# Teacher's Questioning Behaviour and
# ESL Classroom Interaction Pattern

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**Abstract:** The quest for improved teaching of English in a second language in Nigeria has made scholars and researchers to focus attention on what goes on in English language classroom, especially interaction between the teacher and the students. An important aspect of classroom interaction in ESL classroom is teachers' question which plays significant roles in ESL instruction. Hence, the study investigated the impact of English language teachers' use of Display and Referential questions on teacher pupil interaction in ESL classroom in selected secondary schools from Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria. Two Research question namely: Is there any difference in the distribution of Display and Referential Questions in ESL classroom; and Will Referential question create more interaction in the classroom than Display Questions? Were raised and answered in the study. A direct observation and recording of what went on intact ESL classes between 20 teachers and 400 students from six randomly selected secondary schools in Oyo and Osun State was conducted. A total of six weeks was spent on the study (one week per school). The results revealed that teachers used more of Display Question (85%) than Referential question (15%). The results further revealed that Referential question (100%) created less classroom interaction than Display (87.6%): 24.4%). Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that ESL teachers in Nigeria should exploit more of Display questions in English language classroom as a means of improving classroom participation and involvement of learners. English language teachers in Nigeria must to be equipped through workshops and seminars, to exploit questioning behaviour as a way of promoting classroom interaction in ESL instruction.

**Key words:** Teachers · Questioning Behaviour · Classroom · Interaction Pattern · Display Question · Referential Question

## INTRODUCTION

What goes on in the English language classroom has been the concern of teachers and scholars in recent time. Most of the researcher on English language classroom focused on the language used by the teacher and learners as well as the structures and patterns of classroom interaction in English to a second language (ESL) classroom Odekunle [1]. In the views of Allwright and Bailey [2], these are aspects that are observable in the classroom.

An important aspect of classroom interaction in ESL classroom, which has received a great deal of attention, in teachers' questions. Teachers' questions may serve different functions, including focusing attention, exercising disciplinary control in the course or an instruction, encouraging students' participation and moving the lesson forward among others [3]. In a separate study, Brock [4] investigated the role of questions in ESL instruction, in classroom environment and he discovered that classroom questions of whatever fort are designed to get learners to produce language. Long and

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Sato [5], Lier [6] and Brock [4] are of the view that referential questions by teachers may create discourse which can produce a flow of information form students to the teacher and may create a more near-normal speech.

Olateju [7] citing Sato (1983) identified two main types of questions-Display questions and Referential questions. Lynch [8] characterizes display questions as those questions for which the questioner knows the answer before hand and that such questions are usually asked for comprehension checks confirmation check or clarification requests. Odekunle [1] amplifies further that display questions is used for getting students their knowledge of the linguistic forms of the factual content needed to respond. He also sees it as information question, on the other hand, Referential questions according to Lynch [8] is that which asks for information which the teacher does not know. Referential question is characterized further by Shomoossi [3] as requiring interpretation and judgements on the part of the person to whom it is directed.

From the foregoing, it could be concluded that of all the dimensions of teacher talk, the questioning behaviour of the teacher is at the centre as it has the potentials of correcting learners' errors, reinforcing the lesson and developing the concept being taught.

**The problem:** An important determinant of effective teaching and learning of English as a second language in Nigeria is the type of interaction that takes place in the ESL classroom between the teacher and the learners the notable aspect of which is teachers questioning behaviour. Hence, this study examined the effect of English language teachers' questioning behaviour on teacher-pupil interaction in ESL classroom in selected secondary schools in Nigeria.

**Hypotheses tested:** Two null hypotheses were tested in the study namely.

- There is no significant influence of teachers question behaviour on ESL classroom interaction.
- There is no significant difference between the distribution of teachers' use of display and referential question.

**Significance of the study:** Teachers questioning behaviour has been identified as an important aspect of classroom interaction in teaching/learning situation. Examining the effect of teachers' questioning behaviour on ESL classroom interaction is expected to provide insight into the use of teachers' questions to facilitate better learning of English language. Teachers of English language will particularly benefit from the study as findings from the study will be an eye-opener to them on how to use questions to improve ESL classroom interaction. Ultimately, the findings of the study is expected to improve students' competence in English as a second language.

**Research design:** The study adopted a survey research design to examine the effect of English teachers questioning behaviour on ESL classroom interaction. This is because the researcher has no control over the variables of the study.

**Population and sample:** The population of the study consisted of all senior secondary school students and their English language teachers in Oyo and Osun States of Nigeria. From this population a total of 400 students and 10 English language teachers in intact classes from ten (six) randomly selected senior secondary schools, three each in Oyo and Osun States were involved in the study.

**Instruments:** The only instrument used for data collection in the study was Classroom Interaction Observation Schedule which comprised a checklist on the teacher's use of questions in ESL lessons.

**Validity and reliability of the instruments:** The face and content validity of the instrument was ensured through suggestions and inputs from senior colleagues in the Department of Teacher Education, Language Unit University of Ibadan. Ibadan. As for the reliability of the instrument, a trial-study was conducted with the instrument and using Cronbach Alpha, a coefficient of 0.81 was obtained.

**Procedure:** The researcher carried out observation on teachers questioning behaviour in ESL classroom. The classes were observed very carefully during a six-week period. The researcher carried out the observation personally sitting in the classrooms from the beginning to the end of each lesson session. During the observation, the researcher took notes of teachers questions their number and function (such as comprehension check, talk initiation), listening to the students. Discussions, writing down the amount and frequency of teacher-student or student-student interactions, length of the learners responses to different types questions absence, presence or frequency of exchange and other noticeable patterns. In the process, the number of display and referential questions and their results were all recorded. Students' participation in teacher-fronted questions were also observed.

