



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Impact of Questioning on the Interaction between Teachers And  
ESL Undergraduate Students at UAJ&K**

<sup>1</sup>Ammara Manzoor\* <sup>2</sup>Dr. Zafeer Hussain Kiani

1. M. Phil Scholar, Department of English, University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, Pakistan

**\*Corresponding Author:** [Sammara877@gmail.com](mailto:Sammara877@gmail.com)

**ABSTRACT**

The present research paper aims to analyze the effect of questions on fostering interaction in ESL undergraduate classrooms at the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. It aims to explore what types of questions teachers prefer to promote classroom interaction. Participants in the study consisted of fifty-four undergraduate linguistic students and their teachers at the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The data was collected using non-participant observation and an adapted questionnaire. The open-ended and closed-ended questions asked in the classrooms were examined using Long and Sato's framework. The fostering interaction was analyzed using the pedagogical cycle of Sinclair and Coulthard, which consisted of questions from the teachers, responses by the students, and teacher feedback. Results showed an association between referential questions and the development of classroom interaction. Further study is recommended at the college and school levels.

**KEYWORDS** Interaction in ESL Classrooms, Referential and Display Questions, Teacher Questioning

**Introduction**

Learning a new language is always a challenge for students at the school, college, and university levels. Past studies show that students interactions in L2 are always influenced by L1. Students social, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds affect their communication and manner of sentence construction. The current study aims to discuss what types of questions are frequently used in ESL undergraduate classrooms. Moreover, this study highlights the significance of teachers' questions in ESL classrooms. Moreover, the interaction between student and teacher is also influenced by their knowledge of the language and its culture. The current research is designed to analyse the students' preparation for any task, such as checking on homework and classroom work completion, etc. Furthermore, the study aims to pose the problem that leads to the subject of the lesson.

**Literature Review**

Learning a second language has been the most challenging issue for the last few decades. It has been noticed that classroom communication is the most important change that influences L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1990). Pianta (2016) stated that in a language-teaching classroom, a strong relationship between teacher and student is a basic key to learning and improvement. Interaction is considered an important tool for learning a new language. Brown (2001) regarded "interaction as the heart of communication". Interaction is the mutual exchange of ideas, emotions, thoughts, and feelings among two or more people. Teachers are considered the resource person for the students, and they are the first and most important model whom they contact. Teachers are the only ones who give one-on-one information to their learners (Cullen, 1998). Hattie (2002) declared the teacher a central body that runs and controls the classroom as a lecturer and moderator in teacher-student

interaction. It is assumed that when teachers interact with their students, they learn and attempt the task more quickly. The interaction in the classroom can be of any kind, like teacher-student, student-student, or teacher-group interaction. The interaction between teacher and student is an important factor that can change the educational path of learners. Fisher (2005) stated that students were passive learners in traditional classrooms. Teacher's questions provide an opportunity for learners to produce the correct language (Brown, 2001a). Quirk et al. (1992, 1985) explain that questions are statements that are used to gather information on a particular point. Lyons (1977) describes a question as an utterance with a particular illocutionary force. Cotton (2012) states that teachers' questions serve several major functions in ESL classrooms. Motivate and encourage the students to take part in classroom lessons.

Different researchers classified the questions into different types. Branes (1969) classified the questions into four types. The first type is related to "what," which is used for factual matters. The second type starts with "why" and "how," which elicit the information of reasoning. The third set of questions is open-ended and does not require any reasoning. The other type of question is used for the sake of communication or to control the behaviour of the learners. Long & Sato (1983) categorised questions as referential (open-ended) and display (closed-ended) questions. According to Brown (2001), closed-ended or display questions are those whose answers are already known to teachers, whereas referential or open-ended questions are those whose answers are not already known to teachers. Teachers highly prefer display questions because their primary aim is to measure the basic knowledge of the learners (Yang, 2011). Eggins and Slade (1997) stated that open questions are commonly the "WH" question. It is stated that these types of questions motivate the students to produce a variety of responses.

