

Questioning Strategies on Enhancing Critical Comprehension Skills in 354 Juniou High School

Elizabeth G. Enano^{a*} Sherill A. Gilbas, PhD^b

**Elizabeth.gacos@deped.gov.ph*

^aDepartment of Education, Gubat National High School, Gubat Sorsogon, 4710, Philippines

^bSorsogon State University, Graduate Studies, Sorsogon City, 4700, Philippines

Abstract

This study investigates the impact of questioning strategies on enhancing the critical comprehension skills of junior high school students, particularly in the context of Gubat National High School in the Philippines. The research focuses on analyzing the different questioning techniques employed by English teachers to promote critical thinking, reading comprehension, and deeper engagement with the learning material. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study involved audio-recorded classroom observations and thematic analysis of teachers' questioning strategies. The findings suggest that effective questioning, including sequential questioning, personal reflection, and higher-order thinking, can significantly improve students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information. However, challenges such as over-reliance on lower-order questioning and insufficient student reflection were identified. Based on these results, the study recommends that teachers undergo professional development workshops to enhance their questioning techniques and foster a more interactive and engaging learning environment. Additionally, the study advocates for further research into the effectiveness of questioning strategies across different educational contexts and diverse student populations to optimize critical comprehension skill development. The findings underscore the essential role of teachers in facilitating cognitive growth and critical understanding among students.

Keywords: Questioning Strategies; Critical Comprehension Skills;

1. Introduction

In today's fast-paced, information-age society, students need to have developed critical thinking skills. Teachers will play an essential role in helping students grow and possess these skills. They will play an important role in their own teaching methods, specifically in how they utilize questions as a teaching tool using both technique and manner. The teacher's way of questioning is crucial because using questions as a teaching tool can incite cognitive processes that are key to deep learning and knowledge. Accordingly, developing critical understanding skills among the senior high school students is key to students' academic success.

The use of effective questioning strategies plays a significant role in stimulating effective learning and critical thinking in the classroom context (Zulfikar et al., 2022). The empirical data provide strong evidence that these questioning strategies influence the second language reading comprehension and influence the development of learners' attitudes towards critical questioning of them as students in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Liu, 2020; Kholisoh & Bharati, 2021). The reading strategy approach also has been shown to have important implications for reading comprehension for ESL learners (Swan et al., 2018). The above facts reinforce the use of effective questioning strategies to advance learners' ability toward critical comprehension within the senior high school context.

Since critical thinking can alter academic and personal life among students, it is essential to learn how questioning can be utilized to develop these skills. Although critical thinking and understanding are prioritized in all educational standards, there is always uncertainty on how best to develop these skills through classroom discussion. Questioning strategies are a simple and participatory way of engaging students in critical higher-order critical thinking processes essential to critical understanding (Liu, 2020). However, the efficacy of these strategies depends on how they are utilized and the pedagogical setting where they are used. Through the identification of the most prevalent questioning strategies utilized in the classroom of senior high school and an analysis of students' attitudes and reactions to these strategies, we can assess the effect of these strategies on academic performance and cognitive development, thus gaining important insights on how teachers can overcome challenges related to their implementation.

In the Philippines, the education system struggles with more than a lack of education. Instead, the system is lacking critical comprehension skills in Filipino learners. According to the 2020 Census of Population and Housing, the literacy rate in the Philippines was 97.0%, a 1.2 percentage point increase from the previous five years. In 2020, females (97.1%) were slightly more literate than males (96.8%). Such problems are evident in the poor performance of Filipino learners on the National Achievement Test, which records continuously declining performance of the reading and language subjects on the N/A test, making this clear (Gatcho and Hajan, 2022).

This home environment provides an interesting opportunity to investigate the challenges of critical understanding and the effectiveness of questioning techniques. The Philippine K-12 curriculum, including the SHS years, is intended to help students prepare for

college, work, and entrepreneurship. Roomy (2022) adds that, despite these objectives, there are discrepancies between the intended actions of the curriculum and the actual understanding and critical thinking displayed by the students. These discrepancies can be attributed to multiple factors, such as curriculum content, instructional strategies, and resources.

Most classrooms' traditional pedagogical practices are heavily reliant on teacher instruction and rote memorization (Erasmus et al., 2016). These methods limit the chances of students to undertake interactive learning and critical thinking. Sound questioning skills have the potential to enhance students' learning if used appropriately; nevertheless, most schools have issues arising from poor resource allocations and poor teachers' training in such practices (Espina, 2022). In addition, variations in the levels of students' proficiency in Filipino and English may disrupt their ability to comprehend intricate texts and meaningfully discuss them.

Addressing these concerns is the top priority in developing critical thinking skills among Filipino students. These skills are essential to their personal and professional development in a global context. By using proper questioning strategies, teachers can facilitate the establishment of more challenging and engaging learning environments that promote critical thinking. This study aims to explore these strategies, which in turn could enhance the quality of educational practices and pursuit of excellence for junior high school students.

