

The Impact Of Teachers' Questioning Techniques On Students' Speaking Performance In EFL Classrooms At Dong Nai Technology University

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of teachers' questioning techniques on the speaking performance of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at Dong Nai Technology University, Vietnam. In response to a growing emphasis on communicative competence within higher education, the research investigates how referential versus display questions and open versus closed questions relate to students' speaking fluency, accuracy, complexity, and motivation. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 210 non-English-major students. Data were collected through structured speaking tasks and classroom observations of teacher questioning patterns, coded using validated frameworks. Statistical analyses, including Pearson correlations and multiple regression, revealed that referential and open-ended questions were significantly associated with higher levels of fluency, accuracy, complexity, and student motivation to participate in speaking tasks. Conversely, display and closed questions showed negligible or negative associations with these indicators. The findings support international literature emphasizing the pedagogical value of communicative questioning strategies and highlight a gap in their application within the Vietnamese tertiary context. The study provides practical implications for teacher training and curriculum reform aimed at fostering oral proficiency through more effective classroom discourse. Recommendations for future research include longitudinal studies and mixed-method designs to explore the long-term effects of questioning strategies on language development.

Keywords: questioning techniques, speaking performance, EFL, fluency, accuracy, complexity, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Speaking proficiency has long been recognized as one of the most challenging yet essential components of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, particularly in tertiary education where communicative competence is emphasized as a key graduate attribute (Richards, 2015). In the Vietnamese higher education context, the national emphasis on English as a tool for global integration and workforce readiness has accelerated the shift from traditional grammar-translation methods towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which prioritizes meaningful interaction and authentic language use (Nguyen & Walkinshaw, 2018; Pham & Hamid, 2021). Within this pedagogical transition, teachers' questioning techniques have emerged as a pivotal classroom practice that can significantly shape students' oral language development. Well-designed questions not only check comprehension and manage classroom discourse but also serve as catalysts for eliciting extended student talk, encouraging critical thinking, and reducing affective barriers such as speaking anxiety (Chen et al., 2020; Lee, 2022). Research indicates that referential and open-ended questions those that seek information unknown to the teacher are more likely to generate complex, fluent, and accurate student speech compared to display or closed questions, which often result in minimal language production (Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Walsh, 2011). Nevertheless, studies in Vietnam suggest that EFL teachers still predominantly employ display questions and closed-ended questioning patterns, which limit opportunities for communicative interaction and authentic language output (Nguyen & Pham, 2021; Vu, 2022). At Dong Nai Technology University, where non-English-major students have few avenues for English exposure outside the classroom, the role of questioning strategies becomes even more critical in promoting speaking proficiency. Despite this importance, little empirical work has investigated how specific questioning techniques relate to measurable aspects of students' speaking performance, such as fluency, accuracy, and complexity, in this context. Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a quantitative approach to explore the relationship between questioning types and speaking outcomes, thereby offering practical insights to

enhance EFL pedagogy and support communicative competence development in Vietnamese higher education.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do teachers' use of referential and display questions affect the speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity of EFL students at Dong Nai Technology University?
2. What is the relationship between open and closed questioning techniques and the speaking performance (fluency, accuracy, complexity) of EFL students at Dong Nai Technology University?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Questioning has long been regarded as a fundamental communicative strategy in classroom discourse that supports learners' cognitive engagement, scaffolds meaning-making, and stimulates productive language use (Walsh, 2011). In the EFL context, where opportunities for authentic communication may be limited, questioning assumes an even greater significance as a pedagogical tool that can bridge the gap between input and output (Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Effective questioning enables learners to process language at a deeper cognitive level, encouraging them to move beyond surface-level recall to analysis and synthesis of ideas (Chen et al., 2020). In particular, referential questions—those that require learners to provide information not already known to the teacher—have been shown to promote extended, syntactically complex, and meaningful responses, thereby creating richer opportunities for speaking practice (Nassaji & Wells, 2000; Lee, 2022). Conversely, excessive reliance on display questions, which typically seek confirmation of known facts, may limit students' oral output to brief and formulaic answers, reducing the potential for language development (Walsh, 2011; Vu, 2022).

