

Linguistic Forms of Questions in Reading English Texts

Maria Cora E Cabacang*

College of Arts and Communication, Department of Languages and Communication. University of Eastern Philippines, Catarman, Northern Samar, Philippines. *Corresponding Author's Email: mariacoracabacang@uep.edu.ph

Abstract

The study examined the linguistic forms and characteristics of questions generated by students from reading English texts. The performance of freshman students enrolled in English 121 classes at University of Eastern Philippines Main Campus was assessed. Visual materials were utilized for the experimental group, while traditional lectures were employed for the control group. A quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design was used to analyze the results of the self-questioning reading activities. Data were derived from questions formulated by readers based on 12 English texts taken from Philippine Daily Inquirer editorials and articles from a book. Findings revealed that although both experimental groups passed the pretest, the control classes failed. However, all groups demonstrated excellent performance in the posttest, signifying the effectiveness of the activities. Wh-questions were the most frequently generated, whereas declarative questions were rarely produced. Most questions were found to be sensible and grammatically correct. Both visual materials and traditional lectures were highly effective in eliciting questions from students. Given their effectiveness in stimulating critical thinking and questioning skills, these activities should be integrated into freshman English courses.

Keywords: Linguistic Characteristics, Linguistic Forms, Reading English Texts, Self-questioning, Sensible Questions, Wh-question.

Introduction

Language learning in an English class should be approached as language use; hence, it should be treated as a communicative experience. Communication is viewed as a two-way process that requires competence in speaking, writing, listening and reading. It involves interaction that may occur explicitly or implicitly. The ultimate instructional goals include the development of linguistic and communicative competence, as well as intellectual growth. These serve as essential teaching-learning foundations that educators must consider.

Years of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) have shown that students are often hesitant to use English during classroom discussions. Considerable encouragement is usually needed to stimulate participation, reflecting limited proficiency in the language. Similar observations among high school and college students have indicated a decline in English proficiency. Concerns regarding the linguistic competence of incoming first-year students have likewise been expressed by university English teachers. Difficulties in adapting to English-dominated academic environments among learners from non-

English-speaking backgrounds were previously identified and these difficulties were found to negatively affect academic performance. Poor language backgrounds were also shown to directly affect students' ability to use English effectively in the classroom (1). Similar difficulties in English language use have likewise been reported in other schools in the country. Consequently, different strategies have been explored to improve students' English proficiency beyond the classroom setting. Studies on metacognitive strategies and critical thinking have been conducted to address these concerns (2, 3). Intervention programs, problem-solving strategies and "making connections" as metacognitive teaching strategies were also suggested to address students' learning limitations (4-6). These findings indicate that self-regulating questioning skills are essential for college English learners. Among the various learning difficulties encountered by students, weak comprehension in reading and thinking skills remains the most alarming, as interpretation beyond the literal level is often inaccurate, as reflected in responses to teachers' probing questions (7). Despite this concern, limited attention has been given to the

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problem and it is frequently overlooked. Hence, this study was conducted at University of Eastern Philippines.

This study posits that questioning is a vital technique in carrying out reading-thinking tasks. Student performance may best be demonstrated through the use of questions and the manner by which reading experiences are sustained across different levels of comprehension. Questions provide rich opportunities for improving reading experiences and developing the language performance of second-language learners. They direct readers' focus and attention toward significant parts of the text, resulting in deeper understanding and appreciation of the material. Questions also provide a means of accessing the reader's cognitive and thinking processes. Thus, self-questioning serves as a powerful metacognitive tool that enables learners to take control of their own language acquisition and transforms passive learning into an active and strategic process (8).

The objectives of the study were to determine the level of performance of the experimental and control groups in the pretest; ascertain the linguistic forms of questions generated by the students, specifically whether these were *wh*-, *yes/no*-, or declarative questions; identify the linguistic characteristics of the generated questions, particularly whether they were incoherent, sensible but ungrammatical, or both sensible and grammatical; and determine the level of performance of both groups in the posttest.

