

## **EFL Learners' Responses to Teacher Questions: A Case Study in an Indonesian Junior High School**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study looks at how teacher questioning methods influence classroom interaction in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) situation. Its goal is to identify the types of questions used by teachers and to investigate how these questions shape interactional patterns during classroom conversation. Using a qualitative descriptive methodology, data were collected from classroom observations during three lessons, yielding 132 instructor questions. The data were transcribed, coded, and classified into four types: display questions, referential questions, procedural questions, and checking comprehension questions. The findings show that display queries were the most common and consistently produced short, predictable responses, resulting in interactional sequences that swiftly ended. Although allowed for more personalized responses they were not expanded through follow-up methods. Procedural and verifying comprehension questions were primarily used to manage classroom flow and confirm comprehension, with little contribution to interactional growth. Overall, classroom engagement was described as teacher-led, short, and with limited discourse expansion. According to the study, the efficiency of questioning is determined not only by the type of question employed but also by how teachers handle interactional sequences, which includes their ability to encourage student responses and facilitate deeper discussions. It proposes that more follow-up tactics should be used to generate more meaningful and student-centered classroom on their answers and facilitating peer discussions.

**Keywords:** Teacher Questioning; Classroom Discourse; Interactional Competency; Questioning Tactics; Discourse Growth

### **INTRODUCTION**

Although instructors' questions provide numerous benefits, they frequently face constraints that limit their effectiveness. Teacher who use questions as a main classroom tactic, on the other hand, can produce greater results. These questions are often convergent in nature, such as yes/no or short-answer types, and are used to assess understanding, draw attention, improve thinking abilities, and engage pupils. Because inquiries influence student motivation (Astrid et al., 2019; Kurniawan E, 2020; Suartini et al., 2020), EFL teachers may overlook speaking errors due to

material gaps, unwillingness to interrupt, correction fatigue, or fear of demotivating students. This study examines teachers' questioning tactics, motivations, and effects on student learning-one of the most common and important teaching abilities (Ozturk, 2016; Sujariati et al., 2015; Wangru, 2016).

Despite these benefits, most Indonesian EFL studies have focused on teacher strategies such as prompting, probing, redirecting, cold calling, and wait time, while ignoring student responses-types, frequency, and influencing factors such as question difficulty or classroom dynamics (Rido & Sari, 2018; Suartini et al., 2020; Wangru, 2016). For example, (Suartini et al., 2020) at SMP Negeri 5 Singaraja did not evaluate these responses, and lacked specifics on junior high student response patterns (Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015).

To close this gap, the current study uses a qualitative case study uses a qualitative case study with observation to categorize student responses (full, incomplete, or none) and link them to features like Bloom's revised taxonomy, revolutionizing the field. It focuses on Indonesian junior secondary students, which is important for EFL foundations, as opposed to earlier research on higher/secondary levels or teacher practices alone (Astrid et al., 2019; Erianti et al., 2018; Sujariati et al., 2015). This gives valuable information for local curricula (Ozturk, 2016; Rido & Sari, 2018; Suartini et al., 2020).

Ultimately, the major goal is to uncover interaction patterns, problems, and improvements in Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms, with a focus on student responses to teacher inquiries (Astrid et al., 2019; Erlinda & Dewi, 2014; Suartini et al., 2020). It advises teachers on how to optimize questioning for increased competency and engagement, with appendices including case examples. (Kurniawan E, 2020; Matra, 2014; Wu et al., 2017). As a result, this study examined how teachers asked questions in an English classroom at a secondary school in Indonesia. The study focused on identifying the types of questions used by teachers, determining the most frequently used question types, and analyzing how teacher questioning was employed to promote classroom interaction.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Existing research emphasizes the importance of instructor questioning in EFL classes, but it exposes persisting inadequacies, notably in assessing student responses. Studies emphasize convergent questions (e.g., yes/no or short-answer) for assessing comprehension and engagement (Ozturk, 2016; Sujariati et al., 2015; Wangru, 2016), as well as methods such as probing, redirecting, and waiting time to increase interaction (Rido & Sari, 2018; Suartini et al., 2020). For example, (Astrid et al., 2019; Kurniawan E, 2020) associate questioning with student motivation, whereas (Erianti et al., 2018; Erlinda & Dewi, 2014) discuss its impact on speaking abilities in secondary contexts.

However, these studies frequently miss student response patterns—such as full, incomplete, or no responses—as well as characteristics such as question cognitive level (e.g., Bloom’s taxonomy) and classroom dynamics (Davoudi & Sadeghi, 2015; Matra, 2014; Wu et al., 2017). Indonesian EFL research, which focuses primarily on higher or secondary levels, offers little insights into junior high situations crucial to foundational learning (Astrid et al., 2019; Suartini et al., 2020).

