

## The Roles of English Language Teacher Questions in Libyan EFL Classroom

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### Abstract

This study examines the role of English language teacher's questions in Libyan secondary school classrooms. It also seeks to determine how teachers modify these questions when students fail to provide responses in order to make the questions understandable and promote classroom interaction. This research used a qualitative interpretive study by specifically observing classroom interaction in teacher's questions. Participants were two English teachers from Al-Entesar secondary school, Zliten, and their students in a natural classroom setting. Audio recordings of EFL classrooms and a semi-structured interview with the teachers were used to collect data. Conversation analysis approach was employed in the analysis of the data. The analysis revealed that the teachers' questions had different roles depending on the context in which they occurred. Those roles are to introduce the lesson; to assess students' background knowledge; to assess students' understanding; to elicit students' ideas, guesses, and imagination ; and to interact with students. It has also been found that teachers make several attempts to elicit answers from students and generate interaction. The present study showed further evidence that teachers' questions can play a significant role in enhancing interaction in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** classroom discourse, EFL teachers' questions, interaction, modifications, role of questions

## أدوار أسئلة معلم اللغة الإنجليزية في الفصول الدراسية التي يتم بها تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في ليبيا

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### الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة دور أسئلة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية في الفصول الدراسية بالمدارس الثانوية الليبية. وتسعى هذه الدراسة أيضاً إلى تحديد كيفية قيام المعلمين بتعديل هذه الأسئلة عندما يفشل الطلاب في تقديم إجابات لجعل الأسئلة مفهومة وتعزيز التفاعل في الفصل الدراسي. استخدم هذا البحث دراسة تفسيرية نوعية من خلال مراقبة التفاعل الصفّي على وجه التحديد في أسئلة المعلم. شارك في البحث استاذين اللغة الإنجليزية و طلابهم في بيئة صفية طبيعية من مدرسة الانتصار بزلتين. تم استخدام التسجيلات الصوتية لفصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية وإجراء مقابلة شبه منظمة مع معلمين لجمع البيانات. تم تحليل البيانات باستخدام نهج تحليل المحادثة (CA). وكشف التحليل أن أسئلة المعلمين كان لها أدوار مختلفة اعتماداً على السياق الذي حدثت فيه. هذه الأدوار هي لتقدم الدرس؛ لتقييم المعرفة الأساسية للطلاب؛ لتقييم فهم الطلاب؛ لاستنباط أفكار الطلاب وتخميناتهم وحياتهم؛ والتفاعل مع الطلاب. كما خلصت الدراسة إلى أن المعلمين يقومون بعدة محاولات للحصول على إجابات من الطلاب وتوليد التفاعل. أظهرت الدراسة الحالية دليلاً إضافياً على أن أسئلة المعلمين يمكن أن تلعب دوراً مهماً في تعزيز التفاعل في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الخطاب الصفّي، أسئلة معلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التفاعل، التعديلات، دور الأسئلة

### 1. Introduction

Classroom discourse has been analyzed by many researchers in order to improve the teaching methods. Many researchers have conducted extensive research in EFL classroom settings by observing teachers' and students' behaviors as well as teachers' questioning practices and examining the role these questions can play in eliciting learner output (Markee, 2004; Darong,

Niman, Su & Fatmawati, 2021; Esmailibavili, Seifoori, & Ahour 2023). The teacher's way of asking questions is the most prevalent methods in classroom teaching that influence student learning and the quality of teaching used by classroom teachers to engage students in classroom discussion and promote more interaction (Adedoyin, 2015). In addition, Mohd Noor, Aman and Mustaffa (2012) point out that teacher questioning has been identified as an important channel for exchanging ideas between teachers and students that enables effective teaching practices. Therefore, the teacher must be aware of how to facilitate students' participation in classroom activities based on an understanding of how teacher questioning method affects the dynamics of classroom interaction and implement meaningful strategies.

Since teacher questions play an important role in comprehensible input which is widely used in EFL classrooms (Al-Zahrani & Al-Barji, 2017; Darong, et al. 2021), studies of teacher questions can therefore contribute to a better understanding of how foreign language use is learned, especially through conversational interaction in the classroom. According to Al-Zahrani and Al-Barji (2017), teacher's questioning in the classroom serves as a technique to stimulate students learning, as well as to evaluate students' understanding of the topic.

