

Teachers' Perceptions on Questioning Strategies at Pre-Speaking Stage in EFL Classroom Interaction – A Case of a University of Mekong Delta

Huynh Nhu ^{1*}

¹ Tra Vinh University, Tra Vinh City, Vietnam

*Corresponding author's email: huynhnhutlc.tvu@gmail.com

*  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0426-1422>

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ABSTRACT

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In the context of speaking English as a means of international communication, improving English skills for students, especially non-English majors, is a mandatory requirement for teachers. Among the methods of improving language skills, the questioning strategy is applied by most teachers. Therefore, the study is to determine teachers' questioning strategies and perceptions of questioning strategies in the pre-speaking stage. This qualitative research is carried out by semi-structured interviews of five teachers who teach General English in a university in Mekong Delta where English is obligatory for non-English major students. The data collected were analyzed which teacher's questioning strategies were used and teachers' perceptions of teachers' questioning strategies in EFL classroom interaction. The research's findings showed that convergent questioning and divergent questioning strategies are more common than procedural questioning strategies. Besides, teachers consider questioning strategies useful to pique curiosity and attention, students' interest, understanding of the lesson, classroom interaction, and critical thinking. The findings are also an additional resource for teaching English as a foreign language.

Introduction

According to some researchers like Astrid et al. (2019), every country uses English as a global language for communication. It is well-known as a means of daily global connection with citizens from many countries. In some countries, people use English for international communications. Therefore, speaking keep an important role in teaching and learning the language. In Vietnam, with learning English as a foreign language, The Ministry of Education and Training carried out The National Foreign Languages 2020 Project to renovate the teaching and learning of English. Educational systems organize teaching based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Teachers try to help students gain competence in communication. By facilitating students learning process, teachers apply various teaching strategies to enhance students' skills. Questioning is such a popular strategy that teachers use in their teaching process. Some researchers like Huan (Hong & Nguyen, 2019;

Nguyen & Nguyen, 2018) used questioning strategies at the pre-reading stage. The research, therefore, fills the gaps in teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies in teaching EFL students at the pre-speaking stage.

Teacher's questioning

According to Tsui (1995, as cited in Izzati & Wahyuni, 2021), classroom interaction has two parts: teacher talk and students talk. Questioning or asking questions is one part of a teacher speaking. According to Vebriyanto (2015, as cited in Izzati & Wahyuni, 2021), a teacher's question or teacher's questioning is one of the most frequently used techniques in classroom interactions. It describes the teacher's efforts to encourage critical thinking and the expression of the students' thoughts or ideas in order to facilitate effective learning (Maphosa & Wadesango, 2016; Şeker & Kömür, 2008; as cited in Wahyudi, 2017).

Role of questioning strategy

Teachers should utilize questioning strategies to guide discussion in EFL classes. Because asking or posing questions is one of the fundamental strategies a teacher can employ in the teaching process. That is why the questioning strategy is significant. In fact, according to Shaunessy (2005, as cited in Astrid et al., 2019), questioning strategies are necessary for the growth of critical and creative thinking. Teachers use questioning strategies to discover their students' abilities and how well they grasp the content they have been taught.

In summary, questioning is one of the most significant strategies for improving students' abilities. In addition, teachers can utilize the questioning method to assess their students' capacity to think critically. Blosser (2000, as cited in Astrid et al., 2019) claims that students must develop higher-order thinking abilities in order to become better problem solvers. To promote students' thinking and perspectives, teachers should ask questions. Based on the findings of the investigation. Based on the research conducted, 60 percent of the tasks required for recalling information, 20 percent for thinking, and 20 percent for procedural. It indicates that professors frequently respond to questions with a simple yes/no or brief remarks.

Aims of teacher's questions

Ross (1860), cited in Fatmawati et al. (2020), proposed two main goals for teacher questions: assessing whether students understand the material and having them apply what they have learned. Willen (1991, as cited in Fatmawati et al., 2020) also stated that even though the two main goals of teachers are to assess students' comprehension and help them apply knowledge in a critical way. Encourage student engagement by reviewing previous materials, sparking debate, and encouraging students to think creatively. Some researchers indicate other functions include evaluating student skills, measuring student development, establishing the amount to which objectives have been met, generating student interest, managing student conduct, personalizing subject content, and promoting student contributions in class. (Carin & Sund, 1971; Groisser, 1964; and Hyman, 1980, as cited in Fatmawati et al., 2020). The activity of questioning and answering is a kind of communication that is employed by students and teachers in the classroom (Shen & Yodkhumlue, 2012). Teachers utilize a variety of inquiries and questioning kinds as part of their questioning tactics not just to enhance classroom engagement but also to help students to communicate in a real-world situation and to develop

critical thinking skills (Astrid et al., 2019).

