

A Descriptive Qualitative Study on Types of Teachers' Questions in Classroom Interaction

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Abstract: Teachers' questions have become a vital role in building good classroom interaction. This study aims to qualitatively describe teachers' questions in building classroom interaction in the teaching and learning process. A qualitative descriptive research design was done by analyzing a video recording and interview with an English classroom teacher who was also one of the participants of this study. A framework used in this study to analyze teachers' questions is display and referential questions and the other three types of questions (confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification request) proposed by Long and Sato. The result revealed that the classroom teacher used five types of questions in building classroom interaction in the teaching and learning process. Other researchers may conduct further research on how students respond to teachers' questions and see more detail about the influence of questioning strategy in motivating students to speak out fully in English.

Keywords: *clarification request; comprehension checks; confirmation checks; display and referential questions; teachers' questions*

Introduction

A question is a sentence that asks us or someone and requires an answer. Simply, a question is any sentence that has an interrogative form or function. While teacher questions, in the classroom setting, teacher questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that expose students to the content elements to be learned (Azerefeqn, 2008). It becomes a crucial part of instruction that allows teachers to monitor students' competence and comprehension and increase thought-provoking discussion (Critelli & Tritapoe, 2010). It has something to do with leading students to acquire certain knowledge. Thus, it can be inferred that the question refers to any idea which requires a response from the listener or audience. In the classroom context, teacher questions are usually used as instructional cues or impetus that impart or transmit content elements to be acquired by students and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it (Cotton, 2010).

Questions are imperative in acquiring knowledge. Azerefeqn (2008) stated that questions are vital instruments for examining new ideas, facts, information, knowledge, and experiences. Having the same tone with this, Brown and Wragg (1993) mentioned that people typically ask questions when they want to know something, and when they already know the answer, they do not need to ask. In communication, questions play a significant role since they function as a learning tool to promote interaction (Ma, 2008). Thus, questions in the language classroom enable the teacher to evaluate and motivate his/her students to attend the lesson attentively.

Richards and Lockharts (1994: 185) justified how vital questions are in teaching, namely: (1) to stimulate and maintain students' interest, (2) to encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson, (3) to enable teachers to check students' understanding, (4) to enable a teacher to elicit particular structures or vocabulary items, and (5) to encourage student's participation in a lesson. Those justifications imply that questions are the heart of all communication between a teacher and learners in the teaching and learning process. It is in line with Hamiloglu (2012), who mentioned that questions are crucial language features and part of the teaching process. Even Ennis (1996: 165) perceived that questions are tools used to develop learners' critical thinking ability. Teachers' questions are the quickest and the easiest techniques for moving students toward real conversation (Nhlapo, 1998).

In giving questions to her/his students, a teacher must expect students' responses, and the students must also be expecting the teacher's feedback. It is like a cycle. Thus, classroom interaction is seen vividly. Classroom interaction is an interaction that happens among participants (teacher-students and student-students) in the classroom. To create a good classroom interaction, everyone must well manage his/her role. The classroom interaction depends on the attitudes and intentions of the students involved and on their interpretation of each other's attitudes.

The classroom interaction can also be seen when learners respond to teachers' questions, teachers' talk, students' response towards other answer/responses, teachers' motivational strategies, feedback from teachers and other students. However, this study focuses only on teachers' questions.

Zaenudin (2015) from University of Mataram did a case study of types of teachers' questions and students' response in SMKN 1 Lombok Barat and reported that the two participants (teachers) used display and referential questions, comprehension check, clarification request, and confirmation check in their classroom interaction.

Through her study, Lesly Narwastindun (2015) reported that it is so strategic when teachers use questions to encourage students to speak up using English in classroom activities. However, this study examines the types of teachers' questions used in classroom interaction.

Literature Review

In the classroom, a teacher asks questions to manage the class, engage students with the content, encourage participation, and increase students' comprehension (Darn, 2008). In line with it, Turney (1973 in Brown and Edmondson) opined that teachers ask questions to arouse interest and curiosity concerning a topic; to focus attention on a particular issue or concept; to develop an active approach to learning; to stimulate learners in giving or delivering their questions or others; to organize a task in such a way to maximize students' learning; to diagnose specific problems inhibiting learner learning; to communicate to the cohort that involvement in the lesson is imperative; to contribute an opportunity for learners to assimilate information; to involve learners in using an inferred cognitive operation; to develop contemplation and criticism by learners on the responses of teacher or students; to provide an opportunity to learn through discussion and to articulate learners' exact interest in ideas and feelings.

