



# Enhancing Classroom Interaction Through Teacher Questioning Strategies: An Analysis of Question Types and Student Engagement in EFL Learning

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## ABSTRACT

Teacher questioning plays a crucial role in shaping student engagement and learning outcomes in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. However, previous research indicates that many EFL teachers predominantly use display questions, which limit students' opportunities for critical thinking and communicative competence. This study investigates the types of questions employed by teachers in an EFL classroom at SMAN 3 Enrekang and examines their impact on student participation. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observations and video recordings, which were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings reveal that display questions were the most frequently used, followed by yes/no, referential, and open-ended questions. While display questions effectively assess comprehension, they often elicit brief, factual responses rather than promoting in-depth discussion. In contrast, referential and open-ended questions, though less frequent, encourage longer, more meaningful student responses, fostering higher-order thinking. Challenges such as curriculum constraints, student language proficiency, and teacher questioning habits contribute to the limited use of diverse questioning strategies. These findings suggest that EFL teachers should adopt a more balanced approach to questioning, incorporating both lower-order and higher-order questions to enhance classroom interaction. The study highlights the need for teacher training programs to equip educators with effective questioning techniques and recommends further research on the long-term impact of questioning strategies on language acquisition. By refining classroom discourse, this study contributes to improving pedagogical practices and fostering active student participation in EFL learning environments.

## KEYWORDS

*Teacher questioning strategies, EFL classroom interaction, higher-order thinking, Student engagement, Language learning pedagogy.*

## Introduction

The role of teachers' questioning strategies in classroom interaction has been extensively discussed in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) and

education. Questioning is a fundamental pedagogical technique that facilitates classroom discourse, engages students in cognitive processes, and fosters interaction between teachers and students (Walsh, 2011). Studies have

shown that questioning can stimulate students' critical thinking, encourage participation, and enhance comprehension in language learning contexts (Ellis, 2012; Waring & Hruska, 2012). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, questioning serves as an essential tool to promote students' communicative competence, allowing them to engage in meaningful interactions (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Given its pedagogical importance, understanding how teachers utilize questioning techniques in an EFL setting is critical to improving instructional effectiveness. Furthermore, recent research suggests that formative assessment and dynamic engagement strategies can enhance students' motivation and interaction in learning English (Ismail & Tini, 2020).

Research in classroom discourse analysis has highlighted that teacher questions account for a significant portion of classroom talk, with teachers asking hundreds of questions daily to guide learning and maintain engagement (Zhang & Patrick, 2012). However, not all types of questions contribute equally to students' learning outcomes. Certain types of questions, such as referential questions—those that require original student responses rather than predefined answers—have been shown to stimulate higher-order thinking (Long & Sato, 1983). In contrast, display questions—those that assess knowledge rather than elicit genuine communication—dominate classroom interactions, particularly in EFL contexts (Brock, 1986; Tsui, 1995). The balance between these question types significantly affects classroom dynamics and students' cognitive engagement (Nunan, 2004). A recent study on Project-Based Learning (PBL) further supports

the idea that interactive teaching strategies, including effective questioning, contribute to improving students' language skills, particularly in writing and comprehension (Ismail, 2023).

Despite the recognized importance of teacher questioning in language learning, research indicates that many classrooms worldwide still rely heavily on lower-order questions that limit students' opportunities for deeper engagement (Shomoossi, 2004). Studies have reported that teachers tend to use close-ended and display questions more frequently than referential and divergent questions, which could enhance students' analytical and problem-solving skills (Xie, 2010). This trend is prevalent in EFL contexts, where teachers often prioritize grammatical accuracy over communicative competence (Lee, 2006). Consequently, students may develop passive learning habits, where their responses are constrained by the types of questions posed by their teachers (Peacock, 2001). Furthermore, research on reading comprehension strategies indicates that student engagement increases when teachers integrate culturally relevant materials and interactive questioning techniques (Ismail et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian EFL context, particularly in secondary schools such as SMAN 3 Enrekang, preliminary observations suggest a similar pattern in teacher questioning practices. Teachers tend to rely on structured questions that elicit brief, fact-based answers rather than encouraging open-ended discussions. This aligns with findings by Suherdi (2012), who noted that Indonesian EFL classrooms are often characterized by a teacher-centered approach, where students act mainly as