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This study investigates how students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) respond to teachers’ questions in Indonesian junior high school classrooms. A qualitative case study design was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of social phenomena in their natural settings, providing rich, contextual descriptions of classroom interactions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This approach is especially useful for research questions that aim to determine question types (RQ1), frequency (RQ2), and role in fostering interaction (RQ3). Unlike quantitative methods, case studies allow for detailed observation of question-response sequences in authentic EFL lessons, capturing nuances such as student response patterns (full, incomplete, or none), influencing factors (e.g., question difficulty per Bloom’s taxonomy), and dynamic classroom effects (Kwak & Yin, 2018). By examining two entire classes as bounded systems, the study illustrates how teachers’ questioning strategies influence student engagement and learning outcomes in this particular Indonesian environment.

The study was conducted in three entire Grade 7 EFL classes at a junior high school in Semarang, Indonesia, with a total of 64 students aged 12 to 13. These classes utilized regular teaching methods and a standardized EFL curriculum, assuring comparability while preserving natural classroom dynamics. Participants were chosen using intentional sampling (Patton et al., 2015), a technique that is best suited for qualitative case studies that seek rich, context-specific insights rather than statistical representativeness. Random sampling was avoided because it could undermine ecological validity by affecting actual interactions. Instead, the following characteristics were prioritized: Classes with active student participation and varied response patterns to teacher queries, Experienced EFL teacher use questioning tactics to capture real-world interaction sequences, and Maintain groups to sustain natural conversational dynamics and question-and-answer chains. This strategy increased informational richness on question types, frequency, and their impact in boosting engagement while directly addressing research issues.

### **Instruments and Procedures**

Data collection employed an unstructured observational approach, emphasizing naturalistic analysis to minimize the impact of the research (Tisdell et al., 2025). Observations primarily revolved around questions posed by teachers and students’

responses in classroom and group activities. Rather than using predefined observation lists, themes were allowed to evolve spontaneously. Each observation was conducted with a smartphone. Notes from one of these sites included nonverbal indications, context adjustments, and rapid reflections. Ethical precautions were taken to protect data, including information about instructors, pupils, and school administrators, through secure storage and the use of pseudonyms.

### **Data Analysis**

This study investigated data using a qualitative descriptive approach. According to (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), qualitative data analysis include organizing, processing, and interpreting data to discover patterns and significance. The researchers used classroom observation recordings as their primary data source. First, they reviewed the recordings on a regular basis to determine what information was contained in them. Next, they picked and refined statements about classroom interactions for additional investigation. We then utilized open coding to identify key data segments based on the purpose of classroom interactions, such as discussions, questioning strategies, and student answers. This coding strategy adheres to the approach proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which simplifies data through systematic coding and categorization. This iterative process is consistent with current qualitative research methodologies that prioritize systematization, transparency, and stringent manual coding procedures (Brown et al., 2025). The next step in the analysis was to identify the themes identified to address the study questions and integrate the findings based on patterns of interaction that typically occur during classroom activities.

Four functional groupings were created from the questions: Display questions (These assess students' factual knowledge while the teacher already know the answer), Referential question are those that ask for private information or yield unexpected answers, Managing classroom timetables and logistics are examples of procedural questions, Checking Understanding evaluating how well students have understood the subject matter. To find prevailing patterns, the researchers computed the frequency of each sort of query. This analysis shows how various questioning techniques affect classroom interaction dynamics and student involvement.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Overview of Interaction Patterns**

This section presents the analysis results of 132 questions raised by teachers during three classroom observations. These questions did not appear in isolation but rather constituted a recurring interactive pattern that shaped classroom communication. Overall, the results indicate that classroom interaction was primarily teacher-led and knowledge-oriented. Most questions aimed to test students' understanding. Confirm knowledge, or organize the teaching process; therefore, interactions were

typically brief and highly structured. Student responses were mostly short, limiting opportunities for in-depth interaction.

This interaction pattern can be further understood using existing models of classroom discourse analysis. The teacher-led, brief interaction pattern embodies (Walsh, 2014) description of a material-and explanation-oriented teaching model, in which interaction is strictly controlled and designed to efficiently achieve teaching objectives. Furthermore, the interaction sequence observed in this study aligns with IRF (Initiation-Responses-Feedback) model originally proposed by John Sinclair and Malcolm Coulthard. In this model, the teacher poses a question, the student provides a brief response, and then the teacher assesses or moves on to the next steps. This structure often limits opportunities among students. From a second language acquisition perspective, this also implies limited opportunities for interaction hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of negotiation and feedback for language development.