Teachers' perceptions

Phan and Nguyen (2021) defined perceptions are the capacity of a human to perceive, hear, become aware of, or comprehend objects around them via the use of senses. Teachers' perceptions are how they receive information, think about it, and make decisions.

According to the preceding viewpoint, questioning keeps in a key role in enhancing classroom interaction, as well as encouraging students' critical thinking. Previous studies had been conducted about types of questions and types of questioning strategies. In this study, the researcher concentrated on teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies in EFL classroom interaction at a university in the Mekong Delta. This study is to widen resources on language teaching methodology for teachers who teach EFL learners.

Literature review

The article "A case study of teacher's questioning and students' critical thinking in college EFL reading classroom" (Shen & Yodkhumlue, 2012) was to see if teacher-assisted critical thinking might help students modify knowledge rather than just recollect it. The study used classroom observation and interviews for collecting data based on two questions: "What are the common features of questions asked by the teacher in college EFL reading classroom under investigation?" and "Can the teacher's questions facilitate learners' critical thinking under the investigation? Why or Why not?". Through classroom observation and interviews with 17 students, the study focused on the influence of a teacher's questions on students' critical thinking growth, aiming to determine whether the questions can assist students' critical thinking. The results revealed that the teacher asked more lower-cognitive questions (79.2%) than higher-cognitive questions (20.8 percent). According to the cognitive domain hypothesis, overuse of lower-cognitive questions did not help pupils develop critical thinking. In addition, the teacher was found to be misusing higher-order cognitive questions. The results also showed the limited use of high cognitive questions would affect the development of students' critical thinking.

The purpose of this study, "Teacher's questions in EFL classroom interaction" (Vebriyanto, 2015), was to define the types of questions that teachers typically utilize in the classroom to facilitate teaching and learning, to determine the teacher's reasons for using those levels of questioning, to express the effects of using those levels of questioning on students' English comprehension, and to classify students' spoken responses to teacher questions. The study's findings were gathered from the transcript of conversations between the English teacher and students in the classroom and from an interview with the English teacher. The teacher was seen using particular types of questions. 31 percent of the questions were open-ended and might lead to lengthy responses. In contrast, 69 percent of the questions were display-closed. Display/closed questions were extensively utilized for testing students' grasp of the topics, whereas open-ended questions were widely utilized for eliciting specific information from students.

Yuliawati, Mahmud, and Muliati's article (2016), "Teacher's questioning and students critical thinking in EFL classroom interaction," purpose of the study was to assess the types and levels

of Bloom's Taxonomy-based questions in the interaction of EFL classroom, as well as the teacher's questioning strategies and the impacts of teacher questioning on critical thinking skills of students. By the qualitative descriptive method, the researchers used classroom observation and an interview with an English teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Tolitoli to find the answers to three questions: "What are the levels of questions used by the teacher in EFL classroom interaction?", "How does the teacher initiate the questions in EFL classroom interaction?" and "Can the teacher's questions facilitate students' critical thinking under the investigation? Why or why not?". The findings showed that the teacher used four of six Bloom's question levels. All questions were at lower-order levels. Additionally, the instructor used all of Turney's suggested questioning strategies, including organizing, concentrating, redirecting, distributing, halting, teacher reaction, prompting, and varying the amount of cognitive demand. A new strategy, joking, was also discovered in this study. Nevertheless, the findings demonstrated that teachers' questioning primarily influenced students' lower-order thinking, which encouraged students' critical thinking without helping them think critically.

In the article "Teacher's questioning behavior and ESL classroom interaction pattern" (David, 2017), the research stated the purpose of the article was to examine the impact of English language teachers' use questions on secondary schools in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria by observation and interview in six different classes. There were 200 teachers and 400 students studying for six weeks. The findings showed that the Display question (85%) is preferred over than Referential question (15%). It means Display question was used less in classroom interaction. Therefore, teachers in Nigeria should use Display questions more.

