

Analyzing Teacher's Questions in Reading Activity

Muhammad Hasanul 'Aqil

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

aqilhasanul@gmail.com

Abstract - Teacher's questions play significant part in teaching unexceptionally in teaching reading. Ineffective questions made by teachers lead to misconception among the students. Besides, the domination of low-level type of questions within reading class has low access in promoting reading comprehension. This study was focused on investigating the types of questions used by the teacher and the purposes underlying the questions in reading activity. The study used qualitative method by observing reading classroom interaction specifically in teacher's questions. The findings showed that teacher applied various types of questions during a reading lesson with the most frequent use of convergent (50,41%/61 of 121) and display (75,20%/91 of 121) type of questions. It also revealed that mostly the purpose underlying teacher's questioning was to encourage students' thinking and focus on the content of reading text (38,01%/46 of 121). By the frequent number of both convergent and display questions dominating the reading classroom, it can be concluded that teacher still used typically a lower-level type of question. It was then suggested that teacher purposely plans and promotes a higher-level type of question for the future classrooms.

Key words: Teacher Question, Reading Activity

1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching involves various activities that are designed with an attempt to meet the successful students' learning. One of those activities take place during teaching and learning process is questioning. Over half of class time is taken up with question-and-answer exchanges (Gall, 1984 in Richards and Lockhart, 1996, p.185). Similar idea is also stated by Cotton (1988, in Hamiloglu and Temiz, 2012) as classroom teachers spend anywhere from thirty to fifty percent of their instructional time conducting question sessions. Considering that amount of time spent, it can be inferred that questioning plays plenty vital role in teaching and learning process.

Teacher's questions have many perspectives as either the strategy or activity. According to Richards and Lockhart (1996), questioning is one of the most common techniques used by the teacher in teaching process. Similarly, questioning is significant instructional tools in the process of improving and leading classroom learning, communication and interaction (Cotton, 1988; Yang, 2006 cited in Temiz and Homiloglu, 2012). Questions have several benefits to be applied in the classroom. According to Brown (1994), questioning session could effectively give chances to initiate communication and promotes students' active interaction as well as involvement, and as a mean of checking students' learning progress or comprehension. However, making effective questions for the classroom is not as

easy as it looks. Common problem reveals that teachers are lack of consideration in making effective questions. In reality, effective questioning does not always happen, even among teachers with considerable experience in teaching (Hussin, 2006). Consequently, ineffectiveness questions will lead to misconception for the students. Another common problem found is that teachers pose too much domination on low-level questions. Low-level questions are hardly challenge students to think of the answers demandingly because answers can be readily lifted from the texts (Moore, 1995 in Hussin, 2006). The dominance of low-level of questions will discourage them to have better level of thought processing. Thus, the necessity of questioning variance to promote better and effective teaching and learning processes need to be addressed by the teacher.

Specifically speaking of reading activity, Anthony and Raphael (1987, p.8) states that questioning practice is good to increase students' conceptual knowledge, develop knowledge of text's structure, and enhance the use of text processing strategies. Another similar opinion is stated by Suherdi (2008, in Dzulkarnain, 2012) who says that teacher questions must be viewed in its roles to provide input, to push students' output, and to encourage interactive teaching and learning process. Questioning in reading, therefore, promotes both bottom-up and top-down processing that leads to reading comprehension. Questioning during pre-, while-, and post-reading activity serves different function to support comprehension from the text. In pre-reading question, teachers are encouraged to pose questions which are relating the text they are going to read to their own background knowledge (Branson and Johnson, 1972 in Anthony and Raphael, 1987). Pre-reading activity is meant for activating students' schemata that will ease students in comprehending the text to their background knowledge (Anderson, 1999 in Widodo, 2009). Meanwhile, while-reading questions facilitate students to understand the content of the text as well as be aware of the reading process itself (Anthony and Raphael, 1987). During while-reading activity, questions posed should lead students in text processing strategy such as knowing the text organization and finding important ideas. According to Widodo (2009), questions during this phase are seen as tools to trigger the interaction between teacher and students as well as among students themselves. In last, post-reading questions according to Anthony and Raphael (1987) play not only as to assess but also as to review the information from the text that they have read and integrate the information into their personal life.

