

“WHAT’S UP WITH THE INSTRUCTOR’S QUESTIONS IN WHATSAPP?” STUDENTS’ VOICES

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Abstract

The way an instructor utilizes questions constitutes an essential issue to ponder. By understanding them, the interaction between the instructor and students and the students’ performance of certain tasks can be construed. However, it may be challenging when it comes up to online learning for the situation is different from the situation they commonly experience via a face to face learning. Thus, this study aimed to reveal the questions deployed by the instructor, and the students perceived it during the online learning over six sessions using a WhatsApp group. It was conducted in one university in Bandung city. Twenty-three graduate students and an instructor were involved. A mixed-method with an embedded design was utilized and the data were garnered through online archives and interviews. Through the online archives, the types of questions used were investigated. Meanwhile, some systematic coding procedures were employed to analyze the students’ voices of the questions used. The findings revealed that convergent questions were the most frequent type of questions found followed by divergent questions, procedural questions, and rhetorical questions consecutively. Besides, most of the students perceive positive views related to the questions used. However, some challenges still emerged during the online class.

Keywords: Instructor’s Types of Questions, Online Learning, Whatsapp

INTRODUCTION

Questions posed by instructors constitute one of the essential facets of the English teaching and learning process. It due to the fact that the way the classroom interaction runs is influenced by the instructors’ questions. Banbrook and Skehan (1989) explicate that teachers’ questions have to do with students’ participation in the teaching and learning process, i.e. students’ participation can be sustained by utilizing the appropriate questions techniques. Moreover, besides making students participate in the class, Richards and Lockhart (2007) reveal other crucial roles of the instructors’ questions comprising to a means for making students get interested in the materials learned, leading students to stay give their attention to the subject matter learned, clarifying their utterances, introducing some language elements such as vocabulary or grammatical structures, making sure whether the students have comprehended the materials learned or not. In addition to the roles of the instructor’s questions mentioned above, Ma (2008) points out another role, namely, these can be employed to foster the ‘students’ creative thinking’ during the classroom interaction takes place.

Meanwhile, there are some types of questions. Some experts have their own classifications of the teachers’ question types. First, Thompson, (1997) divides the questions based on three dimensions, namely *grammatical form*, *content* having to do with outside classroom or personal facts or opinions, and *purpose* that may comprise to check students’ comprehension or to obtain new information. Besides, Brown (2001) classifies the question into display questions and referential questions; the former refers

to questions that the answers have already known by the instructor or teachers, whereas the latter refers to those that the answers have not known by the instructor (or its aim is to gain new information). Furthermore, Richards and Lockhart (2007) assert some types of teachers' questions encompassing: *procedural questions* having to do with questions that have connections with 'classroom procedures and routines, and classroom management', *convergent questions* having to do with the questions that are commonly answered by *yes* or *no* answers or short answers and usually these focus on recollecting the background or previous information, *divergent questions* having to do with questions that require students to make use of their higher-order thinking and these are indicated by the answers that are not commonly short. Another type of question is rhetorical questions which have to do with the questions that do not need any answers for the answers are given by the questioner (Ma, 2008).

For teachers or instructors, construing the types of questions used is crucial. It is because if teachers or instructors cannot use them effectively, the students tend to be less participative (Farahian & Rezaee, 2012). Also, each type of question is used to influence the way students use the target language (Vebriyanto, 2015). Furthermore, a lot of researchers have scrutinized the instructors or teachers' types of questions. However, as the writer's best known, those studies were mostly conducted in face-to-face learning and teaching setting; hence few studies concerning the use of question types by teachers or instructors in an online setting were still encountered. Therefore, the present study was focused more on the question types in an online setting, in this regard, it particularly is carried out in the WhatsApp group. Moreover, understanding the questions types used by instructors in this learning can be more relevant if it has to do with the current condition, in which due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all the learning and teaching process conducted is required to be moved on to distance learning and one of the alternatives is by utilizing an online application or platform, in this regard, WhatsApp.

Regarding the use of WhatsApp in English language teaching, some studies have shown that WhatsApp has both advantages and disadvantages. For instance, evidence shows that it provides space for more elaborations for the topics learned (Keogh & Robles, 2018). Besides, for having discussions, giving announcements which can be checked whether the students have read the messages containing the announcement or not constitute the other advantage of using WhatsApp (Zayed, 2016). Moreover, learning lexical items can be more facilitated by utilizing WhatsApp (Ashiyan, 2016), as well as fostering language skills (Andújar-Vaca & Cruz-Martínez, 2017) which can be promoted through learning from students mistakes and raising students' enthusiasm (Hamad, 2017). Meanwhile, some challenges also emerge as a result of the use of WhatsApp in English language teaching and learning practice. For instance, more time to prepare the materials are needed, some students cannot be monitored altogether, copying and pasting the messages that lead the uncertainty whether the students' answers are truly from their own comprehension or not (p. 85). Also, in fact, students' participation is encountered to be low during the class as a result of the use of WhatsApp (Alenazi, 2017). The other issue is because the myriad messages appear, students cannot follow the discussion conducted through this application (Durriyah & Zuhdi, 2018). Based on this dichotomy of the use of WhatsApp in English language teaching and learning, the teachers' role and intervention during the online class using this application is required so that it leads to the teaching and learning process become more effective (Annamalai, 2015).