Gubat National High School, a public secondary school situated in Gubat, Sorsogon, is known as the biggest of its kind in the area and a learning center for students residing in surrounding and distant barangays. When the school implemented the K to 12 English curriculum, there was a shift towards not only improving students' proficiency in the English language but also developing critical thinking and cultural awareness. Students in English classes engaged in active teaching, such as group work and class discussions, means that teachers have a means to look into the various needs their students have to enable them to be equipped with the skills needed for academic achievement and indisputable motivations toward their lives. Having an inclusive learning environment for students ensures that all students, no matter their background, have the means to achieve success in their education. Therefore, the focus of this research is to explore the questioning strategies used by English teachers in an effort to build critical comprehension skills of Junior High School students at Gubat National High School, for the 2023-2024 school year.

2. Methods

To achieve this objective, a qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on an in-depth analysis of classroom interactions, particularly the questioning techniques used by teachers. The participants in this study included six English teachers from Gubat National High School. The primary data collection method involved audio-recorded observations of English classes led by these teachers, capturing the interactions with a particular focus on the questioning strategies employed during lessons.

The audio recordings were transcribed to create 11 detailed transcripts of English classes for analysis. The data were subjected to thematic analysis and content analysis to identify and categorize themes related to the observed questioning strategies. The thematic analysis aimed to identify dominant patterns in questioning strategies, while the content analysis provided a more in-depth examination of specific instances of teacher questioning. This comprehensive analysis allowed for a detailed understanding of the various questioning techniques utilized by the teachers throughout their lessons. The findings were presented narratively, citing verbatim statements about each teacher's questioning strategies.

3. Results and Discussions

Developing critical comprehension is important for student success, particularly at the junior high school level. English teachers are aware of many questioning strategies to engage students and ensure a deeper understanding of literary texts. Based on the analysis of classroom discussion transcripts, this study illustrates how teachers' questioning strategies stimulated critical reflection and comprehension skills. The results are presented narratively, and through emergent themes, the types of methods employed by teachers that demonstrate the effectiveness of questioning in developing critical comprehension skills in their students.

Sequential Questioning for Deep Understanding. Teacher A is facilitating a lesson on general statements vs. specific statements, as well as assertions and reactions. In this lesson, the teacher works with the students to understand the differences between general and particular statements, discusses student responses to assertions (with the lens of social media), emotions (as reactions) in relation to the ever-present emoticons that students use to express their "reactions" to other people's posts or comments on a social platform like Facebook, and asks students to analyze some recent posts from their peers and discuss the language that they used to agree or disagree with someone else's post. The goal of the lesson is to have students recognize different types of statements and have an opportunity to practice responding to those statements.

To create a comfortable classroom environment, Teacher A starts with icebreaker questions such as "How's your day today?", which helps the students feel relaxed, but also gives the teacher an idea of what the mood of the class is like. Teacher A follows up with recall and review questions to activate the students' prior knowledge, and she draws connections from previous lessons to the new concepts. Throughout the lesson, Teacher A refers to students with direct, directive questions to encourage them to volunteer their thoughts and ideas. The teacher successfully scaffolds her lesson by getting students involved beyond the selected tasks for the lesson, and this promotes student engagement and comprehension with the new material.

While the lesson unfolds, Teacher A is able to employ a number of questions during the lesson. Teacher A implements guiding or probing questions (e.g., "what is this?" or, "saying what? general or specific?"), which encourages some critical thinking, and identifies an important phase of the process of arriving at the correct answers. Clarification questions (e.g., "What did you see?") support students' thinking of sometimes very complex concepts and give them a clearer understanding as a result. Reflective questions (e.g., "How does this lesson connect to what you did in your personal life last week?") encourage students to draw comparisons between their learning in

the lesson and what they have recently experienced in their lives. Group discussion questions (often unplanned) make room for more opinions and analysis to occur about what the lesson is about, and use a robust student interaction to help refine ideas.

Overall, Teacher A uses a wide variety of question styles during the lesson, but still has room to improve. For example, Teacher A uses a few scripted questions throughout the lesson, and these questions can become boring. Teacher A should be cautious of how they can take away the engagement level, and in turn, higher-order thinking can be lost. In addition, other questions have a level of ambiguity throughout the lesson where students do not comprehensively understand the instructor's intent (or what they were to respond to!), such as around transitions. Teacher A could also have used questioning to enhance this individual's contributions to the group activity, and transition to deeper follow-up questions to promote critical thinking to make sure EVERY student is engaged.

Abdelhalim (2017) indicates that group work encourages cognitive processing and creates a community of inquiry. Here, students answer questions posed to them by peers. In this way, Masduki (2022) notes that employing strategic questioning can improve reading comprehension among ESL students. Effective repetition within questioning could help to consolidate the students' understanding, as well as positively influence their ability to retain complex literary concepts. With the findings from both of these insights, Teacher A could consider how to employ questioning strategies that might engage her students and their learning even further.

Open-Ended Questions for Deeper Reflection. Teacher A held a teaching session with senior high school students on analyzing literary works. This included an array of approaches to literature, including feminist, moralist, structuralist, and Marxist theory. Students looked for key ideas in texts reviewed and applied multiple theoretical approaches to understand the content. Teacher A reinforced that these methods are essential for grasping deeper meanings and encouraged students to connect them to current issues like relationships and expectations from society.