### Question Type Distribution

Table 2 explains the questioning tactics used and the distribution of question found in the data.

*Table 2 Distribution of Teacher Question Types*

Question Type	Frequency	Percentage
Display Questions	66	50%
Referential Questions	18	13.6%
Procedural Questions	23	17.4%
Checking Understanding Questions	25	18.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100%</b>

Display inquiries accounted for half of all questions, demonstrating that classroom interaction was primarily focused on validating understanding rather than facilitating further communication.

### Pattern 1: Knowledge-Based Questions and Closed-Ended Interaction Patterns

The most common type of question is a knowledge-based question, and this type of question has a significant impact on classroom interactions. These questions are typically designed to reinforce students' understanding of previously taught material, and the answers are often fairly predictable. To illustrate the role of good questions in the classroom, some data is presented below.

#### Excerpt 1 (#DQ47\_S48)

T: "How many minutes are there in a quarter an hour?"

S: "15 minutes."

This sample portrays a teacher asking a factual inquiry with a clear expected response. The student response. The student responds correctly with a brief sentence, and the engagement concludes suddenly without further reaction. This suggests that the purpose of the question was to confirm understanding, not to expand the discussion.

**Excerpt 2 (#DQ43\_S44)**

T: What is the Indonesian word for “minutes”?

S: “Minutes.”

In this scenario, the teacher is evaluating the students’ vocabulary knowledge. Similar to Excerpt 1, the students’ answers are brief and consist of only one word. The teacher doesn’t ask any follow-up questions to assess understanding, so the conversation ends.

**Pattern 2: Referential Questions and Limited Interaction Development**

Although referential inquiries are less common, they enable students to respond autonomously, which provides extra opportunity for discussion. However, research indicates that this potential has not yet been completely exploited.

The following quotation exemplifies this:

**Excerpt 1 (#RQ37\_S38)**

T: “What time do you usually leave for school?”

S: “A little before 7 o’clock.”

This snippet demonstrates that students are delivering answers based on their personal experiences rather than predefined replies. However, the teacher does not ask clarifying questions such as “Why?” or “Does this always happen?” resulting in limited interaction.

**Excerpt 2 (#RQ39\_S40)**

T: “What time do you guys eat dinner?”

S: “At 8 o’clock, Miss.”

The students responded once more, this time based on personal experiences. While their comments may have been improved, the engagement stopped after one round, demonstrating a lack of communication.

**Pattern 3: Procedural Problems and Interactive Control**

Procedural questions are frequently used to regulate classroom activity and keep order. While this is necessary for classroom administration, it is not particularly helpful for encouraging engagement.

The following figure illustrates this pattern:

**Excerpt 1 (#PQ28\_S29)**

T: "Okey are you ready to learn?"

S: "Yes, Miss."

This excerpt shows the teacher checking on student readiness. The answers are predictable and require no further explanation, indicating a functional, rather than a communicative, purpose.

**Excerpt 2 (#PQ29\_S30)**

T: "Is the book ready on the table?"

S: "Yes, Miss."

Similarly, this question is used to ensure that students have prepared their materials. The answers are standard and do not stimulate further interaction.

**Pattern 4: Checking Understanding Questions as a Confirmation Tool**

Checking understanding question are often used to check whether students are keeping up with the lesson. However, analysis shows that they function more as a confirmation tool than a tool for in-depth assessment.

The following excerpts illustrate this point:

**Excerpt 1 (#CUQ42\_S43)**

T: "Do you understand so far?"

S: "I understand, Miss."

This excerpt shows that the student immediately stated that he understood. However, the teacher did not verify this statement with follow-up questions.

**Excerpt 2 (#CUQ10\_S11)**

T: "Understand?"

S: "Understand, Miss."

The questions were simplified, and the answers were kept brief. The interaction did not probe whether the student truly understood the material.

According to the research findings, classroom activities primarily follow patterns that can be summarized as follows: Teacher-led discussions, Closed-ended questions, There are not many follow-up questions or additional tests, and Emphasis on confirming knowledge. Interactions frequently take the shape of a rapid-fire series of questions, answers, and evaluations, giving students little opportunity to delve deeply into a topic or engage in discussion. While this paradigm helps with good classroom management and content delivery, it limits opportunities for meaningful involvement, which is critical for language development, increasing referential inquiries and employing follow-up strategies can help to alter interaction patterns toward a more student-centered, communicative approach.