### ***1.1 Problem Statement***

EFL learners in Libyan schools faced language barriers influenced by their limited English proficiency and teachers' lack of knowledge of how to communicate with them (Eshkal, 2019). However, in any classroom, teacher talk is a crucial element that denotes classroom discourse and the communication system of classroom interaction (Cazden, 2001). In ESL/EFL classroom discourse, teacher questions play an important role in language learning. According to Esmailibavili et al. (2023), more than half of the class time in EFL or ESL classrooms is spent exchanging questions and answers. In addition, Mohd Noor et al. (2012) indicate that the nature of the teachers' questions asked in classrooms will have a direct impact on second/foreign language acquisition. Therefore, teacher talk and questions can serve as a linguistic tool and a way to help students learn English as a foreign language.

Little attention has been paid to how learners learn and how teachers teach in many Libyan schools, especially in the area of examining EFL discourse in classrooms (Eshkal, 2019). Furthermore, there has been a lack of

investigation on how teachers' questioning practices influence classroom discourse (Yen, 2017). Hence, this research attempts to reveal and explain the role of the English teacher's use of questions and how the teacher modifies these questions when students fail to give answers in order to make the questions understandable in Libyan secondary schools classroom. This study will provide insight into questioning practices for foreign language teaching and benefit the teachers of English language to try out different procedures and technique in the classrooms to obtain a fruitful and meaningful learning.

### ***1.2 Objectives of the Study***

The following research goals are suggested to be examined by the study:

1. To identifying the role of asking questions in Libyan secondary school classrooms.
2. To identify modification techniques that the teachers employ to modify/simplify the questions to get the students response.

### ***1.3 Research Questions***

The following research questions have been developed for the study in light of the objectives:

1. What role do English teachers' questions play in the classroom?
2. What modification techniques do teachers use to modify/simplify questions to get students to respond?

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Teacher Talk***

Classroom interaction includes any type of classroom participation that occurs in the classroom such as teacher-student, student-student, group discussions and any other type of classroom participation (Al-Zahrani & Al-Barji, 2017; Walsh, 2013). However, Cazden (2001) reviews interactions in classroom communication systems where "spoken language is the medium by which much teaching takes place" (Cazden, 2001: 2). He also explained that teachers control the talk through "the language of curriculum, the language of

control, and the language of personal identity" (Cazden, 2001: 3). Therefore, teacher talk is verbal communication or utterances made by the teacher directed to learners in any type of communication in the classroom.

Teacher talk is also considered as institutional talk, a communication that differs systematically from ordinary conversation (Markee, 2004). As Markee (2004) notes, while ordinary conversation is talk-in-interaction between speakers who have equal rights to initiate the turn or sequence, teacher talk or classroom talk is initiated by the teacher. Thus, the dominant sequence of talk-in-interaction controlled by the teacher is either initiation-response-feedback (IRF) or initiation-response-evaluation (IRE) (Cazden, 2001; Esmailibavili et al. 2023). According to IRF, the teacher controls the conversation where the teacher asks a question, the student answers the question, and the teacher provides some form of feedback (Cazden, 2001).

## 2.2 Teacher Questions

Teacher questions have been used as instructional strategies that convey new information to students. In most classrooms, the purpose of asking a question is to receive response. A number of researchers have identified types of questions, their functions, and their forms. According to Darong et al. (2021) questions are grammatically divided into: yes/no questions expecting either affirmative or negation; Wh-questions seeking for information; declarative and tag questions.

There are various categories of teacher questions that can serve different functions, namely lower cognitive and higher cognitive questions. Lower cognitive questions include display, factual, closed-ended, direct, recall, convergent, and knowledge questions; they are often used to check understanding or to elicit specific information (Ho, 2005; Yen, 2017). While higher cognitive questions include referential, open-ended, authentic, divergent, evaluative, and synthesis questions; they require a more detailed answer and encourage students to express their ideas and opinions. Therefore, higher cognitive questions are used to promote discussion and critical thinking (Ho, 2005; Yen, 2017).

Regarding the objectives of questioning, Walsh and Satz (2005) suggested that the use of questions is based on two purposes: recitation questions to assess students' knowledge and practice; Discussion questions encourage students to reveal their ideas and reflect their understanding.

Therefore, teachers' questions are tools to assess students' understanding and enhance engagement.

