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# INVESTIGATING TEACHER'S QUESTIONING STRATEGIES AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN EFL CLASSROOM INTERACTION: A CASE STUDY AT A VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL IN SEMARANG

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Current educational trends emphasize the increasing focus on teachers' strategies for questioning to enhance student engagement in the classroom. Despite the growing recognition of these practices as effective techniques for active learning, there is a lack of research investigating how teachers' questioning strategies affect how students engage. This study aimed to investigate how the questioning strategies influence students' engagement during classroom interaction. The research employed a qualitative case study analyzing the teacher's questioning strategies and students' engagement during the classroom instructional process and the teacher's interview. The participants were an English teacher and a vocational high school class in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The study revealed that the teacher used five types of teacher's questioning strategies proposed by Chen (2016): wait time, probing, repetition, paraphrasing, and simplifying. Among the most frequently used were wait times and probing types of strategies. In addition, the strategies in question affect the students' engagement; for example, waiting time encourages behavioral and cognitive engagement, probing increases cognitive engagement, and simplistic and repetitive language use increases affective and behavioral engagement. These results emphasized the need for teacher questioning to engage students in classroom activities. Therefore, by understanding how the teacher's questioning affects the students' engagement, the teacher could improve their questioning strategies skills to engage students and encourage active participation in classroom interaction.

Keywords: Teacher's Questioning Strategies, Student Engagement, and EFL Classroom Interaction.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Teachers play a primary role in fostering interaction during classroom activities. They are instrumental in selecting appropriate teaching strategies for managing the classroom to achieve effective teaching (Lazarides et al., 2018), cited in (Zulfikar et al., 2022). Effective teaching occurs when teachers can identify suitable techniques and engage students actively in the learning process (Livingston, 2017; Louws et al., 2017), cited in (Zulfikar et al., 2022). Therefore, teachers must be adept at fostering active classroom interaction. This aligns with the regulation of the Emancipated Curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Number 12 of 2024, which emphasizes student-centered learning and students' active participation through its Process Standards for Primary and Secondary Education. The regulation encourages student participation, thus requiring teachers to create an active and engaged learning environment where students are at the center of the learning process. One effective method to promote student engagement in learning is through questioning strategies (Zulfikar et al., 2022). The proper questioning techniques can facilitate



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teachers in obtaining feedback from students regarding their understanding of the subject matter (Ismalinda et al., 2023).

Building interaction in the EFL classroom remains challenging. Faridi et al. (2016) stated that teachers encounter difficulties in encouraging students to participate actively during the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, many researchers have investigated the challenges in implementing SCL, such as (Adnyani et al., 2021; Kishore Kumar, 2016). These studies showed that most students were inactive and disinterested in learning through student-centered methods due to several factors, including lack of interest and confidence, fear, and mother tongue influence. Hence, teachers must employ strategies that encourage students to interact in the classroom. The strategies employed by teachers significantly affect classroom interaction, so they should apply appropriate strategies while considering the students' conditions. Therefore, teachers need to implement questioning strategies to engage students to participate actively in the classroom. Shanmugavelu et al. (2020) stated that questioning is one of the practical tools to encourage students to be actively involved in learning. Additionally, the success of the questioning strategy also depends on the type of question and the strategy for delivering the question to students. In other words, a good question design not only can encourage students' engagement, but also can encourage students to think critically and creatively.

Many studies have been conducted related to this current study. Putri et al. (2024) conducted research on the same topic as this study. However, they analyzed two English learning videos from YouTube conducted by English teachers at the high school level in Indonesia. The analysis showed that teachers mostly used convergent question types, which are questions that demand specific answers. It was also found that divergent question types that allow students to give broad and creative answers were rarely used by teachers. Regardless of the type of questions used by teachers, students' engagement was low, with only a few students actively responding. However, a study conducted by Rahayu & Suharti (2023) showed that the questioning strategy was effective in increasing student engagement. The research also emphasized that teachers' awareness of their abilities is important. Meanwhile, research conducted by Hendrian & Kurniawati (2024) examined the relationship between the quality of teacher relationships and student engagement in one of the private schools in Indonesia. The results showed that the level of teacher-student relationships and student engagement was at a high level, and there was a positive correlation between teachers and student engagement.