passive recipients of knowledge. This phenomenon raises concerns about the extent to which questioning strategies support students' communicative competence and cognitive engagement. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence from classroom observations at SMAN 3 Enrekang suggests that students frequently struggle with responding to referential questions, possibly due to a lack of exposure and practice in open-ended interactions. Given this issue, an in-depth investigation into the questioning strategies employed by teachers in this setting is necessary.

To address the challenge of ineffective questioning strategies, scholars have suggested the adoption of a more balanced approach that incorporates both lower-order and higher-order questions (Chin, 2007). Studies have shown that a strategic combination of referential, open-ended, and critical-thinking questions can enhance student engagement and learning outcomes (Walsh & Sattes, 2015). By varying question types and encouraging student-generated questions, teachers can foster an interactive learning environment that promotes deeper comprehension and critical thinking (King, 1994). Moreover, professional development programs have been recommended to train teachers in effective questioning techniques, ensuring that they can design and implement questions that align with instructional objectives (Wragg & Brown, 2001).

Several empirical studies have demonstrated the benefits of implementing questioning techniques that stimulate higher-order thinking skills. For instance, Inoue (2011) found

that when teachers deliberately incorporate open-ended questions into their lessons, students become more active participants in discussions, leading to improved language proficiency. Similarly, Dalton-Puffer (2007) highlighted that referential questions encourage students to construct longer and more complex responses, thereby enhancing their spoken language abilities. In the Indonesian context, Suryati (2016) reported that training teachers in questioning strategies resulted in a noticeable shift towards a more student-centered approach in EFL classrooms. Given these findings, this study aims to examine the types of questions used by teachers at SMAN 3 Enrekang and explore how these questions influence student engagement and interaction.

A substantial body of literature has examined teacher questioning strategies in various EFL settings. Previous studies have identified distinct categories of teacher questions, including display and referential questions, as well as convergent and divergent questions (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Nunan, 2004). While research has consistently shown that referential questions foster higher-order thinking and student engagement (Brock, 1986; Shomoossi, 2004), many studies have also reported that EFL teachers predominantly use display questions (Long & Sato, 1983). However, there is limited research on how these questioning strategies manifest in Indonesian secondary schools, particularly in rural contexts like SMAN 3 Enrekang. This gap in the literature underscores the need for localized studies that examine teacher

questioning practices within specific educational and cultural contexts.

This study aims to analyze the types of questions used by English teachers at SMAN 3 Enrekang and evaluate their impact on student engagement and interaction. By categorizing the questions based on established frameworks (Yang, 2010) and assessing students' responses, this research seeks to provide insights into how questioning strategies influence the learning process in an Indonesian EFL classroom. While previous studies have focused on broad patterns of teacher questioning in EFL settings, this study offers a localized perspective by investigating the specific case of SMAN 3 Enrekang. The findings will contribute to the growing body of research on classroom discourse in Indonesia and provide practical recommendations for teachers to enhance their questioning strategies. The hypothesis underlying this study is that a higher frequency of referential and open-ended questions will lead to increased student participation and more meaningful classroom interactions. By bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and classroom practice, this research aspires to inform teacher training programs and curriculum development in EFL education.