Questions vary in the types. They may represent the same ideas but different in terminology. Richards & Lockhart (1996)

classify questions into three categories in terms of their roles in the classroom which covers procedural, convergent and divergent question. Procedural questions have to do with classroom procedures or routines and classroom management rather than to the content of learning. Meanwhile, the rest two questions are used to engage students with the content, facilitate comprehension, and promote interaction. Convergent questions encourage similar student responses or responses which focus on a central theme. They do not usually require students to engage in higher-level thinking in order to come up with a response but often focus on the recall of previously presented information. In contrary to convergent type of questions, divergent questions encourage students to provide their own information rather than to recall previously presented information. This question promotes higher-level thinking. Meanwhile, Long and Sato (1983, in Richards and Lockhart, 1996) classify the questions into two group; display question and referential question. Display questions are questions that teachers know the answer and which are designed to elicit or display particular structures while a contrary definition is referred to referential questions.

As questions perform different characters in their types, they also are diverse in purposes. Richards and Lockhart (1996) define five different purposes behind teacher's question in the classroom; 1) stimulate and maintain students' interest, 2) encourages students to think and focus on the content of the lesson, 3) enable teachers to clarify what students have said, 4) encouraging students participation in a lesson, and lastly 5) to check students understanding.

A number of researches have been conducted in the same area of teacher questions in teaching reading. The study found out that teacher' questions affected students' learning (Hamiloglu and Temiz, 2012). Further, the carried researches revealed that in some reading classroom practices, teachers tended to use various types of questions or questioning techniques which mostly were considered as low-level type of questions such as remembering or understanding questions which discouraged students' critical thinking (Hussin, 2006; Rahmawan, 2014). Besides, each reading stages required different types of questions to meet the reading purposes effectively (Widodo, 2009). However, different characters of students in the classes may reflect different frequency of certain questions types effectively applied by the teacher in the classroom. Based on the perspective above, the present study aimed at addressing the following research questions:

- 1) What types of questions are used during reading activity by the teacher?
- 2) What are the aims of the questions asked by the teachers?

2. METHODS

The present study employed qualitative design since it was aimed at investigating the concept of teacher's questions, its

description as well as characteristics in teaching reading classroom setting in order to have better understand (see Berg, 2001). The study involved an English teacher and 24 students of acceleration class which were considered as high-achiever students. The technique used to collect the data was classroom observation whereby the focus was on teacher's talk of questioning which was recorded. The data were analyzed through an interactive model of analysis that involved three main stages; reducing data, displaying data, and drawing/verifying conclusions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Teacher's questions as the data were reduced through the process of sorting, selecting, and simplifying from the transcription based on their classification proposed by Richards and Lockhart (1996) and Long and Sato (1983) for the types of questions and questions purposes classification based on Richards and Lockhart (1996). The data were then displayed on the tables of classification and its description. They were then drowned into conclusion and suggestion in related areas of research and practical reading classroom.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the fifty-minutes-reading class session, there was found 121 questions produced by the teacher in total. Those questions were classified according to both classifications of Richards and Lockhart (1996) and Long and Sato (1983) to address the first research question as in the following table:

Table 1: Question Types (In Number)

| Question Type | | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-------------|--------|------------|
| Richards and Lockhart (1996) | Procedural | 39 | 32,23% |
| | Convergent | 61 | 50,41% |
| | Divergent | 21 | 17,35% |
| Total | | 121 | ±100% |
| Long and Sato (1983) | Display | 91 | 75,20% |
| | Referential | 30 | 24,79% |
| Total | | 121 | ±100% |

From the table 1, the categorization of question type according to Richards & Lockhart (1996) revealed that 39 questions found were associated with procedural questions in which were out of content context, but more related to classroom procedural as well as management. The questions such as "How are you today?", "Do you get the point?", or "Who gets the first paragraph?" referred to what was so called as procedural. Meanwhile, 61 questions were classified to convergent questions which were aimed for recalling from what was stated on the text. Typical questions such as "What is saliva?", "What is the meaning of worn out" or "What is the purpose of digestive system?" referred to the answer which lied on the text. Among the three, divergent questions were the least found-21 out of 121. However, this type of question is highly suggested by some experts for higher-level questioning is positively related to improved student achievement (Redfield and Rousseau, 1981 in Cotton, 1988). The questions such as

“Can you notice what kind of process digestive system is?” which stated in pre-reading activity was considered as divergent question since the text was not yet in hand and required students’ activation in background knowledge. Another question such as “How many juices?” was not explicitly stated from the text and encouraged students to relate their own comprehension they got from other courses out of the text. “Do you think digestion is simple process?”-question also required students’ analysis that they inferred after reading the text.

