

# AN ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVE TEACHERS' QUESTIONING STRATEGIES IN EFL CLASSROOM INTERACTION: A STUDY AT SMA NEGERI 1 MAKASSAR

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**ABSTRACT** Questioning Strategy is a crucial element in establishing communication between teachers and students in classroom interaction. This study was aimed at analyzing the effective teachers' questioning strategies in EFL Classroom interaction. It also investigated the reasons effective teachers utilized the strategies. This research applied a case study and employed a discourse analysis approach. Participants in the study were two effective English teachers of SMA Negeri 1 Makassar which were chosen based on the result of the students' perception questionnaire. The data were collected through observation, audio-video recording, and interviews. The findings revealed that rephrasing, simplification, repetition, decomposition, probing, translating, and blank-filling were applied by both effective teachers as their questioning strategies. Probing was the dominant strategy that effective teachers used in classroom interaction. It also showed that the teacher utilized the strategies to avoid failure in eliciting verbal responses, expand their answer, develop their critical thinking, release the embarrassment and build up confidence. Furthermore, by utilizing these questioning strategies particularly probing, the teacher could expand students' responses and make the students more attentive and engaged in the teaching and learning process.

**Keywords:** Questioning Strategies, Effective Teachers, Classroom Interaction

## A. INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction is known as the main factor in facilitating on teaching and learning process especially in teaching English as a foreign language. In the classroom, interactions exist in the teaching and learning process between the teacher and the students as a central (Walsh 2011). Dagarin, (2004) defined classroom interaction as a two-way process between teacher and students which influences each other in the learning process. Further, Richards & Schmidt (2013) stated that classroom interaction is the patterns of verbal and non-verbal interaction and social relationships that occur in the classroom.

To build a good interaction in the EFL classroom, the opportunity of teachers and students to talk should be balanced. The dominant teacher talk can affect students' chance to speak or to use the language that they are learning so that it is important for the teacher to control his/her talk in the classroom. The teacher should know what they want to talk to students and what

activity can help the students to engage them in speaking independently. Asking questions is deemed as the appropriate way to encourage the students' responses and create a balance interaction in the classroom.

Questions have become a popular way of teaching and learning activities. Lynch (1991) defined a question as a command or interrogative expression used to gain information or stimulate a response or knowledge test. In other words, when the teacher asks a question to students in the teaching and learning process, teachers may stimulate them to recall their prior knowledge, promote their comprehension, and build their critical thinking skills. Willen in Fusco (2012) stated that the aim of asking a question is to stimulate students' participant in the classroom. Teachers' questions become the main tool to achieve teaching and learning purposes (Boyd, 2015)

Questions are varied, teachers employed them in a variety of ways for a variety of reasons (Fusco, 2012). The teacher should know the right way in asking questions because how teachers deliver the questions will influence students' understanding. Moreover, students' level of ability are different, some students need special treatment to understand the questions given. Teachers must analyze their level ability and comprehend before they decide appropriate strategy for their student. Lestari (2018)

The problem not only comes from the different students' abilities but also comes from the teacher himself. Some studies have found that some teachers occasionally express an unclear question, which can create students' confusion. Furthermore, students' verbal responses are not elicited well and demolish the learning process. Al-Zahrani & Al-Bargi (2017) asserted that teachers always use verbal questions to create interaction with their students. However, some of their verbal questions cannot be understood by the students. They were failed to elicit the desired inter

action. Hence, question strategies are needed to give guidance to the teachers in giving questions to students.

Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the effective teachers' question strategies, the dominant strategies, and the reasons why they utilized them in EFL classroom interaction. Findings in this study are valuable to know the effective questioning strategy for the teacher to elicit students' responses and develop their critical thinking.

