

# ***Teacher's Acts of Questioning as the Strategy to Build the Interactions in the ESP Classroom***

## ***A Case Study at a Health College***

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***Abstract***—This study was aimed at exploring the unique phenomena about the acts of questioning as the strategy to build the interaction in the ESP Classroom. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach within a case study design. The data of this research were collected through observations and interviews. The findings of this study showed that there were several types of questions used by the lecturer and students to hold the interactions in the class. They were display-convergent, referential-divergent, procedural, and motivational questions. In addition, those kinds of questions made by the lecturer and students performed several functions such as teaching through exploring background knowledge, controlling the class, and asking for clarification, assessing through evaluating comprehension and digging potentials, and stimulating through inviting participation, giving the turns or chances, and extending the interactions. In short, the existence or emergence of the features of the classroom interactions in the ESP classroom was affected by both the lecturer and students' motives and initiations.

***Keywords***—*questions, questioning strategy; classroom interaction; ESP teaching and learning activities; lecturer and students' motives and initiations*

### I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important factors contributing to get the success of building of the interactions during the implementation of the ESP classrooms is the acts of questioning performed or done by teachers. In this case, the ESP teachers are expected to be able to have a good ability of asking questions resulting some strategies that may lead to the building of the interactions in the class. Some researches found that the acts of questioning could give an access for the teachers to make the students think deeply and foster their abilities of doing the analyzing and producing creations [1][2].

Walsh [3] explains that questioning is assumed to be one of the strategies used by the teachers to hold

interactions through asking some questions to the students. There are some specific functions of questioning. First, the acts of questioning may function to initiate or simulate the interactions. This means that every interaction held by teacher and student or student and student needs to originated by giving the questions. Questions are assumed to be an initial access for people to share their ideas and opinions about something. Hence, the acts of questioning are necessarily done by the teacher and students who want to initiate the interactions in the class.

Another function of questioning is to control the class. Learning situations are complicated and need to be controlled through the acts of questioning which can be done by the teacher in the class [4]. As known that ESP classrooms provide some strange situations in which the students are often found to be uncontrolled. This may be caused by their feeling bored about the materials given, worried about their lack of competence, nervous about their performances, and afraid of making the mistakes, and so on. Such conditions often lead the students to lose their concentrations and focuses on learning. Even, they tend to find other things to their activities or focuses during the ESP teaching and learning process. To overcome the problems above, the acts of questioning are assumed to be able to lead the students to get their concentration or focus of learning back. Then, the class disorder can be managed or controlled.

The last function of the acts of questioning is concerned with assessing the students. It is aimed at knowing the students' progress or development. ESP teaching and learning cannot be separated from teacher's actions or plans to get some information about the students' progress or development. This is crucial since the information about the students' progress or development can be the tool whether the

goal of learning can be reached successfully or not. Therefore, the teacher needs to do the acts of questioning for assessing or testing the students' comprehension. Ur [5] views that the teacher questioning serves purposes such as letting learners present their ideas, testing their understanding knowledge or skills, engaging them actively in participating in learning, stimulating their thinking and getting them to review and practice previously learnt materials.

Meanwhile, referring to the purpose of the questions given by the teacher in the class, they are divided into three types – procedural, convergent, and divergent [4]. Procedural questions have to do with classroom procedures and routines and classroom management. They are used to ensure the smooth flow of the teaching process. Unlike procedural questions, many of the questions asked by the teacher, such as convergent and divergent questions, are designed to engage the student in the content of lesson, to facilitate their comprehension, and to promote the classroom interaction.

Convergent questions encourage the similar student response, or responses which focus on a central theme. These responses are often short answer, such as 'yes/no' or short statement questions. They do not require the students to engage in high level thinking in order to come up a response but often focus on the recall of previously presented information. Meanwhile, divergent questions encourage diverse student responses which are not short answers and which require students to engage in higher-level of thinking. They encourage the students to provide their own information rather than recall previously presented information.

With the growth in concern for communication in language classroom, Long [6] has made the distinction between display and referential questions. Display questions refer to ones that teachers that teachers know the answer and which are designed to elicit or display particular structures. Ozturk's research [7] showed that by giving the display-convergent questions, the teachers could ask the students just for the sake of asking and serving the conversational routines and gap fillers during the interactions built with the students in the class.

On the contrary, referential questions refer to the questions that teachers do not know the answers and can gain various subjective information. This is also supported by Javidkar & Soelemani [8] in their research which found that the referential questions could create more opportunities for language development and enabled the students to express their feelings and opinions, so they were believed to be the most effective technique in the language classroom.