In the initial phase of the lesson, Teacher A conducted the lesson through open questions involving "What do you see?" and "What else?" based on an iceberg metaphor presented in regard to success. These questions open thinking beyond what is obvious and challenge students to think critically and question visual presentations in relation to the barriers they may encounter with success. In doing so, Teacher A begins to develop the students' critical thinking capabilities, primarily emphasizing that success is visible but that it might only relate to 10% of the actual work and sacrifices made to obtain that success.

In the middle of the lesson, Teacher A continued probing and questioning strategies with "What is the message?" and "What does it tell you?" These questions engaged a deeper understanding of the iceberg metaphor while allowing every student to offer multiple ways to interpret their ideas and the situations presented in reference to their own experiences. Teacher A then posed a social question, "How would your friend feel if you preferred one to the other because of their skin?" which invited discussion to think critically about the effects of feeling discriminated.

Besides the process of the lesson performed above, Teacher A attempted to elicit responses through value-judging questions, including "how would you make a judgment without value?" The ultimate goal was to make judgments objectively after thorough, careful consideration of their own beliefs. If, for example, students could have generated some questions, this could expand student engagement and provide an avenue for ownership of their class discussions. Lastly, incorporating wait time after questions usually allows student responses to be more thoughtful. It ultimately allows deeper connections, involvement with the material, and working on or developing their critical thinking.

According to Han et al. (2020), open expressions validated a student's engagement and comprehension. It offered potentially richer and more triggering responses to the original question posed and provided for more thorough qualitative analyses. In their context, they focused only on language learning, literature classes characterized student attention in more depth, allowing students to examine the motivations of characters, themes, and objectives presented by the author, thus connecting with the text personally.

Personal Reflection as a Catalyst for Critical Thinking. Teacher B engages students in an interactive lesson that begins with a game of Family Feud, serving as an icebreaker and preparing them for a discussion on analyzing various types of evidence. The lesson covers how evidence supports claims using real-life scenarios, such as bullying incidents, to illustrate different forms of evidence, like witness statements, physical evidence, and statistical data. Students participate in activities that apply evidence in contexts such as news reports and persuasive speeches, enhancing their ability to evaluate and present evidence effectively.

The questioning process begins with personal reflection, as Teacher B asks, "If you were one of the students who witnessed the incident, what would you tell the guidance counselor?" This question encourages students to engage with the content on a personal level. However, responses tend to be general and lack depth, indicating an opportunity for Teacher B to deepen questioning to elicit more thoughtful answers. By probing further into students' thoughts and feelings, Teacher B could enhance critical reflection.

Teacher B also uses questions that challenge assumptions and promote critical thinking about evidence. For example, asking, "What else could you show to prove your truth to the guidance counselor?" invites students to consider alternative evidence. While students demonstrate the ability to analyze types of evidence, deeper follow-up questions, such as "Why do you think witness statements are reliable?" would prompt more elaborate responses and critical evaluation of the evidence's credibility.

To further promote critical thinking, Teacher B encourages exploration of multiple perspectives with questions like, "How might others describe the incident?" This approach begins to cultivate a broader understanding among students. Additionally, questions about the reliability of their perspectives, such as "What would you do if another witness contradicted your statement?" could be rephrased for clarity to facilitate deeper consideration of conflicting information. Overall, enhancing follow-up questions and providing context would strengthen students' analytical reasoning and engagement in the lesson.

In the research of Chen et al. (2017), they emphasize the importance of self-reflection as a means of strengthening critical thinking. The authors advocate for strategies such as journaling to promote self-reflection among nursing students, which can parallel strategies implemented in literature classes. When students articulate their responses to literature through reflective writing or dialogues, they cultivate a space for self-discovery and deeper insight into the texts. This iterative process of reflection encourages learners to draw connections between personal experiences and course materials, leading to critical engagement with literature.

Gradual Progression from Recall to Critical Analysis. Teacher C conducted a lesson with a class discussion about karma and stress, based on the story "The Man with the Coconuts." The lesson began with a reading cycle, which included students reading different sections of the story, and a discussion of other themes in the story about impatience and stress. Teacher C encouraged connections to the

text and made the point about patience and the problem of rushing through life. The questioning format of Teacher C's questioning was helpful in engaging students in higher-order cognitive thinking, and helps them improve as a reader while learning how to analyze a text.

At the onset of the lesson, Teacher C asked the question, "What was that topic?". This recall question assesses students' prior knowledge, and being able to recall essential information about the topic initiates students' involvement with the lesson. As the discussion evolved, Teacher C used interpretive questioning methods to innovate the students' frequencies of thinking about the text, such as "What do you feel this story is about?" and "What would you say about this story?". The interpretive questions moved students beyond a literal understanding of the text towards deeper reading engagement and comprehension.

Not every question during the lesson was interpretive; in fact, it was during this part of the lesson that Teacher C started using conceptual and critical thinking questions, for example, when she said, "What can you tell us about those words? The nature of their significance and pleasure of language". The questions that asked the students, "What message have you gotten?" to make the implicit moral explicit and quantitative would emphasize their consideration of their own lived experience and expose them to dilemma thinking. The questions that asked about the contrasting ideas in the text gave the students the opportunity to examine important relational constructs while practicing higher-order thinking skills, including evaluation and synthesis.