## B. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### *Questioning Strategies*

Questioning strategy is an essential tool that can help the teachers in eliciting students' verbal responses. It can make students attentive and engaged in a lesson. Guest (1985) stated that the questioning strategy utilizes by the teacher to enhance the students' achievement and critical thinking in teaching and learning. In line with Guest, Shaunessy (2005) argue that questioning strategies are essential to the growth of critical thinking skills, creative thinking ability, and higher-level thinking skill.

Questioning strategies provide ways on how to make students realize the teachers' questions. According to Fitriati, Isfara, & Trisanti, (2017), students are quiet because they probably do not have any idea about what they asked, how to answer it or feel shy. By applying questioning strategies, teachers can solve these problems. Wu (1993) argued that teachers might use various strategies in eliciting students to respond to their questions. Rephrasing the complex questions into simple and clear structures is a common strategy that teachers apply, particularly in the language classroom. When the meanings of the question cannot be caught by the students, teachers must reconstruct their questions by using different types and ways of giving questions. It can encourage students to answer and help them to arrange utterances, so they are motivated to speak confidently. Therefore, the questioning strategy is very effective in the language learning process. (Sun, 2002)

There are some questioning strategies that teachers can utilize to stimulate students' responses. Wu (1993) proposed five questioning strategies that teachers may use to gain students' verbal responses namely: (1) Rephrasing refers to expressing a question in an alternative way, it may involve swipe a word with synonyms (rewording) or change the order of the word in the question, (2) Simplification refers to a process of rephrasing a question by simplifying it so that the students can be easier to understand it, (3) Repetition refers to repeating a question more than once in the hope that a verbal response from students will be elicited, (4) Decomposition is reformulating a question into two or more parts so that the students may obtain the answer, and (5) Probing is asking a question which is followed up by one or more other questions so that the teachers can solicit more responses from a student.

Some researchers have conducted researches on communication strategies. The first researcher was Hadiani (2014). Her findings revealed that there were several questioning strategies used by the teachers namely rephrasing, blank-filling, code-switching, probing, simplification, exemplification, repetition, and decomposition. Rephrasing became the dominant and effective strategy in eliciting students' responses. Besides, Sujariati (2015) in her

study also found that the teacher utilized repeating the question to clarify students' understanding and translating the question into students' first language when they could not catch the meaning of the question in their target language. Both strategies gave a positive effect on the students' interaction. It was proven from the enhancement of students' responses.

Moreover, Davoudi & Sadeghi (2015) in their research on Questioning as a High-Level Cognitive Strategy, the finding indicated that giving probing questions solicited more responses from the students and stimulated student critical thinking. He also suggested developing this skill in the teaching and learning process. Further, Dös et al. (2016) also found probe question was essential in an educational context as they reveal possess detailed knowledge on a particular topic. The teacher posed this question to paraphrase the response and demand new information.

Furthermore, Rido (2017) also conducted a study related to questioning strategy. He found that the teachers used close-display, open-referential, and follow-up questions. The repeating question was the right strategy when there was no response from the students. Besides, he asserted that this strategy is employed by the teachers to stimulus and guide the students to respond to the question. Thus, students get the opportunity to talk more in the classroom. Astrid et.al. (2019) also asserted that there were four reasons why the teachers utilized questioning strategy in the classroom. They are recalling students' understanding, attracting students' attention, developing students' thinking ability in higher order level, and engaging students in the content of the lesson.

### **C. METHOD**

This study was a case study research and employed discourse analysis to describe the effective teachers' questioning strategies in EFL Classroom interaction and the reasons for effective teachers utilized the strategies. Discourse analysis is applied in foreign language teaching and learning to expose much about how teachers perform in the classroom. Besides, the application of it can be used as a basis for teachers' improvements. (Xin, Luzheng, & Biru, 2011)

#### **Respondents**

The respondents of this study were two effective English teachers with their students in SMA Negeri 1 Makassar. The effective teachers were chosen based on the result of the students' assessment. In this study, the researcher utilized the assessment instrument for the Indonesian EFL teacher's performance based on students' perception developed by Atmowardoyo et al. (2017) to measure the effectiveness level of the teacher. The two effective teachers were labeled as Teacher A and Teacher B in this research.

