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# **Classifying teacher questions in EFL classrooms: Question types and their proper use**

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*This paper reports the findings of a case study investigating the taxonomy of question-types in Hong Kong EFL classrooms, their appropriate application by teachers, and the resulting effectiveness in helping students understand the correct lesson objectives. Triangulation was conducted in data collection using classroom observations, teacher in-depth interviews, and student interviews. Results indicated low-cognitive questions were common. Of those, knowledge-based questions were most frequently used for teaching vocabulary or confirming student understanding. This was regardless of whether the lesson's nature was straightforward grammar or task-based learning. Other findings indicated that teachers used questions inefficiently to manage the classroom or stage lessons. High-cognitive questions, which engender practical English use, were rarely used. Teacher-selected question-types are evaluated for effectiveness, and implications for classroom pedagogy are discussed.*

**Keywords:** *EFL; Hong Kong; questions types; teachers*

## **Introduction**

Question types—applied skillfully—are a key part of a teacher's armoury. They are useful for stimulating student thinking, constructing knowledge, and connecting students' prior knowledge and experience (Good & Brophy, 2000; Wilen 2001, 2004). However, questioning consumes considerable teaching and learning time. Indeed, past studies report teachers asking up to 120 questions per teaching hour, and 300-400 questions per day (Carlson, 1997; Graesser & Person, 1994). Asking good questions can show students how to ask their own questions well, and greatly improve their thought processes. Conversely, it has been found that teachers' lack of knowledge about questioning taxonomies can have adverse effects on student learning, particularly if many

of the questions asked are of a low-cognitive level (Tan, 2007), and thus ineffective for practical, dynamic English training. This paper reports the findings of a case study investigating the taxonomy of question-types used in Hong Kong EFL classrooms, their appropriate application by teachers, and the resulting effectiveness in helping students understand the correct lesson objectives. By investigating a case in Hong Kong, it is intended to shed light on the implications for asking questions that support effective English learning in TESOL classrooms more broadly, including Australia, where there is a focus on thinking orientated curricular.

### Theoretical framework

The “Question taxonomy” was developed by Bloom and his colleagues from their seminal work, Bloom’s *Taxonomy of the Cognitive Domain* (Bloom, 1956). They proposed classifying questions into six skill or complexity levels, thought of as existing along a continuum. Bloom’s framework has been adopted by others such as Caulfield-Sloan (2005) and Tan (2007) to evaluate the classroom effectiveness of EFL teacher question taxonomy.

Figure 1: Continuum of six question types—A taxonomy by Bloom (1956)

<i>Example:</i> What is the meaning of “shopping mall”? What is the name of the book?	<i>Example:</i> Can you paraphrase this term? What is the gist of the story?	<i>Example:</i> What questions would you ask if you were the main character in the story?
Knowledge	Comprehension	Application
Low-cognitive Qs .....>		
<i>Example:</i> What are the start, build-up, climax, resolution and ending of the story?	<i>Example:</i> Compose new lyrics to a known song.	<i>Example:</i> Can you come up with a set of criteria for a good oral presentation?
Analysis	Synthesis	Evaluation
.....> High-cognitive Qs		

## Literature review

Past studies investigating the nature of teacher questions have been of great interest to education researchers. As early as 1912, Stevens reported that 65% of teacher questions were concerned with the recall of textbook data. In 1935, Haynes discovered 70% of questions were factual. During the 1980s, Kerry (1989) found that 50% of questions pertained to classroom management, with the remainder focusing on facts.

