

QUESTIONS AND QUESTIONING SKILLS IN ELT

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Abstract: Question and questioning skill have a very important role to play in motivating students to learn. Besides, questioning is a very special term in English language teaching (ELT) because it is one of the basic skills of teaching, one of the components of scientific approach that a teacher applies in the main or core activities in teaching and learning process, and one of the components of the CTL approach that a teacher also applies in ELT. Therefore, it is believed that this topic is useful for English teachers because they can improve their comprehension and then implement their experience and knowledge in the field. In addition, this paper describes about the term of question, types of question, question categories or levels of question, purposes of questions, and wait time. It is expected this paper is useful to improve English teachers' knowledge and skill, and they can use this theoretical and practical knowledge to promote the participation of their students to be active in ELT in the classroom.

Key words: *questions, questioning skills, and question levels or categories*

English teachers will always ask questions in teaching learning process as one of the basic skills of teaching, . They ask questions for several reasons namely to motivate students to study, to give chance for their students to practice using English language, to know whether their students understand or not, and to know how their students express their opinions or ideas. What type of questions they use depends on their students' proficiency levels, objectives of the teaching and learning, and the content of the materials. In the 2013 curriculum, teachers are suggested to apply scientific approach in the main or core activities in teaching learning process which include observing, questioning,

associating, experimenting, and networking.

A number of studies have been conducted on teacher questioning beginning from Socrates of ancient Greece and Confucius of ancient China, who were in the same period of time and both brought forward the application of teacher questioning. As time went by, until 1912 R, Stevens, the American scholar firstly made a systematic study on teacher's questioning and found that teacher's questioning as well as student's answering occupied 80% of the class time. And accordingly, teacher's questioning was regarded as the core effective teaching (Chuanbao, 1997 as quoted by Xu, 2011).

From the early 20th-century to the early 1960s, studies were focused on how to promote students' study by teacher questioning; during the period of later 1960s to early 1970s, the focus was changed into how to ask questions properly inserting texts; since 1970s, studies on teacher's questioning have come into popularity and the focus ranges from *classifications* (Barnes, 1969, 1976 in Ellis, 1999; Long & Sato, 1983), *functions of teachers' questions* (Kauchak & Eggen, 1989; Richards & Lockhart, 2000), *principles of questioning* (Betts, 1991; Cole & Chan, 1994; Orstein, 1995, in Li Min, 2006) to teacher training on classroom questioning (Long & Crookes, 1987, in Ellis, 1999). Kerry (2002) states that types of questions teachers formulate and use in a classroom lead to students' learning achievement. As Brown and Wragg (1993) highlight, teachers usually ask questions to check learners' knowledge rather than because they are seeking new information. This contrasts with the use of questions in real-life. As described by Peacock (1990), teachers also ask questions to activate learners' schematic knowledge about the topic being discussed and to provoke them to use their thinking skills.

Teachers can also use information, yes/no, and alternative questions in the forms or types of display or referential questions. According to Long and Sato (1983), display questions are used more frequently than referential questions. In addition to this finding, Brock (1986) suggested that teachers should be trained to increase the number of referential questions they ask when teaching learning process takes place. There are at least five main purposes of writing this paper namely: to define

question and questioning technique, to describe types of questions, to describe purposes of questions, to describe levels of questions or question categories, and to describe wait-time

QUESTION AND QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

In general, question can be defined as the form of the sentence which is used to gain information needed. However, definition of question will vary from one person to another as described in this section. Mills *et al* (1998, p.1161), for example, describe question as 'a sentence or phrase used to find out information'. According to Aik and Hui (1999, p.235), a question refers to 'an utterance which asks for an answer'.

Furthermore, Hanks (1983:197) states a question as 'a form of words addressed to a person in order to elicit information or evoke a response'. Then, Sinclair (1994:785) defines a question as 'something which a person says or writes in order to ask another person about something'. Hornby (1995, p.952) describes a question that 'asks for information'. A more complete definition is given by Richard, Platt and Platt (1992). They define a question as a sentence which is addressed to a listener/reader and asks for an expression of fact, opinion, belief, etc. In English, questions may be formed by the use of a question word or by the use of an auxiliary in the first position in a sentence, or through the use of intonation.

From the definition of a question described earlier, it can be inferred that in asking questions, there must be at least two persons: a person who asks (speaker/writer), and a

person who answers the question (listener/reader). In the context of teaching learning process, a question refers to an utterance, a sentence or a phrase expressed or addressed by a person (usually a teacher) to another person (a student or a learner) in order to get information, to know his opinion, belief, etc. It is true that questions can be addressed by a teacher or a student. However, this paper limits to the questions used by teachers, particularly English teachers.