## **Research Method**

### ***Research Design***

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the types of questions used by English teachers in an EFL classroom at SMAN 3 Enrekang. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth examination of teacher-student interactions and provides a rich description of questioning strategies in a

natural classroom setting. The research design follows an interpretative paradigm, which seeks to explore the meanings behind teacher questioning and its impact on students' engagement and interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### ***Research Setting and Participants***

The study was conducted at SMAN 3 Enrekang, Indonesia, during the academic year 2024/2025. This school was selected due to its status as a public secondary school where English is taught as a foreign language. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants, ensuring that the selected teacher had substantial teaching experience and actively engaged in classroom discussions. The primary participant was one experienced English teacher, who has been teaching at SMAN 3 Enrekang for more than ten years and holds a professional teaching certification. The students in the observed classroom (Grade 11) were also involved as secondary participants, as their responses to teacher questioning were analyzed. The criteria for selecting the teacher included: (1) At least five years of teaching experience in an EFL classroom; (2) Active classroom interaction with students; and (3) Willingness to participate in classroom observation and recording.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Data were collected through classroom observation, video recordings, and field notes to analyze teacher questioning strategies at SMAN 3 Enrekang. Classroom observations were conducted over four weeks (two sessions per week, totaling eight sessions) using an observation guide based on Yang's (2010) framework. Video recordings captured authentic teacher-student

interactions, ensuring accurate transcription and analysis, with all participants providing informed consent. Field notes documented contextual elements such as non-verbal communication and student engagement, aiding in data triangulation to enhance validity. The combination of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of classroom discourse.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's (1994) interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved categorizing questions into Yang's (2010) classification (e.g., open-ended vs. closed-ended, display vs. referential). Data display was done through tables and excerpts illustrating question types and their effects on student engagement. Conclusion drawing and verification ensured reliability through member checking with the observed teacher, inter-rater reliability, and thick description for contextual clarity. This structured approach ensured rigor in interpreting the impact of teacher questioning strategies.

### **Results**

This section presents the findings of the study, focusing on the types of teacher questions used in EFL classroom interactions, their frequency, and their impact on student engagement. The data were analyzed based on Yang's (2010) framework, which categorizes teacher questions into open-ended and closed-ended, display and referential, convergent and divergent, and yes/no

questions. The findings are presented in structured sub-sections to ensure clarity and coherence.

### **Distribution of Teacher Question Types**

The analysis of classroom discourse revealed that teachers at SMAN 3 Enrekang predominantly used display questions, followed by yes/no questions and referential questions. Open-ended and divergent questions were the least frequent.

The dominance of display questions aligns with previous research indicating that EFL teachers tend to use questions that require factual or pre-determined responses to check students' comprehension (Long & Sato, 1983; Brock, 1986). This finding is consistent with Suherdi (2012), who noted that Indonesian EFL classrooms are often teacher-centered, where teachers control the discourse by posing questions that elicit brief, structured answers.

Despite the prevalence of display questions, referential questions—which require students to construct original responses—were used occasionally. These questions, though less frequent, prompted longer and more elaborate student responses, supporting findings by Dalton-Puffer (2007) that referential questions contribute to increased linguistic complexity in student output. However, their limited use suggests that teachers may prioritize controlled practice over communicative engagement.

### **Teacher Questioning Patterns and Student Responses**

The analysis of teacher-student interactions revealed distinct

questioning-response patterns. Display and yes/no questions often led to brief, one-word answers, whereas referential and open-ended questions encouraged

extended responses. Table 1 summarizes the observed patterns of teacher questions and corresponding student responses.

**Table 1. Questioning Patterns and Student Responses in EFL Classroom**

Question Type	Example Question (English & Indonesian)	Typical Student Response (English & Indonesian)	Response Length
Display	"Apa artinya itu?" / "What is the meaning?"	"Mulut istrinya besar sedangkan hidung suaminya kecil." / "The wife's mouth was huge while the husband's nose was small."	Phrase/Sentence
Display	"Apa artinya 'latest position'?" / "What is the meaning of 'latest position'?"	"Penghabisan." / "The last position."	One word
Display	"Apa tipe kalimat ini?" / "What type of sentence is this?"	"Type 1."	One word
Yes/No	"Any question about that?" / "Ada pertanyaan tentang itu?"	"Yes, ma'am." / "Ya, bu."	One word
Yes/No	"Finished?" / "Sudah selesai?"	"Yes." / "Belum." / "Not yet."	One word
Yes/No	"Kalau masih mungkin terjadi, apa bahasa Inggrisnya 'mungkin'?" / "If it is still possible, what is the English word for 'mungkin'?"	"Maybe?"	One word
Referential	"How was your Sunday?" / "Bagaimana harimu di hari Minggu?"	"Yes." (incorrect response) / "I am happy but I have problem."	Minimal/Extended response
Referential	"What did you do yesterday?" / "Apa yang kamu lakukan kemarin?"	"Happy." (short answer) / "I played football with my friends." (extended response)	One word / Sentence
Referential	"What is your opinion about this text?" / "Apa pendapatmu tentang teks ini?"	"It is interesting because..."	Extended response
Open-ended	"How about type 3? What is the difference?" / "Bagaimana dengan tipe 3? Apa perbedaannya?"	"Would." (short answer) / "Type 3 is different because..." (extended response)	One word / Sentence