### ***2.3 Questioning in the Teaching and Learning of Second/Foreign Languages***

Asking questions in order to engage students in classroom interaction is the most common technique used by teachers in ESL/EFL settings. According to Tsui (2001) “an important dimension of classroom interaction is the teacher question, and when teachers fail to elicit any response from learners, they often need to modify their questions” (Tsui, 2001: 122). In addition lack of response may be caused by the complexity of the question and inappropriately phrased questions (Tsui, 2001). Therefore, modifications are used.

According to Richards and Lockhart (1994) questions in ESL/EFL classroom are classified based on their purpose as procedural questions which related to classroom procedures and management; convergent questions encourage responses and focus on lesson content; and divergent questions relate to the lesson but encourage students to engage in higher-level thinking. Moreover, a further distinction has been made between display and referential questions in ESL/EFL classroom (Tsui, 2001; Walsh, 2013), where in display questions teachers know the answer but are asked to elicit or display particular structure. In contrast, referential questions are questions that teachers do not know the answer and ask to seek information from the students (Tsui, 2001).

Mohd Noor et al. (2012) argued that the focus should not be on the types of questions display or referential questions but to explore whether the question provides input and acts as a stimulus for the learner. They also suggested that the role of questions asked in ESL/EFL classroom must be based on how and why teachers ask questions and how the questions benefit students' learning.

## ***2.4 Input Modification***

Influenced by Krashen's (1985) concept of input that "simplified speech will be helpful when it provides the acquirer with...a content that makes the message comprehensible" (Krashen, 1985: 8). A number of studies focus on the effectiveness of input modification on second language comprehension. As Walsh (2013) noted, teachers can use a variety of strategies to develop interaction in EFL classrooms.

Mackey (2007) distinguished input modifications into linguistic simplification which tends to involve the use of simplified sentences with an emphasis on ease; elaborative modification appears through information added to the text using repetition and rewording; and conversational adjustment shifts the focus to compensating for the complexity of the spoken message using clarification. Adriosh and Razi (2019) also indicated that the teachers adopted L1 code-switching in EFL Libyan classroom to provide clarification of complex L2 input to their students.

Cabrera and Martinez (2001) examined the effects of input supported by modification techniques. Elementary school students learning English as a second language listened to a story with various modifications and simplifications. Results indicated that students were able to follow the story thread when both linguistic adjustments and interactional adjustments were available. They concluded that simplified input through short speech length could not only facilitate comprehension. Interactional modifications such as the use of repetition, paraphrasing, and visual aids should be provided to maximize processing.

Thus, not all types of modifications are always effective, as excessive modifications, for example using frequent pauses, may prevent an attempt to understand the message. Therefore, the type of modifications to be used may depend on the communication situations.

## ***2.5 Theoretical Framework***

Vygotsky's "Social development theory or sociocultural theory" of learning (1978) highlights the importance of social interaction in the learning process. The importance is that by constructing personal meaning from experience, by reflecting on experiences, learners construct their own

understanding of the world and make sense of their prior knowledge. Then, the learner becomes integrated with the individual's own perceptions. Individuals benefit from social interaction under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers, as learners move from a lower level to a higher level. This guidance or collaboration is considered "scaffolding" in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. "What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow" (Vygotsky, 1962).

Scaffolding can be viewed as teacher intervention. When applying this notion, the teacher needs to realize that the support provided to the learner must respond to specific learning outcomes. In ESL/EFL classes, scaffolding plays a crucial role, especially when a learner is unable to perform a task. Danise (2001) differentiate scaffolding in second language teaching and learning into the macro and micro levels. According to Danise (2001), macro scaffolding is associated with the teacher's communicating clear objectives and understanding the learner's current language ability. Micro scaffolding is closely related to the concept of scaffolding during student-teacher interaction.

Scaffolding that teachers provide to ESL/EFL learners include, for example, modeling, using visual aids, using gestures and writing on the board (Danise,2001). In addition, Van Lier (1996) stated that pedagogical scaffolding can be seen through teachers' strategic behavior, where directional intervention may be in the form of giving examples at the beginning of the task; or interactional intervention is used as teacher participation in the ongoing task. Scaffolding is often implemented by the teacher, who is considered the expert in the classroom. However, Van Lier (2014) suggested that students can also scaffold by helping each other, as when strong students assist weaker peers in pair and group work.