The conceptual framework of the study assumed that students are capable of formulating significant questions in English based on reading texts presented through visual materials or traditional lectures. One major aspect examined in reader-generated questions was their linguistic form. Student performance was evaluated based on the written questions produced. Pretests and posttests were administered to both the experimental and control groups to determine performance gains. The results were then compared between the two groups. In the experimental class, visual materials were used during self-questioning activities, whereas the lecture method was employed in the control group. Both groups used the same texts to elicit or generate questions and student performance was measured according to the linguistic levels of the generated questions.

This study was anchored on constructivist theory, which emphasizes that learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based on current and prior knowledge (9). Information is selected and transformed, hypotheses are constructed, analyses are presented and decisions are made according to learners' cognitive structures in order to move beyond the information provided. Within this framework, learners interact with texts to achieve higher levels of intelligence and understanding. Self-questioning activities were previously found to effectively develop higher-order thinking skills and creativity among second-language learners (10, 11). Constructivism and questioning approaches are closely interconnected.

Constructivism asserts that learners actively build understanding and knowledge through experience and reflection rather than passively receiving information. Questioning functions as a primary mechanism that facilitates this active learning process. It prompts learners to engage, analyze and connect new information with prior knowledge. Without questioning, learning remains passive. Through questioning, learners are challenged to construct meaning through critical thinking rather than rely solely on memorization.

Methodology

This study utilized a quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design. It was conducted at University of Eastern Philippines, an institution where English is used as a second language. Two of the ten colleges of the University, namely the College of Education (COED) and the College of Arts and Communication (CAC), participated in the study. The respondents were drawn from two intact sections of English 121 classes. The participants included freshman students enrolled in the Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) program in COED and first-year Bachelor of Arts in Political Science (AB Pol Sci) students in CAC. All students officially enrolled in the selected class sections were included in the study.

Each section was divided into two groups using the students' English Placement Test scores to determine the control and experimental groups within each class. Preliminary examination of the scores confirmed an equal distribution between the two groups. Students assigned odd numbers were placed in the experimental groups, whereas

those assigned even numbers formed the control groups. These participants were selected because they shared similar characteristics in terms of interests, age and year level. As future educators and legal professionals in the community, they were considered likely to benefit from mastering questioning skills and were viewed as appropriate participants in a learner-centered teaching environment.

The course English 121, entitled "Writing in the Discipline," is a three-unit course offered to freshman students. Its prerequisite course is "Study and Thinking Skills," making it an appropriate subject for testing the proposed activities. Furthermore, the respondents were relatively homogeneous because all had successfully passed English 111, which serves as the prerequisite for English 121.

The independent variables in this study were the methods used in presenting the reading activities, namely visual materials and traditional lectures. Visual materials were utilized in presenting lessons to the experimental groups and authentic copies of the reading texts were likewise provided to them. In these sessions, no formal discussion was conducted; instead, students were given the opportunity to interact directly with the texts. Conversely, in the traditional lecture format, the reading texts were presented and discussed by the teacher. Students in the control groups relied on the teacher's discussion as the basis for formulating questions because copies of the reading materials were not provided.

The dependent variable was the students' performance, which was measured through the linguistic levels of the questions generated from the twelve reading texts. Lessons for both groups were conducted by the researcher across twelve sessions, resulting in twelve sessions for the experimental classes and twelve sessions for the control classes.

A quasi-experimental method was employed because no randomization was conducted among the student participants (12). Intact classes were maintained in order to preserve existing class schedules. Specifically, the non-equivalent control group design was used because the experiment involved both experimental and control classes. Two replications were conducted: two experimental groups, one from the BEED class and another from the AB Pol Sci class and two control

