AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER QUESTIONS USED BY AN ENGLISH TEACHER
AT AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Abstract

This study was conducted to analyze the teacher questions used by the English teacher at an elementary school called SD 02 Sumogawe Getasan. Long and Sato’s theory was used to analyze the types of teacher questions and Richard & Lockhart’s theory to analyze the reasons for using the questions. Five observations were conducted and the results of the analysis show that display questions outnumbered referential questions. The most frequent reason used by the teacher in asking questions was to check students’ understanding.

Key Words: teacher question, type and reason

Introduction

English as a foreign language has become popular especially in entering the new globalization era and of course as an international language English has become a need in the world of education. Nowadays, it is believed that English can be taught from elementary school level because it is best to start it since childhood. According to Moon, Brumfit, and Tongue (1991), elementary students are keen and they are enthusiastic young learners just beginning their schooling. English as a foreign language is taught in most elementary schools in Indonesia. English is also taught at SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan, an elementary school in the country.

Talking about teaching English in the classroom, one thing that we should not ignore is the role of teacher questions in the English teaching process. Teaching children at the elementary level is definitely different from teaching adults. Techniques such as questioning strategies are very important in teaching children
because they affect the children’s learning process in studying English which is still quite unfamiliar for them. Teacher questions in the classroom play an important role in language acquisition: “They can be used to allow the learner to keep participating in the discourse and even modify it so that the language used becomes more comprehensible and personally relevant” (Banbrook and Skehan, 1989 as cited by Richards & Lockhart, 1994).

Teachers should be aware of question types and how they can be used for different purposes. To make the interaction between the teacher and student go well, it may depend on how teacher questions are contributed. Teacher questions play an important role for the students to learn the target language.

Based on the above discussion, I was interested in analyzing the teacher questions in teaching English to students at SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan. I wanted to know what kinds of questions were used by the teacher and the reasons for the questions used.

**Teacher Questions**

Questioning is one of the most common techniques used by teachers (Richards & Lockhart, 1994) and serves as the principal way in which teachers control the classroom interaction. The tendency for teachers to ask many questions has been observed in many investigations (Chaudron, 1988). In some classrooms over half of class time is occupied by question-and-answer exchanges (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). Teacher questions have attracted considerable attention from researchers of language classroom.
Questioning is part of the teaching learning process. By asking questions teachers can gather a lot of information. McNaughton and Williams (1998) said that questioning is a very good and pervasive teaching technique which is relevant to most learning experience especially for young learners. Through questions they can convey their sense of curiosity and wonderment.

Functions of teacher questions

The common use of teacher questions in the classroom can be explained by the specific functions they perform. These functions can be grouped into three broad areas: diagnostic, instructional, and motivational (Donald & Eggen, 1989).

As a diagnostic tool, classroom questions allow the teacher to look into the minds of students to find out not only what they know or don’t know but also how they think about a topic. Recent research on schema theory suggests that the structure of students’ existing knowledge is a powerful determinant of how new information will be learned, and that often student misconceptions and prior beliefs interfere with the learning of new material (Mayer, 1987; Donald & Eggen, 1989). Through strategic questioning, the teacher can assess the current state of student thinking, identifying not only what students know but also gaps and misconceptions.

A second important function that questions perform is instructional. The instructional function focuses on the role that questions play in helping students learn new material and integrate it with the old one. Questions provide the practice and feedback essential for the development. Questions alert students to the information in a lesson. Questions are also valuable in the learning of integrated bodies of knowledge. Toward this goal, questions can be used to review previously learned
material to establish a knowledge base for the new material to be learned. In addition, as the new material is being developed, questions can be used to clarify relationships within the content being discussed.

A third function that classroom questions perform is motivational. Through questions teachers can engage students actively in the lesson at hand, challenging their thinking and posing problems for them to consider. From a lesson perspective, a question at the beginning can be used to capture students’ attention and provide a focus for the lesson. In addition, frequent and periodic questions can encourage active participation and provide opportunities in the lesson for continued student involvement. Research in this area shows student on-task behaviors are highest during teacher-led questioning sessions. Finally, at the individual level, questions can be used to draw wandering students back into the lesson or to provide an opportunity for one student to “shine”.

