

MELTA ELT SERIES

# Discourse Analysis in Malaysian English Language Teaching

Edited by Normala Othman and Zahariah Pilus

**AUGUST**  
P U B L I S H I N G

August Publishing Sdn Bhd (665084-U)  
3F-15, IOI Business Park  
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Bandar Puchong Jaya  
47170 Puchong  
Selangor, MALAYSIA

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[www.augustpub.com](http://www.augustpub.com)

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18   17   16   15   14

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Discourse Analysis in Malaysian English Language Teaching

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ISBN 978-983-3317-84-4

When ordering this title, use ISBN 978-983-3317-84-4

Printed in Malaysia

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## Chapter 8

# A STUDY OF TEACHERS' QUESTIONING TECHNIQUES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Selvarajah Tharmalingam

In English language classrooms, questions are the core around which almost all communication between teacher and pupils take place. According to Kissock and Lyortsuun (1982), questions are a fundamental tool of teaching and lie at the very heart of developing critical thinking abilities in students. Literature in English teachers need to learn questioning skills and conscientiously use them. Appropriate questioning techniques can solve behaviour problems, promote students' attention and enhance involvement in Literature in English lessons. Questions are statements that have an interrogative form or function. The effective use of questioning techniques would enable the Literature in English teachers to solicit student responses and provide instructional cues that convey the content to be learned or provide directions toward the content to be learned in a literature class. Porter and Brophy (1988) report in their review of the effective teaching literature, that the most effective teachers planned a variety of academic and social goals for their students. Such planning includes questioning techniques that require students to think critically about the information presented rather than just recall facts.

According to Wixson (1983), questions are important to teachers because they can be used to help students know what they are to do and how they are to do it. Questions allow Literature in English teachers to open up or to close down interaction, to draw students in or to exclude them from the discussion. Specific techniques and general strategies will be explored as teachers interrogate and are interrogated in the class.

Good questioning techniques are very important in teaching of Literature in English. Effective teachers use different questioning strategies to help motivate students to pay more attention in class and to remember information better. Questioning can be used to cause students to reason through problems and to put pieces of information together in new ways. Callahan and Clarke (1988) argued that questioning is "the key technique" involved in most teaching. In fact, if one uses problem-solving in teaching, as described by Crunkilton and Krebs (1982) or by Newcomb, McCracken, and Warmbrod (1986), questions are the basis of the lesson plan itself and are central in the delivery of instruction.

Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading that involves five levels of reading: literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation are a useful guide for literature teachers to plan their questioning strategies for teaching literature. This taxonomy is useful in that they assist teachers in their development and use of questions. Appropriate questioning techniques would enable literature teachers to create a wider scope for teacher-student communication and co-operation. Asking good questions in English Language classrooms would allow teachers to deal with things emotionally, such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes (Kratwohl et al., 1968).

In order to teach well, it is widely believed that one must be able to question well. Asking good questions fosters interaction between the teacher and his/her students. Rosenshine (1971) found that a large amount of student-teacher interaction promotes student achievement. However, it is important to know that not all questions achieve this. Teachers spend most of their time asking low-level cognitive questions (Wilén, 1991). These questions concentrate on factual information that can be memorized (ex. What year did the World War II begin? or Who wrote "The Pearl"?). It is widely believed that this type of question can limit students by not helping them to acquire a deep, elaborate understanding of the subject matter.

### ***Development in Questioning Techniques***

Researchers concerned with questioning techniques point out that questioning has a long and venerable history as an educational strategy. In addition to its long history and demonstrated effectiveness, questioning is also of interest to researchers and practitioners because of its widespread use as a contemporary teaching technique (Cotton, 1988). Crunkilton and Krebs (1982) state most questions that teachers ask are simple recall questions that require the student to remember some factual information and recite it to the teacher. Wolf (1987) adds that much of classroom inquiry is low-level, short, even exclusive or harsh.

An early study on questioning done in 1912 (Stevens 1912) found that two-thirds of classroom questions required nothing more than direct recitation of textbook information. Now, more than 90 years after the initial study, research suggests that 60 percent of the questions students hear require factual answers, 20 percent concern procedures, and only 20 percent require inference, transfer, or reflection (Gall 1970).

Following the 1948 Convention of the American Psychological Association, Bloom took a lead in formulating a classification of "the goals of the educational process". Three "domains" of educational activities were identified. The first of these, named the Cognitive Domain, involves knowledge and the development of intellectual attitudes and skills. The other domains are the Affective Domain and the Psychomotor Domain (Carneson, Delpierre and Masters, 1991). Bloom and his co-workers intended to develop a classification system for the three domains: the cognitive, the affective, and the psychomotor. Work on the cognitive domain was completed in 1956 and is now generally referred to as **Bloom's Taxonomy (Huitt, 2000)**. The major idea of the taxonomy is that statements of educational objectives can be arranged in a hierarchy from less to more complex.

