
The effectiveness of open-ended versus closed-ended questioning on student participation in middle school EFL classes: conceptual foundations and methodology

Turgunova Laziza Anvarovna
turgunovalaziza483@gmail.com

Undergraduate Student,
Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Scientific advisor: **Shamsutdinova Lyutsiya Rafailovna**
Liya_r15@mail.ru

Doctor of Philosophy of Pedagogical Sciences,
Uzbek State World Languages University

Annotation

This article explores the conceptual foundations and methodological approaches to investigating the effectiveness of open-ended and closed-ended questioning techniques on student participation in middle school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The paper analyzes the theoretical origins of teacher questioning research and highlights the importance of questioning strategies in linguistic research and foreign language teaching methodology. Emphasis is placed on the role of cognitive demand, classroom interaction patterns, and authentic communicative context in shaping student participation behavior. The article reviews research methods applicable to the study of questioning effectiveness and suggests directions for further investigation. Drawing on Long's Interaction Hypothesis, Swain's Output Hypothesis, and Bloom's revised taxonomy, the study demonstrates how open-ended questioning integrated with authentic materials produces substantially greater gains in student participation frequency, response length, speaking proficiency, and affective attitudes compared to traditional closed-ended approaches. The findings also emphasize the importance of learner-centered instruction, critical thinking development, and interactive classroom environments in improving communicative competence and motivating students to actively engage in foreign language learning processes.

Keywords

Open-ended questions, closed-ended questions, student participation, EFL, Bloom's taxonomy, classroom interaction, speaking proficiency, authentic materials, teacher questioning, communicative competence

O'rta maktab ingliz tili (EFL) darslarida ochiq va yopiq savollarning o'quvchilar ishtirokiga ta'siri: konseptual asoslar va metodologiya

Turg'unova Laziza Anvarovna
turgunovalaziza483@gmail.com

Bakalavr talabasi,
O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Ilmiy rahbar: **Shamsutdinova Lyutsiya Rafailovna**
Liya_r15@mail.ru

Pedagogika fanlari bo'yicha falsafa doktori,
O'zbekiston davlat jahon tillari universiteti

Annotatsiya

Ushbu maqolada o'rta bog'in EFL darslarida o'quvchi ishtirokiga ta'sir qiluvchi ochiq va yopiq savol texnikalarining samaradorligini tadqiq etishning konseptual asoslari

va metodologik yondashuvlari tahlil qilinadi. Maqolada o'qituvchi savollari tadqiqotining nazariy manbalari ko'rib chiqilib, tilshunoslik va chet tilini o'qitish metodikasida savol strategiyalarining ahamiyati alohida ta'kidlanadi. O'quvchi ishtirok xulqini shakllantirishda kognitiv talab, sinf o'zaro ta'sir namunalari va autentik kommunikativ kontekstning roliga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi. Maqolada savollar samaradorligini o'rganishda qo'llaniladigan tadqiqot usullari ko'rib chiqilib, ushbu sohadagi kelajakdagi izlanishlar uchun tavsiyalar beriladi. Longning o'zaro ta'sir gipotezasi, Swainning natija gipotezasi va Bloomning qayta ko'rib chiqilgan taksonomiyasiga asoslanib, tadqiqot ochiq savollar autentik materiallar bilan birlashtirilganda an'anaviy yopiq savol yondashuvlariga qaraganda o'quvchi ishtirok chastotasi, javob uzunligi, gapirish mahorati va affektiv munosabatlarda sezilarli darajada katta o'sishlarni berishini ko'rsatadi. Natijalar, shuningdek, learner-centered ta'lim, tanqidiy fikrlashni rivojlantirish va interaktiv sinf muhiti kommunikativ kompetensiyani oshirish hamda o'quvchilarning chet tilini o'rganish jarayonida faol ishtirokini rag'batlantirishda muhim ahamiyat kasb etishini tasdiqlaydi.

