Optimizing Teacher Questioning Strategies for Enhanced Reading Comprehension in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Background:
Recent developments in reading theory emphasize the significance of an interactive approach to reading comprehension in EFL contexts. This study investigates the role of teacher questioning strategies in promoting effective reading comprehension in EFL classrooms.

Methodology:
This qualitative classroom research studied teacher questioning and students' responses in reading comprehension classes using non-participant observation and interviews to assess the effectiveness of EFL teacher questioning.

Findings:
EFL teachers in reading classes used closed and open forms of display and referential questions. They employed questioning strategies such as translation, repetition, and pausing. Modifications included probing and rephrasing to improve students' engagement and comprehension.

Conclusion:
In conclusion, the study found that EFL teachers in reading comprehension courses used a range of effective questioning techniques, including translation, repetition, pausing, probing, and rephrasing, to enhance student engagement and comprehension. However, the use of complex or punishing questions can impede effective questioning.

Originality:
The novelty of this study lies in investigating the types of questions and strategies employed by EFL teachers in reading comprehension courses. Additionally, the study provides insight into the relationships among the different types of questions and strategies, and their effects on student engagement and comprehension.

1. INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is described by the traditional approach to reading as the simple

extraction of information from the text. Due to numerous studies, the perception of reading has changed over time, particularly in first-language reading. One such study, conducted by Zhao & Zhu (2012), highlights the importance of the Psycholinguistic Model and Schema Theory in the context of interactive reading. As per this theoretical perspective, the act of reading is a multifaceted process that involves the integration of textual information with pre-existing knowledge by the reader. Eskey (1970) proposed the Interactive Model, which conceptualizes reading as a "dialogue" between the reader and the text. This approach takes into account the dynamic interplay between the reader and the text, as well as the interdependence of the lower and higher levels of the reading process. The presented model posits that pre-existing knowledge pertaining to the subject matter can potentially enhance the reader's ability to comprehend the given text.

According to Landi (2010), fluent reading is a result of the interplay between lower and higher-level reading skills. Lower-level skills, such as word and sentence identification, are essential for decoding and comprehending explicit information. On the other hand, higher-level skills demand greater cognitive effort, including reading between the lines to infer implicit information, grasping the author's perspective, and interpreting the text. Hence, lower and higher level skills must operate concurrently for fluent reading and good comprehension to occur. In addition, Landi's perspective is in line with that of Carrell et al. (1988), highlighting the importance of integrating the different levels of reading skills to enhance reading ability.

In Indonesia, most research on teachers' questioning techniques has not delved into the cognitive processes or intellectual levels involved. However, Simanjuntak & Barus (2020) conducted a study to gather information about the learning styles and preferences of inquisitive and critical junior high school students, using the Plomp model to foster an interest in reading English literature, promote literacy campaigns, and increase cultural and social value. Their research found that using English-language publications for reading literacy is crucial and feasible. Similarly, Shomoossi (2004) study focused on the impact of teachers' questioning behavior on student responses, particularly display and referential question types. Using a classroom research approach, the qualitative-quantitative study observed the effects of the questions on the students' responses in four reading comprehension classes at universities in Tehran.

According to Aziza (2018), observing and practicing effective questioning techniques in EFL reading classrooms is essential for practical and theoretical reasons. In Indonesia,

there is a growing interest in improving the ability of teachers to generate questions in the context of teaching and learning. To enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process, seminars, workshops, and training programs are organized to equip teachers with the necessary skills (Aflalo, 2021; Susantara & Myartawan, 2020). Recently, universities have also implemented the Applied Approach to promote effective classroom questioning strategies. This trend reflects the importance of developing teachers' ability to generate effective questions, which can ultimately enhance the quality of education.

In Indonesia, foreign language instruction primarily aims to equip students with communication skills, with a focus on developing reading proficiency for both informational and academic purposes. Reading activities in English can pose complex psycholinguistic challenges for certain students who have not yet attained proficiency in the language, thereby hindering their ability to engage in successful academic reading activities (Nguyen et al., 2021). The act of reading can be considered as a discourse-centered educational activity aimed at fostering chances for the enhancement of students' cognitive and linguistic growth. (Goldenberg, 1991; Yang, 2022). Therefore, it is imperative to offer instructional assistance to individuals, which may include questioning.