### ***Bloom's Domains of Educational Activities***

Bloom and his colleagues identified the domains of educational activities. The domains are cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Krathwohl, 1968). Two domains of questions; the cognitive and affective are used to describe the types of questions teachers should ask (Kissock and Lyortsuun, 1982:8) Cognitive questions are concerned with intellectual understanding and affective questions are concerned with emotions, attitudes and values (Bloom, 1956).

The cognitive level questions are organized according to the six categories in the cognitive domain of educational objectives (Bloom, 1956). They include all the levels of thought processes: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Research suggests that the cognitive level of the questions has dramatic impact on students' response (Tollefson, 1989). According to Tollefson, Wilson (1973) describes that the cognitive complexity of students' response is largely determined by

the cognitive complexity of the question. In addition to that, Cole and Williams (1973) point out that the cognitive level of teachers' questions determines the syntactic complexity of students' response.

The affective level questions are organized in five categories according to the affective domain (Krathwohl, 1964). It is concerned with emotions, interests, feelings, beliefs, values, and appreciations. Kissock and Lyortsuun (1982) state that the affective domain is not used as often as the cognitive domain but it is equally important in instruction. The affective domain addresses students' emotions towards learning experiences. The students' attitudes, interest, attention, awareness, and values are demonstrated by affective behaviours. These emotional behaviours, which are organized in a hierarchical format also, starting from simplest and building to most complex. These five categories can be thought of in a scaffolding manner, one must be learned in order to move onto the next category (Bly, 1986).

Both the cognitive and affective domains of Bloom's taxonomy describes that there are important differences in the impact of teachers' different questioning techniques on students and the learning process. Tollefson (1989) points out that difference such as these affect not only the cognitive complexity of students' responses, but grammatical complexity as well. These important differences among levels of difficulty of questions are captured by taxonomy of questions developed by Thomas Barrett (Clymer, 1968). This taxonomy is known as Barrett's taxonomy and it is adapted for use in ESL classes (Tollefson, 1989).

### ***Barrett's Taxonomy***

Barrett's taxonomy was developed by Thomas Barrett and introduced at a conference in 1968. It involves five levels of reading: literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential

comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation (Clymer, 1968). Barrett's taxonomy will be used as a tool to analyze the levels of the teachers' questions in this study. The taxonomy is a good guide to the levels at which we are trying to measure comprehension (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984).

According to Pearson and Johnson (1978), Barrett's taxonomy has been the most widely used in reading courses. Barrett's taxonomy also refers to questions related to reading comprehension and is far more detailed. Barrett's Taxonomy involves five levels of reading: literal comprehension, reorganization, inferential comprehension, evaluation, and appreciation (Sax, 1997). The last three levels are considered higher-level thinking. This taxonomy is useful in that they assist teachers in their development and use of questions (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984).

A review of early models of reading, including reading comprehension, was provided by Clymer (Clymer, 1968) and this includes reference to an unpublished paper by Barrett (Barrett, undated cited by; Clymer, 1968, p.17 - 23). Clymer cites Barrett's claim that teachers face two misconceptions concerning reading comprehension instruction: "considering comprehension a single unitary skill and assuming that comprehension contains so many separate skills as to be unmanageable" (Clymer, 1968, p.17). Despite an abundance of discussion and research in the years since Barrett's claim, the misconceptions he outlines and the taxonomy he suggests might still be relevant for teachers today (Freiberg & Driscoll, 2000).

The history of the development of questioning techniques led researchers to believe that teachers need to use appropriate questioning techniques in classroom (Cotton, 1988). Good questioning techniques would enable students to participate actively in the learning process by raising and responding to questions requiring higher levels of thinking and valuing (Kissock and Lyortsuun, 1982). It is the teachers' task to ensure

that students operate at levels beyond "literal" (Barrett, 1966) and take them up the skills hierarchy to "inferential" and even "evaluative" levels, where answers are not right or wrong, and it becomes necessary for students to use appropriate discourse modes to justify individual view to others (Tuiman, 1973).

### ***Questioning Techniques in Different Stages of a Lesson***

Questioning is one of the most important dimensions of teaching and learning. It is one of the most often used teaching techniques (Kim and Kellough, 1987). It gives teachers the chance to find out what students know and understand, and it allows students to seek clarification and help (Durkin, 1978). It also challenges students to think about issues and may even unsettle them and encourage them to think about issues in new and different ways (Ciardiello, 1986:119-122).