Since Teacher C's questioning strategy was emphasized, it would improve her use of questioning if she varied the questioning methodologies they use in their responses, for example, including predictive or hypothetical style questions, as the students would be required to analyze the text but at different levels. Then, group discussions of peer inquiry could provide a powerful opportunity for students to pose challenges to each other's understanding. Finally, formative assessment techniques like exit tickets taken by the students could assist Teacher C in having a more systematic way to formatively assess students' comprehension of the lesson themes and adjust the lesson for all students' progress and engagement during the lesson for the learning process.

Activating Prior Knowledge for Engagement. In lesson C, the lesson will include value judgment, consultations, analysis, and action. The lesson begins with a discussion using the iceberg metaphor, where we can see a small portion of the situation, but the biggest portion that we don't see is the one that often matters the most. Teacher C encourages students to reflect on their situations and the stories or articles they read. She emphasizes that success is attributed to sacrifices that we are not aware. In order to activate prior knowledge, she asks, "Who in here remembers what we talked about in the last lesson?" This recall question made students think about what they know to recall and prepare for new learning.

Teacher C will ask students to provide an example of communication and categorise the different types. Teacher C's questions, "What is happening in the picture?" and "Can you give me some examples of communication?" require student respondents to analyze pictures, rather than simply articulate what they believe. This prompts a higher level of thinking about both verbal and non-verbal communication. New learning will be framed within a context demonstrating relevance in contemporary communication. Teacher C's probing and follow-up questions, "Why do you think this is happening?" and "What do you think we should do in this situation?" are used to help students analyse the intent and consequences of failed communication, initiating solutions-oriented thinking.

In the context of Teacher C's active evaluation of possibly different points of view, she can also introduce various social scenarios, involving partly or fully interpersonal communication, and ask students, "What strategy should be used in this situation?" or "What would you do if there was a breakdown in communication?" These questions required students to relate critical thinking and apply new strategies to real-life situations. Additionally, questions such as "Can you give me examples of verbal communication?" encouraged students to build on new information and integrate it with their prior knowledge while considering the emotional and social implications.

To increase the efficacy of Teacher C's questioning technique in her classroom, it would be helpful to include wait time after her questions to allow students to formulate thoughtful responses. Teacher C could help students initiate questions of their own to promote students to think critically and take ownership of their learning. Teacher C could further extend the students' learning by allowing discussions between peers after her questioning, to enable her students to express their views and challenge each other's views, creating and stimulating a learning atmosphere that provoked the type of learning that promotes reflective and analytical thinking.

Overall, activating prior knowledge in literature classes is an essential step in encouraging student engagement and understanding of complex literary texts. It has been shown that activating students' prior knowledge is key to encouraging reading comprehension, especially with expository texts (Tarchi, 2025). When teaching literature classes, teachers can apply similar strategies to promote engagement. By asking students to recall previous discussions or texts they have read, teachers can provide an initial framework for engaging students with new information. When students are involved in classroom discussion in this manner, they feel invited and encouraged to give feedback on their cognitive perspectives.

Progressive Depth in Questioning for Critical Thinking. Teacher D's lesson focuses on understanding story elements through the Indian epic, the Ramayana. The lesson highlights elements such as love, heroism, and sacrifice. The lesson begins with a review of materials previously discussed in class, with the class discussing the Ramayana story and movie. Teacher D believes the best way to analyze a story is to identify four parts of a story: setting, characters, plot, and viewpoint. The lesson continues with a new short story, "The Man with the Coconuts," where Teacher D begins with recall questions such as "Can you tell me the title of the movie we watched?" By asking these types of questions, Teacher D is challenging students to keep details stored using long-term retention by asking them to recall questions on topics studied in previous lessons.

As the lesson unfolds, Teacher D asks higher-order questions such as, "What is the central theme in the Ramayana?" This question encourages students to search through the text, determine the main themes, and connect their thoughts into a more complete answer. This structured questioning creates opportunities for students to think about big ideas, where students are asked to find nuances and layers in the story to justify their answers. Teacher D has asked many questions of greater complexity by using open-ended questions, encouraging student-to-student differences in answers, and making their interpretations more complex.

In addition to thematic understanding, Teacher D employs problem-solving activities where students assess narrative statements of truth. This activity develops critical examination skills and guides students in distinguishing what is true and what is false. Teacher D employs interactive questioning strategies by finding negative words and determining their grammatical use, which engages them in deeper understanding and autonomy in their learning.

To further improve questioning strategies and approaches, Teacher D could purposefully develop wait-time after each question, which would provide an opportunity for students to think a little longer and deeper before answering. By following a scaffolded questioning strategy, Teacher D would be able to move students from straightforward recall to complex analysis. I would encourage peer-to-peer questioning where students pose questions to one another, promoting collaborative learning and ownership of their education. Finally, including real-world connections or applications to discuss the themes of the Ramayana or the grammatical concepts would heighten student engagement, making lesson discussions more relevant. Overall, Teacher D's several approaches to questioning strategies are all productive; they increase students' overall level of critical thinking and engagement with content material, leading to deeper analysis and understanding.