More recent studies reveal primary science teachers asking mainly low-cognitive questions (Caulfield-Sloan, 2005), with similar results in primary reading comprehension classes (Parker & Hurry, 2007). Studies of primary science classes show that simple closed type questioning, in particular, was widely used (Harris & Williams, 2007). Tan (2007) also found similar results with questions asked by teachers at tertiary level: lower cognitive questions used mainly to check text comprehension, sustain student concentration on the text, and maintain classroom discipline. Tan indicated that this type of questioning behaviour had a potentially adverse impact on student learning, since high-cognitive questions have been found to be important in what and how well students learn (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Pease, 1983; Good & Brophy, 1986). On the other hand, Erdogan and Campbell (2008) found a significant number of open-ended questions were used where there was a focus on constructivist teaching practices. Quality questioning and sufficient wait time were also identified as important factors in numeracy learning (Sangster, 2007).

However, the above studies and many others have only investigated teacher questioning behaviour in science and mathematics classroom contexts, and the results may not be applicable to the EFL classroom (Caulfield-Sloan, 2005; Chin, 2006, 2007; Franke, Webb, & Chan, 2007; Herbal-Eisenmann, & Breyfogle, 2005; Sangster, 2007; Sahin, 2007; Souvignier & Kronenberger, 2007). Similarly, most have only examined elementary or tertiary-level contexts, which cannot be readily applied to adolescent L2 learning. (For studies of elementary English classrooms, see Souvignier & Kronenberger, 2007; Hill & Flynn, 2008; Parker & Hurry, 2007; Bintz & Williams, 2005. For tertiary, see Tan, 2007; Lee, 2008.) The present study therefore aims to investigate teacher questioning in secondary EFL classrooms; that is, *what types of questions* are asked in EFL classrooms, whether the types of questions asked *relate to a focus on*

*content* being taught, and the *effectiveness of the application of teacher questions* as they relate to student learning quality.

### **Research questions**

This paper aims to address the following research questions to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher questions in EFL classrooms.

*Research Question 1 (RQ1):* How frequently are the six question types used in Hong Kong EFL classrooms?

*Research Question 2 (RQ2):* Do questions relate well to the specific content of the course?

*Research Question 3 (RQ3):* Do students understand the lesson's focus by the end of the lesson?

### *Design*

This study adopts qualitative paradigm principles (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001) which help to capture the fluidity of English teacher questioning behaviours. The researcher conducted five double-lesson observations, each of which was followed by a stimulated-recall teacher interview to elicit teacher intentions during the lessons, and post-lesson student interviews to evaluate whether students accurately perceived the teacher objectives.

As the class size was 30 and the study involved 5 observation lessons, 6 students of different English proficiency levels (i.e., 2 each at a low, medium, and high proficiency level) were interviewed after each lesson to ensure all students could participate to enhance reliability. Before each lesson, the participating teacher randomly selected students for the post-lesson interviews given her familiarity of their English proficiency level. By the end of the study, 26 of the 30 students were interviewed.

### *Participants*

The researcher observed one particular English teacher over the 5 lessons for the duration of this study. The participating teacher, Jane (pseudonym), was nominated by the principals of the partner school, although it was a voluntary decision as to whether she wished to participate.

Jane had been teaching English as a foreign language for seven years, and was also an assistant panel chairperson in the English Department of her school. She graduated from a Hong Kong university majoring in English, and is an experienced teacher.

### *Procedure*

Each lesson lasted 80 minutes and was video-recorded while the researcher took observation notes. Observation lessons were chosen on the basis of convenience for both the teacher and researcher, with approximately one month between each observation.

After each observation lesson, the teacher was asked to reiterate the learning objectives for the lesson through a stimulated-recall procedure, which involved watching a video of the lesson that had just finished. The teacher would occasionally pause the tape and recall what she was intending to teach during the lesson. The researcher could also pause the video at times to ask what the teacher was thinking at that point in the lesson.

Concurrent with the teacher/researcher stimulated recall interview, a research assistant conducted semi-structured interviews with the students who were asked to itemize what was taught in the lesson and how they responded to the teacher's questions. The research assistant was careful not to provide help to the students in recalling the perceived learning objectives to affect the nature of their own responses.

