

# EFFECTIVE USE OF QUESTIONING BEHAVIORS TO TRIGGER DYNAMIC CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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**Abstract:** It has been generally asserted that communicative interaction which involves effective input-output activities plays a vital role in EFL classroom. Fruitful communication will be only achieved if students, as the core element of learning sources, involve actively in the process of teaching-learning. Engaging students in productive and meaningful interaction help them to notice comprehensible language input and provide them a wide range of opportunities to produce output. To reinforce classroom communication, questioning is frequently occupied by teachers to control interaction and deliver the instruction. In this vein, the use of effective questioning is essential to encourage students' active participation in joining the lesson, allow them to express their thoughts and explanations, and keep them alert on task during class time. However, teachers should be aware in structuring questioning behaviors in classroom communication on the way that these should be applicable to handle students' behaviors and assist them in learning optimally. In accord to this, this article attempts to discuss four key issues: (1) classroom interaction in EFL, (2) the roles of questioning in language learning, (3) effective questioning strategies to assist fruitful interaction and (4) the use of effective language in questioning practices.

**Keywords:** questioning behavior, teacher language, interaction

## Introduction

In most EFL context in Indonesia, classroom is regarded as the primary place where students are mainly engaged and exposed to the target language through particular interaction. It cannot be denied that the teacher takes the major role as the learning source that students expect to communicate with. As the target language has no favorable condition to be practiced outside the classroom, student

exposure to the language in the classroom is crucial issue to notice. In this vein, the teacher should be able to help students learn to talk and be encouraged to make use of the target language during classroom interaction. Practicing and applying the language for communication has a considerable importance to the improvement of learning and enhancing their communicative competence.

Additionally, in order to promote dynamic classroom communication, questioning is one of the most common techniques used by the teacher and serves as the principal way in which he can control classroom interaction as it is noted by Richards & Lockhart (1996). In accord to this, Banbrook and Skehan (1989) confirm that questionings can be used to let learners keep taking part in the classroom discourse and even modify it so that the language will be more comprehensible. In similar vein, admitting the significant role of the teacher's questioning in creating an interactive language classroom, Brown (2007) suggests that the teacher is inclined to enhance his role as an initiator of interaction to develop a repertoire of questioning strategies. Moreover, students' language proficiency can be improved through the interaction between the teacher and the students and among the students themselves (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). In short, the use of appropriate questioning in the classroom is widely agreed to promote learning as it maximizes the input learners obtain and provide crucial contribution for the success of students' language learning.

Despite the fact that questioning provides great advantage in language learning, however, effective questioning practices in EFL classrooms is not a simply task to do. Reflecting upon my teaching practice in the classroom, for instance, I mostly encountered problematic challenges that my students tended to be passive to take part in classroom interaction I arranged although I had occupied various strategies of active learning. It was quite often that my students felt reluctant, afraid, or embarrassed to response my questions. I wondered that even though I had attempted to encourage them to involve actively in question-answer activities and provide them with different type of questions, unfortunately most of them showed little motivation to engage with and I still receive little response from

them as well. In addition to this case, I try to encourage them to speak in such ways and guide them to respond my questions, the students still keep silent.

In accordance to the above case, I realized that occupying effective questioning behaviors require adequate knowledge of the types of questions, strategies and the art of questioning skills as it is stated by Tolfeson (1989). It is suggested that the teacher should have self-awareness on using effective questioning strategy that is fitted with the students' needs in learning. In relation to this, this article attempts to discuss several issues on occupying effective questioning behaviors to assist communicative interaction in the classroom. Firstly, the nature of classroom interaction in language learning is highlighted. Additionally, the discussion is preceded with the roles of questioning in language learning, effective questioning strategies to assist fruitful interaction, and the use of effective language in questioning practices consecutively. It is expected that this article sheds crucial light on the nature of questioning practices in language learning, and in turn it may be a useful yardstick for the implementation of teacher's effective questioning strategy and classroom language to trigger dynamic interaction.

### **Classroom Interaction in EFL**

It is generally known that most of researches in the field of EFL/ESL have revealed to a great extent the importance of classroom interaction that involves both input and output (Allwright, 1984; Long, 1983; Swain 1985). Classroom instruction, both in the form of meaningful interaction and in the form of linguistic rules, may influence the students' level of acquisition (Ellis, 1985). This statement shows that kind of interaction that occurs in the classrooms is greatly influenced by the teacher in which the outcome of learning may depend on the way how he/she occupies the language and the type of interactions occurring in the classroom.