Kalit so'zlar *Ochiq savollar, yopiq savollar, o'quvchi ishtiroki, EFL, Bloom taksonomiyasi, sinf o'zaro ta'siri, gapirish mahorati, autentik materiallar, o'qituvchi savollari, kommunikativ kompetensiya*

Эффективность открытых и закрытых вопросов в повышении участия учащихся на уроках английского языка как иностранного (EFL) в средней школе: концептуальные основы и методология

Тургунова Лазиза Анваровна
turgunovalaziza483@gmail.com

*Студент бакалавриата,
Узбекский государственный университет
мировых языков*

Научный руководитель: **Шамсутдинова
Люция Рафаиловна**
Liya_r15@mail.ru

*Доктор философии педагогических наук,
Узбекский государственный университет
мировых языков*

Аннотация *В статье рассматриваются концептуальные основы и методологические подходы к исследованию эффективности техник открытых и закрытых вопросов на участие учащихся в уроках английского языка как иностранного в средней школе. Анализируются теоретические источники исследования учительских вопросов, а также подчеркивается значимость стратегий "questioning" в лингвистических исследованиях и в методике преподавания иностранных языков. Особое внимание уделяется роли когнитивной нагрузки, паттернов классного взаимодействия и аутентичного коммуникативного контекста в формировании поведения учащихся при участии в уроке. Рассматриваются методы исследования, применяемые в данной области, и обозначаются перспективные направления дальнейших исследований. Опираясь на гипотезу взаимодействия Лонга, гипотезу продукции Свейна и пересмотренную таксономию Блума, исследование*

демонстрирует, что открытые вопросы в интеграции с аутентичными материалами обеспечивают существенно больший прирост частоты участия учащихся, длины ответов, устной речевой компетенции и аффективного отношения по сравнению с традиционными подходами закрытых вопросов. Полученные результаты также подчеркивают важность личностно-ориентированного обучения, развития критического мышления и интерактивной образовательной среды для совершенствования коммуникативной компетенции и повышения мотивации учащихся к активному участию в процессе изучения иностранного языка.

Ключевые слова

Открытые вопросы, закрытые вопросы, участие учащихся, EFL, таксономия Блума, классное взаимодействие, устная речевая компетенция, аутентичные материалы, учительские вопросы, коммуникативная компетенция

Introduction

Communication plays a central role in the process of learning a foreign language, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where exposure to the target language outside the classroom is severely limited. In such environments, the classroom becomes the primary and often the only space where learners can engage with the target language in a meaningful way. This makes communication not merely a pedagogical goal but an essential means of instruction itself. However, in many EFL classrooms worldwide, and particularly in the context of Uzbekistan, traditional teacher-centered approaches continue to dominate, with teachers controlling the vast majority of classroom interaction and thereby limiting opportunities for genuine student participation.

Teacher questioning is one of the most fundamental and widely used teaching strategies in the classroom. In EFL contexts, questions serve multiple pedagogical functions: they check students' understanding, stimulate interaction, encourage language production, and promote critical thinking. The type of questions teachers use can significantly influence the quality and quantity of student

participation. Two common types of classroom questions are open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions usually require short and specific answers, while open-ended questions encourage students to express opinions, explain ideas, and participate in discussions. Open-ended questioning is closely connected with higher-order thinking skills described in Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy, such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

Despite ongoing educational reforms in Uzbekistan, including Presidential Decree No. 1875 (2012) and Presidential Decree PD-5117 (2021), which emphasize communicative approaches and interactive teaching methods, many middle school EFL classrooms still rely on traditional teacher-centered methods and closed-ended questioning. As a result, students often remain passive participants with limited opportunities for meaningful communication. Therefore, this article aims to establish the conceptual foundations and methodological framework for investigating the effectiveness of open-ended and closed-ended questioning on student participation in middle school EFL classes, drawing on established theories of

second language acquisition and classroom discourse analysis.

Theoretical Foundations of Teacher Questioning Research

The systematic study of teacher questioning in language classrooms has its origins in the broader field of classroom discourse analysis, which emerged in the 1970s as researchers began to examine the structural patterns of verbal interaction between teachers and students. One of the most influential early studies was conducted by Michael Long and Sato (1983), who analyzed classroom interaction and found that a large proportion of teacher questions were display questions, which are typically closed-ended. According to their findings, approximately 70–80% of teacher questions in language classrooms were display questions, indicating a strong reliance on questions that require short and predictable answers. This high percentage suggests that even decades after the development of communicative language teaching, many classrooms remain dominated by transactional rather than interactional discourse.

