
An Analysis of Teachers' Questions in Teaching English During the COVID-19 Pandemic Era: A case of Teachers in State 1 Soe Senior High School

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Abstract

The process of teaching and learning in a classroom requires good communication between students and teachers. In this sense, a teacher plays a crucial role in creating situations that lead to good classroom communication. Asking questions is one way to make good communication between teachers and students. And yet, since the spread of the COVID-19, teaching and learning processes have changed rapidly because students and teachers do not meet directly, so the communication between them becomes less effective. This study aims to find out the kinds of teachers' questions and the reasons for asking these questions, whether the teachers ask more divergent questions or convergent questions, and the reasons for asking the kind of questions. Qualitative descriptive design is used in this study, and the instruments used were observation and interview. The data was collected through observations and interviews. The data were then analysed using Miles and Huberman's model of analysis (Flow Model). The study shows that during the pandemic era, the teachers mostly ask convergent questions (questions with short answers) and only ask divergent questions (questions with long answers) sometimes. The reason why convergent questions were mostly asked is that the teacher wants to try to stimulate and maintain students' interest, encourage students to think and focus, clarify students' answers, and ensure students' participation. Based on the result of the study, it can be concluded that the teachers tend to ask convergent questions in order to make sure that the students would be able to think critically during the pandemic.

Keywords: Teachers' Questions, Convergent Questions, Divergent Questions.

Introduction

Questioning is one of the most common techniques used by teachers. In daily classroom activities, there is communication happening between teachers and students. Communication can be in the form of asking and answering questions. The role of teacher talk plays a crucial role in the language classroom. Questions play an important role in teaching and learning processes because students' achievement and their level of engagement depend on the types of questions teachers formulate and use in a classroom (Kerry, 2002). In classroom settings, teacher questions are defined as instructional cues or stimuli that convey to students the content elements to be learned and directions for what they are to do and how they are to do it. Teachers' use of the target language fulfils a number of purposes, including modelling language, eliciting information, providing input and opportunities for output, managing the lesson, the

nature of interaction in the lesson, and organising the learning environment. But sometimes, teachers do not really understand the purpose of asking questions (Course, 2014). The common purpose of asking questions is the teachers only want to check the students' understanding of the lesson given when the teachers are delivering it. But in fact, there are some other purposes for asking questions.

According to Richard (1994), there are two kinds of questions: convergent questions and divergent questions. A convergent question encourages similar students' responses, often a yes/no question or a short answer. A divergent question is an opposite in which to encourage students' responses that are short answers and require students to engage in higher-level thinking. A divergent question also encourages students to provide their own information rather than recall previously presented information. Therefore, based on what Richard said, it can be said that there are different kinds of questions that have different purposes.

Richard (1994), in his book *Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms*, also states that there are some reasons for asking questions such as to stimulate and maintain students' interest, to encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson, to enable students to clarify what students said, to allow a teacher to elicit a particular structure of vocabulary items, to enable a teacher to check students' understanding, to encourages students' participation in the lesson (p. 185). Hence, it is clear that teachers' questions and their reasons are very important to teaching and learning in the classroom. This study found out the kinds of teachers' questions and the reasons for asking the questions. According to Edward & Bowman (1996, p. 52), a question is "A sentence worded or expressed to seek information ". It means that in order to get information, we need to ask questions. Based on this definition, this research has been carried out to find out how the teachers get the information or reply from the students. It is proved that for getting information from the students in the process of teaching and learning, teachers ask questions.

For foreign language learners, a classroom is the main place where they are frequently exposed to the target language. So, teacher talk plays a vital role in language learning as a tool for implementing teaching plans and achieving goals. The kind of language used by a teacher for instruction in the classroom is known as teacher talk. According to Richard (1992, p. 471), "While trying to communicate with learners, teachers often simplify their speech, giving it many characteristics of foreign talk and another simplified style of speech addresses to language learners". From the definition above, we can say that teacher talk is a particular communicative activity, and its goal is to communicate with students and develop students' foreign language proficiency. The role of teacher talk plays a crucial role in a language classroom. Teachers' use of the target language fulfills a number of purposes, including modelling language, eliciting information, providing input and opportunities for output, managing the lesson, the nature of interaction in the lesson, and organising the learning environment. With the emergence of social constructivist approaches to learning, the role of language that is shown by the way teachers communicate with their students in the learning process has come under the spotlight (McNeil, 2012).