Long and Sato (in Ellis, 1994) proposed categories of questions based on whether or not the questioners have already known the answer. The categories are "*display*" and "*referential*" questions.

Display questions refer to questions that questioners (e.g. teachers) know the answer and which are designed to elicit or to display particular structures, for example: “*what’s the opposite of up in English?*” On the contrary, referential questions or “genuine questions” (Thornbury, 1996) refer to the questions that the questioner (e.g. teachers) do not know the answer, and can gain various subjective information, for example: “*why don’t you do your homework?*” Besides display and referential questions, Long and Sato also proposed types of question based on function of the questions. *Comprehension check* (e.g. All right?, OK?) is used to determine whether the other speaker has understood a preceding message, *clarification request* (e.g. what do you mean?) is used to seek assistance in understanding the other speaker’s preceding utterance through questions, and *confirmation check* (e.g. carefully?) is used to seek confirmation of the other’s aforementioned utterance through repetition, with rising intonation, of what was perceived to be all or part of the aforementioned utterance.

Long and Sato’s display and referential questions are used as a framework in analyzing teachers’ questions in this study. As an addition, display questions are also known as close questions, while referential questions are known as open questions (Eng Ho, 2005). Display questions are questions that need a restricted and close answer, while referential questions are questions that require long and complex answers. Furthermore, the research question of this study is “What types of teachers’ questions are used in classroom interaction on the 12th grader students in SMA Kolese Loyola, Semarang?”

Methods

Since this study explores teachers’ questions used in the teaching and learning process in the classroom activity in a natural setting, descriptive qualitative research design is appropriate to be employed in this study.

Video recording and interview with the classroom teacher are then taken to be the instruments of this study. The video is taken from the classroom teacher’s YouTube account, and then transcribed by the researcher into text to be analyzed. The interview was also done on January 12, 2021 to gain more information about teachers’ purpose in giving the questions and also to know students’ response from teachers’ perspective.

There were one English teacher and twenty-nine students in one classroom that were chosen to participate in this study. Both participants are English teachers and her students are 12th graders in SMA Kolese Loyola, Semarang. The aim of this study is to qualitatively describe types of teachers’ questions used in classroom interaction on the 12th grader students in SMA Kolese Loyola, Semarang. Therefore, it is believed that the study will enrich the knowledge of both the readers and the researcher about questioning and its function to motivate students to be involved in classroom interaction.

Findings and Discussion

Based on the instruments of this study; video recording and interview about teachers’ questions used in the classroom, it is found that the classroom teacher used display and referential questions in the teaching and learning process and also three other types of questions based on their functions namely; comprehension checks, clarification request, and confirmation checks as well proposed by Long and Sato (in Ellis, 1994). A clear and detailed finding is clearly seen in the tables below.

Table 1. Teachers’ Questions and the Classification

No	Teachers' Questions	Classification
1	How's life today?	Confirmation Check
2	Really?	Confirmation Check
3	What's happen?	Referential
4	Everyone, in the last meeting we have talked about?	Comprehension check
5	Do you still remember our activity in the last meeting?	Display
6	Do you still remember the jobs that we have described?	Display
7	Do you still remember?	Display
8	what else?	Display
9	Can you just ...yourself and reason why?	Clarification Request
10	So, everyone, is there any information for him?	Display
11	So, what do you think?	Referential
12	Alright, do you agree?	Display
13	Ready for speaking class?	Display
14	Why we need to create job application letter and then what happen or the aspects which appear in the job application letter?	Referential
15	right?	Comprehension Check
16	Can anyone help me?	Display
17	How do you feel after watched the video?	Referential
18	Give me the reason why?	Referential
19	And?	Comprehension Check
20	Any other comments?	Referential
21	Or different opinion?	Referential
22	Feeling happy, enthusiastic, optimistic?	Confirmation Check
23	what do people do to fulfill the needs?	Referential
24	Any one?	Referential
25	How does?	Referential
26	what do people do before getting the job?	Referential
27	What is special skills?	Referential
28	driving motorcycles?	Confirmation Check
29	any left ... guys?	Display
30	how many participants or how many people are there?	Referential
31	Who are they?	Referential
32	Finished?	Confirmation Check
33	which one is better?	Referential
34	Meaning that which one is more complete?	Referential
35	What is it?	Display
36	Hey, where's the person?	Display
37	Excel, can you read?	Display

