

# Teachers' Questioning Strategies from the Perspective of Scaffolding Instruction in EFL Classrooms

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**ABSTRACT.** *Teachers' questions are the most common type of elicitation technique found in any classroom setting. Teachers' questioning strategies directly influences the construction of foreign language learning. How to enhance questioning strategies is one of the indices in classroom talk. Teachers' questioning from the perspective of scaffolding instruction is a novel topic in classroom discourse, which is crucial in classroom discourse. This research makes suggestions for enhancing teachers' perception of questioning strategies and scaffolding students' critical thinking in pedagogical improvement.*

**KEYWORDS:** *teachers' questioning, scaffolding, English teachers, question strategy*

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, teachers' questioning has been studied from different theoretical framework in the field of classroom talk. In actual teaching practice, teacher questions account for a large proportion in classroom talk to promote justification and generalization in English. English teachers' classroom talk is a method of organizing, managing and directing teaching. The purpose is to investigate whether teachers' questioning can facilitate students' critical thinking which require students to manipulate knowledge instead of rote. The main aim of the research is to examine the association between tutorial instruction and students' development. As Premack's principle put it, "brain like questions" and a more-desired question can serve as a positive catalyst for a less-desired activity (Eggen, P.& Kauchak,D., 2010).

## 2. Literature Review

Theoretically, scaffolding originates from Vygotsky's concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) based on sociocultural theory (SCT). Scaffolding is

assistance that helps children complete tasks they cannot complete independently and zone of proximal development is a range of tasks that an individual cannot yet do alone but can accomplish when assisted by the guidance of others (Eggen,P.&Kauchak,D., 2010:47). The scaffolding process includes *recruitment, reduction in degrees of freedom, direction maintenance, marking critical features, frustration control* and *demonstration* (Adopted by Wood *et al.*,1976). The orchestration procedure is conceived as hierarchical program to guide students to solve problems, which is at the heart of scaffolding instruction and skill acquisition. Purpose of teachers' questioning consists of four stages, introduction, presentation, application and conclusion (Qatipi, S., 2011).

Previous studies have confirmed that there is a paucity of research on the integration of scaffolding and teachers' questioning. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, foreign researchers began to explore teachers' questioning. With the remarkable development of the Internet, on-line scaffolding reading emerges. This method serves as a "cognitive ladder" in the process of English reading comprehension. Relevant studies reiterated that teachers utilized various communicative moves to scaffold English language learners in referential questions to engage in higher order thinking (McNeil, L., 2012).

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research is a qualitative study that forges new links between teachers' questioning and scaffolding students' critical thinking. This research adopted non-participant classroom observation and semi-structured teacher interview, mainly focusing on teachers' questioning behavior and question-answer sequence. Both videotaped classroom observation and teacher interview serve as the corpus of data. Pre-service teachers (PSTs), in-service teachers (ISTs) and their students are the respondents of classroom observation. Teacher interview is adapted by six dimensions of scaffolding instruction. To accomplish the purpose of this study, the subsequent questions are proposed:

1. What is the status quo of teachers' questioning from the perspective of scaffolding?
2. What is the disparity of teachers' questioning between pre-service teachers (PSTs) and in-service teachers (ISTs)?
3. What are the influencing factors of the disparity?

### **4. Result and Discussion**

From the above analysis, the major findings have been generalized from three perspectives.

**(1) ISTs are more mature and professional than PSTs in question level and use of scaffolding instruction.**

Firstly, teachers are not acquainted with questioning strategies systematically. Teachers ignore the fact that teachers' questioning as an elicitation technique is playing an indispensable role in classroom interaction and instruction.

(i). Lecturers overemphasize lower level questions than higher level questions.

(ii). ISTs pay much attention to critical thinking and higher order thinking skills than PSTs.

(iii). ISTs focus more on applying, analyzing, evaluating and creating than PSTs.

(iv). The good result is that questioning technique exerts a direct influence upon students' achievement and thinking.

**(2) The obvious discrepancy of scaffolding questioning strategies exists between ISTs and PSTs.**

Secondly, disparity of teachers' questioning between PSTs and ISTs is obvious to some extent.