Krashen (1985) confirms that learning only takes place by means of a learner's access to comprehensible input. From this statement, it is believed that input plays a crucial role to the students' language development that comprehensive

and right quantity input is the central concern that learners are able to learn language. In other word, the language occupied by the teacher in classroom instruction affects the language produced by the learners, the interaction generated, and hence the kind of learning that takes place. It is suggested that natural communicative input should be created in order that students can receive adequate input that is appropriate for his/her current stage of linguistic competence. In this notion, two-way interaction is a particularly good way of providing comprehensible input because it enables the students to obtain additional contextual information and optimally adjusted input when meaning has to be negotiated because of communication problems.

On the other hand, while exposure to comprehensible input is necessary, it alone does not guarantee the acquisition to occur (Long and Sato, 1983). They have given prestige to comprehensible input as what is proposed by Krashen, but they emphasize more on two-way interaction, conversational adjustments as a result of negotiation and how negotiation can make the input more comprehensible. In this notion, students should be provided with a wide range of opportunity to negotiate meaning when communication breaks down. This is because negotiation trigger student's awareness of those language features which do not match the standard of the target language (TL) and the parts that are still beyond them (Gass, 1997).

Meanwhile, Swain (1995) encompasses that in addition to comprehensible input, learners' output should not be obeyed. In accord to this statement, it is recommended that the teacher should provide ample output activities because there are at least three important contributions to make in enabling second language learning. Unlike reception-based theories represented by Krashen and Long, Swain's theories have credited language development to learners' attempts at actually producing the target language. Teacher's language can encourage students to pay attention to not only semantic processing of the language but also syntactic processing. Besides, the process of using the target language is also the process for learners to test their hypotheses about it. In addition, it plays a metalinguistic function: learners use language to reflect upon their language use.

Drawing upon the theories above, it can be underlined that each reveals the effects of different types of classroom interaction on EFL/ESL from different point of views. In one hand, the theorists have accorded importance to comprehensible meaning-focused exposure to the target language and on the other hand, the theorists have given significance to learners' active negotiation and their production of comprehensible output. Despite different perspectives, they all point out the importance of interaction and negotiation in facilitating students' second language acquisition. For this, it is suggested that language teachers should ensure that the input is comprehensible, make every effort to be comprehended by negotiating meaning, give students ample practice in actually using the target language for communicative purposes, provide opportunities for learners to participate in a wide array of communicative contexts which allow their full performance of language functions.

### **The Roles of Questioning in Language Learning**

Generally, Gabrielatos (1997) notes that effective questioning will enable the teacher to gain an insight into students' level of understanding, develop the communication skills of students, extend students' analytical skills, develop critical thinking skills, develop a relationship with your students, provide recognition and reward to students and promote an environment in which students learn actively. In particular, the teacher questions in the classroom can be explained by the specific functions they perform. These functions can be categorized into three main areas: diagnostic, instructional, and motivational (Donald & Eggen, 1989).

As a diagnostic tool, classroom questions allow the teacher to glimpse into the minds of students to find out not only what they know or don't know but also how they think about a topic. The teacher can assess the current state of student thinking, identifying not only what students know but also gaps and misconceptions through strategic questioning.

The second important function that questions perform is instructional. The instructional function focuses on the role that questions play in helping students

learn new material and integrate it with the old one. Questions provide the practice and feedback essential for the development. Questions alert students to the information in a lesson. Questions are also valuable in the learning of integrated bodies of knowledge. Toward this goal, questions can be used to review previously learned material to establish a knowledge base for the new material to be learned. In addition, as the new material is being developed, questions can be used to clarify relationships within the content being discussed.

The last function that classroom questions perform is motivational. Through questions teachers can engage students actively in the lesson at hand, challenging their thinking and posing problems for them to consider. From a lesson perspective, a question at the beginning can be used to capture students' attention and provide a focus for the lesson. In addition, frequent and periodic questions can encourage active participation and provide opportunities in the lesson for continued student involvement. Research in this area shows student on-task behaviors are highest during teacher-led questioning sessions. Finally, at the individual level, questions can be used to draw wandering students back into the lesson or to provide an opportunity for one student to shine.

### **Effective Questioning Strategies to Assist Fruitful Interaction**

Developing appropriate questioning techniques is an important part of teaching and assessing students' learning. Brown (2007) suggests that the teacher is inclined to enhance his role as an initiator of interaction to develop a repertoire of questioning strategies. It is suggested that the teacher should be able to identify the types of questions asked, why he occupies that sort of questions, and what techniques are utilized to improve the questioning that occurs in the classrooms. In doing so, the teacher is expected to develop students' questioning skills and employ different types of questions in ESL Classrooms in order to improve the learning opportunities for the class, motivate students to talk more, and provide responses. If questionings are properly handled and employed, they may facilitate interaction and bring about the necessary changes in the students language proficiency.