38	Yuda can you read your reflection?	Display
39	And then next?	Referential
40	Is there any questions related to job interview, job application?	Confirmation Check
41	So, everything has been so clear for you?	Confirmation Check
42	Ok?	Confirmation Check

Table 2. Types of Teachers' Questions used in the Classroom, Frequency, and the Percentage of the Usage

No	Types of Teachers' Questions	Frequency	%
1	Display Questions	13	31
2	Referential Questions	17	41
3	Comprehension Checks	3	7
4	Clarification Request	1	2
5	Confirmation Checks	8	19
	Total	42	100

The tables demonstrate that the most frequent questions used by the classroom teacher as the participant in this study are referential *questions*. Some examples of this kind of question are:

- What do people do to fulfill the needs?*
- What do people do before getting the job?*
- What is special skill?*
- How many participants or how many people are there?*
- Which one is better? Meaning that which one is more complete?*
- How do you feel after watched the video?*
- Give me the reason why?*
- So, what do you think?*
- Why we need to create job application letter and then what happen or the aspects which appear in the job application letter?*

This fact shows that in natural communication in her teaching and learning process, the classroom teacher was not aware that most of her questions referred to “genuine questions” (Thornbury, 1996) or open questions (Eng Ho, 2005) that lead to gaining various subjective information from her students. It is clearly seen also that those questions are questions that require long and more complex answers. Usually these kinds of questions are delivered to dig out more students/learners’ perception on something that is considered imperative and having connection with the instructional material at the day. It is believed that referential questions could increase the quality of interaction.

Paying attention carefully to the video posted in the teacher’s YouTube account and the result of the interview with her, it is clearly seen that most of the referential questions used by the classroom teacher were WH questions, such as: what, which, why, and how. These types of questions seemed to give more chances to the students to not only give a short answer, but also explore more than

merely saying one or two words. This happened because the referential questions, as it is mentioned previously, could increase the quality of classroom interaction. That means students give responses and pay attention to critical thinking, which means that they do not answer as it is.

The second type of question used by the classroom teacher was *display questions*. Some of *display questions* used in her teaching and learning process are:

Do you still remember our activity in the last meeting?

Do you still remember the jobs that we have described?

Do you still remember?

What else?

So, everyone, is there any information for him?

Alright, do you agree?

Ready for speaking class?

Those questions imply that the classroom teacher knew the answer to those questions, yet she used them just to elicit or display certain structures. She knew that her students must be remembering their last meeting activity, the job description, etc., yet she kept questioning them to gain particular structure. It is clearly seen also that those kinds of questions are questions that require restricted and close answers, not long and complex ones, for instance the questions like “*Do you still remember our activity in the last meeting?*” “*Do you still remember the jobs that we have described?*” “*Do you still remember?*” These questions actually could be answered with “yes”, or “no” responses, but in the video, it is found that the response “yes” is always followed by mentioning something else, especially when the teachers uttered “what else?” then the quantity of the interaction is also increased. She said in the interview that when she uttered “what else?” she actually gave chances to other or different students to also be involved in the classroom interaction. When the referential questions could increase the quality of interaction, the display questions could increase the quantity of interaction and facilitate effective feedback.

Confirmation checks are the most third type of questions that are also used by the classroom teacher. Some of them are:

Driving motorcycles?

Finished?

Is there any questions related to job interview, job application?

So, everything has been so clear for you?

Ok?

Those questions are functions to check confirmation on something, in this case, teaching and learning activity, for instance, when the teacher wanted to confirm whether the students have finished the task or not, then she simply asked “finished?” or merely to check whether what she explained was ok for them, then she asked “Ok?” Teachers must ask confirmation checks just to confirm that everything is clear enough for his/her students to avoid misinterpretation or misleading. The confirmation checks are questions with rising intonation at the end. Based on the interview, she did it because she wanted to check and confirm that what she has heard is correct, or not, or misheard. This can also give students a chance to also check whether what they say is correct or incorrect, so they may correct themselves when it is incorrect.

