
Variety of Questions in English Online Courses. The Case of the University Of Yaounde I

Hagbe Edwige Damaris (PhD)

St Theresa Higher Catholic Institute of Yaounde (INUCASTY) Yaounde, Cameroon

Corresponding Author: Hagbe Edwige Damaris **E-mail:** hdamaris2003@yahoo.fr

ARTICLE INFO

Received: June 08th, 2023
Accepted: August 10th, 2023
Published: August 14th, 2023
Volume: 1
No: 1 (2023)
DOI:

KEYWORDS

variety, questions, key,
online, English

ABSTRACT

Over the centuries, educationists and psychologists from different nationalities have been concerned about how to make English language lessons more interesting. John Dewey, often known as the ancestor of constructivism, proposed an integrated approach to teaching. Castling (1996) suggests that teachers must use a wide range of teaching aids and language resources to create and sustain motivation. Harmer (2000) advises teachers to make use of a variety of techniques, materials and activities in order to keep learners engaged and interested. Tchombe (2004) contends that no single method can be appropriate to guarantee reasonable learning outcomes, so she recommends the eclectic method or variety. This clearly means that, more than the spice of life, variety remains the spice of lessons because it fights effectively against boredom. The present paper seeks to raise awareness about the importance of variety in terms of questions during English online classes where the main motivator is physically absent. It equally aims at identifying the different questions asked by the teacher as well as their various pedagogic and pragmatic functions during Year 1 & 2 English tutorials in 2021. As far as the research methodology is concerned, direct classroom observation and interviews have been done to collect data in four WhatsApp groups, the research setting. In addition, descriptive statistics is used for data analysis. It is important to mention that the linguistic analysis is done in accordance with Austin & Searle's (1962) and Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.

1. Introduction

Traditionally, questioning is central in the context of teaching-learning because it is used in all the stages of a lesson. In essence, questions are asked by teachers to attain numerous ends. Questions are not only designed to elicit a specific answer from the learners but they also fulfill a wide range of pragmatic functions in the classroom, which is a micro society. This clearly means that there is no doubt that questioning lies at the base of teaching/learning. However, proper questioning requires skills and competences on the part of the facilitator who needs to be conscious of their role. This is not always the case in our classes where all the teachers ask questions without being aware of their impact. In this light, Rimmer (2019) highlights the pedagogic importance of questions and warns teachers in general and language teachers in particular not to take questioning for granted: "There is a danger in taking

questioning for granted and assuming that because it is common, it must be good for students and easy for teachers to apply. We understand that teaching questioning is not the easiest thing to do because as Brualdi Timmins (1998) contends that there cannot be bad answers, they are all part of the process of knowledge discovery. In contrast, this author makes clear that there are bad questions that are generally poorly formulated and have little pedagogic value. Research has never disputed the essential function of questioning but it is obvious that not all the questions asked promote learning in the classroom. It is against this backdrop that this topic has stirred our curiosity in the present pandemic era where distance education has become a necessity rather than an option. The present article lays a special emphasis on questioning strategies in English online tutorials in the University of Yaounde I. As an aware-raising piece of research, this work raises the issue of the redundant use of questions by lecturers during online classes.

1.1 The Problem Statement

Over the two last decades, researchers from various origins have paid sustained attention to English language teaching. A good number of scientific works have been chunked by pedagogues: Ur(1996) designed a course in language teaching with an emphasis on practice and theory; Castling(1996) examined the competence-based teaching; Tchombe (2004) explored psychological parameters in teaching; Hagbe (2006) investigated variety in the use of pedagogic methods in EFL lessons in secondary education; Njwe (2016) investigated models and the teaching of English in Cameroon; Rimmer(2019) researched questioning practice in the EFL classroom in USA; Ganesan et al (2020) explored questioning techniques and teachers' role in the classroom and More recently, Yola (2021) investigated questioning as effective tools to enhance students' interaction. These previous studies reveal that English teaching attracts scientific curiosity and there is a pressing need to improve on its teaching daily warrants more research. In addition, it has been noted that a good number of teachers do not significantly vary the types of questions during online tutorials courses and fail to exploit them to boost interaction. As a result, the need to raise awareness on the functions of questioning in a classroom arises in a context where the physical absence of a teacher can easily decrease the motivation to interact.