Questioning techniques are important in every stages of a lesson. Teachers need to use appropriate questions during the pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading stages of a lesson (Cotton, 1988). A pre-reading activity with the focus on arousing interest in a text and getting students started reading will be different from one with the focus on establishing a common understanding about the main idea or technique employed in a text (Mills, 1980:194-204). Teachers need to consider how to initiate the reading of any text. As Irwin (1990:96) points out:

*... questioning techniques in pre-reading stage of a lesson help students to activate what they know about a topic and anticipate what they will read or hear. It helps teachers to point out how a text is organized, to teach unfamiliar vocabulary or concepts, and to provide students with a purpose for reading or listening.*

Researchers point out that most teachers ask literal comprehension level questions (Barrett, 1968) in pre-reading stage of a lesson (Kasulis, 1986). Literal comprehension

questions are the lowest level in Barrett's taxonomy. This does not mean that they are unimportant because literal level questions can stimulate students' interest in the lesson (Gall, 1970). The reorganization level questions (Barrett, 1968) are suitable in pre-reading stage because it not only helps students to understand words but they also assist students to understand the organization and relationships between ideas (Alderson and Urquhart, 1984).

In the while-reading stage of a lesson, teachers often ask questions to compare and generalize, identify the theme, and clarify meaning (Lyman and Collins 1990). Literal comprehension level questions are the most common type of questions asked by teachers at this stage (Foley 1993). These are questions that have a simple answer, which the student is expected to know. Literal level questions are used to determine the student's knowledge about factual information (Thomas, (1997). Many present day researchers agree that literal comprehension level questions do not provide students enough opportunities to use their thinking skills and expand their knowledge beyond the literal level (Blanton, Wood and Moorman, 1990).

Inference and evaluation level questions (Barrett, 1968) are considered as suitable at while-reading stage of a lesson (Bozsik, 1982). Inference level questions enable students to look for information that is in the text but not directly stated. Inference is a higher level processing skill, which can develop students' vocabulary, grammar and other linguistic knowledge during the while-reading activities (Pearson, 1985: 724-738)

Evaluation level questions require students to make a value judgement, to express opinions, to provide a criticism, or to raise their own questions. They require the highest form of thinking and there are no right or wrong answers to evaluative questions (Barrett, 1968). Evaluation level questions are useful to create awareness among students

pertaining to certain issues in the while-reading stage of a lesson (Wilén, 1977: 237-245). Evaluation level questions enable students to balance their new learning against their other beliefs and value system and allow the teacher to get a feel for what the students are thinking (Partin, 1979: 254-256).

In the post-reading stage of a lesson, students must be exposed to more appreciation level questions. Teachers need to ask appreciation level questions to help students get a better understanding and interpretation of the lesson (Hunkins, 1969: 45-58). Students developed their creativity as well as their proficiency and fluency in the English language through appreciation level questions. It also stimulates the intellectual, communicative and affective response of the students (Arnold, 1999). Tollefson, (1989) describes:

*...appreciation level questions in post-reading stage require the students to articulate emotional and aesthetical responses to the text according to personal standards, and to professional standards of literary forms, styles, genres, theories and critical approaches.*

### **Types of Questions at Different Levels of Barrett's Taxonomy**

Barrett's Taxonomy of Reading Comprehension (Barrett, 1968) categorizes questions into five levels of difficulty: literal comprehension, reorganization, inference, evaluation and appreciation (Clymer, 1968). The questions in the first two levels of the taxonomy – literal comprehension and reorganization are considered as low-level (Sax, 1997). Researchers describe these type of questions are the most frequently used by teachers in present day classrooms (Huitt, 2000).

Sax (1997) further elaborates that the questions in the last three levels of the taxonomy – inference, evaluation and appreciation are considered higher-level. Higher-level

questions are well recommended by many researchers because these types of questions allow students to think more deeply and critically (Gall, Ward, Berliner, Cahen, Winne, Elashoff, and Stanton, 1978:175-199). Higher-level questions can also encourage students to solve problems, inspire discussions and stimulate them to seek information on their own (Bozsik, 1982). Researchers suggest that teachers need to ensure that students operate at levels beyond the 'literal' level (Barrett, 1966) and take them up the skills hierarchy to inferential, evaluative and appreciation levels of the taxonomy (Clymer, 1968).

### **Low-level Questions in ESL Classrooms**

The simplest and most frequently asked questions are at the literal comprehension level of Barrett's taxonomy. These are questions that have a simple answer, which the student is expected to know (Ornstein, 1988: 72-80). Literal comprehension level questions are used to determine the student's knowledge about factual information (Barrett, 1966). Teachers have a tendency to use too many literal comprehension level questions because they are easy to ask and easy to answer. Many researchers argue that literal comprehension level questions do not challenge the student's ability to think but only to remember (Morgan and Saxton, 1991). This does not mean that literal comprehension level questions are not important. Camp (1990) points out those literal comprehension level questions are important and hold the key to students' understanding of a lesson.

The reorganization level questions help students not only to understand words, but they also guide students to understand the organization and relationships between ideas (Sitko and Slemon, 1982: 109-121). The reorganization level questions can accommodate various levels of language proficiency from 'silent' and 'speech emergence' through 'fluent' stages as well as articulate, highly verbal responses (Olsen 1996:16). It requires students to demonstrate the ability to take given information and reorganize it into different formats. Reorganization usually includes tasks that lend themselves to group

work, such as classifying persons, things, and places into groups, organizing a selection in outline form, summarizing a selection and synthesizing information from more than a single source (Tollefson, 1989).