In addition, foreign language instruction in Indonesia is primarily designed to educate students with communication skills, with a focus on reading skills for information and study. Reading in English can be a challenging psycholinguistic task for some pupils who have not yet mastered the language for academic reading success (Nguyen et al., 2021). In fact, reading is a type of discussion-based instruction designed to create opportunities for conceptual and linguistic development among students (Goldenberg, 1991; Yang, 2022). Therefore, an effort to provide them with instructional assistance, such as inquiry, is required.

In Indonesia, foreign language teaching aims to enhance students' communication skills, especially reading skills, for learning and getting information. However, for some students, reading in English can be a challenging psycholinguistic activity due to their limited mastery of the language (Nguyen et al., 2021). In this regard, reading can be considered a discussion-based lesson that creates opportunities for students to develop both their linguistic and conceptual skills (Goldenberg, 1991; Yang, 2022). Therefore, instructional assistance, such as questioning, can be beneficial in supporting students in their reading activities.

According to research on teacher questioning behavior in EFL reading comprehension courses, teachers must generate effective questions that encourage higher-order thinking skills (Barnett & Francis, 2012; Shomoossi, 2004). Traditionally, reading comprehension in

ESL and EFL has been viewed as simply extracting information from the text. However, recent research suggests that reading is a more complex process that involves the reader's background knowledge and linguistic and content schema (Carrell et al., 1988; Zhao & Zhu, 2012). Fluent reading and good comprehension require the simultaneous interaction between lower-level identification skills and higher-level cognitive effort (Landi, 2010).

Observing EFL teacher questioning and developing effective questioning practices in EFL reading classrooms is essential for both practical and theoretical purposes. In practical terms, there is a growing concern in Indonesia to improve teachers' skills in generating effective questions to enhance the teaching and learning process (Simanjuntak & Barus, 2020). Additionally, foreign language instruction in Indonesia emphasizes the development of students' communication and reading skills, particularly for academic purposes (Susanto, 2017).. Therefore, instructional help, such as questioning, is necessary to assist students in mastering academic reading activities (Goldenberg, 1991).

Theoretical reasons for effective questioning in EFL reading comprehension courses include the role of questioning as a teaching strategy that keeps students actively involved in lessons, enables students to express their ideas and thoughts, helps teachers to pace their lessons and moderate student behavior, and evaluates student learning (Brock, 1998). Teachers are responsible for managing interaction in the classroom to optimize learning opportunities for all students (Allwright et al., 1991). Furthermore, teacher questions are crucial in directing students' attention, stimulating verbal participation, and assessing students' academic advancement (Yang, 2021).

Overall, the abundance of research in the field of questioning and the frequent use of questioning by instructors implies that EFL teachers must cultivate an extensive repertoire of pedagogical expertise concerning effective questioning in reading comprehension courses. Consequently, additional studies examining the factors that contribute to the efficacy of teacher questioning in EFL reading comprehension courses are required.

The study was mainly conducted to investigate teacher questions in reading comprehension classes. Due to the nature of a qualitative study, some important features in need of investigation were known and the researcher actually witnessed them. The study then aims at answering two research questions. First, "What does EFL teacher effectively pose the types of questions in RC courses?" Second, "How do EFL teachers make effective questions in Reading Comprehension courses?"

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the interactive effects of teacher questions and student responses in the classroom setting. Specifically, the research project utilized classroom research to observe the nature of teacher questions and the resulting student responses. The data pertaining to the utterances (questions) of teachers and students were acquired via non-participant observation. The research subjects selected for observation were two instructors who teach reading comprehension courses at the Language Center of Muhammadiyah University of Malang. As the study necessitated the participants' perspectives and comprehension of specific phenomena, it necessitated the information that was obtained through interviews. The aforementioned statement implies that the data utilized in the research was produced by the research subjects in a subjective manner, and subsequently interpreted by the current researcher in a subjective and qualitative manner. Given that the analysis falls under the purview of qualitative research, the current investigation can be broadly classified as qualitative in nature.