The classification of teacher questions provides insight into their pedagogical function and impact on learner output. Long and Sato (1983) distinguished between display questions, aimed at eliciting known information, and referential questions, intended to gather new or unknown information from students. This distinction highlights the communicative orientation of questioning types: display questions primarily assess comprehension, whereas referential questions foster genuine dialogue and negotiation of meaning (Nassaji & Wells, 2000). Furthermore, open-ended questions, which allow multiple plausible responses, are more likely to encourage elaboration, critical thinking, and authentic language use compared to closed-ended questions, which typically demand a single correct answer (Chen et al., 2020). Recent classroom discourse studies confirm that open and referential questions result in greater syntactic complexity, longer responses, and more meaningful interactions (Lee, 2022; Boyd & Markarian, 2011). Therefore, understanding and applying diverse questioning strategies are essential for teachers aiming to enhance student speaking performance in EFL classrooms.

A growing body of empirical evidence demonstrates a strong connection between teacher questioning techniques and students' speaking performance in EFL contexts. Referential and open-ended questions have consistently been associated with greater learner output, higher levels of accuracy, and increased fluency (Kim, 2017; Chen et al., 2020). In their meta-analysis, Chen et al. (2020) synthesized findings from 35 studies and concluded that referential questions significantly enhance the complexity and length of learner utterances, supporting the development of oral proficiency. Lee (2022) further underscored the positive impact of effective questioning strategies on speaking fluency, arguing that such techniques provide learners with opportunities for authentic use of the target language, thus reducing anxiety and promoting confidence. These findings highlight the critical role of questioning not merely as a classroom management tool but as a central mechanism for fostering oral language competence.

Empirical studies across various EFL contexts have confirmed the value of referential and open-ended questions in supporting student speaking performance. For instance, Kim (2017) reported that in East Asian EFL classrooms, teachers' use of referential questions was linked to longer, more complex student responses, thereby facilitating communicative competence. Similarly, Boyd and Markarian (2011) found that dialogic teaching characterized by open and authentic questioning significantly improved learners' interactive speaking abilities. In Vietnam, however, studies suggest that such questioning practices are underutilized. Nguyen and Pham (2021) found that tertiary-level EFL teachers in Vietnam predominantly employed display and closed-

ended questions, limiting opportunities for student talk beyond minimal responses. Vu (2022) echoed these findings, noting that teacher questioning patterns in Vietnamese universities seldom promoted extended or meaningful learner talk, thus failing to support speaking development effectively. These studies collectively point to the need for greater emphasis on questioning strategies that align with communicative language teaching principles in Vietnamese higher education.

This study is grounded in sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes the role of social interaction and scaffolding in learning. According to Vygotsky, learners achieve higher levels of cognitive and linguistic development through guided participation in meaningful dialogue with more knowledgeable others in this case, teachers (Walsh, 2011). Teacher questioning functions as a form of scaffolding that mediates learner participation, enabling students to extend their linguistic competence by responding to prompts that challenge their current abilities and stimulate language production (Chen et al., 2020). Effective questions help learners negotiate meaning, reflect on their language use, and engage in higher-order thinking, all of which are essential for developing speaking proficiency. This theoretical lens underscores the importance of designing classroom interactions that provide appropriate support while encouraging independent language use.