### *Data analysis*

Data from the five lesson observations were transcribed, and the five stimulated teacher recalls and student interviews were transcribed and translated from Cantonese to English by a research assistant. The final transcripts were then analyzed qualitatively and thematically by the researcher.

In addressing RQ1, all questions were categorised using Bloom's taxonomy to reveal which occurred most frequently. Those not able to be categorised would be read repeatedly (Rice & Ezzy, 1999) to discover if an overarching type of question might emerge from the data (Daly, Kellehear, & Gliksman, 1997). Additional question types would be cross-checked against Bloom's taxonomy questions to rank their frequency.

For RQ2, the researcher would try to correlate the frequency of each question type with the content reiterated by the teacher in the stimulated-recall interviews. This was to see if particular types of content (e.g., reading comprehension) would affect the teacher's question type.

For RQ3, learning objectives were listed from the student interviews to evaluate the effectiveness of the teacher's questioning.

## Results

*RQ1: How frequently are the six question types used in Hong Kong EFL classrooms?*

Table 1 shows that knowledge type questions were the most frequently occurring type, at 73% of total questions, followed by comprehension questions at 15.4%; in other words, low-cognitive questions comprised 88.4% of total questions. The more effective application and analysis type questions were asked much less frequently, while synthesis and evaluation questions were not asked at all. That is, practical high-cognitive level questioning was not merely uncommon in this study of EFL classrooms—it never occurred at all.

Looking at the results more carefully, knowledge type questions were mainly asked: to check whether students understood the meaning of selected words or to teach vocabulary; to elicit words from students; to ask students to locate information; and to reactivate students' previous knowledge (for examples, see Table 2).

For comprehension-based questions, teachers usually asked students to explain the gist of the passage in their own words and to interpret the meaning, thus eliciting student opinions.

Relatively fewer application type questions were asked. When they were, they focused on seeing how well students could apply what they had learned and extend their knowledge. For example, in Lesson 1, the teacher asked questions in past tense, and then asked the students to turn the question into a negation:

How about not? ... How about negative? ... The sentence, "My boss will have a meeting in New York next month" is a positive statement. What about if we turn it into a negative one?

As for analysis-based questions, the teacher usually asked students to analyze language features; an example from Table 2,

*So if I ask you on the board, there are two groups of verbs, two groups, okay, two different kinds of verbs, how do you group them? Which are in the same group?*

This question aimed to have students differentiate the nature of verbs. Analysis-based questions were also used to exercise analytical thinking. Again, an example from Table 2: "So do you think this is an even greater success to him?"

It bears repeating that, surprisingly, no synthesis or evaluation-based questions occurred in the EFL classrooms studied.

Table 1. Frequency of different types of questions asked in EFL classrooms.

	TOTAL*		LESSON 1		LESSON 2	
Knowledge	175	72.9%	43	74.15%	17	50%
Comprehension	34	14.2%	13	22.45%	6	17.6%
Application	8	3.3%	1	1.7%	4	11.8%
Analysis	23	9.6%	1	1.7%	7	20.6%
Synthesis	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Evaluation	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	<b>240</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>100%</b>
	LESSON 3		LESSON 4		LESSON 5	
Knowledge	24	75%	42	79.2%	49	77.8%
Comprehension	5	15.6%	2	9.4%	8	12.7%
Application	0	0%	3	5.7%	0	0%
Analysis	3	9.4%	6	5.7%	6	9.5%
Synthesis	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Evaluation	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
	<b>32</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>100%</b>

\* Total number only included questions under Bloom's taxonomy

Table 2. Sample questions from each lesson.

	LESSON 1	LESSON 2
1. Recalling student memory	We are talking about shopping. Do you still remember?	Do you still remember what the difference is between "there be" and what...? "Have". What's the difference? Do you still remember?
<b>Comprehension</b>		
1. Gist of the passage	What is it about? What is this e-mail about?	-
2. Elicit students' opinion	Do you think it's an unhappy face? Why? Why does he feel unhappy?	Why not, Dave?

