

# TEACHER'S DISPLAY AND REFERENTIAL QUESTIONS

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**Abstract:** *This paper discusses an English teacher's display and referential questions in teaching speaking at MAN 3 MALANG. It investigated the ways teacher employed display and referential questions, students' responses, and the ways the questions maintained communication in the classroom. The observations in several meetings were applied and were confirmed by the instructional objectives stated in lesson plans and syllabus. It was found that the teacher mostly employed referential questions rather than display questions in teaching speaking. The employment of display questions was put in the beginning of the lesson and was functioned as ice breaker or warmer. Through display and referential questions, the communication in teaching speaking was maintained. It suggests that the teacher applies questioning strategies in employing referential questions so that the communication in the classroom is well-maintained.*

**Keywords:** *display question, referential question, communication.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is a process of interaction and exchanging message among senders and receivers. In education discipline, communication happens not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom orally and in the written form. Communication in the classroom happens between teacher and students, or a student and a student. Richmond and Wrench (2009) define communication in classroom as instructional communication that covers not only the way a teacher talks to students but also a wide range of relationship. The wide range of relationship is like a process of selecting and arranging what students are to learn, deciding what instructional strategy for students, and determining the goals which students have to reach. In classroom, teacher and students 'play complementary' roles to each other (Babad, 2009). Teacher's behavior is stimuli for students' response, and students' response is stimuli for teacher's behavior.

A teacher plays role in providing input for speaking to students and facilitating them to have communication skill. Teacher's involvement in the students' speaking activities can be a resource or a participant. Harmer (2008) asserts that the roles give students typical examples of oral productions. As a resource, teacher can give students aids and advice for speaking. As a participant, teacher can brighten things and make students comfortable having the teacher during the activities. Then in a discussion, for instance, the conversation happened between teacher and students might runs without worries. Furthermore, Hinkel (2006) asserts that a usual teaching model found in many language class-room around the world deals with

employing learners' receptive skills to provide input and modeling for productive skills. For instance, in teaching speaking, students are listening teacher's utterances as models for speaking, interaction, or pronunciation skills, and in teaching writing, what students read are input for writing. Thus, in this case, the way the teacher talks in the classroom provides students a model of speaking, and facilitates them to have communicative competences for communication.

Teacher questions play roles to students' oral productions. The research by Rohmah (2002) shows that when the teacher speaks in a proper manner, puts questions in a correct way and gives feedback within suitable situations, the students learn a lot from their teacher's pronunciation, stress, and intonation as well as verbal behavior like nodding and gesture. Yulia's study (2013) suggests that English language instruction is needed by students to maximize the language exposure. Therefore, teachers' proficiency in spoken language as the model for students in class has become a critical issue in language learning.

Setiawati (2012)'s study concludes that teacher's questions as parts of teacher's talk serve as a tool to build better dynamic interaction between teacher and students in classroom settings. It can be detected that communication is maintained in the dynamic interaction if teacher's questions are employed appropriately and students respond to them properly. Based on Long and Sato (1983)' findings, referential questions, which are mostly used in conversation outside classrooms, are rarely asked by the teacher in target language classroom and the display questions still dominate the language classroom. The purpose of using a referential question is to seek information, while the purpose of using a display question is to elicit language practice (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). For its purposes, these questions are commonly used in the communication as open-ended questions.

Students' responses upon teacher's questions indicate their competence in speaking. Students may show their ability in expressing the information they have in the form of responses upon teacher's display and referential questions. Their responses also indicate the meaningful classroom interaction. It is due to that when teacher offers questions and students respond, there is a reciprocal communication. Therefore, Brown (2000) argues that the greatest difficulty that learners encounter in attempts to speak is not the multiplicity of sounds, words, phrases, and discourse forms that characterize any language but rather the interactive nature of most communication. The interactive nature is the smooth communication that occurred among participants. In speaking, the matters to speak by the learner are influenced by the rules of how to say things, when to speak, and other dialogue

limitations. Thus, it is not linguistic features only but also sociolinguistic features that students acquire in order that the interactive nature occurred in a communication.

Moreover, the way how teacher delivers the questions to the students determine how students respond to them. The strategies employed by the teacher in delivering the questions take important effects on students' responses. Brown (2000) states that to develop questioning strategies is one of the best ways for teacher to improve the role as an initiator and sustainer of interaction. Some previous studies concern on types of questioning strategies. Rohmah (2002) in her study argues that a teacher's question alone may not promote learners' production unless the teacher is aware of the weaknesses of too closed, too fast, too vague questions, or too many repetitions of the same unclear question. In her findings, the strategies used by the teacher are repeating/rephrasing, narrowing by giving a clue, giving alternative, and providing wait time. These strategies are conducted due to pending students' responses. Four strategies which were applied by the teacher help students reply previously unanswered questions.