Research Gaps

Despite the extensive global scholarship on the impact of teachers' questioning techniques on learners' speaking performance (Chen et al., 2020; Kim, 2017; Lee, 2022), there remains a notable paucity of empirical studies that focus on this issue within the specific context of Vietnamese higher education, especially in technology-oriented universities where English language exposure outside the classroom is limited. Internationally, meta-analyses and large-scale studies have established that referential and open-ended questions are consistently linked to greater speaking fluency, syntactic complexity, and accuracy among EFL learners (Chen et al., 2020; Lee, 2022). However, in Vietnam, most research to date has been descriptive rather than analytical, documenting general patterns of classroom discourse without systematically examining how these questioning techniques translate into measurable speaking outcomes. For instance, Nguyen and Pham (2021) found that Vietnamese tertiary EFL teachers predominantly rely on display and closed questions, which often restrict student talk to brief and formulaic responses. Similarly, Vu (2022) reported that questioning practices in Vietnamese universities rarely promote dialogic interaction or extended learner output. Yet, these studies stop short of quantifying the relationship between specific questioning types and subcomponents of speaking performance such as fluency, grammatical accuracy, or lexical complexity. Moreover, technology universities such as Dong Nai Technology University present unique challenges, as many students major in technical fields and have limited motivation or opportunity to engage in English communication outside formal instruction (Pham & Hamid, 2021). The present study seeks to address this significant gap by providing a robust quantitative analysis of how teachers' questioning strategies affect EFL students' speaking performance at Dong Nai Technology University. By focusing on distinct speaking sub-skills and employing statistical methods to explore these relationships, this study offers new insights that can inform teacher development, curriculum design, and communicative language teaching practices within Vietnam's tertiary education sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative correlational research design to systematically examine the relationship between teachers' questioning techniques and EFL students' speaking performance at Dong Nai Technology University. The quantitative approach was chosen to provide objective, measurable data that could reveal statistically significant patterns and associations between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A total of 210 non-English-major undergraduates, enrolled in mandatory English courses, participated in the study. Participants completed structured speaking tasks designed to elicit extended oral responses, which were audio-recorded and subsequently analyzed for three key dimensions of speaking performance: fluency (speech rate and hesitation phenomena), accuracy (grammatical correctness), and complexity (lexical diversity and syntactic variety), following frameworks recommended in applied linguistics research (Skehan, 2009; Tavakoli & Skehan, 2005). Concurrently, classroom observations were conducted across 12 intact classes to document

teachers' questioning practices. A validated coding rubric based on Long and Sato's (1983) distinction between display and referential questions, as well as Nassaji and Wells' (2000) classification of open and closed questions, was applied to categorize teacher questions reliably. All quantitative data were processed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27. Descriptive statistics summarized the frequency and distribution of questioning types, while Pearson correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted to explore the strength and direction of relationships between questioning techniques and students' fluency, accuracy, and complexity scores. This methodology is aligned with best practices in second language acquisition research, which emphasize the need for rigorous statistical analysis to identify pedagogical factors that contribute to language development (Chen et al., 2020; Lee, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings and Discussion for Research Question 1

To examine the extent to which teachers' use of referential and display questions influenced students' speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity, quantitative data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and regression techniques. Table 1 presents the correlations between question types and speaking performance metrics. The analysis revealed that referential questions were positively correlated with all three dimensions of speaking: fluency ($r = .51$, $p < .001$), accuracy ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), and complexity ($r = .44$, $p < .001$). In contrast, display questions showed weak or negative correlations, particularly with complexity ($r = -.12$, $p = .081$), indicating a negligible relationship. The multiple regression model confirmed that referential questions were significant predictors of fluency ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$) and accuracy ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$), while display questions did not significantly predict any of the speaking outcomes.

These findings align with prior international studies showing that referential questions stimulate extended and meaningful language output (Chen et al., 2020; Kim, 2017). The positive association between referential questions and fluency supports sociocultural perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978) suggesting that authentic communicative prompts foster richer learner interaction and speech production. The lack of significant contribution from display questions echoes earlier observations that such questions mainly elicit brief, formulaic responses (Lee, 2022; Nguyen & Pham, 2021). In sum, the data underscore the critical role of referential questioning in promoting EFL learners' oral proficiency, providing strong evidence for teacher training programs to prioritize communicative questioning strategies in Vietnam's tertiary context.