Based on the previous studies, there is a lack of research concentrating on the relationship between teacher questioning strategies and student engagement. Furthermore, few studies have explored the connection between teacher questioning strategies and student engagement within EFL classroom interactions, with the limited number and scope often focusing solely on surface-level engagement or utilizing restricted data sources. Given this gap, there is a pressing need to conduct research that holistically analyzes teachers' questioning strategies and student engagement at the secondary school level in Indonesia. Thus, this research will undertake an in-depth investigation into how teachers implement questioning strategies and how students engage in EFL classroom interactions. While some studies recognize the role of questioning in enhancing student engagement, they frequently fail to comprehensively analyze how these strategies impact the various dimensions of engagement (cognitive, affective, and behavioral). This research aims to answer the following questions:



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- 1. What are the types of the teacher's questioning strategies used in classroom interaction?
- 2. What types of student engagement appear during classroom interaction?
- 3. How do different questioning strategies affect students' engagement in classroom interaction?

#### **METHOD**

This investigation employed qualitative case study research methods. Yin (2018) defined a case study as an in-depth empirical analysis of a phenomenon in a natural setting. In line, Creswell (2018) stated that the case method explores a real-life, single, or multiple-bounded system in-depth, gathering the data through multiple sources. The case study of this study was English teaching, which involved the teacher and students in classroom interaction. Classroom discourse analysis was applied in this research since this study was conducted in the classroom and analyzed the teacher's utterances, students' talk, and responses as the data (Nur Kholisoh & Anggani Linggar Bharati, 2017).

This study was conducted in a state vocational high school in Semarang City, Central Java, Indonesia. The teacher who is the study participant has experience teaching English for approximately 25 years. She got a Bachelor's degree in English education from the local university. The teacher taught XI Accounting class, which consisted of 26 students.

The data of this study were drawn from audio-video recordings of 2 meetings of English lessons in the same class. Two methods were used to gather the data. The first was classroom observations. In the classroom observations, audio-video recordings were used to capture the teacher's utterances and classroom situation, especially related to questioning strategies used by the teacher and students' engagement during teaching and learning sessions, to avoid missing information. The observation notes were also used to note additional information during classroom observation and to be an alternative if the recorder was in trouble. The second was an interview. An Interview was conducted with the teacher. It aimed to explore their perspective on the teacher's questioning strategies that engage students. The interview was held before the classroom observation.

Regarding the data analysis, the audio-video recordings were analyzed in three steps. The first step is transcribing the lessons, identifying and categorizing the teacher's questioning strategies, and ensuring the students' engagement. The identification, coding, and categorization were based on Chen's (2016) for teachers' questioning strategies and Fredrick et al. (2004) for student engagement. After the teacher's questioning strategies were categorized, the identification of the teacher's frequently used questioning strategies was conducted. The analysis of students' engagement was also conducted to see the extent to which the students engage with the teacher's questioning strategies. Teacher interviews provided insights that were subsequently enhanced by classroom observation records to guarantee data triangulation and thus improve the validity of the findings.

#### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results were derived from the analysis of the teacher's questioning strategies and students' classroom engagement, and semi-structured interviews were presented in this section. We classified the data gathered based on Chen's (2016) theory for the teacher's questioning strategies and Fredrick et al (2004) for student engagement. Chen's (2016) classification of questioning techniques, such as wait time, probing, repetition, paraphrasing, and simplifying, as well as Fredricks et al. (2004) model of student engagement, which



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encompasses behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions, are consulted in the analysis. The three research questions guide the organization of the data: (1) the kinds of questioning strategies the teacher applied; (2) how the students employed the engagements; and (3) how students reacted to these strategies.

## 1. Types of the Teacher's Questioning Strategies Used in Classroom Interaction

Regarding answering the first question, we refer to Chen's (2016) theory, which consists of wait time, probing, repetition, paraphrasing, and simplifying. The frequency of the questioning strategies used by the teacher during classroom interaction as shown below.