Open-ended	"Can you explain your answer?" / "Bisakah kamu menjelaskan jawabanmu?"	"Yes, because in the text it says that..." / "Ya, karena dalam teks disebutkan bahwa..."	Sentence / Extended response
Divergent	"If you were the character in the story, what would you do?" / "Jika kamu adalah tokoh dalam cerita ini, apa yang akan kamu lakukan?"	"I would try to solve the problem by..." / "Saya akan mencoba menyelesaikan masalah dengan cara..."	Paragraph-length response
Divergent	"How would you apply this concept in real life?" / "Bagaimana kamu akan menerapkan konsep ini dalam kehidupan nyata?"	"I would apply this by using..." / "Saya akan menerapkannya dengan menggunakan..."	Extended explanation

The findings support Nunan (2004), who stated that closed-ended questions (display and yes/no) often result in minimal student participation, as they do not require elaboration. In contrast, open-ended and referential questions stimulate higher-order thinking and longer responses, which aligns with Shomoossi (2004), who argued that increasing referential questions enhances student engagement in classroom discourse.

### ***The Impact of Questioning Strategies on Student Engagement***

To further examine the role of questioning in fostering student engagement, video recordings and field notes were analyzed. Findings indicated that classes where teachers used a mix of referential, open-ended, and divergent questions exhibited higher student participation. Students appeared more active, posed follow-up questions, and engaged in discussions. Conversely, sessions dominated by display and yes/no questions showed lower student involvement, with students providing minimal responses and limited voluntary participation.

This trend aligns with research by Chin (2007), who demonstrated that higher-order questioning techniques encourage deeper cognitive engagement. Similarly, Walsh & Sattes (2015) highlighted that students in interactive classrooms where teachers employ divergent and referential questioning exhibit improved critical thinking and linguistic fluency.

Despite these benefits, the low frequency of referential and divergent questions in the observed classrooms suggests that teachers may need professional development in questioning techniques to enhance student-centered learning (Suryati, 2016).

### ***Challenges in Implementing Effective Questioning Strategies***

Several factors contributed to the limited use of higher-order questions in the observed classrooms. Teacher interviews and field notes highlighted three primary challenges:

1. *Curriculum Constraints.* Teachers expressed that the national curriculum prioritizes textbook-based instruction, limiting time for exploratory questioning. This aligns

with Lee (2006), who found that structured syllabi often lead to a predominance of display questions in EFL settings.

2. *Student Language Proficiency.* Many students struggled to respond to open-ended or referential questions, leading teachers to revert to simpler, close-ended questioning strategies. This challenge is echoed by Peacock (2001), who observed that low-proficiency students often exhibit reluctance in responding to complex questions.
3. *Teacher Questioning Habits.* Some teachers acknowledged that habitual reliance on display questions was due to their training and experience, as previous teaching methodologies emphasized structured questioning rather than exploratory discussions. Similar findings were reported by Wragg & Brown (2001), who noted that teacher training programs often neglect advanced questioning techniques.

## Discussion

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to previous research and theoretical perspectives on teacher questioning in EFL classrooms. The discussion is structured into four key areas: (1) the dominance of display questions, (2) the role of referential and open-ended questions, (3) the impact of questioning techniques on student engagement, and (4) challenges in implementing effective questioning strategies. Additionally, this section highlights the implications of the findings for EFL instruction and acknowledges the study's limitations.

