through these methods, the study provided valuable insights into the role of questioning strategies in enhancing students' learning engagement and comprehension.

3. Results and Discussion

Teacher 1

The classroom observation results highlighted the use of questioning strategies by the teacher during English learning activities. Mr. IR consistently applied various questioning strategies throughout the teaching process. These included probing, higher order, divergent, and factual questions, which were frequently used during

the lessons. For instance, when checking on his students' well-being, he used questions such as:

Extract 1 (IR, September 25, 2024)
"Selamat pagi anak-anak, apa kabar?"
(Good morning, how are you, students?)

These questions were typically used at the beginning of the lesson to re-energize and engage the students. To initiate the learning material, Mr. IR asks learners about their initial understanding of the learning material. Teacher 1 (Mr. IR), including divergent, probing, higher-order, and factual questions, each serve a specific purpose in classroom dynamics. Divergent questions, such as:

Extract 2 (IR, September 25, 2024)
"Apa saja informasi penting yang harus ada di label?"
(What is some important information that should be on the label?)

This question effectively encourages students to think creatively and generate various responses, sparking lively class discussions and promoting diverse perspectives. This strategy allows students to explore different elements of a product label beyond the surface level, thus contributing to a richer understanding of the topic. Probing questions, exemplified by:

Extract 3 (IR, September 25, 2024)
"Dapatkah Anda menjelaskan kembali fungsi label pada produk ini?"
(Can you explain again the function of the label on this product?)

Probing questions are important in assessing students' understanding and encouraging them to elaborate on their answers. These questions encourage students to reflect deeper and clarify their thinking, ensuring a solid understanding of the material.

Extract 4 (IR, September 25, 2024)
"Jika Anda merancang label untuk produk favorit Anda, apa yang akan Anda tulis?"
(What would you write if you were designing a label for your favorite product?)

Additionally, higher-order questions stimulate critical thinking and creativity by challenging students to apply their knowledge in a practical and creative task. These questions are particularly effective in developing students' problem-solving and analytical skills as they require students to go beyond recall and engage in deeper intellectual processes.

Extract 5 (IR, September 25, 2024)

“Apa yang Anda pelajari tentang informasi penting yang harus ada pada label produk?”

(What did you learn about important information that should be on a product label?)

Factual questions reinforce core material and ensure that students remember important information. These questions help anchor student learning by encouraging reflection and recall of key concepts covered during the lesson and connecting the learning material to real-life situations.

Based on the observation, Mr. IR effectively employed various questioning strategies, including probing, higher-order, divergent, and factual questions. He began lessons with engaging inquiries to energize students and foster a positive atmosphere. Divergent questions encouraged creative thinking and sparked lively discussions while probing questions assessed understanding and prompted deeper reflection. Higher-order questions stimulated critical thinking, challenging students to apply their knowledge in practical contexts. Factual questions reinforced key concepts and connected the material to real-life situations. Overall, Mr. IR's diverse questioning strategies significantly enhanced student engagement and comprehension in the classroom.

Teacher 2

The results of the classroom observation demonstrated how well Mrs. EK used questioning strategies in her English instruction sessions. She expertly incorporated various questioning strategies into the courses, such as factual, higher-order, divergent, and probing questions, which greatly enhanced the students' educational experience.

Extract 6 (EK, September 24, 2024)

“Apa kabar? Selamat pagi anak-anak.”

(Good morning, how are you, students?)

These are the questions used at the beginning of class. This helped foster a friendly and upbeat learning environment in the classroom and provided a means of evaluating their well-being. Mrs. EK could re-energize her students and engage them in the course from the beginning by employing these kinds of questions. Her approach emphasized the importance of engaging students through interaction and dialogue, fostering an environment where they felt comfortable participating and expressing their thoughts. Her diverse questioning strategies were instrumental in promoting student involvement and facilitating a deeper understanding of the lesson content.

