Analyzing Iraqi EFL Learners' Belief about Teachers' Questioning Practices at Open Educational College

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Abstract:
This study investigates the beliefs of Iraqi male and female EFL learners about their teachers' questioning practices and examines the functions these questions serve in the classroom. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combines qualitative data from video-recorded classroom observations with quantitative data from survey questionnaires distributed to fifty first-year students at Open Educational College in Iraq. The findings indicate that both male and female learners recognize the communicative potential of teacher questions but highlight issues such as wait-time management, the need for revision time, and additional motivational activities. Gender differences were significant, with female learners more likely to express the need for teacher encouragement to participate. Discourse analysis revealed that teacher questions serve evaluative and discursive functions, promoting engagement and preventing communication failures. The study underscores the importance of addressing learners' concerns through targeted professional development to enhance questioning strategies, ultimately improving EFL classroom interactions and learning outcomes.

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تحليل توجهات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في العراق حول ممارسات طرح الأسئلة من المعلمين في الكلية التربوية المفتوحة

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الملخص:

تبحث هذه الدراسة في توجهات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من الذكور والإناث العراقيين حول ممارسات طرح الأسئلة التي يتبعها معلموهم وتفحص الوظائف التي تخدمها هذه الأسئلة في الصف الدراسي. باستخدام نهج مختلط الأساليب، تجمع الدراسة بين البيانات النوعية من ملاحظات الصفوف الدراسية المسجلة بالفيديو مع البيانات الكمية من استبيانات المسح الموزعة على خمسين طالبًا في السنة الأولى في الكلية التربوية المفتوحة في العراق. تشير النتائج إلى أن كلا من المتعلمين من الذكور والإناث يدركون الإمكانات التواصلية لأسئلة المعلم ولكنهم يسلطون الضوء على قضايا مثل إدارة وقت الانتظار، والحاجة إلى وقت المراجعة، والأنشطة التحفيزية الإضافية. وكانت الاختلافات بين الجنسين كبيرة، حيث كانت المتعلمات أكثر ميلاً للتعبير عن الحاجة إلى تشجيع المعلم على المشاركة. كشف تحليل الخطاب أن أسئلة المعلم تخدم وظائف تقييمية وخطابية، وتعزز المشاركة وتمنع فشل التواصل. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية معالجة اهتمامات المتعلمين من خلال التطوير المهني المستهدف لتعزيز استراتيجيات طرح الأسئلة، وتحسين التفاعلات في الصفوف الدراسية للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ونتائج التعلم في نهاية المطاف.

الكلمات المفتاحية : للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الجنس، معتقدات المتعلمين، ممارسات طرح الأسئلة

Introduction

All grades of learners in Iraq must take English as a required subject (Ali, 2022). As an essential topic, learners need the assistance of a teacher to develop knowledge and thinking as well as to get a deeper comprehension of the subjects they are studying (Altae, 2020). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, teacher-learner contact is essential to enhance the learning activities and inspire learners to respond. Using teacher questions is essential in EFL classroom interaction if one wants to reach the learning objective. According to Engin (2013), teacher questioning is a method of instruction used to assess the knowledge of learners and investigate how they learn about the subjects. Zheng and Wang (2019) stated that teacher questions actively improve learners' cognitive growth, advance higher-order thinking, foster creativity and speculation, and suggest several levels to be pushed. That is, question and interaction are not separated to support the learning objectives as without any questions, the classroom setting would be passive and more difficult for the instructors to gain more knowledge about the learners.

According to Rashid and Caisar (2016), instructors in EFL classrooms discovered that learners were unable to think deeply enough to answer the questions that were relevant to the real-life situation. Since not all questions can elicit replies from learners, instructors should be able to provide question practices to establish an interactive EFL classroom. According to Altae (2020), Iraqi learners in an EFL classroom lack confidence while using the English language to answer teacher questions and to voice their views, thoughts, and ideas in EFL classroom interaction.

Research on the use of teacher questioning for a variety of learners, including senior high school (Sujariati et al., 2016) and vocational high school has been conducted in past years (Tarigan & Yusriati, 2019). To the best of my knowledge, few research examined the types of teachers' questioning practices (Susantara & Myartawan, 2020) and learners' perceptions of teacher questioning practices in the classroom (Chandra Handa, 2020). The role of instructors' questioning and university learners' perspectives in the Iraqi setting has not, however, been examined in any earlier research. Therefore, our current research attempts to fill this gap by investigating how Iraqi

EFL learners see their teachers' questioning practices and identifying the function these questions serve in the EFL classroom. By closing this gap, the research aims to contribute to the understanding of successful questioning practices in higher education EFL settings, thus improving teaching practices, student engagement, and learning results.