## ***The Dominance of Display Questions in Classroom Interaction***

The findings revealed that display questions were the most frequently used question type in the observed EFL classrooms. Teachers often asked students to recall factual information or provide predefined answers, as seen in questions like "*Apa artinya itu?*" (*What is the meaning?*) or "*Apa tipe kalimat ini?*" (*What type of sentence is this?*). These results are consistent with previous studies indicating that EFL teachers primarily rely on display questions to check comprehension and assess students' knowledge (Long & Sato, 1983; Brock, 1986).

The high frequency of display questions may be attributed to the teacher-centered instructional approach commonly found in Indonesian EFL classrooms (Suherdi, 2012). Teachers tend to control classroom discourse by prompting students for specific answers rather than encouraging open-ended discussions. This pattern aligns with Nunan (2004), who noted that many EFL classrooms are dominated by structured questioning techniques that prioritize accuracy over communicative fluency.

While display questions are useful for checking students' understanding of linguistic forms, over-reliance on them can limit critical thinking and language production. Studies have shown that when students are frequently exposed to display questions, they tend to develop passive learning habits, where they focus on memorization rather than developing analytical and communicative skills (Shomoossi, 2004). Thus, while display questions serve an important function in the classroom, they should be balanced with other questioning techniques to enhance student engagement.

### ***The Role of Referential and Open-Ended Questions***

Although referential and open-ended questions were used less frequently, their impact on student engagement was notable. Referential questions, such as *"What did you do yesterday?"* or *"What is your opinion about this text?"*, encouraged students to construct original responses rather than simply recalling information. However, as observed in the study, some students struggled with referential questions, leading to responses that were either minimal (e.g., *"Happy."*) or incorrect (e.g., *"Yes."* in response to *"How was your Sunday?"*).

This finding is consistent with research by Dalton-Puffer (2007), who argued that referential questions contribute to increased linguistic complexity in student responses, but only when students have sufficient exposure and practice. The study by Peacock (2001) also noted that low-proficiency EFL students often exhibit reluctance in responding to referential questions due to limited confidence and experience with spontaneous language production.

In contrast, open-ended questions (e.g., *"Can you explain your answer?"* or *"How about type 3? What is the difference?"*) provided opportunities for extended responses and deeper reasoning. However, similar to referential questions, the effectiveness of open-ended questioning depends on student familiarity with complex language structures. Research by Walsh & Sattes (2015) found that teachers who incorporate open-ended questions more frequently create a more interactive learning environment, allowing students

to engage in critical thinking and collaborative discussion.

Given these findings, it is recommended that EFL teachers increase the use of referential and open-ended questions while simultaneously providing scaffolding to help students develop confidence in responding. Strategies such as modeling responses, using sentence starters, and allowing extended wait time can improve students' ability to engage with higher-order questions.

### ***The Impact of Questioning Techniques on Student Engagement***

The study's findings suggest that the type of questions used by teachers significantly influences student engagement levels. Class sessions that incorporated a mix of referential, open-ended, and divergent questions showed higher levels of student participation. Students appeared more engaged, asked follow-up questions, and demonstrated greater willingness to elaborate on their responses. This observation supports Chin (2007), who emphasized that higher-order questioning techniques encourage deeper cognitive engagement and discussion.

In contrast, lessons dominated by display and yes/no questions resulted in lower student involvement. Students often provided brief, one-word responses and rarely initiated further discussion. This aligns with research by Yang (2010), who found that classrooms that overuse display questions tend to limit student interaction and reduce opportunities for communicative language use.

A key implication of these findings is the need for a balanced approach to questioning. Teachers should vary their

questioning strategies to include both lower-order and higher-order questions, ensuring that students have opportunities to develop comprehension skills while also engaging in critical thinking and extended discourse.