Failure in the acquisition of a second language has been widely associated with a lack of teacher-student relations. Learners feel inspired to work well when they have good relationships with their teachers (Paterson, 2015). A significant facet of classroom interaction in the ESL classroom that receives a great deal of importance is the teacher's question. In this relation, questions from the part of the teachers are regarded as the most influential way of developing negotiation between teacher and student. In addition, instructors used to ask dozens and even hundreds of questions in each class. Questions play several roles in the encouragement and development of new understanding in the classroom (Harrison & Howard, 2009). By asking questions that promote discussion, instructors can lead and motivate students to think. There are two major reasons for asking questions: first, it leads the students to think, and second, it provides information to teachers about what to do next (William, 2005). The study also highlighted that questions reveal the state of students' existing knowledge, misconceptions, and gaps in existing knowledge. This helps the teachers make the changes in the current lesson as well as plan the actions for the upcoming lessons. Questions are considered important tools for new ideas, information, experiences, and knowledge. Brown and Wragg (1993) stated that people ask questions when they really want to get information about something and do not ask them when they already know the answers. So, questions are used as a learning tool to promote interaction in the classroom. Brock (1986) examined the function of questions in the ESL classroom and stated that questions are asked to get learners to produce language. Both teachers and learners showed a positive attitude towards referential questions in the EFL/ESL classroom setting. Khadraoui and Bouaziz (2016) evaluated the responses of teachers and students of the English department at Larbi Ben M'Hidi University about referential questions. The descriptive study was conducted with twenty teachers and fifty-five students in the English department. The result of the study showed that both teachers and students highly favoured open questions in the classroom. In ESL classrooms, the long-elicited responses were regarded as useful by both teachers and students. In view of this, most teachers agreed that they ask coded questions less often than open questions. The teachers also stated that in the classrooms, they prefer referential questions to display questions. These questions helped the learners give their own arguments, opinions, and thoughts. In contrast, Farahian and

Rezae (2012) conducted the case study with an EFL instructor and 15 pre-intermediate learners. The result of the study showed that students answered display questions more than referential questions. They were of the opinion that whatever sort of questions the teacher asked in the classroom, the learners' replies were so little because, at this level, they did not have enough vocabulary to shape their ideas into words. According to Siposova (2007), referential questions for university students are effective and creative, leading to constructive conversation in language seminars. The qualitative study was conducted with first-year university students in English-language seminar classrooms. Observation and personal interviews were used as tools for collecting the data. The results of the study showed that participants considered the referential questions effective in the classroom. The respondents emphasised open-ended questions in the classroom because these types of questions demand subjective preferences from the students in the classroom. Additionally, Farooq (2004) observed 40 Japanese EFL students in English language classes at a Japanese university. The study revealed that learners produced longer, more complex grammatical sentences in response to higher-order questions. Higher-level questions require the students to produce different and longer stretches of language. Whereas David (2007), who conducted a study with all senior secondary school English teachers and students, stated that display questions were more significant and appropriate in teacher-student interaction.

### **Material and Methods**

This research paper employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches to determining what type of questions are used in ESL classrooms and how much the questions influence the interaction between teachers and ESL undergraduate classrooms. These methods allow the researcher to get abundant information that could not be obtained using each method alone (Almedia, 2018).

### **Sampling**

The sample for this study consists of fifty-four students and four teachers of the BS 5<sup>th</sup> English department at UAJ&K. The sample size is too small to make generalizations, but the main objective of the study is to highlight the types of questions and their importance in developing interaction in ESL classrooms. Concerning students at this level, their competence in the English language has developed enough to allow them to communicate and share their thoughts and feelings with their teachers.

### **Instruments**

The non-participant observation and questionnaire were considered the best methods to analyse the classroom interaction. Through non-participant observation, eight classes were observed in eight days. During the classroom observation, the researcher used an observation checklist to measure the pre-decided aspects of interaction, which are questions from the teachers, replies from the students, and feedback from the teachers.

In this study, the questionnaire from the teachers was selected to get things further confirmed because the data had already been collected through non-participant classroom observation. A questionnaire is usually considered the more objective research instrument that can produce a generalizable result (Oppenheim, 1992).

### **Results and Discussion**

The findings of this study highlighted a huge difference in the number of interactions per class. The overall average number of interactions per class was 12.87, with a range of 0–24 three-part exchanges. Table 1 shows the overall number of three-part exchanges coded during each class.