## ***2.6 Previous Studies***

There have been numerous previous researches related to the practice of questioning in EFL classroom interactions. Al-Zahrani and Al-Barji (2017) conducted a study to examine the effect of questions on enhancing interaction in EFL classes at the English Language Institute (ELI) of a Saudi Arabian university. The data were analyzed using discourse analysis techniques. The results showed a correlation between characteristics of the questions and the creation of classroom interaction. Furthermore, Vivekmetakorn and Thamma

(2015) investigated patterns of interaction resulting from questioning in an EFL classroom at a liberal arts school at a Thai public university and the teacher's use and views of questioning using discourse analysis, classroom observation, and teacher interviews. The findings revealed that display questions were found more frequently than referential questions during the reading activities and that the teacher asked questions to engage the students; elicit responses to be used as content for teaching; and guide the students to apply prior knowledge to better comprehend the reading.

In a different study in 2019, Eshkal investigated the nature of teacher-students' interaction in English as a foreign language classrooms in the Libyan university context. Audio recorded classroom interaction, recall questionnaires, focus groups and field notes were utilized to collect the data. The data were analyzed using conversation analysis (CA) approach. The study suggested that there is a relationship between the discourse features of teacher talk and the construction of learning opportunities by the students.

In a recent study, Darong, et al. (2021) analyzed the pragmatic functions of EFL teachers' questioning act in their interactions with students. Six EFL Indonesian English teachers took part in this research. Data were transcribed and analyzed following the principle of Conversation Analysis (CA) and Freed's taxonomy (1994) namely external, talk, relational, and expressive functional category. The results revealed that most of the questions served more than one purpose ranging from factual information to teacher expressive styles (external, talk, relational and expressive categories). As well as, the functions of questions were not only associated with their pedagogical purposes but also with the pragmatic and social functions depending on the context where they possibly appeared.

Another study in 2022, Darong examined the types, forms, and functions of the questions asked by EFL teachers during their interactions with students. Audio recording of two college-level EFL teachers. The data were transcribed and analyzed using the principles of conversation analysis. The results of the study showed that the teacher questions used were insufficient for the questioning activity. The form is related to the question type. In addition, the teachers' questions had diagnostic, educational, and motivating purposes.

More recently, a descriptive study was carried out Esmailibavili et al. (2023) to examine the frequency of inferential and referential questions used by novice and experienced teachers to initiate interaction at lower-intermediate (LI) and upper-intermediate (UI) levels. A purposive sample of

20 English classrooms were selected at nine branches of an English institute in Tabriz, Iran. The results revealed that experienced teachers used significantly more referential questions at both levels. While, novice teachers were found to use much more inferential questions at both levels.

Existing literature reveals a recent focus on teachers' question types, their purposes for language students, classroom interaction, and language classroom goals. However, what has been overlooked is how the teacher can modify questions to make the questions understandable. Therefore, this study set out to investigate the role of EFL teachers' questions and how the teachers modify questions in order to make the questions understandable in the Libyan secondary school classroom.

### 3. Methodology

This study is an interpretive research using qualitative data collection and analysis. According to Thomas (2013) the interpretive paradigm has begun to play a significant role in educational research. Holliday (2007) adds that qualitative research enables the researcher to study a phenomenon in its natural setting without trying to control or manipulate the situation. Moreover, the main goal of interpretive research is "collection of data that is rich in description of people, the investigation of topics in context, and an understanding of behaviour from the participants' own frame of reference" (Holliday, 2007: 10). Thus, this study employs a variety of data collection techniques, namely observation with audio recording of two classroom sessions to obtain transcripts of natural interaction in EFL classrooms, and a semi-structured interview with the teachers who were observed. The researcher was an observer in the class, not a participant.

The data analysis in this study used conversation analysis as approach to analyzing spoken discourse. Markee (2000) demonstrated that data analysis in CA aims to unpack the structure of conversation through "an in depth analysis of a particular phenomenon" (Markee, 2000: 60). Therefore, relying on CA, the researcher analyzed the turns related to the teacher's questions and question modifications. The audio-taped utterances were transcribed based on Gail Jefferson's system transcription (1979).

In this study, the data analysis framework is based on open coding and interpretation. Coding was carried out for transcripts from classroom observation/ audio recording and the teachers interview and themes were drawn based on the codes. Markee (2000: 60) stated that data for analysis in

CA can be “either single cases or collections of talk-in-interaction”. Therefore, this study utilized the collection-based analysis of talk-in-interaction in classroom observation transcripts and teachers interview transcripts.

