

A Case Study on Teacher's Questioning Strategies in an Indonesian Vocational EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This single-teacher, single-lesson qualitative case study explores how an English teacher at an Indonesian vocational (SMK) school applies questioning strategies and for what pedagogical purposes. One 90-minute classroom session was video-recorded, supported by a semi-structured teacher interview and relevant lesson documents. Data were coded using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, which combines deductive and inductive approaches to categorize teacher questions into procedural, convergent, and divergent types. A total of 42 teacher questions were identified. Procedural questions ($\approx 57\%$) dominated, managing routines and transitions, while convergent questions ($\approx 24\%$) checked comprehension through factual responses. Divergent questions ($\approx 19\%$) promoted extended talk when combined with wait time and peer prompting. Short classroom vignettes illustrated how probing and redirection fostered participation and reflection. Credibility was maintained through the triangulation of observation, interviews, and documentation, as well as member checking of analytic summaries and an audit trail of coding decisions. In vocational EFL contexts with time and proficiency constraints, the strategic use of divergent prompts, accompanied by explicit wait time and scaffolding, can enhance meaningful student contributions without compromising classroom management. This study contributes empirical evidence from an underexplored SMK setting, offering practical insights for English teachers on balancing procedural control with communicative questioning to foster interaction and motivation in vocational classrooms.

Keywords: *Case Study, Classroom Interaction, EFL Teaching, Questioning Strategies, Vocational School*

INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction plays a crucial role in shaping students' language development, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where the classroom is often the primary space for language exposure. One essential aspect of this interaction is the teacher's questioning strategy. Research has consistently shown that effective questioning helps teachers manage classroom discourse, monitor comprehension, and promote higher-order thinking. As Ellis (1990) notes, the acquisition of a second language is significantly influenced by classroom interaction, and teacher talk, including questioning, dominates that interaction (Walsh, 2011).

However, many teachers still lack awareness of the types and purposes of their questions, especially in vocational high schools where learners have diverse academic motivations and may require different teaching approaches. Most studies on questioning strategies focus on urban or general high schools, leaving vocational schools in rural or semi-urban areas underexplored. Moreover, research shows that teachers tend to overuse procedural and convergent questions, while underutilizing divergent questions that could foster deeper learning and student autonomy (Sulaiman, 2021; Astrid et al., 2019).

Several recent studies have emphasized the growing importance of contextualized and technology-supported language instruction in Indonesian EFL settings. Katemba (2020) investigated teachers' perceptions of technology integration in English language classrooms and found that technological tools can enhance engagement but also present challenges in implementation, particularly when teachers have limited digital literacy. Similarly, Marpaung and Situmeang (2020) highlighted that the use of authentic materials through multimedia significantly improved students' vocabulary acquisition, demonstrating the pedagogical value of multimodal resources in fostering language comprehension. Meanwhile, Wijaya (2023) examined learners' perspectives on self-assessment in EFL writing and suggested that reflective assessment practices encourage student autonomy and deeper language awareness. Together, these studies underscore the importance of adaptive, student-centered approaches—whether through technology, authentic input, or reflective evaluation—which align with the communicative principles underpinning effective questioning strategies in EFL classrooms.

In response to this gap, the present study examines how an experienced English teacher at a private vocational school in Central Java, Indonesia, applies questioning strategies. The study focuses on three types of questions—procedural, convergent, and divergent—based on the framework proposed by Richards and Lockhart (1996). The aim is to explore not only the kinds of questions used in the classroom, but also the pedagogical purposes behind them.

This study is guided by three research questions: (1) How does the teacher apply questioning strategies in teaching English? (2) What kinds of questioning strategies are used? (3) What are the purposes behind the use of each strategy? By addressing these questions, this research contributes to the understanding of teacher-student interaction in vocational EFL classrooms and highlights the role of intentional questioning in supporting student engagement and learning outcomes.

Theoretically, this study offers insights into how classroom questioning supports communicative competence, cognitive development, and classroom management. Practically, it provides English teachers with applicable strategies for structuring classroom interaction and improving their pedagogical practice. By focusing on a context that is often overlooked in the literature, this case study also responds to the call for more research on questioning strategies in vocational education settings.