Literature Review

One of the most popular practices utilized by instructors in a classroom context, according to Finkelstein et al. (2021), is teacher questioning. Supported by Milawati and Suryati (2019), teacher questioning is regarded as the crucial approach to stimulate or empower learners in transmitting the themes to be learned and providing instruction for what things the learners have to accomplish and how the learners can do it. This approach affects students' behavior and preserves engagement or communication between teachers and learners in EFL classroom interaction. Additionally, teacher questioning is a helpful approach for instructors to produce knowledge (Chew & Cerbin, 2021), transmit information (Carless, 2022), get feedback from students (Carless, 2022), and establish engagement since students strive to answer and consider the proper answer based on the teacher's question (Barkley & Major, 2021).

In the era of communicative language teaching, classroom engagement has become a major concern in English education (Barkley & Major, 2021). The teaching and learning process depends especially on interaction to get the learners more involved in the classroom activities (Reeve & Shin, 2020). Interaction helps learners enhance their academic progress in their learning, their social interaction between teacher-learners and learners-learners in the EFL classroom, and their communication in answering to questions (Uspayanti, 2020). A teaching method known as "classroom interaction" involves students in the learning process instead of seeing them as passive users (Buehl, 2023). In order to achieve the learning objective and provide dynamic whole-class instruction, teacher and learners must engage in the EFL classroom. Conversely, by means of interaction, the teacher helps the students improve their knowledge, inspires their motivation in response or feedback, develops their interaction skills and hence fosters good communication during the course of learning and solves the recurrent issue of learners' English language problems (Buehl, 2023). In order to control classroom involvement and encourage learner language creation, the teacher and learners are crucial players in the study of English as a foreign language.]

When it comes to classroom interactions, learners are forced to speak English constantly while communicating with one another (Dewaele & Pavelescu, 2021). Using the teacher questions in teaching-learning activities is one of the efficient approaches to design an interactive classroom environment and to preserve communication. Because the learners have possibilities to utilise language communicatively, instructors should be able to employ various question types to create a dynamic and pleasant classroom environment, especially in EFL classrooms (Buehl, 2023). Examining teacher questioning has become the most important and common concern in EFL classroom dynamics. Vebriyanto (2015) claims that as instructors ask a lot of questions using many kinds of questions, teacher questioning becomes the major focus of the teaching-learning process.

To demonstrate the significance of questioning, past studies looked at the teacher questioning used in EFL classrooms (Engin, 2013; Zheng & Wang, 2019; Rashid & Caisar, 2016). As suggested by Al-Zahrani and Al-Bargi (2017), teachers can imply various strategies in EFL classrooms to develop interaction in foreign languages, but one strategy to develop classroom interaction is asking questions. Obviously, teacher questioning is still worth investigating in further studies. Also, it stimulates the language production of learners. Using questions has demonstrated that teacher's questions have greater effects on learners' actions in negotiating the contents they already know and they do not comprehend in order to reach the aim of learning. From the development of certain research, the impact of questions on promoting interaction in EFL classrooms is quite useful and practical for managing classroom discourse. Thus, teacher questioning is successful in playing the roles in EFL classroom interaction as follows: to promote and create classroom interaction, to develop learners' understanding, to encourage learners to think deeply and focus on the materials, to activate learners' cognitive skills, to evaluate the previous lesson, and to increase the participation of passive learners to become active learners.

In order to focus on aspects mentioned above, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ: How do Iraqi EFL learners perceive teachers' questioning practices in their classroom?

RQ: What are some functions of teachers' questioning practice in the Iraqi EFL classroom?

Methodology

Design

Designed under the "mixed methods" research paradigm, this study combined the qualitative and quantitative (Dawadi et al., 2021). Based on students' answers to a questionnaire, the quantitative approach was used to compile extensive information providing a basic understanding of learners' perceptions of their EFL classroom questioning strategies. Still, utilizing a survey alone as the only source of information for this research was considered inadequate due to the lack of assurance about the collection of sufficient data. Therefore, video classroom observations were conducted to accurately record the "real-time" classroom questioning technique. This made it possible for a component of qualitative research that would advance the studies beyond simple statistics and numbers and help to create a greater understanding of observed classroom speech. Figure 1 shows the general research approach of the study.