### ***3.1 Participants***

The participants of this study were two English teachers in the Libyan secondary school; Al-Entesar, Zliten, and their students in a natural classroom setting. Purposive sampling is used when “researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are rich information” (Creswell, 2005:204). Therefore, the purposive sampling procedure was applied in selecting the teachers who teach the third-year classes, which consist of 25 students in each class. The names of the teachers were changed to T1 and T2, and students were referred to as S1, S2, etc. within the excerpts. T1 was a female teacher and was 26 years old at the time of the study. She has taught English for 3 years. She graduated from Arts faculty majoring in English Language. while T2, was a female teacher and was 46 years old. She has 20 years of experience in teaching English as a foreign language and holds a bachelor's degree in English language. They agreed to be audio-recorded as participants in this study in order to investigate the roles of EFL teachers' questions and how the teachers modify questions.

## **4. Results**

### ***4.1 The Role of Questions in Classroom***

This section contains the findings indicating the roles of questions in the Libyan classrooms that answer the first research question. The following descriptions are the patterns of questioning roles in the Libyan Secondary classroom implemented by the teachers during observation and according to the teachers' interview.

### *1. Asking Questions to Introduce the lesson*

Teachers' questions served as an introductory technique to prepare students for the new lesson which includes reviewing previous lessons associated with the lesson. For example, instead of telling the content topic, T1 asked a question to attract students' attention.

- Excerpt 1 Lesson 1  
 T1: (004) Ok last time we discussed about what? About the places that if there is  
 (005) possibility to find any places in the airport.  
 S1: (006) [Check in  
 T1: (007) [check in, check out, all of these things, [information yes

The above question was used to stimulate the students' mind and prepare them by asking them a question about the previous lesson related to the current lesson. This method of asking questions, which indirectly guides the new lesson about safety in the sky, is regularly used in ESL/EFL teaching.

- Excerpt 2 Lesson 2  
 T2: (001) now we have problem here (.) look at the girls (.) the two girls here  
 (002) what can you find from the picture here?  
 (004) Ok what can you see from the pictures here?  
 S1: (006) oil tankers spilled

In excerpt 2, the teacher introduced the new lesson indirectly by enhancing the students thinking of what the image related to the topic of the lesson.

### *2. Asking Questions to Assess Students' Background Knowledge*

It is evident that in two observed classes the questions were posted to check students' background knowledge related to the lesson.

- Excerpt 1 Lesson 1  
 T1: (069) Do you think travelling by the airplane safer than the car?  
 S2: (070) yes  
 T1: (072) why?  
 S3: (073) because there is no traffic jam [and  
 T1: (074) [no traffic jam  
 S3: (075) [yes and no accident



### 3. Asking Questions to Assess Students' Understanding

In response to the roles of questions, the teacher determined that the questions regularly requesting an assessment of the students' understanding of the concepts and topics covered by the teacher. The following extract is taken from the interview with the teachers.

Excerpt 1 Interview

R: What do you use questions for in your classroom?

T1: For me I just use questions to give more or further explanation or further elaboration if the students couldn't understand anything so I give further explanation.

T2: Actually, the questions functioning to elaborate the topic, and to confirm student's understanding.

Here the teachers explained that the role of the question in the classroom is to attract students comprehension as they use questions to provide further clarification or detail if the students couldn't understand anything

Excerpt 2 Lesson 1

T1: (040) for example if a flight tend to leave to Libyan airport and from Libyan

(041) airport to Kuwait airport or a flight for example from (bango) to Libya

(042) what do you think now the radar?

(043) what is the aim?

(044) what is the purpose of radar?

(045) why do we use radar?

(046) تعرفو الرادار شنو؟ (do you know what is radar?)

S5: (047) yes

T1: (048) white screen (.) just screen have a dot

S7: (049) to record the speed of the plane may be

In this excerpt, questions are preceded by the teacher's explanation to check whether students really understand the teacher's explanation. The teacher kept asking similar questions to evaluate the extent of understanding of the same topic or point before moving on to the other point, which

confirmed that the teacher definitely wanted to ensure that the students understood the concept of radar.