In the teacher-centered classroom, the display questions tend to be applied more than the referential questions. Meanwhile, in the student-centered classroom, the referential questions tend to be applied more than the display questions. This is because in the student-centered classroom, the students are to

participate in the classroom activities in which this will not happen when the teacher only emphasizes much more on the form and accuracy of the second language. A research conducted by Benham and Pouriran [9] found that display questions and referential questions were the most strategies used by the teachers in holding the interaction in the process of teaching English in the class.

However, doing the questioning is not easy. In the ESP classrooms, it is often found that teachers find some difficulties in asking the questions to the students. This is because the teachers lack of background knowledge related to the students' major. As known that most of the ESP teachers graduate from English department and they do not understand the students' background knowledge. This gap makes the teacher be passive and know nothing what to ask or do in relation to make the students be active in the class through answering the questions or responding something. Another thing considered to be the problem for ESP teachers is indicated by their lacks of grammar. Grammar is also assumed to have great contribution in doing the questioning. By understanding grammar well, ESP teachers are able to modify their speeches or improve their talks through making varieties of questions to be given to the students. Unfortunately, most of them lack of grammar understanding. Consequently, they are less creative in producing high order thinking questions to the students.

The students, on the other hands, are also often found passive in joining the ESP class. They like to keep silent and do not have any motivations. This can be seen from the way how they ask questions and respond the interactions held. The main reason is that they are often doubtful about the contribution of learning English for supporting their future career. The other reason is concerned with their lacks of English proficiency. Referring to the information above, it is crucial that the teacher and students have ability of doing the questioning. The ability is concerned with understanding the types of questions applied and their functions behind. Hence, the teacher will know what to ask and can predict the expected answers or responses that can be given by the students as to prepare the feedback that can be shared. As a result, meaningful interactions between the teacher and students can be built.

Based on the rationale explored above, the writer needs to conduct the investigation on teacher's acts of questioning as the strategy to build the interactions in the ESP classroom. Therefore, to get the focus of the investigation in this research, the writer formulates the research questions as follows:

1. *What questions are given by the lecturer in the ESP classroom to build the interactions with the students?*
2. *What are the functions of the acts of questioning done by the lecturer in the ESP classroom behind the interactions with the students built?*

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach within a case study design. The whole events or realities on the classroom interactions in the ESP classroom were naturally investigated, interpreted and described to get rich information about the phenomena occurred [10][11]. This study was carried out in a nursery faculty of Muhammadiyah Health College of Lamongan located in Lamongan city. In particular, this study was done in nursery and midwifery departments. In this case, there was only one class for each department to be investigated. The two classes investigated were taught by two different lecturers and consisted of 40 students with 8 males and 32 females for each. They were registered as the first year students of academic year 2016-2017.

The data of this research were collected through observations and interviews. In conducting the observations, the writer acted as a non-participant observer. In particular, the researcher just needed to sit at the back to note various classroom interactions without interfering in the process of the ESP teaching and learning activities held. All observations were recorded through an observation tool like a tape-recorder and camera. Furthermore, as a non-participant observer, the writer needed to design some means for recording notes during the observations. Therefore, the researcher used or made field notes [12]. Meanwhile, the interviews were semi-structured and took place in the class at the spare time of the subjects. Since the purpose of the interview was to clarify the researcher's understanding of what was happening during the investigation activities, the individual interviews or one-on-one interviews were recommended. Also, a set of questions were prepared before the interview. Besides, the writer also tried to have some modified questions while conducting the interviews.

## III. RESULTS

In conducting the ESP teaching and learning activities in the class, the lecturer could not avoid building the interactions with the students through questioning. In doing this, there were various types of questions made by the teacher from the beginning to the end of the process of the ESP teaching and learning activities held. Those questions were divided into four types. They were display-convergent, referential-divergent, procedural, and motivations questions.