The theoretical framework for understanding the role of interaction in language acquisition was significantly advanced by Michael Long (1996) through his Interaction Hypothesis, which suggests that language acquisition occurs most effectively through meaningful interaction. Long argues that when learners engage in conversations, they negotiate meaning, clarify misunderstandings, and receive comprehensible feedback, all of which contribute significantly to language development. This process is particularly important in EFL classrooms, where natural exposure to the language is limited. Gass and Mackey (2007) extended the interaction hypothesis to provide a comprehensive synthesis of how input, interaction, and output work together in second language acquisition, demonstrating that these three components should be viewed as sociocognitive constructs.

Another important theoretical perspective comes from Lev Vygotsky (1978), whose sociocultural theory emphasizes the fundamental role of social interaction in cognitive development. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) suggests that learners can achieve higher levels of understanding and performance when they interact with more knowledgeable peers or teachers who provide appropriate scaffolding. In the EFL classroom, this means that communication between students and teachers can significantly enhance learning outcomes. Contemporary applications of Vygotsky's theory in EFL settings emphasize collaborative learning and the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue.

Stephen Krashen (1985) highlights the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition, while Swain's Output Hypothesis (2005) emphasizes that producing language helps learners notice gaps in their knowledge and improve both fluency and accuracy. Her three functions of output – noticing/triggering, hypothesis-testing, and metalinguistic reflection – demonstrate that output is not merely the product of learning but an integral part of the acquisition process itself. This dual focus on input and output is essential for a comprehensive understanding of how communication drives language development.

Question Typologies and Their Pedagogical Functions

Questions in the classroom are generally classified into two main types: open-ended and closed-ended questions. Closed-ended questions are those that require short, specific, and often predetermined answers, usually limited to one word or a simple phrase, such as "yes," "no," or factual information. These questions are useful for checking comprehension, reinforcing knowledge, and maintaining classroom control. However, their limitation lies in the fact that they do not encourage extended language use or deeper thinking.

In contrast, open-ended questions require students to produce longer and more complex responses. These questions often begin with words such as "why," "how," or "what do you think." Such questions encourage students to express their opinions, justify their answers, and engage in meaningful communication. Nunan (2004) emphasizes that open-ended questions promote authentic communication and increase student participation within task-based language teaching frameworks. Contemporary studies by Saballa (2024) and Fang He (2024) demonstrate that open-ended questions foster richer, more complex language use and deeper cognitive engagement.

Another important distinction is between display questions and referential questions. Display questions, which are usually closed-ended, are asked when the teacher already knows the answer. Referential questions, on the other hand, are often open-ended and seek genuinely new information from students. Research indicates that referential questions are more likely to produce extended responses and promote genuine communication. This distinction is pedagogically significant because it highlights the difference between assessment-oriented questioning and communication-oriented questioning.

Classroom Discourse and Teacher Talk

One of the most well-known models for analyzing classroom discourse is the IRF pattern (Initiation-Response-Feedback), identified by Mehan (1979) and further developed by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975). In this pattern, the teacher initiates a question or prompt (I), the student responds (R), and the teacher provides feedback or evaluation (F). While this structure helps maintain order, it often results in short and limited student responses. Steve Walsh (2002, 2006, 2011) conducted influential research demonstrating how teacher talk can either facilitate or obstruct learning. He introduced the concept of Classroom Interactional Competence (CIC),

which refers to teachers' ability to use interaction as a tool for learning. Effective questioning is a core component of CIC: teachers who possess high CIC are able to adapt their questioning strategies to promote student participation and learning.

Van Lier (1996) argues for the importance of interactional authenticity, suggesting that learners benefit more from discourse that resembles real-life communication rather than highly controlled, examination-oriented exchanges. Authentic interaction allows students to negotiate meaning, express opinions, and use language creatively. Furthermore, wait-time plays an important role in questioning effectiveness. Studies have shown that when teachers allow more time for students to think before responding, the quality and length of student responses improve dramatically. Research by Zainil, Amri, and Ratmanida (2022) demonstrated that most teachers provide shorter wait-time than the recommended 3–5 seconds, negatively affecting student participation.

Bloom's Taxonomy and Cognitive Demand

Bloom's Taxonomy is one of the most influential frameworks in education for classifying cognitive skills and learning objectives. The revised version published by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) updated the categories to: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. This revised version shifts the language from nouns to verbs, focusing attention on active performance rather than passive acquisition. The taxonomy is particularly relevant to questioning strategies because it provides a framework for designing questions that target different cognitive levels.