Excerpt 3 Lesson 2

- T2: (007) ok in picture number one there are two girls here  
(008) they are discussing about a problem (.) about what?  
(009) they're just walking may be on the beach  
(010) and they're just see what? [waste  
S7: (011) [waste of oil

Here too, the question is preceded by the teacher's explanation to ensure the students' level of understanding of the topic and problem that the sea had

#### ***4. Asking Questions to Elicit Students' Ideas, Guesses, and Imagination***

Questions can also play another role of invitation to stimulate students' ideas, guesses, and imagination. For example, the teacher in the interview insisted on the role of questions in making students think for better learning outcomes.

Excerpt 1 Interview

- R: What types of questions are most appropriate for getting students to interact with the teacher?  
T2: I think the most suitable question is WH questions to get the students to interact with the teacher  
R: Why?  
T2: Because just give students chance to answer WH questions. This sound to think ...yeah Thoughtful questions.  
T1: For me... mmm.. I think open-ended questions, so students can learn to think aloud, imagine, and explore new ideas.  
T2: Actually, I've discovered that students problems are occasionally not with their grammar or English language skills, but rather with their inability to think. So I ask questions in an attempt to get them to think.

Excerpt 2 Lesson 1

- T1: (192) OK what do you think about the small box?  
(193) you can see the small box it is kind of letters  
(194) what do you think?

- S10: (195) which small box?  
T1: (196) this is small box what do you think?  
S2: (197) I think it is a letter

In this dialogue, the teacher asks 'what do you think' and invites students to think and guess about the subject of this picture. Likewise, Excerpt 3 prompts students' idea whether this sentence makes sense or not.

- Excerpt 3 Lesson 2  
T2: (090) The people فاصله (comma) the people pollute must pay  
(091) But do you think it is logical? (.)  
(092) do you think in English it is logical to say such this sentence?  
(093) so that's why they used to give such subject relative clause  
(094) its matter of must that we use it in order to avoid redundant words ok

### ***5. Asking Questions to Interact with Students***

It is clear from the interview with the teachers how important the questions are in their teaching, as they answered to achieve communication and mutual understanding between them and their students.

- Excerpt 1 Interview  
R: How important do you think questions are in your classroom?  
T1: In the classroom just to get interaction with the student to get mutual understanding, mutual communication between me and students that's why I use questions.  
T2: In fact, mmm....by asking questions, the student interacts with me and with each other.

The following excerpt also shows how by asking questions the teacher starts a small conversation between herself and the students which helps them interact with each other.

- Excerpt 2 Lesson 1  
T1: (299) Ok now tell me what does the status mean?  
(300) the status?  
S7: (301) status  
S13: (302) status hahaha

- T1: (303) you can find it in the text... here the answer why you look at me?  
 (304) Go  
 S13: (305) hahaha  
 T1: (306) شنو قاعد بتضحك ( why do you laugh?)  
 S15: (307) status is the position [that airplane  
 T1: (308) [it is the position that airplane take once it goes to space

#### 4.2 Modification Technique

Due to the diverse roles of EFL teacher questions, questioning becomes an essential element of the teaching/learning process. When the question failed to elicit answers, the teacher used techniques to modify and simplify the questions to elicit the answer. These techniques are illustrated through the following categories with examples.

##### 1. Repeating the Original Question

In the following extract the teacher insisted that she should never repeat the same question, and instead might repeat it in a different way.

Excerpt 1 Interview

- R: Ok what do you do when students cannot give answers to your question?  
 T1: I change my methodology, I change my bath, my way I never repeat the same question *sometimes I repeat the same question but in different way*, so I am going to use different methodology *sometimes, but repeat the questions I never repeat the questions it's for me*.  
 T2: I started over, usually *by asking the same question again, simplifying the structure and vocabulary...*

Excerpt 2 Lesson 1

- T1: (187) what is the meaning of invisible air traffic controller?  
 (188) what is the meaning of invisible?  
 (189) [All of you  
 S5: (190) [مخفى (invisible)

Here the teacher repeated only the key words of the original question to get the student response.

## ***2. Providing more Explanation and Related Information about the Question and Sometimes Drawing on the Board***

Regarding modifying the questions, the teachers provided additional information or explained the question in detail, as shown in the following examples.

### Excerpt 1 Interview

R: How do you proceed when students are unable to respond to your questions?

T1: ... if the students can't understand I just draw pictures on may be on the white board *just to give further explanation to them that's all..*

T2: ...by *providing clues and suggestions*, and asking each student to respond to the questions on their own.