### **Instrument**

In gathering the data, the researcher used several instruments, namely audio and video recorder, field notes, and interview questions.

### **Procedures**

In collecting the data, the researcher used three ways namely observation, interview, and triangulation. In this case, the researcher observed directly but does not interact and participate in the setting. According to Hood (2009, p. 77), direct observation is a process of investigation. The researchers played the role of observer. The researchers watched and observed the participants or the case directly. After doing the observation, the researcher interviewed the teachers to seek information about the reason and the function of the questioning strategies that they used. The last procedure was triangulation. To gain reliable resource, a method which used is triangulation related to data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation.

### **Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data, the researcher employed some steps adapted from Miles, et. al. (2014), they are (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing, and (4) verification. Data analysis is the process of systematically searching patterns and arranging data in such a way so that the data will be understandable.

## **D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Teachers' Questioning Strategies**

After analyzing the transcript, the researcher found that there were seven questioning strategies used by effective teachers. The strategies were categorized and identified based on the taxonomy of Wu (1993). The results can be seen as follows:

#### ***Rephrasing***

Rephrasing refers to expressing a question in an alternative way, it may involve swipe a word with synonyms (rewording) or change the order of the word in the question.

#### ***Extract 1: rephrasing a word***

T<sub>A</sub> : Okay, what is that song tells about?

S : The meaning?

T<sub>A</sub> : What is the story of this song?

S : Someone who has a dream and he believe there will be an angel can make his dreams comes true.

Extract 1 showed that teacher A asked a student by uttering “okay, what is that song tells about?” and the student answered by giving another question. He said “the meaning?” with an

interrogative voice. It indicated that the student did not recognize the meaning of the question, she thought that the teacher asked her to translate it. To avoid misunderstanding, teacher A asked the student again by saying “What is the story of this song?”. She rephrased her question by swiping “that song tells about” into “the story of this song” so that the students can answer the question correctly.

*Extract 2: rephrasing a word*

- T<sub>B</sub> : What do you think about the purpose of the song?  
S : I think. It is very good because they can make.  
T<sub>B</sub> : No, no, no, the purpose or the aim. What is the aim of the song?  
S : The purpose, explain the wonderful @@  
T<sub>B</sub> : Yeah?  
S : The wonderful Indonesia, like I said before.  
T<sub>2</sub> : And?  
S : And then to introduce the world that there are Indonesian people who has many cultures

In extract 2, teacher B also used rephrasing to avoid students’ failure in eliciting verbal response. It can be seen in the extract above, teacher B asked the student “What do you think about the purpose of the song?” but the student answered incorrectly. Therefore, the teacher preferred to rephrase her question by saying “What is the aim of the song?”. Further, the students replayed it by saying “the purpose, explain the wonderful @@ the wonderful Indonesia, like I said before”. The student’s answer indicated that the student understood the meaning of the question. It proved that rephrasing can avoid the students to answer the question incorrectly. It was supported by the result of Hadiani’s research (2014), she stated that rephrasing was an effective way to elicit students’ responses.

***Simplification***

Simplification refers to the process of rephrasing a question by simplifying it so that the students can be easier to understand.

*Extract 3: Simplifying the question*

- T<sub>A</sub> : From the song, the man wanted the girl to come back, so what does this man want to know when the girl comes back?  
S : *Kembali, apa yang dilakukan?* [what will he do?]  
T<sub>A</sub> : What does he want to know? What does he want to find out?  
S : Eh..  
T<sub>A</sub> : What does the man want to hear from the girl?

S : He wants.. he wants to hear that she was heartbreak and misery.