Table 2 (Continued). Sample questions from each lesson.

	LESSON 1	LESSON 2	
<b>Application</b>			
1. Apply what students have learnt to extend new knowledge	How about not? How about, we talk about, this is positive (drew '+' at the beginning of the sentence). How about negative? How do we turn this sentence into negative?	What shops do you like? Can you now describe your design to your classmates?	
<b>Analysis</b>			
1. Analyse language features	So if I ask you on the board ... there are two groups of verbs, two groups, okay, two different kinds of verbs, how do you group them? Which are in the same group?	-	
2. Exercise analytical thinking	-	What are the selling points of your shopping center? What are the most attractive features of your shopping center?	
	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5
1. Recalling student memory	Do you remember the term "recipe"? Do you remember what a "recipe" is?	Which one is for countable nouns?	Do you still remember what an "opera" is?
<b>Comprehension</b>			
1. Gist of the passage	-	-	Who is this chapter about?
2. Elicit students' opinion	Which one do you like more? Recipe A or Recipe B? Why?	England, okay, you like England. Why? Why?	-



	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5
<b>Application</b>			
1. Apply what students have learnt to extend new knowledge	–	So, class, how will you describe the situation now?	–
<b>Analysis</b>			
1. Analyse language features	What do you think is the special point about the grammar? Is the cooking list special?	–	–
2. Exercise analytical thinking	–	So what do you think? Who thinks computers have more contribution?	So do you think this is an even greater success to him?

In addition to the aforementioned question types, this study also found others in use in this EFL classroom (Table 4). These include questions related to staging the lessons, directing student learning behaviour, and maintaining classroom discipline. “Logistical” in nature, these questions related to keeping the classroom conducive to learning.

To further investigate these findings—the identification of both logistical and teaching question-types—both types were combined with an interesting result (Table 5). It was found that the most frequent questions were still knowledge-type (teaching types), followed by those used for maintaining classroom discipline and staging the lesson (logistical types). Comprehension and analysis teaching-type questions were asked less frequently than logistical questions. Question to facilitate teaching (i.e., logistical questions directing student learning behaviour and checking comprehension) were asked more frequently than application-type questions.

Table 3. Examples of other types of questions asked in EFL classrooms.

	FREQUENCY	LESSON 1	LESSON 2
<b>Staging of lesson</b>	35	How about Question Two?	How about the third reason?
<b>Directing student learning behaviour</b>	15	Can you hear her?	Can you read out the answers?
<b>Maintaining classroom discipline</b>	38	Oh! Do you know which question we are talking about? Yes or no? Daydreaming?	Are you reading along with me?
	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5
<b>How about these two persons?</b>	How about these two persons?	How about this?	How about News 2?
<b>Can you try to do it now?</b>	Can you try to do it now?	Can you read out this sentence together?	Can you try to read this word?
<b>Can you keep quiet?</b>	Can you keep quiet?	Do you know how to speak softly and keep quiet?	Can you sit properly?

*RQ2: Do the questions the teacher uses relate well to the specific content of the course?*

Considering the low number of high-cognition type questions found in response to RQ1, the relevance of question-type-to-content seems worthy of further scrutiny, since logically, teaching content should direct teaching behaviour in the form of questions. That is, the teaching content would be expected to direct teacher questions, and teacher questions would not expect to deviate from the intended teaching content. However, as Table 5 shows, there is no correlation between the content taught and types of questions asked. Indeed, the evidence suggests the same quiver of questions

is used regardless of lesson content. The foci of the five observed lessons were reading comprehension (Lesson 1), designing a shopping mall and related vocabulary and sentence patterns (Lesson 2), making salad and related vocabulary and sentence patterns (Lesson 3), learning to use English to compare amounts with practice via a game format (Lesson 4), and reading articles on Jackie Chan, plotting his life chart, and describing his life (Lesson 5). Yet, although lessons ranged from pure reading to task-based content, only low cognitive questions were asked.