As a qualitative study, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument for data collection. The employment of the researcher himself as the instrument was based on the following considerations: 1) a human being is more responsive, 2) he is more adaptive to the situations, 3) he can understand the overall context better, 4) he can selectively gather data, thus, come up with the appropriate ones, 5) he can conduct data processing within site and right after the data are collected, 6) he can easily summarize, filter, and explain the collected data, and 7) he can give response to the collected data conceptually (Lincoln et al., 1985). Thus, human instrument can respond, adapt, emphasize, process, clarify, and explore during data collection and analysis.

During the process of data collection, the researcher utilized field notes and video-audio tape recorders to observe and collect data. The field notes were used to chronicle the researcher's experiences and thoughts during data collection, whereas the video-audio tape recorders were utilized to capture events that occurred during observation. These tools were required because the researcher had certain limitations and weaknesses, such as limited attention span and an inability to recollect everything for an extended period. Consequently, field-notes were used to record brief but significant observations during the observations, and the video-audio tape recorders were replayed afterward to capture any events that were overlooked.

In addition, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with EFL instructors and students to collect data on the factors contributing to EFL teacher questions'

effectiveness. The interview results supplemented and validated the observational data. The interview queries were designed to elicit specific information in order to gain a deeper comprehension of the observed classroom phenomena.

3. FINDINGS

The analysis conducted on EFL teachers' questioning patterns in reading comprehension courses reveals various types of questions used in class, which include display and referential questions. These two types of questions were used in both closed and open forms, where closed forms require a single correct answer and open forms demand multiple right answers. Examples of closed and open forms found in display inquiries include interrogative yes/no questions, wh-questions, commands, and statements. Teachers used complete sentences and raised their intonation to transform statements into inquiries. Similarly, interrogative yes/no questions, wh-questions, and statements contained closed and open referential inquiries. In contrast, open referential inquiries were posed as wh-questions, statements, or commands. Teachers in classroom practices more frequently used display questions than referential questions.

Regarding the questioning strategies employed by EFL teachers in RC courses, three different strategies were identified: translation, repetition, and pausing. The first strategy, translation, involved the teacher translating between English and the students' native language (Indonesian) to clarify their explanation or description. Interviews with some student subjects revealed that they preferred this strategy, suggesting that their low English proficiency may have influenced their preference for L1 translation. The second strategy, repetition, was used to increase comprehensibility and maximize opportunities for students to answer. This strategy was discovered to increase EFL students' engagement in learning, as demonstrated in the observed classes and supported by previous research.

The third questioning technique employed by EFL instructors is the use of wait time or pausing. The study reveals that instructors paused for an average amount of time, with a mean wait-time of 3.69 seconds for the questions asked. This research also found that many students were willing to answer each question. Furthermore, the study indicates that the wait-time pause was similar across different types of questions.

The EFL teachers observed in the study made various modifications to their questioning strategies to pose effective questions. These modifications included probing and rephrasing. Probing involved two types of sequencing: focusing on subordinate categories and exemplifications. Rephrasing also involved multiple modifications, such as using a hint

to describe an attribute of the expected response, comparing or contrasting the expected answer with something else, and rephrasing with alternative or choice questions.

3.1 The Types of Teacher Questions

In relation to the varieties of questions presented by the educators, it is possible to make the following inferences:

1. Based on the observation, the two teachers in this study preferred to ask display questions, while fewer referential and interpretive questions were asked. It is known that display queries activate lower-level skills and emphasize surface-level meanings. In Reading Comprehension courses, the instructors in this study may have instructed their students to focus on lower-level skills and surface-level meanings. To maximize comprehension, however, queries should target all three levels of information: display, referential, and interpretive. This strategy will facilitate the activation of both fundamental and advanced reading comprehension skills in interactive classrooms.

2. This study recorded the reactions of students to varying types of questions initiated by teachers in classroom settings. It was found that students responded with more lengthy answers to wh-questions as compared to their responses to yes/no questions. As a result, two conclusions can be drawn: firstly, there is a correlation between the types of questions asked by the teacher and the responses provided by students, and secondly, the efficacy of wh-questions is relatively greater since they are capable of eliciting more intricate and complex responses than yes/no questions.