In the extract above, the teacher rephrased her question three times. She tried to simplify the question. First, she asked the student by saying “what does this man want to know when the girl comes back?”. The question confused the student. Then, she rephrased her question to “What does he want to know?” and “ What does he want to find out?” which were more simple than the previous question. The students only responded to it by “ eh” which indicated that the student didn't get the point of the question. Moreover, the teacher simplifies the question by saying “what does the man want to hear from the girl?” and the students answered it by saying “he wants.. he wants to hear that she was heartbreak and misery”. It showed that this strategy was successful in that classroom.

### ***Repetition***

Repetition refers to repeating a question more than once in the hope that a verbal response from students will be elicited.

#### *Extract 4: Repeating a question*

T<sub>A</sub> : He said he believes. What does he believe?

S : *Percaya* [believe]

T<sub>A</sub> : Yah, What does he believe? What does he believe in this song?

S : Eh, oh believe an angel

T<sub>A</sub> : Yes, an angel. He believes an angel

Regarding the extract above, the teacher utilized repetition. She repeated her question three times. She uttered, “What does he believe?”. She just answered it by saying “*percaya*” in low intonation. The student responded to the question doubtfully and by using her first language (L1). When the teacher repeated her question, the student could answer it correctly. It indicated that the student knew the answer but she felt not confident to answer it. The teacher’s strategy in repeating a question may help the students to build their confidence and give additional time to expand students’ answers.

#### *Extract 5: Repeating a question*

T<sub>B</sub> : okay. What is information that you find about this song? ...What is information that you find about the song? Tell me!

S : oh.. Rossa make this song about

T<sub>B</sub> : Sure? Rossa makes it?

S : oh no, no, no. Rossa sing that song for explain about the wonderful of Indonesia.

In line with teacher A, Teacher B also used a repetition strategy in asking a question. It can be seen in Extract 5, the teacher repeated her question after waiting for more than 5 seconds.

She said “okay. What is information that you find about this song? ...What is information that you find about the song? Tell me!”. The (...) mark indicated that there was a pause of more than .5 second. The teacher repeats the question to find out whether the students understand it or not.

### ***Decomposition***

Decomposition is reformulating a question into two or more parts so that the students may obtain the answer.

#### *Extract 6: Decomposing a question*

- T<sub>A</sub> : how long is dry season in Indonesia?  
 SS : seven? Six? ↓ [Discussing in]  
 T<sub>A</sub> : When does dry season start?  
 SS : April↑  
 T<sub>A</sub> : When does it end?  
 SS : October↑  
 T<sub>A</sub> : So?  
 SS : 6 months mam↑  
 T<sub>A</sub> : Yeah, six months. Because you count it from the middle of each month

In extract 6, teacher A decomposed her question into three parts. Firstly, she asked “how long is dry season in Indonesia?” but the students were confused in answering the question. They hesitated to say the answer. It was proved by the falling shift in students’ intonation. Then the teacher reformulated her question by saying “When does dry season start?” and the students answered by utilizing “April” in the high intonation. This condition also happened when the teacher asked the next part of her question. This strategy is successful to avoid students’ failure in eliciting verbal responses.

### ***Probing***

Probing is asking a question that is followed up by one or more other questions so that the teachers can solicit more responses from a student.

#### *Extract 7: Probing*

- S : [sing a song]  
 T<sub>A</sub> : Okay, thank you. What is the song tell about?  
 S : the song is about friend. It is a true friend who always beside you no matter you are and sometimes you think you don’t need them but you realize need them because they will always help you no matter you are in up and down.



- T<sub>A</sub> : Do you have a true friend?  
S : Yes mam.  
T<sub>A</sub> : How is your true friend?  
S : She is kind and smart and she always beside me.  
T<sub>A</sub> : Okay yes. What is the meaning sometimes you think you will be fine by yourself?  
S : *Kadang kamu berfikir kau akan baik-baik saja sendirian.*  
T<sub>A</sub> : Okay, good. Now, my questions, what you will find.. What you will find.. what will help you to find yourself inside? (00.16)  
S : the beauty...  
T<sub>A</sub> : What beauty?  
S : yeah, the beauty of all  
T<sub>A</sub> : What will happen in your opinion yah, what will happen when you have a friend like in this song?  
S : What will happen, mam?  
T<sub>A</sub> : Yah, *satu saja*. [just one]  
S : Everything is bright  
T<sub>A</sub> : and how if you lost your true friend?  
S : I will sad.