1.2 The purpose of the study

The present paper aims at reemphasizing the role of a variety of questioning strategies in English classes with a view to:

- identifying the types of questions asked by teachers during online classes
- identify the pragmatic and pedagogic functions of the various questions asked during online classes
- find out if teachers know the types of questions proposed by Bloom

To attain the above objectives, four questions were asked:

1. What types of questions do teachers ask during online classes?
2. What are the pedagogic and pragmatic functions of the questions asked by teachers during online classes?
3. Are most English teachers aware of the types of questions proposed by Bloom ?

4. Do teachers prepare the questions they ask during online tutorials?

1.3 Research Hypothesis

1. Most English tutors are not well versed with the types questions by Bloom.
2. English teachers do not significantly vary the questions they ask during English online classes.
3. The questions asked by teachers have several pragmatic and pedagogic functions.
4. Tutors do not always prepare the questions they ask in class.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Literature Review

English teaching has been thoroughly researched for the two past decades. In Cameroon, Tchombe (2004) studied psychological parameters in teaching and stressed the critical role of variety in terms of pedagogic methods to maximize learning and increase students 'motivation. In a similar wise, Hagbe (2006) examined the pedagogic benefits of variety in the use of teaching/learning strategies and found out that variety increases students' motivation, develops the communicative competence and makes English classes enjoyable. Njwe (2016) investigated language models and the teaching of ELT in secondary education and his findings revealed that in Cameroon, the overwhelming majority of teachers admitted that they cannot confidently implement CBA because they have not mastered it during seminars. Abroad, the concern of language researchers is the ongoing quest for improvement. For instance, Gall (1970) researched the use of questions in teaching; from empirical data, he drew the conclusion that the quality of the questions determines both the students' engagement and the learning outcomes in the class. Similarly, Rimmer (2019) explored the patterns of questions used by EFL teachers in class to attain their pedagogic aims. He found out that several questions are used to attain different pedagogic ends. Ganesan et al (2020) investigated the questioning techniques used by teachers and assessed its efficacy in the EFL class they drew the conclusion that questions are the best tools for achieving goals. First, they can stimulate the students' mental abilities, then drive them to clear ideas, stir imagination and increase motivation. Yola (2021) studied questioning as an effective tool to enhance students 'interaction in the classroom. The results of the study revealed that questions, when appropriately asked, enhance interaction and promote effective learning.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The present paper is ground in the speech act theory which has to do with analysing performative acts by emphasizing the illocutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary in each situation. Austin & Searle (1962) as well as Searle (1969). The speech acts theory considers utterances as acts and it looks at the various things or actions done with language in each language. In the context of this study, the theory adopted is used to analyse what is said (the questions), the real intended meaning as well as the effects of the questions on the students. Another theory that will guide the data analysis is Bloom's taxonomy which classifies the questions in any pedagogic interaction.

2.3 Research Methodology

The data was collected directly from the whatsapp groups of first-year and second-year classes. Then, it was analysed using descriptive statistics. The analysis was purely pragmatic: questions were identified and grouped into categories; then, their functions were highlighted. The sample considered for the present research comprises 12 teachers teaching two first-year and two second-year classes made up of 80 students each. Among the informants, 8 teachers were trained and 4 were untrained. 12 two-hour sessions were observed and a total of 24 hours were recorded in three weeks. After classes, all the English teachers were interviewed in the Department and their answers are tabulated in the present paper. All the lecturers who took part in this study were teaching first-year and second-year classes. In general, first-year classes were taking place in The morning and second-year classes in the afternoon . The data is presented in figures and tables.