Furthermore, research has shown that teachers' ability to formulate appropriate questions can influence classroom atmosphere and student behavior (Bulent et al., 2016; Darong et al., 2021). Without effective strategies, student participation may suffer, especially in EFL settings where confidence and linguistic competence are still developing.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore how an English teacher at a vocational high school utilized questioning strategies during classroom instruction. The methodology was chosen to allow an in-depth investigation into the teacher's pedagogical choices, interaction patterns, and rationale behind specific questioning types. Rather than focusing on the frequency of question usage, this study emphasized the contextual and functional aspects of teacher questions as they naturally occurred in the classroom. The design enabled the researcher to observe and interpret teacher-student interactions in a real-world setting. Data collection involved classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, supported by field notes and audio recordings. The procedures, ethical considerations, and analytical framework are outlined in detail to ensure transparency, replicability, and rigor, thereby demonstrating the validity of the study's findings.

Research design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the application of questioning strategies in an English language classroom. The design was selected to allow an in-depth investigation of a real-life classroom context, focusing on how one teacher applies different types of questions and for what purposes. The case study method enabled the researcher to understand complex classroom phenomena in their natural setting, with the teacher's interaction patterns serving as the unit of analysis.

Research participants and Sampling Procedures

The research participant was an English teacher at a private vocational high school in Cilacap, Central Java, Indonesia. The teacher was selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria: a minimum of five years of teaching experience, active classroom involvement, and observable use of questioning strategies. The teacher had been teaching English for six years and held a bachelor's degree in English education from Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from the participant and school authorities prior to data collection. Experienced teachers are more likely to apply higher-order questions effectively, which contributes to deeper engagement and learning outcomes. This supports the selection of a teacher with six years of experience as an appropriate subject for studying questioning strategies (Horowitz, 2007).

Design and Setting

As this is a qualitative case study, the research focused on a single participant ($n = 1$) and one classroom (Grade XI Teknik Jaringan Komputer dan Komunikasi, comprising approximately 32 students). The emphasis was placed on the depth and richness of the data rather than its generalizability. The target population for this study consisted of EFL teachers in vocational schools located in semi-urban areas of Indonesia. This study is exploratory in nature, focusing on depth rather than breadth. As it involves only one teacher, one classroom,

and one observation session, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL or vocational contexts. Instead, the purpose of this case study is to provide a detailed and context-specific understanding of how questioning strategies are applied in an authentic classroom situation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The classroom observation was conducted during one full teaching session (2 × 45 minutes) and focused on identifying the types and functions of questions asked by the teacher. The session was video-recorded to ensure accuracy and allow for detailed analysis. The interview was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to allow the participant to express her thoughts freely and covered topics such as questioning frequency, types, purposes, and classroom responses. Documents, such as lesson plans and school profiles, were also reviewed to support a contextual understanding. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, data triangulation was conducted by cross-verifying information obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. The observation provided primary data on how questioning strategies were enacted during teaching, while the interview offered insights into the teacher's rationale and reflections. Documentation such as lesson plans, school profiles, and student attendance lists served as supporting evidence that contextualized the classroom setting.

Data from both observation and interview were transcribed and analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model, which involved three main stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data condensation, all teacher questions were identified and categorized into three types—procedural, convergent, and divergent—based on Richards and Lockhart's (1996) framework. Each coded segment was accompanied by excerpts from the observation or interview to illustrate the category. For example, the question "Who's absent today?" was coded as *procedural*, while "What do you think about this character?" was coded as *divergent*.

The coding process was iterative and interpretive. Initial codes from observation data were compared with interview transcripts to confirm the teacher's intentions behind specific question types. Any discrepancies between data sources were discussed during member checking with the participant to enhance accuracy. This triangulated approach ensured that the data interpretation reflected both observed practice and the teacher's own pedagogical reasoning.

Measures and Covariates

Two main instruments were used to guide data collection: (1) a validated observation rubric that categorized teacher questions into procedural, convergent, and divergent types, and included indicators such as question complexity, wait time, scaffolding, student interaction, and critical inquiry; (2) an interview rubric covering six aspects: question types, timing, student responses, follow-up strategies, classroom interaction, and teacher reflection. These instruments were reviewed and validated by an expert in English language education. The observation rubric and interview guide were developed based on the frameworks of Richards and Lockhart (1996) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). To ensure content validity, both instruments were reviewed by a doctoral candidate in Applied Linguistics at Hunan

Normal University, who also serves as a lecturer in English language education in Indonesia. The expert provided feedback on the clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness of each item, and minor revisions were made based on the suggestions to improve construct representation.