Reflective inquiry, as Yatiman et al. (2024) discuss, uses personal narratives to promote deeper understanding in teaching. Reflections are a way to reflect on the knowledge base for effective critical teaching. Similarly, Morris-O'Connor (2024) argues that poetic inquiry is a reflective approach that professors can use to develop their writing process and critically analyze literary texts, reinforcing the value of the personal connection to literature in developing students' analytical skills. This gradual move is enabled by processes or structured teaching approaches that require students to engage critically with the text beyond surface engagement with a text to allow for more meaningful analysis of themes, characters, and structures of the story.

Structured Recall for Reinforcement of Prior Knowledge. Teacher D continues with the explicit instruction of paragraph writing, specifically with respect to the structure and principles of a paragraph. The lesson begins with a review of previous lessons and a brief refocus on grammatical signals and patterns of developing ideas previously covered with students. Teacher D checks disabling behaviors with respect to the class discussion, and urges them to be active participants as well as respectful audience members, and builds in opportunities for handing out recitation points to the students if they not only participate, but demonstrate active and engaged recitation and contribution. Students are also reminded that they will need their learning tracking sheets, will need to be able to refer back to the resources independently, and so forth, to help build up to this next layer of more engaged learning in the lesson.

Once the lesson got underway, Teacher D began with higher-order questions to develop critical thinking. For instance, the question, "What is the perfect pattern of idea development for this topic?" has students reflecting on and evaluating the structure of writing related to that topic. Teacher D's questions support students in synthesizing ideas and making connections between ways in which certain patterns are used, which builds upon students' overall thinking about effective writing they learned previously.

Teacher D slowly starts to reengage the class with applied learning of problem-based, interactive "exercises" where students will do group work, putting their knowledge into action. Open-ended questions about important considerations, such as "Why do you think that is?" have students reflect on their thinking process and justify their answers. Teacher D has developed active learning conditions for their students to promote active engagement and reflection about their learning and thought process! The class is moving away from a passive-learning model and sees students verbally articulate their reasoning for their answers and participate in discussions happening in the lesson.

During the last few minutes of the lesson, Teacher D incited class discussion about how their learning may or may not apply to writing situations in their everyday lives. The teacher asked, "What do you think about the summer vacation shift?" in terms of how students perceived shifts they had not noticed in their thinking. Overall, Teacher D's questioning strategies created an environment for knowledge retention and critical engagement, and allowed them to create, discuss, collaborate, and engage with their ideas and knowledge across several contexts collaboratively! Teacher D could further develop these strategies by adding in wait-time, peer questioning, and/or application of Socratic questions to the open class prompts to build students' critical thinking further while establishing a more reflective learning environment.

Several studies underscore the effectiveness of structured recall in enhancing students' analytical skills. Yulia and Budiharti's (2019) findings emphasize that low-order thinking skills in classroom interactions often hinder student creativity and critical thinking. This observation suggests that promoting structured recall strategies could significantly shift the pedagogical focus toward exercises that require more analytical engagement rather than mere memorization. Rahayu et al. (2020) highlight that passive learning environments, characterized by traditional lecture methods, often limit the development of critical thinking skills among students. Teachers create opportunities for students to revisit and relate new knowledge to their previous learning experiences, facilitating a more thoughtful understanding of literary concepts.

Building Engagement Through Observational Questions. Teacher E's lesson emphasizes the importance of skills for inference making and distinguishing between summarizing and paraphrasing. To open the lesson, the students will do a vocabulary activity in which they define and use words like "mitigate," "nemesi," and "nostalgic." The vocabulary definitions and examples are part of a larger whole-class activity that discusses the larger and key aspects of the lesson. Teacher E explains to the class that they are to summarize. Summarizing a text means condensing it but retaining its main ideas and concepts. Whereas paraphrasing, Teacher E explains, requires rephrasing the sentences and extracting their form without reducing the text. The questioning style focuses the students on the task at hand and allows them to engage more with the materials and develop their critical thinking skills.

The type of questioning begins with simple observation: What do you see when presented with a picture of an umbrella? Once a few observations are presented, Teacher E asks, "What else can you say about the umbrella?" Guides to the next level of observation and verbalization. These observations help to lay the framework for higher-order thinking. Next, students interpret and describe their observations.

As the lesson progresses, Teacher E transitions to more complex questions and asks, "Why do we say that one picture can have multiple inferences?" The analysis required provoking students to think in critical ways. In each stage, Teacher E wants students to justify their own actions and consider appropriate ways to validate the inferences. Teacher E was encouraging the students to continue, deeper analysis and inquiries, asking students to devalue research, thinking must be formed upon evidence and logical reasoning.

Moving from simple observation and analysis to more advanced cognitive processes around summarizing and paraphrasing, Teacher E asks questions, "What is paraphrasing?" and "What is summarizing?" The questions stimulate students and they repeatedly go back to their memory and analyse the differences between the two concepts. Teacher E proceeded to have students make an inference, citing,

"What made you think the old woman will be going to the market? This enables students to retrieve their prior, supported knowledge and deeply develop their understanding of the process of inference.

Throughout the lesson, Teacher E encourages students to think about their thoughts with follow-up questions like, "What else can we infer?" and "What are the facts you based your conclusion on?" Consistent questioning drives high-order cognitive thinking and problem-solving. Before terminating the lesson, Teacher E provides them with an even more complex task by asking, "What do you need to consider in writing?" The question asks students to take their learning a step, and connect what they now know back to their world. This increased learned immersion can enhance students' analytical inquiry skills.