Asking questions is a part of the teaching and learning process. By asking questions, teachers can get a lot of information about the students' understanding of the lesson. In addition, "Questioning is the essence of effective teaching because of the numerous purposes it serves, like motivating learners intrinsically, assessing knowledge and skills, and renewing content" (David 2007). Referring to this statement, questioning is an important process that teachers can use to check their students' ability to understand and know what they are learning. A great deal of empirical research pointed out the significance of teachers' questioning strategies on the learning process in the class. As Adedoyin (2010) states, teachers' questions are of significant value for many instructional purposes, eliciting student reflection and challenging deeper student understanding and engagement in the classroom.

As mentioned above, asking questions is plays a vital role in the learning and teaching process. The most common reason for asking questions is to get information. But actually, there are some other reasons for asking questions, as stated by some experts. For instance, Vogler (2005, cited in Adedoyin, 2010) states that questions can monitor comprehension, help make connections to prior learning, and stimulate cognitive growth. As Shulman (1987, cited in Boaler & Brodie, 2004) indicates, the act of asking a good question is cognitively demanding; requires considerable pedagogical content knowledge.

Another argument about the reasons for asking questions is stated by other experts who mention that there has been a great interest in the field towards the analysis of what purposes teachers' questions convey in the class. As there are different ways of asking questions, questions have many different purposes (Azerefegn, 2008). Brown and Edmonson (cited in Çakmak, 2009) classify some purposes teachers' questions including 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 themselves and others, to diagnose specific difficulties inhibiting pupil learning, to express a genuine interest in the ideas and feelings of the pupils, to provide an opportunity for pupils to assimilate and reflect upon information.

According to Jack Richards (1994), there are four reasons for asking questions such as; to stimulate and maintain students' interest, to encourage students to think and focus on the lesson, to enable teachers to clarify what students said and to encourage students' participation in joining the lesson. The first reason why teachers ask questions is to stimulate and maintain students' interest because by asking questions, teachers can attract students' interest, teachers can stimulate students' interest by giving the present/reward so by doing this so that the students will concentrate more on teachers' questions because by answering it, they can get a reward from the teachers. The second reason is to encourage students to think and focus on the lesson; teachers can encourage students to keep focusing on the lesson that teachers are delivering by asking questions. When students lose their attention, the teachers can ask them questions to keep them focused. The third reason is to enable teachers to clarify what students said (students' previous answers). When teachers ask questions to students, and the students get the answer, the teachers can ask the same question to the same student to repeat his/her answer in order to clarify what the student said. The fourth reason is to encourage students to join the lesson when teachers are teaching. The situation in the classroom will be more alive if the students are active. By asking questions, teachers can encourage their students to participate in the classroom by answering the teachers' questions.

According to Richards (1994), there are two kinds of questions: Convergent questions and Divergent questions. A convergent question encourages students' similar responses or short answers such as yes/no answers. A convergent question does not require students to engage in higher-level thinking in order to be able to answer, but it mainly focuses on recalling information. The teacher uses convergent questions to help the students develop aural skills and vocabulary and encourage students' participation in the classroom. On the other hand, divergent questions are the opposite of convergent questions. A divergent question encourages diverse students' short answers and requires students to engage in higher-level thinking conversations. Divergent questions demand the students provide their own information rather than recall previously presented information.