Types of teacher questions according to Long and Sato (1983)

a. Display Questions

Display questions refer to ones that teachers know the answer and which are designed to elicit or display particular structures.

b. Referential Questions

Referential questions refer to the questions that teachers do not know the answers to, and can gain various subjective information.
The reasons why teachers ask questions

According to Richards & Lockhart (1994), there are several reasons why questions are so commonly used in teaching:

- They stimulate and maintain students interest
- They encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson
- They enable teachers to clarify what students has said
- They enable teachers to elicit particular structures or vocabulary items
- They enable teachers to check students' understanding
- They encourage students participation in a lesson

The Study

This research can be considered as a descriptive study because it tried to describe the kinds of questions that were used by the English teacher who taught at SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan. It also described the reasons why the teacher used the questions.

In this research, the participant was the English teacher who taught grade 4, 5, and 6. She had been teaching English for 2 years.

The data for the research were collected through class observations, recording and notes.

1. Class Observation

The observation was conducted in the classroom as the teaching and learning process was in progress. The gathering of the data by observation was conducted five times in different classes. In addition, the observation focused
on the questions used by the teachers during the teaching. Notes were taken in order to get more accurate data.

2. Recording

The teacher talk was recorded and then transcribed and compared with the data got from the observations. A mini recorder was used in the classroom during the observation to avoid losing valuable data.

All the teacher questions were collected and then they were analyzed based on the criteria chosen. After deciding the types of questions used by the teacher, the analysis went on to find out the reasons why the teacher used the questions.

In conducting this study, first library research was done to get all the information needed about teacher questions. Second, observations and the recording were carried out to get the data. Third, the data were analyzed and finally conclusions were drawn.

Discussion.

A. Types of teacher questions used by the English teacher at SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan.

The data were analyzed based on Long and Sato’s (1983) theory. They divide types of teacher questions into two:

1. Display questions which refers to ones that teachers know the answer and which are designed to elicit or display particular structures.

2. Referential questions which refer to questions that teachers do not know the answers to, and can gain various subjective information.
The following table gives the analysis of the types of teacher questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Display Question</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Referential Question</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>46.6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>73.3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting 5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total in 100%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Types of teacher questions

From the table we can see that the most frequently used questions in teaching English in SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan were display questions.

1. From 65 questions asked in 5 classroom observations, display questions appeared 41 times or 63.1%.

Examples of display questions are:

Meeting 2:

T : Kalo sudah berlalu, jawabannya “I painted the house atau I paint the house?

St : I painted the house

T : Ya betul
In this case the teacher already knew the answer, and in order to help the students she gave the options. Here the teacher wanted to show the use of the past tense to refer to a past event.

Meeting 5:
T : Where is the post office? Siapa yang bisa jawab?
St : The post office is in front of the Bank
T : Good

Here the teacher knew the answer to the question and the question was asked to give students practice on the use of the preposition *in*.

Meeting 3:
T : Kalo pohon dibilang seekor pohon boleh ndak?
St : Tidak boleh

The Teacher asked a question by giving an example of a logical statement so that the students could imagine their natural environment. Here also the teacher knew the answer to the question asked.

2. The rest of the questions were referential questions (36.9%) and in this case the teacher did not know the answers to the questions.

Examples of referential questions are:

Meeting 1:
T : How did you do last holiday? apa yang kamu lakukan saat liburan kemarin?
St : I go picnic
This was a genuine question asking about the student’s activity during the holiday and before the student gave the answer, the teacher did not know what it was.

Meeting 2:

T : “Ok, I will check” siapa yang sudah selesai?

This was a simple question to know whether the students had finished doing the exercise or not.

Meeting 1:

T : Who likes singing?

This question was not to give the students an exercise but in order to get new information from them.