Figure 1

Study's Overall Research Process.
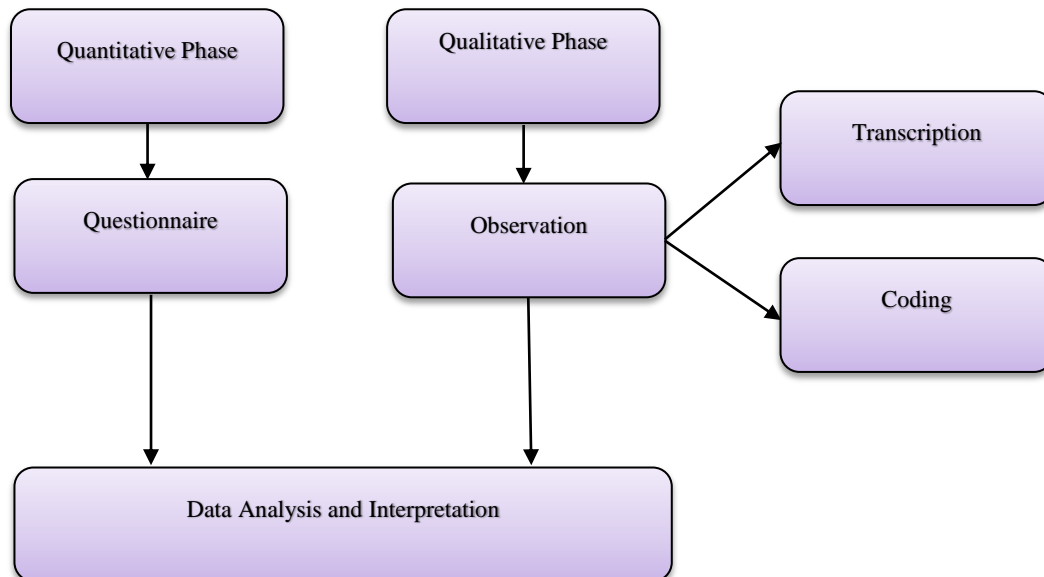
Participants

This study involved 50 male and female EFL learners, as well as an Iraqi male teacher from Open Educational College. My familiarity with the place and the people was advantageous in my role as a researcher. It enabled me to easily identify individuals, get access to classrooms, and obtain permission to record the video courses. Commentators including Stake (1995, p. 4) advised that "if we can, we need to pick cases which are easy to get to and hospitable to our inquiry". The present study focused on first-year students who were selected based on the fact that this academic year group had the largest number of students. These students, who are at a transitional stage between school and university learning, are likely to participate in more dynamic classroom questioning discourse. Despite having undergone the same educational system and studied the same curriculum in Iraq, it is probable that the learners' proficiency in English would differ.

Instrument

Questionnaire

A questionnaire designed by Alshenqeeti (2014) was utilized to better understand how learners perceive teacher questioning practices. My own personal administration of the questionnaire in the classroom helped to raise the return rate. The questionnaires used in this study included both closed (n=12) and open-ended items (n=1) to address the issues of limited scope and reliability associated with closed questions. The participants in this study's questionnaire were asked to rate their perspectives on the utilization of questions in their EFL courses using a 5-point rating system. They had to indicate whether they agreed or disagreed with the statements. In addition, they were requested to describe the level of certain interrogative conduct, ranging from a large extent to not at all.

Observation

Participating in social observation inside a language classroom is a common approach for gathering data in applied language research (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021). Using observation, a researcher may make up descriptions of activities as they take place in the environment (e.g., Duff, 2008; Nassaji, 2021), and "understand the physical, social/cultural, and linguistic contexts in which language is used, and also collect relevant linguistic and interactional data for later analysis," (Duff, 2008, p. 138). EFL classrooms may be quite effective source of observation as most formal learning

and instruction occurs in the classroom. This research used non-participant and unstructured observations where I did not engage with the participants at any point during the class in an effort to preserve the balanced viewpoint of an observer.

Procedure

Nine hours of classroom instruction were videotaped in this research; Chan and Jazby (2022) claims that recordings provide a more "objective record" of classroom activities. Furthermore, electronic data-collecting instruments, such as video-recorders can let researchers later on see, examine, and re-analyze the data from many angles. The camera was not, however, positioned in full view of the learners in the classroom in the hope that it would be quickly forgotten, in line with the warning put forward by Tilstone (2013, p. 149) that "a frequently underestimated problem is the reaction of some learners to the presence of the recording equipment". Furthermore, generally speaking, I arrived in the classroom 10 minutes before the scheduled start of the class I was observing. This little period of time enabled me to converse with the teacher, switch on the camera, and record the lesson as soon as the learners arrived.

The teacher and learners were doing their regular teaching and learning activities while the observation was taking place. The camera was positioned at a wide angle to video-record the whole class even though it was focused on the teacher. To help the instructors properly record their voices, a little wireless microphone was also connected. Together with a wired microphone to capture the voices of every class member, a digital audio-recorder was also positioned beneath the teacher's table. Once classroom conversation was gathered, it was essential to arrange them into a reasonable, analyzable source of information (Gass & Mackey, 2005). Turning oral data into written transcripts came first in order to complete this work. Following accepted research guidelines and transcription standards (Ten Have, 2007), the recorded classroom discourse data were transcribed with an eye toward the elements pertinent to the second research question of the study.