This study, "The impact of teacher questioning on creating interaction in EFL: A discourse analysis" (Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi, 2017), investigated the influence of questions in EFL classroom interaction, as well as determining question types that enhanced classroom interaction. The researchers employed Discourse Analysis methods to analyze EFL classes from video recordings. Besides that, a group of intermediate-level English students at the English Language Institute (ELI) of a Saudi Arabian university also took part in the research procedure as participants. At first, classes were video-recorded and transcribed. There were two questions for two groups: one was deemed to promote classroom interaction, and another failed to create classroom interaction. The result was the research can define types of questions. The results revealed a link between the qualities of the questions and the creation of classroom engagement. That means some questions enhance classroom interaction; some do not work.

This study by Apriani and Marrchelia, "An analysis of teacher questioning in the classroom interaction" (2018), is to classify the questions' types. The research used a descriptive qualitative method to gather the data from observation and interviews of teachers and students. This research was conducted on teachers and students of the second-grade students of SMK TI Garuda Nusantara Cimahi. The research showed that teacher was on regular questioning habits in the classroom.

In the article of Astrid et al. (2019), "The power of questioning: teacher's questioning strategies in the EFL classrooms," the researchers investigate the methods in which English teachers utilize questioning strategies in the teaching and learning processes, as well as the reasons for their usage of specific questioning strategies. The researchers used observation and interviews

with two teachers at The Madrasah to answer two questions: "What are questioning strategies used by English teachers at one Madrasah in Palembang, South Sumatera?" and "What are the reasons driving the teachers to use the types of questioning strategies?". The observation was used to look at the types of questioning methods used by the teachers in their everyday teaching practices in the EFL classroom, while the interview was utilized to learn why they used such strategies. By thematic analysis, the research analyzes the data based on the steps proposed by Creswell. At first, the researchers gathered thorough information through observation (e.g., field notes) and interviews (e.g., interview transcriptions). After translating the raw data into text, the researchers coded all of the data that related to the research questions. Finally, they interpreted the results and findings. According to the research, convergent, divergent, and procedural questions are the three main categories of questions that teachers employ to guide students through the teaching and learning process. It also made use of the four factors that make teachers more interested in these kinds of questioning techniques: remembering students' comprehension, grabbing their attention, encouraging higher-order thinking, and involving students in learning activities. The article "English as Foreign Language teacher's questioning strategies in classroom interaction" (Nashruddin & Ningtyas, 2020) found out the strategies of teacher's questioning, the teacher's questions types, and the reasons for using the questioning strategies in EFL classroom interaction. By discourse analysis approach, this qualitative research collects data from an English teacher of senior high school students at SMPN 1 Tanete Riaja, Barru through recording, observation, and interview. Through conversational analysis, the research showed that the teacher employed questioning strategies by asking several types of questions, such as open-ended and closed-ended questions, as well as knowledge questions. Otherwise, the teacher did not on a regular habit of using synthesis and assessment questions. The teacher also used other strategies such as questioning in the opening sessions of teaching, questioning in the middle of teaching, prompting, probing, and giving feedback to make the interaction and communication in the learning process more effective.

In the article "Teacher's questioning strategies in EFL classroom interaction" (Fatmawati et al., 2020), the researchers showed that this article aims to identify and examine teachers' questioning strategies in EFL classroom interactions. The researcher used three major techniques to analyze the data: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These techniques included observation, data analysis, and interviews with two English teachers. According to the findings, the teacher used questioning-planning strategies, question-controlling strategies, and nomination strategies. The endless-questioning approach was discovered to be a new questioning strategy. Besides, the teacher used his questioning strategies by asking individual students, pairs of students, and the entire class questions. The teacher preferred using questioning an individual student and the entire class to pairs of students.

To identify and examine instructors' questioning methods in EFL classroom interactions, in the article "Teacher's questioning strategies in EFL classroom interaction" (Fatmawati et al., 2020), the researchers gathered information from a university instructor at STKIP YPUP Makassar in 2015. The researchers used classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students in a qualitative study. The researcher employed three main processes to examine the data: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The teacher used some

strategies such as questioning-planning strategies, question-controlling strategies, and nomination strategies in the classroom. The research findings showed that endless questioning was a new questioning strategy. The teacher preferred using questioning to ask individual students and the whole class to pairs of students.