Table 4. Frequency of questions in EFL classrooms.

QUESTION TYPES	FREQUENCY
Knowledge	175
Maintaining Classroom discipline	38
Staging of lesson	35
Comprehension	34
Analysis	23
Directing student learning behaviour	15
Checking comprehension	11
Application	8
Evaluation	0
Synthesis	0

Table 5. Correlation between taught content and questions taxonomy.

LESSON	LESSON FOCUS	TEACHING CONTENT/TASK GIVEN	TYPES OF QUESTIONS ASKED
1	Comprehension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of past tense</li> <li>• No task given in this lesson</li> </ul>	Knowledge (43) Comprehension (13) Application (1) Analysis (1) Synthesis (0) Evaluation (0)

Table 5 (continued). Correlation between taught content and questions taxonomy.

LESSON	LESSON FOCUS	TEACHING CONTENT/TASK GIVEN	TYPES OF QUESTIONS ASKED
2	Shopping mall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is+are, was +were,</li> <li>• Types of shops in shopping mall</li> <li>• Task: Designing own shopping mall</li> </ul>	Knowledge (17) Comprehension (6) Application (4) Analysis (7) Synthesis (0) Evaluation (0)
3	Making salad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imperative</li> <li>• Format of recipe</li> <li>• Verbs related to cooking</li> <li>• Ingredient names</li> <li>• Task: making salad</li> </ul>	Knowledge (24) Comprehension (5) Application (0) Analysis (3) Synthesis (0) Evaluation (0)
4	Comparing amounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sentence patterns for comparing amounts</li> <li>• Task: comparing amounts and making sentences</li> </ul>	Knowledge (42) Comprehension (2) Application (3) Analysis (6) Synthesis (0) Evaluation (0)
5	Life of Jackie Chan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading comprehension (theme: Life of Jackie Chan)</li> <li>• Format of writing a personal profile</li> <li>• Synthesise data and plot a life chart for Jackie Chan</li> <li>• Task: Plot own life chart and sharing with friends</li> </ul>	Knowledge (49) Comprehension (8) Application (0) Analysis (6) Synthesis (0) Evaluation (0)

Table 6. Summary of results.

LESSON	TEACHING COMPONENTS	ITEMS STUDENT ALSO IDENTIFIED	N	% OF STUDENTS IDENTIFIED	ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF SS	STUDENT VERBAL RESPONSE
1	Differentiating time words and the use of past tense through a reading comprehension passage.	-	4	100%	High, Medium, Low	I learnt to change the verb into past tense when I see the time word for past tense.
2	Describing a mall by using 'There + be with the correct tenses	-	4	100%	High, Medium, Low	I have learned the methods of using the sentence patterns there be, such as the use of appropriate tenses.
	Students designing their own mall*	-	4	0%	-	-
	-	Vocabulary: Level	4	50%	High, Low	I have also learned the word 'level.'
3	Action verbs related to cooking	-	3	100%	High, Medium, Low	I have learned methods of talking about cooking in English.
	Names of food ingredients	-		100%	High, Medium, Low	I have learned the English words for the ingredients, such as 'pineapple' and 'banana'. I learned the methods of writing the procedures for making salad.
	Format of a recipe	-		33%	Low	-
	Imperatives*	-		0%	-	-
	-	Name of soccer players		25%	Low	I have learned the English names of some soccer players. I learned the methods for comparing things in English.
	-	Discussion with classmates		25%	Low	I have learned the concept of 'amount.' I practiced discussing with my classmates in English.
	Students applied what they had learnt by teaching classmates to make a salad*	-		0%	-	-
4	Comparing amounts	-	4	100%	High, Medium, Low	I have learned 'comparing amounts.'
	-	-				I have learned grammar items. I have learned to use the sentence pattern '... than ...'. I have also learned the methods of using 'the most' and 'the least/fewest.'
5	Students practiced the learnt language items by playing a game*	-		0%	-	-
	Understanding the life of Jackie Chan	-		83%	2 High, 2 Medium, 1 Low	I have learned about Jackie Chan's life. He changed his name many times.
	Format of writing a profile (Jackie Chan)*	-		0%	-	-
	Synthesising data and plot chart*	-		0%	-	-
	Describing and presenting student's own life	-		16%	High	I have learned about the events that happened to Jackie Chan. I also learned to describe my life experience in English.
	-	Vocabulary		50%	1 Medium, 2 Low	I have learned about Jackie Chan's life experience. I also learned some new words, such as 'skillful.'