**Table 1**  
**No of three-part exchanges in each observed class.**

Subjects	Observation of class 1	Observation of class 2	Total
Sociolinguistics	24	21	45
Syntax	17	12	29
SLA	0	14	14
Advanced reading & writing	9	06	15
			103
Range:	0-24 interactions per class.		
Overall average:	12.87 interactions per class.		
Sociolinguistics class average:	22.5 interactions per class.		
Syntax class average:	14.5 interactions per class.		
Second language acquisition class average:	7 interactions per class.		
Advanced reading & writing class average:	7.5 interactions per class.		

The greater number of interactions was found in sociolinguistics' classes. It is for this reason that this course was based on more regional languages, and the teacher preferred to ask more questions to students related to their languages. The two types of questions (referential and display) were asked in eight observed classes. The following graph shows the number and percentage of questions that were asked by the teachers in undergraduate classrooms. A total of one hundred and three questions were asked in eight sessions. It is noted that 62.13% of the total questions were referential, while only 37.86% were displayed. It is worth noting that in response to teachers' questions, students either voluntarily replied or were selected by their instructor. The data shows the number of instances where volunteers replied and were selected by the teachers. The above-highlighted graph shows that 72.81% of students voluntarily replied to teachers, while only 27.18% were selected by the teachers. During the classroom observation, it was noticed that students were more likely to call the teachers when the referential open-ended questions were raised by the teachers. In contrast, when the closed-ended questions were raised by the teachers, all the students were willing to get answers. The final category of three-part exchanges is the types of teachers' responses. In the observation checklist, the teachers' responses were further categorised into four categories: praise, acceptance, remediation, and criticism.

**Table 2**  
**No and types of teachers' responses for each subject.**

Subjects	Praise	Acceptance	Remediation	Criticism	Total
<b>Sociolinguistics</b>	08 7.76%	06 5.82%	19 18.44%	0 0%	33
<b>Syntax</b>	05 4.85%	09 8.73%	11 10.67%	0 0%	25
<b>SLA</b>	06 5.82%	14 13.59%	05 4.85%	0 0%	25
<b>Advanced Reading &amp; Writing</b>	07 6.79%	06 5.82%	07 6.79%	0 0%	20
<b>Total</b>	26	35	42	0	103
<b>Average</b>	25.24%	33.98%	40.7%	0%	100%
Range	4.85-7.76%	5.82- 13.59%	6.79-18.44%	0-0%	

The above-mentioned table highlights that more praise and remediation responses were given in sociolinguistics classes. Moreover, more acceptance responses were given in second language acquisition classes.

**Table 3**  
**No of teachers' responses to the types of questions asked in undergraduate classrooms.**

Question Type	Total Number	Praise	Acceptance	Remediation	Criticism
<b>Display Questions</b>	39 37.86%	18 46.15%	12 30.76%	17 43.58%	0 0%
<b>Referential Questions</b>	64 62.13%	08 12.5%	19 29.68%	29 45.31%	0 0%
<b>Total</b>	103 100%	26 25.24%	31 30.09%	46 44.66%	0 0%

With respect to the total number of responses, it is noticed that more remediation and acceptance responses were given to referential questions as compared to display questions. On the other hand, more praise responses were given to display questions.

### Qualitative Analysis of Questionnaire

The following seven questions were asked of the teachers to confirm a few major checklist aspects:

1. Do you like to invite individuals or have volunteer students answer your question?

All four teachers replied that they employ both methods to call on the students for class participation.

1. What is your way of selecting students for answers (in sequence or haphazardly)?

Among the four teachers, three replied that they call the students haphazardly. One said that he calls the students in sequence because, in this way, every student gets an opportunity to participate in the classroom's activities.

1. Which criterion do you suggest to approach students' answers?

The teachers preferred to call the students by their roll numbers and names.

1. What sort of questions do you like to ask in the classroom?

All the teachers commented that they used to ask both types of questions (referential and display) depending on the subject matter in the classrooms.

1. How do you generally react to students' incorrect replies?

1. By correcting them with the right answer.
2. By asking the right answer to another student.
3. By posing the supplementary question.

1. How do you respond to students' right answers?

Teachers replied that they appreciate and encourage the students.

- Do you think questions play an important role in the classroom?