### Excerpt 2 Lesson 1

T1: (127) what is the meaning of vertical and horizontal?

(128) عكس بعضهن هن (they are opposite each other)

(129) this horizontal and this is vertical. (Draw on the board)

S1: (130) عمودى و (vertical and)

T1: (131) exactly عمودى و افقى (vertical and horizontal)

T1: (132) all of these words keep in your mind (.) all of these words

### Excerpt 3 Lesson 2

T2: (007) ok in picture number one there are two girls here

(008) they are discussing about a problem (.) about what?

(009) they're just walking may be on the beach

(010) and they're just see what? [waste

S5: (011) [waste of oil

In Excerpts 2 and 3, the teachers provided further explanation and additional information about the question in order to get the students' response at the end. Sometimes even drew on the board to get their answer as in extract 2.

### 3. Rewording / Paraphrasing the Question

Modifications of teacher questions through rewording or paraphrasing were evident when teachers made changes but maintained the meaning of the original questions. The following excerpts show this.

- Excerpt 1 Lesson 1  
 T1: (044) what is the purpose of radar?  
 (045) why do we use radar?  
 (046) تعرفو الرادار شنو؟ (do you know what is radar?)  
 S2: (047) yes  
 T1: (048) white screen (.) just screen have a dot  
 S7: (049) to record the speed of the plane may be

- Excerpt 2 Lesson 2  
 T2:(144) عطينا(give us) what can you see from the pictures?  
 S3: (145) newspaper  
 T2: (146) what can you see? The first picture  
 (147) it's like a warning (.) what do you think?  
 S9: (148) warning of overfishing

### 4. Providing Alternatives to the Question

Another modification method that the teacher uses in the classroom is giving choices and alternatives to the question in order to simplify the question for the learners and get the response from them. Students have just chosen the choices presented to them. This is the method clearly illustrated in the following example.

- Excerpt 1 Lesson 1  
 T1: (145) what is the vertical?  
 (146) Vertical؟ افقى او شنو عمودى (what is vertical or horizontal)  
 S6: (147) عمودى (vertical)  
 T1: (148) وينه الفير تكل هذا او هذا؟ (which one is vertical this or this)  
 T1: (149) which the vertical number 1 or 2?  
 S6: (150) number 1  
 T1: (151) yes, number 1, this is the vertical

### 5. Code-Switching and Translation into L1

Sometimes the teacher applies another modification technique using the students' native language. They used this technique when they encountered misunderstandings or students seemed confused. Sometimes the teacher relies on translating the question by converting it into the students' original language, which is Arabic. They also provide explanations in Arabic as a useful mechanism to get the answer from the students. The following excerpts illustrate this technique.

#### Excerpt 1 Interview

R: Do you use translation or the mother tongue?

T2: Mother tongue yeah sometimes I... translate for them for example I give them something in English and the mother language the basic, the first language for us is Arabic sometimes yeah I translate for them especially the meaning if I will give them new words...I can't give them the meaning in English may be some teachers give them examples, I put the words in examples in sentences but I think more of them just to write Arabic translation for them.

T1: certainly, I believe that we should convert to Arabic, but you know that instruction is usually given in English. So that in order to facilitate greater understanding and clarification, I must explain a few things in Arabic.

#### Excerpt 2 Lesson 1

T1: (127) what is the meaning of vertical and horizontal?

(128) عكس بعضهن هن (they are opposite each other)

(129) this horizontal and this is vertical. (Draw on the board)

S1: (130) عمودى و (vertical and)

T1: (131) exactly عمودى و افقى (vertical and horizontal)

T1: (132) all of these words keep in your mind (.) all of these words

#### Excerpt 3 Lesson 2

T2: (027) which density higher the oil or the water?

(028) ايهما اعلى كثافته (which density higher)

S8: (029) the oil

It appears from the interview and lessons that the teachers used the Arabic language to clarify the questions to obtain an answer from the students who failed to answer them.

## 6. Identifying Students' names to Answer

Assigning student names to answer is one way to modify questions to get students to answer. The following excerpts demonstrates this technique.