To initiate the learning material, Mrs. EK asks students about their initial understanding. Teacher 2 (Mrs. EK) uses divergent, probing, higher-order questions, and factual questions, each of which serves a specific purpose in classroom dynamics.

Extract 7 (EK, September 24, 2024)

“Dapatkah Anda memberi tahu teman Anda arah ke perpustakaan dari ruang kelas ini dengan menggunakan kata-kata seperti ‘kiri’, ‘kanan’, atau ‘sebelah’?”

(Can you tell your friend the direction to the library from this classroom using words like ‘left,’ ‘right,’ or ‘next to’?)

Divergent questions effectively encourage students to think creatively and generate various responses, sparking lively class discussions and promoting diverse perspectives. This question gives directions for practicing using specific location terms. Probing questions, exemplified by :

Extract 8 (EK, September 24, 2024)

“Di mana letak kantin jika Anda berjalan ke kanan dari ruang guru dan kemudian berbelok ke kiri?”

(If you walk to the right from the teachers' lounge and turn left, where is the canteen located?)

Probing questions play an important role in assessing students' understanding and encouraging them to elaborate on their answers. These questions encourage students to reflect deeper and clarify their thinking, ensuring a solid understanding of the material. For example, this question can test understanding of directional terms by describing a route.

Extract 9 (EK, September 24, 2024)

"Dapatkah Anda menginstruksikan teman Anda tentang arah ke toilet menggunakan istilah 'di sebelah'."

(Can you instruct your friend on the direction to the toilet using the term 'next to'?)

Additionally, higher-order questions stimulate critical thinking and creativity by challenging students to apply their knowledge in a practical and creative task and synthesize information from different sources or topics, allowing them to make connections and develop a more comprehensive understanding of the material. The most important thing is that by challenging students with thought-provoking questions, teachers can increase student motivation and engagement, making the learning experience more dynamic and interactive. Factual questions, such as,

Extract 10 (EK, September 24, 2024)

"Apakah istilah seperti 'antara' dan 'di samping' masih sulit dipahami?"

(Are terms like 'between' and 'next to' still challenging to understand?)

This factual questioning strategy plays an important role in the learning process by assessing students' ability to recall specific information, build a basic understanding of their prior knowledge, and verify their understanding of key concepts. They encourage engagement with the content, helping students actively participate in discussions while building a foundation for higher-order thinking.

Based on observations, Mrs. EK effectively used diverse questioning strategies, including divergent, probing, higher-order, and factual, that enhanced student

engagement and critical thinking. Divergent questions encouraged creative thinking and diverse perspectives while probing questions prompted students to expand their answers for better understanding. Higher-order questions stimulated critical thinking by applying knowledge to practical scenarios, and factual questions assessed recall and comprehension. Mrs. EK's approach fostered an interactive, supportive classroom, promoting engagement and a deeper grasp of the lesson content.

4. Discussion

The results of this study in which the researcher showed questioning strategies used by English teachers in one of the schools. The questioning strategies used were probing, divergent, factual, and higher-order questions. Probing questions encourage students to think more deeply and develop their answers. At the same time, divergent questions encourage creative thinking and generate various answers or perspectives; factual questions aim to test students' basic knowledge of specific facts or information. On the other hand, higher-order questions are designed to encourage students to think critically and analytically. According to Sujariati, Rahman, and Mahmud (2016), this questioning strategy is designed to encourage students to participate and actively deepen their understanding of the material. Research conducted by Firdaus (2021) shows that English teachers in the classroom use three categories of questions in their questioning strategies: referential, display, and procedural. Referential questions encourage students to share personal thoughts and opinions, while display questions aim to test students' understanding of the material that has been taught. On the other hand, procedural questions help direct students in the learning process, provide instructions, or explain specific steps. This research highlights the importance of variety in the questions teachers ask to improve student interaction and understanding in the classroom.