**Table 1.** Types and frequency of the teacher's questioning strategies during classroom interaction

Types of the			Percentage				
Teacher's Questioning Strategies	1 <sup>st</sup> observation	oservation Percentage Observation Percentage					
Wait time	6	40%	20	48%	26	45%	
Probing	5	33%	9	21%	15	26,3%	
Repetition	1	6,8%	5	12%	6	10%	
Paraphrasing	1	6,8%	4	9,5%	5	8,7%	
Simplifying	2	13%	4	9,5%	6	10%	
Total	15	100%	42	100%	58	100%	

The results of the table regarding the categories and frequencies of the teacher's questioning strategies across two classroom observations are as follows: wait time was the most frequently employed inquiry strategy during the initial observation, accounting for 40% of the 15 recorded instances and occurring six times. This was succeeded by probing queries, which were asked five times (33%). Simplifying (2 instances, 13%), repetition, and paraphrasing (each used once, representing 6.8% respectively) were less frequently employed. This suggests an initial preference for permitting students to have more time to contemplate and for promoting more profound student responses.

The second observation's higher use of simplifying, paraphrasing, and repetition might have helped to keep clarity and support understanding. In the second observation, the incidence of all strategies increased, resulting in a substantial increase in wait time to 20 instances, which accounts for 48% of the total 42. Again, probing was the second most prevalent, with nine instances (21%). Repetition and paraphrasing experienced moderate increases (5 and 4 instances, respectively), while simplifying remained consistent with four uses (9.5% each for paraphrasing and simplifying). The dominant strategy across both observations (a total of 58 instances) was wait time, which was employed 26 times and accounted for 45% of all inquiring strategies. Probing was the second most frequently used, with 15 instances (26.3%), followed by simplifying and repetition with 6 uses each (10%), and paraphrasing that was slightly less frequent at five instances (8.7%). The second observation was conducted when the class began in the morning at 7 a.m.; the first hour of instruction was still at 7 a.m., so the students were still enthusiastic compared to when it was noon. It is also related to the interview results from the teacher. She said that the learning time influences the student's engagement.

The findings showed that the participant used all types of the teacher's questioning strategies, but she dominantly used to wait for time and probing strategies in the teaching and learning process. This finding is in line with Saswati (2022), who revealed that the



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following question (probing) was addressed more. This indicates that the teacher often allows the student to answer the question posed. Such strategies are crucial in EFL classrooms, where student language competency fluctuates. Repetition or simplifying questions helps teachers ensure students completely grasp what is being asked, fostering better engagement. Those questioning strategies were used to meet the students' needs.

### a) Waiting time

Regarding the types of teacher's questioning strategies, the type of questioning strategies that most teachers used was wait time from two observations in two meetings. In the first meeting, the teacher used the wait time strategy 6 times, reaching 40%, and 20 times in the second meeting, reaching 45%. This demonstrates that the teacher typically allows the student to respond to the question posed. It allowed the students who were being quiet to sign and allowed the teacher to finish answering the question without being interrupted. Here are some examples of how the waiting time is used (extract 1):

#### Extract 1

T: Do you still remember saying good morning, good afternoon, and good evening? However, it is at forty-seven past eleven, so what do you say? Students are silent

T: Good morning, good evening, or good afternoon?

Ss: Good morning

Extract one shows that the teacher uses the wait time strategy. When students do not immediately respond to the questions given by the teacher, the teacher gives a pause time for students before simplifying the questions given. This strategy proved effective for students to think, reduce pressure, and encourage students to participate.

#### b) Probing

The probing strategies reached 33%, which were used 6 times in the first meeting, and 21%, which were used 9 times in the second meeting observation. The teacher posed the following questions to probe more deeply into students' understanding (extract 2). Here are some examples:

### Extract 2

T: karena? Bahasa inggrisnya karena apa?

S: because

T: Yes, because?

S: silent

T: saya bahasa inggrisnya?

S: I

T: menonton?

S: (silent)

T: watch, okay, terus?

S: silent

T: film movie kan?

S: nodding

T: And then?

S: On youtube



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T: Okay, digabung sekarang, because? 1?

S: because I have watched a movie on YouTube

Extract 2 shows the teacher's use of probing strategies, where the teacher explores students' answers gradually through follow-up questions. The teacher gives clues one by one to help students build complete sentences in English. The probing strategy encouraged students to expand on their answers, promoting more advanced cognitive involvement. In an English as a Foreign environment, this not only promotes critical thinking and language use but also enables students to create increasingly sophisticated linguistic structures employing extended conversation.