\* Nil students could recall.

In Lessons 2, 4, and 5, analysis-based questions were asked more frequently than in the other two lessons. Regarding the contexts in which these questions were delivered, they were used to have students analyse the selling point of a shopping mall (e.g., “If you love shopping, you will love Festival Walk. What is the selling point?” [Lesson 2]), the reasons Lee Ka Shing became the richest man in Hong Kong (“Why is he so rich?” [Lesson 4]), and a character’s upbringing (“Do you think he was happier? Why?” [Lesson 5]). Of these three contexts, all questions were related to exercising students’ analytical thinking through the use of language. In other words, low-cognitive questions were for pedagogical use and enhancing student language knowledge, whereas high-cognitive questions were reserved for the practical use of language.

*RQ3: Are students able to understand the lesson’s focus at lesson’s end?*

To evaluate the effectiveness of teacher questions, it would be remiss not to investigate whether students were able understand the intended lesson goals. Table 6 summarises the extent to which students could recall lesson goals in relation to the knowledge and comprehension based teaching components (e.g., action verbs related to cooking [Lesson 2], or understanding the life of Jackie Chan [Lesson 5]). Teaching components related to the use of language, such as application (e.g., Students designing their own mall [Lesson 2]) or synthesising (e.g., Synthesise data and plot a chart for Jackie Chan [Lesson 5]), appeared more difficult for students to grasp.

### **Discussion and implications**

This study found that the teacher asked low-cognitive questions most frequently in her classrooms, echoing the results of previous studies on other disciplines and EFL learners of other levels (e.g., Brown & Edmondson, 1989; Caulfield-Sloan, 2005; Parker & Hurry, 2007). The majority of questions were knowledge-based questions, questions to control classroom discipline, questions as tools for staging the lesson, and comprehension questions. Specifically, there was habitual use of knowledge-based questions when teaching vocabulary, asking students to locate information from texts, and activating students’ previous knowledge or schemata. As Wragg and Brown (2001, pp. 6-7) indicate, “we often ask questions of children, not to obtain new knowledge for ourselves but to find out what children already know ... there are also questions to do with class management.” The present study

found that question types were only related to “cognitive” (knowledge and comprehension) and “procedural” (classroom management and staging a lesson) uses.

Cecil (1995) explained that teachers prefer low-cognitive questions because they were easy to answer since they required only small amounts of specific information, had fewer possible answers to dispute in comparison to high-cognitive questions, and made classroom behaviour easier to control because students were involved in fast-paced question and answering. What Cecil explained was indeed the situation in this EFL classroom and others like it. However, the reasons behind these low cognitive and procedural questions sends an alarming message to the second language teaching community. That is, students come to see acquiring vocabulary, understanding words, and comprehension as the core components of learning English because of the substantial amount of knowledge-based questions that teachers ask—regardless of the nature or focus of the lesson.