## **Higher-level Questions in ESL Classrooms**

Higher-level questions in Barrett's taxonomy can be defined as questions that require students to use higher order thinking or reasoning skills (Clymer, 1968). By using these skills, students do not remember only factual knowledge. Instead, they use their knowledge to problem solve, to analyze, and to evaluate (Mills, 1980: 194-204). It is popularly believed that this type of question reveals the most about whether or not a student has truly grasped a concept. This is because a student needs to have a deep understanding of the topic in order to answer this type of question (Smith, 1985: 44-49). Teachers do not use high-level-cognitive questions with the same amount of frequency as they do with low-level-cognitive questions. Ellis (1993) claims that many teachers do rely on low-level cognitive questions in order to avoid a slow-paced lesson, keep the attention of the students, and maintain control of the classroom.

The inference level questions in Barrett's taxonomy are considered as higher-level questions. Like all higher-level questions, inference requires broad knowledge and an extensive vocabulary for students to be able to compare, contrast, apply, synthesize, deduce or infer, conclude, reason, presume, conjecture and hypothesize (Dillon, 1984: 50-56). Thus, before a teacher asks inference level questions, there has to be broad vocabulary development that is applied to comparing and contrasting ideas, to synthesize principles, and to arrive at conclusions or infer other ideas. Inference level

questions that involve cause and effect can get your students to go beyond the information given and begin serious discussions (Gall, 1984: 40-47).

The evaluation level questions in Barrett's taxonomy require the students to compare information and ideas in a text with material presented by the teacher and with the student's own knowledge and experience in order to form judgments of various kinds (Tollefson, 1989). There is no observable attempt to present the standards on which the judgment is being made or to demonstrate how the thing being evaluated meets those standards. It is therefore important for teachers to help students form logical and rational judgments and express concern for the basis on which they are being made. In this way students can be helped to think through the basis for their judgments and the effects of them (Kissock and Lyortsuun, 1982: 67).

The appreciation level questions are the highest level in Barrett's taxonomy. Questions in appreciation level require the students to articulate emotional and aesthetic responses to the text according to personal standards and to professional standards of literary forms, styles, genres, theories and critical approaches (Tollefson, 1989). Appreciation level questions can influence students' achievement, attitudes, and thinking skills (Wilén, 1982).

Arends (1994) argues that many of the findings concerning the effects of using lower-level questions versus higher-level questions have been inconclusive. While some studies and popular belief favour asking high-level questions, other studies reveal the positive effects of asking low-level questions. Gall (1984), for example, cited that "emphasis on fact questions is more effective for promoting students' achievement, which primarily involves mastery of basic skills; and emphasis on higher-level questions is more effective for students of average and high ability..." (p. 41). Nevertheless, other

studies do not reveal any difference in achievement between students whose teachers use mostly high level questions and those whose teachers ask mainly low level questions (Arends, 1994; Wilen, 1991).

### ***Analysis of Teachers' Questions***

Barrett's taxonomy is used to categorize the level of the teachers' classroom questioning (refer to Appendix F). All five teachers have used a range of different types of questions in their respective classrooms. The findings of this analysis would suggest the appropriateness of the teachers' questions and its implications towards the teaching of Literature in English. Table 4.1 below shows the data collected from the research tapescript of the lesson.

**Table 1: Analysis of Teachers' Questions**

SAMPLES	LEVEL OF TAXONOMY										Total Questions
	Lit	%	Re	%	In	%	Eva	%	Ap	%	
Teacher 1	55	55.9%	3	2.8%	16	15.1%	24	22.6%	8	7.6%	106
Teacher 2	71	66.4%	0	0%	20	18.7%	7	6.5%	9	8.4%	107
Teacher 3	66	66.7%	0	0%	21	21.2%	5	5.1%	7	7.1%	99
Teacher 4	143	71.9%	0	0%	45	22.6%	8	4.0%	3	1.5%	199
Teacher 5	83	74.1%	0	0%	15	13.4%	10	8.9%	4	3.6%	112

The analysis of the data suggests that all five teachers have relied heavily on literal level questions. All the teachers have asked more than 50% of literal level questions in their classrooms. Teacher 1 has asked 55.9% literal level questions. Teacher 2 has asked 66.4% literal level questions. Teacher 3 has asked 66.7% literal level questions. Teacher 4 has

asked 71.9% literal level questions and Teacher 5 has asked 74.1% literal level questions. Literal level questions are the low level questions in Barrett's taxonomy. It only elicits direct responses from the students (Alderson and Urquhart, 1984). Literal level questions are necessary but it has to be limited and replace with more high-level questions in order to encourage creative responses from the students (Cotton, 1988). This is a clear indication that these teachers do not encourage their students to think creatively and speak confidently in classrooms. The questions that the teachers ask are direct and specific. The students tend to answer the questions with just a single word. There is no sign of encouragement from the teacher to motivate the students to interact confidently in English.