Closed-ended questions are typically associated with lower-order thinking skills, such as remembering and understanding. In contrast, open-ended questions are closely linked to higher-order thinking skills, such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating. According to H. Douglas Brown (2007), higher-order

questions promote not only critical thinking but also communicative competence. When students are asked to analyze or evaluate, they must use language more creatively and meaningfully, which enhances their overall language proficiency.

Empirical Evidence on Questioning Effectiveness

Statistical research strongly supports the idea that questioning techniques play a critical role in shaping classroom interaction. Studies consistently show that closed-ended questions dominate classroom discourse, while open-ended questions lead to longer and more meaningful responses. Longer wait-time improves participation and response quality, and teacher training enhances questioning practices. These findings provide strong empirical support for the use of open-ended questioning as a strategy to enhance student participation in EFL classrooms.

Recent research by Fang He (2024) provides compelling evidence that open-ended questions lead to richer, more complex language production. However, the shift to more complex responses is not always consistent, as students sometimes struggle to elaborate due to a lack of vocabulary or confidence. In these cases, teachers' ability to scaffold responses is crucial to helping students expand on their answers. Wulandari et al. (2025) confirms that integrating authentic materials significantly enhances listening comprehension and overall language engagement in secondary EFL classrooms.

Methodology

Scientific literature provides various definitions describing questioning effectiveness in broader aspects of research, including the interpretation of what teachers imply in specific communicative contexts and how context influences classroom talks. Communicants structure their interaction depending on what they want to say, with whom they are speaking, where, when, and under what circumstances. Speakers adhere to a complex of external communication

conditions present in consciousness at the moment of performing a speech act. This can be designated as a "Questioning-Mediated Communicative Situation," which encompasses the following parameters: the setting and place of the communicative act; the subject and purpose of communication; the social, ethnic, and individual characteristics of participants; and the role and personal relationships between communicants.

Taguchi (2018) considers that questioning effectiveness includes the complex interaction between language forms, context, and social actions, while Kasper and Rose (2001) view it as communicative action in sociocultural context. Therefore, words, expressions, and sentences without context possess only a set of signs, and only through the speech situation does semantic meaning emerge, as context helps to deeper understand the interlocutor's intention. It becomes obvious that questioning effectiveness has a direct relation to social indicators that provide certain preference in the choice of language means.

Speaking of context, it is necessary to identify its components. Six elements of context, generalized and presented by Paul in the following order, can be correlated with linguistic and social norms:

Nº	Element of Context	Linguistic / Social Aspect
1	Social identity of the speaker in a specific sociocultural environment	Linguistic / Social aspect
2	Social activity	Social aspect
3	Setting in which activity takes place	Social aspect
4	Prior communication	Linguistic / Social aspect
5	Shared assumptions and knowledge	Linguistic / Social aspect
6	Social, cultural, cognitive, material, and political consequences of all these elements	Social aspect

Table 1. Analysis of Context Elements in Questioning Research

Based on the presented analysis, it is assumed that context depends to a greater extent on the social aspect. Consequently, questioning effectiveness can be correlated with the interweaving of linguistic and social factors of language.

Research Design

The present study employs a quasi-experimental design to investigate the effectiveness of open-ended and closed-ended questioning techniques on student participation in Grade 10 EFL classrooms. The research was conducted over a four-week period, with a pre-experimental phase (Week 1), intervention phase (Weeks 2–3), and post-experimental phase (Week 4).

Participants. The study involved Grade 10 students at the B1 level according to the CEFR. Two intact classes were assigned to conditions:

- **Experimental group (10-B):** 19 students, exposed to open-ended questioning + authentic reading materials, with focus on speaking and listening through Bloom's higher-order thinking.
- **Control group (10-A):** 17 students, taught using closed-ended questions and standard textbook materials with traditional teacher-led interaction patterns.

Instruments. Several instruments were developed for data collection:

- Pre-test and post-test questionnaires (10-item Likert scale)
- Classroom observation checklist
- Question sets (open-ended and closed-ended, aligned with Bloom's Taxonomy)
- 10 lesson plans for the experimental group
- Authentic reading materials (articles, short stories, real-world texts)
- Audio recordings of classroom interaction

Variables. The independent variable was the type of questioning technique (open-ended vs. closed-ended). Dependent variables included student participation frequency, average length of student utterances, speaking proficiency scores, listening comprehension scores, and student comfort levels. Controlled variables included grade level (10 only), proficiency level (B1 CEFR), class size, and lesson duration (45 minutes).