groups, one from the BEED class and another from the AB Pol Sci class. The design employed both pretest and posttest measures for the two groups. Prior to the conduct of the study, formal approval was secured from the deans of the COED and CAC. Informed consent was likewise obtained from the students and all procedures were ensured to comply with the ethical research standards of the University. Participants were assured that all data gathered would remain strictly confidential and would be used solely for the purposes of the study. A pretest was administered to both the experimental and control groups to determine student characteristics and ensure that the respondents satisfied the requirements of tests such as the English Departmental Test administered before enrollment. The pretest also served as the basis for interpreting the results of the study. It consisted of 30 items, which were scored by the researcher according to how respondents formulated questions based on linguistic form. The classification of the linguistic forms of reader-generated questions was adapted from a previous study, in which questions were categorized as wh-, yes/no and declarative questions (13). Wh-questions referred to literal questions that sought specific information such as what, when, where and why. In this study, these questions were classified under summary and definition questions. Yes/no questions referred to short questions answerable by "yes" or "no," whereas declarative questions referred to questions copied directly from the texts. Question characteristics, such as incoherent, sensible but ungrammatical, or both sensible and grammatical, were likewise examined. The reading texts were carefully selected on the basis of students' interests, relevance and content. In previous lessons, students were asked about the types of reading materials they preferred. The articles selected dealt with issues involving public officials and politics in the country, which had remained widely discussed in the media for a considerable period (14, 15). These topics were regarded as highly relevant because they focused on issues within the Philippine government, including graft and corruption, election fraud and family-related concerns. The content of the texts was considered easy for readers to understand, while the differing perspectives presented by the writers provided a strong basis for critical thinking activities.

After the twelve reading activities, a posttest was administered to determine performance gains. Visual materials were used during instruction in the experimental classes, whereas the traditional lecture method without visual materials was employed in the control classes.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the pretest performance level of the experimental groups. Two replications composed of 49 subjects were included in the study. The first experimental group consisted of 26 students, while the second group consisted of 23 students. Results showed that both experimental groups shared a similar initial level of performance. From this, it may be inferred that prior to the conduct of the study, the student respondents demonstrated comparable performance regarding the linguistic levels of the questions they generated. Similar findings were reported in previous studies in which students exhibited comparable levels of performance before the implementation of the intervention (16–18). These findings also support the common observations of many high school and college teachers regarding students' limited language proficiency and weak reading and thinking skills (7). The respondents in this study were found to

demonstrate limited proficiency in language use and difficulties in reading comprehension and critical thinking. Consequently, they required additional reading activities to further develop their critical thinking skills. To become critical thinkers, learners must be able to raise significant questions and identify problems effectively (19).

Table 2 presents the pretest performance level of the two control groups, which consisted of 42 subjects in total. The first replication included 23 students, while the second replication included 19 students. In the first replication, most students failed the pretest, with 11 students (47.8%) obtaining failing scores. Eight students (34.8%) passed, whereas only four students (17.4%) achieved a fair level of performance.

A similar pattern was observed in the second replication. The majority of students, or 13 respondents (68.4%), failed the pretest. Five students (26.3%) passed, while only one student (5.3%) achieved a fair level of performance. The findings from both control groups indicate that the respondents shared a similar level of performance and possessed limited knowledge regarding the linguistic levels of questions. Comparable pretest performance levels among control groups were also observed in previous studies (16, 17).

Table 1: Pretest Performance Level of the Experimental Groups

Level of Performance	Replication 1		Replication 2	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Fair [6-11]	6	23.1	2	8.7
Passed [3-5]	12	46.1	12	52.2
Failed [0-2]	8	30.8	9	39.1
Total	26	100	23	100

Table 2: Pretest Performance Level of the Control Groups

Level of Performance	Replication 1		Replication 2	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Fair [6-11]	4	17.4	1	5.3
Passed [3-5]	8	34.8	5	26.3
Failed [0-2]	11	47.8	13	68.4
Total	23	100	19	100

The linguistic forms of the analyzed questions included wh-, yes/no and declarative questions. Results revealed that students in both the experimental and control groups primarily generated wh-questions, followed by yes/no questions and declarative questions. The experimental groups generated a total of 4,877 wh-questions (56.64%), while the control groups produced 4,142 wh-questions (56.11%). Students predominantly utilized wh-questions across the reading texts provided. The only exception was the

text entitled Reasons for Optimism, in which the experimental groups generated more yes/no questions, totaling 242 questions (50%), compared with 213 wh-questions (44%) (20). Only 29 questions (6%) generated by the students were declarative in form.