Dalton-Puffer stated some other kinds of questions such as; Display Questions and Referential Questions. Display questions request information that the questioner already knows the answers to. Still, according to Dalton-Puffer (2007), display questions only need short answers that make the students do not be critical to think of the answer. On the other hand, referential requests new information. Dalton-Puffer (2007) explains that referential questions are frequently seen as more natural and are expected to generate students' answers that are somehow qualitatively better, more authentic, more involved, longer, and more complex than answers. In addition, Yang (2010) demonstrates that display questions are commonly asked while referential questions are rarely asked.

From all the different kinds of questions proposed by the experts above, this study focused only on the types of questions suggested by Richards (1994), which are convergent and divergent questions.

Methodology

Research Design

The design of the research was a form of qualitative research because the focus was on figuring out and analysing kinds of teachers' questions when teaching in the classroom and the reasons behind asking those questions. Cresswell (1994: 145) states that one of the purposes of qualitative research is to understand the participants' point of view of the events, situations, and actions they are involved in and the explanation they give about their lives and experiences. In relation to the research design, Nunan (1993: 2- 3) defines research as a process of formulating questions, problems, or hypotheses.

Data and Data Collection

There are three elements proposed by Nunan: problem, data, and data analysis and interpretation. Any activity that lacks these elements should be classified as other than research. In this study, the design was employed to deeply understand the kinds of teachers' questions when they were teaching and the reasons for asking the questions. This study was conducted in a senior high school, SMAN 1 Soe, from 19th August to 19th October 2021. In dealing with this study, some teachers were recruited as the participants to gain the data. Since the selection of the participants is an essential step in conducting research, the participants involved were four English teachers who are teaching English as a foreign language in State Senior High School 1 Soe.

Unit of Analysis

Some things were analysed in this research in relation to the kinds of questions and the reasons for asking the questions. The specific items to be interpreted were the questions asked by the teachers teaching English in classrooms. The questions were analysed based on the kinds such as divergent questions or convergent questions; thus, the reasons for asking the questions are based on what is stated by the expert (Richards, 1994). After analysing the questions and the reasons, the questions were also classified into the kinds of questions, whether divergent or convergent, to find out the most dominant questions asked by teachers when they were teaching.

Framework and Techniques of Analysis

This study was focused on analysing the kinds of teachers' questions and the reasons for asking the questions when teaching in the classroom. There were some steps in collecting the data for this study. As argued by Creswell (1994: 148), data collection steps involve setting boundaries for analysis, collecting information through observation, interviews, documents, visual materials, and establishing the protocol for recording data. To obtain the data for this study, there were two instruments used. The instruments were observation checklists and interviews.

Findings and Discussions

The data of this study were gained by doing observation when the teachers were teaching. There were four English teachers in SMA Negeri 1 Soe, as mentioned in the chapter before. The observation was done for all four teachers. The result of this kind of data gained would be presented as follows:

Observation	Number of Questions Asked	Kinds of Questions	
		Convergent Questions	Divergent Questions
1 st	88	53	35
2 nd	63	46	17
3 rd	71	59	12
Total	222	158	64
Percentage			

Based on what is stated in the table above, it could be seen that along with the pandemic era, the teaching and learning process still ran well, but the teachers tended to ask more convergent questions than divergent questions. From table 1, it is obvious that the total number of questions asked by the teachers when the teaching and learning process was 222. From the total number of questions asked, the teachers asked 158 convergent questions or 71. 17% of the questions belong to convergent questions. While the teachers only asked 64 questions or 28. 82% of the questions belong to divergent questions.

Some example questions asked by the teachers when they were teaching English in the classrooms were displayed on the following:

Teacher 1: How are you?

Student A: I am fine.

Teacher 2: Can you hear me?

Student B: Yes, I can.

Teacher 3: Can we start now?

Students C: Yes

Teacher 4: Do you love your parents?

Student D: Yes

From the examples above, it is very clear that the English teachers asked mostly convergent questions that only needed short answers. In other words, it could be concluded that the teachers ask questions that require only short answers where the students do not need to think about answering the questions because the answer is only Yes or No. Teachers mostly ask questions aimed at finding out information about students' condition in joining the lesson as asked by teachers 1 and 4. Teachers only ask questions aimed to stimulate and maintain students' interest in joining the lesson when the teaching and learning process is done in classrooms.