The previous studies emphasize the need of employing teacher's questioning strategies and its effects to students' behavior in responding the questions. The teacher's questions are also found to create classroom interaction as an indication of communication process. Yet, how the teacher's questions and its strategies as well as students' responses are used to maintain the communication in classroom setting has not been conducted.

In accordance to that, the present study investigated in depth the way the teacher asks display and referential questions and the way students respond to the questions. Then, the study investigated the ways the teacher asks questions and their strategies as well as students' responses in maintaining communication in classroom setting.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study focused on teacher's display and referential questions, students' responses, and communication maintained through the questions and its responses. Due to the concerns, the data were about the teacher's and students' verbal acts in speaking activities. Therefore, classroom discourse analysis was applied to investigate the occurrences.

The research was conducted by employing qualitative method and presented descriptively. In accordance with qualitative approach, the sources of data adopted the 'nature' of classroom setting, teaching and learning process at the senior high school. The researcher directly observed the events happened in the setting as the 'key instrument', and the study described the facts of teacher's questions, its strategies, and students' responses.

The main data were taken from observations in four meetings in which the activities were focused on speaking training. The teacher conducted free forum activity in two meetings and biography of well-known persons' presentation in other two meetings. The main data were confirmed by the data of instructional objectives which were taken from lesson plans of the activities conducted and syllabus.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 3.1 Findings

The results of the research are presented in the summary of the employment of teacher's display and referential questions in teaching speaking. It also presents the impacts of questioning in students' responses and classroom communication. The summary is shown in the table below.

**Table 1. Teacher's employments of display and referential questions**

No	Question Types	Teacher's Questioning Employment		Questioning's Impacts	
		Strategies	Quality	Students' Responses	Communication
1.	Display Questions	By phrasing clearly	N/A	N/A	N/A
		By providing wait time	N/A	N/A	N/A
		By providing positive feedback	N/A	N/A	N/A
		By probing students' answers	Clear Dynamic	Short Clear Nonverbal acts	Maintained Verbal and Non-verbal
2.	Referential Questions	By phrasing clearly	Clear: - Clear Voice - Clear Questions - Good language Organized	Appropriate Long Meaningful Clear Short Restricted	Maintained Effective
		By providing wait time	Adequate Dynamic Stimulating	Obvious Appropriate Directed / Respected Subjective	Maintained Effective
		By providing positive feedback	Accurate: Clear feedback Essential feedback	Non-verbal acts	Maintained Effective

By probing students' answers	Accurate Consistent Clear Organized Vivid	Better Reasonable Meaningful Long Defined Elaborated Complex	Maintained Effective
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It was found that the teacher employed the display questions finitely. In two kinds of speaking activities, the teacher employed the questions in the beginning of the activities and in purpose of doing humour and ice breaking or warmer. Based on observations, the teacher employed display questions to stimulate students to speak up in the class and did a joke. The findings of that kind of question are presented below. It investigated that the teacher mostly employed referential questions in the discussion. This happened because the topics discussed were varied and were determined by the students. The activities supporting the topics were open forum or free conversation from two meetings. Another meeting was about the presentation of well-known person which was set before by the class as classroom task.

The topic discussed was offered by the teacher yet it covered what students experienced in the holiday. The topics discussed could be holiday experiences, extracurricular activities, student exchange programs, and school achievements in competitions. The students were free to talk about or share anything to others. Based on the observation of free forum activity, the students who were volunteer to share were talking about holiday experiences, new class experience, and students exchange experiences. In the following observation, the students were talking about holiday experiences, school achievement in Olympiad competition, scouting, and person's characters.

Meanwhile, in the observation of group presentation activity, the topic discussed in the beginning of the lesson was school achievement in Olympiad competition which was asked by the teacher. The students were asked to give their opinion on the achievement. Then they would have group presentation about well-known person biography. The topics for presentations were set before and the students prepared by collecting materials about the topic. In that occasion, there were two groups presenting well-known person biography. They presented the biography of Nick Vujicic and Erdogan. Nick Vujicic is an Australian difable motivator, and Erdogan is the president of Turkiye.