The result shows that the teachers did not maximize the usage of reorganization level questions in the classroom. Only Teacher 1 has asked reorganization questions. Teacher 1 has asked only 3 reorganization questions, which is equivalent 2.8% of the total classroom questions. The other four teachers did not ask even a single reorganization question. This shows the teachers lack of knowledge in classroom questioning techniques. The teachers need to utilize reorganization questions to improve students' knowledge in sequencing and analyzing information (Tollefson, 1989).

All five teachers did not ask many high-order questions during the lessons. Inference, evaluation and appreciation questions are essential in developing the students' critical thinking skills and language proficiency (Brophy and Good, 1985). The limited usage of these questions has hindered the students' progress in developing their language proficiency. Teacher 1 has asked only 16 or 15.1% inference questions. Teacher 2 has asked 20 or 18.7%, Teacher 3 has asked 21 or 21.2%, Teacher 4 has asked 45 or 22.6% and Teacher 5 has asked 15 or 13.4% inference questions. The teachers should ask more

inference questions in order to involve the students in classroom activities in an active manner.

Evaluation and appreciation level questions are known to be effective in teaching literature because they create opportunities for the students to express ideas and opinions (Tollefson, 1989). These types of questions enable the students to respond by engaging in effective communication in the classroom. The low usage of the questions prevented the students to interact effectively in the classroom. Teacher 1 has asked 24 or 22.6% of evaluation questions. Teacher 2 has asked only 7 or 6.5%, Teacher 3 has asked only 5 or 5.1%, Teacher 4 has asked 8 or 4.0% and Teacher 5 has asked 10 or 8.9% of evaluation questions. The teachers need to ask more evaluation questions to encourage the students to make judgments in light of the working materials. Tollefson (1989) states that evaluation level questions enable teachers to engage in better communication with students in forming and expressing their own views.

The highest level in Barrett's taxonomy is the appreciation level. Teachers are encouraged to ask more appreciation questions to improve the language competency level of the students (Gall, 1978: 175-199). The limited usage of appreciation questions would not help the students achieve the required competency level. Teacher 1 has asked 8 or 7.6% of appreciation questions. Teacher 2 has asked 9 or 8.4%, Teacher 3 has asked 7 or 7.1%, Teacher 4 has asked 3 or 1.5% and Teacher 5 has asked only 4 or 3.6% appreciation questions. The teachers need to understand the importance of these types of questions and increase the usage of appreciation level questions in their respective classes.

## ***Analysis According To Individual Teacher's Questioning Techniques***

### **Teacher 1**

The data collected from the tapescript of Teacher 1 shows that the teacher has asked 106 questions throughout the 80-minute lesson. Table 2 shows the levels of questions asked by the teacher in the ESL classroom.

**Table 2: Analysis of Level of Taxonomy Used by Teacher 1**

<b>Level of Questions</b>	<b>Total Questions</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Literal	55	51.9%
Reorganization	3	2.8%
Inference	16	15.1%
Evaluation	24	22.6%
Appreciation	8	7.6%

Based on the data in Table 2, Teacher 1 asked 55 literal level questions, which is equivalent to 51.9% of the overall questions. This evidence points out that Teacher 1 asked too many literal level questions. Literal level questions do not create sufficient opportunities for the students to engage in classroom conversation effectively. The students merely answer the questions directly found in the text. However, it cannot be said that literal level questions are unimportant. This type of questions is necessary for weaker students. Alderson & Urquhart (1984) point out that literal level questions are the most common type of questions asked in classrooms and they are the key to our students' achievement in classroom. The evidence suggests that Teacher 1 has asked too many literal due to the low language proficiency of the students.

The reorganization level questions are the least asked by Teacher 1 in the classroom. Only 3 out of 106 questions are asked. It means 2.8% of the classroom questions are reorganization level. According to Tollefson (1989), reorganization level questions are fundamental in encouraging students to analyze, synthesize, or organize information. Thus, the limited usage of reorganization level questions shows that the teacher did not utilize the questions to its maximum capacity.

Teacher 1 asked 16 inference level questions, which is equivalent to 15.1% of the classroom questions. It is insufficient due to the nature of inference level questions, which are fundamental to develop students' creative thinking skills (Ellis, 1993). The students' were not given enough opportunities to respond creatively. Due to this the flow of the lesson is one-way. It clearly shows that the teacher dominates the classroom activity without involving students in a wider perspective. Classroom interaction between the teacher and students are fundamental in developing students' language proficiency and thinking skills (Cooter, 1984: 251, 824). Teachers need to encourage the students to speak the target language and think critically. Both teacher and student should see themselves as partners in learning as they work together to resolve the problem or situation under study (Kissock & Lyortsuun, 1982:4).

Teacher 1 asked evaluation questions to encourage the students to make their own judgment in light of the material. The teacher has asked 24 evaluation level questions, which is equivalent to 22.6% of the classroom questioning. Evaluation level questions enable the students to respond by thinking more deeply and critically and providing their own ideas (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). This encourages the students to participate actively in classroom activities. There are good communication between the teacher and the students due to this. The teacher needs to motivate the students to respond positively by asking more judgments of reality and fantasy rather than just stating the fact or opinion.