3. The study found that the two observed teachers did not use display and referential questions in the same proportion, indicating that this was a natural occurrence resulting from differences in their teaching styles and strategies. Each teacher had their unique approach to teaching, which was reflected in their use of questioning techniques, making it difficult to find identical practices across teachers.

4. The reading process does not strictly follow a fixed pattern of cognitive processes and may have flexible relationships between them. As a result, effective questioning by teachers may depend on the possible combinations of display and referential questions.

5. In the context of reading comprehension classes, the use of display questions was found to be more frequent than referential questions. This suggests that there are two factors contributing to this trend. Firstly, display questions typically require a small amount of information and can be quickly verified. Secondly, in reading comprehension classes, teachers must ensure all students understand the reading material before moving on. This can be achieved through the use of display questions as a way of checking comprehension, which often elicits short and syntactically simple responses from students.

3.2 Strategies Employed by EFL Teachers to Make Effective Questions in Reading Comprehension Courses

The observed teachers employed a variety of questioning techniques in their reading instruction. Regarding the strategies, teachers in RC courses employed five distinct strategies when posing questions: translation, repetition, pausing, probing, and rephrasing.

According to the present study's findings, translation occurred either from the target language (English) to the student's native language (Indonesian) or vice versa. The translation was not always complete; the teacher translated only a portion of the query to ask for the synonym of a particular word. (in limited number). The teacher did not only do the attempt to translate. The students, as observed, quite often did the same thing as well when they had to give the response to the teacher questions. They translated their own response in Indonesian. They did it because they felt uncertain with their English. With all of these results, the use of translation strategy suggests several conclusions:

1. The teachers wished to accentuate and clarify matters they explained and described via translation. Additionally, it can be asserted that this tactic was rarely employed alone; it was typically combined with other techniques, such as questioning and rephrasing.
2. There was a preference from the observed teachers to use translation. However, this preference varied with the type of the lesson and the students' ability to comprehend. In addition, the teachers tended to switch to another strategy and to chose the easiest one whenever they felt another strategy they employed did not make the students get involved in the reading text discussion. The teachers admitted using non-English utterances to pose questions when they felt their speeches were incomprehensible. Hence, L2 - L1 translation might be useful for the students as long as it helped them comprehend their teachers' questions and gain comprehension on the reading text.
3. The translation was also the students' preferred option. This suggests that students desired the L1 (Indonesian) equivalents of their instructors' English speech whenever they found it incomprehensible. The students (mostly undergraduates) required L1 equivalents in order to comprehend their instructors. Although it might hinder the process of language acquisition, this could be the fastest way to understand their teachers' questions. This also suggests that the freshmen had limited English proficiency. This conclusion supports the notion that the preference of students for L1 and the language dominance of the setting may influence the communication strategies and language used in classrooms by instructors.

The subsequent approach utilized by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors during reading sessions was the implementation of repetition. The instructor restated the inquiry to ascertain the pupils' comprehension level regarding the queries presented. The strategy of repetition was designed with the dual purpose of enhancing the level of

comprehensibility as well as optimizing the potential for students to provide responses. In relation to the repetition questioning strategy, it is possible to draw the following conclusions.

1. Following (Farooq, 1998), this study concludes that, in EFL teaching situations, repeating the same questions worked more effectively than only a single asking, particularly when the students got into trouble understanding what was being asked. This is arguing against the existing views that effective questions should avoid usingepetition questioning strategy (Kelly, 2018; Mazuecos et al., 2020). The observed classes provided ample evidence to suggest that implementing a repetition strategy effectively promoted and enhanced student engagement during the learning process. The numerous iterations were designed with the aim of enhancing not only the level of understanding but also to optimize the chances for learners to respond. This phenomenon is because humans possess a long-term memory that can be readily accessed through repeated associations. Thus, the repetition can make it possible for the students to activate and to retrieve their already existing long-term memory that stays relatively permanent in their hippocampus. The present study highlights the use of repeated questioning by teachers, which is consistent with prior research indicating that this strategy is effective in enhancing learners' understanding.