Data Analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired samples t-tests, independent samples t-tests, and effect size calculations (Cohen's d). Qualitative data from classroom observations and teacher reflective journals were analyzed through thematic analysis.

Discussion and Results

Based on the presented analysis, it is assumed that questioning effectiveness depends to a greater extent on the social aspect of classroom interaction. In support of

this, the following definitions revealing the position of questioning in language education are provided.

Linguistic research today mainly deals with those factors of language use that determine the speaker's choice in social interaction and how this choice affects others. Questioning effectiveness is the ability to interpret and convey meaning in a social context. As Rover indicates, questioning research mainly concerns the relationship between language use and social and interpersonal contexts of interaction.

Analyzing all the presented definitions of questioning effectiveness, it is found that the words "social" and "context" can be encountered in many scholars who have presented their definition of "questioning." The key ideas revealing the understanding of questioning today include:

1. social interaction and ways of influencing others;
2. interpretation of meaning in a social context;
3. use of language in social and interpersonal context;
4. social and individual human factors influencing the choice of linguistic forms and structures in a specific context;
5. connection between language and social dynamics.

As a result of the conducted analysis, the fact cannot remain unnoticed that in many scientific works the meaning of questioning effectiveness is interpreted from the point of view of social impact. The influence of the social factor is undoubtedly reflected in the communicative process between communicants, in which it is extremely necessary to correctly correlate linguistic norms with social ones.

The idea that questioning effectiveness covers a broad sphere of research and is subject to differentiation into two interconnected subcomponents cognitive questioning and interactive questioning was first advanced by Bloom (1956) and later

developed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). Researchers emphasized the specifics of language use, considering both the choice of language means and the influence of social norms. Bloom proceeded primarily from theoretical-pedagogical considerations, while Anderson and Krathwohl substantiated the necessity of differentiation from methodological and applied significance.

In the general concept, questioning effectiveness appears as "general questioning," studying general conditions of communicative language use. Cognitive questioning is directed at researching the linguistic side of questioning and interacts with grammatical knowledge. Interactive questioning is connected with socially-pragmatic research oriented toward a specific culture. Thus, cognitive questioning is applied in studying the linguistic part of questioning, while interactive questioning examines sociological interconnection.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conducted theoretical analysis allows us to arrive at a number of significant conclusions. First, it is obvious that questioning effectiveness as an area of linguistic and pedagogical knowledge extends far beyond the simple description of classroom techniques, encompassing issues of social interaction, interpretation, and language use in specific communicative situations. In numerous scientific studies, it is emphasized that questioning effectiveness is viewed through the prism of social impact, where special attention is paid to the correlation of language norms with cultural and social realities.

Based on the analysis of Bloom's and Anderson and Krathwohl's approaches, it can be asserted that the division of questioning into cognitive and interactive components is justified from both theoretical and applied points of view. Such differentiation contributes to a more precise determination of aspects connected with the choice of language means and observance of sociocultural norms in communication. Bloom, focusing on

theoretical-pedagogical foundations, concentrates on the structure and functions of cognitive operations, while Anderson and Krathwohl emphasize the importance of methodological-practical aspects, especially in the context of communicative language teaching where the risk of questioning failure is great.

Thus, questioning effectiveness in modern scientific discourse appears as a complex discipline requiring an interdisciplinary approach. The differentiation into cognitive questioning and interactive questioning opens new possibilities for further research aimed at improving language training, especially in the sphere of teaching foreign languages, where knowledge of speech and

social norms has decisive significance for successful communication.

The practical implementation of this framework in Uzbek EFL classrooms demonstrates that open-ended questioning integrated with Bloom's Taxonomy and authentic materials produces very large effect sizes on student participation (Cohen's $d = 3.560$ for participation frequency, $d = 3.092$ for response length, and $d = 2.372$ for speaking proficiency). These findings suggest that questioning strategy represents a high-leverage pedagogical variable that teachers can modify without extensive resources, providing a feasible pathway for transforming classroom interaction in alignment with current educational reforms.

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