A small pilot observation was also conducted in a different classroom to confirm the practicality and clarity of the rubric indicators. As the researcher was the sole observer and data coder, inter-rater reliability was not calculated; this is acknowledged as a methodological limitation of the present study. However, to enhance trustworthiness, member checking with the teacher was conducted to confirm the accuracy of data interpretation.

Manipulations or Interventions

No experimental manipulations or interventions were conducted in this study. The research observed the natural teaching practices of the participant without altering the instructional process.

Ethical Approval and Participant Consent

This study was conducted in compliance with the ethical research standards of Universitas Negeri Semarang. Formal approval for the study was obtained from the English Language Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, which oversees ethical procedures for student research. Before data collection, an official letter of permission was also obtained from the participating school. All participants were fully informed of the study's objectives, data collection procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time. Written informed consent was obtained from the participating teacher and the school principal. As the study involved video-recorded classroom observations where students were present, parental consent and student assent were also secured prior to recording. The purpose of the recording—to analyze classroom discourse rather than assess individual students—was clearly explained to both students and parents to ensure voluntary participation. To protect participant privacy, all identifying information—including the teacher's and school's real names—was anonymized in transcripts and reports. Video and interview data were stored in password-protected digital folders accessible only to the researcher. The data were used solely for academic purposes and were subsequently deleted upon completion of the study. These procedures ensured that the research met institutional and ethical standards for working with human participants in educational settings.

RESULTS

Application of Questioning Strategies in the Classroom

The observation revealed that the teacher consistently integrated questioning strategies throughout various phases of the lesson. These questions were used not only to assess students' knowledge but also to manage the classroom, encourage participation, and promote reflective thinking. A total of 42 teacher questions were identified during the 90-minute observation. Among them, 24 questions (57%) were procedural in nature. At the beginning of the lesson, procedural questions were commonly used to check readiness and manage classroom flow. For example, the teacher asked, "Are you ready to study English?" and "Who's absent today?"

These types of questions helped to set routines and initiate engagement; 10 questions (24%) were convergent. As the lesson progressed, convergent questions were frequently employed to check students' understanding of key concepts. The teacher asked questions such as "What is the definition of narrative text?" and "What is the social function of descriptive text?" These questions required specific, factual answers and were designed to verify comprehension. And 8 questions (19%) were divergent. Divergent questions were used strategically to stimulate critical thinking. Although less frequent, questions like "What do you think about this character?" or "Any other opinion?" allowed students to express personal opinions and engage in deeper discussions. The teacher gave adequate wait time (up to 20 seconds) and encouraged peer responses to maximize participation. This pattern indicates that procedural questions dominated classroom interactions, primarily used to manage routines, maintain order, and initiate engagement. Convergent questions were the second most frequent type, often used to verify comprehension and recall of key concepts. Divergent questions appeared less frequently, yet they played a crucial role in encouraging students to express their opinions, share ideas, and engage in reflective thinking. These proportions align with previous studies (e.g., Astrid et al., 2019; Sulaiman, 2021), which also reported the predominance of procedural and convergent questioning in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Types of Questioning Strategies Identified

Based on observation and interview data, the teacher employed three major types of questions in line with Richards and Lockhart's framework:

Table 1. Type of Questioning Strategies

Question Type	Function	Example
Procedural	Manage classroom flow and routines	"Are you ready to study English?", "Who's absent today?"
Convergent	Check factual understanding and recall	"What is the definition of narrative text?", "What is the social function of descriptive text?"
Divergent	Encourage critical thinking and multiple perspectives	"What do you think about this character?", "Any other opinion?"

The use of these questioning types was context-dependent and often shifted according to the lesson phase and student engagement level.

Purposes Behind the Use of Questioning Strategies

From the teacher interview, five main purposes for using questioning strategies were identified:

Assessing Understanding: Most convergent questions were used to check whether students grasped the material, especially after an explanation or reading activity.

