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STUDENTS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS TEACHER' QUESTIONS AND QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM INTERACTION

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Abstract

This study was aimed at examining the perceptions of vocational high school students towards questions and questioning technique produced in classroom interactions. Questions play important role in classroom interaction, especially in the 21st century – in which critical thinking skills are the target of learning, beside content knowledge. Almost in every classroom, questions are used for various purposes. It might be given at the initial stage, when core activities take place, or at the end of the lesson. Therefore, it is important that teachers are skilful in questioning, know what types of questions can trigger critical thinking, are aware of whom the questions are for, how questions are used to manage classroom, etc. 98 students of a vocational high school participated in the study, responding to a questionnaire developed on the basis of the purposes of questions and the tactics for questioning. Descriptive qualitative was used as the method of explanation, with the help of questionnaire as the instrument for collecting data. SPSS data analysis application was used to get description of the phenomenon. The result showed that most students favored questions – they helped them learn. It sharpened their thinking ability. It reflected also the fact that teachers were quite skilful in questioning, as items of the questionnaire targeted information on purposes and tactics of questioning. We can say that questions and questioning techniques were well-practiced.

Keywords: students' perception, EFL classroom, purpose of questions, questioning technique

Introduction

Classroom activities bring successful learning when they are meaningful. When classroom activities involve questions, they are believed to help students learn better. In the case of English classroom, successful learning should mean mastery of both the language and the content. Questions in English classroom should provide chances for students to be actively involved in the learning process so that learning can be meaningful and thus becomes successful. That motivated the writer to explore more about students' perception towards their teachers' question practices. The study is going to find answers to the question: What are students' perceptions towards teachers' questions and questioning technique in English classroom interaction?

Based on several researches, indeed, questions are believed to have positive impact in learning. It is important in a way that questions can stimulate thinking, learning and class participation (Hill, 2012, p. 6). Further, Hill (2012, p. 5), mentioning the work of Steven (1912), wrote that teachers must develop questions that stimulate reflective thinking. The kinds of questions involved in the classroom interactions should also be top consideration of teachers. Questions should stimulate thinking (Hill, 2012, p. 6). However, to avoid fear of giving wrong answers from students, teacher should start with simple questions. Scaffolding questions – beginning with the low level of questions to the higher level of thinking – is suggested. At the beginning of lesson, teacher may start with chit chat questions to create good atmosphere and lessen the tense and to create a schemata of what is going to be learnt. In the next step after pre-learning, teachers can

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give more thoughtful questions – related to topic of the lesson. Questions in this phase can open discussions among students. This is where thinking process happens, in which students are invited to give reasons or arguments to the opinions or ideas given. At the end of the lesson, teachers can check students' understanding by giving kinds of concluding questions, to confirm whether or not students have learnt. The above explanation is derived from what writers have said about questions, that they can be given before-during-after learning process (Crawford, et al., 2005, p. 18 and Meredith D. Gall, in Wilen's *Questions, Questioning Techniques, and Effective Teaching*, 1987, pp. 27-29), and that questions serve various purposes – as mentioned by Wilen (1991, pp. 8-9), citing the result of research conducted by Carin, A.A., and Sund, R.B (1971), Groiser, P (1964), and Hyman, R.T (1979) - that "…educators have suggested other related purposes (of questions): (1) to stimulate student participation; (2) to conduct a review of materials previously read or studied; (3) to stimulate discussion of a topic, issue, or problem; (4) to involve students in creative thinking; (5) to diagnose student abilities; (6) to assess student progress; (7) to determine the extent to which objectives have been achieved; (8) to arouse student interest; (9) to control student behavior; (10) to personalize subject matter; and (11) to support student contributions in class." Concerning the techniques of questioning, Gibbs (2001) in Crawford, Saul, Mathews, Makinster' *Teaching and Learning Strategies for The Thinking Classroom* (p. 6) posed effective strategies for questioning in the classroom. Wragg and Brown (2001, pp. 28-37) gave clearer description of the tactics.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research is survey design. Survey design is categorized as quantitative research method as it uses mostly numbers to generate ideas, and grouped into non-experimental design, as explained by Lodico, et al. (2010, p. 24), that "Non experimental research uses numbers to describe preexisting groups or to determine whether a relationship exists between variables." The study is basically describing students' perceptions of the teacher's questions behaviors, and thus is named descriptive survey design as it "aims to describe behaviors and to gather people's perceptions, opinions, attitudes, and beliefs about a current issue in education." (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 26). Another explanation is given by Creswell that survey design can be used to describe trends or opinions by studying a sample of population (2009, p. 12).