The frequency of vocabulary-focused questions might lead to student ignorance of a more holistic language-learning process. Instead, learning English is presented as a modular process due to the teacher’s continual series of knowledge-based questions. Students deal with short-term *temporary* teaching points rather than seeing language learning as a larger process. Teacher questions related to vocabulary or content of a comprehension passage are not likely to help students acquire all the language skills necessary to communicate effectively. Students will also get the impression that facts and details are more important than personal interpretations and evaluations of ideas. A more long-term effect will be that students have little opportunity to practice their oral, dynamic language skills to express ideas and explain details in an inspired manner. Low-cognitive questions demand low intellectual engagement and do not capture students’ interest or imagination. If teachers are only concerned with transmitting knowledge about English to students, very likely students will miss the overall point of learning English as a communication medium. Students are ultimately only subjected to an “inquisition,” rather than becoming participants in an “inquiry,” as phrased by Cecil (1995). In this study, an inability to perceive the “tasks” as the learning objectives of lessons was evidence of such modularity, or segregation, of language learning (RQ3).

The students’ flow of cognitive learning would also be interrupted with the frequent need to manage the class with questions. Thus, time intended for the development of analytical

thinking or other generic skills is lost. Careful question planning is therefore necessary, as argued by Angletti (1991), who found that teachers trained to ask high-quality questions are more able to harness their students' potential.

Another way out of the dominance of low cognitive questions is to conduct "grand conversations" (Bird, 1988; Edelsky, 1988). That is, in engaging students to think and respond to ideas and events, teachers should ask questions that allow students to express their ideas freely, rather than merely checking their understanding of texts or vocabulary items. A free flow of ideas, questions, and answers among teachers and students is certainly more conducive to effective learning.

RQ2 found that question were not related to lesson content—be it grammar or task-based—as they were predominantly of a low-cognitive type. However, when analytical questions were asked, they were used to develop students' analytical thinking while at the same time requiring students to practice how to express themselves through practical English use.

To enhance the effective use of questions, teachers on the one hand may first need to change vocabulary teaching methods (e.g., teaching students how to use a dictionary), which would cultivate student initiative and autonomy. On the other hand, teachers also need to spend more of their own time creating questions commensurate with their purposes (e.g., questions which can be sequenced and re-worked to match the learning objectives of the lesson) as well as being at an appropriate level of student cognitive thinking. In so doing, teachers will save class time for more relevant, high-cognitive questions which have longer-term benefits.

To judge the effectiveness of teachers' question-types (RQ3), this study also examined whether students could identify the lesson learning objectives. Students were only able to identify less demanding knowledge-based learning objectives, such as comparing amounts, vocabulary, and so on. Higher level objectives of language use (e.g., tasks), were not perceived by the students as outcomes. This also explained why students could not identify the communicative nature of tasks as an objective of the lessons, because the same pedagogy (i.e., a primary reliance on low-cognitive questions) was used regardless of the teaching content or learning objectives.

There are two further points worth noting. First, the misleading "signals" sent by teachers when sequencing the lesson at the start of each class, and, second, how these signals can be



misleading to students about upcoming content. For example, the teacher may give many grammar tips before a task, so students assume they should focus on grammar, rather than the task (see Appendix). Yet it is common practice for EFL teachers to give such language tips before students perform lesson tasks. The question arises: with better attention to lesson sequencing, might students properly perceive English learning as “doing the task” rather than “learning the vocabulary/grammar”? That is, should teachers allocate more time to instruction on doing the tasks, rather than beginning with a focus on vocabulary or grammar instruction? Further research is needed here.

Based on these findings, a revisit to the current classroom language assessment descriptors in Hong Kong seems paramount. The current descriptors related to language of instruction only assesses a teacher’s ability to use English adequately, unambiguously, and clearly in language presentation—not whether the teacher is able to organise classroom discourse and use appropriate signaling devices to alert students to the various stages of that presentation. The descriptors assess teachers’ language of instruction in a very unclear way. The ability to use questions to facilitate effective English learning should also be incorporated into the assessment parameters. Training teachers how to ask questions should also be emphasized in teacher education.