Table 1 . Correlation between Question Types and Speaking Performance (n = 210)

Variable	Fluency (r)	Accuracy (r)	Complexity (r)
Referential Questions	.51***	.47***	.44***
Display Questions	-.05	.08	-.12

*** $p < .001$

The results provide empirical confirmation that referential questions are associated with improved speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity among EFL students at Dong Nai Technology University. This is consistent with findings by Chen et al. (2020), who reported that referential questions lead to greater utterance length and syntactic richness, and by Kim (2017), who demonstrated enhanced fluency linked to referential questioning in East Asian EFL contexts. By contrast, the negligible correlations observed for display questions reaffirm their limited pedagogical value in communicative classrooms (Lee, 2022). These outcomes suggest that increasing the frequency of referential questions in Vietnamese EFL classrooms could meaningfully enhance students' oral performance. The findings thus highlight an urgent need for teacher professional development programs to focus on questioning techniques that align with communicative language teaching principles and sociocultural theory.

Findings and Discussion for Research Question 2

The quantitative analysis explored the relationship between teachers' use of open and closed questioning techniques and EFL students' speaking performance in terms of fluency, accuracy, and complexity. In addition, the study examined how these questioning types related to students' motivation to participate in

speaking tasks. Data analysis using Pearson correlations and multiple regression revealed distinct patterns for each question type across both learning outcomes and motivational indicators.

Table 2. Correlation between Question Types and Speaking Performance (n = 210)

Question Type	Fluency (r)	Accuracy (r)	Complexity (r)
Open Questions	.48***	.45***	.43***
Closed Questions	-.06	.05	-.10

***p < .001

The data show that open questions were positively and significantly associated with higher speaking fluency ($r = .48$, $p < .001$), accuracy ($r = .45$, $p < .001$), and complexity ($r = .43$, $p < .001$). In contrast, closed questions showed no significant correlation with these speaking indicators. These results align with earlier findings in international research suggesting that open questions promote richer, more extended student output (Kim, 2017; Lee, 2022). The positive association between open questioning and speaking performance underscores the role of dialogic, exploratory talk in supporting oral proficiency (Walsh, 2011). Conversely, the absence of meaningful relationships for closed questions confirms their limited pedagogical value for enhancing speaking complexity and fluency (Chen et al., 2020).

Table 3. Correlation between Question Types and Student Speaking Motivation (n = 210)

Question Type	Motivation to Participate (r)
Open Questions	.50***
Closed Questions	.03

***p < .001

Analysis of motivational outcomes revealed that open-ended questioning was significantly associated with increased student motivation to engage in speaking tasks ($r = .50$, $p < .001$). This finding is consistent with sociocultural and CLT-based theories, which argue that authentic, open-ended questions create a supportive environment that reduces anxiety and encourages risk-taking in speaking (Vygotsky, 1978; Lee, 2022). Closed questions, however, demonstrated no significant correlation with speaking motivation, echoing previous studies indicating that such questions do not foster communicative engagement (Nguyen & Pham, 2021; Vu, 2022). The evidence highlights the importance of training teachers to incorporate more open-ended questioning techniques, as they not only improve linguistic outcomes but also enhance students' willingness to participate, a critical factor in developing oral proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the impact of teachers' questioning techniques specifically referential versus display questions and open versus closed questions on the speaking performance of EFL students at DNTU. Using a quantitative correlational design, the findings provided clear evidence that the types of questions teachers employ significantly influence students' oral proficiency, as measured by fluency, accuracy, and complexity, as well as their motivation to participate in speaking activities. Referential and open-ended questions demonstrated strong positive correlations with enhanced speaking performance and higher levels of student motivation, whereas display and closed questions showed negligible or negative relationships with these outcomes. These results echo global and regional studies that emphasize the importance of communicative questioning in promoting authentic language use and interactive discourse in EFL classrooms (Chen et al., 2020; Kim, 2017; Lee, 2022).

The study contributes to the limited body of empirical research on questioning strategies within Vietnamese higher education, particularly in technology university contexts where opportunities for English use are often constrained. By quantifying the relationship between questioning techniques and specific sub-skills of speaking, the research offers practical implications for teacher development programs and curriculum design. Training initiatives should prioritize the use of referential and open-ended questioning to foster communicative competence and learner engagement. Future research could extend these findings by employing longitudinal designs or mixed methods to capture not only statistical relationships but also learner

perceptions and classroom dynamics over time. Ultimately, this study highlights the transformative potential of effective questioning practices in shaping meaningful language learning experiences for Vietnamese EFL students.

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