In this lesson, Teacher E successfully guides students from basic observations to somewhat complex analysis thesis, making systematic, progressive use of questioning. Opportunities for peer discussions and more shared thinking would have enhanced collaborative learning. Teacher E could have facilitated students' ability to brainstorm higher-order questions in small groups and then share out to the class; this would promote dialogic involvement and understanding. Teacher E also could have used more open-ended questions to help students connect theoretical knowledge and application back to complex real-world situations, ultimately cultivating critical and innovative thinking.

Observational questions invite students to closely examine texts, encouraging them to describe, analyze, and interpret literary elements, ultimately promoting active participation and critical thinking. Violita and Budiraharjo (2022) demonstrate that different types of engagement can emerge when utilizing flipped classroom models in literature classes. Their findings suggest that behavioral engagement, characterized by active involvement in learning tasks, is significantly enhanced when students are encouraged to observe details and express their interpretations through discussions. This is particularly relevant in literature, where understanding can lead to richer interpretations of characters and themes.

Higher-Order Questioning for Deep Analysis. Teacher E conducts a lesson on making inferences and logical guesses based on evidence and prior knowledge. The class begins with a discussion about observations from various pictures, such as umbrellas, computers, and beach scenes. Teacher E distinguishes between tangible observations (like color and structure) and non-tangible observations (like emotions). Throughout the lesson, she employs varied questioning strategies to enhance students' critical thinking skills, focusing on three key thinking paths: deep thinking, information analysis, and reasoning justification.

When Teacher E asks, "Are there any differences between the two observations that you have given?" she prompts students to engage in higher-order analysis by comparing and contrasting their observations. This encourages them to notice subtle differences in the information presented, which is essential for developing sound critical thinking skills. Additionally, her question, "How can you say that they're having fun? What evidence can you give?" fosters evaluation and inference, prompting students to justify their conclusions based on observed evidence.

Teacher E further encourages critical thinking by asking, "What inference can you make out of this scenario?" This question invites students to apply their prior knowledge to draw conclusions that aren't explicitly stated, promoting deeper meaning from the information. Similarly, when she inquires, "Why did you say that the students are doing their tasks?" it motivates students to substantiate their observations and reflect on the reasoning behind their deductions. This process enhances their ability to assess critical scenarios.

The strategic questioning techniques employed by Teacher E stimulate active participation, critical analysis, and reflective thinking, key elements in fostering students' critical thinking abilities. Students are encouraged not only to recall facts but to critique, justify, and analyze their thoughts, developing them into independent and reflective thinkers. To further enhance her questioning skills, Teacher E could incorporate more open-ended questions that allow students to explore multiple perspectives. Questions like "What might happen if the students were not using their notebooks?" or "Can you think of a situation where this approach might not work?" would encourage broader thinking and creativity. Incorporating peer discussions or small group work after these questions could significantly increase student engagement, allowing them to develop ideas collaboratively and engage in critical analysis of diverse perspectives.

Higher-order questioning strategies promotes deep analysis and critical thinking among students. Rahmadhani and Wirayuda (2023) argue that when teachers habitually incorporate higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) questions into their lessons, students become more adept at navigating challenging inquiry and analysis. This is crucial in literature studies, where students must interpret various layers of meaning within texts and articulate their evaluations coherently.

Encouraging Higher-Order Thinking Through Open-Ended Questions. Teacher F's lesson is focused on review, focusing specifically on reading techniques such as skimming, summarizing, paraphrasing, and direct quoting. The lesson begins with reading: students read an article related to writing techniques, along the way, varying styles of writing and stages of writing, drafting, editing, and publishing. After reading, Teacher F asked students what unfamiliar words they saw in the text, and this included "macro skill," "paraphrasing," and "summarizing." The questioning method Teacher F used was aimed at creating awareness and developing the students' critical thinking skills.

The lesson begins with a review of the foundational skills, skimming and scanning, which are considered lower-order thinking skills. Reviewing the foundational skills helps situate the students in basic reading methods before implementing higher-order thinking in the lesson. Teacher F slowly transitioned to questions that prompted higher-order thinking skills. For example, when she asked, "What did you understand?" she encouraged students to analyze and synthesize their understanding in relation to the text and cognitive engagement with the text.

Teacher F said, "Maria thought that writing is a simple job, but the truth is... what?" This question challenges the students to use evaluation and think critically about writing, when, at the very least, they can think about writing with a complex understanding and with their preconceived knowledge. These types of questions allowed the students to engage critically with the content, transforming the students from recall to analysis. Teacher F poses probing questions that stimulate thinking, such as when discussing "macro scale." This question can encourage students to think critically and utilize prior knowledge.

Teacher F provided an example of self-regulated learning by asking the students to underline unknown words in the text, and when deciding what these unknown words are, if they can use a dictionary. Within this questioning strategy, the student assumes responsibility for their education and works independently. By connecting the unknown vocabulary to their understanding of the text, they are building their lexical knowledge and comprehension. Teacher F not only effectively engages the students with her intended questioning strategies,

but she also creates a learning environment that fosters longer and higher-order thinking, which makes the students analyze and synthesize their discipline, information, and knowledge.