- Excerpt 1      Lesson 2  
T2: (201)      Ok now do exercise B  
         (202)      put the words in correct order to make sentence with relative clause  
         (203)      what do you think?  
         (204)      first sentence Fatima (.) or Asma anyone able to speak  
         (205)      yes the first sentence

- Excerpt 2      Interview  
R:      When students are unable to answer your questions, what steps do you do next?  
T2:      ... and I asked the students individually to answer the questions.  
T1:      mmm...I call upon students one by one...actually, I nominate other students when I could not elicit a correct answer from the student being questioned.

## 5. Discussion

The findings of this study were discussed with reference to the two research questions. Although this study provides two main findings regarding the roles of EFL teacher questions and question modification techniques, all findings can be extensively discussed in more detail. The first important aspect that emerged in this study involves the IRE pattern of significant interaction which Cazden (2001: 53) considered “the default pattern of classroom discourse”. Although each observed lesson consists of several stages, the initiation or opening of each stage tends to be a question. It was also revealed in this study that display questions were the types mostly preferred by the teachers in both classes, and the I-R-F pattern was the dominant interactional pattern found in the classroom. This result was similar with the previous studies which revealed that teachers use I-R-F pattern, and ask more display questions than referential questions (Vivekmetakorn & Thamma, 2015; Esmailibavili et al., 2023).

The first question explored the roles of EFL teacher questions in Libyan secondary classroom discourse. Based on observations and interviews, it

became clear that questions were varied and had a number of different roles following the context where they occurred. The analysis indicated that the common roles of teachers questions are to introduce the lesson; to assess students' background knowledge; to assess students' understanding; to elicit students' ideas, guesses, and imagination ; and to interact with students. Based on the previous studies these results seemed to be relatively relevant to other studies conducted on EFL classroom discourse, for example the study made by Vivekmetakorn and Thamma (2015), Darong, et al. (2021), and Darong (2022) argued that questions were functioning in a number of different ways which reflect teacher's ways to utilize questions and put their students actively, through their responses in meaning negotiation process or sequence of talk. These findings also in some ways corresponded to the results of Al-Zahrani and Al-Barji (2017), and Eshkal (2019) that the teacher questioning create interaction in the Libyan and Saudi Arabian classrooms.

The second question explored how the teacher modify and simplify the questions when the students' lack of response. The analysis revealed that the teachers make several attempts to obtain answers from students. The teachers re-initiated with a repetition of the original questions; provided further clarification and relevant information about the question; made structural and lexical modifications to the original questions; asked alternative questions; code-switching and translation into L1; and determine the names of the students to answer. These results were consistent with the findings of Vivekmetakorn and Thamma (2015) where modifying the questions was aimed at eliciting answers from students and engaging them in classroom interaction. Code switching and translation into the L1 was also used by Libyan teachers as a modification technique in this study. This result was in line with Adriosh and Razi's (2019) finding that teachers adopted L1 code-switching in Libyan EFL classroom to provide clarification of complex L2 input to their students.

The second aspect of this study concerns scaffolding. As discussed by Danise (2001), there are two levels of scaffolding - macro scaffolding and micro scaffolding. How the EFL teachers who were participants in this study modified their questions can be viewed as micro scaffolding techniques. Danise (2001) stated that micro scaffolding was employed during teacher-student verbal interaction and was mostly in the form of modeling, using visual aids, incorporating gestures, adjusting speech, as well as providing input through additional channels.

## 6. Conclusion

The present qualitative study investigated Libyan EFL teachers' questioning roles and question modification techniques. This study relied on the conversation analysis of audio-recording of classroom interaction between two teachers and their students and conducted interviews with the teachers at Al-Entesar secondary school, Zliten, Libya. The findings indicated that questions are important in EFL classroom interaction and serve many different roles. However, modifications to the original questions that teachers used to elicit students responses suggested that teachers attempted to engage students in interaction and lead them to higher level of cognitive ability.

The results of the study also have significant pedagogical implications within the Libyan Ministry of Education. It is important to raise Libyan teachers' awareness of all types of questions and how these different types of questions can be used strategically in EFL classroom to engage students, check understanding, promote critical thinking, and generate interaction. This can be achieved by conducting training in modifying questions to make students interact with the teacher and providing the support that EFL students need in order to participate verbally in the classroom.

In conclusion, the current study demonstrated further evidence that teachers' questions can play a significant role in enhancing interaction in EFL classes. Furthermore, it provided insights into question modification techniques used by EFL teachers to create teacher-student relationships and enhance students' use of English in verbal interaction.

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