Overall, the experimental groups generated 3,264 yes/no questions (37.91%), whereas the control groups produced 2,738 questions (37.09%). Declarative questions were the least frequently used linguistic form, with 468 questions (5.44%)

generated by the experimental groups and 502 questions (6.8%) by the control groups. These results indicate that students in both groups were more accustomed to formulating wh-questions. Familiarity with “why” and “how” questions was particularly evident, suggesting that these questions reflected not only simple inquiries but also students’ confidence in expressing ideas and emotions, consistent with constructivist principles. Learning is viewed as an active process in which learners construct new ideas and concepts while selecting and transforming information. The limitless nature of questioning in the thinking process was likewise emphasized in earlier literature (21). Similar findings were also reported in previous studies in which most respondents generated wh-questions rather than yes/no or declarative questions (22). Students who formulated declarative questions often copied them directly from the reading texts. Such findings suggest a lack of confidence among some readers in formulating their own questions. Therefore, additional instructional support and guidance should be provided to these students (13).

A test of difference between the pretest results of the experimental and control groups was conducted using the t-test for independent samples. Although the mean score of the experimental groups was higher than that of the control groups, the computed t-value was 1.41. With a critical value of 1.960 at the .05 level of significance and 89 degrees of freedom, the difference was found to be statistically insignificant. This finding confirms the hypothesis that no significant difference existed between the pretest performance of the experimental and control groups.

The linguistic characteristics of the generated questions were classified as incoherent, sensible but ungrammatical, or sensible and grammatical. In the first reading text, both the experimental and control groups primarily generated sensible and grammatical questions, totaling 634 questions (39.35%) and 437 questions (70.37%), respectively. These were followed by incoherent questions, with 125 questions (15.64%) in the experimental groups and 135 questions (21.74%) in the control groups. Sensible but ungrammatical questions were the least frequent, with 40 questions (5%) in the experimental groups and 49 questions (7.89%) in the control groups.

From the second reading text onward, a similar pattern was observed. Both groups consistently generated mostly sensible and grammatical questions. The experimental groups produced 5,814 sensible and grammatical questions (66.99%) out of 8,679 generated questions, while the control groups generated 5,046 questions (68.12%) out of 7,408 total questions. Sensible but ungrammatical questions followed, with 2,175 questions (25.06%) in the experimental groups and 1,806 questions (24.37%) in the control groups. Lastly, 690 incoherent questions (7.95%) were generated by the experimental groups, while 556 incoherent questions (7.5%) were generated by the control groups.

These findings suggest that most questions formulated by students in both groups were of acceptable quality. Nevertheless, the presence of numerous ungrammatical and incoherent questions indicates the need for continued instructional attention from English teachers. A marked improvement in question formulation was likewise observed from the first activity to the final activity. Questions gradually shifted from incoherent forms to sensible but ungrammatical constructions, reflecting improvement in students’ ability to formulate understandable questions. This finding supports the view that continued exposure to higher-level cognitive questioning activities facilitates language use and the development of critical thinking skills. However, these findings differ from previous findings in which students predominantly generated sensible but grammatically incorrect questions (22).

Table 3 presents the posttest performance level of the experimental groups. Findings revealed that in the first replication, the majority of students, or 13 respondents (50%), achieved a very good level of performance in the posttest. Nine students (34.62%) obtained excellent results, three students (11.54%) achieved good performance and only one student (3.84%) demonstrated fair performance. In the second replication, most students likewise achieved very good performance. Eight students (34.8%) obtained good performance, while two students (8.7%) achieved excellent performance.