To extend Teacher F's questioning methods, she can add Socratic questioning methods to further facilitate students' reflection by asking them to explain and defend their response. Also, as a way to increase classroom participation, the Think-Pair-Share method could be incorporated: think, pair, share. Participation knowledge could involve continuing to believe as an individual; sharing their understandings or thoughts with a partner, then sharing their understandings with the class. Waiting to implement Wait Time 2, which helps to give teachers more time for students to formulate reflective answers to input, which also engages students with metacognitive knowledge. Finally, "direct the students" to create their higher-order questions or "create their concept maps, which further their understanding and higher-order thinking, and their critical thinking would provide a more engaging and self-directed learning environment while helping improve more crucial analytical and reflective skills.

Bekcan (2023) emphasizes that open-ended and higher-order questions play a crucial role in developing students' critical thinking skills within literature discussions. When students encounter questions that do not have straightforward answers, they are encouraged to reflect critically on their previous knowledge and engage in deeper inquiry, which is crucial in literature studies. Çakır (2016) suggests that the application of open-ended questions contributes significantly to the development of cognitive and language skills, providing a framework for students to engage critically with texts. This is particularly relevant in literature classes, where students are required to interpret and analyze various texts, reflecting on their implications and underlying meanings. Open-ended questions prompt learners to explore complex ideas, make connections, and articulate their interpretations, which aligns with the objectives of literary education.

Open-Ended Questions to Foster Synthesis. Teacher F's questioning strategy is designed to build upon lesson content and foster critical thinking skills in students. She begins with an open-ended question: "Can you give me a main idea or whatever you understood from the text?" This prompts students to synthesize the information they have just read, encouraging them to focus on significant concepts and improving their analytical skills. By asking for the "main idea," Teacher F helps students identify essential information and underlying concepts within the text.

The questioning then shifts to technical vocabulary, requiring students to recognize unknown words and provide definitions based on contextual clues. For example, when a student is asked to define "macro skill," Teacher F provides context and guidance to deepen their understanding. Follow-up questions like "What do you mean by macro skill?" prompt students to reflect critically on their answers, enhancing their grasp of the terms and concepts involved.

As the lesson progresses, Teacher F addresses the nuances of paraphrasing, summarizing, and direct quotations. By asking, "What is the difference between paraphrasing and summarizing?" she encourages students to engage in higher-order cognitive thinking, prompting them to analyze and differentiate between these processes. This segment of the discussion hones their text analysis skills and prepares them for various writing situations.

The questions become more reflective and practical, such as, "What do you need to consider when writing your own essay or research?" This approach motivates students by connecting classroom concepts to their assignments, fostering real-world application. Teacher F reinforces understanding by revisiting the writing process and asking for details about specific stages, enhancing long-term retention of the material.

Teacher F skillfully employs a blend of wait-time and probing questions, allowing students to think critically before responding. By scaffolding her teaching with examples and clarifications, she makes learning accessible to all students. To further enhance her questioning methods, incorporating peer-to-peer discussions would allow students to verbalize their thoughts and build confidence. Additionally, using scaffolded questioning that progresses in difficulty could challenge learners at varying cognitive levels. Open-ended questions that ask students to explain their responses with examples from personal experience would further encourage deep thinking and critical analysis, making the learning process more relevant and meaningful.

Open-ended questions nurture higher-order thinking by inviting learners to explore relationships between themes, characters, and historical contexts which leads to a better understanding of literary works. Septiani et al. (2022) discuss the impacts of open-ended questions on student creativity and communication skills, but their research primarily pertains to mathematics rather than literature. However, the principles of creativity transfer effectively to literature classes, where students benefit from opportunities to explore personal interpretations of texts and articulate these interpretations through critical discussions. Such engagements encourage students to think critically and synthesize their viewpoints with the analysis of their peers, enhancing their overall literacy skills.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

As a result of the exploratory study, a number of conclusions were made with respect to questions generated by teachers in the classroom. The findings show that the range of questioning techniques yields 11 narrative themes and is an important factor in transferring the critical comprehension skills to students in a junior high context. Specifically, the role of sequential questioning, personal reflection, and higher-order thinking through open-ended questioning showed a noticeable impact on student learning. Many teachers fail to reach the "Creating" level of Bloom's Taxonomy with respect to teaching higher-order thinking skills because they rely on lower-order questioning techniques, do not reflect on student responses, or discuss collaboratively. This limits students from synthesizing information and producing new ideas.

To conclude these findings, a series of recommendations was made. Professional development workshops that focus on what has been demonstrated as effective questioning techniques for diverse questioning strategies are fundamental to teaching practice. The workshops should provide samples of useful techniques, including sequential questioning, other methods of activating prior knowledge, and generally different questioning styles to build an implicit understanding of how teachers adapt their styles (teaching) to create an inclusive learning environment. Programs that provide some responsibility for structuring student participation are preferred, as the partial format can be used for academic peer-to-peer questions. Further sessions can be held to discuss possible best practices in implementing strategies. Also, additional research processes should be encouraged to examine the significance of questioning techniques on varying learning styles, and culturally responsive questioning techniques for diverse populations.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Susan S. Janer, PhD; Anabell A. Manga, MAEd; Maricel A. Dichoso, PhD; and Ritzelda A. Deri, PhD, for their constructive feedback and insightful suggestions that enhanced the quality of this paper. To my family and friends for the endless support and prayers.