1. Participants

The participants were students of vocational high school; they were from 2 classes of mechanical engineering program and a class of mechanical engineering design class. They were in their second year. The school uses 2013 Curriculum.

2. Sampling

Convenient sampling method was used for the study, involving three classes of a mechanical engineering vocational school consisting of 98 students, all are male. The participants are students of a vocational school – 65 students are of mechanical engineering subject – class, 33 students are of design engineering subject – class.

3. Data collection procedure

As indicators for the questionnaire had been identified, items were made. They were written in *Bahasa Indonesia* to make them easier to comprehend. The questionnaire was group-administered to make it well-responded. It was distributed in the classroom during the free session after the second semester lesson ended.

4. Instruments

Closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 29 items was used to collect data. The items were 3-levels Likert scale: agree, unsure and disagree. To make the

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questions more understandable, they were written in *Bahasa Indonesia*. Questionnaire items were derived from the theories mentioned about questions and questioning technique, the indicators were:

a. Purpose of Questions
i. Encouraging thought, understanding of ideas, phenomena, procedures and values
ii. Checking understanding
iii. Gaining attention to task
iv. Reviewing and revisiting previous learning
v. For management purposes

b. Tactics of Questioning
i. Structuring
ii. Pitching and putting clearly
iii. Directing and distributing
iv. Pausing and pacing
v. Prompting and probing
vi. Listening to replies and responding
vii. Sequencing

The purposes are coded as A (A1 to A5) and the tactics are coded as B (B1 to B7). The questionnaires were distributed in the classroom – in the form of paper-based copy. Students were expected to complete the questionnaire in less than 30 minutes. As they had already finished all the lessons, they were expected to feel relaxed in answering the items.

5. Data Analysis Technique

All students returned the questionnaire in more or less 30 minutes and they filled out the questionnaire completely. Data were analyzed using SPSS to see the validity and reliability. The result of the calculation can determine which items are valid and whether the result of the questionnaire can be categorized as reliable. Validity test used Pearson correlation method in which the coefficient must be > 0.199. The reliability test used internal consistency technique, in which the Cronbach alpha coefficient must be > 0.6. To describe the perception of the students, descriptive statistics was identified. Percentages of each responses of each item were also presented. This will give picture of each indicator's responses. Conclusions are then derived from the data.

6. Procedure of the Research

The study was intended to see students' perceptions towards teachers' questioning practices. The writer followed the following steps: (1) identifying problem, (2) reviewing literature to determine indicators, (3) defining the population, (4) developing instrumentation plan, (5) collecting data, (6) analyzing data, and (7) writing report.

Findings and Discussion

1. Findings

The result of the validity test is as follows:

Table 1. Result of Validity Test

Item No	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	r-tabel	Conclu-sion
P1	.275	.006	0.199	valid
P2	.241	.017	0.199	valid
P3	.394	.000	0.199	valid
P4	.339	.001	0.199	valid
P5	.316	.002	0.199	Valid
P6	.458	.000	0.199	valid
P7	.426	.000	0.199	valid
P8	.089	.383	0.199	Invalid
P9	.299	.003	0.199	valid
P10	.382	.000	0.199	valid
P11	.331	.001	0.199	valid
P12	.173	.088	0.199	invalid
P13	.042	.683	0.199	invalid
P14	.398	.000	0.199	valid
P15	.304	.002	0.199	valid
P16	.331	.001	0.199	valid
P17	.194	.056	0.199	invalid
P18	.134	.190	0.199	invalid
P19	.244	.016	0.199	valid
P20	.245	.015	0.199	valid
P21	.157	.123	0.199	invalid
P22	.175	.085	0.199	invalid
P23	.459	.000	0.199	valid
P24	.374	.000	0.199	valid

