



Teacher Questioning in English Speaking Classroom Interaction at Grade Eight

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the types of teacher questioning and how these questions were realized in English speaking classroom interaction at grade eight of SMPN 37 Medan. The research employed a descriptive qualitative method, with data collected through classroom observation and interview across four meetings, yielding 200 teacher questions in total. Data were analyzed following the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. The findings revealed that the teacher used three types of questions based on Richards and Lockhart's (1994) framework: procedural, convergent, and divergent questions. Convergent questions were the most dominant, accounting for 137 questions (68.5%), followed by procedural questions with 56 questions (28%), while divergent questions were used only seven times (3.5%). This pattern indicated that the teacher focused more on guiding students to produce correct

answers than on encouraging open-ended expression. Regarding realization, procedural questions were realized in participation, convergent questions in accuracy, and divergent questions in fluency. The limited use of divergent questions restricted students' opportunities to develop speaking fluency and higher-order thinking. In conclusion, the teacher's questioning strategy in this classroom emphasized accuracy over fluency, suggesting a need for more balanced and varied questioning strategies to strengthen students' communicative competence.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the essential skills that students must master when learning English as a second or foreign language, encompassing not only accurate pronunciation but also effective participation in communicative interaction. To sustain a lively and engaging learning process, teachers commonly rely on questions to capture students' attention and

structure new information. According to Gall (1984), more than half of classroom talk revolves around questioning and answering, underscoring the centrality of questions to classroom life. Teacher questions play a particularly vital role in fostering classroom interaction during speaking activities, as questioning has long drawn scholarly interest as a key element of second language classroom interaction (David, 2007). Interaction itself, as Brown (2001) explains, involves an exchange of thoughts, feelings, and ideas between two or more people that produces a mutual effect on the communicators involved, and such interaction rarely unfolds smoothly without deliberate effort from the teacher (Vebriyanto, 2015). Teachers are therefore expected to continuously encourage and involve students in classroom activities, using effective questioning techniques since they are typically the ones who initiate and sustain classroom relationships. Xiaoyan (2008) identifies three functions of teacher questions: diagnostic, instructional, and motivational, with the motivational function in particular serving to promote and challenge students' thinking while encouraging active participation.

In practice, however, questioning is not always used effectively. Speaking activities in many classrooms remain suboptimal, with teachers tending to dominate through one-way explanations while students stay passive due to shyness, low confidence, or the teacher's difficulty in designing effective questions. This pattern was observed at UPT SMPN 37 Medan, a junior high school selected for its prominence among schools in Medan that emphasize English use in daily activities. Preliminary observation at this school revealed that classroom interaction, particularly in speaking, was still not optimal: the teacher relied mainly on closed-ended questions requiring short responses, rarely posed open-ended questions that invited students to express ideas or opinions, and gave limited wait time and follow-up feedback. Consequently, students frequently remained silent, and the teacher's questioning was used but not applied optimally to stimulate active participation. Shomoossi (2004), examining question types across forty EFL reading classes in Tehran, similarly found that teachers relied heavily on display questions (82%) over referential questions (18%), with referential questions appearing more often only during pre-reading activities; the study further noted that not every referential question generated genuine interaction, as factors such as topic interest, teacher engagement, and humor also shaped classroom interaction.

Based on these observations, a gap emerged between the expectation that teacher questioning should encourage active speaking and the reality that questioning at SMPN 37

Medan remained limited and monotonous, with minimal related research conducted at this school. As Brown (2001) notes, EFL students are generally reluctant to initiate and sustain interaction on their own, making teacher questions an important stepping stone for their participation in classroom interaction. Building on this gap, the present study aimed to examine the types of teacher questioning and how these questions were realized in English speaking classroom interaction at grade eight of SMPN 37 Medan, guided by Richards and Lockhart's (1994) framework of procedural, convergent, and divergent questions.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative method, drawing conclusions from detailed observation and description of classroom phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2005). This approach was chosen because the research aimed to describe what actually unfolded during classroom interaction rather than to test a hypothesis. The study was conducted at UPT SMPN 37 Medan, located on Jl. Timor No. 36B, Medan, North Sumatra, with data sources comprising the English teacher and 21 students of grade eight class VIII-B, along with supporting documents such as the English syllabus, the lesson plan (RPP), and video recordings of classroom sessions.

Data were collected using observation guidelines and semi-structured interview guidelines. The observation checklist covered the three categories of teacher questions proposed by Richards and Lockhart (1994): procedural, convergent, and divergent questions, along with indicators of how each type was realized in students' speaking performance, such as response frequency and answer quality. The interview guideline consisted of open-ended questions addressed to the teacher, such as how questions were used to encourage students to speak and what impact these questions had on students' speaking skills. Data were gathered through classroom observation across four meetings and a twenty-minute interview with the teacher, supported by audio/video recording and field notes, over a period of four to six weeks. The data were then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which consists of three concurrent activities: data condensation (selecting, simplifying, and organizing the raw observation and interview data), data display (presenting the condensed data in tabular form to reveal patterns of question types and their realization), and drawing and verifying conclusions (triangulating

the observation and interview data to determine how each type of question related to existing theory).

RESULTS

Types of Teacher Questioning

Across four meetings of classroom interaction in grade VIII-B, the researcher recorded a total of 200 teacher questions, all of which corresponded to the three types identified by Richards and Lockhart (1994): procedural, convergent, and divergent questions. As shown in Table 1, convergent questions were the most frequently used, accounting for 137 questions (68.5%) and realized in students' accuracy; procedural questions followed with 56 questions (28%), realized in participation; and divergent questions were used least often, with only 7 questions (3.5%), realized in fluency.