References

- Abdelhalim, S. (2017). Developing efl students' reading comprehension and reading engagement: effects of a proposed instructional strategy. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 7(1), 37. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0701.05>
- BEKCAN, A. (2023). Efl bağlamında öğrencilerin eleştirel düşünme becerilerini geliştirmenin zorlukları ve stratejileri: sistematik inceleme. *The Journal of International Educational Sciences*, 36(36), 34-55. <https://doi.org/10.29228/inesjournal.71936>
- Çakır, H. (2016). Open ended questions: a comparison of mothers' and fathers' language use during play time. *Creative Education*, 07(04), 574-585. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2016.74060>
- Chen, S., Chang, H., & Pai, H. (2017). Caring behaviours directly and indirectly affect nursing students' critical thinking. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*, 32(1), 197-203. <https://doi.org/10.1111/scs.12447>
- Erasmus, E., Lehmann, U., Agyepong, I., Alwar, J., Savigny, D., Kamuzora, P., ... & Gilson, L. (2016). Strengthening post-graduate educational capacity for health policy and systems research and analysis: the strategy of the consortium for health policy and systems analysis in Africa. *Health Research Policy and Systems*, 14(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12961-016-0097-0>
- Espina, J. (2022). The effectiveness of critical evaluation and questioning strategies to increase students' critical thinking skill: a case study. *Jelita Journal of Education Language Innovation and Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.37058/jelita.v1i1.4283>
- Gatcho, A. and Hajan, B. (2022). Augmenting junior secondary esl learners' reading skills through explicit instruction of metacognitive strategies. *Jeels (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies)*, 6(1), 1-24. <https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v6i1.1202>
- Han, T., ÖKSÜZ, A., ŞARMAN, G., & NACAR, A. (2020). Covid-19 salgını zamanında yabancı dil olarak ingilizce öğrenen lisans seviyesindeki türk öğrencilerinin çevrimiçi dil derslerindeki akış deneyimleri. *Milli Eğitim Dergisi*, 49(1), 1059-1078. <https://doi.org/10.37669/milliegitim.787835>
- Kholisoh, M. and Bharati, D. (2021). Teachers' questioning strategies and students' perceptions toward critical questions in efl classroom interaction. *Elt Forum Journal of English Language Teaching*, 10(2), 136-145. <https://doi.org/10.15294/elt.v10i2.43302>
- Liu, H. (2020). Does questioning strategy facilitate second language (l2) reading comprehension? the effects of comprehension measures and insights from reader perception. *Journal of Research in Reading*, 44(2), 339-359. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12339>
- Masduki, M. (2022). Optimizing teacher questioning strategies for enhanced reading comprehension in efl classrooms. *Script Journal Journal of Linguistic and English Teaching*, 7(2), 398-412. <https://doi.org/10.24903/sj.v7i2.1301>
- Rahayu, S., Ashadi, A., & Dwiasuti, S. (2020). Analysis of students' critical thinking skills in secondary schools on plants' structure and functions material.. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.200129.131>
- Roomy, M. (2022). Investigating the effects of critical reading skills on students' reading comprehension. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4085855>.
- Septiani, S., Retnawati, H., & Arliani, E. (2022). Designing closed-ended questions into open-ended questions to support student's creative thinking skills and mathematical communication skills. *Jtam (Jurnal Teori Dan Aplikasi Matematika)*, 6(3), 616. <https://doi.org/10.31764/jtam.v6i3.8517>
- Swan, C., Wong, S., Ayub, A., & Hussin, H. (2018). Reading strategies effect on reading comprehension performance of esl learners. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 8(12). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v8-i12/5009>
- Tarchi, C. (2015). Fostering reading comprehension of expository texts through the activation of readers' prior knowledge and inference-making skills. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 72, 80-88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2015.04.013>
- Violita, V. and Budiraharjo, M. (2022). Enhancing students' engagement and active learning through flipped classroom in literature class. *Academic Journal Perspective Education Language and Literature*, 10(1), 49. <https://doi.org/10.33603/perspective.v10i1.6800>
- Yatiman, R., Abdullah, R., Hilmy, N., & Budiyantri, S. (2024). Rethinking of the knowledge base for teaching through duoethnography reflective inquiry. *International Journal of English Language Studies*, 6(2), 137-141. <https://doi.org/10.32996/ijels.2024.6.2.20>
- Yulia, Y. and Budiharti, F. (2019). Hots in teacher classroom interaction: a case study. *EduLite Journal of English Education Literature and Culture*, 4(2), 132. <https://doi.org/10.30659/e.4.2.132-141>
- Zulfikar, T., Syahabuddin, K., Maulidia, K., Emawati, E., & Amiruddin, A. (2022). Looking inside an efl classroom: promoting productive learning through teachers' questioning strategies. *Studies in English Language and Education*, 9(3), 1019-1040. <https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v9i3.26072>