In the extract above, the student was invited to sing a song one by one in front of the class and should answer some questions based on the song that she/he sung. The first question, the teacher asked “What is the song tell about?”. Then, students said “the song is about friend. It is a true friend who always beside you no matter you are and sometimes you think you don’t need them but you realize need them because they will always help you no matter you are in up and down”. The student’s answer indicated that the student understood what the teacher asked. In this case, the teacher asked not to expand the student's answer. She used follow-up questions to develop their critical thinking and build her confidence. It can be seen from the extract, the teacher asked the student about his or her prior knowledge. She asked “How is your true friend?” and the student answered it by saying “She is kind and smart and she always beside me”. She looked confident in answering the question. Moreover, the teacher also asked her opinion about something and the student answered it well. It indicated that probing was an effective strategy in building up critical thinking and confidence.

### ***Translating***

Translating refers to asking a question by switching the language into the students’ L1.

*Extract 8: Switching the language*

- T<sub>B</sub> : okay listen to the riddles and answer it! What does always run but never walk, It often murmur but never talk. It has a bed but never sleep. And it has a mouth but never eat?
- SS : murmur?
- T<sub>B</sub> : yah murmurs, what does often murmur? What is often *berbisik*?
- S : oh, river
- T<sub>B</sub> : okay river, why?

Extract 8 shows that the teacher switched her language into the students' first language. She uttered "what does often murmur? What is often *berbisik*?" because the students did not know the meaning of "murmur". Therefore, the teacher utilized translating to avoid the failure to elicit a verbal response.

### ***Blank-filling***

Blank-filling refers to asking a question that consists of a phrase, sentence, or paragraph with a blank space where a student provides the missing word or words.

#### *Extract 9: Blank-filling*

- T<sub>A</sub> : okay.. What is the answer number four? [Pointing a student to answer]
- S : I don't know mam.
- T<sub>A</sub> : the *Titik-titik* bird
- S : early bird
- T<sub>A</sub> : the early bird *titik-titik* the worm
- S : Catch
- SS : The early bird catches the worm [students pronounce the word worm incorrectly]
- T<sub>A</sub> : Worm
- S : Worm

The extract above showed teacher A pointed a student to answer a question, she said "What is the answer number four?" but the student could not answer it. She just responded to it by uttering "I don't know mam". Therefore, the teacher tried to use blank-filling to elicit the student's answer. She reconstructed her question by providing a missing word. Further, she utilized the question to ask the same student. She uttered "the *Titik-titik* bird" in an interrogative voice. The word *titik-titik* indicated the missing word so that the student can easy to recall her memory or think about missing word. It can be seen in the third and fifth paragraphs, the student can fill the missing word correctly. It indicated that blank-filling can be categorized as an effective strategy in stimulating students' responses. Hadiani (2014) also asserted that this strategy is quite effective in encouraging students to talk.

In this study, the researcher also analyzed the dominant questioning strategies used by effective teachers. The following table presents the dominant types of questioning strategies used by effective teachers A and B.