I encouraged all of the learners to participate in the completion of the research questionnaire after the first semester in order to get accurate and valid data. The learners were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire after being informed of its goal.

Data Analysis

The questionnaire answers from learners were encoded by giving each response a number value after being entered into an SPSS file. The study included descriptive statistics, including measures such as mean, standard deviations, and cross-tabulations. These measures were employed to ascertain the frequency and percentages of agreement and disagreement among the participants in relation to the various problems mentioned in the questionnaire. The independent sample t-test, a kind of inferential statistics, was used to assess if there were any statistically significant disparities between male and female learners in their viewpoints on questioning in the EFL classroom.

After doing the SPSS questionnaire analysis, the data was presented in a tabular format along with explanations and discussions of the findings. The textual comments provided by the learners were analyzed alongside the quantitative analysis of the questionnaire data. The addition of a "Comments" section was implemented for each of the twelve closed questions, as well as for the open-ended question after the questionnaire.

After examining the whole transcripts line by line, instances of both instructor and learner questions were recorded. The pertinent recorded statements were subsequently extracted at the level of conversation to enable the examination of the interactions including instructor and student inquiries and modifications. By using discourse analysis, the examination of transcripts at the level of interaction allows for the identification of classroom talk, as shown in the works of scholars such as Wray and Kumpulainen (2010).

Results

Questionnaire's Close-ended Questions

Descriptive Statistics

Initially, it is important to examine the descriptive statistics for the closed questions in the questionnaire, which consists of 12 items, as shown in Table 1. The table displays the range of

means, ranging from 2.92 to 4.54, and the standard deviations, ranging from 0.861 to 1.392. These values represent the extent of variability in the collected data. The statistical analysis of the closed-ended questionnaire items indicates that more than two-thirds of Iraqi students studying English as a foreign language indicated that the questions posed by their professors were beneficial in facilitating their engagement in classroom discussions conducted in their second language (L2). This conclusion is substantiated by feedback from students, including a male student who found the questions intriguing and beneficial, a female student who considered the questions helpful but with some limitations, and a male instructor who acknowledged the usefulness of the questions but regarded them as being used in a restricted manner. The conclusions are substantiated by documented classroom dialogue and the viewpoints articulated by the instructor, who holds the belief that inquiries possess a symbolic significance and effectively communicate to students that their active involvement in the continuing conversation is anticipated. The students' limited English ability likely influenced their favorable reaction to the questionnaire, indicating that male students may have been acclimated to the teacher's perspective and considered the teachers' questions as beneficial.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Student Responses to Questionnaire Items

No.	Questionnaire Item	Response (in %)*	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	Do you feel that teacher's questions help students participate more in classroom L2 discussion?	80.4	4.29	.877
2	Do you think students need a longer wait time to answer teachers' questions given in English?	87.2	4.47	.861
3	Are students afraid to answer teacher's questions in English because they think their English is not good enough?	74.8	4.54	.861
4	When asked a difficult question, do you feel you can think of a right answer but have trouble answering it in English?	74.8	4.14	1.110
5	When the teacher asks a question about the L2, do you feel you do not want to respond even if you know the answer?	58.9	3.94	1.200
6	Over the span of the class, do you feel more willing to answer a teacher's questions about the L2 when other students also answer?	77.2	3.84	1.132
7	Would you answer the teacher's question if you might be wrong?	51.3	3.77	1.072

8	When the teacher asks a question in English, do you prefer being called upon by him/her rather than volunteering an answer?	58.7	3.51	1.121
9	Do students find it more beneficial resorting to Arabic when asked to work in pairs or a group to answer teacher's questions?	87.2	3.73	1.219
10	Do you find it more comprehensible when the teacher uses Arabic and English in their questioning practice?	58.4	2.92	1.392
11	Do you think you should always get the teacher's permission before you contribute an answer to his/her question?	61.8	4.19	1.047
12	Do you think it is the teacher's role to answer other students' questions?	77.2	4.16	.903

* The total number of the percentages of replies from those who approved the statement with a greater frequency or level of agreement.

The research demonstrates that EFL students with low proficiency indicate that instructors' questions enhance their capacity to engage in classroom conversations. Nevertheless, this finding also corroborates the results of McNeil (2010) that the level of competency in a second language (L2) significantly influences how language learners inquire and reply to inquiries in their L2 courses. The study revealed that students expressed concerns or difficulties that could impact their behavior when responding. These concerns include the amount of time teachers give them to answer, their belief that they are not proficient in English, their attitudes toward how teachers choose students to participate, and their perceptions of the teacher's role in classroom discussions.