These findings indicate that the questioning skills of students in both the experimental and control groups improved after the conduct of the study. Similar improvements in posttest performance

were reported in previous studies involving interactive, conventional and self-questioning instructional approaches (16, 23). The findings further support the claim that providing students with meaningful tasks, activities and authentic reading materials promotes critical thinking development (24). Rather than relying solely on direct instruction, the provision of activities such as self-questioning was found to be highly effective in helping learners comprehend texts more actively and critically (25, 26).

The posttest performance results of the control groups are presented in Table 4. Both groups demonstrated very good performance, with 12 students (52.2%) in Replication 1 and 10 students (52.6%) in Replication 2 obtaining very good

ratings. In the first replication, 10 out of 23 students (43.5%) achieved an excellent rating, whereas only one student performed at the good level. In the second replication, eight students (42.1%) achieved a good level of performance, while only one student achieved an excellent rating.

These findings indicate that questioning skills improved considerably, particularly in the first replication where traditional lectures were employed. The teacher therefore plays a vital role in improving students' linguistic skills. Although lectures alone may not be sufficient, the provision of interesting topics and writing activities, such as self-questioning activities, helps students remain engaged and promotes critical thinking (27).

Table 3: Posttest Performance Level of the Experimental Groups

Level of Performance	Replication 1		Replication 2	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent [27-30]	9	34.62	2	8.7
Very Good [21-26]	13	50	13	56.5
Good [12-20]	3	11.54	8	34.8
Fair [6-11]	1	3.84		
Total	26	100	23	100

Table 4: Posttest Performance Level of the Control Groups

Level of Performance	Replication 1		Replication 2	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent [27-30]	10	43.5	1	5.3
Very Good [21-26]	12	52.2	10	52.6
Good [12-20]	1	4.3	8	42.1
Total	23	100	19	100

Tests of significant differences were likewise conducted to determine the differences between the pretest and posttest performance of both the experimental and control groups. Results revealed significant differences in the pretest and posttest scores of both groups, thereby confirming the hypotheses that significant differences existed between the pretest and posttest performance of the experimental groups and between the pretest and posttest performance of the control groups.

However, when the posttest performance of the experimental and control groups was compared using the arithmetic mean and the t-test for independent samples, the computed t-value of -0.303 yielded a corresponding critical value of -1.960 at the .05 level of significance with 89 degrees of freedom. The result was found to be statistically insignificant. This finding indicates that both groups performed similarly in the posttest. Therefore, both the use of visual materials and the use of traditional lectures were found to be

highly effective in eliciting questions from students.

Conclusion

The conclusions and implications presented in this study were drawn from the findings and results obtained. Since both experimental groups obtained passing scores in the pretest, it may be inferred that the students were relatively homogeneous prior to the conduct of the study. The respondents began with approximately the same level of questioning skills. However, the students demonstrated limited knowledge regarding the linguistic levels of questions before the intervention was conducted. Although familiarity with wh-questions was observed, comprehensive knowledge and understanding of linguistic questioning remained limited.

Because both control groups failed the pretest, it may likewise be inferred that these groups were also relatively homogeneous. The respondents in

the control groups began the study with minimal knowledge regarding the linguistic levels of questions. Their questioning skills required further development and their thinking skills likewise needed enhancement.

The linguistic forms of questions most frequently generated by students in both the experimental and control groups were wh-questions. This finding suggests that students had become more accustomed to using “why” and “how” questions, which was reflected in their improved performance in question generation. Students were also able to formulate yes/no questions, a process that involved evaluating ideas and weighing facts. Only a few declarative questions were generated, which may indicate limited confidence or insufficient ability to express original ideas independently. Instead, some students relied heavily on statements directly lifted from the texts or from ideas discussed by the teacher during classroom instruction. These findings indicate that both visual materials and traditional lectures were effective in eliciting higher levels of questioning from students. Providing engaging reading materials and allowing sufficient time for students to read and understand texts were likewise found to be highly effective in developing cognitive skills.