2. The present study also concludes that, through repetition strategy, it was possible for teachers to direct the question to different question targets; questions could be directed to individuals, to groups, or to entire class, or to more able learners, and learners of mixed ability. The repeated question directed to the mixed-ability class might keep all students alert and engaged in the reading process. In adherence to the findings of the present study, the avoidance of repetition in questioning is still questionable. The upholding theory suggesting the repeated question is ineffective can be argued accordingly.

The teacher utilized the third strategy of questioning, which involved the implementation of wait-time or pauses. The findings of the current investigation indicate that educators utilized a wait-time of 3.69 seconds. As evidenced, a majority of the inquiries posed by teachers can be answered by their students. Furthermore, the intervals of wait-time pauses exhibited a high degree of similarity across various types of questions. Meanwhile, in a particular segmentation, the teacher tended to employ a relatively shorter period of wait time. However, it was not at all atypical of many classrooms across the reading classes in ESP program. With regard to these results, in ways of conclusion, it can be stated that:

1. Moderate period of pause was used by the teachers under the observation. With such a moderate period of pausing, it was possible for the teachers to provide sufficient time for the students to answer each question. This brings about another implication that the observed teachers did not feel the need to give some question types using longer processing time than others. Thus, the finding provides impressive testimony to the important role that wait-time can have on students' response.

2. There was also as a very rapid questioning rate. In the process of reading, the practice could be perceived as a serious problem for the student subjects, particularly for those who were not well prepared with the response to a question posed by a teacher.

In order to make questions effective, The EFL teachers under observation implemented several alterations to their questioning approach. The endeavor involved the alteration of an appropriate inquiry through the use of probing and restating techniques. Upon implementing these alterations, it was discovered that the instructors in question were able to assist pupils in eliciting the anticipated response during reading-based classroom discussions. As far as the modifications are concerned, there are a number of conclusions drawn:

1. The probing and rephrasing along with the modification were found to be able to increase the quantity and particularly the quality of student participation in reading lessons. The students were able to comprehend the questions easily because they were finally led to elicit the intended responses.

2. A correlation was observed between the extent to which teachers modified questions and the resulting quantity and quality of students' responses. Upon making modifications to the questioning techniques, the study discovered a significant amount of evidence indicating that the observed educators were successful in facilitating their students' ability to extract the intended responses during the process of comprehending a written text. Therefore, it is advisable for educators to attain a significant level of perceptiveness and consciousness to utilize inquiries most efficiently.

3. Modifications of the questioning strategy employed by the observed teachers made the reading classroom interactive. In addition, the teachers with their modified questioning strategies, were able to provide comprehensible input in the acquisition of English as the target language in the classroom.

4. The practice of raising overly complex, ambiguous or "double" questions and using/posing questions as "punishment" impede the practice of effective questioning. Double questions left students arguing feverishly for the entire period of questioning without being able to focus on the specific answer. Meanwhile, regardless of the intent, posing questions as punishment was unlikely to engage the student actively in meaningful learning and left the students with a poorer self-image, less confidence, and more anxiety.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide valuable insights into the types of questions and strategies used by EFL teachers in reading comprehension courses, which can have significant implications for effective language teaching. Display questions were found to be used more frequently than referential questions, indicating a focus on testing the students' knowledge and understanding of the material rather than encouraging critical thinking and

analysis. However, it should be noted that this study was conducted in a specific setting with specific teachers and students, so further research is needed to see if these findings can be generalized to other EFL classrooms.

The use of translation strategy by teachers is an interesting finding, as it suggests that teachers in this setting are using L1 to help facilitate comprehension and learning in the classroom. This is in line with previous research that has shown the benefits of using L1 in language teaching, particularly in the early stages of language learning (Cook, 2001; Shin et al., 2020; Wach & Monroy, 2020). However, it is important for teachers to also encourage the use of target language in the classroom, as excessive use of L1 can hinder language acquisition (Hall & Cook, 2012).

The use of repetition strategy by EFL teachers in reading classes can be seen as a way to increase student engagement and comprehension. This is in line with previous research that has shown the benefits of repetition in language teaching, as it can help learners to better retain information and improve their overall language proficiency (Abdelhalim, 2017; Azizi et al., 2020). However, teachers need to use repetition strategically, as excessive repetition can lead to boredom and disengagement among students.