The findings indicate a strong consensus among the polled students that they need an extended period before responding to L2 questions posed by professors. This discovery is significant and should alert Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors to the fact that insufficiently allotted wait time might provide a problem to the questioning process, especially for the students. It suggests that the questions related to L2 knowledge were more challenging to answer accurately since their lecturers provided a restricted amount of time to respond.

Researchers have asserted that language instructors must increase the amount of time they wait before expecting a response during classroom questioning to enhance students' verbal achievements. Long wait times may result in "significant alterations" in pupils' linguistic patterns, as well as their attitudes and expectations. Furthermore, the duration of waiting is contingent upon

the current conversation, including the nature of the inquiries posed, the proficiency level of the students, the frequency of student queries and responses, and the number of unsolicited replies.

Most of the questioned students (74.8%) found it challenging to reply due to their limited English skills and difficulties in expressing themselves in English. This conclusion might be further clarified by the fact that some students may not be sufficiently acclimated to, or well prepared for, a classroom discourse conducted exclusively in their second language (L2).

The research indicates that students in Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) schools had a rudimentary to somewhat advanced proficiency level, which might potentially impact the extent and quality of their verbal communication. These findings indicate that students may have comprehended the L2 questions posed by their professors, but lacked the necessary L2 skills to respond or fully grasp them, perhaps owing to their limited English competence. This result may also indicate a 'confidence' problem among students, maybe stemming from the expectations set by instructors or society.

A significant majority of respondents, namely 77.2%, said that they were more inclined to reply to L2 questions posed by instructors when their peers also provided answers. The high level of agreement suggests that more classroom participation will occur as students become more involved in question-answer interactions. A majority of participants (61.8% and 77.2% respectively) said that they should get their teacher's consent before responding to inquiries.

Female students exhibited a higher level of compliance, while also expressing diverse viewpoints and engaging in arguments. This phenomenon might be attributed to the influence of religious or societal factors on the local educational system, which emphasizes the need to show respect for instructors. The results may provide insight into the obstructive attitudes that students have when it comes to replying and asking questions in the classroom. To summarize, the research emphasizes the significance of comprehending gender-related disparities in classroom interaction and the possible influence of silence on dynamics such as student engagement, contributions, and language use.

Inferential Statistics

Another important finding from the statistical investigation is revealed by inferential statistics. The groups of respondents in the questionnaire satisfied the requirements for using the t-test, since the students were categorized based on their gender (males/females), and the data exhibited a normal distribution.

The t-test conducted in this research showed that there were significant differences ($p \geq .05$) between the average scores of male and female students on four questionnaire questions (refer to Table 2). There were no significant statistical differences seen between men and girls in their responds to the remaining questionnaire questions.

Table 2

Results of Inferential Statistics

No	Questionnaire Item	Male		Female		F. Ratio	T. Sig
		Mean	Std. Error	Mean	Std. Error		*P*
1	Do you feel that teacher's questions help students participate more in classroom L2 discussion?	4.32	.820	4.05	.971	.752	.004*
7	Would you answer the teacher's question if you might be wrong?	3.49	1.286	3.76	1.156	6.174	.038*
10	Do you find it more comprehensible when the teacher uses Arabic and English in their questioning practice?	3.01	1.329	2.51	1.328	.048	.002*
11	Do you think you should always get the teacher's permission before you contribute an answer to his/her question?	3.55	1.058	3.84	1.093	.023	.018*

* *P-value* considered statistically significant

Regarding questionnaire item 1, the statistical analysis indicates that male students (mean = 4.32) reported finding the teachers' questions more helpful in promoting their participation in classroom discussions compared to female students (mean = 4.05). This difference in perception is attributed to the gender of the participants (p = 0.004).

The discrepancy in the mean scores obtained from doing the independent sample t-test for questionnaire item 7 was also noteworthy. The findings indicated that female students achieved a higher mean score (3.76) compared to male students, who had a mean score of (3.49). The finding (p= .038) suggests that the difference observed is connected to gender. Therefore, it may be tentatively concluded that female students, more than male students, were less likely to reply to their professors' questions if they believed their replies would be erroneous.

The t-test results shown in Table 2 indicate that men exhibit a greater degree of acceptance towards their instructors' use of Arabic in the EFL classroom. This is because it enhances their understanding of the questions posed by their professors, as indicated by questionnaire item 10. Among the data collected in this questionnaire, the statistical significance is greatest for p= 0.002. The mean score for male students was 3.01, while for female students it was 2.51.

The t-test findings for questionnaire item 11 (p= .018) were also significant. They indicated that female students had a mean score of 3.84, while men had a mean score of 3.55. Thus, the importance of the difference leans towards femalesFemale students, to a greater extent than male pupils, believe that their teacher should continually encourage them before they respond.