All four teachers answered that questions are very important because they show the student's progress.

It is not amazing to see a huge number of questions asked by four teachers in only eight sessions since questioning is the major tool for evaluating and teaching in the classroom. Cotton (2003) stated that questioning is the most common instructional device used by most teachers in the classroom. Concerning the first question, the interaction in ESL classrooms depends on the number of questions asked by the teacher, the replies by the student, and the feedback from the teacher. During the observation, the researcher noticed that in each class, the teacher preferred to ask questions of the students. Table 1 highlights the overall number of interactions in each class. The result showed that more interaction took place in sociolinguistics classes. It is worth mentioning that this course is more practical and based on the variations among the languages spoken by the students. On the other hand, less interaction took place in the other three courses because those courses were more theoretical-based and teachers asked fewer questions in these classes. Considering the second question, graph 1 shows the frequency of the total number of questions asked in ESL classes. The result revealed that referential questions were the most frequently asked questions in eight classes (62.13%). It is worth noting that the reasons for asking more WH questions to students are that they can answer the question in a more elaborative way, they can share additional information in response to the particular inquiry, or they can share their personal experiences. It is noted that referential questions were used at the beginning and end of the class; these types of questions were to get the students point of view and interpretation about the particular topic. For example, "Why do people switch to another language with the passage of time?" "How would you relate the socio-cultural theory with daily life learning?" "What is turn-taking?" This result accords with the findings of the study of Brock (1986), where the amount of referential questions evoked the learners to produce complicated and longer responses. In contrast, display questions were asked in the middle of the lesson or somewhere else when the idea was being completed in order to check the comprehension level of the students. For example, "Do you understand the idea?" "Slang is the informal use of language. Is this true?" Regarding the question from the teacher about the types of questions, they favoured both types of questions in ESL classrooms. The types of questions depend on the objectives of the lesson. The result of this study is consistent with the study by Nunan et al. (1996, p. 92), which said that "the choice of questions depends on the objective and size of the class".

Regarding students' responses, it was noticed that teachers used two ways of soliciting students' answers: volunteered students and students selected by the teachers. The result of the study revealed that most of the time, students voluntarily replied to teachers' questions. It is due to this reason, in the diverse classrooms or due to time constraints, that whenever teachers raised the question, students simply spoke out. In this case, the current study is similar to the study of Sibley (1990), in which students replied at once when teachers asked questions in the classrooms. It is worth noting that students were mostly selected by the teachers in response to referential questions. Because teachers asked answers to those students who were more prepared and willing for an answer, This category was confirmed by the teachers in the second question of the questionnaire. Additionally, teachers replied that they prefer to call the students haphazardly.

Concerning the final category of the pedagogical cycle, it is noted that teachers encouraged and appreciated the students' answers. It was also observed that when the students answered incorrectly, the teachers made a question easier or asked the answer to any other volunteer student. Table 4.2 revealed that students received different types of appreciation from the teachers. It was noted that in responding to the referential questions, students received more remediation and acceptance responses. For example, "What do you mean?" "How can you say that it is true?" "Yes," "right," etc. On the other hand, the results revealed that in answering display questions, the students received acceptance. Because these questions demand less speech from the student's side and their answers are already

known to the learners, So, this exchange of question-and-answer sessions builds a healthy interaction between teacher and student in ESL classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

The present study investigated the types of teachers' questions and their impact on interaction in ESL classrooms. Questions are considered an important stimulus for developing interaction between ESL teachers and students. The result of the study revealed that teachers asked more open-ended questions than display questions. The analysis of the teachers' responses showed a positive attitude towards the questions in the classrooms. They argued that different types of questions compel the students to take part in the classroom discussion. It was inferred from the data that referential questions motivate the learners to share their own views related to a specific point. The result of the current study highlighted that increased opportunities for verbal practice, interaction with the teacher, and useful teacher feedback linked positively with language acquisition. In addition, the positive interaction with the teachers and participation in ESL classrooms could be beneficial in language classrooms. The current study will have the following research implications: The other interested bodies can carry out research on other domains, such as the role of students' questioning in the development of interaction between teacher and student. In addition, future researchers can conduct research on the length of teachers' questions. Moreover, research can be carried out on the types of student 'responses.

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