The use of wait-time or pausing strategy by EFL teachers in reading classes can also be seen as a way to increase student engagement and participation. By giving students time to think about their responses, teachers can encourage deeper thinking and analysis, which can lead to more meaningful and productive classroom discussions. However, it is important for teachers to strike a balance between wait-time and keeping the pace of the lesson moving, as excessive wait-time can lead to boredom and disengagement among students.

The alterations made by the observed English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors to their questioning approach, specifically the utilization of probing and rephrasing techniques, can be regarded as efficacious methods for fostering critical thinking and analysis skills among students. Probing questions that focus on subordinate categories and exemplifications can help students better understand and apply the material being taught. Rephrasing questions with clues, comparisons, or alternative choices can help students better grasp and retain the material being taught. These modifications can also help to prevent rote memorization and encourage deeper engagement with the material.

One study by (Navtria et al., 2020; Rachmawaty & Ariani, 2019) examined the types of teacher questions in EFL classes in Turkey and found that the majority of questions were display questions. This finding is similar to the present study's results. Another study by (Blything et al., 2020) investigated the relationship between the types of questionthe teacher poses and the students' reading comprehension. he study found that high-challenge questions are effective for students of different ages and reading abilities. Teachers should be aware of the effect of syntactic forms of questions, especially wh-word questions. The study also

highlights the benefits of corpus search methods for examining the influence of teacher questioning strategies in the classroom.

Regarding the strategies used by teachers in posing questions, one study by (Pan, 2014) found that RPQ instruction was more effective than conventional lecture instruction in enhancing the English reading comprehension of EFL college students. Self-questioning encouraged active engagement with texts, and peer-questioning provided opportunities for students to elaborate on the texts and achieve enhanced comprehension. RPQ instruction greatly impacted high-proficiency students, as they often led discussions and provided more explanations. However, for low-proficiency students, appropriate text difficulty was crucial for successful RPQ processing. RPQ instruction offered limited effects for low-proficiency students, who struggled to generate appropriate questions and lacked confidence in explaining their opinions. Future researchers should carefully select reading texts and consider material difficulty levels in RPQ instruction.

Another study by Kasim et al. (2020) aimed to identify the most challenging sub-skills in academic English text reading comprehension among advanced EFL learners. Descriptive statistics revealed that vocabulary was the most problematic sub-skill, followed by stated detail, inference, main idea, and unstated detail. Conversely, reference was the least difficult sub-skill. Furthermore, inferential statistics categorized the difficulty in reading comprehension into three levels, with vocabulary being the most challenging sub-skill in level 1. Stated and unstated details, main idea, and inference were moderately difficult, i.e., level 2, while reference was the least difficult, i.e., level 3. Lastly, vocabulary was found to be correlated with all sub-skills except main idea.

In conclusion, this study investigated the types of questions and strategies used by EFL teachers in reading comprehension courses. The study found that display questions were used more frequently than referential questions, and that teachers employed translation, repetition, and pausing as questioning strategies. The study also identified modifications in the strategy of questioning, including probing and rephrasing, which can be used to pose effective questions. The findings of this study contribute to understanding how EFL teachers can pose effective questions in reading comprehension courses. However, further research is needed to investigate the relationship between the types of questions and students' reading comprehension and to explore the effectiveness of different questioning strategies in promoting students' English proficiency.

5. CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the types of questions and methods employed by EFL teachers in reading comprehension classes. According to the findings, teachers use showcase questions more frequently than referential questions. Furthermore, the professors use closed and open question types and various methods such as translation, repetition, and pausing.

These tactics are used differently depending on the objective of the questioning. The translation technique, for example, is used to explain and accentuate the teacher's explanations, whereas the repetition strategy is intended to increase students' involvement and comprehension. Probing and rephrasing adjustments are also utilized to pose effective inquiries and urge pupils to think critically. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of effective questioning in EFL reading comprehension classes. Teachers should be aware of the different types of questions and strategies available to them and use them strategically to engage students, clarify concepts, and encourage critical thinking. By doing so, they can create a more interactive and engaging learning environment for their students.

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