*Statistical results of comparison of PSTs and ISTs for one-way ANOVA on questions (sig.=.000<sig.=.001) shows that the questioning behavior of PSTs and ISTs utilizing knowledge level questions is extremely different.sig=.012<sig.=0.05 shows that the questioning behavior of PSTs and ISTs using analysis are different to some degree. In short, sig.=.758 shows that the phenomenon that PSTs and ISTs use question level is largely consistent.*

*Excerpt of classroom observation makes a comparison between IST and PST regarding frustration control. Frustration control is lessening the stress levels of the student during the task. Teachers usually direct at a specific student and offer direct assistance.*

**In-service teacher (C):**

<b>Teacher C</b>	• In reading this poem about love the mother and baby, how do you understand it better?/
<b>Female student</b>	• I should experience the feeling through my own life.
<b>Teacher C</b>	• How about putting your feelings in your reading?
<b>Female student</b>	• I think it is a good idea.\$
<b>Teacher C</b>	• For example, from your voice, people can know your feeling.
<b>Female student</b>	• I think so.

IST uses intonation to train students to appreciate and pose questions to guide students to scaffold their literacy ability. Poem is uncommon in teaching routine. And the theme of this story is abstract and broad. In order to lessen the stress level of reading the story, teacher instructs students how to appreciate the story in a step-model question. Meanwhile, the teacher behaves naturally and vividly through her facial expression, fall and rise tone and appropriate thought-provoking questions.

The questions in this excerpt are hierarchical in orientation, moving students from lower to higher level cognitive thinking skills. Directions are clear and concise to guarantee that students are able to carry out the task.

**Pre-service teacher (F):**

<b>Teacher F</b>	• After reading the passage, can you list the differences and similarities between ancient and modern Olympic Games?/
<b>Class</b>	• ##
<b>Teacher F</b>	• Now let’s find them together. You should the passage again and finish the blank of the differences and similarities.
<b>Class</b>	• % %

On the contrary, PST is aimed at accomplish the question-answer sequences at a predetermined level because of their working experience and teaching wisdom. Since PST pay much attention to the teaching procedure and ignores the classroom setting. Admittedly, they do not concentrate on reducing the stress level of the students within the time allotted. After raising the question, almost all of the students keep silent. Perhaps the question is large-scale, difficult and challenging. Thus the students will be stressed and even a little frustrated when they are confronted with this higher level question. PST does not understand the status quo of the students, so inappropriate arrangement of question will contribute to tension and pressure. The question is not progressive and it advances by a roundabout route.

Consequently, teachers should realize that students’ learning mood need be aroused and noticed at any point in the learning process. Some negative behavior, such as criticism, reprimand, and discouragement should be avoided. The concept “face saving” can foster dependency and trust on the tutors (Wood *et al*, 1976; Li Danmei & Fu Yao, 2017).

**(3) Questioning strategies, the influencing factors of the phenomenon, which affect teachers’ questioning behavior, will be stated.**

Thirdly, influencing factors of the disparity is multifaceted and dimensional. In terms of questioning strategies, they are attributable to the teachers’ role as an activator.

Teachers should emphasize questioning strategies consisting of wait time, Socratic Method Questioning, pre-planning, rephrasing, prompting and probing.

**5. Conclusion**

As an implement, a good questioning strategy can assist teachers in crafting a learning context paving the ground for genuine communication and negotiation of meaning in the class and provide a dialogic process, allowing pupils to gain understanding of real-life situations (Chafi,M.E. & Elkhouzai,E., 2014). Questions are used for different purposes including stimulating thinking, checking responses, comprehension and clarification, capturing attention, classroom management,

initiating discussion, and formative assessment. Asking the right questions can elicit the right answers. Most importantly, if teachers grasp scientific questioning strategies, questions stimulate different levels of thinking.

Scaffolding questions can preserve the complexity and authenticity of study situation. Scaffolding questions can make students experience thinking process, especially for understanding and comprehending implicit knowledge. Through internal scaffolding, students can obtain the skills of completing the task and seek to pursue the solutions in questioning setting. Scaffolding questions can ensure that students gain a sense of fulfillment when they cannot finish the task independently. In a sense, scaffolding questions can enhance students' antecedent ability level and help them realize their potential developing zone.

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### Appendix I: Teacher Interview Outline (Adapted by Scaffolding's six strategies)

1. Do you perceive the significance of teachers' questioning and scaffolding instruction?
2. Do you know about classroom questioning strategies, such as probing, prompting, and rephrasing and so forth? Which strategies do you often apply in your teaching practice?
3. Do you prepare your questions from low-level to high-level?
4. What do you think of higher-order thinking skills and cognition development in your questions?
5. Can your questions draw learner's attention to the task?
6. Do you simplify or limit the task demands when students can't answer a question?
7. How do you use questions to ensure that students are on-task for a solution? (For instance, comprehension checks, clarification requests)

8. How do you accentuate the main parts of the activity?
9. How do you decrease learners' stress in the learning process?
10. How do you provide a model of the solution method for the child?