Besides, the categorization based on Long and Sato (1983) revealed 91 numbers of display questions and 30 numbers of referential questions. A question such as “what is actually the main purpose of digestive process?” was assumed that teacher knew the answer of question so that it classified as display question. In other hand, referential question reflected in such a form of “any problem with the text?” question in which teacher didn’t know the answer. From the two classifications on the data findings, the reading classroom was still dominated by typically and categorically low-level of questions. In Richards and Lockhart’s classification, 61 (50.41%) out of 121 questions gathered were typically convergent questions while 21 (17.35%) questions were classified as divergent type of question. Furthermore, according to Long and Sato’s classification, 91 (75.20%) out of 121 were classified as display question while the rest 30 (24.79%) questions were identified as referential question. Both convergent and display questions did not require that much effort from students to answer for they were either easily found within the text, students’ recall, or already expected from the students. Hence, they were closely related to low-level question which did not promote students with higher thinking level such as in divergent or inferential question since the answers were beyond the text so that they had to analyze or synthesis the right answers from the questions.

Teacher’s questions were made with certain intentions that contributed to the success of teaching and learning process. Richards and Lockhart (1996) classified the questions into several purposes and the following table was intended to answer the second research question of the study.

Table 2: Question Purposes (In Number)

| | Question Purposes | Number | Percentage |
|------------------------------|---|---------------|-------------------|
| Richards and Lockhart (1996) | Stimulate and maintain students interest | 4 | 3.30% |
| | Encourages students to think and focus on the content of the lesson | 46 | 38.01% |
| | Enable teachers to clarify what students has said | 18 | 14.87% |
| | Encouraging students participation in a lesson | 12 | 9.91% |
| | To check students understanding | 41 | 33.88% |
| Total | | 121 | ±100% |

The result indicated various purposes underlying the questions. From the total question, the most frequent use of questions (46) were purposed to encourage students think and focus on the lesson content. It was followed by the purpose of checking students’ understanding which gained 41 questions in number. Meanwhile, it was found 18 questions were meant for clarifying what students’ said and 12 questions for encouraging participation. After all, stimulating or maintaining students’ interest-purpose gained the least number which was 4.

From this second research question finding, it can be interpreted that teacher mostly used the question for the intention of enabling students to think and focus on the content of the lesson as the finding showed the highest number-46 out of 121 (38.01%) among all the other purposes classification. It showed that teacher’s questions were meant to engage students to comprehend the reading text they read. When the teacher delivers the question with such purpose, it will increase students’ conceptual knowledge, develop knowledge of text’s structure, as well as enhance the use of text processing strategies.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study has answered the research questions through the findings. It can be concluded that teacher applied various types of questions during a reading lesson. The most frequent type used were the type of convergent questions (61/50,41%) and display questions (91/75,20%). Meanwhile, in relation to the purpose of questions, it can be concluded that teacher aimed the most of questions for the purpose of encouraging students’ thinking and focus on the content of reading text (46/38.01%). However, by the frequent number of convergent question dominating the reading lesson, it is suggested that teacher also promotes higher-level question. Teachers should purposefully plan questions which typically engage in higher-level thinking. It is also important that teacher maintains students’ interest in the classroom for the study revealed that such purpose was the least among all (4/3,30%). Interest in reading lesson is essential to make the learning process meaningful for students which will contribute to the success of teaching reading. Ideally, teaching and learning process should accommodate different ways of thinking. Therefore, a teacher should see the students’

characteristics, see what the most effective type of questions will be effective the most to maximize students' learning, and accommodate both lower and higher level of questions to students, especially the one which promote higher-level of thinking for the better learner.

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