Allwright and Bailey (1991:123) offer some techniques that can be employed by the teacher to promote sustainable interaction in the classroom, such as by employing comprehension checks, confirmation checks and clarification request. The teacher is suggested to employ comprehension check in question-answer activities to find out whether the students understand what has been discussed or not. Moreover, clarification request may also be used as a request for further information or help with understanding something the teacher has previously said. Meanwhile a confirmation check is that the teacher queries about whether or not the students understand his correct meaning.

In accord to creating conducive interaction in the classroom, McComas and Abraham (1995) suggest the teacher to pay attention on these basic communication skills as follows: physical setting, teacher's attitude, hints for calling on students to maximize student participation, wait-time after asking questions, handling student responses to questions and responding to students' questions. The teacher needs to be aware of the acoustics of the room and make sure that all students can hear the teacher or students' voices. Besides, it is expected that he can listen attentively to the students' response, encourage them to speak, and help them focus the question-answer by maintaining eye contact or using nonverbal gestures. In order to maximize students' participation, there are several ways that teachers should do, for instances, asking questions of the entire class and trying to encourage all students to participate, calling students by their names as opposed to pointing in their general direction, making an attempt to randomly select students to respond, trying to avoid repeating all student responses and anticipate the students who dominate in class and giving students a wide range of opportunity to ask questions.

Another factor that might be possibly to have powerful effects on student participation is choosing appropriate questioning strategies, for instances, the use of probing, redirecting, and reinforcement when the students respond or ask questions. The teacher can occupy probing questions when he finds that the student's response is vague, the language is unclear due to encounter many grammatical errors, or the reply needs more detail exploration. In this regard, the use of probing question is

essential to be occupied to check for the completeness or clarity of the information provided and help students to analyze their own initial reasons critically. Probing question can be employed when the students' answer is superficial to urge them explore or support the answer they provide so as to the ideas given are more comprehensible.

The important of probing technique is in line with McComas and Abraham's idea (1995) who state that probes can be used to: (a) analyze a student's statement, make a student aware of underlying assumptions, or justify or evaluate a statement, (b) help students deduce relationships. Instructors may ask student to judge the implications of their statements or to compare and contrast concepts, and (c) have students clarify or elaborate on their comments by asking for more information. In sum, it is possible to say that probing strategy is one of the lecturer's ways that takes essential role in assisting students to engage in more productive learning, helping them to elaborate their ideas and increase critical thinking, and also creating genuine communication in the classroom.

Another effective questioning behavior is redirection strategy. This strategy can be occupied in classroom questioning by allowing the student to add information or correct another student's response. The use of redirection strategy provides positive contributions in which the teacher can facilitate students to participate more in learning English. This technique can facilitate them to share and receive information or experience from different point of view, give suggestion or rejection each other, help them comprehend the text or the content of discussion and involve them in more productive discussion. In short, when this technique is employed in the process of question-answer, the teacher is able to get the students focus on the lesson and participate actively in the classroom interaction.

Additionally, reinforcement strategy is necessarily undertaken by the teacher in order to get the students actively engage in such productive and communicative interaction in the classroom. Positive and appropriate reinforcement provides motivation for students to be more active in future participation. It is possibly to say that students are motivated in learning when their work or



performance is, even little, rewarded. The teacher can use reinforcement to encourage students engage in classroom communication by responding or giving opinions, acknowledge the student's performance and help them focus on the task. It is suggested that the use of encouragement is not merely directed to get the correct answer from the students, but it should be occupied to dig the students' understanding about the topic, focus their attention toward the lesson, encourage them to take part more in the lesson as well as treat students' misbehavior in order to catch their attention, manage the lesson, and create conducive atmosphere.

In accordance to the use of reinforcement strategy in classroom questioning, McComas and Abraham (1995) suggest some practical ways. They state that the type of reinforcement provided should be determined by the correctness of the answer and the number of times a student has responded. If a student gives an answer which is off target or incorrect, the lecturer may want to briefly acknowledge the response but not spend much time on it and then move to the correct response. Beside that, the lecturer may want to provide a student who has never responded in class with more reinforcement than someone who responds often. It is suggested to vary reinforcement techniques between various verbal statements and nonverbal reactions and avoid the overuse of reinforcement in the classroom by overly praising every student comment.