## c) Repetition

The teacher used less repetition in the first and second meetings. It reported that the teacher posed only 1 time, reaching 6,8% in the first meeting and 5 times, reaching 12% in the second meeting. Here is an example of the teacher's use of repetition (extract 3).

Extract 3

S3: I like drinking mango juice

T: Okay, do you know how to make it?

S3: Silent

T: Do you know how to make mango juice?

The use of the repetition strategy by the teacher. When the teacher asked the students, "Okay, do you know how to make it?", the students were silent and did not respond. Then the teacher repeats the question using Indonesian to give students the opportunity to understand what it means. Repetition is important as students still have limited vocabulary. In an EFL context, repetition in Bahasa Indonesia is necessary if it helps to clarify the meaning of the question, reduce students' anxiety, and increase their engagement in learning.

## d) Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing was used by the teacher 1 time, reaching 6,8% in the first observation and 4 times, reaching 9,5% in the second observation. This strategy is used by the teacher to restate questions in a different form to make them more understandable to the students (extract 4). The following is the example.

Extract 4

T: How is your life? Students were silent

T: Are you fine?

The implementation of the paraphrasing strategy at the beginning of the lesson. The teacher changed the form of the question from "How's your life?" to "Are you fine?". This change aims to simplify the question so that it is easier for students to understand. This strategy is effective because it can help overcome vocabulary limitations and improve students' understanding.



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## e) Simplifying

The simplifying strategy was used by the teacher 2 times in the first observation, reaching 13% and 4 times in the second observation meeting, reaching 9,5%. Here is the example (extract 5):

### Extract 5

T: Okay, I hope you know many kinds of job professions. Maybe you already know what job descriptions there are in the world, so what do you want to be?

Ss: silent

T: What do you want to be?

Extract 6 shows the use of simplifying strategies where the teacher asks questions in complex sentences. However, students are silent and do not respond, so the teacher simplifies the question into a simple sentence, such as "What do you want to be?" This simplification aims to facilitate the understanding of students who may have difficulty capturing the meaning of the original question due to limited vocabulary. This strategy is effective in reducing cognitive load and encouraging student engagement in communication.

## 2. Students' Engagement in classroom interaction

In this study, we analyzed the students' engagement, referring to the Fredrick et al. (2004), including behavioral engagement, affective engagement, and cognitive engagement. In addition, we also analyzed the disengagement to see how many students were disengaged during classroom interaction. The data were analyzed as follows:

**Table 2.** The students' engagement during classroom interaction

Types of Engagoment	1 <sup>st</sup> Observation			2 <sup>nd</sup> Observation			
Types of Engagement	Sometimes	Always	Total	Sometimes	Always	Total	
Behavioral	30,6%	69,4%	100%	40%	60%	100%	
Affective	18%	58%	76%	18%	58%	76%	
Cognitive	0	40%	40%	0	40%	40%	
Disengagement	1%	0	1%	1%	0	1%	

Based on observations, student engagement in classroom interaction can be divided into behavioral, affective, and cognitive engagement, with very few students showing disengagement. In the first meeting, behavioral engagement was strong, with 69.4% of students consistently participating, while 30.6% showed engagement only sometimes. Affective engagement, which reflects students' emotional involvement, was always present in 58% of students, while 18% demonstrated it occasionally. For cognitive engagement, 40% of students actively engaged in thinking and processing information, while the rest showed minimal involvement. Disengagement was low, with only 1% of students appearing unresponsive during classroom activities.

In the second observation, behavioral engagement remained high, though slightly lower, with 60% of students always engaged and 40% showing occasional participation. The pattern of affective engagement was the same as the first meeting, with 58% consistently involved and 18% engaging intermittently. Cognitive engagement also remained steady, with 40% of students showing active thinking, while others had limited participation. Again, disengagement was minimal, affecting only 1% of students.