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P25	.372	.000	0.199	valid
P26	.409	.000	0.199	valid
P27	.284	.005	0.199	valid
P28	.245	.015	0.199	valid
P29	.073	.477	0.199	invalid

The result of validity test of the 29 items showed that 21 items were valid and 8 items were not valid, they were item 8, 12, 13, 17, 18, 21, 22 and 29. They were not valid as the r value of each item was less than the r table, which was 0.199. The other 21 items were considered valid. Therefore, conclusion can be drawn from the responses. Among the categories (A1-A5, B1-B7), 2 categories (A2 and B7) were not represented in the result, as the items were considered not valid.

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.701	21

The result of reliability test, counted using the formula of Cronbach alpha coefficient, was 0.701. As the coefficient was 0.701, which was > 0.6 – the r table. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered reliable.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	N	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std. Dev**
Perception	98	69.8	100	90.3	6.6
Valid N (listwise)	98				

The descriptive statistic test resulted in coefficient of 90.327. Based on the value, it can be concluded that students' perception towards the English teacher was very good, which meant that students had positive perception towards teacher's questioning practices.

Table 4. Responses in Percentage

Item	**Code**	**Agree**	**Unsure**	**Dis-agree**
P1	G	85%	14%	2%
P2	A4	62%	31%	8%
P3	A3	75%	17%	8%
P4	A1	80%	18%	2%
P5	A1	80%	18%	2%
P6	A1	80%	20%	0%
P7	B6	77%	20%	3%
P9	B5	68%	23%	9%
P10	B5	69%	25%	6%
P11	B1	85%	12%	3%
P14	B3	78%	17%	5%
P15	B4	52%	35%	12%
P16	B4	82%	14%	5%
P19	B2	86%	14%	0%
P20	B2	85%	12%	3%
P23	A1	69%	29%	2%
P24	A5	34%	45%	22%
P25	A1	82%	18%	0%
P26	A1	83%	17%	0%
P27	A1	80%	18%	2%
P28	B6	80%	15%	5%

2. Discussions

The result of the study showed that students had positive perceptions towards the teachers' questioning practices. In general, students agreed that teachers should often give questions (G), as much as 85% students responded positively. The discussions below are presented in order of their categories (A1-A5, B1-B7).

On the average, 80% of the participants thought that questions functioned to encourage thought, understand of ideas, phenomena and procedures (A1). This means that the questions involved in their English classroom stimulated thinking, whether they were intended to understand the topic or used as discussion starters. Questions posed were also helpful in understanding the tasks they had to do and drawing conclusions of what they had learnt. Critical thinking was also practiced by using the question-answer talk. An item of A1 category was not quite well-responded (69%). The statement was: Teachers ask questions to find alternatives or other solutions. This might happen because the most of the questions posed during learning were well-responded, that they needed no more explanation because they were clear enough. The case might also be that teachers did not explore more after the

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students gave answers. Giving more thorough questions – named "responses repertoire" (Willen, 1991, p. 10), in which the question-answer talk increases in terms of the level of questions - is believed to increase students' thinking ability.

As to A3 category (question for gaining attention to task, warm ups), students gave quite well response. Based on the category, questions served as warms ups, they acted as knowledge builder and served to brainstorm. Given on the stage of pre-learning, these questions made a path that led to the targeted topic.

Next category was for category A4, in which questions posed by the teachers functioned to check comprehension of the previous learning. This is important when the lesson is connected or a continuation of the previous learning. In Indonesian context, a topic can be completed in more than 2 or 3 sessions. When this happens, teachers must make sure that students still remember what they have learnt, as it is a kind of pre-requisite for the upcoming learning. Although the A4 item was not well-responded, 62% of the participants thought that teachers had given enough comprehension checks.