Questionnaire's Open-ended Question

Learners' responses, regardless of close-ended questions, provided a variety of viewpoints on a key aspect of questioning and merited further study by instructors and academics. From the remarks of learners, three distinct themes emerge. First of all, 18 comments connected the value of revision time in classroom discussion to the learners' belief that it enhances classroom questioning. Among the male students, one said: "In revision classes, the majority of students participate more actively in question-and-answer sessions". A female student also said, "At the end of certain classes, when the teacher conducts a brief review or summary, many students engage in asking and answering questions".

Secondly, only nine female learners (n=9) indicated setting aside a designated time for question-and-answer exchanges. The learners, as shown by this female student's response, believed that "The class duration is one hour, so why not officially allocate 10 minutes of this time for students to ask and answer questions?". The other learner similarly said things like "The class should include a certain time for questioning. This will help us with tests and improve our future language use".

Finally, fostering learners' questioning via activities was the subject of seven learners' remarks. A female student pointed out, for example, "Providing question prompt cards, particularly for vocabulary learning, will make the class more enjoyable and enhance the effectiveness of question-and-answer sessions". Among the male students, one also said, "with simple activities and prompts, learners will answer with complete sentences".

Figure 2

Summary of Learners' Comments
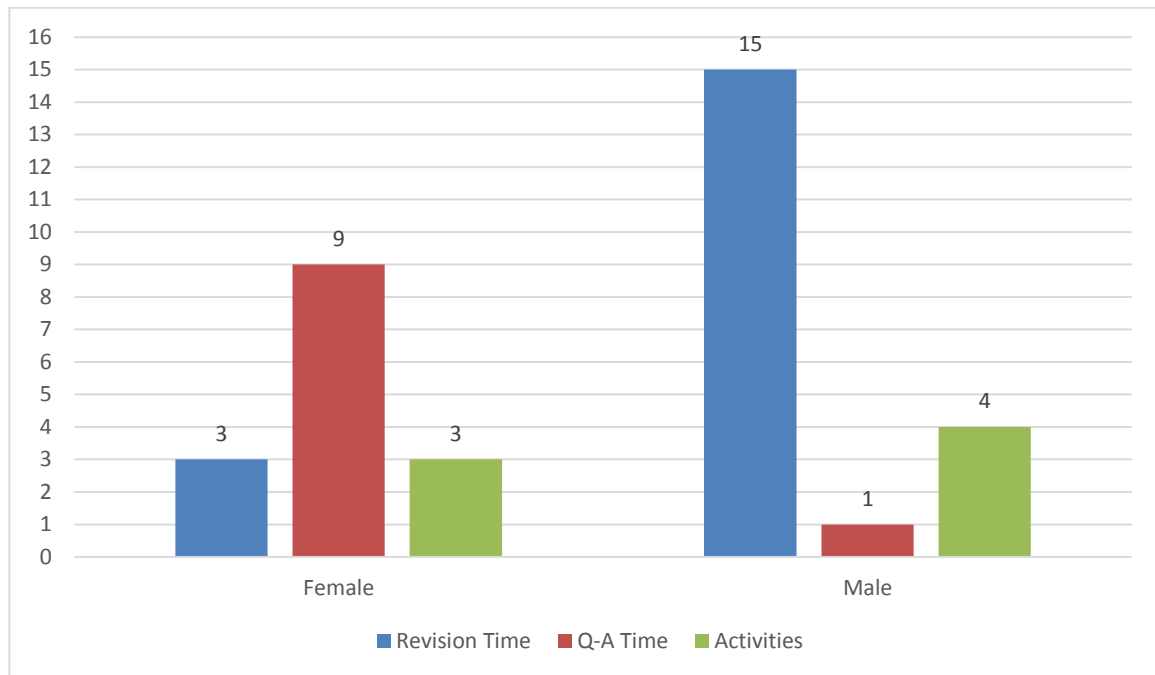
Classroom Observation

As already noted, video-recorded total EFL classroom interaction amounted to about nine hours. Data extract including Question-Answer (Q-A) sequences (McHoul, 1978) have been taken under consideration to show the direct function of teacher questions. The main three functions derived from the excerpts are as follows.

Encouraging Learner Talk

As previously argued, it was clear from the observed classrooms that instructors asked questions for different purposes. Of them, as shown in extract 1, instructors' questions functioned as a tool for encouraging learner talk. Following a PowerPoint presentation on English grammar of regular and irregular past tense (e.g., study/studied, go/went) the teacher (T) started the following conversation:

Extract 1

1	T:	does anybody know if fly is regular of irregular?
2		who can tell me?
3	S₁:	irregular, flew
4	T:	excellent
5		((pointing to PowerPoint))
6		how about cut?
7	S₂:	teacher, teacher
8	T:	Ahmed, go
9	S₂:	it is the same
10	T:	yeah

From the following passage, it is evident that T's primary objective was to get grammatically accurate responses from the learners, which Ellis (2016) defined as 'emphasis on form'. It should be emphasized that T's display question ("...regular or irregular", line 1) was focused on assessing learners' comprehension, which categorizes it as a low-order inquiry. Without receiving a response, T's question is promptly followed with a closed question addressed to the whole class ("Who can tell me?", line 2). Furthermore, T's question in line 6 aimed to clarify a specific aspect of the information that T presumed learners had or had acquired. S2 responds to this query by requesting an answer (line 7). Subsequently, S2 presents a response (line 9) to which T responds affirmatively using the acknowledgment marker 'yes' (Walsh et al., 2011).