In addition to question, Ragawanti (2009) makes a distinction between question and questioning. Question according to her can be classified based on the form, and content. Questions based on the form can be distinguished into *convergent* and *divergent* questions. Convergent questions refer to questions which provide one right or wrong answer. On the other hand, divergent questions can provide more than one correct answer which can be also called *open questions*. Questions based on content can be classified from low level questions to high level questions. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, *knowledge* and *comprehension* questions are categorized into low level questions, and *application*, *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation* questions are categorized into high level questions. In relation to questioning, she defines it as the technique of asking questions, then known as questioning technique. Richard, Platt and Platt (1992:303), furthermore, describe questioning techniques as different procedure that teachers use in asking questions and different kinds of questions they ask.

TYPES OF QUESTIONS

There are several ways of classifying questions. An important

distinction is that between display and referential questions (Tsui, 1995). Display questions as defined by Thornbury (1996) are those for which the teacher knows the answer in advance, and they are used to check learners' knowledge. Ellis (1994, p.700) defines the display question as "one designed to test whether the addressee has knowledge of a particular fact or can use a particular linguistic item correctly". Lightbown and Spada (1999) note that teachers ask display questions not because they are interested in the answer, but because they want to get their learners to display their knowledge of the language.

Referential questions, on the other hand, as defined by Lightbown and Spada (1999), are genuine questions for which the asker does not know the answer. Research on classroom discourse has constantly found that the majority of teachers' questions are display questions (See, for example, Seedhouse 1996). Nunan and Lamb (1996, p.88) define referential questions as "those to which the asker does not know the answer". Ellis (1994, p.721) also explains that these are questions which are "genuinely information-seeking". Lynch (1996) argues that teachers should ask referential questions because (a) learners tend to give longer answers than they do to display questions and (b) learners will be less willing to answer questions if their purpose is always to test knowledge. Chaudron (1990), on the hand, states that display questions which tend to be closed can increase student productivity while, referential questions which tend to be open and general questions can increase meaningful communication between teacher and learner.

Another common way of classifying questions is into open and closed questions. According to Peacock (1990) open questions are those where a variety of responses are acceptable, and the questioner does not expect a particular answer. Nunan and Lamb (1996, p.84) describe open questions as “those that encourage extended student responses”. Ellis (1994, p.695) suggests that in open questions the teacher does not have a particular answer in mind and different responses are possible. He also mentions that some questions seem to be open, but in fact they are closed (these can be called ‘pseudo-questions’).

Closed questions, on the other hand, are those which require a single word or a brief response for which there is a single correct answer. Questions can also be classified in terms of their form. There are *yes/no* questions, *wh-* questions, and *either/or* questions, and each can have an effect on the type of response learners are able to produce. Gap-filling questions are those where the teacher provides the first part of the answer and the learners.

Furthermore, Eldredge (2000) divides questions into three main types; they are prediction questions, intervention questions, and exploration questions. The first type of questions seeks to predict an outcome under specific predefined circumstances. Intervention questions seek to address foreground questions by comparing two or more actions in terms of how “successful” they are in attaining intended goals or outcomes. Exploration questions as the last type of questions seek to answer question “why”.

PURPOSES OF QUESTIONS

Teachers know that they ask their students questions for several purposes. Levin and Nolan (2004), for instance, state that teachers ask their students questions “to assess readiness for new learning, to create interest and motivation in learning, to make concept more precise, to check students understanding of the material, to redirect off-task students to more positive behavior, and to create the moderate amount of tension that enhances learning.”

As Brown & Wragg (1993) highlight, teachers usually ask questions to check learners’ knowledge rather than because they are seeking new information. In addition, Peacock (1990) states that teachers ask questions to activate learners’ schematic knowledge about the topic being discussed and to provoke them to use their thinking skills.

Then, Brown and Wragg (1993: 4) list several purposes of questions, such as “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 pupils to ask questions of themselves and others.”

However, with reference to language teaching, Nunan and Lamb (1996) state that teachers ask questions mainly to check learners’ understanding, to elicit information and to control their classrooms. Peacock (1990: 128) says that “more often than not teachers appear to ask questions either to find out what pupils do or do not know and understand, or to remind them about work completed in a previous lesson, or perhaps to challenge, stimulate and develop their thinking”. Brualdi (1998) add that teachers ask questions for several

purposes. They ask questions to keep their learners involved during lessons, to express their ideas and thoughts, to enable learners to hear different explanations of the material, and to help teachers to evaluate their learners' learning and revise their lessons when necessary.

Usman (1999) states that a good question has at least five positive impacts to students namely to improve students' participation in teaching learning activities, to encourage interest and eagerness of students, to develop learning pattern and student active learning, to guide student thinking process to determine good answer, and to attract students' attention toward the materials being taught.

Kemendikbud (2013) points out that when teachers ask their students questions, their questions should be short and clear, inspire the answer, have focus, probe students' critical thinking, have an opportunity for students to think before they answer the question, stimulate and develop students' thinking ability, and improve interaction process in teaching learning process in the classroom.