### **Limitations of the study**

Two limitations can be noted in this study. First, only one teacher was observed. Second, the teaching sequence might appear more fragmentary than it actually was because lessons were not observed in an unbroken sequence, but only once per month.

### **Conclusion**

Teacher questioning should ideally generate engaging discussion to lead to more practical learning. Teaching is more than transmitting knowledge, it should aim at developing students’ intellect and higher cognitive skills and processes. Teachers should also skillfully place the onus of learning where it belongs—on the students. This study shed light on the crucial nature of educating teachers about the language of instruction, and argued that teachers must be equipped with a high-level understanding of types of classroom questioning. By understanding how different types of questions can impact the learning process, teachers can use appropriate, skilled questioning to enhance their overall effectiveness. What occurs in EFL classrooms must be built upon

student needs, thus the questions asked by teachers should be carefully designed to result in higher quality learning than is presently transpiring. Teachers must act as clever facilitators by posing timely, thought-provoking questions—questions that guide our students to think more critically and intelligently, thus helping them reach the new heights of English usage required to meet the changing demands of society.

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## Appendix. Summary of Lessons.

TEACHING STEPS	LESSON 1	LESSON 2	LESSON 3	LESSON 4	LESSON 5
<b>Start</b>	T started a new chapter	T reviewed the differences between the use of 'there + be' and 'have' by demonstrating examples Individual Ss gave answers T pointed out some mistakes and emphasized the use of the present and past tense	Lead in with the announcement of the arrangement of the lesson – T introducing words and Ss making salad afterwards Ss moved and assembled into groups	Lead in with the announcement of the target grammar item of the lesson – comparing amounts T explained the meaning of 'comparing amounts'	Lead in by requiring Ss to take out their English textbook
<b>Pre-task</b>	T reviewed and taught vocabulary related to shops in a mall.	<b>Task 1</b> T required Ss to work in pairs and describe a shopping centre by using 'there + be' <b>Task 2</b> T asked Ss if they liked the shopping centre described in the textbook and the kinds of shopping centers they liked T listened to a survey – the reasons for liking a shopping center <b>Task 3</b> T played a video about a shopping mall in Canada T demonstrated the methods of designing a shopping centre on the computer	T introduced the format of a recipe, the sentence pattern –imperative sentences, and words used in a recipe – verbs, food	<b>Task 1</b> T taught the use of comparatives and superlatives by comparing the number of fans of football players, the amount of money owned by rich people, etc. (in the form of Q&A) <b>Task 2</b> T required Ss to count the number of their personal belongings based on several given prompts (e.g. coins, exercise books, etc.) <b>Task 3</b> T showed three students' photos and asked them to tell other students the number of objects they had Other Ss compared the amounts	T checked answers of the guided questions with Ss, which they should have done at home – Jackie Chan's early life and his success T distributed three pieces of unfavourable news about Jackie Chan to Ss. Ss read them individually and T summarized the news by Q&A
<b>Task</b>	T went through the content of a section of comprehension passage (an e-mail) about a shopping mall with Ss. Language focus: Past tense.	<b>Task 1</b> Ss worked in pairs and three pairs presented afterwards <b>Task 2</b> T played an audio CD about an interview Ss identified the reasons for which the interviewee liked the shopping center and T corrected mistakes <b>Task 3</b> Ss worked on the worksheet individually T explained the methods for designing posters T asked a student to share the name of the shop he had designed	Ss made salad in groups Ss wrote recipes for making salad in groups Some groups instructed (by reading their own recipe) other groups to make salad	Ss worked in groups Ss compared the number of their own belongings based on the topic of the worksheets and wrote the answers on the worksheets Two groups presented their work	T explained the meaning of 'ups and downs' and plotted a chart of the ups and downs in Jackie Chan's life on a slide by Q&A Ss plotted their own charts of ups and downs individually and shared the work with their friends in groups Two Ss shared their work in front of the class
<b>Post-task</b>					T shared her ups and downs in life