Improving Learners' Fluency

The teacher's questions helped learners speak more fluently. This is further clarified in the passage below. During a grammar exercise T and the learners were working on, the following events occurred.

Extract 2

1	T:	okay everybody, what does induvial mean?
2		ha? what does induvial mean? It means ... ((pause))

3   S₁: fardi 'individual'

4   T: yes fardi 'individual' or forada 'individuals'

5   but well, I want the meaning not translation Fatema 'S₁'s name

6   S₂: teacher

7   T: yes Taghi

8   S₂: people action

9   T: again? ↑

10   S₂: I mean what a person is or being who we are

11   T: good

The foregoing excerpt demonstrates that T lays significant emphasis on the acquisition of a new language. T used an elicitation method known as 'designedly incomplete utterance' (Koshik, 2002; Sert & Walsh, 2013) to delay the end of his turn after asking two open questions to the whole class (lines 1-2). As stated by Margutti (2010), instructors purposefully use incomplete utterances to encourage learners to provide missing information and to urge replies to unanswered questions. One potential drawback of this technique is that it assumes there is a definitive solution and that T has it unless T specifically acknowledges that there may be several alternative answers to a given problem. Furthermore, in this passage, the pause in line 2 serves as an implicit solicitation for a response and demonstrates T's anticipation of a quick reply from the learners. Although T explicitly said that his questions were not intended for a literal translation of the term 'person' (line 5), the challenging nature of his investigation would imply that he desired a response in the learners' native language. In line 5, T used the discourse marker 'well', which, as Lenk (1998, p. 160) explains, indicates that the next material will deviate somewhat from the typical path of discussion. The surprising revelation here is that T was not inquiring about translation, but rather seeking a precise definition. Currently, S2 provides his interpretation of the term 'person' (line 8). T in line 9 communicates to S2 that a more target-like response was needed by using the discourse marker 'again' with a rising tone. T (line 11) commended S2's comment (line 10) without changing its basic meaning.

Repairing Interactional Breakdowns

Apart from the functions already indicated, instructors' questions seemed to help resolve interactional breakdowns as seen in the extract below. This passage is from a lengthy teacher-learner conversation about the top neighborhoods Najaf has to live in.

Extract 3

1   T: why don't you like to liv in Jadida? I have no idea so tell me

2   S₁: Qalia 'expensive'

3   T: do you mean the rents are expensive?

4   S₁: no teacher Qalia Qalia 'expensive'

5   T: I am not sure what you mean exactly

6   how is Jadida expensive? I really like to know

7   S₁: grocery and price are expensive teacher

8   T: mmm

9   S₁: I mean the living expenses

10 T: I see

In this conversation, T is using a why question to either prompt S1 to provide a more detailed answer or to ascertain S1's perspective on the topic being discussed. The questions featured in T's utterance are categorized as 'reasoning' (Dalton-Puffer, 2007) because they encourage the responder (S1) to engage in critical thinking and provide their viewpoint, which may be difficult for foreign language learners at times. However, this conversation indicates that S1 had a greater understanding of the underlying situation being addressed compared to T, who recognized a lack of expertise to encourage additional discussion from the learner on this specific subject (line 5). In this

context, S1 consistently used the phrase 'expensive' in both English and Arabic, and T seems to be unable to comprehend the reason behind the high cost of this property. A settlement of the conversation was reached after T's requests after S1's statement in lines 7 and 9. The exchange in the following extract is concluded with the discourse marker 'I see', marking the conclusion of the discourse.

Discussion

The majority of male and female learners surveyed expressed their belief in the communicative efficacy of teacher questions in the EFL classroom, which is a significant finding from the data. Nevertheless, participants had acknowledged issues or problems that may affect their responding behavior, such as the wait-time teacher allocation, revision time, and additional activities for motivating learners and managing questions addressed during the classroom discourse. Researchers (e.g., Shomoossi, 2004; Chang, 2009; McNeil, 2010) established similar results even if their methodology for gathering data can differ. According to these researchers, the level of proficiency in L2 among EFL learners plays a significant role in how they respond to and ask questions in the classroom. Therefore, the amount of time given for students to think before responding (wait time) is extremely important for their active participation in verbal discussions. If not managed properly, it can have a detrimental effect on their ability to speak fluently.