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These findings suggest that student engagement remains fairly consistent, highlighting the important role of teacher questioning strategies in fostering classroom interaction. Students were cognitively engaged when they tried to think critically, resolve themselves, and figure out what questions meant by reflecting on them. Students showed behavioral engagement when they answered questions, took part in discussions with their peers, and did tasks in the classroom. Furthermore, the students' comfort levels were shown by their smiles, laughter, and willingness to answer even when they weren't sure. This was an indicator of their affective engagement. The link between certain questioning strategies and these kinds of engagement shows how important it is to use a variety of responsive questioning strategies to encourage meaningful participation. So, the teacher should carefully change how they ask questions to meet the needs of each student and make the classroom a more interesting and helpful place to learn.

In the EFL classroom context, careful application of such strategies, especially wait time and probing, can greatly improve classroom interaction, promote meaningful conversation, and help language acquisition. These findings underline the need for professional growth for teachers in the field of successful questioning strategies, which are fundamental instruments for establishing dynamic and engaging language learning settings. This is in line with the study conducted by Aliabadi & Weisi (2023) also found that teachers' questioning strategies can promote learners' engagement.

## 3. Students' Engagement toward the Teacher's Questioning Strategies

The correlation between different types of the teacher's questioning strategies and student engagement was identified through observable behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses during classroom interaction. Drawing on the framework of the questioning strategies, refer to Chen's (2016) theory. Additionally, student engagement was analyzed by Fredricks et al. (2004). The analysis revealed that specific questioning strategies elicited distinct forms of engagement.

#### a. Wait time strategy promotes cognitive and behavioral engagement

Waiting time often led to cognitive and behavioral engagement, as students were observed thinking critically, discussing with peers, and eventually attempting to answer after a period of silence. This indicates that providing sufficient processing time enables deeper reflection and collaborative problem-solving. When the teacher paused, students were seen thinking, discussing with friends, and finally answering. Sometimes they ask for a clue or say "wait, miss", which shows they were actively processing information (extract 6). The following is the example:

Extract 6

T: Yellow is running, green is stopping. What is it? [Pause and wait time]
Students discuss with a peer and try to answer
Ss: Wait, miss, clue miss.

## b. The probing strategy employed cognitive engagement

Probing questions prompted cognitive engagement by encouraging students to elaborate, justify, or reconsider their responses, thus stimulating higher-order thinking. It can be seen



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when the teacher asks follow-up questions, when students hesitate or answer incorrectly. Students eventually correct or improve their answers (extract 7). Here is the example: Extract 7

T: What do you say if it is forty-six past eleven?

Ss: Afternoon

T: Are you sure? What do you say?

Ss: Morning

Cognitively, probing calls on students to consider underlying ideas, examine material, and defend their answers rather than only provide surface-level responses. Behaviorally, probing questions encourage students to elaborate, explain, or rethink their answers, promoting active participation. This creates a lively learning atmosphere in which students are more involved and more confident in expressing their ideas, enhancing classroom interactions.

c. Paraphrasing and simplifying strategies promote affective and behavioral engagement Paraphrasing strategy promotes affective and behavioral engagement due to the teacher paraphrasing the question into a more familiar language (usually mixed with Indonesian), students seem more responsive and do not hesitate to answer (extract 8), for instance: Extract 8

T: What do you want to be? Kamu ingin jadi apa kira-kira?

S: Tax staff

T: Okay, what next?

S: Bank teller

T: Bank teller okay

S: Employee

T: Okay, is there anything else?

S: Manager

T: Okay, great.

Simplifying promotes affective engagement. It can be seen that the teacher simplifies the question or explains new vocabulary. After that, students try to answer even though they are slow or still stumbling (extract 9).

Extract 9

T: I want to speak English fluently. Artinya apa?

Ss: Saya ingin berbicara bahasa Inggris dengan lancar.

The extract above shows that the teacher has paraphrased and simplified questions provoke students to respond and feel comfortable with the questions given actively. These strategies lower barriers, increase (affective) comfort, and ultimately encourage participation.

d. Repetition promotes cognitive engagement.

The repetition strategy used by the teacher from two meetings indicates cognitive engagement to evaluate the students' answer and recall material (extract 10).



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#### Extract 10

T: What do you say if it is forty-six past eleven? What do you say?

T: It is at forty-six past eleven, so what do you say? Good?