According to the article by Izzati and Wahyuni (2021), "Teacher's questioning in classroom interaction towards students' learning process in an EFL classroom", the researchers considered that the many forms of teacher questions asked by English teachers during the teaching and learning process, as well as their roles in students' learning. In this study, the researcher looked at the many sorts of instructor questions asked in EFL classroom interactions, as well as the role of each type of teacher's questions in classroom interaction on the student's learning process. This study examined grade X students from three classrooms at one of Surakarta's Senior High Schools. By qualitative research, classroom observations, interviews, and audio-visual material were used to gather data for this study. Firstly, the classroom's English instructor asked three types of teacher questions. Procedural, convergent, and divergent questions were all asked. Secondly, every question plays a part in the learning process of the students. The research showed that there were two divergent questions, or 1.26%, found during the teaching and learning process, while procedural questions and convergent questions were found at 65 or 41.14% and 91 or 57.60%. Besides that, from the research data results, the research argued that the English teacher preferred procedural questions to convergent or divergent questions at the beginning of the lesson. The research data found that convergent questions are the most common questions in the classroom. Moreover, in this research, the researcher also proposed that asking high-order thinking questions needs to be applied in the EFL classroom to encourage the students to think critically. It is because the teacher's questions assist students in enhancing their learning processes.

In Kholisoh and Bharati's article "Teachers' questioning strategies and students' perceptions toward critical questions in EFL classroom interaction" (2021), the researchers explore teachers' questioning strategies and students' perceptions toward critical questions in EFL classroom interaction. The research was performed in an online class during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It collected data from two English teachers and two classes of one of the Senior High Schools in Semarang by using classroom observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation. The findings indicated that the teachers apply all types of questioning strategies, including critical questions. The strategies used to ask critical questions were wait-time, repetition, paraphrasing, simplifying, and probing. Probing was an apparent strategy of eliciting replies from students to critical inquiries. In order to elicit critical responses from students, the teachers paired their questioning strategies with students' critical responses. Although almost all students in Eleventh Class and Tenth Class, with 83.33% and 58.33% respectively, considered the critical question a challenge, they perceived critical questions as motivational questions. Besides, the vast majority of the students were willing to answer teachers' critical questions. The researcher suggested that the teachers should use critical questions in the learning process. Similarly, the students should show their activeness in answering critical questions. Moreover, it should be enhanced research on students' perceptions of factual questions.

According to the preceding viewpoint, questioning keeps in a key role in enhancing classroom interaction, as well as encouraging students' critical thinking. Previous studies had been conducted about types of questions, types of questioning strategies, and effects of questioning strategies on enhancing students speaking capacity. Some other research was conducted on using questioning strategies at the pre-reading stage. Therefore, this study fills the gaps in teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies in teaching EFL students at the pre-speaking stage.

Research questions

This study answers the following questions:

- What are the teachers' perceptions on questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage?
- Why do the teachers use questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

Qualitative data from semi-interviews were conducted with five English teachers who teach General English to non-major English students. Five teachers who are chosen to participate in the interview are actual teachers at the university. These five teachers have experience of more than three years of teaching General English and always use questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage.

Design of the Study

Semi-interview data discussed in this study aimed to explore in-depth teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage. The interview was designed based on the research's purpose as well as the research's questions.

Data collection & analysis

The interview was carried out with five open-ended questions. However, the interview attempted to answer two main questions: "What are the teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage?" and "Why do the teachers use questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage?" All interview questions were designed in both Vietnamese and English. The interview was conducted in Vietnamese to ensure that the participants could deeply understand the questions and easy to express their idea clearly. The interview data were recorded and organized using thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998).

By collecting data from the semi- interview, this study was carried out using questioning strategies at a pre-speaking stage in the case of a university of Vietnam in general, in Mekong Delta in particular.

Findings

Teachers' perceptions on questioning strategies

The teachers believe in five effective themes in questioning strategies, including curiosity and attention, students' interest, understanding the lesson, classroom interaction, and critical thinking.

Curiosity and attention

Two out of five teachers said that questioning strategies help students pique the curiosity and attention of upcoming topics and content. The two extracts below illustrate their views:

“I think questioning strategies are suitable for piquing the curiosity of learners about the upcoming topic and content.” (Teacher 3, interview extract)

“These strategies attract students' attention. They are curious what they will discuss. From these strategies, teachers can stimulate students' interest.” (Teacher 4, interview extract)

Students' interest

Two of five teachers believed that questioning strategies also affect arousing students' interest.

“Questioning strategies create excitement for students to acquire new knowledge.” (Teacher 3, interview extract)

“These strategies can stimulate students' interest. Students have a chance to share their own ideas.” (Teacher 4, interview extract)

Understanding the lesson

Four out of five teachers expressed their views that questioning strategies could somehow help students understand the lesson. Examples of four teachers' views are presented below.