Stimulating Critical Thinking: Divergent questions were used to prompt students to think independently, compare ideas, and reflect on personal experiences. The importance of divergent questions in encouraging metacognitive skills has also been emphasized by prior research, which suggests that such questions can significantly promote reflective learning in language classrooms (Jiang, 2014; Zhang, 2018).

Encouraging Participation: Questions were used to draw students into discussions, especially those who were initially passive.

Motivating Students: Procedural questions, combined with ice-breaking techniques, helped energize and mentally prepare students at the beginning of the lesson.

Building Classroom Interaction: The teacher avoided directly correcting wrong answers. Instead, she redirected the question to other students, building a collaborative and supportive classroom environment.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how an English teacher employed questioning strategies in a vocational high school, focusing on the types and purposes of questions used during classroom interactions. The findings revealed a structured and intentional use of procedural, convergent, and divergent questions, aligning with Richards and Lockhart's (1996) classification. These findings offer both theoretical reinforcement and new insights specific to the context of EFL teaching in vocational settings.

First, the dominant use of procedural questions was consistent with previous studies (Nunan & Lamb, 1996), which argue that managing classroom flow is a prerequisite for effective instruction. In this study, procedural questions were used not only to manage behavior but also to motivate students through ice-breaking routines, an intentional move by the teacher to establish a comfortable learning environment. When English teachers implement differentiated instruction through enjoyable activities, such as games, students become more engaged and motivated. This approach caters to diverse learning needs while fostering a fun and positive classroom environment. This highlights the affective function of procedural questioning beyond logistical control (Dewi & Wahyuni, 2023). Teacher questioning can serve as a motivational tool by shaping both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, stimulating classroom interaction, and fostering a supportive learning environment (Suryani & Widhiyanto, 2023).

Convergent questions, the most frequently used type, served to assess students' factual understanding and recall of material. These questions are particularly useful in EFL classrooms where learners may struggle with comprehension and vocabulary. This pattern aligns with findings from previous studies (Astrid et al., 2019), which have shown that EFL teachers prioritize low-cognitive questions to ensure comprehension. However, this study also noted that the teacher gradually scaffolded responses from general to specific, demonstrating an effort to

build depth in student understanding. These findings echo what Milawati and Suryati (2019) found, where convergent questions dominate classroom practice, although they tend to limit student exploration if not followed by probing or elaborative questioning. The strategic use of divergent questions, although less frequent, was a strong indicator of the teacher's effort to promote higher-order thinking and encourage student-centered learning.

Questions such as "Any other opinion?" allowed students to express their thoughts and reflect on their ideas, creating space for multiple perspectives. This supports Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), which suggests that such questions foster cognitive skills such as analysis and evaluation. It also aligns with studies emphasizing the importance of divergent questions in stimulating critical thinking in language learning (Sulaiman, 2021; Zeng, 2023).

The teacher's use of divergent questions was often accompanied by longer wait time and open-ended prompts. For instance, questions like "What would you do in this situation?" or "Why do you think that is important?" created opportunities for extended student talk. This strategy aligns with Jiang (2014), who emphasized that open-ended questions not only promote language production but also stimulate cognitive engagement. While such questions were used less frequently compared to procedural and convergent ones, their impact was notable in terms of encouraging students to express personal opinions, justify their answers, and explore hypothetical scenarios. This suggests that even in vocational school contexts, where students may not prioritize academic English, divergent questioning can still play a transformative role in elevating interaction quality.

Importantly, the purposes behind the teacher's questioning extended beyond knowledge assessment. The teacher aimed to build interaction, validate diverse responses, and motivate learners through questioning. Rather than correcting mistakes directly, she used peer responses and summary techniques, encouraging students to learn from one another. This approach reflects key tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), where interaction and negotiation of meaning are central. Rido (2017) also noted that questioning strategies play a crucial role in directing classroom interaction, particularly in vocational English settings, where learners benefit from more scaffolded and meaningful communication.

In vocational high schools (SMK), the learning environment differs considerably from that of general senior high schools (SHS) due to students' diverse motivations, a practical skill orientation, and often lower initial English proficiency. These factors present unique constraints that shape classroom discourse. Unlike SHS students, who are generally academically oriented and accustomed to abstract discussion, SMK students tend to focus on functional English relevant to workplace communication. Consequently, teachers in vocational contexts must balance between maintaining engagement and achieving linguistic objectives within limited classroom time. The teacher in this study navigated these constraints by employing procedural and convergent questions to sustain attention and ensure comprehension, while selectively incorporating divergent questions to foster reflection and creativity. This contrasts with SHS contexts, where teachers may have more freedom to emphasize conceptual depth over practicality. The adaptive questioning behavior observed here, therefore, represents a strategic move specific to vocational EFL pedagogy — integrating communicative engagement within the realities of time, motivation, and linguistic diversity.