The classroom teacher also used *comprehension checks* just to check her students’ comprehension on the explained material. Some of them are:

*Everyone, in the last meeting we have talked about?
Right?
And?*

It seems that there is a long question, yet there are still short questions such as “Right?” and “And?” The first question reveals that she wanted to check and to know her students’ comprehension about the last meeting material. The second and third imply that she also wanted to check their comprehension about something she mentioned previously. Check it please. “... *some questions follow the video, and you have to answer them all, right?*” Another one is “OK. *That person didn’t get any job. Unemployed. And?*”

The least used question was a *clarification request*. She used it once, “*Can you just ... yourself and reason why?*” This question was unclear to be heard, yet the point was understandable. This question was delivered to somebody who was suddenly knocking the door, and then she asked him to introduce himself and the reason why he came to the class. Based on the interview with the classroom teacher, it is clear enough that he did not belong to the class. It is a fact that clarification request is imperative since it is used to seek assistance in understanding the other speaker’s preceding utterance through questions. Questions like “Do you mean this?” or “could you repeat?” are normal and standard, even appear many times in our teaching and learning process to request clarifying something.

Based on the interview, the classroom teacher said that she never prepared those types of questions before teaching activity, those were uttered and used naturally based on the need and the function. She also admitted that she knew those types of questions based on the function (confirmation checks, comprehension checks and clarification requests), yet she did not know about display and referential questions proposed by Long and Sato. She also added that all questions she used in classroom activity not only to confirm, check students’ comprehension, clarify, but also to build the rapport among her and her students, and students and other students. When they could answer her question, it means that they understand it, and know how to answer and respond to it correctly. So, it is no surprise when we watch the video recording, we see that the classroom activity is really vivid, and students really enjoy the activities.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings and discussion reveal a conclusion that the English classroom teacher used referential and display questions, and also the other three types of questions based on their functions, namely: confirmation checks, comprehension checks, and clarification requests as well. The most frequent use is referential questions since those kinds of questions could increase the quality of interaction in the teaching and learning process.

It is recommended that other researchers may conduct further research on how students respond towards teachers’ questions, and also to see in more detail about the influence of questioning strategy in motivating students to speak out fully in English. It is also recommended to fully record the learning and teaching process by the researcher her/himself while taking some notes about the real things happening in the classroom. The researcher should be the direct observer.

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Appendix

Text Transcription JOB DESCRIPTION

12th Grader
Maria Susana
SMA Kolese Loyola, Semarang

Teacher = T

Students = SS

Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, Student 4 etc = S1, S2, S3, S4 etc.

Other Students = OS

T : Hello everyone

SS : Helloooo, Good morning

T : Good morning. How's life today?

SS : It's really

S1 : It's hot

T : Really? It's hot. You said it's hot. What's happen?

S2 : I'm hot

(Everybody laughs)

T : You're feeling hot today, and then I'm sure that you're hot too.... Everyone, in the last meeting we have talked about?.....

SS : Jobs Application

T : Do you still remember our activity in the last meeting?

SS : Yes

OS : Oh yes

S3 : Describing Jobs

T : Describe the jobs. Do you still remember the jobs that we have described?

SS : Yes ...

T : Do you still remember? The first one is designer, and then ..., ..., what else?

SS : (Answer, mention one by one)

T : Wait a second. Someone is coming

S4 : Morning

T : Welcome here (laugh) Can you just ...yourself and reason why?

S4 : (Give reason why he came late)

T : So, everyone, is there any information for him?

SS : Nooo

T : No information

S4 : (Still explains)

T : Yeah, you may ask them because they cannot speak Bahasa. (Everyone laughs). Come on we're out of time

S4 : (Keep explaining something)

(Students are talking with friends but still in control)

T : Alright just forget him. (while showing slides to the students). First meeting we have talked about job application and the description. It's journalist. So, what do you think? Do you agree with the job description of the journalist? Can you read clearly, yes? Alright, maybe someone will read the job description for us please, a journalist.