LEVELS OF QUESTIONS OR QUESTION CATEGORIES

Questions are often divided into two categories: lower-level and higher-level questions. Lower-level questions are those asked at the knowledge, comprehension, and simple application levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

Based on Bloom's taxonomy, Nasir and Abdul Majid Khan, (2006) classified questions into four levels or categories namely: factual, empirical, productive and evaluative as can be seen on Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Questions based on Category, Bloom's Taxonomy and Type of Thinking

Category	Bloom's Taxonomy	Type of Thinking
Factual	Knowledge Comprehension	Identification and recall previous learned information, organization and selection of facts and ideas
Empirical	Application Analysis	Use of facts, rules and principles Separation of a whole into its component parts
Productive	Synthesis	Combination of ideas to form a new whole
Evaluative	Evaluation	Development of opinions judgments, decisions

Factual Questions . In knowledge or comprehension questions, students are asked to simply recall information. Here are the examples that can be used: *Define....* , *What did the text say? Who was ...?* Factual questions are believed to be the mostly used type of questions by the teacher. Examples of these questions are What is the meaning of article? What's going on in that listening? You know 'parking lot'?

Empirical Questions. In these types of questions which refer to application or analysis questions, students integrate or analyze given or recalled information as shown in these examples: *Compare ... with* , *Explain in your words....* . A few numbers of these questions can be used by the teacher. Other examples of these questions are What is a financial problem? Can you use this word in a sentence?

Productive Questions. In productive questions, learners think creatively and imaginatively and produce something unique as can be seen in

these examples: *What will life be ...? What's good name for ...? Why do you use proverbs?* The following are some examples of the productive questions that can be used by the teacher in the classroom: What do proverbs tell us? What rules are there in a library? What about an art museum?

Evaluative Questions. In evaluative questions, students make judgments or express value as shown in these examples: *Which method is the most suitable in teaching speaking skill? What do you favor ...? Who is the best ...?* In some cases, teacher can provide the learners with a hypothetical situation and ask them about what they will do in that particular situation. Examples are as follows:

You forget your best friend's birthday. What would you do?

If someone gives some ugly present to you, what would you do?

(Are there) any other suggestions?

What else can you do?

A person who was cheating got a higher mark than you. What would you do?

You have found a diamond ring. What would you do?

As can be seen in Table 1, knowledge and comprehension questions can be categorized into lower question levels or lower cognitive questions, while application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation can be grouped into higher question levels or higher cognitive questions. Lower cognitive questions are also more effective when the goal is to impart factual knowledge and commit it to memory. In higher question levels, students also give responses at higher levels.

The following is the conceptual framework taken from Bloom's taxonomy (1956). It can be inferred from the conceptual framework that questions can be grouped into two types: low level cognitive questions

(LLCQs) which include knowledge and comprehension, and high level cognitive questions (HLCQs) which include application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The two different levels of cognitive questions can be in the form of display questions or in the form of referential questions. Then, the forms of the questions can be used with or without the use of question words. Questions without the use of the question words are known as yes/no questions, while questions with the use of question words are called information questions. Then the following table describes the competence, skills demonstrated and question cues of the six categories as defined by Bloom (1956).

Table2.
Question Categories
(Bloom's Taxonomy)

Competence	Skills Demonstrated	Question Cues
Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation and recall of information • knowledge of dates, events, places • knowledge of major ideas • mastery of subject matter 	arrange, count, collect, define, describe, duplicate, examine, identify, know, label, list, locate, match, memorize, name, order, quote, recite, recognize, recount, relate, recall, repeat, reproduce, show, state, tabulate, tell, underline, who, when, where, etc.
Comprehension (understanding)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding information • grasp meaning 	associate, classify, contrast, describe, differentiate,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • translate knowledge • interpret facts, compare, contrast • order, group, infer causes • predict consequences 	<p>discuss, distinguish, estimate, explain, express, extend, identify, indicate, locate, predict, recognize, report, restate, review, select, summarize, translate</p>		<p>experiment, explain, infer, investigate, order, point out, question, select, separate, test</p>
Application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use information • use methods, concepts, theories in new situation • solve problems using required skills or knowledge 	<p>apply, calculate, change, choose, classify, complete, compute, demonstrate, develop, discover, dramatize, employ, examine, experiment, implement, illustrate, interpret, modify, operate, practice, relate, schedule, show, sketch, solve, use, utilize, write</p>	Synthesis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use old ideas to create new ones • generalize from given facts • relate knowledge from several areas • predict, draw conclusions <p>arrange, assemble, collect, combine, compose, construct, create, design, develop, formulate, generalize, hypothesize, integrate, invent, manage, modify, organize, plan, prepare, propose, rearrange, research, rewrite, set up, substitute, what if?, write,</p>
Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seeing patterns • organization of parts • recognition of hidden meanings • identification of components 	<p>arrange, analyze, appraise, calculate, categorize, classify, compare, connect, contrast, criticize, differentiate, discriminate, divide, distinguish, examine,</p>	Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • compare and discriminate between ideas • assess value of theories, presentations • make choices based on reason argument • verify value of evidence • recognize subjectivity <p>appraise, argue, assess, attach, choose, compare, conclude, convince, core, defend, decide, discriminate, estimate, evaluate, explain, grade, judge, measure, originate, predict, produce, rate, rank, rank, recommend,</p>