**Methods of data analysis:** The observed pattern form the study were analyzed to find and reveal noticeable generalizations and patterns in teachers' questioning behaviour and its effect on ESL classroom interaction. As such, descriptive statistics of simple percentage was used. In addition, inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between teachers question behaviour and ESL classroom interaction while t-test statistics was used to determine the significant difference in the distribution of display and referential questions in ESL classrooms studied. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows that 400 students respondents participate din the study out of which 52.3% were male and 47.7.% were female. This implies that both sexes were well represented in the study among students.

Table 2 further reveals that 20 English language teachers participated in the study out of which 60% were male while 40% were female. This also implies that both sexes participated in the study among the teachers.

**Research question 1:** Is there any difference between the distribution of teachers' use of Display and Referential Questions?

As shown in Table 3 above, display questions take the lion share of the totals number of questions asked during English language instruction accounting for 85% while Referential questions accounted for only 15% of the total questions asked by the teachers in all the six schools observed. The inference drawn from the above scenario is that in all the classes observed, English language teachers use of Display Questions is by far greater than Referential Questions and this implies that there is a difference in the distribution of Display and Referential Question in ESL classroom in the two states studied.

**Research question 2:** Referential Questions create more interaction in the classroom than display and referential questions.

Table 1:Gender distribution of students

| Gender | F | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Male | 209 | 52.3 |
| Female | 191 | 47.7 |
| Total | 400 | 100.0 |

Table 2: Gender Distribution of Teachers

| Gender | F | % |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Male | 12 | 60.0 |
| Female | 8 | 40.0 |
| Total | 20 | 100.0 |

Table 3: Simple percentage table showing the frequency of occurrence of display and referential questions in english language classroom

| Classroom sessions | A | B | C | D | E | F | Total | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Display question | 19 | 22 | 18 | 23 | 18 | 21 | 121 | 85 |
| Referential question | 7 | 03 | 05 | 01 | 03 | 02 | 21 | 15 |
| Total No. of questions | 26 | 25 | 23 | 24 | 21 | 23 | 142 | 100 |

Table 4(a): Simple % table showing classroom interaction with display and reference question

| Classes | Display | No of Trs initiation with % | No of pupil initiation with % | Referential question | No of Trs. initiation with % | No of pupils initiation with % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 19 | 15 (78.8%) | 04 (21.1%) | 7 | 7 (100%) | - (0%) |
| B | 22 | 18 (81.8%) | 04 (18.2%) | 03 | 03 (100%) | - (0%) |
| C | 18 | 16 (88.8%) | 02 (11.2%) | 05 | 05 (100%) | - (0%) |
| D | 23 | 20 (86.9%) | 03 (13.1%) | 01 | 01 (100%) | - (0%) |
| E | 18 | 18 (100.0%) | - (0%) | 03 | 03 (100%) | - (0%) |
| F | 21 | 19 (90.4%) | 02 (9.6%) | 02 | 02 (100%) | - (0%) |

Table 4(b): Summary of simple percentage table showing classroom interaction with display and referential questions

| Questions | | No of teacher initiation with percentage | No of pupil initiation with percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Display | 121 | 106 (87.6%) | 15 (24.4%) |
| Referential | 21 | 21 (100.0%) | 0 (0.0%) |

Table 4a and 4b above illustrate that display questions create opportunity for teacher-pupils exchanges in the English language classroom even though the involvement of pupils is minimal (12.4%). Conversely, Referential questions do not create opportunity for teacher-pupils' exchanges. All the questions are dominated by the teachers.

Table 4a and 4b therefore show that referential questions do create less classroom interaction than display questions.

**Discussion of findings:** The findings from this study revealed that there is a difference in English language teachers' distribution of display and referential questions. The Display questions accounted for about 85% of the total questions asked while Referential questions accounted for just 15%. This finding corroborates that of Shommoossi [3] in which he found out that 14% of the questions asked in a Tranian English language classroom were Referential questions. While Display questions carried 76% meaning that Display questions outnumbered Referential questions. In earlier studies, Brock [5] and Long and Sato [9] and Akerele [9] reported that classroom interaction was characterized by greater frequency of display questions. These finding may be as a result of the fact that display questions are often short and are related to comprehension of the lesson taught by the teacher.

The study also revealed that display questions favour more classroom interaction than do referential questions. This finding accords perfectly with Allwright and Bailey [2], Hickman [10] and Shomoossi, [3] who found in separate studies that display questions encourage language learners, especially beginners to get interested participate actively in the lesson. This is the case with the junior secondary school student used in this study.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In summary, it was found from this study that teachers' questioning behaviour affects ESL classroom interaction. The Display questions were more frequently used by the teachers and such question were found to have created more interaction in ESL classroom. Therefore, it is recommended that EFL teachers in Nigeria should use more of display questions in English language classroom as a means of improving classroom participation and involvement of learners. Also, English language teachers in Nigeria must be equipped to exploit questioning behaviour as a way of promoting classroom interaction in ESL instruction. It is important that teachers of English language must learn to adjust their teaching style to learners strategies. Finally, since it has been discovered that display question promotes better classroom interaction among junior students, it is suggested that ESL teachers should exploit the use of referential questions as a way of enhancing better classroom interaction among highly proficient and more matured ESL students in senior secondary schools.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

## Prior publications

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