This study investigates how teachers' questions influence EFL classroom interactions. The findings show that interactions across all question types display (50%), referential (13.6%), procedural (17.4%), and checking understanding (18.9%) were generally quick, structured, and teacher-led, which restricted extended discourse. This finding supports previous research on form-focused and teacher-dominated EFL classroom patterns (Rido & Sari, 2018; Suryati, 2015), but it also highlights that the main limitation lies not simply in the type of question asked, but in how interaction is managed after students respond.

Display questions dominated the data and typically generated predictable answers intended to check comprehension. Because these responses were rarely followed by probing or elaboration, the exchanges ended quickly and offered limited opportunities for negotiation of meaning (Long, 1996). This confirms earlier studies showing that display questions often lead to superficial participation and prioritize correctness over communication (Astrid et al., 2019; Fatmawati et al., 2020).

Referential questions, in contrast, had greater potential to invite personal experiences and less predictable responses, yet this potential was not fully realized because teachers seldom used follow-up questions such as asking for reasons, clarification, or elaboration. As argued by (Long, 1996) and (Walsh, 2014), meaningful classroom interaction depends on negotiation and interactional space, and without these follow-ups, referential questions produce only brief and temporary contributions despite their communicative promise (Astuti & Lammers, 2020; Rido, 2015). Procedural questions were also common, but their primary purpose was to manage the classroom, check readiness, and maintain lesson flow. While these functions are important for classroom organization (Pratiwi & Fithriani, 2023), they contributed little to language practice because they mostly elicited short yes/no responses.

A similar pattern was found in checking understanding questions, which functioned more as surface-level confirmation than as genuine assessment of comprehension. Questions such as "Do you understand?" often prompted automatic affirmative responses, but teachers rarely asked students to restate, explain, or demonstrate their understanding. As a result, these questions risked assuming comprehension rather than verifying it, which may cause teachers to overlook gaps in student learning (Long, 1996; Putri & Sari, 2020; Walsh, 2014).

Overall, the findings reveal a consistent interaction pattern characterized by strong teacher control, limited student contribution, and underdeveloped classroom discourse. Unlike previous studies that mainly describe classroom interaction as teacher-controlled (Davoudi M & Sadeghi N. A., 2015; Rido & Sari, 2018; Suryati, 2015; Zainil et al., 2022), this study offers a more specific insight by showing that the limitation lies in the inability to develop student responses through reciprocal interaction. Across all question types, the absence of sustained back-and-forth dialogue kept discussions brief and prevented deeper exploration of meaning. This

suggests that what matters most in classroom interaction is not only the question itself, but how the teacher manages student responses after the question is posed.

From a pedagogical perspective, this means that improving classroom interaction requires a shift from merely categorizing question types to strengthening interaction management. When teachers do not extend students' answers, opportunities to deepen understanding, negotiate meaning, and increase student engagement are reduced (Long, 1996). According to (Walsh, 2014), effective classroom interaction depends on the teacher's ability to create space for student engagement through strategies such as probing, prompting, and elaborating on student responses. In line with (Kurniawan E, 2020) and (Wu et al., 2017), questioning becomes pedagogically effective only when it leads to sustained interaction. Therefore, teachers need to move beyond using questions solely as assessment tools and begin using them as tools for interactional development. By consciously extending responses, asking follow-up questions, and encouraging students to explain their thinking, teachers can transform short question-and-answer exchanges into more dialogic interactions that support both language development and student engagement. Such practices are essential for developing interactional competence and creating a more student-centered EFL classroom (Walsh, 2014).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study shows that the effectiveness of teacher questions lies not only in the types of questions used, but more importantly, in how those questions are developed within classroom interactions. Without follow-up and expanded interactions, even questions with communicative potential will fail to generate meaningful interactions. Therefore, greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing teacher interaction strategies to support more dialogic and student-centered classroom communication. These findings can be used by EFL teachers in junior high schools in Indonesian to improve questioning and increase student participation through strategies: Use Bloom's taxonomy to scaffold from lower-to higher-order thinking by balancing divergent (e.g., "Why do you think...?") questions with convergent (e.g., yes/no) ones for rapid checks; Include wait time and follow-ups: To foster dialogic exchanges and lower the number of "no response" cases, pause three to five seconds following inquiries to allow for processing, then probe incomplete responses (e.g., "Can you add more details?"); Encourage inclusive interactions: Analyze response patterns (full, incomplete, and none) mid-lesson to modify difficulty and sustain motivation, and call fairly to engage quieter students; Professional development: Take in workshop or peer observations to hone tactics, monitoring advancements with straightforward logs of question types and student responses. These procedures, which are based on the study's findings, can turn standard questioning into a total for increased EFL proficiency and active participation.

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