3. Presentation and Analysis Of Data

The present section deals with the findings; they are classified into the types of questions that were asked by teachers during online classes, the pragmatic functions of these questions, teachers' knowledge of the types of questions and their functions in class and strategies used by teachers to enhance students' participation in the online classes and teachers' opinions on the impact of questions on students 'interactions.

3.1 The types of questions asked by teachers during online courses

The analysis of the lecturer-students exchanges in the twelve online lessons used in this study revealed that the English teachers used two types of questions to enhance students' participation in the two first-year classes as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: questions by teachers identified in the first-year online courses

Questions	Classes			
	first-year a	%	first -year b	%
Knowledge-based	45	52%	25	28%
Evaluation	40	47%	10	20%

The table above gives a global account of the types of questions used by the lecturers targeted for this study; the data tabulated reveals that there is no significant degree of variety in terms of questions. Considering Bloom's taxonomy of education, it is obvious that only two questions out of six were frequently used by lecturers during the 12 lessons observed. Despite the recommendation of Bloom in his taxonomy, we realized that only two types of questions out to six were used by the teachers; 52% of the questions asked during tutorials in the first-year classes were knowledge-based questions; So , there is no significant degree of variety in the four classes observed . The results of classroom observation

were interestingly the same in the two second year classes we observed as can be seen on Table 2 that follows.

Table 2: The questions identified in second-year online classes

Questions	second - year Classes			
	second -year a	%	second year b	%
Knowledge-based	35	55%	35	85%
Evaluation	30	45%	20	15%
Total	65	100	55	100

The results from class observation of 10 lessons in year 2 indicate that lecturers of year 2 like those of Year 1 did not vary the types of questions they asked during online lessons. To find out whether the lecturers who take part in this study, they were asked if they significantly vary the questions they ask in class; the results are presented on table three below corroborate those of the interviews. The lecturers were asked if they often make effort to vary the types of questions, they ask during online English lessons: their answers are presented in the table that follows:

Table 3: teachers' answers about the variety of questions during their online tutorials

teachers	first-year classes	second-year classes	total	%
Often	05	04	04	33.33
Sometimes	00	00	00	00
Never	07	08	08	66,66
03	12	12	12	100

The results of the interview show that almost all the teachers interviewed in the context of this study said they often vary the types of questions. However, when asked if they have ever heard about Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives, 04 out of the 12 teachers said they heard about it. Surprisingly, only 2 out of the four trained teachers who said they heard about Bloom's classification of questions, could name the questions' types. Their answers show that almost all the lecturers who were teaching first-year and second-year courses of English tutorials we observed for five weeks. They were not aware of Bloom's classification of questions. This probably accounts for the fact that many trained teachers overlook questions' planning and continuous professional development. They had a vague notion of the types and aims of question during lessons. It was observed that though the questions were logically asked, most of them were not carefully prepared. The third question of the interview was framed to find

out whether the tutors involved in the online classes considered for this study generally prepared their lessons and questions ; the findings are presented in the figure below.

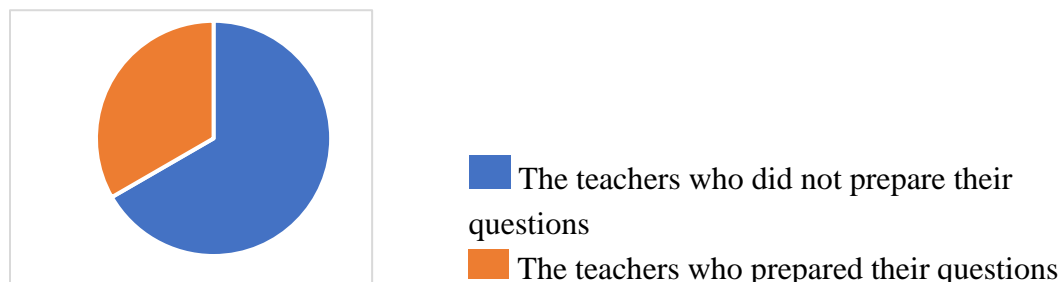


Figure 1: frequency of questions' planning in first -year online classes

The findings from the figure above reveal that 8 teachers representing 66.66 % of first-year classes' lecturers interviewed during the survey admitted they do not often prepare their questions. This can then explain the reason why they did not vary the types of questions asked in class. Lesson planning enables teachers to think carefully about all the aspects of the lesson to be taught because questions are both a means and an end in teaching learning; The same questions was asked to second -year classes ' teachers considered for the study and four teachers said they always carefully prepare each of their lessons including the questions. The figure below presents the frequency of questions preparation during the online lessons observed:

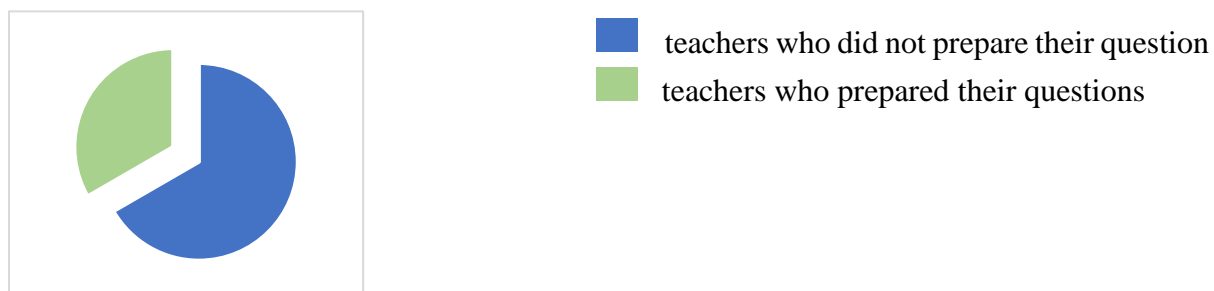


Figure 2: frequency of questions' planning by teachers of second-year classes

Unlike the first-year lecturers who took part in this study, 7 teachers representing 70% of the second-year online tutors said they never prepared their lessons and questions. It should be highlighted that all the second-year online tutors who said they always prepare their questions were trained high school teachers who were pursuing their doctoral studies in the English Department of the Higher Institution where we carried out the present research. Similarly 5 teachers representing 30% of the tutors who said they do not prepare the questions they ask during their lessons were not trained teachers and when asked about Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives and admitted they have never heard about it. Hence, it is obvious that the use of questions requires some pedagogic background with a view to improving on online lessons and maximise the learner's engagement and results in class.

Another reason behind the low exploitation of types of questions during online classes is ignorance because among the 4 trained teachers who took part of the study, only 2 could confidently name the six types of questions recommended by Bloom in his taxonomy of educational objectives for maximal learning; However, all the teachers who took part in the interview were conversant with wh questions, yes/no questions, tag questions and rhetorical questions. Only two teachers could satisfactorily say the aim of each type of question they used in class.

3.2. *The pragmatic and pedagogic functions of the questions asked by online tutors*

One of the objectives of the present study was to identify the acts performed with questions during online tutorials. An analysis of the corpus revealed that the pedagogic functions of the questions asked by teachers are multiple as shown in the table below.

Table 4 : teachers responses on the types and functions of the questions used during online classes

Classes	Types of questions	Pragmatic /pedagogic functions	Examples
first -year	Knowledge -based questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For revision - To check understanding 	Do you remember what a concentric circle is ?
			What is the difference between a clause and a sentence ?
	Evaluation questions	To check that the objectives of the lesson have been attained	Can you then give some examples of Indo-European languages ?
second-year	Knowledge-based questions	To help students remember their lessons	What is semantic meaning of words ?
	Evaluation questions	To assess the notions taught	Can you then name some of the key theoreticians of politeness theories ?