The highest level in Barrett's taxonomy is appreciation. Teacher 1 asked 8 appreciation questions, which is equivalent to 7.6% of the classroom questioning. Appreciation level questions are important as it enables students to articulate emotional and aesthetic responses to the text according to personal standards and to professional standards of literary forms, styles, genres, theories and critical responses. However, the limited usage of the appreciation level questions does not benefit the students in this class. Students need to be able to articulate emotional and aesthetic responses effectively (Sanders, 1966). The study suggests that it is essential for the teacher to employ more appreciation level questions to motivate the students to communicate confidently.

## Teacher 2

The data collected from the tapescript of Teacher 2 shows that the teacher has asked 107 questions throughout the 80-minute lesson. Table 3 shows the levels of questions asked by the teacher in the ESL classroom.

**Table 3: Analysis of Level of Taxonomy Used by Teacher 2**

Level of Questions	Total Questions	Percentage
Literal	71	66.4%
Reorganization	0	0%
Inference	20	18.7%
Evaluation	7	6.5%
Appreciation	9	8.4%

Based on the data in Table 3, Teacher 2 has asked 71 literal level questions, which is equivalent to 66.4% of the classroom questioning. The wider usage of literal level questions suggests that the lesson is teacher-centred. Most of the questions are direct

and specific form the text (Dillon, 1984: 50-56) that is inadequate for students' language development. It would be beneficial for the students if the teacher is able to ask different levels of questions to improve their thinking skills rather than asking too many literal level questions. It is important to note that the study is not suggesting that literal level questions are unimportant but should be used only when it is necessary. For example, during the set-induction or pre reading stages of a lesson, literal level questions can be asked to attract students' attention and interest (Brophy and Good, 1985).

The teacher did not ask any reorganization level questions during the lesson. This proves the poor questioning strategy used by the teacher. Reorganization questions are essential for students to reorganize information. It enables the students to analyze information and develop their thinking skills (Tollefson, 1989). A reorganization level question, which is categorized as low-level questions, is important in teaching of Literature in English. Cotton (1988) suggests that low-level questions are more effective when the teacher's purpose is to impart factual knowledge and assist students in committing this knowledge to memory.

High-level questions in Barrett's taxonomy, which consist of inference, evaluation and appreciation, are fundamental in developing students' critical thinking skills (Barrett, 1968). Teacher 2 asked 20 inference level questions, which is equivalent to 18.7% of the classroom questioning. Inference level is a higher level processing skill. The limited usage of inference level questions creates a barrier for the students to use information explicitly (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984). Teacher 2 asked 7 evaluation level questions, which is equivalent to 6.5% of the classroom questioning. This is too low compared to the importance of this type of questions. The appreciation level of questions that are encouraged by most scholars (Smith, 1985:44-49) is not fully utilized in this classroom. The teacher has asked 9 questions, which is equivalent to 8.4% of the classroom

questioning. This is insufficient to develop the students' language proficiency. The limited usage of the appreciation level questions discouraged the students to engage themselves in positive communication in the classroom.

### Teacher 3

The data collected from the tapescript of Teacher 3 shows that the teacher has asked 99 questions throughout the 80 minutes lesson. Table 4 shows the levels of questions asked by the teacher in the ESL classroom.

**Table 4: Analysis of Level of Taxonomy Used by Teacher 3**

Level of Questions	Total Questions	Percentage
Literal	66	66.7%
Reorganization	0	0%
Inference	21	21.2%
Evaluation	5	15.1%
Appreciation	7	7.1%

Based on the data in Table 4, the number of questions asked by Teacher 3 suggests that the teacher has insufficient knowledge on the importance of using questioning techniques as a tool to improve classroom communication. The teacher has asked 66 literal level questions, which is equivalent to 66.7% of the classroom questioning. The data shows that Teacher 3 has widely asked literal level questions in every stage of the lesson. These types of questions do not encourage the students to use their thinking skills to the maximum capacity (Wilén, 1982: 222,488). The teacher also did not ask any reorganization level questions. This is not beneficial for the students who are deprived an opportunity to improve their reorganization of information ability. The teacher

should create opportunities for the students at every possible angle to improve their language proficiency.

Teacher 3 has asked 21 inference level questions, which is equivalent to 21.2% of the classroom questioning. This information suggests that the teacher has provided the students certain degree of opportunity to express themselves through inferential questions. This is a positive approach of the teacher, as inference level questions would enable the students to use information along with their personal experience and knowledge to form hypotheses (Cotton, 1988).

Evaluation and appreciation are the highest levels of questions in Barrett's taxonomy. However, Teacher 3 did not fully utilize these types of questions. The teacher has asked only 5 evaluation level questions, which is equivalent to only 5.1% of the classroom questioning. Evaluation level questions enable the students to make judgments in light of the material (Alderson & Urquhart, 1984).