At this point, I think the question of how much the professors at Open Educational College implement the listed learner concerns comes into play. Questioning techniques used by instructors in this research (either reported or observed) may be necessary to address this problem. If the problem still exists, yet, the learner issues raised in the research should be given careful thought at the quarterly professional development seminars in the study target environment. Johnson (1995, p. 3) states "if teachers understand how the dynamics of classroom communication influence L2 learners' perceptions of, and participation in, classroom activities they may be better able to monitor and adjust the patterns of classroom communication in order to create an environment that is43onducivee to both classrooms learning and L2 acquisition".

In terms of learners' gender, the surveyed learners' views differed statistically significantly. This outcome gives great support to the results of studies like Adamson (2022), Hémon et al. (2020), Derwing et al. (2021), which revealed that a fear of making errors is one of the resident

elements of learners' conversation in the language classroom. The research emphasizes the need for our female EFL teachers to address this issue and perhaps encourage more learner participation by cultivating positive attitudes about speaking mistakes, considering the significant number of learners who are concerned about this matter. The t-test's statistical significance tests demonstrated that female learners were more likely than male learners to think that their teacher should constantly urge them to answer. This finding aligns with research on questioning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, such as Wu (1991) and Chang (2009), which found that EFL learners tend to prefer waiting to be asked before responding.

The second part of this research focused on the examination of classroom questioning practices and associated beliefs among instructors. As decades of studies by Dillon (2007), Cazden (2001), and Walsh (2002, 2006, 2011) have shown, practically every classroom environment is characterized by almost constant use of instructors' questioning nature. The EFL classes in this study did not exhibit any variation, since the act of questioning by teachers was a prevalent occurrence in the discourse of every classroom. The current study has used discourse analysis to examine teacher-learner interactions at the exchange level. As a result, a collection of functions of teacher questions has been identified, some of which align with previous research.

The above conversation suggests that the functions of the EFL teacher's questions might usually be categorized as having an evaluative and discursive function. In addition to vocally evaluating learners' learning and L2 knowledge, teacher questions encourage learners to engage in verbal interaction, according to researchers like Walsh and Sattes (2005). Recent studies (Vehkakoski, 2020) have also shown that teacher questions work in signaling or averting communication failures, therefore generating possibilities for L2 learning.

Conclusion

One significant contribution provided by this work is the applied methodology. First time, a mixed-method study methodology including a questionnaire and video-recorded observation was used in the Iraqi setting. Furthermore, differentiating the current work from most of those mentioned in this study (e.g., 2013; Zheng & Wang, 2019; Rashid & Caisar, 2016) none of those have used all the methods utilized in this research. This analytical technique therefore advances the area of methodology and offers easily used analytical tools to researchers using data comparable to

the current study. In addition, this study provides more evidence for the increasing notion that instructors' questions are an important instrument in the discourse of EFL classrooms. This study adds to the existing body of research that advocates for the use of teachers' questions, along with other studies such as Cazden (2001) and Shomoossi (2004).

In addition, previous research on classroom questioning in similar EFL settings in Iraq has mostly focused on quantitative analysis of question quantities and kinds, without considering the specific purposes that teacher questions may serve in the EFL classroom. Some of these studies also gathered data from instructors but neglected to include the viewpoints of the learners. Therefore, the question that arises is whether this need undermines or improves the ability to ask questions in EFL settings. Examining classroom inquiry from the perspective of learners enables us to have a deeper understanding of the actual dynamics occurring in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, it highlights the need to clearly understand the purpose and impact of challenging as a good form of communication in the classroom. It is crucial to consider how participants in the classroom perceive and benefit from this questioning practice.

Notwithstanding the contributions and implications of certain elements of this research, it is still an individual endeavor with unavoidable limits and flaws. It is challenging to generalize the results for the larger context of EFL classroom discourse regionally and worldwide since the research included EFL learners from one institution in Iraq. Furthermore, the complicated character of classroom questioning made it impossible for this research to thoroughly investigate or understand all facets of these phenomena. Shulman (1986, p. 7) claims, "there is no real world of the classroom, of learning and of teaching". There are numerous such worlds, maybe nested within one another, maybe inhabiting alternative realities, which often, albeit randomly, disturb one another. Thus, despite its focus and refined outcomes, the current study does not assert in any way that it has captured all instances of research that occurred in the observed classes. More investigation might help to clarify the possible relevance of some of the broad ideas found in this study, including the perceptions of learners. Conducting a comprehensive examination of these issues, each of which has the potential to be studied independently, might have significant consequences for research in EFL classrooms. Additionally, it could provide valuable insights for teacher training.

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