There might be times when a classroom is in a chaotic situation. Participants of the study, although the number was very little – only 34% - thought that teachers had posed questions which helped manage the classroom. 45% of the participants felt unsure of the situation. This can mean that such disorders rarely happen in their English classroom, as this vocational high school is famous for its discipline.

The next discussion concerns questioning technique or tactics. As mentioned earlier, a category was not represented in the responses (B7-sequencing) as it was not valid. For the first category (B1 – structuring), students perceived that their teachers gave enough clues and made the questions more comprehensible by providing guidelines so that they could answer them. 85% of the students agreed to the statement that teachers helped students get the answers by providing clues and guidelines.

As much as 85% of the students felt that their teachers helped clarify the questions they had given. The teachers also use simple words when asking questions. In this case, simple meant words that are comprehensible. Wragg and Brown (2001, pp. 29-30) described the tactic of pitching (B2) as adjusting to the students' level. They defined pitching as "estimating the right intellectual level of the people you are teaching, so that you neither bewilder nor patronize them" (p. 29).

To give equal chance for every student to take part in classroom talk, teachers should direct the questions to the class and distribute opportunity in a fair manner. Calling up names directly after giving questions is not suggested (Wragg and Brown, 2001, pp. 31-32). The writers also mentioned about "monitoring the body language of the students" (p. 32), because sometimes students feel unsure whether or not they get the correct answers. 78% of the students responded quite well for this item (B3).

Concerning wait time (B4), students thought that their teachers gave around 3 minutes-time to answer the questions. 52% of the students did not agree that wait time should be about 1 minute. This is a little bit contradictory to what Rowe (1987, pp. 96-97) explained that wait time usually lasted for seconds (wait time 1) or longer (for wait time 2). More than 1-2 minutes might not be effective. However, when questions need thorough thought, students might need more time to build ideas.

The rest of the categories deals with how teachers should respond to the students' answers. They must listen attentively (B6), give positive rewards and feedback (B5), and when students give incorrect answers, teachers should respond wisely by prompting and probing. 80% of the students agreed that their teachers listened attentively to the students when they were trying to

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answer teachers' questions. However, around 65% of the students thought that their teacher repeated the questions when students got them wrong, or asking further elaboration from the students. Yet, students felt that their teachers had given rewards and positive feedback to them.

In general, students' responses revealed that what the teachers had done in the classroom regarding questions and questions technique made good impression to them. They perceived them positively. It can also be said that the teachers had practice the techniques of questioning quite well.

Conclusions

The study had presented some questionnaire items that can be used for further research in exploring teachers' questioning practices. Although there are categories that are not represented in the responses, the result of the study can give a piece of picture of what has been going on in an English classroom of a vocational high school. Further exploration should be made to get thorough explanation for contradictory results. The method of sampling and not-piloted instrument should become the next researcher's consideration. The characteristics of the participants (all are male) might also need a little touch on the theory part. Above all, teachers and educators can learn from the result of the study, that students need questions in all the three phases of learning, pre-, during and after-learning. Giving chances for students to brainstorm their prior knowledge before learning will help build a concept and map of what they are going to learn. This will lead to the right path, to the topic that is about to master. During learning, teachers can pose questions to stimulate discussions among students or between teacher and students. Questions should be phrased in comprehensible language to invite more correct answers from the students. Re-phrasing and re-formulating questions when repeating the question might help students understand the questions better. When students are answering the questions, the teachers should listen attentively and respond them in positive ways by giving rewards like all-thumbs-up or good words or giving feedback. Teachers can also ask students to elaborate their answers – this can promote critical thinking.

In conclusion, the study had answered its main question: What is students' perception towards teachers' questions and questioning techniques in English classroom interaction?

Based on the discussion, it can be said that the students or participants felt and perceived that the teachers' questioning practices were good.

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