Dillon (1983) suggests that the appreciation level questions are essential to improve students' critical thinking skills. It also encourages healthy classroom discussion. Teacher 3 has asked only 7 appreciation level questions, which is equivalent to 7.1% of the classroom questions. This could be due to the students' low proficiency level which prompted the teacher to minimize the usage of appreciation level questions. The teacher should know that the students need appreciation level questions to develop their thinking skills and language proficiency.

### Teacher 4

The data collected from the tapescript of Teacher 4 shows that the teacher has asked a total of 199 questions throughout the 80-minute lesson. Table 4 shows the levels of questions asked by the teacher in the ESL classroom.

**Table 5: Analysis of Level of Taxonomy Used by Teacher 4**

Level of Questions	Total Questions	Percentage
Literal	143	71.9%
Reorganization	0	0%
Inference	45	22.6%
Evaluation	8	4.0%
Appreciation	3	1.5%

Based on the data in Table 5, the number of questions asked by Teacher 4 suggests that the lesson is teacher-centred with little emphasis given to students' language development. Undoubtedly, students had to be allowed to think and use language in a creative way, without forgetting about the special requirements called for by the exam students were to take. Teachers must demonstrate how language items are used, and in what situations they are appropriate. In order to achieve this, teachers need to be aware of the importance of questioning techniques" (Revell, 1979:5).

The teacher has asked 143 literal level questions, which is equivalent to 71.9% of the classroom questioning. The study points out that literal level questions are necessary but

it needs to be used appropriately. The high usage of literal level questions by the teacher suggests that the students are given fewer opportunities to express themselves and eventually limit their classroom interaction. Camp (1988) states that:

*... it is high time that we, as teachers, placed as many intellectual demands on our students. Unfortunately, literal level questions do not challenge the student's ability to think, only to remember. All teachers, have a tendency to use too many literal level questions because they are easy to ask and easy to answer.*

The teacher also did not ask any reorganization level questions. This proves that the teacher does not understand the fundamental aspects of good questioning techniques. Tollefson (1989) points out that it is vital for students to be actively involved in group work or pair work in classroom activities. Reorganization level questions would enable the students to analyze, synthesize and organize information (Barrett, 1968). These types of questions would commonly help the students to communicate effectively.

Teacher 4 has asked 45 inference level questions, which is equivalent to 22.6% of the classroom questions. The students are able to use the information positively by responding to these types of questions. The teacher needs to minimize the literal level questions and increase inferential questions to develop students' knowledge in the lesson.

This would help the students to give longer responses, which is necessary to improve their language proficiency. Dillon (1981) and Smith (1978) found that literal level questions, which have a low level of cognitive difficulty, generally elicit shorter responses than higher-level questions requiring students to express opinions or interpretations.

The teacher asked a total of 8 evaluation level questions, which is equivalent to 4.0% of the classroom questioning. The limited usage of evaluation questions discourages students to participate more actively in the classroom activity (Cotton, 1988). The teacher has asked only 3 appreciation level questions, which is equivalent to 1.5% of the classroom questioning. This is insufficient for the students to develop their thinking skills. It also discourages the students to interact in the class and deprive them from developing their language proficiency. The teacher needs to improve the questioning strategies in order to develop the students' knowledge and language ability.

### Teacher 5

The data collected from the tapescript of Teacher 5 shows that the teacher has asked a total of 112 questions throughout the 80-minute lesson. Table 6 shows the levels of questions asked by the teacher in the ESL classroom.

**Table 6: Analysis of Level of Taxonomy Used by Teacher 5**

Level of Questions	Total Questions	Percentage
Literal	83	74.1%
Reorganization	0	0%
Inference	15	13.4%
Evaluation	10	8.9%
Appreciation	4	3.6%

Based on the data in Table 6, Teacher 5 has asked a total of 83 literal level questions, which is equivalent to 74.1% of the classroom questioning. The high usage of literal level questions suggests that the teacher dominates the lesson and provides little room for the

students to be involved in the lesson actively (Cross, 1992: 59). The teacher also did not ask any reorganization level questions. This clearly shows that the teacher does not possess the necessary knowledge in using appropriate questioning techniques to improve communication in the classroom.

Teacher 5 has asked 15 inference level questions, which is equivalent to 13.4% of the classroom questioning. The limited usage of the inference level questions hinders the progress of the students' analyzing skills (Tollefson, 1989). The teacher asked 10 evaluation level questions, which is equivalent to 8.9% of the classroom questioning. This is insufficient for the development of the students' thinking skills.

The fewer evaluation questions do not improve the language proficiency of the students (Cotton, 1988). The teacher has asked only 4 appreciation level questions, which is equivalent to 3.6% of the classroom questioning. Although many educationists suggest that appreciation questions could be used to develop the thinking skills and language proficiency of the students, the teacher has failed to utilize this type of questions to the maximum capacity. The students are not able to communicate and interact effectively in the class. The teacher needs to improve the questioning strategies in order to help the students to improve their proficiency level.