### ***Challenges in Implementing Effective Questioning Strategies***

Despite the recognized benefits of using a variety of questioning strategies, several challenges hinder their implementation in EFL classrooms. The findings of this study indicate that three major obstacles contribute to the limited use of referential and open-ended questions: curriculum constraints, student language proficiency, and teacher questioning habits.

First, curriculum constraints play a significant role in shaping the questioning techniques employed by teachers. Many teachers follow a structured, textbook-driven curriculum that prioritizes grammatical accuracy and rote learning over communicative competence. This structured approach often restricts teachers from incorporating exploratory questioning techniques that encourage higher-order thinking. As noted by Lee (2006), rigid curricular frameworks in many EFL settings discourage teachers from using interactive questioning methods, leading to an over-reliance on display questions.

Second, student language proficiency levels influence the types of questions teachers feel comfortable using in the classroom. The study found that many students exhibited difficulty in responding to referential and open-ended questions, leading teachers to default to simpler, closed-ended questions to maintain the flow of classroom interaction. Similar trends were observed by Peacock (2001), who

reported that low-proficiency EFL learners often struggle with complex questions due to limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. This challenge suggests that teachers may require additional strategies and scaffolding techniques to help students gradually develop confidence in answering more cognitively demanding questions.

Finally, teacher questioning habits also affect the use of questioning strategies. Some teachers acknowledged that their reliance on display questions stemmed from habit and prior training, as structured questioning has been deeply ingrained in their pedagogical practices. Wragg & Brown (2001) noted that teacher education programs often focus on controlled questioning rather than student-led discussions, resulting in classroom environments where teachers dominate discourse, and students take on passive roles. This finding suggests a need for professional development programs that emphasize a more balanced approach to questioning, incorporating both lower-order and higher-order thinking questions.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes curriculum flexibility, targeted teacher training, and increased student support to foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment. Teachers should be encouraged to experiment with different questioning techniques and provided with the necessary resources to implement effective questioning strategies in their classrooms.

### ***Implications and Limitations***

The findings of this study have several important implications for EFL instruction, teacher training, and curriculum development. First, teacher

training programs should focus on developing effective questioning strategies that promote higher-order thinking and communicative competence. Many teachers may not be fully aware of the impact of their questioning techniques on student engagement. Thus, professional development initiatives should include workshops, peer observations, and reflective teaching practices to help educators refine their use of diverse questioning techniques.

Second, classroom practices should incorporate a variety of question types, ensuring that students are not only assessed on factual knowledge but also encouraged to express opinions, provide explanations, and engage in problem-solving. A more balanced distribution of display, referential, and divergent questions can lead to improved student participation, critical thinking, and language proficiency. Teachers should also consider using scaffolding techniques, such as providing sentence starters, modeling responses, and increasing wait time, to support students in responding to more complex questions.

Third, curriculum designers and policymakers should recognize the importance of allowing teachers greater flexibility in lesson planning and classroom interaction. Overly rigid curricula that prioritize textbook-driven instruction and standardized assessments may discourage teachers from implementing dynamic questioning strategies. Policymakers should consider incorporating more communicative and student-centered approaches that align with modern language learning theories and best practices in EFL education.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the types of questions used by teachers in an EFL classroom at SMAN 3 Enrekang and examined their impact on student engagement. The findings revealed that display questions were the most frequently used, followed by yes/no, referential, and open-ended questions. While display questions were effective in checking comprehension and maintaining classroom control, their dominance limited students' opportunities for critical thinking and language production. Referential and open-ended questions, though less common, led to more extended and meaningful student responses, supporting prior research that emphasizes their role in enhancing communicative competence.

The discussion highlighted the importance of balancing question types in classroom discourse. While lower-order questions (display and yes/no) serve a crucial role in assessing factual knowledge, higher-order questions (referential and open-ended) foster deeper cognitive engagement and interactive learning. The study also identified key challenges affecting the use of diverse questioning strategies, including curriculum constraints, student language proficiency, and teacher questioning habits. Addressing these challenges requires professional development programs for teachers, curriculum flexibility, and scaffolding techniques to support student responses.

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