From the teachers answers in the table above, we understand that only three out of the six questions recommended by Bloom were used by lecturers during the online English lessons observed. In fact, the findings of the present study show that there is no significant degree of variety of questions during English lessons because knowledge-based questions were generally used by the first -year and second-year lecturers to help learners revise and check the degree of understanding of the lessons. In addition, such questions were used by the lecturers who took part in this study to verify the knowledge acquired by learners within a time frame. Finally, evaluation questions were used by lecturers at the end of the online lessons we observed. The teachers' answers were similar to the results of the class observation. The conclusion drawn is that teachers who were part of our sample for this study did not use several

types of questions; this can be accounted by the fact that most of them were not aware of the various types of questions and their pedagogic functions .8 out of 12 teachers said that they do not know Bloom's taxonomy of education. In addition, they admitted that they did not often carefully plan the questions they asked before their classes. This could then explain why they only asked two out the six types of questions proposed by Bloom.

4. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to find out if there is a significant degree of variety in terms of questions during online tutorials observed in 2021 in the English Department of the University of Yaounde I. Specifically, it aimed at identifying the types of questions asked by 12 first-year and second- year classes lecturers during online English courses; In addition, another objective of this study was to know whether the selected lecturers were conversant with the types of questions proposed by Bloom in his *Taxonomy of Educational objectives* .The study consisted in observing the lessons to take stock of the questions used. The findings have shown that 66, 66% of the selected lecturers during tutorials ignored Bloom's classification of questions as well as their pedagogic functions; This can explain why only two types of questions were frequently asked during the online tutorials we observed for three weeks. It was equally found out during the interview that they did not carefully prepare the questions they asked during online tutorials. This results in the use of two types of questions without clear and specific aim. This can be explained by the fact that only 4 out of the 12 online teachers were well versed with pedagogy and didactics. 8 tutors who were untrained said they had never heard of Bloom and could only talk about yes/no, Wh, tag questions and rhetorical. These respondents could hardly explain the rationale behind the use of each type of question they asked. This therefore implies that different types of questions need to be asked because variety impacts the quality of teacher-student class interaction. This article is therefore aware-raising and places variety at the heart of online teaching in a context where in-person teaching is gradually giving way to digital teaching, which is more demanding in terms of quality, content and methodology. Finally, it is obvious that variety, as the spice of life , must be considered when teaching. As recommendations, we can advise teachers to make sure they prepare the questions they will ask in order to have more impact. English teachers should include several questions knowledge based, recall, evaluation, analytical which are high -order questions in order to enhance the interactive and thinking skills of the learners.Finally, teachers must be aware of the fact that monotony is a cause of demotivation and poor performances; It shall therefore be dealt with.

References

- Austin, J & Searle, J (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: OUP
- Bloom, B (1956) *Taxonomy of Educational objectives, handbook I :Cognitive domain* .NewYork David McKay
- Brualdi Timmins, A (1998). Classroom Questions, *Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation*. Vol 6(6)
- Castling, A (1996) *The Competence -based Teaching and training*. Macmillan: City & Guilds
- Gall, M .D (1970) “The use of questions in teaching” in *Review of Educational Research*, vol 40, I (5) pp 707-721
- Ganesan, S et al (2020) “questioning techniques and teachers’ role in the classroom” in *International Journal of Education*, Vol 8, (4) PP 45-49
- Hagbe, E (2006) Variety of teaching/learning strategies in English Language Classes: the case of two highschools in Yaounde, DIPES II unpublished dissertation, ENS Yaounde
- Harmer, J (1982) *The Practice of English language Teaching* .Oxford : Longman
- Njwe, A (2016). “Language Models and the Teaching of English to Secondary Schools in Cameroon”. *World Journal of Education*. Vol 6(2), pp50-67
- Rimmer, W (2019) “Questioning Practice in the EFL Classroom” in *Training Language and Culture*. vol 3, (1), pp53 -72
- Searle. J (1969) *Speech acts: an Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: CUP
- Tchombe, T (2004) *Psychological Parameters in Teaching* .Yaounde :Presse Universitaire d’Afrique
- Ur, P (1996). *A Course in Language Teaching: Practice and Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge Teacher Training and Development
- Yola, I (2021) “Questioning as an effective tool to enhance classroom interaction” in *South Florida Journal of Development* ,vol 2, N 2 , PP3510-3520