Based on the rationales revealed above, the aim of this study is to answer the following questions: 1) What are the questions used by the instructor in a WhatsApp group during the online learning class? 2) How do the students perceive the questions used by the instructor in a WhatsApp group?

METHOD

A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, mixed-method, was employed. Moreover, an embedded design was utilized. This was based on the ground that it can be more facilitative and accommodative to answer the research questions proposed (Hamied, 2017; Morgan, 1998; Morse, 1991). Furthermore, the participants encompassed 23 students of a school of postgraduate studies in one university in Bandung city. Besides, the instruments used comprised interview and document taken from the online archives from six sessions started from April to May 2020. Descriptive statistics and systematic coding procedures comprising initial coding followed by axial coding and selective coding were employed to analyze the data. Moreover, the types of questions investigated in this study consist of a procedural question, divergent question, convergent question, and rhetorical question (Ma, 2008; Richards & Lockhart, 2007); the framework was utilized based on the ground, as the writer's best known, there were still few studies utilizing these types of questions in an online setting; also, it was employed based on credence it could fit the online setting, particularly that which was conducted in WhatsApp.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The following part discusses the result from the data collated. In this regard, it reveals the types of the instructor's types of questions and the way the students perceive them.

1. The Instructor's Types of Questions

Based on the online archives analyzed, regarding the first question, i.e., the most frequent types of question used by the instructor in an online class, the results show that over six sessions, there were 286 questions posed by the instructor. In detail, the result is illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The Instructor's Types of Questions Over Six Learning Sessions

Types of Questions	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5	Session 6	Total
Procedural Question	9	5	3	3	21	17	58
Convergent Question	13	29	33	28	20	25	148
Divergent Question	12	9	22	23	6	6	78
Rhetorical Question	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
Total	30	43	58	55	47	48	286

Table 1 above indicates that over six sessions, the convergent question is the most frequently used by the instructor with 148 questions. It is followed by 78 divergent questions and 58

procedural questions. Meanwhile, the rhetorical question is the least question used by the instructor with only two questions encountered, in detail, it is only found in Session 1 and Session 4.

If the result shown in Table 1 above is changed into a percentage, it is found that 52 percent of the whole six sessions constitute the convergent question, followed by 27 percent of the divergent question, 20 percent of the procedural question, and one percent of rhetorical question consecutively (see Figure 1 below).

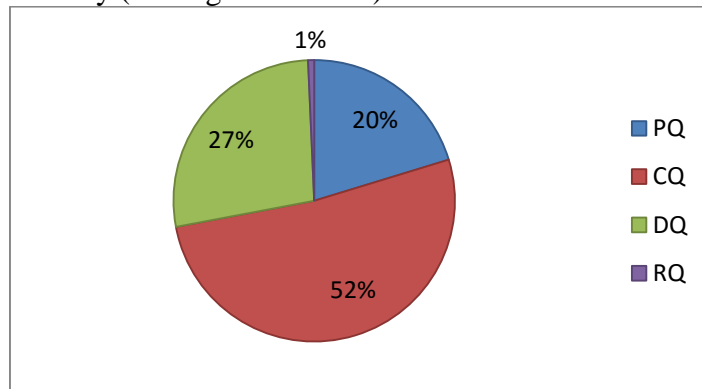


Figure 1. The Percentage of the instructor's types of questions of overall sessions*)

*) PQ: Procedural Question; CQ: Convergent Question; DQ: Divergent Question; RQ: Rhetorical Question

Moreover, the followings are some of the instances of the four types of questions found during the online course taking place facilitated through WhatsApp. In this regard, the instance of the procedural question found was "Who is not listed?"; it was posed by the instructor when he tried to check the students' presence before the course was started. Next, the instance of convergent question encountered was "How long is an introduction?"; it was delivered by the instructor to know the students' background knowledge in regard to the part of an introduction having to do with academic writing. Furthermore, the instance of divergent question used by the instructor was "What does the author want to show in this paragraph 2?"; this question was raised to assess the students' analytical thinking concerning the content of an excerpt of an academic text presented. Moreover, "...several studies... who studies? We have to mention relevant references (studies)" constituted the instance of the rhetorical question posed by the instructor; it was questioned by the instructor as he wanted to inform the students that relevant studies were needed to corroborate their writing.