The distribution of question types also varied across the four meetings observed, as presented in Table 2. Convergent questions rose steadily from the first to the third meeting before slightly declining in the fourth, while procedural questions remained fairly stable across all sessions. Divergent questions appeared only sporadically, with the highest count recorded in the third meeting.

Table 1. Frequency and Realization of Teacher Question Types

Type of Question	Frequency	Percentage	Realization
Procedural	56	28.0%	Participation
Convergent	137	68.5%	Accuracy
Divergent	7	3.5%	Fluency
Total	200	100%	-

Realization of Teacher Questioning

The realization of teacher questioning corresponded to the three functions identified by Richards and Lockhart (1994): participation, accuracy, and fluency. Procedural questions were realized in participation through encouraging initial participation, such as asking whether students were ready to begin, ensuring readiness to participate by checking task understanding, and initiating speaking participation by inviting a student to read a text aloud. Convergent questions were realized in accuracy through producing accurate information, such as asking for the title of a text, focusing on correctness by identifying the

main character, and ensuring correct understanding by checking vocabulary meaning. Divergent questions were realized in fluency through encouraging students to express ideas freely, such as asking for opinions about the lesson, developing extended explanation by asking about the moral message of a story, and promoting expressive speaking by asking students to imagine themselves as a character.

Although each realization type served a distinct pedagogical function, the dominance of convergent questions meant that accuracy-oriented realization occurred far more frequently than participation-oriented or, especially, fluency-oriented realization. This imbalance is summarized in Table 2, which sets out the frequency of each question type against its corresponding realization.

<i>Table 2. Distribution of Teacher Question Types Across Four Meetings</i>			
Meeting	Procedural	Convergent	Divergent
1	16	23	2
2	16	37	1
3	9	40	3
4	15	37	1
Total	56	137	7

DISCUSSIONS

The dominance of convergent questions found in this study reflects the teacher's emphasis on guiding students toward correct and specific answers rather than encouraging open-ended expression. This finding aligns with Chaudron's (1988) view that classroom interaction, including questioning and answering, forms the backbone of the language learning process, and with Gall's (1984) observation that more than half of classroom talk revolves around questioning. The high frequency of convergent questions during the main teaching activity, particularly when discussing the structure and language features of recount text, suggests that the teacher prioritized comprehension checking over communicative engagement, a pattern consistent with Brown's (2001) description of questioning as a tool primarily used to verify understanding, recall facts, and maintain classroom control. This tendency also echoes recent findings on teacher-student interaction in other contexts, where the balance between macro-level instructional goals and micro-level questioning choices was shown to shape the overall quality of classroom interaction (Bui & Nguyen, 2025).

This pattern of favoring closed, comprehension-focused questions over open-ended

ones parallels Shomoossi's (2004) findings from EFL reading classrooms in Tehran, where display questions similarly outweighed referential questions by a wide margin. In both contexts, questions requiring specific, text-based answers dominated classroom talk, while questions inviting personal interpretation or opinion remained comparatively rare. The limited use of divergent questions in the present study, only seven out of two hundred, indicates that students had few opportunities to practice extended, communicative language use, a concern consistent with Richards and Lockhart's (1994) argument that divergent questions are essential for developing fluency and higher-order thinking.

The consistent use of procedural questions throughout the four meetings supports the view that classroom management and comprehension-checking questions, though simple in form, play an important supporting role in sustaining student participation (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). However, the overall balance of question types observed in this study, weighted heavily toward accuracy over fluency, suggests that the teacher's questioning strategy remained largely teacher-controlled rather than student-centered. This finding reinforces the need, as suggested by prior research on classroom questioning (Firmansyah & Risnawati, 2023; Suartini et al., 2020), for teachers to diversify their questioning strategies by incorporating more divergent questions, thereby giving students greater opportunity to develop both accuracy and fluency in speaking.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the types of teacher questioning and their realization in English speaking classroom interaction at grade eight of SMPN 37 Medan. Based on classroom observation across four meetings and an interview with the English teacher, three types of questions were identified in line with Richards and Lockhart's (1994) framework: procedural, convergent, and divergent questions. Convergent questions were the most dominant, comprising 137 of 200 questions (68.5%), followed by procedural questions with 56 questions (28%), while divergent questions were used only seven times (3.5%). This distribution indicates that the teacher's questioning strategy emphasized guiding students toward correct and specific answers rather than encouraging open, exploratory responses.

Regarding realization, procedural questions supported students' participation by encouraging engagement and confirming readiness for tasks, convergent questions supported accuracy by guiding students toward correct responses based on the lesson

material, and divergent questions supported fluency by allowing students to express personal opinions and ideas in extended responses. However, because divergent questions were used so infrequently, students had limited opportunities to develop speaking fluency and higher-order thinking, resulting in classroom interaction that remained more accuracy-oriented than communicative.

These findings suggest that teachers should adopt more varied and balanced questioning strategies, incorporating a greater proportion of divergent questions alongside procedural and convergent ones, to give students fuller opportunities to practice speaking fluently and confidently. Students, in turn, are encouraged to pay closer attention and respond actively when teachers pose questions, particularly those requiring personal opinions or extended explanation. Future researchers are encouraged to examine teacher questioning strategies in different contexts, such as other schools or language skills, and to explore more deeply the relationship between questioning strategies and students' critical thinking or speaking achievement.

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