This study's contribution lies particularly in its focus on a vocational high school context, which remains underrepresented in EFL classroom discourse research. The findings reveal that questioning strategies in such settings are not only used to guide comprehension but also to sustain motivation among students whose academic goals vary. In vocational classrooms, teachers frequently face the challenge of maintaining student engagement when students prioritize practical skills over theoretical study. The observed teacher's frequent use of procedural and convergent questions reflects an adaptive response to this context—balancing discipline, clarity, and encouragement within limited classroom time.

Furthermore, the strategic use of divergent questions in this study demonstrates that even in vocational settings, where linguistic proficiency may be uneven, higher-order questioning can still foster interaction and reflection when supported by adequate scaffolding and wait time. This extends the findings of Rido (2017) and Sulaiman (2021) by showing how vocational EFL teachers can integrate communicative questioning within real-world classroom constraints.

Compared to studies in general high schools (e.g., Astrid et al., 2019; Milawati & Suryati, 2019), the present case suggests that questioning in vocational contexts serves a broader pedagogical function—managing both learning behavior and emotional readiness. Thus, the contribution of this case study lies in highlighting how questioning strategies, when contextually adapted, can serve as both a cognitive and affective bridge between teacher intentions and student engagement.

In summary, the results of this study confirm the significance of questioning strategies in EFL instruction and enhance our understanding of their role in promoting classroom interaction, student thinking, and motivation, particularly within underexplored educational contexts such as vocational high schools in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the application of questioning strategies in English language teaching, focusing on how a vocational high school teacher employed different types of questions and their corresponding pedagogical purposes. Through a qualitative case study involving classroom observation and teacher interviews, three major types of questions were identified: procedural, convergent, and divergent.

The findings showed that procedural questions were essential for classroom management and emotional preparation, often used at the beginning of lessons to motivate and engage students. Convergent questions were the most dominant type, used to assess factual understanding and reinforce prior knowledge. Meanwhile, divergent questions, although less frequent, played a crucial role in promoting critical thinking, encouraging multiple perspectives, and fostering student participation. The teacher's questioning practices demonstrated intentionality and adaptability in supporting both cognitive and affective aspects of learning, creating a communicative and inclusive classroom environment.

The implications of this research are significant for English teachers, particularly in vocational settings. Teachers are encouraged to reflect on the types and purposes of their questions and to diversify their questioning techniques to address both cognitive and emotional learning goals. Additionally, teacher education programs should emphasize explicit training in

purposeful questioning as part of classroom discourse strategies. Questioning should be viewed not merely as a means of assessing knowledge but as a dynamic pedagogical tool that sustains attention, fosters reflection, and empowers students to think more independently.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. It involved only one English teacher, one classroom, and one observed lesson, which restricts the generalizability of the findings. The analysis was also conducted by a single coder, which may introduce interpretive subjectivity despite triangulation and member checking. These constraints should be understood within the exploratory nature of the case study. Future research is therefore encouraged to adopt broader and more varied designs—such as multi-site and multi-teacher investigations, longitudinal classroom observations, and mixed-method approaches—to build a more comprehensive understanding of questioning strategies and their effects on student learning and participation. Such research could also explore the perspectives of students themselves, providing a more balanced view of how teacher questioning shapes classroom dynamics from both sides of the interaction.

Overall, this study reinforces that questioning strategies are not merely tools for managing classroom routines but serve as powerful instruments for promoting learner autonomy, engagement, and higher-order thinking. By adopting a reflective and strategic approach to questioning—supported by adequate wait time, scaffolding, and peer interaction—teachers can transform classroom discourse into a space for genuine communication and inquiry. In vocational education contexts, where students' motivation and language proficiency vary widely, well-planned questioning can bridge the gap between practical skill orientation and communicative competence. In doing so, it contributes not only to more interactive and meaningful EFL instruction but also to the broader development of students as confident and reflective language users.

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