The teacher delivered the referential questions by some strategies, like by phrasing questions clearly, providing wait time, providing positive feedbacks, and probing students' answer. The strategies used due to unclear and inappropriate students' answers. Then, the responses upon teacher's referential questions were mostly generated in this study. The

referential questions which were intended to ask opinions and to seek information were employed by several strategies. Thus the students' responses were longer and meaningful. The findings of delivery of referential questions with some strategies and students' responses are presented as follows.

### 3.1.1 By phrasing questions clearly

The teacher delivered and phrased the questions clearly and in an organized way. "Clear" means that it was not only clear voice that the students could hear teacher's voice but also clear questions which students were familiar with the meaning brought in that question. Delivering the questions clearly and in an organized way is significant to aim students to answer the questions appropriately and clearly. This strategy happened because the students did not answer appropriately and the teacher directly wanted to get expected answers.

Excerpt 1

- [1] T : So Afrizal, what do say of that question?
- [2] S4 : Before entering here I only relationship with some of you, like Huda, Salman, when I took an example ehhhh.. I know that this class is nice, because when I was in friend with Huda, Salman n Rayhan, I like with them, I like with them...but ehhh before entering here I'm surprised because why when break time I never see someone go out the field, I was surprised.
- [3] T : Well, that's your thought before coming to this class, **after joining in this class, what do you think of this class??**
- [4] S4 : Before joining this class, I'm thinking that science one only staying in the class when it is breaking time not going out to the field. but after joining this class, I realized that they are so religious

At move 3 in the Excerpt 1, the teacher phrases the question clearly to get appropriate answer from the student. The question at move 3 is the extended question at move 1. Thus, the answer from the student is appropriate answer for that question as seen at move 4.

### 3.1.2 By providing wait time

The strategy of providing wait time happened mostly when the teacher was asking students' opinion about certain topic at the beginning of discussion. It found that at the beginning of the activity, the students were not ready and less enthusiastic. Thus the teacher realized that situation and provided time for students. The time which was provided by the teacher was medium. It was not long nor short. The teacher would not just keep silent waiting for the students' responses, but the repeated questions in other phrases were provided. This reflects that the teacher was dynamic in providing wait time. Through waiting time, the teacher was also stimulating the students to respond the questions by multiple questions. Consequently, the students' responses were obvious and appropriate. The students were also

involved in better social interaction. They felt directed and respected upon their answers. The following is the example of the strategy of providing wait time by the teacher.

Excerpt 2

- [1] T : oh this interesting, what is the good thing and what the bad thing?  
[2] S8 : the good thing, because all of my classmate are boys is easy to connect with them.  
[3] SS : (laughing and applause)  
[4] T : **and the bad thing is //**  
[5] S8 : eehhh....  
[6] T : **what?//**  
[7] S8 : I cannot see beautiful faces

### 3.1.3 By providing positive feedback to students' answers

The teacher rarely acknowledged the students' answers or the teacher employed simple acknowledge words to praise student's answers. The teacher usually gave feedback "ok" upon students' responses and seemed to be checking or confirming students' responses. The word "ok" here was also acknowledge to confirm the students' answer. Despite of short acknowledgement, this could make the interaction between the student and the teacher maintained. It functioned to build a good rapport because the student feels directed and respected on the story told. The student could be more enthusiastic if the teacher gave compliment upon their answers.

As seen in the following dialogue in Excerpt 3, the teacher employs the acknowledgement. The following student's answers, after being acknowledged by the teacher (at move 4), is an obvious and appropriate answer. The answer at move 6 indicates that the student is enthusiastic in giving answer because the student feels confident after the acknowledged previous answer.

Excerpt 3

- [1] T : Thats right  
[2] T : Iqbal, d u know about biggy?  
[3] S : he is so wise  
[4] T : **he is so wise, that's what I want to hear**  
[5] T : and then?  
[6] S : and then he is calm  
[7] T : **thank u like me yaa**  
[8] S : he is very responsible  
[9] T : **yes, you are right.**

### 3.1.4 By Probing Students' Answers

Based on the observations, it was found that the teacher probed students' answers and in a certain occasion the teacher called another student to respond. This strategy was also associated with the teacher strategy of phrasing questions clearly because some students'

responses were generated after the teacher phrased the questions. The student's responses upon the teacher's questions were definite and reasonable. One occasion in one observation, although the structures of the utterances were not well-syntactical, the meaning given was rational to what the question expected. The student gave the reason why it was not easy for him to have a relation with the girls. Obviously, the student's responses were in long sentences and even complex. The following dialogue is the example of the strategy.