“I use questioning strategies to help students guess answers and more understand about the situation” (Teacher 1, interview extract)

“Students can more understand lesson through answering the questions” (Teacher 2, interview extract)

“By using questioning strategies, I can check students' knowledge about what they are taught and support them promptly.” (Teacher 3, interview extract)

“Questioning strategies help students know and understand thoroughly what they are learning.” (Teacher 4, interview extract)

Classroom interaction

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 confirmed that questioning strategies were beneficial in classroom interaction. They said:

“Questioning is an effective strategy in teaching at the pre-speaking stage. It helps both teachers and students have a chance to interact with each other. From this, students, step by step, learn a lesson. Moreover, this strategy is also useful in enhancing group work and pair work skills.” (Teacher 1, interview extract)

“Questioning strategies is the good way to supply knowledge to students and enhance students’ interaction.” (Teacher 2, interview extract)

Critical thinking

From interview results, Teacher 1 expressed that questioning strategies are useful in practicing students’ critical thinking. Similarly, Teacher 5 also agreed that questioning strategies help improve students’ critical thinking.

Using questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage

Teacher 2 likes to use three types of questioning strategies. Nevertheless, she said,

“Divergent questioning strategy and procedural questioning strategy are only used when she needs to know more students’ proficiency. It is required to be flexible for asking questions.” (Teacher 2, interview extract).

Teacher 1 enjoys convergent and divergent questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage. She argued,

“Convergent questioning strategy is suitable for all levels of English while divergent questioning strategy helps students practice critical thinking and brainstorming knowledge related to lesson” (Teacher 1, interview extract).

While Teacher 3 and Teacher 5 tend to use a convergent questioning strategy, Teacher 4 prefers a divergent questioning strategy to the two remaining questioning strategies. They revealed,

“I usually use convergent questioning strategy at the pre-speaking stage. I use the strategy to ask students to brainstorm and express their understanding of the lesson. Moreover, it helps pique learners' curiosity” (Teacher 3, interview extract).

“Using convergent questioning strategy helps students improve critical thinking and solving problems” (Teacher 5, interview extract).

“I use divergent questioning strategy because in this stage I just suppose my students to share their idea (not having any Yes/No questions or True/False questions)” (Teacher 4, interview extract).

Discussion

The findings from the study pointed out the benefits of using questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage in teaching General English. First, questioning strategies pique the curiosity and attention of upcoming topics and content. This finding is in line with researchers (Bui & Nguyen, 2021; Heritage & Heritage, 2013; Thuy & Yen, 2018; Tofade et al., 2013) who consider that questioning strategies stimulate students' curiosity about the topic, link the background knowledge to the new knowledge. Second, the finding is consistent with other studies by Heritage & Heritage (2013) and Tofade et al. (2013) forward deeper understanding. Furthermore, they agree that using open-ended questions relates to enhancing students' understanding. In addition, to help students step by step acquire knowledge, questioning strategies are well-known as a kind of scaffolding. Likewise, the authors also demonstrate that questioning practices may scaffold students' understanding. Third, the study expresses students

enhance critical thinking and brainstorming. The findings are in line with some researchers (Pham & Hamid, 2013; Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). And fourth, questioning helps to create classroom interaction. This view is in line with researchers like Nashruddin & Ningtyas (2020). This concurs with several researchers (Hong & Nguyen, 2019; Pham & Hamid, 2013; Sunggingwati & Nguyen, 2013). Teachers use questions to support students in acquiring new knowledge. At the pre-speaking stage, the teachers perceived that questioning strategies are not only for improving students' knowledge and skills such as critical thinking and solving problems but also for increasing classroom interaction. This is in line with Yuliawati et al. (2016) and Shen (2012) study.

Conclusion

This study provides insights into teachers' perceptions of questioning strategies and the reasons for using questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage. Teachers should use three types of questioning strategies so that all students can join in the lesson and show their thinking. Using questioning strategies at the pre-speaking stage arouse prior knowledge and the lesson. Furthermore, classroom interaction is an important issue teacher must be concerned about in teaching. Teachers need to offer opportunities for students to interact by questioning and helping them answer questions during the learning process. Using various questioning strategies promotes students' critical thinking and brainstorming. Therefore, teachers should ask for all types of questioning strategies.

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Biodata

Huynh Nhu is an officer and instructor, at the Center of Excellence in Learning and Resources Innovation, Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. Her research interests include teachers' methodology, teachers' perceptions, active learning, second language acquisition, and curriculum planning, technology in teaching and learning.