B. Reasons for using teacher questions

Richard & Lockhart (1994) give five reasons for using teacher questions as follows:

1. Stimulate and maintain students interest
2. Encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson
3. Enable teachers to clarify what students has said
4. Encourage students participation in a lesson
5. To check students understanding
The following table gives the analysis of the reasons why the teacher asked the questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Mtg 1</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mtg 2</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mtg 3</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mtg 4</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mtg 5</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stimulate and maintain students interest</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18.18</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarify what students has said</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage students participation in a lesson</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>36.36</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To check students' understanding</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27.27</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16.7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.33</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2: The reasons for using teacher questions**

The table above shows that 20 questions (30.8%) were meant to check students’ understanding and 17 questions (26%) were meant to stimulate and maintain students’ interest. These were the most common reasons that the teacher had. The next was to encourage students’ participation in the lesson (23.1%), followed by to encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson (20%). From the data it is shown that there was no question to clarify what students had said.

Below are some examples from the data following the order of the frequency:

1. **To check students' understanding**

   **Meeting 2:**

   T: Where is the cinema? Di mana bioskopnya?
Meeting 5:

T : Understand to?

The two questions above were meant to check students’ understanding and the second question was a direct one.

2. To stimulate and maintain students’ interest

Meeting 1:

T : What did you last holiday?
St : I go shopping

The interest of telling one’s experience can make students to talk more and give more opportunities to the teacher to ask further questions.

Meeting 4:

T : Do you like doll?
St : yes

T : Boneka apa yang kamu suka?
St : Panda

When students are interested in something, they will be more freely to share their ideas.

3. To encourage students’ participation in a lesson

Meeting 1:

T : Siapa yang bisa tunjuk jari. “Raise your hand”!

Meeting 3:
The teacher used the two questions above to encourage students’ participation in a lesson.

4. To encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson.

Meeting 4:

T : Siapa yang mau ncoba ngisi titik-titik yang kosong ini?

Meeting 2:

T : Ini warnanya apa? coba dilihat dicatatan.

The two examples show that the teacher tried to encourage the students to think and focus on the lesson.

As a conclusion, I present two charts: one explains in general about the types of questions used and the other gives reasons for using the questions in the teaching-learning process at SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan.

Chart 1: Types of questions used by the teacher in SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan
There were 65 questions from 5 observations conducted at SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan: Referential questions dominated the English classes which was about 63.1%. The rest was display questions.

Chart 2: Reasons for using questions used by the teacher of SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan

Conclusions and Recommendation

A. Conclusions

As mentioned earlier the research questions are:

1. What kind of questions does the teacher in SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan use?

Long and Sato (1983) in their book *Forms and Functions of Teachers’ Question* mentioned 2 types of questions, display and referential question. After 5 observations in SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan, I came with the data that show 63.1% of total questions were display questions or 41 in
number and referential question only occurred 36.9% or 24 questions. This means that the teacher of SD Sumogawe 02 Getasan used display questions more often than referential ones.

2. What are the reasons for using those questions?

Richards & Lockhart (1994) in their book entitled Reflexive Teaching mentioned five reasons: (1) Stimulate and maintain student’s interest, (2) Encourage students to think and focus on the content of the lesson, (3) Enable teachers to clarify what students has said (4) Encourage students participation in a lesson, and (5) To check students understanding. Based on the analysis, the most common reasons was to check students’ understanding with 30.8% or 20 questions. The teacher wanted to check their understanding toward the lesson frequently. The 2nd most common reason was to stimulate and maintain students’ interest with 26% or 17 questions. Since the students were children, their attention span was short so the teacher needed to keep their attention by giving them a question. Whereas the reason to clarify what a student had said did not appear at all during the five observations.

B. Recommendation

In this study, the analysis of teacher questions in teaching English was done in an elementary school. Hence, a similar study could be conducted using different participants such as teachers of junior or senior high school or even teachers of kindergarten.
**Acknowledgement**

It is unbelievable that finally I finished my thesis. Praise **God Allah** who always gives wonderful love, wisdom, blessings, guidance, and strength in my life. Thank you God that always give me the best I really need and thank you for showing many miracles in my life. Without You, I would never have been able to write this thesis.

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References