Excerpt 4

- [1] T : **who's your favorite in this class?**  
[2] T : **who's the most favorite in this class?**  
[3] S4 : ehhh...I think he is (pointing someone)  
[4] T : **Zidan is the most favorite person?**  
[5] T : **why is Zidan?**  
[6] S4 : because he is nice

### 3.2 Discussions

Following Long and Sato (1983), the study investigated the display questions which were employed by the teacher to check students' understanding about particular topic of discussion, check confirmation, and clarify requests. Because the topic the teacher and students discussed was about the holiday experiences of individual person, then the teacher would not know it before or the story shared was something new for the teacher. Consequently, the teacher display questions were limited. The ways the teacher employed, as stated by Wilen (1987), was not found significantly due to limited use of display questions. The questions mostly employed by the teacher in this study are classified as Referential Questions. According to Long and Sato (1983), referential questions as purpose based questions are to seek information. In this case, the teacher intended to know students' opinion or thought about particular topics, like holidays, their class, school achievement, and presentation topics about biography.

In line with the previous study (Hasan, 2013), the referential questions in this study required long answers containing giving opinions and subjective information in spite of its less syntactical responses. It also proved Yang (2010)'s study about referential question in which the teacher employed the strategy of phrasing questions clearly was able to aim the question in making students produce longer responses. As stated by Willen (1987) about questioning strategies, when the teacher phrased the referential questions clearly, it would help students answer the questions in longer and meaningful utterances.

Another strategy employed by the teacher is by providing wait time. By providing wait time is teacher's giving interval time either between teacher's question and student's response

or to the interval between student's response and subsequent teacher's question. The effect of this strategy was greatly on students' social control pattern. The students may feel that they are parts of the interaction between the teacher and the students. Accordingly, it will encourage them in participating.

Waiting for the responses, especially from the student who is appointed to answer, will make the student feel directed and respected. When the teacher does not provide enough wait time or just simply offer the question to others because the student does not answer, it will demotivate the student because the student may feel that they are not parts of the interaction. Therefore, while phrasing question clearly and providing enough wait time, the teacher should provide positive feedback upon the students' responses.

The way of providing positive feedback is applied to acknowledge and build upon students' ideas (Wilén, 1987). The teacher's response upon the students answer usually is just simply by repeating student's answer or even without praising words like "good", "ok", and etc. In order to encourage the students in answering teacher's questions, the teacher should provide more responses or feedbacks to students' answer.

Probing Students' Answers is a strategy to assist the student in strengthening his or her initial response rather than providing negative feedback or ignoring the inaccurate answer and calling on another student to respond (Wilén, 1987). Based on the results above, the teacher probed students' answers and did not provide negative feedback. The teacher seemed to encourage students by pursuing or giving other correlating questions to get better answers from the students. The teacher did not comment negatively over the students' answer and never criticized grammatical mistakes which the student made.

The responses which students utter depend on what types of the questions the teacher employs. It also depends on the way the questioning strategies are employed by the teacher and the target language ability which the students acquire. In this study, the focus is on the purpose-based questions, display and referential questions by Long and Sato (1983) and the strategies which the teacher employs are questioning strategies by Willen (1987).

The students' responses based on display questions and referential questions are different in teaching speaking. Students' responses upon display questions in teaching speaking are short or even just in non-verbal actions. The display questions in teaching speaking are for warming up part in the activities. There are no written materials as input for students so that the students have no knowledge. Consequently, the display questions which are to check students' understanding over something discussed are not exposed significantly.

Based on Long and Sato (1983), the referential questions were exposing more than display questions in this study. Consequently, the responses were long and meaningful. The responses from the students were new things for the teacher. Thus, there should be another question about the things students told. Whereas the responses upon the questions were long and meaningful. However, in some extracts the referential questions did not elicit long and meaningful responses. There were factors which determined the referential questions could not elicit long and meaningful responses, for instance, low proficiency and motivation. As stated by Shomoossi (2004), it happened because the student was a low proficiency learner and affected on interaction. A low proficiency in a target language is a factor which can fail the interaction so that when asking the question the teacher needs to employ several strategies to elicit the response.

The questioning strategies as stated by Willen (1988) help the students respond better and appropriate. The employment of phrasing questions clearly, providing wait time, providing positive feedbacks, and probing students answer showed that they aimed students in responding to the questions. However, several strategies needed to be accompanied by other strategies in order that the students were able to respond well. In conclusion, referential questions were frequently asked by the teacher to seek information about the student's story or opinion. The teacher employed the strategies of questioning by Wilen (1987) to get better and appropriate responses. The teacher employed referential questions through phrasing questions clearly, providing wait time, providing positive feedback, and probing students' answers. In doing those strategies, the teacher employed clearly, in dynamic and organized way.