Furthermore, the relatively low performance of some students, reflected in their use of declarative questions, may be associated with inadequate mastery of grammatical structures. With proper guidance and encouragement from teachers, students may gradually develop greater confidence in expressing their thoughts through writing. Although students were initially hesitant because questioning was often perceived as the teacher’s responsibility rather than the learners’, improvements were eventually observed through the use of wh- and yes/no questions during lecture discussions. Teachers should therefore emphasize that even simple wh- and yes/no questions may lead to higher-order inquiry and critical thinking.

The linguistic characteristics of the questions generated by the students were predominantly sensible and grammatical. This implies that most students were capable of formulating meaningful questions and demonstrated familiarity with the ideas presented in the texts. The use of authentic reading materials and lecture discussions contributed positively to the improvement of

students’ performance. Nevertheless, some incoherent questions were still produced, reflecting very low proficiency in English language use among certain students. These learners may require additional attention and remediation, particularly regarding question structure and grammatical accuracy. This situation presents a challenge to teachers in identifying appropriate interventions and support mechanisms for students who require additional time, guidance and instructional assistance.

The posttest performance level of the experimental groups was classified as very good. This finding implies that the respondents improved considerably after the conduct of the study. Students were able to formulate questions more accurately and demonstrate higher-order questioning skills, as reflected in the written questions produced during the activities. The use of visual materials was found to be highly beneficial in enhancing students’ thinking skills. Although the respondents initially possessed limited knowledge regarding questioning strategies, substantial improvement was observed because they were given adequate time to read and interact with the texts. Students were allowed to internalize the content of the texts, which facilitated the flow of ideas and encouraged self-expression through questioning.

The control groups likewise demonstrated a very good level of performance in the posttest. This finding indicates that students learned significantly about the linguistic levels of questions through lecture discussions. The teacher therefore played an important role in the development of students’ critical thinking skills. The findings suggest that attentive listening and active engagement in classroom discussions may greatly contribute to students’ learning. Teachers serve as strong motivators within the classroom and may influence even low-performing students to think critically and creatively when learners remain cooperative and diligent. As demonstrated in this study, students became capable of generating higher-level questions and improving their questioning and thinking skills.

Overall, the reading activities stimulated students’ thinking processes and motivated them to formulate questions with higher cognitive levels and correct linguistic forms in expressing their views and opinions in English.

Based on the findings of the study, several recommendations are proposed. A diagnostic test may first be administered to determine students' level of performance and identify their strengths and weaknesses. Such assessment may serve as a baseline for comparison and help teachers determine appropriate instructional starting points and suitable classroom activities. Teachers should likewise emphasize questioning techniques in writing sentences, paragraphs and other English language activities that require text comprehension. Additional time may also be allotted for self-questioning activities.

The use of self-questioning activities together with engaging and relevant reading texts, similar to those utilized in this study, may motivate students to formulate high-quality questions in English. These activities may therefore be adopted by language teachers to further improve and develop students' language skills. Furthermore, self-questioning activities may be integrated into English curricula and course syllabi to strengthen overall language proficiency. The use of visual materials, particularly in English reading activities, is also recommended because these materials were found to be effective in this study. Finally, a similar study focusing on speaking skills is recommended in order to determine whether self-questioning activities may likewise serve as effective motivational tools for verbal communication.

Abbreviations

AB Pol Sci: Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, BEED: Bachelor of Elementary Education, CAC: College of Arts and Communication, COED: College of Education, ESL: English as a Second Language, UEP: University of Eastern Philippines.

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Author Contributions

Maria Cora E Cabacang: Conceptualization, Research Design, Methodology, Data Collection, Data Analysis, All Phases of the Research Conduct.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Data Availability

All data gathered, analyzed and carefully studied are available from the author upon justifiable request. Student's data are protected from the public for confidentiality purposes and compliance with institutional research policies.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The author declares no use of artificial intelligence (AI) all throughout the process of research. The authors take full responsibility for the content's originality, interpretation and accuracy.

Ethics Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with the institutional ethical guidelines for research. Formal approval from the deans of the colleges were obtained before the conduct of the study. Research participants were guaranteed of anonymity and that data collected from them were solely used for the conduct of this research.

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