2. The Students' Voices of the Instructor's Questions

Based on the interview conducted with nine students, in regard to the second question, i.e., how the students perceive the questions used by the instructor, some findings were encountered. In this regard, the students, S1, S2, S3, S5, S6, S7, and S8 revealed their positive impressions, i.e., they felt that it was useful, efficient, challenging, and interactive due to the interaction conducted in a WhatsApp group; in this regard it was facilitated through the instructor's activeness, i.e., using structured questions, and if the students did not know the answer, he would give the solutions directly. Besides, the questions were useful in terms of their function to check the students' presence, i.e., whether the students have attended and followed the class, and to check the students' comprehension of the materials learned. Also, it was used to lead the students to participate and convey their ideas about the materials learned in the online class conducted and keep focusing on the materials learned. In detail, they reported,

Bapak aktif bertanya, kemudian memberikan jawaban; Lalu mengajarkannya dengan terstruktur. Mengasyikkan dan menikmati juga dan dapat dimengerti. Beliau memberikannya secara terstruktur, jadi dapat dimengerti dan sangat useful (He actively asked questions, then he gave the answers; besides, he taught us in a structure way. It was exciting, enjoyable, and understandable. He delivered the materials included the questions in a structure way so these could be understood and useful.) (S1).

Excited. Kelasnya sangat memacu adrenalin; terlebih lagi ketika memasuki kelas daring, metode yang digunakan efisien (Excited. The class got my adrenaline going; moreover, as I attended the online class, the method used was efficient.) (S2).

Dosen Mata Kuliah ini mensiasati dengan memberikan pertanyaan secara acak untuk mengecek apakah mahasiswa benar-benar mengikuti pembelajaran (The instructor of this course gave some questions randomly to check whether the students have followed the class) (S3).

Beliau mengklarifikasi dan memberikan penegasan seperti itu. Jadi itu lebih efektif, menurut saya, kalau secara online (He clarified and gave a confirmation. Thus, it was more effective, in my opinion, for the online class) (S5).

Ketika ada beberapa pertanyaan, kemudian jawabannya ada yang sedikit missed, bapak (the instructor) langsung menjelaskannya (When there are some questions, then the students' answers less correct, he (the instructor) immediately explained them) (S6).

Semua mahasiswa seperti seolah-olah dipastikan memahami dan juga mampu mengerti apa yang ada dalam materi tersebut. Untuk mengecek apakah mahasiswa itu benar-benar mengetahui diberikanlah soal (pertanyaan) (All the students were ensured that they had understood the materials. Then, to check whether the students have understood them, he gave them some questions) (S7).

Dosen juga tetap menuntut mahasiswanya untuk tetap aktif, yaitu berpartisipasi dalam kelas, dengan cara memberikan kita pertanyaan; jadi kita harus fokus di mata kuliah ini melalui WhatsApp group ini (The instructor insisted students to be active, i.e. participated in the class by giving us some questions; therefore, we should focus on this course conducted in this WhatsApp group) (S7).

Sepertinya, kalau yang saya alami sendiri itu, ketika kelas online itu sepertinya lebih interaktif. Jadi setiap orang itu diberikan kesempatan oleh Bapak A. untuk bisa speak up tentang materi yang kami pelajari, sehingga kesempatan untuk saling berinteraksi memang lebih besar (As what I had experienced, the online class seemed more interactive. In this case, each person was given an opportunity by Mr A. to speak up about the materials learned; hence, there were more opportunities to have interactions) (S8).

However, some challenges appear due to it was conducted in an online setting. In this case, S1 and S5 perceived that the question could be biased. In this regard, particularly it has to do with the procedural question. It happened during the instructor tried to check the students' presence and one of the students did not attend the class on time. Then, the instructor asked the student the reason for coming lateen; in this case, she did not feel quite certain whether the instructor was angry or not as he asked because she could not know the instructor's direct (facial) expression. In detail, they reported,

Jadi seperti kemarin ada seorang yang terlambat. 'Mengapa ini ada yang terlambat?' jadi ketika itu sebenarnya saya pikir bapak itu biasa saja. Biasa saja mengajukan pertanyaan yang demikian ketika itu. Tapi entah mengapa persepsi teman-teman saat itu beliau marah. Jadi terkadang apa yang ditulis itu, orang lain berbeda menafsirkannya, secara emosional seperti itu (Well, as what happened yesterday as one student came late. The instructor asked 'Why late?' At that time, actually I thought he was just alright with it. It was common to ask such a question then. However, my classmates felt that he got very angry. Therefore, I thought that sometimes what was written could be interpreted differently, emotionally.) (S1)

Kami tidak bertatap muka jadi agak sulit, kadang terdapat bias kalau menurut saya (We did not meet face to face, so it is a bit difficult, sometimes there was bias, in my view) (S5).