From the activities conducted by the teacher and students, it can be inferred that the communication happened was like genuine communication. It is in line with Nunan's (1987) about genuine communication, and Seedhouse's (1996) about free conversation. The classroom activity conducted by the teacher and students was free conversation. The topic discussed was not dominated by the teacher but coming from the students so that the information sources were mainly from the students. Then the teacher would have more questions to seek information rather than checking students' understanding of the topic. They talked about and shared holiday experiences which could be various among the students. Consequently, the questions employed would be extended and the communication happened would not just easily stop after one teacher's question.

However, from the activity in which the topic was decided before, it was assumed that the questions employed was limited to the topic and rather be display questions. Yet, the

questions' contents were almost asking opinion, and seeking information about the topic. Thus, the questions tended to be referential questions so that the communication happened mostly due to referential questions. Communication patterns happened in verbal and non-verbal acts. Through teacher's questions and student's response, the communication happened in verbal acts. While the communication happened in non-verbal acts if the teacher applied gestures, mimic, and body movements in employing the questions and if the students responded the teacher's questions. In line with Miller (1988), there are more feelings and intentions in turn taking interaction so the communication happens smoothly. It is because the atmosphere in the classroom is built well. Then the students are well confident in expressing their idea through students' responses. Based on Miller (1988), the effective communication happened through teacher's questions and students' responses. The teacher's behavior in responding to the students' responses determines the effectivity of the communication. The teacher plays roles by listening to verbal and non-verbal messages expressed by the students, knowing when a student desires to be heard, and understanding the situation in the classroom.

In the communication happened in the classroom, the interaction between the teacher and students can be seen. In this case the interaction is exposed through teacher's display and referential questions and students' responses. The questions and students' responses make free conversation as suggested by Seedhouse (1996) which fulfill features of genuineness in conversation. The activities conducted provide the setting of conversation was not based on the textbook, yet it is based on what students experienced before so that the topic would be flourished. The topic was also negotiated and the teacher facilitated it.

According to Nunan (1987), the referential questions play significant role in classroom interaction which exposes genuine communication. Due to its purposes, the referential questions possibly seem to interrogate students in seeking information thus the interaction does not stop after the teacher offers one question. It is also in line with what Hassan (2013) found that the overuses of WH questions, which consider as referential questions, affect positively students' language ability and then lead to more communicative interaction. Furthermore, based on Shomoossi (2004), the factors which provide classroom interaction in supporting communication are interesting topics which were provided by the students, teacher's intention through questions during the students telling their experiences, and humour which was generated by the teacher in the beginning of the activities. In conclusion, the referential questions provide significantly classroom interaction and maintained and effective communication. It is also in line with Brock's (1986) and Yang's (2010) ideas about referential questions effects.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

According to the results of the discussions in the previous chapter, there are some conclusions that are obtained based on the research questions. The employment of referential questions in teaching speaking to senior high school students was essential because the questions generated long and meaningful responses. On the other hand, the display questions were found in certain occasion, especially in the beginning of the activity. Furthermore, in the teaching speaking, the aim was to train students to speak in a target language, and one of the indicators of the ability of speaking was the way students respond to teacher's questions. Thus, the way the teacher employs the questions, especially display and referential questions, or teacher's questioning strategies aimed the students to respond appropriately and meaningfully.

Among those questioning strategies, paying attention more in providing wait time and probing students' answers significantly generate better students' responses. The referential questions employed through those questioning strategies were more significant in aiming students to reach communication goal and classroom interaction in speaking activity.

The communication in the classroom could be maintained through teacher's display and referential questions because the questions' impacts on students' responses exposed the genuine communication. Although the display questions were rarely found in this study, the questions could be employed to generate humor in the beginning of the activities. In the teaching speaking, the topic discussed was decided by the students and it was flexible. Thus, the questions offered by the teacher were mostly to seek information. Consequently, the display questions were rarely employed. On the other hand, the referential questions were appropriate to employ in teaching speaking because the topic was based on the students' background knowledge so that there would be free conversation. The questions would make students express what they knew or based on their background knowledge. Through referential questions, the teacher could explore or seek information from the students.

The suggestions are made based on the findings that refer to the conclusions above. The suggestions are primarily addressed to English teachers. In teaching speaking the referential should be employed more than display questions. The referential questions should be accompanied by questioning strategies, such as, phrasing questions clearly, providing wait time, providing positive feedback, and probing students' answers. As a result, the teacher can maintain the communication in the speaking activities.

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