Table 1. The Dominant Questioning Strategy used by the effective teachers

No	Teacher's Questioning Strategies	Frequency		Percentage	
		Teacher A	Teacher B	Teacher A	Teacher B
1	Rephrasing	12	9	16.9 %	14.5 %
2	Simplification	1	0	1.4 %	0 %
3	Repetition	15	18	21.1 %	29.0 %
4	Decomposition	1	0	1.4 %	0 %
5	Probing	28	21	39.4 %	33.9 %
6	Translating	9	13	12.7 %	21.0 %
7	Blank-Filling	5	1	7.1 %	1.6 %
	Total	71	62	100 %	100%

Table 1 above illustrated the frequency of questioning strategies used by effective teachers A and B. From the data, it showed that teacher A utilized questioning strategies more than teacher B. Teacher A applied all the teacher strategies namely rephrasing, simplification, repetition, decomposition, probing, translating, and blank-filling while the teacher B only applied five strategies in her classroom namely rephrasing, repetition, probing, translating, and blank-filling. Further, the data also show that the dominant strategy used by both effective teachers is probing. It was proved by the percentage of the use of probing by teachers A and B was 39.4% and 33.9%. In line with Wu (1993), Davoudi & Sadeghi (2015), and Dös et al. (2016), probing or probe question is the dominant questioning strategies that utilized by the teacher. A probing question is an effective strategy that may elicit more responses from the students and stimulated students' critical thinking. The second-placed was repetition with the percentage was 21.1% (teacher A) and 29.0% (teacher B). Then the percentage of teacher A questioning strategies was followed by rephrasing (16.9%), translating (12.7%), blank-filling (7.1%), simplification (1.4%), and decomposition (1.4%) while the teacher's questioning strategy percentage order for teacher B was translating (21.0%), rephrasing (14.5%) and blank-filling (1.6%).

### Reason of Teachers utilized the Questioning Strategies

Based on the finding of this study, there were four reasons why the teacher utilized questioning strategies in the EFL classroom. The reason can be seen as follows:

### **Avoid the failure in eliciting verbal response**

Avoid the failure in eliciting verbal responses was the core reason why questioning strategies are needed in the classroom. Almost all question strategies are designed to prevent mistakes in interpreting the meaning of the question or to avoid misunderstanding between the questioner and the answerer. Based on the observation and teachers' interviews, it was found that both effective teachers used rephrasing, simplification, repetition, translating, and blank-filing to clarify the meaning sense of the question. Wu (1993) argued that teachers may use other strategies to stimulate students to respond to the questions by rephrasing or changing the complex questions into simple and understandable constructions so that the teacher may avoid the students' failure in eliciting verbal response.

### **Expand their answer**

The researcher found that decomposition and probing can be used in expanding the student's answers. Decomposition is reformulating a question into two or more parts so that the students may obtain the answer, while probing is asking a question which is followed up by one or more other questions so that the teachers can solicit more responses from students. Both strategies were effective in expanding students' answers. The following questions can encourage students to talk more. In line with Rido (2017), he also asserted that a follow-up question or probe question can promote interaction.

### **Develop their critical thinking**

A probe is one of the strategies that can be used to develop students' critical thinking. According to Dös e al. (2016), a probe question was important in an educational context as they reveal possess detailed knowledge on a certain The teacher posed this question to demand new information. By asking a probing question, the teacher may practice students' critical thinking skills. In line with Dös, Astrid et.al. (2019) also argued that one of the functions of the question strategy is developing students' higher order thinking.

### **Release the embarrassment and Build up the confidence**

Students are quiet because they probably do not have any idea about what they have been asked. They feel ashamed of their inability to answer questions. Simplifying the question can help the students to understand the complex question. When students can answer the questions given it will indirectly increase their self-confidence in the classroom.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Questioning strategy is an essential tool that can help the teachers in eliciting students' verbal responses. The teacher should know the right way in asking questions because how

teachers deliver the questions will influence students' understanding. There were seven questioning strategies used by effective teachers. They were rephrasing, simplification, repetition, decomposition, probing, translating, and blank-filling as their questioning strategies. Effective teachers used probing strategy dominantly to elicit student response in the classroom. By utilizing these questioning strategies particularly probing, the teacher could expand students' responses and stimulus them to more attentive and engaged in the teaching and learning process. Further, the teacher utilized the strategies to avoid failure in eliciting verbal responses, expand their answer, develop their critical thinking, release the embarrassment and build up confidence.

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