This also correlates with Rahman, Rahman, and Irawan's (2024) research. English teachers utilize various questioning strategies, such as repetition, paraphrasing, simplification, decomposition, and probing, each of which has its own function to improve student understanding. These strategies are designed to

facilitate interaction, stimulate critical thinking, and encourage students' active engagement during the learning process. Students respond positively to these questioning strategies because they help them remember previously taught material and facilitate their understanding of new material. Both teachers and students agree that the questioning strategy significantly increases student engagement, deepens understanding of the material, and develops critical thinking skills. This shows that effective questioning strategies can create an interactive learning environment and support the achievement of English learning objectives.

Another study from Lestari and Puspitasari (2022) highlights the importance of questioning strategies in teaching English as a Foreign Language in vocational schools. This study found that EFL teachers used prompting and repeating questioning strategies more frequently to encourage active participation and improve students' understanding during classroom interactions. In contrast, probing and redirecting strategies were used less frequently. This varied use of questioning helped to control classroom dynamics and stimulate students' critical thinking. By customizing questions to understand students' comprehension levels and conditions, teachers can create an interactive learning environment that supports the effective development of students' language and comprehension skills.

It can be concluded that the most common questioning strategies used by English teachers in the classroom learning process are probing questions, divergent questions, factual questions, higher-order questions, repetition, paraphrasing, simplification, decomposition, prompting, and repeating, which have a significant impact on improving student engagement and understanding.

The study had several strengths, including a detailed exploration of questioning strategies using multiple data collection methods, such as classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. This approach provided rich insights and enhanced the credibility of the findings. By incorporating teacher and student perspectives, the study offered a balanced view of questioning strategies, contributing valuable knowledge to English language teaching. However, the study also had limitations. The small sample size, with only two teachers and two classes observed in a single school, limits the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts.

Additionally, the focus on questioning strategies within English language classes may not capture variations in other subjects or classroom environments.

To optimize questioning strategies in English classrooms, it is essential to consider the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders, including students, teachers, and future researchers. Based on the results of this study, several recommendations are made to enhance the effectiveness of questioning strategies. For students, it is crucial to actively engage in classroom discussions and not shy away from answering questions, as this helps deepen their understanding and improve critical thinking and language skills through group discussions and reflections prompted by teacher questions. Providing adequate thinking time after asking questions is important for teachers to encourage thoughtful responses. Emphasizing higher-order questions that challenge students to apply their knowledge to real-world scenarios and incorporating more probing and discussion-based questions can foster deeper engagement and interaction among students. Future researchers should explore the impact of questioning strategies on students at varying learning levels to understand how different types of questions affect diverse student groups. Additionally, investigating the long-term effects of questioning strategies on academic performance could provide valuable insights into their effectiveness in improving learning outcomes. By implementing these suggestions, questioning strategies can contribute more significantly to student engagement, critical thinking, and overall learning success.

5. Conclusion

In this study, both teachers demonstrated strategic use of questioning methods that effectively supported student learning. Probing questions encouraged students to reflect on their responses, prompting them to provide more detailed explanations and engage in deeper thinking. Divergent questions promoted creativity by allowing multiple possible answers, fostering an environment where students could explore ideas freely. Factual questions played a crucial role in assessing students' basic understanding of the lesson content by requiring accurate recall of specific information. These questions helped establish a foundation of knowledge, ensuring

that students had a clear grasp of fundamental concepts before progressing to more complex tasks. Higher-order questions challenged students to think beyond basic recall and apply their knowledge to more complex, real-world scenarios, encouraging critical thinking and problem-solving skills. These strategies enhanced students' understanding of lesson content and empowered them to think critically and independently.

The findings of this study align with the research objectives, highlighting the importance of effective questioning strategies in engaging students and promoting cognitive development. By examining the different types of questions teachers use, the study sheds light on how these methods can foster deeper student engagement and improve learning outcomes. However, while the study provides valuable insights, there are areas for future research that could further explore the impact of questioning strategies. For example, future studies could investigate how questioning strategies vary across different learning levels or educational contexts and examine their long-term effects on students' academic performance. By expanding on these areas, future research can build upon the findings of this study and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of effective questioning practices in the classroom.

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