TABLE I. QUESTION TYPES (IN NUMBER)

Types of Interactions	Lecturers		Total
	Midwifery Department	Nursery Department	
Display-convergent	14	16	30
Referential-divergent	20	24	44
Procedural	5	8	13
Motivational	8	10	18
	47	58	105

Overall, the table above shows that the referential question was supposed to be dominant types made by the lecturers during the ESP teaching and learning activities in the class with a total number 44 of 105. Though those two departments investigated had different teaching methods or activities conducted by different lecturers, there was not a big difference between the departments in terms of the question type numbers. This is in accordance with Toni and Parse [13] found that the teacher-student interactions were often characterized by the acts of questioning done by both the teacher and learners during the foreign language learning. In addition, they added that there were some various types of questions that could be used by them both. Similarly, a research conducted by Sunggingwati and Nguyen [1] also suggested the importance of practicing the questioning strategies for the teachers in the EFL classrooms. The findings emphasized how important the acts of questioning to build the classroom interactions in the foreign language learning. The table also shows that the least number in the types of questions occurred in the class was procedural questions with a total number 13 of 105. Hence, it was clearly seen that there was a great difference in distribution of the referential-divergent and procedural question types in the college.

Furthermore, those question types applied above could not be separated from the functions behind. Ur [5] views that the teacher questioning serves purposes such as letting learners present their ideas, testing their understanding knowledge or skills, engaging them actively in participating in learning, stimulating their thinking and getting them to review and practice previously learnt materials. Table II below shows various functions of acts of questioning performed by the lecturer during the ESP teaching and learning activities. Specifically, digging potentials was supposed to be most preferred function of acts of questioning that was performed by the lecturer with a total number 32 of 166. This also indicated that the two lecturers investigated tended to apply the referential-divergent question type in the class. This was because they wanted to lead the students to have high order thinking through internalizing knowledge dialogically, assisting another speaker to perform a skill that they are unable to perform independently, extending the turn, and modeling the learner's contribution [14][15]. Also, the least preferred function of acts of questioning went to exploring the students' background knowledge with a total number 16 of 166. This was because the students had been realized to be familiar with the topic learnt so that the lecturer was not necessary to ask questions any more to know their background knowledge.

TABLE II. QUESTIONING FUNCTIONS (IN NUMBER)30

Functions of Interactions	Lecturer		Total
	Midwifery Department	Nursery Department	
Controlling the class	10	12	22
Exploring Students' Background Knowledge	8	8	16
Asking for clarification	10	14	24
Evaluating comprehension	14	16	30
Digging potentials	14	18	32
Inviting the participations	10	10	20
Extending the interactions	10	12	22
	76	90	166

#### IV. DISCUSSIONS

The acts of questioning done by the teachers still remains as the crucial issue in the EFL/ESP teaching and learning activities. Poehner and Lantolf [16] explain that teachers may need a mediator for offering suggestions, making corrections, and helping the students think the language difficulties. To do this, the teachers are claimed to ask certain type of questions to the students. Having 44 of 105 for referential-divergent question type, it indicates that the ESP classroom promoted some topics or issues which were related to the specific subject matter referring to the students' major to be discussed. In this case, the lecturer had a responsibility to assess those ESP students by asking them some specific questions resulted from her improvisations. The questions proposed also directed the lecturer to internalize the students' knowledge of their own subject matter or major. In doing this, the lecturer needed to use the referential-divergent question type which could lead the students to think highly or deeply about the answers. As a result, there was a possibility that one student got failed to answer the questions correctly, this situation led the lecturer to open some opportunities or to invite others to give their comments or to help their friends to answer the questions or issued discussed.

In addition, this referential-divergent question type could also encourage the students to provide their own information rather than to recall previously presented information and refer to the questions that the lecturer did not know the answers, so that various subjective information could also be gained [9]. The function of digging potential with 32 of 174 showed clearly about the lecturer's tendency to lead the students to have high order thinking behind the interactions held.

Finally, the phenomena found in this study was actually concerned with the motives performed by the lecturer in doing such interactions within their acts of questioning. Ellis [17] suggest that these acts of questioning through referential-divergent question type may help the students with language acquisition because through this process, they can get additional

information about the target language from the other side and at the same time, focus more attention on his/her own language use. Then, some new language information can be integrated to his/her developing inter-language.

#### V. CONCLUSION

An important point to be concluded in this research is that the patterns or features of questioning acts in the ESP classroom were affected by the lecturer's motives and initiations. This factor has brought the change of perceptions among the lecturers about the way how to conduct the process of the ESP teaching and learning activities. As a result, their traditional ways of conducting the ESP teaching and learning activities with no or less interactions built have shifted to the act of eliciting the meaningful communications through questioning strategy done. In addition, the use of referential-divergent questions in digging the students' potentials and increasing their high order thinking in the ESP classrooms gives new paradigm of the ways of holding the interactions within the assessing activities held.

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