S2 perceived that the question posed by the instructor could be stressful as she reported "*Meski kadang membuat mahasiswa sedikit tertekan* (sometimes it made students a bit stressful)" In addition, S3, S4, S6, and S7 perceived some difficulties in answering the question due to it was conducted in WhatsApp because they had to take a turn with her classmates and flood of messages also emerged. Besides, S3 reported that sometimes she needed more time to answer the question because she had to search for the answer first; such a condition made her be regarded as not a responsive student. The unresponsiveness was also reported by S6, S7, and S9; in this regard, it was due to the unstable internet connection. Moreover, S8 and S9 revealed that lack of engagement was perceived because it was conducted in an online setting, particularly through WhatsApp.

Furthermore, it was reported that to give an emphasis on the questions that the instructor used, a particular conventions, such as 'bold' or capital letters, were utilized. This was revealed by S5 who explicated, "*Beliau memberikan pertanyaan dan menuliskannya dengan bold atau capital* (He gave questions and typed them in bold or capital letters)."

To cope with the issues during the online class, particularly in connection with answering the questions posed by the instructor, some suggestions were revealed. In this case, the suggestions comprised having some preparations before the class, i.e., reading the materials that would be learned (S6), ensuring the internet connection was stable, and making notes, and using the feature of WhatsApp, i.e., the important messages were starred (S7).

Discussion

Based on the findings aforementioned, all types of questions were employed by the instructor. In this regard, in total over the six sessions, the convergent questions were found to be the most frequent type of questions used by the instructor with 148 questions (52%), followed with 78 divergent questions (27%), 58 procedural questions (20%), and 2 rhetorical questions (1%) consecutively. This study in line with a study conducted by Dos, Bay, Aslansoy, Tiryaki, Cetin, and Duman (2016) who found that the two most frequently used questions comprised convergent and divergent questions.

Concerning the students' views of the instructor's questions, some advantages were encountered. In this regard, these have to do with an opportunity to have interaction, that is, through the questions posed by the instructor, students could convey their thought of the materials learned; hence, the class could be more interactive and effective. This finding is corroborated by some experts who reveal that the instructor's questions are crucial for these constitute a key element of the interaction (Brown, 2001; Ma, 2008; Richards & Lockhart,

2007; Thompson, 1997). Besides, its effectiveness hinges on the instructor's questions used which were delivered in a structured way (Nappi, 2017; Şimşek and Gönen, 2020). In addition, the instructor's question was perceived to have a function to check the students' comprehension of the materials learned which fit the theory advocated by Richards and Lockhart (2007).

Despite the advantages, the students also perceive some challenges during the online class using WhatsApp. In this case, bias was found as a result of the questions used in WhatsApp; besides, the questions used could sometimes be stressful for students. In addition, a lack of engagement was perceived by the students. Such a finding was challenged by the study conducted by Awada (2016) who revealed that the use of WhatsApp could motivate students. Therefore, it is highly recommended to ensure that the instructor 'present', i.e., could facilitate the students effectively (Alenazi, 2017; Baishya & Maheshwari, 2020). The other obstacle which led the students difficult to answer the questions had to do with the flood of messages that appeared and the unstable internet connectivity during the online class (Bouhnik & Deshen, 2014; Gon & Rawekar, 2017; Rosenberg & Asterhan, 2018; Sugianto & Prasetyo, 2020; Sugianto & Ulfah, 2020; Wijayanti & Gunawan, 2019)

To cope with those obstacles, some suggestions were suggested by the students. In this regard, a need to be ready to answer the instructor's questions by having some preparations such as reading the materials before attending the class, making notes, and some features of WhatsApp such as starring the important message are required (Anderson, 2016; Hamad, 2017). Moreover, to give emphasis, the instructor was found to use an uppercase letter. This is in line with Indrová's study (2011) that revealed uppercase letters indicate the user emotion, i.e. to give an emphasis on the message conveyed during the online communication.

CONCLUSION

Convergent question constitutes the most frequent type of questions found followed with divergent and procedural questions, and rhetorical question consecutively. Moreover, some themes concerning the students' views of the questions used by the instructors comprised interactivity, effectiveness, and a tool to check students' understanding. However, some challenges were perceived by them, namely the unstable internet connection, flood of messages, and lack of engagement. Any preparation before coming to the class and careful attention is required to be taken into account by students as they join the online class, particularly that which makes use of WhatsApp. Moreover, for future research, the other framework concerning the instructor's types of questions which are conducted in other applications or platforms are advocated.

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