Ss : Afternoon

T: Afternoon? Are you sure you said that good afternoon for this time?

Ss : Yes

T : Do you still remember when you say good morning, good afternoon, and good evening?

But it is at forty-seven past eleven, so what do you say?

Ss: Silent

T: Good morning, good evening, or good afternoon?

Ss : Good morning

Extract 10 shows that the repetition strategy was used to evaluate the students' answers. It also aims to recall the students' knowledge from the previous meeting. The teacher mentions it again to provoke students to remember the meaning of the word from the previous lesson.

Hence, the findings show that different types of the teacher's questioning strategies are linked to specific forms of student engagement. Wait time is strongly associated with cognitive engagement, as it encourages students to think critically and reflect before answering. Probing strategy promotes cognitive engagement by encouraging students to elaborate, justify, or reconsider their responses, thus stimulating them to think critically. Simplification and paraphrasing employed the affective engagement that can reduce students' anxiety in learning English, so that students are more engaged and enjoy participating in classroom interactions. Otherwise, repetition strategies support memory and evaluate incorrect answer. It allows students to recall previously learned information and lead students to the correct answer. The repetition plays a role in encouraging students to maintain an active and responsive engagement in class interactions. Finally, it shows that the use of questioning strategies is effective in encouraging students' active and persistent engagement in EFL classroom interactions.

Therefore, the types of questioning employed by the teacher were closely related to how students engaged during the lesson, both mentally and behaviorally. The observation of student responses, such as answering questions, seeking clarification, discussing with peers, or showing emotional responses such as nodding or smiling, is a practical indicator of engagement in response to each questioning technique.

#### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study revealed that the participants used five types of teachers questioning strategies proposed by Chen (2016): wait time, probing, repetition, paraphrasing, and simplifying. The teacher most frequently used the wait time strategy in the two meeting observations. The teacher would simplify the questions when students were not responsive to them. Sometimes, the teacher used code-switching if the students did not understand the questions in English. Apart from the numerical results on the frequency and kinds of teacher questioning strategies, qualitative observations showed that students participated actively in the classroom activities during both observation periods. This implies, especially in the English as a Foreign Language instruction framework, a close connection between the questioning strategies applied by the teacher and the degree of student participation and engagement.



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One of the most often used strategies was the use of wait time, which helps increase student engagement. In EFL settings, where students often need extra time to understand questions in a second language, giving students more time to consider before answering can be crucial to getting more critical answers. This approach promotes a more inclusive classroom where students feel less pressured and more secure in their engagement.

Our study also found that the teacher's questioning strategies can influence the students' engagement. The relationship between different types of teacher questioning strategies (TQS) and student engagement was identified through observable behavioral, cognitive, and affective responses during classroom interaction. Using Fredricks et al.'s (2004) framework for student engagement as a guide, the analysis showed that different types of questioning led to different kinds of engagement. The students dominantly show behavioral engagement. Cognitive engagement was observed when students demonstrated efforts to think critically, self-correct, and understand the meaning of questions through reflection. Behavioral engagement appeared when students actively responded, participated in peer discussions, and took part in classroom activities. Meanwhile, affective engagement is reflected in students' comfort level, which can be seen in smiles, nodding, expressing opinions without hesitation, and their willingness to answer even if they are unsure.

This finding highlights the importance of using varied and responsive questioning techniques to encourage meaningful participation. This is also in line with research conducted by Fitriati et al. (2017), who found that teachers' questioning skills are important to engage students. This strategy helps reduce language anxiety and encourages students who were hesitant to participate more confidently. Identifying these links was based on observable indicators such as students' attempts to answer after delay, peer discussion, clarification requests, and affective reactions such as laughter, smiling, or verbal expressions of uncertainty. Therefore, it can be concluded that questioning strategies play an important role in shaping the nature and quality of student engagement in EFL classrooms, and that varied and responsive questioning fosters interactive classroom interaction. (Lestari et al., 2022). The teacher should adjust the question level, either lower or higher, according to the students' level of understanding. Thus, passive students can also contribute comfortably and engage in class interaction. The teachers should carefully adapt their questioning approaches to meet students' needs and create a more engaging and supportive learning environment.



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