S5 : (Read it)

T : Alright, do you agree?

- SS : Yes
 T : Alright, next..
 (S5 keeps reading the job's description of the journalist written in the slides).
 T : So, you must be trusted..... Ready for speaking class?
 SS : Yes.. No... (some yes, some no)
 T : (While showing the next slides) ...Why we need to create job application letter and then what happen or the aspects which appear in the job application letter? And the next one....
 S5 : (keeps reading ...)
 T : Alright everyone we are going to practice job interview for today, the next one..
 S5 : (Keeps reading...)
 T : Yeah, so actually all activities are going to be done in pairs. OK. Next one, ...pay attention that ... to the video because there are some questions are follows the video, and you have to answer all, right? Can anyone help me? (someone turn off the light, everyone laughs). Ok everyone, take a look yah the video...

(the video is played).

- T : Alright. So everyone, How do you feel after watched the video?
 S6 : Sad.
 T : Why you are sad. Give me the reason why?
 S6 : that person didn't get any job.
 T : OK. That person didn't get any job. Unemployed. And?
 S6 : He used drugs, drink, and suicide.
 T : Alright. Any other comments? Or different opinion? Feeling afraid for example right now because you are now in the 12 grade. Feeling happy, enthusiastic, optimistic? In order to check whether you follow...or not, I'm going to give you some questions. There are 5 oh sorry 4 questions the first one, what do people do to fulfill the needs? Any one? Yes.
 (pointing to a student who raises the hand)
 S7 : Working.
 T : Yes. Working. Working to earn some money. Thank you. Next. Question number 2. How does?
 S8 : Maschine will change a the.....
 T : Machine and robots will change our role as ...ok, next one, chaos, corruption everywhere...the last one, what do people do before getting the job?
 S9 : Job interview.
 T : (LAUGHING) We are having a job interview. Of course. How come a company accepts you if you haven't got any job interview? Thank you. The next one. Still a video. We are going to know the process of having a job interview. Maybe after this, anyone will have a job interview with some companies. That's why you can learn from this video. Lamp ... (the second video is played)

After playing the video...

- T : special skills. What are special skills? Your special skills.
 S9 : driving motorcycles?
 (everybody laughs) oh drawing...

(Teacher gives the handouts, a dialogue to students) any left ... guys? Ok. In the first dialogue, how many participants or how many people are there?

SS : TWO.

T : TWO. Alright. Who are they?

SS : The interviewer and Ms. Anderson.

T : ALRIGHT. The interviewer and Ms. Anderson. So, I need you to read by yourself first.....Finished? Yes. ...

(Teacher guides the students to do the exercise in the first dialogue, and after that moves to the second dialogue and then doing the same activity as previous one)

T : So, if you have to compare dialogue 1 and dialogue 2, which one is better? Meaning which one is more complete?

S : Dialogue 1

T : Dialogue 1. So the best example is dialogue 1. But actually you still need to add something in dialogue 1. What is it?

SS : Special skills

T : Special skills. So guys, with your partner, I need you to practice dialogue 1. So I'll give you 3 minutes to please read with your partner, and later I will choose some couples to come in front. Two minutes to prepare. (after some minutes) ok everyone. We're going to start. Hey, where's the person? (a couple of students practice by reading the conversation of job interview)

(After that, the teacher asks her students to create their own dialogue in 10 minutes, and gives some explanations to guide them. Another group practices their dialogue of job interview)

T : Great. Thank you. You may have a sit....

Next go to self-reflection. I need you to answer honestly, uhmmmm Excel, can you read?..... (teacher gives time to students to do self-reflection by guiding them to fulfill it). Ok, so I'm going to hear from Yuda. Yuda can you read your reflection? Excuse me everyone, listen to Yuda ... (Yuda reads his reflection).. ok. And then next? (yuda continues reading his reflection till finished)...Esia, please read your reflection. (Esia reads her reflection).. ok, so everyone thank you for today. Is there any questions related to job interview, job application? So, everything has been so clear for you? Yah..don't forget to do your homework. After that we're going to have the next practice, next week. Ok? So thank you for today, thank you for coming, I'll see next week, bye-bye.

SS : Thank you. Bye-bye.