Another example of questions asked by the teachers when teaching is provided as follows:

Teacher 1: Is it clear?

Student E: Yes, it is

Teacher 2: Where is Brazil?

Student F: It is in Latin America

Teacher 3: Is Nita here?

Student G: Yes

Teacher 4: Who is your best friend?

Student H: Yessy

From the example of questions and answers stated by the teachers and students above, it could be seen that in the process of teaching and learning English in the classrooms, teachers only asked questions that needed short answers without thinking critically. It means that teachers asked more convergent questions or questions that only required short answers. The reasons for asking those questions were to check students' understanding as asked by teachers 1 and 2, while teachers 3 and 4 only asked questions to encourage students' participation in the lesson.

Based on the data displayed on the table, it could be identified that in the process of teaching and learning during the pandemic era, teachers mostly asked convergent questions or questions that only needed short answers. Convergent questions are only used to check students' understanding. This result was similar to the research conducted by Erlinda & Dewi (2014), who also found that the English teachers mostly asked convergent questions when teaching in the classroom. This is also similar to the result of the interview where the teachers stated that asking convergent questions was easy because the students did not need to think higher in responding or answering the questions. Still, they will directly respond to the teachers' questions by repeating their statements or giving a short answer.

On the other hand, teachers only asked a small number of divergent questions, which could help the students think harder to answer the teachers' questions when the process of teaching and learning in the classroom.

Some example questions asked by the teachers when they were teaching English in the classrooms were displayed on the following:

Teacher 1: What do you think about the text?

Student A: I think the text is very long, so it makes me feel difficult to find the answers to the questions

Teacher 2: What do you know about descriptive text?

Student B: Ummm...it is a text that describes a thing, a person, or a place

Teacher 3: Why don't you do your task?

Student C: It is because I was busy working on my math task last night

Teacher 4: What is your opinion about online learning?

Student D: I think online learning is good because I can learn more about how to use technology in learning.

Based on what is stated on the table about the percentage of a number of questions, it could be identified that the number of divergent questions asked by the teachers was 64 questions or 28.82%. Also, in the teaching and learning process during this pandemic era, teachers rarely asked students with divergent questions, which made the students think harder or critically about answering the teachers. The divergent questions asked by the teachers when teaching English in classrooms were good because they could make the students think critically before answering the questions. However, in the process of teaching and learning English in the classrooms, teachers only asked a small number of divergent questions. It can be concluded that teachers rarely ask students to think before answering the questions.

The result shown in this study was in line with the research done by Qashoa (2013), who found that teachers and students need to interact mostly by asking divergent questions that could help the student think critically in solving the problems or even in answering the teachers' questions. The result of the interview was also similar to the result of observation, where the teachers stated that divergent questions were asked to help students to think harder or critically. Still, when the teaching and learning process was done, the teachers only asked a few divergent questions. In fact, it helped the students work harder even think critically in order to give the appropriate answer to the questions asked. The teachers also added that even though divergent questions were difficult, they can be used for encouraging the students to develop their thinking skills to answer the questions asked by the teachers.

CONCLUSION

From the result of the questionnaires and interview which was explained in the previews chapter about questions asked by the English teachers of SMA Negeri 1 Soe when teaching in the classroom during this pandemic era, it could be concluded that teachers mostly asked convergent questions or the questions that only need short answers and only asked few questions that were categorised in divergent questions in which help the students to think critically in order to answer the questions or solve the problems. It could also be seen that the teachers have some reasons for asking the questions, such as checking students' understanding to clarify what the students' said, raising students' curiosity, and developing the student's critical thinking skills.

Looking from the result of the research, this study suggested that English teachers in SMA Negeri 1 Soe need to ask more divergent questions that could encourage the students to develop their thinking skills because by asking divergent questions, the students feel encouraged to analyse the questions even try to think more about what should be done in order to solve the problem.

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