## **Conclusion**

The proficiency level of English language among the present day students is low. Educationists and policy makers have suggested various reasons for this situation. One the most frequently mentioned reason is the teachers' poor pedagogical approach. This study enables us to look at a particular strategy, which could be fully utilized to improve the proficiency level of the students. That strategy is the questioning techniques of the teachers. Good questioning techniques are very important in teaching

(Camp, 1988). He further states that teachers use effective questioning techniques to help motivate students to interact confidently in classroom.

The study suggests that all the five teachers did not use effective questioning techniques in the classroom. The teachers tend to use a lot of literal level questions, which did not provide sufficient opportunities for the students to develop their creative and critical thinking skills. Students should be allowed to express their opinions without any fear (Henson, 1979:14-16). The teacher needs to attract the students to engage in active communication through appropriate questioning techniques. Various question forms are appropriate to elicit different types of answers from the students (Cross 1992:59).

The lack of high-order questions discouraged the students to participate effectively in the classroom activities. It is necessary for the teachers to familiarize themselves with different types of questioning techniques to be used in their classroom (Camp, 1988). The study suggests that all five levels of Barrett's taxonomy: literal, reorganization, inference, evaluation and appreciation are fundamental in teaching of Literature in English. These questions need to be asked consistently at every stage of the lesson to elicit good responses from the students.

The study aims to investigate the relationships between the teacher's questioning techniques and its implication on teaching literature. The ultimate interest of the researcher is to find out whether the questions asked by the teachers facilitate literary competence among students. The study examines the types of questions teachers employ in teaching of Literature in English. The questions are categorized according to Barrett's taxonomy of reading comprehension and analyzed to determine the levels of thinking processes activated through the teacher's questioning techniques.

The finding of the study suggests that the teachers prefer to ask too many literal level questions in their classrooms. This is evident when the data collected show that Teacher 1 has asked 51.9% literal level questions in the classroom. Teacher 2 has asked 66.4% literal level questions. Teacher 3 has asked 66.7% of literal level questions. Teacher 4 has asked 71.9% literal level questions. Teacher 5 has asked 74.1% literal level questions. Literal level questions in Barrett's taxonomy are low-level questions. These type of questions are direct and do not challenge the students' thinking ability. The high frequency of literal questions in the classroom discouraged the students from communicating effectively. Most of their communication is limited to a single word or phrase.

The lack of two-way communication in the classroom has led the teachers to dominate the class without realizing the negative implications they are creating. The study proves that all the five teachers failed to employ the constructivism theory as proposed by the Curriculum Development Centre.

The finding also shows that only Teacher 1 has asked the reorganization level question. Reorganization questions allow students to work confidently in pairs or groups. These types of questions are able to motivate the students to participate actively in the lessons. However, Teacher 1's reorganization questions are insufficient because only 2.8% of the questions are asked. The other teachers did not ask any reorganization questions. This evidence suggests that the teachers are not familiar with appropriate questioning techniques to be used in classroom teaching.

In Barrett's taxonomy, inference, evaluation and appreciation are higher-level questions. Teachers are encouraged to ask these types of questions to develop the students thinking skills. The study suggests that all five teachers did not utilize the higher-level

questions to maximum capacity. Teacher 1 has asked 15.1% of inference, 22.6% of evaluation and 7.6% of appreciation questions. Teacher 2 has asked 18.7% of inference, 6.5% of evaluation and 8.4% of appreciation questions. Teacher 3 has asked 21.2% of inference, 5.1% of evaluation and 7.1% of appreciation questions. Teacher 4 has asked 22.6% of inference, 4.0% of evaluation and 1.5% of appreciation questions. Teacher 5 has asked 13.4% of inference, 8.9% of evaluation and 3.6% of appreciation questions. The low usage of evaluation and appreciation level questions proves that the teachers did not attempt to create sufficient opportunities for the students to develop their critical thinking skills.

There is also a possibility that the teachers are more comfortable asking the literal level questions due to the students' poor standard of English language. The teachers feel that by employing literal level questions, the students are at least able to answer the questions. This should not be used as an excuse because the teacher as a role model should encourage the students to speak English language through appropriate use of questioning techniques.

Another possible reason for the teachers to ask more literal level questions is the low language level of the students. The students' poor proficiency level of language prompts the teachers to shift their language to basilectal level. This is evident because the data shows that there are too many unforced grammatical mistakes in the question form of the teachers. The teachers feel that basilectal level of language enable the students to understand their instructions better. This will eventually kill off the students' progress in learning English language.

It is important for teachers to employ questions according to the ability of the students. It is a norm in Malaysian schools to have mixed ability students in the same class. The

teachers need to ask questions to higher ability students before as well as after the material is read and studied. The same cannot be done to lower ability students. The teachers should ask questions only after the material has been read and studied.

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