select,
summarize,
support, test,
value

Furthermore, Anderson, a former student of Bloom, revisited the cognitive domain in the learning taxonomy in the mid-nineties and made some changes, with perhaps the two most prominent one being, 1). By changing the names in the six categories from noun to verb forms, and 2). By slightly rearranging them. This Bloom's Taxonomy was firstly created in the 1959s, then revised in 1990's in an attempt to make it more relevant for 21st century students and teachers, and this new taxonomy reflects a more active form of thinking and is perhaps more accurate.

Based on Anderson's revised version, the brief definitions of the term can be described as follows:

Remembering refers to recall previous learned information,

Understanding means comprehending the meaning, translation, interpolation, and interpretation of instructions and problems. State a problem in one's own words.

Applying can be described as using a concept in a new situation or unprompted use of an abstraction. Applies what was learned in the classroom into novel situations in the work place.

Analyzing means separating materials or concepts into component parts so that its organizational structure may be understood. Distinguishing between facts and inferences.

Evaluating refers to making judgments about the value of ideas or materials.

Creating is defined as building a structure or pattern from diverse

elements. Putting parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure.

WAIT-TIME/WAITING TIME

Wait time refers to the amount of time a teacher pauses between asking a question and soliciting an answer. Generally speaking, wait-time is helpful for students, Sadker and Sadker (1999) pointed out that when teachers increased the wait time from one second or less into approximately three or five second or longer, students gave longer answers. Furthermore, the quality of students' responses improved and they showed more confidence in their answers. This shows that wait time has the positive influence on students' participation and the quality of their responses. However, teachers generally wait less than a second to elicit a response, research indicates that students need at least three seconds to comprehend the question, consider the available information, formulate an answer, and begin to respond. The maximum amount of time a teacher should wait for a response is 5-7 seconds. A longer period often has a negative impact on student response and is detrimental to student interaction. The exact amount of time that is needed depends in part upon the level of question the teacher asks and upon student familiarity with content and past experience with the thought process required. As general rule, lower level cognitive questions require less wait time, whereas higher-level cognitive questions may require more (Goodwin, et al., 1992).

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions earlier, it can be inferred that questions have a very important role to play in English Language Teaching (ELT) because the

quantity and the quality of questions will determine the quality and quantity of student interaction in the lesson (Cullen, 1998). A question, in this paper, can be described as an utterance, a sentence or a phrase expressed or addressed by a person (usually a teacher) to another person (a student or a learner) in order to get information, to know his opinion, belief, and so forth. Furthermore, questioning can be defined as the technique of asking questions used by teachers in teaching and learning process in the classroom.

Questions can be grouped into two types, namely display and referential questions. These types of question may be in the forms of Yes/No Questions, and information questions. These questions can be grouped into convergent (Yes/No Questions) and divergent questions (Open Questions). Questions based on content can be classified from low level questions to high level questions. Based on Bloom's Taxonomy, *knowledge* and *comprehension* questions are categorized into low level questions, and *application*, *analysis*, *synthesis*, and *evaluation* questions are categorized into high level questions. Then, Anderson, a former student of Bloom, classifies questions into six level namely remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. It seems his classification more relevant for 21st century students and teachers, and this new taxonomy reflects a more active form of thinking. Questions have several purposes. They may be asked to keep their learners in order to be involved during lessons, to express their ideas and thoughts, to enable learners to hear different explanations of the material, and to help teachers to

evaluate their learners' learning and revise their lessons when necessary. Other purposes of asking questions are to assess readiness for new learning, to create interest and motivation in learning, to make concept more precise, to check students understanding of the material,

In asking questions, students should be given enough time approximately 5-7 seconds in order to give an opportunity for the students to understand the questions, to think about the answers, and to begin answering the questions. Since questioning is one of the basic skills of teaching, it is expected that English teachers can improve their quality as professional teachers as stated in Teachers and Lecturers Law No. 14, 2005. English teachers are expected to use various levels of questions in ELT by using operational words/phrases of each level of questions as has been listed in this paper. It is also expected that teachers can use this theoretical and practical knowledge to promote student participation to be active in ELT in the classroom.

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