### **The Use of Effective Language in Questioning Practices**

The effective use of communication skills by the teacher is the key factor to the development of positive interaction in the classroom. The use of effective language in guiding questions is able to invite students' participation in learning and encourage them to share ideas to others. Nunan (1989) states that teacher's language is crucially important, not only for the organization of the classroom but also for the processes of acquisition. The use of effective language plays important role for the organization and management of the classroom since the language that the teacher occupies impact on the success or fail in implementing their teaching plans. Additionally, Cullent (1998) suggests the teacher to pay attention not only on

how much teacher talk should be occupied but also on how effectively it is able to facilitate learning and promote communicative interaction in the classroom, for instances, the kinds of questions they ask, the speech modifications they make when talking to the students, or the way they react to student errors.

Since not all teacher talks are appropriately effective and communicative in the classroom context, this article has endeavored to highlight some language features that belong to effective talk. As it is noted by Thornbury (1996:281-282), the characteristics of the language used by teacher which are considered as being communicative are the use of referential questions, content feedback, speech modifications and negotiation of meaning. The criteria of communicative classroom interaction above are of course hard to implement in the teaching practice. For instance, the use of exclusive display questions and form-focused feedback are still dominant in the process of learning. On the context of teaching English at secondary level in Indonesia, it cannot be denied that commonly teachers still concern on the use of exclusive or excessive use of display questions that are far from being called communicative since it cannot result in genuine communication. Besides, the feedback provided by teachers is mainly focusing on form in which teachers only show interest in the correct formation of the students' contribution. This matter must be one of crucial aspects that cause the students reluctant in learning, passive in joining the lesson, have less confidence and self-reliance, and have bad attitude toward teacher talk. The absence of those criteria may result in less or uncommunicative interaction in the classroom.

It is widely accepted that the use of referential question can facilitate the students in question-answer more dynamically and invite them to reply the teacher question as well as improve their motivation to always use the target language as their own. Furthermore, the genuine conversation will happen when the teacher endeavors to use referential question. In other hand, the students attempt to participate in the discussion by asking or replying questions, offering suggestions, or giving additional information voluntarily. Besides, the use of referential questions can involve the students in more negotiation of meaning between the

teacher with students or among the students themselves. The existence of negotiation of meaning is better able to promote target language usage and make classroom interaction more communicative. In other words, the use of referential questions does not only arouse the students' interests but also help them develop their output and communicative ability in learning.

In addition, the use of content feedback given by the teacher provides positive effects on the students' subsequent performance. Providing feedback to students focusing on the content is one of important aspects of the teacher ways to create communicative teaching. As it is stated by Cook (2001) that this kind of feedback is regarded as the teachers' evaluation of the student response to help them improve the fluency of their speaking. This can set up interactive communication, help students to be more aware to get involved in the classroom discussion, and facilitate them to be more confidence in conveying the ideas.

The other type of lecturer's effective language is the use of speech modification. Commonly, there are some speech modifications occurred during the question-answer process. The most dominant modifications made by the teacher are such as the use of modified pronunciation, pauses, and self repetition. Modified pronunciation is sometimes occupied by emphasizing the speech by raising the intonation, volume, or speed. Besides, speech modifications are also applied in the form of pauses and wait time. The use of pause provides the students a wide range of opportunities to process the input, help them reduce cognitive load, and comprehend the content or topic being discussed. Meanwhile, the use of appropriate wait time enables students to engage more in the classroom questioning as students are better able to comprehend the question, consider the available information, formulate an answer and provide optimal response.

### **Concluding Remark**

The use of appropriate and effective questioning techniques is essential to trigger dynamic classroom interaction. It takes essential role to assist students use the target language and engage in productive classroom interaction. The teacher

should be aware in structuring questioning behaviors in classroom communication on the way that these should be applicable to handle students' behaviors and assist them in learning optimally.

The use of appropriate questioning strategies, for instances probing, is noticeably able to help students recall their previous knowledge or experience, assist them to analyze their own initial reasons critically, check for the completeness or clarity of the information provided and handle students' superficial responses. Besides, the use of redirection strategy provides students with wide range of opportunity to practice their language, focus on the lesson, and participate actively in the classroom interaction. Meanwhile, the use of reinforcement is better able to encourage students engage actively in classroom communication, acknowledge the student's performance, help them focus on the task and create conducive learning atmosphere.

On the other side, the effective use of communication skills during question-answer is also the key factor to the development of positive interaction in the classroom. Some communicative features of talk should be utilized well to stimulate students to practice on delivering ideas to others, encourage them to use the target language, and get the students' participation and performance in the classroom. The teacher can make a use of effective language during question-answer by occupying referential question to probe students' ideas, providing feedback focused on the content, and modifying the speech. In sum, it is expected that the teacher should be able to incorporate various questioning strategies optimally and occupy effective classroom language in questioning behaviors to trigger dynamic interaction in the classroom.

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**Biodata**

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